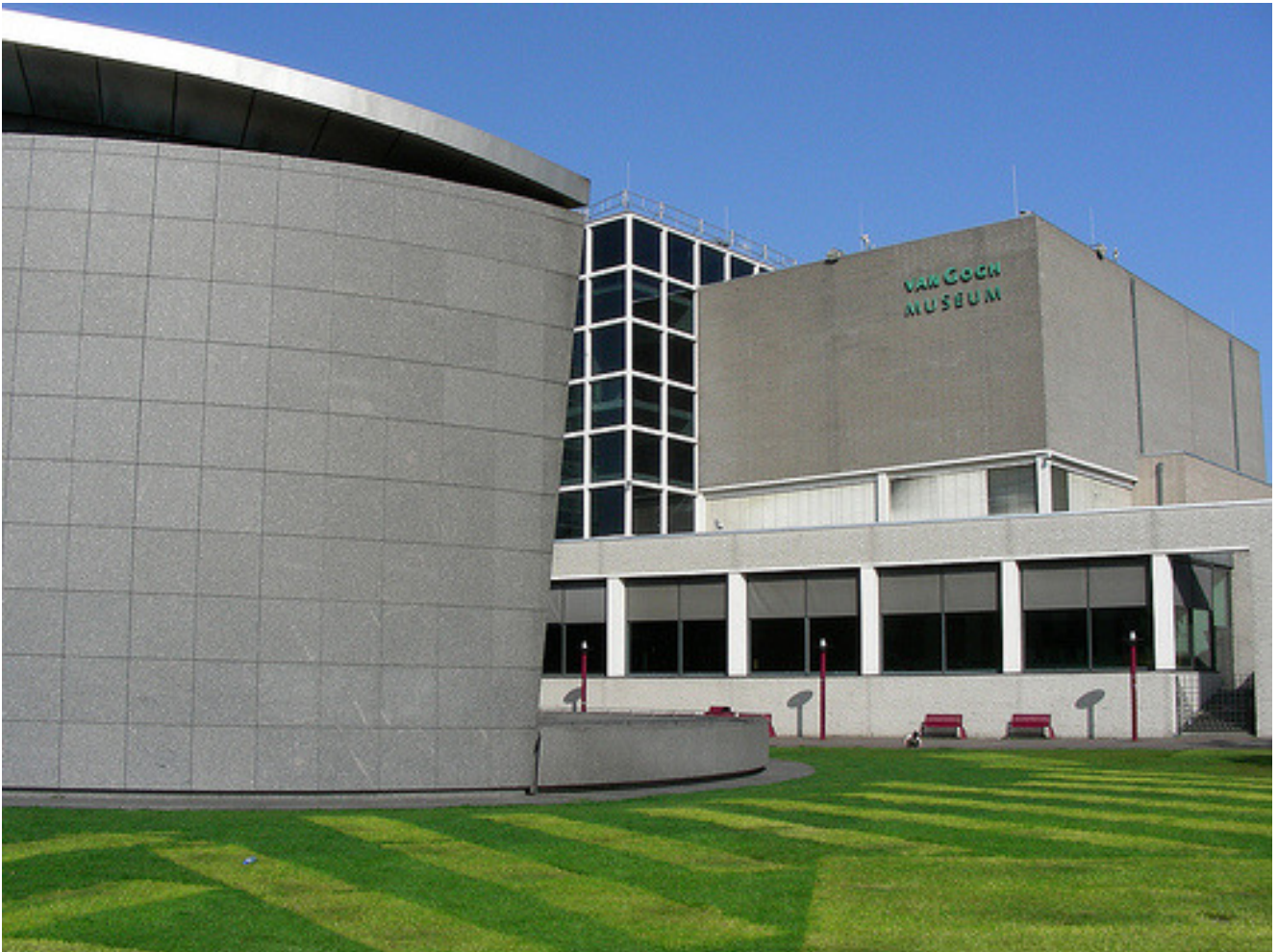


THE FUTURE OF MUSEUMS

The development of museums of modern art
in the Netherlands



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Foreword

After finishing my bachelor study *Kunsten, Cultuur en Media* (Arts, Culture and Media) in Groningen I decided to obtain my masters degree in Culture Economics and Cultural Entrepreneurship at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. I knew that by choosing to obtain my masters degree I had to write another thesis, and I also had in mind how much I struggled with my bachelor thesis...

Now, nearly three years after I started my study in Rotterdam I know that I am the personification of procrastination:

Procrastination is a type of avoidance behaviour which is characterized by deferment of actions or tasks to a later time. It is often cited by psychologists as a mechanism for coping with the anxiety associated with starting or completing any task or decision. For the person procrastinating this may result in stress, a sense of guilt, the loss of productivity, the creation of crisis, and the chagrin of others for not fulfilling one's responsibilities or commitments. (Source: Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia)

And I can tell you that for almost two and a half year, I was confronted with all of the results mentioned above. I can really say that having to write this thesis was like torture a lot of times. But finally, the end is here and I am very pleased with the result!

However, I could not have done it alone. The greatest lesson I learned when writing my thesis is that I could ask for help when needed, and that my friends and family were always present to reach out a helping hand, or mostly a listening ear and a pat on the back for support. For me, wanting to do everything by myself, this was difficult at most times, and I know it was almost equally torturing for my loved ones. Therefore I would like to thank them all for their support.

Special thanks are for Roelant)(, who has helped me over the finish these last days, for his support throughout the years, and for keeping his faith in me at points when I lost all faith. Furthermore I would like to thank Helen Terpstra, my coach, who gave me the simple but important insight that all great journeys start with one first step. And of course I would like to take this chance to thank Arjo Klamer: I was very happy when I found out that you were my tutor and I kept this feeling throughout time. For me, you are an inspiring person. Your patience, your guidance and your insights helped me to obtain more structure and distinctness in my thesis.

After having said all this, I will now enjoy with great pleasure the dinners and celebrations that were promised to me when I would finish my thesis!

Introduction

For some time now there is a debate going on in the Netherlands concerning the future of museums of visual arts, and their changing policy concerning exhibitions.

According to visual artist Paul Dikker there is nothing wrong with the classical museum that creates a precious collection at some distance of the current art practice and functionally displays this collection. When describing the museum of his dreams, he is very conscious of what it should *not* be like: "(...) The museum of my dreams is furthermore no laboratory, no video store, no educational institution, no economical moment of perception, no annex of the international art trade and in its restaurant people cannot order rucola focaccia's with Sicilian mortadella of pomodori, marinated red onion and a topping of balsamico, neither will these sandwiches cost 9,50 euro, and the entrance of the museum will not be hidden in a maze of staircases and concrete." Dikker (Boekman 61, 2004) states that museums should not want to influence the arts. That is something the artists themselves will do.

Pam Emmerik, writer and visual artist, shares this opinion. She longs for "a place where knowledge and concentration and historical notion are celebrated, in stead of despised. A place where your worn-out mind can find a safe haven" (Boekman 61, 2004).

Their ideal museum does not need to build dance floors in order to attract more youth, it does not need to buy expensive audiovisual devices for the educational support of the collection, and it should certainly not compete with the amusement industry in order to get higher visitor numbers. (Boekman 61, 2004)

Others, such as the new generation of museum directors, are in favour of this shift towards the amusement industry. They are looking for a balance between the devotion to art and the so-called entertainment that is needed in order to attract more visitors. Edwin Jacobs, director of the *Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal* in Leiden, is of the opinion that it is most important to teach the public how to look at art. In order to reach this objective the *Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal* strives for an intensive involvement of the artists they are working with: "In the best case this leads to a more dynamic relationship between the three primary tasks of a museum: education, presentation and the forming of a collection." Stijn Huijts, director of museum *Het Domein* in Sittard, shares this view. He states that the museum of the future should

manifest itself pre-eminently as an interface that shifts continuously between different dynamic systems and that undertakes to be an interpreter for various target groups.

Boekman 61. Het museum van de toekomst. Pretpark of Pantheon? (Boekman 61. The museum of the future. Theme park or Pantheon?), was fully devoted to the future of museums. The developments of museums in the Netherlands were examined, and the question whether the present museum is some sort of theme park with different attractions and events, or a temple where art and knowledge are most important, was discussed (Boekman 61, 2004).

Figures from the Social Cultural Planning Office (SCPO) of the Netherlands show that museums are competing with the amusement industries. Articles and figures from the SCPO illustrate that, within the cultural field, there are two developments in our society that could have stimulated the appearance of extra activities and events in museums: the expanding competition with other leisure activities and the recently new cultural omnivore; somebody who enjoys the art and culture and who develops cultural activities within the traditional high culture as well as within the more popular low culture.¹

Since people have so many options to spend their leisure time on, the chances are that they will choose for other events than a visit to a museum. This is one of the reasons why museums, nationally and internationally, have been organizing other activities and events, besides displaying their collection and making exhibitions.

Since the mid eighties museums have changed their policy towards a professionalization of their activities. The tasks of a museum concentrated on the presence of objects (collection, scientific research, conservation and restoration) and its presentation. In the course of decades the accent has shifted from the first, to the latter. "Traditional concepts of what a museum is, and how it should operate, are confronted by contemporary intellectual, social and political concerns which deal with questions like the validity of value judgements, bias in collecting and display, the demystifying of specialized knowledge, the protection of the environment, and the nature of our place in history." (Belcher, 1991)

¹ www.scp.nl

Nowadays, the public would not go to a museum in the first instance to acquire knowledge or information. Instead, visitors of a museum expect to go through a unique experience. This is why museums should be able to offer an “event” in their competition with movie theatres, amusement parks and shopping malls (Verduijn, Van Mil & Verbei, 2001, p. 5). The opinions concerning this trend differ a lot in the museum world. According to some, museums should not disown their identity, they should stick to their original functions and to their collection and the knowledge they possess (Verduijn, Van Mil & Verbei, 2001, p. 5).

Among others, due to this emerging experience economy, there is a discussion going on in the Dutch museum world concerning the place and function of activities and events in museums. This discussion is more or less based on the question if the organization of such activities and events fit within the tasks and goals of museums as defined by the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

It can be said that the opponents of the organization of activities and events in museums are afraid that enjoyment will become the leading goal, and that study and education, as well as the care for the collection, will play a lesser part. According to Johnson (2003, p.318) “the prime responsibility of museums is now seen, both by museum managements and the public, as being much more towards their visitors than to their collections.” The main reason for this shift in emphasis lies in the fact that public funding has not kept pace with museum growth; museums had to look for other sources of funding, therefore it has become increasingly important for them to focus on the preferences of their “customers” (Johnson, 2003, p.318).

This thesis will shed a light on this discussion from the perspective of the emerging experience economy and its effect on museums in order to find out whether these opponents are right or wrong.

The discussion in the Dutch museum world is not that much about whether the extra activities and events belong in an art museum, but to what extent can marketing, commerce, and enjoyment, influence the museum’s policy? The museum definition of the International Council of Museums clearly points out three purposes: study, education and enjoyment. Will the purpose of “enjoyment” predominate over the purposes of “study and education”, thereby lacking in the care for the collection? Are museums really in danger of becoming places for pleasure and enjoyment, exactly what the critics are afraid of, or will they remain to be places where people can

satisfy their curiosity and need for knowledge? In other words: *In what manner are the art museums in the Netherlands influenced by the emerging experience economy with respect to their original tasks and functions?*

In his article “De waardering van cultureel erfgoed: commercie versus cultuur”, Arjo Klamer states that the commercial exploitation of cultural heritage should not be a problem. Museums and other cultural institutions possess a certain emanation, and entrepreneurs will try to exploit this. There is something special about a museum entrance that makes it a perfect location for a reception, banquet, or party. “A bank will be glad to receive its guests in front of the *Nachtwacht*, and will readily pay for this privilege” (Klamer, 2002, p.4).

Aims and objectives

For this thesis I want to look at the effects of the emerging experience economy on museum policy in art museums in the Netherlands. One reason for choosing the influence of the experience economy on art museums as my topic for my master thesis is my personal interest in visual arts. Furthermore, the relationship between economics and arts is of interest to me. The continuing debate in the Netherlands whether art is being commercialized due to the emerging experience economy is something I like to think about. The experience economy is not yet a very big phenomenon in the cultural world in the Netherlands, but cultural institutions are becoming more interested since arts have unique characteristics and can therefore touch consumers in many different ways by making use of experiences.

I will focus specifically on the Dutch situation; however one should be aware that this situation is under the influence of international developments and movements.

It seems to be the case that museums are now reviewing and rethinking their role. As was said before, since the mid eighties museums have changed their policy more and more into a proceeding professionalism of their activities. The tasks of a museum concentrated on the presence of objects (collection, scientific research, conservation and restoration) and its presentation. In the course of decades the accent has shifted from the first, to the latter. Therefore I will research to what extent this shift has taken place, and what the consequences are of this shift on the original tasks of an art museum.

The experience is going to be more important, not only in the culture sector, but in all sectors of society. Since museums have to compete with other (cultural) organizations for the scarce leisure time of their potential visitors, they are looking for ways to differentiate themselves in the hope that they will attract more visitors. That is why museums are organizing extra activities and events, in addition to their permanent collection and (temporary) exhibitions. These activities and events include everything a visitor can participate in apart from their regular visit to the museums collection or exhibition, such as guided tours, multimedia tours, the letting of the auditoriums, and the food and beverages in the museum café.

For this thesis I focus on the activities and events that are in the first instance organized for the individual adult. I will leave activities for children and for the course *Culturele en Kunstzinnige Vorming* (Cultural and Artistic Education) out of consideration, since they are often organized in connection with the educational function of museums and I want to focus only on the activities where this is specifically not the case.

Furthermore, I will only bring into discussion Dutch art museums, this means that the collection of the museums that will be discussed, mostly consists of visual art (primarily paintings, illustrations, photographs, drawings, prints and sculpture). There may be collections of applied art, including ceramics, metalwork, furniture, book art and other types of object, but these objects play a lesser part in the museums collection. I draw this line because in art museums the organization of extra activities and events is not as self-evident as it is in natural history, science or ethnological museums, since the collection of these last museums can become more vivid with the use of theatre, music or other activities, it encourages learning by doing, whereas art is made with the intention of stimulating the human senses as well as the human mind; thus art can be seen as an action by itself.

My aim is to develop a better insight into the influence of the experience economy on the functions and tasks of art museums in the Netherlands. To achieve this I will describe the theoretical concepts that are needed for this specific research concerning the experience economy as well as art museums and its policy, and I want to compare the different views of people in the cultural field in order to come to a conclusion. Will pleasure take a leading role in the art museums, thereby defeating study and education? Are art museums really “in danger” of becoming places for pleasure and amusement, or will they remain to be places where people can

appease their curiosity and eagerness to learn? With this central aim it will be possible to find an answer to these questions.

In order to reach a clear and complete answer to my research question and the related sub questions, I will discuss the theoretical concepts that are relevant to my research in the first two chapters.

In the first chapter the museum in general will be discussed. First the history of museums will be described. Then the three purposes of museums are defined. At last I will explain how marketing can or should be applied in art museums in order to attract more visitors.

In chapter two I will shed a light on the emerging experience economy. First of all I will explain what is implied with the experience economy. This will mainly be based on the findings of Pine and Gilmore but I will also give the view of some of their precursors and opponents. Secondly I will set out the effects of the experience economy in the Netherlands.

In the third chapter I will make the connection between the emerging experience economy and the museum world. The first part will be about the different experiences that can be found in museums. After these examples the different pros and cons of the appliance of these experiences will be discussed in order to come to a better understanding of the debate that is currently going on in the Dutch museum world.

In the fourth chapter I will demonstrate how all the discussed theory can be made visible in a museum. I will use the Van Gogh Museum as an example of how the experience economy has become part of the museums policy. As discussed before, my focus is on Dutch art museums. I have chosen for the Van Gogh Museum as a case example because this museum is a relatively young museum (open to public since 1973), that has built a reputation in the 35 years of its existence of international grandeur. Furthermore, the museum organizes specific experiences; therefore it is interesting to find out how these experiences have influenced the original tasks and functions of the Van Gogh Museum.

In the fifth and last chapter the research will be evaluated and I will draw conclusions. If it is necessary I will also give indications for further research in this final chapter.

Chapter 1 Art Museums

1.1. Introduction

From the outset the museum has been the subject of close scrutiny and perpetual critique and revision (Schubert, 2000, p.11). Until this day the opinions differ: on the one hand museums are seen as mausoleums, drawn from their past and the interest of the elite. On the other hand, present museums are breaking with tradition: they open to the public and democratize.

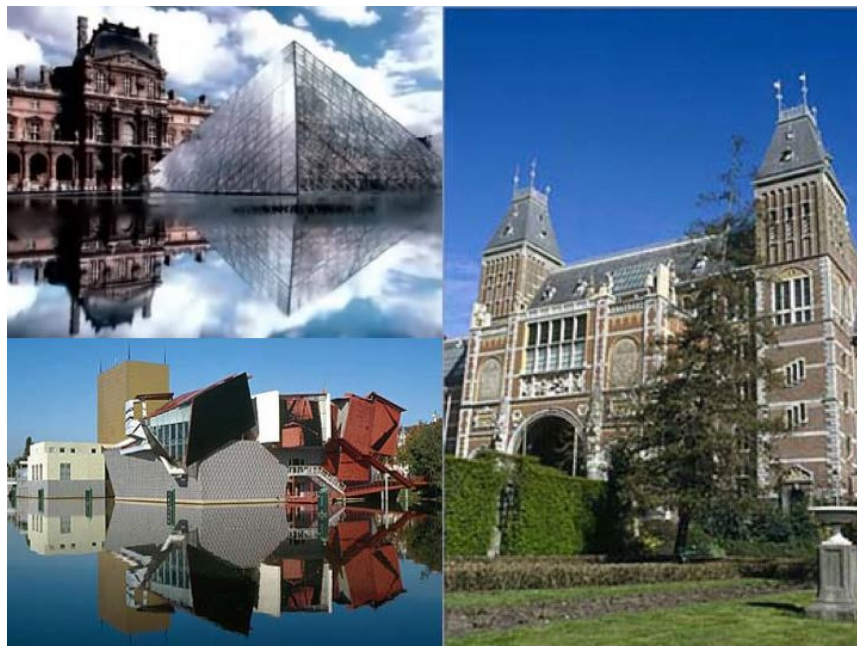


Fig. 1.1. Impression of different museums: top left corner the *Louvre*, Paris; bottom left corner the *Groninger Museum*, Groningen; and on the right the *Rijksmuseum*, Amsterdam

Like the rest of the economy, museums are subject to dynamic change. We know that there are life cycle effects and that the relative importance of different types of museums changes over time (Johnson, 2003, p.317). In addition, the museums sector embraces a very wide range of institutions of varying size and reputation. At one end of the spectrum are the internationally renowned “superstar” organizations like the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam or the Louvre in Paris, with their world-class collections and research activity and millions of visitors per year. At the other are a very large number of relatively small, often locally focused museums, which sometimes depend significantly on volunteers for their continued operations; they undertake little or no research (Johnson, 2003, p. 315). Since there are so many different museums that exist in all shapes and sizes, it is difficult to find a general

definition for the term “museum”. Nevertheless, in 1974 the International Council of Museums (ICOM)² has come up with the following definition:

“A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment”

(ICOM Statutes art. 2 paragraph 1)

This definition forms the basis of this thesis, it points out three purposes: study, education and enjoyment. One could state that the critics of activities and events within museums are afraid that the purpose of enjoyment will predominate over the purposes of study and education, thereby lacking in the care for the collection.

There are about 900 museums in the Netherlands that fulfil the museum definition of the International Council of Museums, 196 of these are art museums. Apart from this definition there are more than 1250 museums in the Netherlands, among which are some castles, local archaeological museums, zoos and botanical gardens.³

² The International Council of Museums (ICOM) was established in 1946. It is an international non-governmental organization of museums and museums professionals which is committed to the conservation, continuation and communication to society of the world's natural and cultural heritage, present and future, tangible and intangible. The ICOM is based in Paris.

³ URL: <http://www.museumvereniging.nl/default.aspx?id=336>

1.2. The history of art museums

This thesis has as its title “The future of museums”, but in order to get a clear vision on this future it is important to define the history of museums. When we know more about its past, we can come to a better understanding of its future, or as Schubert (2000, p.10) said: “Much of what constitutes today’s museum is based on past record and institutional precedent. Without a look at history, today’s museum would be virtually indecipherable.”

The English (and Dutch) word "museum" originally comes from the Greek word *mouseion* (seat of the Muses), which denotes a place or temple dedicated to the Muses (the patron divinities in Greek mythology of the arts).⁴ The word “museum” was first used in the 15th century to describe collections and their comprehensiveness, but from the 19th century on the focus of a museum tended to be more on the actual building that houses the collection.



Fig. 1.2. Ole Worm’s Cabinet of Curiosities, a private collection that was eventually transferred to the Danish Royal Cabinet, Copenhagen. From an engraved frontispiece in the *Musei Wormiani Historia* (1655)

Early museums began as the private collections of wealthy individuals, families or institutions of art and rare or curious natural objects and artefacts. These were often displayed in so-called “wonder rooms” or “cabinets of curiosities”. Public access was often possible for the “respectable”, especially to private art collections, but at the

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum>

whim of the owner and his staff.⁵ Many of today's famous European museums trace their beginnings to these rich private collections.

The first public museums in the world, as they are known today as institutes that show (part of) their collection to the public for free or for a certain entrance fee, opened in Europe during the 18th century's Age of Enlightenment. The adoption of the word *museum* to signify collections has been attributed to the evolution of a sense of public or social agency in the modern period (Encarta Online Encyclopaedia, 2007). These "public" museums, however, were often accessible only by the middle and upper classes. It could be difficult to gain entrance. In London for example, prospective visitors to the British Museum had to apply in writing for admission (Wikipedia, 2008). Even by 1800 it was possible to have to wait two weeks for an admission ticket. Visitors in small groups were limited to stays of two hours.

The first truly public museum was the Louvre Museum in Paris, it opened in 1793 during the French Revolution, which enabled for the first time in history free access to the former French royal collections for people of all stations and status. The fabulous art treasures collected by the French monarchy over centuries were accessible to the public three days each "*décade*" (the 10-day unit which had replaced the week in the French Republican Calendar). The *Conservatoire du muséum national des Arts* (National Museum of Art's Conservatory) was charged with organizing the Louvre as a national public museum and the centrepiece of a planned national museum system. As Napoleon I conquered the great cities of Europe, confiscating art objects as he went, the collections grew and the organizational task became more and more complicated. After Napoleon was defeated in 1815, many of the treasures he had amassed were gradually returned to their owners (and many were not). His plan was never fully realized, but his concept of a museum as an agent of nationalistic fervour had a profound influence throughout Europe (Encarta Online Encyclopaedia, 2007). This showed the beginnings of removing art collections from the private domain of aristocracy and the wealthy into the public sphere, where they were seen as sites for educating the masses in taste and cultural refinement.

⁵ http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761557357/Museum.html



Fig. 1.3. The *Teylers Museum* in Haarlem is the oldest museum in the Netherlands

The oldest Dutch museum is the Teylers Museum in Haarlem. It was founded in 1798. The rest of Europe, the United States and European colonies soon followed. A period of intense museum building, in both an intellectual and physical sense was realized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (this is often called "The Museum Period" or "The Museum Age"). And this growth remained: during the last half of the 20th century, museums throughout the world grew tremendously in number and in diversity.

The tension between the focus on the collection on the one hand, and the focus on the audience on the other hand, increased in the course of the 19th century. At first the main goal for museums was the preservation and conservation of their collection, as well as giving researchers, collectors and students the opportunity to expand and test their knowledge. Museums began to change this goal when they became more focused on their audience (Kotler & Kotler, 1998, p.12).

Since the museums were now open for public, more attention was given to their visitors. Accessibility alone was not enough. For the first time, educational purposes were explicitly part of the service that museums provided and besides housing the

collection, museums had broadened their role and were also becoming information centres and sources for leisure activities. Due to the explicit recommendations of the *Commissie van het Museumbestel* (Commission of the Museum Establishment) from 1952 the people that were in charge of the education, were placed in range next to the curators (Noordman, 2000, p. 19). To combat the perception that they were ivory towers designed for the enjoyment and participation of the privileged few, the museums reached out to new audiences through special programs and large special exhibitions, often referred to as blockbusters. Furthermore, museums began to adopt marketing techniques to promote their many offerings; the promotion was organized through education and without the help of distribution channels and the use of the price instrument (Noordman, 2000, p. 147-148).

In the seventies of the last century, it showed that this educational approach was not working quite as well as expected; the audience did not make use of the educational services that were offered by the museums. However in the eighties the number of museum visits increased enormously and the educational staff obtained an important place in the museums, next to the curators.

The last decade the government's intervention reduced and museums had to come up with their own financial plan. As a result museums had to adopt a more business-like approach, with effective promotional activities. To realize this goal, museums hired professionals that were in charge of the public relations and promotion. Although this implementation of marketing functions in museums started in the last two decades, a lot of museums are still struggling with these reorganizations (Noordman, 2000, p.269-274).

Nevertheless, at this day, museums throughout the world enjoy public respect and popularity. Each year, millions of people visit museums to see, enjoy, participate in, and learn from their collections, programs and exhibitions.

All the different developments that were explained in this paragraph have led to the current situation in the museum world. Museums are at a critical moment in their history, since the emphasis is on the market, and museums are forced to focus on this market and its audience instead of only focussing at their collection in forms of study and education. Museums have to compete with the growing supply from the amusement industry, and potential visitors have to choose where they want to spend their scarce spare time. Besides, due to the emerging experience economy, visitors

are looking for an experience. Museums must develop their public service functions through becoming more knowledgeable about the needs of their visitors and more adept at providing enjoyable and worthwhile experiences (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). Will this lead to a shift from education to enjoyment? Are museums in danger of becoming “pleasure places” or will they remain to be places where people can appease their curiosity and eagerness to learn? The impact of this shift towards the experience economy on museums will be explained in the coming paragraphs and in chapter two and three.

1.3. Study, education and enjoyment

Now that we are aware of the history of museums and their “new” focus on their audience, we can take a closer look at their functions and tasks. The museums sector embraces a very wide range of institutions of varying size and reputation. At one end of the spectrum are the internationally renowned “superstar” organizations like the Rijksmuseum or the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam or the Louvre in Paris, with their world-class collections and research activity and millions of visitors per year. At the other end there are a very large number of relatively small, often locally focused museums, which sometimes depend significantly on volunteers for their continued operations; they undertake little or no research (Johnson, 2003, p. 315). Even though museums exist in these different shapes and sizes, and vary in type of art, they also have common characteristics. In the case of art museums these characteristics are that they own art collections and exhibit them to the public on a regular basis. O’Hagan (1998) describes this as “the physical collections and the interaction between these collections and the visitors”. And from these shared characteristics, you could form the general functions the museums intend to serve. Most art museums operate from the ICOM-definition; however they adapt it to their collection and their functions and tasks.

Early museums began as the private collections of wealthy individuals, families or institutions of art and rare or curious natural objects and artefacts, so the original function of museums was the conservation of their collection, but other functions have been added over time since changes in society have put new demands on museums. The ICOM-definition states that museums acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit a collection for purposes of study, education and enjoyment. According to Johnson (2003, p. 315) however, museums are an important mechanism for conserving, interpreting, researching and displaying heritage. And Vaessen (1986, p.100-128) distinguishes the following tasks: collecting; conservation and restoration; scientific research and documentation; presentation; and lastly education.

This points out that there is no general consent over what the “the tasks and functions” of an art museum are. Within the different art museums, the accent lies on different tasks. Nevertheless these four or five tasks that were mentioned above can all be placed within the purposes of study, education and enjoyment.

Study

The purpose of study not only includes the task of scientific research and documentation, but it also contains collecting, conserving and restoration. In other words: all the tasks that deal with the collection. At the heart of almost every museum is its collection, which provides the intellectual content for its educational mission. Therefore, the historically primary function of museums is to maintain this collection (Kotler & Kotler, 1998). Scientific research is essential if you make use of the museum collection, since the other functions and tasks are dependent on it and because museums hold the primary material evidence for a number of subjects concerned with an understanding of humans and their environment. A museum's research program can be very diverse. Nowadays, only curators and scientific researchers are allowed to study and research the collection, but in the past the visitors could also examine parts of the collection to learn more about it.

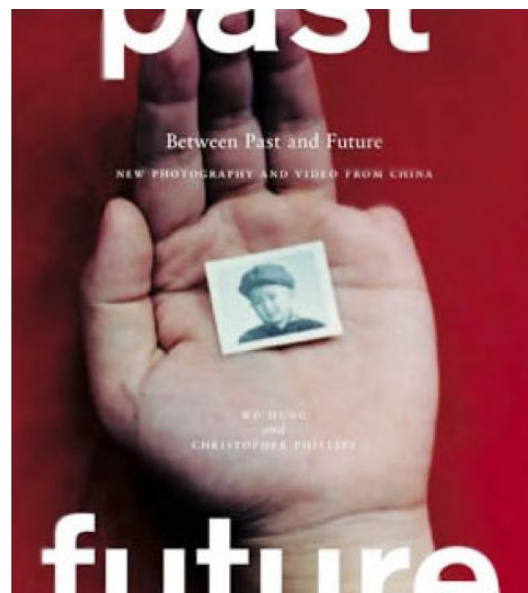


Fig. 1.4. Catalogue of the International Centre of Photography: *Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China*

Catalogues, guided tours, specialised literature and multi media applications can be seen as a replacement for this “self-investigation”. Since museums hold primary material evidence of human nature and culture, they often provide facilities for researchers or scholars from outside the organisation to do their research, so the purpose of study is not entirely restricted to their own research staff (Noordman, 2000).

Museum research involves the study of the collections of the museum and it should not be confused with the research done at universities. Besides collecting data on the objects in their collection and uncovering information which is relevant to the collection, the research also includes the production of collection catalogues (O'Hagan, 1998).

Education

Another important purpose of museums is education. Contemporary art can evoke confusion and cause discussion since the intentions of the artist are not always clear to the perceiver of the artwork, to him/her a lot of the used forms and figures might be absolutely unrecognizable. That is why art museums should put a lot of effort in their educational programs (Kotler & Kotler, 1998, p.17). This includes the exchange of knowledge, the explanation of the significance of the presented objects, and the illustration of the themes of an exhibition (Vaessen, 1986). The contributions that museums can make to education are widely acknowledged. Most children visit museums for the first time with a school trip and the majority of the visitors learn by looking at exhibitions and displays (McLean, 1997, p.113).

Given that a good presentation is important for the exchange of knowledge, this can also be partly included in this function of museums. How permanent and temporary exhibitions are presented and designed is very important for the representation of museums. Everything evolves around communicating the museum's product to a wider audience (Kotler & Kotler, 1998). The quality of the museum's educational programming and outreach determines the lasting message in the visitor's mind. As educational institutions they offer opportunities for self-directed learning and exploration by people of diverse ages, interests, backgrounds and abilities (Encarta Online Encyclopaedia, 2007).

There are a lot of different definitions concerning museum education. Weil (2002) states that education covers the clarification and explanation of the exhibited objects, to work out and comment on the themes of certain exhibitions and to stimulate development, therefore all activities that create relationship between the museum and its public are considered education. In his article "Luring or lecturing", Rik Vos (1989) defines education as "the communication with an audience in a museum about the exhibited." According to Noordman (2000, p.147) education must be an active presentation, which includes direct accompaniment during the tour through the museum, it should not be a passive presentation, which includes routing through the

building and the use of audiovisual media. These different definitions show that there are a lot of ideas on how to implement education in museums. Apparently, it is hard to come to an agreement between the balance that should be achieved between the use of objects, versus the use of texts explaining the context of objects. Because of all these different explanations and views concerning museum education, the educational role of the museum was registered in the code of ethics for museums, set up by ICOM:

“The museum has an important duty to develop its educational role and attract wider audiences from all levels of the community, locality or group it serves. It should offer opportunities for such people to become involved in the museum and to support its goals and activities. Interaction with the constituent community and promotion of their heritage is an integral part of the educational role of the museum”

(ICOM, 2004, p.12)

As a consequence of the introduction of education in museums, visitors did no longer have to study the art objects themselves, now the art could also be thought to them. Even though the first forms of education in museums showed up at the beginning of the 19th century, it took until the fifties for an educational service to be developed. From this time on, museums tried to spread their “message” as interesting and appealing as possible. Now, most museums have specially trained educational staff members working in their organisation.

This educational staff should, together with educational tools, bring skills and knowledge to the visitors of museums, and it should change their attitude. In view of the fact that museum visitors still tend to be drawn disproportionately from higher-income and better educated groups (Johnson, 2003, p.316), the educational staff should not only be focused on children. Instead, it would be better to develop educational programs for different target groups.

Enjoyment

According to Kotler & Kotler (1998) there are five basic elements that together should be able to organise the museum visitor’s time and activity during his or her visit:

- 1) The museum setting, its exterior and interior;
- 2) The objects, the collection and exhibitions;
- 3) The interpretive material available such as labels and catalogues;
- 4) The museum programs which include lectures and performances;

5) The museum services, such as reception, food and the museum shop.

With a good functioning of these five basic elements the pleasure of the visitor will be increased during his or her stay in the museum. And this pleasure of course is closely related to the last purpose of museums: enjoyment. A customer friendly approach, a clean toilet, a tidy cloakroom and the presence of a café or restaurant, can all enhance once feeling of enjoyment, even though these services are not directly related to the collection of the museum. Instead of the traditional provision of information about the collection and associated topics in the form of formal lectures and publications, museums can offer other services to the public, such as thematic routes, workshops or queue avoidance (McLean, 1997).

Presentation was already mentioned as a task within the educational purpose of museums, but it also plays a great part in the enjoyment, since it determines what visitors see and experience. Furthermore it influences the publicity around the exhibitions. It is no longer sufficient to simply display a collection, people have high expectations.

Modern trends in the museum world have broadened the range of subject matter and introduced many interactive exhibits, which give the public the opportunity to make choices and engage in activities that may vary the experience from person to person. Moreover, today, new presentation possibilities, such as museum nights and evening opening hours, are explored by museums with the same objective: to reach a wider audience and to accommodate them during their stay at a museum.

Everything that concerns the enjoyment is in connection with the changing of our current information society into an experience society. In this thesis the emphasis will be on this stimulation of the enjoyment of museum visitors.

1.4. Museum marketing

Museums enjoyed a surge in popularity in the 1990s, driven by a strong global economy and rising public demand for high-quality cultural and educational activities to fill leisure time. Due to the fact that public funding and government support have decreased, museums have sought to develop other sources of funding. As a result, they became more market-driven and started with the implementation of marketing functions in museums. The museums' goals are twofold: they want to attract more visitors, and they need to generate income that ensures the museum's financial stability. Nevertheless, after two decades of "museum marketing", a lot of museums are still struggling with these reorganizations (Noordman, 2000, p.269-274).



Fig. 1.5. Mind map of museum marketing found on ProSpectatore

Marketing can be defined as “a social and managerial process by which individual and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and exchanging products of value with others” (Kotler, 2000, p.9). The American Marketing Association (AMA) states that “marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.”⁶ The recruitment of new customers (acquisition) and the retention and expansion of relationships with existing customers (base management) are major factors of marketing, since the goal of marketing is optimization of the relationship between companies and customers and maximization of their mutual satisfaction (Colbert, 2001, p.8).

⁶ <http://www.marketingpower.com/mg-dictionary-view1862.php>

The adoption of marketing methods by museums is of relatively recent origin. Marketing was traditionally seen as a technique that businesses in the for-profit sector employed to sell their products or services to consumers. Museums and other cultural institutions were generally included in the service sector, which is why museums did not make use of marketing for many years. Non-profit organizations do not have a financial goal, which makes it hard to measure the success or failure of such an organization on financial grounds. Furthermore for-profit organizations only have three stakeholders: their shareholders, their employees and their consumers, whereas non-profit organizations like museums are influenced by a lot more stakeholders, such as the visitors, the museum staff, patrons, professionals, members, researchers, tourists, the government, other cultural institutions, and the media (McLean, 1997, p.51-52). That is why non-profit organizations, such as museums, should use a different marketing approach than a for-profit organization.

Philip and Neil Kotler were one of the first researchers that raised the question of marketing cultural institutions (Colbert, 2001, p.11) and they did research on the way marketing techniques from the for-profit sector could be applied in the non-profit sector. This research was soon followed by others, such as Mokwa et, al. (*Marketing the Arts*, 1980), Melillo (*Market the Arts*, 1983), Diggles (*Guide to Arts Marketing: the principles and practice of marketing as they apply to the arts*, 1986) and Reiss (*The Arts Management Handbook, 2nd ed*, 1974). And with these new texts, there also came new definitions of marketing with a focus on culture and the arts. Diggles (1986, in Colbert, 2001, p.11), for example, states that “the primary aim of arts marketing is to bring an appropriate form of contact with the artist and in doing so to arrive at the best financial outcome that is compatible with the achievement of that aim.” But this definition is more applicable to an individual artist than it is to a museum. In 1988, Lewis offers relief when he defines marketing as “the management process which confirms the mission of a museum or gallery and is responsible for the efficient identification, anticipation and satisfaction of its users”, with “users” Lewis refers to all stakeholders of a museum. This includes the visitors, as well as the museum staff, patrons, professionals, members, researchers, the government, and the media.

Marketing has increasingly been seen as a helpful and essential museum activity (McLean, 1997) and it has become highly important for museums, not only as a way of obtaining financial resources. According to Kotler and Kotler (1998) marketing in the non-profit sector is not only about “hard selling”, but it must be seen as an

instrument: “a methodology in the hands of the management for shaping, communicating and distributing quality experiences and programmes reaching the broadest possible audience.” Tobelem (1997, p.341-344) states that the introduction of marketing into museums can be attributed to four factors whose relative importance depends on the country and the nature of each institution:

1. *The growth of museums.* Nowadays, museums are complex organizations with a diversified range of activities, such as research, educational programmes, temporary exhibitions, commercial activities, cultural services and fund raising, involving sizeable budgets and numerous staff. Over the last decades, museums have seen a considerable increase in their budgets, programmes, and staff members, even though traditional financial resources could not keep up with these new needs.
2. *The question of financing.* The weight of ever greater financial constraints following a reduction in state funding and/or the need to find new financial resources in order to allow museums to expand, forces them to find ways to generate supplementary funds and to establish the means for better communications directed towards various target groups.
3. *Competitive environment.* The proliferation of cultural institutions and the increased range of leisure time activities have propelled the museums into a competitive environment. The fact that an art museum is not a commercial institution does not mean that it is not operating within a market. There are other competitors, since the time available to individuals is by definition limited.
4. *The need to know the visitor better.* This means helping the museum to fulfil its mission through adjusting its message, indeed to seek to understand better the perceptions and expectations of non-visitors in order to catch the interest of particular groups.

If you want to set up a marketing plan, you should first analyse the museum’s internal and external environment. The internal environment has a direct influence on the museums functioning; it includes the museum board, the director, the (paid) staff, and its volunteers (Kotler & Kotler, 1998, p.60-61). The external environment is composed of different elements which constantly influence all organizations.

The first element is the museum’s competition, over which the company has some control (for example, following the opponent’s lead by lowering prices). Other

museums are of course competitors, but a lot of competition is also coming from other leisure activities, such as theme parks, historic properties and gardens. In the latter case, the leisure time of their potential visitors can be seen as the currency of competition. McLean (1997, p.72) addresses that there also exists competition outside the consumer market, that is competition for funds since a lot of organizations are competing for the same, limited, supply of subsidies, grants or sponsorship income.

Secondly, there are the macro-environmental variables, also referred to as “uncontrollable variables” (Colbert, 2001, p.18). There are five main variables in the macro-environment: demographic, technological, economic, political-legal, and cultural. These uncontrollable variables constantly affect the life of any corporation which may have to adapt to radical changes yet never have the chance to act upon the causes of these changes (Colbert, 2001, p.19). In museums these changes have placed increased significance on the discipline of marketing.

Thirdly, there is the market environment, which includes all collaborating groups and organizations of the museum such as their visitors, members, neighbours, activists, and the media.

And lastly, there is the regulating environment, consisting of the government, the provincial and municipal councillors, and other regulating institutions. They make sure that the museum adapts itself to the law, rules and regulations.

The goals and strategy of a museum follow from this environment analysis. In order to reach its goals, all the means of the museums should be examined, including the human resources, financial means, knowledge and the goods that are in the possession of the museum (McLean, 1997, p.187).

From the analysis of the means of the museum the strengths and weaknesses of the museum can be defined. These strengths (S) and weaknesses (W) can be related to the opportunities (O) and threats (T) of the museum, forming a SWOT analysis. The marketing plan can now be used to utilize the strengths and opportunities of the museum, and at the same time tone down its weaknesses and threats (Kotler & Kotler, 1998, p. 73-79).

A marketing strategy is based on expected customer behaviour in a certain market. The next step is to find out who the museums' visitors are, and what their needs are. The biggest challenge for an art museum is to acquire an audience. A lot of people have more trouble identifying themselves with art, than with scientific matters such as technique. Another disadvantage lies in the fact that their younger audience does not yet know the "value" of art, this may even result in a permanent lack of interest during the rest of their lives.

Art museums attract two types of public. The first group consists of benefactors, collectors and donors. The other group consists of visitors, members and the regular audience (Encarta Online Encyclopaedia, 2007).

In order to know the customer and its expected buying behaviour, the process of segmenting and positioning is needed. Segmentation is the process of dividing the market into segments based on consumer characteristics and needs. Colbert (2001, p.104) defines it as "the action of separating into subgroups the units that make up the market." The variable that characterizes and quantifies a segment is called a descriptor, and even though there are almost "as many descriptors as there are adjectives in the dictionary" (Colbert, 2001, p.110), researchers limit themselves to the following groups: geographic, sociodemographic, psychographic, and related to the benefits sought by consumers.

Through segmentation, a museum can adjust its marketing policy to a specific group and position its products to the visitor's needs. But another important step before developing the marketing mix is deciding on how to create an identity or image of the product in the mind of the consumer, this is done by positioning. In the process of positioning the museum first identifies the differential advantages in each segment, and then it decides on a different positioning concept for each of these segments. According to Colbert (2001, p.117) there are two types of positioning possible that are not mutually exclusive. The first is positioning in terms of one or more segments; the second is positioning against the competition. When the positioning statement is created, one can start on creating the marketing mix.

Every marketing strategy is composed of the same four components:

1. *The product that is offered.* The product is the centrepiece of any enterprise (Colbert, 2001, p.20). According to Kotler & Kotler (1998, p.174) the product of a museum consists of the museum setting itself, the objects, collection and exhibition, the labels, texts and catalogues, the museum program, and the extra services. There might be a sixth element of the product of a museum: the success of a museum to turn a museum visit into an experience (Kotler & Kotler, 1998, p.174). This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.
2. *The price that is charged, in terms of money, time, energy, and attention.* Every product has a price, which is normally expressed as the monetary value attributed to that product, but the price also includes the effort a customer must expend in the act of buying the product (Colbert, 2001, p.20). So, even when a product is free, there is always a price to pay.
3. *The place (distribution) of the product and how the product is delivered, presented, and made accessible to the customer.* Place is composed of several elements, the main ones are physical distribution, distribution channels, and commercial venue (Colbert, 2001, p.20). For a museum the main place is the museum building, but the location, publications, the off-site programs and their websites are all places of a museum as well.
4. *The promotion, e.g. how the message is communicated and transmitted.* Promotion represents all of the communications that a marketer (in this case a museum) may use in the marketplace. It is the way the museum communicates with its target groups (McLean, 1997, p.138-139) and it is made up of four distinct components: advertising, personal selling, sales promotions, and public relations (Colbert, 2001, p.21).



Fig. 1.6. The National Maritime Museum has pasted a car to promote their museum

These four, controllable, variables can be seen as the tools to facilitate the transaction between the museum and the customers, together the “four Ps” make up what is known as the marketing mix (Colbert, 2001, p.19). This marketing mix can be seen as a set of activities that are working together in order to fulfil the museum’s mandate, and to satisfy different segments of its audience. According to Noordman (2000, p. 129) the marketing approach for the smaller art museums should differ from the marketing approach for the large museums, since the smaller art museums are dealing with a lot of regular visitors and friends of the museum that visit the museum on a regular basis, whereas large museums have a lot of visitors that visit the museum only once. In the end it is easier to communicate with friends as it is with tourists. A small museum is a museum that annually organizes one or two, or sometimes even no exhibition at all, and is visited by less than 40,000 people per year (Noordman, 2000, p.14). The emphasis with these small museums is on promotion, since neither the product, nor the price or the distribution channels, are devoted to meet the audience demand. If they use a promotion mix at all, they will concentrate on acquiring the regular audience for a certain exhibition. This mix consists of: the mailing of invites for the opening of the exhibition; the distribution of the press report to the (local) media; the publicity among the friends association; and finally, the production of posters (Noordman, 2000, p.14). The smaller museums should be careful with advertisements, since they do not often have a certain master piece. This makes it not profitable, as the costs of advertisement go beyond the proceeds. They can better invest their money in flyers to supply the visitor with information (Noordman, 2000, p.44). As was said before, the larger museums (which organize more than two exhibitions each year and are visited by more than 40,000 people) have a lot of visitors that come only once: the exhibition lovers and the tourists. They should adopt their marketing strategy to this audience.

The principle of the marketing mix is to break down an offering “into a number of component parts and to arrange them into manageable subject areas for making strategic decisions. Decisions on one element of the mix can only be made by reference to other elements.” (McLean, 1997, p.48) Thus, successful marketing depends on a skilful balance of these four components, and the marketing mix will differ for every museum, and for every target group. According to Colbert (2001, p.19) synergy exists when “the overall effect of several elements is greater than the sum of the effect of the elements taken separately.”

All of the above shows us that marketing is more than a matter of promoting the museum and its offering. Today, marketing is a tool for analysis and a means for action which allow an organisation, for-profit or non-profit, to achieve fully its objectives. Whereas for private enterprises this would mean achieving the highest possible profit, a museum could instead choose as its goal the education of the visitor, or the stimulation of his awareness of specific facets of art, and not merely his commercial exploitation (Kotler & Andreasen, 1987). According to Tobelem (1997) museums marketing can be used to “rationalise the total process of developing their own resources, going to the creation or speeding up of commercial programmes (shops, restaurants, hiring out premises), intensifying efforts to raise funds from individuals and companies as well as the launching of subscription programmes, but also in order to gain its cultural objectives more efficiently.” Museums are realizing that the organisation of experiences in museums has a great commercial potential as a way of attracting funds and high amounts of visitors, and therefore is a means to accomplish a lot of their goals.

Chapter 2 The emerging experience economy

2.1. Introduction

In the article “More than a feeling”, Wim de Ridder (2007), who is currently a professor in reconnoitering the future at the University of Twente, states that emotion is the fastest growing product in today’s prosperous economy. When a company cannot compete with the large shopping malls it should offer experiences. According to De Ridder potential buyers are more and more prepared to pay for products and services that have an emotional value.

In order to follow the right strategy a company or institution should to be able to read and predict the consumers’ behavior. Different trends run parallel or together with each other. The average consumer has the disposal of a growing purchasing power and is becoming older. But the behavior of that future elderly will “grow grey” to a less extend: they will continue to go on vacation, they will still make excursions and they will continue to go out for dinner.

On the lifestyle ground the freedom of choice has increased. People are better informed and the “new” consumer does not want to be seen as a herd animal. Furthermore he (or she) uses consumption to distinguish himself from others. But according to De Ridder (2007) the individuality of the consumer is volatile and consists of different dimensions. Companies are forced to anticipate in this individualization. Production can no longer be planned in advance but is becoming more and more a delivery at buyer’s request. Joint decisions (co decision) and joint production (co production) with the consumer already exist and consumers are making alliances and are skipping intermediate trade more often.

This trend gives an important impulse to “the new consumption”: more entertainment, more interest for mass events and festivities and an increase of recreation and adventurous travels. Because all this, experiences are gaining economic interest. De Ridder (2007) states that we are living in an experience economy. Pleasure, experience and consumption intertwined, and the first two are being sold together with the product or service, or are supplied for free.

If you search the internet for “experience economy”, Google gives you 17,200,000 hits. The highest one on this list is “The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage”, a link to Google Books that gives you information on the

book by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore. The second and third hits, link to the site of the European Centre for the Experience Economy. Fourth on the list is “The Experience Economy- Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia”, and there you can find that “the term *Experience Economy* is first described in a book written in 1999 by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore titled “The Experience Economy”. In it they describe the experience economy as a next economy following the agrarian economy, the industrial economy and the most recent service economy. This economy has begun to sell “mass customization” services that are similar to theatre, using underlying goods and services as props” (Wikipedia, 2008). Apparently, these two authors are leading the discussion on the experience economy at this point in time.

In *The Experience Economy: work is theatre and every business a stage* B. Joseph Pine and James Gilmore argue that there is a frequently overlooked element in the economy, one beyond commodities, goods, and services. It's experiences. The authors stress that the whole move to customization is a prime example of the experience economy at work. In short, the experience economy is all about the creation of experiences in order to involve the public in a certain product or company; it is all about the feeling and the emotion that can be attached to a product or service. Organizations have to offer their “guests” an unforgettable experience to make sure they will keep coming back. Entertainment is only one aspect of this experience. Rather, companies stage an experience whenever they engage customers, connecting with them in a personal, memorable way (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.3).

2.2. The experience economy in general

In our present society experiences are becoming more and more important. According to Pine and Gilmore this is all part of the experience economy. In their book, they state that experiences represent an existing but previously unarticulated genre of economic output (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. ix), and they give several examples of how companies, restaurants, theme parks, cafes, and ware houses try to add value to their products by surrounding them with experiences. They present the experience as a new stage of economic offering, but this is not entirely true: as long as people exist, experiences exist.

Pine and Gilmore were not the first to write about the experience economy. A lot has been, and is being written and said about the transformation from a service oriented economy to a new kind of economy where experiences are seen as a product. In the following paragraphs a few of these writings are discussed to set out the development of the experience economy. It will show that experiences are not just a marketing trick or hype that is to be exploited for financial gain, but that the experience economy should be seen within a broader societal framework of development.

1959

Sidney Levy was one of the first to see the value of doing research on brand image, symbolism, and cultural meaning in marketing and of broadening the marketing concept (Harris, 2007, p.7). In his article "Symbols for sale" he gave some credence both to symbolic and to functional attributes. He stated that symbolism in a brand's image added to its functional dimensions. According to him, products are not just tangible things, and consumption is not only rational, but it also has a symbolic value. If you see that consumption has meaning for people, then you will also see what the place of a product is in the entire cultural context. In later work he stressed the symbolic over the functional (Harris, 2007, p.10). According to Harris, one might differ over Levy's structural approach to cultural symbols, but no one can argue the impact of his ideas: "At a time when marketing thought was primarily concerned with defining its activities and making distribution more efficient, Levy saw consumers as non-economic, socially goal-oriented, and living out their destinies –that is their lifetimes of consuming- with the potential for infinite variety.(...) By breaking with the assumptions of economic rationality in consumers and the functional utility of products, Levy saw the phenomena of brand image and symbols before others did" (Harris, 2007, p.10).

1970

Alvin Toffler is an American writer and futurist, known for his work discussing the digital revolution, communications revolution, corporate revolution, and technical singularity. His early work focused on technology and its impact (through effects like information overload), then he moved to examining the reaction of and changes in society (Wikipedia, 2008). His works and ideas have been subject to various criticisms, usually with the argumentation used against futurology: that foreseeing is nigh possible. Nevertheless, in 1970 he seemed to foresee the future when he wrote the book *The Future Shock*. In this book, Toffler argues that society is undergoing an enormous structural change, a revolution from an industrial society to a “super-industrial society”. He based his book on developments he saw in society. An entire chapter (Chapter 10: The Experience Makers) was devoted to experiences, and he stated that in three decades, there will be companies that will produce nothing but experiences. There is disagreement about whether his exact predictions have come true or not, but much is to be learned from the way he comes to his vision about the future.

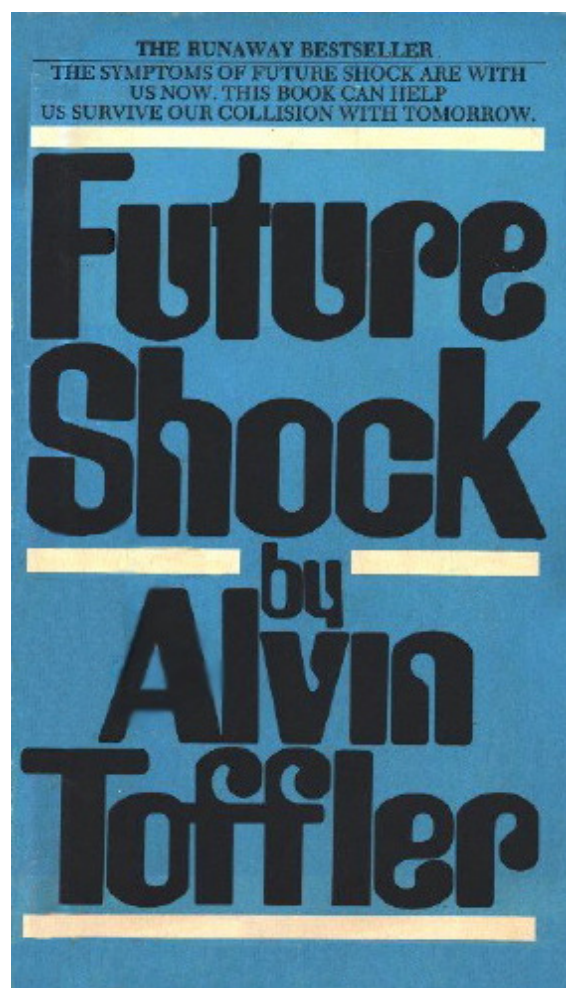


Fig. 2.1. Cover *Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler (1970)

1976

Although the book of Dean MacCannell *The Tourist: A new theory of the leisure class* handles about the tourism industry it also explains a lot about experiences. MacCannell writes that a lot of experience is being staged in tourism. These experiences are developed especially for this industry, and people charge money for it. This all has to do with authenticity; according to MacCannell, authentic experiences are those that are not contrived or faked, where visitors witness authentic behavior from their hosts and see back areas, or the places where hosts typically act authentically (Smith, 2007, p.7). The question that rises is: “what is real and what is not?”, for example, if you visit Holland, is it really Holland you see when you visit Volendam? What is “typically Dutch”? Throughout his book, MacCannell contrasts experiences in people’s daily lives.

In June 2006, over thirty years after the appearance of MacCannell’s book *The Tourist*; Joseph Pine presented the new book he wrote with James Gilmore: *Authenticity*. At this book presentation he discussed the present state of the experience economy and his ideas on authenticity based on the questions: “Are you what you say you are?” and “Are you being true to yourself?” As you can see in the matrix, four possibilities emerge: real-real, real-fake, fake-real, and fake-fake.

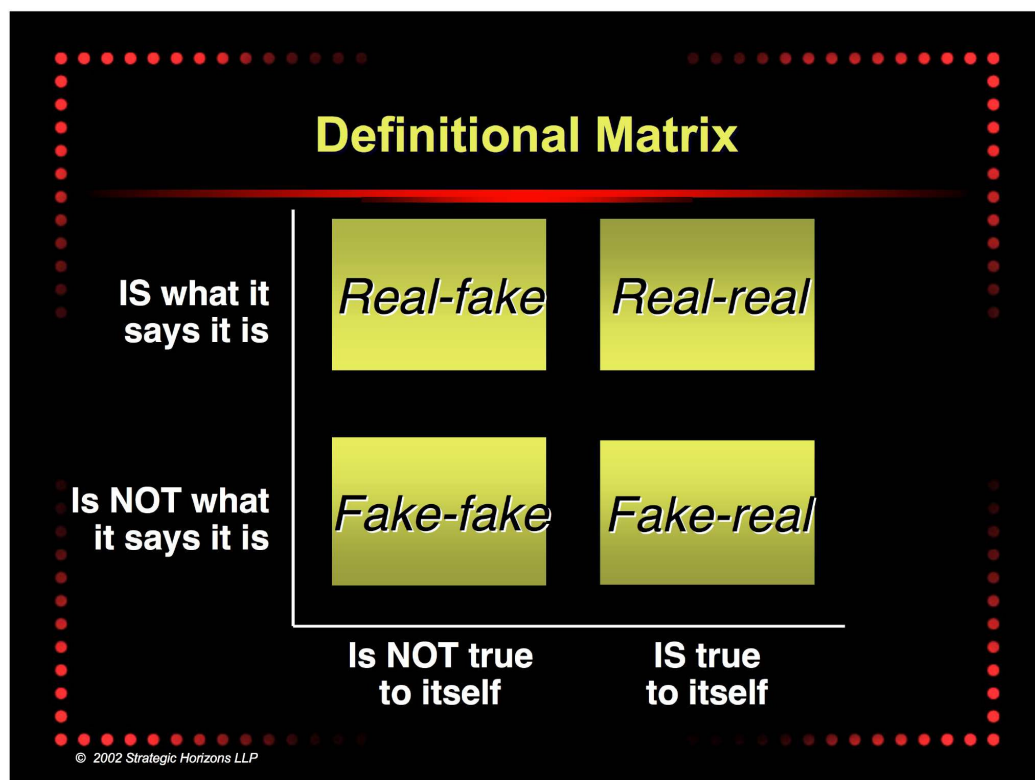


Fig. 2.2. Definitional Matrix Authenticity Pine and Gilmore

Pine stated that a lot of companies claim to be authentic in their advertisements whilst they are not. According to him, if you are authentic you do not need to say that you are.

In *Authenticity*, five types of authenticity are given:

- Natural: the natural soaps of Lush or Sabon;
- Original: the iPod;
- Exceptional: a five star hotel;
- Referential: the Venetian in Las Vegas;
- Influential: corporate social responsibility claims.⁷

MacCannell already discussed this matter of authenticity thirty years earlier. This shows that the question of authenticity, as well as the experience economy, is of all times.

1982

In their paper “Hedonic Consumption: Emerging Concepts, Methods, and Propositions”, Elizabeth Hirschman and Morris Holbrook discuss the facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product usage experience: the hedonic consumption. According to them, consumption is not only rational, but also symbolic: people interpret the product they buy in a certain way and they attach value to it. They state that experiences are stimulating events that provide intrinsic pleasure (i.e. a pleasure for its own sake), rather than the utilitarian benefits derived from services (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

1992

In the early nineties Gerhard Schulze published his book *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* (The Experience Society). He describes how in the past people were merely focused on how to affect, control and shape their external world, since hunters and gatherers, and later farmers, were completely subjected to what nature provided them. The focus of human reasoning was on biological survival and that is why people were occupied with the creation of more food, shelter and stability for themselves and society, in other words, productivity and efficiency were increased. This process was not only accelerated by the two industrial revolutions in the 19th and 20th century, but it was changed by them as well. The process of mass production was affected by

⁷ URL: www.experience-economy.com/2006/05/04/umbria-2006---authenticity/

growing affluence and a great increase in the rate of technological process. Due to the success of mass production the society was flooded with new products, services and ideas and more and more people could afford them. This enormous increase in choice and possibilities also made it possible for people to make different choices, which included choices in lifestyle. As a result the stability and homogeneity, on which the mass production principle rested, came under pressure, consumers were turning into individuals. And these individuals were seeking for meaningful experiences (Schulze, 1992).

According to Huub Mous, adviser Visual Arts at *Keunstwurk* in Leeuwarden, after the publication of Schulze's sociological bestseller "all people in the museum world talked of nothing else than the experience, the experience, and once again the experience."⁸

1999

In their book *The Experience Economy, work is theatre and every business a stage*, Pine and Gilmore propose that Western societies have evolved from an agrarian economy, to an industrial economy, then to a service economy and now have entered an "experience economy". This evolution is evidenced by a change in what consumers demanded. Demand for agrarian commodities was supplanted by demand for industrial goods, followed by demand for intangible services, and now consumers want memorable experiences.

The authors stress that services and experiences are distinct economic offerings. Whereas commodities are exchangeable, goods are tangible and services are immaterial, experiences are memorable. "Experiences are a fourth economic offering, as distinct from services as services are from goods. (...) When a person buys a service, he purchased a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages –as a theatrical play- to engage him in a personal way." According to Pine and Gilmore, companies now use goods and services to engage customers in a memorable event, or experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.2).

⁸ URL: <http://www.go-gol.nl/esseeHMmei2005friesmuseum.htm>

The progression of economic value is depicted in figure 2.3.

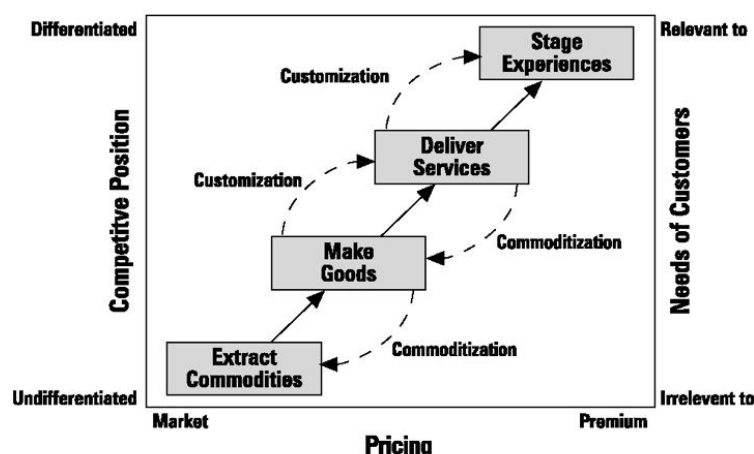


Fig. 2.3. The Progression of Economic Value

In this figure, you see that each successive offering greatly increases in value because the buyer finds each more relevant to what he truly wants. And Pine and Gilmore stress that “because companies stage so many different kinds of experiences, they more easily differentiate their offerings and thereby charge a premium price based on the distinctive value provided, not the market price of the competition” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.22). The assertion that experiences are the highest-value economic offerings has got to be taken on faith; they provide no empirical evidence in the book that it is true.⁹

Pine and Gilmore give four reasons why the Experience Economy is emerging. The first reason can be found in the progression of technology, which powers many experiences. The increasing competitive intensity can be seen as a second reason, since it drives the ongoing search for differentiation. The third reason is the rising affluence, by which means people were given more freedom to express their emotions and feelings. But, according to them, the most encompassing answer “resides in the nature of economic value and its natural progression from commodities to goods to services and then to experiences” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.5). Besides the economic reasons for the emerge of experiences, experiences can be seen as a manifestation of many different kinds of developments in society and culture.

⁹ URL: http://www.consulttci.com/Book_reviews/experience.html

Pine and Gilmore (1999, p.16) discuss how manufacturers should “experientialize” their goods, and how service providers can turn the delivery of their services into engaging theatre. To produce these experiences, managers need to think of themselves as stage directors and their business as a theatrical event. This is not so much to entertain customers as to engage them. The quality of the experience provided (meaning the extent to which it is enjoyable, memorable, educational, useful, etc.) will then determine the price that can be charged. It is important to keep in mind that no two people can have the same experience. Each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event and the individual’s prior state of mind and being (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.12). According to Pine and Gilmore this price that can be charged will be higher than what could be realized for the good or the service by itself alone (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.16-17).

At this point in time, there are many business enterprises that have fully embraced the concept of the experience economy, and they are providing themed experiences for their customers. As with any theatrical event, you need to consider all of the aspects that will heighten the experience, therefore Pine and Gilmore (1999, p.49-51) present five principles that in their view are critical to the staging of a successful themed experience for a customer:

1. An engaging theme must alter a guest’s -that is how Pine and Gilmore refer to consumers- sense of reality;
2. The richest venues possess themes that fully alter one’s sense of reality affecting the experience of stage, time and matter;
3. Engaging themes integrate space, time, and matter into a cohesive realistic whole;
4. Themes are strengthened by creating multiple places within a place;
5. A theme should fit the character of the enterprise staging the experience.

Furthermore, no company sells experiences as its economic offering unless it actually charges guests an admission fee. An event created just to increase customer preferences for the commoditized goods or services that a company actually sells is not an economic offering (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p.100). “Charging admission -requiring customers to pay for the experience- does not mean that companies have to stop selling goods and services. Disney generates significant profits from parking, food, and other service fees at its theme parks as well as from the sale of memorabilia. But without the staged experiences of the company’s theme

parks, cartoons, movies, and TV-shows, customers would have nothing to remember -and Disney would have no characteristics to exploit” (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p.101). “Before a company can charge admission, it must design an experience that customers judge to be worth the price. Excellent design, marketing, and delivery will be every bit as crucial for experiences as they are for goods and services. Ingenuity and innovation will always precede growth in revenue. Yet, experiences, like goods and services, have their own distinct qualities and characteristics and present their own challenges” (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p.102).

Pine and Gilmore (1998, p.102) think about experiences across two dimension. The first corresponds to customer participation. At one end of the spectrum lies passive participation, in which customers do not affect the performance at all. At the other end of the spectrum lies active participation, in which customers play key roles in creating the performance or event that yields the experience. The second dimension of experience describes the connection, or environmental relationship, that unites customers with the event or performance. At one end of the connection spectrum lays absorption, at the other end, immersion.

Figure 2.4. shows how the experiences can be sorted into four broad categories to where they fall across the spectra of the two dimensions.

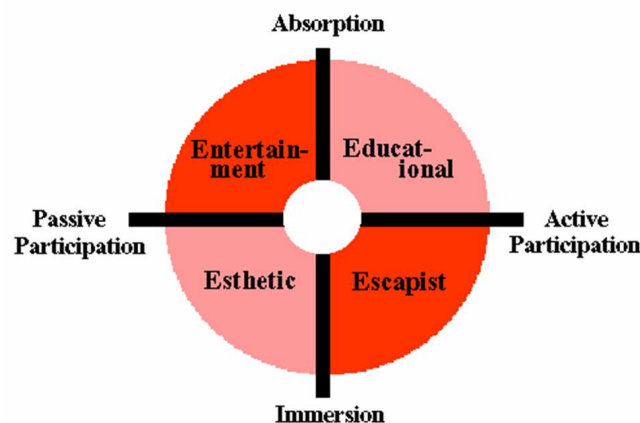


Fig.2.4. The Four Realms of Experience

Generally, Pine and Gilmore find that the richest experiences encompass aspects of all four realms, forming a “sweet spot” around the area where the spectra meet.

The authors end their book by discussing the next logical conceptual position in their “Progression of the Economic Value” framework (fig. 2.3). Whilst experiences do

provide sensations and a memorable event, these do wear off with time. According to them, eventually, experiences will become like commodities, and individuals will seek out the next level of economic offering: that of transformations, where the customer literally becomes the product. Transformations make a permanent beneficial change to the customer. When a company guides transformation the offering is the individual, the basis of success will be in understanding the aspirations of individual consumers and businesses and guiding them to fully realize those aspirations (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.173).

Whilst experiences are memorable and sustained for a time, transformations are inspirational and must be sustained through time (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Since transformations cause changes in an individual, they will never become commodities, according to Pine and Gilmore (1999, p.173) this makes transformations the fifth and final economic offering.

However, since the experience economy has not yet progressed into the transformation economy, this thesis will only deal with the effects of the experience economy on museums.

2005

Albert Boswijk, Managing Director European Centre for the Experience Economy, Thomas Thijssen, European Director of Research at the European Centre for the Experience Economy and University of Amsterdam, and Ed Peelen, from Nyenrode Business University and research partner European Centre for the Experience Economy, are the authors of *Een nieuwe kijk op de Experience Economy: Betekenisvolle betekenissen* (A new perspective on the Experience Economy: Meaningful Experiences). In this book they state that the experience economy is more than just “excite me”, “feed me”, and “entertain me”, it’s about more than just offering a staged setting for an experience. According to them, a meaningful experience needs to be rooted in the individual experience, the point of departure needs to be the individual’s personal experience: “his or her everyday world and societal context” (Boswijk et al, 2006, p.1).

A new perspective on the Experience Economy takes the current state of knowledge in this field a step further, in linking personal, social, cultural, and economic experiences and making them manageable in practice. The three authors approach the experience economy from the perspective of the individual and his or her

potential program of giving meaning to his or her life. “We are returning to a human scale in our thought and actions and shift the focus from “the supplier” and “the organization” to “the individual”” (Boswijk et al, 2006, p.1). Businesses and organizations can play a meaningful role in helping the individual to find his or her own way.

The authors stress that there is a difference in experiences; they explain this difference with the German words *Erlebniss* and *Erfahrung*. The “*Erlebniss*” is an isolated event, it can be a moment, or it can last a certain amount of time. The “*Erfahrung*” on the other hand, has no exact beginning and ending. It is a process that deals with issues like learning, consciousness, and reflection. It can be said that “to sum total of a series of “*Erlebniss*”, good or bad, feed into “*Erfahrung*”, good or bad. Reflection on the cumulative experiences leads to personal insight and possibly the means to personal change or transformation” (Boswijk et al, 2006, p.2). They define human experience as follows: “Experience in the sense of *Erfahrung* is a continuous interactive process of doing and undergoing, of action and reflection, from cause to consequence that provides meaning to the individual in several contexts of his life. Experience as *Erfahrung* causes the individual to change the perspective on self and/or the world around him” (Boswijk et al, 2006, p.2).

It is important to recognize that experience is essentially a form of behaviour, a process in which feelings play an important role. This makes experiences intangible. Boswijk et al (2006, p.3) have come up with ten characteristics of meaningful experiences, furthermore they give six starting points in bringing about meaningful experiences, and they offer a five-stage process of developing and realising meaningful experiences (Boswijk et al, 2006, p.3-6). All of this can be found in Table 2.1.

Characteristics	Starting points	Stages of development
There is heightened concentration and focus, and all five senses are engaged.	The individual experiences an individualised treatment of meaning.	Innovation and creativity in developing experience concepts
One's sense of time is altered.	Value creation takes place in the individual. The supplier focuses on this process of giving meaning.	Development of actual meaningful-experience propositions; these involve co-creation and self-direction.
One is touched emotionally.	The customer is considered a 'guest' within a culture of hospitality.	Internal processes and core competencies.
The process is unique for the individual.	Solve any seemingly irresolvable dilemmas.	The people and culture who have to put the chosen experience strategy into practice
There is contact with the 'raw stuff', the real thing.	The creation of an experience setting is an interactive process between the individual and the supplier.	The business model with which the money is earned.
One both does and undergoes something.	Respect	
There is an element of playfulness (flow).		
One has the feeling of being in control of the situation.		
There is a balance between the challenge and one's own capacities.		
There is a clear goal.		

Table 2.1. Characteristics, starting points, and stages of development of meaningful experiences

Boswijk et al (2006, p.9-10) consider the same five principles as Pine and Gilmore (1999) for experience settings that offer simple instruments with which physical experience settings can be tested, but they add a sixth principle to this group:

1. Theme;
2. Harmony;
3. Eliminate negative cues;
4. Memorabilia;
5. Engage all five senses;
6. Naturalness: one whole.

With this sixth principle they mean that the whole concept must make a natural and authentic impression. "The entire concept should give you the feeling that you are welcome; all the various elements should feel right together" (Boswijk et al, 2006, p.10).

According to the authors there is a second-generation of experience settings, they speak of it as experience co-creation, where the customer's contribution is leading in the development and realisation of the meaningful experience concept. "The idea of co-creation not only needs to be evident within the experience setting ultimately created, but also during its conception and development. We've already abandoned the idea that it's the supplier who decides what the customer wants. The conviction that customers are unable to indicate what they want and are therefore of limited value in developing (breakthrough) innovations has been rejected" (Boswijk et al, 2006, p.10). Co-creation can only be successful if the customer and his or her values from the focus and a structures approach is followed, in which the customer functions as co-creator.

In their conclusion the authors stress that the concept of the experience economy is still in the pre-theory stage and lacks empirical evidence. The research conducted by the authors at the University of Amsterdam aims at adding to theory from an integrative human perspective.

Different Fields

After reading all these different views and opinions on the experience economy, it seems that only people from the business and marketing field are researching experiences, but this is not true. The experience economy is also researched by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and researchers from other social science disciplines.

In the business and marketing literature the researchers mostly discuss the production, the measurements, and the managing of products. In other words, these researchers are looking at experiences from a traditional perspective. They see an experience the same way Pine and Gilmore do: as a distinct economic offering.

The researchers from the social science field do not agree with this approach, according to them it is an interactive process of a person with its environment. "Experiences are not manufactured and distributed by the outside world like products or services. They are not created in organization space but in individual space. They form spontaneously inside our mind as a result of interaction with our environment. If we want to understand how memorable, meaningful experiences are formed and structured, we may need to start from the inside and see what cognitive science that studies human perception and cognition has to tell us" (Van Doorn, 2006, p.1).

Anna Snel, researcher at the European Centre for the Experience Economy, agrees with Mark van Doorn. According to her, an experience is not evidently a “long lasting memory” as most companies like us to believe, this will only work when you link an experience to personal interest, motivation, and personality. If there is no personal connection, than very little of the experience will stick in the memory.

Education can play a big part in this process, since the effect of experiences is build up through the years. Throughout your life you have dealt with a lot of experiences. Studies by professor Gerald Zaltman of the Harvard Business School, among others, indicate that a customer’s behaviour is influenced less by the attributes of a product or service than by the customer’s own largely subconscious and emotional reaction to the total experience (Ransom et al, 1998, p.176).

Unlike entertainment, education involves the active participation of the individual. Pine and Gilmore (1999, p.32) state that “to truly inform a person and increase its knowledge and/or skills, educational events must actively engage the mind (for education) and/or body (for physical training). In their book they quote Stan Davis and Jim Botkin, in *The Monster under the Bed* they recognize the following: “The industrial approach to education... [made] teachers the actors and students the passive recipients. In contrast, the emerging new model [of business-led education] takes the market perspective by making students the active players. The active focus will shift from the providers to the user, from educat-ors (teachers) to learn-ors (students), and *the educating act will reside increasingly in the active learner, rather than the teacher-manager*. In the new learning marketplace, customer, employees, and students are all active learners or, even more accurately, interactive learners” (Davis & Botkin, *The Monster Under the Bed: How Business Is Mastering the Opportunity of Knowledge for Profit* (1994), p.125, in Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.32).

This is also what Diane Senese, at the time Vice President of Harris Bank in Chicago has in mind. She agrees with the fact that companies need to create experiences for customers, however, she is even more convinced that companies need to create experiences for their employees. This must be done through learning, since this is “where it matters most”: “Creating experiences for employees so that they can absorb knowledge and make connections is critically important. Living in the information age often means fending off the onslaught of data attacking us daily. Think of the possibilities if companies could redirect that energy and get employees to connect with information.” (Ransom et al, 1998, p.175) Pine and Gilmore agree

with Senese on this, and they add that “people will learn better when their information experience resides in the sweet spot of the four realms we discussed in the article [and in their book as well]: the educational, entertainment, escapist, and aesthetic realms. In order to fulfil the promise of experiences, we all need to learn to blend these four realms”. (Ransom et al, 1998, p.178)

Education must and will become an experience rather than a state of mind: “Schools and colleges that learn to shape an educational experience or transformation, based on action, will quickly trounce the dinosaurs that stubbornly stress only knowledge” (Maital, 1999, p.3). The term edutainment was coined to connote an experience straddling the realms of education and entertainment (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.32),

2.3. Comments on Pine and Gilmore

A lot has been written about Pine and Gilmore's book, they received positive and negative comments. Despite his comments concerning Pine and Gilmore's "false claims to intellectual primogeniture", Holbrook (2000, p.180) found the "energy and breadth of focus invested by the authors toward investigating the experience economy to be both admirable and refreshing."

Shlomo Maital (1999, p.95), at the time Academic Director of the Technion Institute of Management in Israel, was also very enthusiastic about the book: "Pine and Gilmore got it right. The Experience Economy will force managers to change their most basic, cherished assumptions about innovation and strategy. This must not only be read, but acted on—and fast."

Robert Jones, at the time Director of Wolff Olins in London, is also positive about the concept of the experience economy. He thinks that a brand is nothing but the promise of an experience and according to him "the biggest brands will be those that promise the best experiences" (Ransom et al, 1998, p.175). Pine and Gilmore agree that a brand is nothing but the promise of an experience. They state that "the problem with much brand management today is that the experience all too often falls short of the promise. And while services, goods, and even commodities can be branded, brands are not economic offerings; experiences are. Brands merely represent; only experiences are real" (Ransom et al, 1998, p.176).

In his article "A feast for the senses", Alan Fairweather (1999, p.56), at the time Director at PowerPlan is quite positive about Pine and Gilmore's book: "The idea that work is theatre may not sit well with those in manufacturing, who may see it as applying only to retail and service industries. But I believe that this book has something to offer to almost everyone in business, whether they work in general management, marketing or HR. Pine and Gilmore certainly make a strong case for the experience economy."

Even though *The Experience Economy* contains much thoughtful analysis and is well received by a lot of critics, there is also some critique on the book by Pine and Gilmore. Their thesis has been criticized as an example of an over-hyped business philosophy arising from or in the dotcom boom and a rising economy in the U.S. that was tolerant of high prices, inflated claims, and no limitations of supply- or investment (Wikipedia, 2008).

In his article “The Millennial Consumer in the Texts of our Times: Experience and Entertainment”, Morris Holbrook (2000, p.178) states that the hedonic and experiential aspects of consumption awoke in the 1980’s: “All this has been in the air for some time and can hardly be considered novel or revelatory at this late date. However, it appears that a new wave of experiential perspectives and expansions thereof has recently broken upon the scene-- indeed, a veritable tsunami of new literature that has swamped us in a flood of texts attempting to extend our view to the experiential consumer.” Holbrook emphasizes that the idea that value inheres in the consumption experience is hardly a new concept. Given the abundance of previous literature on this topic, Holbrook (2000, p.180) greeted *The Experience Economy* by Pine and Gilmore with a slight sense of déjà vu: “These authors claim to have presented “the first publishing of the concept of experiences as a distinct economic offering”, but the date of publication identifies them as arrivistes rather than pioneers in this direction.”

Holbrook (2000, p.180) also has some comments on Pine and Gilmore’s conceptualization: “they tend to offer a rather teleological view of commerce, regarding economic progress as a succession of stages from commodities to goods to services to experiences.” He finds three problems with their progression of economic values. According to Holbrook (2000, p.180):

- The framework (fig. 2.3) encourages us to think of all products as experiences staged for guests—even in the case of experiential products for which this viewpoint might be counterproductive (such as education, medical services, clinical social work, or the penal system);
- The analysis encourages us to adopt a “what’s next?” viewpoint, to wonder what the next stage in the progression will be, and to assume that the economy must be moving toward some higher level of output to be found past the realm of experiences;
- The conceptualization is just plain wrong because it flies in the face of everything we have learned about the nature of consumer behaviour.

Holbrook (2000, p.181) believes that all products involve goods-services-and-experiences to provide consumption experiences, in other words: “every consumption event provides some form of experience(s) and this has been true since the time of Adam and Eve (gee-that-apple-tasted-good-but-now-I-suddenly-feel-very-ashamed experiences).” According to Holbrook this points out that staging experiences is not a new phenomenon.

Gary Ransom, at the time Senior Vice President of The Forum Corporation in London thinks that “although the idea of comparing oneself to a Disney-like benchmark is intriguing, there are a number of dangers inherent in such thinking (Ransom et al, 1998, p.173)”. According to him, the importance of asking customers to design experiences for themselves cannot be minimized; one must never underplay the importance of customer research. He continues and states that “overwhelming sensory experiences excite curiosity, but not loyalty” (Ransom et al, 1998, p.173). No matter how much a person has enjoyed an experience the first time; he will lose his interest when this experience is repeated over and over again. Therefore, Pine and Gilmore point out that it is important that experience venues bring customers back in order to grow: “The trick is to vary the play being presented: virtually all companies providing experiences must constantly refresh their offerings to ensure that they remain engaging the second, third, and nth time guests experience them” (Ransom et al, 1998, p.177). If experience stages fail to change their experiences, or add elements that keep the offering new and exciting, the offering denigrates. “Rather than having an experience that remains the same between visits, people would rather try a new one where they do not know quite what to expect and are sure to be surprised” (Pine Gilmore, 2000, p.21)

Another comment Ransom (1998, p.174) has, is that customer experiences are culturally specific, he points out that this fact will become more important in a European Union and a wired world.

According to Lewis P. Carbone, at the time president and CEO of Experience Engineering in Minneapolis, and Stephan Haeckel, Director of Strategic Studies at IBM Advances Business in New York, Pine and Gilmore fail to mention a fundamental point in their prescription for how businesses can create value through experience: “They argue that companies should stage experiences around their goods and services and charge for the incremental value produced. We have learned, however, that “bolting” a set of sensory experiences onto an existing product or service is much less effective than managing the total customer experience as an integrated value proposition.” (Ransom et al, 1998, p.176) According to them, the customer’s total experience is formed not only by the actual products and services but also by the environments in which they are discovered, acquired, used, and paid for. “Designing a total experience requires an integration of product, service, and “atmospheric” design and managing the total experience means understanding and responding to emotional as well as rational preferences” (Ransom et al, 1998, p.176).

Nevertheless, Pine and Gilmore state that effective scripting of experiences requires not just designing around emotional and rational needs, but around the physical and spiritual needs as well (Ransom et al, 1998, p.177).

Their thesis has also been criticized from within the fields of Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Studies where theories as to the role of experiences in the economy were already well established prior to the work of Pine and Gilmore, but were not acknowledged in their work. Although continuing to influence business thinking, the concept of the experience economy has already been superseded within much Service Marketing and Management literature by the argument that the value of all goods and services are co-created or co-produced through the interaction of consumers and producers. Therefore, at one level of abstraction all consumption can be understood in experiential terms (Wikipedia, 2008).

2.4. The effects of the Experience Economy in the Netherlands

Pine and Gilmore (1999) stated that “in the emerging Experience Economy companies must realize that they make memories, not goods, and create the stage for generating greater economic value, not deliver services. Its time to get your act together, for goods and services are no longer enough. Customers now want experiences, and they’re willing to pay admission for them. There’s work to do, and only those who perform that work so as to truly engage their guests will succeed in the new economy.”

With this in mind, there is a whole industry of companies arranging experiences for other companies. Companies that differentiate their products by quality or price, seek other ways to make their brands memorable. In the article “In the name of experience” (2000, p.73) they give the example of Mont Blanc, which makes expensive pens: “Mont Blanc has what it pretentiously calls a “deacceleration studio” above its store on the corner of Madison Avenue and 69th Street in New York. Here, customers can sip tea, gaze at displays of antique pens, listen to soothing music--and, of course, write a letter with a Mont Blanc.”

Pine and Gilmore themselves also give numerous examples of businesses that “sell” experiences, but these companies are all located in the United States. Nevertheless, the same thing is occurring in Europe. For example, in the summer of 2000, Volkswagen opened Autostadt, built near its Wolfsburg plant. The project began as a way to give the buyer of a new car an exciting way to take delivery of the vehicle, and turned into a vast car-lovers' theme park, with a luxurious hotel and pavilions named for VW's family of brands: Audi, Seat, Bentley, Lamborghini and Skoda. “Where a product is linked to its town of origin, a visit becomes a bit like a pilgrimage,” says Jack Rouse, whose consultancy worked for three years on Autostadt. “The aim was to make VW more open and customer-friendly. It may also do wonders for tourism in an obscure corner of Germany” (*The Economist*, 2000, p.74).

Concepts like these can also be found in the Netherlands. For instance, Oger Amsterdam, a store where businessmen can buy suits located at the P.C. Hooftstraat, provides its clients with service at the highest level: in “The Boardroom” they create one’s own walk-in wardrobe where one can make his selection in absolute privacy. If needed, you will be picked up from Schiphol Airport, and when you have arrived you are welcomed with champagne and maybe some caviar. All the

designs and fabrics that match your personal style are displayed in The Boardroom and you receive a custom-made service, in total privacy and discretion.

Schiphol Airport is another example where experiences play a crucial role. For the airport it is important to transform the “lost-time” of the travelers into “gained-time”. The Rijksmuseum Schiphol, a meditation room, a casino, all the different stores, etc. are all there to keep travelers entertained and satisfied. If you have checked in, the experience can begin.

In her book, *Pret! Leisure en Landschap* (Pleasure! Leisure and Landscape), Tracy Metz (2002) discusses the effects of the experience economy in the Netherlands. She explains that there has been a rise in affluence since World War II (Metz, 2002, p.274). As a result, the Dutch people can spend more time and money on pleasurable events. The downside however is that, even though there is an increase of affluence, at the same time there is a decrease in the leisure time of the Dutch population. As a result the quality time of families has become very precious, and these families do not mind spending money on this precious leisure time.

An average Dutch household spends 25% of its income on leisure activities (Metz, 2002, p.8-9). At the same time, the older generation, also referred to as “golden generation”, is becoming more active on this leisure market as well. These healthy and active senior citizens have the disposal of time and money, and they want to be active instead of staying at home (Metz, 2002, p.9).

As a consequence, the offer in the Dutch leisure industry is growing, and competition in this field is getting tougher. Time has become scarcer than money, and therefore the different suppliers try their best to come up with new ideas, and good offers to attract customers. And the different sectors are also competing with each other, since consumers most of the time, are not loyal to a particular sector. One day, they feel like skiing, and the other day they might want to visit a museum. At all times however, the consumer wants to enjoy an experience, and be excited, and he does not mind paying a large amount of money for it, as long as the experience is guaranteed (Metz, 2002, p.9).

Chapter 3 The experience economy in art museums

3.1. Introduction

The transition of the information society into an experience society has been of great influence on the shift from study and education to pleasure in museums of modern art; in the experience economy ones feelings, emotions and experience play a central role. This influences the way people think about the things they buy and the activities they undertake.

The focus on collections and education has been joined by a focus on museum-going experiences, and as a result, contextual and interpretive materialism storytelling and exploration of the meaning of objects more and more surround collections and exhibitions. Visitors feel better informed and are better able to participate in museums (Kotler, 1999). “The end product of a museum is not simply viewing an exhibit. A more fundamental outcome is to change a visitor’s awareness and knowledge so that afterwards he or she can recall the experience as a significant one” (Sullivan, in Kotler, 1999, p.34)



Fig. 3.1. *Blitze gidsen* (Blitz Guides), Lotte Meijer Museum visitors can use the Blitz Guides if they do not want to comment the art works themselves. Blitz guides are wearable garments that have build-in headphones. Every garment represents a different character that gives its view on an art work from its own perspective, such as a cook, an artist, a child, or your old aunt

The experience is going to be more important, not only in the culture sector, but in all sectors of society. Since museums have to compete with other (cultural)

organizations for the scarce leisure time of their potential visitors, they are looking for ways to differentiate themselves in the hope that they will attract more visitors.

Because of their elite attitude, art museums are the least focused on their audiences of all the different types of museums (Kotler & Kotler, 1998, p. 16-17). But this attitude is undergoing some change; extra activities and events have become part of the agenda of museums. Most of the time, these types of events are organized in connection with the exhibition to give the audience the possibility to participate actively, instead of passively. By doing so the visitors are “experiencing” a certain exhibition, and this feeling of submersion is becoming more and more important in the Dutch society. For this reason cultural institutions are increasingly organizing events: there have never been so many festivals in the Netherlands and moreover these festivals are well-attended.¹⁰ Art and culture have become part of the leisure economy.

One reason this has happened can be found in the *Tendrapport Museumeducatie* (Trend Report Museum Education) which was published in 1996. In this report Folkert Haanstra and Jacob Oostwoud Wijdenes stated that ever since the seventies and eighties the medium sized and larger museums in the Netherlands found education and public relations just as important as the preservation and conservation of the collection (De Vreede, 2002, p.3). The research showed that museums are adding “new” activities that you normally would not find in museums, such as festivals, concerts and valuation days. Through these activities the museums hope to attract new visitors, who differ from their regular, highly educated audience. In short, these museums want to offer their visitors an experience (De Vreede, 2002, p.3).

Making use of different elements of the experience economy may offer relief; museums may appeal a new, young audience with their experiences. However, this new audience does not look at the museum as a provider of information and knowledge, but it expects to get a unique experience, just as they do in a movie theatre, a disco or a theme park (Verduijn, Van Mil & Verbei, 2001, p. 10). Does this mean that museums are transforming into pleasure factories? In this chapter the different experiences that are organized by art museums in the Netherlands are explained, followed by a reflection of the debate that is currently going on in the Dutch museum world.

¹⁰ Vooradvies 2005-2008, Raad van Cultuur, URL: www.cultuur.nl/files/pdf/vooradvies0508/vooradvies_3_april.pdf

3.2. Different experiences in art museums

Nowadays, more than ten years after the publication of the Trend Report, there is so much more to do in museums than only visiting its (permanent) collection and exhibitions. If you visit the websites of different art museums you will soon discover that there is far more to be seen and done. Museums have increasingly seen themselves as operating in a competitive market for visitors; they compete for people's leisure time and money, which in turn has created pressure to develop more visitor-friendly ways of operating (Johnson, 2003, p. 317).

Through the organization of events and other activities, museums are in some way using elements from the leisure industry with the purpose of attracting a new audience. This seems to be working if you take a look at the yearly Museum Nights that are visited by thousands of visitors in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and other cities. There are several reasons for this popularity. First of all, a lot of visitors find it exciting to visit a museum outside its regular visiting hours, when it has become dark outside. Another, more important, reason can be found in the special activities organized by the participating museums.



Fig. 3.2. Impression of the different Museum Night flyers

On Saturday November 3rd 2007, over 26,000 people in Amsterdam celebrated the eighth Museum Night, the program included DJs, bands, dance performances, food & drinks, and, of course, the permanent collections and temporary exhibitions of the museums themselves. On the first of March 2008, 11,000 visitors of the seventh Rotterdam Museum Night could "Set a Light" and enjoy a thematic Museum Night Tour. The eighth Museum Night in Utrecht had as its theme "The Seven Deadly Sins"

and was organized in the night of 07/07/07. 18,500 people visited the participating museums where they could go to darkrooms, an anger lounge, and a Lust Party. However, due to a lack of finances, the Museum Night 2008 in Utrecht could not be held.¹¹

Apart from the activities during big events such as the Museum Night, museums also organize a lot of activities during their regular visiting hours. On the one hand, this includes the normal (educational) activities such as guided tours, lectures and courses. But it also includes the more peculiar events to be organized by a museum such as festivals, concerts, and theater performances. The *Rijksmuseum* in Amsterdam for example, organizes a picnic every Friday night in July and August. The *Van Abbemuseum* in Eindhoven organizes lectures, films, and concerts in its auditorium and during the summer the visitors of the museum can follow a course in modern and contemporary art. You can enjoy an exclusive dinner in the *Centraal Museum* in Utrecht, and besides dining in Italian style the *Groninger Museum* in Groningen offers you the possibility to get married in the museum. All these activities have in common that the visitors themselves can actively participate, and thereby become more involved in the museums collection or exhibition.



Fig. 3.3. Getting married in the Groninger Museum *Viktor & Rolf, Outfit 35* (from the collection: *White, prêt-à-porter (ready-to-wear) spring-summer 2002*), Groninger Museum

¹¹ <http://www.groenlinksutrecht.nl/indez.php?item=1289>

The museums do their utmost best to organize as many attractive and special activities as possible, besides the showing of their permanent collection and the organization of temporary exhibitions. For some museums, these activities are organized by their educational staff, whereas other museums, such as the *Stedelijk Museum* in Amsterdam, and the *Museum Boijmans van Beuningen* in Rotterdam have formed a special division, *SMCS op 11* and *Art & Pleasure* respectively, which is in charge for the organization of such activities. It may be evident that the activities organized by these special divisions are often a lot more spectacular and diverse than the activities organized by the museums' educational staff.

In the last few months, the Dutch art museums have organized a lot of divergent activities, varying from lectures and concerts to films and theater, and from special tours to courses and workshops. Most of these activities were related to the collection, the current exhibition, or the museum itself, for example the *Van Gogh Museum* in Amsterdam has in its past organized trips to Paris, following in Vincent van Gogh's track. Besides from this, the *Van Gogh Museum* organizes a lot of different sidelines, especially on Friday nights when the museum is opened till 22 hours. Visitors then have the possibility to dine in the museum, and enjoy live music; most of the time a DJ performs. Furthermore, the visitors can attend lectures, dances, or tours that are hosted by a Dutch celebrity.

These Friday night openings are very popular and attract a lot of visitors. Apparently, people are enjoying the visit of a museum outside its regular opening hours and of course the fact that the museum organizes all these extra events makes it even more attractive to visit the museum at night time, the popularity of the Museum Nights is another good example for this.

We have to keep in mind though that a distinction should be made between the "regular" activities the museums organize, such as the tours, the lectures, and the courses and the "special" activities that are organized around an exhibition or a special occasion. These regular activities have been organized for years now, and are especially focused on the visitors that are already interested. Their main goal is to give these visitors background information on a certain exhibition and to educate them on the developments in the art world. They are educational activities that fit within the tasks and functions of a museum that consists of collecting, documenting, preserving, exhibiting and interpreting material evidence and associating information for the public benefit (Barbour, 1992, p.436).

On the other hand, there are the special activities, such as the Museum Nights or the Friday night openings. These activities are relatively new in the museum world. They have as their main goal to attract new, especially younger, visitors, and can be seen as marketing activities. Most of the time, it concerns cultural activities, like music, theater, dance or film, or combinations of these different disciplines that are not expected in an art museum, and they do not fit within the tasks and functions of a museum. These extra activities and events intensify the value of experience of a museum and this makes it more attractive for visitors to repeat their visit.

Most museum websites however, emphasize that the activities organized by the museum are always connected to the collection or to a certain exhibition. And the organizers of the different Museum Nights also claim that the content of the organized events is always linked to the permanent collection or the temporary exhibitions of the different, participating museums.

Nevertheless, there is a lot of criticism on these experiences in the art museums. Critics have their doubts concerning the added value of these experiences for the collection, according to some a museum was not made for dances, films, dinners, and weddings. These activities do not fit within the tasks and functions of the museums, and they are too commercial. These critics fear that the museum will turn into a cultural pleasure factory that invests more in the marketing of arts than in the art itself (Boekman 61, 2004).

3.3. Pros and cons: the debate in the Dutch museum world

It may be clear that a lot of art museums are using marketing techniques and organize experiences to attract more visitors, even outside the regular opening hours of these museums. The popularity of these experiences is growing: this year, ten thousands of people visited the different Museum Nights in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht.

The audience is clearly enjoying these experiences, but opponents of the organization of activities and events in museums are afraid that enjoyment will become the leading goal, and that study and education, as well as the care for the collection, will play a lesser part. According to Johnson (2003, p.318) “the prime responsibility of museums is now seen, both by museum managements and the public, as being much more towards their visitors than to their collections.” The main reason for this shift in emphasis lies in the fact that public funding has not kept pace with museum growth; museums had to look for other sources of funding, therefore it has become increasingly important for them to focus on the preferences of their “customers” (Johnson, 2003, p.318). A lot of people criticize the fact that museums organize activities and events.



Fig. 3.4. Impression of the Friday Night Opening at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Critics, such as Janneke Wesseling, art critic in *NRC Handelsblad*, share the opinion that most of these activities and events can be seen as pleasurable and amusing and they therefore do not belong inside a museum. These critics are afraid that museums are becoming theme parks, whereas they should be seen as temples. According to them, art museums are beginning to transform themselves into theme parks due to the organization of new activities and experiences. In these museums, the experience of the visitor plays a central role, as well as interactivity with the audience. Here, visitor numbers determine the success, and commerce and marketing play an important part in the policy of these museums. The justification of the content is of lesser importance, but this does not have its effect on the quality of the exhibition since this has to be high to remain attractive for the present, demanding consumer: the cultural omnivore that likes to see a mix of different cultural disciplines during his or her museum visit. Wesseling: "Museums should do what they are supposed to do: preserve the common culture and to place culture at the service of the society." (Metz, 2002, p. 116)

Olav Velthuis, journalist for *de Volkskrant* defines the "museum as a temple" as: "the house of the muses, focused on consciousness and inspiration" (Boekman 61, 2004, p.122). In such a museum, content and quality of the collection play a central role; it is all about *l'art pour l'art*: art for art's sake. Visitors can peacefully enjoy the art that is displayed in a sacral environment, and visitor numbers are not the determinants of the success of the museum.

In his article "Een museum zonder (m)uren" (A museum without walls/hours), Hendrik Henrichs states that the museum is no longer a temple, the stately building "that is respectfully visited to learn from the esthetically, historically, or scientifically interesting and instructive objects in an almost sacred way" (Henrichs, 2003, p.8). He claims that the notion of the museum is beginning to change; it is becoming more dynamic since the attention has shifted from an intrinsic value of the collection to the presentation of the collection and the way it is perceived by the audience. It is all about how the visitor experiences the art museum and its collection (Henrichs, 2003, p.8). According to Henrichs this is inevitable since the museum has lost its position as temple of beauty or wisdom; it is now a competitor in a world of different suppliers of education and entertainment, such as (cultural) festivals, movie houses, and theme parks. The art museums are competing for the scarce leisure time of their potential visitors.

In her book *Pret! Leisure and landscape* (Pleasure! Leisure and landscape) Tracy Metz describes that people are facing a decrease in their leisure time, but in this scarce leisure time they want to do as much pleasurable activities as possible: “museums and theaters are competing for their visitors time and attention with the ski run, the trip abroad, the Sunday shopping, the theme park, the more and more better equipped living, and the beautiful but laborious garden” (Metz, 2002, p.108).

How far can art museums go along with this “pleasure trend” and the search of the Dutchmen for experiences and enjoyment? How long will it take before the point of no return will be reached, and museums can no longer take themselves serious as cultural and scientific institutions, because they do not distinguish themselves from other pleasure sights? It is difficult to find an answer to this question, which is why there is this debate going on in the Dutch museum world concerning the place and function of activities and events in museums. The discussion is not that much about whether these extra activities and events belong in an art museum, but to what extend can marketing, commerce, and enjoyment, influence the museum’s policy? The museum definition of the International Council of Museums clearly points out three purposes: study, education and enjoyment. Will the purpose of “enjoyment” predominate over the purposes of “study and education”, thereby lacking in the care for the collection?



Fig. 3.5. Fireworks for the opening of the Museum Night at the *Maritiem Museum*, Rotterdam

According to Wim van Krimpen, former director of *De Kunsthal* in Rotterdam and current director of the *Gemeentemuseum* in The Hague, most experiences in the art museums can be seen as forms of marketing, that are sometimes used with a commercial purpose: to attract visitors. The appliance of marketing techniques may cause an increase in visitor numbers, and that is exactly what is desired by a lot of museums since they are charged by these visitor numbers by the government. "The politicians have a bag of money and what do they want in return? Visitors. Museums are judged by their number of visitors. (...) Museums used to be scientific institutions, but this is no longer the case. Now we have to compete with theme parks" (Boekman 61, 2004). And this is where the point of no return is reached according to Henrichs. He states that it is ok for art museums to bring experiences as a form of enjoyment and pleasure, but "as soon as a museum visit becomes an alternative for a visit to a sauna or discothèque, it will belie its origin as *Bildungs* institute for forming and developing the audience. And this must have consequences (Henrichs, 2003, p.8-9).

As said before, Janneke Wesseling is a strong opponent of every form of commerce and marketing within museums as well. Where Henrichs accepts the fact that the museum is no longer a temple, Wesseling states that the art museum should do everything to remain to be a temple. An art museum should be a sanctuary where art is not pressured by economics. According to Wesseling our society is too much under the influence of a commercial culture, where there is little place for the arts, history and science, since these disciplines do not realize a direct and demonstrable economic output. Museums are trying to change this by "trimming their sails to the wind of commercialization" (Boekman 61, 2004). That is the reason that they participate in the Museum Nights and organize experiences. They do their utmost best to meet their visitors' wishes in their need for entertainment.

Wesseling holds the government responsible for the rise of commerce in the Dutch art museums, since she has withdrawn herself and strives for the privatizing of these museums. This had as a result that culture and economy have grown closer since the end of the last century, among others under the influence of the cultural policy of Rick van der Ploeg, minister of state 2001-2004. He thought highly of cultural entrepreneurship and he expected that cultural institutions would undertake activities in order to be entitled to subsidies. To stimulate this even further, Van der Ploeg initiated the *Actieplan Cultuurbereik*: the State, the municipalities, and the provinces, had to work together to enlarge the reach of arts and culture and thereby attract and involve a new audience (Van der Ploeg, 1999, p.36-37). As a consequence,

museums had to justify their existence with high visitor numbers, since visitors bring in money and high visitor numbers give the impression that the museum is visited by a lot of people from all layers of society (Boekman 61, 2004, p.7). Wesseling does not understand that museums did not put up a fight; instead they worked hard to “transform themselves into a part of the amusement industry”. They have shifted from demand to supply, and from art lovers to passers-by: what is the most important is that the visitor should experience a sensation (Boekman 61, 2004, p.10).

Olav Velthuis agrees with Wesseling. In his article “Het nieuwe museum. Kunst moet luchten” (The new museum. Art needs air), he states that museums should not focus on amusement and sensation, but on reflection and inspiration. According to him, art museums are seriously flirting with the amusement industry, the experience society, the festival culture, and the night live, without any result: “It is a cramped attempt to attract a younger audience. An attempt that is doomed to fail, because the speed of combustion in the amusement industry is high, and competition is tough. When the novelty of the amusement in museums is gone, this amusement must quickly retire from the field.” (Boekman, 2004, p.122)

The Dutch Council for Culture does not entirely agree with this statement. In their “Vooradvies 2005-2008”, the *Raad voor Cultuur* (Council for Culture) states that cultural institutions, such as museums should realize that art and culture have become part of the leisure economy. This does not mean that art museums should transform themselves into pleasure factories, but they have to be capable of connecting the need for significance in the art, to the need for experiences. The fact that the traditional transfer of knowledge is losing ground to learning methods that are more focused on participation and play creates possibilities for museums for renewal. But museums have to be open for this change, and they should be able to disengage means to design these new concepts. By doing so cultural institutions can contribute to the further democratization of the arts and culture, without making the goal of enjoyment the leading principle (Raad voor Cultuur, 2003, p.3)

In their “Adviesaanvraag Publieksbereik Hedendaagse Kunst en Vormgeving” the Council for Culture acknowledges that museums are forced to use a businesslike and commercial approach due to the policy notes and the competition with non-art products. “This has as a result that the visitor is seen as a “consumer”. Only few institutions avoid the question how directive the preference, taste and interest of the cultural consumer should be.” (Raad voor Cultuur, 2002, p.2) This has to do with the

current interaction of art and economy. In the “Adviesaanvraag” (Inquiry for Advice) it is “exaggeratedly” stated that there is an “economization” of culture and a “culturalization” of economy. Both sectors are approaching each other as they study and adapt each others means and strategies. For instance, with the presentation of its products, the market looks at the way art is presented, whereas museums focus on the formulas of theme parks, places of entertainment, and shopping malls when they want to enlarge their financial means and audience. The effort of this will show in “the value of attraction of goods and activities” (Raad voor Cultuur, 2002, p.2).

According to the Council for Culture museums have become part of the experience economy, where there is no place for the traditional institutions that strictly separates its functions and disciplines. In this climate, art will become a product, which can be commercialized and marketed as any other product, and this is not what the Council desires. That is, the Council for Culture agrees with Wesseling and Velthuis that “the museum should occupy and emphasize an excellent position within the world of culture” (Raad voor Cultuur, 2002, p.4). But in contrast to Wesseling, the Council is of the opinion that marketing is a perfect instrument for art museums for the broadening and deepening of the public reach and that is what they believe art museums should strive for (Raad voor Cultuur, 2002, p.5). It pleads for a form of marketing that supports the specific starting points of museums and focuses on an audience from this point. This may include actions, events, experiences, promotions, and discounts, but “the Council does not support marketing methods that have no connection with the program in content. This will lead to self denial and the loss of identity, and furthermore it will not produce a durable relation with the audience” (Raad voor Cultuur, 2002, p.6). That is why most museum websites emphasize that the activities organized by the museum are always connected to the collection or to a certain exhibition. And the organizers of the different Museum Nights also claim that the content of the organized events is always linked to the permanent collection or the temporary exhibitions of the different, participating museums.

Joke Bosch, chief of PR and marketing of the *Amsterdams Historisch Museum* was one of the organizers of the Museum Night in Amsterdam. She thinks the critique is wrongful: “Such a night, with a special program is a good way to get youngsters to visit a museum. The extra activities are just an enticement, but they do have a connection with the museum. You demonstrate what is happening” (Donker van Heel, 2005).

It is striking that the organization of the Museum Night in Rotterdam is rather negative about the Museum Night in Amsterdam. According to Geer Pouls, chairman of the Rotterdam Museum Night foundation, they turn museums into discotheques during the Amsterdam Museum Night: "We don't want the institutions to come up with the standard deejays and veejays, instead they need to organize an extra activity that can be related to the content of the normal programming" (Siebenga, 2003, p.20).

The organizers of the Museum Night in Utrecht also claim to have a different approach than their "colleagues" in Amsterdam: "We bring night programs for the youth, but the content of these programs has to refer to the collection (...) The party aspect should not be at the foreground, as is the case in Amsterdam" (Siebenga, 2003, p.21). This shows that the organizers of the Museum Nights are trying hard to get rid of the "party image" that the Museum Nights are having, nevertheless they still receive a lot of criticism.

Rutger Wolfson, director of *De Vleeshal* in Middelburg, thinks that museums are ambiguous: "Normally they are not prepared to make concessions on the content of their exhibition in order to attract more visitors. But, since they are expected to achieve high visitor numbers, these museums are prepared to lower themselves once a year and to organize an event for a broad audience. This makes the Museum Night a transparent prostration that is not motivated by content" (Siebenga, 2003, p.23). According to Wolfson, the Museum Nights demonstrate the inability of museums to see what is going on outside the traditional art historic perspective; furthermore they do not build any credibility with their audience: "This enters the museum semi-drunk with some sort of ticket book, looking for racket. I for one think that the Museum Nights should be abolished" (Siebenga, 2003, p.23).

Annemarie Vels-Heijn of the *Nederlandse Museumvereniging* (Netherlands Museums Association) is a strong opponent of this view. Before she started working at the Netherlands Museums Association, she worked at the *Rijksmuseum* in Amsterdam for 31 years, and there she organized the Museum Night in 2000. That night, the *Rijksmuseum* received 14.000 visitors, to the enjoyment of Vels-Heijn. But she also was confronted with negative sounds: "In the museum world there was a lot of criticism on the Museum Night. Such a night was not suitable for a serious institution like a museum. It would hurt its image. But I think it worked. We welcomed visitors that normally would not set foot in our museum. The later it got, the more youth

entered the museum and they were truly surprised. Museums were not as dusty as they thought" (Van Rotterdam, 2001).

But how long can these sidelines continue to grow? Are we at some time allowed to picnic on the museum floors, or skate along its paintings? Annemarie Vels-Heijn does not think this will happen: "Museums are at the end of their possibilities; they cannot forget their collections. When they do not maintain the collection, they will not be an attractive museum in the future. That is why they cannot invest all their money in these activities." She expects that experiences will become part of a bigger picture of facilities, cafes and customer friendliness. According to her the experience in museums will belong in the heart of the museum, instead of playing a role in its margin (Van Rotterdam, 2001).

Sjarel Ex, former director of the *Centraal Museum* in Utrecht, current director of the *Museum Boijmans van Beuningen* in Rotterdam, agrees with Vels-Heijn. He thinks that museums can take advantage of the leisure industry and learn from it. Museums must constantly offer an experience to their audience, when they do not want to lose their position. That is the reason that Ex wants to turn the *Museum Boijmans van Beuningen* into a museum for the public: in all ways the museum is focused on attracting a large audience by presenting the art works in an exciting and enjoyable way. According to Ex: "Everything fits within the museum, and the museum fits everything" (Boekman 61, 2004, p.21).

Only few people in the Dutch museum world will agree with this statement, even the supporters of the experiences in museums will think that this statement is a bit too strong. In the end, there is a common agreement that there is room for experiences in art museums, as long as it does not affect the core business of the museum. Not everything is suitable for a museum. Nowadays it should be possible for an art museum to improve the relationship with its visitors without the use of pure entertainment where the museum becomes a theme park.

Society is changing, and new generations of visitors must be convinced of the value of the art museum. Therefore, museums have to use a different, more dynamic approach that still takes into account the tasks of a museum: conserving, interpreting, researching and displaying heritage (Johnson, 2003, p.315).

3.4. Conclusion

The experience has become more important, not only in the culture sector, but in all sectors of society. Since museums have to compete with other (cultural) organizations for the scarce leisure time of their potential visitors, they are looking for ways to differentiate themselves in the hope that they will attract more visitors; extra activities and events have become part of the agenda of museums. Most of the time, these types of events are organized in connection with the exhibition to give the audience the possibility to participate actively, instead of passively.

Making use of different elements of the experience economy may offer relief; museums may appeal a new, young audience with their experiences. However, this new audience does not look at the museum as a provider of information and knowledge, but it expects to get a unique experience, just as they do in a movie theatre, a disco or a theme park.

Through the organization of events and other activities, museums are in some way using elements from the leisure industry with the purpose of attracting a new audience. This seems to be working if you take a look at the yearly Museum Nights that are visited by thousands of visitors in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and other cities.

Apart from the activities during big events such as the Museum Night, museums also organize a lot of activities during their regular visiting hours. On the one hand, this includes the normal (educational) activities such as guided tours, lectures and courses. But it also includes the more peculiar events to be organized by a museum such as festivals, concerts, and theater performances.

Most museum websites emphasize that the activities organized by the museum are always connected to the collection or to a certain exhibition. And the organizers of the different Museum Nights also claim that the content of the organized events is always linked to the permanent collection or the temporary exhibitions of the different, participating museums.

Nevertheless, there is a lot of criticism on these experiences in the art museums. Critics, such as Wesseling and Velthuis, have their doubts concerning the added value of these experiences for the collection, according to some a museum was not made for dances, films, dinners, and weddings. These activities do not fit within the

tasks and functions of the museums, and they are too commercial. These critics fear that the museum will turn into a cultural pleasure factory that invests more in marketing than in the arts.

The appliance of marketing techniques may cause an increase in visitor numbers, and that is exactly what is desired by a lot of museums since they are charged by these visitor numbers by the government. Wesseling holds the government responsible for the rise of commerce in the Dutch art museums since she has withdrawn herself and strives for the privatizing of these museums. This had as a result that culture and economy have grown closer since the end of the last century.

On the other hand, the *Raad voor Cultuur* (Council for Culture) states that cultural institutions, such as museums should realize that art and culture have become part of the leisure economy. This does not mean that art museums should transform themselves into pleasure factories, but they have to be capable of connecting the need for significance in the art, to the need for experiences.

The people that are in favour of this shift towards the amusement industry such as Vels-Heijn and Ex, museums can take advantage of the leisure industry and learn from it. Museums must constantly offer an experience to their audience, when they do not want to lose their position.

The discussion is not that much about whether these extra activities and events belong in an art museum, but it is questioned to what extend marketing, commerce, and enjoyment, can influence the museum's policy.

It may be evident that there is still no consensus in the Dutch museum world about the role of enjoyment in museums through the organization of experiences, besides displaying the permanent collection or temporary exhibitions.

Chapter 4 Case: The Van Gogh Museum

4.1. Introduction

Even though Chapter Three did point out the different opinions of people in the museum world, all these people agree on one thing: the experience has become more important in the culture sector. It has been explained that since museums have to compete with other (cultural) organizations for the scarce leisure time of their potential visitors, they are looking for ways to differentiate themselves in the hope that they will attract more visitors. That is why museums are organizing extra activities and events, in addition to their permanent collection and (temporary) exhibitions.

The aim of this thesis is to develop a better insight with regard to the influence of the emerging experience economy on the functions and tasks of art museums in the Netherlands. As written in the introduction of Chapter One, in 1974 the International Council of Museums (ICOM) came up with the following definition:

“A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment”

(ICOM Statutes art. 2 paragraph 1)

This definition formed the basis for this research and it points out three purposes: study, education and enjoyment. In the past three chapters it has become clear that apart from these three purposes, extra activities and events have become part of the agenda of museums. Different experiences that are organized by art museums in the Netherlands were explained and this was followed by a reflection of the debate that is currently going on in the Dutch museum world. But, having read all this one question remains: How does the Experience Economy become visible in a museum?

To answer this question the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam will be used as a case example on how the experience economy has become part of the museums policy. If there is one art museum in the Netherlands to be named that fits the description of an “experience museum” it would be the Van Gogh since it has become one of the largest attractions in the Netherlands and has reached the international top-25 on the

list of best visited museums in the world.¹² It now is a hugely popular museum, visited by over a million people every year.

The choice for the Van Gogh Museum as a case example was made because this museum is a relatively young museum (open to public since 1973), that has built a reputation in the 35 years of its existence of international grandeur. Furthermore, the museum organizes specific experiences such as their Friday Night openings; therefore it is interesting to find out how the original tasks and functions of the Van Gogh Museum have been influenced over time by these kinds of experiences. With respect to this influence the mission of the Van Gogh Museum is discussed, as well as its organization structure and the shifts that have taken place in the museums organizational structure over time.

¹² Source: Leeuwarder Courant ed. Zuid, 05/03/08, p.10 *Van Gogh Museum in internationale top-25*

4.2. The Van Gogh Museum: history, mission and organization

A concise history

Since its establishment in 1973 the Van Gogh Museum has grown to be one of the most prominent museums in the world with a good reputation due to the quality of its presentations, exhibitions, research and publications. The core of the collection is the collection of Vincent van Gogh and his relatives. After Vincent's suicide in July 1890, his brother Theo came into possession of Vincent's large and unwieldy collection. When he passed away shortly after Vincent, responsibility for the stewardship of the collection then passed to Theo's widow, Johanna (Jo) Bonger, and later on to their son: Vincent Willem van Gogh.

In 1962 the collection was purchased by the newly formed Vincent van Gogh Foundation with funds provided by the Dutch State. Construction of a new museum beside the *Stedelijk Museum* in Amsterdam began in 1969, and the *Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh* opened officially on the 2nd of June 1973. Thanks to the permanent Van Gogh collections, the Van Gogh Museum has become one of the largest attractions in the Netherlands and the museum is now a hugely popular institution, millions of visitors have set foot in this museum in the Paulus Potterstraat in Amsterdam, which was designed by Gerrit Rietveld.

From the beginning, the emphasis was not just on preserving the collections but on using them. Vincent Willem van Gogh and the museum's first director, Emile Meijer, realized that there was a risk that a museum devoted to a single artist could become a mausoleum. That is why they devised a program that was "intended to create a lively institution with a broad popular appeal" (Leighton & Heijne, 2003, p.17). Their intention of the collection was that it should be broadened with new acquisitions and loans of works by Van Gogh and other artists and they never regarded it to be fixed and closed.

Vincent Willem van Gogh and Meijer were of the opinion that temporary exhibitions were an essential way to create diversity and variety in the presentations. "There were concerts, film shows and many other events, (...) More controversial, and stemming from V.W. van Gogh own theories, there was the "Visual Arts Workshop", a space for self-expression where visitors could unlock their innate creativity." (Leighton & Heijne, 2003, p.17-18)

Even though the newly opened museum quickly established itself as part of the cultural scene in Amsterdam, it would take many years before it settled on a steady course and established a reputation as a serious institution of (inter)national importance. Within this time there was also a lot of critique on the Van Gogh Museum. Some observers called it a tourist trap, “designed to serve large crowds brought in daily in buses, intent on doing Van Gogh in the minimum of time.” (Ibelings, 1999, p.8) And there were other critics who felt that Meijer had “reduced the museum to the status of a social centre” and that he had gone too far in his efforts to engage a local audience (Leighton & Heijne, 2003, p.18).

There is much that has changed and developed in the thirty five years since the Museum first opened its doors to public. Meijer’s directorship was brought to an early end due to tensions with the Ministry of Culture in 1976. Meijer’s departure was followed by a long period of turbulence in the leadership of the museum; the directorship changed hands several times and during several years the museum even fell under the control of the Rijksmuseum. Leighton and Heijne (2003, p.18) describe that the appointment of Ronald de Leeuw as Director in 1986 “at last ushered in a period of stability and sustained development”.

Under De Leeuw’s guidance (1986-1996) Van Gogh remained at the core, but his art was supplemented by displays of other trends and movements in fine arts, the scope of the collection was broadened to embrace a wider range of 19th-century art. Even though the Visual Arts Workshop that was once founded by V.W. van Gogh is now long gone, there are lasting values that Vincent Willem and other founding spirits behind the Van Gogh Museum would surely recognize.

The notion that Van Gogh’s art can make a difference to people’s lives is still highly prized in the Van Gogh Museum. Leighton and Heijne (2003, p.22): “In part, this is reflected in a commitment to education in the traditional sense, with programs for schools and other visitors with special requirements. But this also means offering all our visitors a unique and rewarding experience. The passion and imaginative force of Van Gogh’s art still provide the momentum for our Museum, and the idealism that motivated so many of those involved in its history still thrives unchecked. No doubt the Museum’s strategies and programs will change and develop over the next thirty years and beyond. But a simple commitment to using these great collections to inspire and engage a broad public will surely remain at its heart.”



Fig. 4.1. The dancing-performance *Gradual and Persistent Loss of Control* of Abramovic and De Châtel was a great success in 2005

Mission

In line with the ICOM definition the Van Gogh Museum has as its mission to “manage, study and develop the world’s leading collection of art by Vincent van Gogh and his contemporaries, its purpose being to reach, inspire and inform the broadest possible public, both now and in the future”¹³.

The Van Gogh Museum fulfils this mission not only by acquiring, managing and conserving collections of work by Vincent van Gogh and western artists from the period circa 1830 to 1914, but also through an active program of research and publication, based on these collections. Furthermore a program of exhibitions is held in the museum and elsewhere that extends and enhances the reach and appeal of its permanent displays as well as a program of education that satisfies the needs of a broad public.

The museum strives to be an internationally authoritative institution for the research and presentation of Van Gogh and 19th century art and as such it plays a key role with the representation of Amsterdam as an international cultural center. That the

¹³ <http://www3.vangoghmuseum.nl/vgm/index.jsp?page=23701&lang=en>

radiation of Van Gogh exceeds all borders is shown by the composition of the public that visits the museum: the past few years this public consisted for 80% of foreign visitors from all parts of the world.¹⁴

Even though a comparison with other single artist museums, such as the Picasso Museum in Paris is easily made, the Van Gogh Museum is internationally seen as one of the greater museums of our time, in line with for example *Musée d'Orsay* in Paris. This is shown by the amount of invitations to jointly organize exhibitions by other prominent art museums all over the world.

The Museum has succeeded to remain attractive for art lovers from all over the world. This is partly due to its well-considered programming and the increasing display of a great range of 19th and early 20th century artists, but a lot of the “attractiveness” of the Museum is concerned with the words of Leighton and Heijne (2003, p.22): “this also means offering all our visitors a unique and rewarding experience.”

But what exactly is meant with “offering visitors a unique and rewarding experience”? In the previous chapters it could be read that Dutch art museums are organizing a lot of divergent activities, varying from lectures and concerts to films and theater, and from special tours to courses and workshops. Most of these activities are related to the collection, the current exhibition, or the museum itself. In the case of the Van Gogh Museum this was done by organizing trips to Paris, following in Vincent van Gogh’s track. But apart from this, the Van Gogh Museum organizes a lot of different sidelines, especially on Friday nights when the museum is opened till 22 hours. Visitors then have the possibility to dine in the museum, and enjoy live music; most of the time a DJ performs. Furthermore, the visitors can attend lectures, dances, or tours that are hosted by a Dutch celebrity.

As was said before, these Friday night openings are very popular and attract a lot of visitors. Apparently, people are enjoying the visit of a museum outside its regular opening hours and of course the fact that the museum organizes all these extra events makes it even more attractive to visit the museum at night time. These kinds of activities have as their main goal to attract new, especially younger, visitors, and can be seen as marketing activities. Most of the time, it concerns cultural activities,

¹⁴ *Beleidsplan Van Gogh Museum 2001-2004*

like music, theater, dance or film, or combinations of these different disciplines that are not expected in an art museum, and they do not fit within the tasks and functions of a museum. These extra activities and events intensify the value of experience of a museum and this makes it more attractive for visitors to repeat their visit.

In order to find out what the effects are of these kinds of experiences in museums we will first have a closer look on the organization of the Van Gogh Museum.

Organization

It may be evident that a lot has changed in the organization of the Van Gogh Museum since its foundation in 1973. The museum expanded and as a consequence the organization was becoming larger and more professional.

At this point in time, the primary activities of the Van Gogh Museum still are the management, conservation and presentation of works of art. To this end, the museum now employs an extensive organization: a staff of 167 people, in 11 different departments. Staff with traditional museum skills such as curators, restorers, librarians and archivists work alongside professionals from many other disciplines that one would expect to find in a modern business. "As well as Government subsidy, the Museum can draw on support from many sectors, including corporate sponsorship, and it now has a wholly owned subsidiary: Van Gogh Museum Enterprises, to deal with its commercial activities." (Leighton & Heijne, 2003, p.19-20)

The Van Gogh Museum is headed by its Director, Axel Rüger, and its Managing Director, Rik van Koetsveld. They are joined on the Management Team by the heads of five departments that are directly engaged in the museum's primary activities: Collections, Exhibitions, Research, Communication and Marketing. Besides these five departments there are five supporting departments: Personnel & Organization, Finance & Control, ICT, Marketing and the Management Office. The Facilities Service and the Security Department complete the set. Museum Mesdag in The Hague is also managed by the Van Gogh Museum and can be considered part of the organization. Nevertheless, as said before, in this research the organization of the Museum Mesdag is excluded, the only focus will be on the Van Gogh Museum.

4.3. The experience economy in the Van Gogh Museum

On 4 November 2003 the following press report was released: “From 27 February 2004 the Van Gogh Museum will remain open until 22.00 (instead of 18.00) every Friday. This extension of opening hours is part of a campaign by the museum and its *promoting partner* Rabobank¹⁵ to enable as wide as possible an audience to visit the museum. With this service, the Van Gogh Museum hopes to attract new visitors, as well as regulars. (...) As well as the permanent collection and the temporary shows in the exhibition wing, Friday evenings will also feature an exciting program of lectures, concerts, films etc, connected with the museum’s various activities. Other facilities, such as the museum restaurant and individual audio-tours, will also be available on these evenings.”

Ever since, divers activities are arranged, varying from *Kookgek* Joop Braakhekke, a Dutch cook who displayed his culinary art (from 18 June to 26 September 2004) to a race on a home trainer: whoever pedaled a 1000 meters the fastest was rewarded with a cycling shirt signed by Erik Dekker and Michael Boogert (July 2004). These activities are said to be “connected with the museum’s various activities” but a direct connection to the art of Van Gogh and his contemporaries is not likely to be found. Nevertheless a team of 30 persons (mostly security) is working every Friday night to make these evenings possible. Employing these people and the production of such nights involve considerable expenses, and it is mainly with thanks to the cooperation of the Rabobank that such a broad program can be executed and communicated to an audience.

On an average Friday night the Van Gogh Museum is visited by two to four hundred visitors, whereas during normal visiting hours over a thousand people visit the museum.¹⁶ With such figures it may be evident that large visitor numbers are not the main goal for these Friday night openings. It is the ambition to attract the culture lovers of Amsterdam: the people that are frightened by the troop of tourists that normally visit the museum. Gus Maussen, at the time programmer of the Friday night openings: “It has become clear that the Dutch public wants to visit the museum at a peaceful moment that is why we decided to open the museums on Friday night. (...) During the week the Dutch audience is quite busy and it thinks that the museum is

¹⁵ From 2003 onwards Rabobank is ‘promoting partner’ of the Van Gogh Museum and aids in the realization of a number of special exhibitions. Rabobank is also the main sponsor of several of these shows

¹⁶ An overview of the number of visitors per year and a yearly average of the Friday night visitors can be found in respectively Appendix 1 and 2

crowded by international guests during the day. Now these people have a chance to a calm environment.”¹⁷

The evenings at the Van Gogh Museum are mainly visited by people in the age of 20 to 35 years. According to the current programmer Maaïke van Geijn a lot of museums believe that in order to attract a young audience they should program a DJ or a rock band: “Museums think that young people don’t like art and deepening. This is absolute nonsense. A museum will not fill itself by turning itself into a discotheque. You are dealing with art lovers. We also use DJ’s but they play pleasing music that fits the museum. And when Fay Lovski plays experimental compositions, inspired by the expressionism of Van Gogh, this place is crowded with young people. They are listening, with a drink, and afterwards they are likely to visit the exhibitions. No, they are not allowed to bring their drinks then. Drunken people spilling red wine on *De Zonnebloemen* (The Sunflowers), that is something we need to avoid.”



Fig. 4.1. During *Vincent van Gogh en het Expressionisme* (Vincent van Gogh and the Expressionism, 29/12/2006) music played a central role, with at its height a cello concert with the works of Bach en Kodály and a theatral concert of *de VeenFabriek* & Touki Delphine.

¹⁷ Source: Recreatie & Toerisme. 31/08/04 *Nederlands publiek krijgt avond; Mee met trend museale programmering* p. 37

Even though the Friday night openings seem to be successful, it might be questioned if their success is related to the alleged emerging experience economy. In an interview, Rik van Koetsveld¹⁸, the current Managing Director of the Van Gogh Museum, stated that there is no such thing as an influence of the emerging experience economy in the Van Gogh Museum. According to him Van Gogh *is* experience. Vincent van Gogh and his art are so full of life and so vivid and interactive that to visit the museum is like undergoing an experience all by itself.

Van Koetsveld underlines the fact that the Van Gogh Museum did not come to a point in time where it tried to fit in the experience economy in its policy. Throughout the nature of this policy there has always been some sort of experiential factor in the museum, but at all time, the substantial side of the art remained most important. Van Gogh's artwork lends itself for an interactive approach and therefore the experiential exhibitions hit it off from the start with their audience.

Nevertheless, Van Koetsveld explains that when Ronald de Leeuw became director of the Van Gogh Museum in 1986 the exhibition policy set forth at large and ever since the museum has developed an active policy concerning its exhibitions. Under De Leeuw's guidance (1986-1996), the scope of the collections was broadened to embrace a wider range of 19th-century art (Leighton & Heijne, 2003, p.18). At the same point in time, one of the goals of the Van Gogh Museum became to attract more Dutch visitors, especially the inhabitants of Amsterdam.

It may be evident that the Van Gogh is still trying to include the Dutch and especially the inhabitants of Amsterdam as its audience. A significant proportion of its audience comprises foreign tourists; therefore one of the goals of the museum is also receiving increasing numbers of visitors from Amsterdam and the rest of the Netherlands. But this goal is not something of the last four years, when the first Friday night openings occurred. Neither is it a goal that had been created this last decade, when Pine and Gilmore revealed their view on the experience economy. Ever since the foundation of the Van Gogh Museum in 1973 the museum directors were trying to achieve this goal and from this very beginning the museum was (and remained to be) "a dynamic meeting place where visual stimulus, intellectual engagement and emotional provocation all form part of a rich and rewarding experience" (Leighton & Heijne, 2003, p.9).

¹⁸ This interview was held on the 16th of May 2008

It was Vincent Willem van Gogh, Vincent van Gogh's nephew, who intended to create a lively institution with a broad popular appeal. From the beginning, the emphasis was not just on preserving the collections but on using them: "there were concerts, film shows and many other events (...) More controversial, and stemming from V.W. van Gogh own theories, there was the "Visual Arts Workshop", a space for self-expression where visitors could unlock their innate creativity." (Leighton & Heijne, 2003, p.17-18) This statement conflicts with the thoughts of writer and visual artist Emmerik who longs for "a place where your worn-out mind can find a safe haven" (Boekman 61, 2004). But is there really a conflict? Or might it be possible for a museum to give its visitors the possibility to "unlock their innate creativity" and create a place "where your worn-out mind can find a safe haven"? Can museums become a sort of theme park with different attractions and events and still be considered a temple where art and knowledge are most important?

When the Van Gogh Museum is taken into consideration the affirmative answer to this question can be found in the annual report of 2005 (p.92): "Over recent years the policy pursued by the Van Gogh Museum has particularly addressed quality and accessibility, two objectives that cannot be considered separately. The museum endeavours to present programmes that lead the field nationally and internationally, while remaining accessible to a wide and varied public. In debates about museums the fear is often expressed that preoccupation with the public leads to a relaxation of standards and superficial programmes. However, we are of the opinion that attracting many visitors, from all corners of the world and all walks of life, is entirely compatible with high quality. In 2005, as in previous years, we have managed to produce presentations, exhibitions, publications and activities which we believe may be regarded as some of the best in the world. Our exhibitions have attracted exceptionally high numbers of international visitors, while drawing in more local and national visitors."

Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusion

5.1. Summary

Since the mid eighties museums have changed their policy more and more into a proceeding professionalism of their activities. The tasks of a museum concentrated on the presence of objects (collection, scientific research, conservation and restoration) and its presentation. In the course of decades the accent has shifted from the first, to the latter. In this research it is examined to what extent this shift has taken place, and what the consequences are of this shift on the original tasks of an art museum, more specific:

In what manner are the art museums in the Netherlands influenced by the emerging experience economy with respect to their original tasks and functions.

Nowadays, the public would not go to a museum in the fist instance to acquire knowledge or information. Instead, visitors of a museum expect to go through a unique experience. This is why museums should be able to offer an “event” in their competition with movie theatres, amusement parks and shopping malls.

The experience is going to be more important, not only in the culture sector, but in all sectors of society. Since museums have to compete with other (cultural) organizations for the scarce leisure time of their potential visitors, they are looking for ways to differentiate themselves in the hope that they will attract more visitors. That is why museums are organizing extra activities and events, in addition to their permanent collection and (temporary) exhibitions. These activities and events include everything a visitor can participate in apart from their regular visit to the museums collection or exhibition, such as guided tours, multimedia tours, the letting of the auditoriums, and the food and beverages in the museum café.

The aim of this thesis was to develop a better insight on the influence of the experience economy on the functions and tasks of art museums in the Netherlands.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has come up with the following definition:

“A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires,

conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment"

Most art museums operate from the ICOM-definition; however they adapt it to their collection and their functions and tasks, especially when the tension between the focus on the collection on the one hand, and the focus on the audience on the other hand, increased in the course of the 19th century. At first the main goal for museums was the preservation and conservation of their collection, as well as giving researchers, collectors and students the opportunity to expand and test their knowledge. Museums began to change this goal when they became more focused on their audience.

Since the museums were opened for public, more attention was given to their visitors. Accessibility alone was not enough. For the first time, educational purposes were explicitly part of the service that museums provided and besides housing the collection, museums had broadened their role and were also becoming information centres and sources for leisure activities.

Furthermore, museums began to adopt marketing techniques to promote their many offerings; the promotion was organized through education and without the help of distribution channels and the use of the price instrument.

The last decade the government's intervention reduced and museums had to come up with their own financial plan. As a result museums had to adopt a more business-like approach, with effective promotional activities. To realize this goal, museums hired professionals that were in charge of the public relations and promotion. Although this implementation of marketing functions in museums started in the last two decades, a lot of museums are still struggling with these reorganizations.

All these different developments have led to the current situation in the museum world. Museums are at a critical moment in their history, since the emphasis is on the market, and museums are forced to focus on this market and its audience instead of only focussing at their collection in forms of study and education. Museums have to compete with the growing supply from the amusement industry, and potential visitors have to choose where they want to spend their scarce spare time. Besides, due to the emerging experience economy, visitors are looking for an experience. Museums must develop their public service functions through becoming more knowledgeable

about the needs of their visitors and more adept at providing enjoyable and worthwhile experiences. In the end, everything evolves around communicating the museum's product to a wider audience.

According to Kotler & Kotler there are five basic elements that together should be able to organise the museum visitor's time and activity during his or her visit:

- 1) The museum setting, its exterior and interior;
- 2) The objects, the collection and exhibitions;
- 3) The interpretive material available such as labels and catalogues;
- 4) The museum programs which include lectures and performances;
- 5) The museum services, such as reception, food and the museum shop.

With a good functioning of these five basic elements the pleasure of the visitor will be increased during his or her stay in the museum. And this pleasure of course is closely related to the last purpose of museums: enjoyment. A customer friendly approach, a clean toilet, a tidy cloakroom and the presence of a café or restaurant, can all enhance once feeling of enjoyment, even though these services are not directly related to the collection of the museum.

It is no longer sufficient to simply display a collection, people have high expectations. Modern trends in the museum world have broadened the range of subject matter and introduced many interactive exhibits, which give the public the opportunity to make choices and engage in activities that may vary the experience from person to person. Moreover, today, new presentation possibilities, such as museum nights and evening opening hours, are explored by museums with the same objective: to reach a wider audience and to accommodate them during their stay at a museum.

Everything that concerns the enjoyment is in connection with the changing of our current information society into an experience society. Due to the fact that public funding and government support have decreased, museums have sought to develop other sources of funding. As a result, they became more market-driven and started with the implementation of marketing functions in museums. The museums' goals are twofold: they want to attract more visitors, and they need to generate income that ensures the museum's financial stability.

Marketing has increasingly been seen as a helpful and essential museum activity and it has become highly important for museums, not only as a way of obtaining financial

resources. According to Kotler and Kotler marketing in the non-profit sector is not only about “hard selling”, but it must be seen as an instrument: “a methodology in the hands of the management for shaping, communicating and distributing quality experiences and programmes reaching the broadest possible audience.” Tobelem states that the introduction of marketing into museums can be attributed to four factors whose relative importance depends on the country and the nature of each institution:

1. *The growth of museums.*
2. *The question of financing.*
3. *Competitive environment.*
4. *The need to know the visitor better.*

The biggest challenge for an art museum is to acquire an audience. A lot of people have more trouble identifying themselves with art, than with scientific matters such as technique. Another disadvantage lies in the fact that their younger audience does not yet know the “value” of art, this may even result in a permanent lack of interest during the rest of their lives.

Marketing is more than a matter of promoting the museum and its offering. Today, marketing is a tool for analysis and a means for action which allow an organisation, for-profit or non-profit, to achieve fully its objectives. Whereas for private enterprises this would mean achieving the highest possible profit, a museum could instead choose as its goal the education of the visitor, or the stimulation of his awareness of specific facets of art, and not merely his commercial exploitation.

The experience economy is all about the creation of experiences in order to involve the public in a certain product or company; it is all about the feeling and the emotion that can be attached to a product or service. Museums have realized that the organisation of experiences in museums has a great commercial potential as a way of attracting funds and high amounts of visitors, and therefore is a means to accomplish a lot of their goals.

In our present society experiences are becoming more and more important. Pine and Gilmore present the experience as a new stage of economic offering, but this is not entirely true: Holbrook believes that all products involve goods-services-and-experiences to provide consumption experiences. This points-out that staging

experiences is not a new phenomenon: as long as people exist, experiences exist. This is especially true for the arts.

Pine and Gilmore stress that services and experiences are distinct economic offerings. Whereas commodities are exchangeable, goods are tangible and services are immaterial, experiences are memorable. "Experiences are a fourth economic offering, as distinct from services as services are from goods. (...) When a person buys a service, he purchased a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages –as a theatrical play- to engage him in a personal way." According to Pine and Gilmore, companies now use goods and services to engage customers in a memorable event, or experience.

The transition of the information society into an experience society has been of great influence on the shift from study and education to pleasure in museums of modern art; in the experience economy one's feelings, emotions and experience play a central role. This influences the way people think about the things they buy and the activities they undertake.

The focus on collections and education has been joined by a focus on museum-going experiences, and as a result, contextual and interpretive materialism storytelling and exploration of the meaning of objects more and more surround collections and exhibitions. Visitors feel better informed and are better able to participate in museums. "The end product of a museum is not simply viewing an exhibit. A more fundamental outcome is to change a visitor's awareness and knowledge so that afterwards he or she can recall the experience as a significant one".

The experience has become more important, not only in the culture sector, but in all sectors of society. Since museums have to compete with other (cultural) organizations for the scarce leisure time of their potential visitors, they are looking for ways to differentiate themselves in the hope that they will attract more visitors.

Because of their elite attitude, art museums are the least focused on their audiences of all the different types of museums. But this attitude is undergoing some change; extra activities and events have become part of the agenda of museums. Most of the time, these types of events are organized in connection with the exhibition to give the audience the possibility to participate actively, instead of passively.

By doing so the visitors are “experiencing” a certain exhibition, and this feeling of submersion is becoming more and more important in the Dutch society. For this reason cultural institutions are increasingly organizing events: there have never been so many festivals in the Netherlands and moreover these festivals are well-attended. Art and culture have become part of the leisure economy.

One reason this has happened can be found in the *Tendrapport Museumeducatie* (Trend Report Museum Education) which was published in 1996. In this report Folkert Haanstra and Jacob Oostwoud Wijdenes stated that ever since the seventies and eighties the medium sized and larger museums in the Netherlands found education and public relations just as important as the preservation and conservation of the collection. The research showed that museums are adding “new” activities that you normally would not find in museums, such as festivals, concerts and valuation days. Through these activities the museums hope to attract new visitors, who differ from their regular, highly educated audience. In short, these museums want to offer their visitors an experience.

Making use of different elements of the experience economy may offer relief; museums may appeal a new, young audience with their experiences. However, this new audience does not look at the museum as a provider of information and knowledge, but it expects to get a unique experience, just as they do in a movie theatre, a disco or a theme park.

Nowadays, more than ten years after the publication of the Trend Report, there is so much more to do in museums than only visiting its (permanent) collection and exhibitions. If you visit the websites of different art museums you will soon discover that there is far more to be seen and done. Museums have increasingly seen themselves as operating in a competitive market for visitors; they compete for people’s leisure time and money, which in turn has created pressure to develop more visitor-friendly ways of operating.

We have to keep in mind though that a distinction should be made between the “regular” activities the museums organize, such as the tours, the lectures, and the courses and the “special” activities that are organized around an exhibition or a special occasion. These regular activities have been organized for years now, and are especially focused on the visitors that are already interested. Their main goal is to give these visitors background information on a certain exhibition and to educate

them on the developments in the art world. They are educational activities that fit within the tasks and functions of a museum that consists of collecting, documenting, preserving, exhibiting and interpreting material evidence and associating information for the public benefit.

On the other hand, there are the special activities, such as the Museum Nights or the Friday night openings. These activities are relatively new in the museum world. They have as their main goal to attract new, especially younger, visitors, and can be seen as marketing activities. Most of the time, it concerns cultural activities, like music, theater, dance or film, or combinations of these different disciplines that are not expected in an art museum, and they do not fit within the tasks and functions of a museum. These extra activities and events intensify the value of experience of a museum and this makes it more attractive for visitors to repeat their visit.

The audience is clearly enjoying these experiences, but opponents of the organization of activities and events in museums are afraid that enjoyment will become the leading goal, and that study and education, as well as the care for the collection, will play a lesser part. According to Johnson “the prime responsibility of museums is now seen, both by museum managements and the public, as being much more towards their visitors than to their collections.” The main reason for this shift in emphasis lies in the fact that public funding has not kept pace with museum growth; museums had to look for other sources of funding, therefore it has become increasingly important for them to focus on the preferences of their “customers” (Johnson, 2003, p.318). A lot of people criticize the fact that museums organize activities and events.

The appliance of marketing techniques may cause an increase in visitor numbers, and that is exactly what is desired by a lot of museums since they are charged by these visitor numbers by the government. “The politicians have a bag of money and what do they want in return? Visitors. Museums are judged by their number of visitors. (...) Museums used to be scientific institutions, but this is no longer the case. Now we have to compete with theme parks”. And this is where the point of no return is reached according to Henrichs. He states that it is ok for art museums to bring experiences as a form of enjoyment and pleasure, but “as soon as a museum visit becomes an alternative for a visit to a sauna or discothèque, it will belie its origin as *Bildungs* institute for forming and developing the audience. And this must have consequences.

5.2. Conclusion

Nowadays, experiences have become part of the culture of museums of modern art in the Netherlands, but does this necessarily mean that these museums are under the influence of the experience economy? In the end, there is a common agreement that there is room for experiences in art museums, as long as it does not affect the core business of the museum. Not everything is suitable for a museum. Nowadays it should be possible for an art museum to improve the relationship with its visitors without the use of pure entertainment where the museum becomes a theme park.

Society is changing, and new generations of visitors must be convinced of the value of the art museum. Therefore, museums have to use a different, more dynamic approach that still takes into account the tasks of a museum: conserving, interpreting, researching and displaying heritage (Johnson, 2003, p.315).

I am of the opinion that museums do not disown their identity when they organize activities and events in order to attract more visitors. Such activities and events may fit well within the tasks and goals of museums as defined by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). As is the case for the Van Gogh Museum enjoyment has not and will not become the leading goal, on the contrary: study and education, as well as the care for the collection, will always play the most important part.

It is not so much the goals that are changing; it is the visitor that has undergone change and due to the decrease of public funding museums have to look for other sources of funding, therefore it has become increasingly important for them to focus on the preferences of their “customers”. Since arts have unique characteristics museums can therefore touch consumers in many different ways by making use of experiences. Art is made with the intention of stimulating the human senses as well as the human mind; thus art can be seen as an action by itself. Per definition, art is something that people will have to experience.

It is important to keep in mind the difference in experiencing something (remember the German words *Erlebniss* and *Erfahrung*), the key to a good experience is turning an *Erlebniss* into a pleasurable *Erfahrung*. When applied to art: one has to undergo the emotion of an artwork, but this emotion has to remain in the visitors mind. Experiences in the form of events can attribute to this process and they may have a positive effect on the “undergoing” of this emotion. This will have a positive effect on the consumption pattern of potential visitors since emotion is the fastest growing

product in today's prosperous economy and potential buyers are more and more prepared to pay for products and services that have an emotional value (De Ridder, 2007).

The experience economy is all about the creation of experiences in order to involve the public in a certain product or company; it is all about the feeling and the emotion that can be attached to a product or service. Therefore it is hard not to bring experiences into a museum: you simply cannot detach your feeling and emotion when looking at a certain artwork or visiting an exhibition. This makes it self-evident that experiences have always been, and will always remain to be part of a museum's policy; people will always be connected in a personal, memorable way when art is concerned.

Pine and Gilmore were right when they stated that experiences represent an existing but previously unarticulated genre of economic output (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. ix). And by articulating this genre of economic output managers from all kinds of enterprises can profit of the effects. That is why it would be wise for museum directors or managers to make use of experiences in their museums: it is something that is already present, but when presented in the right way it will generate higher visitor numbers and therefore financial gain.

When looking at the characteristics of meaningful experiences as given in table 2.1. by Boswijk et al (2006, p. 3-6) it is clear that all characteristics fit within the perception of art. That is why it is relatively easy to come up with ideas for activities and events that are pleasurable and amusing and therefore attract more visitors but still keep their connection to the artwork itself. True: sometimes this connection is nowhere to be found (like getting married in the Groninger Museum) but most of the times the justification of the content remains important.

That is why I do not agree with critics such as Velthuis who defines the museum as a temple. In the end art serves a lot of purposes, but in my opinion the main purpose of art is that it should move people. It should bring about a change in once perception. Whether this is accomplished in the sacred environment of the formal exhibitions, or be it in the theme park sphere of the experiences and events this both suits me. In the end, art stands for itself and by itself and will remain to be *l'art pour l'art*, art for arts sake, regardless of its environment.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

year	visitors	year	visitors	year	visitors	year	visitors
1973	345590	1983	413210	1993	750000	2003	1341586
1974	485526	1984	443362	1994	unknown	2004	1338105
1975	653992	1985	537217	1995	837620	2005	1417096
1976	582434	1986	586489	1996	971479	2006	1677268
1977	532091	1987	687000	1997	1018681	2007	unknown
1978	486736	1988	656901	1998	758263	2008	unknown
1979	502145	1989	700149	1999	721254		
1980	500796	1990	1226055	2000	1312204		
1981	514690	1991	802545	2001	1276309		
1982	509024	1992	850965	2002	1592771		

Number of visitors of the Van Gogh Museum

Appendix 2

	Museum Night	Friday night openings
2000	7500	X
2001	6000	X
2002	9000	X
2003	5000	X
2004	5000	624
2005	7000	868
2006	unknown	unknown
2007	unknown	unknown
2008		

Number of visitors of the Museum Night and average number of visitors of the Friday night openings