

Not just a luxury...
The museum as urban catalyst

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Originally prepared for the seminar
Glasgow's Urban Renaissance 11-12 April, 2002
organised by
The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)
In co-operation with Scottish Enterprise Glasgow

*Dedicated to Friedrich von Metzler, who has done more than anyone
to prepare his city for the challenges of the 21st century*

21 March 2001/revised 4 January 2004

This paper first appeared in 'Urban Renaissance: Glasgow: lessons for innovation and implementation', the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), Paris 2002; pp. 214 – 226

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Museums are often seen as stuffy, traditional, and inflexible – and indeed they often are. Nevertheless, this is not a necessary part of a museum’s definition, rather, it is a feature that has developed in the affluent years after the Second World War. On the contrary, museums have always been a part of the society they serve, and as society changes – for political, economic, or social reasons – museums too must change to serve society’s new needs. Now more than ever, society needs to use its museums as a ‘motor for the learning society’ – and as a key means of attracting new businesses – and thereby new tax revenue – to the City. If we fail to meet the challenge of renewing and revitalising our museums, they risk becoming a marginalised and irrelevant burden on the taxpayer.

MUSEUMS IN A LEARNING SOCIETY – A SHORT HISTORY

What is a museum? According to Joseph Veach Noble (Head of Education at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and later President of the American Association of Museums) the purpose of the museum is ‘to collect, to conserve, to study, to interpret and to exhibit.’ These, he said, ‘are like the five fingers of a hand, each independent, but united for a common purpose.’¹

If one defines the museum largely as the first three fingers of the hand, its history is linked to that of the collection, and the museum has its roots in the Classical past. The earliest museum of which we can speak was actually a library: the ‘mousseion’ of Alexandria, the institutional sibling of the famous library that flourished three centuries before Christ. Since the Renaissance, the dominant model of the museum has been the collection, and the demands of the collection have taken precedence in the museum’s organisation.

If one puts the emphasis on the last two fingers, the museum’s history can be traced to the late 18th century. By the end of the 18th century, the political situation was extremely volatile, and the demands for access to social, political and cultural machinery found decisive political expression. Following the French Revolution in 1789, the very existence of private collections was called into question. Out of the passionate defence of the need for collections to the Convention of 1793 and 1794, the

first modern museums were born: the Louvre, the Museum de l'Histoire Naturelle, and the Musée des Arts et Métiers.

The arguments for founding Museums were linked to their ability to teach new skills - not just convey information about the distant past or amuse idler time-wasters.

Justifying the creation of the Musée des Arts et Métiers, arguably one of the first museums of applied arts, the Abbé Gregoire summarised his proposal to the Convention by saying 'I have just disclosed to you the means of developing the national industry.'

Faced with a substantial delay in catching up with English, apprentices were to be routinely brought to the Conservatory to study machines and working models of machines, in order to make up the French deficit in technology speedily.

Nearly all new museums had as their mission to educate the public - notably the labouring classes - often with the explicit expectation that an increased exposure to the arts would be translated into better products. Museums were no longer to be the preserve of the few - they were to open Sundays and evenings for the many. Workers newly sensitive to beauty would give industry the competitive edge. This was the Golden Age of the Industrial Revolution, and industry needed a visually literate public - to buy its goods, and to produce them. The Museum was an important part of a broad social, economic, and cultural strategy. The importance to industry of museums - particularly museums of applied art - can be seen in the early exhibitions at London's Victoria and Albert Museum, and indeed most museums of applied art, which were founded in the last third of the 19th century as collections of samples for craftworkers to imitate.

The times continue to change, and our museums must continue to change with the times - at least if they are to meet the challenges of the 21st century - and the key to change is to embrace a museology that looks to the future, not just to the past. Just as in the last decades of the 19th century, we are now seeing an immense museum-building boom - but now the challenge is to sustain the relevance of our museums as we enter the 21st century. The challenges are substantial. In the past ten years the world economy has globalised at a dizzying rate, largely due to new information technologies. Those growing up today must be prepared for rapid technological change, to change jobs more

often than their parents, and to add value to their work as a condition of economic survival. A federal Europe is in the making, but it needs a population for whom learning is a way of life, not an isolated event. We must – at all costs – become a learning society, and the museum has the chance to become the institution at the heart of that society. The museum is part of preparing us to be part of a ‘community of learners’, - or as Jonathan Miller once said, the museum prepares us ‘for a world in which the life of the mind is a pleasure.’ Museums have not always been merely repositories of the past, enormous storehouses of potentially useful things. In the Renaissance they were instruments of power, in the early days of the French Revolution they were the key to economic competition, in the late 19th century they were the means to increase the quality of industrial production. Museums have always been instruments of social and educational policy, and in particular, the museum setting has been used as the site of informal learning *par excellence*. In particular, museums have been preferred sites for communicating new skills - the skills required by contemporary society.

INFORMAL LEARNING AS PART OF ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Education is rapidly becoming a big business, and the failure of the public school system is becoming a major political issue. As Marjorie Scardino, CEO of Pearson says ‘Education is one of the great growth industries of our time.’ In America the crisis in the school system is being compared to the crisis in the American auto industry in the 1970s – and the consequence is the same – America now has to import more and more creative brains from outside the country. It is also creating a whole new market for remedial education, and for corporate universities and colleges. But are schools and universities the only place we learn? Or even the best places to learn? Where do we learn the joy that comes from unforced learning – the pleasure that comes from discovery, from self-initiated and self-directed exploration? Almost certainly not at school. But where?

Traditionally museums have considered their visitors – when they considered them at all – as ignorant, or at best, as blank slates on which to write new information. In fact, the opposite is true. Far from being ignorant, our visitors are competent and intelligent, and, if we are to believe countless visitor surveys, often highly educated. Far from

being blank slates our visitors come with existing experience, education, and opinions. Visitors create their own understanding, and the Museum gives them opportunities to create new knowledge during and after their visit. We cannot insist on dictating the specific new knowledge they create – a museum is an informal learning environment – not a school classroom. The role of the museum is to create an environment where the visitor can explore the ways in which she can actively modify her relationship with culture, by enhancing her knowledge, piquing her curiosity, by honing her critical judgement. Learning is not an undifferentiated concept – learning can either be seen as the acquisition of new information, transmission from those who know to those who do not – or it can be the acquisition of new skills, directed by the learner and serving the learner’s own needs.

As an instrument of informal learning – lifelong learning is the expression currently in vogue – museums are an investment in creating a future workforce that is able to respond to change, and able to meet the challenges of new ideas, new working relationships, and new technologies. In the last two years, especially after the downturn provoked by the collapse of the dot.com bubble and exacerbated by the attacks of September 11th, it has become painfully clear that businesses – and the people who work for them – must be prepared to face sudden and often unpleasant changes. Workplaces are being transformed, new efficiencies being sought, and employees in once secure positions forced to seek new jobs from one week to the next. These challenges mean that increasingly the economy needs places where its citizens learn to enjoy the pleasure that comes from learning outside the school.

The success of mak.frankfurt is evidence for this approach². The mak.frankfurt experiment is based entirely on partnerships with the private sector, for whom mak.frankfurt represents both short term value in terms of marketing, and long term value in terms of preparing the next generation for change. With the support of some of the city’s leading bankers, notably Friedrich von Metzler, who first introduced the North American ‘matching funds’ model to the Frankfurt, the partnership model has become a mainstay of the museum’s activities. Moreover, the Metzler family’s success in leveraging private support for Frankfurt’s entire cultural sector has already become known as the ‘Metzler effect’. The museum now has twelve museum three-year

partners, including Nokia, Sun Microsystems, Deutsche Telekom, Deutsche Börse, JP Morgan Chase, Braun, Publicis, the Messe Frankfurt and the FAZ, and is in discussions with several more. Partnership revenue now accounts for nearly 20% of the museum's annual budget, and well over half of the museum's non-City revenue. This has the advantage of making the museum less dependent on City funding, and giving the museum greater autonomy to develop new programmes and activities to reach new target groups and address new issues. Without any exaggeration, partnership is at the heart of the museum's ability to deliver on its claim to be a 'motor of the learning society'. The next step is to convince the City of Frankfurt – in the spirit of a true partnership – to 'match' the partner revenue with an equal amount of city revenue, thus creating a true 'public-private partnership'.³

MUSEUMS – NOT 'EDUTAINMENT', NOT ATTRACTIONS, NOT THEME PARKS

If museums are to fulfil their promise as privileged sites for learning in the 21st century, they must rethink the way in which they function, and become increasingly user-driven - in a word, more 'bottom-up'. In abstract terms this means taking the visitor's competence and abilities seriously, and creating opportunities for the visitor to actively shape their experience in the museum. It has long been my conviction that – contrary to the belief among some museum professionals – that our visitors derive real pleasure from confronting material that makes them think about the world in which they live. Baxandall writes of the importance of 'patterns of intention'⁴, and it is the invitation to create meaning that seduces us in museums. Making meaning – the central task of every child – is able to provide an almost sensual delight. It is the key to engagement and interactivity. That people find pleasure in using their minds can be found everywhere – from the sales figures for murder mysteries and science fiction, to the membership in chess clubs. The term 'edutainment' has always seemed to me a pernicious nonsense, a puritan prejudice that associates pain with gain, and pleasure with frivolity. The fact that many 'couch potatoes' are as well informed as coaches about their favourite team's past performance speaks for the willingness of people to engage with material that matters to them. The fact that many museums are under-

attended is witness, not to the inability of the visitors to appreciate the material, but more often than not of the museum's inability to make it relevant. As a privileged site for informal learning, the museum can only add real value to society by preparing a new generation for a life of learning. In this way it not only helps create a flexible and motivated workforce, but can also help those without access to technology – such as older people and socially excluded populations – learn new skills.

Many museums are trapped in the assumption that their main task is to display – to exhibit. Other museums, however, take seriously Nelson Goodman's contention that museums should be 'institutions for the prevention of blindness'. He goes on, 'the museum has to function as an institution for the prevention of blindness in order to make works work. And making works work is the museum's major mission. Works work when, by stimulating inquisitive looking, sharpening perception, raising visual intelligence, widening perspectives, and marking off neglected significant kinds, they participate in the organisation and reorganisation of experience, in the making and re-making of our worlds⁵'. Museums such as London's National Gallery, despite the enormous pressure of tourist crowds, continue to produce thought-provoking and intelligent exhibitions. Jonathan Miller's 'Mirror Image⁶' and Neil McGregor's 'The Image of Christ⁷' challenged the visitor to come to grips with difficult ideas, and savour the delight of thinking about familiar topics in unfamiliar ways. In a recent exhibition treating the subject of time in painting, the National Gallery allowed visitors to participate in an eye-trace experiment, and placed a small camera next to Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' to allow visitors to look at other visitors looking at Van Gogh. These initiatives show the enormous range of possibilities open to museums if they are willing to rethink their traditional role. Instead of being large sheds for the display of desirable objects, museums can become places to excite minds to culture – to become 'learning platforms'.

The museum specialist Kenneth Hudson⁸ was clear about his position: 'When I am in a museum' he wrote in 1999, shortly before he died, 'I like to look at an object and let my imagination work on it. I like to say to myself *What am I learning from this object that kicks my imagination into life, that helps me to have a better understanding of the world*

*in which we live and a better understanding of history? I see museums as places with that as their main function.*⁹ [italics in original]

THE MAK.FRANKFURT EXPERIMENT

If the museum is to play its role as a new learning platform, it must have new facilities. I will cite the museum I directed from 1999 - 2002 as an example of the direction in which I believe museums must move if they are to survive relegation. With the support of its partners, mak.frankfurt featured two computer labs (the Andersen Computer Lab and the Nokia Lab), a permanent collection of 'Digital Craft' where teenagers test new computer games and websites (supported by Sun Microsystems, the Deutsche Börse, Deutsche Telekom, Nokia and Andersen), wireless Internet throughout the museum, a multi-purpose reading room – the so-called 'FAZ Leselounge' (after Germany's leading newspaper and museum partner, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), and a learning lab (the JP Morgan Lern.labor) where children can create their own robot choreography – ROBO.mak – in addition to its design and applied arts workshop (the Braun Lab). It is not enough to have the facilities alone, however, they must be used. The museum had already developed a strong reputation for its courses and workshops, and these remained a central part of mak.frankfurt's activities. As the museum's mission grows, however, so do its possibilities.

Museums have traditionally been the domain of a privileged few, and despite many attempts to change the audience mix, museums as institutions are still seen by many to be instruments of social exclusion. During the course of the past two decades much has been done to reduce barriers to participation in the museum's activities. Frankfurt is the German city with the greatest percentage of non-German nationals in its population – over 30% of Frankfurt's residents do not hold a German passport. On the one hand, this brings a refreshing multi-cultural dimension to the city, but on the other, it makes even more remarkable the degree to which these publics are not taken into consideration in most of Frankfurt's museums. Since its relaunch in May 2000, mak.frankfurt has been a pioneer in making the museum more accessible – in creating an international 'piazza' in the heart of Frankfurt's museum mile. The vision of mak.frankfurt as piazza could be

seen in nearly every aspect of the museum's activities.

The mak.frankfurt strategy began with the ticket¹⁰. The museum was open daily until 8 p.m., and every ticket was valid for one month from the date of purchase, transferable, and admits a child free. There was a group of specially trained interpretive staff – the so-called 'mak.crew' – ready to provide information, explanation, or even tours on demand. On every floor there were reading tables stocked with books, magazines, newspapers, and Internet access. There were small ladders to help children look into the taller vitrines. All the museum's wall texts are in German and in English – and in the East Asian collection, also in Japanese and Chinese. The majority of Frankfurt's non-German population are Turkish, and in mak.frankfurt's Islamic collection the texts are also in Turkish and Arabic – a first for Germany. In May 2001, mak.frankfurt hosted a collection of Ottoman calligraphy, and over 25.000 visitors – most of them Turks – came to the museum for the first time. With the museum's partner the Nassauische Heimstätte (the local social housing developer) we developed special programmes in the museum for Turkish-speaking visitors, and outreach programmes that encouraged Turkish tenants to create their own exhibitions in the museum. The museum also placed an emphasis on children and families, and special children's labelling was implemented throughout the museum. Special hands-on activities were mixed in with the museum's traditional collections, and ladders allowed small children to look into tall vitrines.

Many vitrines are designed with integral bench seating. The museum supported wireless Internet throughout, which meant you could wander around with a laptop (available from the info counter) and access in-depth information about museum object – whilst sitting beside the object! With Nokia's help the museum visitors could play a discovery quiz in the museum using any WAP-enabled mobile 'phone – in German, English or Turkish. The museum's 'mak.3' shop was not just a shop – it was an integral part of our education programme. The objects in the shop have interpretive labels – and we sold objects that can be found in our collections and exhibitions. Even the museum bistro was not just a bistro – it was part of the museum¹¹, with objects from our collections on display. It was open until midnight, offered over 50 wines by the glass, and featured designer porcelain and glasses – after all, in a museum of applied art, you have to be able to see the collection in action! And of course there are chairs everywhere.

Throughout the museum there are chairs – lightweight and elegant portable stools that can be picked up, carried, and left. The configurations in which they are left told a story of how people stop to chat, to talk with one another, to discuss what they have seen.

At first glance, the issue of chairs may seem irrelevant to the experiment outlined above. On the contrary, chairs are at the heart of the museum enterprise. Normally we find chairs where we think it is appropriate to sit – in waiting rooms, in restaurants, in libraries. But what about museums? What is appropriate behaviour in the museum? Looking at most museums, the prevailing assumption seems to be that museums are places for looking at things, and that the relatively short period spent looking at any particular object, combined with the large number of objects to look at, means that museums are places for standing, not sitting. Sitting is of course allowed, but only grudgingly as a concession to those with weak backs and weak moral fibre, unable to soldier on for two hours of uninterrupted cultural ecstasy. It is not generally known that some of the first visitor studies, conducted at the beginning of the last century, were addressing the problem of so-called ‘museum fatigue’¹². If we expect the museum experience to be defined by a series of small epiphanies of short duration, then it is neither inconsistent nor surprising that we expect the museum visitor to be in a state of almost perpetual motion, not dissimilar to a bumblebee flitting from flower to flower. Nor is it surprising that we create museum spaces as long series of passages, along which the visitor can flit, or shuffle, depending on the crowds.

But what if we don’t think that the museum experience is defined by periods of relatively short engagement, one-on-one, with objects of putative desire? What if we believe that the museum experience is marked by affective moments with others – with friends, parents, grandparents, classmates? What if the binome of viewer and artwork is in fact, as Michael Baxandall argues, a triangle that includes others¹³? What if we believe that the museum is a privileged site for informal learning, not the cognitive learning of the classroom, but the realisation that, as Jonathan Miller says ‘the life of the mind is a pleasure’? If we believe that these moments tend to be sustained, social, marked by discussion and exchange – in short, take time – then the chairless museum suddenly begins to look slightly misguided. Kenneth Hudson puts it quite succinctly. He writes ‘I believe that the real barrier too museums developing in a balanced and

creative way is their tradition of pedestrianism.¹⁴ The mak.frankfurt experiment is as much about sitting on chairs as it is about displaying chairs.

ARE MUSEUMS THE KEY TO AN URBAN RENAISSANCE?

Since the 60s, new museum building has been an integral part of the urban development strategy of cities throughout the world. From Basel to Bilbao, from Frankfurt to San Francisco, new buildings by famous architects have been seen as a way of revitalising older museums or making space for new collections. Many – the so-called Kunsthalle – have been built expressly to house blockbuster temporary exhibitions, while nearly all new building includes large areas dedicated to temporary displays. Many of the new buildings are recognised as architectural masterpieces – from Louis I. Kahn’s Kimbell Art Gallery in Fort Worth and Renzo Piano’s Pompidou Centre, to Frankfurt’s Museum für angewandte Kunst (formerly Kunsthandwerk) by Richard Meier, Stuttgart’s Staatsgalerie by James Stirling, Piano’s De Menil Collection and Beyeler Foundation, Gehry’s Bilbao. Due to their striking architecture, the new buildings also draw huge numbers of visitors – often hundreds of thousands per year – visitors whose main interest is in the building’s architecture, not necessarily the museum’s collections.

What is clear, however, is that with certain notable exceptions such as the Centre Pompidou, the visitor numbers generated by new buildings start to drop off after the third year – the well-documented ‘S’-curve, and in the case of some museums, the drop in visitor numbers can be vertiginous¹⁵. At the same time, new buildings often bring substantially increased operating costs in terms of overhead, maintenance, and staff. Increased operating costs combined with drastically reduced visitor revenue can injure – or even kill – a new institution¹⁶, and paralyse an older one¹⁷. Building new museums in and of itself is not the answer to revitalising a city or a neighbourhood. A new museum building will bring visitors to an area on a one-time basis, generating interest that generally peaks after three years. If the operational costs of the museum are not adequately funded in the long term, museum building is urban suicide. Even the Bilbao effect – once a byword for urban regeneration – will soon be a symbol of the failure of short term urban planning. The once full flights are even now fewer, cancelled for lack

of interest in seeing the same exhibitions that the international visitor has already seen in New York, Berlin or Venice. Those who wished to see Gehry's architectural wonder have largely done so. What will remain is a forlorn outpost of the McGuggenheim, its titanium petals rusting in the Spanish sun, its exhibition halls empty.

Even mak.frankfurt is an example of the short-sightedness of museum building without considering its long term sustainability. For the first few years, the Museum für Kunsthandwerk (as it was called from 1935 – 2000) basked in the sun of public attention due to its world-renowned Richard Meier architecture. The visitors came in droves, from both Frankfurt and abroad, largely to see the new building - an architectural landmark. The Director responsible for guiding Meier's work retired in 1987. By 1989, with the only change being in the form of temporary exhibitions, visitor numbers had fallen predictably (following the so-called 'S'-curve), although the quality of the Museum's exhibitions continued to draw a loyal local following. Unfortunately, in 1994, the City began to feel the pinch of their generous support of the cultural sector (at its peak, Frankfurt's cultural budget exceeded the cultural budget for all of Holland). Abruptly the money supply was turned off. Exhibition projects went unfunded, positions went unfilled, building maintenance went undone. For the first time, Frankfurt's museums had to charge admission, but this brought in no more than 10% of the amount slashed from the budget, and as a consequence the visitor numbers halved again. To this date, the museum has no City budget for exhibitions, education, publications, or publicity. Not surprisingly, given the double impact of diminishing value and increased prices, visitor numbers plummeted.

BETTER MUSEUMS – NOT NEW MUSEUMS

As opposed to those who claim that new museum building is the secret to economic and urban renewal, I would argue that the opposite is in fact true. The market for new museums – at least as currently defined – is over saturated, and the resulting bubble is unsustainable and set to collapse. In particular, by overbuilding, the museum is forced to over-trade, thereby compromising its institutional mission. In order to pay the costs of maintaining expensive buildings with a large staff, the museum is forced to move away

from its traditional role as an essential supplement to formal education. Instead, to appeal to new audiences, it must either become a provider of remedial education, or compete in the leisure sector against films, television and events. On the one hand, providing remedial education entails greatly increased costs, without a convincing increase in effectiveness, calling into question the museum's claim to be supported as part of the educational system. On the other hand, if educational goals are sacrificed in order to compete as entertainment with other 'leisure activities', the museum's high operating costs make it uncompetitive, and the museum is only saved from bankruptcy by continuous infusions of tax revenue. The current demographic and political trends would suggest that this form of support – and hence the museum itself – is not sustainable in its current form. The answer would seem to lie in a freeze on new museum building, a consolidation of existing institutions, and a return to the museum's core values. Key among these values is the museum's mission to be a public informal learning environment.

Kenneth Hudson put the importance of the museum's public mission more bluntly. 'Nowadays, if museums do not exist mainly for the benefit of the visitors who go there, they are not doing their job. A museum that believes its justification to exist is based only or mainly on its ability to provide a living for the people who work there has no right to exist under today's conditions.'¹⁸ Kenneth Hudson was intolerant of museums that shamelessly took advantage the generosity of the public purse by not taking seriously their mission to serve the public. A museum had to be paid for – and money didn't just fall from the sky. 'A museum has to have money in order to survive. And where is that money going to come from? The money will come, directly or indirectly, from the people who come to see the museums.'¹⁹ Or put another way, 'It comes from the taxes paid by poor widows'²⁰. A museum that only displays its treasures, but cannot make them relevant to its visitors, cannot justify its existence. Display is not enough – the museum must excite minds to engage with the world they live in.

Since the 60s the overall political landscape – especially in the United States – has shifted dramatically to the Right. In the museum field, this can be seen in the trend towards unreflectively importing business models from the private sector. This means that the museum sector is increasingly described as part of the 'leisure industry', that

informal education is increasing presented as ‘edutainment’ (just as the news has become ‘infotainment’, with ‘reality shows’ and re-enacted events). Museums are told they must compete in the marketplace with other leisure activities such as baseball games, theme parks, visits to the shopping mall and performances of light opera. Museums are exhorted to codify and imitate ‘best practice’, and the diminishing subsidy from the public purse is measured by ‘performance indicators’, ‘value for money’ ‘balanced scorecards’ and ‘best value’. As McGuigan noted in 1996, ‘the public sector has been required increasingly to function pseudo-capitalistically, which is not only an organisational phenomenon but a deeply imbibed ideological phenomenon and one which has had enormous impact on cultural agencies... and the network of arts-subsidising bodies’.

Most pernicious among the rhetorical shifts is that museums are now encouraged to treat their visitors as ‘clients’. This innocuous change masks a far deeper shift towards a society in which our agency is defined increasingly in terms of choices we make as consumers – and not as social and political actors empowered to democratically determine the conditions under which we live together, and co-incidentally, produce, distribute and consume. As McCullough says looking back to the transformations wrought by the Industrial Revolution, ‘just as artisans had become labourers, now citizens became mere consumers.’ ‘I shop therefore I am’, says Barbara Kruger, but surely citizens are more than merely consumers – and museum users are more than ‘clients’, purchasing an experience. Consumption plays an increasingly important role in contemporary society, a consequence of late industrial economics, but surely the challenge is, on the one hand, to educate a generation of critical consumers. On the other hand, a museum must recognise and encourage a model of citizenship that includes the right to challenge, debate, question, and ultimately restructure the terms of the social contract. The museum is a privileged site for informal learning, potentially an important environment in which one can discover new cultures, test one’s assumptions against the material evidence of the past, explore the differences that stem from different times and places. It is a place where a person can ultimately feel the un-commodified experience of wonder and inspiration while confronting the best expressions of human culture. Although it would be naïve to think that the museum is completely neutral, and that markets, politics and ideology play no part in the museum

experience, nevertheless, facing a Book of Hours, a Vermeer, or a Beuys, one is a long way from being a just a 'satisfied customer'. If the customer doesn't experience epiphany – can she demand her money back? If the user is a client, it is not clear what the museum client is buying, what is being consumed, and what measures one could use to assess its value. Instead, I would argue that museums are not to be seen as sites of consumption at all, but as 'motors of the learning society', whereby the better the learning environment, the more the critical agency of the user is enhanced. In modern America, museums are places to 'empower' the user – not just as a consumer of pre-determined choices, but as an active member of society – as much a generator of experience as a receiver.

WHAT MAKES A MUSEUM WORTH THE WIDOW'S TAXES?

It is completely unrealistic to imagine that the private sector can and will finance the museum entirely. Even in the United States where the number of private museums is far greater than in Europe, it is a rare museum that can survive only from earned revenue and sponsors. In reality, even in the US model, financial sustainability is largely ensured by the tax system (which by giving tax incentives supports a form of self-directed taxation), trust funds, and government grants. Regardless of the degree to which museums are exhorted to adopt private sector business models, few museums are a genuine business, and without the means to generate revenue in excess of costs, cannot be entirely run as one. This inability stems in part from the fact that certain key museum functions (the first three fingers of the museum hand described above) are long term investments that can only be financed by the society as a whole by means of its taxes. As tax revenue is withdrawn, or inadequate provision made to sustain the museum's underlying activities of collection, preservation and study, the remaining two functions – interpretation and exhibition – are not able to generate enough revenue to cover the costs of the museum. Private sector partners can – and will – support museum activities that create value for them in terms of media exposure, brand positioning, and even knowledge and skills transfer, but few firms will invest in the preservation and study of objects for posterity. Museums, like universities and libraries, must be financed in part from the public purse. And like museums and libraries, museums can

only justify using widows' taxes if they are seen first and foremost as an educational resource, and financed as such.

This argument for government support makes a plea for the universal values that museums and similar institutions represent – the acquisition of knowledge, the need to preserve and nurture culture, the necessity of education for a democratic society. These arguments are worthy ones, and convincing in abstract and idealistic terms. They plead the wisdom of investment today in the hopes of realising broad social gains in twenty or more years. As the public purse is squeezed by falling tax revenue (regardless of whether caused by economic or ideological circumstances), governments are increasing driven by short term considerations, in a democratic society rarely extending beyond the current term in office. In order to ensure continued financing, cultural institutions must supplement their usual arguments to the head and the heart with arguments to the pocketbook – in the short term. Not all taxes come from poor widows, in fact, a goodly portion of any city's tax revenue comes from business. Museums aren't just good in themselves, they are good for business, and business is good for taxes.

The short term argument for sustained support of the cultural sector can be summarised as follows. Cities and regions compete with other cities and regions to attract new businesses. Every head office that builds an office tower, every firm that locates in Frankfurt, every business that opens a branch office, brings revenue to the City. They bring revenue in the form of direct investment, they bring revenue in the form of taxes, they bring business, and they bring employees. Employees buy houses, pay taxes, and buy groceries. Most importantly perhaps, employees rarely come alone – they come with husbands, wives, families. Attracting new business – and new employees – is not always easy. On the one hand the Internet means that we are seeing a return to 'cottage industry'. With a computer an ISDN line many have chosen to work directly from home – and home can be a villa in Tuscany as easily as a bungalow in the Taunus. On the other hand, young people are returning to the cities, and the major exchanges are still located in world capitals. But the city has to compete to attract and keep the young and mobile. It is easier than ever to move, and cities such as Paris and London have a lot to offer in the way of nightlife, culture, and cuisine.

If a city such as Frankfurt expects to play a role as the centre of European finance, if it hopes to attract new industry to the region, if it hopes to seduce young talent from cities such as London, New York, Paris, or Milan, it must offer something more than a good job. It must offer a vital urban experience to the young, a rich learning environment for families, a wide spectrum of cultural activities for adults. A city needs more than just workplaces, it needs schools, shops, cinemas, theatre – and museums. In the city of the future – and Frankfurt is certainly poised to be such a city – the battleground for talent and investment will be fought on the grounds of amenities – ‘liveability’ – not on the basis of tax breaks or easy access to the sea. And while liveability includes much more than just museums, if museums have the courage and vision to play their part, providing a wide variety of opportunities for children, students, and families to discover and shape the world around them, the vitality of the museum sector can play a decisive role in attracting new investment to a city. The argument for Frankfurt applies equally well to other cities such as Milan, Lyon, Birmingham and Glasgow. Seen in this way, museums are not merely a luxury, icing on the cake of commerce, but an essential ingredient in a city’s offer to investors – and possibly, a city’s ‘sustainable competitive advantage’ in a rapidly changing, innovation-driven society.

The argument for both private and public sector support for museums that truly function as privileged places for informal learning, as multi-cultural ‘piazzas’, as repositories for our common culture past, present and future is a strong one. However, to realise the promise our museums hold out, we must have the courage not to build yet more monuments to political egos, but to concentrate on initiatives that deliver on their educational promises, that serve their existing publics, and most importantly that reach new publics. Only by investing in the institutions we have, will we be able to fully enjoy the return on investment in terms of a society prepared to meet the challenges of change head on with new skills, new knowledge and a deep-rooted passion for learning.

Building a museum through partnerships
Linking audience development strategy to financial planning

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9 January 2001

First published as A new strategic approach to the museum and its relationship to society
in the Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship, 2001, London

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INTRODUCTION: THE MUSEUM DILEMMA

For over ten years, I have been actively concerned with two similar and seemingly related museum phenomena: the relatively low engagement with objects in the museum, and the falling numbers of repeat museum visitors. Both of these phenomena have been remarked upon – with varying degrees of urgency and emphasis – since the early part of the century²¹. However, I am equally troubled by the two most common strategies employed to address these phenomena since the late 60s: the ‘blockbuster’ temporary exhibition, and new museum building – used as a panacea to cure all museum ills. From Thomas Hoving to Thomas Krens, from the V&A to the Tate Modern, museum directors and museums have sought to remedy the museum’s perceived sluggishness by using temporary exhibitions and new buildings to increase visitor numbers. I am concerned, however, that the increased number of visitors only serves to mask the continuing malaise of the museum on the one hand, while undermining the quality of the museum experience for all visitors on the other.

The so-called ‘blockbuster’ exhibition was re-invented in the early 60s by Thomas Hoving at the Met, and refined during the course of the past decades by countless museums around the world. The blockbuster brings together works from museum

collections worldwide, in order to celebrate an artist's oeuvre or present a particular theme. In most cases, due to the large amounts of time and money involved, the exhibition is seen in several museums over the course of a period of time. On the one hand, the success of many (although far from all) temporary exhibitions has been striking. A successful exhibition like the *Effeto Arcimboldo* at the Palazzo Grassi, *Masterpieces of the Barnes Collection* at the Gare d'Orsay, the *Van Gogh* exhibition at National Gallery or the *Vermeer* exhibition at the Mauritshuis can generate hundreds of thousands of visitors in a matter of months. The *Monet in the 20th century* exhibition at the Royal Academy drew such crowds that during the final weeks of the exhibition, the Royal Academy stayed open around the clock.

On the other hand, despite their apparent success, blockbuster exhibitions come at a high price to the museum – and the practice of museum-going. Paradoxically, increased attendance at blockbusters tends to reduce the amount of time visitors spend in the exhibition, and, given the crush of visitors, drastically reduces the possibility to enjoy the masterpieces on display. Moreover, instead of dropping in to a museum, visitors come to treat the museum in the same way they use a cinema – they wait until 'something's on' before making the trip. The even flow of casual visitors is replaced by huge crowds coming in waves after the exhibition opening – the piazza becomes a stadium.

Since the 60s, new museum building has also been an integral part of the urban development strategy of cities throughout the world. From Basel to Bilbao, from Frankfurt to San Francisco, new buildings by famous architects have been seen as a way of revitalising older museums or making space for new collections. Many – the so-called Kunsthalle – have been built expressly to house blockbuster temporary exhibitions, while nearly all new building includes large areas dedicated to temporary displays. Many of the new buildings are recognised as architectural masterpieces – from Louis I. Kahn's Kimbell Art Gallery in Fort Worth and Renzo Piano's Pompidou Centre, to Frankfurt's Museum für angewandte Kunst (formerly Kunsthandwerk) by Richard Meier, Stuttgart's Staatsgalerie by James Stirling, Piano's De Menil Collection and Beyeler Foundation, Gehry's Bilbao. Due to their striking architecture, the new buildings also draw huge numbers of visitors – often

hundreds of thousands per year – visitors whose main interest is in the building’s architecture, not necessarily the museum’s collections.

What is clear, however, is that with certain notable exceptions such as the Centre Pompidou, the visitor numbers generated by new buildings start to drop off after the third year – the well-documented ‘S’-curve, and in the case of some museums, the drop in visitor numbers can be vertiginous²². At the same time, new buildings often bring substantially increased operating costs in terms of overhead, maintenance, and staff. Increased operating costs combined with drastically reduced visitor revenue can injure – or even kill – a new institution²³, and paralyse an older one²⁴.

FROM VISITORS TO USERS

In the late 80s, Canadian anthropologist Drew Ann Wake and I began to experiment with ways in which we could enhance the visitors’ engagement with objects in the museum. Working with museums in Alberta and British Columbia, we developed experimental exhibitions designed to increase visitor engagement – visitors stayed longer, came back more frequently, explored the material further. These exhibitions included *The Body in the Library*, an exhibition of forensic science designed as a murder mystery, *Beyond the Naked Eye*, an exhibition on medical imaging based on real case studies, and *Mine Games*, an exhibition on resource use that challenged visitors to decide whether or not a copper mine should proceed. The overwhelming success of these experiments in reaching new visitors, in holding their attention, and in encouraging them to return, led us to believe that the design strategies traditionally used in museums and science centres was fundamentally flawed.

By 1994, as a consequence of the experiments described above, I began to articulate a full-fledged strategic approach to the museum and its relationship to society. This approach was implemented first at new Metropolis science and technology centre, where I was Head of Design from 1994 – 1998.

One of the most telling criticisms of many earlier science centre exhibits was the little time visitors engaged with them, the relatively low percentage of completion, and the low percentage of exhibits actually engaged with during a typical visit. Clearly something wasn't working²⁵. Part of the solution seemed to lie in redefining what sort of activity should be happening in the first place. Thus instead of looking for 'learning' in terms of observable cognitive gains - a series of facts learned - we had to look for sustained engagement with the activity. Instead of looking at our job as creating 'exhibits' to show visitors scientific principles, we had to look at them as 'supports' that helped structure and sustain interaction between users. This shift entailed two important moves away from the way designers and educators had traditionally looked at their role. First, it meant that our task was to support action (or better, interaction), rather than broadcast facts - we had to become an informal learning environment, not an exhibition. Second, we had to see our visitors as users, which is to say that our success could no longer be measured in terms of numbers of visits, but in terms of repeated, thus sustained, action.

Opened June 4th, 1997, newMetropolis was Europe's newest science centre. But it is important to note from the outset that newMetropolis was not a science centre in the 'traditional' sense. It was not *about* science and technology, nor was its prime goal to transmit information about science and technology. It was conceived as an informal learning environment in which the emphasis is explicitly on developing new skills - such as abstraction, experimentation, collaboration, and systems thinking - that allow users to better deal with the rapid changes caused in large measure by advances in science and technology. It was a place where the human being - in the fullest sense - was at the centre. It was a learner-driven environment conceived explicitly to allow the user to develop new skills to allow her to better deal with the challenges of contemporary society²⁶. newMetropolis received over 450.000 visitors during its first year, won awards for its computer-based interactive exhibits (CeBit 1998), its multi-media (Danish Princes Award 1998), its art installations, and its architecture. Research conducted at newMetropolis has been presented and praised at some of the world's leading educational conferences.

Unfortunately, the museum approach used to develop newMetropolis was not matched by an equally effective financial approach, and despite substantial support from City, State, and private sector, newMetropolis opened with a multi-million-guilder debt due to unforeseen building costs. The crippling debt was a serious problem from the outset, but the urgency of the crisis was exacerbated by the assurances the Directors had made to their financial partners that the operating costs of the new institution would be 100% paid by earned revenue – a foolhardy and ultimately suicidal promise. newMetropolis declared bankruptcy in February 1999, after reducing its staff and services to a complete minimum, and was bailed out in the last minute by a one-time government cash injection of 11 million guilders.

Since January 1999, I have been Director of mak.frankfurt, earlier known as the Museum für Kunsthandwerk. For the first few years, the Museum für Kunsthandwerk basked in the sun of public attention due to its world-renowned Richard Meier architecture. The visitors came in droves, from both Frankfurt and abroad, largely to see the new building - an architectural landmark. The Director responsible for guiding Meier's work retired in 1987. By 1989, with the only change being in the form of temporary exhibitions, visitor numbers had fallen predictably (following the so-called 'S'-curve), although the quality of the Museum's exhibitions continued to draw a loyal following. Unfortunately, in 1994, the City began to feel the pinch of their generous support of the cultural sector (at its peak, Frankfurt's cultural budget exceeded the cultural budget for all of Holland). Abruptly the money supply was turned off. Exhibition projects went unfunded, positions went unfilled, maintenance went undone. For the first time, Frankfurt's museums had to charge admission, but this brought in no more than 10% of the amount slashed from the budget. To this date, the museum has no City budget for exhibitions, education, publications, or publicity. Not surprisingly, given the double impact of diminishing value and increased prices, visitor numbers plummeted.

By 1998, the situation was still serious, albeit stable. Visitor numbers had stayed roughly constant for three years, at less than a third of the first year's heights, and just over half the pre-1994 levels. The Director retired in 1997, and the Senior Curator installed as Acting Director in his place. In July 1998, I was appointed Director, with

the explicit goal of helping to awaken the 'sleeping' museum²⁷, and to restore it to its former vitality. This awakening would be signalled first by increased visitor numbers, and secondly by reduced financial dependence on the City. This process must of course take into account the strengths - and the weaknesses - of the Museum's architecture.

My appointment provided the opportunity to put the theories I had been developing over the past ten years to the test. From the outset, it was clear that we could implement many of the successful strategies we had developed in other institutions almost directly to Frankfurt. However, unlike newMetropolis, where only the visitor strategies had been implemented, the Frankfurt museum allowed me to explore whether a corresponding financial strategy could be developed – a strategy that was consistent with the aims and ambitions of the museum.

First I would like to briefly describe mak.frankfurt and its ambitions to be a 'laboratory for change'. What distinguishes the mak.frankfurt project from nearly all apparently similar projects is the degree to which every aspect of the renovation is linked to an explicit ambition to experiment with a completely different relationship between the museum and the society in which it is embedded. This new relationship suggests a model to bring the museum (and if the experiment is a success, other museums as well) – much closer to its original mission.

As of January 200 there is a new name outside the museum – the Museum für Angewandte Kunst (Applied Art) – mak.frankfurt. This is not just a fashionable change of clothes to dress up an old reality. The new name means a new direction – with a broader mission, a new emphasis on families and young people, and an ambition to become a new 'piazza' in a multicultural city. From 1935 to 1999 the museum was called the Museum für Kunsthandwerk – the Craft Museum. But the meaning of craft had always been too narrow to properly describe the museum's collections – particularly of Asian and Islamic art, and it had also become too narrow to encompass the applied arts of the 20th century – notably the industrial design and digital appliances that are shaping our lives. The new name was no caprice – it was a necessity. The new identity is also an important signal. mak.frankfurt is not a

traditional museum any longer – and its identity as *mak* eclipses the importance of its identity as ‘museum’, ‘applied’, or ‘art’. *mak.frankfurt* is *mak.frankfurt*, and must take on a meaning uniquely its own.

If *mak.frankfurt* is to become a ‘piazza’, as part of its commitment to increasing the number and variety of museum users, it must offer facilities that *can* be used – rather than just visited. This means enhancing the features of the museum that are currently used – the café/restaurant, playground, the neighbouring park – and adding new facilities that encourage repeat use, such as a shop, reading tables, portable stools, and ladders for children to see into high vitrines. It also means being open when people want to visit, and making an effort to give access to as broad an audience as possible. To this end the museum is now open daily (except Mondays) until 20.00, and we have brought together a group of young art history students – the so-called ‘*mak.crew*’ – to give information and tours on demand. The museum has a new bistro/restaurant, ‘Emma Metzler’, open ‘till midnight, with 55 open wines available. The museum also has a new shop, *mak.3*, which offers the visitor a chance to buy objects that are found in our collections – at least in our design collection! The visitor's opinion about a Moretti champagne flute is perhaps culturally relevant when looking at it behind the forbidding glass of a museum vitrine – but critical when looking at it with a price tag of DM 250 attached. Is it really *that* beautiful? Is it worth it? The shop is one of the museum’s prime sites for informal learning.

If the museum is to play a role as a new learning platform, it must have new facilities. *mak.frankfurt* opened its doors in May 2000 with the Arthur Andersen Computer Lab, the JP Morgan *lern.lab*, and the Nokia Lab. And these facilities have to be used. In addition to our traditional workshops in papermaking and ceramics, we are working with teachers to develop their own digital learning programmes (*Fliegende Klassenzimmer*), with older people to teach them how to use the Internet (*webgrannies*), with children to translate their own movement into LEGO robots (*ROBO.mak*). The museum now hosts a wide range of programmes including interactive theatre tours, wine tastings, fashion shows, and Internet auctions. The museum has now re-installed its permanent collections, and added a permanent collection of design for the first time in the museum’s history – a collection that

includes the first acquisitions for the museum's collection of the applied art of the 21st century, so-called 'digital craft'. As a practical starting point, all the museum's wall texts are in both German and English – and sometimes other languages as well. And information does not just mean text on the wall. It also means reading tables throughout the museum – reading tables with not only books and magazines, but Internet access. It means wireless access to the new mak.frankfurt website in English and German – anywhere in the museum.

In all respects, the museum is more accessible, more user-friendly, more interactive. 'How can a museum with objects in glass cases be interactive?' you might ask.

Let me give you a concrete example. In my office is a vitrine, specially designed for the Richard Meier monument of which I am steward. In the vitrine is a selection of beautiful glasses, from a 16th century Venetian masterpiece to a set of Boris Sipek glasses. I often use the vitrine to test new text panels – after all we are not an interactive science centre! I have one text panel with the title 'Glasses through the century'. It is amusing, informative, and written in a popular style. Visitors to my office often stop to read it, and chuckle at the humour. I also have another text panel, with another title. This title reads 'One of these glasses is a fake'. The difference in behaviour is striking – often visitors stand for ages closely inspecting the glasses. Nor is the question trivial – after all, what is a fake glass anyway? All that has changed is the direction of the learning process – from top-down, to bottom-up. Interactivity is in the mind – not just in the hands. Of course our museums remain treasure houses of interesting and wonderful objects - objects that can be enjoyed, inspected, compared, and discussed. Texts can guide us through the history of our material culture, or help us look critically at the museum's objects - at provenance, style, composition, sources. Our eyes are sharpened by the process of looking. By honing our critical faculties the museum is indeed 'an institution for the prevention of blindness.'

FROM SPONSORS TO PARTNERS

My experience in Amsterdam – where I had to look on helplessly as the institution’s Director and Board drove the centre into bankruptcy – forced me to reflect seriously on the ‘sustainability’ of the museum, not just the adequacy of its exhibits. It was clear that the desired visitor experience – longer engagement, repeat use – could only succeed if it were matched by an equally coherent strategy for long-term financial sustainability. In other words, to really understand a museum and its visitor strategy, it was not enough to focus on the museum’s content – its educational and cultural claims – we had to ‘follow the money’ to get a true picture of the museum’s beliefs. Moreover, a museum wherein the philosophy that informed its content was in tension with the structure of its funding, was inevitably bound to encounter serious problems.

As argued above, most museums’ visitor strategy is built on the foundations of one-time visits to new buildings, enhanced by further one-time visits to temporary exhibitions. Not surprisingly, traditional museum financial strategy also revolves around capital campaigns to raise funds for new buildings, and the revenues (or losses) generated by temporary exhibitions. In addition, most museums, including mak.frankfurt, depend in part on substantial subsidies from the public purse. This strategy leaves museums extremely vulnerable in almost every regard. Falling visitor revenue, competition for donations, and reduced government subsidies all threaten to upset the delicately balanced museum budget. In the cases where the museum is almost entirely dependent on a single source of income – in our case the City of Frankfurt – this means that the museum’s plans are inextricably linked to the rhythms of the City’s politics. When I began my work in Frankfurt, approximately 95% of the museum’s budget came from the City, supplemented by a trickle of visitor income and the occasional donation.

The relaunch described above, as well as the new programmes and facilities, required a substantial injection of cash. How could we fulfil our ambitious plans when the City had already determined the level of our subsidy for the next two years? To meet this challenge we were obliged to think deeply about the ways in which a public institution can be sustained, developed, and protected from unwelcome fluctuations in income. Due to the City’s policy of offering free entry every Wednesday, visitor income has never played the important role it does in some museums. The City’s

subsidy is fixed and inflexible, except in the case of emergency funding for building maintenance.

To look for an answer, I looked to the claims we had made as we developed the visitor strategy for newMetropolis and implemented at mak.frankfurt, in particular the desire to encourage repeat use, not single visits. In financial terms, what constitutes a one-time visitor? Clearly, a sponsor. Sponsors provide one-time cash in return for the benefits of being associated with a one-time exhibition. If the exhibition is a success, the sponsor is happy, if the exhibition is a failure, the sponsor is not. In any event, the money is spent. What then would a financial user be? The answer is, a partner. Partners provide financial support over a longer period of time, and enjoy the benefits of developing projects which meet both the aims of the museum and those of the partner. Longer-term partnerships allow both partners to evaluate the programme as it develops, and steer it more accurately, thereby ensuring greater accountability for the partner's investment.

This thought experiment led to the formulation of a rather shocking claim: the museum doesn't want any more sponsors – it wants partners. This mirrors exactly the equally shocking claim I often make that the museum doesn't want any more visitors – it wants users. For the first time in my experience, the same strategy that informs the development of museum content also informs the development of museum financing. The strategy goes far beyond partnerships – partnerships are an expression of the strategy. The strategy suggests that the long-term financial sustainability of the museum depends for the most part on use-generated income, rather than one-time investments. This means that the relationship to all stakeholders should be defined and contracted in terms of use, and the effectiveness of the use regularly evaluated. The restaurant/café is a source of user revenue, as are the shop, the parking lot, and the rental of the museum's facilities for events and receptions. Programmes and activities generate revenue based on use. To encourage users rather than one-time visitors, a full-price ticket now admits one child free – and is valid for an entire month. And, once the museum develops a reputation for being a lively piazza with frequently-changing exhibitions, visitor revenue will in effect be user revenue. Even the City's subsidy can be seen as use – and be linked to functions the City wishes the

museum to fulfil – collecting new objects, maintaining the City’s existing collections, conducting research.

Returning to the idea of partnership, as an essential ingredient in a sustainable financial strategy based on use, I would like to use the example of our first partner, Nokia, to illustrate the strength of the concept.

A key difference between sponsorship and partnership is that partnerships – being long-term relationships – are based on shared values. It is no longer a case of taking the money and running, as with one-time sponsorships. The partner and the museum must share certain core values if they are to work together to develop programmes and products without compromising the museum’s privileged position in society on the one hand, nor the partner’s interests on the other. As a partnership means a regular contribution to specified programmes for three years, it is important for the museum to take the lead in selecting partners that it feels would be sympathetic to the museum’s ambitions. In the case of mak.frankfurt, with its strong emphasis on the learning society, contemporary design, and digital technology, this means carefully looking at companies positioning in the market. Happily, Nokia is known for ‘connecting people’ – what could be a better fit for a museum that positions itself as a new ‘piazza’? Moreover, Nokia is the world’s leader in mobile communications – what could be a better fit with the museum’s ambition to be a museum of the 21st century?

Our discussions with Nokia ripened very quickly, and Nokia expressed its interest to become a partner in our project ‘Digital Craft’. ‘Digital Craft’ is a three-year research project, conceived in collaboration with Frankfurt’s Institut für neue medien (INM), that has as its goal to define a museum approach to what can only be described as the applied arts of the next century - digital media. The Digital Craft project has two distinct parts: ‘using digital craft’ as a means of supporting users of the museum (internal and external), and ‘defining digital craft’, a research project to provide the theoretical basis for a museum strategy, culminating in a collection, public exhibitions, a curator, and plans for further research. The first part, ‘Using Digital Craft’, is a prerequisite of the second, as it creates the

opportunity to conduct research with visitors in the museum. It also creates an entirely different kind of museum and museum interaction.

Imagine the following. On a sunny Sunday morning in June, a young girl and her grandfather arrive at the Museum für Angewandte Kunst. She presents herself at the information desk and asks for a 'Digital Picnic' basket – a tangerine-coloured Apple iBook. They take the iBook with them and wander through the collections, stopping to log on to the 'Digital Picnic' site on the museum's homepage, that offers games, stories, and activities based on the museum's collections of tea sets, tableware, and teacups. The young girl is proud to be able to show her Grandpa how to surf the Internet – and in turn, he enjoys telling his granddaughter about picnics past, the tableware, the special tablecloths, the ways in which things were used long before she was born. 'You mean you didn't even have computers then?' She asks, and her grandfather just smiles...

The 'Digital Picnic' is only one of the ways in which the museum is preparing to play its part in what Nokia calls the 'mobile information society'. The museum now has 'reading tables' throughout the museum, where visitors can browse through newspapers, magazines, and books – and access the Internet. The museum's own website provides a convenient way to link to related sites – other museums, information about applied arts, as well as to the sites of museum partners. Another experimental programme supported by Nokia – DoWAP – is the use of WAP mobile phones to access bilingual information about the objects in the museum's collection – the first such use of WAP technology in Europe! After all, a wander through the museum should be like a walk through the park – but unlike the trees, new technologies can make the objects talk!

Putting digital technology into the hands of museum users is just the first step to interpreting the role of digital artefacts in today's society. The digital arts are supposed to support the traditional and make them accessible. We have wireless Internet in the whole museum. So you can walk through the rooms with an i-Book and sit down in front of an illustrated 16th century Nara Ehon picture book which is in a display case and must not be touched. Only the first page is open in the display

case but you can find the others on the net—we have put them there. You can read all the text, including translations just by logging onto our website (with your wireless laptop). The virtual world supports the real world, both complement each other.

In December 2000, Nokia launched the ‘Nokia Lab’ where, teenagers use the museum’s computers to evaluate the latest computer games – and to help pick the best games and websites for the museum’s ‘digital craft’ collections. The best of the young computer experts will be encouraged to work with the museum on a longer-term basis, forming the core of a volunteer crew that will help museum visitors of all ages learn the skills of surfing the Internet or making their own website. By the time they are in their teens, many young people have already far outstripped the possibilities of merely playing with computers – they want to get inside and tinker with them. The interactive programme [hack@mak](#) let’s would-be programmers tinker to their heart’s delight – and makes ‘hacking’ a positive learning experience. The Nokia Lab is also home to [puellae@net](#), a programme aimed at encouraging teenaged girls to develop digital skills.

What does the future of the Nokia partnership hold? The Nokia Lab is a success, and the Digital Craft project is attracting international attention. We have already started work with Kiasma in Helsinki, and are looking at the possibilities of implementing a museum-wide information system based on mobile phones, as well as linking the Nokia Lab to a similar lab in Kiasma in real time.

Since May 1999, when we first discussed the partnership in Digital Craft with Nokia, the partnership model has become a mainstay of the museum’s activities. We now have ten museum partners, including Sun, Apple, Deutsche Telekom, JP Morgan Chase, Braun, and the FAZ, and are in discussions with several more. Partnership revenue now accounts for nearly 20% of the museum’s annual budget, and over half of the museum’s non-City revenue. This has the advantage of making the museum less dependent on City funds, and giving the museum greater autonomy to develop new programmes and activities to reach new target groups and address new issues.

Without any exaggeration, partnership is at the heart of the museum’s ability to deliver on its claim to be a ‘motor of the learning society’. Where do we go from here? The

next step is to convince the City – in the spirit of a true partnership – that the City ‘matches’ the partner revenue with an equal amount of City revenue, thus creating a true ‘public-private partnership.’

As you can see from the above, mak.frankfurt is an experiment in the truest sense. It is committed to exploring new ways to create value for the society in which it is embedded – and for the ‘new economy’ into which its next generation of users are growing. It is committed to finding a sustainable financial model which ensures its long-term growth – and its long-term independence – as an indispensable feature on the educational and cultural landscape. As long as it can continue to create value for its users – and for its partners – the experiment remains a valuable one, from which lessons can be learned for museums throughout Europe.

¹ Joseph Veach Noble, *Museum Manifesto*, address to the American Association of Museums, 1970

² The author resigned his position as Director of mak.frankfurt at the end of 2002. The remarks made about the nature of the museum’s programmes and their reception applies only to the period 1999 – 2002. Under the new direction since May 2003, the museum’s programmes, positioning and performance no longer correspond to those described in this paper.

³ Since the time of writing, the City of Frankfurt’s fortunes have turned, and the City is struggling to reduce a massive deficit, thus making it impossible to look at innovative ways to support its near bankrupt cultural institutions.

⁴ Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985

⁵ Nelson Goodman, 1980, address to the American Museums Association

⁶ See the accompanying book, Jonathan Miller, *On Reflection*, National Gallery Publications, London, 1998

⁷ Neil McGregor, *The Image of Christ*, National Gallery Publications, London, 2000

⁸ Kenneth Hudson (1916 – 1999). During the course of his long career Hudson authored over 50 books (including the ‘The Social History of Museums’ and ‘Museums of Influence’⁸), and was a pioneer in championing the cause of industrial archaeology. He lectured extensively, and despite his natural suspicion of large organisations, advised both ICOM and UNESCO. He helped found in 1977 – the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA), and later, the European Museum Forum. The award and the forum gave Kenneth a platform from which he could promote and recognise what he considered best museum practice.

⁹ op.cit.

¹⁰ For a complete description of the mak.frankfurt experiment to date, see *Laboratory for Change*, Alliage No. 44/automne 2001, and *A New Strategic Approach to the Museum and its Relationship to Society*, *The Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, Fall 2001

¹¹ see *Salon of the future*, mak.frankfurt, Frankfurt, 2000

¹² B. Gilman, *Museum Fatigue*, *Scientific Monthly*, 1916 2: pp. 62-74

¹³ in Karp and Levine, *Exhibiting Cultures*, Smithsonian, Washington, 1990

¹⁴ Kenneth Hudson, *The Right and Wrong Road for Museums*, 1995

¹⁵ For instance at the Rotterdam Kunsthalle

¹⁶ For instance the Discovery Centre in Baltimore, which closed after a year due to low attendance

¹⁷ For instance Frankfurt’s Museum für Kunsthandwerk, which saw visitor numbers of over 350.000 in 1986 fall to a more or less stable base of 85.000 by 1996

¹⁸ Kenneth Hudson, op.cit

¹⁹ Kenneth Hudson, op.cit

²⁰ Kenneth Hudson, op.cit

²¹ Schiele, B. and Samson, D. *L'évaluation muséale: publics et expositions*, Paris: Expomedia; 1989

²² For instance at the Rotterdam Kunsthalle

²³ For instance the Discovery Centre in Baltimore, which closed after a year due to low attendance

²⁴ For instance Frankfurt's Museum für Kunsthandwerk, which saw visitor numbers of over 350.000 in 1986 fall to a more or less stable base of 85.000 by 1996

²⁵ A biting critique can be found in Shortland, M. No business like show business Nature Vol. 328, 1987

²⁶ For a comprehensive history of newMetropolis, see Bradburne, J. La problématique d'une création - newMetropolis in Vers les musées du XXIe siècle - La Révolution de la Muséologie des Sciences Nouvelles perspectives américaines, européennes et australiennes ed. Bernard Schiele, Presses Universitaires de Lyon: Lyon; 1997

²⁷ a common and diplomatic expression applied often to the Museum in recent years