Capitalising Experience: Museums and Entrepreneurship

Deadline: May 31, 2021

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Museums are directly affected by neo-liberal policies and market economy. Cutbacks in government spending and privatisation press for the redefinition of museums as financially competitive enterprises; and marketing, visitor satisfaction and donor-driven experience take centre stage. Often described as a “no alternative” condition, entrepreneurship has become a soft power device that reshapes museum identities, as well as an adversary. It poses aesthetic, ontological and ethical questions regarding the production, marketing and offer of art and culture; as well as regarding the status and validity of history, identity and knowledge. Affected by this “entrepreneurial turn”, museums shift their discourse on accessibility, diversity and inclusivity. What is more, this discourse has to adapt to the critical questions that arise regarding the future of museums in a post-COVID world.

Museums are called to stir away from grand narratives and decentralise interpretation in favour of multiple viewpoints, fluid encounters and an experience akin to browsing in the day and age of internet-mediated social interaction. Theme-based exhibition designs are put forward by cohorts of architects, curators-auteurs, industry sponsors and multimedia experts; learning becomes branded, and the dramaturgy of space is utilised as a marketing device to attract not only visitors but also a new form of spectatorship: the followers. Such shifts towards entertainment and activities that are social-media friendly and marketable to the widest possible audiences can affect the cognitive value, and importance, of the museum visit.

We thus need to scrutinise the benefits and limitations of different types of exhibition layouts; how well different experts coordinate their input in a well-rounded museum visit; and the extent to which important discussions on the development of ideas are sidelined in favour of marketability. While audiences should be encouraged to engage with museum collections through experience, it doesn’t follow that museums should relinquish their function as sites of learning—nor their responsibility. Likewise, we need to evaluate the extent to which institutional preference for oversimplified information, open-ended questions and do-it-yourself interpretations responds constructively to demands for accessibility, diversity and inclusion, as well as the type of knowledge production this leads to. False “democratisation” of participation might result in an elitist holding back of knowledge and mask institutional practices of selection, framing and exclusion that continue to create spatial narratives and shape viewer experience and understanding.

Understanding the role and impact of entrepreneurship on institutional practices and priorities is a fundamental challenge for the future of museums. Casting a critical eye on contemporary museum trends, challenges and problematics, especially as developed in our post-pandemic condition,

this edited collection asks: How do entrepreneurial practices and marketing discourse affect the ways in which museums are conceptualised, organised and experienced?

We are particularly interested in theoretical evaluations, critical perspectives and case study comparison and analysis that explore entrepreneurship in relation to exhibition design and architecture; knowledge and narratives; and public engagement and education.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:
- entrepreneurship, curatorial intent and dramaturgy
- exhibition design, architectural discourses and the staging of cultural heritage
- entrepreneurship, (contemporary) art and culture: production, access, mediation
- market strategies, politics of display and the exhibition of knowledge
- institutional framing, narrative models and interpretation, especially in relation to historicity, tradition, identity and processes of decolonisation
- (false) democratisation, visitor engagement, satisfaction and the impact on learning
- responses and challenges for museum education: from knowledge distribution to knowledge economy and networking
- museum policies, entrepreneurship and post-pandemic challenges

We invite contributions of 7000-9000 words, including footnotes. If you would like to be considered, please send a chapter proposal, no longer than 300 words, and a short bio note by 31 May 2021 to the editors Dr Eve Kalyva (e.m.kalyva@uva.nl), Dr Pamela Bianchi (pamelabianchi1@gmail.com) and Dr Iro Katsaridou (akatsaridou@culture.gr).

Proposals will be selected by 30 June 2021 and draft chapters expected by December 2021.

Reference:

CFP: Capitalising Experience: Museums and Entrepreneurship. In: ArtHist.net, Feb 14, 2021 (accessed Nov 29, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/33405>.