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Museum and exhibit design: How forms and places of knowledge exchange influence community participation and empowerment

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Abstract: Museums have been criticized for sharing a singular narrative that does not reflect the diverse beliefs and values of their communities. Participatory design has been recognized as an approach capable of processes that allow communities to contribute to designing museums and exhibits. However, as the participatory design processes change according to the specific situation, they can lead to a wide range of outcomes, and degrees of community participation. This paper explores how a specific element of the participatory design approach, knowledge exchange, influences the degree of community participation. Three examples of participatory design processes in museum and exhibit design are analyzed and compared to understand how the degree of participation varies through Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation. Results reveal that processes that are community-driven and embrace frequent knowledge exchange between designers and community members achieve higher levels of community participation.

Keywords: community participation; knowledge exchange; museums; participatory design

1. Introduction

Arts and culture contribute to the wellbeing of cities and the enrichment of communities. Museums are cultural institutions that house art, history, and knowledge. They also hold symbolic significance as stewards of culture, and as representatives that support diplomatic relationships between countries (Hoogwaerts, 2017). Despite all of this, museums have been criticized for maintaining an elitist, colonial system (Minott, 2019). They have been called upon to serve and reflect their communities' interests in order to democratize the space for all (Hoogwaerts, 2017). In response to this, curators have engaged with participatory design (PD) processes to encourage more inclusive and democratic practices that embody the interests of the community (Minott, 2019; Boast, 2011; Franco, 2013).

PD is a design approach through which decision-making power is shared between the designers and the participants, usually the affected community (Sanoff, 2007). The latter is



given voice throughout the design process. For this reason, PD is often understood (and romanticized) as a reliably democratic process (Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014). However, while PD encourages involvement of the community, every PD process is different; each producing wide-ranging outcomes.

This paper engages with the nuances of participation and examines how differences in knowledge exchange in PD processes in museum and exhibit design produce a different degree of community participation and empowerment. Firstly, the paper will discuss the need for PD in museum and exhibit design. PD is then analyzed as a process that involves knowledge exchange to encourage community participation. Subsequently, three examples of PD in museum and exhibit design are presented to provide an overview of the range of PD approaches within museum and exhibit design. The degree of participation within each case is assessed according to Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), specifically with consideration of participants' decision-making power and of the degree of knowledge exchange within the process. The analysis conveys insight into the relationship between knowledge exchange, decision making, and community participation.

2. Museums and power

Cultural heritage, such as that found within museums, often holds significance in upholding the identity of a city, establishing local character through "place making and city branding" (Grincheva, 2020, p. 115). On the surface level, museums can be understood as touristic spaces. A more critical perspective reveals that they are source of authority and identity within a city or nation. According to Grincheva, they "play more than just a marginal role in such a rise of cities as actors of soft power" (2020, p. 112). Museums exert power by representing their host cities on a global scale and playing a role in the cultural diplomacy of a city (Hoogwaerts, 2017).

Museums act as storytellers and their portrayal of history establishes the narrative of a city's culture. This role comes with great responsibility for museums. However, as Minott (2019) points out, as products of colonialism, museums have exploited this responsibility and disseminated Eurocentric perspectives, often obscuring other views within the community. As a result, they have generally presented a narrative through a Western perspective and reinforced Western knowledge, supremacy, and Western monopoly of academic knowledge production. Therefore, museums' activities have mixed implications: while their work is viewed as a means of cultural diplomacy with other countries or cities, historical misrepresentation can falsely reflect and damage the community narrative.

As institutions that were initially established as "tools of colonial celebration" (Minott, 2019, p. 561), recently museums have been condemned for their neocolonialist inclinations. They have been criticized for employing a Eurocentric lens to all artifacts and the narratives they display. Minott (2019) illustrates how this can lead to a feeling of exclusion or othering for visitors or members of the audience that self-identify with non-Western communities, as well as minority populations.

As institutions of great influence, the work that museums present and the narratives they perpetuate hold great significance for their communities on a global and local scale. Therefore, efforts have been made to promote culturally-inclusive museum environments through the facilitation of community participation and integration of new knowledge. Concepts such as the “contact zone” and the “new museology” strive to uncover multiple perspectives and attempt to dismantle the old concept of the museum as the singular source of Western-centric knowledge (Boast, 2011). Within this framework, PD has emerged as an approach that not only improves visitors’ museum experience (Taxén, 2004), but also supports community participation and empowerment in shaping the historical narratives shared.

Employing PD in museum and exhibit design has the potential to tackle the complex issue of community participation, empowerment and representation. However, there is no single, unique way to practice PD, since methods are embodied (Light & Akama, 2012) and reflect contextual conditions (Del Gaudio, 2014; Del Gaudio et al., 2017). Contextual conditions (Del Gaudio, 2014; Del Gaudio et al., 2017) and the diversified way in which PD is practiced affect and inform the degree of community participation and the outcome. This will be explored in the next section, providing a better understanding of PD.

3. PD and interdisciplinarity

PD is valued as a more democratic design approach that encourages stakeholders to provide feedback and be involved throughout the design process. Robertson & Simonsen (2012) describe PD as an approach that encourages “mutual learning” (p. 2) between the designer and user through “reflection-in-action” (p. 2). The use of PD has been recognized as able to promote more democratic communities (Robertson & Simonsen, 2012).

In PD, there is the understanding that methods are embodied (Light & Akama, 2012) and adapted according to each situation and contextual dynamics (Del Gaudio, 2014; Del Gaudio et al., 2017). This means that community participation varies based on the specific approach that is employed. Bratteteig & Wagner (2014) state that there is the need to move “...away from idealizing notions of participation, [...] there may be different degrees of participation in a [Participatory Design] project” (p. 427). This illustrates the importance of awareness of the spectrum of participation within PD projects and considers how the level of participation in a PD project may influence the design outcome.

Decision-making and knowledge exchange are key elements of a PD process. Sanders and Stappers (2008) discuss the value of participants’ involvement in decision-making, proposing that it plays a role in enacting change in substantial issues as well as transforming design practice. Giving participants the ability to assert their opinions and make final decisions is essential for leading to an outcome that expresses participants’ input. The way in which the decision-making process is implemented acts as a measure of the degree of participation (Arnstein, 1969).

Alongside the sharing of the decision-making power, PD requires an interdisciplinary mindset that facilitates knowledge exchange and casts off the notion of the designer as the sole expert. Boradkar (2017) defines interdisciplinarity as: “...situations where the knowledge and tools of one discipline inform, influence, and redirect the results of another” (p. 8). An important element of interdisciplinarity in the design practice is its “integrative” nature (Boradkar, 2017, p. 60). This is illustrated through knowledge sharing between disciplines and the integration of disciplinary knowledge as a process that informs design. Boradkar (2017) warns of the dangers of isolating knowledge by fields or domains within a design project, emphasizing that the interdisciplinary approach of knowledge sharing is crucial to designing in complex situations.

PD employs an interdisciplinary approach to design by drawing on the practice of “mutual learning” between designers and users (Robertson & Simonsen, 2012, p. 2). Botero et al. (2020) describe the PD approach as a “circulation of considerations and actions amongst different domains” (p. 29), concluding that PD considers “how issues and work in each domain can be acceptably translated to the others across an array of trade-offs, tactics, and strategies” (Botero et al., 2020, p. 29).

Therefore, the interdisciplinary process of exchanging knowledge through learning and the process of knowledge translation is at the core of PD and community empowerment (Boradkar, 2017; Rocha, 1997). Not only is it necessary to accept and be open to multiple and new forms of knowledge in community projects for empowerment (Rocha, 1997), but in community PD projects there is the need to recognize that knowledge exchange encourages participants to take on a significant role as an expert of their own experiences (Taffe & Kelly, 2020). Consequently, participants have more confidence in informing the project with their own knowledge.

While shifting decision-making abilities to participants leads to a higher degree of participation (Arnstein, 1969), encouraging the process of knowledge exchange facilitates more opportunities for participants to inform decisions based on their lived experience (Taffe & Kelly, 2020). Therefore, the degree of knowledge exchange reflected in a design approach can influence the overall degree of participation in the design process. Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) provides an understanding of how decision-making and knowledge exchange are reflected in different degrees of community engagement and participation in a civic or social process.

4. Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation

The Ladder of Citizen Participation (Figure 1) is a renowned model used to assess the level and type of public participation and engagement. It is an 8-rung ladder mapping participation, which progresses through levels of “Non-Participation”, “Tokenism”, and “Citizen Power” (Arnstein, 1969).

“Non-Participation” involves activities that maintain differences in power between authorities and communities, often infantilizing the participants in this process. “Non-Participation” is broken down into two sub-categories: “Manipulation” and “Therapy”. “Manipulation” engages the community superficially by welcoming participants to contribute as an advisory committee. While participants feel that they are being engaged in the process, they are poorly informed by the organization and uninvolved in the decision-making process. According to Arnstein (1969), rather than striving for community empowerment, organizations use “Manipulation” to maintain public relations with the community. “Therapy” occurs when organizations involve community members in sessions to improve the community’s behaviors or habits. Organizations in power put the burden of responsibility on the community for existing issues instead of enacting change internally and systemically. Levels that fall under the category of “Non-Participation” do not allow citizens to exercise any power; instead, authority feigns community participation through superficial engagements that dismiss community input, ultimately giving the authority full control and decision-making power (Arnstein, 1969). Within “Non-Participation”, knowledge exchange does not occur; members of authority provide information to the community, but do not gather input from the community members.

“Tokenism” encourages greater engagement and contributions from the community; however, the implemented results are still selected by the authority. “Informing”, “Consultation”, and “Placation” are three types of “Tokenism”. Through “Informing”, the authority provides community members with a greater understanding of what goals, projects, or other information the organization is working on for the community. While this process is educational, Arnstein (1969) emphasizes that it does not allow participants to share their knowledge and make contributions to the actions of the organization. “Consultation” refers to the institution entering the community and speaking with participants in order to gain a greater understanding of the issues. In “Consultation”, the institution still retains the ability to make the final decisions, and the participant acts as a reference that informs their choices (Arnstein, 1969). In “Placation”, a role of power is given to the participants through a leadership position, however they continue to be outnumbered by the institution and as such, they are not given full control in the decision-making process. While citizens are given power to express their opinions and propose methods of action in “Tokenistic” participation, their proposed actions are never implemented without input from other powers (Arnstein, 1969). In “Consultation” and “Placation”, citizens are invited to share their knowledge, however the exchange of knowledge is restricted by the authority’s decisions and therefore may not inform the final outcome.

“Citizen Power” shifts control over to the community and enables citizen-driven change. “Citizen Power” can be exercised through “Partnership”, “Delegated Control”, and “Citizen Control”. Through “Partnership”, the community works alongside the organization to make decisions and contribute ideas. While working in collaboration with the organization to achieve a common goal, the community is finally given decision-making abilities. Arnstein (1969) defines “Delegated Control” as: “Negotiations between citizens and public

officials...[that] result in citizens achieving dominant decision-making authority over a particular plan or program” (p. 31). While citizens must continue negotiating with organizations, they are given control over the final decisions that are implemented. “Citizen Control” is the final stage in the ladder. In “Citizen Control”, actions taken for the community are completely citizen-led and independent of intermediaries or negotiations with other authorities. The degrees of “Citizen Power” allow citizens to voice their opinions and engage in knowledge exchange with other participants. Ultimately, their insights contribute to the outcome.

The differences between the rungs reside in the decision-making and knowledge exchange possibilities within the community. The decision-making ability of a community member acts as an indicator of the degree of citizen participation. As Arnstein states, “Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making clout” (1969, p. 25). The higher the degree of decision-making abilities assigned to the community, the higher the level of community participation. Knowledge exchange also increases in higher categories of citizen participation, as citizens contribute perspectives as experts of their own experiences. This leads to outcomes that are informed by community knowledge and perspectives.

While Arnstein admits that this ladder is a simplification of a very complex process, the use of this framework allows differing practices to be juxtaposed and evaluated through a specific lens, providing the opportunity for comparison (1969). This paper employs Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation to gauge community participation in the context of designing museums and exhibits. The role of knowledge exchange within the PD process, and its ranking on the Ladder of Citizen Participation, based on the decision-making ability of the community, will be explored in three PD museum projects.

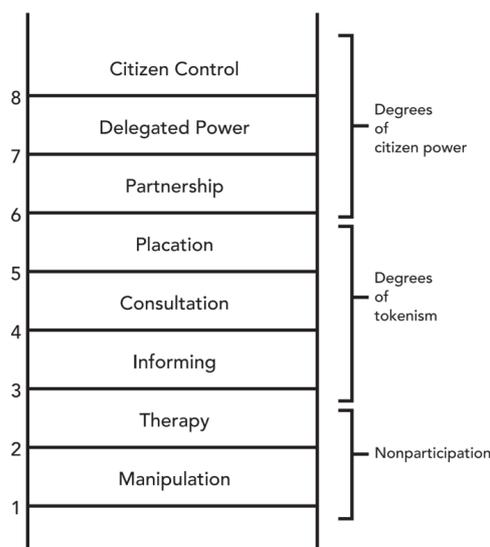


Figure 1. Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation. Diagram by Arnstein (1969).

5. PD in Museums

In this section, three examples of PD in the context of museum exhibitions and curatorship are described: *The Past is Now* held at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2017; the Kelabit Community Museum developed in 2011-2016; and *Expedição São Paulo 450 Anos* held in São Paulo in 2004. These projects were identified through mapping review, and selected due to their heterogeneity in regard to who initiated the collaborative approach (the community or the museum), and to when the participation happened (in one stage of the process or throughout the whole process). Information was gathered through secondary data (i.e., research papers, exhibits, press and websites) and the case descriptions focus on: the issue addressed, the PD approach taken by exhibit organizers, the participants' role, the exhibit organizers/designers' roles, the museum's perspectives, and main challenges and conflicts that emerged, if any.

5.1 *The Past is Now*

The Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery developed *The Past is Now* in 2017: a co-curated exhibit that engaged a diverse group of participants to reflect on hidden narratives of colonialism in museum artifacts. This exhibit sought to address the colonial histories embedded in artifacts and critique Birmingham Museum's tendency to center history and culture on Western perspectives. *The Past is Now* responded to this issue through a participatory approach that invited persons of colour to co-curate this exhibit. The exhibit covered contentious issues surrounding colonialism and provided new perspectives to many of the celebrated artifacts, revealing the darker narratives of colonial history (Minott, 2019). Participants were invited to propose the themes that the exhibit should cover, choose objects, write the descriptions, and establish the final design. The museum itself selected the final objects and edited some of the descriptions informed by knowledge from scholars in these fields.

Although the goal of the exhibit was to give a platform to the underrepresented and problematize museum authority, according to Minott (2019), the Birmingham Museum was concerned about how this process might interfere with its own goals and values as an institution:

"Despite the co-curators being members of the community the museum sought to engage, and thus the voice that it wanted to privilege, the institution was fearful of using an unfiltered version of their voice, in the fear that doing so could create further barriers, isolate new and existing audiences, and challenge the museum in ways that it was not resourced to handle" (p. 565).

Thus, the exhibit organizers struggled with managing the participants' vision for the gallery alongside meeting the demands of other stakeholders.

In an attempt to prevent a clash between different groups, the exhibit organizers edited some of the participants' work and made decisions without their consultation. This led to

participants feeling that their individual opinions were not valued by the museum: “As a result, [participants] felt as though they were being treated as resources – and as the least ‘professional’ people in the room.” (Minott, 2019, p. 571). Participants also felt a sense of objectification of their personal narratives and culture as generalizations for the narratives told in the exhibit, describing their experience co-curating as feeling “tokenized” (Minott, 2019, p. 571). They felt commodified as a diversity requirement, instead of being valued for their individual opinions.

5.2 *The Kelabit Community Museum*

In “Exchanging Expertise across Cultures and Time: Participatory Design Approaches for Creating Community Museums”, Taffe & Kelly (2020) shared their experiences using PD to develop a community museum. Members of the Kelabit Community invited design researchers from Deakin University (Australia) to assist with the development of the Kelabit Community Museum, located in the Kelabit Highlands (Malaysia). The researchers visited the community several times to attend meetings with community members. These meetings encouraged the community leaders and members of the community to engage in dialogue and allowed the scholars to learn more about the community and culture. The goal of these sessions was to better understand and articulate the cultural values of the group, as well as understand how this would be embodied within a museum. Taffe & Kelly (2020) describe the organic PD process that unfolded throughout the whole project, explaining that, from the beginning, the roles of designers and community members were unclear; they often overlapped and were ambiguous in nature (Taffe & Kelly, 2020). On the one hand, community participants actively engaged in discussion and debate, frequently advancing discussion and decision-making without involvement of the designers. On the other hand, the designers grappled with their responsibility in the process and felt threatened by their lack of engagement in certain stages of the design process. As the project unfolded, designers recognized their role in “...[communicating] intangible heritage values through tangible constructs” (Taffe & Kelly, 2020, p. 720). Through the negotiation of roles with the community, the designers-researchers took on a role of visualizing intangible community values. They held expert roles in certain contexts involving visualization of the community dialogue and management of museum logistics, while the community members remained experts of the museum content and their interpretations of their own culture (Taffe & Kelly, 2020). Ultimately, this project sought to foster a sense of “cultural democracy” and encouraged designers to embrace ambiguity and reject the role of experts in the entire design process.

5.3 *Expedição São Paulo 450 Anos*

In 2003, researchers from the Museum of the City of São Paulo (Brazil) initiated an innovative process for designing the exhibit *Expedição São Paulo 450 Anos*. The exhibit was created through a systematic exploration of the many contexts that can be encountered within the city of São Paulo (Franco, 2013). São Paulo is a diverse megacity containing a wide

range of inhabitants, lifestyles, and cultures (Franco, 2013). Franco discusses the “contradictory” (2013, p. 259) nature of São Paulo resulting from groups of people from very different backgrounds co-inhabiting the city, also touching on the relationships between centers and peripheries within São Paulo. In an attempt to capture the character of the city, an interdisciplinary team was formed consisting of researchers from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, architecture, history, sociology, and others. This group conducted a journey across São Paulo, with teams traveling North to South and East to West. Along this journey, researchers simply observed the diversity of people and environments and collected information. As they traveled, researchers immersed themselves in varied environments to speak with São Paulo residents and gather stories and perspectives. The researchers visited all places, ranging from detention centers to community centers, and the people that spoke with them came from different social and economic backgrounds. As Franco notes, researchers were not projecting a belief or looking to affirm their convictions during their journey (Franco, 2013). Rather, the goal of the research centered around painting a complex picture of the city by exposing a multitude of voices and perspectives within the city of Sao Paulo. After all of this, the researchers synthesized their observations and created a final exhibition, *Expedição São Paulo 450 Anos*, depicting the city of Sao Paulo through images, stories, and other mediums.

6. Analysis

In this section, community participation in each of the three projects outlined above will be analyzed through Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) (see Figure 2). The role and place of decision-making and knowledge exchange within each case will be considered.

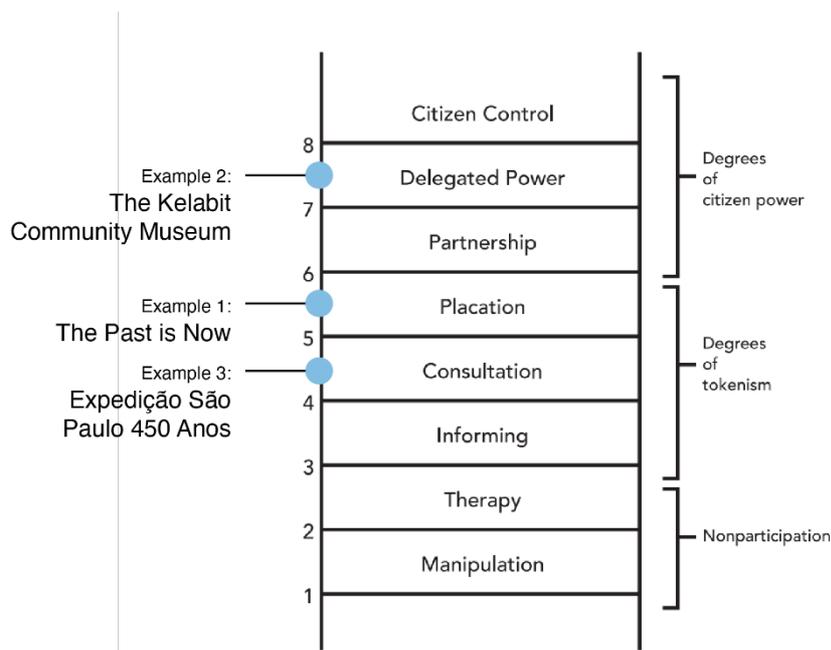


Figure 2. The three cases mapped along Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation

6.1 The Past is Now

This case illustrates “Placation”, a “Tokenistic” degree of participation. In the development of *The Past is Now*, community participants were invited as co-curators of the exhibit. However, implementation of this collaborative process by the museum revealed serious shortcomings in the PD approach for co-curation. This case reveals issues in the attempt to nurture knowledge exchange between museum staff and participants. While the goal of this exhibit was the sharing of different narratives, participants still felt as though their knowledge was not given equal value as that of the museum staff. As their contributions were edited and re-evaluated by museum staff prior to their release to the public, they were continuously censored and denied control of the final narratives that were shared in the museum. That is, knowledge exchange was relegated only to one phase of the process, and its contribution was later disregarded. This prevented participants from having any decision-making power and allowed museum staff to override the work that participants had already completed. The refusal to share full ownership over the project with the participants allowed the institution to maintain its role as the sole knowledge expert. This case demonstrates a PD process that restricts knowledge exchange between museum and community and limits decision-making abilities of community members. Despite their attempts, the approach taken by the Birmingham Museum does not reflect community participation in the creation of an exhibit, leaving Minott (2019) to question if the museum as an institution could ever truly be decolonized.

6.2 The Kelabit Community Museum

The development of the Kelabit Community Museum facilitated “Delegated Control”, falling within the category of “Citizen Power”. This means that the community worked alongside other organizations, although it led the initiative and had full control over the decision-making process. The Kelabit Community Museum was a community-initiated and community-led project. Community participants were able to craft their own design process for the development of the museum in a way that suited their collective preferences. In this regard, they consulted with knowledge experts in design to shape their work. The museum design development process centered on discussion and dialogue within the community; it was structured in a way that these discussions encouraged knowledge exchange between community members. These discussions were important for community participation and engagement in the issue (Taffe & Kelly, 2020, p. 724). If this process left the designers uncertain of their leadership role, it also allowed for the role of expert to change hands freely between the community and designer. While the role of expert constantly changed, the community continued to challenge the work presented by designers and held all the decision-making power over the realization of the designers’ work within the museum project. As designers and community members traded the role of expert through different stages of development, knowledge exchange emerged naturally and encouraged a mutual learning process. Through active discussion (knowledge exchange) throughout the whole process and a community-driven outcome (centralized decision-making power), this PD

approach facilitated a high level of community participation and reduced the designers' decision-making power.

6.3 Expedição São Paulo

This case embodies "Consultation", a "Tokenistic" form of participation as described in the Ladder of Citizen Participation. This project pursued decentralization through equivalent treatment of perspectives and voices in São Paulo, as illustrated by the researchers' systematic journey across the entire region, eliminating the notion of peripheries and centers in the city. With this goal in mind, an apparently participatory-inspired process was employed as a census, attempting to survey the entire population and compile an understanding of the city through innumerable narratives. In this sense, participants were a consulted source of information, however they were not treated as key decision-makers in the assembly of the project. The researchers were a diverse group and brought expertise from their own discipline to the project. *Expedição São Paulo 450 Anos* embraced a plurality of opinions and stories; this naturally facilitated an interdisciplinary approach to the formation of the exhibit. Narratives shared by community members were also consulted as another form of knowledge; however, community members were not engaged as experts that would contribute to designing the exhibit. Despite the interdisciplinary approach to bringing together the ideas within the research team in the synthesis of the findings and development of the exhibit, the process of knowledge sharing occurred only between researchers. Knowledge exchange between museum and community took place when community members shared personal experiences that contributed to the gallery, however the community was unable to engage in knowledge exchange with the researchers in the actual construction and organization of the exhibit. In other words, the knowledge exchange emerged only in the data collection process, not in its interpretation. The limitation of knowledge exchange to that phase resulted in the community having no control over the final decisions on how their personal stories and narratives would be presented. While there was knowledge exchange between community and researchers at the beginning of the project, the researchers retained power over the final decisions in assembling the exhibit.

7. Discussion and final considerations

PD advances dialogic entanglements between communities and museums, however the way that the PD process is implemented affects the degree of community participation. This article applies the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969) to real-world cases of PD in museums. These findings support engaging in a critical mindset prior to assuming that all PD processes are consistently democratic and interdisciplinary; and point out the need for a more critical reflection on forms of knowledge exchange.

The theoretical background and the three projects presented suggest that knowledge exchange is a process that facilitates community participation and democratic processes and outcomes. Furthermore, the projects suggest a correlation between forms of knowledge

exchange and higher levels of community power over decision-making (and therefore participation) in shaping the final narratives exhibited within the museums.

Table 1 Summary of the level of participation for each example.

Case	When knowledge exchange occurred	Who defines how and when knowledge exchange should occur	Level of participation (Based on Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation)
The Past is Now	Initial phases of the project: Yes, participants contributed to exhibition development. Final phases of the project: No, the museum staff edited the outcomes.	The museum: Museum staff	Tokenistic: Placation
Kelabit Community Museum	Initial phases of the project: Yes, community participants were engaged in discussion. Final phases of the project: Yes, community participants continued to drive the project.	The community: Kelabit community members	Citizen Power: Delegated Control
Expedição São Paulo 450 Anos	Initial phases of the project: Yes, participants provided initial input. Final phases of the project: No, the researchers interpreted the data for the exhibition.	The museum: Museum staff and researchers	Tokenistic: Consultation

Higher levels of democratic community participation occur not only when knowledge exchange takes place in all phases of the design and development process, but also when community members exercise power in defining how knowledge exchange should happen and on how to integrate a community's knowledge in the final result. In the Kelabit Community Museum case, through an approach based on dialogue and knowledge exchange throughout the whole process, participants exercised a great amount of power in decision-making and could benefit from the researchers' contribution. Furthermore, the development process was characterized by the community's leading role in defining ways and times of exchange between designer and community, resulting in a higher degree of community participation - "Delegated Power" within "Citizen Power". *The Past is Now* had the initial intention of bringing participants from the community to retell historical narratives and confront colonial paths. However, it ultimately illustrates an unsuccessful attempt at participatory practice. Community members were initially encouraged to share and exchange knowledge in the development of the exhibit according to a method managed and controlled by the museum staff – which edited the community's ideas to suit their own agenda. The mode and place of knowledge exchange within the design process were not

participant-driven, and not really integrated into the design process. Therefore, it resulted in the lack of decision-making by participants during the final revision of the exhibit. *Expedição São Paulo 450 Anos* presented the lowest degree of community participation of the three project - Consultation” within the “Tokenistic” participation level and type. While knowledge exchange occurred between the community and researchers during the research phase, there was no knowledge exchange between researchers and the community in any decision-making activity related to the final exhibition, much less for making the final decisions on the exhibit design. This resulted in a total absence of the community’s input in the final outcome.

By analyzing three cases of PD in museums for community engagement, it has been illustrated that the degree of actual democratic participation (and even more representation) in a PD project can vary based on who defined the forms of knowledge exchange and when it is practiced between designer and community. In order to facilitate a “Citizen Power” degree of participation, in which the distribution of decision-making power is done in a way that allows democratic processes and citizen-driven change, knowledge exchange as a process that facilitates community participation should happen throughout the whole design process and be led and managed by the participants. In the attempt to support community participation and decision-making, and therefore empowerment, PD designers should reflect on the complex nature of knowledge exchange.

As museums hold the responsibility as storytellers of many communities, they must also work towards representing the voices of these communities. While museums continue to explore the opportunities that PD offer in engaging community and gaining input from citizens, it is necessary to facilitate knowledge exchange in the development of future PD projects. Ultimately, the issues discussed in this paper are considerations that aim to support museums in shedding their discriminatory, elitist connotations, and in practicing PD more critically.

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