

Designing the Experience

A smart guide for co-creating a new museum experience

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Introduction

What this guide is about

The last decades we experience a slow shift in the way cultural institutions relate to their visitors. This originates from their current tension to move away from a traditional conception of value making, into a more user-centered value making conception. Within this user-centered focus, **co-creation** and **experience design** appear as two concepts which cultural institutions explore and are interested in to employ for the design of their exhibitions. However, even if this ‘new wave’ of co-creation/experience design commences, museum professionals and mainly curators are finding it hard to apply and use them efficiently. This happens because of the broad definitions and the multiple approaches that these two concepts can get. This leads to confusion for the Curators, who are struggling to find the right ways to design meaningful experiences by involving also their visitors.

Inside this smart guide, which the ‘Designing the Experience’ team created, curators are able to find relevant and important information surrounding the notions of co-creation and experience design. More precisely curators can learn about:

- **The what’s, why’s and how’s of experience design.**
- **The what’s, why’s and how’s of co-creation.**
- **Means for Evaluation frameworks and Feedback translation.**

In the following pages you will find more information about the process followed for the formulation of this guide.

Preface

Where the information in this guide is coming from

For this guide to be relevant our team conducted an extensive research around the notions of co-creation and experience design in the cultural sector, but also in other fields. This research was build upon:

- **literature study and review**, combined with the examination of relevant cases surrounding the main topics of interest.

- A **Photo Safari** in the exhibition “Graffiti - New York meets The Dam” of Amsterdam Museum. Twelve visitors expressed what constitutes a unique experience for them inside an exhibition through a personal photograph combined with some words.

- **Interviews were made with museum professionals** from six Dutch cultural institutes, including namely: Amsterdam Museum, FOAM, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Het Schip Museum, Tropenmuseum Amsterdam and Nederlands Institute for Sound and Vision.

The purpose of the Photo Safari and interviews was to better understand the needs of both the visitors and the curators in order to have a clearer overview and a more holistic approach while creating this guide. Subsequently important for our research was **an event we attended, entitled “Hacking Heritage: The Audience”** organized by Waag Society, an Amsterdam based institute for Arts, Science and Technology. During this we came into contact and discussion with many museum professionals interested (or not) on co-creation processes.

From all the above and after careful selection and consideration of the data collected we started filling in the pages of this guide, which is a summary of all the different actions and aspects that we took into account and consider important and relevant for people who are interested in co-creating a new museum experience.

Experience

What is an experience?

The first step of creating an experience is understanding what an experience is.

“The ultimate, nonanalyzed data of all happenings that may be apprehended; the summum genus of all knowable reality.” ¹

Merriam Webster

“Experiences are the foundation for all life events and form the core of what interactive media have to offer.” ²

Nathan Shedrof



“An experience is based on the identification of moments that are linked to the emotions of people in relation with their memories.” ³

Jaime Valero

In the next experience chapters we will further investigate what an experience is, what museum visitors consider an experience, the curators point of view and what constitutes a museum experience.

Experience

Photosafari at Amsterdam Museum

In order to understand what constitutes a museum experience and especially how visitors make sense of an experience, we conducted a photosafari at the exhibition 'Graffiti: New York meets the Dam' at the Amsterdam museum with the participation of 12 visitors.

From the fotosafari there were three main categories identified, based on the preferences of the visitors. Figure 1 defines the first category by the name **interaction**. Four out of the 12 participants relate to an exhibition through the interaction which it provides (between artworks and people/interactivity, social interaction).



Figure 1

The second figure represents the category: **surroundings**. Six out of the twelve participants perceived their visit to an exhibition by its surroundings (spatial interpretation).



Figure 2

The final figure demonstrates the last category: **Artworks**. Two out of the twelve participants make sense of their visit through the meanings and messages that they create/perceive from the artworks.



Figure 3

Through the fotosafari method we got a sample of the aspects that visitors consider important during a museum visit. However it should be noted that this method was used in one exhibition with twelve participants, which does not allow us to come up with general conclusions (what visitors in general consider an experience). From the above, and through the experience using the fotosafari method we suggest that a photosafari is easy to execute and enables you to provide relevant data for visitors studies in a fast way. We would recommend museum professionals to apply this as a feedback tool for their exhibitions as well.

Experience

1-on-1 interviews with museum professionals

When it comes to exhibitions and museums experiences in general, it is rather impossible to exclude the professionals perspective. For this reason, we conducted interviews with museums professionals from six Dutch cultural institutions namely: Amsterdam museum, FOAM, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Het Schip, Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision (Beeld en Geluid), and TropenMuseum Amsterdam. These interviews focused on exhibition design, the aspects of co-creation/participation and on the feedback means that they use. The results of this interviews can be found in the following diagram.



Two approaches

Visitor-focused



Make decisions by taking their visitors needs into account.

Institutionalized



Making decisions by focusing mainly on the museum, artists and their own needs.

“In my view, we still do too little about visitors studies. We mainly know which exhibition visitors come for, their position in society and their age.”

Daan Van Dartel curator of popular culture and fashion at Tropenmuseum Amsterdam



Two approaches

Traditional means



Questionnaires, comment book, face to face conversation, guided tours

Social Media



Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest

“The means are not the goal (use of physical or digital media). The goal is to get the information and the experience across to the visitors”

Laura Van Hasselt Curator/exhibition maker at Amsterdam museum.

Experience

What factors constitute a museum experience?

Research group Crossmedia of the Amsterdam University of Applied Science is doing a project called 'Designing Experience Shapes' where they also investigated what factors constitute a museum experience. While you as a curator may not even consider a lot of them, these are the factors that they considered important and influenceable when constituting a museum experience. They divided the factors in six categories: social, lay-out, aesthetics, ambient, flow and media. Social is concerned with social processes in the exhibition space, lay-out is concerned with the physical layout, aesthetics is concerned with the space decoration, flow is concerned with the usage of the space and media is concerned with the use of media in the space.⁴

Aesthetics

- Floor covering (materials, texture, patterns)
- Wall covering (materials, texture, patterns)
- Ceilings (materials, texture, patterns)
- Furniture (materials, texture, patterns)
- Recognizable entrance
- Recognizable exit
- Design of information (labels, flyers, booklets)
- Decorations
- Quality of appearance
- Emphasize architecture of space
- Emphasize scale of space
- Usage of high quality materials
- Style of decorations
- Usage of authentic objects or replicas
- Tidiness
- Whether or not show fixtures in space

Social

- Presence of employees
- Number of employees present
- Employees uniforms
- Role/instructions employees
- Audience consumes
- Audience participates
- Audience co-creates
- Interaction of visitors who know each other
- Interaction of visitors who do not know each other
- Reactions of visitors visible for others
- Contributions of visitors visible for others
- Social media
- Visitors can draw up their own plan
- Take into account socially desirable behavior
- Aim for same kind of visitors

Flow

- Fixed route
- Offer background information
- Usage of storytelling
- Interaction with objects
- Single assignments (eg. search for objects)
- Scavenger hunt
- Storyline
- Activities to do something
- Enrichment (receive extra information)
- Align succession of experiences
- Crowd control
- Ensure a memorable ending
- Create wow-moments
- Signage throughout the space
- Avoid dead areas

Lay-out

- Number of objects
- Which objects to display
- Arrangements of objects
- Placing of objects in space
- Display height of objects
- Objects are/aren't protected
- Size of space (floor space)
- Height of space
- Number of rooms
- Compartments in space
- Signage to (emergency exits and toilets)
- Orientation in space
- Aisles explicitly marked
- Width of aisles
- Main aisles with side aisles
- Number of comfortable areas (eg. seating)
- Location of comfortable areas
- Location of entrance in space
- Location of exit in space
- Design of space allows for crowd control
- Use of heights in floor space allocation
- Furniture
- Placing of equipment in space

Media

- Audiotour
- Multimediatour
- Tablets
- Touchscreen displays
- Multitouch table
- QR-codes
- Audioscape
- Monitors
- Mobile App
- (Video) Games
- Augmented Reality (eg. Google Glass)
- Booklet/ Flyer
- Tag (ring, ticket, etc.)
- Virtual Reality (eg. Oculus Rift)
- Gesture-based browsing (eg. kinect)
- Availability of WiFi
- Labels
- Instruction cards
- Guestbook

Ambient

- Music
- Sounds
- Smell
- Color
- Temperature
- Air quality
- Ventilation (air circulation)
- Usage of artificial lightening
- Cleanliness
- Comfortable areas
- Touch
- Noise outside building
- Noise inside building (airco, other spaces, etc)
- Taste

You are not always able to influence all of the factors above but at least keep them in mind when designing an experience and keep in mind that all these factors play a role in how visitors experience your exhibition.

Experience

What constitutes a good experience?

Moving further into the experience part of this guide, there are three core factors⁴ that need to be achieved for the creation of a successful experience. The first one is **attraction**. The attraction is the factor that initiates the experience, and it can be represented as a cognitive, visual, auditory or as any signal to any of the senses. The second factor is **immersion**. Immersion is an important part of every experience and is the one which holds people's attention through the whole experience, avoiding them getting bored. Last but not least is **meaning**. This is the conclusion of the whole experience. This may still sound a little vague and therefore we will explain this theory further with an analysis of 'De Efteling' theme park in the Netherlands. This theme park succeeds in attracting visitors by the storytelling that surrounds the activities that take place there.



Through the tactics used in De Efteling, we see that visitors are more possible to reach the outcome of having a meaningful experience. This happens first of all because the whole experience is taking place in a different 'world' which is separated from their everyday lives. Secondly, theme parks are generally able to create memorable experiences without letting visitors get bored by creating a once in a lifetime experience. Also, fairytales and storytelling are two practices which hold the power to bring back memories from our childhood, creating a direct connection with our inner self and emotions.



After the successful attraction, De Efteling then succeeds to immerse their visitors through the magical and fairytale-like themes which it uses. The visitors feel immersed inside this story world while all their senses are being stimulated by interacting with their surroundings. There are two main ways that create immersion for the visitors, based on the activities which take place in Efteling. You can feel your adrenaline rising inside a rollercoaster or explore your imagination through the themed activities.



Co-creation

5 common types of co-creation⁵

Co-creation workshops

What?

Specific users are involved in brainstorm sessions to generate ideas or being involved in concept workshops to enhance ideas.

When?

Co-creation workshops are especially suitable to gain more insights in the needs of your customers or to find ideas that are relatively easy to implement on short or middle long term.

Example:

Wallace Collection (see casestudy on page 12)

Open Source

What?

A (large number of) volunteers are actively involved in development and maintenance of a product. Open source is often applied with development software.

When?

It is very suitable if you want to set a new technical standard.

Example:

Linux and Firefox. Also the non-profit organization Creative Commons stimulates this type of co-creation with great success.

User-generated content

What?

Customers create their own 'products' that they share through your system or platform.

When?

User-generated content is especially suitable for digital products and services. If you can create the right platform it will spread rapidly and your platform can even become a brand on its own.

Example:

Youtube, LinkedIn, Slideshare and Flickr

Crowdsourcing

What?

You define a question or problem for a large audience and offer a reward for "the winning idea". The interaction with the customer is minimal, since the ideas are developed by the customer themselves.

When?

Crowdsourcing is applicable in three situations:

- You have a concrete problem for which you want a solution.
- You are looking for inspiration through new ideas that will expand your employees' views.
- You want to generate a lot of free publicity around an upcoming product. You promise that the winning idea will be brought to market.

Example:

The HEMA design contest, Treadless T-shirt maker, "Connect + Develop" program of P&G and Elektrolux's annual student contest.

Mass customization

What?

Customers can design their own product within the framework you define.

When?

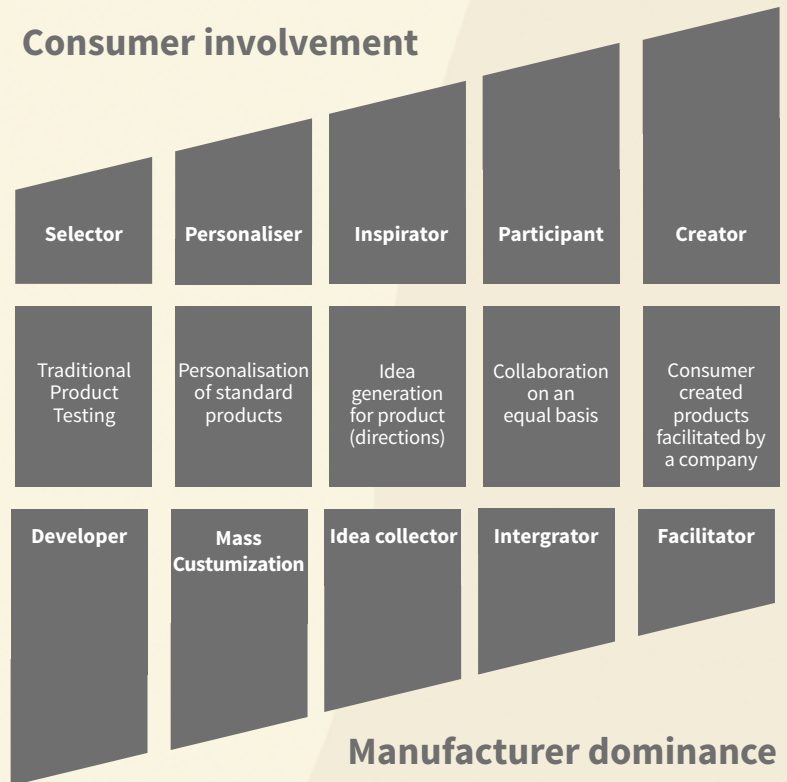
This generally means that a customer can select different shapes, colors or materials for the product parts. This makes him willing to pay a premium price for the product. Mass customization can accomplish a lot for your brand and positioning, and it can turn your customers into ambassadors.

Example:

NikeiD and Lego Factory

Marketing agency VODW created model which points out what kind of co-creation to use related to the level of involvement of the participant and the level of authority of the organisation.⁶

Consumer involvement



Manufacturer dominance

But which type to choose when co-creating a museum experience?

Taking into account that we are aiming at co-creating a meaningful museum experience we consider the co-creation workshop to be the best way of co-creating with your visitor because this is the best way to really dive into their needs and benefit from their ideas and creativity. In the next sections we shall further explain what co-creation is, what the benefits are and what to do and what not to do, keeping in mind that we are writing for a co-creation workshop. We would also recommend to look into other fields of co-creation and other fields than museums to get inspired when planning your first co-creation workshop.



Co-creation

What is co-creation exactly?7



“Co-creation is an initiative that brings different parties together , in order to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome.”

Co-creation is:

Allowing the visitor to co-construct the experience to suit her context

Joint problem definition and/or problem solving

Continuous dialogue

Creating an experience environment in which visitors can have active dialogue and co-construct personalized experiences

Experiencing the museum as visitors do in real time

About joint creation of value by the museum and the visitor. It is not about the museum trying to please the visitor

“Co-creation is much more work than writing somewhere in a hidden corner and then publishing your content. However, the benefit outweigh the costs.”

Alexander Osterwalder

Co-creation

How musea and visitor Benefit from co-creation⁸



To **give voice** and be responsive to the needs and interests of local community members.



Co-creation processes **guarantees a broad support among the stakeholders**, since they are directly involved. The results are a joint creation developed by and for all the actors involved, making it 'theirs'.



To help participants **develop skills** that will support their own individual and community goals.



True co-creation is highly motivating! From the start it is clear how the process to address the issue or challenge will be organized and every participant will have the same mission and vision.



To provide a place for **community engagement and dialogue**.



Co-creative processes have **a strong positive impact on the quality** of the result. The result takes into account the different perceptions, realities and interests of all parties.

Co-creation

The do's and don'ts of co-creation^{9,10}

 DO'S	DON'TS 
Create a set of shared guidelines	Don't expect a big "a-ha" moment when the clouds part and somebody blurts out The Next Big Thing. The real art is in synthesizing all the ideas afterwards and understanding the big, unlooked-for themes that underpin them
Use a facilitator	
Create a safe environment	
Create a common language	Don't criticize stupid-sounding ideas, they're often attempts to solve an intelligently-defined problem
Treat participants like experts	Don't underestimate the time it takes to evaluate co-creation sessions
Push boundaries	Don't let anybody feel excluded
Reward participants	Don't project your pre-assumptions on the participants

Casestudy¹¹

Here are the basics. For one year, a group of twelve school children age 9-11 were invited to work with staff at the Wallace Collection to develop a family-focused exhibition using the museum's artifacts. With the support of museum staff, children developed the exhibition theme, selected the objects, designed the space, developed interpretative materials (including interactives), managed the budget, raised sponsorship, created press and marketing materials, put on the opening party, led interpretative tours, and trained museum guides. The exhibition was open for 54 days and was visited by 14,000 people. While the staff who led the project cheerfully commented that they didn't know what they were doing when they started, the process they ended up with bears remarkable similarity to other successful co-creative efforts, like the Wing Luke Asian Museum's community exhibition process or the Oakland Museum's Days of the Dead project.

But what made this project a big success?

It started with a real institutional need. The Learning Staff wanted to develop a family-friendly exhibition, and they couldn't figure out what to focus on. They decided to ask children, and the project was born. The exhibition had a real story and theme determined by the young curators. It wasn't just "here's what kids like at the Wallace Collection"—it was a real exhibition designed by the community it was intended to serve.

The process was professional. My favorite part of the report is the clear expectations set out for the students, museum staff, and the school (page 7). While the staff did guide students through the exhibition development process, the students had serious responsibilities and lived up to professional expectations. Even without knowing exactly how the process would go, the museum staff set themselves up for success by treating the young curators as respected partners.

Everybody learned something. While the exhibition report disproportionately focuses on the learning value of the experience for the children involved (reasonable considering they developed the exhibition during school hours), the staff at the museum learned quite a lot about designing for and with children. As Learning Director Emma Bryant commented, "The exhibition is much more subtle than I think we would have done if we had done it by ourselves for children."

The project wasn't isolated to one department of the museum. Because the children were organized into teams (design, interpretation, finance, marketing), they intersected with many staff members across the museum. This created opportunities for institution-wide learning about working with children and understanding family audiences. A curatorial assistant, Rebecca Wallis, reflected that "their creative imaginations allowed me to see the collections in a new light. From the interesting objects they chose, not the usual well-known pieces, to the way they described them in their own words, not museum speak!" The exhibition report includes both successes and challenges of the project from multiple perspectives—children, staff, parents, teachers.

The exhibition reflects the particular interests and abilities of children while maintaining high quality. Judging from the videos, the exhibition was well-designed, well-lit, and generally in keeping with others at the Wallace Collection. This was not a poor man's "community gallery;" it was a real show. From the limited view on the Web, I found the artifacts novel (who doesn't love a desk with secret compartments?) and the interactives that connected to the objects smart and appealing. These young curators really made 18th century design, art, and armory accessible and intriguing. I loved the mannequins you could use to understand the relative positions of people in a complex painting, and the hats you could try on to feel what it was like to wear a hidden metal protective cap under your fashionably floppy chapeau. As a lover of audience participation, I was particularly taken by the "souvenir tree," which invited visitors to emulate a woman in a painting carving a message into a tree by writing their own secrets on postcards and putting them in a box on a graphic tree on the wall.

The partnership was a manageable starting point for future collaborations. The museum worked with St. Vincent's school because it was just down the road from the museum, making it easy for the children to meet weekly throughout the year at either site to work on the project. While the museum and the school didn't have a strong history of collaboration, this project seemed reasonable enough to try. The project was carefully designed to achieve related but different goals for each institution—for the museum, to learn more about children and generate an exhibition, and for the school, to support children's educational development through a novel opportunity. The museum and school are now planning future projects together, including a youth advisory board for the museum.

The project was well-documented. The Wallace Collection folks did the little things that matter—shooting photos and video throughout the process—as well as the big things—writing a report that included multiple stakeholders.

Evaluation Frameworks

Considerations when developing a monitoring and evaluation framework^{11,12}



Resources

List of resources

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