



Mapping the Research on Museums and the Public Sphere: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Approach — A scoping review methodology is used to provide a knowledge synthesis of the museum–public sphere literature. This approach is instrumental for researching multidisciplinary, fragmented, or underdeveloped research fields. Reviews can help identify otherwise easily overlooked gaps in the research literature and are an essential tool.

Purpose — In museum research, museums are held as vital in maintaining the public sphere. This scoping review takes stock of the present status of museum–public sphere research by providing an overview of the existing literature as a point of departure for future research. In short, it maps the research aims, theoretical concepts, research methods, and findings within the field and identifies research gaps.

Findings — Overwhelmingly, the published literature consists of case studies, some of which are theoretically ambitious. Still, cases are selected without explicit goals regarding analytical or theoretical generalization, and the studies are not placed within a theory-building framework. Moreover, the museum–public sphere research primarily focuses on museums in the core Anglosphere countries and is conducted by researchers affiliated with institutions in those countries. The museum–community relationship is a common research theme addressing engagement with the public through either visitor participation or community participation.

Originality — This is the first published scoping review or systematically conducted review and knowledge synthesis of the museum–public sphere research literature to our knowledge. The article finds and discusses a range of research gaps that need to be addressed theoretically and empirically

Keywords Museum; Research, LAM, GLAM, Libraries, Museums, Archives, Public sphere, Curation, Cultural policy, Policy, Scoping review

1. Introduction

Document digitization and digital communication media have been seen as threats to the current public sphere infrastructure, undermining libraries, archives, and museums (LAM institutions), and media outlets. Among the three LAM institutional types, museums seem to be the least affected by digitalization. A survey of six European countries found that museums are significantly more visited physically (in person) than libraries and archives, while libraries and especially archives are more frequently visited through digital media (Vårheim *et al.*, 2020).

In museum research, museums are held as vital in maintaining the public sphere (Barrett, 2011). The primary goal of public sphere institutions is to be an arena for the freest possible discussion and formation of public opinion (Habermas, 1989; Habermas *et al.*, 1974)—the cornerstone of the public sphere and democratic government. Museum representations of histories and identities are often contested. This occurs even as recent events show the significance of questions of justice and representation in the public sphere: e.g., the protests racism that took place in many countries in the wake of the police killing

of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, including removals of public monuments and expressions of anger and strong feelings of injustice among underprivileged, ethnic, and social groups.

Given the necessity of a functioning public sphere for liberal democratic government, knowledge of the role of the democratic infrastructure and institutions supporting the public sphere is paramount. However, a preliminary search of the Web of Science and Scopus showed no current or underway systematic reviews or scoping reviews on museums and the public sphere, and primary research articles were found. This indicates the need for a review of the existing studies on the museums–public sphere relationship.

1.1. Research aims

We carried out a scoping review to synthesize the knowledge and identify research gaps in the literature on museums' role in the public sphere. The research objective is to take stock of the present status of museum–public sphere research by offering an overview of the literature as a point of departure for future research. We map the research aims, theoretical concepts, research methods, and findings of previous studies. By identifying the research topics, especially those that need further attention, both conceptually and empirically, this article contributes to and inspires theory development on museums' role in the public sphere.

1.2. Research questions

Mapping museum–public sphere research means asking how the literature describes museums as institutions of the public sphere. To this end, we address the following five research questions (RQ's):

RQ1: What are the themes and issues addressed in museum–public sphere studies?

RQ2: What do the studies find?

RQ3: What are the theoretical frameworks and methods used in museum–public sphere research?

RQ4: What types of studies, theoretical articles, or empirical studies have been conducted more frequently?

RQ5: What are the paths for future museum–public sphere research as identified in the literature?

2. Methods

A “systematic review” of research studies has been held as the method of knowledge synthesis. This approach employs formalized and rigorous scientific methods and is comprehensive, fair and unbiased, transparent, and replicable (Dixon-Woods *et al.*, 2006). However, what has been understood as a systematic review is but one type of systematic knowledge synthesis (Munn *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, a whole range of systematic literature review approaches exists, and the appropriate choice of method is related to the review objectives and research questions for study (Gough, 2015; Munn *et al.*, 2018; Snilstveit *et al.*, 2012). Among these approaches, the scoping review (or “systematic scoping review”) comprehensively maps the variety of knowledge within a given research field or the use of a specific theoretical concept, and it identifies knowledge gaps (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). The aim is to systematically explore and map the literature, in contrast to systematic reviews, which pose much more specific research questions (Dixon-Woods, 2011; Munn *et al.*, 2018), for example, appraising the effects of treatments for gonarthrosis (osteoarthritis of the knee) compared to researching the use of the concept of “meeting places” in LAM research. A scoping review aims to provide systematic research-based input to the development of research on a particular topic. It differs from the traditional literature review's primary reliance on the review author's pre-existing knowledge of the field and research interests (Dixon-Woods, 2011; Munn *et al.*, 2018). Systematic reviews typically

evaluate research results and outcomes, such as the usefulness and applicability of the findings for informing professional practice and user groups (e.g., patients).

As mentioned, the appropriate choice of review methodology depends on the issues to be addressed (Gough, 2015; Snilstveit *et al.*, 2012). This article applies systematic scoping review methods to identify and map the research on how museums serve as public sphere institutions (Gough *et al.*, 2017). The review is conducted based on the Johanna Briggs Institute methodology for scoping reviews (Peters, Godfrey, *et al.*, 2020; Peters, Marnie, *et al.*, 2020). Using thematic analysis, we create a map to provide a synopsis of research topics, objectives, and results (Thomas and Harden, 2008). Moreover, a thorough interpretative analysis is applied to carry out the thematic analysis and define research goals and findings.

2.1. Identifying study relevance: inclusion criteria

Topical relevance was the main content-based criterion for including studies in the review, whether the research aims, and findings of studies relate to museums and the public sphere. Publications that mentioned museums or the public sphere only in passing, without establishing a connection between the two, were excluded. Peer-reviewed publications: journal articles, conference papers, books, and book chapters reporting primary research, whether qualitative, quantitative, theoretical (conceptual), or empirical, were included in the search while all other document types, and otherwise eligible documents that did not report research (e.g., a description of a museum exhibition without any analysis), were excluded. Studies published in any language from database year one through 2019 were eligible for inclusion.

2.2. Search strategy

Following preliminary searches in general and specialized bibliographical databases covering the field of museum studies (Teasdale and Fruin, 2017), an extensive search strategy for identifying documents was developed to map a wide range of research topics on museums and the public sphere, with consideration given to the multidisciplinary nature of the research field. We searched for (museum* AND "public sphere*") in the topic fields (title, abstracts, and keywords) of the following bibliographical databases: ARTbibliographies Modern (ABM) (17 documents found); Art Index (H.W. Wilson) (2); Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) (11); International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) (24); Scopus (88); and Web of Science (60). Additionally, a title and keyword search for books was conducted in WorldCat, and 41 citations were retrieved. The final searches took place on October 30, 2020. A search of the gray literature (research reports, both published and unpublished) was not conducted due to the limited availability of personnel and funding. To provide a broader document base for the article, we conducted a preliminary topic search in Scopus and Web of Science for terms related to the public sphere. The search for museum* AND "deliberative democracy" retrieved zero documents.

2.3. Selection of publications

The identified citations were exported to the reference manager Endnote (2020), and duplicates were removed. The search identified 243 documents, and 167 documents remained after removing duplicates (Figure 1). The authors screened the search results against the selection criteria. The first two steps in the selection process applied criteria for titles and abstracts, leaving 36 documents for the full-text assessment.

The first full-text assessment found 22 documents eligible based on the relevance, document type, and peer-review criteria. Next, the reference lists of the selected publications were scanned for other eligible works (snowballing). This procedure produced no additional documents. The second evaluation of full-text documents produced the

selection of the final sample ($n = 17$). The full-texts were imported into Nvivo 12 (NVivo 12, 2019) for data extraction and content analysis.

<Place Figure 1 approximately here>

2.4. Data extraction

The following metadata variables were extracted from the documents: author, publication year, source, author affiliation, study location, study type (theoretical or empirical), and methods. Also, the research themes, aims, and findings were identified and analyzed through qualitative content analysis. An inductive thematic content analysis was conducted (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013), and a manual coding process was carried out using qualitative data analysis software, i.e., NVivo 12. Inductive analysis was chosen in view of the mapping purpose of this review. A focused theory-based coding would have been of less value in mapping the research field, as it would have limited contents and results to apriori specifications made on the assumption of a unitary framework of analysis similar to what can be found in the natural science literature, which could have severely limited the findings and usefulness of the review. Within the museum–public sphere research field, article structures show much variation, and structured extraction approaches are less relevant than in especially medical research. The authors performed the screening and coding against the inclusion criteria independently and finally assessed the remaining full-text documents. A few cases required deliberation to achieve consensus.

3. Findings

First, this section presents the documents using relevant document metadata: author name and year, source, author affiliation, the country where research was conducted, paper type (theoretical or empirical), and methods applied (Table I; Table II). Next, it summarizes the research aims and findings of the documents grouped by research theme, according to whether they have a visitor or community focus (Table III).

3.1. Publications metadata

Among the materials, 13 of the 17 documents were published during the last decade (Table I), with a majority ($n = 8$) appearing within the last five years studied (2015–2019). This signals an increase in interest in museum–public sphere research. Three of the 16 articles appeared in museum journals, while 13 appeared in cultural studies or media and communication journals. All authors, except Noy, with four articles published in 2016 and 2017, are represented with one article or book. Among the total of 19 authors (12 single authors, 3 first authors, and 4 co-authors), 7 single and first authors are affiliated with universities in North America (U.S.A.: 6; Canada: 1), while the numbers for the remaining countries are as follows: Australia (3), Israel (1), Norway, (2), South Korea (1), and U.K. (1). Noy changed address after his first article from U.S.A. to Israel and is counted twice. The four co-authors originated from Germany, Hungary, New Zealand, and South Korea.

As Table II shows, the only book is mainly a theoretical study. Among the 15 empirical studies, most collected research data in a single country: U.S.A. (8), New Zealand (1), Canada (1), U.K. (1), and South Korea (1). Three studies used data from multiple countries: one study surveyed Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Norway, and Sweden; another provided case studies of Jordan and Morocco; and another examined the U.S. and New Zealand. The multi-country survey analyzed quantitative data, while 14 articles reported case studies using document analysis, interviews, observation data, or multi-method approaches.

<Place Table I approximately here>

<Place Table II approximately here>

3.2. *Museum engagement research themes: visitors and communities*

All the studies examined how museums relate to their visitors and communities—i.e., museum engagement. Accordingly, we distinguish two main categories of research—engaging visitors or communities.

3.2.1. *Visitor engagement*

Coleman (2016) investigated how art museums can play a positive role in a democratic society. The article is a single case study exploring to what degree Habermas' work on the public sphere can be adapted as a theoretical framework for studying art. It investigates the meanings art can have for the public and how the same meanings can impact individuals' lives and society. Secondly, the author focuses on how Habermas is relevant for studying cultural phenomena.

<Place Table III approximately here>

Empirically, the article studies the reception by critics of the exhibition “High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture,” presented by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City in 1990. The exhibition generated much public discussion on the value of high art, including its claim to cultural and normative superiority compared to calls for more democratic representation in the art field. The empirical material consisted of 93 reviews of the exhibition in outlets ranging from academic journals and national magazines to popular newspapers. It is difficult to gauge whether the exhibition educated the public and thereby was an antidote to cultural impoverishment. However, the demonstration of the importance of the Habermasian notion of the public sphere in analyzing the exhibition contributes to building a theoretical framework for the empirical study of the cultural public sphere, which is ambitious and may serve as a building block for future research.

Noy (2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b) are single case studies investigating museum visitor participation, communication studies, and ethnographic theoretical perspectives. Noy (2016a) examines the Florida Holocaust Museum (FHM), while Noy (2016b, 2017a, 2017b) are case studies of the National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH) in Philadelphia. All four of Noy's articles investigate aspects of museum commenting systems. Noy (2016a) studies museum visitor books as media for participation in the public sphere: “how museums and institutions (. . .) frame participation of ‘ordinary’ people in the public sphere, and how, in return, visitors variously articulate their participation” (274). Noy finds that the museum frames the visitor book by placing it centrally, displaying powerful moral citations on the exit wall, and having a sign that instructs visitors to share and document their museum experiences in a handwritten text. Visitors participate in different ways: The majority describes having a strong moral feeling, and some describe having a moral awakening; also, a small number of texts establish the special relationship of the visitor to the museum (e.g., as an expert or relative of Holocaust victims).

Then, Noy (2016b) compares visitor participation through the traditional visitor book to participation through an interactive digital media installation, asking how different media and remediation form public participation. The installation digitizes handwritten visitor answers to museum questions on Post-it notes, displaying notes digitally on screens and video footage of visitors. The study is based on observation and interviews with visitors as well as interviews with museum staff. The significant findings are that digital media create more interaction between the museum and visitors compared to the analog visitor book and a better display of voice. In contrast, visitor-created content in books gives a better representation of voice, and the written contributions are longer and more elaborate.

Noy (2017a) analyzes visitor contributions to public discourse about a digital installation named the Contemporary Issues Forum (CIF). The article describes that visitor participative contribution are mostly a “ritualistic” practice, confirming or disconfirming the questions already posed by the museum. In sum, any discourse gravitating toward the

public sphere ideal is difficult to construe. This is also due to the structural limitations of the CIF as a digital installation: “No texts respond to other texts, nor does the museum offer a platform for responding to ‘visitors’ contributions” (296).

Noy (2017b) continues the analysis of museum questions and visitor responses in the CIF, focusing on moral discourse and argumentation in the museum-visitor relationship. Moral discourse is constitutive of the public sphere and deliberative democracy, and the museum as a public institution contributes to shaping “the public sphere both thematically (topically) and materially (communication technologies and materialities of display and participation)” (39). As spatially sited media, museums contrast with the portability of books and mobile phones, powerfully situate or even enclose visitors, and control visitors’ cultural experience. Moreover, the museum is a social arena where cultural experience is co-experienced with physical others.

These qualities of museums create publics and specific cultural public sphere contexts. The museum connects with lively and dramatic literary public sphere experiences compared to the more rationalistic-deliberative political public sphere. The article explains variation in the drama of moral discourse. It shows how institutionally created design settings and technology, as “modes of access, and architectures of display, mediation and participation” (45), shape the public sphere.

Sherman (2014) analyzes the exhibit “This Progress” in the Guggenheim Museum of New York (2010). The exhibit was an empty space where visitors encountered performance actors, called “interpreters,” who spontaneously engaged them in conversations that were only partly scripted. The article investigates the conversations and settings from a public sphere theoretical perspective, using ethnographic methodology, including the researcher’s participation in the encounters/meetings and interviews with interpreters. The majority of visitors participated in conversations on many topics. Simultaneously, a significant number said that being engaged in conversation was contrary to their expectation of passivity in a museum, and the experience elicited confusion and strong resistance. The article argues that the exhibition was an important attempt to bring socially relevant conversation back into public life. It explored “a microfoundation of politics or policy discussion but is also a crucial part of a vibrant cultural life, as well as a precursor to (and probably a condition of) specific social critique” (412). The unexpectedness of a new form of museum social interaction tilted the order of the exchange itself and created “meaningful, nonroutine talk among strangers about social life” (412). The author points to these encounters and similar ones outside of museums as a topic of further research on the public sphere.

3.2.2. *Community engagement*

Ashley (2005) describes the widening of the museum–public sphere in Canada and the representation of an increasingly ethnically diverse population from the 1990s onward. The idea of the public sphere as a single, universal entity was challenged by ideas of multiple identities and voices growing more salient outside the museum walls, demanding participation in museum curation and presentation. The paper is a qualitative study discussing theories of the public sphere and ethnic identities in the context of national museum policies and participation by the public in constructing narratives. Participation also relates to an alternative understanding of museums as non-exclusive public sphere institutions—in the form of a community center—creating social cohesion and a public forum among social groups. Further, the paper shows that in the 20 years prior to 2005, Canadian museum policies changed from emphasizing nation-building to social cohesion and citizen participation. However, there is not much evidence, except for the First Nations, for a substantial participative turn in museum practice. Ashley amends this situation in a study of an exhibit of African Canadian history, “The Underground Railroad: Next Stop Freedom,” which “propelled both formal and substantial changes” (p. 14) in the museum and influenced government museum policies. The article uses a multi-method approach, employing document analysis of research and policy documents. The author also

interviewed stakeholders and museum staff.

Audunson, Hobohm, and Todt (2019) reports findings from a survey to LAM staff in five European countries. According to the participants, despite considerable digital development and initiatives for community integration, traditional services are still the main services and represent the institutional core values. Regarding contributions to a working public sphere, the museum staff emphasized generating visitor engagement, emotional involvement, and providing arenas for meetings and discussion.

Barrett (2011) examines museums in relation to the public sphere concept. Adding to the discussion of Habermas' theory of the public sphere and its critics, the book reveals and grounds the modern museum as a public sphere infrastructure and a space that enriches civil society and the formation of public opinion. The author expands the public sphere concept by stressing the importance of visual objects as public sphere elements besides the literary, printed media of the public sphere, adding a new dimension to the discussion of Habermas' theory. Barrett shows how the museum, as a physical space, not only serves as an arena for rational political deliberation but constitutes an essential aspect of the public sphere, a social space and meeting place, an arena for community participation by museum enthusiasts (friends of the museum) and the local community at large, and a social space for visitors in general.

The book follows the museum–public sphere relationship since the birth of the modern museum in the 18th century. Compared to other document and media institutions as public libraries, museums have been more politicized, reflecting their closeness to dominant actors and political regimes. This hegemonic tradition of museums has shaped and complicated their relationship with audiences and communities, whether represented or non-represented, in museum collections. In discussing the “new museology,” Barrett widens the public sphere concept by providing tools for sharpening our understanding of the roles of community participation in museum curation and museum practice.

Gans (2002) examines how the Newseum museum in Washington, D.C., contributes to creating collective or public memory. The Newseum is a museum about the news and media. Gans describes that it presents an American patriot narrative, allowing for few critical voices and perspectives. Interestingly, the museum has successfully reached the public, primarily children, through interactive digital technology. The chief explanation provided for the museum's presentation of a one-sided story is that the institution depends on corporate funding: “The Newseum's corporate connections make it unresponsive to critics of the press” (370). The author shows how the museum presents itself as a public museum and, in the process, hides the fact that media conglomerates fund it. Thus, it functions poorly as a custodian of the collective public memory. The mechanisms by which the media establishment influences the museum's mediation strategy and curation need further elucidation.

Then, Guthrie (2010) discusses problems of researching and comparing different cultural traditions through concepts perceived as cross-cultural, particularly regarding heritage studies. Data collection methods are not described in the paper, but document analysis is probable from the context, and interviews are mentioned. Three case studies from northern New Mexico (a historical monument, a cultural center, and a museum) describe more or less incommensurable cultural differences, and the construction of heritage is viewed from a postcolonial theoretical perspective. Heritage institutions are understood as “discursive tool[s] for creating, maintaining, or expanding publics organized around commensurable forms of difference” (307). The author finds mostly cultural hybridity but also incommensurable differences within and between cases, the paradox being that heritage institutions can, at the same time, present commonality and difference and, as such, contribute to a meta-consensus masking radical difference. The article concludes that decolonial studies, to research radical difference and hybridization, may need to abandon heritage as an analytical concept.

More recently, Larsen (2018) discusses the role of LAM institutions as social and informational infrastructure in the Nordic public sphere. This conceptual paper places LAM institutions within a general sociological model of national welfare systems. The

1
2
3 model is used to identify national and segmented systems of the public sphere, focusing on
4 the organization of LAM institutions. LAM institutions' specific contribution is making
5 the public sphere open to their communities by being sources of free information
6 unbounded by special interests and providing spaces for public discussion. This involves
7 more than being arenas for training in political participation—identity formation and
8 building social cohesion are essential.

9 Lynch (2011) is a comparative case study of 12 museums in the U.K. in the process of
10 “shifting from museums as essentially collection-focused to museums as essentially
11 public-service institutions” (441). Pressure for public accountability has triggered
12 initiatives for community collaboration and participation in the shaping of collections and
13 institutions. Thus, “the museums are to become more vibrant public sphere of contestation
14 through public engagement” (441). The study investigates the impact of engagement
15 practices in 12 museums and galleries; the museums have received considerable public
16 funding for public engagement programs and community participation initiatives over
17 several decades. Community engagement practices are prioritized in the museum policies
18 and reflected in the funding reports of the museums.

19 The study reports an external evaluation led by the author and commissioned by the
20 Paul Hamlyn Foundation (an important funder of museum-community engagement
21 initiatives). Both the institutions and their community partners participated in a
22 “participatory action learning process” project. However, none of the museums had any
23 open conversation about museum-community engagement activity with community
24 stakeholders. Similarly, no such discussions took place among the museum staff. This lack
25 of dialog led to “disillusionment” and anger among both parties—stakeholders and
26 museum staff. Several factors negatively affected the museums' public engagement
27 success: the system of short-term project funding, management pressures for task
28 efficiency, and rewards that discourage innovative thinking and risk-taking did not
29 promote the long-term focus necessary for reflection and organizational learning.
30 However, in a few cases, museum practice was discussed internally and externally. In these
31 cases, the institutions had articulated aims, organization-wide commitment, and, as a
32 result, more robust community partnerships. Ultimately, the opportunity for discussion and
33 debate provided by the action research approach “became the most important outcome of
34 the study” (443).

35 The article explains the dismal state of museum-community collaboration in that the
36 dominant party (museums) had turned “the museum-community dialog” into a deficit
37 model of public engagement: communities have deficits, which are gaps that the museum
38 can fill. The author suggests that museums with community partners develop a new set of
39 community-focused “museum rules” for joint participative processes in creating new
40 museum practices. New collaborative institutional practices should be firmly grounded in
41 “the idea of the museum or gallery as a ‘public’ institution that focuses on supporting and
42 facilitating [and motivating] people’s capabilities as active citizens, inside and outside the
43 museum, to act freely, speak openly and confront the power of others” (454).

44 Malt (2006) discusses museums as public spaces and public sphere institutions for
45 women in Jordan and Morocco. The study includes 65 museums and qualitative interviews
46 with female museum employees in the two countries, in addition to analyzing relevant
47 statistics. In general, the findings depict a grim situation regarding the representation of
48 women in the collections and museum staff compared to the ideals of equality and
49 representation for women, the idea of the museum as an open public sphere institution free
50 to represent any point of view and cultural expression, and the museum as a universal
51 meeting place for all social groups. Interestingly, Malt finds developments in Jordan and
52 Morocco toward more independent museum institutions and practices regarding women’s
53 position in collections and museums as meeting places for women: literacy classes,
54 museum libraries, and inclusion in the museum staff. Still, women over 50 years old and
55 from upper-middle-class families are overrepresented in the staff. The author finds that the
56 general perception of museums as “safe” places makes them socially accepted arenas of
work and social interaction for women in the two countries.

Message (2007) is primarily a conceptual paper that develops perspectives for studying whether two museums—the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa—function as “an open and inclusive public space that encourages debate about what constitutes citizenship in postcolonial multicultural societies” (236) or as an arena for government social inclusion policies. The author understands museums as cultural centers and spaces for community interaction facilitating museum development participation close to the public sphere ideal. Yet, museum-community participation practices are influenced by global policy ideas (e.g., neoliberalism and postcolonialism) in tandem with national museum policy. The article concludes with an understanding of museums as contested sites: “they do not neatly define bounded ‘cultures’” (252) but instead mediate between different interests, including nation-states, communities, First Nations, and migrants from non-Western countries.

Park and Kim (2019) analyze the development leading up to South Korea’s current museum policies. Following the South Korean government’s democratization in 1987, the instigation of democratic reform processes swept through most public policy areas, including museum policy. Two sets of policy ideas developed into competing museum policies for the democratization of museums. Over time, museums policy has become dominated by a neoliberal reform agenda. The article explains this outcome, introducing national political factors combined with international neoliberal policy ideas.

One policy trajectory focused on developing museums as public sphere institutions opening discussions of collective and individual historical memories. The second set of museum policies developed exploiting the Seoul Olympics (1988) as a trigger for a Cultural Olympics policy to build institutions for bringing high culture to the people. The pre-1987 authoritarian military government first implemented this cultural “democratization” policy. The post-1987 democratic government adopted the Cultural Olympics policy of the military. Then, through the 1990s and after the 1997 East Asian financial crisis, neoliberalist ideas revitalized the Cultural Olympics policy. Quantification of quality appraisal and active policy evaluation meant that museums of memories and public sphere-oriented museum policy were not prioritized. Also, memory museums were easily challenged because they were small and scattered institutions on the South Korean museum landscape.

Schorch and Hakiwai (2013) describe how museums and communities together can transform museums from gathering places into working public sphere spaces. They report a case study of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). Together, by practicing the Maori concept of Mana Taonga, the museum and the Maori community have succeeded in making this concept the core of the museum practice. Mana Taonga is the Maori custom of politics and debate involving openness to any point of view, disregarding the speaker’s status, and acknowledging opposing views in conflict resolution by bringing them into work practices; in the case of the museum, this means bringing such views into activities, collections, and exhibitions. The complexities of Maori bicultural adaptation to Western immigrant culture and immigrant appropriation are thematized and brought into museum practice, creating temporary reconciliations open to an ongoing debate. The authors refer to Western postcolonial theory, identity politics, and concepts such as “interpretive ‘common sphere,’” “political ‘intersubjectivity,’” and “performative democracy” (202) as helpful in understanding Maori discussion practices. But “[m]ost academic contributions, however, remain on a normative or theoretical level without offering empirical insights” (191). This does not apply to the article itself, where much of the analysis is based on fieldwork by the authors, including interviews.

4. Discussion

4.1. Concentration of research

The literature on museums and the public sphere is limited; altogether, 16 journal articles and one book were identified in this research area. That said, the 17 documents eligible for inclusion in the scoping review provide a map to the museum–public sphere research. The

study results show a concentration and lack of variation in document metadata variables and research themes. The Anglosphere dominance is huge for researcher affiliation, data collection locations, and journals (Table I). For single and first author affiliations, 11 out of the 17 publications originate from institutions in the core Anglosphere countries: United States (6), Australia (3), Canada (1), and the United Kingdom (1). Three articles originate in the Middle East (Israel); two are from Norway, representing Continental Europe. One is from South Korea, representing the vast majority of countries and people outside the Anglosphere and Europe. The distribution is even more skewed in the analysis of the locations of the cases studied—i.e., in the origins of the research data.

From the first name of the single/first authors, we observe that eight have female names and five have male first names; that is, slightly more than 60% can be considered female. Given the geographically concentrated author affiliations, the research data locations are not very surprising. It is not unlikely that the topics of research, theoretical perspectives, and research results are influenced by the geographical concentration of the researchers, from both the researcher affiliations and study locations. Research interest reflects research training, affiliation, and data access. Possible biases arising from researcher ethnic and gender identities have not been investigated.

The studies are mostly empirical, and all but one empirical study are qualitative case studies. The concentration of research approaches may hamper the development of the field—impeding conceptual discussion on theoretical contributions for future research or theory developed from empirical research. There is a lack of quantitative studies and qualitative studies situated in a theory-building research framework or aimed at theoretical generalization (see Yin, 1989 for a classic text). Perhaps unexpectedly, given the ubiquitous research concentration, we do not find many shared citations or cross-citations, except for Habermas and Habermas-related studies, indicating fragmentation and an underdeveloped research field. However, the bias inherent in research concentration in the Anglosphere does not imply that the research is not legitimate. The publications are highly relevant museum–public sphere studies, and as such, they function as steppingstones for the development of research.

4.2. Museum–public sphere research and engagement

The studies have two foci on museum engagement: visitor and community engagement. Together, the studies complement each other by covering two central expressions of museum activity and other important aspects of the museum–public sphere relationship. Communities whose stories are exhibited can have their cultural identities challenged and misrepresented through the museum’s eyes and the eyes of the general museum visitor—to avoid this, the represented need to be included in the representation and presentation processes. Therefore, represented communities should become museum participants. However, even if museum visitors do not share the cultural identities on display depending on the context and location, museums still need to know what visitors think of the exhibitions and how they are affected by the stories told. This way, every museum visitor becomes a participant in a visitors’ community, albeit in a different sense and in a different community from those whose narratives are represented.

4.3. Community participation

Communities whose cultural expressions and identities are on display in museums want representation, including a say in how they are represented. In other words, communities want participation in the politics of museum curation. Discussing Habermas and his critics, Barrett (2011) speaks for participation, but how to succeed in integrating community voices is a difficult question. New Zealand and Canadian indigenous museums have successfully built collaboration between museums and communities (Ashley, 2005; Schorch & Hakiwai, 2013). Ashley (2005) finds, except for the First Nations, little evidence in Canadian museums of a participatory turn in museum practice, although

examples of success exist. Also, in Jordan and Morocco, museums have opened up for more representation of female society and art, opportunities for female participation, and inclusion in staff (Malt, 2006).

Lynch's (2011) evaluation of British museums found that not even museums and stakeholders taking part in a participatory action learning process project had an open discussion about community engagement between the two partners, and even among the museum staff, such discussions rarely took place. In a few cases, museum internal and external discussions happened and led to stronger partnerships. Emphasis on task efficiency and short-term project funding were considered to have contributed to the negative results. This linking of the lack of museum-community collaboration to neoliberal governance principles is also found in the research on collaboration and convergence between LAM institutions (Vårheim *et al.*, 2019). The influence of neoliberal policy ideas is further evident in South Korean national museum policies (Park and Kim, 2019). Gans (2002) discusses the related question of how private funding and donations influence museum representation. In the research on museums' public sphere, the participative turn in museum institutional development is a primary research theme. Theoretically, in addition to leaning on Habermas' approach, Message (2007) presents museums as participative cultural centers contested and shaped by neoliberalism, postcolonial ideology, and government policies.

Particularly concerning community participation, questions of representation of community voices and identities in the museum public sphere become pronounced in the research literature. Questions of incommensurable and commensurable identities have been raised in the literature, and postcolonial theory is put to use in the analysis.

4.4. Visitor participation

The studies of museum visitors and the public sphere focus on how museums try to engage visitors as participants. Various visitor participation frames have been studied, from exhibitions (Coleman, 2016; Sherman, 2014) to different visitor book technologies (Noy, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b). Sherman (2014) aptly describes the aims of museum-public sphere activities to bring back socially relevant museum conversations into public life.

4.5. Understanding communities and visitors in the museum-public sphere

Although limited in quantity, scope, quantitative studies, and theoretical development, the museum-sphere research literature tells a story that provides a theoretical and empirical basis for further research and theory development. We construct a simple model of the museum-public sphere nexus of the museum institution and its community of visitors and participants from the extracted publications. Museums lean on community participants and visitors for legitimation. Museum institutional and professional values are reflected in museum policies and in exhibitions and related museum activities. Museum output affects its visitors (experiences) and communities (identities).

Museum policies create feedback effects in the institutional environment. Feedback effects refer to how "policy, once enacted, restructures subsequent political processes" (Skocpol, 1992, p. 58). New policies provide information, meaning, and resources, and this transformation of existing power and resource distributions changes interest groups' political behavior (Pierson, 1993). Policy feedback effects are not easily predictable, and perhaps more so within highly institutionalized and contested fields as museum policy. As shown in this article, museum policies may have unclear and conflicting interpretations among different publics, communities, and visitors.

Moreover, museums relate to different publics. In addition to communities and visitors, museums must relate to the policies and politics of government (e.g., neoliberal policies), professional practices influenced by changing policy ideas (e.g., identity politics and postcolonial theories), and private donor interest (e.g., patriot history). The general

museum–public sphere model, provides a theoretical framework for generating a range of research themes and research questions.

4.6. Implications for future research

The existing museum–public sphere research is limited regarding what countries are researched and in what countries researchers are based; specifically, it is mostly an Anglosphere activity. A wider variety of researchers and research institutions could broaden the selection of research themes and theoretical perspectives and, ultimately, findings and theory development.

Moreover, the research overwhelmingly consists of case studies. Quantitative surveys would increase the empirical knowledge about the museum sector and the public sphere in nation-states and globally. The lack of quantitative studies means that basic knowledge about museums and the public sphere does not exist. How many museums focus on their role as community meeting places? How do they engage with visitors in a public sphere context? How do museum curators and administrators shape museum–public engagement? Do they think that this role is important, if they think about such questions at all? How do these and other museum and public sphere-relevant research questions vary between types of museums and between national contexts? This knowledge would help create a more solid foundation for developing theoretical mechanisms explaining how the museum–public sphere relationship plays out.

Although many of the articles reviewed use theoretical concepts in the analysis and present exciting findings, the studies are overwhelmingly single case studies and without much ambition regarding theoretical generalization and theory development. Canadian and New Zealand museums' apparent successes with indigenous community participation in museum curation point to the need for more research on immigrant communities and people outside groups affluent in cultural capital.

However, the already intense conflicts around identity politics along dimensions of ethnicity and gender of the 2020s are not reflected in the museum–public sphere literature discussed. This relative peace is already over, and the contested status of museums will most likely be on the increase in the future and with it the research agendas and relevance of museum–public sphere research.

5. Limitations

While providing an overview of the museum–public sphere research literature covering a broad range of relevant databases and languages, this article has limitations, as have most reviews. Relevant sources might have been omitted. The extent to which the coverage of non-English language museum studies journals in the general and comprehensive bibliographical databases and the specialized art and humanities databases is satisfactory is questionable. Limitations also concern that the gray literature on the topic has not been examined. Regarding search terms, terms related to the public sphere as “deliberative democracy”, would presumably have provided a broader basis for the article. However, preliminary searches in Scopus and the Web of Science retrieved no documents in a topic search of museum* AND “deliberative democracy”.

6. Conclusion

Two significant findings emerge from this scoping review of museums and the public sphere. First, there is a concentration of museum and public sphere research efforts in the core Anglosphere countries, research institutions, and researchers. A clear majority of researchers are women. In addition, almost all the studies are qualitative case studies. The museums studied represent indigenous cultures, and other museums and communities in

the core Anglosphere countries. Second, the two major research themes are visitor and community input to museum curation. Many of the studies relate to Habermas' theory of the public sphere. Also, some of the research uses and discusses theories of decolonization.

Various research gaps exist regarding research themes, research methods, museum locations, and researchers (countries and affiliations). The existing studies consider important research themes in a limited variety of geographical communities and communities of researchers. Many important research themes are underexplored in museum–public sphere research, including questions relating to the representation and participation of indigenous, minority, and majority populations and identities inside and outside the Anglosphere and Western countries, particularly outside.

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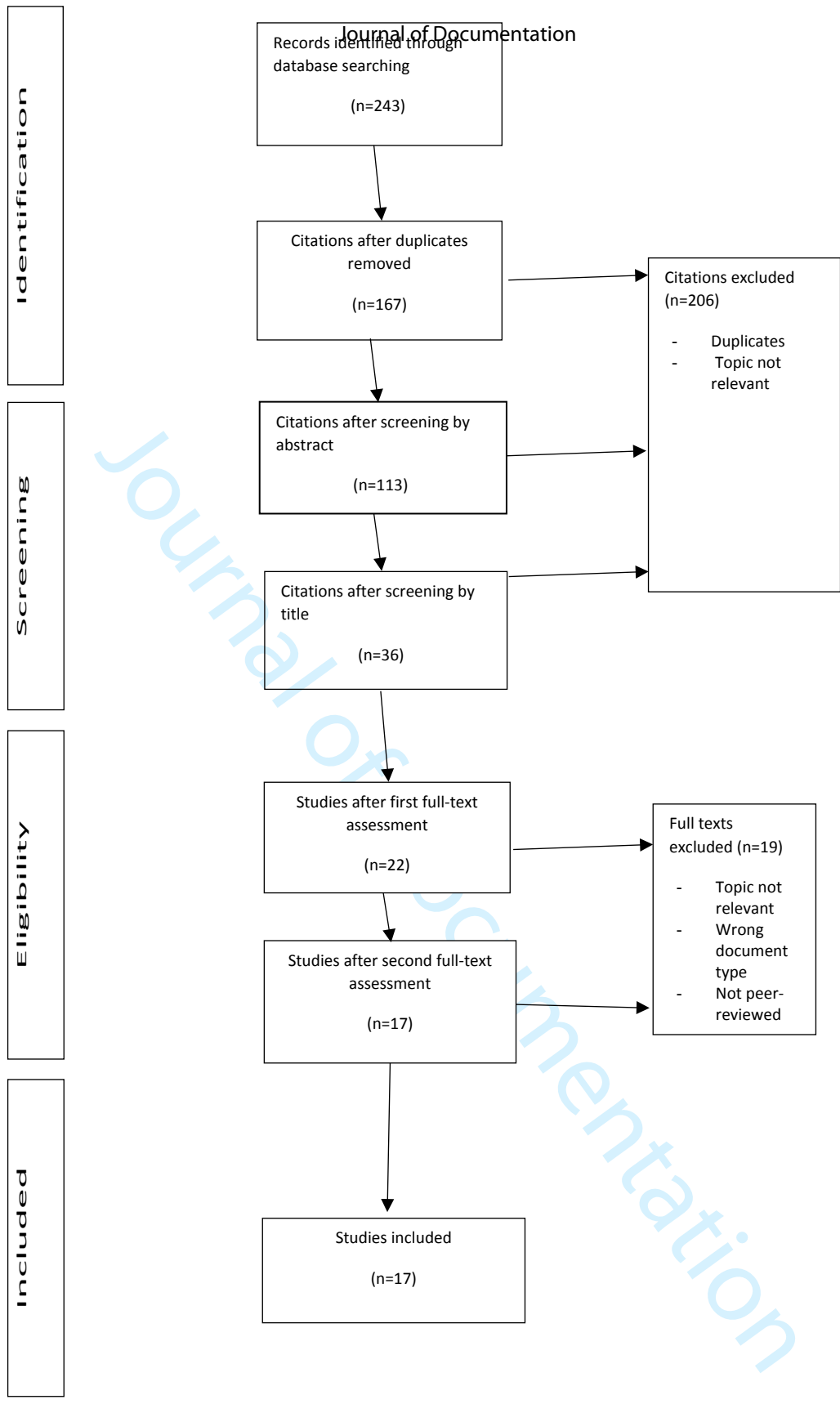


Figure 1 Review dataset selection: search and screening processes illustrated.

Table I *Museums and public sphere research metadata in numbers. Reviewed documents according to publication year, publication source, researcher location, study site, study type, and method. N=17.*

YEAR	2015-2019	2010-2014	–2009				
	8	5	4				
SOURCE TYPE	Museum	Culture/Media	Info science				
	3	13	1				
AFFILIATION SINGLE/FIRST AUTHORS	USA	Canada	Australia	UK	Israel	Norway	South Korea
	6	1	3	1	1	2	1
AFFILIATION CO-AUTHORS	Germany	Hungary	New Zealand	South Korea			
	1	1	1	1			
STUDY SITE	USA	Canada	New Zealand	UK	South Korea	Multi-Country	
	8	1	2	1	1	3	
STUDY TYPE	Empirical	Theoretical					
	15	2					
STUDY METHOD	Qualitative	Quantitative					
	16	1					

Table II. *Museums and public sphere research metadata. Reviewed documents according to publication year, publication source, researcher location, study site, study type, and method. N=17.*

Author (Year)	Source	Affiliation	Study country	Study type	Study Method
Ashley, Susan (2005)	Museum and Society	Ryerson Uni, Canada	Canada	Emp	Case study, doc analysis, observation, interviews
Audunson, Hobohm, & Toth, (2019)	Inf Res	Oslo Met U, NOR; Potsdam U Appl Sci, GER; Nat Széchenyi Lib, HUN	DEN; GER; HUN; NOR; SWE	Emp	Quantitative survey analysis
Barrett, Jennifer (2011)	Book	Uni of Sydney, Australia		Theo	Doc analysis
Coleman, Karen (2016)	Am J Cult Sociol	Winona State Uni, MN, USA	USA	Emp	Case study, doc analysis
Gans, Rachel (2002)	J Commun Inq	Uni of Pennsylvania, USA	USA	Emp	Case study, observation
Guthrie (2010)	Int J Herit Stud	Guilford Coll, Greensboro, USA	USA	Emp	Multiple case study, observation
Larsen (2018)	J Doc	OsloMet Uni, Norway	Norway	Theo	Doc analysis
Lynch, Bernadette (2011)	Mus Manag Curatorship	Change Management and Associates, UK	UK	Emp	Multiple case study, interviews, doc analysis
Malt, Carol (2006)	J. Middle East Women's Stud	Uni of West Florida, USA	Jordan; Morocco	Emp	Multiple case study, doc analysis, interviews
Message, Kylie (2007)	Soc Identities	Australian Nat Uni, Canberra	New Zealand; USA	Emp	Multiple case study, doc analysis
Noy (2016a)	Discourse Commun	Uni of South Florida, USA	USA	Emp	Case study, doc analysis
Noy (2016b)	Crit Stud Media Commun	Ashkelon Academic Coll, Israel	USA	Emp	Case study, doc analysis, interviews, observation,
Noy (2017a)	Discourse, Context and Media	Ashkelon Academic Coll, Israel	USA	Emp	Case study, doc analysis, observation
Noy (2017b)	Commun Cult Crit	Ashkelon Academic Coll, Israel	USA	Emp	Case study, doc analysis
Park & Kim (2019)	Int. J. Cult. Policy	Seoul Nat Uni of Sci&Tech/ Yonsei Uni, South Korea	South Korea	Emp	Doc analysis
Schorch & Hakiwai (2013)	Int. J. Cult. Stud	Deakin Uni, Australia/ Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa	New Zealand	Emp/ Theo	Case study, doc analysis, participant observation
Sherman, Rachel (2014)	Public Cult.	New School for Social Research, NY, USA	USA	Emp	Case study, observation, interviews

Table III *Museums and public sphere research themes: summary of aims and findings*

Author	Theme	Research aims/questions	Findings
Ashley, Susan	Community engagement	A study of the widening of the museum public sphere in Canada. The idea of the public sphere as a single and universal entity is challenged by ideas of multiple identities and voices demanding participation in the museum public sphere—in the museum curation and presentation.	The article discusses the public sphere and public participation in constructing museums as non-exclusive public spheres for social cohesion and a public forum among First Nations; still, a prominent black community is presented.
Audunson et.al.	Visitor/Community engagement	Are there indications that digital and social developments have led to new services and work practices in LAM institutions, and how does this play out in five European countries?	Overall, digital and socially oriented services and the LAM professionals consider traditional practices.
Barrett, Jennifer	Community engagement	The book examines museums in relation to the public sphere concept. The author expands the public sphere concept by stressing visual objects' importance as public sphere elements.	The book widens the public sphere and community participation in museum curation. The museum as a physical space, not only its content, constitutes an important aspect of the public sphere.
Coleman, Karen	Visitor engagement	The article asks how an art museum can play a positive societal role, and aims at exploring to what degree the work of Habermas on the public sphere can be adapted as a theoretical framework for studying art.	The article studies the reception by critics in New York C. (1990). "High and Low Art" discussion on the value of high art compared to low art. The display of the usefulness of Habermas' theory in an exhibition is a step towards building a public sphere.
Gans, Rachel	Visitor engagement	The article studies, from a public sphere perspective, how the Newseum museum in Washington, D.C., contributes to creating collective or public memory.	The main finding is that the museum is not allowing few critical voices. The principle is that it depends on corporate funding. The museum is primarily children, through interactive displays.
Guthrie	Community engagement	The article investigates the problems of research and comparison of different cultural traditions through concepts perceived as intercultural, especially concerning heritage and heritage studies.	The article finds mostly cultural hybridity and between cases. To study radical differences, we have to abandon heritage as an analytic category.
Larsen	Comm. engagement	In the article, the Nordic welfare state model is used to identify national and segmental systems of the public sphere focusing on the organization of the LAM institutions.	LAM institutions' specific contribution is to engage communities by being sources of information and providing spaces for public discussion.
Lynch, Bernadette	Community engagement	The study investigates the impact of engagement and participation practices in the twelve museums and galleries. The museums received considerable public funding for community engagement over several decades. Community engagement practices were prioritized in policies and reflected in the funding reports of the museums.	The study found that none of the museums had community engagement with community stakeholders. Several factors negatively affected museum engagement: did not promote the focus necessary for community engagement for efficiency, and rewards discouraging community engagement.
Malt, Carol	Community engagement	A study of museums as public spaces and public sphere institutions for women in Jordan and Morocco.	Overall, the representation of women in museums is low. However, developments towards more community engagement regarding the position of women in collection, classes, museum libraries, and in the museum.
Message, Kylie	Community engagement	The paper develops perspectives for studying whether two specific museums—the National Museum of the American Indian) and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa—function as “an open and inclusive public space that encourages debate about what constitutes citizenship in postcolonial multicultural societies (236)”, or as an arena for government social inclusion policies.	The article understands museums as community engagement and participation in museum curation. The paper concludes with an understanding of museums as “neatly define bounded ‘cultures’” (256) including nation-states, communities, and countries.
Noy 2016a	Visitor engagement	The article studies museum visitor books as media for participation in the public sphere: “how museums and institutions (...) frame participation of ‘ordinary’ people in the public sphere, and how, in return, visitors variously articulate their participation” (274)	Noy finds that the museum frames the visitor book as a powerful moral citations on the exit wall and document their museum experiences.
Noy 2016b	Visitor engagement	In this article, visitor participation through the traditional visitor book is compared to participation through an interactive digital media installation. The installation digitizes handwritten visitor answers to museum questions on Post-it notes, displaying notes digitally on screens and video footage of visitors asking how different media and remediation form public participation.	Significant findings are that digital media encourages more visitors than the analog visitor book and that digital book content is richer in several ways and that contributions are longer and more detailed than participation.
Noy 2017a	Visitor engagement	Noy analyzes visitor contributions to the public discourse through a digital installation named the Contemporary Issues Forum (CIF).	The article finds that visitor participative practice, confirming or dis-confirming to the museum, any discourse along the public sphere is not limited to other texts, nor does the museum encourage visitor contributions” (296).
Noy 2017b	Visitor engagement	Noy continues the analysis of museum questions and visitor responses in the CIF, focusing specifically on the moral discourse and argumentation in the museum-visitor relationship.	This study of the CIF shows how the museum (museum) created design settings and technologies for display, mediation, and participation (456).

Author	Theme	Research aims/questions	Findings
Park and Kim	Community engagement	In the aftermath of the democratization of the Korean government in 1987, the instigation of democratic reform processes swept through most public policy areas, also museum policy.	The article finds that since the Seoul Olympics, the wish to democratize culture, defining the introduction of easily quantifiable needs as compatible. Quantification of quality aspects of the public sphere-oriented museum policy as they were small and scattered institutions.
Schorch and Hakiwai	Community engagement	This article describes how museums and their communities can transform museums from gathering places into working public sphere spaces. The article reports a case study of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa).	Together, the museum and the Maori cultural centre, <i>Mana Taonga</i> , have made it the core of museum custom of politics and debate involving the speaker's status, and acknowledging opportunities to bring them into work practices, in the case of exhibitions. The article describes the co-existence of western immigrant culture and indigenous Maori culture.
Sherman, Rachel	Visitor engagement	Sherman analyses the exhibit "This Progress" in the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010). The exhibit was a space where visitors were confronted with performance actors, "interpreters", unexpectedly engaging them in conversation situations. The article investigates the conversations from a theoretical public sphere perspective.	The article finds that the exhibition provided a relevant conversation back into public life. The social interaction tilted the interaction of talk among strangers about social life." (Sherman, 2010)

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