

CHAPTER TWO | PAPER

DEFINING
PARTICIPATION:
PRACTICES IN THE
DUTCH ART WORLD

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THE LEVEL OF cultural participation in the Netherlands is high. The country often ranks in the top five when it comes to the percentage of the population that has attended concerts, museums or theatre performances. In cultural policy and cultural participation research the definition of cultural participation has remained unchanged for decades: visiting cultural institutions or producing art as an amateur are seen as cultural participation. But recently, both inside and outside the cultural sector, the term participation has started to mean a lot more than this definition implies. In the 2013 annual speech by Dutch King Willem-Alexander, the term *participation society* was coined to replace the welfare state. Politicians now want all Dutch citizens to participate, with cultural participation seen as one of the ways to be part of this new participation society. However, participation has been the focus of Dutch cultural policy ever since the government started outlining a clear cultural policy after the Second World War (Joostens, 2012; Oosterbaan Martinius, 1990; Vreede *et al.*, 2012; Pots, 2000). The focus on cultural participation has taken different meanings throughout the years: from bringing in more diverse audiences, to increasing the amount of people participating, and from stimulating cultural education in schools and raising an audience for the future, to bringing culture to the neighbourhoods.

In the last few years, active, more intense forms of participation – which ask audiences to contribute, co-create, or interact with artworks, artists, and art institutions – are becoming more popular. The Dutch museum world is closely following the practices of foreign museums, especially in the UK and USA, so it is no wonder that this worldwide trend has now

reached Dutch museums as well.

In recent decades social developments have pushed museums worldwide into answering the call of New Museology to work with communities, to strive for relevance, and to have a critical view of museum history, theory, and practice (Vergo, 1989). The advent of the sharing economy has also contributed to what some see as a paradigm shift for museums and their position in society; the need to become socially embedded (Davies, 1994: 33–35). Simultaneously, digital developments have had a significant impact on expectations of participation in society (Shirky, 2008: 260). Just as in the USA and UK, Dutch science, history, and ethnography museums have been using participatory methods for a long time. But in recent years some interesting initiatives have been seen in art museums as well – some completely new, some revived from earlier decades (Vreede, 2010), and some building on long traditions.

Certain specifics of art museums set them apart from other cultural institutions. They often work with living artists who have their own understanding and agency in terms of their relationship with audiences, the level of participation their work should provoke, and the way they define their own place in the process (from isolated genius to community mediator). Furthermore, the debate between autonomous and instrumental views of art is still very much alive and has great influence on the understanding of the word *participatory*. Hence, today participatory practices are less common in art museums than in history museums or science centres. Despite this, in the last decade art institutions have become increasingly interested in such endeavours. Thus far, attempts have been mostly project-based rather than integrated into the regular functioning of art

institutions, which shows the experimental nature of participatory practices in this field.

At the same time, a new interest in measuring cultural participation has emerged: cultural participation is measured not only as a visit to a museum, or involvement in a painting course, but also by such things as the impact a confrontation with an artwork had on audience members, for example. This makes it even more important to define clearly what participation means in the context of art museums. Are we still just talking about visiting a museum? Or is a more active definition gaining popularity? With an increasing number of projects in Dutch art museums claiming to be participatory, the multiple definitions of participation are creating misunderstanding.

This chapter aims to pinpoint the tensions created in the Dutch art field by the many and sometimes contradictory definitions of the term participation. It will first map the diverse definitions by which the field defines participation practices. It will then consider the levels of tension created by the ambiguous and co-existing definitions of participation and analyse them in examples taken from the Dutch art world.

Defining participation: ambiguity and co-existence

The ambiguous definition of the key term *participation* is due in part to emerging practices, in part to the multiple background and focus of scholars studying this phenomenon, and in part to the different professions within museum practice.

Artists and artworks

Modernist artists started abandoning part of their authorial authority when interpretation by the public was deemed an

inherent part of the work. For example, Marcel Duchamp claimed that “a work of art exists only when the spectator has looked at it” (Furlong and Gooding, 2010: 23). In this framework the goal of participation for the artist is the recognition of the artistic value of the artwork through active meaning-making by the viewer. Participation is therefore essential for the artwork to be considered art by institutions. Many cultural players still define participation as such: the engagement of a single audience member with the meaning-making of an artwork.

Some artists, looking to increase social relevance and connection with the public, explored ways of engaging the audience more actively (ranging from performances such as Marina Abramovic’s *Rhythm 0* (1974), to community art). These endeavours defined public participation as more than meaning-making and tried to create in the viewer a radical engagement for or against the work. For such artists, participation is defined as an individual visitor’s emotional reaction and or a profound engagement (aesthetic, political or social). The goal of participation still recognises artistic value, but it is also dependent on the public acting or reacting to the work. This definition of audience participation has been very influential and is still used throughout artistic discourse. In this framework, while facilitating encounter, the museum also has the role of enhancing provocation or engagement. However, these artistic practices stayed on the fringe of the art world until the coming-of-age of participatory art.

Participatory art has been increasingly popular since the 1990s and its validity as an art form, while still controversial, has opened the doors to some forms of participatory practices

in the art museum. Tom Finkelpearl states that participatory art “can be considered to fall into three categories: relational, activist, and antagonistic” (Finkelpearl, 2014). In any of its forms the main aim of participatory art is to activate or have an emotional and physical impact on the audience members. Finkelpearl stresses that it is “the social space, the interactive moment” that makes participatory art rather than any visible output. To Claire Bishop, participation is a practice “in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material” (Bishop, 2012: 2). For her, *participatory* implies a social interaction engaging a multiplicity of visitors. Therefore, from the viewpoint of participatory art, the role of the art institution is to offer a participatory space and timeframe and facilitate human interaction.

Within the realm of art production we can see that there are a range of definitions for participation, leading to diverse goals such as:

- Individual meaning-making of an artwork by a single visitor.
- Giving audiences a challenging experience (political, social or aesthetic; individual or collective).
- Engaging the public physically (individually or collectively).
- Creating social and or artistic communities.

However, the main goal of participation for artists is that by creating a relationship with audience members their artworks come into existence intellectually (through meaning-making) or physically (participatory art).

Curatorship

Under the influence of changing artistic practices and the emergence of New Museology, curatorship saw a shift from an institutional discourse to a curatorial discourse, and then to a participatory non-authoritative discourse. When curating art exhibitions, the aims of curators are diverse but often relate to story-telling and creating a supra narrative rather than focusing on a single artwork (as artists do) or on the visitors (as educators or marketers do). Jacques Rancière describes the hesitation between different modes of curation in the world of the theatre as “constantly oscillat[ing] between these two poles of distanced investigation and vital participation” (Rancière, 2011: 2). In the art museum world “distanced investigation” can be seen as reflection and meaning-making and “vital participation” as engaging viewers’ bodies and consciousness through immersive practices. In the case of the curator immersive practices are there to support the overall narrative of the exhibition rather than the meaning-making of a single work. More than immersive practices, relational curating looks to engage the viewer to create aesthetic, social, and cultural impact (Bourriaud, 1998).

Jean-Paul Martinon distinguishes curating – which he defines as professional practice – and the Curatorial – which explores the intentional and non-intentional impact of exhibitions. To him:

...the curatorial is a disturbance, an utterance, a narrative... [that] engage[s] in another process, that of precipitating our reflection, of encouraging another way of thinking or sensing the world. (Martinon, 2013: 87)

The role of the curator is not limited to the museum, rather he expands it to buildings, areas or countries. Participation of the audience too goes beyond the museum walls and the role of the curator is to engage by disrupting and creating reflection (Martinon, 2013: 498).

Paul O'Neill offers a synthesis of sorts and distinguishes three stages in the art of public participation: relational (based on Bourriaud); social (linked to participatory art practices and social engagement); and durational (engaged in long term relationships) (O'Neill, 2010). Here again the focus is on forms of participants' engagement and experience, on the form of relationship created by the curator between the artworks, and the audience.

In the framework of this definition of participation – as a physical, social, psychological, and intellectual engagement – participation is also multiform. It can be one-on-one or collective, a one-off event or durational, and it can take place inside or outside the museum. The role of the museum and often the curator is that of a mediator between the art/artist/curator and the public. The museum is a place to engage in “flow” activities and what matters is the audience's experience and the form or depth of engagement. The main goals of participation according to these definitions are:

- Transmitting, creating, or challenging meanings or stories
- Engaging audiences (physically, socially, psychologically, and intellectually) with flow-like experiences (individual or collective) (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

As for artists' definitions of participation, for the field of curatorship, meaning-making, engagement, and experience are key. But they are aimed at different goals: transmitting, creating, or challenging meaning and established discourses.

Education

Education departments are often the instigators of participatory projects in the art museum. Drawing on the ideals of John Dewey, education is a matter of democracy, and participation is then key in the educational process. Dewey argues for a society that attempts to equally engage all its members in participation through institutions that offer "flexible readjustment" (Dewey: 2008 [1916]). He also insists on participation as sharing, education as an exchange between learner and teacher, and the importance of participants' engagement. Participation is defined by Dewey as an egalitarian process of representation, adaptation, and mutual learning between the institution and the public.

This democratic ideal is also reflected in constructivist approaches to learning in museums (Hein, 1998, 1999; Falk and Dierking, 2000). The museum visitor is then considered an active learner who constructs meaning (not merely as a receptacle) in a free choice learning environment (Falk and Dierking, 2002: 9). Furthermore, to constructivist educators the engagement in learning and the participation in the activities offered by the museum allow the visitors to become a community (Falk and Dierking, 2000: 9). The visitor is embedded in the community he/she entered the museum with and that was created through the learning experience. Hooper-Greenhill focused on meaning-making visitors not as individuals but as groups with shared backgrounds, which she calls an

“Interpretive Community” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999: 44). Participation, according to constructivist cultural education theorists, is visitor-centred (rather than artwork-centred or supra-narrative-centred) and aims to provide visitors with free choice experience, opportunity for meaning making, and creating communities of learners and interpreters.

It is impossible to talk about definitions of participation in relation to education without talking about Nina Simon’s influential book *The Participatory Museum* (2010). Her work tried to advocate participation as active engagement from the visitors (create, share, connect), and took forms ranging from contribution to collaboration. Simon’s definition of participation is relatively narrow and asks for a significant level of activity from the visitors. Furthermore, she asks that participatory projects “create new value for the institution, participants, and non-participating audience members” (chapter 1). She stresses the importance of good design and sustainability and notes that participatory projects are not meant for a broad audience and will have a limited impact.

In the realm of cultural education, participation is then generally defined as democratic, inclusive, visitor-centred, and based on the creation of learning or interpretative communities. Unlike artists’ artwork validation, or curators’ discourse delivery, the aim here is the visitor’s personal or collective development. In that framework the museum is a place to connect and to learn together, to build meaning, a place which offers a range of participatory opportunities. There is an awareness within the cultural education field that participatory projects are not meant to broaden audiences but rather to deepen the relationships between institution/objects/artists

and the audience. From this perspective the aims of participatory projects are:

- Giving audiences a tailored meaningful educational experience (individual or collective).
- Creating communities (of learners or social).
- Activate participants (attendance isn't enough to be participatory) to promote a democratic society.

Engagement and experience again play an important role in the definitions of participation; but this time they are mostly social and intellectual engagements or experiences. It is important to understand that for the educational theorists (and Nina Simon), participation goes well beyond attendance.

Marketing

In the Dutch context the word participation continues to mean attending an arts event or visiting a museum. Many participatory projects in museums quote as their (main) goal: to reach a large or diverse audience. This goal is generally seen as part of the arts marketing domain. Most publications on the topic mention that one of the main tasks of arts marketing is finding the right audience for the right product (for example Colbert, 2012). Both audience numbers and audience profiles can be seen as contributing to the “rightness” of the audience. Whether art always needs a large audience – and what exactly the definition of large is – is a much-discussed topic. What is clear is that arts organisations in the Netherlands are confronted with funding bodies which request larger audience numbers and higher percentages of earned income. Various initiatives are taken to

make that happen, and participatory projects are amongst these. The reasoning behind the use of participatory projects to raise audience numbers is that “arts groups devoted solely to a consumption model of program delivery will slowly lose ground in a competitive marketplace” (Brown, 2011: 4).

Just like the “right” number of visitors, the “right” profile of an audience is much discussed and hard to define. On the one hand, experts stress that arts marketers should focus on target groups that are inclined to participate (McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001; Ranshuysen, 1999). On the other hand, we can see that very few museums are happy to focus only on “the usual suspects.” A lot of effort is put into trying to reach a broader, more diverse audience. This is often also stimulated by funding bodies, who feel art should be available to “everybody”. Boorsma adds another perspective when she states that for art to function in society, it needs to “intermingle with the general culture”. She writes:

In order to fuse new artistic metaphors with general worldviews, it is important that consumers talk about works of art, not only using technical jargon, but also using everyday terms. Non-specialist – occasional or new – art consumers form an important bridge between art and general culture. (Boorsma, 2006: 86–87)

This leads her to conclude that:

For arts organizations, the selection of valuable customers comes down to the selection of an optimal mixture of competent, arts-committed consumers and non-specialist consumers. (Boorsma, 2006: 86-87)

Both Joostens (2012) and Boorsma are trying to make a connection between the customer value approach of the marketing discipline and the functioning of art and artworks in society. In the first approach the role of marketing is seen as creating value for customers by taking their profiles, wishes, needs, and satisfaction into account. Boorsma shows how this approach is often seen as problematic in the arts world, where artists risk making artistic sacrifices when they are too customer-focused (Boorsma, 2006: 74). She proposes a strategic concept for arts marketing which balances customer value with artistic value. The main point builds upon the relational art concept by stating that the experience of art, and not the artwork itself, is the main criterion for artistic value (Joosten, 2011: 51). That is why arts marketing, in Boorsma's view, can and should contribute to the artistic mission of arts organisations. In this context she stresses again and again that the audience should play a co-creative role in making meaning and that the role of arts marketing is to facilitate this co-creation.

A somewhat more practical approach is taken by Odding (2011). He makes the point that for museums to stay relevant in today's society, it is necessary for them to stop focusing on the next blockbuster exhibit, stop generating one-directional traffic, and change their view from the inside to the outside. He calls this the network museum, and the main characteristics of this new kind of museum are that "it listens," that it is "subjective," and "that it is not about the truth, but about meaning". His conclusion is very similar to Boorsma's: museums are about meaning-making and visitor numbers do not tell you much about that.

In the realm of arts marketing, we can thus see that

participation or participatory projects are related to three different goals:

- Bringing in a large enough number of visitors.
- Bringing in a diverse audience.
- Giving audiences a good and or relevant experience.

All three goals are seen as important from different perspectives as a way to make enough money, to be democratic, to be relevant to the larger society, and to let art function in an optimal way.

The different faces of participation

While visitor experience and audience engagement are present in all the definitions covered, the type of experience or forms of engagement vary greatly. The diverse goals of participatory projects outline different perspectives and priorities present in art museums.

The expected level of participant activity greatly differs depending on the definitions adopted: attendance, contribution, collaboration, co-creation of meaning or interpretation, and co-creation of the artwork or event itself (Figure 1).

Furthermore, the expected level of exchange or discursive quality is also variable in the definitions (Figure 2). Is it a one-way or a two-way conversation between the participant and the artist/institution (Vergo, 1989; Joosten, 2012)? Does it present single or multiple narratives (Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 1998; Sandell, 1998; Martinon, 2013)? Is the dialogue engaged and sustained – a loop (Simon, 2010; Odding, 2011; Boorsma, 2006)?

As a conclusion to this investigation of multiple co-existing

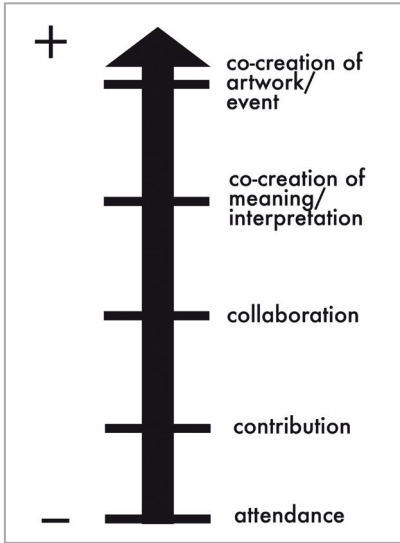


FIG. 1: Levels of participant engagement.

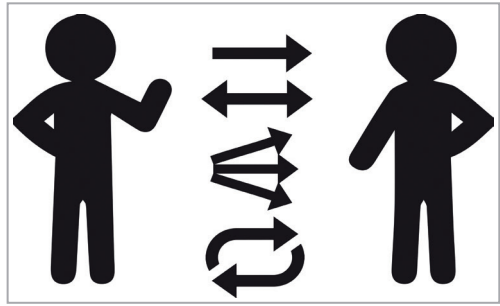


FIG. 2: Forms of communication between the artist/institution and the participant.

definitions of participation, we can outline different aspects of tension in the implementation of participatory projects stemming from the different viewpoints: space, time, and stakeholders. First, the relation to space can be ambiguous (Figure 3). Participatory practices can imply activities within the museum space (Furlong and Gooding, 2010; Falk and Dierking, 1992, 2000, 2002; Hooper Greenhill, 1999); outside of it (Martinon, 2013; Dewey, 2008); in the digital world (Shirky, 2008; Novak-Leonard and Brown, 2011); or a combination of some or all of these spaces (O'Neill, 2010; Simon, 2010; Novak-Leonard and Brown, 2011).

Second, the relationship to time implied in participatory practice is also equivocal. Participatory practices can be defined as one-offs (Bishop, 2012; Finkelpearl, 2014); engaged over a certain period of time (Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999); or as a sustained relationship (Simon, 2010; Odding, 2011; Boorsma, 2006).

A third ambiguous aspect is who should be involved in such participatory projects: the artist/artwork (Bourriaud, 1998; Rancière, 2011; Furlong and Gooding, 2010)? The individual participant visitor (Joosten, 2012; Boorsma, 2006; Dewey, 2008)? The individual non-participant visitor – exploring the results of a participatory project (Simon, 2010)? A community of participant visitors (Hooper Greenhill, 1999; Simon, 2010; O'Neill, 2010; Bishop 2012)? A community of non-participant visitors (Simon, 2010)? A combination of specialists and non-specialists (Boorsma, 2006)? And/or the institution itself? Finally, there are major differences within the definitions used in the field about who should be initiating and driving these participatory activities (Figure 4).

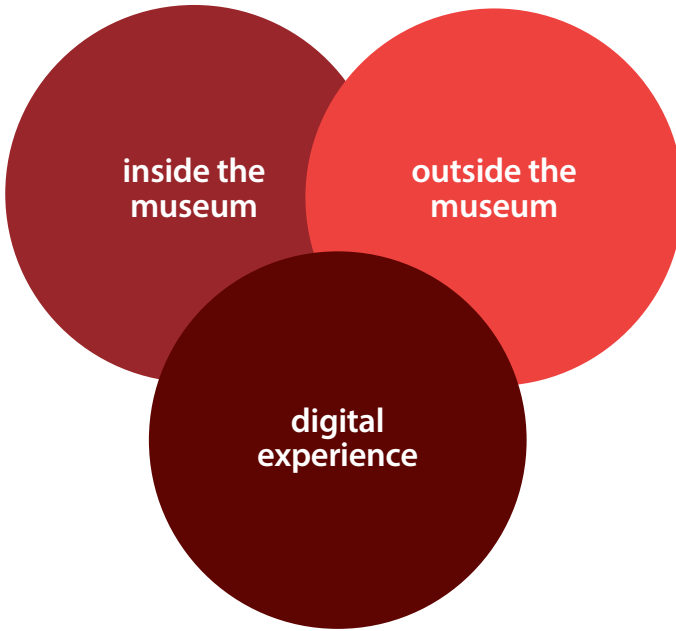


FIG. 3: The relationship between participation and space can be ambiguous.

The various understandings of the different definitions and facets of participation within art institutions create a range of challenges which institutions need to address.

Levels of tension

Aims and expectations

The first level is that of aims and expectations. Depending on the definitions of participation adopted when a project is conceptualised different expectations and aims are set by different stakeholders. This great variety of goals attached to participatory projects often stays implicit and this can lead to tensions.

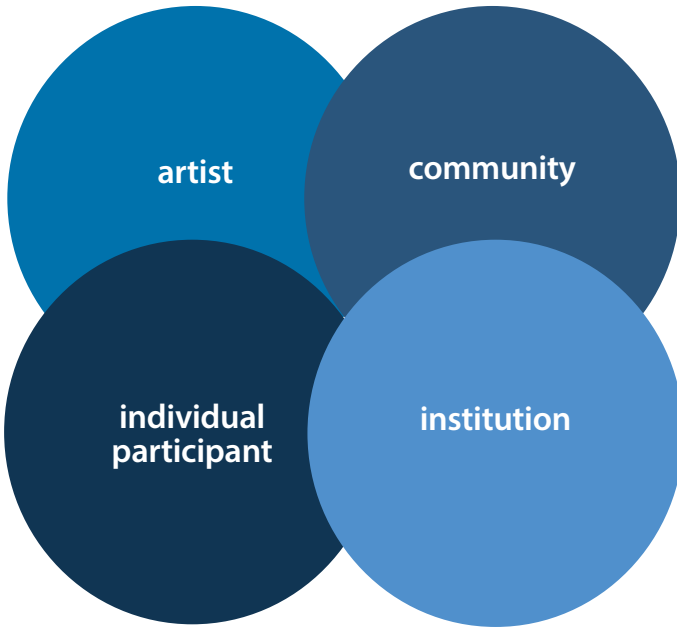


FIG. 4: Who should initiate and drive the activities?

This is, for example, visible in Rotterdam, where the municipality has long been known for its active cultural participation policy. One of the programmes which took place between 2001 and 2012 was called Museums in the Neighbourhoods. The idea was simple: if people don't want to come to the museum, the museum will come to the people. This expansion of the museum's role is visible in some of the definitions of participation (for example Martinon, 2013 and Dewey, 2008). Over the years the focus of the programme shifted: in the first years the goal was to present the project's work as a teaser to attract people to the museum; in later years active participation in museum

projects by inhabitants of the neighbourhoods was seen as the right approach. Evaluation of the impact showed that museums found the initial goal (attracting new audiences to the museum) hard to forego (Elffers and Stein, 2012). This led to tensions between the different aims and expectations of the project.

Most of the museums saw the participatory projects as valuable: they enjoyed the in-depth contact with different kinds of people “around content”, as advocated by Simon. The projects gave them the opportunity to talk about the museum’s work and to listen to the audience’s stories and experiences, establishing a level of dialogue they are almost never able to reach in the museum. But this also led to a lot of discussion. The projects often did not reach a large audience, and they were very work- and time-intensive, often not reaching the diverse audience they were aimed at, let alone bringing new audiences to the museum. However, the goal of reaching a new and diverse audience by means of the projects was not abandoned. The in-depth conversations, the facilitation of meaning-making and the relevance which came about were not seen by the museums as enough to legitimise the projects. While these elements are seen as central goals of participatory practice for artists, curators, and educators, the dominant emphasis on increased and diversified attendance makes it hard for institutions to justify such practices to society and funding bodies. One of the museums, for example, wanted to make this way of working its main focus, but had a very hard time communicating the value of this approach to a larger audience than the professional museum community.

Implementation

The second level of tension is that of implementation. Through

publications, conferences, policy papers, and in the media, museum professionals hear a lot about participation being the new, new thing. This results in many interactive and participatory elements being included in exhibitions, often without a clear goal and implemented in an ad-hoc way (see, for example Idema, 2013). An interesting project which was evaluated and in which the goal was, in part at least, to discuss the value and practical applicability of participatory or interactive approaches in art museums, was Museum Minutes, initiated by cultural innovator Johan Idema.

This exhibition in de Kunsthal in Rotterdam, in cooperation with the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, tried to find ways to make visitors look at artworks longer than the mythical average of nine seconds, with the idea that looking longer would allow a more intense experience. It was half provocation (to start a discussion in the art museum world about the way art is presented), and half a serious attempt to find new ways of engaging the public with art. The sixteen artworks from the Gemeentemuseum's collection could be viewed while sitting on a deckchair or while running on a treadmill (Figure 5).

In this way visitors could experience whether an active or a relaxed position influenced how they experienced art. Next to all artworks headsets allowed visitors to listen to very different kinds of audio fragments: some containing music, others children discussing the artwork, others firing questions at the viewer (what do you see?). This was also designed as an experiment: visitors could "test" the influence of what they heard on their experience of the artwork. When the headset was used, a digital stopwatch started, so that visitors were made aware of the number of seconds or minutes they were viewing and listening.



FIG. 5: Museum Minutes – view the collection from a deckchair or on the treadmill.
Photograph: Mike Bink.

A team of relative outsiders, mainly from the world of communication and advertising, developed the concept. The project succeeded in igniting discussion. Idema (2013) reviewed the reactions to the project and concluded that there are two distinct groups in the museum world: the content-focused practitioners (curators, conservators) and their audience-focused colleagues (educators, marketers). The latter group was mainly positive about the innovations proposed during Museum Minutes, while the first was less convinced: they thought the innovations were detrimental to the art historical content. A successful exhibition in the eyes of the curator, is not necessarily successful in the eyes of the educator, and what is successful in the eyes of an educator, does not have to mean a success for the marketer. This often makes it hard to agree on a single way to implement participation.

Output and consequences

The final level of tension is that of output and consequences. The definition of participation impacts greatly on result measurements, quality indicators, and the use of audience input in the work of museums. Ideally the impact of participatory projects goes further than igniting an internal discussion on the value of involving audiences and communities in museums' work, although this is clearly an important first step towards success. The field of visitor research in museums is evolving together with the definition of participation. If participation is defined as more than attendance, then measuring participation demands new approaches. Although collecting visitor numbers and profiles is still very important, more and more attention is being paid to the experience of the visitors and the impact



FIG. 6: Call of the Mall – Fernando Sanchez Castillo, *Tank Man*, 2013.
Photograph: Hans Roggen.

that art has on them. This is notoriously complex to measure (and impossible according to some), but different attempts have been made with the use of observation, qualitative interviews, and even standardised surveys to understand this important participation factor (for example Zebracki, 2009).

In the Dutch context, examples of contemporary art museums using visitor input in the design of exhibitions, or in the shaping of artworks, are rare or are often not made public. An exception – albeit not a museum – is the public art initiative *Art in the Station Area (Kunst in het stationsgebied)* in Utrecht. The goal of this project was to bring a large and diverse audience into contact with art outside of the museum walls, and to create artworks which meaningfully relate to the public and space. To accomplish this goal the organisation took two years to prepare the large event which took place in the summer of 2013: *Call of the Mall*. A year before the real event, a try-out was organised and ten artworks were placed in the area to test out what worked and what did not. Curators, artists, marketers, educators, shopkeepers, local people and audiences were involved in this test. Observations were made and research workshops with different audience groups held. This had several interesting effects: it helped the organisation choose the right artists, the right spots to place their works, and the most effective ways to distribute information about the works to optimise the impact on visitors. It also sparked discussion in the team about the reasons for organising the event and its intended effect on audiences. It also stimulated the prolonged building of relationships with visitors and users of the area (Diesfeldt, 2014).

Visitor research during the event in 2013 showed (again) that passers-by were grateful for the opportunity to experience

art in the station area. Call of the Mall also tried to attract visitors to come to the station specifically to see art as well as to transform casual passers-by into purposeful visitors.

The research clearly showed that relatively few visitors came to Call of the Mall as a day out and it only happened incidentally that passers-by were enticed to see more artworks. But it also became clear that did not mean that the project was not successful. Success was defined by other factors such as the large impact the artworks had on passers-by and the effect the passers-by had on the artworks, and the surprising engagement of shopkeepers, office workers, and inhabitants of the area with contemporary art (Elffers, 2013b, 2015). Call of the Mall is therefore a good example of the different (and unplanned) outcomes which participatory approaches can have and the learning effects that observations, visitor research and try-outs can have on art professionals who work with this evolving method. The lessons learned are now being used for a new project in the same area.

Conclusion

The term *participation* has gained popularity in the last decade – inside and outside of the art world – and the word itself is currently understood in many different ways. A shift is visible from participation meaning visiting a museum or creating art as an amateur, to a more diverse repertoire of forms of participation where audiences contribute, co-create, or interact with artworks, artists, and art institutions. We have seen that different fields of study (art, curatorship, art education, art marketing) are all interested in how audiences are engaging with art. But we have also seen that, depending on the field of study or

function in the art museum, participation is connected to different goals. This often creates misunderstandings about what participatory ways of working are supposed to accomplish. This can then result in projects or methods that are trying to accomplish various goals that are hard to achieve simultaneously.

The focus on audience numbers and audience diversity in relation to participatory practices seems to be the source of the majority of misunderstandings. As Nina Simon also stresses, the outcome of participatory practices is often to create in-depth individual experiences and sustained relationships rather than creating broad and diverse audiences. But she sees these in-depth relationships as a way for museums to be relevant as much as to be democratic. Odding even sees the creation of in-depth relationships as possibly leading to financial sustainability. One might think that a focus on in-depth relationships or good, relevant, challenging or flow experiences, is not reconcilable with marketing goals or funders' requirements, where the focus on visitor numbers becomes more dominant every day. However, both theory and practice show that there is room for more attention being paid to audience experiences. It is also clear that in-depth, small-scale participation is valuable and that museums should gain confidence and funding support for such projects. This is particularly important in the field of art museums, since artistic experience is not about the number of people looking at an artwork but about the quality of the gaze.

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