

Book
in progress

European city museums

Tim Marshall and Joan Roca, ed.



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Part 1:
European city history
and city museums now

Summary text for webpages

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These webpages present the work-in-progress chapters of a publication on European city museums. Even before the whole book is completed and published, readers will be able to benefit from the varied illuminations contained in these pages.

The purpose of the final publication is to provide a book on the development of European city museums, their current transformation and their potential as a response to urban and continental changes and disruptions.

The book surveys the alterations of city museums underway in Europe, presents discussion of central themes raised by the current phases of museum transformations, and disseminates city museum experience.

This experience is primarily that of the Barcelona based City History Museums and Research Network of Europe. This Network was set up in 2010 by the city museums of Barcelona and Amsterdam. By means of regular meetings of its 20 members it has debated current challenges faced by this type of museum, in an informal and small scale setting, as a complement to the formal meetings and networks in the ICOM institutional frameworks. The network published in 2013 The Barcelona Declaration on European City Museums, later published also by ICOM/CAMOC [<https://cityhistorymuseums.wordpress.com/>].

Current members of the network come from the following cities (the membership changes over time, with a few previously involved not now active, and others joining recently): Amsterdam, Antwerp, Barcelona, Berlin, Bordeaux, Budapest, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Helsinki, Krakow, Lisbon, Ljubljana, London, Luxembourg, Lyon, Madrid, Rome, Rotterdam, Stockholm, Turin, Vienna.

Specifically the book will have the following sections

Introduction

Introducing the topic: the need for an urban approach to Europe in a fast changing world, focusing on the role of city museums in explaining the city; why this is important and current, the origins of the book in the Barcelona based network of European city museums, the arrangement of the book.

Part 1: the european city museum phenomenon

This Part provides the foundation for understanding how and why city museums came into being in the late 19th century, and gives some idea of their historical development across a range of varied European contexts. It also introduces the normative discussions around the purposes of these museums in the

creation of a new dimension in public space and in the public domain, with a social and participatory dimension, as seen by the Barcelona city history museum director. This Part has four chapters.

Part 2: big city museum projects

This Part consists of a set of case study chapters of some recent and current transformative projects. These are selected for their interest and variety, as well as because they have been active in the Network: Barcelona, Berlin, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Lisbon and London. These are city museums with large projects either completed, under way, or in the planning stages. This Part has six chapters.

Part 3: city museum themes

This Part is thematic. In the meetings of the European Network since 2010, a wide range of topics has been debated, partly coinciding with the discussion underway in many forums (especially in CAMOC) on the core purposes of city museums, and how these can be achieved in the wide range of real world circumstances around Europe. This Part has seven chapters.

Conclusion

The concluding chapter will recap some of the most critical issues for the future of city museums in the construction of Europe, and in the construction of each city. In particular, how can the current city museums investment offensive be valorised (taken full advantage of), to meet the challenges across Europe in the coming decades?

Part 2: Major transformation projects in six city museums

The new Museum of Copenhagen

Vivi Lena Andersen and Jakob Ingemann Parby

The inauguration

In February 2020 the new Museum of Copenhagen opened in a central location of Copenhagen. The opening took place after a shutdown period of four and a half years during which the municipality and the museum collaborated with architects, engineers and other specialists in the restoration and transformation of the existing building, consisting of municipal offices and dating to 1894, to a venue that suited the needs and facilities of a modern city museum.

Simultaneously, the museum staff developed and curated the new exhibitions, redefined the vision and mission of the museum and even carried out a major move of its collections to a newly built storage facility in the suburbs of Copenhagen finished in 2017.

More than 3000 people attended the opening event including Her Majesty the Queen of Denmark, the Lord Mayor, but also huge crowds of Copenhageners of all kinds and ages that wanted to be part of the inauguration and be among the first to see the results of the long creation process. The response to the new museum and the public interest in attending the reopening in the new location was a testimony to the significant role of city museums in the 21st century and clearly demonstrated the longing and sensation of an almost existential void that the close down had created among the audience.

For the museum staff and the vast number of external contributors the opening marked both a climax and an exhilaration of relief following a process that has taken almost 10 years from the first ideas about the need for new premises for the galleries and storage spaces of the museum . To experience the joy, dialogue and conviviality among the visitors. To glance at the queue of visitors and guests lining up 800 meters down the road. To hear the sound of the music played from the balcony over the entrance reverberating through the building, the exhortations of admiration, the buzz of the conversations and laughter, and the thoughtful words of invited speakers. To feel the bodies of visitors thronging together in the central staircase, the galleries, the museum café and the historical garden in the courtyard with the words of the first positive reviews in national and local media still spinning in our minds.

It was an amazing moment for both the curators and the rest of staff at the museum, just as it seemed to be for our visitors, but we were well aware that the celebrations only initiated the next phase in the history of the museum as a kind of rite of passage into the long haul of operating the museum in its new neighborhood and adjusting our organization to cater for an altered and more

numerous public. Little did we know that a month later COVID-19 would arrive in Denmark and change our personal as well as institutional life. Before COVID-19 the museum was well on its way to a new level of visitor numbers with a projection of 150.000 visitors a year. As elsewhere the pandemic has seriously crippled this projection, but even after the lock down the museum has had higher numbers than before the move.

An open-ended democratic space

This article explores the context and history of the creation of the new Museum of Copenhagen as an example of the broader trends among European city museums. In recent decades city museums have taken long strides to transform themselves from their origins as a kind of local version of the traditional national museums of cultural history, into what Duncan Grewcock has described as “an open-ended [...] democratic space, that can be physically experienced as a quarter of the city, but also used as a site for debate, discussion and experimentation on urban issues within the context of a city’s past, present and future”. He also envisions the city museum as “a networked, distributed conversation rather than an inward-looking institution”.¹ This means, among other things, that the exhibitions, collections and research projects of the museum should include both immaterial and material heritage, involve and engage different group of citizens and advance a concept of urban history that emphasizes the ongoing production and rewriting of history, a polyphonic concept of urban and neighborhood identity, a methodological generosity and the nurturing of cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Since 2008 the Museum of Copenhagen has attempted to rethink itself along such lines of thinking. Changing its profile from a more traditional, static museum with permanent chronological galleries to a more contemporary institution, it has developed its visitor profile through a comprehensive program of outreach projects, exhibitions on contemporary topics, and experiments with online and urban space dissemination. Simultaneously, the huge archaeological excavations carried out preceding the completion of the Metro City Ring in 2019 along with many other important excavations in recent decades, have increased our knowledge of both the earliest and the later phases of Copenhagen’s urban development and everyday life. And this has led to an increase in research on various topics related to migration and cultural diversity, urbanity, consumption, health and identity among other topics. All of the above prepared the ground for the move.

1. Duncan GREWCOCK, “Museums of Cities and Urban Futures” in *Museum International* 58, 3, p. 32-42, 2006); see also Joan ROCA: “At the Crossroads of Cultural and Urban Policies. Rethinking the City and the City Museum” in Jelena SAVIC, ed.: *The Future of City Museums*, Camoc, 2018, pp. 14-25.

The layout and exhibitions of the new museum merged the concept of networked conversation with new tendencies in the museum sector centering on sustainable exhibition practices, accessibility and new forms of cultural tourism. Among other things this meant creating anew a permanent exhibition presenting the history of Copenhagen for locals, visitors and newcomers to the city, while incorporating knowledge and experiences from user-involving curatorial processes of recent years. It has also meant focusing on creating a diverse event program and special exhibition program to accommodate the ambition to maintain and extend the museum as a site for all the users and citizens of the Danish capital. After the outbreak of the COVID 19-pandemic some of this target points have of course changed dramatically and the focus on tourism has been partly supplanted by the notion of more balanced urban economies that rely less heavily on mass tourism.² But this was not the case when we started the project in 2015. Before we move on it feels necessary to offer a brief presentation of the history of the museum.

A brief historical overview

The museum’s history began in 1901 at the newly built City Hall, which was officially inaugurated in 1905, but from 1901 had a functioning clock tower and from 1903 housed the meetings of the Copenhagen’s City Council and municipal administration. The City Hall intendant, Ernst Nyrop-Larsen, a cousin of the City Hall’s architect, Martin Nyrop, began collecting paintings, photographs and remnants of torn down buildings for an exhibition in the loft of the City Hall. From 1916 the collections were opened to the public. Since then the management and further development of the collections were professionalized by the employment of a curator from the National Museum and the museum were gradually expanded. In 1956 the loft of the city hall had become both impractical and inconvenient for the purposes of a museum and the museum found a new venue in the Royal Shooting Society’s 18th century palais at Vesterbrogade, which had been vacated some years earlier.

The museum remained in this location until the autumn of 2015 and the 60 years saw the museum transform from a traditional cultural history museum with a more traditional exhibition practice including tableaux, interiors and lots of objects on display to more thematic exhibitions related to contemporary issues. In 1996, when Copenhagen was the cultural capital of Europe, new permanent galleries were developed and a rise in visitor numbers ensued, only to drop again in the new millennium, until a number of special exhibitions,

2. For more perspectives on the future of city museums, see: SAVIC, *The Future of...; Focus on sustainable tourism*, see: Jan VAN DER BORG and Antonio PAULO RUSSO, “Towards Sustainable Tourism in Venice” in *Sustainable Venice: Suggestions for the Future*, 2001, pp. 159-193.



The original museum galleries in the loft of the City Hall. The museum at the time was hardly a museum, but more an open collection organized topographically.

new research projects and an extensive event program between 2010 and 2014 formed the latest peak in the museum's popularity and public impact.

However, between 1995 and 2015 visitor numbers never exceeded 60.000 a year and this eventually led to a push to move. Both the museum's management and the municipality gradually came to the conclusion that the new Cultural District, which integrated well known cultural institutions and tourist hubs like Tivoli, City Hall, the National Museum, Glyptoteket, the Royal Library with new ones like the new BLOX/Danish Architectural Centre built between 2014 and 2018, had the potential to increase the museum's visitor numbers and create a synergy similar to the effects that could be observed in areas like Museumsinsel in Berlin, Quartier des Spectacles in Montreal and the MuseumsQuartier in Vienna. Since 2016 the neighborhood has been branded as the Copenhagen Cultural District.³

The decision was made to move the museum to this area. And the building selected to house the museum was Stormgade 18; an architectural

3. See <https://kulturkvarteret.dk/en/>



Illustration 2: The new museum building. Photo: Adam Mørk.

gem now again made accessible to the public. The new museum building—originally built to house the Public Trustee in 1893-94—is a historicist complex modelled after the Italian villa and containing a rich and varied architectural expression and ornamentation related to the Public Trustee's role as caretaker of the funds and properties of minors and other legally incapacitated persons.

As part of the transition from municipal offices to public museum, a concerted effort was made to restore and highlight the architectural qualities and the cultural history of the site as an integral and important part of the museum experience, while simultaneously creating an exhibition design that clearly signified the vision of the city museum in the 21st century.

The mission of the new museum of Copenhagen is to be the collective memory of Copenhagen and to reflect the history of the city and its people. It should be easily accessible and the obvious choice for everyone curious to know more about the city and its histories, connectivities and contrasts. The museum should be a place of identification and pride and a place that Copenhageners of all ages, origins, beliefs and occupations recurrently visit and use as a starting point for dialogues about the city's past, present and future.

Curating and designing the museum experience

The permanent galleries

The new permanent galleries in the museum are an integral and central part of the new museum. Their conceptualization emerged from the notion that, rather than specific objects in the collection, the city is in fact the museum's main object. The overall conceptual idea behind the design and curation of the new galleries was to “bring the city into the museum” as well as “taking the museum to the streets” as we had earlier done very successfully with *The WALL*—an award-winning digital and user-involving dissemination project consisting of a 10 meter long touchscreen containing small exhibitions and an interactive cityscape. This installation toured the city from 2010-2016 alongside the archaeological excavations carried out by the museum's archaeological department prior to the establishment of the Metro City Ring—the third phase of Copenhagen's underground railroad-system.⁴ It was taken out of use because of new copyright regulation in Denmark that made it complicated to keep the uploaded material of users accessible online. In 2017 we created a new mobile museum *The Past Exposed* that built on our experiences with *The WALL* and functioned as a kind of pop-up museum while the new museum was in the making.⁵ New forms of dissemination in the city space continue to be a part of the museum's strategy for the future, although we also still use more traditional forms of dissemination like city walks, open archaeological excavations and pop-up photo exhibitions on site.⁶

The city in the museum

To bring the city into the museum we structured our design and curation of the galleries around a reinterpretation of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope. In literary theory the chronotope is a notion describing how configurations of time and space are represented in language and discourse. And Bakhtin himself particularly used the concept to explore how different literary genres operated with different configurations of time and space, which gave each genre its particular narrative character.⁷ In the curation of the galleries we applied the

4. Jette SANDAHL, et al.: “Taking the Museum to the Streets”, in J. TRANT and D. BEARMAN (eds). *Museums and the Web 2011: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Published March 31, 2011. Consulted September 10, 2020. http://conference.archimuse.com/mw2011/papers/taking_the_museum_to_the_streets

5. See www.fortidenfremkaldt.dk

6. See f.i.: <https://kulturhavn365.dk/havnen-foer-og-nu/>

7. Mikhail M. BAKHTIN, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics”, in Mikhail M. BAKHTIN, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. 1981. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990d. 84-258. We thank Mikkel Thelle, head of the Danish Centre for Urban History, for suggesting the perspective of the chronotope in the initial stages of the curatorial process.



Graphic presentation of the concept for the permanent galleries. From the prospectus in 2017. Nanna Arnfred/Elias Levinsky [note this figure should be adapted to the layout of the book if used]

concept to create a very direct connection between a specific time period in the history of Copenhagen and a specific site in the contemporary city. From this starting point we unfolded different themes of particular relevance for the age in question. For instance, the theme of city planning is presented in the gallery relating to the renaissance of Copenhagen in the 17th century, the building of the Bourse and the first attempts at large scale city planning inspired by Dutch influences during the reign of Christian IV. Whereas the interpretation of modern Copenhagen around 1900 uses the new square in front of the City Hall to unfold the impact of new technologies in the transformation of the city and its inhabitants. Other galleries relate to poverty and crime, literature and communication, social hierarchies and neighborhood identities. Every gallery is named after a locality in the city and thus, for the visitors, a walk through the history of the city also becomes a walk through its geography. The museum experience to some extent emulates that of the city map—in a way that is similar to the psycho-geographical maps of the Situationists and Guy Debord—focusing on the personal and playful exploration of the urban.⁸

8. See f.i.: Tom McDonough, ed. *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, Boston, October Press, 2004; Guy DEBORD: “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography” in *Les Lèvres Nues*, 6, 1955. <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/2>



Example of cast: foot from the sculpture of Johan Ludvig Holberg in front of the Royal Theatre at Kongens Nytorv. JAC studios/Museum of Copenhagen 2020.

The galleries were developed in a close collaboration between designers from JAC studios and curators at the museum. In the design and composition of the galleries we highlighted the presence of the past in the contemporary city by naming the galleries after specific neighborhoods or locations in the city and supplementing those with casts of elements from the area at full scale.

This way visitors can for example get close to and touch parts of sculptures and buildings related to the location, time period and topics in each gallery. The curatorial approach is intended to offer visitors a physical connection with the city outside the museum's walls and a very clear sense of the interconnectivities between the past and the present.

The designers from JAC studios added to this experience by creating cases in each room related to the architecture and urban development of the historical age they described, and the themes explored in each gallery. Thus, the cases in the gallery related to the metropolitanization and electrification of Copenhagen around 1900 was done with white glass emulating the glass of the first electric street lamps in the city from 1892, whereas the gallery dealing with the social hierarchies and ethnic diversity of 17th and 18th century Copenhagen were inspired by baroque pavilions and the intensive use of mirrors in the banquet halls of the époque.

Elsewhere, in the gallery Brokvartererne/The Bridge Districts we use an open grid design to give a sense of the activity and construction in the period of modern urbanization and industrialization. The design emulates the scaffolding used by construction workers to raise the multilevel apartment buildings in the second half of the 19th century, built to house the huge influx of rural migrants seeking job opportunities in the new factories and shops of the growing metropolis and fleeing from the growing poverty of the countryside. The scaffolding was fitted with screens showing images of present-day inhabitants in the Bridge Districts as a comment on the gallery's focus on the historical processes that have shaped the identity and layout of each neighborhood and their populations.

The cases in all the galleries are made in white colours in order to make a clear contrast to the colourful original decorations in the historical architecture of the new building. This was done to create a clear distinction between the restored architecture and the history of the building itself vis-a-vis the insertions and interpretations of the modern museum.

The interplay between darkness and light was another way to distinguish the original architecture from the interpretative layers in the exhibition. A case in point was the gallery Slotsholmen/The Creation dealing with the foundation of the city in the 11th and 12th century. The central case was designed as an oval structure around a marble beam that was part of the original architecture of the room. The case was designed with a dark bottom and with finds hovering above the darkness in an epic lighting emulating the archaeological excavation and symbolizing the knowledge about the early history of Copenhagen hovering over the abyss of lost or still undiscovered information on early life in the city.



The gallery Slotsholmen/The Creation. Photo by: Adam Mørk.



Look inside/through the mirrored cabinet. An interactive installation shows the visitor at Amalienborg Slotsplads witnessing an encounter of persons of rank as an introduction to the social hierarchies and cultures of greeting in 18th century Copenhagen. Photo by: Adam Mørk.



The Gallery Amalienborg with the mirrored cabinet-case. Photo by: Adam Mørk.



The gallery The Bridge Districts with the white scaffolding. Photo by: Adam Mørk.

Curatorial principles

The space of this article will not allow us to go into detail about the narratives and objects selected for all the galleries. Instead we will highlight three curatorial principles and offer some examples of how we have unfolded them in our selection of items to be displayed.

Urban Planning

One of our primary ambitions was to give visitors an understanding of the processes of urban generation and regeneration as well as some of the structuring principles and events in the making of Copenhagen. This was done throughout the exhibition with an extensive use of maps and figures demonstrating the transformation of the city through time from the earliest signs of human settlements in the area to the expanding city of the 21st century. Many galleries also used specific objects to explore the shifting definitions of the urban and the urban plan. In most cases the perspective was on the city and its inhabitants rather than national and political history.

In the section dealing with the medieval city, a large display of wooden posts from the 13th century that were used to keep the soil of the medieval ramparts in place were placed alongside items related to the specialization of production and trade in the medieval city. In this way visitors gained insight into archaeological definitions of urbanity ranging from the establishment of defence systems and churches to the development of craft and commerce. The room exploring the development of the Renaissance city in the 16th and 17th century was designed following the model of the ideal city envisioned by Renaissance architects and urban planners using a pillar from Sankt Annæ Rotunda as the focal point of attention. Sankt Annæ Rotunda was part of the New Copenhagen neighborhood laid out by King Christian IV and was planned as a magnificent dome church with inspiration from St Peter's in Rome. The king, however, had to give up the project because of his wartime expenditure and the dome was left as a 16-meter-high unfinished structure later to be destroyed, while the building materials were used in other building projects of the 17th century. The pillars were recovered from restoration projects in the 20th century and preserved in the museum collections.

In another gallery, Nørreport or The Northern Gate, visitors can explore the structure of the city gates as an important boundary between urban and rural identities as well as a toll gate. An archway of the new museum building is used to create a sense of the scale and soundscape of passing through the city gates and stimulate the imagination of visitors. The gallery unfolded the importance of the gate as both a part of the defence of the city, but more importantly as a physical, juridical and mental border between urban and rural, foreign and native, privileged and unprivileged.



Gallery on the Renaissance city with the column from Sankt Annæ Rotunde.

A final example to highlight is the gallery on the development of the city after WW2 where modern city planners, politicians and grassroots groups negotiated and fought over the right to the city. In this room a movie gives voice to citizens that took part in different waves of peaceful and more violent squatting of condemned buildings and tried to form alternative ways of life in the city against a backdrop of protest and resistance from authorities as well as other local citizens. Some were successful, as was the case of the Freetown Christiania, whilst others ultimately failed, but in some cases still imprinted a lasting memory on the city for better or worse. The movie as well as the exhibited items have proved effective in starting dialogues among visitor groups about current protest and grass root movements as well as the broader issue of the right to the city as formulated by Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey.⁹

9. The movie was produced for the museum by Christine Hybschmann and Adam Rieper, but for copyright reasons is only available in the museum. Regarding the concept Right to the City, see: Henri LEFEBVRE: *Le Droit à la Ville*, 1968 and David HARVEY: "The Right to the City" in *NLR*, II, 53, 2008, pp. 23-40. <https://newleftreview.org/issues/II53/articles/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city>

The potential in disasters

Exploring the interplay between disasters like fires and epidemics and the ensuing transformation of the urban space as well as measures to improve hygiene, hospitals and supply systems are another topic in the permanent exhibition. Like most cities, Copenhagen has experienced its share of disasters like fires, epidemics and war. In other city museums such disasters are often presented as dramatic or even fateful moments in time and the interpretation focuses on the human lives and cultural heritage lost. This narrative was also integrated in our galleries focusing on the plague in 1711, the cholera of 1853, the fires in 1728 and 1795 as well as the British bombardment of the city in 1807. But alongside the focus on living through disastrous events we also highlighted the potential for change that is inherent in such events and unfolded how each disaster had given rise to new practices within urban planning, burial customs and health care while in some cases also introducing new architectural styles and new regimes of hygiene, poor relief, water supply and sewage. The themes explored in the room has only increased their relevance during the current global health crisis.

The intimacy of everyday life

In the central case of the initial room one encounters the remains of early Copenhageners alongside documents and items documenting our latest knowledge of the city's foundation which can now be dated to the middle of the 11th century or more than a 100 years before the hitherto official dating. This introduces our use of the presence of the past and the intimacy of everyday life as curatorial principle. Throughout the galleries we have integrated items and narratives that illuminate the personal lives of past Copenhageners and make use of their life stories to introduce broader themes and interconnectivities. Thus, the story of the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, of whom the museum has a unique collection of personal items, is integrated in a broader narrative about the importance of Copenhagen for the development of the Danish book market and the birth of the modern writer. But items like his silver dip pen, a lock of hair taken from his deathbed and the finger ring that he first gave to his fiancée, Regine Olsen, and later got back, refitted and wore the rest of his life after breaking the engagement, brings us very close to the everyday life of perhaps the most world famous Copenhageners. Similarly, a medieval children's boot, an ear cleaner in 24 carat gold, an 18th century sedan chair and the camera from the last of the 20th century street photographers on City Hall Square along with a movie of his work offers visitors an intimate connection with past lives and routines. So does a jacket belonging to one of the first squatters in Copenhagen in the 1960s and a uniform from one of the poorhouses for boys from the 18th century dotted with ink stains from the pen of a scribe, when the boys were involved with drawing the winning numbers for one of the first state

lottery. The income from the lottery funded the poorhouse, but the lottery itself also led people to gambling problems and new poverty.

Another intimacy is created through an extensive use of voice recordings giving visitors access to life stories and eye-witness accounts. We use listening stations and in some cases actors reading original sources to bring the past and present experiences of Copenhageners to life—for instance eyewitnesses to the plague in 1711 and the cholera in 1853.



Remains of a plague victim 1711. The woman died from the plague at approximately 25 years of age.



A lock of hair from Søren Kierkegaard.



Camera from the street photographer Jens Nielsen, who worked at the City Hall Square from 1929-1973.



Sedan chair from the 18th century used in Copenhagen.



Woollen coat used by one of the early members of the squatter movement in Copenhagen during the peaceful occupation of the condemned property Sofiegaarden 1965-1969.



Uniform worn by a boy from the royal orphanage. The uniform has ink stains on the right shoulder. They stem from the boys' function during the drawing of the winning numbers for the state lottery. The income from the lottery ticket sale funded the orphanage.

Copenhagen Panorama – a place in time

The visit culminates with an interactive model displaying the layout of the contemporary city and using laser technology, soundscapes, light, a data wall and a movie to add multiple layers of interpretation of the model and to visualize the boundaries of the city in the past.

Copenhagen has been shaped by thousands of years of history. The model of the city and the panorama with the Copenhagen skyline show how the city has come into being. The model is a 1:750 cast of Copenhagen today, from the lakes around the center of Copenhagen to Amager and from the northern port to the south harbour. Here you can see the places and buildings you can discover as 1:1 fragments in the other rooms of the exhibition. Each fragment has its place in the story, and each place has its own history, and together they form a city and become our gateways to its past and future. Here time and place meet and fragments coalesce to create a city.

Here you can experience 24 hours in 24 minutes, but you can also experience a time lapse from the Ice Age to today. Lasers and lights reflect the tempo and pulse of the city, sometimes pinpointing a place in the past when the scope and borders of the city were very different. This is a place to immerse yourself in a sensory experience of Copenhagen, where the visitor can look, sense, feel and listen to the dynamic and ever-changing city. But it is also a place to explore facts on the data wall. How big is Copenhagen? How many people live here —now and in the past? How old are Copenhagen's buildings? How much do Copenhageners cycle? And what do they die from?

From there you can then go from facts to feelings in the small cinema and watch the film *Copenhagen* —which is a poetic impression of the past with people of the present and the city as their stage telling the stories of how Copenhagen changed and always will change.

The aim is for the visitor to get inspired to head out into the real city and experience Copenhagen anew. With fresh eyes that see the big picture in even the smallest detail and see the traces of history all around.

Facilities, Activities and Future Plans

Special exhibitions and events:

Alongside the permanent galleries the museum works with an extensive program of special exhibitions and events including talks, city walks, pop-up exhibitions, debates on contemporary issues and hands-on experiences of the work carried out behind the scenes. The first special exhibition at the new museum took a new look at the painter Paul Fischer and his extensive production of paintings, postcards and illustrations of Copenhagen around 1900. The plan for the years to come includes an exhibition on urban planning called *The City on the Drawing Board*; an exhibition on *Local Characters* (in Danish “originaler”)



City model and detail of model with horizon and laser light indicating the layout of the ramparts and the fortification between 1680 and 1870.

and Eccentricity and last but not least an exhibition on soundscapes, languages and oral cultures in the city past and present related to the research project *The Sound of the Capital* running from 2019-2023.

Behind the scenes and outreach strategy

A particular focus in this regard is the archaeological work of the museum. To this end we have in recent years developed both a mobile museum, an archaeological workshop and an historical garden that all share the principle of giving citizens a chance to take part in and gain insight into the processes involved in gaining new knowledge about the city's origin and material culture of the past.

Café, museum shop and other public facilities

We aim at making our guests feel welcome and to make the museum space a safe environment in which to share ideas and be together with friends and family. The museum café, the shop, the historical garden and the rooms reserved for school groups all play an important role in fulfilling this. As does the access for people with disabilities. An important task within the restoration of the new museum building has been achieving public facilities that sustains this experience, while still respecting the historical architecture. In order to increase the number and diversity of visitors we have extended our opening hours. Every day of the week the museum is open from 9-18 and 9-21 on Thursdays.

Method of Financing

The museum is fundamentally a public, non-profit organization. All income from ticket sales and the museum shop covers staff and other projects in the museum's portfolio. The financing of the restoration of the building and the production of exhibitions and other inventories connected to the establishment of the new museum has been funded partly by the Municipality of Copenhagen and partly by donations from private foundations.

Future plans

In the years to come the museum's primary focus is to establish the brand of the museum in the new location and to build on the massive public interest in the new museum and its exhibitions following the opening.

Other strategic goals for the upcoming years include research and outreach projects revolving around the collaboration between archaeology and the natural sciences as well as research and exhibitions on the cultural history of sound, language and listening in the city (see f.i. <https://lydenafhovedstaden.ku.dk/> + www.fortidenfremkaldt.dk) along with the development of a varied program of special exhibitions and events aimed at different target groups and involving citizens in the creative process of gathering knowledge and making the exhibitions.

Behind the scenes the museum is completing the move of its collections to the new storage facility, improving the preservation and registration of the collection as well as its future usability for research and dissemination purposes alike. Parts of the collection have been available online through the platform <https://kbhbilleder.dk/> and more images are on their way, including selections from the vast collection of paintings and drawings in the museum collection as well as an online selection of objects for the benefit of students and researchers and the general public.

The accessibility project I Feel Copenhagen

We will continue to strive for being even more inclusive. Being a museum for all is not only about the content, the stories that are communicated, but also about being accessible for all. The accessibility project —I Feel Copenhagen— is a project taking shape right now dealing with making the museum both more physically accessible and securing that the content in the exhibitions is being presented in accessible ways. We wish to become a museum that is both welcoming and relevant to the young and old, the tall and short, for those who move on wobbly legs or on wheels. For those who can't speak and those who can't hear or see or for those who are visually impaired. All of us are different from how we are born, and as time shapes us, also creating different and changing basic needs through life, yet we want to put everyone in the same position so to speak, and through many different types of communication.

This will be done through: chromatic differences to mark obstacles, tactile maps, audio guides based on visual interpretation, tactile reconstructions of exhibited objects, guided tours in sign language, create meetings between generations and people with different (dis)abilities and much more.

We do not pretend to know it all, so the users and experts from the different societies are an integral part of this project from the very start. Developing and revising the solutions together as we go along through meetings, workshops and extensive user tests. Through outreach, participation and ownership we believe that we can create welcoming, inclusive and functional spaces —making not only the museum space more accessible, but also communicating the history of Copenhagen to more and becoming a shared space, that truly will belong to everyone.

Part 3: City museum themes

City Museums and ‘Explaining’ the City: Narratives of Past, Present and Future Part 1 – the United Kingdom

Glyn Davies

‘How do I define history? It’s just one fucking thing after another’
Alan Bennett, *The History Boys* (2004)

Bennett’s acerbic remark above — which is at the centre of the issues explored in his play — is a knowing reworking of a sentiment usually attributed to the historian Arnold J. Toynbee, itself seeming to derive from a commonplace observation at the beginning of the twentieth century. It neatly encapsulates the challenge of the historian, that of taking seemingly random and unconnected events, and attempting to weave a coherent pattern from them. The challenge is particularly pronounced for curators and educators in city history museums when they seek to present a narrative of the city’s past. The challenge is not simply to provide a compelling and digestible storyline. There is also an expectation, either underlying or avowed, to somehow embody the city’s character or personality in the telling.

While every European city has its own unique character and history, it is remarkable how many city history museums have adopted similar strategies and structures to introduce and explain that history to their audiences. The following two chapters explore this theme across examples in both the United Kingdom and Poland, introducing different local and national approaches. Together, they provide a range of options that are now available in the presentation of city narratives. This first chapter begins with some general thoughts about the challenges facing the city museum in its aspiration to present a meaningful history of place; this is followed by three recent case studies, in Liverpool, Cardiff and London.

What makes the narrative of a museum gallery presentation typologically unique is that it derives from text, visual stimuli and other elements displayed in space, through which the visitor passes on a self-selecting journey. This has been usefully termed by Susanna Sirefman as an ‘experiential narrative’.¹ Despite all of the disputes and changes in curatorial practice of the

1. Susanna SIREFMAN, ‘Formed and Forming: Contemporary Museum Architecture’, *Daedalus*, Vol. 128, No. 3 (Summer 1999), pp. 297-320, p. 297.

last forty years — including moves away from and back towards 'grand' narratives, an increased focus on story rather than objects or collections, and the involvement of communities and visitors themselves in the creation of museum displays and narratives — this self-selecting journey through space to create meaning remains a constant of everything apart from virtual presentations of museum content.

The expectation that a city could (or should) be 'explained' in a museum — its character illuminated through the display of its past — dates back at least as far as possibly the most famous city museum of all, the Musée Carnavalet, which even now is proud to declare that it does not just present the story of Paris but that it is 'le reflet vivant de son histoire'.² Few curators would today be so bold. A recent polemical discussion of the role of the social history curator in Britain described as one of the common values of this group that knowledge does not reside with the curator, but is 'dispersed between many people, contingent, specific'.³ Yet on an institutional level, this kind of aspiration persists in both bombastic (the Museum of London's current 'We Are London' slogan) or less obvious ways (for example, the Museum of Liverpool's desire that 'local people have a strong emotional engagement to its content and identify with multiple and diverse historical and contemporary narratives').⁴ It is probably in this desire for emotional engagement, truthfulness and authenticity that we can usefully locate the idea of 'explaining' the city.

Deep Time — the role of archaeology

For any city with a past dating back to the medieval period or earlier, there will inevitably be a degree of interdisciplinarity in the construction of a gallery narrative that runs from this past to the lived experience of the present. Many city history museums begin their narratives with archaeological finds before gradually transitioning to other sorts of collections — artworks, quotidian objects, documents, and latterly photography, film and 'born digital' items. The differing work practices, expectations and values of archaeologists, historians, art historians and social history curators must be seamlessly blended if the intention is to produce a coherent narrative.

Unlike many U.S. city museums, which were often formed from the interests of local historical societies, a number of European city museums

(typically those which can trace their history to the Roman period) have at their core an archaeological collection.⁵ Some European cities such as Frankfurt and Cologne have chosen to split their Roman archaeological displays from their city museums, and this gives them a distinctly different character. Those city museums that do choose to deal with archaeology face an immediate issue in terms of the narratives they present — the past revealed through archaeology is usually buried beneath the modern city, and it yields only partial information that must be painstakingly reconstructed for the benefit of a general public. Furthermore, it is not unusual for such museums to retain an interest in the presentation of archaeological sites in situ around the city — as for example, in Lisbon and London. To truly experience this lost urban environment, the visitor must be encouraged to range out more widely from the museum site itself.⁶ Archaeology requires expert interpretation, although paradoxically its concern with everyday life also means that it lends itself well to community engagement projects. However, these projects usually focus more on the practice of archaeology than on the kinds of synthetic narratives that are essential to museum displays that 'tell the story' of an urban settlement.

Lived Experience

At the other end of the chronological scale is the world of lived experience, and shared history. The last forty years have seen the triumph of the view that museums present their narratives best when they involve the people whose stories are being told within the telling. Although most curators do not yet subscribe to the view that 'visitors are the new curators', the related practices of co-curation, guest curation and community-engaged curation are the standards in pulling together any display that covers the last eighty-odd years.⁷

Between these two poles, best practice is less clear. The more that city history displays try to present a single story, the more they inevitably represent the values and attitudes of dominant groups in society — such displays also

2. Jean-Marc LERI, *Musée Carnavalet. Histoire de Paris* (Paris: Fragments Editions, 2000), p. 12.

3. Michael TERWEY, 'Social History Curatorship in Crisis', *Social History in Museums*, Vol. 39 (2015), pp. 4-7, p. 6.

4. Museum of London Strategic Plan 2018-2023 (2018), p. 3; National Museums Liverpool Strategic Plan 2019-2030 (2019), p. 16 (unpaginated).

5. For the U.S. see for example Michael Wallace, 'Razor Ribbons, History Museums and Civic Salvation' in Gaynor Kavanagh and Elizabeth Frostick (eds.), *Making City Histories in Museums* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), pp. 19-39, pp. 20-22; and Barbara Franco, 'The Challenge of a City Museum for Washington, D.C.', *Washington History*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2003), pp. 4-25. European examples include the Museum of London, the Museu d'Història de la Ciutat de Barcelona, the Musée Carnavalet, the Museu de Lisboa, and the Museum of Copenhagen.

6. For more on city museums and archaeology, see Max Hebditch, 'Approaches to Portraying the City in European Museums', in Gaynor Kavanagh and Elizabeth Frostick (eds.), *Making City Histories in Museums* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), pp. 19-39, pp. 104-106.

7. Jonathan Wallis et al., 'The SCHG Debate: This Conference believes that visitors are the new curators', *Social History in Museums*, Vol. 37 (2013), pp. 4-9. In the U.K. the most radical approaches to community-led gallery displays are undoubtedly those being developed by Derby Museums Service.

have an inevitable pull towards a narrative of 'progress'. This inevitably begs the question of whose stories the city museum is there to tell.

Diversity and Decolonisation

Since their earliest days, there has been a consciousness among curators and directors of urban history museums that their narratives could not simply represent the stories of the wealthy and the powerful. One of the earliest such museums to embrace this view was the London Museum.⁸ With the founding of the Museum of London from the collections and staff of both the London Museum and the Guildhall Museum in 1965, there was an explicit desire to represent the city's history as it had been experienced by ordinary Londoners.⁹ In practice, this tended to mean the lives of London's industrialised working class. The lives of women in London were also addressed comparatively early.

It was not until the ground-breaking exhibition *The Peopling of London*, in 1993, that the Museum of London began to seriously engage with London's post-War (and by implication, post-colonial) history, and with London as a city of diversity.¹⁰ In the years since then, city museums all over Europe have increasingly emphasised their diverse communities, both in the past and in the present, as well as seeking to tell the stories of these communities increasingly in partnership with them.

Sometimes, this involves looking again at the historic collections, through new lenses, and with the benefit of others' expertise. Projects of this sort have, for example, been successfully carried out with LGBTQ+ communities — such as recent reassessments at Liverpool and Sheffield.¹¹ Just as often, it involves new collecting activity and work with groups and communities to tell otherwise 'hidden' stories, as was extremely effectively done at Liverpool with the exhibition *April Ashley: Portrait of a Lady* (2013), a collaboration with the arts and social justice organisation Homotopia to tell the story of one of the most famous transgender individuals in recent UK history.¹²

8. Catherine ROSS, 'Collections and Collecting' in Gaynor Kavanagh and Elizabeth Frostick (eds.), *Making City Histories in Museums* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), pp. 114-132; Samuel Aylett, *The Museum of London 1976-2007: Reimagining Metropolitan Narratives in Postcolonial London* (PhD Thesis: The Open University, 2020), pp. 78-83.

9. S. AYLETT, op. cit., pp. 87-93.

10. S. AYLETT, op. cit., pp. 163-266.

11. Matt EXLEY, 'Get Out of the Closet and the Stores!: How the Museum of Liverpool is uncovering LGBTQI stories and objects from its existing collections in their Pride and Prejudice project', *Social History in Museums*, Vol. 41 (2017), pp. 4-11; 'Proud! Telling LGBTQ+ Stories in Sheffield': <https://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/about/proud> (accessed 9 November 2020).

12. Kay JONES, 'Working in collaboration to tell the history and stories of the transgender community: April Ashley, Portrait of a Lady', *SHG News*, No. 73 (June, 2014), pp. 10-12.

What has become increasingly clear in recent years, however, is the limitations of this approach. Primarily, this comes down to two main factors — the continuing role of museum curators as gatekeepers, and wider societal inequalities. For this reason, Bernadette Lynch and Samuel Alberti could describe their experiences in putting on an exhibition on Race in Manchester by saying that 'Encounters between museum professionals and external individuals, particularly those from diaspora communities, still bear traces of coloniser meeting colonised'.¹³ One way of combating this is for the museum to step back and become, in effect, a mute 'host' for content developed by others. But this still does not avoid the issue of who the museum chooses to collaborate with in this way, and why. As has been highlighted in the UK by the group Museum Detox, this situation can only positively change when a more truly representative workforce is active within the museum.

The decolonisation debate also has far-reaching reverberations, some of which are currently only on the radar of specialists. For instance, the study of the early English middle ages as a discipline is usually referred to as 'Anglo-Saxon studies'. This nomenclature has recently undergone a sustained challenge, led primarily by historians of colour, which has pointed out both the explicitly colonial context in which 'Anglo-Saxon' as a term was first employed by Victorian historians, and the ways in which it continues to be used by far-right groups to embody a supposed period of white European 'purity'.¹⁴ When museum narratives refer to 'Anglo-Saxons', 'Vikings', 'Normans' or even 'Romans', certain signals are given about these people that rely on cultural stereotypes and widely-held assumptions which may have little reality in history. Yet the use of such terms in educational curricula, and the fact that museum displays cannot problematise or fully explicate everything that they touch on, means that the museum cannot but be implicated in wider narratives of culture, race, colonialism and power.

UK Case Studies

In the UK, we can consider three separate case studies that all chose to look at the question of how to tell the story of the city in a variety of new ways.

13. Bernadette T. LYNCH and Samuel J. M. M. ALBERTI, 'Legacies of prejudice: racism, co-production and radical trust in the museum', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2010), pp. 13-35, p. 13. See also Sumaya Kassim, 'The Museum will not be Decolonised', *Media Diversified* (2018): <https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/> (accessed 9 November 2020).

14. See M. RAMBARAM-OLM, 'History Bites: Resources on the Problematic Term "Anglo-Saxon"', *Medium* (September 2020), <https://mrambaranolm.medium.com/history-bites-resources-on-the-problematic-term-anglo-saxon-part-1-9320b6a09eb7> (accessed 9 November 2020).



The People's Republic gallery at Museum of Liverpool (photo: author).

The first is Liverpool, where the approach of the National Museums has since the early 2000s led to the pooling of collections and the creation of a number of new museums, including the World Museum and the International Slavery Museum. In 2011, the group opened the Museum of Liverpool, a newly-constructed building that took over the functions of the old Museum of Liverpool Life, but which represented a complete re-think of that museum's purpose, contents and approach.¹⁵

The new museum's approach to the city is to carry out projects with different groups of Liverpoolians on an ongoing basis, and for these projects to be reflected in changing displays and content. This was already underway during the preparations for the museum, which drew on the 4 million relevant objects held across the National Museums' collections. A large number of workshops were undertaken with locals, initially to discuss what should be included, and later to test content ideas. The new museum was structured into six thematic galleries. These were: Great Port, which is mostly conceived around Liverpool's industrial history, but which also includes the role of the Mersey in pre-history; Global City, which has a small permanent element relating Liverpool to each continent, complemented by changing displays; History Detectives, which spotlights archaeology as a way of learning about the area; City Soldiers, which draws on the regimental collections; Peoples' Republic, which deals with political struggles and which has included displays on emotive topics such as the Orange Lodge; and Wondrous Place, which is intended to celebrate Liverpool's achievements in music, sport and entertainment. The majority of the displays cover the last two hundred years, and this relatively tight focus on more recent history mitigates the general lack of an overarching narrative. For those visitors who would like more chronological orientation, there is a large 'visual timeline' display case near the entrance, an element that was partly included in order to make the museum more useful to schools groups.

The Museum of Liverpool neatly juggles its relationships with nearby institutions within the National Museums family. The International Slavery Museum is the major statement on Liverpool's role in the transatlantic slave trade, but this does not get glossed over within the Museum of Liverpool, where the story of the British Empire in particular is clearly relevant to the Global City gallery. The museum is next door to the Maritime Museum, which deals with some of the same industrial history that is addressed in the Great Port gallery and elsewhere. These sorts of overlaps seem not to trouble visitors unduly. On the whole, the Museum of Liverpool's narrative approach seems to attempt to give a sketch of the city's character and communities, more than it does its story through time.

15. I am grateful to Dr Liz Stewart of Liverpool Museums for having discussed the Museum of Liverpool project with me.

In practice, there have been two main issues with the approach taken by the museum. The first was a lack of temporary exhibition space. This has meant that certain gallery displays have had to be displaced in order to accommodate major displays. Most obviously the Wondrous Place gallery was decanted to make way for *Double Fantasy* (2018), which told the story of John Lennon and Yoko Ono in their own words. The other problem has been that although the intention was for large parts of the displays to regularly change, this has often been difficult to achieve, and this failing has been recognised in the 2019-2030 Strategic Plan.¹⁶

In Cardiff, a museum of the city has only recently been created.¹⁷ The project was initiated in the early 2000s, was greenlit by Cardiff City Council in 2004, and opened to the public in 2011. The creation of the museum was partly rooted in a desire for Cardiff not to be 'outdone' by cities such as Bristol and Liverpool which were also creating city museums at this time. Furthermore, the project looked explicitly to the Peoples' Palace in Glasgow as a potential model.¹⁸ The museum began from a standing start, since there was no collection, nor were there large numbers of relevant objects in such potential partner organisations as the National Museum of Wales.¹⁹ Decisions about the chronological parameters of the project were pressing, since Cardiff Castle was in the process of developing a visitor centre that would explore Cardiff's Roman and medieval pasts. The 2004 feasibility study recommended concentrating on Cardiff's history from 1800 to the present day, a periodisation that covered Cardiff's enormous growth into a major port city during the Victorian period, and its subsequent evolution into Wales's capital city.²⁰ There was already a recognition that the collections would of necessity start small, with loans and items obtained from a public callout, but that they would grow and evolve with time. A site was also selected, the Old Library building in Cardiff's city centre.

By the time the museum opened in 2011, some of these initial plans had been altered. The museum displays, designed by Redman Design, were intended to present the city's history as an introduction for visitors to Cardiff,

16. National Museums Liverpool Strategic Plan 2019-2030 (2019), p. 17 (unpaginated).

17. Indeed, the lack of such a museum was lamented in Gaynor Kavanagh, 'Buttons, Belisha Beacons and Bullets: City Histories in Museums' in Gaynor Kavanagh and Elizabeth Frostick, *Making City Histories in Museums* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), pp. 1-18, p. 11.

18. Report — Living Museum of Cardiff (Cardiff Council, 5 February 2004) including the feasibility study *Cardiff Alive! The Museum of Cardiff Life* by Chadwick Jones Associates, sections 2.1 and 2.2. http://archive.cardiff.gov.uk/Government/english/Cabinet_Papers/04_02_05_Cab/Reports/publiccab5feb04Cardiff%20Museum_tot.pdf (accessed 17 November 2020).

19. *Idem*, sections 3.2 to 3.9.

20. *Idem*, sections 2.9 to 2.10.



Wales Is... gallery at St Fagans (Wales News Service).

and as a community resource for residents. The Sense of Cardiff gallery was designed as a largely open space, with broadly themed areas defined by bold colour coding. These included such topics as Changing Cardiff and Working Lives. One section, A Port of Some Importance, specifically addressed Cardiff's pre-industrial past. A sense of the city's chronological history was further reinforced through five 'monoliths' representing different time periods, with key events and projected images. However, the real emphasis within The Sense of Cardiff was, as with the Museum of Liverpool, to attempt to characterise the city, and to provide a voice for its inhabitants' lives and experiences. This was perhaps made most explicit in the Object Theatre, a display that gave voice to some familiar Cardiff objects through the use of oral histories.

The Museum of Cardiff's concentration on the city's industrial history is particularly striking since the city is also home to the St Fagans National Museum of History, an institution that broadly conforms to the folk museum model, but which has in recent years reinterpreted its role to be a peoples' museum of everyday life for Wales. In 2018, the museum opened three new galleries, *Wales Is...*, *Life Is...* and *Gweithdy* (the workshop). *Wales Is...* attempts to 'explain' Wales



Gallery installation at the Museum of Cardiff (copyright Redman Design).

through objects, history, lived experience and debate. It takes the form of a white laboratory-type space, divided into a series of stereotypical statements or questions about Wales, which are then explored in a display, many of which prompt the visitor for a response. In this sense, the displays are provocative in a way that the Museum of Cardiff's more comfortable reminiscing is not, reflecting the curators' stated aim of adopting a more embedded, activist stance for the museum.²¹

At the Museum of London, the monolithic suite of galleries telling London's chronological history has sometimes been perceived by the curators as a straitjacket preventing them responding nimbly to what is happening in the city around them. As part of the organisation's preparations for moving to a new site at West Smithfield in 2024, the decision was taken to organise a season of programming in 2017-2018 to run alongside the exhibition *The City Is*

21. Sioned HUGHES and Elen PHILLIPS, 'From Vision to Action: the journey towards activism at St Fagans National Museum of History' in Robert Janes and Richard Sandell (eds.), *Museum Activism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 245-255.

Ours. The season was called *City Now, City Future*, and comprised 15 displays and 87 public events.²² It took as its starting point the fact that with increasing urbanisation will come a number of environmental and social challenges; cities will therefore be at the forefront of the requisite innovation and solutions. The season explored how we live in London today, what it might be like in the future, and how we can all be part of making our city better. The programme was developed in partnership, and the museum worked with over 300 artists, organisations, companies, charities and universities.

City Now, City Future was designed to meet a number of the museum's aims: to build new partnerships, and to develop the museum's capability in developing and sustaining them; to encourage engaged citizenship; to be experimental and risk-taking, recognising that sometimes the outcome of an experiment can be failure from which it is possible to learn; and to create a collections legacy, through new kinds of commissioning and collecting, including digital as well as physical items. The intention was to help reposition the museum as engaged with the present and future as well as the past, as a provoker of debate, a convener of conversations and an inspiration to action.

The season included a number of salon discussions on topics such as Emotion, Protest and Edgelands. It also included a number of 'Initiatives'. Each of these was a partnership with a project in London working to improve the city. The initiative would be explored in a digital interactive, and every week during the season, one initiative delivered a talk, tour or workshop in the galleries or local area. Initiatives ranged from co-housing to community energy companies. There were also a number of displays. For example, *Voice Over Finsbury Park* was a partnership with Umbrellium and Furtherfield to work with residents of a tower block in Finsbury Park to provide a hyper-local social radio that aimed to bring residents together and give neighbours a reason to chat.²³ Research for *City Now, City Future* also enabled the museum to make important new contemporary acquisitions, such as images of a future London by the digital design studio Squint/Opera, or community currencies such as the Brixton Pound.

City Now, City Future was a way of bringing the Museum of London's presentation of the city to life, and engaging visitors in the city's past, present and future. It also repositioned the museum as a space for debate and action. The challenge for the Museum of London now is to take what has been learned and to embed it into a new telling of London's Story.

22. For a full list, see the archived web page: <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/city-now-city-future-celebrating-season> (accessed 17 November 2020).

23. *The Views of London: a behind the scenes exploration of Voiceover Finsbury Park* (Museum of London, 2018), <https://pastexhibitions.museumoflondon.org.uk/city-now-city-future/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/VoiceOver.pdf> (accessed 17 November 2020).



Part of the City Now City Future programme (©Museum of London).

Conclusion

The recognition that curators (and museums) can no longer expect to be the expert gatekeepers to knowledge of the city provides a challenge to anyone setting out to communicate the history of a place. A plethora of voices and approaches risks becoming formless and confusing for visitors, and often sits awkwardly with the rather more conservative historical approaches still favoured in schools. At the same time, the involvement of contemporary city dwellers in the presentation and discussion of their own city's history offers opportunities to involve visitors in empathising with life experiences perhaps very different from their own. Museums now have a much greater understanding of the barriers that they put up as institutions, as well as a sense of the sorts of groups and communities that are typically excluded or ignored. Community engagement, co-curation and other strategies for greater inclusion are now well-established, but it is also true that museums are inextricably enmeshed in wider societal issues of power, wealth and discrimination — three primary barriers to access. The character of a city is perhaps always in the eye of the beholder, and the 'story' of a city will always be contested and changing. A preparedness to change, and to make change a central element of the storytelling process, is perhaps the surest approach for the future.

Collecting contemporary cities¹

Jette Sandahl

The 21st century poses immense challenges for museums and opens equally vast new opportunities and obligations. The year 2020 seems to pointedly epitomize these challenges and expose some of the fault-lines in our relationships to our societies and communities.

Snapshots from 2020

For Europe, 2020 set yet another record as the hottest year in recorded history, forest fires have devastated huge territories of land, and yet more species have been lost and the biodiversity further decreased.

Close to two million people across the globe died from the Covid 19 pandemic, millions of people around the world lost their jobs or were struggling to get by on government schemes, while the wealth of global billionaires rocketed.

Millions of people are displaced from their homes, and the richer countries of the Global North, desensitized to the suffering of others, tighten our borders, retain refugees in camps under atrocious conditions and sit back and allow them to drown at sea.

Continued calls for acknowledgement of the violence beneath the surface of our collections are ignored, denied and marginalized, and demands for reparation, restitution and repatriation are met with the same passive-aggressive retort from the trenches of museum leadership as twenty years ago.

Current and former staff and core stakeholders take museums to task for the continued systemic racism, sexism, supremacy as well as the personal exclusion, discrimination and exploitation practiced with staff and partners. Monuments and trustees, directors, curators fall from their pedestals.

These are times that call for long overdue societal contextualization of museums and for a genuine personal and institutional self-reflection and self-critique for those of us who are or have been in positions of institutional power in museums.

1. My personal frame of reference and relationship with city museums is rooted in my period as director of the Museum of Copenhagen, which remains the lens through which I see city museums. As this publication is generated with the so-called Barcelona city museum network, it recounts examples of what some of these European city museums have communicated to me as their most radical new collecting, in terms of themes and content, and/or in terms of methods employed in the collecting. I have been interested here in new collecting on the borders or boundaries rather than in the overall collections policies of city museum. Focusing on a European museum context, without fully exploring and situating it in its larger global setting, is, obviously, a quagmire these days, as the differences between Europe as a waning (neo)colonial power and other parts of the world are —maybe increasingly— pronounced.

Revitalizing collections and democratizing collecting

Increasingly aware that failing to address major global and local concerns will jeopardize their continued relevance, museums are showing a new commitment to address social issues. This shift is often initiated in the areas of public programs, education, exhibitions and events, with collections and collecting the last area in which changing objectives, principles and methodologies take a real hold.

Over recent decades new collecting has become minimal in many city museums. Decades of prolific collecting led to lack of space and resources, huge back-logs of documentation and a subsequent lack of overview and reluctance to deaccession.² In some case new collecting becomes almost solely digital.

But if new collecting ceases to be a continuous and defining live stream in the whole of the museum, the museum will gradually become static, relying on frozen history and stale narratives of times gone by, of a past no longer questioned and reinterpreted through fresh objects. The museum will not, from its own core, be compelled to reflect its live and breathing environment or communicate the meanings of life in a dynamic, contemporary sense for its constituents.

Urban life is chaotic and complex, and fundamentally interconnected. Its scale is enormous. It resists order and defies linearity. It is too unruly to fit the categories of the museum registration guides. Its qualities cry out in protest against the divisions into museum disciplines and specializations. City museums struggle to create a coherent and cohesive understanding of their city's history which is at the same time both continuous and ruptured,³ and new collecting is often also halted by a sense of bewilderment, of what to collect, in the infinite mass of objects of a contemporary city.

In 2011 Barcelona History Museum involved the public, partners, and contemporary communities in identifying and locating absent or missing objects to fill in gaps in its historic collection and thereby also gaps in a coherent narrative of the trajectory of Barcelona as a modern European metropolis and as the capital of Catalonia. A research based 'non-exhibition', as it was called, was used as a collecting tool.⁴ A big exhibition room was set up as an historical overview exhibition, but among the rich display of objects empty frames, empty podiums and pedestals punctuated and marked the holes in the story line.

2. The UK Museum Association offers a series of recommendations towards different paradigms to short-circuit this paralysis, see *Empowering Collections - Museums Association*, accessed 15.01.21.

3. Few city museums manage to unify archaeological finds with historic and contemporary objects. Even when, in terms of periods, these objects overlap, they tend to be assigned different systems of documentation, categorization and interpretation. In this chapter I am leaving out the whole area of archaeological excavations and collecting which tends to follow different logics of their own.

4. Josep BRACONS CLAPES, "Buits que s'omplen, nous objectes per a la història de la ciutat", MUHBA Butlletí 27, 2012, and MUHBA exhibition brochure, and personal communication, Edgar STRAEHLE PORRAS, email 17.09.20.



MUHBA Lab, Barcelona History Museum. Photo: MUHBA.

You enter a workspace destined to build relationships between the museum, citizens, agencies, companies and institutions with the aim of collecting the city, especially that of contemporary times. The collection of new objects, together with the construction of stories based on historical research, should make it possible to improve knowledge of Barcelona and make the museum a mirror of the city.

Why do you think [a particular object] should be part of the collection? Would you like to propose it to us, the museum asked of its visitors?

Collecting is evolving into an active, participatory and public process that includes the constituents and communities of the museum. Democratizing collecting implies expanding both how new collecting is done and what is collected. In city museums, often originating literally or metaphorically in the attics of city hall, it has meant going beyond the focus on public history and powerful founding fathers and collecting and integrating the biographical, personal everyday life of, in principle, all of its residents.



Pillowcase made by a widow from pajamas belonging to her deceased husband, Museum of Copenhagen. Photo: Allan Smith.

Drawing on its experiences from collecting in an interactive digital environment, the Museum of Copenhagen sought to revitalize and renew the relevance of its important, but dormant collection of the few objects left from philosopher Søren Kierkegaard through new collecting, structured and defined through core themes of his intensely personal writing on the different aspects of love.

An on-line app was developed, which leads a donor seamlessly through a standard object registration process, complete with photos and full provenance. This information and narrative followed the objects into the exhibition, where the newly collected objects and the Kierkegaard objects ‘mirrored’ each other through their shared focus on one of the specific themes from Kierkegaard’s philosophy —such as friendship, motherlove, erotic or romantic love.

The use of the expertise and authority of the donors in documenting their own objects empowered them and saved museum documentation resources. The process exemplified the growing permeability of the boundaries of the museum as an institution.

Registering conflicted objects from their own personal biographies, the registration app was also used by museum staff —and subsequently in other museum training contexts— as a tool for strengthening their empathy skills and



Curating London —creating a display of Dub music. Photo: Giulia Delprato. Museum of London.

confidence in dealing with psychological encounters, emotionally charged objects and narratives, and for heightening their awareness of how one’s biases and projections, values and world views enter the collecting and documentation process.

Diverse cities and a plurality of lived experiences

Cities often predate their nations, at times they also outlive them. They are growing in importance, independence and confidence. Their densely populated demographics, patterns of life and profiles of opinions are continuously changing. They are diverse and dynamic and tend to share more core traits across borders than they do with their own nations or rural or suburban surroundings.

‘The Peopling of London’ project at the Museum of London in the 1990s gave a new frame of reference for the plural history and diverse populations of a capital, uncovering and unfolding an interpretation of cities as porous and open to new people and new influences. It punctured the myths of the homogeneous, monocultural, walled off metropolis, and influenced a dynamic way of thinking about cities and city identities as continuously evolving processes, as was later underscored in, for instance, ‘Becoming a Copenhagener’ at the Museum of Copenhagen. The Museum of London continues to collect to supplement and strengthen its collection of the lived experience of Londoners from prehistoric to modern times.

‘Cities are important social laboratories and London is one of the world’s greatest. For centuries they have been at the centre of global networks attracting all sorts of knowledge and cultures.

Curating London will enrich the existing collection by taking up the challenge of collecting 21st century London to capture the superdiverse nature of contemporary London by working collaboratively with the communities and individuals who call London home. Museum collections are shaped by particular hierarchies of knowledge which have marginalised and often excluded certain worldviews. The knowledge coming from people’s lived experience has been traditionally overlooked and deemed unworthy of museum collections.⁵

Relationship building as a framework for collecting and museum re-constructions

Reflecting the diversity and heterogeneity of their city has become a core effort for city museums, not least when trying to build a new museum and create a contemporary profile in tune with a wider, more diverse public. Collecting and curating are increasingly the intermediate results of continual, long term relationship building in museums. New —or re-constructed— city museums from this century, like the Museum of Liverpool and the Museum of Helsinki, shaped their approach and their priorities, their displays and tone of voice, their themes of content through extensive and systematic consultations with their surrounding communities. Getting up close to people’s everyday lives through objects and displays, museums begin to actually meet the demographics of their cities and overcome the persistent barriers of class and education that continue to haunt museums.

In documenting the past and the present time, museums are also forecasting what the future needs to know, and they become part of shaping these futures. In wide-reaching partnership with other museums, libraries, archives, the university, the municipality, media, as well as diverse urban communities, neighbourhood organizations and artists, the Amsterdam Museum has initiated a multifaceted five-year collecting process, which will be driving and shaping the renewed Amsterdam Museum due to open in 2025 as a self-portrait and mirror for the city of Amsterdam as it celebrates its 750th anniversary.

5. Domenico SERGI, Curating a new Museum of London | Museum of London, and <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/collections/about-our-collections/enhancing-our-collections/curating-london>, accessed 15.01.21.

6. Personal communication, email, Maren SIEBERT, Collecting the City | Amsterdam Museum, 9.09.20.



Collecting the City of Amsterdam. Photo: Jette Sandahl.

‘In ‘Collecting the City’ the museum asks what does Amsterdam mean to you? What does the city look like in 2025? Which objects, places and collective, polyphonic stories should be preserved or imagined to ‘unlock’ the city of 2025 for present and future generations? These memories will sometimes be beautiful and loving, but also sad and hurtful. They make friction visible, put important issues on the agenda and establish connections.

An open invitation, ‘in-take events’, assignments for artists, a mobile studio, an educational program and storytelling workshops will support the broadest possible participation. ‘Collecting the city’ will provide material for an interdisciplinary overview exhibition in 2025 with programming throughout the city and publication of the 750 most special, meaningful stories and objects, curated by a diverse committee of Amsterdammers. In the museum, the process is expected to generate a more inclusive idea of heritage, consisting of material, immaterial and imaginary heritage, and an acquisition policy changed accordingly.⁶

Part of the narrative of a territory and part of the infrastructure of a city⁷

European city museums are as diverse, amorphous and unevenly outlined as their cities. They sit at the intersection of multifarious lines and hold multifaceted functions and responsibilities – from the deep past of prehistory into contemporary times, from arts and culture into involvement with urban preservation and future planning and development. Many of them are part of or close to municipal authorities and administrations, and work hard to be counted on as an active partner with valued contributions to the discussions, citizen dialogues and solutions of major current issues on the municipal agenda.

Immigration has been one such issue for city museums.⁸ Sustainability is emerging as another. Both the Museum of London and the Museum of Copenhagen have focused on themes of waste and trash, as an obvious area of interest for museums with long archaeological traditions and expertise, and over the last decade city museums have begun to research, collect and exhibit the theme of urban nature. Prompted by an acute need to address the destructive consequences to city infrastructures of changing climates, such as for instance floods, current thinking is moving away from the dichotomies between nature and culture, between rural and urban posited in previous centuries. Contemporary urban planning begins to re-conceptualize urban environments as large living landscapes and ecosystems, which need to be shaped in respect and understanding for the laws and balances of nature. The annual European ‘Green Capital’ provided a framework for the Museum of Copenhagen’s extensive focus on Urban Nature in 2014, creating new, fertile gardens on its grounds and thematic exhibitions in all its galleries. In 2020, as Lisbon holds the title of ‘Green Capital’, the museum of Lisboa is likewise opening this as a new sphere of interest and commitment.

‘As part of a 3-year research and exhibition project on vegetable gardens in Lisbon, the museum of Lisboa is collecting a series of new objects: two models of urban gardens; a set of seed bombs; eight videos of interviews with eight gardeners currently working in community urban vegetable gardens across the city. It will be the first time the museum is incorporating objects which are totally out of the usual sphere of historic documents, visual and decorative arts, archaeology or industrial heritage. A thematic exhibition showcases the theme for a year from the fall of 2020.’⁹

7. These terms of how city museums are —ideally— situated and grounded have been powerfully phrased by Joan ROCA I ALBERT, Barcelona History Museums, in a number of different contexts.

8. Migration and City Museums has been a focus for CAMOC, the ICOM committee for museums of the city. See for instance, https://museumsandmigration.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/camoc_review_nr4_jan2017.pdf, accessed 15.01.21.

9. Personal communication, Joana SOUSA MONTEIRO, email, 15.09.20.



Model of a permaculture vegetable garden. Photo: José Frade. Museu de Lisboa.

Rapid response to urgent crises

When the corona pandemic hit cities in 2020 as a major crisis in infrastructures, health and welfare, city museums in London, Frankfurt and Helsinki moved to collect objects, documents, recordings that for the residents signified the situation in a meaningful way, in what after the collecting done by the Museum of the City of New York and the New York Historical Society after September 11, 2001 has become known as a rapid response collecting.

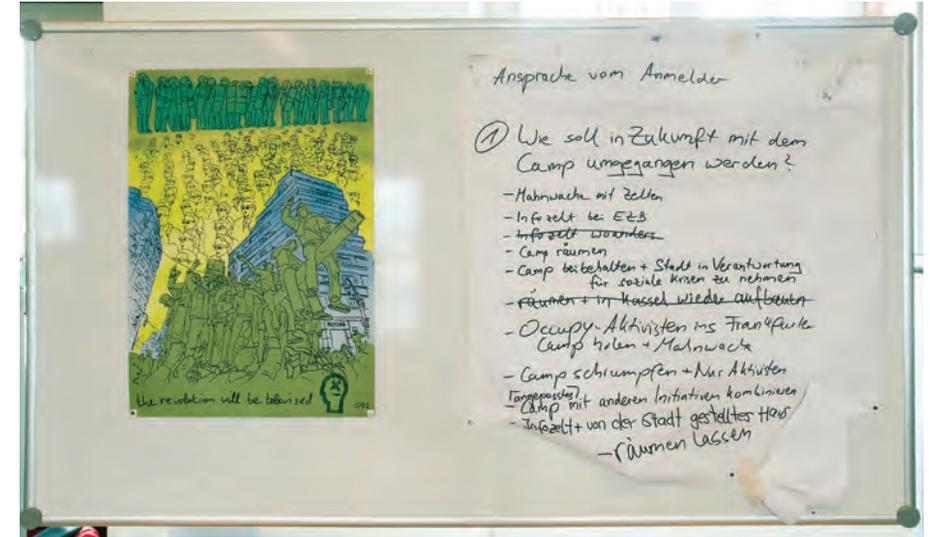


Boy on a swing. One of the challenges of distance work was to relax between work and school.
Photo: Yehia Eweis. Helsinki City Museum.

‘For the Helsinki City Museum community work and participatory strategies are core as they are for the city of Helsinki as such. With a continued focus on the organization of the City of Helsinki, not least as a key provider of the welfare services for the residents, under the corona crisis the museum collected the stories of city officials and staff about the exceptional spring with a focus on distance work — a process which became in itself an almost therapeutic experience for the participants.

New collecting at the Helsinki City Museum is mainly digital. A further Covid 19 project was a documentation of Helsinki residents’ Moods in Corona Time, collected via Instagram. This was integrated as an intervention in an existing exhibition of the war period 1939-45, with the current moods almost confusingly similar to those from the wartime, and the current crisis serving to lend new topicality and meaning to the memories of the war.’¹⁰

10. Personal communication, Minna SARANTOLA-WEISS, email, 7.09.20.



OCCUPY. Historisches Museum Frankfurt. Photo: P. Welzel.

Collecting conflicts, opposition and resistance

Cities are places where space is continuously negotiated and conflicts need to be continuously solved for a functioning, everyday coexistence. Collecting the contested and conflictual areas of urban life is a balancing act for city museums. As neutrality looks increasingly like a happy self-deception from former times, museums need to be vigilant and reflect which interests they are, implicitly or explicitly, supporting, resisting or opposing.

Particularly when collecting from conflicts over ‘the rights to the city’, from confrontations over symbolic spaces in the city between urban authorities and squatters, youth groups and ‘autonomous’ groups, city museums can find their professional autonomy under political pressure and the personal ethics of the professionals challenged by authorities with whom they otherwise work constructively – with an underlying assumption that being on the side of protest is to be political and activist, while supporting the status quo is not.

In the past decade the Occupy movement has represented such a contested socio-political movement which both the Museum of London and Historical Museum of Frankfurt have found it relevant to collect.

‘From its contemporary collecting the Historical Museum of Frankfurt has experienced the deep relationship which people can develop to the museum when donating their stories or objects and which may in turn lead to a stronger sense of belonging to the city as such.

The Frankfurt Occupy Camp was torn down by the police in the summer of 2012. In late summer a series of contemporary objects were collected by the museum in collaboration with the camp's activists. Political movements and protests are ephemeral events, and protest objects are often made for the moment. Camp activists identified important objects which symbolized the different aspects, purposes and daily life in the camp, and curators and activists discussed the perspectives of 'musealizing' contemporary protest. Through the meetings the teams got to trust each other, the activists developing faith in the museum as a communal institution, a place for every citizen and a forum for different historical perspectives, which was important for the decision in the camp to actually make the donation.¹¹

Museological blind spots of power, wealth and privilege

The socio-economic maps published by many or most major cities present the unambiguous facts about urban inequality, in terms of access to education and jobs, income and a good place to live. They also show the distribution of these resources according to demographic variables as ethnicity or migrant origin and status. Intersecting topographic and demographic data are readily available on such indicators of inequality as life expectancy across the different districts or neighbourhoods of a city. As inequalities are, preposterously, accelerating in our period of time, grasping and collecting them in a broad and profound sense is a major challenge for city museums, which have often seemed more comfortable with a vaguer concept of plurality and diversity than with a more precise perspective of social justice.

Objects and collections are, almost by definition, documented, labelled and interpreted from the privileged frame of reference and points of view of the time of their collecting. Residents who fail to conform to the dominant, conventional norms or who consciously have confronted power and public institutions have had little place in museum collections. Museums are known to be trusted and respected institutions, but they are, on closer scrutiny, also clearly the domain of the white, well-educated upper and middle classes. When city museums, in the name of plurality, attempt to reach out to include and collect from un-, under- or misrepresented communities, as, for instance, recent immigrants or LGBT communities, they may discover, as did the Museum of Copenhagen, that donating the hopeful, shameful, joyful or angry objects from one's conflicted and complex daily life is an act of trust, which the museum may not have earned or does not, as of yet, deserve.

In the formal or informal division of labour between museums, the systematic collecting of objects and narratives from the major protest or resistance movements against patriarchal capitalism, such as unions, workers' movements, tenants' movements, women's movements, have tended, if at all, to go to specialist or national museums.

The absence of 'ethnographic' collections in most European city museums has also meant an absence of the tangible reminders of the fraught and violent exchange between Europe and other continents. What colonialism and imperialism—or specific areas as, for instance, the transatlantic slave trade—have meant and continue to mean for the wealth and privilege of European cities and their residents has not been part of or constitutive for the predominant narrative of city museums.

The impetus for filling gaps in collections and setting new strategic directions for collecting and correcting a city's narrative complexity and inclusivity can only to a certain extent come from within the collections themselves. Some gaps are rooted in epistemological and museological traditions that serve as blind spots essential for maintaining a perspective skewed by power, privilege and wealth. In these cases, the impetus will have to come from a theoretical discourse and research, and from living communities demanding representation.

The deep affiliation and multiple allegiances with the past and the status quo

The examples cited in this chapter all bear witness to the willingness and efforts of museums to engage with and respond to the major societal issues of our time from within the core of their museum functions.

Some of these collecting initiatives are part of an already established practice of community involvement and participation, and some are even seen as drivers for new developments in the museum. But one needs to keep asking oneself to what extent this type of collecting is representative for how museums spend the bulk of their resources, and whether, on closer appraisal, the social commitments of museums might come out looking trivial and tokenistic? One needs to keep balancing on that knife's edge between, on one side, our celebration of the rich potentials of museums, and, on the other, a nagging doubt that these potentials will remain exactly that, potentials only. Never underestimating the deep affiliation and multiple allegiances of museums with the past and the status quo and remembering how easily new developments can be turned back, the question one should ask—and which has not been asked here—is how thoroughly this social focus and commitment is embedded in the museum's mission, principles, governance and among core staff to not evaporate or disappear under changing circumstances?

11. Personal communication, Jan GERCHOW, email, 24.09.20 and Dorothee LINNEMANN, email 20.11.20.

These are days of reckoning for museums, as has been repeated so often in 2020. These are times when museums cannot afford to overstate their societal value and make undocumented claims to societal importance.

What time is this place? City museums faced with the Historic Urban Landscape approach¹

Ramon Graus, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya — Barcelona Tech (UPC)

Time and change

“What time is this place?”, this was the astute question that urban planner Kevin Lynch asked in 1972 about US cities. In his study, he stated that the built environment was subject to continuous changes: “A change in environment may be a growth or a decay, a simple redistribution, an alteration in intensity, an alteration in form. It may be a disturbance followed by a restoration, an adaptation to new forces, a willed change, an uncontrolled one”.² Lynch considered that these changes could not be halted, and we would have to settle for understanding them so we could manage transitions: “Changes, when managed, are meant to lead to more desirable states, or at least to avoid worse ones. Nevertheless, all changes exact costs: economic, technical, social, psychological”.³ Concerned with other issues, specifically methods in history of art, George Kubler had reflected on similar problems: “Like crustaceans we depend for survival upon an outer skeleton, upon a shell of historic cities and houses filled with things belonging to definable portions of the past”.⁴

The expressions “monument”, “heritage” and “landscape” were not used in Kubler’s quote or that of Lynch, who had read Kubler. Lynch had preferred the expression “environment” and Kubler a laconic “things”. Both were well aware that the words heritage and landscape have added values, they are cultural representations, constructions shared by a human group, a community, in a certain place and time.

This is not the place for an in-depth explanation of the origin of these concepts, but we should note the overlap between them. If we look at the French historiographical tradition, both the historian of urban forms Françoise Choay,⁵ in reflections on the concept of heritage, and philosopher Alain Roger,⁶

1. The original text in Catalan has been translated into English by Lucille Banham.

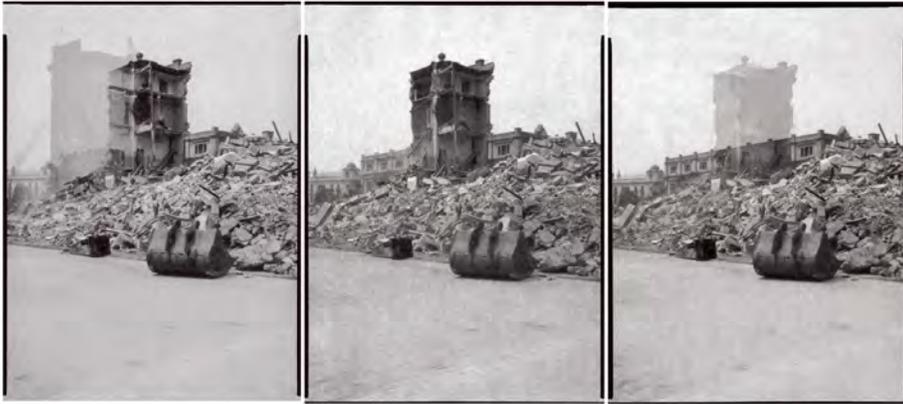
2. Kevin LYNCH, *What Time Is This Place?* Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 1972, p 190.

3. LYNCH, *What Time Is...* p 190.

4. George A. KUBLER, *The Shape of Time*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1962, p 1.

5. Françoise CHOAY, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, translated by Lauren M. O’Connell, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001; Françoise CHOAY, *Le patrimoine en questions: Anthologie pour un combat*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2009. See also, Jean-Pierre BABELON and André CHASTEL, *La notion de patrimoine*, 6th ed., Paris, Liana Levi, 2016.

6. Alain ROGER, *Court traité du paysage*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997.



Martí Llorens, *Triptych*, 1989. "Icària, Càmara Oscura" series. Gelatine silver paper toned in selenium and dyed with tea, 18 x 24 cm. Martí Llorens Photographic Archive, Barcelona.

in a study of the concept of landscape, traced their origins to fifteenth-century Europe. The way the Renaissance looked back at Antiquity and gazed on nature as landscape, through the window imagined by Alberti, would set the path for the invention and formulation of these two modern concepts.⁷ These authors showed how the range of meaning of the two concepts is expanding as they become loaded with values. In less than five hundred years, the terminology that is used has changed from antiquities, ancient monument, historic monument, architectural heritage, urban heritage, industrial heritage, historic landscape, historic urban landscape and cultural heritage to cultural landscape.

This would be the framework that could enable a city museum to approach the complexity of a place's time, formed by things from the past to which, in addition, cultural values of heritage have been attached. For example, the series of photographs by Martí Llorens on urban renewal in the area that would soon become the Vila Olímpica of Barcelona attempt precisely to capture the invisible element left by a demolition. The use of a pinhole camera with low-sensitivity negatives required 5 to 10 minutes of exposure. This made it possible to photograph the fall of the walls, which would be underexposed as transparent shadows. In this way, the presence of the absence would activate the memory of the city.⁸

7. For a comparative history of the development of the heritage concept in France, Germany and England, see Astrid SWENSON, *The Rise of Heritage: Preserving the Past in France, Germany and England, 1789-1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

8. Paul RICOEUR, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago, London, The University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp 7-15.

Outside the city museum: the city in all its complexity

What museums tend to conserve are collections of artefacts or works of art. But a city museum has the city itself outside of its premises. This implies a change in scale and necessarily a change in methods and practices. Of course, it is difficult to collect buildings or urban sites. Several years ago, Australian museologist Linda Young argued ironically that "Acquisition was, in any case, a limited practice compared to the alternative project of listing or registering places of heritage significance, which may be seen as a form of conceptual or symbolic collecting".⁹

The modern cult of monuments, to use the title of Riegl's seminal work,¹⁰ has completely transformed western society's relationship with the architecture of the past over the last 300 years.¹¹ However, the constant change in the built environment that Kevin Lynch demonstrated can also be found in any building, even in any monument; Saint Sernin in Toulouse could serve as an example. It is true that every municipality or every state defines its architectural heritage through the listed buildings that it has decided to preserve. However, this does not mean that these buildings or built environments have not been modified, amputated, destroyed and restored several times, often before the twentieth century, or they could be altered in the future. Restoration is a cultural act at a specific time in which the values of a building are recognised.

It could be illustrative to start this approach from the materiality of a Barcelona building's party wall. This wall has strata that represent around 1,800 years of urban history, from the first century CE to the nineteenth century. It has been left uncovered as part of the Barcino Plan that recognises the value of the city's Roman walls.¹² The wall could be used to explain the history of Barcelona from its Roman foundation to industrialisation. But why limit ourselves to the Roman period? It could be argued that other medieval monuments, other Baroque churches or other factories from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries explain each period better. But that does not answer the question with which this piece began: What time is this place? The time that the wall has accumulated is much richer and belongs to the entire city.

Something similar can be seen at neighbourhood and city scale. As early as 1931, Italian urban planner Gustavo Giovannoni stressed that, in the

9. Linda YOUNG, 'Museums, Heritage, and Things That Fall In-between', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 3, 1, March 1997, pp 7-16.

10. Alois RIEGL, 'The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin', translated by Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions*, 25, Fall 1982, pp 21-51.

11. David LOWENTHAL, 'Fabricating Heritage', *History and Memory*, 10, 1, 1998, pp 5-24.

12. Carme MIRÓ, 'La muralla, estudis arqueològics recents i perspectives de treball futur', in Eduard RIU-BARRERA (ed), *Intervenir a la muralla romana de Barcelona: Una visió comparativa*, Barcelona, Museu d'Història de Barcelona (MUHBA), 2017, pp 78-91.

processes of transforming old cities, a monumental building could not be uprooted from its built environment.¹³ For Giovannoni, “the same characteristics that closely link the biggest monuments to the lesser diversity of smaller buildings also links the architecture and the urban fabric in one entity, organised by a logical, coherent idea. These characteristics constitute a crucial extrinsic element for appraising monuments. They are the expression of a single conception of the monument and its environment or, if you prefer, of a collective architecture that is really urban. It is more serious to alter this whole than to spoil a monument”.¹⁴

From this thinking, which was replete with Camillo Sitte’s ideas, the concept of urban heritage emerged. Giovannoni’s original Italian phrase for this was “patrimonio d’Arte urbanistica”¹⁵ (urban art heritage). Giovannoni, with his writings and his daily work on the master plans of Italian cities, opened the eyes of a generation of architects to a new way of looking at the city. For example, Piero Gazzola, a direct student of Giovannoni,¹⁶ was president of the committee that compiled the *Venice Charter* of 1964, which included the concept of historic site. The historic typological research of Saverio Muratori and his followers was also influenced by Giovannoni’s reflections.¹⁷ Over time, a long list of recommendations has established the concept of urban heritage as one of the mainstays of cities’ conservation activity. Examples are the inclusion of monument, groups of buildings and sites in the broader concept of cultural heritage in the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972),¹⁸ the idea of integrated conservation in the *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* (1975) and the defence of inhabitants of historical centres in the *Washington Charter* (1987).¹⁹

The step from this cultural construction of urban heritage to that of urban landscape is slightly more complex. Alain Roger argued that land would become landscape when an artist teaches us how to look at it. To clarify this idea, he used a long quote from an essay entitled *The Decay of Lying* (1891) by Oscar Wilde in

13. Gustavo GIOVANNONI, *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova*, Torino, UTET, 1931. See also, Françoise CHOAY, ‘Introduction’, in Gustavo GIOVANNONI, *L’urbanisme face aux villes anciennes*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1998, pp. 7-32; Steven SEMES, ‘New Design in Old Cities: Gustavo Giovannoni on Architecture and Conservation’, *Change Over Time*, 7, 2, 2017, pp 212-233.

14. GIOVANNONI, *Vecchie città ed...* p 26.

15. GIOVANNONI, *Vecchie città ed...* p 183.

16. CHOAY, *L’urbanisme face...* p 28.

17. Giancarlo CATALDI, Gian Luigi MAFFEI and Paolo VACCARO, ‘Saverio Muratori and the Italian School of Planning Typology’, *Urban Morphology*, 6, 1, 2002, pp 3-14.

18. ‘Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage: Adopted by the General Conference at Its Seventeenth Session: Paris, 16 November 1972’, in *Basic Texts of the 1972 World Heritage Convention*, Paris, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2005, pp 7-22.

19. *Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (Washington Charter 1987): Adopted by ICOMOS General Assembly in Washington, DC, October 1987*, Washington, DC, ICOMOS, 1987.



Juan Martín López, *Party wall at the Baixada del Bisbe Caçador of Barcelona*, 2017. Ramon Graus Collection, Barcelona.

which, in a Socratic dialogue between the characters Vivian and Cyril, Vivian states that “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life”,²⁰ which would also imply that nature imitates art. To support his position, Wilde used the example: “Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master, do we owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fading grace curved bridge and swaying barge? The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to this particular school of Art”.²¹ Wilde, and therefore also Roger, considered that “what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing”.²² Who but the painter Robert Delaunay has shown us to see the Eiffel Tower invading the streets of Paris? Who but the civil engineer Robert Maillart has revealed the natural beauty of Salgina Gorge after constructing its bridge? Who but art historian Francis D. Klingender²³ has taught us to see the landscape of English industrialisation? Who but photographer Eric de Maré²⁴ consolidated the 1960s view of the same industrial landscape? Who but architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown²⁵ have shown us how to see the urban landscape of Las Vegas?

Deliberately, none of the selected examples refer to what we could expect from the European landscape tradition that considers a natural, pleasant place. Architecture historian Antoine Picon defined as ‘anxious’ the landscape of the current “endless cities”²⁶ where the outskirts are saturated with technological infrastructure, much of which is obsolete. Picon described this new landscape: “In a city without perceptible limits, completely devoted to mass consumption and its consequences, the contrast between commercial spaces and garbage dumps might well have replaced — on a level more symbolic than real, of course — the old opposition between center and periphery”.²⁷

20. Oscar WILDE, ‘The Decay of Lying: An Observation’, in *Intentions*, New York, Brentano’s, 1905, p 39.

21. WILDE, ‘The Decay of...’ p 40.

22. WILDE, ‘The Decay of...’ p 41.

23. Francis D. KLINGENDER, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, London, Noel Carrington, 1947.

24. James M. RICHARDS and Eric de MARÉ, *The Functional Tradition in Early Industrial Buildings*, London, The Architectural Press, 1958.

25. Robert VENTURI, Steven IZENOUR and Denise SCOTT BROWN. *Learning from Las Vegas*. Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 1972.

26. Antoine PICON, ‘Anxious Landscapes: From the Ruin to Rust’, translated by Karen Bates, *Grey Room*, 1, 2000, pp 64-83.

27. PICON, ‘Anxious Landscapes: From...’ p 75.

We accompany this text with two examples that explore the possibilities of cinematographic fiction and photographic reporting to renew ways of looking at architecture or constructing landscapes.

The subjective construction of the landscape does not exclude the multidisciplinary approach of sciences such as geography, ecology, anthropology, landscape architecture, history or archaeology. For example, from 1991, English Heritage promoted the Historic Landscape Characterisation approach²⁸ as an extension of archaeological methods. This approach has a strong focus on managing continuous change in the English landscape — Lynch’s insight is again relevant here — considered as material culture. The method adopts the definition of landscape in the *European Landscape Convention* (2000): “Landscape’ means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.²⁹ Hence, the entire territory is studied systematically, because everything would be landscape, including the anxious landscape that Picon mentioned. With the help of geographic information systems (GIS), it has been possible to map the natural landscape as well as urban landscapes such as the metropolitan county of Merseyside³⁰ or Barcelona Metropolitan Area³¹, with very revealing results.

Faced with the Historic Urban Landscape approach

At the same time, discussion on the new city’s impact on historical city centres was promoted by the *Vienna Memorandum* (2005).³² This document brought the idea of protecting the landscape to the forefront of the debate on the historical city. This was not an entirely new topic. For example, in London, rules called ‘St. Paul’s Heights’ have protected local views of St Paul’s cathedral since as early as 1938. The current rules, ‘Protected Views’, do not allow the construction of high-rise office buildings that block views of the cathedral from various perspectives.³³ In this context, in 2012, UNESCO took elements discussed in

28. Jo CLARK, John DARLINGTON and Graham J. FAIRCLOUGH, *Using Historic Landscape Characterisation*, s. l., English Heritage, Lancashire County Council, 2004.

29. *European Landscape Convention: Florence, 20.X.2000: European Treaty Series-No. 176*, s. l., Council of Europe, 2000, article 1.

30. <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/historic-character-of-merseyside> accessed 27 June 2020. Merseyside Historic Characterisation Project. Museum of Liverpool, 2011.

31. Pere SALA and Jordi GRAU (eds), *Catàleg de Paisatge: La Regió Metropolitana de Barcelona*, Barcelona, Generalitat de Catalunya, Diputació de Barcelona, Observatori del Paisatge, 2017.

32. *Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture: Managing the Historic Urban Landscape*, s. l., UNESCO, 2005.

33. Peter WYNNE REES and Philip EVERETT, *City of London: Protected Views: Supplementary Planning Document: Adopted 31st January 2012*, London, Department of the Built Environment, City of London Corporation, 2011.

the Vienna Memorandum, reviewed them and applied part of the methods to the city, in an approach called Historic Urban Landscape.³⁴ The expression was chosen to condense in the broad concept of landscape the complexity of two phenomena: the necessary conservation of urban heritage and the inevitable dynamics of urban change.³⁵ However, bringing together three such consolidated words in one very ambitious phrase could create a certain amount of confusion. Immediately, controversy broke out in the heart of ICOMOS international. The outgoing president, German art historian Michael Petzet, was sceptical: “Those who as conservationists have been fighting at least for a certain continuity, as expressed in the conservation of monuments and sites, might even assume that the slogan ‘tolerance for change’ is already a sign that neo-liberal tendencies which have caused the present economic disaster, are playing a certain role”.³⁶ In contrast, the incoming president, US architect Gustavo F. Araoz, defended the Historic Urban Landscape approach as a necessary change of direction, despite the risk of biased interpretations: “an important cultural value of the historic city rests precisely upon its ability to be in a constant evolution, where forms, space and uses are always adapting to replace obsolescence with functionality. This gives rise to the paradox — or perhaps the oxymoron — of the concept of preserving the ability to change”.³⁷ Both positions are understandable and, like almost everything in life, the correct application of this approach will depend on decision-makers’ capacity for critical judgement, based on a careful assessment of each specific case.³⁸

This could be one of the potential conceptual frameworks in which to insert the activity of a city museum in coming years. The Historic Urban Landscape approach continues to make its way and improve strategies and tools.³⁹ For this reason, it seems that city museums should consider its principles, as they could become a very valuable stakeholder in the discussion on the “limits of acceptable

34. ‘Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape’, in *Records of the General Conference, 36th Session, Paris, 25 October-10 November 2011, v. 1: Resolutions*, Paris, UNESCO, 2012, pp 50-55.

35. Francesco BANDARIN and Ron VAN OERS, *The Historic Urban Landscape: Managing Heritage in an Urban Century*, Chichester, Wiley Blackwell, 2012.

36. Michael PETZET, ‘Conservation or managing change?’, in *International Principles of Preservation*, Paris, ICOMOS, 2009, pp 10-12.

37. Gustavo F. ARAOZ, ‘Preserving Heritage Places under a New Paradigm’, *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 1, 1, May 2011, pp 55-60.

38. Jukka JOKILEHTO, ‘Reflection on Historic Urban Landscapes as a Tool for Conservation’, in Ron Van Oers and Sachiko Haraguchi (eds), *Managing Historic Cities*, Paris, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010, pp 53–63; Jukka JOKILEHTO, ‘Notes on the Definition and Safeguarding of HUL’, *City & Time*, 4, 3, 2010, pp 41-51.

39. Ana PEREIRA RODERS and Francesco BANDARIN (eds), *Reshaping Urban Conservation: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach in Action*, New York, Springer, 2018; Julia REY-PÉREZ and Ana PEREIRA RODERS, ‘Historic Urban Landscape: A Systematic Review, Eight Years after the Adoption of the HUL Approach’, *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 10, 3, March 2020, pp 233-258.

change”.⁴⁰ That is why we asked at the start What time is this place? It probably has many layers of time, so we should again stress Kevin Lynch’s point: at the most, we could be capable of managing transitions!

Box 1

And if even the monuments change?

Saint-Sernin of Toulouse, a French Romanesque masterpiece that has been on the World Heritage list since 1998, was restored by Viollet-le Duc (1845, 1859-1879) with the idea of recovering the contour of the original roofs. As the years passed, the stone used in the restoration had deteriorated. Architect Yves Boiret asked whether Viollet-le-Duc’s work should be restored or whether the basilica’s image before the nineteenth century restoration should be recovered based on what was shown in old engravings, which were the only credible document. Boiret decided to undo the restoration (1980 and 1995), but in Toulouse there was no memory of any other Saint-Sernin. For a hundred years, all the postcards had shown the monument in the form that it had been given by Viollet-le-Duc; why change the postcards now?

<https://doi.org/10.4000/lha.210>



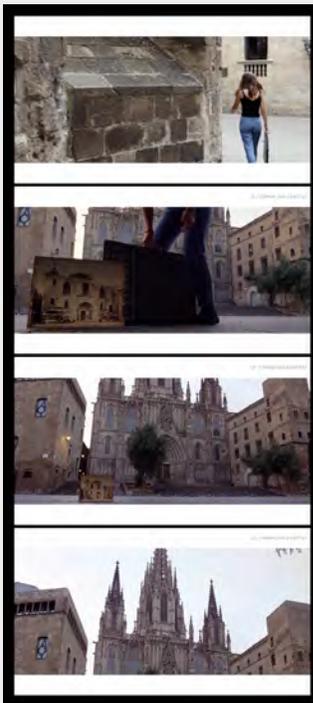
Saint Sernin of Toulouse restored by Viollet-le-Duc, before being un-restored by Yves Boiret. Ramon Graus Collection, Barcelona.

40. BANDARIN and VAN OERS, *The Historic Urban...* p 193.

Box 2**The use of cinematographic language to focus on architectural heritage**

How can the value of Barcelona's architectural heritage be shown without detaching it from the present? The filmmaker Carme Puche-Moré proposed a narrative with eight citizens of Barcelona who acted as guides and left some clues on the city's streets to help people to see the architecture. For example, a girl carrying a folder walks along next to the back of the cathedral. The shot changes, and now she is in front of the cathedral putting a large-format photograph on the ground. It is the unfinished gothic façade. The before and after. Suddenly, you discover that the façade, which has been there forever, is only a hundred years old. This is the path of the exhibition Barcelona Flashback by the Museum of the History of Barcelona (MUHBA) to connect the museum with the living city.

<https://youtu.be/3Q3CfOHQfe0>



Carme Puche-Moré, *Architecture in Barcelona: Urban mirror, seven looks*, 2019. Stills 3:05, 3:25, 3:32 and 3:40. MUHBA, Barcelona.

Box 3**Create urban landscapes**

The profound changes in post-Olympic Barcelona sparked a far-reaching initiative in the Institut Barri Besòs secondary school and the Fòrum de la Ribera del Besòs: an exhibition and a book entitled *Barcelona vista del Besòs* (Barcelona, Besòs view). The Besòs is a river, but it is also the neighbourhoods beside the river. Between 1999 and 2008, geographer Joan Roca and photographer Patrick Faigenbaum gradually, radically photographed them and managed to change the predominant centre-suburb view. The first photographs were presented in 1999 at the Des territoires seminars in Paris, promoted by Jean-François Chevrier, and at La ville en récits in Brussels. Roca and Faigenbaum have created an urban landscape because they have taught how to look at the city in a new way.

https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/museuhistoria/sites/default/files/bcnbesos_0.pdf

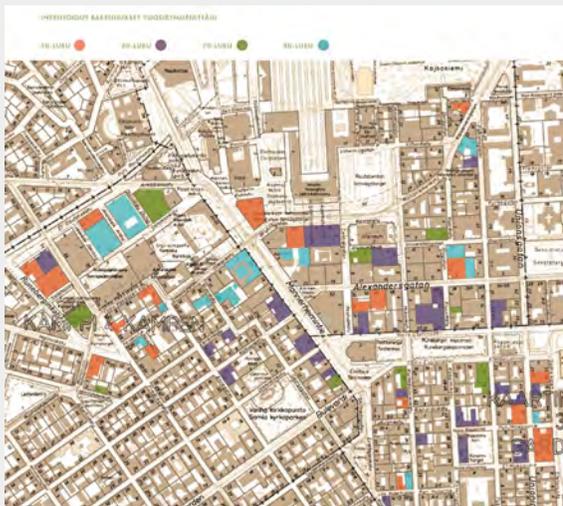


Patrick Faigenbaum and Joan Roca. *Barcelona vista del Besòs*. Edited by Jean-François Chevrier and Jorge Ribalta. Barcelona: Museu d'Història de Barcelona (MUHBA), [La Virreina] Centre de la Imatge, 2018, pp 110-111.

Box 4**Participate in the entire process of protecting the cultural environment**

The Finnish legal framework for protecting urban heritage gives a very relevant role to city museums (*Antiquities Act 1963, Land Use and Building Act 1999, Act on the Protection of Buildings 2010*). Thus, the Helsinki City Museum is the authority for the conservation of built heritage, archaeological heritage and cultural landscape in Helsinki and in six other municipalities of Central Uusimaa. Its Cultural environment department carries out historical and archaeological research, inventories, official statements (for example, on building and demolition licences) and protects the built environment. This organisational proposal brings together the criteria of collecting artefacts and that of buildings and sites and forces the city to balance criteria of the city planning departments.

<https://www.helsinginkaupunginmuseo.fi/en/pictures-objects-helsinki/cultural-environment/>



Inventory of modern buildings in the centre of Helsinki. Aura KIVILAAKSO, *Kun Helsinkiin Rakennettiin City: Keskustan Vuosina 1945-1990 Valmistuneet Liikerakennukset*, Helsinki, Helsingin Kaupunginmuseo, 2014, p 8.

The impact of digital formats on city museums: displaying, creating heritage and mobilizing cities and citizens

Rosa Tamborrino

Recent changes in museums encompass the use of digital technology to display collections, create narratives and engage visitors. They also include ways of shaping new knowledge through innovative practices. Beyond preserving and exhibiting their collections, museums have become complex engines of culture that develop research, create new kinds of collections and promote social engagement and participation. The creation and implementation of digital formats involves deep transformation. Methods for sharing heritage are joined by societal challenges, such as democratisation and sustainability.

Novel formats can be especially disruptive in city museums, as narratives shape meanings across our living cities. While cities are embedded in the globalisation process, the methods with which city museums are using and focusing their collections concern the contemporary construction of the past and the diversity of urban identities. Questioning formats reveal how city museums are generating cultural strategies by managing their collections and shaping a response to societal and cultural developments.

The increase in audience and public engagement are key objectives to which digital approaches contribute for all kind of cultural institutions. However, curatorship, approaches, tools, and socio-cultural-economic impact account for specific challenges in the case of city museums. Strong relationships link these museums to their territory. Urban space and heritage as well as local developments and public wellbeing are crucial. Current museum formats range from integrating permanent collections and temporary exhibitions with virtual environments to online visitor engagement, from archives and digitally-created collections, to public events and webinars; from formats for training/educating/fun to formats for 'recovering'. The digital approach is a crosscutting perspective, embedded in the impact of museums on our digital society.

Making history in museums and creating heritage digitally

In recent decades, digital methods have increasingly infiltrated museum approaches and practices. At the most basic level, they are used to digitize heritage collections. Digital technologies have also given museums new ways of displaying and expanding, as well as creating new collections. They include public engagement formats and education programmes. In short, the digital approach



Visitors interact with digital outfitting at Museum of London. Photo: Rosa Tamborrino.¹

is strongly changing museum practices in both exhibition and collection management. It is also affecting how objects coexist with data systems in databases, on websites and in museum galleries.

Digital formats have moved to city museums from other heritage fields (particularly archaeology) where first they were used to entertain visitors, improving the understanding of objects from ancient civilisations.² In city

1. Cf. Matthew BATTLES and Michael MAIZELS, 'Collections And/of Data: Art History and the Art Museum in the DH Mode', in Matthew K. GOLD and Lauren F. KLEIN (eds) *Debates in the Digital Humanities* Minneapolis; London, University of Minnesota Press, 2016, pp 325-44. Accessed February 8, 2021. doi:10.5749/j.ctt1cn6thb.30.

2. Cf. Sebastian HAGENEUER, Sophie C. SCHMIDT, 'Introduction' in Sebastian HAGENEUER (ed) *Communicating the Past in the Digital Age: Proceedings of the International Conference on Digital Methods in Teaching and Learning in Archaeology (12th-13th October 2018)*, London, Ubiquity Press, 2020. Accessed February 8, 2021. See also Adolfo MUÑOZ, and Ana MARTÍ, 'New Storytelling for Archaeological Museums Based on Augmented Reality Glasses' pp. 85-100.

museums, turning digital fosters a novel approach to making urban history and identifying urban heritage.³ Favourite digital formats seem to be narrative and story-based approaches,⁴ which allow them to collect urban memories, enlarging and integrating their original collection with digital born collections (which have no storage issues and can be easily re-used). By integrating exhibitions with digital formats and encouraging people to contribute their own evidence and stories, city museums aim to offer a plural historical perspective.

Digital methods are already in use across parallel academic fields of humanities and social sciences and have fostered new approaches to urban history. In classrooms and museums, digital formats display virtual reconstructions and push dynamic visions of cities. They emphasize past events and changes as a component of urban history.⁵ The introduction of digital media also fosters another format, enabling the explicit link with sources and the simultaneous coexisting of different interpretations of historical and material data. They enable non-linear narratives.⁶

Digital transformation initiates a change beyond the museum's mission as a storyteller. It involves a 'shift in the positioning of audiences from cultural consumers to cultural producers.'⁷ This shift not only concerns how digital formats display data but also how they enable other narratives and interactive behaviours.⁸ It is especially relevant in city museums because of the immediate link of urban stories with our current civic life. Beside exhibiting the past, these formats play a role in collective memory-making across conflicts and

3. Cf. R. TAMBORRINO, 'The city on display: 'entering' urban history', Donatella CALABI (ed.) *Built city, designed city, virtual city. The museum of the city*, Rome, CROMA Università degli studi di Roma Tre, 2013, pp 35-55.

4. On the matter of digital storytelling see Joe LAMBERT, *Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, London, Routledge (2009) revised edition 2018. Together with Dana Atchley the author founded the Center of Digital Storytelling at Berkeley University and the digital storytelling movement, <https://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/page.cfm?id=27&cid=27&sublinkid=31> Accessed March 8, 2021. See also some other developments at Story Center website, <https://www.storycenter.org/>

5. Cf. Sven DUPRÉ, Anna HARRIS, Julia KURSELL, Patricia LULOF, and Maartje STOLS-WITLOX (eds), *Reconstruction, Replication and Re-enactment in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2020. Accessed February 10, 2021.

6. HAGENEUER (ed), *Communicating the Past...*

7. Rhiannon BETTIVIA and Elizabeth STAINFORTH, 'The Dynamics of Scale in Digital Heritage Cultures' in Tuuli LÄHDESMÄKI, Thomas SUZIE, and Zhu YUJIE (eds) *Politics of Scale: New Directions in Critical Heritage Studies*, New York, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2019, pp 50-62. Accessed February 8, 2021.

8. Ian GWILT, Patrick MCENTAGGART, Melanie LEVICK-PARKIN, and Jonathan WOOD, 'Enhancing Museum Visits through the Creation of Data Visualisation to Support the Recording and Sharing of Experiences', in Simon POPPLE, Andrew PRESCOTT, and Daniel H. MUTIBWA, *Communities, Archives and New Collaborative Practices* (eds), Bristol, Bristol University Press, 2020, pp 123-38. Accessed February 7, 2021.



Digital terminal and "workstation" for visitors at Historische Museum Frankfurt.
Photo: Rosa Tamborrino

changes in cities and the lives of their people, affecting controversial memories and memory removal.⁹

Digital formats can be quite expensive for city museums, which rely heavily on municipal support. Are digital methods really changing the face of city museums? How do digital formats affect urban memory building? Do participatory processes, community, and "openness" really have an impact? These questions have taken our survey to European city museums and beyond. The survey has been conducted through a literature review, various visits just before

9. See the Red Location Museum of Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality devoted to apartheid in South Africa. Cf. Naomi Roux, 'Memorial Constructions: The Red Location Cultural Precinct' in *Remaking the Urban: Heritage and Transformation in Nelson Mandela Bay*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2021, pp 33-83. See also Moniek DRIESSE, 'Mapping traditions: a dynamic notion of urban heritage and the changing role of the city museum', *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 30, 1, 2018, p. 87 accessed 3/14/2021.



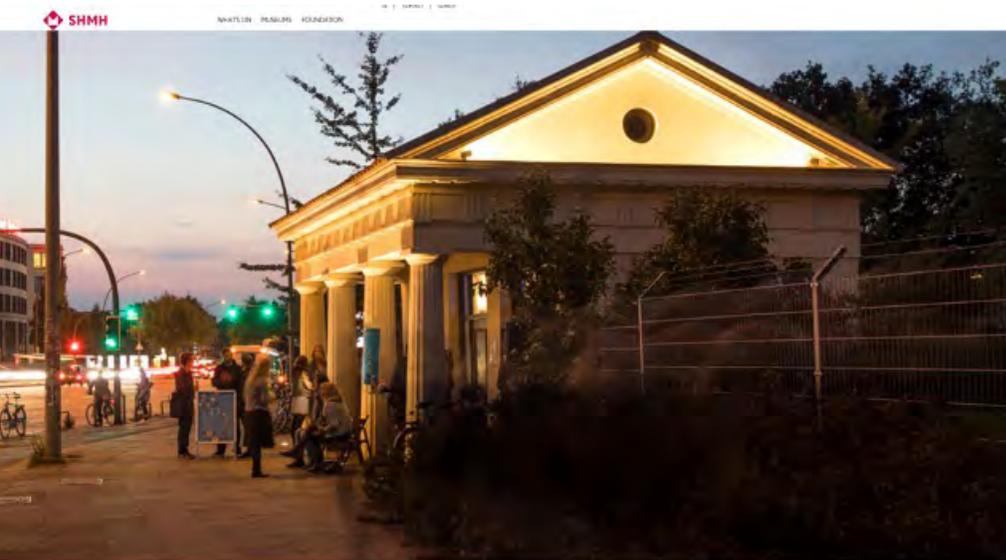
Video-cabine for collecting collective memories at Historische Museum Frankfurt.
Photo: Rosa Tamborrino

the pandemic, and museum websites. This analysis also benefits from research and meetings during recent collaboration with city museums.¹⁰ Some data and reflection are provided below.

The recent new exhibition at the refurbished Historische Museum Frankfurt provides an updated good practice example of a general reconsideration of museum narratives which encompasses traditional and digital formats.

The permanent exhibition in situ is chronological and thematic, and pays attention to issues that emphasize the highlights of urban history and some problematic crossroads. It should be noted that a limited number of museum pieces are displayed to create a dense narrative. In parallel with the collection,

10. Several meetings organized by the Museum of Barcelona of the intersectoral group History City Museum and Research Network of Europe, and debates conducted by its director, Juan Roca, offered a chance to reflect through a comparative perspective.



Millerntor Guard House

Millerton Guard House Museum of Oral History from the website of Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg Accessed April 1st 2021 <https://shmh.de/en/millerntor-guard-house>.

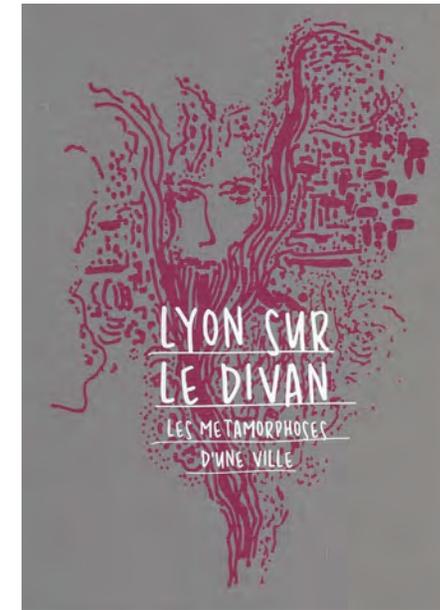
the museum has devoted extensive space (ca 600m² entitled *Frankfurt Now*) to new projects that create collaborative stories. New stories are clearly shown as ongoing curated projects of the *CityLab* format: they have specific focus and designated positions.

The *CityLab* in the museum is complemented by two other formats: a street-format (which triggered the others) taking curators outside the museums to meet people on the streets, and a *Digital CityLab* in the form of a digital platform where users can expand the collected and geolocated information. Invited users are expected to be the people of Frankfurt.¹¹ A department of expert staff is available for this purpose.¹²

Digital formats for crowdsourcing and/or participatory projects have been undertaken by several city museums in the last few years. Some museums foster online projects while others prefer to focus on real urban space,

11. This web page and the urban city map navigation contents are in German only. Cf. <https://stadtlabor-digital.de/de/stadtlabor-digital?language=en> accessed 8/3/2021. Historische Museum Frankfurt, Digital City lab.

12. I would like to thank the director, Jan Gerchow, for the visit and our discussion on the matter of the new setup, together with my colleague from Antwerpen University, Peter Stabel, in December 2019.



Detail of the book cover *Lyon sur le divan* (Gadagne Musées, Libel éditions, 2017) with an urban image portraying Lyon realised at the occasion of the campaign.

encouraging people to physically interact with the museum and the city. The Hamburg Museum represents a case of museums devoting a special urban site to engaging visitors in a project for the construction of a new oral history collection. Shown in the presentation on the museum website, the neoclassical Millerntorwache, is a guard house which was once part of the city walls, and this site is a component of this city museum-visitor interaction.

Visiting ‘a piece’ of living urban heritage establishes the first contact. Contributors can arrange appointments to deliver their private memories about urban past events that they have witnessed.¹³ By moving from an historical reconstruction of the event to its perception (“How does it feel if you are caught up in a catastrophe in the middle of a cold night in February?”), these kinds of museum stories are also supporting a people-centered approach to disaster and social resilience. Moreover, people-centered projects encourage reflecting

13. The project is located in the neoclassical Millerntorwache, a guard house which was once part of the city walls. It identifies this “cosy place” to invite citizens “to share their personal memories and to listen to others”. <https://shmh.de/en/millerntor-guard-house> accessed 7/2/2021 Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg, Millerntor Guard House.

Making History

A resource for students & community groups

Making History, is a unique set of resources that supports students, individuals and community groups to investigate and create a short digital history (up to 3 minutes). This site guides you through the process to research, produce and share a digital history about a person or event. Follow the modules below to research, create and share family and community stories.



The online format "Making History" developed by Victoria Museums as it appears at museum website, <https://museums.victoria.com.au/learning/making-history/1-introduction-to-digital-history/> accessed 29/1/2021.

on changes of urban image perception. The campaign *Lyon sur le divan* in 2017 fostered citizens to discuss with researchers of the National agency of urban psychology (by sitting in a sofa in the middle of the city) and to draw their own portrait of the city. The following exhibition organised by the Musée de Histoire de Lyon added a "et pour vous?" asking visitors point of views.

As a parallel path, *'Making history: research, create, share'*, created by Australia's Victoria Museum, is an online format made available through its website.¹⁴ It enables users or a group of users to create their own family or community story based on a set of resources provided by the museum's digital archive.

Digital formats also question the figure of the format's curator. By engaging people, city museums are enabled (or would enable) non-linear format in order to create a plural urban perspective in today's multicultural multi-ethnic cities. Accordingly, the curator becomes a cultural mediator. *Cleveland Historical* is a format developed by the Center for Public History and Digital

14. Cf. "Making History", the online format developed by Victoria Museums <https://museums.victoria.com.au/learning/making-history/1-introduction-to-digital-history/> accessed 29/1/2021. Museums Victoria Introduction to digital history. It includes Melbourne Museum and other museums, such as Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre. The online format allows the use of a set of resources, supporting students, individuals and community groups with investigating and creating a short digital history. <https://museums.victoria.com.au/learning/making-history/>

Humanities that suggests a new kind of curation.¹⁵ It provides a transformative way of understanding "the place" in cities.¹⁶ In this collaborative oral history project, the community actively participates in reworking understandings of places and community identity.

The German museums mentioned above foster gradual engagement to increase awareness in citizens as witnesses and experts of their city, contributing to the museum collection. The Cleveland perspective focuses more on people as users of urban space. The Victoria Museum's approach combines collecting and displaying with educational activities. It bases its online potential on oral history videos and classrooms.

The formats target people/users of all provenance, age and genders. Their engagement with events contemporary to their lives as well as the focus on subjectiveness aim to build a new narrative of urban heritage. This approach overcomes urban identity as a notion based only on the specificity of city history and traditions, taking into account the sense of belonging and cultural identity¹⁷ provided by collective memories that shape current urban identities, both in practices and players with different backgrounds.

Not only do these new formats impact the urban heritage on display by incorporating different storytelling, they also influence novel teaching/learning approaches. Open-ended narrative and egalitarian dialectical have an enormous impact on education formats. Some parallel aspects have been identified both in museum practices and in digital humanities scholarships.

On one hand, authors have identified a kind of *performative format*. The activation of digitally enabled doing has been described as a form of 'enactment' (Parry 2019; Dupré 2020). This term, pertinent to theater and music, frequently recurs in digital humanities relating to the "senses of action" of its approach.¹⁸ The same recurrence and meaning characterizes forms of education and public

15. Cleveland Historical website Cf. <https://clevelandhistorical.org/> accessed 4/1/2021.

16. Mark Tebeau, 'Listening to the City: Oral History and Place in the Digital Era', *The Oral History Review*, 40, 1, 2013, pp 25-35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43863453> accessed 8/2/2021.

17. The recommendations of international organisations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS underline the need to include plural identities and intercultural dialogue by fostering the notion of "belonging" rather than identity. Examples include the integration of the concept of "cultural significance" in the Burra Charter (ICOMOS, 1979, Burra Charter. https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/Burra-Charter_1979.pdf). Cf. UNESCO (2015), Recommendation Concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, Their Diversity and Their Role in Society. Available online <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/museums/recommendation-on-the-protection-and-promotion-of-museums-and-collections/>.

18. See Kyle Parry, 'Reading for Enactment: A Performative Approach to Digital Scholarship and Data Visualization' in GOLD and KLEIN *Debates in the Digital Humanities...*, pp 141-60. See also Elisa Mandelli, *The Museum as a Cinematic Space: The Display of Moving Images in Exhibitions*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvnbh8k> accessed 2/7/2021.



Visitors at digital terminal of Museum of Liverpool. Photo: Rosa Tamborrino

engagement that bring “bodily knowledge and sensory skills” to classrooms and museums.¹⁹

On the other hand, city museum practices and digital humanities methodologies share data-driven rebuilding processes that require technological supports. The Museum of Liverpool, for instance, offers a multimedia approach to listening for music groups, immersive panorama projection to experience a football game, and a designated place where visitors become users of a digital platform to explore in situ geolocated contents and search for place-related contents in the museum database.

The content in question appears “computationally domesticated to the database”.²⁰ Moreover these emerging models also implicate new methods for assessing the social impact and public mission of museum.²¹

The pandemic formats: the portrait of time

19. Cf. DUPRÉ, HARRIS, KURSELL, LULOF, and STOLS-WITLOX (eds), *Reconstruction, Replication and Re-enactment...*

20. BATTLES and MAIZELS, ‘Collections And/of Data...’ p 334.

21. Cf. ENRICO BERTACCHINI and FEDERICO MORANDO, ‘The Future of Museums in the Digital Age: New Models for Access to and Use of Digital Collections,’ *International Journal of Arts Management* 15, 2, 2013, pp 60-72. Accessed 7, 2, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24587113>

Since the 1990s and the launch of the first museum websites, museums have developed new channels to engage their public.²² Museums publish data on the Internet and in closed networks (intranets) for their visitors. However, most museums have not fully benefited from this tool as a new kind of cultural on-line offer until now.

In many cases, city museum websites are just a component of municipal websites. The Museo de Historia de Madrid provides an interesting example.²³ There are two web developments. The double path appears as a way to underline a choice by creating certain specifications. The city’s official tourism website provides some information on the city museum in Spanish and English.²⁴ The municipal website integrates the museum’s online offer into urban life. Monthly museum curators introduce “a piece”, linking it to the related urban heritage site and pertinent documentation. The Musée de Histoire de Lyon does something similar. A new city museum website was recently launched, offering details of programmes, projects and curators involved in the remaking of the museum as well as webinars.²⁵

In other cases, online formats interact with onsite museum formats. Following the digitization of the Amsterdam Museum’s entire collection, the museum decided to make everything accessible online. This gives people an insight into the complete collections of both the Amsterdam Museum and Museum Willet-Holthuysen, and the museum is free to be more selective in the presentation of its collection in the permanent exhibition (90% of the pieces are not on display in the museum but clearly visible online).²⁶ The museum asks researchers and members of the public for contributions. Online visitors are asked for their ‘assistance’ item by item, with comments and suggestions. There are some difficulties in the transition between the objects and their immaterial representation, involving the distinction between real and digital formats

22. Cf. Caitlin Chien CLERKIN and L. Taylor BRADLEY, ‘Online Encounters with Museum Antiquities,’ *American Journal of Archaeology* 125, 1, 2021, pp 165-75.

23. Cf. <https://www.madrid.es/portales/munimadrid/es/Inicio/Cultura-ocio-y-deporte/Cultura-y-ocio/Museo-de-Historia-de-Madrid?vgnextfmt=default&vgnextoid=ab18a1ead63ab010VgnVCM100000d90ca8c0RCRD&vgnnextchannel=c937f073808fe410VgnVCM2000000c205a0aRCRD>. Accessed 6, 2, 2021 Madrid municipality web site Museo de Historia de Madrid.

24. Cf. Madrid official tourism website <https://www.esmadrid.com/en/tourist-information/museo-de-historia>

25. Cf. <https://www.gadagne-lyon.fr/> Accessed 6, 2, 2021 Musée de Lyon-Gadagne Cf. also <https://www.lyon-france.com/Je-decouvre-Lyon/culture-et-musees/musees/musee-d-histoire-de-lyon-musees-gadagne> Only Lyon Musée d’Histoire de Lyon-Musées Gadagne

26. Cf. Amsterdam Museum official website, <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/collection/online-collection> accessed 26, 1, 2021 Amsterdam Museum Online Collection

(museum collection and digital libraries). Linguistically too, the call mentions 'piece' while it actually means data.

In general, even if they have their own website, city museums usually see it as a tool for reaching the public instead of a format. Social media also had been mostly used to spread information rather than analyse it. The development of a real platform to meet people and deal with the museum mission in a new digital environment requires expertise and investments, and online tools have been used poorly due to their novel disruptive potential.

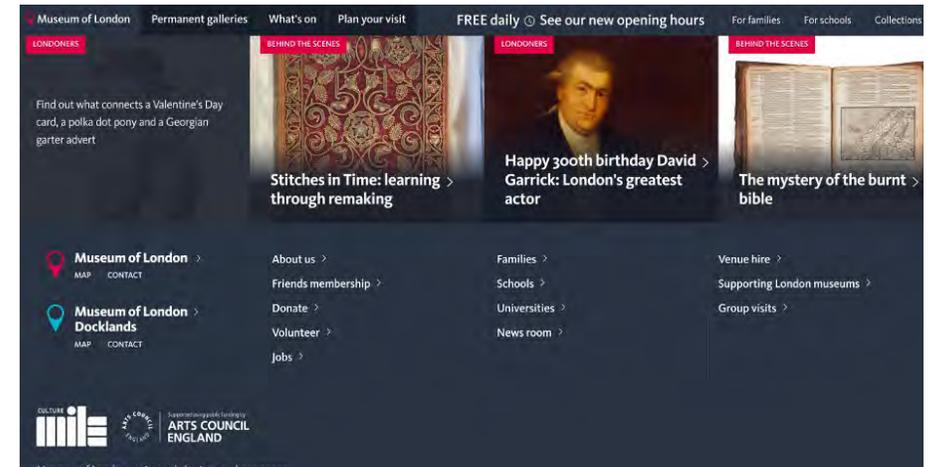
However, while online educational formats were seen by authors as still needing to be explored and the museums' learning-centred approach still had to be transferred to the web,²⁷ the Coronavirus pandemic suddenly encouraged new online curation formats. City museums using digital technologies have made huge progress in making their collections and narratives digitally accessible over the last year. Two kinds of format are currently in use: synchronous technologies such as live webinars and online digital archives, along with collaborative environments where you can interact and create a sense of community. The first makes resources available to visitors for their entertainment, while interactive formats aim to go beyond the notion of 'visitors' and actively engage people in creating.

In March 2020, in Italy, with the first lockdown in the world a new need for an online cultural offer arose. While cultural institutions were closing, some of them felt the need to offer a 'comfort format' to encourage people to stay at home with virtual public entertainment. Despite a lack of digitization of Italian museums, they set to work creating formats to 're-open online' in response to the dramatic situation. I call this response a *new pandemic format* which provided evidence of cultural and social resilience.

The ongoing Italian project MNEMONIC —by Politecnico di Torino in partnership with Fondazione Polo del 900— will provide a digital platform to collect 'the memory of the present' and offer Italian museums productions and collectively changed uses of urban and marginal spaces in locked down Italy.²⁸

27. William B. CROW and Herminia DIN, 'The Educational and Economic Value of Online Learning for Museums'. *The Journal of Museum Education* 35, 2, 2010, pp 161-72 (p. 162). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25801345> accessed 2/9/ 2021.

28. MNEOMONC is a research project (coordinated by the author of this paper) by the Department of urban and regional studies and planning in partnership with Fondazione Polo del 900. The foundation is a museum and cultural center in Turin clustering 22 Turin cultural institutions. MNEMONIC website <http://www.mnemonic.polito.it/>. The project was launched in July 2020 and is supported by Politecnico di Torino. It follows the initial observation of changes in the use of private, collective and public spaces since the beginnings of lockdown in Italy. Cf. R. Tamborrino, 'Coronavirus: locked-down Italy's changing urban space', *The Conversation*, March 20th, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-locked-down-italys-changing-urban-space-133827>. accessed 2/11/2021.



Museum of London website, some online digital formats at <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/emma-hamiltons-copy-haydns-creation> accessed April 1st 2021.

Unlike elsewhere in Europe, Italy's urban heritage is spread among a myriad of museums. The online platform will allow the networking of the current digital and real-world transformations of urban heritage practices by mapping formats (tools, interactions, stakeholders) in Italian cities and cultural institutions as a form of urban resilience. The final *MNEMONIC Atlas* aims to know more about new ways 'to make and provide' heritage, culture, entertainment, education at the time of the pandemic era.

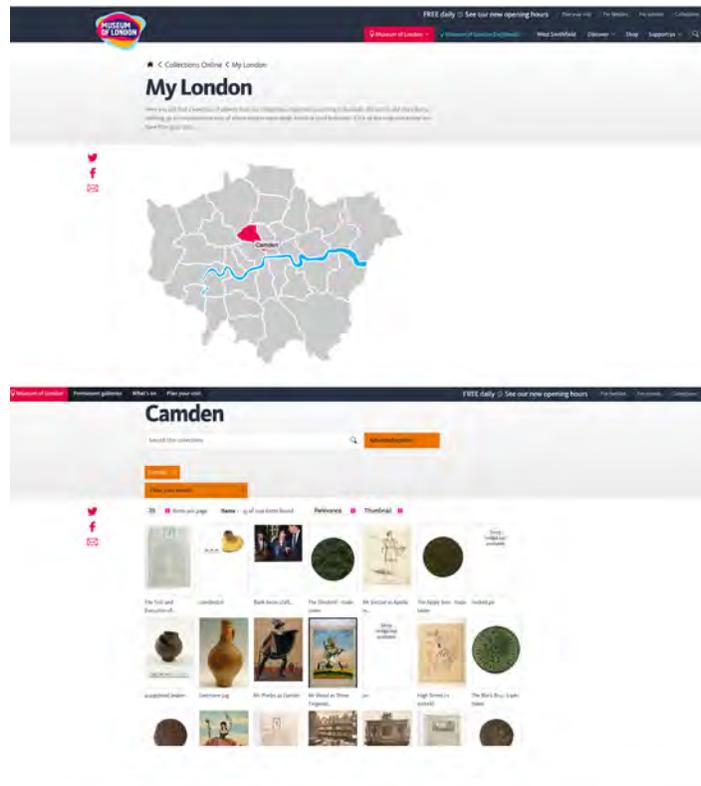
The spread of the pandemic around the world has generated the offer of special online formats everywhere. Several city museums are 'open online with loads of content to keep you entertained'.²⁹ The Museum of London website offers several online exhibitions on various aspects of urban history, such as fashion, the Roman period, black history, Londoners, Hidden London; the *Behind the scenes* is a container-format that also offers access to a series of online exhibitions.

My London format groups together items from the museum collections linking them to urban boroughs.

The offer is continuously updated and formats are re-organized. Since January 2021 the museum also acquires 'viral tweets for collecting COVID'.³⁰ Users

29. Cf. Museum of London website, <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london> accessed 2/11/2021 Museum of London.

30. The format is a part of the project *Going Viral*. <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/news-room/press-releases/museum-london-acquires-tweets> accessed 3/13/2021 Museum of London acquires 'viral' tweets for collecting COVID, 28 January 2021.



Camden collection in My London format at the Museum of London website
<https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/boroughs/> accessed April 1st 2021.

of the Wien Museum website can visit the online “*History and City Life Collection*” searching through 53195 “items reflecting the cultural, political, social, economic and day-to-day history of Vienna from 1500 to the present day”. Alternatively, they can access visual stories in the form of digital *Albums*. These digital formats are among the most articulate and eclectic online materials offered by city museums, with thirty Albums on Vienna, the Viennese, and art from different periods, displayed in random order.³¹ The Helsinki Museum web site lets

31. Thirty individual short *Albums* in digital format are listed in random order (enabled by the chronology of their creation). However, some themes can be recognized: some *Albums* focus on objects (shields, watches, money, death masks, shadow plays, fans), others are monographic portraits of artists (painters, musicians, engravers, artistic directors, graphic artists, photographers), others socio-architectural (such as cafés, cards, 18th Century Viennese buildings and urban space), socio-political (barricades, production by female artists, avant-garde). Wien Museum website. <https://www.wienmuseum.at/en/collections/history-and-city-life>. accessed 3/3/2021.

you browse the collection of photographs, art and objects. It also offers *Finna* as a special collaborative project to survey Finland’s streets. The Marseilles Museum offers a virtual visit of the city through a 3D interactive map and a chance to discover its history through a timeline.³² *When Corona goes to the museum* is the concept around which Ljubiana Museum has created its new special pandemic format. The *Corona Project* is a call for the local community to describe how the pandemic has changed ‘our households, workplaces and leisure activities’.³³

Other developments are shown by the Luxembourg Museum website as a consequence of a constantly changing situation that requires short-term adaptation. As the exhibition *Fouillez les archives/Browse through the city archive* cannot be visited because of COVID-19 restrictions, a short video behind the scenes of the exhibition is available. The interactive format, *Discover the exhibition in 3D*, enables a visit to the real exhibition in a virtual environment. The Virtual Reality method is also available with the use of Oculus and a strong interaction with the tool is encouraged, offering the chance to zoom in and out on objects and captions.³⁴

Conclusions

If the history of the city is on display in the museum, the living city seems to be more and more the real subject of museum formats nowadays. Introducing the book *Museums Inside Out*, the editor asks “Where does the museum end and the outside world begin?”³⁵

Formats capable of creating direct interactions between museum heritage and urban heritage in urban space (the city which hosts the museum) are provided by Apps. By downloading the Marseille museum website app, some *Historical Journeys of Marseilles* are enabled to experience open air urban heritage.³⁶ However, beyond enacting a digital experience, digital transformation entails digital curatorial practices for ‘(re)negotiating identities, cultural revitalisation and economic development’.³⁷ Among the different scales of heritage-making

32. Cf. <https://www.musee-histoire-marseille-voie-historique.fr/fr> accessed 2/3/2021 Musée de histoire de Marseille

33. <https://mgml.si/en/city-museum/exhibitions/518/corona-project/> accessed 2/3/2021 Ljubiana Museum

34. <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=zYcioJ8QBt6> accessed 3/2/2021 Lëtzebuerg City Museum.

35. Mark W. RECTANUS, ‘Introduction: MOVING OUT’ in *Museums Inside Out: Artist Collaborations and New Exhibition Ecologies*, Minneapolis; London, University of Minnesota Press, 2020, pp 1-26.

36. Thanks to augmented reality, the format allows users to visit the city “walking” in its history. Cf. <https://www.musee-histoire-marseille-voie-historique.fr/visit/tools> accessed 3/8/2021 Musée de Marseille.

37. Gregory ASHWORTH, ‘Interview’ in Bryony ONCIUL, Michelle L. STEFANO, and Stephanie HAWKE, *Engaging Heritage, Engaging Communities* (eds), Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA, Boydell & Brewer, 2017, pp 51-54.

in recent years,³⁸ increasing awareness of urban heritage is related to its impact on local communities.

The digital world is an opportunity for democratization and a challenge for designing new city museum developments. A critical approach to tools and formats as well as the integration of these formats in cultural and scientific standards are essential. A number of new formats have been rapidly produced under the pressure of current needs. Our analysis reveals uncertainty. Dating for digital products is always dubious as is their curation. These oversights, together with ephemerality, are critical aspects of digital formats. There is also sometimes a lack of context (both physical and cultural). Some formats provide visual sequences (image galleries) to narrate the past, instead of providing historical interpretative narrative as a museum is expected to. The most interesting formats seems to be those created specifically for a digital environment. Once shaped, they are presented as containers of various exhibitions and activities. Being tools, they perform different functions to those of an exhibition in real life. User-friendly interfaces can enable more than a basic search in a database. The digital approach has to empower human vision, enhancing not only the use of a collection but the power of heritage itself. Networking museum digital formats could be an interesting perspective for questioning urban heritage.

In a publication on digital museum practice by the Frankfurt City Museum, the curator and senior advisor of digital museum practice, Marete Sanderhoff, has indicated the museum's "idea of Public Domain" as "the sum of human intellectual and creative efforts" to be used by everyone "how they please". Accordingly, the museum shares reproductions of works in the Public Domain free of restrictions. This clearly indicates that formats involve complex and relevant issues. In a digital society, curating is, more than ever before, a crucial aspect of cultural policies. Formats can position city museums as catalyzers of local and socio-cultural development or leave them at the mercy of change. The governance of formats capable of maintaining the museum's independent cultural and critical role is challenging. They need to be continuously explored and discussed.

38. Cf. LÄHDESMÄKI, Thomas SUZIE, and Zhu YUJIE (eds) *Politics of Scale...*