Arts participation: what is the point?

Master Thesis

Lenka Havlenová

Erasmus University Rotterdam
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Student number: 476292
Supervisor: Frans Brouwer

Abstract

This study examines the current situation concerning arts participation in Dutch visual arts museums. In order to map different perceptions of arts participation, 11 in-depth interviews were conducted. Arts participation is viewed from the perspective of educational departments and, therefore, the interviewees are all involved in educational programs development. The results confirm that there is not one single definition of arts participation and that what is understood under the term differs significantly from one museum to another. However, arts participation is regarded as an important element in museum programming and all selected museums do pay attention to participation, although the extent to which they utilize it varies. Since arts participation can take on different forms, the evident struggle is how to measure the outcomes and how to evaluate its results. Based on the individual perceptions, the study establishes an overarching definition of arts participation in the Netherlands. All in all, the impacts of arts participation are in general perceived as beneficial and they are ascribed highly positive effects.

Key words

museum functions, arts participation programs, active engagement, visual arts museums

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1   Introduction

The societal role of museums gradually changes and even though they, to some extent, still maintain their role as collectors and preservers of cultural objects, they are frequently finding themselves faced with situations in which they are more and more pushed into taking an active part in debates concerning contemporary issues like social inclusion, discrimination, or community cohesiveness (Munro, 2013). They are becoming additional parts of communities and play a role of agents in bridging different groups with diverse cultural backgrounds, worldviews and problems (Rosenberg, 2011). In the past, museums' attention was pointed only towards their collections and scholarly activities. Today, on top of that, they extend their objectives, try to generate satisfaction of their visitors and put efforts into additional services (Kotler & Kotler, 2000).

Progressive strategies of cultural development aim to reduce economic and social disparities within populations and to encourage overall citizen participation (Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007) by spreading access to the arts; as research has shown, individuals actively participating in the arts tend to engage in other civic activities as well (Salzman & Yerace, 2017; Walker et al., 2002; Walker, 2003). The arts are also being more and more utilized to enhance community identity and to help with revitalization of neighbourhoods. For instance, creative placemaking, a term frequently used in the US settings, is one of several approaches to community development. It stands for engaging local communities in co-creating public spaces and its goals are to enhance civic engagement, establish and strengthen social bonds, animate public spaces, improve business viability, make areas safer, or shape physical as well as social character of neighbourhoods (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010).

Although the main focus of creative placemaking has been pointed towards small decentralized cultural 'events' (Salzman & Yerace, 2017), big cultural projects such as museums, galleries, or performing art centres are also important players in building local identity. They do not only attract visitors to a certain location, but they are nowadays also often regarded as "the essential components of the city's cultural community" (Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007, p.363). They are expected not to just offer a short-term experience but to contribute to social value since they "incorporate not only objects but, more importantly, the intellectual heritage, the history, values and traditions of society" (Australian Department of Finance, 1989, as cited by Burton & Scott, 2003, p.67). In its own definition, ICOM (2017) also indicates that a museum is a social space:

"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".

To begin with, it is necessary to mention that this research focuses on 'active' arts participation. However, in this case, 'active' does not aim to indicate distinction between 'active' participation (such as art making) and 'passive' participation (attendance) as it is often differentiated in the on-going scholarly discussions. For the purpose of this study, 'active' participation can be understood as 'physical'; not in the sense that participants would have to necessarily physically create art but indicating that they have to be physically present at a certain time at a specific place. The purpose of this specification is to exclude any form of digital participation which can happen anywhere at any time, not requiring any personal or social contact between a participant and an institution. Online engagement is a rather complex topic in itself and the way in which people react to digital media can differ from how they are affected by active physical engagement.

Museums and curators often play a role of mediators between artists and the public; they convey, create, or challenge meanings while engaging audiences in different ways, e.g. physically, intellectually, socially, etc. (Elffers & Sitzia, 2016). For arts participation is seen as a tool to lift up competences like creativity, innovativeness, or openness to new ideas (McCarthy & Jinnet, 2001), museums are encouraged to actively influence audiences and raise the awareness in addressing societal issues. According to a recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2012), everyone has a right "to take part in cultural life" and "the State not only has a responsibility to ensure a wide supply of cultural services, through all its public institutions, but also acts as an initiator, promoter and regulator of synergies between public institutions and organisations in the non-profit and private sectors..." (p.1). In contrast to the Assembly's stress on the "important role played by local and regional authorities in promoting and implementing cultural rights" (2012, p.3), in 2011 the Dutch government introduced substantial budget cuts in the cultural sector. This shows that cultural institutions, including visual arts museums, have to find ways to become more independent. Dutch cultural policy for the period between 2013 and 2016 stressed entrepreneurship, internationalization, innovation and cultural education. Although cultural education and talent development are still focal points of the government, since 2017 more attention is being paid also to social value. Because cultural participation is emphasized as an important part of Dutch cultural policy (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science,

2013), it is reasonable to assume that museums in the Netherlands pay special attention to arts participation of their audiences. In addition, according to Elffers and Sitzia (2016), the approach of Dutch institutions to cultural participation has recently taken a more intense form which demands more active involvement of audiences as well as direct interactions with artworks, creators and institutions.

As it has been already suggested, from the point of view of scholars and policy makers, museums are expected to have strengthening impact on society (Newman, 2013; Rosenberg, 2011). Promoting cultural participation is, therefore, seen as a step towards supporting community cohesion and improving 'civic health' (Walker, 2003). However, although museums are outwardly perceived as important influencers of local communities, how is the importance of arts participation seen from the inside, from the viewpoint of a museum's management? Does a visual arts museum regard arts engagement as its significant mission? When trying to answer these questions, it is first important to realize that even within a museum there are several parties with varying views and sometimes conflicting interests. During the preparation of museum programs, cooperation among various departments is essential. The objective of an artist can be a process of active meaning-making by a viewer, or an arousal of some sort of emotional reaction from the audience. Participatory art usually tries to have certain emotional or physical impact on a viewer who then becomes an artistic medium him-/ herself. When seen from this perspective, museums are expected to offer space and timeframe for such interactions. On the other hand, curatorial goals relate to story-telling and multiple narratives, rather than focusing on a single art piece. And then there are educators who set different objectives for themselves, such as providing access to the arts for distinct (often underrepresented) social groups, or creating suitable environment in which visitors can learn, create and share (Elffers & Sitzia, 2016).

This thesis focuses on the interactions between visual arts museums with their audiences; specifically, on how these museums perceive the importance of engaging visitors in creative activities and in the arts. The goal is to map the current situation (regarding arts participation) among Dutch visual arts museums, the benefits they ascribe to engagement of audiences, the strategies they employ in order to boost arts participation and, last but not least, the strategies they use to evaluate outcomes of their participation programs. In order to do so, the research was conducted among educators from 11 Dutch visual art museums. The reason for choosing the education perspective is the following: education departments are the museum units where most participation ideas stem from and where programs for audiences are being constantly developed. As Elffers and Sitzia, (2016) indicate, it can be

suspected that while curators are more art-focused and marketers prioritise reaching large/ diverse audiences, educators would be more visitor-centred and so give priority to visitors' experience and personal development. In terms of education, a museum represents a place to connect people and to provide a shared learning experience (Elffers & Sitzia, 2016). However, one can expect to come across different definitions of arts participation even amidst museum educators, as well as across various approaches towards 'active' (non-digital) engagement. Therefore, in addition, this study aims to summarize the individual views on arts participation and to establish an overarching definition which would describe what the arts participation actually stands for in the eyes of visual arts museums located in the Netherlands.

The second chapter is dedicated to the overview of literature concerned with not only arts participation but also with issues such as the changing role of museums in relation to society, museums' functions, audiences, etc. The literature review ends with a short summary of the presented theoretical background. The main topic of the third chapter is methodology which describes how the research was prepared and carried out. The fourth chapter starts with a general introduction of the interviewed subjects and then addresses results which emerged throughout the analysis. In the last part, limitations of the study are reflected upon, followed by recommendations for future research. On top of that, the chapter arrives to final conclusions.

2   Literature review

First of all, it is necessary to start with a theoretical framework which can be used as a building stone for the presented research. Because of an overwhelming supply of literature concerning topics such as cultural capital, museum audiences, audience engagement, segmentation, motivational factors, etc., it is not an easy task to select the most relevant information. Nevertheless, this chapter summarizes essential theories and concepts which help to understand the issues that museums nowadays encounter while building active arts participation. Furthermore, the literature review serves as basis for the utilized interview guide which is built on the acquired information.

2.1   Role of museums in the contemporary society

Historically, museums started as elite institutions accessible only to higher classes (Hendon et al., 1989) which put them into an isolated position and underlined their image of "secluded temples of culture" standing 'above' neighbouring communities (Herguner, 2015, p.783). According to Pierre Bourdieu's model of social reproduction, access to power can be gained through inherited forms of knowledge (as cited by Newman, 2013). Following the view of Bourdieu, 'cultural capital' can be defined as "tastes, knowledge, and modes of appreciation that are institutionally supported and very broadly acknowledged to be high-status and worthy of respect" (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004, p.189). Bourdieu argued that investing in a 'cultural capital' in a young age ensures future success of the 'privileged' children since especially teachers and other gatekeepers regard familiarity with 'prestigious' forms of arts as an indicator of a somehow elite status. The ways in which individuals relate to culture correspond with social classes to which they belong; therefore, those who have accumulated some cultural capital already during their upbringing, have an advantage over those who come from 'less educated' background (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004).

Because regular museum visitors are on average well-educated and financially secured (Hood, 1983, as cited by Hendon et al., 1989; Novak Leonard & Brown, 2011; Burton & Scott, 2003), many argue that museums can add to already existing inequalities in society and further deepen gaps between distinct social classes. One of the reasons for such belief is that they "promote the experience and values of elite social classes" (Smith, 2006, as cited by Newman, 2013, p.122) and "construct and communicate a particular vision of society" (Sandell, 2007, as cited by Newman, 2013, p.122). Since this 'bourgeois' image still lingers in public consciousness, one of the building blocks of community engagement is the effort

to make museums accessible for everyone and to create a responsive 'shared space' where diversity, identity, heritage, etc. are incorporated and embraced (Herguner, 2015).

Following the concept of 'new museology', passive observation is being gradually side-lined. Museum service dimensions shift from functional (mainly focused on preservation and display of art objects) to purposive (encouraging enjoyment and learning) while visitor priorities come to the foreground and participation becomes one of the guiding principles (Herguner, 2015). Meaning of cultural participation has been developing little by little and it encompasses not only engagement of diverse populations but also stimulating education, fostering future audiences, and bringing the arts into neighbourhoods (Elffers & Sitzia, 2016). A museum can either try to trigger arts participation, while remaining in a role of an initiator and letting the community steer further development, or it takes a top-down approach in which the museum 'heads to the public' and tries to get people involved directly (Elffers & Sitzia, 2016). In her book *The Participatory Museum* (2010), Nina Simon points out that participatory projects affect only smaller audiences and hence have a smaller impact. Rather than attracting crowds, museums should, in her opinion, aim to create in-depth individual experiences. Participation on a small scale is considered valuable because it builds deeper and more sustainable relationships among included actors (Elffers & Sitzia, 2016).

Nevertheless, most people nowadays feel like they have less free time at their disposal and due to changing leisure patterns, museums have to compete for visitors with other forms of entertainment (Burton, 2003; Burton & Scott, 2003). In the past, high culture used to stand away from other cultural forms, however, this hierarchy has been changing. High arts are becoming less isolated thanks to the new trend of multiculturalism which aligns with Richard Peterson's concept of cultural 'omnivores', namely people who are indifferent to arts hierarchy and are opened to participation both in high and popular cultures (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). Many 'high-brow' arts institutions therefore suffer from falling attendance which they have to compete for with other leisure activities. Continuously declining attendance may result in public cuts in subsidies and subsequent budgetary problems (Burton, 2003; DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). On that account, maintaining or even boosting audience engagement in cultural activities seems as an important activity significant for any museum.

2.2   Defining arts participation

Conversation about 'engagement' and 'arts participation' is hindered by the fact that there is not a consensus among scholars about a precise definition. For instance, James

Clifford came up with the concept of the so called 'contact zone' which implies that a museum space can be seen as an inclusive place offering "engagement as a process of equal reciprocity and mutual benefit, where different cultural groups could share, negotiate and change perspectives on knowledge" (Ashley, 2004). Nonetheless, this does not exactly specify what kind of activities may be involved. Brown and Ratzkin (2011) state that 'audience engagement' often refers to "the creation and delivery of arts experiences" (p.5). In this case, the essential component is the maximum effect on a participant. Yet, this can be achieved in several ways and different institutions assign different meanings to 'engagement'. Sometimes 'participation' is regarded merely as 'arts attendance'; however, 'active participation' evokes the idea of being personally involved in an arts activity (Elffers & Sitzia, 2016; Novak Leonard & Brown, 2011).

From Walker's perspective (2003), there are four types of arts participation. Firstly, he relates participation in the arts to an attendance at events, which is said to bolster an institution's influence by expanding and maintaining its audiences. Moreover, it enhances connections among participants and increases vitality of community spaces since they are animated with cultural activity. Secondly, he sees arts participation as amateur art making, which creates deeper individual understanding of cultural art forms. This can include making art either in private, or for a family, friends, and even in public. Third category is socialization of children (meaning both engaging them actively in the arts like arranging lessons for them, or just bringing them to art events), which encourages their future arts participation and support for the arts, while at the same time, it builds their cultural capital and appreciation of cultural experiences. Lastly, arts participation can mean support for arts organizations, either financial, or through active volunteering. Nevertheless, the scope of activities listed in Walker's (2003) classification seems to be rather broad.

Taking into account varied degrees to which one is involved in art activities, Brown (2004) developed a framework consisting of five modes, each of them associated with different benefits one can derive from participation. When one randomly happens to be around art which he/ she has not planned on experiencing, then we are talking about 'ambient participation'. Slightly less passive form is 'observational participation' since in this situation one personally selects art which he/ she wants to experience and for which he/ she has some value expectations. 'Curatorial participation' is a creative act in itself because it involves not only selecting but also organizing and collecting art on purpose. 'Interpretative participation' incorporates self-expression that "adds value to pre-existing works of art"

(p.12). And finally, 'inventive participation' represents creation of a completely new and unique piece of art.

Even though all those kinds of arts participation are all related to one another, they require different amounts of dedicated time, money and skills from participants (Walker, 2003). Depending on the specific definition of the arts participation, quality and success can be both subjects to different kinds of measures and indicators. It is important to be clear about what goals are targeted so that the best methods to accomplish them can be chosen properly (Elffers & Sitzia, 2016; Herguner, 2015; Kotler & Kotler, 2000).

2.3   Impacts of arts participation

Studying and measuring social impact of arts participation is a complex topic without a strong theoretical grounding (Merli, 2002). It is analysed, for instance, in Matarasso's study (1997) where the author states that it is time "to start talking about what the arts can do for society, rather than what society can do for the arts" (Matarasso, 1997, p. iv). Matarasso is a sworn advocate of participatory programs which he believes to have positive effects like for instance personal development leading to enhanced confidence, educational progress, social cohesion in a form of establishing networks and mutual understanding, health promotion, etc. (Matarasso, 1997, p. vi) Moreover, active cultural participation is also associated with positive results when it comes to reducing social exclusion (Matarasso, 1997).

On the other hand, Matarasso's work has been widely criticized and he is said to judge other's quality of life based on his own standards without attempting to really understand participant's economic and social situation (Merli, 2002). According to Matarasso's critics, social inequality can be fought only by changing structural conditions which cause these societal issues; as it is argued, "[such inequality] will not be removed by benevolent arts programmes" (Merli, 2002, p.113).

It is rather clear that the impacts of arts participation are not widely generalizable and that different activities cause different results among different communities and cultures. Nonetheless, Vanherwegen and Lievens (2014) found that the effects of family background and general education on active participation in the arts are relatively small and, therefore, although social status may be of certain importance for receptive (passive) participation, it is not a deciding factor when it comes to active engagement. On top of that, no effects of higher education on active arts participation in visual arts have been confirmed (Vanherwegen & Lievens, 2014). Hence, we could assume that active participation is not

something benefiting exclusively people of higher social status and its positive impacts can apply to everyone.

It is not easy to measure benefits of arts participation on an individual level since its effects happen mostly on subconscious level. Although the effects of active and passive participation are overlapping, there is a certain difference between how they stimulate one's brain (Bolwerk et al., 2014). Previous research has placed arts participation not only in the connection with impacts on wider society but also in the context of health and individual well-being. From a psychological perspective, active (as well as passive) arts participation has several effects on one's health conditions. Engaging with artistic activities is told to enhance one's moods, reduce stress and anxiety, restore emotional balance, or even achieve control over pain (Węziak-Białowolska, 2016; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Ennis et al. (2016) suggest that 'art-making', which is described as a process of creating art (or craft) and is understood as individual creative expression, brings about pleasure and new skills. At the same time, it also mediates self-expression and self-understanding, helps to gain different perspectives on life and mortality, creates a safe space, provides meaningful time occupation, or is simply fun. On the other hand, positive influence from arts engagement on the overall health may be caused by the fact that healthier people participate more often in cultural activities. Therefore, there is an issue of reverse causality since it is difficult to determine whether frequent participants have better health, or whether those with better health are more likely to participate (Węziak-Białowolska, 2016).

Brown (2004) created a framework consisting of several values which can be derived from arts participation. The most intrinsic values are aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual, all of which are rather difficult to asses; however, they do alter individual's inner perception and balance. Participation can also have physical value of engaging one's own body in a creative process; cognitive value for engaging one's brain, imagination, and improving or acquiring new cognitive skills; socio-cultural and political value which is realized when one connects with other members of a certain community and expresses personal opinions through art. Last but not least, identity formation value is associated with self-confidence, esteem, or dignity.

Arts museums may consider evaluating how their programs resonate with their visitors and they shall ask themselves a question what values a specific activity generates while looking at it from a participant's perspective. In this way they can enhance impacts of offered programs and create relevance of participation at new levels (Brown, 2004).

2.4   Whom to focus on? Motives and segmentation

The general feeling of shortage of time is omnipresent in our society and, therefore, many people carefully reconsider to which activities they allocate their 'insufficient' free time. People perceive a certain 'obligation' to spend time 'purposefully' and that is partly why multitasking has become a common component of everyday life. Because contemporary leisure is characterized rather by distraction than immersion, fickle consumers look for multiple narratives combining 'traditional' museum experiences with new entertaining models and activities (Burton & Scott, 2003). In addition, the "hierarchical, linear and narrative" (Burton & Scott, 2003, p.58) way in which museums present information demands time and more contemplation than other 'superficial' non-committed engagements. Art museums need to look for innovative approaches while combining their offer with the actual demand from visitors. Hence, in order to increase attendance and raise interest, museums should share the same values with their target populations and customize their promotion accordingly (Burton & Scott, 2003).

Marilyn Hood argues that a reason behind visiting an art museum is grounded in six factors. Beside learning new things, doing something worthwhile, being challenged with new experiences, socially interact, and feeling comfortable, one of them is a desire to participate actively (Hood, 1983, as cited by Hendon et al., 1989). Her research segments museum visitors into three categories – frequent visitor, non-participant and occasional participant. Frequent visitors value all above mentioned attributes and do ascribe them to museums, non-participants do not think that a museum visit will provide them with active participation, which is why they opt for a different kind of leisure activity. These are usually people who did not go to museums while growing up. The last category, occasional participants, also look for active participation and sometimes perceive it in museums; nonetheless, not always and not in a satisfactory amount. Hence, this explains their irregular visits (Hood, 1983, as cited by Hendon et al., 1989).

Another type of visitor segmentation (Waltl, 2006) divides visitors in four groups according to their primary motivation. Most visitors fall into a category of 'socially' motivated, followed by 'intellectually' and 'emotionally' motivated. On the top of the hierarchy stand 'spiritually' motivated for whom museum visits are the most fulfilling and rewarding.

The decision to take part in activities involving the arts is a complex process with several steps. McCarthy and Jinnett (2001) differentiate between four stages which together form an individual participation decision. At the beginning, in the background stage, one's general

attitudes are influenced by background characteristics (e.g. personality traits, previous experiences with the arts, socio-demographic factors). In the following stage, predisposition toward the arts participation is formed by perceptual factors (e.g. personal beliefs concerning the participation, reference groups' views of the participation). Then, one weighs up specific participation opportunities with regard to practical factors (e.g. information at hand, involved costs, convenience). The final stage includes the experience itself. According to McCarthy et al. (2004, as cited by Radbourne et al., 2010), motivation to return and positive attitudes towards the arts are influenced by intrinsic benefits such as for instance captivation, pleasure, or social bonds. To make people come back, it is then recommended to meet their individual self-actualization needs. Another implication for an organization is to provide a potential visitor with suitable information depending on in which stage of a decision-making process he/ she finds him-/ herself (McCarthy & Jinnett, 2001).

As it has been indicated, active museum-goers seek different kinds of benefits and have different inclinations for arts participation. That is why museums cannot satisfy everybody in the same way and they need to set a clear set of priorities based on what their internal mission and available resources are (Kotler & Kotler, 2000). Knowing the target audience is a key to improve overall service quality and therefore doing a market research is the first essential step (Waltl, 2006).

2.5 Literature summary and conclusions

To sum up the presented theoretical background, museums are traditional institutions embedded in the Western culture. Although they were originally focused on education and entertainment for higher social classes (beside their collecting and research activities), their status has been changing with the shifts affecting today's society and its stratification. Since the conception of leisure activities is shifting towards more interactive and entertaining experiences, the way in which museums approach and communicate with audiences needs to adapt as well. In order to overcome the gap between museums and people, the image of a diverse shared space where everyone, regardless of past individual experience with arts, is welcomed is frequently being promoted among public. Museums aim to encourage visitors not only to come but also to broaden their horizons and to actively participate.

However, as it has been implied, arts participation is a quite problematic topic raising many questions. The 'traditional' view is that participation equals attendance, thus goals such as 'increasing participation' often refer to simply attracting visitors and boosting attendance numbers. But there are also other ways in which one can look at participation.

Because most visitors are said to seek self-actualization and the core audiences expect to be actively involved, art museums should take this into consideration and acknowledge these demands while accommodating participation elements them in their programs.

In the existing literature, the terms 'participation' or 'engagement' often describe the same activities and since the boundary between them remains rather unclear (Villarroya, 2015), they will be used interchangeably for purpose of this study. Moreover, although some papers distinguish between active and passive (receptive) participation (e.g. Węziak-Białowolska, 2016), such categorization is rather vague and often misleading. This inadequate framework makes it extremely difficult to evaluate impacts that participatory museum activities have on participants or to justify existence of those programs. Nevertheless, the word 'participation' in itself suggests 'taking part' and that evokes the idea of being 'active'. Therefore, speaking of 'passive' participation can seem somewhat contradictory. Even though marketing executives may perceive participation simply as attendance measured in numbers of sold tickets, from the viewpoint of museum educators, a visitor is regarded as an active learner, as someone who develops him-/ herself through the participatory activity (Elffers and Sitzia, 2016). Since this study investigates the perception of arts participation among educational departments, there is little use in considering 'passive' museum attendance to be participation at all. In order to consider an activity to be participatory, certain added value has to be created, be it a new insight for a museum, newly acquired knowledge or meaning for a participant, or an inspiring experience for a observer. All in all, this study takes into account only participation activities which happen at a predetermined physical place. Such activities may utilize digital technologies (like in the case of museum audio guides), however, they still demand visitor's physical presence. Nevertheless, because perceptions of arts participation differ, the research leaves certain room for interviewees' individual interpretations as long as the interpretations of active participation are supported by viable arguments.

3   Methodology

Following the theoretical framework, this chapter describes the operationalization of the presented research. The objective of this study is to answer the main research question: *How do various visual arts museums in the Netherlands perceive the impacts of arts participation and its possible benefits?* Furthermore, the study seeks to understand how the selected museums build arts participation programs (in terms of strategies) and how they evaluate their outcomes.

3.1   Research strategy and design

After discussing the main theoretical concepts, we will proceed to outline a methodological procedure. Since the purpose of this research is to uncover how arts museums perceive and address arts participation and to collect information about different strategies they employ in order to affect their audiences, the qualitative approach enables gaining specific knowledge and details from the selected topics. In fact, qualitative data collection focuses primarily on "the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants" (Bryman, 2016, p.375). The research design provides a structure, it sets boundaries for the research itself and, even though cross-sectional design is usually associated with quantitative studies, qualitative methods can also utilize this framework (Bryman, 2016). The research is conducted in the form of a comparative case study.

3.2   Methods

According to Bryman (2016), inductive approach consists of gathering data in order to establish a theory; therefore, no prior hypothesis is developed. The goal is not to confirm nor disprove already existing theories concerning arts participation and other concepts mentioned above but to understand 'personal' perspectives of certain museums on those concepts and to see what role audience engagement plays in their agendas.

To gain deeper knowledge, semi-structured interviews were utilized so that the interviewees would be able to express their opinions, practices, motivations, etc., in more detail. It is, after all, the interviewee's point of view which stands in the centre of interest (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, thanks to the flexibility of semi-structured interviews, additional topics which were not always anticipated during preparations of the leading questions, could surface during the actual interviews. Also, questions for the following interviews were adjusted accordingly based on the themes that had arisen from the preceding interviews. The course of each conversation and the follow-up questions depended on the specific situation

and settings. The overarching questions are summarized in an interview guide which provides a general outline but does not include each question literally, exactly for the reasons mentioned above. The interview guide is based on the conclusions arising from the literature review[1].

3.3   Empirical settings

In the Netherlands, participation in the arts is relatively high which is partly due to high levels of education but also to the fact that with a dense cultural infrastructure, the average distance from one's home to the nearest museum is about 4.1 km (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2017). Moreover, in total, there are 4.7 museums for every 100,000 inhabitants (NMV, 2011). In its cultural policy (for years 2013-2016), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science emphasizes cultural participation as one of its national priorities and an active cultural participation together with education at schools are considered to be an important part of cultural life. The government supports the National Expertise Institute for Cultural Education and Amateur Art (LKCA) and Cultural Participation Fund, which both encourage and promote active art making among citizens.

40 % of the population (aged over 6 years) are involved in creative and artistic leisure activities and even with a slight decrease (of 1 %) since 2013, it amounted to 6.4 million people in 2015. Such activities are on average most frequent among children (6-11 years old). Additionally, artistic and creatively involved citizens are, according to a research, more likely to engage in volunteering, sports, or heritage activities (LKCA, 2017).

The Netherlands Museums Association (Museum Vereniging, NMV) was founded in 1926 and nowadays joins together 420 Dutch museums which constitute the majority of the local museum sector[2]. One of the NMV's projects is called Museumkaart (Museum Pass); holders of such card are enabled to enter over 400 museums in the Netherlands either for free or with a substantial discount. Museumkaart has existed since 1981 and in 2016 the reported number of card holders was ca. 1.3 million. Museumkaart makes it exceptionally easy to visit museums and to stay updated with current exhibitions taking place all over the country. The annual yield is proportionately divided among the participating museums who are, therefore, the main beneficiaries of the project. According to the Museumkaart's annual report from 2016, thanks to this initiative more people are coming to museums and the

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[1] The interview guide can be found in appendices.
[2] For more information see: https://www.museumvereniging.nl/english

average number of visits of a card holder in one year (duration period of a Museumkaart subscription) is 6.6 museums. Another NVM's project which aims to boost general awareness and interest of public in museums is for instance the Museumweek (Museum Week). In addition, NMV promotes the Code of Cultural Diversity (Code Culturele Diversiteit) which aims for opened cultural sector and provides guidelines for cultural institutions to make their organizational policies inclusive. When an organization accepts the Code, it makes the commitment to adhere to four pillars - personnel, public, program, partners – all focused on avoiding unconscious bias and exclusion[3].

Furthermore, data from The Heritage Monitor (provided by Cultural Heritage Agency) report 83 Dutch art museums in 2015. These museums are registered in the Museum Register Nederland which is accessible online. Beside registered museums, there are also unregistered museums (199 in 2015).[4]

3.4   Data collection

As stated by Bryman (2016), qualitative research usually entails some kind of purposive sampling. Since the attention of this study is paid to visual arts museums in the Netherlands, the location of an institution in this country is a necessary criterium. The generic purposive sampling is applied because it implies selecting cases based on criteria defined a priori (Bryman, 2016). Since there is no museum law in the Netherlands, museum standards are promoted by the NMV and the museums included in the Register have to submit to following requirements (Bína et al., 2016):

[1] Having an institutional basis;

[2] Having a stable financial basic;

[3] Having a written policy plan;

[4] Having a collection;

[5] Having a registration of its collection;

[6] Taking care of the preservation of the collection;

[7] Having the collection researched;

[8] Having basic public amenities;

[9] Having qualified museum staff.

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[3] For more information see: http://codeculturelediversiteit.com/de-code/

[4] For more information see: https://erfgoedmonitor.nl/en/indicators/museumpopulation-numbers-registerednot-registered

Statistics Nederlands (CBS) includes in its studies both museums in the Register and also unregistered museums, as long as they comply with the following rules[5]:

[1] The museum has a permanent location, is permanently open and is freely accessible for at least 28 weeks per year and three days per week;

[2] The museum is not for profit, or is an ANBI institution or foundation;

[3] The museum has its own collection and carries out research into the collection in order to disseminate knowledge about it;

[4] The museum has a website or is accessible via reference on a larger platform;

[5] Museums that, according to the above rules, are not museums, but are regarded as such by the public, are considered exceptional and are also included in the research population of CBS.

All museums chosen for the research are members of the NMV and, therefore, they are all considered to meet the necessary requirements to be regarded as a museum. Nonetheless, more criteria for the chosen art museums needed to be defined. First of all, the research considers exclusively visual arts museums which focus primarily on drawings, paintings, prints, sculptures, and photographs. Moreover, museums whose collections are dedicated to applied arts and design are included as well, however, the share of those two lastly named art areas should not represent the majority of a museum's collection. This rule is applied in order to avoid possible conflicting interests between art museums and historical museums. Many historical museums rather often own large collections of design and dedicate exhibitions to the arts, too. Yet, one can assume that arts museums focus primarily on the art itself while historical museums put the historical context first. Therefore, the focus of their possible participation activities may differ from what arts museums offer.

Secondly, museums are drawn from two groups based on their locations. One category encompasses museums located within Randstad – Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag, and Utrecht. The other group includes museums from elsewhere (other provinces excluding Zuid-Holland, Noord-Holland, and Utrecht). The reason behind this division is the following. Randstad represents a megalopolis and one of the largest metropolitan regions in Europe. Although it is a rather abstract concept since it does not have any official boundary,

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[5] Retrieved from: https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/onze-diensten/methoden/onderzoeksomschrijvingen/korte-onderzoeksbeschrijvingen/musea

it has, nonetheless, an economic and social significance. According to OECD assessment, in 2007 42 % of the Dutch population lived in this area and earned about a half of the national income. On top of the fact that Randstad is already densely populated (OECD, 2007), it also attracts the majority of new immigrants (CBS, 2016); consequently, it is a very culturally diverse area. In contrast, outside the four biggest cities the share of native residents exceeds the share of those with non-Dutch cultural background (Nabielek K. et al., 2016). Furthermore, Randstad's population is said to be more educated and richer than Dutch average (OECD, 2007). Almost half of the foreign visitors to the Netherlands in 2014 headed to the four major cities, from which Amsterdam is the most popular one by far and in 2014 the capital welcomed over 5 million non-Dutch tourists (ca. 38 % of all international tourists) (NBTC, 2015). Moreover, Zuid-Holland and Noord-Holland (provinces where the major Randstad's cities are located) together account for ca. two-thirds (21.5 million in 2016) of all museum visits (37.1 million in 2016). On the other hand, Randstad is not considered to be among the areas with the highest density of museums (number of museums per 100 thousand inhabitants) (Stichting Museana et al., 2017).

To conclude, Randstad is often placed in contrast with the rest of the provinces which are viewed as more 'rural' areas. Because the demographic composition differs, we may expect art museums to segment and approach their audiences in different ways as well. Moreover, promotion of arts participation can be assumed to be targeted rather at local residents who are more likely to visit such programs than foreign tourists (due to time and practical matters); therefore, these practices may also differ accordingly to the composition of visitors. In order to make the museums comparable and to avoid possible bias, the sampled museums all belong to the 10 most visited museums (regarding the number of visitors per year) in the respective group (either in the top 10 in Randstad or in the top 10 in the group consisting of the remaining provinces). Due to unavailability of some approached museums (e.g. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, De Fundatie Zwolle), the final sample consists of 6 museums located in the Randstad and 5 museums situated in other provinces. The

following table shows which museums are included in the research and how many visitors they received in 2016.

	Location: Randstad/ Province		# visitors in 2016
1	R	Van Gogh Museum (Amsterdam)	2100000
2	R	Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam)	650000*
3	R	Hermitage Amsterdam	468000
4	R	Mauritshuis (The Hague)	414000
5	R	Gemeentemuseum Den Haag	410000
6	P	Kröller-Müller Museum	346352
7	P	Groninger Museum	287682
8	R	Centraal Museum (Utrecht)	285000
9	P	Drents Museum (Assen)	215531
10	P	Bonnefantenmuseum (Maastricht)	133000
11	P	Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven	94656

List of the included visual arts museums ordered by visitor numbers. Based on the data from their annual reports.
* Data retrieved from Het Parool

3.5   Data analysis

As already indicated, the analysis includes 11 Dutch visual arts museums. In each one of them, executives from educational departments were interviewed since the focus is on the program development regarding arts participation and those departments represent incubators for such initial ideas[6]. All interviewees were informed beforehand via email that the focus of the interviews is on 'active' arts participation, leaving out activities connected to digital environment and online engagement. Everyone had agreed to being recorded before each interview started. On average, interviews lasted approximately 55 minutes and were carried out in April 2018. Eight of them took place in person while visiting the offices of the respective museums, two interviews (Mauritshuis, Bonnefantenmuseum) were conducted over a phone and Mrs Janssen from Van Abbemuseum responded to selected questions by email later in May 2018. Data collected in the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed word by word with minor adjustments due to practical matters. During the coding process, specific themes were identified within the transcripts. Same as Bryman (2016) states, although initial coding was rather exhaustive, after a re-evaluation of the selected codes overall coding system became more focused and narrower. Concepts were grouped into categories with distinct properties which were then used as building blocks for

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[6] The list of interviewees can be found in the appendices.

a thematic analysis. Major themes and subthemes were finally ordered into a grid framework for a more comprehensible overview[7]. In the results section, data derived from interviews were combined with additional information and further details stemming from museums' annual reports, printed educational materials, and from various websites, especially museums' websites referring to their missions, programming, specific offers, collaborations, etc. This allowed for deducing relevant findings and arriving to overall conclusions. In addition, each interviewee received the transcript of his/ her interview via email and everyone was given a chance to provide additional information explaining certain comments or expanding explanations of topics which were touched upon.

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[7] The coding scheme can be found in the appendices.

4   Results

In this chapter, the data gathered throughout the interviews are presented. As it has been already indicated, the most frequent themes which appeared in the transcriptions have been organized in the framework that allows for a comprehensible summary of the most important topics mentioned. Each one is discussed and, in addition, accompanied by characteristic quotes. However, before discussing the results, all museums are briefly introduced.

4.1   General information about the selected museums

The Van Gogh Museum is located in Amsterdam and, as the name already suggests, is dedicated to the life and work of Vincent van Gogh, a Dutch post-impressionist artist. On top of that, it also owns art works from Van Gogh's contemporaries and altogether it has works from 247 artists at its disposal. The Van Gogh Museum also manages The Mesdag Collection in The Hague. With the steadily growing inflow of visitors, the museum is by far the most visited one in the Netherlands. It wants to be a museum 'for everyone' and with its projects such as Family Days, Vincent on Friday or Kunst Maakt de Mens [Art makes a man] the museum promotes social inclusion and outreach programs. This goal derives from the mission which states that "the Van Gogh Museum makes the life and work of Vincent van Gogh and the art of his time accessible and reaches as many people as possible in order to enrich and inspire them."[8] Van Gogh Museum builds its image of being an 'age friendly' museum (especially oriented on elderly people) and strives for knowledge exchange in that area of interest while planning to establish a network of like-minded museums.

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam stands right next to the Van Gogh Museum on the Museumplein in Amsterdam. With a mission to "enrich people's lives with modern and contemporary art and design"[9], the museum has "an ambition to constantly bring new narratives to art history" (Stedelijk, 2017?, p.5). Stedelijk Museum stresses its role as a 'showcase for young talent' and with the Blikopener program it supports young people in the age of 15 to 19 years to become peer educators. Beside giving guided tours, Blikopeners are also asked for advice and opinion regarding several issues concerning the museum. With this initiative, youngsters are involved in a dialogue about the museum world and they are given the opportunity to interpret art in their own way.

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[8] Retrieved from: https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/organisation/mission-and-strategy
[9] Retrieved from: https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/museum/organisation

Another museum located in the Dutch capital is Hermitage Amsterdam, a satellite museum of the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia. It is a young museum which was firstly opened in 2009 with a purpose to host and exhibit parts of the collection belonging to the State Hermitage Museum and to introduce its art works to Dutch audience. Hermitage Amsterdam also takes part in putting on exhibitions in De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam, even though these two institutions are separate legal entities. In its mission statement, Hermitage Amsterdam claims "to use art and history to inspire, enrich and above all offer opportunity for reflection."[10] In line with such statement, the museum focuses primarily on art education of children. It offers free educational program called Hermitage for Children aimed at primary schools. The museum also scouts for talents who are then invited to Hermitage Atelier which has a more individual approach. Older children aged between 12 and 16 years can further continue to Hermitage Academy. With this continuous programming the museum aims to support thorough talent development. Interestingly, Hermitage Amsterdam is financed entirely from its own resources with a help of corporate and private donors and sponsors.

Mauritshuis is a museum situated in The Hague and the majority of its collection revolves around famous pieces of the Dutch Golden Era. The museum's simple mission to "share the best of Dutch Golden Age painting in our house"[11] does not reveal much about its educational or social programming. However, Mauritshuis does offer programs for primary and secondary schools among which also some more creative activities such as painting workshops can be discovered. Additionally, Mauritshuis is trying to reach out to 'young professionals' with its project Maurits&, special Thursday evenings including 'various activities'.

Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, placed in a highly noticeable Art Deco building, has an extensive collection ranging from impressionistic paintings, Delftware collection to crucial works of Piet Mondrian. Moreover, it is linked to Fotomuseum Den Haag and GEM, museum for contemporary art, both of which opened in 2002. Gemeentemuseum Den Haag "wants to be an open, creative and dynamic museum, with a strong anchoring in society" and "always look for new ways to get in touch with large and diverse visitor groups" (Gemeentemuseum, 2017?). It prides itself on its special project Wonderkamers which is a sort of an interactive game comprising of 13 distinct rooms where visitors are encountered

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[10] Retrieved from: https://hermitage.nl/en/about-museum/our-mission/
[11] Retrieved from: https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/organisation/wie-zijn-wij/

with various tasks combining physical activities, also with digital engagement. Participants collect points through completing assignments including dance, putting together their own exhibitions, drawing, listening to stories, dressing up, etc. At the same time, visitors learn facts about the museum's collections, history and other educational areas.

Kröller-Müller Museum is a quite remote institution located in the midst of the Hoge Veluwe National Park. Compared to the other mentioned museums, it is rather difficult to reach and, therefore, also its audience composition somewhat differs. The museum draws from its special setting which allows for an unconventional experience connecting art and nature. Beside a famous sculpture garden, Kröller-Müller houses the second biggest Van Gogh collection in the world. The museum promotes a DIY approach to education with its package Philosophizing with Sculptures. The aim of this project is to offer not only to school teachers but also to parents and other visitors with children the opportunity to form their own learning experience while visiting the museum. Next to children programming, the museum is involved in initiatives directed especially at elderly citizens like e.g. Kunst Maakt de Mens (Van Gogh Museum's initiative) or Museum Plus Bus.

Groninger Museum, situated in the capital city of Groningen province, tries to attract young people by offering free entrance to children, youngsters and students from Groningen. Since it "aims at a wide audience"[12], its Studio, where several workshops take place, is opened to all visitors. In addition, audiences get untraditional experience at the Discovery Space, an area designated especially for the presentation of art in a playful way. People are welcomed to browse through countless drawers full of surprises which encourage imagination and creativity. Groninger Museum is in charge of Wall House #2 and ensures its public and cultural use. The Wall House serves the purpose of being a venue for various events as well as knowledge and talent development.

Centraal Museum in Utrecht has undergone a thorough renovation to "fully connect with its surroundings"[13] and since it opened Nijntje (Miffy) museum in 2016 as its additional part across from the main building, the number of visitors has almost doubled. Centraal Museum also manages Rietveld Schröderhuis, an UNESCO heritage site. Although Nijntje museum is mainly intended for small children, Centraal Museum lays stress on participation as an important factor in its programming meant for all kinds of audiences. Because the museum wants to enhance the visitor's role within an exhibition, it has come up with a

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[12] Retrieved from: http://www.groningermuseum.nl/en/mission-statement
[13] Retrieved from: https://centraalmuseum.nl/en/about/organisation/

concept of the so called Werkplaats. It is a temporary workshop which accompanies certain exhibitions and where visitors are invited to actively participate in different programs usually involving 'hands-on' activities such as drawing, building, designing, etc. It also allows for interaction not only with professionals but also with other visitors and peers.

Although a large section of the Drents Museum is dedicated to archaeology and history of the province of Drenthe, substantial part of its collection includes both fine and applied arts from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century as well as contemporary realism. Moreover, temporary blockbuster exhibitions often focused on visual arts take place in its modern annex. In order to accomplish its vision to "offer an enriching experience to as many people as possible"[14], Drents Museum tries to attract visitors with its Doll's House, specially designed rooms in 18th century style, and other programs like for instance Unforgettable Drents Museum. In addition, the museum works on low-threshold programs for people with impairments.

Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht, mainly focused on modern and contemporary art, offers a broad variety of programs combining different art forms. It cooperates with higher education institutions from the city and provides free access to local students from certain faculties. An official department YOUNG OFFICE (YO) concentrates on cooperation with young people interested in the arts who are invited to share their ideas and opinions with the museum. On top of that, YO organizes events to attract young audiences. Beside that, Bonnefantenmuseum organizes workshops for schools, families and adults, develops programs for refugees, people suffering from Alzheimer's disease and other target groups, all in line with its mission to "establish connections between art practices and the community."[15]

The last museum included in the analysis is Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. It wants to create space for dialogue by becoming an inclusive meeting place accessible to everyone and it is not afraid to touch upon rather controversial topics. Especially for local community Van Abbemuseum has opened the Werksalon where the relationship with the society of the city is explored. Through the project 'Queering the Collection', 'Expat Spouses', or 'Agents of Change' social inclusion is fully embraced. In addition, Van Abbemuseum has an extensive range of participation programs consisting of adult workshops, family offers and activities for schools. Beside various guided tours included in 'Special Guests' program

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[14] Retrieved from: https://drentsmuseum.nl/en/organization/mission-and-vision
[15] Retrieved from: https://www.bonnefanten.nl/nl/over_bonnefanten/missie_en_visie

which is oriented on different groups such as deaf and hard of hearing, blind and partially sighted, people with Alzheimer's disease (Onvergetelijk Van Abbe), or people suffering from aphasia (Spraakmakend van Abbe), Van Abbemuseum also provides a robot for people with a physical disability which can be controlled via a special app from one's own home. The special program called 'Prikkelarm museumbezoek' [Take a sensory break] reduces sensory stimuli during museum experiences aimed for people with e.g. autism, some disabilities or illnesses. On top of that, a travelling mobile workplace KUNSTBLOK enables cooperation between local residence artists (in a place where the KUNSTBLOK is temporarily located) with people from Vitalis Woonzorg Group (residences for elderly). For adult visitors Van Abbemuseum has prepared several workshops like 'De waan van de dag' [The issues of today] where participants connect current affairs with aspects of a specific art piece, 'Samen kijken, meer zien' [Look first, then see] focused on visual thinking strategies which take a participant through several stages of analysing an art work, or 'Dat kan ik ook' [Two can play at this game] which combines discussion about selected art with practical assignments (e.g. painting, drawing, modelling). Children are invited to Kinderkunstclub [Children's art club] or Familiekunstclub [Family art club] or they can participate in various school programs like Kijkwijzer.

Already from the preliminary overview it is noticeable that all of the selected museums do offer certain participatory programs directed at diverse target groups, their differentiation mostly based on age. Schools are always paid special attention to; however, while children constitute a universally established target group, not all museums develop programs for the so-called special groups such as people with handicaps. Despite various goals and missions, one can notice that a special attention is paid to diversity and reaching broad audiences. Inclusion and outreach programs have a special place in museum programming and they utilize arts participation as a tool for bringing in underrepresented groups.

4.2   Functions of a museum within society

The first main subject discussed in the interviews concerns roles of a museum in nowadays' world. Following the long tradition museums have always played in society, it is still obvious that collecting and exhibiting belong to the main goals every museum sets for itself. Assembling collections, which are extensive but comprehensible at the same time, stands at the forefront of museums' activities. However, it does not end just with having top-class masterpieces. Although the aspect of preserving cultural and other values for future generations should not be overlooked, collections are also used as a medium for achieving

further educational goals since works of art can e.g. stimulate thinking about importance of art or about perception of beauty. Moreover, they serve as a perfect tool for developing visual literacy. Museums seek to nudge spectators to look carefully at presented art pieces and to teach them how one can interpret art from different perspectives. Self-development is another important aim of educational programs. Through discussions and interaction, people are invited to form and express their own opinion on specific topics and to find personal ways of approaching art. Thanks to multiple narratives one can broaden his/ her horizons and learn more not only about art but also about him-/ herself. As it was expressed by Mrs Van Overeem from the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag:

"... the contact with works of art is also a stimulation for thinking about the values of life. What it means to be human, what it means to be part of a society, what it is to be a family, what it evokes to be in a presence of beauty, what it evokes to be in a presence of something that shocks you..."

In addition, visual arts museums have the ability to sparkle creativity and enhance imagination of their audiences. However, to do so, they often first need to encourage audiences to overcome psychological barrier of thinking that amateur art has no (artistic) value. Many visitors do not expect to be actively involved during a museum stay. Therefore, what some museums (e.g. Kröller-Müller Museum, Groninger Museum) are trying to do is to give people a little push in order to kick-start the creative process. Once empowered, participants often take initiative into their own hands. Nonetheless, museums still need to retain certain level of guidance. Which may eventually lead to a conflict of interests which Mr Kolsteren from Groninger Museum described in the following words:

"One message we send out is 'everything can be art' and on the other hand, we have to also say '[a] museum has to choose, not everything people make can be shown in a museum'. That's where we are on the edge, it is not easy to explain..."

Museums such as for instance Kröller-Müller have mentioned that their own experience have taught them that visitors often not only need but also expect museums to offer advice and to lead. Visitors do not want to be thrown inside an exhibition or an activity without any clue. Perhaps the easiest way of introducing exhibited art works and providing them with some context (beside traditional practice of accompanying exhibitions with descriptive texts) is providing audio guides.

Same as the literature proposes, all museums are aware of the necessity to build one's cultural capital already during childhood because it becomes more and more difficult with the growing age. It is easier to feel connection to a museum if a person starts coming at young age, for then he/ she can get accustomed to the idea of a museum as an interesting place to spend time at. Once it takes root in minds of young visitors, they are more likely to return later in life, bringing along friends, families, their own children, etc. Most interviewees stressed that the outcomes of the learning or creative processes matter less than the general experience of being actively engaged. Overall, they do not try to develop participants' artistic skills, for that academies and specialized courses are better suited, but what they want to achieve is providing people with a memorable and pleasant time.

Closely connected to the educational function is without doubt the societal role of art museums which manifests itself in several forms. Firstly, museums are important architects of social cohesion. Because visiting museums is rather often a social activity, it provides numerous occasions for bonding. From the point of view of educational departments, museums have a responsibility to bring people together. All interviewed institutions are in favour of conversations and interactions which can lead to intercultural understanding, some of them even encourage visitors to share their personal stories and they use art as an instrument to discuss contemporary issues. Moreover, they all try to connect interests and knowledge of their visitors while introducing several narratives so that everyone would be able to relate to at least one of the presented stories. Telling stories from different perspectives and different angles is important for people to understand not only where they come from but also to comprehend the world we live in now and what the future may look like. As Mrs Reeskamp from Centraal Museum Utrecht put it:

"I would say it's [museum] a place of inspiration, sometimes of escape, sometimes of confrontation with what's happening in the world."

Mr Van Zijverden from the Drents Museum also touched upon the concept of 'civic health' through museum engagement (as mentioned by Walker, 2003):

"... people who understand the world around them feel that they are a part of that world and when you are a part then you are a happier person and then you are a better citizen."

All interviewees agree that it is crucial to understand how to be relevant to distinct social groups and how to find common language in which they can transmit their message. Furthermore, museums see themselves as intermediaries linking together artists, art and

public in order to create mutual recognition. Which is why they are working towards making their narratives understandable, compact and interesting.

Secondly, social inclusion is a subject taken into account by all the museums. Hence, reducing boundaries for those who find it difficult to come, lowering thresholds and becoming opened to everyone, or reaching out to often overlooked citizen groups are frequent focal points of museums' activities. The goal is not to force people to come but to give everybody the opportunity to judge the museum experience for themselves. If certain audience segments are not attending, they should not be immediately disregarded because perhaps they want to visit but do not know how to find their way in. For instance, Hermitage Amsterdam calls it a 'social inclusion principle' which is a building pillar of its activities. In line with the perceived responsibility to be culturally diverse it interconnects children with different social backgrounds through providing school educational programs for free. Another example of an outreach program is the Stadsdelenproject from Gemeentemuseum Den Haag containing evenings with free admission and free transportation for citizens living in specific neighbourhoods of The Hague. Similar projects were also introduced by e.g. Groninger Museum or Stedelijk Museum. As Mrs Siebert from Stedelijk Museum said, it is not so much about attracting as many visitors as possible but about attracting visitors with as many different backgrounds as possible.

Probably the most important factor influencing visitors' experience is the feeling of being welcomed; therefore, selected museums are trying to create a place where people could feel at ease and they are showing visitors that they take them seriously, that their opinions matter. The key for creating a memorable experience is being personal and bringing about a feeling of safe environment where one can openly share his/ her own stories. Enjoyment and having a good time are important elements since people need to have fun if they are supposed to return.

4.3   Perception of arts participation

After understanding how museums perceive their role within society and what functions they ascribe to their activities, another topic was brought up in the interviews, namely arts participation. All interviewees agree on the fact that participation is an important part of museums' programming. Nevertheless, as it had been anticipated, individual perceptions of the term differ significantly and, in essence, everyone seems to be somewhat unclear about what arts participation actually stands for. Mrs Siebert from Stedelijk Amsterdam made that rather clear with her remark:

"... it is very important to be clear about what kind of participation we are talking about. Is it creating? Or is it engaging with an artist? Or engaging with a tour guide? Is it making meaning? Is it through schools? Is it in your spare time? It's all very layered and we have a responsibility to create programs that are positioned in all these different levels."

What is apparent is the fact that arts participation is composed of many elements. First of all, participation encompasses interaction. However, such interaction can take on several forms ranging from physical engagement in a form of 'doing' to intellectual or emotional involvement which is by many (e.g. Van Gogh Museum, Bonnefantenmuseum, Gementemuseum) considered to be of at least the same importance. Like Mr Van Zijverden stated:

"... we think it's very important to get interaction. Of course, it can be like workshops, but we also consider thinking, talking, making discussions as part of participation or interaction."

In truth, none of the interviewees even touched upon the distinction between active and passive participation. Those two forms are not strictly separated in the museums' perceptions of arts participation. Hence, as long as something (like an information) is being exchanged between individuals, it is then regarded as a legit form of participation. Therefore, audio guides are often (e.g. Hermitage Amsterdam, Groninger Museum) also considered to be participatory, although the interviewees do acknowledge that there is a difference between mere receiving of information and an eventual subsequent discussion which has a much stronger impact. For that reason, guided tours are regarded as a common and useful kind of arts participation. To have a successful museum tour, museum guides (teachers) try to tune into a group in front of them, to pick up the right thread for conversation and to make the topic personal.

Where the opinions differ is whether simple 'looking at an art work' can be viewed as participation. For some, participation needs to be a 'two-sided' engagement. For instance, Mrs Blokland from the Van Gogh Museum does not even consider workshops to be a real participation because they represent a 'one-sided' action. On the other hand, Mrs Van Overeem believes that:

"... someone that's really intensely looking at a painting and taking his time for that, that is of course a form of participation."

She provided her conviction with an explanation that a person participates not only when he/ she acquires new knowledge or creates an object but also when the contact with art generates some emotions. Mr Kolsteren noted that interaction is basically a combination of opinion formation and discovering one's own abilities, not only physical (practical) but also intellectual. He thinks that:

"What you see here [in the museum] somehow sparkles your imagination or makes you feel happy, sad, whatever. It does something to you, to your emotions. And then you want to translate that into creativity and that [creativity] can take all forms."

Creativity is then the next crucial ingredient. Because it is creativity which enables one to experience art from 'the other side', from the perspective of an artist. Another important component is simplicity. For the purpose of making the arts accessible to everyone, techniques chosen for designing participation activities are uncomplicated and easy to carry out. In addition, the time factor is taken into consideration as well because most visitors have limited time reserved for a museum stay.

Despite being rather simple, activities also need to vary to remain attractive. With variety museums can appeal to different interests and personalities. Activities that stimulate all senses are considered especially engaging. Combining texts with hearing, touch, even smelling (e.g. Groninger Museum), provides participants with additional experiences.

Although the primary purpose of developing arts participation programs may be based on a sense of social responsibility and duty, the majority of museums hopes to achieve further goals than just mission fulfilment. Participatory programs are seen as a handy tool for relationship building and attracting audiences. They help establish enticing image while persuading people that museums are not boring, rather on the contrary, they can be interesting and lively. Moreover, specially designed activities can attract attention to museums' collections, create appreciation for art on display and make people stay longer. Another important benefit resulting from interaction and conversation with audiences is that museums themselves can learn and get a new perspective on their own functioning.

4.4   Participatory programs development

It is common among Dutch museums that their educational departments are small in comparison to other organizational units. On average they consist of ca. 3 employees supported by work of many freelancers. Usually, everyone within an educational department specializes on a certain area but close cooperation across the department is necessary.

Moreover, educational departments have to collaborate with other departments such as e.g. marketing, PR, or curators. Sometimes such collaboration is complicated by different goals each department can have and misunderstanding may arise when participatory programs are regarded simply as a marketing tool.

While developing educational and participative programs, starting point for basically all concerned museums is always their collection or current exhibition (only Mrs Janssen stated the museum's vision as the primary point of departure). However, not all exhibitions are suitable for all audiences. Mrs Van Overeem stressed how important it is to clearly define museum objectives:

"... you have to be really critical and give it a good deal of thoughts. The things you organize, why you organize them, how you organize them, what tools you use, why you use them... there is a huge variety of what you can do in a museum but you really have to know what you do, when and why, where and for whom. That's the key."

For developing school programs in particular, ever changing exhibitions may pose an obstacle while connecting schools' curriculum to a topic at hand. Several interviewees (e.g. Hermitage Amsterdam, Gemeentemuseum) observed that curriculums of secondary schools are quite strict and difficult to combine with museum experience, further complicated by the fact that the Dutch secondary education involves several types of schools with different specializations. In contrast, it is easier to find a link to primary schools.

Since museums wish to develop ongoing programs and not only one time 'experiments', they keep an eye on reactions of their participants and adjust their programs accordingly. The most common composition of workshops consists of firstly visiting an exhibition, taking in inspiration, then moving into a separate studio and creating one's own work. However, Centraal Museum is willing to go even further and to set up a creative space right inside the exhibition area. In this way it erases the theoretical boundary between 'real' and amateur art, bringing both together in a new context. On the other hand, such endeavour may be also perceived as disruptive and going against the idea of creating a peaceful environment in which a visitor can enjoy art quietly in his/ her own pace. This issue is something where opinions diverge and the prevailing solution is to set up an interactive studio somewhere in the premises, however, separated from the galleries.

Either way, it is becoming a common practice for museums to build interactive 'art labs'; e.g. Stedelijk Museum, Gemeentemuseum, Groninger Museum, or Van Abbemuseum have them integrated as permanent addition to their exhibitions. These art spaces resemble

playgrounds where visitors are stimulated to engage, play, create, and to communicate with each other.

Museums' buildings play another important role in program development since they often offer range of possibilities and topics to discuss. What museums feel differently about is whether museum programs should take place within a museum building or not. For instance, Gemeentemuseum, Hermitage Amsterdam or Groninger Museum think that the building is one of their most valuable assets and they do not organize activities outside of it. In contrast, despite having an impressive architecture as well, Stedelijk Museum does not cling to the inner space and ventures with its (outreach) programs into the Amsterdam neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, regardless of where the programs are taking place, their ultimate goal is to pave a road towards repeat visits in the respective museum.

All museums hope that arts participation activities would have several effects on their audiences. First of all, they want everybody to have fun and to enjoy themselves, hoping for people to leave the museum with smiles on their faces. They try to have emotional impact on participants who should feel inspired, self confident and even proud of one's own work. By being involved in a creative process themselves, people have the opportunity to understand how an artist works and looks at the world and to discover their own (not only artistic) abilities. Furthermore, it is important for museum educators that people form their own opinion and think critically about the provided content. Like Mr Kolsteren explained:

"We are not telling [you] what is right and what is wrong, we want you to decide what is right and what is wrong. If you think it is bad art or it is dirty or the colours are bad, whatever, that's fine, just come and tell us. We want you to see [for yourself] and to make your own decision. In this sense, we are not an old-fashioned school ... it is not top down [approach]."

4.5   Target groups for participation

All selected museums feel a duty to work with schools. For that reason, they usually develop school programs in collaboration with school teachers who express their specific needs and provide feedback. School programs are always very interactive and participative in a sense that they do not only include talking about art but also creating. A distinct approach has Kröller-Müller Museum which does not offer its own guided tours for schools but tries to educate school teachers to become museum guides themselves. For that it provides a written guide, organizes teaching workshops and sends its own ambassadors to schools to help with preparations.

Beside programs for children in relation to schools, Groninger Museum enables individual children to take part in developing audio tours or meeting artists through its Junior Club, or Hermitage Amsterdam has its regular Hermitage Atelier and Academy where children and teens develop their artistic (mostly painting and drawing) skills.

Family activities commonly involve going around a museum together with parents and looking for certain answers. 'Treasure hunts' in Van Gogh Museum, Gemeentemuseum, or Hermitage Amsterdam have a more educative character when participants are provided with working paper sheets that contain questions and tasks revolving around museum exhibitions. In comparison, Kröller Müller Museum has its 'blind dates' for which children first have to prepare at home by creating their own little art works. Bonnefantenmuseum and Groninger Museum came up with the idea of 'family bags' you can borrow at the entrance and inside you find different games and activities which range from creating little objects, discussing art works to using one's own body in different expressive ways. Moreover, most museums organize creative weekend family workshops involving the whole family.

On the other hand, not all museums focus their attention on young adults. But at the same time, there are a few with developed specialized programs for youngsters in the age between ca. 14 to 20 years since they believe it to be important to support this generation and to build its relationship to the museum world. Bonnefantenmuseum has its YOUNG OFFICE, similar to Stedelijk's Blikopeners. Groninger Museum had the so-called GM Insight, sort of a member organization, however, the problem was that students find it easier to unite under their own university organizations. If a museum organization targeted at students is to succeed, it shall provide students with some additional value that a 'normal' student organization cannot offer. Therefore, Groninger Museum has transformed the GM Insight into an integrated student advisory board which now functions as a bridge connecting the museum and the student world, especially through providing communication between the two. Basically, all these programs for youngsters aim for providing young people with the opportunity to have a taste of what it means to work in a museum and to try out varied tasks ranging from giving guided tours, devising workshops to organising events. In addition, participants get to meet new people, socialise, build personal networks, and, which is important, to be creative, innovative and able to implement their own ideas and improvements within the museum framework. At the same time, such collaborations bring new insights for museums themselves because they get to see their work from a different angle, namely from the perspective of young adults. In this way they have access to valuable information.

Beside workshops for children, artistic workshops for grown-ups are sometimes organized as well, however, not all of the museums have them in their regular program offering. Workshops often take place only within special outreach programs (e.g. Gemeentemuseum) or they are organized on irregular basis just a few times a year (e.g. Drents Museum). Bonnefantenmuseum, in contrast to its rather interactive and creative school programs, views participation for adults more as an intellectual than physical activity. On the other hand, museums such as Hermitage Amsterdam or Mauritshuis provide artistic workshops where attendants learn how to e.g. paint or draw. Workshops for adults are in general more focused on developing artistic skill than those meant for children. For that reason, they tend to be taught either by freelancers (usually artists) or organized in cooperation with art academies and other external institutions. However, these 'traditional' workshops represent a 'narrower', more traditional form of arts participation. Only a few museums have experimented with introducing activities combining different art forms in relation to their exhibitions. For instance, Kröller Müller Museum organized dancing lessons together with the Dutch dance company Introdans which proved to be a highly successful idea. Another successful project were yoga classes organized as an additional program to a photography exhibition in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht. One of the Centraal Museum's Werkplaats concepts, created for an exhibition concerning the Treaty of Utrecht, involved a collective game when everyone was invited to take part in it and play with other visitors. These examples show that cross-overs combining visual arts with other sorts of activities, be it music, dance or even an interactive game, have a potential to enhance desired effects of arts participation such as self-expression since they provide an opportunity to create a personal connection to visual arts even for people who find it easier to express themselves in a different (other than visual) way.

Most museums (e.g. Bonnefantenmuseum) do not segment among adult audiences based on age but rather in accordance to individual capabilities and needs. The situation is different when it comes to special groups such as people with handicaps. Even though not all museums (e.g. Hermitage Amsterdam) have yet developed specialized programs, it is a common future goal.[16]

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[16] For more see: 4.8 Interorganizational collaborations

Lastly, tourists are in most cases not considered among target groups for arts participation programs. The only exception is Van Gogh Museum where Mrs Blokland expressed:

"... sometimes they [tourists] are our target group and I can say that there is nothing wrong with having this huge target group... for us it is also important not to forget the big mob. And not to assume that they [tourists] will come anyway."

4.6   Demand for arts participation

Museums are doing more in the recent years when it comes to arts participation and the majority believes that the demand for those activities is growing. Nevertheless, it is difficult to say whether the overall interest in active participation has really risen or if the higher demand is due to the fact that the general amount of museum visitors steadily increases.

Particularly young visitors are more critical about what they experience in a museum, they do not read everything, they prefer to talk to each other and to ask questions. They have taken upon a role of not only simple consumers of information, but also of being producers and critics at the same time since they are more used to the fact that their opinions are valued. As Mr Van Zijverden observed, following the ideas of the director from Van Abbemuseum, Charles Esche, museums should start thinking about their audiences in terms of users, not in terms of visitors. This again indicates the growing importance of the active participation factor in a museum experience. Overall, visitors are becoming more and more used to being able to actively participate.

Nevertheless, Mrs Reeskamp would not consider participation programs as the main reason for visitors to come, even though the Centraal Museum has the image of an interactive institution. In spite of the attempts to overcome the 'traditional' image of museums as somewhat elevated serious institutions, most visitors still do perceive them in such way. As Mr Kolsteren expressed it:

"... some people still think that they are not allowed to talk in a museum. They only whisper ... Why? They see a museum as a holy temple, something elevated. That's why they whisper. There is no sign telling you that you have to whisper [in a museum] ... You may laugh in a museum if you find something funny. It is a social activity."

Moreover, *"... while coming to a museum they [the visitors] think that they are just going to see art, they don't expect to be involved, to be creative..."*

Although schools in general are becoming accustomed to the idea of participation programs within museums, many schools, especially from poorer or rural areas, still do search for ways how to select museums where to bring their pupils. The problem is that networks connecting schools and cultural institutions greatly differ depending on specific types of schools and where those schools are located. Therefore, schools often know only of a limited amount of possibilities they have and they tend to stick to the 'safe choices' (like the most famous Dutch museums) from which they roughly know what to expect. In addition, schools are closely affected by changing governmental policies. At present, secondary schools are expected to visit museums as a part of art education curriculum which is why their demand has risen.

4.7   Success measures

In essence, everyone in the educational sector of museums can agree on the fact that performance results in the form of 'numbers' are less important for success evaluation, yet necessary to justify the existence of each participation program. This is where conflicts may arise since educational departments attach importance to qualitative measures, whereas financial management appreciates quantitative evaluation. Nevertheless, although it may create organizational conflicts, in most cases there is a consensus and mutual understanding about how difficult evaluation of intrinsic benefits of arts engagement is. As Mr Kolsteren put it:

"We can pick up the facts. But you don't really learn from those numbers. I don't want to stress them too much, we do have the numbers but we keep a bit of a distance from them."

Mrs Siebert feels the same:

"... numbers are nice but for education it's more about focus and about being critical about who you are reaching out to..."

To dig out some tangible results, most museums make use of questionnaires, although they are often reluctant to do so because they are afraid that visitors would feel bothered and, on top of that, surveys are not considered the most appropriate tool to measure intrinsic motivation and outcomes. When asked directly after the experience, people tend to give neutral or socially acceptable answers, not providing a very constructive feedback.

On the other hand, observations belong to popular assessment methods since museums try to learn from what they immediately see within workshops and museum tours. Sometimes museums have staff observing people leaving a museum (e.g. Drents Museum);

however, even if people look satisfied at departure, it is difficult to link together what exactly made them feel that way. That is why museums most appreciate personal feedbacks in a form of notes, comments, testimonials, etc. (often shared via social media). Museums also make use of advisory councils involving public and representatives of students, teachers, etc. Moreover, pilot projects are normally tested with focus groups.

All in all, everyone acknowledges how difficult it is to evaluate arts participation. Since its effects are very individual, intrinsic and difficult to pinpoint, frustration concerning current lack of measuring methods and possibilities was voiced several times. Only Mrs Reeskamp from the Centraal Museum referred to a specific measuring method, namely the generic learning outcomes. On the basis of David Kolb's experiential learning theory which argues that learning involves four learning dimensions – concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation – and every person combines each one of them in an individual mix (Metallidou & Platsidou, 2008), Centraal Museum's Werkplaats aims for altering the 'traditional' museum experience for both active participants and observers watching other visitors at work. The concept of the Werkplaats was tested with the help of Generic Learning Outcomes (GLO) which identify different effects of the interaction with arts on people. The purpose of the GLO framework is to make the research of the learning experience easier. As proposed by Hooper-Greenhill (2004) in the study exploring learning outcomes in British museums, archives and libraries, learning outcomes for museums consist of increased knowledge and understanding; increased skills; changed attitudes or values; enjoyment, inspiration, creativity; and action, behaviour, progression. Although rather generalized, it is apparent that these dimensions correspond with the effects Dutch art museums want to have on their participants. Because most museums struggle with the evaluation and overall assessment of their participation programs, employing such comprehensible framework may bring several advantages and, in addition, provide justification for existence and necessity of developing participatory activities.

4.8   Interorganizational collaborations and sources of inspiration

Although setting up exhibitions together is nothing exceptional for Dutch art museums, developing shared arts participation programs is not so common. One of the reasons which was mentioned is the fact that there still exists certain secrecy and unwillingness to share ideas. Mrs Siebert described the situation in the following way:

"... lot of the institutions are working on projects and nobody wants to share because they are afraid someone else will steal the idea."

On the other hand, most interviewees agree that collaboration across educational departments is more intensive than in any other part of the museum world. In fact, educators are often in close contact with each other, sharing experience and advice. Some even see it rather as a compliment when others adapt their programs. In the words of Mrs Van Veggel:

"Let others adopt our program. It is not like we want to be the only ones. We've always had a goal to share ideas."

Half of the researched museums mentioned working together with art education institutions while developing participatory programs, e.g. Kröller-Müller Museum collaborates with ArtEZ Academy of Art & Design (Arnhem), Van Gogh Museum with the Gerrit Rietveld Academie (Amsterdam), Groninger Museum with Academie Minerva (Groningen), Stedelijk Museum with Aslan Muziekcentrum (Amsterdam), or Centraal Museum with Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht. Through this cooperation, art students get the opportunity to either become teachers for museum workshops (e.g. Kroller-Müller Museum), to draw inspiration from museum collections (which do not have to be publicly on display like in Van Gogh Museum), or work side by side with professionals on setting up exhibitions (e.g. Van Gogh Museum).

Discussion about arts participation and inclusion is endorsed by Dutch initiatives such as 'STUDIO i'. This sharing platform was first set up by Van Abbemuseum together with Stedelijk Amsterdam and its purpose is to collaborate with other Dutch cultural institutions in order to make the arts accessible to everyone. 'STUDIO i' manages a digital platform, organizes knowledge cafés, symposia, offers consultancy projects, etc. Those who want to make their institutions inclusive can turn on 'STUDIO i' for advice and gain support from its network.

Another initiative, also created by Stedelijk Museum and the Van Abbemuseum, is the already above-mentioned project Onvergetelijk [unforgettable]. It started in 2013 and since then 12 Dutch art museums have joined, including Centraal Museum, Drents Museum, Mauritshuis and Stedelijk Museum. Onvergetelijk is inspired by the Meet Me at MoMA program from the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. It encourages people with dementia and their caregivers to discuss art objects and share personal stories, ideas and enjoyable time in a calm atmosphere. The implementation of the project was backed up by a research conducted by the Psychiatry Department of VU medical centre in Amsterdam. Not being part of this project, Groninger Museum has developed its own program for

Alzheimer patients together with a local care provider De Hoven which essentially has the same goals as Onvergetelijk.

Photography Museum Amsterdam (FOAM) has together with the organization Wat Telt! launched the program Musea in Gebaren [museums in sign language] which trains deaf museum guides to offer guided tours in the Dutch Sign Language. Since 2016 the number of participating museums has grown to 16; Centraal Museum, Drents Museum, Stedelijk Museum, Groninger Museum, Hermitage Amsterdam and Van Gogh Museum are also involved.

Museum Plus Bus is aimed at elderly people and organized by De Zonnebloem, an extensive Dutch volunteer based charity organisation. In this project, bus transportation for mainly people living in elderly centres is arranged and they are taken to one of the 14 involved museums, among which are Drents Museum, Hermitage Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Kröller Müller Museum and Gemeentemuseum. Without this initiative, many of those elderly participants would not get a chance to visit museums. This inclusive initiative enables them not only to come but also to engage in conversations about art.

International collaborations with museums abroad basically do not exist when it comes to arts participation. Some of the reasons are different legislatives, funding systems and educational curriculums as well. Nevertheless, Dutch art museums are inspired mainly by developments in the USA and in the UK. Special attention is paid to British Tate or American MoMA. From the Dutch environment, Van Abbemuseum with its broad range of participatory programs is seen as the most advanced Dutch visual arts museum regarding inclusion and participation.

5   Conclusions

In spite of unrelenting efforts of Dutch visual arts museums to overcome existing social division between citizens with different levels of education and assets, the gap separating distinct social classes is still perceptible. In line with what literature suggests, according to museum educators, the situation in the Netherlands compares to other countries. Individuals who are used to visiting museums, and other cultural institutions in general, are on average better educated and wealthier. Moreover, their familiarity with museum environment stems partly from the fact that they have been taken to museums already at young age. On the other hand, those who have not been acquainted with arts while growing up are less willing to come to museums. Even a museum building itself, how it is designed, can be appealing to certain public but somewhat intimidating, less welcoming or less accessible to another population. Yet, basically all museums are proud of their original architecture which represents one of their main unique selling points. Distinct visual appearance makes it especially difficult to tear down the outlived stereotypical temple-like image of museums. Therefore, most of the selected Dutch visual arts museums are trying to actively get in touch with the underrepresented groups through their various outreach programs. Museums face a challenge of breaking down this psychological barrier and luring potential audiences inside. Although all museums do acknowledge the societal gap as a significant issue, some regard it to be more serious than others. Nonetheless, they all strive to persuade public that their doors are unlocked and that they do not wish to educate people on how to properly enjoy art but only to provide guidance for personal discovery and meaning-making.

On the other hand, the goal of most outreach programs is to reach broad and diverse audiences which goes against Nina Simon's (2010) conviction that participatory activities should be used to create deep individual experiences and sustainable close relationships between museums and visitors. According to Simon, arts participation has limited impact and, therefore, is not suitable for broad outreach programs. Nonetheless, the core of museums' outreach programs is to use participatory activities as a tool to attract new audiences to a museum and then, preferably, establish a sustainable bond with them. In this scenario, arts participation has a more instrumental value. The question is how probable it is that someone who participates once in an outreach program will return to a museum by him-/ herself without the museum's direct action. Museums should decide what is the real goal of their arts participation efforts because then it would become clearer how to measure the desired effects. If arts participation is simply a tool used for reaching as many different

people as possible, then the outcomes can be measured by attendance numbers with additional information concerning visitors' origins and backgrounds. But is reaching as many different people as possible the real goal? What is the probability that a one-off visit will influence one's life or change one's attitude towards the arts? Museums perceive their social responsibility to serve everyone and to provide everyone with similar opportunities. However unfortunate it may seem, building deeper and more sustainable relationships on a smaller scale may in the end have more influential results. Moreover, questionable is also the function of a museum as a bridge between people. Do outreach programs really bring together isolated groups? Or could it be that those who participate in them already know each other and then the only new person they get to know is a museum guide/ teacher? The outcomes of inclusion programs seem to be somewhat vague and there is a clear discrepancy between who museums want to reach and who is a regular visitor.

The real struggle is to figure out what steps need to be taken to get more people in contact with the arts. Once again, the question arises whether a one-off school visit really changes children's perspective on a museum or whether it will be remembered just as a special occasion, not really integrated into everyday life. Therefore, following the example of Hermitage Amsterdam, providing schools with continuous educational programs aimed at repeat visits could build cultural capital of children more effectively. In addition, sending ambassadors to schools like Kröller-Müller Museum does, educating school teachers, preparing children for a museum visit in advance and offering follow-up activities has a potential of changing the overall museum image. A logical solution seems to be firstly establishing sustainable connections with schools, local citizens, local care institutions, etc., since they are the ones who have more insider information and have a better idea about what is actually necessary for each specific group. Only then it makes sense to develop participatory activities adjusted to each group's individual needs.

Somewhat surprising is the fact that, despite what reviewed literature indicates, competition from other leisure activities was not pointed out as such a threating challenge. In fact, it was brought up only in the interview with Mr Kolsteren from the Groninger Museum. Nonetheless, most museums do understand the importance of being constantly innovative and searching for new ways in which to approach their audiences because only then they can attract attention and swing the public perception into their favour. Yet, the levels of innovativeness differ among the researched museums and it is quite clear that some museums (e.g. Centraal Museum) are ahead of others. While workshops involving painting, drawing, or sculpting, are already regarded as a standard component of educational

programming, not everyone dares to proceed further. If something more playful and experimental is developed, most times it is aimed at children or families with children. Activities for adults are usually based either on discussion (guided tours) or development of artistic skills (traditional workshops). However, it should be acknowledged that not only children can 'play'. As Mr Kolsteren mentioned, adult visitors are often shy in the beginning but if given the right opportunity, they like to create and play, too. Moreover, adult visitors are the ones who can offer the biggest support to a museum. Therefore, building relationships with them and providing them with memorable experience is important. In order to set up an original participatory activity, experimenting with different art forms and artistic crossovers provides a great opportunity, although it is not a common practice, yet. Nevertheless, since contemporary audience is said to be mainly composed of 'cultural omnivores', it is reasonable to assume that in the upcoming future museums will have to start devising more original activities so as to remain attractive and relevant.

Since not everyone enjoys 'working hard' (intellectually) to be able to grasp the meaning of exhibited art, coming up with new techniques and methods to present art is becoming one of the goals, in order to make art accessible to as many people as possible without losing sight of other important values. Following the advice of Burton and Scott (2003) to look for innovative approaches, including participatory activities within museum programming provides a great opportunity to enhance the learning experience and make the overall message more memorable. The relationship between the presented art and an individual visitor can take different directions. An artwork can be used either as a conversation piece to spark discussion which may even depart from the original meaning of the art, or the individual worldviews and beliefs can be used to uncover meanings of specific art works while making the art relevant for an individual.

As Elffers and Sitzia (2016) have already pointed out while studying participation in the Netherlands, Dutch visual arts museums employ several techniques to create and challenge meanings for their audiences. However, there is not one single strategy which could be attributed to educational departments specifically. The educators make use of several participation approaches, combining participatory art with multiple story-telling levels, meaning-making, physical/ social/ intellectual engagement, etc. In accordance with Clifford's concept of the so-called 'contact zone' (Ashley, 2004), all the museums in question are trying to be free spaces, welcoming meeting points where knowledge is shared, interpreted and created. Sometimes there is a prevailing tension among educational programmers and curators since curators are said to primarily focus on telling stories of the

presented art; for which they tend to forget about needs and wants of museum visitors, making it more difficult to design a related educational program. But at the same time, in museums such as Van Abbemuseum or Kröller-Müller Museum mutual support and close integration of curatorial work with educational development is present. The situation calls for understanding audiences and the way in which they think, followed by re-examination of exhibition practices.

So, what is the point of arts participation? Dutch visual arts museums recognize that arts participation has several values for an individual. Through offering participatory programs, museums are trying to ignite people's imagination, to make them think and to establish personal opinions on different matters, not necessarily directly related to the presented art which can serve 'only' as an instrument to bring about discussion. This cognitive value goes hand in hand with identity formation value, building self-confidence and personal esteem. Socio-cultural value is not any less important because museums believe that participatory programs can bring people together. Which is why museums strive to be open safe spaces where everybody can feel free to express themselves and to engage in shared experiences. Arts participation is also utilized for its emotional and aesthetic impact since through personal engagement one can develop a deeper appreciation for the arts. Last but not least, physical value should not be overlooked because all workshops and studios are built on the idea of engaging a body in a creative act.

As has been already stated, this study aims to establish an overarching definition of arts participation, combining views of several Dutch visual arts museums. Although some common features can be identified, results suggest that the perception of arts participation differs across the educational departments significantly. Using terms of Brown's framework (2004), it could be said that in the Dutch settings arts participation is generally understood as a combination of observational, curatorial, interpretative and inventive participation; participation programs have either one or more of the features including watching other visitors participating (observation), active involvement in setting up exhibitions (co-curating), interpreting already existing art (interpretation), creating wholly new art pieces (invention), etc. Despite what Walker (2003) suggests, mere arts attendance is not considered to be arts participation, neither is financial support of arts organizations. Regardless of whether participation is seen as active or passive, some kind of an additional value has to be created throughout the participatory activity. This additional value can take on several forms, from an individual emotion, shared experience, to a completely new art work. All in all, a working definition of arts participation as it is perceived by the majority

of Dutch visual arts museums included in this research would be as follows: Arts participation is an interaction between a museum and a visitor through which certain additional value (either material or immaterial) is created for both the museum and the visitor. It is a 'two-sided' exchange in which both sides have an active role and they both learn from each other. Arts participation consists of various elements such as creativity, simplicity, playfulness and conversation; these are combined in a way to stimulate participants' cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and physical abilities. Coming back to the main research question, it can be concluded that the impacts of arts participation are in general perceived as indispensable and they are ascribed highly positive benefits.

6   Limitations and future research

The line between a visual arts museum and a history museum often becomes blurry when it comes to exhibitions concerning for instance design or antiquities; and therefore, it is difficult to say if a museum presenting not only arts, but also exhibitions about history should or should not be included while studying arts participation. To narrow down the focus of this research, fields like fashion or media arts have been excluded; however, according to some definitions[17] these categories may also fall within the range of visual arts. Therefore, future research may consider including those disciplines and related institutions.

As with the most qualitative studies, the degree to which this research can be replicated is limited since it cannot completely eliminate personal beliefs and worldviews. Even though the interviewees are the leaders of their respective educational departments and their attitudes towards arts participation thus align with the museums' overall perception of the subject, the study makes use of specific individual opinions of these professionals which might differ on a personal basis. Moreover, to analyse museums' perspective on arts participation as a whole, the study would need to be conducted not only with educators but also with employees from other organizational departments like marketing, curators, PR, etc. In addition, the sample includes only 11 out of 83 Dutch visual arts museums (The Heritage Monitor) and because of a few rejections, interviews could not be conducted with all the most visited museums. Which is another reason why generalizability is restricted. Also, each theme could be investigated more into detail when given more time for each interview.

Since for instance media art closely relates to digital environment, it offers many new opportunities how to engage with audiences and how to come up with different interactive programs. Engagement in a broader sense often involves digital technologies in which case audiences are encouraged to connect with an institution e.g. via social media and to build communities on online platforms (Brown and Ratzkin, 2011). However, this aspect of participation covers several areas of interest and, with regard to the limited extent of this research, museum activities in digital environment and their online strategies were not explored. The focus of this research is solely on 'active' participation and its effects on a person and on a community. Active participation stimulates different parts of a human brain than online engagement and, therefore, impacts of online participation would be a topic for another study. Yet, in the fast-moving world where the Internet plays indispensable role, the

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[17] See e.g.: http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/definitions/visual-art.htm

importance of developing online presence, being active on social media platforms and combining digital and 'real' experience cannot be overlooked.

Lastly, most of the existing literature concerning arts participation is rooted in the Anglo-Saxon environment (in the US and the UK). The topic is not so thoroughly researched in continental Europe. On top of that, because of different legislatives and cultural settings, it is difficult to apply practices from one country to another. Nonetheless, since the Dutch museum world is rather advanced in terms of arts participation, it has a potential to set an example for countries where arts participation is still not at the centre of attention.

7   Appendices

7.1   List of interviewees

MUSEUM	INTERVIEWEE	POSITION	DATE	INTERVIEW	LENGTH
Van Gogh Museum	Ann Blokland	Senior Curator of Education	16.4.2018	in person	43'59''
Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht	Stefanie Metsemakers	Curator of Education	25.4.2018	over a phone	44'54''
Centraal Museum Utrecht	Eveline Reeskamp	Coordinator of Education and Interpretation	26.4.2018	in person	70'20''
Drents Museum	Mr J. (Jan) van Zijverden	Head of Education	5.4.2018	in person	60'46''
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag	Jet van Overeem	Head of Education and Curator	20.4.2018	in person	49'25''
Groninger Museum	Steven Kolsteren	Head of Education and Public Information	23.4.2018	in person	99'23''
Hermitage Amsterdam	Wieke van Veggel	Coordinator of education	26.4.2018	in person	58'48''
Kröller-Müller Museum	Herman Tibosch	Head of Education	6.4.2018	in person	58'19''
Mauritshuis	Femke Hameetman	Head of Education an Learning	18.4.2018	over a phone	20'54''
Stedelijk Museum	Maren Siebert	Head of Education	16.4.2018	in person	53'50''
Van Abbemuseum	Loes Janssen	Education and Interpretation	19.5.2018	via email	

7.2   Interview guide

Questions in *italics* indicate the main themes.

1. *Could you please briefly describe your position within _____museum?*

2. *What do you think are the most important functions of a museum (in general) in relation to society? (e.g.: societal (community cohesion, revitalization, civic engagement, community identity, shared (safe) space); educational; collecting, ...)*

    Sub-questions:

    What do you think is the societal role of visual arts museums specifically? Is it any different from other kinds of museums?

    Sometimes there still lingers a certain stereotypical image of a museum as a place of entertainment for wealthy and educated people... would you say that museums can widen the gap between unequal social groups?

    What can they do to prevent it? Can they actually play an active role in bringing people together and reducing social tensions among different social groups?

3. *What do you understand under the term 'arts participation'? (e.g. attendance; amateur art, financial support, ...)*

    Sub-questions:

    What forms of participation does your museum support?

4. *What are the reasons behind including active participation within your program?*

Sub-questions:

What are the desired effects you want to have on your participants?

How are participation programs beneficial for your museums?

5. *How do you develop these programs? What is your starting point? How do you decide?*

Sub-questions:

Do you engage in collaborations for developing these programs? (which?)

What are your critical success factors concerning active participation? (how do you measure the success of these programs?)

6. *What population groups do you target when it comes to active participation?*

(OR why do you think it is better not to have a target group...?)

Sub-questions:

Why do you select these groups? How do you make the selection?

Do you pay special attention to the local community? Why (not)?

Do tourists engage in active participation?

Additional questions:

How have your programs developed in the last decade/ a few years/ since you started working here?

Are these kinds of activities more desired by audiences than they used to be?

How many people from your department develop these programs?

Can you think of any museum (Dutch or worldwide) which you would say does a good job in active participation? How does it inspire you?

Coding (main topics):

museum's functions

arts participation programs

audiences

7.3   Coding book

museum's functions		
theme	**category**	**code**
societal role	social cohesion	cultural understanding
		social activity, bonding
	social inclusion	outreach programs
		community building
		welcoming environment
	being relevant, intresting	
	making happy	
	intermediation	
educational goals	learning process	
	visual literacy	
	sparkle creativity, imagination	
	self-development	forming personal opinion
		building cultural capital
		broadening one's horizons
	interpretation of content	
collecting&exhibiting		

audiences		
theme	**category**	**code**
target groups	special groups	dementia
		Alzheimer
		deaf
		blind
	primary schools	
	secondary schools	
	families	
	elderly	
	outreach	
	tourists	
	adults	
demand	development	
audience characteristics	explorers	
	interactive	
	communicative	
	users	

theme	category	code
arts participation programs		
components	narratives	
	interaction	physical engagement (doing)
		intellectual engagement (thinking)
	all senses	
	creativity	
	variety	
	playfullness	
	simplicity	
	co-creation	
forms	workshops (classes)	painting
		sculpture
	school programs	
	open studio	
	discovery room	
	co-curating	
	guided tours	
	crossovers	festivals
		musical audio guide
		multi-media
desired effects	express creativity	
	understanding	
	being inspired, emotional impact	
	empowerment, opinion formation	
benefits	relationship building	
	image	
	attract to collection	
program development	organizational structure	specializations
		cooperation
	starting point	curriculum
		exhibition/ collection
		building (architecture)
		audience
		season
	collaborations	individualism
		teachers (schools)
		art academies
		artists
		special initiatives
		museums
		international
	success measures	visitor numbers
		comments/ reviews
	measuring methods	observation
		questionnaires, evaluation forms
		teachers' evaluation
	inspiration	USA
		UK
	conflicting interests (money, budget)	

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