

Museum in Dialogue





Museum in Dialoog/Musée en Dialogue is a joint initiative of the Evens Foundation and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in collaboration with FMDO vzw and a group of interested visitors, to explore if and how museums and their collections can foster encounter and dialogue.

PARTNERS

Evens Foundation

The Evens Foundation aims to contribute to a European reality committed to the values of diversity, freedom, responsibility and solidarity. We highlight innovative ideas and achievements through our prizes and calls in the fields of arts, education, journalism and science. In our experimental projects we explore different ways of living together that recognise the plurality of human histories and cultures. We also facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences through our lectures, seminars, debates and publications.



Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België
Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique

The collection of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium covers a period extending from the 15th to the 21st centuries. The Cultural Education Department aims to make their galleries and collections accessible to each visitor. The Made to Measure program offers guided tours, creative courses, workshops and themed activities tailored to specific audiences. In this way everyone has the opportunity to visit the museum in a personal and adapted way, regardless of disability, culture, language or any other restriction.



FMDO (Federation of Global and Democratic Organisations) is a membership organisation that supports organisations of people with a migration background. Through a variety of projects it aims to have a positive impact on the super diverse society we live in.

Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue: putting the project into perspective

At the end of the 1990s, through their Educational and Cultural Service, the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB) launched a process that was unusual at the time: going outside their four walls to meet 'excluded groups'.

Several specific projects were created, highlighting the desire to open up and become accessible to everyone. They included the Sésame project which developed outreach work and an innovative methodology in partnership with the community sector and social intermediaries (community centres, social restaurants, homework classes, accommodation centres for asylum-seekers, etc).

It was a patient endeavour, which gradually changed the profile of the people visiting museums. *Sésame, Musée ouvre-toi/Sesam, Museum open u* (Open Sesame, Museum) was finally launched in 2003. The main challenge for the visiting cultural mediators at the time was how to convince people to step through the doors to the museum. The 'tailor-made' activities introduced, focused on dialogue, which was the cornerstone of the project. This was the concept of the extra muros visit, i.e. a visit by a mediator who, armed with his museum suitcase, made an initial visit to the group in their district or community. This visit evoked a concrete response by the participants, who were in turn invited to visit the museum to continue the activity launched by their guide, but this time in front of the art works.

In 2008, with the *Regards croisés, d'ici et d'ailleurs* project, the Sésame team invited several visitors and staff members, regardless of whether they were from an immigrant background or not, to talk about their encounters with art in the context of the Royal Museums collections. Year after year, other one-off projects made it possible to develop specific approaches, such as the succession of surrealist poetic proposals (the intergenerational *Generation René* project in 2012, and the *Ceci n'est pas un poème* recitals between 2014 and 2019, for example), targeting young people from the districts to try to create links between their world and that of the museums. All these experiments, when added to the discussions during the guided visits, highlighted the role of the museum institution as a place of encounters between individuals and cultures in today's society.

Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue launched in 2019, is part of the extension of these reflections. It meets the RMFAB's objective of paying attention to the notion of diversity that is at the heart of many current debates.

The need to constantly readjust to new questions and societal movements, coincided with the Evens Foundation's proposal to support a process of inquiry launching a critical reflection on access to the museums and their collections, more specifically in relation to audiences on the fringes of the traditional circuits.

Starting from the question: A museum as a place of encounter and dialogue?, a group of visitors from a range of geographic, cultural and social backgrounds, was invited to give their views. The framework for the work was flexible, giving the participants a great deal of initiative, in a spirit of co-creation with the 'Made to Measure Museum' (RMFAB) teams, the Evens Foundation, and our partner for the project, FMDO. All the texts brought together here form a series of reflections on this exciting adventure, which we hope will lead to other initiatives.

OVERVIEW

- ▶ **Autumn 2018**
Initial contacts between the Evens Foundation and the RMFAB.
- ▶ **January 2019**
Organisation of a stakeholder meeting by the RMFAB and the Evens Foundation to check the basic idea behind the project with, among others, Demos, the Federation for Global and Democratic Organisations (FMDO), Culture et Démocratie, Alter Brussels, United Stages.
- ▶ **Autumn 2019**
Search for partners and additional funding.
- ▶ **Autumn 2019**
Test tours Bruegel in Dialogue RMFAB – *Made to Measure* in cooperation with FMDO, with the support of the VGC.
- ▶ **11 February 2020**
International Seminar *The Aesthetic Experience*, with all the partners involved: Isabelle Vanhoonacker, Isabel Vermote, Marie-Suzanne Gillemann and Marianne Knop (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium), Leidy Soto (FMDO), Anne Davidian and Marjolein Delvou (Evens Foundation), Delphine Rabin and Benjamin Simon (Centre Pompidou), John Bingham-Hall (Theatrum Mundi), Dimitri Szuter (Voi[e,x,s] Research Fellow), as well as guest experts: cultural anthropologist Jonas Tinius (CARMAH Berlin); Collective Learning Curator Jessy Koeiman (Art Institute Melly); sociologists Lionel Ochs and Astrid van Steen (Méthos).
- ▶ **February–May 2020**
Several preparatory meetings with the partners and the facilitator in order to further develop our approach based on previous experiences and input from the stakeholder meeting and seminar.
Key elements of the final process: open invitation, mixed group, emphasis on the process, with an open question and an open end.
- ▶ **March–April 2020**
Preparation and dissemination of the call through the FMDO network.

- ▶ **May 2020**
FMDO and EF conduct individual online interviews with interested people in order to further clarify the process.
- ▶ **27 June 2020**
Informal introduction to the group in the RMFAB.
- ▶ **September 2020–January 2021**
4 work sessions each with a coordination meeting beforehand and a debriefing session afterwards:
 1. Live: Welcome/Not Welcome
 2. Live: Open-Space
 3. Online: What does Made to Measure already do? Ideas for the future
 4. Online: Joint selection of priorities and organisation of working groups
- ▶ **Documentation of the process**
- ▶ **Working groups**
 1. Podcasts
 2. Reception and communication
 3. Activities and community work
 4. Themes for exhibitions
- ▶ **June-October 2021**
Realisation of the podcasts in collaboration with De Veerman



Retrospective by Marjolein Delvou, Evens Foundation

What was your role/the role of your organisation?

Together with the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, the Evens Foundation was one of the initiating partners. Both organisations had similar questions and decided to join forces to explore them further in the form of this project.

As an external actor, the Foundation took on the role of a critical friend. Thus, in the run-up to this project, we organised a seminar in order to put the question in a broader framework and to explore a few other similar initiatives. We also participated in several preparatory meetings in order to shape the process.

At the same time, we were closely involved in the design and realisation of the project. Together with FMDO, the other partner in the project, we talked in advance to all the people who had expressed an interest in contributing to the process. We also participated in the coordination meetings and the sessions with the group.

The foundation also took care of the funding of this project.

What did you/your organisation expect from this project?

For the Evens Foundation, this project is part of *The Aesthetic Experience*, a broader initiative in which we work with different partners to explore whether and how a shared aesthetic experience can contribute to social and cultural inclusion; whether an encounter with a work of art – usually an individual aesthetic experience – also creates the possibility to relate to others; whether cultural heritage can be the basis for exchange and dialogue in our diverse society; whether existing museum and artistic practices contribute to the maintenance of power relations or succeed in transforming them.

In the context of *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue*, we were particularly curious about the views of a heterogeneous group of people on whether and how museums and their collections can be a place of encounter and dialogue.

In addition, we expected to gain more insight into the conditions needed to bring such a process of joint reflection to a successful conclusion.

Usually, projects are expected to deliver specific, predefined results. Especially in participatory projects like this one, this can lead to frustration. That is why we explicitly chose not to define the outputs in advance and only involve the group to develop those. Instead we adopted an open-ended approach that invited the group to think and interact on the basis of the initial question working step by step towards more specific ideas.

Given that, as an organisation, we would like to do this more often in the future, this project was also in that respect a learning opportunity.

Finally, with this initiative, we hoped to contribute to a future in which museums, through strong links with local partners and the public, become meeting places that fully realise their emancipatory potential.

How did you experience the process?

At what point did you feel most connected to the project and/or the group?

Prior to the start of the process, we had many reservations and questions. How do we handle this in a way which makes sense for the group? How do we ensure that the group can take the lead within an institutional setting? What is our role in this process? Etc.

During the preparation phase, it already became clear that it would be crucial to question ourselves repeatedly about the decisions we had taken and to adjust our plans where necessary. Since this was a collaborative project between several partners, the violins had to be retuned every time. This constant process of construction and deconstruction brought confusion and uncertainty, but above all it was fascinating and fostered openness also towards the learning community. For example, we decided very quickly that it was not up to us to decide who would participate or not, but up to the interested people themselves, based on the information which we gave them during the preparatory talks. We also considered it important to reimburse travel expenses, provide childcare and to offer at least a volunteer allowance for their participation.

When we started, our concerns became more specific and manageable but at a certain point we came back to the question of what is possible within the institutional framework of a large institution such as the RMFAB.

During the second session, we experimented with the Open Space Technology. After a brief period of initial hesitation, the group went along with this very smoothly. The ideas and energy generated by this way of working were contagious. Unfortunately, we were not able to keep this up as we had to hold the next meeting online.

So the pandemic has certainly affected the process: we had too few opportunities to wander around the museum itself. Related to this, the lack of sufficient time was one of the main challenges.

Since we had only four working sessions, two of which were online, certain issues were only touched upon superficially.¹

‘it appeared that the group saw a close connection between the structure and the organisation of the museums on the one hand, and the space for dialogue and the possibility of a shared aesthetic experience on the other.’

From the topics discussed during the open-space, it appeared that the group saw a close connection between the structure and the organisation of the museums on the one hand, and the space for dialogue and the possibility of a shared aesthetic experience on the other. The aesthetic experience in itself was not enough or was even hindered by it. The group also very quickly detected and made explicit certain unspoken expectations, rules of play and conduct which prevail within the context of the museum. In this respect, too, the experience was enlightening and transformative, since at that level, one can also speak of a dominant perspective or a form of cultural perception. But there was no time for the group to go deeper into this and expose more fundamental problems. Nor was there time to explore the collection thoroughly, including the background of and stories behind certain works of art.

In this context, the question arises as to whether the limited duration of the project also frustrated the ambitions of both the group and the organisers. Nevertheless, the process has set a few things in motion in the museums; processes of which we will only see the results later, outside the scope of this project.

Finally, it was also a challenge for the organisers to find a balance between letting go and guiding. We would have liked to let the group work simply on the basis of the key question, but some guidance proved necessary to get them started – mainly because we were working within an existing framework and institute. Moreover, a freer process needs even more time.

What struck me personally the most was the sense of connection which I quickly felt and which made a visit to the museum a very different experience. Being part of this group made me feel a lot more ‘at home’ in the museum. The space for dialogue and humour which the group created is not unrelated to that. There was also a great willingness to listen. Leidy’s role as the intermediary was crucial. Her generosity and warm attention made it easier for everyone (the organisers included) to find their place.

The feeling of belonging may also have to do with the fact that the group was given a certain role: they/we were asked a question and they/we searched for an answer together. That gave them/us a certain authority. But there is also some contradiction in this. The group was given a role, which implies that they did not determine that role themselves. The key question did not come from the group, and the organisation (including financing) of the sessions remained in the hands of the partners involved. In the next phase, depending on their actions, more autonomy may be given to the different working groups.

¹ It was agreed with the participants that they would engage for at least three sessions after which everyone could decide whether s/he wanted to continue.

In the end the whole group participated in 5 sessions.

Looking back and forward

As an organisation, it was not easy for us to find our place. The questions preoccupy us, but at the same time we are not actors in the field. We were able to contribute to this project with our ideas and support (financially), but ultimately the structural decisions were taken elsewhere. In future collaborations, we will try to include this issue of concern during the partnership discussions.

In retrospect, we might also question the project-based nature of this process. Although we worked with an open-ended approach, the term 'project' still implies an end point. An open ending is therefore not enough, especially in the case of a short project. Moreover, some of the group's specific ideas for turning the museum into a meeting place were too far-reaching to be realised within the framework of this project.

During the process, we realised once more that a learning community like this should ideally be structurally integrated into a museum, not as a project for the future, but as a necessity today. But even in this case, the question remains as to how such a rather free space could be positioned within a large institution such as the RMFAB.

Fortunately, it is already becoming clear that this project will in any case be followed up. Hopefully, those people in the group who wish to do so can continue to be involved.

We also noticed that it might have been better to inform all the departments of the museum before the start of the project – not only for the sake of mere information exchange, but also in order to enable synergies with other departments and/or projects. Several other initiatives have shown how crucial the cooperation between different departments of a museum is in order to make a structural transformation at all possible.

Due to our enthusiasm, we took this too lightly. However, the intention is to do this post factum. At the same time, it can also be instructive to see whether a project started in a small, enthusiastic department can have an impact in a large institution.

'In short, it was and is a process of trial and error, and precisely in that fact lies hope: to keep working in spite of the contradictions encountered en route.'

Finally, it appeared at various times that the parties involved evaluated the process differently. The fact that these different perspectives are given a place in this small publication illustrates our intention to listen and learn. In that respect, the involvement of various partners is a good thing. It keeps everyone alert.

In short, it was and is a process of trial and error, and precisely in that fact lies hope: to keep working in spite of the contradictions encountered en route.

Retrospective by Isabel Vermote and Marie-Suzanne Gilleman, Museum op Maat/Musée sur Mesure – Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

The *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue* project, which brought together 17 people from different backgrounds to explore the question of how museums and works of art can be a place of encounter, happened in the midst of the coronavirus crisis. The impact of the pandemic was twofold. On the one hand, we had to constantly adjust our programme, hold online meetings and take strict sanitary measures; on the other hand, without the coronavirus crisis, we might never have experienced this project quite so intensely. ‘Never waste a good crisis’, as Winston Churchill said. Every crisis also offers opportunities. We reflected on how the RMFAB can respond to a diverse society and how the museum can be a meeting place for everyone regardless of their (economic, social or cultural) background. Moreover, the project encouraged the necessary self-reflection for the museum: how coloured is our own view and how do we deal with this? As museum staff, we are in a constant state of tension where our values of inclusiveness and public friendliness are sometimes difficult to reconcile with the strict rules of a museum visit, which are there to preserve our heritage for future generations.

What was your role/the role of your organisation?

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts took on the role of host. We welcomed the participants to the museum and guided them through the permanent collections and the temporary exhibitions (in this case, the *Be Modern* exhibition).

In addition, we were responsible for the logistical organisation: providing meeting rooms, writing materials, photocopies, tickets, drinks, snacks, etc. Given the context of the coronavirus, we saw to it that the hygienic safety measures were strictly respected (extra face masks, disinfecting gels, respecting the number of allowed participants, etc).

Moreover, we regularly reported back to our management about the state of affairs. As soon as the project was elaborated, we also looked internally at the feasibility of the ideas and what could be implemented in the current museum context.

What did you/your organisation expect from this project?

The *Made to Measure* programme is part of the RMFAB's Education department. It has been in existence for more than twenty years. Since then, it has come a long way and implemented numerous initiatives and projects to make the museum more accessible to larger audiences. With the recent diversity charter, the museum aims to open up to everyone, both internally and externally. At the same time, our society is constantly changing and becoming more diverse in sociocultural terms. That is why we want to continue to respond actively to this evolution. What can the institution do, beyond all the efforts of recent years and the outreach to an ever-widening public, to be even more meaningful, more accessible? How can a museum contribute even more to the well-being of citizens?

The RMFAB is located in a multicultural city. Three-quarters of the inhabitants of the Brussels Capital Region have a migration background or another nationality, compared to two out of three in 2010. This trend is, of course, also reflected within the school population. Moreover, one of every two Belgians is struggling with mental problems as a result of the coronavirus crisis. The need for meaningfulness and togetherness has never been greater. The public function of the institution transcends the 'management, preservation and display' of valuable objects. It extends to the well-being (in the broad sense of the word) of people; including people who are less or not familiar with art, or who, consciously or not, reject it. How do we remove the existing barriers so that they too feel welcome in the museum?

With the *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue* project, we fully and firmly played the participatory and inclusive card by involving participants in the preparatory thinking process from the very beginning. We listened to the needs and expectations of this diverse group of people, who helped to think about how a museum could also be a meeting place for everyone. They allowed their different backgrounds (gender, religion, culture) to influence them. In this way, they were holding up a mirror for us, helping us to view the museum from a new and valuable perspective.

| 'The objective is the path.'

How did you experience the process?

At what point did you feel most connected to the project and/or the group?

Thanks to the intense cooperation with the FMDO and the Evens Foundation, we worked together with a very diverse, multicultural group of people who did not know each other at first and many of whom had seldom or never visited a museum. This provided very different perspectives, frames of reference and experiences. The group grew closer and closer together. A WhatsApp group was started and physical meetings in particular strengthened the bond. The Open Space Technology, a method without too strict guidelines or guidance, supported us to come to an energetic exchange of knowledge and co-creation. It proved to be a working method which appealed to all participants, and which perhaps represented a turning point in creating

a sense of belonging. At that moment we also felt very connected to the group. It is a pity that, because of the coronavirus, we had to continue the project online which made it less evident to work in smaller groups.

From the beginning, it was clear that the process was as important as the end result. So no course was mapped out beforehand. Each session was followed by an evaluation and reorientation. This had the disadvantage that there was not always a straight line to follow, and that the final objectives sometimes fluctuated; the whole thing gave us less control than what we are used to. This was not always easy, especially in the early stages when it was not yet clear where we would end up.

‘From the beginning, it was clear that the process was as important to us as the end result.’

By joining the participants, observing how they experience a visit to the museum, and talking on an equal footing about all aspects of the concept of ‘accessibility’, we realised all the more that the museum is still impressive for many people. The building itself comes across as intimidating, just like the Brussels Law Courts. Some visitors may feel small and uncomfortable. At the same time, a ‘sense of equality’ (‘I am allowed to be who I am and the way I am’) seems to be a condition for fully enjoying art, and for entering into dialogue with it... This fact was even more pronounced in the context of coronavirus: the reception was (of necessity) subjected to security scans, and a strict one-way route reinforced the formal aspect of the visit. However, it is very important that people feel welcome in a place which they have probably never visited before and of which some do not fully understand the significance. Many other barriers, either discouraging or dissuasive, still exist. In fact, the first meeting starts outside the museum. Do potential visitors see themselves as part of the audience when looking at communication materials and can they build a bridge to their own world and experiences? Are these texts and images sufficiently understandable and convincing? Do they feel addressed by them? This brings us to another question: how can the museum reach its heterogeneous target audience (including ‘connoisseurs’ and ‘non-connoisseurs’) as effectively as possible?

‘Cherish your conversation partners’

Looking back and forward

It is not always easy to bring a long-term project to a successful conclusion without some participants dropping out. We realised how important a discussion partner such as the FMDO is – with whom, incidentally, we have already been working very constructively for several years. The coordinator, Leidy Soto, played a crucial role in the success of the project. She was the cement of the group, the connecting factor between the participants and the institutions (the museum, the Evens Foundation and the external partners). Leidy took care of the people attending. She asked questions about their observations and their doubts. She kept her finger constantly on the pulse.

A prerequisite for a true dialogue is to be open to the perspective, the colourful experiences and the multitude of opinions of others. The focus of the group was not on the 'other' identity, but on sharing common experiences in order to establish a dialogue on equal terms. We looked for what united us and not for the matters which separated us.

Things are moving within the institution

The *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue* project emerged as early as the autumn of 2018 and, step by step, travelled a long way. Slowly but surely, the initiative found resonance within the institution itself. At the request of the museum management, an internal debate is now developing in which the museum, in cooperation with the staff, questions the values of the institution in relation to current issues, also addressed in the planned exhibitions. The *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue* project, with external participants, can serve as an inspiration and a reference point for the internal process.

The RMFAB is committed to public accessibility: a recent study of the customer journey in the museum carried out in 2020 will take the findings of *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue* into account. In this way, an external and internal process can reinforce each other for a future open and diverse museum experience.

The French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1926-84), described the museum as a 'heterotopic' place, an in-between space in which man finds himself 'outside of time'. This applies to prisons, hospitals, cemeteries... as well as museums. The difference is that museums are visited freely and for pleasure.

In this way, a project like the *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue* demonstrates that not only participation but also co-creation are essential conditions for achieving a constructive dialogue within the museum context in order to grow towards each other while respecting each other's individuality.



Retrospective by Leidy Soto, FMDO

What was your role/the role of your organisation?

My role as FMDO's project officer was to find a diverse group of people who were interested in this project; people with and without migration backgrounds. They were invited to think together about how we could contribute to making the museum a welcoming place. We placed the call on our social networks and immediately received many replies. In the beginning, we thought it would be a difficult topic for our supporters, because it was clear in the call that we were going to think together with the museum, the educational team and the philosopher Eef Cornelissen about the barriers encountered by everyday people with such a large 'institution' as the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

We were surprised that so many people replied. At the beginning, we were looking for 8 participants and finally we had 20. Initially, there were 17 who decided to join after we spoke. However, 3 had to drop out due to illness, work and other personal reasons. The rest have experienced the whole process both in real life and online, and always with great enthusiasm.

This topic is very much open to discussion and sometimes we do not dare to ask about it directly. In the interviews, it became clear that everyone wanted to do something to address the internal and external barriers of the museums.

What did you expect from this project?

More exchanges with museums, more encounters, but also the essence of that process, how can we contribute something to change the cultural offer? Analysing together with different people how the museum can become a welcoming place. Identifying the different barriers and finding a solution together through dialogue or an action plan for the future.

Also to give our volunteers a space where they can let off steam and make themselves heard through dialogue with people who are also looking for answers to these problems.

How did you experience the process?

At what point did you feel most connected to the project and/or the group?

With great enthusiasm and confidence for such an initiative; also among the participants, I saw with great surprise that this 'problem' was not as unfamiliar as we thought.

From the beginning, I felt connected to both the participants and the people at the museum. I felt the connection and the good intentions all those times when we gathered together.

Looking back and forward

I look back on the project with pride and I find it amazing that everyone put so many ideas, creativity and enthusiasm into this process. The situation forced us to move online, but everyone was determined not to lose the momentum which we had built up from day one. This is something which we can still see in our WhatsApp group.

I personally think it is a great pity that we had to change the course of the process due to unforeseen circumstances, namely the pandemic. The experience was certainly not negative, but I have the feeling that if we had carried out the sessions physically in the museum with more interaction and exchange, a different story and a different 'end product' would have been realised today.

Providing sufficient time and space to further develop processes that are being launched and to learn from the results achieved along the way, is not so obvious at present.

Also in the case of this project, it is too soon to draw effective conclusions after only five sessions. We are undergoing several stages which are necessary for working together on the barriers. Constant evaluations are necessary.

Financial barriers remain a major problem. But certain target groups know very little about existing possibilities like the museum pass and the social rate for certain groups.

There is too little interaction between museums and organisations. Even when the museums organise something related to a particular culture, the cultural communities in question and the target groups in a particular city are often unaware of it.

The target audience often finds few connecting points with museums, which makes them less inclined to go and check out something which they do not know about.

'A social network is needed to participate in cultural activities.'

A social network is needed to participate in cultural activities. People need a certain confidence and recognition to take such a step. It is difficult for a vulnerable target group to do it alone. This is achieved far more quickly if a person you can trust, joins you.

Another problem which people experience is that they do not know how to behave in a different, unfamiliar context, a new atmosphere and a new environment.

What are the expectations placed upon them? A warm welcome can provide a solution here.

Ordering tickets online is often a barrier. Some people would rather buy their ticket at the door.

The FMDO is working with large institutions where our supporters usually find it difficult to participate in activities or to simply experience 'Belgian Culture'. That is why it is important to keep building initiatives like this where different cultures can meet and talk openly about what binds us together and not what our differences are; what we have in common and what solutions we can find, and how we can contribute to a better world with our ideas and motivation.



Retrospective by Eef Cornelissen, the main facilitator

Eef Cornelissen is a researcher working within the team *ExploRatio Odisee*. She is specialised in the Socratic discussion method.

What was your role/the role of your organisation?

To develop a method of reflection together with Erika Sprey and Julie Rodeyans and, during the course of the three reflection sessions, reflect with the group about the basic question 'How can the museums and their collections support encounter and dialogue?'

What did you/your organisation expect from this project?

My expectation coincided with the starting point of this project: to accompany a diverse group of people who were prepared (and enthusiastic) to reflect together about the basic question and, on the basis of these insights, to think about structural recommendations for transforming the museum into a context in which everyone can feel at home and where dialogue and encounter are stimulated.

How did you experience the process?

At what point did you feel most connected to the project and/or the group?

The research question became the starting point for an intensive reflection process with the group. In order to give the process a sustainable character, it was decided to organise sufficient meetings where reflection could occur, exchanges could take place and where good practices could be shared in order for the group to shape their own approach for *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue*.

In order for these meetings to be constructive and meaningful, a methodology was designed which would help guide the group's reflection process. This methodology was not fixed and could be adjusted during the process, depending upon the input and the needs of the group. The central focus was: the creation of sufficient space for reflecting together and meeting others, sharing experiences, examining good practices and exploring the museum together. The plenary moments of reflection

were alternated with moments of reflection and experimentation in small groups. During those moments, the museum was used as an experimentation room. Each afternoon of reflection was preceded by a communal lunch (where informal meetings were encouraged and group bonding took place) and concluded with a meta-conversation. A meta-conversation is a follow-up discussion in which both the personal experience of the participants and the reflection on the process are included so that everyone feels they have been heard and the working method can be adjusted.

During the first meeting moment (June 2020) with the group and during the first session (September 2020), the Socratic method was used, because this method exposes in a short time the different views and perspectives present in a group (of strangers). A WhatsApp group was also set up after the first meeting, where assignments were formulated and ideas could be shared before and after the sessions. During the first session, we sought an answer (both online and during a physical meeting) to the question of what a 'sense of belonging' means and how this sense of belonging was or was not present in the museum. Valuable insights came out of this session, but these insights remained at an abstract level. Philosophising is a slow process in which you initially raise more questions than answers and slowly think 'backwards' (regressive abstraction – Leonard Nelson) to reach a common understanding. Since there was only room for three sessions of reflection², it was decided after the first one to organise the last two sessions (October–December 2020) using the Open Space Technology. This method gives more ownership to the group and allowed the group to search for answers and solutions to the central starting question through their own questions and assignments. The spaces in the museum were also actively used during the open-space reflections.

The open-space sessions created a strong sense of belonging in the group. The participants were very enthusiastic and actively looking for ways to make the museum a meeting place where everyone can feel at home.

'The fact that a group of strangers were prepared to search together in such a short space of time with so much enthusiasm, and were given the space to do so in their own way, was incredibly fascinating to see.'

Looking back and forward

The most important conditions for open dialogue are (1) the security of the group and (2) the willingness of the participants to cooperate, regardless of their differences. These two conditions were actively worked on during the process. The role of Leidy (FMDO) as the group's 'shepherd' was crucial in this process. She was attentive to the needs of the various individuals and was an important and approachable point of contact. On the other hand, she also reminded the participants of their responsibility with regard to the commitment with which they entered into this project. The role and attitude of the museum and the Evens Foundation as active listeners to the different perspectives and solutions

² It was agreed with the participants that they would engage for at least three sessions after which everyone could decide whether s/he wanted to continue. In the end the whole group participated in 5 sessions.

also gave recognition to, and provided motivation for the group. In addition, the WhatsApp group was actively used by the group throughout the entire reflection process, and good practices were regularly shared spontaneously. The WhatsApp group also gave the participants the opportunity to share personal stories (birthdays, holidays) with each other and, in so doing, to strengthen the group feeling.

The fact that a group of strangers were prepared to search together in such a short space of time with so much enthusiasm, and were given the space to do so in their own way, was incredibly fascinating to see.

Points of interest for the future

- Communicating clearly about the intention of an initiative
- Agreeing on (fulfilling) commitments
- Clear agreements regarding ownership
- Clearly stating the limits of the museum (what can/can't be done) before the reflection process begins – which is not self-evident with an open-ended process
- Daring to change/abandon a method, depending upon the needs of the group
- Not losing focus on the basic question
- The process is as important as the end result
- Making time and space for meta-conversations after every meeting with the group
- Time for informal moments (lunch, etc)
- WhatsApp group as support for the reflection process



Retrospective by the Learning Community – Martha Xucunostli, Thamara Cruz, Mohammed Bellaziz, Abdulazez Dukhan, Ahmed Bellaziz, Geert Viaene, Sam Decoene, Nadia Guerti, Sadia Ait Baha Ou Idder, Stephen Scharmin, Saad Alshash

Eleven of the 17 people in the group were interviewed by Leidy Soto and Steve Bosmans of the FMDO after the first phase.

They included artists, people who regularly go to a museum and people who never go; a diverse group with different opinions about *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue*. This was also evident in the interviews. Below we have tried to put together the most important reflections.

Role

As a group we were invited to think about how museums can attract a more diverse audience; how a museum can be a place where people can meet and what role art can play in that.

Expectations

Some people did not really have any specific expectations, but were just curious. They saw it as a pleasant invitation from the museum to enter into a dialogue about this; to exchange with others about what their obstacles are, what they want to see in a museum, what they find beautiful and ugly; to brainstorm with the group about new ways of bringing people to the museum.

It was also seen as a good opportunity to get to know about art and the museum; to learn from each other, and to learn how the museum works.

Others had somewhat more specific expectations: to bring about change; to create new tools and instruments together in order to promote museum visits to a broader target group or to set up their own projects with the museum.

Experience of the process

In general, everyone was satisfied with the project and the process which they went through.

'Innovative' is a word which is often used to describe the process, especially in relation to the open-space, where the group itself took the lead and worked in small groups on certain themes and issues, starting from the questions which arose and the qualities in the group.

The open atmosphere and continuous exchange of views between people with different cultural backgrounds and frames of reference was also appreciated as it allowed for better understanding of the (potential) value of museums to society and the role of art in different contexts. The diversity of the group was also a great advantage in that respect.

There were a few people who felt that the process was not structured enough and the objective was too broad or not really shared by the group. Leaving too much open to individual interpretation can also have a negative effect on the group's creativity. The different backgrounds of the people meant that the conversations took off in all directions and were just talk. In that respect, the process was too open-ended. Others liked the fact that it was left open because it allowed a lot of room for creativity and their own input.

During the discussions the people often talked about the barriers they were experiencing. The building itself was already a barrier for several people: a static and large building that puts people off and immediately creates a very formal atmosphere. The security staff reinforces this feeling. Other barriers which were discussed are the entrance fees and the overwhelming number of things on display, which give you the feeling of being somewhat lost.

The pandemic was, of course, mentioned as a challenge and a game changer, especially since the online encounters were less satisfactory. The lack of time to really get to know each other and the collection was also a recurring issue.

The first exercise with the photos proved to be good practice in order to stimulate connection with the other people in the group. There was something recognisable in every story. But in terms of the whole process, some people found the group too big for them to hold a conversation. Smaller groups work better in order to connect, which the group also noticed during the open-space.

Looking back and forward

Most people look back on the first phase of this project with a positive feeling. Meeting and dialogue were usually cited to explain this feeling.

The openness in the group about sharing ideas with each other was much appreciated. The feeling that they listened to each other prevailed. The diversity within the group was also greatly appreciated. It provided cultural exchange and creativity. Or, as one person put it: During the process, the museum became a place for everyone.

*‘During the process,
the museum became a place for everyone.’*

Of course, there were also some points of criticism. For example, someone felt some pressure to find ideas or solutions for the barriers which they faced. Someone else added that in the last session they were looking a bit too specifically for practical ideas. By this he meant that they were confronted with how realistic the ideas were or were not within the museum’s current functioning. And that was a shame. All of a sudden, it all had to be very specific, which made fascinating ideas which clashed with practical objections suddenly seem superfluous, which undermined the mission of the project.

Someone else said that he did not learn as much as he had hoped, but at least knows now that he is not interested in discussing art.

The majority of participants would like to see a follow-up to the project. The idea of the podcast was something which often came up in that context. A few people have already indicated that they would like to continue working on this.

More generally, they believe that the project will have positive effects in any form anyway. Now we should continue the process of building it.



Gladys Vercammen-Grandjean, Open Museum

Gladys Vercammen-Grandjean worked until August 2021 for Brussels Museums, the independent museum federation representing no less than 120 Brussels museums and art houses. Within this organisation, she set up the *Open Museum* project. *Open Museum* wants to investigate how Brussels museums can become safe(r) spaces, places where everyone feels welcome, regardless of their gender, skin colour, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, level of education or age. Museums not only for, but also by everyone. This should transcend the event-specific and be tackled structurally, at the level of staff, programming, audiences and partnerships.

You can find all the necessary information about *Open Museum* and the further development of this museum inclusion project at www.openmuseum.brussels.

Given her clear link with the *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue* project, we kept Gladys informed of the progress and results. What follows is a summary of a conversation with her in August 2021.

What was striking to Gladys is that *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue* tried to cooperate with a group of people instead of developing something for a specific group. That sounds nice in theory, but often the question remains as to how to actually do it. This initiative got to work on that. The first question is how to reach the people whom you wish to involve. Many museums say they would like to do this, but they do not know how to find these people – on the one hand, because they do not have or know the networks, and on the other hand, sometimes because of a certain embarrassment about speaking to them. This project succeeded through the collaboration with FMDO.

‘*You have to get comfortable with the fact that you’re uncomfortable.*’

The tension between the process and the end result, which is mentioned several times, is familiar. Expectations from the outside in terms of specific results can kill a process and make people feel instrumentalised.

Since no specific end result has been proposed or imposed by the funders of this initiative, the ambition or the desire to achieve specific results in the short term points to a certain conditioning by the system in which we operate. It is difficult to let go of preconceived ideas. Unfortunately,

procedures, rules and practical objections often stand in the way of visionary ideas. The identification and deconstruction of the patterns in which we are trapped is necessary to achieve this. But that is sometimes difficult to justify internally. This brings us to the more philosophical question as to what being productive means.

Specifically within the context of a museum, the dichotomy between the front office and the back office also plays a role. Decisions are made in the back office, but input from the front office is not always sufficiently heeded. The Education and Mediation Department is usually in the grey zone in-between. Scientific expertise about the collection is rated more highly than the experiences and knowledge of the front office, mediators or visitors, while all these perspectives could also complement each other.

So an important question remains as to how to ensure that, at the very least, all the staff feel that they belong to the institution and can be heard – not necessarily to be involved in making decisions, but to ensure better-informed decisions.

Within such a context, ad hoc projects are usually permitted but are rarely, if ever, given a firm foothold, whereas they could in fact be a source of inspiration for more structural changes. The smooth flow of information and the building of bridges between different departments or hierarchical levels of an institution are also points for consideration in this context. Involving the decision-makers and gatekeepers in a process from the very beginning could be a possible route to take here.

In order to keep up with the times, it is also important for museums to look at their own history (and origins) and to communicate it honestly and transparently. The all-inclusive museum does not and will never exist, but it can be considered an ideal towards which you can work on a daily basis.

‘The all-inclusive museum does not and will never exist, but it can be considered an ideal towards which you can work on a daily basis.’

Going deeper into what causes tension and/or conflicts is a must in this context – not only looking at what connects people, but also at what sets them apart. In this project, for example, there is a clear tension between the wonderful world of the works of art and the actual barriers which visitors may experience in order to enjoy them. How can this be addressed? A museum does not have to look for an answer to that question on its own, but can reach out to the public to do so.

In short, an institution can also take a vulnerable and humane stance and admit where there are gaps, historical and current, but many museums unfortunately do not do this because it detracts from their image as a temple of wisdom and knowledge.

Sabine de Ville – Culture & Démocratie

Culture et Démocratie is a platform for reflection, observation, exchange and awareness of what links culture and democracy. This articulation nourishes the association since its origin in 1993.

Culture et Démocratie structures its research and reflection work in several thematic axes - prison, education, health, social work, right to participate in cultural life, digital, territories, commons, migration (s) – in which it explores their articulation with the cultural field. This work gives rise to exchanges and publications.

Culture et Démocratie participated in the initial stakeholder meeting and was informed about the results of the project in the form of this publication.

Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue in the light of cultural rights

The philosophy behind *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue* espouses the ambitions of the cultural policies introduced in the 1960s and 70s in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy, i.e. the desire to make ‘culture’ a polysemous term, accessible to as many people as possible, and in addition, to recognise in everyone a cultural actor able to influence society in an informed and critical way.

These policies, which are still in place today, have not produced all the expected effects. While, within the context of these deliberations on *Museum in Dialog/Musée en Dialogue*, we consider culture – in a narrower sense than the one from which C&D creates its works³ – as the whole of inherited, current and ‘distinguished’ forms of artistic creation of all kinds, the conclusion is clear: these forms mobilise only a small section of the population.

This realisation has resulted in a large number of mediation initiatives over the last few decades. These mediation policies have gradually become more widespread within cultural institutions, stimulated by their subsidising bodies and/or driven by a growing societal concern – taking concrete action to promote the inclusion of groups who would be more representative for the society as a whole. The mediation practices, designed by cultural operators, have become more inventive in order to stimulate an autonomous curiosity and appetite among sections of the

³ We shape culture from the definition given to it by the Mexico City Declaration in 1982: ‘In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life. It is culture that gives man the ability to reflect upon himself. It is culture that makes us specifically human, rational beings, endowed with a critical judgement and a sense of moral commitment. It is through culture that we discern values and make choices. It is through culture that man expresses himself, becomes aware of himself, recognizes his incompleteness, questions his own achievements, seeks...’

public that would normally stay away from this kind of cultural venues and offerings.

The project in question obviously stems from this approach. Even better, it reflects the current trends in cultural mediation, which is now focused on active participation. It was designed based on a dialogue with the participants in question, several external organisations, including ours, that were likely to provide added value to the project, and with the project managers within the RMFAB. And it was rolled out with a continuing desire for discussion, dialogue and shared construction.

Here, because this project implements them, we would like to mention cultural rights, an issue Culture & Démocratie has been working on for almost 15 years.⁴ Céline Romainville (UCL, Université de Namur), whose research covers constitutional law, human rights law and cultural law, states this in her work.

The right for all citizens to be involved in cultural life, a right set out in the Belgian constitution, can be broken down into six concrete rights:

- artistic freedom or the right to create and distribute without hindrance
- the right to maintain, develop and promote cultures and heritages
- the right to access culture; to receive the means to overcome financial, geographic and time obstacles, and to access the cultural references and keys for overcoming psychological, symbolic and educational obstacles
- the right to take part in the diversity of cultural life, to receive the concrete means for self-expression in an artistic and creative form...
- the right for free choice in participation in cultural life
- the right to participate in the implementation of cultural policies and the concrete decisions concerning this right.⁵

While many of these rights are included in the project we are discussing here, we will nevertheless allow ourselves to make one comment and one proposal before we conclude.

Comment: The concept of an excluded or distanced audience continues to influence the cultural discourse, giving even participatory approaches the perhaps involuntary logic of an audience ‘without culture or outside culture’ that will finally have the opportunity to access it. This a priori seemingly insignificant vocabulary issue is crucial, in our opinion.

Proposal: This type of project, an interpretation of the collections based on a dialogue between cultures and an openness to diversity, would best be undertaken with all types of audience, from the most informed to the most distant. Our multicultural society would become even richer if it brought together all its components in this type of initiative within its cultural institutions. The vast creativity of projects created within the Sésame framework would justify going beyond the context of this framework and make it available to every type of audience.

We will conclude there, as we have not been able to closely observe the progress of this project that was also influenced by the pandemic and its consequences. There is still plenty of work to make cultural venues,

⁴ The ‘Culture et vous ?’ (Culture and you?) brochure published by Culture & Démocratie in 2009 and available on its website, contains a useful summary of this issue.

⁵ Céline Romainville, Neuf essentiels pour comprendre les ‘droits culturels’ et le droit de participer à la vie culturelle’, Culture & Démocratie Culture & Démocratie, Brussels, 2013, p.50-51.

and particularly museums, familiar to as many people as possible. We are convinced that, for people who have lived here since their childhood, schools are the first open sesame. In this respect, the cultural and artistic education programme (PECA Parcours d'Éducation Culturelle et Artistique), provided for by the Pact of Excellence for Compulsory Education in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, opens up solid perspectives and, having done a great deal of work to achieve this, we are looking forward.

'This type of project, an interpretation of the collections based on a dialogue of cultures and an openness to diversity, would best be undertaken with all types of audience, from the most informed to the most distant.'



Bart Rogé – Demos

Demos is a team of nomadic knowledge workers. We follow social developments that shape the culture, youth work and sports sector, and work towards equality and participation. We stand for culture, youth work and sports that drive social change and build a more open, inclusive and democratic society.

Demos participated in the initial stakeholder meeting and was kept informed of the progress and results during the process.

Blind spot

I remember a lesson about the functioning of the human eye. I must have been about twelve years old. The lesson, taught by a young intern, was interspersed with various hands-on assignments. That is why it is still so clear in my mind.

We were instructed to draw a dot on a sheet of paper with next to it, at fixed distances, the numbers from 1 to 10. We held the sheet at a distance of 20 centimetres, covered our right eye and let our gaze run over the numbers. Somewhere between numbers six and seven, the dot suddenly disappeared. In this way we discovered our blind spot, the place in our retina where our optic nerves meet and leave our eyeball. I found that a fascinating discovery. But there was more.

We were instructed to draw a coloured line through the numbers. When we then ran our gaze over the numbers, there was no longer a blind spot. The dot was coloured by the image that surrounded it. How genius. Our brains, unconsciously, fill in that blind spot.

I often use this story as a metaphor. Everyone has a blind spot. We are blind to a vast amount of knowledge and experiences. This is normal. We are also fluent in recognizing this fact. But we are less easily aware that we often fill in our blind spots on the basis of assumptions and stereotypes. This applies to both our personal and our professional lives. How do we deal with blind spots and our tendency to fill them in ourselves?

The right starting question

The starting point of this project was such a blind spot: how can the collection of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium be used to stimulate dialogue and encounters with 'the Other' and to explore

concepts such as shared citizenship, integration and belonging? In this trajectory, 'The Other' is the museum's blind spot. 'The Other' would be sought out. Their gaze, their 'other' experience and knowledge would provide answers to a complex how-to question.

During an initial meeting with the project team, I pointed out the danger of othering that might make people part of a problem that is not necessarily theirs. After all, the questioning starts from the institutional framework of the museum. 'Make sure you start working from a shared problem. Definitely make time for that.'

I urged the museum to be vulnerable. 'You will have to explain well to the participants why you are seeking answers to this how question. You will have to be willing to abandon the solutions you are already offering [deploying the collection] and keep new paths open.'

When you run a participatory trajectory from the Other, you easily gain insight into what is driving (group) inequality and exclusion, but you are also more likely to drive it. My point was clear: make sure that you go through this project together – people who work in the museum together with external participants, starting from a question that you all share. After all, the solutions will also have to come from that institutional framework, from the museum, not just from the participants. 'The museum can't shy away from that responsibility,' I said, 'you have to join in.'

The project team was genuinely concerned and receptive to my point of view. The initial starting question was soon left behind. This was to be a co-creative process. In the call to participants, the starting question was reformulated: 'Are you interested in discovering the museums and the collection of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in a small group and exploring whether the art works and the museums can be a space for encounter?' People could sign up. Anyone who wanted to could participate provided they committed to attend at least three sessions. They would work with the museum to consider goals and new, different strategies and initiatives.

Open Space Technology and co-creation

Co-creation is not an easy process. It is an open innovation process in which the initiative, goals, design and final result are created in consultation with participants. Museum staff and participants have to get to know and respect each other's goals and interests.

Open Space Technology was quickly chosen as the method. This allowed the group to self-organize and explore the starting question broadly. An open character, meeting and informal contact are the main ingredients in this method. When starting from an open question and when there is sufficient time and space, participants bring in topics and experiences that they themselves find important. This approach often produces unexpected twists. For example, the group talked about thresholds to the museum, about the right ticket price... but also about the silence in the museum or how people actually talk about art.

To be able to work in a co-creation process in a focused way, a number of important conditions must be met beforehand. From the start, for example, it must be clear what can and cannot be done. That was challenging in this project because it was based on an open question with an open end.

In this kind of co-creation process, the museum has to let go of part of the control. Museum staff must be able to let go of their own expectations or concepts, and be open to new, different ideas from the participants. They must be willing to allow the project to evolve in such a way that it provides the most added value for the participants. In other words, they must recognize that they do not have sole ownership of the process and the results it produces. At the same time, the project team must be able to guarantee that the process will land somewhere, that the results will also be tangible for the participants. This creates a tension: What do the participants want? What can the museum go along with?

'Expertise resides in networks, in which all parties are equal. Networks need to be built and maintained. Networks are relationships, they are interdependent. They require a different way of working – through co-creation for example.'

Confess your colours

In an interim discussion with someone from the project team, I sensed the challenges of the co-creation process. The dynamics within the group of participants were good. They were expertly guided by different people and warmly received by the mediation team of the RMFAB. The group could decide together how to work. But I felt there was some uncertainty about the exact goals of the initiative. The time-frame that was provided and, additionally, the pandemic did not make it easy to work through this. The moment all the ideas that came out of the various open-space sessions were listed; it was up to the mediation team to show their colours. They had to indicate what was feasible for the museum at that time and what was not. After that discussion, the group finally selected two ideas to work on: a podcast series would be made and an internal meeting with all departments of the museum would be set up in which participants would talk about their experiences and ideas.

The latter is important. From literature and similar projects I learned that it is better not to set up co-creation projects only from the mediation department. Such projects must find a broader mandate within an organization. Museums must formulate a shared vision about community participation and determine the extent to which they can let go of control and content. This often requires a change in mindset on the part of a museum.

In this trajectory, I felt that such a change in mentality is growing from the bottom up. There is certainly no need to wait for a solid strategic vision from a boardroom. Such trajectories always have their value and their impact grows when more, and a greater variety, of museum staff can connect to them.

Ownership and control

As diversity in our society increases, so do our blind spots. The premise of this project illustrates this. The museum needs the gaze of the Other to continue to oversee the whole. It is important not to fill in that lack, as our brains do, too quickly with what we already know or expect.

Museum professionals must be open to the idea that they do not have a monopoly on knowledge. Expertise resides in networks, in which all parties are equal. Networks need to be built and maintained. Networks are relationships, they are interdependent. They require a different way of working – through co-creation for example.

It pays to share ownership. And often that also means that control shifts from museum professionals to external communities and groups. The making of the podcast series nicely illustrates this dynamic.

The cultural education organization De Veerman was asked to work with a number of people from the group to make a series of podcasts that would further address the central question of the project. One of the conditions was that the group would be able to work completely autonomously. They would select their own work from RMFAB's collection and work out the storylines. The people at the museum recognized that it was not obvious to let go of that, but in the end they did. The people at the museum agree that the result is surprising and relevant.

To conclude

To give such trajectories every chance, a museum should graft its mission and strategy onto an idea of open innovation and community-building. This implies a change in mentality. It is best to let such a change grow from the bottom up, step by step, through such processes. You do not have to approach everything in a museum in a participatory way. That would not work. But a museum has to use participation in a more targeted way throughout the entire organization and therefore has to be aware of it, also on a strategic level.

Sources

For this text and my contribution to this project I drew heavily on the experience of Nina Simon, as she wrote about it in her book 'The Participatory Museum, and the comments on it by Jacqueline van Leeuwen (FARO) and Tine Rock (Stedelijke Musea Hasselt). The book *Heritage brokerage: practical knowledge for bridge-builders* is a fascinating guide for anyone who wants to work participatively in heritage and museums. The more academic work of Bernadette Lynch is also very suitable for museums that want to discover their own blind spots.

Annex: Overview of ideas

The museum's external communications

- Flyers/posters in atypical places (bakeries, butcher's shops, night shops, general practitioners, hospitals, schools, etc) instead of the typical distribution points
- Large billboards and surveys as to their effect
- Contacts with the neighbourhood and community work
- Broad consultation/promotion together with all kinds of organisations
- Random conversations in the neighbourhood about art in collaboration with volunteers
- Pictograms or street stickers encouraging people to enter

The museum as an institution: how to make it a welcoming meeting place?

- Tickets: price reductions or re-entry tickets
- Welcoming text in the hall/on entering the building
- Security personnel: more colourful clothing and a broader interpretation of their role
- Improving internal communication: the idea of an internal meeting, all departments play a role in making the museum a welcoming place of encounter
- Welcome area/lounge in the heart of the museum: any ideas on how to organise it?
- Making the entrance hall available to the neighbourhood.
- Cooperation with volunteers who welcome and show people around (outside and inside) (in exchange for a museum pass/volunteer allowance?)
- A cosy museum café: non-profit organisations or social entrepreneurs as concessionaires (for a shorter period)? Or include openness to third-party activities in the criteria for concessionaires?
- Space for feedback from visitors with specific questions (continuation of open-space)
- The museum as a serene place for societal debates including different perspectives

Collection and exhibitions: art as a connecting and liberating factor

- Tinder in the museum: developing an app for unexpected encounters in the museum
- Podcasts/blindfolds: looking through different eyes
- Selfie wall: selfies with your favourite work of art (in the welcome area?)
- Exhibitions based on different themes: the kitchen, the role of women, migration etc.
- Creating space for the feelings of visitors (emotional networks)
- Attention for the artist as a person
- Meeting days with a specific painting/work as a theme, in cooperation with the FMDO
- Discussion cafés with breakfast (each time from a different country) on Sunday mornings
- Focus on young/contemporary artists
- Time traveling through the creation of multi-sensory experience (images, sounds, smells) from the artist's time
- Sociological approach with a focus on ordinary people in cooperation with (art) schools (for example, for video/photo reports) and universities
- Permanent art studios in the museum

