MUSEUMS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

by

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"Museums and Civic Engagement in the Pacific Northwest," a thesis prepared by Sarah Gratia Van Der Stad in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the Arts and Administration Program. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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　　　　Museums are critical agents of civic engagement. While many museum

professionals do not ignore this particular role, they often assign it a fairly low

priority. This Master's thesis investigates the community role of four art museums

in urban areas of the Pacific Northwest and seeks to understand how museums

engage their communities by exploring the tools and methods they employ.

Current scholarship suggests that trust and inclusion are essential for

engagement to occur among community members. Museums build trust and

promote inclusion by providing safe spaces for discussions and debate. A

museum's leadership, mission, and exhibition philosophy are primary indicators

of its inclination towards engagement. This study promotes museums as forums

for public discourse and, in doing so, contributes to sustainable community

development by recommending improved museum practice and policy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this Master's thesis I have explored the community role of four art museums in the urban areas of Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington. Through this sample population, the study investigates the relationship between museums and community development. The community perspective, and how museums facilitate that relationship are central to this investigation. The information I have gathered from interviews with museum leaders in addition to my exploration of related literature brings to light what museum professionals are doing to represent, include, and relate with their communities in order to keep museums relevant as significant community resources. This study is designed to assist museums leaders in thinking about the role of their museums and has generated a summary of best practices based on innovative museum philosophy explored through interviews with museum leaders in the Pacific Northwest. My goal here is to promote museums as a forum for civic dialogues, and in turn to contribute to sustainable community development by recommending improved museum practice and policy.

Problem Statement

Current studies imply that museums are trusted members of the community. David Thelan (2001) states that, "Americans trust museums more than any other institution in our culture" (p. 3). What kind of trust does this imply? As I will discuss later, trust has multiple meanings, all of which should be considered by museum professionals when thinking about their roles. Trust can imply that members of the public rely on museums to demonstrate reliable and accurate information in an unbiased way. It can mean that a person feels comfortable walking into the facility to learn, explore, and interact. Trust can also mean that a community believes that the museum will tell its stories in a truthful and considerate manner. Theorists and museum professionals have continued to grapple with the role of museums in American society: Are we experts intended to provide information of the highest acclaimed works? Or should we look into our own neighborhoods to determine what is important? And how do we involve our own communities in order to make our exhibits and programs meaningful?

The civically engaged museum is not a new idea; however many museums struggle to be critical agents within their communities. Sandell (1998) found that at the core of many museum missions is the intention to provide positive social impacts such as quality of life, or, as she put it, "[to enrich] the intellectual life of a community" (p. 401). However, Sandell also suggested that while many museum professionals do not ignore the social role of the museum, they often assign it a fairly low priority. Most museum professionals will agree

that community based collaborations are central to the success of an organization. It has been observed that, "many of [museums] lack the organizational capacity to build stronger community partnerships – i.e. adequate time and money, a strong leadership commitment, an organizational culture that embraces change, and staff skilled at listening to community voices and establishing community relationships" (Holman and Roosa, 2003, para. 3). In this exploratory investigation, I consider this criticism and examine the community role of museums by means of a sample population in the Pacific Northwest.

A significant amount of scholarship on the community role of museums comes from museum studies established in the United Kingdom (UK) where in-depth research projects sponsored by both the private and government sectors have championed the positive effects of museums on communities. Notable museums have participated in community-based projects in attempts to rectify the social exclusion of some groups and to promote civic engagement. These studies exemplify the goal of governmental cultural policy to use museums as agents of social inclusion. The conclusion of one study argues that, "existing policy was confused and ineffective because of a lack of understanding about what museums and galleries are capable of doing and so what their role in society is" (Newman and McLean, 2004, p. 481). While this particular study was specific to the UK, these issues can be easily applied to the American experience. As a museum professional, I have often heard this same criticism applied to smaller communities. The growing concern for what museums are

supposed to do and what they are supposed to mean to their constituents is the primary motivation for this investigation. I have sought to understand who is making the decisions regarding the public role of museums, and how those decisions are made. Institutions such as the American Association of Museums (AAM) and other public and nonprofit organizations have taken the lead in providing direction and public mandates for American museums.

In 2002, the AAM introduced a publication entitled *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums*. As its title suggests, this publication asks that museums "revisit the power of community and consider what assets museums contribute to the shared enterprise of building and strengthening community bonds" (American Association of Museums [AAM], 2002, p. ix). This publication is the capstone of a project put forth by the AAM Museums and Community Initiative to underscore the significant impact of museum-community partnerships. A recent article in *Museum News* explained that, "We are living in a time when museums and other meaning-making institutions of popular education are re-considering their civic missions and practices, the places they seek, the ways they engage new partners and audiences, and therefore, their priorities" (Thelan, 2001, p. 1). The emergence of community oriented museum policy introduces an opportunity for museums and communities to reconsider museum philosophy. Museums need to explore their own communities in order to identify the expectations of their existing and potential constituents. It is time for new dialogue to occur between museums and their communities.

Museums hold an unrealized potential to be significant contributors to community life. Prior to *Mastering Civic Engagement*, AAM's *Excellence and Equity*: *Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* ignited a deeper exploration of the relationship between museums and communities by examining theoretical and practical thought on the wider role of museums and their effects on communities. This directive highlights the need for change in the way museums interact with the public and emphasizes that, "investments in artistic development and quality can go hand in hand with a commitment to expanding public engagement" (Pitman and Hirzy, 2004, p. 2). My own investigation considers and interprets the ideas put forth in *Mastering Civic Engagement* and applies those key concepts to the actual dialogue and philosophies of museum leaders in urban Pacific Northwest areas. The purpose of this study is to move beyond the argument for the importance of museums. My goal is to provide professional assistance by uncovering and presenting best practices and new philosophies that move the museum world forward towards inclusion, social responsibility, and community engagement.

Social Trends and Their Effects on Arts and Culture

In order to begin this investigation with a full understanding of the relationship between museums and community, I have explored different perspectives on social trends as they relate to the arts and culture sector. Current scholarship on community engagement uses several different terms to

describe how people interact and relate to one another at local levels. To set a context for this exploration, I have provided a brief summary of current debates among social scholars. The key concepts surrounding this topic involve current definitions of *civic* or *community* engagement. Civic engagement is a contested term. Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) define civic engagement in terms of participation: "active participation in society presumably encourages citizens to participate further, boosts their knowledge of society and its issues, and makes them more tolerant of and attached to their fellow citizens" (p. 227). While it is generally agreed that these are underlying characteristics of a healthy community, the current debate appears to revolve around the individual (internal) versus the societal group (external). This investigation has uncovered two distinct perspectives on the best ways for communities to engage.

Another perspective holds that civic engagement and community participation are in decline, and the best way to revive them is to encourage participation in voluntary associational activities. This argument suggests that in order for a community to be engaged, the majority of its members should be involved in some form of group activity. Museums offer associational activities through membership and committees, but this mode of engagement has several problems. Most museums charge a fee for membership or a considerable donation to serve on a committee making that opportunity inaccessible to many community members. Involvement through membership does not necessarily require the interaction or collaboration between different groups of a community.

Quite often, museum membership is made up of similar types of people excluding a significant portion of the community. The alternative perspective argues that associational life does not adequately address the problem of engagement and inclusion. This debate illustrates the ambiguity of social, civic, or community engagement. It clarifies how challenging it is for museums to foster such engagement. This debate continues through an exploration of social trends.

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) argued that there is a distinct decline in civic participation and group activities in contemporary American culture. Putnam believes that this decline has generated an incentive for the revival of American communities. He writes that the reversal of such declining trends requires that organizations, clubs, and social groups provide incentives for community participation that in turn will promote the engagement of the whole community and beyond. "The roles of national and local institutions in restoring American communities need to be complementary; neither alone can solve the problem" (p. 413). In other words, Putnam is suggesting that the revival of American communities will stem from the participation of all who live within them. He advocates the renewed involvement in voluntary associational life. Putnam's ideas are not universally well received. In the article, *Citizenship and Civic Engagement*, Theiss-Morse and Hibbing put forward three primary reasons why his solution is ineffective (2005, p. 228):

1.   The voluntary associations people are most likely to join are decidedly homogeneous and therefore incapable of generating the benefits claimed.

2.   Civic participation in some circumstances actually turns people away, leaving them less, not more, engaged.

3.   Many groups do not pursue the kinds of goals that would be necessary for promoting engagement

How then, can museums position themselves to engage beyond associational activities? What are the challenges faced by museum professionals?

Theiss-Morse and Hibbing argue that many American individuals are simply not interested in engaging in civic behavior and are too busy to participate. The impacts of busy lives are also reflected in the decline of leisure activities over the past several decades and have made a significant impact on the involvement in arts and cultural activities, more specifically, in museums. However, Wireman (1997) argued that leisure has, in fact, increased due to the fact that, "the American population is aging. The first baby boomers celebrated their 50th birthdays in 1996" so, "many older people are looking for places to retire…those with increased leisure time swell the tourism market" (p. 17).

Putnam (2000) suggests "that most Americans connect with their fellows in myriad informal ways... On the other hand, evidence also suggests that across a very wide range of activities, the last several decades have witnessed a striking diminution of regular contacts with our friends and neighbors." He writes that

"…we engage less in leisure activities that encourage casual social interaction, we spend more time watching and less time doing" (p. 115). Museums are prime locations for social gathering and connecting significant players in American leisure activities. Putnam's suggestion that we are participating less in such activities implies that museums are also subject to the perceived decline in leisure and that they are also experiencing a decrease in community gatherings and activities.

Since museums are trusted institutions, some believe that they are mandated to fulfill their responsibilities in a socially responsible way. Sandell (1998) suggests that, "Further research is required to establish the social impact of the museum and to identify the causal links between the activity of the museum and its effects on the … audience for which it seeks to create access" (p. 411). In light of the theory that community life is declining, museum professionals attempt to redefine who they are and what impact their presence has on a community. No longer simply safe houses for our material culture, museums are now considered to be social agents. Thelan (2001) describes the future of museums and their community role:

> The issue of community and the roles of museums therein will search to introduce museums to the debates being conducted by other civic institutions addressing many similar issues…These debates are about civic empowerment and they center on issues of how and where citizens

seek and engage each other, about their senses of power, trust, and agency (p. 1).

There are many opportunities for museums to serve as contributors to the civic arena, and several characteristics suggest that they are moving in the right direction. Some scholars imply that museums are in fact, critical agents of community engagement. Gurian (2006) writes, "Museums continue to wish to be responsible. They wish to be supportive and inclusive. They wish to be helpful to society. There is no uniformity now, but to be fair there was none [to begin with] either" (p. 74). The increase in scholarship put forth by museum professionals, scholars, and museum associations indicates that many museum leaders want their institutions to take a participatory role within their communities. What remains to be explored is how communities and museums are working together to effect such a significant change. Gurian (2006) suggests that museums encourage engagement because they are primary locations for congregating. "[Museums] are using lecture halls as umbrellas for debate and the airing of ideas . . . the museum is a fitting safe place for the discussion of unsafe ideas" (p. 93). This assertion is the most important underlying theme of this research. Museums share the thoughts, identities, traditions, and emotions of our communities through the objects that they interpret. Museums put our history and our future on display for all to examine. I cannot think of a more appropriate forum for controversial, divisive, comforting, or unifying ideas to be exchanged.

There is only a modicum of scholarship that pertains to any established techniques used by museum professionals to successfully engage with their communities. Gurian (2006) stated,

> Of course museums are and have always seen themselves as instruments of social responsibility as well as transmitters of cultural values. But the term social responsibility, as our trade uses it, has rarely been construed to cover the provision of direct service to some element of the community (p. 83).

Museums have typically taken a passive role in the civic arena. They have contributed through exhibitions and programs, but there are many other opportunities to be explored.

Research Questions

For this study I ask several questions that explore and identify best museum practice in regard to community engagement. How can museums better engage their communities? What tools are being used to do so? What are the different philosophies on museum and community relations? These questions lead to the greater question: Even though new and innovative ideas have sparked innovative relationships between museums and their communities, should civic engagement ultimately be the responsibility of museums? Is the greatest purpose of a museum to educate or to inspire collaboration and engagement?

Relevance of the Study

My research addresses issues, ideas, and concerns that will assist museum professionals in their work. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to explore the community role of museums in order to understand the relevance of their public mandate. My findings contribute to the sector-wide discussion.

In this study, museums have been identified as civic agents with a particular set of responsibilities that are the focus of investigation. I have conducted my investigations with the purpose of promoting a continuing evolution of museums and the benefits that they provide to society. My findings support new forms of collaboration between community members and arts administrators who identify museums as critical components of an active and engaging community life.

These findings will assist museum professionals and the broader arts administration sector. The interview and research questions explore ways museum leaders, individuals, and community groups can take part in active dialogue promoting civic engagement through the arts. This study has also provided valuable insights by identifying the civic contributions generated by museums through the process of exhibition conception, implementation, and programming.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodological Paradigm

This study is aligned with the interpretive social science framework of research. Neuman stated in *Social Research Methods* that the interpretive social science approach is a "systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds" (2003, p. 76). This investigation positions the art museum as a social agent within a specific social world, a community. The way in which museums engage and participate in their communities was examined through the interpretive social science lens. Interpretive social science explores a particular social reality; the manner in which this investigation has explored the experiences of urban communities in regard to their relationship with museums does just that. I have provided a primary account of the participants' experiences while my own interpretations and observations serve as a secondary form of analysis. As the primary investigator, my own assumptions and professional standards are a strong part of the conclusions. However, I have made every attempt to provide a complete and unbiased account of the investigation by reporting each participant's experience and opinions as accurately as possible.

Role of the Researcher

Interpretive social science positions the researcher as a participant observer. This means that the researcher observes and inquires into the topic of study while allowing his or her thoughts and reactions to be incorporated into the interpretation and analysis of data. As a museum professional, I am an advocate for the community activity of museums. The communication lines between museums and communities are critical to the development of an inclusive and engaging community atmosphere. I have explored the relationship between museums and their communities in order to identify the actual and potential contributions made by museums to foster such engagement.

For the benefit of this study, I have made several basic assumptions. First, it is assumed that a relationship between each museum and its community exists and that each museum has some form of policy that guides and shapes that relationship. Therefore the purpose of this study is not to prove an existing relationship, but to explore the thought process behind those policies that guide the conduct of that relationship. Based on existing theory and observations it is assumed that the participating museums desire to facilitate community engagement through their programming, exhibits, and involvement with community members and groups. I have determined that the participating museums do engage in active dialogue, however unclear and challenging that dialogue might be. I consider museums to be valuable community resources that hold the potential to promote positive and creative citizenship. The result of this

research includes that perspective in the outline of best practice and model policies for museum professionals to consider.

Participant Population and Recruitment

The responsibilities of executive directors vary from organization to organization. As a rule, however, they are expected to steer the organization and to make recommendations for policies that promote the mission of the museum in partnership with a board of directors. At some level, executive directors are involved in the decision making processes for education, marketing, fundraising, and public relations, to name only a few. For these reasons, I chose to interview executive directors. For the purposes of this research, I have made the assumption that these individuals can provide a comprehensive description of organizational philosophy. The participants were initially identified through an Internet investigation, through my own contacts, and through contacts of my advisors.

The most challenging parameter to set for this study was the geographic area. Because of travel limitations and basic geography I chose to focus on the Pacific Northwest, more specifically Washington and Oregon. For comparative purposes, I selected cities that were home to more than one significant museum. City populations were also a significant factor. I wanted a sample that represented urban populations, the term *urban* meaning an area of high population that makes up a city rather than a rural area. A city, for my purposes,

is an extensive, built-up area where large numbers of people live and work. This also made it very easy to find an area with more than one significant museum. Although several municipalities in Washington and Oregon qualify as cities, I wanted to sample the highest populated city in each state: Seattle, Washington, has a population of 582,454, and Portland, Oregon, a population of 537,081 (US Census Bureau, 2000). Therefore, Seattle and Portland were ultimately selected for this study.

The criteria used to select the museums for this study were primarily based on access to and availability of the museum director. I sent letters to the directors of six museums in Portland and Seattle and received four responses. At inception this study focused on the use of art as a tool for communication, so I targeted art museums as the primary target for the sample population. I also identified museum leaders who had made significant contributions to scholarship regarding the issues of community relations, a criterion that led to the selection of Mr. Ron Chew, director of the Wing Luke Asian Museum as a participant. The final small sample represents a variety of museums, including a university museum; a culturally based museum; a major, nationally recognized museum; and a craft center.

Once an individual was identified for participation, a formal letter of recruitment was sent to him or her. This letter informed the individual about the study and described all potential benefits and risks. If an individual were willing to participate, he or she was asked to contact me to determine an interview date.

Once an individual agreed to be interviewed, he or she received an official

consent form to sign and a list of research questions. It was made clear through

these forms and letters that confidentiality would not be granted because the

credibility of the sources was imperative to the reliability of the study. The

participants had the right to terminate the interview process at any time and the

right to approve any quotes or information prior to submission and publication.

This process followed the human subjects protocol requirements of the University

of Oregon and was approved before any recruitment activity began. The time and

location of the interviews were based on the availability of the participants. All

interviewees were adults over the age of twenty-five. A total of four individuals

were interviewed between the months of February and April of 2007. One was

interviewed via telephone.

Strategy of Inquiry

The primary location of the study was in Eugene, Oregon, where the

archival research, data analysis, interpretation, and final write-up processes were

executed. Other locations included the participants' offices in Seattle and

Portland.

Two methods of data collection involved face-to-face and telephone

interviews with key informants and a document analysis of materials provided by

the informants. An in-depth literature review was also completed in order to

explore current scholarship to supplement and provide a context for my interview

findings. The formal data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview. Each interview consisted of pre-determined questions regarding the community role and responsibilities of the museums. The initial questions were intended to provide a framework for the interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed each interview to take its own unique course while still adhering to the original research questions.

Semi-structured Interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews was most appropriate for this study because it dealt with qualitative data of an exploratory nature. "Semi-structured interviews allow all participants to be asked the same [open-ended] questions within a flexible framework... [They] encourage depth and vitality and allow new concepts to emerge" (Dearnley, 2005, p. 21). This type of interview allowed me to gather in-depth information that may have otherwise been restrained by a structured interview or questionnaire. Although these interviews were semi-structured, each was conducted in a consistent manner for validity and reliability purposes. The interviews resulted in a diverse range of responses due to the varied levels of experience of those who participated. The consistent structure allowed each interviewee to reflect on the same questions and concepts from his or her professional perspective.

During each interview, detailed notes were taken to record impressions and observations. Each interview was recorded with a small digital recording

device and selectively transcribed in order to save time. Because confidentiality was not promised, a coding system was used only to assist me in organizing the collected information; it considered the following:

1. Civic engagement – definitions and descriptions

2. Museums – definitions and descriptions

3. Leadership – decisions and philosophy

4. Museum provisions – exhibitions and programs

5. Community/museum relationships

6. Criticisms of museums

This categorizing of information allowed me to compare the strategies and influencing philosophies of each museum director in order to identify patterns, similarities, and differences.

Document Analysis

Data were drawn from the materials that were provided by the participating museums. Archival documents including related journal articles, books, conference papers, and professional listservs were used to identify past and current trends and ideas about the topic of study. The data that was analyzed was of a qualitative nature and developed a point of departure for the study. Document analysis contributed to this study by allowing me to examine historical backgrounds and the current relationships between the museums and

communities. This process introduced social indicators and measures of social well being as it applied to the topic of study (Neuman, 2003, p. 320).

Validity and Reliability

Reliability indicates the dependability or the consistency of data (Neuman, 2003). Reliability was maintained through the triangulation of informants and data collection methods. As mentioned above, the guiding interview questions remained the same for each interview and observations were recorded in a consistent manner. Although every attempt was made to remain consistent, qualitative data tends to shift and change over time as Neuman (2003) explains, "…the relationship between a researcher and the data is one of an evolving relationship or living organism that naturally matures" (p. 185). Therefore, the findings derived from this investigation are open to interpretation.

In qualitative research, validity is more appropriately considered to indicate authenticity by providing a fair and honest account of the social knowledge of someone who experiences it on a daily basis (Neuman, 2003). This study attempts to accurately and fully convey the accounts of informants and compares the accounts with current scholarship. Conclusions were drawn from the literature review and document analysis.

Challenges and Definitions

The size of my sample decreases the likelihood that the findings can be generalized to represent all museums; however the study introduces enough information to touch upon common (and uncommon) ways of thinking about the community role of museums. The findings drawn from this study are subject to other interpretations, as well. The research presented several significant challenges. Travel and geography limited my ability to thoroughly investigate each sample museum and community. As many scholars understand, time was a limiting factor, too. The concluding chapter will introduce ideas for future studies that were eliminated from this project due to time constraints.

Surprisingly, terminology was also a significant challenge both in organizing the literature review and describing the interview processes. As I have mentioned before, many studies on the leisure habits and social trends of the American public include museum participation, and most often museums have been included in the larger category of arts and culture. This makes it difficult to distinguish the effects of these social trends as they are experienced by museums in particular. The following chapter embraces the generalization that conflates museums and the arts and culture sector by exploring the latter to set up a point of departure for the study of museums in particular. Many scholars use language that is not universal. For example, the difference between *civic engagement* and *community engagement* is vague, making the review of literature a complicated process.

Throughout my interviews, it also became apparent that the term *community* is potentially a loaded term. I observed a different reaction from the same participant depending on the use of the term *civic* or *community*. This leads me to believe that *community* infers a local and unofficial identity, while *civic* suggests governmental or political activity. This confusion is a limitation of this study because both terms were used interchangeably throughout each interview. The final transcriptions take this into account so that the intention of the participant is conveyed as accurately as possible. I believe that this has made only a minimal impact on the final conclusions.

With this confusion in mind, I have developed definitions to maintain continuity for the final write-up of this study. Historically, the term *civic* has been used to define the overall duties and obligations of belonging to a population that shares similar geographic parameters. *Community* is a public or society in general with something in common, in this case a relationship with a museum. Therefore *civic engagement* and *community engagement* are used interchangeably to imply the level of connectedness between a group of people and a museum.

Yet another point of confusion is museum typology. Museums are classified in a wide range of types including art, history, culture, and science, to name only a few. Originally, I set parameters for this study that included only art museums. However, I have discovered that this classification itself has an interesting effect on community engagement and that the blending of these once impenetrable distinctions has had significant effects on how a museum relates to its public. This point will be discussed in further detail in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER III

IN SEARCH OF PUBLIC PURPOSE

Introduction

New trends in the collaboration between the arts and culture and

community development build upon what has been described as *new urbanism*

(Borrup, 2003). New urbanism considers the creative and cultural side of

community planning and urban development; it encompasses the way we live

and engage with one another. This chapter identifies the inherent values of a

healthy community to be trust, inclusion, identity, and civic engagement. I

continue to explore how the arts and culture sector addresses these issues

through programming and policy tools. Finally, I examine the creation and

implementation of cultural policy to establish the arts and culture sector as a

generator of trust, inclusion, and engagement within a community.

Key Factors of Community

Social capital is a contested term with many definitions. For the purposes

of this exploration, the term is used to describe a certain set of cultural values

that are needed for a democratic society. Social capital encompasses trust,

identity, inclusion, and civic engagement. One definition of the term *civic*

engagement is the collective action of a group to promote action, solve problems,

and promote a healthy and balanced community (D. Jary and J. Jary, 1991). One of the most notable observers of civil society, Alexis de Tocqueville, saw America as an unusually civic society in the 19th century (Putnam, 1995). Since then, a significant body of related scholarly research has been developed. Civic engagement is of particular interest because "it affirms the importance of trust, generosity, and collective action in social problem solving" (Bowles and Giatus, 2002, p. F419). In his controversial book *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, Putnam (1995) states that, "For a variety of reasons, life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital…networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust" (p. 67). Lochner, Kawachi, and Kennedy (1999) describe communities with *social capital* as networks with, "high levels of interpersonal trust and norms of mutual aid and reciprocity… [that] act as resources for individuals and facilitate collective action" (p. 260). Thus the inherent values of civic engagement are trust, identity, and inclusion.

Trust

Trust as it relates to civic engagement and social capital can be interpreted on several levels. Putnam (1995) observed that Americans are less trusting than they were in previous decades. He draws a correlation between higher levels of social trust and greater density of associational activities. Nonetheless, he argues that Americans are more engaged, community oriented,

and trusting of established institutions in comparison to other countries of the world. At the local level, trust is part of a population's sense of community in both a geographical and relational sense. A person's sense of community is dependent on increased levels of trust around them (Lochner et al., 1999). Lochner et al. maintain that social cohesion is dependent on individuals' levels of trust. Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) argue that civic participation increases interpersonal trust: "Trustworthiness lubricates social life" (p. 230). These accounts contend that public trust and civic engagement are interdependent.

Putnam (2000) distinguishes social capital that bonds from social capital that bridges. Bonding activities reinforce homogenous groups, while bridging activities encompass people across social barriers. "Bridging groups are far more likely to have a positive effect on interpersonal trust" and "when people come into contact with those who are different, they become better citizens, as indicated in their values and their behavior" (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005, p. 232). Other scholars have applied the concepts of bonding and bridging to the structure of community, as well.

The importance of relationships between people and to a broader society has been the subject of much recent research and is described as social capital. Three basic types are identified: 'bonding' relates to links with members of families or ethnic groups; 'bridging' refers to links with distant friends, associates and colleagues; and 'linking' refers to relations

between different social strata, or between the powerful and less powerful

(Newman and McLean, 2004, p. 491).

Putnam's bonding and bridging theory introduces another inherent value of civic engagement: *inclusion*.

Community Identity and Inclusion

In order to create an atmosphere of trust, the community needs to be inclusive. "The defining characteristics of a community are shaped by the identity of a people and emerge out of the history of its members and their relationships with each other" (Mattern, 2001, p. 4). However, studies have shown that "heterogeneous communities have significantly lower civic participation rates than homogeneous communities" (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005, p. 234). This suggests that even if diverse, heterogeneous groups generate generalized trust, they do not come easily to consensus, and it is difficult for them to establish social norms and a common identity. The problem with heterogeneous groups is an increased potential for conflict, but civic engagement empowers communities and is a way of making controversy productive.

"Most individuals seek membership in a group of familiar associates and feel isolated without it, but the baggage of belonging often includes poor treatment of those who do not" (Bowles and Giatis, 2002, p. F428). A heterogeneous community has the potential to provide underrepresented community members with a voice by allowing open communication across

cultures and identities. However, in reality this does not always happen. The challenge for an engaged community is to move beyond conflict and to be proactive by using tools to create a safe environment that is accepting of difference. Conflict is an opportunity for discussion. The arts have proven to be a useful tool for discussing uncomfortable ideas. "[Art empowers] people to respond or act on the issue, change negative behaviors, foster cross-cultural communication, or even change policy" (Bacon, Yuen, and Korza, 1999, p. 32). Controversy can be illustrated by art. For example, Fred Wilson's exhibit *Mining the Museum* juxtaposed long hidden items with more conventional objects from a museum collection to convey the many dimensions and stories that could be connected to one type of object. Metalwork was arranged to display metal objects used by high society which were placed next to iron slave shackles. "The result was jarring and thought-provoking… Wilson caused visitors to rethink their history and attitudes" (Bacon et al., p. 18, 1999).

The dilemma of creating an inclusive yet common identity challenges scholars. "Comparative research on the relationship between group diversity and trust has generated mixed findings at best" (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005, p. 235). Putnam (2003) stated that an inclusive, *bridging* community, "is most essential for healthy public life in an increasingly diverse society" and, "is precisely the kind that is hardest to build" (p. 3). Through membership, activities, and creative programming, arts and cultural organizations are capable of building bridges between groups to negotiate difficult interactions and find common

ground. Amy, a high school student in Manhattan, described her experience participating in the Whitney Museum's Youth Insights program. "I once thought about museums as places for looking and observing. Now I think of them as centers for communicating" (Pitman and Hirzy, 2004, p. 130). The Youth Insights program invites high school students to be ambassadors of the museum by providing formal museum training that exercises the students' analytical and communication skills. Once students have completed museum training, they lead tour groups, facilitate programs for a variety of constituents including seniors, families, and youth. The program utilizes the fresh outlook of the students to reach underserved audiences. Director Adam Weinberg observes that "the energy that comes from this mix is extraordinary and helps us to reevaluate the divisibility of audiences by age and type" (Pitman and Hirzy, 2004, p. 132). By using art as a meeting ground within the museum, the students are able to build meaningful connections with a diverse range of people.

Bowles and Giatis (2002) write that, "Communities can sometimes do what governments…fail to do because their members…have crucial information about other members' behaviors, capacities, and needs" (p. F423). This suggests that an inclusive community can act in concert to address common concerns because of a strong sense of identity and established social norms. In the field of community psychology from the 1970s to the present, roughly 30 studies have come to the same conclusion: membership (the feeling of being part of a group) and integration are necessary dimensions of community life (Lochner et al.,

1999). It is essential to give access to all voices of the community, even in the face of conflict.

Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) challenge civic participation and its potential for "unsocial capital" (p. 239). This occurs when members of a community are intolerant of outsiders, or, as applied to Putnam's bonding and bridging theory, experience too much *bonding*. Although the success of a community depends on its shared goals and values, Theiss-Morse and Hibbing contend that dependence on associational participation is more harmful than helpful to the inclusive community. This disagreement with Putnam's endorsement of associational membership is reflected in a significant body of scholarly literature. A healthy community is a trusting community, but in order for that trust to exist, a community needs to be inclusive and provide an avenue of participation for all of its members, however much they differ.

The Arts and Culture Sector

The character of the arts and culture sector is shaped by the social climate of its corresponding community. In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Florida (2002) describes a new class of young, fast paced, educated, and productive people. This creative class is in search of communities that value creativity and authenticity. They seek out areas of diversity where all people can fit in with little effort or stress. Not only does this category include a new class of arts professionals, it also defines a new audience for arts programming. Florida

states, "The most highly valued options [are] experiential ones---interesting venues, neighborhood art galleries, performance spaces, and theaters" (p. 33). This revitalized interest in the arts is pushing arts organizations to reevaluate and restructure existing forms of programming and management in order to address community development and participation needs.

The last two decades have seen the co-mingling of arts and local economic revitalization as a form of new urbanism. The arts are a tool for urban development (Strom, 2003). In a survey conducted by the Community Partnerships for Cultural Participation (CPCP) Initiative, participants in arts and culture were observed to be more likely to engage in other activities. These participants are identified as *community connectors* (Walker, 2002). Tom Borrup (2003) acknowledges this new trend as the fusion of community development practice with the arts and culture sector at local levels. Matthew Pike noted that, "While there has been much written in recent years about social capital, there has been comparatively little said about cultural capital – or cultural relationships" (as cited in Borrup, p. 2). The idea of cultural policy as development policy has introduced arts administrators to new collaboration opportunities. Many agree that the arts and culture sector is a critical component of community life. "It is basic. Art and culture is essential to the educational, economic and social fabric of our lives" (Borrup, 2003, p. 4).

Arts participation *is* civic participation. Walker (2002) stated that, "the community connections of people who participate in arts and culture are a

potential resource for community organizers, funders, and policy-makers who are seeking ways to strengthen communities" (p. 9). The aforementioned community connectors act as a bridge between different parts of the community. Putnam's theory of bonding and bridging can be applied to this discussion. The bridging that is necessary for the inclusivity of a community can be found in arts participation. This is because arts and culture "can be a way to help people who were outside the social and economic mainstream" (Walker, 2002, p. 10). Borrup supports this by arguing that the arts and cultural sector provides opportunities for the equal exchange of ideas among all members of a community (2003). In the Ueland study, an exploration of the arts in the community of Santa Ana, California, the authors state, "art contributes to community development…by increasing the sharing of experiences through which communal ties are developed" (Mattern, 2001, p. 1). Attendance to art activities and membership in arts and cultural institutions rely on the range of diversity and access that the institutions offer. Arts and cultural institutions must continue to ask how they can facilitate participation and civic discourse.

"Although arts and cultural institutions are recognized as contributors to community cultural life, they are not yet widely perceived as active players in civic discourse" (Jerry Allen, as cited in Bacon et al., 1999, p. 24). Allen describes arts and cultural institutions as catalysts, conveners, or forums for social dialogue and notes that the sector has not yet tapped into its full potential. Arts and culture institutions are still struggling to be recognized as more than

places to observe culture. In the CPCP Initiative survey project, three of the most frequently named spaces where one might engage in community activities were open-air spaces, schools and colleges, and places of worship. Arts and culture spaces, in particular, museum spaces, are not mentioned among the venues explored here. This suggests that there is still significant work to be done to engage communities in arts venues. Walker's (2000) study notes that connections to these spaces are much stronger than connections to traditional arts and culture venues. "Therefore, how the question of participation is posed, and how broadly participation is defined, are critical and can lead to sharply different conclusions" (Walker, p. 7). One can conclude that if an institution wishes to be recognized as a civic participant and community collaborator, it must offer programs and events that encompass a diverse range of perspectives.

Implications for Cultural Policy

This chapter has examined the inherent values of an engaged community and suggests that the arts and culture sector can assist in the development of characteristics that define such a community. However, "the identification of public purpose does not automatically translate into policy, nor does a declaration of purpose determine effective action" (Cherbo and Wyszomirski, 2000, p. 56). An important component of the discussion about engagement between the arts sector and the community is cultural policy. Regardless of the increasing body of scholarship that supports the positive relationship between

arts, culture, and civic engagement, The United States does not have an identifiable, established cultural policy. However, the former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), John Frohnmayer, argues that the United States does have a cultural policy. "That cultural policy, at its irreducible minimum, is comprised of four concepts: The First Amendment, Tolerance, Community, and Education" (n.p., 1993). Frohnmayer refers to an inherent form of policy that underpins the mandate of arts and cultural institutions to become civically engaged. Cherbo and Wyszomirski cite these concepts in their work as well. "Although none of the broad Constitutional purposes explicitly mentions the arts, an artistic or cultural manifestation of each can be perceived" (Cherbo and Wyszomirski, 2000, p. 52).

Cherbo and Wyszomirski identify five public purposes of the arts to be security, community, prosperity, quality and condition of life, and cultivating democracy. This model "distinguishes and relates a series of policy elements that are frequently confused and provides a visual and organic model for thinking about the arts and public purposes" (2000, p. 60). In this model, cultural and general public values are placed at the core that builds public purpose. This model recommends a construction of related policy issues that introduce strategies and tools that will bring the policy effects and outcomes into fruition. Core values of both the general community and the arts community are in constant flux. "Fostering community may invoke any of a number of core values, some of which present the potential for fundamental tensions" (Cherbo and

Wyszomirski, 2000, p. 66). The following examples identify strategies and tools that have been used to address arts and culture policy issues. Two of these three examples are drawn from policy-making outside of the United States. These examples might be models for the U.S. and promote the adaptation of cultural policy from other countries.

Seattle's Civic Partner program awards not for profit arts and cultural organizations with two years of funding to aid in planning and attracting additional supporters. This funding structure provides core program support to help organizations advance their mission and contribute to the lives of Seattle residents and visitors. In 2006, $1.27 million was awarded to one hundred arts and culture organizations in Seattle. These funds specifically supported 3,197 performances, events, and exhibits, reaching an audience of almost one million people (City of Seattle, n.d.). The Wing Luke Asian Museum is a designated Civic Partner and through this funding has created its New Dialogue Initiative, a "multi-strategy program including multi-sensory exhibits, that address community concerns and urgent needs about contemporary social issues and current news events, giving voice to underrepresented ideas and opinions from the Asian Pacific American community" (Wing Luke Asian Museum [WLAM], n.d.). The New Dialogue Initiative invites community members to propose their own ideas for community-curated exhibits. For example, members of the Japanese community expressed the desire to tell their story of the Japanese internment experience, and brought in objects that represented that time in their lives. An

assortment of polished rocks became a significant component of the exhibit because the internees polished those rocks in order to maintain a level of normalcy in their daily lives. The exhibit resulted in profound discussions about how those rocks represented the incredible waste of energy that could have been used for the benefit of the local community and the greater society had these people not been interned. These initiatives are dependant on the funding structure of Seattle's Civic Partner program This is an extraordinary example of how cultural policy and governmental support of arts and culture can promote civic engagement.

In the United Kingdom, "research was conducted as part of a wider project that examined the construction of cultural policy by the government to use museums as agents of social inclusion" (Newman and McLean, 2004, p. 481). One particular museum program known as the Open Museum was granted money from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The result of the project was a social history exhibition covering the history of the area from Roman times to the present. Community members were solicited to participate by contributing their stories and some of their own research about the area. The community group demographics included a wide range of ages, professions, and economic backgrounds. "The process of running and managing the project affected the participants on a number of different levels" (Newman and McLean, 2004, p. 489). Most significant was the overall feeling of being part of something and the enjoyment of working collaboratively with other community members. Policy

makers took this successful project into consideration to re-think the rather confused existing policy.

Arts institutions, particularly museums, have attempted promote national and local identities. "In South Africa, museum displays have historically supported colonial and apartheid ideologies, but with the transition to a post-apartheid society museums have reassessed their divisive roles and repositioned themselves within South Africa's contemporary nation-building project" (Crampton, 2003, p. 218). This project aimed to build unity from the diversity of the area by exhibiting representations of nationhood that redraw South African history in response to major social change. The South African National Gallery contributed to the nation-building project by becoming a democratic institution that promoted the nation's diversity through exhibitions and collection acquisitions. The museum articulated new positions in the context of a widespread political and cultural discourse about democracy (Crampton, 2003). The hope was to challenge existing institutional complicity of museums in racial inequity under apartheid and to allow the identities of a new South Africa to emerge through exhibitions and debate. The museum still struggles to balance the art of nation building and progress towards a democratic exhibition process with artistic excellence, but the use of the museum to affect societal change and promote an inclusive South African identity illustrates the power of a cultural policy. Cultural policy has a profound effect on the levels of inclusion, trust, and engagement in a community, even at national levels. "With regard to the arts,

some of the most common policy tools are matching grants, public art commissions, copyrights, communication regulations, and tax incentives" (Cherbo and Wyszomirski, 2000, p. 58). We can see examples of policy tools such as tax breaks for making donations to arts and culture, or percentages of funds from building projects to create public art spaces in our daily lives. However, these examples provide only a window through which to observe a small part of the larger effects of cultural policy. It is hoped that more experimental policies that draw from international, national, and local examples will be utilized in the future.

Conclusion

The examples from the United Kingdom and South Africa that use art and artistic expression to address social issues demonstrate that arts participation is an important form of engagement. With the support of cultural policy and through programming, activities, and collaborations, the arts and culture sector enhances the social and cultural capital of a community. Trust, inclusion, identity, and engagement are promoted through the arts:

> [The arts] have the capacity simultaneously to offer expression to the particular identities of communities and groups (including those that feel excluded from the dominant community's space) and to capture commonalities and universalities that tie communities and groups together into a whole (Barber, 1997, p.16).

This investigation of related literature continues with an inquiry of the particular role that museums play in this discussion. How do museums contribute to civic participation? The following chapter addresses this question through an exploration of museums and their unique relationships with their respective communities.

CHAPTER IV

ENTER THE MUSEUM

It is not likely that the eccentric amateurs that founded the great traditional

museums of the nineteenth century would have asked themselves such

questions as, why do we exist? What do our visitors and supporters

consider of value? What are our strengths as educational institutions? Or

what do we have to offer our communities? (Hein, 2000, p. 142).

This thesis asks if museums play a civic role in their communities. Do they

face challenges in such endeavors? This exploration of community engagement

and the arts and culture sector has reviewed literature that establishes the

inherent values of a civically engaged community. This chapter examines

scholarship on the specific role of museums within a community, generalizing

findings from the broader arts and culture world to the specific museum

experience.

Investigation of the evolution of scholarship on museums and civic

engagement will demonstrate that museums can be an integral component of an

engaged community. Hirzy (2002) writes that, "Civic engagement occurs when

museum and community intersect…the museum [is] a center where people

gather and meet and converse, a place that celebrates the richness of individual

and collective experience, and a participant in collaborative problem solving" (as

cited in *Mastering civic engagement: A challenge to museums*, p. 9). Community engagement requires trust and an inclusive community identity. This chapter argues that museums can support the characteristics of a healthy community: trust, inclusion, and identity.

The museum world has struggled to balance its public role with its internal collection and preservation mandate. Concern for the public dimension of museums has increased, while collection building and preservation maintain equal importance. Still some scholars argue that there is an imbalance: "Over the last generation, art museums have shifted their focus away from collection-building and toward various kinds of attention to the public—without balancing these two imperatives and without consensus on what constitutes best practices in the latter" (Anderson, 2004, p. 2). This debate defines the difference between museums and other institutions in the arts and culture sector. It also demonstrates the need for more research that is specific to museum-community relationships. Most museum professionals will agree that museums can be agents of community engagement, yet the practices and intentions of museums as they are perceived by the outside world do not always support this function. Have museums contributed to civic engagement through trust building and inclusionary practice?

Notable Contributions to Scholarship

During the past two decades, the AAM has developed a small body of research regarding museums and communities. In 1984, it published *Museums for a New Century* which asked the museum world to consider how it might fit into an increasingly complex and dynamic American social system. *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* followed in 1992 and established ten principal challenges for museums of the 21st century. It promoted the integration of the public dimension into every aspect of museum activities. The principal challenges to museums are as follows:

1. Assert that museums place education – in the broader sense of the word – at the center of their public service role. Assure that the commitment to serve the public is clearly stated in every museum's mission and central to every museum's activities.
2. Reflect diversity of our society by establishing and maintaining the broadest possible public dimension for the museum
3. Understand, develop, expand, and use the learning opportunities that museums offer their audiences.
4. Enrich our knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of our collections and of the variety of cultures and ideas they represent and evoke.
5. Assure that the interpretive process manifests a variety in cultural and intellectual perspectives and reflects an appreciation for the diversity of museums' public.
6. Engage in active, ongoing collaborative efforts with a wide spectrum of organizations and individuals who can contribute to the expansion of the museum's public dimension.

7. Assess the decision-making processes in museums and develop new models that enable an expanded public dimension and a renewed commitment to excellence.
8. Achieve diversity among trustees, staff, and volunteers to assure a breadth of perspective throughout the museum.
9. Provide professional development and training for new and established professionals, trustees, and volunteers that meet the needs of the museum profession so that museums may carry out their responsibility to their diverse public.
10. Commit leadership and financial resources – in individual museums, professional organizations, and training organizations and universities – to strengthen the public dimension of museums (Hirzy, 1992).

These ten principles illustrate the important relationship between a museum and its community. They express a commitment to the public sphere that validates the continued research of the relationship between museums and community as well as ways in which museums can promote engagement.

The AAM's most recent publication on this topic, *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums,* asks museums to re-establish themselves as active community members and contributors. It describes the qualities that make museums a resource for community development and civic engagement. Drawing from over seven hundred conversations with museum professionals and constituents, the authors find museums' assets to be: accessibility*,* ability to make connections, safety*,* objectivity*,* trustworthiness*,* emotional and intellectual stimulation, meaning making*,* and reciprocity (Hirzy, 2002). These assets are powerful tools for encouraging civic engagement.

Mastering Civic Engagement explores museums' roles in civic engagement by considering inclusion and reflection in organizational culture. Thus over the past twenty years the AAM has developed a mandate for public service to be a primary obligation of American museums.

Other contributors to the museum and community discourse support AAM's mandate for greater public service. In *Civilizing the Museum*, Elaine Gurian (2006) states,

> Museums are and have always seen themselves as instruments of social responsibility as well as transmitters of cultural values… [But] the term social responsibility…has rarely been construed to cover the provision of direct service to some element of the community (p. 83).

Many agree that the relationship between a museum and its community is based on independent circumstances relative to that particular community experience. For example, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts made significant changes to its exhibits, education, and outreach programming through direct dialogue with its community. Minneapolis was identified by Robert Putnam as having a strong tradition of civic engagement, making public discussion at the Institute of Arts a natural thing to do. Through a Pew planning grant, the museum was able to complete a two-year research and planning process to discover what obstacles prevented people from visiting and to address those challenges. The project resulted in a "stronger, more integrated visitor focus" and, "for the first time, trustees, staff, and volunteers came together to listen to public perceptions and

shape strategies for change" (Pitman and Hirzy, 2004, p. 110). The process did not end there; an additional research project, A New Audience for a New Century guided the museum even further by targeting underserved audiences and devising a plan to make them feel welcome and engaged. This project changed the way the museum's professionals made decisions and communicated because they were able to understand how the community perceived them. The project helped the museum to be relevant while maintaining an educational standard (Pitman and Hirzy, 2004). Ben Dibley argues for "a decentralization and the circulation of collections in a multiplex public sphere, and an expansion of the range of things that can happen in museums" (2005, p. 5). This will bring about an entirely new way of looking at what museums have to offer. While a universal policy will encourage museums to uphold a public role that promotes community engagement, the methods used to generate such engagement need to be discovered through active discourse between the institution and the unique community that it serves. Scholars are asking if museum professionals can change their perspective to accommodate a mandate for trust, inclusion, and engagement. This can be done only through exchange between a museum and its communities.

Trust

The challenge of establishing a trustworthy museum involves issues of representation and objectivity. For example, the Artists' Village in Santa Ana

faced a significant challenge to provide relevant programming and exhibits that engaged an underrepresented Latino population. It was not until the exhibitions reflected the Latino experience that the arts organizations were considered trustworthy by that community (Mattern, 200). The Ueland study of Santa Ana found that, "Americans trust museums more than other institutions in our culture" (Thelan, 2001, p. 4). People believe that museums are objective in their practices. They are considered expert institutions that provide uncontested knowledge and information. However, current scholarship suggests that the museum's position as culture-definer and certifier of quality is often exclusionary and ethnocentric (Dibley, 2005). Can museums maintain a balance between objectivity and public service such as education to a specific community? The museum must play the mediator and provide relevant and thought provoking material for discussion. It must create an atmosphere of trust that is based on inclusion and a balanced representation of its community. "As community members gain confidence in the museum as a safe space where all viewpoints are welcome, there is potential for fruitful conversations on controversial and divisive topics as well" (Parman, 2006, p. 4).

Museums can use art as a tool to encourage dialogue. Art-based dialogue can create a sense of trust, respect, and safety by making perceptive connections between the art and the experience (Bacon et al., 1999). In one study conducted to explore art as a facilitator of civic discourse, race relations and intercultural understanding were identified as the most significant issues

addressed by the interpretations of and interactions with art. "Because art inherently embodies cultural, political, and social ideas, and because many artists and cultural leaders draw from their experience of civil rights activism, issues of racial relations and equity [are] strong" (Bacon et al., 1999, p. 38). *The Manhole Cover Project: A Gun Legacy* at the Wadsworth Athenaeum provided a point for discourse by linking the issue of gun violence to Hartford's history of gun manufacturing through a collaborative public art project. Two hundred twenty-eight custom-designed manhole covers bore the words "MADE FROM 172 LBS OF YOUR CONFISCATED GUNS." Collectively, they weighed the exact equivalent of the weight of the 11,194 guns confiscated by Connecticut State Police since 1992. The goal of this exhibit was to "engage diverse audiences in the process of translating a pressing social problem into a meaningful set of cultural metaphors" (Bacon et al., 1999, p. 72). Rather than provide an answer to societal challenges, art encourages discussion that leads to creative problem solving often bringing inherent issues to the surface. *Excellence and Equity* also urges museums to address issues of cultural diversity.

Inclusion

There are two camps in the debate over museums and inclusivity. Many scholars agree with Sandell: "In many ways, museums can be seen to represent institutionalized exclusion. They operate a host of mechanisms which may serve to hinder or prevent access to their services by a range of groups" (2000, p. 407).

Some feel that the mere existence of museums creates a social divide. Zolberg (2001) argues that, "museum people talk so much about their responsibility to a public about whom they remain deeply ambivalent" (p. 377). She refers to a lack of attention to the audience that a museum serves. Low levels of access also contribute to exclusivity. "Actors who objectively have few chances to play a meaningful role in the public sphere eventually attach less importance to participation, and might even develop negative feelings about it" (Hooghe as cited in Newman, McLean, and Urquhart, 2005, p. 50). Those community members who do not regularly participate in museum programs and activities might develop negative feelings of exclusion towards the institution.

Other scholars recognize a dangerous tendency for museums to be donor-oriented and elitist. Conversations at the international conference, Art Museums and the Price of Success, confirmed "the art museum lacks immunity to influences from the social world in which it is embedded and from which it draws its sustenance" (Zolberg, 2001, p. 1). Although many museums boast inclusionary practice, some scholars question the reality of the museum's perspective. Ames argues, "Museums are products of the establishment and authenticate the established or official values and image of a society in several ways, directly, by promoting and affirming the dominant values, and indirectly, by subordinating or rejecting alternate values" (as cited in Sandell, 2000, p. 408).

However, several authors point out that museums are responding to these criticisms. A growing body of research has sought to identify the barriers

excluding particular audiences. Museums have responded to this by initiating

programs, projects, and exhibitions that broaden their audiences and improve

access. Sandell concurs that "museums are seeking to become more inclusive,

to tackle their legacy of institutionalized exclusion and, through addressing issues

of representation, participation and access, to promote cultural equality and

democratization" (2000, p. 419). An increase in innovative community-based

museum projects is an indication of new efforts to include broader audiences.

Through a three-year planning grant from the Program for Art Museums and

Communities, the Carnegie Museum of Art instituted an audience research

project that provided extensive data on audience perceptions and expectations.

The museum leaders found that, "many people in Pittsburg viewed the art

museum from a distance but really wanted to be invited in" (Pitman and Hirzy,

2004, p. 52). With this knowledge, the museum produced an exhibit that

stimulated the community members' memories and urged them to talk about it.

Dream Streets: W. Eugene Smith's Pittsburg Photographs was an invitation to

the community to view its city through the context of art and resulted in a steady

stream of engaged visitors. Director Richard Armstrong recognized that the

museum had historically been an "under examined, un-self-conscious institution"

and with the new audience data, the museum was able to forge a renewed sense

of vitality between the museum and its community (Pitman and Hirzy, 2004, p.

52).

Museum professionals argue that their resources and missions will enable museums to counter their reputation for exclusionary practice. "With their collections as their core, and with their missions of civic responsibility and building community, museums, more than any other institution, have the potential to model tolerance and respect for other cultures, creating real and lasting understanding" (Muller, 2003, p. 5).   Are these resources enough to make a significant change? Sandell (2000) argues, "the idea that culture might possess the potential to bring about social cohesion or to narrow social inequalities is not new" (p. 409). However, scholarship suggests that appropriate methods for bringing about such change are still a point of contention among museum professionals.

Museums serve as unique forums for the engagement of a diverse range of constituencies. "Museums encourage people to examine what endures and to recognize truths that unify all generations and define our common humanity. They foster research and life-long learning and encourage the expression of differing points of view" (American Association of Museums Board of Directors, n.d.). Yet, in the face of today's complex issues of cultural diversity and related policies, "[museums are placed] outside of the traditional structures and settings, such as civic organizations, labor unions, and political parties, which have served in the past to organize civic discourse" (Bacon et al., 1999, p. 1). Museums offer many tools for inclusion by offering a new alternative to these traditional venues

for civic discourse that welcomes difference. The following section explores some examples.

Museums in Action

Museums and arts organizations are safe places to tackle controversy because art has the potential to express difficult ideas through metaphor. Art communicates beyond the limits of language (Bacon et al.,1999). But "academic research on the use of museums to resolve social problems is limited" (Newman et al., 2005, p. 44). Nonetheless, there are several examples of how museums facilitate inclusion and communication. The Art Institute of Chicago responded to a need for more family oriented programming with the initiative Looking at Art Together. The program provided families with opportunities to learn together and used the exhibits as tools for intergenerational communication. Workshops for parents introduced new ways to start discussions with their children using art. The family programming was brought out of the children's galleries and into the rest of the museum. The museum leadership felt that reaching families was a way to build diverse audiences for the future by making children of many backgrounds comfortable with the museum and with art. The experience helped the museum to understand that in order to build a more diverse constituency, its programs and exhibitions needed to reflect that diversity. The museum initiated new collaborations with community organizations that were linked to the underrepresented audience populations at the museum. This successful program

convinced museum officials that there is no distinction between a community-based museum and a world-renowned institution. They gave their museum a second face that allowed "the museum to both reach out in welcome and provide that essential sense of sanctuary" (p. 30). This example suggests that museums need to learn from their communities and that this process is an essential precondition of engagement.

The museum is a forum in which a community can establish and create a sense of identity and generate trust. "The most significant contribution of museums in developing active citizens [is] to provide a context for constructing a sense of identity and so develop greater self confidence" (Newman et al., 2005, p. 41). As illustrated at the Art Institute of Chicago, a museum's greatest gift to its community is providing a sense of place. In the study of cultural policy and inclusion in he United Kingdom, the museum was seen as, "an opportunity to socialize and reinforce bonds between family members or friends…[It provided] a backdrop where social exchanges could be entered into, and where shared memories…strengthened or created social bonds" (Newman et al., p. 49).

"Museums vary in their ability to attract a cross-section of community members. A key factor is the museum's self-defined role within the community" (Parman, 2006, p. 1). The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis provides an example of how a museum can increase its reach to a larger range of diverse constituents. The area suffered from an extreme socioeconomic divide. Early descendants of European settlers, one of the largest urban Native American

populations in the country, and recent arrivals from Asia and Africa consider this area their home. The area is sharply divided by a highway creating a physical divider between high and low income areas. The Walker sought to counteract this by creating programs with the community rather than for it. Through its initiative, Artists and Communities at the Crossroads, the Walker was able to increase audience participation by asking community members and other organizations who represented those people who were absent from the Walker what resources they could provide. The answer was more direct interaction with the artists. The intent of the initiative became an integration of "the artistic process…into people's lives…" and a way to "illuminate the ways contemporary art encourages us to explore significant issues that shape our everyday existence" (Pitman and Hirzy, 2004, p. 42). Artists and Communities at the Crossroads became a collection of artist residencies, performing arts, and visual arts programs with community at the core. "The initiative's artist residencies shifted the balance of decision making and even art making, and the ways in which artist-in-residence engaged people from the community were as divers as the community itself" (Pitman and Hirzy, p. 45). It was successful because the museum collaborated with the community and addressed its unique needs. It responded to the desire for more interaction with artists by expanding across the highway through collaboration with more than ten other organizations. These collaborations allowed for the voice of the underrepresented community members to be a part of the programming process. The community became the

artists' partner in order to tackle difficult social issues. The Walker became more than a museum, identified with its audience and responded accordingly by establishing itself as a place of collaboration and open discussion.

Conclusion

A museum offers a unique place where communities can address issues and tackle challenges of exclusion, trust, and identity. This review of relevant literature demonstrates that museums' potential for this service has not come to full fruition. The perceived authenticity and power that have made museums appear as 'elitist' in the past are still concerns. Today however, museums are working harder than ever to create new avenues for expression, interaction and engagement. This investigation continues by providing examples from the Pacific Northwest. The following examples provide a context for continued discussion that asks whether or not all museums should be moving in this direction, and if so, what are the best means of doing so.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The following findings illustrate a variety of ideas, philosophies, and strategies that reflect the dynamic, and sometimes contradictory role the subject museums play within their communities. Three of the four participating museums have recently undergone, or are planning to embark upon large-scale capital campaigns. This was advantageous to the investigation because the campaign process requires museum professionals to re-examine who they are, what they do, and how they will provide their services. Thus, the findings presented here reflect the views of museum professionals who have recently reviewed their missions.

I have identified two major camps or philosophies in the museum community. First, there is the traditional perspective that holds that museum professionals are experts and certifiers of quality. People who hold this view defer to academic expertise, and their museums generate exhibitions and programs internally. The alternative museum model applies a community-response method that considers issues of relevance within the community and promotes a dynamic exchange of ideas in order to produce exhibitions and programs. This model is based on social activism and transparency. Its purpose is to utilize the museum as a forum for community discussion. The following case

studies represent a spectrum of museum philosophies between these two and thus range from the traditional to the radical.

The Portland Art Museum

The Portland Art Museum (PAM) serves a large audience including local, regional, state, national, and international constituents. Its mission is, "to serve the public by providing access to art of enduring quality, by educating a diverse audience about art and by collecting and preserving a wide range of art for the enrichment of present and future generations" (Portland Art Museum, n.d.). Executive director Brian Ferrsio explains that PAM is an extraordinary institution in an extraordinary city, making it even more of an attraction for a broader base of visitors than that of an institution in a smaller, less visited city. As the museum moves forward to expand its community, it will focus sixty percent of its efforts on cultivating the Portland metro area, ten to twenty percent on cultivating state audiences, ten percent on the Oregon coast, and five to ten percent on national and international audiences. This wide variety of constituents makes PAM a significant flagship organization in Oregon.

PAM's collections include a wide range: American art, Asian art, European art, Native American art, Northwest art, photography, silver, and modern and contemporary art. The quality of the objects in this collection reflects the essence of the museum's exhibition philosophy. Ferriso believes that there is a distinction between taste and quality that many other museums overlook: "Museums are not

about taste. Taste is something else, people in the community do have taste but every person has different taste. What we need to do is show what is important" (personal communication, March 20, 2007). The self-mandated role of PAM is to demonstrate samples of artistic excellence in a formal, more traditional setting.

The PAM staff determines the level of significance and quality of a potential exhibition through the deliberation of an exhibitions committee. This committee is made up of the curators on staff and includes Ferriso himself. He explains that, "Museums, like universities, have a level of authority. Museums need to hire professionals, people well trained and well educated in those areas of expertise to make decisions and to understand why they are making those decisions" (personal communication, March 20, 2007). Because Ferriso makes such a strong distinction between taste and quality, he does not invite members of the general public to join his exhibitions committee. He reasons that, "My concern is people who are not trained in [art or art history] will respond with taste rather than what is important" (personal communication, March 20, 2007). The museum generates exhibitions and programs that attempt to provide an opportunity for discussion among visitors and demonstrate the highest level of aesthetic creation. An exhibit of Rembrandt paintings that opened in June 2007 exemplifies the museum's production philosophy. This show illustrates the golden age of Dutch art during the 17th century. The exhibit provides a context in which visitors can explore the time period's issues, such as the economic influence of the East India Trading Company. "We are looking for exhibitions and

displays that allow the context to come through of the time and the period" (B. Ferriso, personal communication, March 20, 2007). PAM is an institution based on aesthetics and a commitment to art of enduring quality. Ferriso describes the goal for their exhibitions is to provide examples of the highest levels of aesthetic creation: "The quality of our objects, the quality of experiences, and the quality of education are critical to the [visitor] experience and to bringing audiences in" (personal communication, March 20, 2007).

While the primary concern at PAM revolves around quality and expertise, Ferriso recognizes the need for community input. He states that,

> To some degree, the audience needs to evaluate the people making decisions. I also think papers, journals, and blogs are good things because they provide a level of constructive criticism to help reinforce or define what the museum is doing (personal communication, March 20, 2007).

Ferriso is relatively new to the PAM and is still in the process of discovering the museum's visitor base and the greater communities it serves. He knows that people are coming through the doors, but the museum is not yet equipped with the mechanisms to determine who those visitors are. Ferriso conceded that it is difficult for him to understand what portions of the community are absent from the museum visitor base. Plans for examining the PAM's current constituencies will include surveys and evaluations: "Historically, museums have people with little clipboards asking about visitorship. Now we have computers and touch screens

where you can get much more information in a less invasive way, and people will be more interested in providing that information" (personal communication, March 20, 2007).

While PAM continues to investigate and identify its communities, its leadership considers the museum to be a critical component of Portland life. Ferriso states, "That is why we exist, art museums are not a luxury, they are essential to human existence" (personal communication, March 20, 2007). This art museum is a traditional institution that preserves cultures and our greatest artistic treasures.

Ferriso did not identify any methods of communicating with the community beyond technology and scholarship, raising questions about the museum's representation of all of the diverse constituencies in its perceived community. While papers, journals, and blogs are credible methods of collecting feedback, the accuracy and equity of those methods might be questioned. The use of touch screens in the galleries to collect visitor information suggests that the museum's reach into the community is limited. Only those who have already come through the front doors are surveyed, leaving a significant lack of input from those who are not yet connected with the institution.

The Museum of Contemporary Craft

The Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon, formerly called the Contemporary Crafts Museum and Gallery, has recently gone through the

process of re-branding itself while relocating to a new facility in the Pearl district in the heart of downtown Portland. Its mission is "to present excellence in contemporary craft, to support artists and their work, to connect the community directly with artists, to deepen the understanding and appreciation of craft, and to expand the audience that values craft and its makers" (Museum of Contemporary Craft, n.d.). The reason for the transition was to develop new audiences and create unique ways to connect with the public. Executive director David Cohen explains that, "We are now putting out a promise to see if we can live up to it, a [promise of] commitment, inclusion, sense of humor, and seriousness at the same time" (personal communication, May 2, 2007).

The Museum of Contemporary Craft (MCC) has traditionally served a niche audience of primarily white, educated women who are interested in craft. Prior to the reorganization, they had considered the museum to be their best-kept secret. Cohen understood that: "Because we were a destination place, our audience had been coming for years and years. They did not want us to become too popular" (personal communication, May 2, 2007). Visitors to the original MCC came to purchase items at the sales gallery, which had become the central component of the museum's identity. After attendance rates began to drop over the years Cohen decided to, "re-cast [the MCC] as a museum, and to change and develop other reasons for people to come." He explains that, "we wanted to become a different kind of museum" (personal communication, May 2, 2007). The museum uses the concept of craft as an opportunity to be something different. "Craft is a

very personal thing about creating, and the objects that we live with. Art in daily life is less pronounced in the art world. We are suited to break the rules" (personal communication, May 2, 2007). The communities of Portland are changing, and Cohen cites this as another reason for the organization's move. The original facility was located in a less prominent and accessible part of town. "We felt that the location limited the community that was using the facility" (personal communication, May 2, 2007).

After re-opening, the MCC is investigating different ways to engage a diverse range of communities. "We have been able to develop new audiences that come with the growth of the staff," Cohen says (personal communication, May 2, 2007). His staff consists of mostly young professionals who are connecting their friends and peers to the organization by focusing on strategic communication. He has built a team that represents the highly desirable creative class in Portland. In the Pearl district there is "a whole new demographic of people looking for a social setting who like a lot of activity and a cool place to hang out" (personal communication, May 2, 2007). Cohen anticipates that this demographic is in search of new ways to connect with art and the community and believes that the MCC can be a primary place for such connections. "We want to provide a sense of home and a sense of ownership by a number of different communities" (personal communication, May 2, 2007).

The MCC has employed several approaches in order to attract and retain its desired audience. Cohen's goal is to provide a space where "[people] can go

talk, be inspired and stimulated; a place where it is about ideas" (personal communication, May 2, 2007). Admission for this museum is free to all visitors, a policy that will potentially increase the diversity of the museum's audience. The new facility boasts large storefront style windows that open the museum up to the outside. This architectural dimension allows visitors to engage at varying levels of commitment and safety. While one visitor may feel comfortable walking into the building, others need a less intimidating path of introduction before feeling ready to engage and contribute at a deeper level. The MCC will also offer monthly brown-bag lunch opportunities for visitors to come in and talk with museum staff in a casual setting. Weekends at the MCC offer an array of artist demonstrations that relate to what is showing in the galleries. Cohen notes that, "Traditional museums engage through didactics, facts, and objects behind glass, and then [visitors] go home" (personal communication, May 2, 2007). By contrast, Cohen explains that MCC is a different kind of museum; it turns the word *museum* on its head. "There are no rules. We want to find out how to play with people's expectations to attract and intrigue them" (personal communication, May 2, 2007).

Cohen considers more traditional museums to be notorious for separating themselves from the community: "Isolation, elitism, and separation is endemic with museums, and it is easy for that to happen. They are these huge bunkers or treasure chests that you have to burrow into to get the treasure" (personal communication, May 2, 2007). Cohen has always seen the potential for

museums to be safe gathering places for discussion, entertainment, and connection. He considers relevance to be the central element of this museum's philosophy. Cohen's goal is to change people's mode of thinking, and will be successful because the MCC's programs are relevant to what is happening in the world today for a variety audiences. He explains, "We cherish dialogue and are interested in all different kinds of engagement . . . but if it is not relevant, then why are we doing it? That is the key" (personal communication, May 2, 2007).

The Henry Art Gallery

The mission of the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington in Seattle is to engage diverse audiences in the experience of artistic invention as a catalyst for the creation of contemporary work that is challenging and inspiring. The website explains:

 Exhibitions, collections, and public programs stimulate research and teaching at the University of Washington, provide a creative wellspring for artists, and reveal a record of modern artistic inquiry from the advent of photography in the mid-19th century to the multidisciplinary art and design of the 21st century (Henry Art Gallery, n.d.).

The Henry serves two primary audiences: the academic community of the University of Washington and the broader regional community of the Pacific Northwest. The Gallery continually seeks to engage new audiences, particularly young people, and has cultivated long-term partnerships with local high schools

in the area. Executive director Richard Andrews views the Henry as the primary contemporary art museum in the state of Washington; it serves its communities by "opening a window onto what national, local, and international artists are doing right now" (personal communication, March 2, 2007).

With a staff of over forty and a board of community members, museum professionals, and academics, the Henry is a leader in the arts because of its open communication and clear strategy. Andrews describes the board as representative of virtually every community in the Seattle area. In order to be effective, a board must strategically include people who reflect its community. It is necessary to have the entire community represented in the most critical decision-making forum, and The Henry's board does just that with open slots held for significant artists, community members, and University representatives. It also incorporates an auxiliary student advisory board. The Gallery makes every effort to reach into its communities for leadership and direction.

Andrews explains that the Gallery tries "to engage with the larger arts community as a whole." He is a member of the Seattle Arts Commission, and other staff members serve on various arts advisory boards. Andrews sees the primary responsibility of the museum to be a voice to solve problems in the artistic community. He acknowledges that there are things that the museum can do and things that it cannot: "If there are issues like artist housing or things like that, the Henry can put in productive goals in support of artists" (personal communication, March 2, 2007). But he considers social issues such as hunger

or housing the homeless to be too removed from the institution's mission to take direct action to address them. However, the Gallery can reach beyond artists' issues by providing a forum for discussion on a wide range of topics.

The Henry demonstrates how exhibition practice and philosophy can reconstruct the reputation of museums as elitist, or exclusionary institutions. Andrews believes that, "museums have traditionally been seen as authority figures within the community in the way exhibitions have been presented. They tend to be [shown] as a single truth" (personal communication, March 2, 2007). The Henry offers exhibitions that use the eyes of the artist to look at both our hopes and fears. Two upcoming exhibitions will demonstrate this. One features the art of a Vietnam veteran who uses performance art as a response to his experience at war. Concurrently, the museum will show the works of a young Vietnamese photographer who was born during the same war. Both artists speak to the effects of war in their lifetimes, and their works will be used as a focal point for the discussion of the effects of war on society. Andrews explains, "We like getting people to think differently about art and history. "[We apply] the idea that artists can help us filter out our thoughts in order to understand our fears" (personal communication, March 2, 2007).

Exhibitions and programming are not the only tools utilized by the Henry to engage the community. In 1997, the museum completed a major renovation project that quadrupled the size of the original building. Prior to the decision to renovate, the Henry's staff conducted an in-depth study of the surrounding

communities. They found that one thousand people per hour walked by the front doors of the museum every day. Out of those who entered, there were two distinct groups of people: those who came with the purpose of visiting the galleries, and those who had never visited before. "The old building was a very common treasure house looking museum," Andrews says. "Those who had never come in said that it looked more like a mausoleum than a museum, even though what we were showing was very edgy and contemporary" (personal communication, March 2, 2007). The goal of the renovation was to provide transparency through architecture. Now visitors encounter a glass lobby where they can see into the museum before entering from the outside. There are windows on the perimeters so that people can look into the galleries even during the installation process. This is a concrete way to use architecture to de-mystify the museum. Andrews believes that once people come into contact with the works on display, they will be intrigued or repelled. For him, either response is an important experience, but a person has to physically enter the building before having either experience.

The Henry also uses collaborations as a tactic to encourage community engagement. Partnerships with other regional museums have been less fruitful that those with other kinds of organizations. Andrews tries to reach new audiences by partnering with organizations that have cross-over audiences. Two examples are 4Culture, a cultural service agency that fosters cultural activity and "enhances the assets that distinguish [Seattle] communities as vibrant, unique,

and authentic" (4Culture, n.d.), and the King County Arts Commission. The Henry focuses a significant amount of energy on local high schools, too. Andrews stated that the biggest challenge with young people is to get them through the front door: "The kind of work we show is often edgy, so there are things that high school aged students have to grapple with, but they can do it" (personal communication, March 2, 2007).

Through collaborations, architecture, leadership, and exhibitions, the Henry is well equipped to engage with a variety of communities. What makes the Henry unique is its commitment to its original purpose: to raise awareness of what artists, designers and architects are doing, and to be engaged with the art community by paying attention to the artistic climate of the region.

The Wing Luke Asian Museum

The Wing Luke Asian Museum (WLAM), located in the International District of Seattle, Washington, is an institution that uses art as a tool to spur dialogue around the past and present experiences of the Asian Pacific American community. Although this museum does not aim to show significant works of art, it is considered an art museum because of its unique use of the medium. It is the first Smithsonian affiliate in the Pacific Northwest.

The WLAM is a community-based museum with a unique emphasis on community development. It "engages the Asian Pacific American communities and the public in exploring issues related to the culture, art, and history of Asian

Pacific Americans" (Wing Luke Asian Museum Homepage, n.d.). Executive

director Ron Chew explains that,

> From the ground up, our institution [works] in a different kind of way. I think
> more traditional museums do their work in isolation, usually with subject
> specialists working inside the museum on a project that has been treated by
> staff and board with relatively little input from the outside. It is an insular
> process (personal communication, March 2, 2007).

> In contrast to the Portland Art Museum, this institution invites non-
academics, students, activists, and other members of the community who are
first-person subject experts to take part in the discussion, creation, and
implementation of exhibitions and programs. Chew explains that the community
becomes the driving force of the exhibits; they are an outcome of a community
organizing process. This community curatorial strategy distinguishes the WLAM
from traditional art museums and allows community members to be stakeholders
and to drive their work forward. The WLAM staff is made up of mostly young
people who serve as facilitators rather than experts. Both the staff and board
reflect the demographics of the community that they serve.

The community served by the WLAM is surprisingly young. Past surveys
indicated that forty-nine percent of its visitors were between the ages of eighteen
and twenty-nine; a very unusual statistic. Chew believes that the Wing Luke is
"building the next generation of leadership in the museum profession" (personal
communication, March 2, 2007). The Asian Pacific American community is made

up of over fifty different ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. This diverse community is the driving force for the decision-making process. Chew reflects on the museum's task:

How do you create an institution that is flexible and embracing of all of these different communities, keeping legitimacy at the core?" His solution: "by understanding that each community is in a different place and has a different relationship with [us] (personal communication, March 2, 2007).

This sort of reflection also propels the museum to reach out to those communities who are not part of the current constituency. Chew emphasizes the great power of building bridges between communities through the museum.

Exhibitions and programs are shaped by the WLAM under the rubric of community-response. New Dialogues is an initiative in which relevant issues are explored through a public forum in order to produce exhibitions. Chew explains, "We create exhibits and programs based on themes and topics that are brought to us from the outside. We solicit these themes and stories, and build our exhibits around that" (personal communication, March 2, 2007). Chew envisions a new research model that moves away from the traditional didactic text approach. He explains that people remember stories and can connect to narratives at deeper levels. The WLAM places its community's stories at the core of its physical displays. Chew's philosophy is based on his dissatisfaction with the way museums have operated in the past. "I think often times museums see themselves as isolated places of quiet contemplation," he says, "but a lot of

contemplation is very, *very* loud and involves the exchange of ideas" (personal communication, March 2, 2007). He encourages museums to think on new and different levels.

The self-mandated role of the WLAM is to bring people to a new level of understanding while creating positive structural change within the community. Chew considers the museum to be an active place where communities can have discussion and stimulating debate, where history and stories come alive, and where art is something that moves people into action rather than simply displaying paintings on the wall. He believes that, "artists have great insight into the world around us and can help us envision a way that we can educate ourselves as well as move ourselves into action" (personal communication, March 2, 2007). Chew is aware that his philosophy is unique and admits that many people question what kind of museum the Wing Luke is. In light of this, he refers to the AAM and points to the profound change that is taking place in the museum world:

> Back in the sixties there was a big push for museums to become educators, then there was a push for more diversity, and now the term community has become a sort of catchword. The AAM is taking a stand by becoming the front and center of the Museums and Community Initiative (personal communication, March 2, 2007).

Chew argues that there is a strong bias within the museum profession towards academic scholarship and suggests that museums need to move forward by

being relevant players in society here and now rather than remaining places of isolation.

Chew's attitude is reflected in the WLAM's current capital campaign. The profound reach of the museum into its community has created a unique opportunity. In the heart of the International District is the East Kong Yick Building. This structure was built by the first generation of Asian immigrants as a symbol of their permanent residence in America. Now that the building is deteriorating in an area of high crime, traffic problems, and poverty, the descendants of those immigrants have asked the WLAM to purchase and restore it. Upon completion of a renovation, the new facility will tell the stories of those immigrants and their children and grandchildren through creative architecture, exhibits, and programs. This building will be a "cornerstone for the revitalization of this fragile community" (personal communication, March 2, 2007). The campaign demonstrates how every aspect of the institution is dedicated to its community. Not only are all of its programs and operations based on the input of the community, but they also reach even further outside the museum walls by providing economic support to the area.

Summary of Findings

These findings, based on interviews and investigations at four art museums in two major Pacific Northwest cities, have uncovered both similarities and differences that illustrate the two major camps or museum philosophies

described at the beginning of this chapter as well as those that fall somewhere in between. The Portland Art Museum is clearly a traditional institution whose primary purpose is to provide examples of artistic excellence with relatively little community input. Its mission is demonstrated not only by the make up of the exhibitions committee and staff, but also by the views of the Executive director. At the other end of the scale, the Wing Luke Asian Museum places primary importance on the perspectives and needs of its communities. This museum uses its staff as facilitators to the community curators rather than as professional or academic experts.

One surprising finding was the use of architecture as a device for encouraging engagement. The Henry Art Gallery, the Museum of Contemporary Craft, and the Wing Luke Asian Museum have all taken advantage of their renovation projects to create a physical space that welcomes visitors. In Andrews' words, they "de-mystified the museum" by providing multiple ways for visitors to view what was happening inside. All of the case studies emphasized the importance of using art as a window to view different ideas and experiences. Findings suggest a new trend of interpretation that moves away from the traditional didactic approach towards a more involved and personal approach. Each museum in the case studies considers itself to be a forum for community discussion to some degree. The major difference between these sites was the level of effort employed to invite the communities' perspectives and provide relevant discussion points.

Several of these cases imply that at some level museums are agents for community engagement. What remains to be discussed is the effectiveness of the various methods used to accomplish such a task. It is difficult to measure or evaluate how well a museum engages with its community, because there is not an established formula for doing so. However, the results of these findings and the discoveries from the previous review of scholarship have allowed me to identify three areas of measurement:

- the self-identified role of the institution
- who constitutes the leadership and decision-makers of the museum
- the museum's method of providing programming and exhibitions

By assessing each case using these three areas of measure, it is possible to estimate how well each museum engages with its respective communities.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion: True Engagement and Responsibility

What is true engagement? Museums in the twenty-first century must "seek contemporary ways to engage audiences with their collections" (Black, 2005, p. 267). The findings from this study suggest that there is an additional element of engaging communities: to stimulate engagement *among* visitors. Community engagement requires museums to serve as a forum in which exhibits and programs spur active dialogue within a community. This extended level of engagement moves beyond didactics and education into the realm of advocacy for positive change in a community and beyond. Therefore true engagement, for the purposes of this study, includes the interaction among the members of a community that is stimulated by a museum's exhibitions and programming.

Before I suggest the best methods for true engagement, I need to address a difficult question: should museums provide opportunities of engagement for their communities? Is it their responsibility to do so? We have established that museums have a certain level of authority. Their traditional role allows for them to provide uncontested knowledge that is accepted by the public as truth or fact. This trust is what gives museums a power of authority. With this authority comes a responsibility to provide multiple perspectives on any given issue. The fifth

principal challenge set forth by the AAM makes this clear: "[museums need to]

assure that the interpretive process manifests a variety in cultural and intellectual

perspectives and reflects an appreciation for the diversity of museums' public"

(Hirzy, 1992, p. 9). However, I find that this issue goes even deeper than that.

The seventh challenge states that the decision-making process in museums

should be continually assessed and new models that enable and expand the

public dimension should be developed (Hirzy, 1992). Museums are required not

only to provide many viewpoints, but also to provide a place these viewpoints can

be shared. However, museums should not be advocates themselves; rather they

need to be curators of advocacy for their community. There is a distinct

difference between taking a stand on any given issue and providing a forum for

different stands to be taken. The word *forum* is repeated throughout this

investigation and I consider this component of museums to be the most critical

factor of community engagement. Innovative museum professionals agree. Chew

observes, "Sometimes the most appropriate role for a museum is to provide a

forum for the exchange of differing viewpoints on a particular topic" (2004, p. 41).

In order to provide appropriate avenues for discussion and determine what topics

to explore, a museum needs to understand its community and serve as a forum

for debate. They need to be safe spaces in which community members can air

unsafe ideas. The fewer opportunities that exist for public debate in a museum,

the fewer interactions will occur among visitors, resulting in less engagement.

Ron Chew (2004) said it best when he explained that museums have to provide

a place for community issues as they actively cultivate relationships. This brings them closer to the heart of the community. In this sense, museums are advocates, not for a particular idea or issue, but for debate and discussion.

Application: Measuring for Best Practice

How are museums engaging their communities? What tools have these museums professionals used? This exploration has brought to light a broad spectrum of strategies that museums can utilize to foster trust and inclusion for deeper engagement within their community. These strategies have been modeled after the non-traditional philosophies explored in this study. They bring up difficult questions that spur new ways of seeing the museum from both the professional and community perspectives.

I have identified three areas to explore in order to measure a museum's level of meaningful engagement: the self-identified role of the museum; the leadership of the museum (who holds the decision-making power); and the ways in which a museum provides its exhibitions and programs. These three areas are by no means the only issues of concern, but by considering each, museum professionals can initiate a dialogue among themselves that brings to light unanticipated opportunities for community engagement.

How does a museum identify its role within the community? Understanding the self-identified role of an institution is central to understanding how it engages with its community. It is the first point for museum professionals

to consider before they can determine what methods to apply to better engage a community. A museum should consider its role by examining how the community uses its facilities and how people engage with each other in relation to its exhibits and programs. This provides an excellent starting point from which to discover how the museum needs to adapt. Questions of relevancy are a significant part of this discussion. Cohen's staff, for example, examined the role the museum had played in the past in order to lay new paths of engaging with both its existing and potential constituencies. This was MCC's first step in redirecting the museum's goal to engage a wider audience. Cohen claims that relevance is the very essence of engaging a community. The MCC also invites the input of its community at regular "brown-bag lunches," where members of the staff come out of their offices to talk with visitors about their experiences in the museum. The process does not stop there; the community's input is integrated into the internal discussions and contributes to the self-identified role of the museum. The relevancy of WLAM's exhibits and programs is also central for Chew. He suggests that the process of defining the role of the museum should be in the hands of the community members. This allows for increased discussion between its members and encourages the community to inform the museum about what they consider to be relevant.

How does a museum's self-identified role provide measurement for its capabilities for community engagement? The answer is quite simple. Findings from this study have shown that if a museum does not critically examine its role

in its community, it will not be relevant to the lives of its constituents. The more a museum considers and adjusts its function, the better it will better attract its targeted community. For example, PAM is an institution that relies on its reputation of being a respected institution that will always exhibit significant objects. There is not a pressing need for reinvention that many smaller, less visited institutions experience. However, because of this, there is no discussion about improving the museum's response to community input. There are always visitors present, and at times there are lines out the door thanks to blockbuster events. But this success has led to a level of inertia that inhibits the museum from truly engaging its community. By contrast, the WLAM, which also has good attendance, has facilitated a continuing dialogue directly with its community to inform its staff on what issues are important to the community. Chew invites community members to use the museum as a place for advocacy. He explained, "Museums need to deal with the fact that they are taking a political stand every day with what they present and how they present it. I think they need to lose the disguise" (Chew, 2004, p. 40). The WLAM responds to the issues that are important to its community by providing a safe space for discussion. Exhibitions are adapted to reflect what is considered relevant by the community, rather than dictating what should be important. This has sparked new levels of engagement.

Who constitutes the leadership; who are the decision-makers of the museum? By examining the leadership of a museum, once can distinguish how decisions are made and identify the institution's philosophy regarding community

engagement. The administrators of the museums examined have very different leadership styles. PAM's leadership is rooted internally, positioning the museum as a certifier of quality. An interesting distinction between PAM and the remaining three examples is that PAM does not use community input; nor does it invite outside opinions into the exhibition discussion. Those in support of community engagement might feel that this is indicative of a strong lack of engagement efforts.

Conversely, the WLAM staff has re-defined their leadership by becoming community facilitators. This new role places the decision making power in the hands of community members while the staff provides the required knowledge and expertise to operate the institution. The WLAM asks its community to decide what should be on exhibit and how stories should be told. This shift in power engages the community on new levels.

The Henry and the MCC fall somewhere in between these differing styles of leadership. Both seek the involvement of outside community members through participation on various committees and the board, yet their staffs still maintain a certain level of control over the decision making process. These findings show that one of the best ways to engage a community is through the leadership structure by placing some, if not all, of the decision-making power into the hands of the community.

The way leadership is constructed and who leads is indicative of a museum's commitment to community engagement. The Henry is an interesting example. As a university entity, this museum has a dual mission. First, it provides a traditional educational experience for the academic community in which it is housed. Second, it provides an engaging museum experience to the greater Seattle community. In addition to university representatives, its leadership is also made up of non-academic community representatives. The Henry's leadership structure welcomes community input. The board is made up of a combination of artists, community leaders, and academic representatives. It purposefully holds open slots for members of varied identities to establish a more balanced perspective. Decisions are made by considering how its exhibitions and programs will be received by both the university community and the greater Seattle communities under the advice of these representatives. This brings us to the last mode of measure: methods of providing museum services.

How does a museum provide exhibitions and programs? A museum's method of providing programming and exhibitions demonstrates several important objectives. A museum must consider its audience before providing a service to that audience. Information about its community then will determine methods of programming. The methods, in turn, will either welcome engagement or discourage it. For example, the WLAM defined its partner communities very clearly. Through facilitated dialogue, the staff learns how each community learns, congregates, and interprets potential programming. Because of this clear

definition, the museum is able to provide activities and exhibits that speak directly to its constituents by telling their stories and relating those stories to others. This results in higher participation rates and deeper levels of engagement.

The MCC uses innovative ways to think about programming. Similar to the WLAM, the MCC deliberately takes time to understand its current and potential community when considering what it provides and how to provide it. This includes new and inventive ideas such as providing an alternative, outside space for people to view exhibits. The staff took into consideration its new high-traffic location and the way people move through the district. Also, the MCC considers a younger, creative class who seek out contemporary and creative spaces in which to linger. With this in mind, the MCC is designed to accommodate both the traditional museum visitors and those who are looking for a comfortable place to spend time. Because it considers the community first, with the intention to stimulate engagement, the MCC has a stronger chance of success in initiating new forms of exhibition practice that will foster deeper engagement on multiple levels.

The MCC, the WLAM, and the Henry have developed new ways of thinking about their communities in their exhibition and programming discussions. PAM takes an alternative route. The blockbuster exhibit is a continuing subject of heated discussion among museum professionals. Although that debate is not central to this discussion, it is worth noting that the central argument revolves around placing entertainment above education. Therefore it is surprising that a

traditional institution such as PAM has chosen to produce several blockbusters. Ferriso explained that while he was visiting the museum during the interview for his position, there were lines outside the building and into the street for a particularly popular and anticipated exhibit. He believes this demonstrated that the PAM does not need new strategies to bring new audiences; they are already successful. I challenge PAM to reconsider this success and investigate the forms of engagement spurred by its exhibits and programming.

Caveats and Opportunities for Future Research

This study has aimed to provide a balanced account of four museums and their community engagement strategies. Certain extenuating circumstances must be taken into account. At the time of his interview, Ferriso was still relatively new to the PAM. This may have influenced his responses significantly. While his overall philosophy was very clear, an interview with one of his staff might have provided a better understanding of the museum's public role. Ferriso was not yet acquainted with PAM's community. Distractions including staff changes and internal controversy demanded his attention. However, it remains clear that he believes museums should continue their traditional role of provider and educator through the use of didactic strategies to promote limited discussion. My findings suggest that this is not the most effective way to engage a community.

There are many museums in the Seattle and Portland areas that were not included in this study. I was unable to meet with the director of the Seattle Art

Museum (SAM), for example. This large museum is a critical agent in the Seattle community. Had I conducted an interview with a SAM representative, the outcome of this study may have been different. Museums of history, culture, and science would have been appropriate samples for this study, as well. After conducting the investigation, it became clear that the difference between an art museum and any other museum was not critical to understanding its impact in a community. A future study should include all types of museums.

This study has investigated only a small handful of museums. Clearly, an investigation of museums throughout the US and the world will uncover new and innovative ideas that can increase the level of engagement generated by museums. Had time allowed, this investigation would have invited focus groups made up of representatives of each museum's community to discuss their opinions about ways a museum can advocate for increased discussion and engagement among community members. By expanding the parameters of this study, one may be able to uncover even more strategies and a deeper understanding of what engagement means in the museum profession.

It is an interesting time to look into the museum's relationship with community. With technology and remote audiences increasing the reach of every museum, the term community is taking on new meanings for museums. Yet the idea of bringing together members of the public into a forum, virtual or not, remains a profound experience that should be explored by museums. An interesting departure from this study would be to examine the global effects of

museum culture. This would incorporate comparisons among the uses of museums in different countries. My review of scholarship has suggested a greater inclination towards using museums as tools for social inclusion in the United Kingdom. Museums in Africa have been used as tools to promote national identities in times of political strife. A comparative investigation of the public role of museums throughout the world may enlighten the museum community in its efforts to serve the public.

Conclusions and Final Thoughts

At the inception of this study, I expected to find an involved, complex answer to my question of museums and community engagement. What I found was not as complicated as I had anticipated. In fact it was very simple: in order to engage its community, a museum must *be* its community. Museum participation in relevant discussions is community participation in relevant discussions. Whether a community is made up of a global population or a local group of individuals, museums provide important opportunities for people to engage with one another. In order to create a healthy community, a certain level of trust and inclusion must be present to foster true engagement. Trust is gained by giving the power of the decision making to the community. Museums tell their communities' stories through art, historical, or scientific exhibitions and programs, and thus encourage participation because those stories are meaningful. The challenge is to provide an atmosphere that is conducive to dialogue and

interaction. Although this is a simple concept, it is not a simple process by any means. It requires a museum to provide sensitive representations of diverse identities based on the input of its community. Museums must allow for differences to be observed and experienced through public forum and debate.

The best practice for engaging community is based on one thing: letting the community into the museum. This means inviting the community to participate in the decision-making processes. It means listening to what is relevant to that community, and using its stories to create exhibits and programs that encourage discussion. While these findings are drawn from the urban areas of the Pacific Northwest, scholarship supports their relevance to the greater museum world. Museum professionals need to be "breaking down the barriers which hinder access to museums and 'building bridges' with different groups to ensure their specific needs are met. It is a process by which a museum seeks to create access and encourage greater use…" (Dodd and Sandell as cited in Black, 2005, p. 46). Museums hold a great deal of power to represent the many identities of the world and to engage them in dialogue. With that power comes the responsibility to provide forums where conversations about the issues most relevant to their communities can be held.

APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Instruments:

Semi-structured interview
Open-ended questions

Questions to be asked to all participants:

1. Can you describe the communities your museum serves?

2. Can you talk about the museum's responsibilities to the community and what role it plays in relation to those people?

3. What obstacles do you currently observe in the museum's attempts to engage the community?

4. Who makes decisions regarding what you exhibit and how you exhibit that material?

5. What does this museum do to engage people?

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER

April 22, 2007

[Name]
[Organization]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[City/State/Zip]

Dear [Name]:

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Museums and Civic Engagement in the Pacific Northwest*, conducted by Sarah G. Van Der Stad from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore the civic role of art museums within their respective communities. The findings of this study will contribute to the completion of a Master's thesis document.

While the concept of community development is not new, we find ourselves in a new era of participation and civic responsibility. This exploratory research project seeks to understand the civic role within, and contributions to community. To best explore this concept I will be conducting a series of interviews with individuals who hold leadership positions in the museum community. Because the validity of this study relies heavily on the credibility of its sources, confidentiality will not be provided. All interviewees' responses will be identified in the final written document by name and profession. You will have the option to review any direct quotes or other identifiable information before submission and/or publication of this study.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position at the [museum]. Your experiences with and expertise pertinent to the arts and civic engagement in [City] are of great interest. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an interview lasting approximately thirty minutes via telephone, email, or in person. Interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews can take place at the location of your choice. Your interview will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I would like to use a small audio-recording device for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone-calls or email.

This study is completely voluntary, and if you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact me at svanders@uoregon.edu, or by mail to 3670 Thames St. Eugene, OR 97405.

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