

# WHO SAID MUSEUMS ARE BORING?

## *A STUDY ON AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT FOR CHILDREN IN DUTCH MUSEUMS*

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# PREFACE

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## **Abstract**

It is a stereotypical image seen in movies and tv shows, especially in the ones of lower quality, to have children half-heartedly strolling across a museum with tired faces while a boring adult is showing them the artifacts of the exhibition in a monotonous, uncharming manner. This thesis wants to show that museums can be exiting places where children can have fun and in the meantime have a meaningful experience that taught them something, may it be about history, science, art, or whatever. By taking the museums in the Netherlands as a case study, this dissertation will look at the efforts done by museums to attract children and ensure that they have a good time while visiting with their family. Using a quantitative method, Dutch museums are analysed in regards to audience developments, strategies to attract children and families, and use of edutainment, while also paying attention to the reasons (e.g.: budgeting or government regulation) why they are organised one way or another. The results of this empirical study shows that the image of bored kids in a museum is indeed a stereotype with little to no connection with factual reality, at least in the Dutch case. Museums are interested in having an important number of children as their visitors

**Keywords:** museums, children, families, audience development, edutainment

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## Introduction

*"A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution **in the service of society and its development**, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of **education, study and enjoyment.**"*

(ICOM, 2007)

This is the definition adopted by the International Council Of Museums (ICOM) to define museums during its 22<sup>nd</sup> general assembly in Vienna on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August in 2007. This definition has gone a long way from the cabinets of curiosities (or *Wunderkammer*) that appeared in Europe during the late renaissance and the baroque period. They were mostly privately owned collections that were completely dependent of the will and motivation of the private collector. Throughout the centuries, the *Wunderkammer* has gradually become the modern museum as defined by ICOM in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The most important points of this definition could be argued to be "*in the service of society*" and the three words "*education, study, and enjoyment*". The first of these two parts of the definition puts it mostly in contrast with the *Wunderkammer* of the days of yore: it is a service to society, not only to an individual and its relatives and friends, and, following that, has the purpose to cultivate its members in order to achieve a better future by understanding the past and contemporary world. As we will see later, Hein (2004) and Hooper-Greenhill (1999) underline the role that a museum plays in society and for the community.

Following ICOM's definition about what a museum actually is, there is space for discussion about the aims of a museum. The last three words of the definition underline that the focal point of a museum lies in teaching. Indeed, teaching is something that can (and should) be oriented to all demographic categories of society; still, it is a concept mostly oriented to young people and children, after all, they are the ones that are usually categorised purely as "students" or "pupils" without other occupations or jobs in society. But museums are not ought to be dry places that replace or merely complete normal education in school (Zeller, 1985): "enjoyment" is one of the key features of the modern museum. As Jensen (1999) put it: "*Museum programmes must relate to the life experiences of the audiences they seek to motivate and engage.*" (p. 110). Other scholars like Waltl (2006) and Briggs (2000) also discuss the primary role that audiences, in particular younger ones, should play in the organisation of museums and exhibitions concluding that the entertainment of audiences ought to be one of the key features of any museum. Others like Switek (2016), claim

that focusing too much on entertainment might even result to be counterproductive. Either way, as can be seen in ICOM's definition stressing the points of the development of society, education and enjoyment, museums seem to highly value the participation of audiences and their entertainment.

Lévy-Garboua & Montmarquette (2011) studied the demand for art and culture and the cultivation of audience's taste. They state that taste is something that can change during a person's lifetime and that can also be cultivated, this is valid for more "simple" kinds of taste like vegetables, as well as for the "higher" tastes of art and culture that are linked to museums. An analysis on existing studies on demand and taste formation will be analysed in the literature review; for the moment it will be sufficient to know that they get to the conclusion that "*Price, income, education and learning experiences are important factors in the demand for the arts, but art is also associated with emotions and feelings*" (p. 184). Lévy-Garboua and Montmarquette's paper shows that museums not only have a function to develop society, but that they also need to put efforts to create a demand for the service that they offer: it cannot be expected that people will fill museums just by themselves, they need to be encouraged and their taste needs to be "shaped" for them to willingly visit museums and have the best possible experience out of it.

Taking the definition by ICOM as an inspiring starting point, this thesis wants to empirically explore if museums indeed try to attract audiences in order to increase their visitors in the short- and long-term while specifically focusing on how (and if) children (and, consequently, their families) are attracted, the demographic category that is mostly connected to the term "education" (Vopat, 2009). As has been seen with Lévy-Garboua and Montmarquette's (2011) study, museums need to foster the demand for their services to society. A good way to do it, is to "strike while the iron is hot" and try to develop a taste for museums to people while they are still children, because children who are used to go to museums are more likely to be museum-goers when they are adults (NMV, 2011). To narrow the scope of this research the museums in the Netherlands are taken as an example and case study, understanding fully that there might be significant differences in policies for audience development and children between museums in different countries.

The research question to be investigated in this thesis is the following:

***To what extent do Dutch museums try to attract children and families?***

With attention given to basic concepts of cultural economics, this thesis tries to find evidence that can corroborate or contradict the hypothesis that museums are interested audience development

focusing on children and families and also analyse the breadth of this potential interest. Attention will also be given to the tools that museums use to attract children and families, thus leading to the subquestion: What are the most effective ways to attract children and families? This subquestion will look to the practical side of the research question, i.e.: how the willingness to attract children and families is implemented into strategies that have to achieve such goal.

## **Definitions**

The research question of this thesis and the work that arises from it are linked to some concepts that are still open for debate in the academic world. Still, for the sake of clarity, definitions of these key concepts that will be central during the thesis had to be taken. The following definitions were used in the empirical research:

- **Audience development:** *"Audience Development is the building of relationships with your existing and potential audiences, through the use of specific audience relations programs, in order for them to become more involved with your organization and/or art form."* (Fanizza, 2015)
- **Child:** A person that has not yet reached adulthood but is already partially capable of taking decisions by him- or herself and to effectively communicate (OED) (Vopat, 2009). For the sake of clarity: a person between 5 and 18 years of age.
- **Museum:** *"A non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment."* (ICOM, 2007)
- **Rijksmuseum:** A national museum is a museum in the Netherlands in which the national collections are included. With the Act on the independence of State-owned services in 1993, the management of the institutions was placed with independent foundations.

Since then, the museums are no longer formally government services. The museums are responsible for the management of the objects from the National Collection and receive a subsidy from the national government through the National Management Collection Scheme. (Overheid.nl, 2016)

- **Edutainment:** *“A hybrid genre that relies heavily on visual material, on narrative or game-like formats computer games-education-implications for game developers, and on more informal, less didactic styles of address.”* (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2005)

## **Academic relevance**

The study of audience development oriented towards children in museums has been taken on by various scholars (some examples are: Briggs, 2000; Walzl, 2006; Chang, 2006; Jeffers, 1999; Reussner, 2003), but is mostly done on a conceptual level, as will be seen in the literature review. Further, most of these studies apply concepts, if they do it at all, to a single case study instead of taking a broader scope. A report like the one by the *Nederlandse Museumvereniging* (2011) indeed takes a broader perspective by analysing a vast variety of museums, and is also specifically focused on practical elements of audience development in Dutch museums. Nevertheless, it is lacking a problematisation of the topic by being a report rather than academic dissertations; for instance, this report starts from the assumptions that all Dutch museums have an interest in attracting children and families, and does not much more than encouraging said museums to increase their efforts into this matter. This report is not strictly academic by itself, but, as said, a report with data from Dutch museums and reported without an academic problematisation of the matter. It is agreed that further research into the study of the practical implications of the interest in audience development for visitor oriented museums is needed (Reussner, 2003).

There is a shortage of studies that try to explore the will of museums to implement an effective audience development for a younger public and, at the same time, analyse the practical effects of said interest on a broader manner and comparatively among museums; shortly, a study that combines theories on audience development, demand, and cultivation of taste, and analyses if and how these theories are implemented in the management of museums. This thesis will fill



exactly this hole in the academic literature.

## **Societal relevance**

According to the *Nederlandse Museumvereniging*, over 10% of the visitors of Dutch museums are children. Questions that may be discussed after seeing this number may be "Do museums attract enough children?" or "Have they properly worked to reach this number?". Museums have, and always had since they came into existence, an important role in the social development of a community (Dodd, 1999), especially for the education (ICOM, 2007) of younger generations (Suina, 1999). Consequently, the aforementioned questions should be asked when thinking and debating about museums and the evaluation of their service to society. They are not silos that only acquire and preserve objects for the mere sake of preserving them, they are not the temple of an antiquarian historian, as Nietzsche would have described them; they must attract people to visit them and spread the knowledge that they contain.

A study that gives insights into their will to engage younger audiences and fulfill their educational role might arise a reflection and discussion about the relationship that Dutch museums have with their public, whatever the results are. This thesis tries to generate attention on the relationship that museums have with children and their families. Further, it may give some precious data that can enrich the discussion while also giving ideas to the museums that want to improve their audience development strategies. Further, the thesis also takes a look into the possible drift that may separate national and civic museums; thus, giving insights into the effects that a possible difference in budgeting of these two kind of museums may have on audience development strategies.

## Literature Review

The first museum that catered specifically to children, is regarded to be the Brooklyn Children's Museum that engages in a variety of topics ranging from science to sociology, founded in 1899. Because it was something new for its time, it is safe to be assumed that the topic of children in museums may have gained academic relevance around this time. Indeed, the question about children's and families' attendance in museums, may they be about art, science, history or else, goes gained academic attention in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even before the Great War, as can be seen with articles by Smith (1918), the *Art and Progress* journal (1911), *Science* (1922), and the bulletin from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1914). These are some of the first examples of scholars discussing about the topic. Up to this day, it is a topic that is still discussed. Switek (2016) states that "*keeping kids frenetically entertained is ruining our museums*", while Hein (2004) took a stance in favour of children attendance in museums, claiming that this educational role is fundamental for museums.

Yet, the academic literature goes far beyond the mere question if children are or are not welcome in museums. Ott (1980) and Unrath & Luehrmann (2009), for instance, analysed how important it is for museums and schools to collaborate and work together in order to engage pupils in museums and the educational value that the museums represent, Trimis & Savva (2004) did the same for pupils from pre primary schools. Another discussion in academia is about the relationship that museums have with schools: they have different educational goals, but they are relatable. Further, cooperation with schools can play an important role in arising interest in museums among pupils, showing them as interesting instead of dry and funless places (Zeller, 1985). Yet, boredom is not the only factor that scare off children from museum, another reason why children and their families can be reluctant to visit places of "high" culture such as museums is that these venues are often perceived as too formal and linked to a specific social class; they are "intimidating", way too 'intellectual' for the common man and needing of a certain etiquette (Gilmore, 2015). These are traits that are not necessarily intrinsic to museums themselves (even if under certain circumstances they can certainly be) but are the way they are perceived by a not insignificant percentage of the population (Coles 1992). Museums often even try to get rid of this image that might be a source of alienation for common man (Coles, 1992) as has also been suggested by the Lila Wallace Foundation (2001): museums should become visitor centered and become "*places that people want to visit because of the way they [the visitors] are treated, the enjoyable experiences awaiting them*

*and staff that make them feel welcome and wanted".*

One way to look at the relationship between audiences and museums is through the lens of demand theory. Demand theory relates to the relationship between the demand of a consumer for goods and services, and their offer and prices. Seaman (2006) and Lévy-Garboua & Montmarquette (2011) studied demand in the arts, coming to the conclusion that art audiences are quite elite and the product can be understood as a luxury good. Yet, both papers agree on the fact that a more in-depth analysis of the topic is needed to see that it is not always like that, financial stability is not the only aspect that influences demand and consumption of "high" art: education, for example, is said to be a stronger determinant than income. Education is not something that shows its fruits in the short-term, but it is an investment for the future: people need to be "addicted" to a certain product (museums in this case), so that they will visit over and over again in the future. Therefore, it can be understood that working on the audience of a museum is a long-term project. Studies of demand have still many critical issues that are unresolved (Seaman, 2006), but are nevertheless quite useful for the study of audience development: developing and audience means also to "chain" them to the product and increase their willingness to purchase said product several times.

To effectively attract visitors audience development needs to be implemented with specific initiatives that are part of a wider strategy (Reussner, 2003). One strategy that can result in a good starting point is to make museums more interactive and encourage visitors to have fun during the visit (Chang, 2006). One example is given by Jeffers (1999), who experimented to let children take the lead as tour guides in museums and it has proven to be quite effective also at destroying the image of museums to be too "sacred" a place to be visited. Initiatives of this kind can be understood as 'edutainment' following the definition by Buckingham & Scanlon (2005). To effectively plan audience development and have a stronger relationship with the audience, Bollo (2014) claims that the cultural sector in general and museums in specific need the new figure of an *audience developer*, a specific professional that specializes in attracting and fostering audiences while "*integrating and harmonizing the tasks and functions of the marketing manager, the networker, the project manager, the animator, and of the facilitator of practices, and social and intercultural dynamics*" (Bollo, 2012). The audience developer is still a rare figure in the cultural sector, despite the usefulness that Bollo claims it has.

The interplay between audience and museums in the specific was studied by Briggs (2000). He distinguishes about qualities of the traditional museums and a new way of designing them that,

in his words, may attract a very diverse body of visitors. He argues that the traditional museum relies too heavily on inspiring a sense of awe and being similar to a "temple" of knowledge, this has repeatedly been seen as counterproductive (Zeller, 1985) (Gilmore, 2015). Briggs disagrees and says that museums must come to terms with the fact that they are "*no more or less an entertainment option than is a shopping mall, a hiking trail in the woods, or a movie theater. many establishments competing for our patrons*" but also claims that museums have a unique feature: they tell authentic, real stories. Museums should capitalize on this feature and try to engage the interest of the audience and make their stay as enjoyable as possible. One of the key ways to achieve a better relationship with a diverse audience is to foster some kind of interactivity in order to engage the visitors on a personal level. Briggs even suggests that the focal point of an exhibition should not be the artifacts that are exposed, but rather the audience and their direct relationship with said artifacts.

In the same fashion as Briggs, Watl (2006) argues that visitors are the fundamental part of any museum, since without them, they would merely be "lifeless, empty halls with no purpose". By claiming that museums should always serve their visitors, he similarly suggests to strip museums of their aura of being a "temple" of knowledge to be revered with awe. Instead arguing that involvement and engagement should be the goals to be pursued. To underline this point, Watl (2006) states that the quality of the collection is not the element that mainly attracts audiences, but rather the whole environment that surrounds the exposition. The chance of a 'dumbing down' of the museum experience for the mere sake of attracting mediocre audience is also addressed. After all, museums ought to be a place of 'high' education (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999). Watl is arguably a bit vague about this point, limiting his discussion about the topic to the sentence "*with the commitment of providing innovative programmes with the highest possible quality standard for a wide range of audiences, museums can establish themselves as centres of excellence, show casting original objects which make a positive difference to people's lives*" (p.3). Further in his article, Watl (2006) firstly tries to define what audience development is ("*breaking down barriers in all its forms and shapes and engaging visitors in activities which they consider worthwhile. It is not only about numbers, and there are different approaches depending on the need of the specific target group.*" p.3) coming to the conclusion that it is an effort to be taken co-ordinatedly by all departments of a museum to provide multiple experiences that resonate engagement in the visitors, trying to focus on specific target groups, and turn non-visitors into visitors.

Until now, it has been seen how important it is for museums to create a meaningful relationship with its audience, and also to approach any potential audiences to encourage them to

become visitors. After all, a museum with no audience is as useless as the proverbial white elephant. Now that the fundamental role of the audience has been explained, the ways in which this relationship can be fostered will be shown.

Reussner (2003) takes a stance in favour of the use of strategic management (i.e.: the implementation of the major goals and initiatives of the company while "*ensuring success in the long-term, dealing with changing contextual conditions and competition*", p.96). Reussner (2003) claims that strategic management is a relatively new thing for museums. Indeed, she claims strategic management to be uncommon in all non profit organisation and being actually a thing of the for profit sector. Some first steps in the direction of strategic management for museums have been undertaken, but in an inappropriate manner for visitor oriented museums: it is claimed that there is a lack of comprehensiveness in three aspects. Firstly, it needs to be done according to the museums' social mandate of "*providing access, enabling social inclusion and promoting cultural diversity*" (Reussner, 2003). Secondly, the orientation towards visitors needs to be done in order to make their visit "*attractive and worthwhile*". Lastly, museums should, as also Walzl (2006) suggests, work in collaboration between all departments and be committed to the decided goals that were set. Especially the second point is vague and would need a few sentences to be better defined. In the rest of her paper, Reussner discusses the application of goal development, strategic analysis, strategic orientation, strategic planning, implementation, and strategic control into the broader scope of the strategic management, coming to the conclusion that museums need to pay attention to an external perspective (develop attracting power) and to an internal perspective (ensure that their services are appropriate for the needs of the visitors) in order to be both competitive and develop their audiences in a long term perspective. Reussner spends also many words on the importance of audience research (both for visitors and non visitors) as this research is "*not a mere critique of museum work, but to initiate a constructive learning process.*" (Reussner, 2003, p.104) and "*audience research and evaluation can help a museum on its way towards a strategic orientation by supporting goal-defining, strategic planning and the implementation of measures*" (Reussner, 2003, p.104). The use of a visitor profile is suggested to be a useful tool, as well as visitor experience survey and non visitor research. Like every theoretical concept, also the one proposed by Reussner is not a blueprint but has to be thought like a lens: it helps in gaining perspective over an issue (audience development strategies, in this case), and, like every lens, their main value is narrowing the focus rather than enlarging it, therefore there are a lot of elements that are left out.

Also Briggs (2000) makes some points about how to attract audiences. He gives the example

of the theme park industry and the way they attract families with school age children: knowing that audiences have a short attention span and some contradictory interests (children will not be engaged in things that adults are interested in while adults may at best tolerate activities that interest children) museums can develop programs to engage families in a variety of different manners suggested by Briggs which include: 1) designing programs only for children, only for adults or specifically for families, 2) create "routes" inside museums with which visitors can plan their tour, 3) develop special events and traveling exhibitions, 4) rely as much as possible on audio-visual and interactive displays while avoiding a too wide use of the written word, 5) fun and enjoyment (as is explicitly stated also by ICOM) should be of utmost importance to the mission statement of the museum, 6) advertise extensively the above listed features, the quality of the exhibitions by themselves is not enough to engage wider, non specialised audiences, marketing campaigns are of utmost importance to enlarge and engage new audiences, especially families in this case. Concluding, Briggs firmly states that museums ought to be not only places of silent learning but also of inspiration *"from which learning opportunities may present themselves to those who may not necessarily have set out to learn, who may instead have set out merely to relax, to be with friends, and to be entertained"* (Briggs, 2000).

Similarly, Deeth (2012) proposes a strategy for audience development for contemporary art museums (contemporary art is defined as art that displaces the aesthetic object produced after the 1960s, identifying Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes from 1964 as the starting point): a more inclusive approach towards audiences is suggested. Deeth argues that contemporary art is depicted to be a 'difficult' kind of art as it defys the usual aesthetic conceptions of the public, and therefore needs special attention when advertising it. Starting from Bourdieu's and Darbel's research from the 1960s, a certain form of "natural selection" between museum goers and people who do not visit museums is discussed, coming to the conclusion that in recent years museums were made more 'popular' as they focused more and more on the experience of the visitors in the museum rather than on the teaching of specialist knowledge. She calls this the approach of the constructivist museum. It is based on the concept that the visitor with his personal experience is an active participant in the construction of knowledge and of the meaning of the exhibition rather than being merely a passive viewer that absorbs notions. This approach is fundamental to engage audiences in contemporary art museums, argues Deeth. Even adults are engaged by interactivity, not only children.

Interactivity has repeatedly been described as a key factor and challenge for museums in the future to attract children and families, thus enlarging their audience even in the long term. The

aforementioned article by Jeffers (1999) carried a study about children, between 5 and 13 years old, "taking the lead" and serving as tour guides to adults in order to engage children and their adult counterparts with the museum in a meaningful way. Amazingly, the adults were quite impressed by the children's ability to effectively lead them through the museum and give precious insights and perspectives about the exhibitions, and also about the museum that hosted these young "tour guides". This initiative effectively obliterated the vision that museums are "sacred groves" (Eisner & Dobbs, 1988) in which one has to enter with a sense of awe. By being an overall positive experience both for the children and the adults, they found out that they were having meaningful experiences and it gave them new perspectives on themselves and the visited collection or exhibition; but overall, Jeffers states that it "*remains to be seen whether or not such experiences have changed children's and adult's views of museums and what can happen within them, in terms of teaching, learning, exploring, and discovering*". Therefore, it is an interesting experiment that promotes interactivity inside museums but its effect on audience development are vague at best.

Blackwell & Scaife (2006) discuss audience development for museums, claiming that an excellent administration of the collection itself is the fundamental feature; other activities such as the improvement of facilities, targeted exhibitions, marketing techniques, and outreach are of secondary importance. Still, they agree that an effective audience development strategy is "*inclusive, collaborative and also a learning process – reflective and evaluative – for the organization*" (Blackwell & Scaife, 2006), and active involvement in the exhibitions. Blackwell & Scaife also insist on the fact that audience development should not be concerned only with increasing the number of visitors of a museum, but also nurturing and adjusting the relationship with existing visitors, maybe by developing their insights into the collection or exhibition. It is the audience that ultimately does interpret what is seen. In his response to Blackwell & Scaife, Halbertsma (2006) suggests that "ambassadors" that promote the museum to acquaintances and strangers alike (either through word of mouth or with, for example, brochures) can have a key role in the promotion and audience development of museums. Seeing someone so passionate and enthusiastic about the museum will bring in new visitors. Further he states that the ambassadors can even "*help the museum in planning exhibitions, or in the development of educational materials and activities and even guided tours. Thus museums hope to build bridges between children, their families and themselves*" (Blackwell & Scaife, 2006, p.76).

It seems to be commonly agreed that one of the fundamental features of an effective audience development strategy for museums, is to involve audiences as much as possible. Also

stripping museums of their temple-like atmosphere is often regarded as being pivotal for an improvement in children and family visits. Financial encouragements on the other hand seem to be rather insignificant.

The report published by the *Nederlandse Museumvereiging* (NMV) in 2011, called *Investing in the audience of the future* can give some insights into some practical aspects of children-visits in Dutch museum. The report analysed the phenomenon of children and families in the museums of the Netherlands also by looking at specific initiatives that were designed for children and made some suggestions about how to attract them. It is a quantitative study of Dutch museums that study provides a lot of data and an in depth analysis concerning this data. According to the report (NMV, 2011) there are over 20 million yearly visitors to Dutch museums, more or less 10% of them are children. The report also explores several possibilities to further increase this percentage, which will be also a long term gain for museums since children that become interested in museums are way more likely to be museum goers also in their adult life. The policy of free admission for children does not appear to work as a tool of audience development, at least not on its own. Following this introduction, the NMV report (2011) presents eight of the most used concepts for audience development for children and families: introduction of a children's section, a varied programme for children, exhibitions for families and children, coordinated activities to be held during school holidays and national events, introduction of supporting activities for children such as games and other interactive activities, collaborations with cultural organisations and primary schools with teaching packages, creating a single "brand" for children, easy to recognize, free admission for children up to the age of twelve. After a swift comparison with strategies of other countries concerning audience development for children, children's visits to museum with school and family are analysed, showing that there is an increase of visit to museums if audience development is properly managed. The overall conclusions of the study are:

- free admissions have a scarce impact on children and family visits.
- there is a wide and diversified variety of initiatives that can lead to a successful audience development for children and their families in this field, i. e.: there is not one 'right' approach.
- low costs (of visit, transportation, etc.) are not an important incentive while high costs are extremely deleterious.



Further, the importance of an online presence of museums is underlined.

The scrutiny of the report by the NMV concludes this literature review. The main academic literature on the topic has been analysed and will be compared to the results of the empirical research. The next chapter will illustrate the methods used in the empirical research.

## **Methodology**

Starting from the research question, the *literature review* analysed various theories and examples out of the existing academic literature connected to the topic of this thesis in order to set the conceptual groundwork for the empirical research. Over this conceptual groundwork, the investigation linked to the the research question can be started. In this chapter the methodology of the thesis will be outlined. The collection of the data will be explained, as will be the methods that will be used to analyse it.

### **General research methodology**

As stated in the introduction, the research question of this thesis is: "*To what extent do Dutch museums try to attract children and families?*". The first decision to be made when starting an empirical research is whether to choose a qualitative or a quantitative method, the main difference consisting in a distinction between deduction (quantitative method) and induction (qualitative method). A qualitative research generally gathers information and data that will subsequently be used to form a theory; it asks open and broad questions and looks at a small scale to go particularly in depth. On the contrary, a quantitative research uses statistical methods to measure a phenomenon and empirically test hypotheses; it asks specific questions and has (or at least should have) an unbiased view towards the subject matter. Following the descriptions of these two kind of analysis, the quantitative method has been chosen to be used in the empirical research of this thesis.

For a quantitative analysis three different approaches for data collection are possible: experimentation, observational research, and surveys (Bryman, 2012). This study will be conducted with the use of a survey, with the clear goal to get clear and quantifiable data in a relatively short period of time, which will consequently be analysed in a comparative manner. The use of a survey instead of structured interviews grants a faster collection of data and a more standardised outcome. Further, personal bias from the interviewer, possible miscommunication due to body language, and variability due to other causes will be limited with the use of a survey (Bryman, 2012). Lastly, a survey is easier to be carried out as participants can fill out the questionnaire at any time in any place they prefer, thus ensuring a quicker and more comfortable data collection.

## Finding the sample

Surely not all museums have the same policies of audience development for children and families, this is what is going to be analysed in this thesis. Thus, some differentiation has to be done between various kinds of museums that may have different budgets, collections, aims, and missions. For example, museums can be divided between science museums, history museums, art history, cinema, natural history, biographical, military history, etc. It could have been researched how museums of different type have a different approach in their audience development oriented to children and families. Such a differentiation would have put the focus of the research in the differences that museums have in the management of audience development according to the subject matter the museum exposes; an analysis based on these categories would have been closely linked to the academic field museology, which is not the aim of this thesis that tries to give insights in the field of cultural economics. Another possible division in categories could have been about museums in big Dutch cities (such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague) and museums in smaller towns and/or on the countryside, showing if there are differences between the audience development for children in museums in big urban conglomerates, that most likely have a wider potential audience to be reached, and in the rural areas, where less people live and visit. This differentiation would have given a social scope to the research and maybe showcase some meaningful insights in the broader discourse of the enlarging political, social and economic gap between cities and countryside that in many ways characterizes Europe, and the western world as a whole. As interesting as studying the possible rift between museums in urban and rural areas could have been, it would have a far too social scope that, again, does not fit into the academic field of cultural economics that this thesis wants to address.

Eventually, the main distinction that has been made is between city (or civic) museums and national museums, called “rijksmuseums” in the Netherlands (not to be confused with the *Rijksmuseum* in Amsterdam, which refers to one specific museum. For the sake of clarity, Dutch rijksmuseums will be referred to as “national museums”). Civic museums usually have to work with a more restricted budget than national museums, and are not directly maintained by the state and the central government, and have to rely on regional or local governments, foundations, or private donors. On the other hand, civic museums can have more freedom in their governance, as they do not have to comply entirely to expectations and decisions made by the central government. Still, they might have to comply to instructions made by the local government, except if they are purely privately funded. A comparative analysis on these two kind of museums has a scope inside the field

of cultural economics and give some insights about the ways that budgets and centralised governance from the state, or lack thereof, can influence audience development for museums, while also giving some smaller hints about the division between urban and rural areas that was addressed earlier in this paragraph.

## Sample size

Depending of definitions, the number of museums in the Netherlands can vary. According to the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* there are 694 museums in the Netherlands (CBS, 2016). The *Museum Vereniging* (NMV), the Dutch museum association, currently counts ca. 420 member museums. In 2011 the NMV published a study with different numbers of museums according to different sources and criteria ranging from 465 to 1254 (the CBS accounts 773 museums in the statistic in *figure 1*), the latter number including a large number of institutions that do not comply with the requirements of the Museum Register (NMV, 2011). The Museum Register is a register of museum institutions that demonstrably meet criteria for a high-quality interpretation of the functions of a museum. *Fig. 1* shows the varying number of museums in the Netherlands according to different definitions and sources. This thesis does not want to define what a museum is, nor take a stance in favour of a specific set of requirements for museums to be described as such. Therefore, for this research the number of museums in the Netherlands was counted as being 465 which is the number of museums that are official members of the NMV as of 2010; in the same fashion, the number of visits to Dutch museums is counted as being 17.600.000, which funnily is almost the same number of people living in the Netherlands. Since then some of the over 80 applications might have been welcomed by the NMV, but the number of visits into Dutch museums would not have varied significantly.

Further, the CBS (2016) divided the Dutch museums in five different categories (*Fig. 2*) : ethnology, natural history, art, business/technology, and history. According to CBS's data, a vast majority of the museums in the Netherlands is about history (almost

Number of museums and museum visits according to different definitions			
2010	Museums	Visits	Source
▶ Museums	1,254	Unknown	Museum.nl
▶ Museums	773	20,800,000	CBS statline*
▶ Registered museums (including pending applications)**	547	18,450,000	Museum Association & Museum Register
▶ Members of the Netherlands Museum Association	465	17,600,000	Museum Association
▶ Museum Pass holders	382	16,500,000	Museum Association
▶ Top 55 largest museums	55	12,500,000	Museum Association

\* Every two years, Statistics Netherlands (CBS) publishes statistics for museums. The data for 2007 were released in 2010 (2009 study; please refer to CBS.nl). Statistics Netherlands and the Netherlands Museums Association are in talks to have the research group focus on museums that meet the requirements of the Museum Register.

\*\* This number also includes the museums that have submitted an application and/or that are likely to become eligible for inclusion in the Museum Register.

*Fig 1: Different criteria on the number of museums by the NMV (2011)*

60%).

The museums were chosen for different reasons. Firstly, to provide a good balance between national museums (over half of all *rijksmuseums* in the Netherlands are included) and other museums not directly managed by the Dutch central government. Further, the chosen museums are geographically spread across the Netherlands and are focused on vastly different topics spreading from history to art and ethnography; these last two points (geographic and topic variety) ensure that the research is

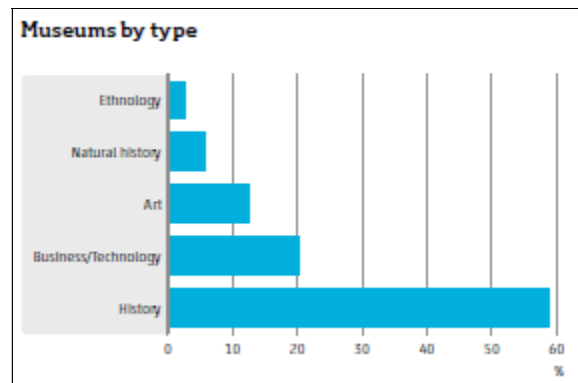


Fig 2: Museums by topic according to the CBS (2016)

done on a diverse range of museums in order to be sure that results can have a validity for museums all over the Netherlands and not for just a specific region or a specific kind of museum (e.g.: only art museums or only history museums). The only categories of museums that were in principle excluded from the survey are museums concerned with adult themes such as sex (e.g.: the Sex Museum in Amsterdam or the Museum of Prostitution in the same city), as these museums are at their very core not children friendly; indeed, any attempt coming from their side to attract underage visitors would even be against the law. Consequently, there is no point in studying their attempts in audience development towards this specific demographic section.

### Data collection & analysis

The following museums received and answered the survey, they are ordered according to the city they are located in, the museums followed with “(R)” are national museums (*rijksmuseum*). In 2016 these museums all together were visited by over 10 million people, accounting to way over half of the yearly museum visits in the Netherlands.

1. Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam) (R)
2. Van Gogh museum (Amsterdam) (R)
3. National Maritime Museum (Amsterdam) (R)
4. NEMO (Amsterdam)
5. Stedelijk Museum (Alkmaar)
6. Netherlands Open Air Museum (Arnhem) (R)
7. Zuiderzee Museum (Enkhuizen) (R)

8. Het Noordbrabants Museum ('s-Hertogenbosch)
9. Kröller-Müller museum (Otterlo) (R)
10. Mauritshuis (Den Haag) (R)
11. Gemeentemuseum (Den Haag)
12. Maritiem Museum (Rotterdam)
13. Museum Rotterdam (Rotterdam)
14. Boijmans van Beuningen (Rotterdam)
15. Nationaal Militair Museum (Soesterberg)
16. TwentseWelle (Enschede)
17. Groninger Museum (Groningen)
18. Naturalis (Leiden) (R)
19. National Museum of Ethnology (Leiden) (R)
20. Museum Boerhaave (Leiden) (R)
21. Natural History Museum (Maastricht) (R)
22. Het Spoorweg Museum (Utrecht)
23. Museum Catharijneconvent (Utrecht) (R)
24. Rijksmuseum Muiderslot (Muiden) (R)
25. Archeologisch Museum (Haarlem)
26. Frans Hals Museum (Haarlem)
27. preHistorisch Dorp (Eindhoven)
28. Van Abbenmuseum (Eindhoven)
29. Fries Museum (Leeuwarden)
30. Museum Flehite (Amersfoort)
31. Stedelijk Museum (Kampen)
32. Zaanse Museum (Zaandam)
33. Nederlands Stoommachinemuseum (Medemblik)
34. Marinemuseum (Den Helder)
35. Heeswijk Castle (Heeswijk)

The survey is composed by nine questions. Questions were put to collect information about the interest of museums in expanding audiences, specifically, younger audiences. To achieve this the survey was designed in the beginning to check the museum's interest in general audience development, followed by two questions that deepen the focus on audience development that has children and families as a target group. The second part is concerned with the ways museums try to

implement audience development. These questions have the double goal of researching the museums' methods for audience development and to check if the said interest in attracting children and families is supported by any activities that go in this direction. If a museum claims to be interested in audience development, but does not have a strategy or activities that corroborate it, the veracity of the first statement can be questioned. There might be reasons preventing the adoption of measures for audience development, e.g.: lack of resources. For this reason, the last two questions (and partly also question 4), are concerned with budgeting and governance in the museum that can influence and shape audience development.

Before the survey is sent, the annual reports of the museums were analysed to look for the needed information. If any of the information that needed to be gathered with the survey was already present in the annual report, the answers were accordingly compared to assess the consistency of the answers with the actual organisation of the museum.

The nine questions of the survey are listed here:

1. Should a museum market itself and try to attract visitors?
2. Does the museum have a specific figure that focuses on audience development?
3. Is the museum interested in attracting children and families? If not, why?
4. Does the museum have a specific figure that focuses on audience development addressed to families and children?
5. Does the museum have to comply to goals set or suggested by the central or local government in terms of audience development for children and families? Were these goals met?
6. Are there, or have there been, any marketing campaigns oriented towards children and families? If not, why?
7. Does the museum think that the concept of edutainment can lead to a positive audience development for children and families? Why?
8. Is a part of the museum's budget dedicated solely to children and families?
9. Would the museum put more efforts into audience development for children and families if it had a higher budget? If not, why?

To distribute the survey, contact was initiated with the museums, the first person that was searched for was the head either of the marketing department or of the educational department. If

this person could not be identified, the normal contact channels with the museums were used to ask which staff member would be fitting and willing to answer the survey, this final person to which the message was forwarded, was the one answering the survey. In addition to the survey, if this data was not already available in the annual reports, it was asked if the yearly or biannual number of children visitors (and related families) can be seen. This data allows to make a comparison between the efforts museums do to attract families and children, and the actual effectiveness of such measures.

The data gathered from the surveys and the annual reports was evaluated and analysed while considering the theories and concepts scrutinised in the literature reviews while also regarding with attention the possible differences between national museums and other kind of museums. The museums' interest in implementing audience development was the focal point of the research and was scrutinised with most attention. To see if the possible interest to attract children and families is real and not just an incorrect statement done for the sake of the survey, the answers were checked for any elements (policies for children and families) that can corroborate the interest of the museum in this matter.



## **Results & Discussion**

This chapter will be divided into two sections; one dedicated to an analysis of the annual reports of Dutch museums, while the other is concerned with the evaluation of the survey. The first section's purpose is to analyse what image the museums try to give themselves to their stakeholders and how much effort they are putting into the attraction of children and families. The image of the Dutch museum scene coming from the annual reports is then put to a test in the evaluation of the survey to see if the data gathered from the reports is corroborated by the answers given by the museums.

### **Annual Reports**

An annual report is a detailed description of the activities of a company in a given year. They are designed to give information about the company's financial and managerial performance to stakeholders, as well as what is planned for the future. Most museums publish their annual report on their home page. At the time the research was done, many museums had not yet published their annual report for 2017; therefore, the annual reports for 2016 were taken into account, so that all museums were evaluated on equal ground. The reports by all museums that answered the survey were analysed, except for the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, whose annual report could not be found. For the sake of having a more complete sight on the Dutch museum scene, also other museum's reports were analysed for a total of 52 reports, these were museums that received the survey but did not answer it for one reason or another. A balance between national museums and others was maintained, as well as the geographical distribution across the Netherlands.

To start with the mere data coming from the annual reports, children visiting Dutch museums amount to 15,7% of all visits, which is higher than the 10% reported by the NMV in 2011. The percentage differs only slightly, but not insignificantly, between national and non-national museums, the former having 14,3% of their visitors being children, while the latter having 16,9%. It is interesting to notice that non-national museums are able to proportionally attract more children than national museums. However, one thing has to be taken into account: the numbers are significantly influenced by NEMO, the museum in Amsterdam has an astonishing 45,9% of children visitors which has a significant impact on the figures shown before. If NEMO is taken out of the account, the number of children in non-national museums lowers drastically to 13,3%, which

is less than in national museums. Indeed, NEMO is always to be taken a bit as a separate element in this research, they acknowledge their “difference” even in the survey by stating that they are a bit 'exceptional', in the sense that they often represent an exception compared to other museums in the Netherlands. The high number of children visiting them is certainly an aspect that sets them apart from the other museums.

86,5% of the annual reports have sections concerning education which includes programmes designed for children, their numbers, and the activities to attract more of them with their families. This high percentage shows a certain interest by Dutch museums to attract children. Children and families represent an important target group and their visits are generally highly valued. It is interesting, but not surprising, that children and the activities correlated with them are usually addressed in the education section of the annual report instead of maybe being in the 'visitors' section. Dutch museums seem to share the views of Heim (2004), Ott (1980), and Unrath & Luehrmann (2009) about the importance of attracting children in order to completely fulfill the educational role of ICOM (2007) definition of museums. Further, the researches on demand by Lévy-Garboua & Montmarquette (2011) seem to be confirmed in the specific case of Dutch museums as there are attempts to create a demand for the services museums offer by instilling a “need” to visit museums into people while they are still young. The remaining 13,5% of museums that did not include a section that reports their efforts to attract children might still be concerned with this topic, but its lack in the annual reports shows that it possibly does not represent one of their fundamental stakeholders and their interest, may it be due to budget constraints or because of rather 'ideological' reasons, but it seems unlikely that they share Switek's (2016) view that keeping youngsters entertained is ruining the quality of museums, even if it cannot be completely excluded as an option.

Concerning the approaches that are used to attract children and families, there are two strategies that are shared by most museums: reduced or free tickets for children (it has to be mentioned that the age above which there is no reduction varies significantly, ranging from 12 to 18 years), and collaboration with schools for pupils to have lectures and guided tours in the museum. Beyond these two approaches, there seem to be no globally shared strategies, but rather a wide variety of different activities to attract children; many museums organise workshops, yet these workshops are pretty diversified. Some examples can show the variegated endeavours done to attract children and families: the Mauritshuis organises birthday parties for children aged between 5 and 12 that include painting and a tour around the museum designed in a fashion that includes

storytelling and little games; the museum Meermanno organises workshops for children (and adults) that show the crafting process of a book; while the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen has many activities in which drawings by children are exposed so that they don't understand the museum as something detached from them but belonging to them too; the last example comes from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam that organises quizzes for primary schools pupils with topics that are included in the museum's exposition. Reussner (2003) claimed that an effective audience development strategy promotes the attracting power of the museum (external perspective) while also ensuring that the services of the museum are suited for the visitors (internal perspective); the analysed museums seem to agree with Reussner since they seem to follow an external perspective for example when they are lowering entrance fees for children and then design activities that suit children and their need (e.g.: fun workshops). Further, exactly as Coles (1992) suggests, many of these strategies seem to have the goal to infringe the intimidating and "sacred" atmosphere that Gilmore (2015) and Eisner & Dobbs (1988) described. Indeed, all these activities seem to be designed to convince kids that museums are places where you can have fun and also learn something in an alternate setting out of school; Chang (2006) and Briggs (2000) promoted such a strategy and Dutch museums seem to agree. All the listed examples use edutainment following Buckingham's & Scalon's definition (2005): they rely on on game-like and narrative formats that go beyond a formal and didactic style of education. These strategies are similar to the ones mentioned also in the NMV report (2011). Lastly, it has to be said that none of the museums used the method designed by Jeffers (1999) to train children in a workshop with the final goal of letting them "take the lead" and act as tour guides for adults, but children are actively involved either way and are encouraged to have fun while visiting the museums.

One noteworthy point to be made is that national museums and non-national ones do not show remarkable differences in audience development for children and families in any of the points that were analysed. The percentage of children visitors to national museums is more or less the same as in non-national museums, and even slightly lower if NEMO is considered into the account. In the same fashion, the strategies and activities designed to attract more children and improve their experience do not differ between national and non-national museums, but rather differ between all museums taken individually. The only point in which there is a difference is in visitor numbers: on average, national museums have more yearly visitors than non-national ones. Yet, a closer look at this number reveals that the status of being a national museum is not the deciding factor. While it is true that national museums have more visitors, the reason for this is that the number is inflated by the national museums in Amsterdam, especially by the Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum.

These two museums attract over two million visitors each, which obviously means that together they host well over four million people, accounting 24,5% of all museum visits in the Netherlands in a year, thus being by far the most visited museums in the country. For comparison, there are four national museums in Leiden (the only city in the Netherlands along with Amsterdam to have so many), but all four together do not have as many visitors as either the Rijksmuseum or the Van Gogh Museum. This explains why national museums appear to have more visitors than non-national ones. Further, also non-national museum in Amsterdam on average have more visitors compared to their counterparts in the rest of the country, but not with numbers as enormous as in the case of the Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum. Amsterdam is an indisputable magnet for tourists: almost five million international tourists visit the city each year; if day-trippers are included, this number goes as high as 20 millions, making in the fifth most visited city in Europe by tourists (Kruyswijk, 2016). With such numbers in mind, it is logic that museums in Amsterdam receive more visits per year. If the museums in Amsterdam are taken out of the statistics, national museum visits are on par with non-national ones.

Based on this short analysis of the annual reports, the Dutch museums seem to have a decently high attention when it comes to the matter of attracting children. Further, the museums show also a certain degree of creativity in their efforts, i.e.: there are hardly two museums with the same plan of action. National and non-national museums do not show significant differences neither in the will to attract children, nor in the strategies to achieve this (activities for children are diversified with no regard to their national or non-national status), nor in the results as the percentages of children visitors differ only by 1% (if the unique NEMO museum is taken out of the equation). The higher number of visitors in Dutch museums is not linked to the status of national or non-national, but is rather related to the museum being located in Amsterdam or not.

To see if the impressions coming from the annual reports hold the test of empirical research, the next section will be devoted to the analysis of the surveys and their results. The data gathered from the reports will be confronted with the outcomes and checked if they are confirmed, partially confirmed or indeed rejected.

## **Surveys**

The survey was filled out by the 35 museums with different amounts of details given, some answered swiftly and without many details, while other museums gave an in-depth feedback to the

questions. Either way, all surveys were usable, and all together gave some interesting insights into the Dutch museum scene. The surveys will not be presented in their entirety in this thesis, but direct quotations will be used; if not differently stated, these quotes will be followed by the name of the museum that gave said quotation.

First of all, there are some points about which the surveyed museums agree unanimously or almost unanimously. It should come without a surprise that these points of agreement are the answers to questions 1, 3, and 8. The evaluation of questions 1 and 3 will be covered in this paragraph and in the following one, while question 8 will be covered further in the thesis. All museums agreed, with various degrees of enthusiasm, that a museum should market itself and try to attract visitors. Apparently, museums are not managed as something “sacred” that has to be preserved only for an elite of scholars and/or educated people without being ruined by a fickle enlarged public exactly like it was portrayed by Briggs (2000) and Walth (2006). The National Militair Museum even remarked that “*a museum without visitors has no meaning*”. The only two voices that showed a small degree of caution with the statement are NEMO and the Stedelijk Museum in Kampen: the former stated that “*marketing should never compromise the essence of quality of the museum*”, thus forcing the point that the content of a museum is more important than its marketing, exactly as was suggested by Blackwell & Scaife (2006). Interestingly, NEMO, also stated that developing the quality of the experience in the museum is more important than having precise audience development plans, partly contradicting Walth's (2006) point that the quality of the collection is not the element that mainly attracts audiences. The Stedelijk Museum Kampen claimed that “*building a good relationship with the field (schools etc.) is even more important*”, thus deepening the importance of the educational role for the museum that Ott (1980) and Unrath & Luehrmann (2009) analysed. Many museums actually do care a lot about this role, as can be seen in the annual reports. This relationship between museums and schools was also strongly encouraged by the NMV report (2011).

Concerning question number 3, the museums almost unanimously (97,2%) claimed to be interested in attracting children and families. Those museums that did specify why, consistently stated that it is a long term strategy to increase their visitor numbers, many explicitly claimed that “*children are the future*” or that children that are engaged early in their education with museums are much more likely to be frequent museum-goers when they grow up. The preHistorisch Dorp in Eindhoven actively noticed that parents who have been visiting them in their youth often return with their children when they grow up. The museums that claimed they do not reject children and

families completely, but have to make choices and are not specifically aiming at children and families while rather focusing on other target groups, they suggested that space constraints also play a huge role. It is remarkable that 40% of museums claimed that children and families are their main target group. The reasons for this are not always the same: almost half of this 40% claimed 'ideological' reasons such as the Catharijneconvent, that wants to spread knowledge about christianity in the Netherlands since "*it defined our society*" and described it to be "*an urgent subject*" for children to be learned, whether coming from a religious family or not. The remaining museums of this 40% claim that education is their main goal, therefore having children and families as their main target group is only a logical consequence. This statement closely resembles the educational role of the museum as represented by Dodd (1999) and Hooper-Greenhill (1999), and also the definition by ICOM (2007). Curiously, most of the museums that claim that children and families are their primary target group do not have significantly more children visitors than the museums that do not have them as a target group, all on the contrary, they are on par with the others. NEMO is again a big exception, but its exceptionality has already been stated. The question arises about how this is possible. Following logic it would seem obvious that a museum that has children and families as its main target audience would attract more of them compared to a museum that is more 'generic' in this respect, but this does not appear to be the case. One explanation could be that these museums that concentrate on children and families offer better experiences for this target group, following a quality over quantity policy, but there are no hard data to either confirm or contradict this explanation. Further research into this matter is needed, including the opinion of audiences and further questions to the museums concerning this topic, but this is out of the scope of this thesis.

Further, also question number 6 received an overwhelming majority of positive answers. 82,8% of the museums have various forms of marketing campaigns specifically oriented towards children and families. Many museums' campaigns are mostly done online, but some other projects are really ambitious, like in the case of the Groninger Museum that involves entire neighborhoods to promote its image among children and families. These projects are usually part of a broader strategy that involves many departments of the museum in a similar fashion as Reussner (2003) and Waltl (2006) suggested. The remaining 17,2% of the museum have no specific marketing campaigns at all, and at most do some extra PR on social media, relying on publicity that can be done for free by the existing staff members. Indeed, budget and staff constraints are said to be the cause of the lack of real marketing campaigns; thus, it is not surprising that the museums with no specific campaigns are all rather small museums with small teams. While talking of budgetary

issues, the answers to question number 8 show that almost all museums (94,2%) have part of their budget dedicated to children and families, only two museums answered with "no". In 17% of the cases the biggest part of the budget goes to this target audience, while 64,2% answered with a general "yes". The remaining museums have a small budget, some are trying to higher said budget by applying for funds. The answers given to questions 6 and 8 seem to confirm the statements given in the museum's response to question 3, i.e.: Dutch museums actively engage with children and families and highly value their visits, at the same time much effort is done to increase the attractiveness of the museums for youngsters. The fact that a vast majority of museums have part of their budgets committed to this endeavour, confirms this fact.

Connected to this point are the answers to question number 9: 68,5% of the museums said that a higher budget would allow them to increase their efforts for audience development for children and families with some museums like the Gemeentemuseum in Den Haag saying that *"there is a strong demand for it"*. The remaining museums either answered that they would not use a higher budget by investing it in audience development for children and families as there would be other departments of the museum that need money with more urgency, or that a higher budget would not specifically be used for the target audience of children, but would be equally distributed between all branches of the museum. Coming back to the 68,5% of museums that answered "yes" to question number 9, they stated that more money would be spent on different things including: hiring more personnel, set up more campaigns for children, and buy and renew materials such as computers. A higher budget may also help museums to reshape themselves to have a better interplay with their audiences, thus shifting from the design of a traditional museum to a modern museum following Briggs' (2000) analysis. Interestingly, many museums said that a higher budget would enable them to purchase and use materials that use the latest technical developments, such as virtual reality and videogames. They could also organise more engaging experiences with games and roleplaying. All of these elements that museums would acquire with a higher budget fit Buckingham's & Scanlon's (2005) definition of edutainment: they are a more informal and less didactic way of sharing knowledge and rely on visual materials, games, narrations, and technological tools. Indeed, 77,1% of the museums claim that they support the concept of edutainment in their museums. Some even go as far as claiming that *"learning while playing is the best way"* (Het Noordbrabants Museum), and *"It is the core of approaching this audience"* (Frans Hals Museum), and that they are *"Embracing this concept. Our aim is to create experiences that will both entertain and educate [...] both the experience and the aspects learned during these experiences will stick with our guests for the rest of their lives"* (preHistorisch Dorp). Actually, most

of the museums that embrace edutainment are really enthusiastic about it and appear to put a lot of effort into it. Even museums whose answers were generally short and concise, spent some more words on question number 7 to explain their position on edutainment, showing that it is a topic that they regard as important. It appears that Deeth's (2012) is right when he observes that museums are increasingly focusing on the experience of the visitors and their active participation: edutainment is all about involving the audience (Christensson, 2006).

Some examples of “edutainment” that were mentioned by the museums include theatre performances, treasure hunts to be solved with informations from the exhibition, and night-visits. It is curious that not all these “edutainment” activities were listed in the respective annual reports, this might be due to the fact that the surveys were filled out in 2018, while the annual reports refer to the year 2016. It has to be said that no museum completely rejected edutainment or said it is not what they are looking for because of it being a “wrong” concept to be used to design a museum: NEMO has no opinion on the matter (it was only museum stating this), while the remaining museums are generally in favour of "edutainment" but underline that the "entertainment" should never overshadow the "education" and insist that *"information should be interesting and correct"* (National Museums of Ethnology) or that *"Correct information must always be the leading aspect. Entertainment plays a part as well but may not dominate."* (Stedelijk Museum Kampen).

Until now, the answers analysed give the impression that Dutch museums are generally on the same page when it comes to audience development for children and families. This large agreement on the matter among museums is not as strong when the museums' staff is analysed. The answers to questions 1 and 3 show that the museums are divided on this topic: not even half of the museums (37,1%) have a specific figure that focuses on audience development, and another 17,1% say that this task is part of a broader job description (commonly it is part of either the marketing or the PR department). 45,8% of the questioned museums stated that they do not have a staff member that fulfills the task of developing audiences, thus partly confirming Bollo's (2014) observation that the figure of the *audience developer* is still not really widespread among museums, even though not as rare as he claimed it to be. It is possible that among the 45,8% of the museums that stated to not have an *audience developer* at least some might have one such figure that can be assimilated by a “broader job description” like it happens in other museums, but there is no hard data to prove this assumption. This time the reason for not having a specific staff member focusing on audience development is rarely claimed to be because of budget shortages, mostly it is justified with the fact that they claim to have other means to reach audiences and develop them. Similarly, only 31,4% of



the museums have an *audience developer* that focuses on children and families, and in over half of this cases it is the same person in charge of audience development all together. It has to be mentioned that one museum that claimed not to have a specific figure for audience development, claimed to have one for children and families; this is strange because it would be assumed that audience development would firstly be done on a scope as broad as possible, and only afterwards it would be focused on a specific target audience. This museum also does not specialise in younger audiences, thus making this statement even stranger. Then, 68,5% of the museums does not have an *audience developer* that focuses his efforts on children and families. Again budget constraints are not said to be the main cause of this. Noticeably, 68,5 is the same percentage as the museums that said to require a higher budget to improve their audience development for children and families. It has to be remembered that some museums explicitly stated that they would hire more personnel that has to deal with the attraction of children and families. This hints to the fact that a bigger staff is not seen as crucial for audience development, or at least not as important as the purchase of better materials and/or well thought out marketing campaigns.

All things considered, the impressions that came from the analysis of the annual reports are confirmed by the results of the survey: there is indeed a high attention given to attracting children and families, even though the means to achieve this are very different depending on the museum. The figure of an *audience developer* is not particularly widespread; yet, this is not symptomatic of a lack of attention given to children and families, but rather because museums think that audience development can be achieved with other means that are more effective, e.g.: improving the quality of the exhibitions or having a well functioning marketing department.

The analysis of the survey showcased no significant differences between national and non-national museums in any way. To further investigate these two kind of museums, regulations from the central or local government, tackled in question number 5, will now be analysed. In the case of national museums, most museums said that there are goals set by the central government that are “*strict*” (Catharijneconvent). Oddly, the Rijksmuseum stated that there are no “*families and children specific*” targets to be met, but a total target. This is peculiar since it would be expected for the government to treat all national museums equally under the same rules; however, as already shown, the Rijksmuseum is an abnormal museum for Dutch standards and might receive a special treatment by the central government. Sadly the Van Gogh museum did not fill out the survey, it would have been interesting to see if the other “abnormal” museum in Amsterdam also claims to not have goals set by the central government in terms of audience development for children and

families. All the national museums that claim to have goals set by the government met these goals. Since all museums reached enough children and families as was expected from them, it appears that the goals set by the central government are not extremely hard to be reached. Another explanation could be that the government is really strict on the numbers of children visiting museums each year. Consequently, the museums that do not meet the goals that were set have to face significant budget cuts. These cuts might be so high that a national museum would seriously suffer from them, even putting under threat their very existence. Since the financing by the government is vital to the museums, the goals of the government have to be reached at any cost. This explanation, while possible, is rather weak as it is unlikely that the government would ever put under serious threat the very existence of a national museums.

Other, non-national, museums can also receive subsidies from the central government, but only a handful of them do, maybe because they want to be “free” of government regulations on the matter, but this is a mere hypothesis not corroborated by any hard data. The Noordbrabants museum said a noteworthy statement, i.e.: that “*there are funds that give extra money for good plans in cooperation with schools*” showing that even the government highly values this strategy, agreeing with many museums that strictly collaborate with school, e.g.: the Stedelijk Museum Kampen. On the other hand, it is reasonable to think that many museums that work with schools do so, because it is encouraged and promoted by the government; this is valid at least for the museums that receive funding from the government. Further, 72,7% of the non-national museums claimed that they do not have to comply with any goals set by the local government, but mostly set their own targets; the remaining 27,3% have specific goals to reach, set either by the central or the local government. Oddly, two museums coming from the same province (Zuid Holland) gave contradicting answers regarding goals set by the government, probably due to one applying for money from the central government and the other one not. Out of all the non-national museums that have targets to be reached (either given local/central government, or self-given), 91% have met said goals, showing a solid success rate. Museums that did not succeed, did not go into detail as why they could not attract as many children and families as they wanted. One point has to be made: since non-national museums are trying to attract children as much as national museums do, even though they have no guidelines coming from the government, and show a similar success rate, it can be argued that government instructions on the matter are quite useless: museums want children to visit them even without regulations by the government, may it be local or central.

Over all, of all the surveyed museums 93,7% met the goals they were aiming for. If almost all goals were met, it means that 15,7% (which means that 2.763.200 out of 17.600.000 visitors are children) is seen by the Dutch museums as a satisfying share of children visits. This is remarkable as it shows that a vast majority of the museums' strategies and activities to attract children and families are effective, at least on the scale that the museums aim for.

# Conclusions

## Evaluation

Inspired by ICOM's definition of museums and by the work of several scholars such as Hooper-Greenhill (1999), Zeller (1985), Chang (2006), Briggs (2000), Fanizza (2015), and many others, this thesis wanted to answer the question “*To what extent do Dutch museums try to attract children and families?*” while having an eye of regard towards the strategies that museums set up to attract this specific target audience (if there is willingness to actually attract it).

To immediately answer the main question: children and families are regarded as being of utmost importance by Dutch museums; maybe the most important one indeed. Consequently, the museums in the Netherlands go to great lengths to have an ever growing number of children and families visiting them, and work so that they will have a meaningful experience out of it as Deeth (2012), Coles (1992), and Chang (2006) encouraged museums to do. The attention and detail that the annual reports give to their policies toward children and education perfectly showcases the value that this target group has in the eyes of the museums. Also the numerous marketing campaigns, some of them having a really large scope that includes entire neighborhoods, oriented towards children and families that are organised by the museums prove the many efforts that are done. The high value given to younger visitors in museums is not related to any geographical location or link to the central government. Regardless of being located in big cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Den Haag, or in smaller conglomerates like Kampen, Den Helder or Enkhuizen museums try to attract as many children as possible, and succeed in doing so. The same thing is valid for national and non-national museums: both regard children and families as an important target audience, even though most national museums have to comply with goals set by the central government and non-national museums do not.

Concerning the subquestion, apparently there are no strategies for audience development for children and families that are privileged by Dutch museums. Two strategies that are commonly used are reduced prices for children and collaborations with school, two approaches also warmly sponsored by the NMV (2011). Except for these two, museums have many different strategies to attract children that are more often than not related to edutainment as defined by Buckingham & Scanlon (2005). Fun, enjoyment, game-like formats, and narrative frameworks are widely agreed to

be the best way to approach younger audiences, this is exemplified by the statement by the Frans Hals Museum that edutainment is "*the core of approaching this audience*". Nevertheless, investments into the quality of the exhibitions are also often seen as fundamental for the attraction of children and families, as museums obviously value the fact that their visitors leave after having had a meaningful experience that taught them something, it should not be only fun. Apparently one of the first things that is taught to a Dutch museum employee that has to deal with children is that fun and education should go hand in hand like many scholars suggested (Chang, 2006) (Briggs, 2000) (Ott, 1980) (Unrath & Luehrmann, 2009). Lastly, since Briggs' (2000) positions seem to be generally shared among Dutch museums, it would not be surprising if his research would be considered a must-read among museum managers in the Netherlands.

In the end, one out of six museum visitors in Dutch museums is a child. Is this a satisfying number? It is a matter of opinion, but apparently it is satisfying enough for Dutch museums and for the government, since the vast majority of museums reach high enough numbers of children and families visiting them. But it is always possible to improve, as the need for higher budgets showcases. After all, children that have great experiences in museums are the museum-goers of tomorrow, that will bring their own children with them. It is a cycle that needs constant maintenance to be kept working, but is definitely worth the effort.

### **Limitations of the study and further research**

The results of this study have to be taken with a grain of salt; as every research, also this one has space for improvement and has a need for other study to complement it. For instance, it would be interesting to make a qualitative study on the same topic: a more in-depth discussion with a smaller number of museums might give better chances to tackle some arguably contradictory statements done by the museums, like the apparent discrepancy between the statement that a higher budget would allow the hiring of more personnel to focus on children and families, and the contemporary lack of *audience developers* for this target audience that is not said to be linked to budget constraints. Further, the survey does not cover questions that address the issue if it is better to invest into a big staff or into better tools and materials that might improve the experience of the visitors to the museums. Arguably, this is a question that could need an entire research on its own to be answered properly, but it would be a good integration to the study presented in this thesis. The same thing can be said for a larger, in-depth discussion concerning the concept of edutainment and its implementation in the museums' exhibitions and audience development: it is a topic that would

have bloated the scope of this thesis and deserves studies on its own, but is a topic that can certainly be further explored. The figure of the *audience developer* should also have received more attention and a more critical analysis than the one that was made during the research for this thesis. Indeed, almost every point of discussion raised by this thesis could be worth a whole research by itself, especially the question concerning the weird fact that museums with children as their target audience do not have more young visitors compared to other, less focused, museums; and the question about the effectiveness of government regulations into museum affairs regarding audience development. Also the question of quality of the experience over quantity of visitors would be interesting to be researched

Lastly, even though the surveyed museums cover well over half of the annual museum-visitors in the Netherlands, the research could have achieved more precise results with a higher number of participants, so that the statistical relevance would have been increased and the margin of error diminished. Also, the study would have certainly benefited if it could have gone beyond the boundaries of the Netherlands and be expanded at least to some other countries, maybe reaching the scale of a broad study on European level. The data gathered in different countries could have been comparatively analysed to discuss which aspects of audience development are better (or worse) refined in said countries. In the best case scenario this would lead to a widespread discussion on a European level that could strengthen the integration of the European Union on the basis of culture and education.

In conclusion, the topic of audience development addressed towards children and families in museums deserves more attention and has still many facets to be explored. With this thesis it is hoped that some precious insights into the matter were given and that it might be a starting point for further discussions and researches on the topic.

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