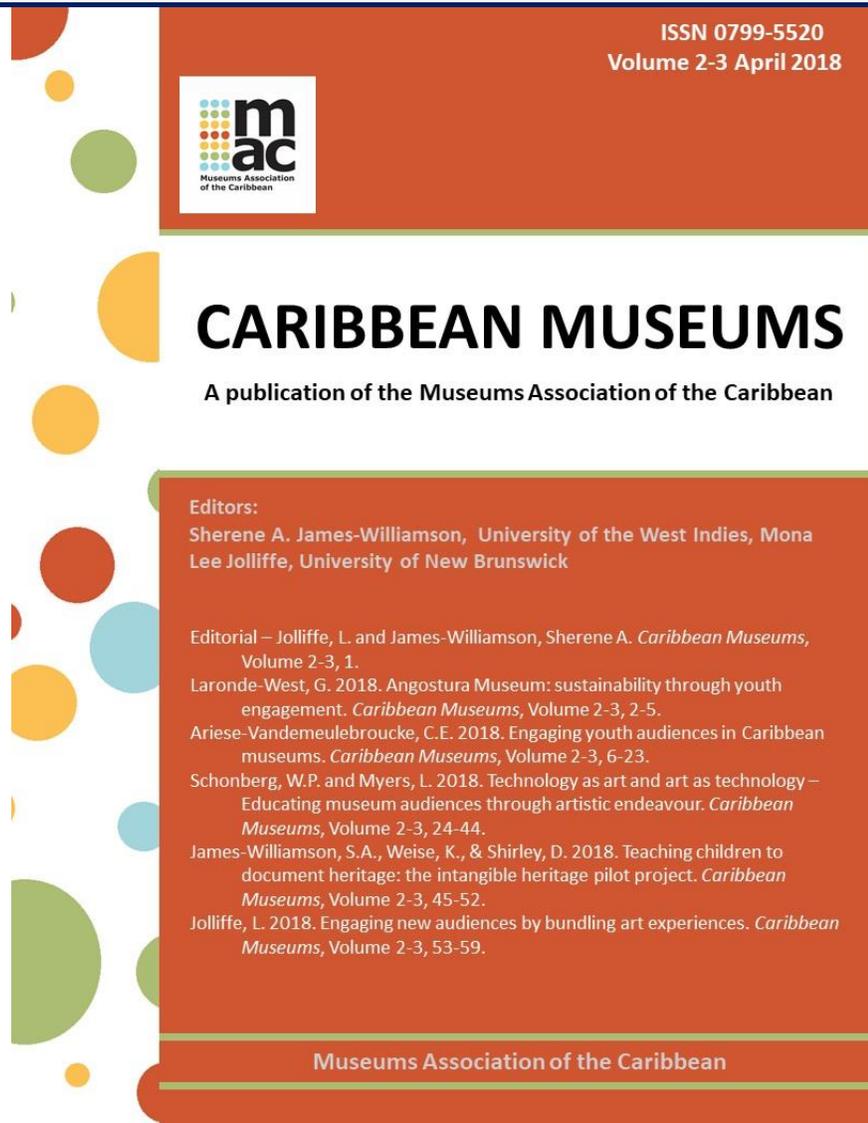


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## Engaging Youth Audiences in Caribbean Museums

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**ABSTRACT.** Community engagement has become a central and essential aspect of the museum process. As part of this shift in focus, museums are broadening their scope and aim to be inclusive to a multitude of communities. One of the audience groups that museums are specifically seeking to engage are youth audiences. This paper discusses youth engagement by presenting examples from museums in the Caribbean. It attempts to increase the diversity of the museological debate by extending the discussion to practices from the Caribbean region.

The paper begins by contextualizing the discussion: the history of the purpose of museums as educational institutions is linked to the contemporary transformation to museums as social agents. Youth engagement is placed partially within educational theories, although the important role of museums as facilitators for social inclusion and cultural performances is also stressed. Theoretical concepts are used to present a number of ways in which youth audiences can be defined, for instance by learning style or visiting group. The core of the paper is a collection of Caribbean examples of youth engagement processes or projects grouped by different approaches and desired outcomes. It concludes with a plan of action for youth engagement in museums.

**Keywords:** Caribbean, community engagement, education, museums, youth audiences

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the development of the New Museology, and in a climate of public accountability to prove their societal value, museums have been seeking ways to become more closely connected to the communities they serve (Vergo 1991; Davis 2008; Sandell 2012: 563). Thus, community engagement has become a central and essential aspect of museum processes and products (Crooke 2015: 481). Part of the aim to be more engaged with the public is to expand the museum's audience and, also for ethical and democratic reasons, to be inclusive to a greater diversity and multitude of communities. Thus, ideally, the museum should not only be more closely linked to its

currently connected communities, but should continually expand its scope of engagement to different and new communities (Black 2015: 134). Such a museum can be multi-vocal by including the voices of these communities and speaking to their needs and interests (Ibid.: 146). One of the communities or audience groups that museums are more specifically seeking to engage is youth audiences. These youth communities are the focus of this paper.

The paper<sup>1</sup> presents a series of recent youth engagement practices as they were applied in museums and heritage sites in the Caribbean. In doing so, it aims to add greater diversity to the current museological

debate about community engagement and youth audiences by presenting Caribbean examples and also to inspire museum staff who are seeking new or different ways to engage with youth audiences. Community engagement projects are happening globally, despite the (over-) representation of case studies from museums and heritage sites in Europe and North America, particularly in the English literature. The examples of community museums in the community museum network (PNMC) in Mexico, for instance, are primarily visible in Spanish literature<sup>2</sup> (e.g. Burón Díaz 2012; De Carli 2004). Certainly, further efforts are warranted beyond this paper to diversify the regional representation in museum studies literature.

The beginning of this paper provides a theoretical and historical background to youth engagement in museums. The core of the paper consists of numerous examples from museums throughout the Caribbean region which showcase diverse youth engagement practices, focusing on different youth audience and with diverse proposed outcomes. These examples are divided by the focal point or the aim of the engagement practice, e.g. to target an audience with a specific level of literateness or to link visitation to a specific curriculum. In the end, a plan of action is provided to guide museum staff wishing to engage with youth communities.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The youth engagement practices and participatory examples presented in this paper were collected during fieldwork by the author in the course of her PhD research. The focus of this PhD was community engagement and grassroots heritage initiatives in museums in the Caribbean (Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke *in press*). The

research was part of a large international and interdisciplinary project and was based at Leiden University, the Netherlands. In the course of the project, the author undertook multiple fieldwork excursions to the Caribbean (2013-2016) and visited 195<sup>3</sup> museums and heritage sites. The aim of this regional survey was to be able to understand the diversity of museums and heritage sites throughout the region and to categorize and assess the multitude of community engagement practices that are used to connect to various communities. This regional survey showed that there is an incredible diversity of community engagement practices in Caribbean museums. These practices occur in all phases of the museum process: from the foundation and organization of the institution itself, to the creation of exhibitions and other museum products, as well as the experience of the museum visit. From this large inventory of community engagement practice, a few were selected that were specifically targeted at youth audiences and investigated for this paper.

## **3. HISTORICAL & THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

To understand the current developments in youth engagement, it is useful to take a historical approach to the museum institution. Contemporary museums are still strongly framed by the nineteenth-century idea of the modern museum as an educational establishment (Hein 2011: 341; Smith 2015: 461). Tony Bennett, in discussing the historical purpose of museums, notes that it was “to show and tell so that people might look and learn” (1995: 98). His analysis goes further, by stating that museums were primarily instruments “of civic education” (Ibid.: 102), meaning that they were for teaching behaviour as much as, or perhaps even more than, for teaching

content knowledge. This historic purpose of museums as tools of civic education was not necessarily aimed at young visitors, but more often described in terms of class-differences. Thus, the lower classes were to be ‘civilized’ during their museum visit by observing and being observed by higher classes.

In the current museum literature related to museum education and pedagogy, the connection is frequently made to youth audiences or younger visitors. Youth communities have become the focal point of such educational or pedagogic investigations of museums. Perhaps because young audiences visit museums in a school group setting with their teachers, which adult audiences rarely do, youth engagement and education are a frequent association and point of investigation.

Most contemporary museum education products, programmes, and activities follow constructivist theories and models (Hooper-Greenhill 1999; Hein 2011: 347). These theories take as a basic point of departure that while museums may wish to teach visitors specific things, meaning-making occurs with the visitor and is affected by the visitors’ background, context of visiting, interaction with the exhibitions, and other elements. Therefore, “learning in and from museums is not just about what the museum wishes to teach the visitor. It is as much about what meaning the visitor chooses to make of the museum experience” (Falk et al. 2011: 325). Constructivism leads museums to understand that they cannot fully control their educational impact but that they can guide meaning-making. With the rise of the use of interactive media in museums, as well as the incorporation of gamification and game theories, playful learning is being encouraged more frequently and is changing the concept of the museum institution (Harrasser 2015: 371).

Although a significant proportion of museological literature concerning youth engagement has been focused on educational aspects, Laurajane Smith brings up an important point of criticism. She states that learning and education “may not be as important or as all-encompassing an explanation of the visitor experience as much of the heritage and museums literature tends to assume [...] A museum visit may be understood analytically as a cultural performance in which people either consciously or unconsciously seek to have their views, sense of self, and social or cultural belonging reinforced” (Smith 2015: 459). Her research has shown that although visitors frequently state that education is their motivation for visiting, learning cannot be identified as often as the actual outcome of the visit. For youth engagement practices, the message here is clear that educational outcomes alone may not be sufficient. In fact, the work of museums as social agents, working towards social inclusion and social regeneration, may be particularly crucial for certain youth communities (Sandell 2012; Silverman 2010). Beyond these outcomes, Carol Scott’s (2009; 2015) research has been instrumental for charting the many types of value museums may have for individuals, communities, and society.

In summary, youth engagement practices, while they have been dominated by educational agendas and models, can be more diverse in aims and outcomes. For this, it is helpful to also consult literature and examples of practices related to participation and community engagement in general (e.g. Simon 2010; Crooke 2011). These examples can provide concrete community engagement outcomes that are not exclusively educational, but also target skill development, recreation, cultural belonging, or social inclusion.

#### **4. DEFINING YOUTH AUDIENCES**

To define youth audiences, it is beneficial to begin with a definition of the term ‘community’ as youth audiences can of course be considered communities characterized by age. There is wide-ranging literature on the term, which lacks a precise definition and carries a myriad of different connotations between different academic disciplines, political policies, or public opinion. Elizabeth Crooke, who has written extensively about the subject from a museological perspective, has summarized a definition by saying that “community is often identified according to characteristics or attachments such as ethnicity, faith, abilities, language spoken, or particular interests” (2015: 482). People who share a characteristic or interest can consider themselves to be, or be considered by others to be, a community. Communities can be both real, in the sense that they have real power and a physical dimension, as well as ‘imagined’, in the sense that communities exist in a conceptual or symbolic state (Crooke 2015: 482; Anderson 2006: 6). Although communities often carry a positive connotation of belonging, they are as much about exclusion of others as they are about inclusion. For instance, a national community includes persons of that nation while excluding all others. Finally, it is important to remember that communities are fluid (changing), heterogeneous, and that individual community members are not necessarily representative of the community as a whole. In deciding to focus a museum engagement project on a youth community, these characteristics and potential challenges of the concept should be kept in mind. It is helpful to be as specific as possible about which youth community the museum wishes to engage, in order to more closely be able to create project outcomes that are suitable. The following sections provide explanations

of a few characteristics according to which youth communities are frequently identified.

##### *4.1 Age*

Although youth communities are already essentially defined by age, they can also be subdivided into age-categories. These categories can be quite broad, for instance ‘teens’ or ‘school-aged children.’ They can also be smaller, related for example to a specific school grade or particular age range. Youth communities may be divided by age for a number of reasons. Primarily, linking youth engagement to a specific curriculum benefits from such a division, as it is expected that each school year children will have learned specific things. Theoretically, the learning paradigm is gradually moving away from defining school children by grade when it comes to capacity – noting that children’s “date of manufacture” does not make the most sense for such categorization of capacity (Robinson 2010). However, in many educational settings, ‘grade’ is still the most common category and is often associated with a perceived level of educational development. This is also true for museums and their youth engagement practices. However, wider age-categories might more accurately reflect a range of emotional or intellectual capacity. It is also understood that such wider categories might be more readily linked to specific interests, personal problems, or developmental stages. For instance, when youth engagement focuses on ‘teens,’ it is often because this community is associated with specific struggles or issues that can be addressed through participatory practices or skill development. Ultimately, defining youth communities by age may be helpful in identifying presumed capacity or levels of knowledge, as well as specific interests or issues. However, it must be pointed out that

such presumptions do not always reflect reality.

#### 4.2 *Learning type*

Another approach is to identify youth communities by their learning type. There are multiple models for learning types that are used by (museum) educators, but many of them take inspiration from Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, first published in 1983. His theory identified eight types of intelligences, such as 'musical,' 'interpersonal,' or 'visual-spatial' (Gardner 2011). Gardner noted that all people have intelligence, but that these intelligences are not equally divided for all people – e.g. while some are 'nature smart,' others are 'people smart.' Recognizing people's primary or preferred intelligence is a first step to mapping their capacity for learning and is often also related to interests (since people commonly prefer activities that they are good at). For instance, if the museum identifies a community of youths with strong interpersonal intelligence, it may be more effective and enjoyable to facilitate social interaction rather than solitary engagement.

Earlier, in 1972, Bernice McCarthy presented her model of the four major learning styles, placing learners on a four-quadrant model (1990: 32). The x-axis reflects a range of processing and goes from *doing* to *watching*, while the y-axis shows a scale of perception from *sensing* to *thinking*. Each quadrant represents a different learner, for instance an analytic learner combines watching with thinking. On the other side of the spectrum is the dynamic learner who uses a combination of doing and sensing. McCarthy's model is known as the 4MAT System and also provides examples of which learning method should be used for which type of learner.

Neil Fleming developed a model, usually referred to as the VARK model (1995: 1–2),

which clearly takes Gardner's theory as its starting point. This model defines learners by their preferred method for learning: **V**isual, **A**ural, **R**eading and **K**inaesthetic. Fleming's VARK model and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences are easily linked by reasoning that aural learners may have strong musical intelligence or vice versa. As another example, a youth community of kinaesthetic learners would more likely benefit from a hands-on activity than a reading exercise. However, it must be noted that the multitude of models for defining learning types reflects the individuality of the connotations that go with it, which can make it difficult to define people by learning type. Nonetheless, it can be a useful strategy to develop engagement practices that apply a specific learning style or learning method that is most effective for a specific youth audience.

#### 4.3 *Skills, interests, or identities*

The previous two categories according to which youth communities may be defined, age and learning style, are strongly connected to educational goals. However, it is also possible to define youth communities by their particular skills, interests, or identities. This may be most apt for community engagement outcomes that are not educational per se, but perhaps more about facilitating social inclusion or cultural performance in a broader sense.

Defining youth communities by skill can be quite straightforward: a community is identified either on the basis of a skill they have or on a skill they do not (yet) have. For instance, a museum may seek to engage a youth community who are skilled artists or musicians for a particular engagement project that relies heavily on the use of those skills. On the other hand, the museum may seek to engage with a youth community who are perhaps not skilled at a particular

activity, in order to develop that skill through an engagement process.

Taking interests or identities as criteria for identifying youth communities can be more complicated. It may be quite simple to define a community based on certain interests: for instance, a youth community of sports-enthusiasts. In these cases, the community engagement project may take place around this topic to ensure relevance for the youth community in question. However, communities of identity may be more difficult to define, self-define, or identify. One way is to focus on motivations, namely motivations for museum visiting. By investigating visitors of all ages, John Falk and his colleagues were able to identify five clusters of “identity-related motivations” (Falk 2006: 156). These visitors are: the explorer, the facilitator, the professional/hobbyist, the experience seeker, and the spiritual pilgrim. The explorer, for instance, is a visitor who is curious and primarily concerned with her or his own discoveries (Ibid.). A facilitator, on the other hand, is typically someone who is visiting to satisfy the needs of someone else (Ibid.: 157). Of course, it must be remembered that these motivation-based categories were identified based on visitors of all ages and do not all apply equally well to youth communities. For example, youth communities are not often facilitators as they do not usually visit museums to satisfy the needs of others. It is even more difficult to apply these categories to youth communities who are non-visitors of museums.

Defining youth communities by skills, interests, or motivational-identities may be helpful for community engagement projects that wish to focus on social inclusion. To provide a few examples, if a youth community feels socially excluded because they do not have a skill that is deemed necessary for them – for instance, literacy –

the museum may develop engagement projects that specifically focus on improving literacy and thus support the social inclusion of these youths. Or, perhaps a youth community is socially excluded on the grounds that their interests are considered niche, in this case a museum may create more awareness and acceptance of this interest by involving it in an engagement project. Of course, relevance is a major strategy for social inclusion: by making the museum relevant for a visitor, by means of targeting skills, interests, or identities, visitors can feel institutionally and socially included. This can be particularly powerful when social inclusion takes place on the basis of identities – helping youth communities, who may otherwise feel like minorities, be included. As such, museums can work towards alleviating some of the symptoms of social exclusion, such as poverty or poor health (Sandell 2012: 568).

#### *4.4 Visiting group*

As a final example, youth communities may be defined by the social setting in which they are visiting the museum: in other words, their visiting group. This is part of the Contextual Model of Learning, as developed by Falk & Dierking (2000), which states that visitors learn differently based on the context of their visit. This context has personal dimensions (such as previous knowledge or interests), physical dimensions (e.g. the museum space and its exhibitions), as well as a socio-cultural dimension. On a macro-level, this latter dimension is influenced by a visitor’s cultural background and upbringing. On the micro-level, the social context of learning influences visitor experiences through the social interactions of the visitor within their visiting group or with other individuals such as guides or staff encountered at the museum (Falk et al. 2011: 327).

For youth communities, a visiting group might consist of peers, friends, or family or take place in a school group setting. Of course, solitary youth visitors may also be identified as a community the museum may wish to engage with. The dynamics of the visiting group may greatly influence the possibilities for engagement projects or the needs of the youth community. For instance, in a school group setting teachers may act as facilitators, which may enhance engagement based on a curricular education. Engagement with youth communities of peers or friends can make it easier to engage with difficult topics that young visitors may not be willing to discuss in family groups. In all of these social settings, collective knowledge and skills may increase the learning capacity of the group as a whole, which can be expanded through collaborative learning (Falk & Dierking 2000: 138).

Regardless of which characteristic a museum decides to use to define a youth community for engagement, it is important to carefully consider this decision. Namely, the selection and definition of a youth community will greatly impact the engagement process, whether in delineating the scope of the project, the needs of the participants, or the possible outcomes. Thus, it is the first step to consider in developing youth engagement practices (see *7 Plan of Action*; Figure 1).

## **5. THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING YOUTH AUDIENCES**

Community engagement processes, as mentioned earlier, are becoming a more and more essential aspect of the contemporary, inclusive museum. From the theoretical perspective of the New Museology, it is necessary for museums to be multi-vocal and thus to be reflective of a diverse society. Youth audiences or communities are often seen as one of the key target groups to engage in the museum process (Appleton

2007: 117). The reasoning for this is often centred around a combination of three arguments, which will be clarified here.

First of all, the argument based on the clichéd saying ‘children are the future.’ In this argument, youth communities are seen as the future of humankind and are, therefore, instilled with particular power and importance for cultural and natural sustainability. Following this logic, museums are the keepers of the past and therefore uniquely equipped to shape present generations to be prepared for the future. In this line of thinking, youth engagement is primarily of importance from a historical-education perspective, although it is often also applied to science centres and natural history museums. For educational purposes, youth audiences are targeted with the collective knowledge gathered from the generations that have existed before them. Culturally, engaging youth communities is seen as a way to create a new generation of cultural defenders and practitioners. From an audience development perspective (for the self-preservation of museums), youth exposure to museums is shown to significantly impact the individual development of a ‘museum visiting culture’ and influences the extent to which a person will visit museums as an adult (Black 2015: 136).

Secondly, it is regularly argued that youth audiences are particularly difficult to engage in a museum setting. These arguments are specifically frequent for youth communities defined as ‘teens’ or ‘young adults.’ It is a common notion for educators or museum curators to assume that youth audiences have limited attention spans making it difficult to keep their attention over longer periods of time (for a counter point, see Modest 2013: 101). Furthermore, in participatory projects, youth communities are not always trusted to be sufficiently responsible and this makes it difficult for

museum staff to share (some of) their power and authority. However, it is precisely because youth communities are seen as such a 'difficult' group to engage with, that some museums have focused deliberately on youth engagement. From their perspective, it is particularly crucial to expend additional or exceptional effort to engage this group in the museum process, as they would otherwise be the first to be left out. These museums become inclusive by choosing to involve a group that is otherwise easily disregarded. Finally, youth communities can be considered a high risk group for social exclusion. Youth communities may have an increased risk of being socially excluded, due to the fact that particularly adolescence is a stage of life that is characterized by rapid change, disruption of social ties, and feelings of isolation. During adolescence, an individual's social ties may weaken, particularly in a familial structure but often also among peers. Youth communities may thus be considered particularly at risk of social exclusion processes and, therefore, could benefit extraordinarily from museum engagement aimed at social inclusion. Youth audiences may also be highly impressionable, for instance under peer pressure, making it all the more important to involve them in the social debate, for instance about racism, discrimination, and intolerance (for a case study, see Wood 2013).

## **6. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT EXAMPLES**

This following section will present a number of youth engagement projects, processes, or practices that have been undertaken or are currently taking place in museums throughout the Caribbean region. The examples are grouped based on the type of desired outcome or by the specific approach applied.

### *6.1 Children's Museums*

A Children's Museum or a Children's Gallery is specifically aimed at youth audiences as visitors and allows the museum to dedicate itself entirely to this community and to developing suitable activities and programmes. Unlike a temporary youth exhibition or programme, a Children's Museum is a long-term project and a significant investment of time and other resources to ensure a high potential impact on many young visitors over a long period of time. Although some Children's Museums can be visited only by children and adults are not allowed to enter,<sup>4</sup> most Children's Museums rely on the presence of adults as potential facilitators. This is the case at *Museo Infantil Trampolin* in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

The museum is designed in a way to be flexible to match the demands of multiple types of youth audiences and varying visitation goals. This is achieved in large part through the flexible roles of the museum guides, who are all trained educators. Additional flexibility is found in the exhibition spaces that contain layered information and are grouped thematically: the human body, the planet earth, prehistory, etc. The museum is thus capable of changing itself in a chameleon-like manner to suit different visitor groups. To illustrate, a secondary school teacher may wish to expand on the biology curriculum by taking their class to learn more about the human body. The educators in the museum will dedicate the entire visit to this topic and this one exhibition hall, going into detail on various aspects of the human body and facilitating activities and assignments.

If families enter the museum with young children, the guides will take them through each exhibition hall but there will be no assignments per se. Instead the guides will engage the children in a dialogue, providing information, asking them questions, and

encouraging them to take part in activities. The children may rely on their parents to facilitate certain activities or help them answer some questions. Although they will also learn about the human body, this will not be the singular focus of their visit. Unlike in most cases when families visit museums, the impact of the visit is not dependent on the parents being facilitators. Instead, the guides as expert facilitators are able to adjust to the needs of the visitors and can tailor the visit precisely, while having all the necessary content and pedagogic knowledge. For instance, the author visited this museum together with a family: pregnant mother, father, and son. In the hall about the human body, the guide made sure to discuss pregnancy and babies, a topic the son was clearly curious about and which was of personal relevance to him.

### 6.2 Outreach

A museum may wish to engage in outreach activities to be able to engage with youth communities who might otherwise not want to or not be able to visit the museum. Engaging with so-called non-visitors is a way in which museums can expand their current audiences, but is also often seen as a social inclusion strategy. Through outreach activities, it is possible to make new audiences feel that the museum can be of relevance to their lives. Outreach activities may be long-term projects, such as the development and mobilization of a travelling exhibition. They may be regularly recurring projects, such as the *Museo Arqueológico Regional Altos de Chavón* in La Romana, Dominican Republic, which has developed an educational ‘museum box’ (*valija didáctica*<sup>5</sup>) that can be loaned to schools. Outreach activities may also be incidental activities, such as a curator being invited to bring objects and their stories to a day care. Such activities are happening throughout the Caribbean region. Naturally, the proposed

outcomes of outreach activities that are so different in scope and scale, will also be dissimilar. However, the collective aim is that these activities take place outside the museum walls, renegotiating the museum’s position of power and facilitating engagement on a more equal basis. Approaching youth communities through outreach activities may not only be able to lead to engagement with non-visitors, but also to lead to engagement that is more participatory and potentially less intimidating.

### 6.3 Co-curation

The co-creation of exhibitions involves the participation of youth audiences in the process of museum-making. According to Richard Sandell, the cultural dimension of social inclusivity entails the promotion of “participation in the process of cultural production” (2012: 568). On the one hand, co-curation shifts the power-balance between the museum staff and the participating youth communities, thus giving these youths curatorial responsibility. On the other hand, this type of engagement stimulates creativity and teamwork while it also encourages action and negotiation. Co-curation may be a method to involve multiple types of learners in the museum process, because it provides a diverse selection of tasks. Participants who have high verbal-linguistic intelligence may wish to write museum texts, while visual-spatial intelligence can be heightened through creative design activities. The museum can design the co-curation process with these possibilities in mind, considering carefully which tasks can be shared with or completed by the youth participants and what the outcomes of engagement with these tasks might be.

Co-curation projects publicly award participation through the presence of the resulting exhibition. Such exhibitions are

often sporadic projects as they rely on a considerable investment of time and resources to develop. Co-curation can also be facilitated through long-term projects such as regular internships at the museum or the creation of a young curators' programme. For an example of the latter, the *Barbados Museum & Historical Society* runs a Junior Curators programme<sup>6</sup> to encourage young people to consider a career in the museum field. Participatory Action Research (PAR) may be a suitable approach for museums to engage more politically, critically, and self-reflexively in co-curation projects with youth communities. This approach relies on its participants to actively generate knowledge to inform action and challenges the notion of knowledge being the prerogative of so-called experts. PAR is particularly suited to shift the power balance between these 'experts' and community members and to transform practice through action (Tzibazi 2013: 157).

#### 6.4 Curriculum

One of the most common ways in which museums engage with youth communities is by connecting their content to a school curriculum. For instance, this may be achieved by pairing text books with museum activity booklets or by developing educational materials specifically geared to support the curriculum taught in schools. A curriculum-based engagement project will need to carefully consider the educational outcomes and the target audiences to develop suitable materials or activities. The choice to develop educational materials has the benefit that once they have been printed they can be used independently – e.g. they do not necessarily require the presence of museum staff to facilitate their use. They take significant effort to develop and are, therefore, unfortunately often not easily changed when the curriculum changes or when new research comes to light. On the

other hand, curriculum-based activities are more flexible to adjust to new curricular demands, although they do require facilitation by museum staff or an educator and are less suitable for independent use. Museums may also choose to adjust their halls, exhibitions, or content to match curricula. For instance, the exhibition halls may be designed to match curricular themes or the content may be presented in a way that is in line with the curriculum design.

Curriculum-based engagement has many obvious educational benefits. For instance, different styles of learners may respond better to the curricular content through visual or kinaesthetic learning than what is traditionally possible in a classroom setting. Museums are also well equipped to show the relevance of certain school subjects, which may otherwise seem abstract when presented in class. As an example, the *University of the West Indies Geology Museum* in Kingston, Jamaica, has created displays which pair everyday objects with the geological materials they are made from. When youth audiences visit in school group settings, they are able to learn what common objects, such as their phones or shoes, are made from and why it is important to think about geological sustainability and the environment. An example of a curriculum-based activity can be found in the *Musée Départemental Edgar Clerc* in Le Moule, Guadeloupe. This is an archaeological museum that focuses on the prehistory of the island and the region. When school classes visit, they not only discover the museum by using an activity booklet, but also engage in a creative hands-on activity. Working in clay, the students are asked to make a modern object, but to decorate it with a pre-Columbian, Amerindian design. They are thus asked to consider what they have learned about the Amerindians, through their curriculum and in the museum, and to

transform a modern object into a traditional style.

Although such engagement practices are ultimately aimed at youth audiences, they must happen in continuous collaboration with teachers. Teachers should be involved in the development of the engagement project, to ensure that the project will be in line with the enacted curriculum (Porter & Smithson 2001: 2). During the museum visit or the engagement project, teachers can be included as facilitators and participants. Afterwards, teachers can provide valuable insight in evaluating the engagement project or by continuing the engagement process in school. Teachers may be able to indicate how a curriculum-based engagement project can be adjusted also based on the limitations the museum may have. For instance, the *San Nicolas Community Museum* in San Nicolas, Aruba, only had a small museum space when visited in early 2014. Teachers adjusted their curriculum-based activity to the physical limitations of the museum space by sending a few students as delegates to visit the museum and learn as much as they could and take photographs. These students were then requested to prepare presentations of their visit for the rest of their class and thus to share the knowledge gained from their visit.

### 6.5 Literacy

Many museum exhibitions tend to rely heavily on printed text to convey content and information, which is not always suitable for youth audiences who may not (yet) be fully literate. As such, literacy may become an issue when museums wish to engage with these youth communities. Although academia and the modern educational system heavily rely on and reward reading-writing-learners, museums are well situated to cater to multiple styles of learners. Thus, exhibitions that do not rely on printed text can be used to engage with

youth communities who are not (yet) literately strong or for youth communities who prefer visual, aural, or kinaesthetic methods of learning. Such exhibitions improve the accessibility of the museum, which is another method of promoting social inclusivity (Sandell 2012: 568). Traditionally, science centres, art museums, and national history museums rely less on the use of text in their exhibitions. For instance, the *Museo Nacional de Historia Natural* in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, combines tactile objects (taxidermy animals that can be touched) with visual elements (photographs, drawings, and maps) and minimal text (infographics rather than full text). However, any type of museum can take literacy into account and shift the balance of an exhibition. Other possibilities are replacing extensive panel texts with comic-style texts or text-bubbles. The use of audio-visual techniques, which is increasingly incorporated in museums around the world, can also improve the accessibility of exhibitions.

### 6.6 Relevance

Demonstrating the relevance of museums or their exhibitions and programmes is fundamental to engagement with any community, especially those who are considered non-visitors. This is true also for youth communities, whether they are non-visitors or frequent visitors. Relevance can be demonstrated in two principle ways: through content or the method of delivery. The relevance of a museum and its content can be shown by developing narratives and activities that relate an exhibition to the daily lives of the youth community. For instance, the *Barbados Museum & Historical Society* in Bridgetown, Barbados, has a children's gallery which discusses history by demonstrating continuity in the present (e.g. what toys they played with in

the past or how they cooked dinner). Another possibility is to engage youth audiences by catching their attention about a topic they are inherently fascinated by. The *Bank of Jamaica Money Museum* in Kingston, Jamaica, has an ultraviolet light set up in one of their galleries where visitors can test for themselves if their money is counterfeit or real. Youth audiences are particularly drawn to this activity, as they are all familiar with money (it has relevance to them in many ways) and yet unfamiliar with how it looks under UV-light. Specifically on the topic of relevance, it is crucial to determine and define the youth community to engage with beforehand – this will allow the museum to identify what is of particular relevant for this audience.

Regarding the method of delivery of their content, museums can also improve their relevance to youth communities. To appease different styles of learners, the museum can create tours or activities that are more interactive and do not rely on a classroom-lecture method of delivery. This is also more in line with the ways in which today's children are engaging with the world through interactive media, video games, the internet, television, and so on. Youth communities are strongly influenced by and familiar with the formats of such entertainment media. This point was illustrated during the Museums Association of the Caribbean Annual General Meeting on '*Museums' Sustainability through Youth Engagement*' (Saint Lucia, 2015). Secondary school students who had been invited to attend the conference, were asked how they wished to be engaged by museums when they are guided through exhibitions. After much lamenting about 'boring' tours and too much silent listening, one of the students concluded: "just leave me on a cliff-hanger!"

### 6.7 Social interaction

It has already been mentioned how museums can encourage social interaction between visitors or even between visitors and non-visitors. For youth communities with strong interpersonal intelligence, social interaction may be the most effective method of engagement. Museums can facilitate or inspire interaction within a youth community, for instance by developing group activities or encouraging conversation and dialogue. Many educational activity booklets tend to stimulate such interaction by containing assignments that need to be solved in groups. Such group activities in booklets were observed in several museums, for instance the *Musée Départemental d'Archéologie et de Préhistoire* in Fort-de-France, Martinique. However, social interaction can of course also be included into a museum tour or group visit. Although aware that a silent atmosphere does not generally induce social interaction, some teachers still need to make an effort to become comfortable with letting their students talk in museums.

Social interaction can also be encouraged between members of a youth community and other facilitators or mediators such as teachers or parents. This can be achieved even through simple techniques that require participants of different physical heights to successfully complete an activity. At the *Yoda Guy Movie Exhibit* in Philipsburg, St. Maarten, intergenerational social interaction is supported, as fully experiencing the various exhibits depends on specific knowledge of or nostalgia for movies from different decades. As mentioned earlier, the importance of social interaction for museum engagement can be located in the socio-cultural context of learning. Of course, different learning styles will also respond differently to engagement through social interaction. If museums wish to develop youth engagement through social

interaction, it is fundamental to consider the composition of the imagined visiting group. Then the museum can scaffold social interaction among peers or between youth visitors and mediators.

### 6.8 Action

The possibility for youth communities to engage with the museum space and museum objects through action is often seen as instrumental to non-classroom learning. Significant research has been undertaken on the use and impact of hands-on activities and interactive displays in museums (e.g. Witcomb 2011). When an educational impact is desired from hands-on activities, George Hein stressed that they must also be 'minds-on' (1998: 2). However, much of this research is imbalanced towards science centres and children's museums. Certainly, engaging with youth communities through action will benefit kinaesthetic learners primarily, but there is also much to be said for the impact of multi-sensory and playful learning on all types of learners. Although interactive displays and hands-on activities summon associations of monitors and screens in museum exhibits, there are also other ways in which engagement through action can be supported. For instance, the *Ecomusée CreoleArt* in Sainte Rose, Guadeloupe preserves the agricultural tradition of the *jardin créole* by engaging youth audiences in agricultural activities in the museum's garden. At the *Centre Spatial Guyanais* in Kourou, French Guiana, youth audiences can engage in numerous activities, including the construction of spacecraft in LEGO. Engagement through action not only benefits non-verbal learning styles, but also encourages playful learning and allows youth audiences to engage energetically with the museum.

### 6.9 Social media

Using contemporary media to engage with youth audiences ties in to the earlier point of connecting through relevant methods of delivery. Social media in particular have rapidly gained importance when it comes to how information is shared and how people interact with each other socially. Adults, but perhaps youth communities even more so, are ever more drawn into social media as a primary method of content delivery and reception. Social media are a fitting way in which "museums can engage technology-saturated young people with social and scientific history" (Russo et al. 2007: 20). Although certain technological developments may be difficult for museums to keep up with, or too resource heavy, social media are relatively easy and inexpensive to adopt. It is helpful that social media are so strongly entrenched in daily life that social media platforms or methods are often intuitively understood by youth audiences without needing explanation. Creating apps instead of educational booklets, using visitors' smart phones in museum tours, or incorporating online photograph sharing into physical museum activities are all ways in which museums can use social media to engage with youth communities. It should be pointed out here that museum staff do not need to reinvent the wheel and develop apps, virtual tours, or games themselves. Although there are many excellent companies that provide such services for museums, this can also be an opportunity to engage with youth communities in a co-creation project and invite them to develop a social media project. From a Participatory Action Research approach, acknowledging the expertise of youth audiences in the field of social media would be the first step to shifting the power balance. Museums may need to begin by reconsidering their

photography policies to allow visitors to take photos in the galleries.

### **7. PLAN OF ACTION**

Although there are multitudes of ways in which diverse youth communities may be engaged in the museum process, it is still possible to develop a basic plan of action that may be consulted. It should be pointed out here, that this plan of action is based on a top-down approach by which a museum decides to reach out and engage with youth communities. Certainly, museums should also be encouraged to support bottom-up or grassroots initiatives that originate with youth communities. For instance, the *Kalinago Barana Autê* in Crayfish River, Dominica, was approached by a group of young Kalinago who wished to establish a dance group. The museum has supported the Kalinago Dancers in developing schedules for performances and in creating organized tours. Where possible, museums should be open to such initiatives by young communities and support collaboration.

In the case of a top-down engagement project, it is of primary importance to define the proposed youth community that will be at the heart of the project. Once defined, this community should be engaged in the process as soon as possible. While it can be helpful to consult theoretical literature or find exemplary practices, it is then necessary to decide what the focal point for engagement will be (or the desired outcome of the project) and which approach will be most suitable to achieving that type of engagement and outcome. Throughout the entire process – during the development, the implementation, and after completion – it is vital to regularly evaluate the project and incorporate mechanisms for feedback and adjustment. Lee Davidson has written a comprehensive overview of evaluation methods that are used in the field of visitor studies (2015). In order to assess the impact of an engagement project or process, Personal Meaning Mapping is a very useful approach (Falk et al. 2011: 333).



Figure 1: Basic Plan of Action for Youth Engagement in Museums, developed by the author.

## 8. CONCLUSION

As elsewhere in the world, museums throughout the Caribbean are involving youth audiences in community engagement projects and processes. A wide diversity of youth engagement practices is the result of this dedication to engagement which has its roots in the theoretical frame of the New Museology. Engagement with youth audiences begins with the challenging tasks of defining the target audience, for example by age, learning type, skills, interests, identities, or visiting group. Selecting a target group is aided by clearly identifying the underlying rationale for the decision to engage with youth audiences. Once this rationale has been outlined and the target audience selected, it becomes possible to decide on an approach.

Museums throughout the Caribbean are incredibly diverse in terms of size, collections, content, resources, and their system of ownership. The challenges and opportunities of each museum, not to mention their missions, will determine which engagement practices they wish to adopt and how they adapt these practices to their specific setting. Due to this variety, it is impossible to point out a single recommended youth engagement approach or practice. Nonetheless, categories of these practices can be explored along with Caribbean examples. The paper discussed children's museums, which present unique opportunities to dedicate every aspect of the museum to youth audiences. On the other hand, in order to reach non-visitors, outreach activities can be especially beneficial. Co-curation tends to require long-term

commitment and is less frequently applied, whereas engagement based on the curriculum is significantly more common. When seeking to engage youth audience, museum may particularly strive to target the appropriate level of literacy, as well as demonstrate relevance in terms of content and its mode of delivery. Finally, engagement with these audiences particularly benefits from including opportunities for social interaction, action, and possibilities to link to social media. More research is certainly needed in order to assess the impact of engagement with youth audiences. Nonetheless, the paper presents a Caribbean dimension to youth engagement in museums and aims to provide inspiration and a basic plan of action for museums in the region and elsewhere wishing to embark on similar projects.

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<sup>2</sup> See Barnes 2008 for an English article on this subject.

<sup>3</sup> A detailed methodology of this fieldwork is published in the author's PhD dissertation. A map of the museums that were visited can be found on the NEXUS1492 project website:

<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/nexus1492/about/interactive-nexus-1492>

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, has a 'Kindermuseum' (Children's Museum) within it. Only children up to a certain age are allowed into this part of the museum where they are taken on a tour and engaged in activities by educators/guides. Parents and other adults are sent off to wander the rest of the galleries. The children tend to feel special by this limited access and it encourages inter-generational conversations afterwards as parents are often very curious to find out what the children have seen, learned, and experienced.

<sup>5</sup> For more information: [http://altosdechavon.museum/sp\\_oferta\\_educativa\\_main.html#valija](http://altosdechavon.museum/sp_oferta_educativa_main.html#valija)

<sup>6</sup> For more information: <http://www.barbmuse.org.bb/junior-curators-a-interns/>

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