

## 2 Shifting from ‘inside-out’ to ‘outside in’

### Envisioning ways of structurally integrating participatory principles in museums

*Susanne Boersma, Cassandra Kist,  
Franziska Mucha, Inge Zwart, and  
Maria Economou*

#### 1 Introduction

Numerous studies have examined the potential of and need for participation as part of museum and more widely, memory practices (e.g. Simon, 2010; Lynch, 2011; Kidd, 2016; Black, 2021; Morse, 2021), ultimately necessitating a revised museum definition by ICOM to reflect this aspect of museum work. The new definition stipulates that museums should not only be ‘open to the public, accessible and inclusive’ but should also work in participation with so-called ‘communities’ in a way that is both ethical and professional (ICOM, 2022). Though participation has become a fundamental aspect of museum work, many of its principles remain underexplored or entirely absent within the internal organisation. This chapter sets out to first, explore four underlying principles that define participatory museum practices and in the second part, use these principles to re-imagine the internal workings of the institution. Seeking ways towards the envisioned museum in the ICOM definition, we ask: what would museums look like and how would they operate if participatory principles were integrated into the institutions’ internal organisation?

To answer this question, this co-authored chapter draws together four different research projects that were part of POEM’s ‘Connectivities built by memory institutions’ work package. It builds on ethnographic and case study research in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States of America, undertaken between 2018 and 2023. Our analyses across these different case studies, situated in one type of memory institution – museums, highlighted the importance of rethinking the internal workings of this institution. Despite each project focusing on very different participatory endeavours in museums and their online spaces, our findings were easily synthesised to define certain principles and consider their importance for work ‘on the ground’. Building on our discussion of four participatory principles, we envision a future museum that has internalised these principles in the day-to-day practice of museum work.

## 2 Problem statement

Participation has been a subject of study since the museum's transformation following the introduction in the 1980s of new, and later, critical museology (Vergo, 1989; McCall & Gray, 2014; Ünsal, 2019). Wide-ranging reflections on participatory museum work have resulted in propositions for levels or categories of participation (Goodnow, 2010; Simon, 2010); investigations of problems in participatory projects (Lynch & Alberti, 2010; Lynch, 2011; Boast, 2011; Kassim, 2017); and its application as a method, such as for the co-production of exhibitions (Mygind et al., 2015) or audience engagement (Lotina, 2014). Alongside these and many others, we have respectively studied co-creation with digital collections (Mucha, 2022), online and digital participation using social media (Kist, 2021), participatory work as a potential means of supporting forced migrants (Boersma, 2023), and community engagement workshops (Zwart, 2023). There is no single, widely accepted definition of participation; rather, it is interpreted and applied to describe different practices. In this chapter, we understand participation in museums as a range of approaches to actively engage external stakeholders, serving goals set by the institution and ideally, also serving those relevant to participants. We also understand participation in the context of cultural heritage organisations as working with and through memory, which from our perspective, can encompass personal experiences, personal and collective memories, and associated objects/collections inside and outside the museum. Participatory practices are often considered a means to interact with (non-)audiences directly, and to include perspectives that are not represented within the museum's team. We see these approaches as inherently flawed, but ultimately advancing the democratisation of museum practice.

Recent investigations, including our own (Kist, 2022; Boersma, 2023; Zwart, 2023), recognise the organisational situatedness of participation in museums (Morse, 2021). These studies emphasise the importance of practitioners' understanding of and ability to do participatory work, as well as the institutional changes necessary to move away from positioning the museum and its work at the centre. Participatory practices have been suggested to be 'good for us all' when they foster institutional change (Graham et al., 2013, p. 109). However, they can also be used in a performative way to hide the lack of responsibility and investment by institutions themselves to achieve such change. A similar observation has been made by Ahmed (2012) in the context of higher education: the institutionalisation of diversity can work to obscure racism. Here, we turn the lens from expecting participants to change an institution through participatory work (see Berenstain, 2016; Kassim, 2017), and instead posit that museums and their staff need to undertake processes of self-reflection in order to lay bare and navigate 'the mechanisms by which power and authority are exerted within as well as beyond the museum' (Message, 2018, p. 111). The symbiosis between participatory work and the internal workings of the organisation was highlighted by Heumann Gurian, who pointed out that the dynamics between museum staff will inevitably affect the relations between them and participants or visitors: 'if staff members care for each other, visitors believe that the staff will care for them' (1995, p. 15). Shifting our focus to the people

involved in participatory work – the participants and the staff working within the institution – and their experiences and needs, our findings point to four fundamental principles for participation: non-hierarchical collaboration, personal connections, transparency, and reflective practice. In this chapter, we argue that these principles should not only be integral to participatory work but also to the institution itself. We not only understand the challenges of applying these principles in memory institutions and are sympathetic to the difficulties of making fundamental structural changes but also outline the benefits these can bring to all aspects of their work, extending beyond participation.

The principles identified and analysed in this chapter are drawn from four research projects (Mucha, 2022; Boersma, 2023; Zwart, 2023; Kist, 2024),<sup>1</sup> each including several case studies, ranging from co-creative remix workshops to facilitated take-overs, and from online community engagement to on-site collaboration in preparation for an exhibition, in local, small-scale projects as well as large state-funded institutions. For museum professionals, building relationships with participants, audiences, or other stakeholders is considered key to participation. Similarly, personal connections were mentioned by several participants as a reason to join a participatory project. Ideally, with the goal of democratisation in mind, these relationships are non-hierarchical. We found that this can be achieved through reflective practice and transparency about a project's limitations, potential outcomes, and decision-making processes.

Previous studies point to the relevance of transparency (Marstine, 2013; Morse, 2021), reflection (Weil, 2007; Lynch & Alberti, 2010; Lynch, 2011), personal relations (De Wildt, 2015; Graham, 2017; Morse, 2021), and non-hierarchical collaboration (Heumann Gurian, 1995; Lagerkvist, 2006; Carpentier, 2011; Graham, 2017; Lynch, 2017), but they rarely assessed these principles at an organisational level. These participatory principles are often sought after yet rarely achieved as part of participatory work and not commonly recognised as key to the inner workings of the institution. This chapter investigates these principles in relation to our findings, not only as important values when 'doing' participation but also first and foremost, as action areas for a participatory transformation of museum organisations to pursue the ideal definition set out by ICOM.

### **3 Key principles for participatory work**

This section outlines the four key principles for participation that have been intrinsic to practice and research on participatory practices. These principles are not the only ones relevant for participation, but they did prove prominent across the museums discussed in our research. Some of the principles were brought up by practitioners when prompted about the obstacles they faced in their work on participatory projects. Other principles were deemed dominant factors by some of the participants we spoke to. Yet, all four of them were largely unexplored as paramount principles for the internal workings of the institution. In each of the following sections, we highlight their role across our studies to consider what a museum shaped by participatory principles might look like.

### 3.1 *Non-hierarchical collaboration*

One of the principles that is understood as fundamental to participation, particularly as a means of democratising museum work, is non-hierarchical collaboration. We could even go as far as describing participatory practice as a tool for removing hierarchies between museums as institutions and their public; the participatory paradigm is underpinned by the ideal of non-hierarchical relations. Thus, this principle and its promise of democratisation have been at the centre of many studies on participatory museum work (Clifford, 1997; Lagerkvist, 2006; Boast, 2011; Lynch, 2017; Graham, 2017). Successful participation, as such, is often measured by the participants' role in decision-making processes (criticised by Morse, 2021), defining maximalist participation, or non-hierarchical collaboration, as an unattainable yet strived-for ideal (Arnstein, 1969; Carpentier, 2011).

Our research confirmed this notion of non-hierarchical collaboration as an ideal that is worth working towards as it supports a practice that outlines and builds on the expectations and needs of everyone involved (Boersma, 2023) and privileges user perspectives (Kist, 2022). At the same time, an attempted non-hierarchical approach fosters practices of reflection within the institution by necessitating continuous conversations about the understanding of participatory goals (Zwart, 2023) and the renegotiation of the roles of museum practitioners (Mucha, 2022). Diminishing hierarchies in participatory work is only possible by reflecting on *how* decisions are made rather than who is involved along the way (Graham, 2017; Morse, 2021). This 'how' ideally reflects the principles outlined in the following sections. To achieve the imagined 'horizontal'ity, processes of decision-making should combine democratic models with affinity models (Graham, 2017). We found that this approach foregrounds the roles of individuals, rather than 'communities' or 'institutions' (Boersma, 2023), and relies on an empathetic relationship between staff and participants (see Mucha, 2022).

Despite the intention to diminish hierarchies, many practitioners pointed to their inability to realise a non-hierarchical collaboration as part of participatory work (Kist, 2021; Boersma, 2023; Zwart, 2023). Understanding a non-hierarchical collaboration as a participatory ideal, practitioners reflected on the different organisational and practical aspects that inhibited the process of becoming truly equal. Their observations highlighted the hierarchies in place. Much in line with this, Piontek (2017) pointed out the impossibility of diminishing power relations by organising a participatory project when the invitation to participate itself confirms the existing hierarchies in place and asks participants to become temporarily dependent on the museum. The hierarchies between practitioners based in an institution and speaking for and from within an institution, and participants who, as part of a museum project, act only on behalf of themselves are evident. An example of this is described by Kassim (2017), who addressed how a project that invited co-curators to decolonise the institution eventually led to few suggestions being taken on board by the museum staff; Lynch (2017), who pointed out that museums are seen as beneficiaries, and their staff do not see themselves as part of the conversations; and Boersma (2023), who further

analysed the roles of practitioners in projects and within the wider institutional infrastructures.

The understanding that participatory practices require a non-hierarchical approach is widespread, yet not all practitioners are readily able to consider and deconstruct their powerful position as part of the institution in relation to the position of participants (Kist, 2021; Mucha, 2022). Participatory work involves a revision of professional practice which brings about uncertainties. Tan (2013) noticed that such uncertainties spark museums (or rather, their practitioners) to increase control and claim authority in processes of decision-making. In one of our cases, an emotional confrontation with the participants caused practitioners to defend, explain, and reinforce their position and expertise (Mucha, 2022). Other practitioners addressed their authority and the importance of their contribution to (participatory) processes (Boersma, 2023). These observations demonstrate the persistence of hierarchies across the prevailing knowledge systems which still define museum practices today.

Similarly, the internal organisation of the museum is defined by these hierarchies that are kept intact throughout (or despite) participatory work. These draw divisions between curatorial positions and community-focused roles (McCall & Gray, 2014; Boersma, 2023), such as outreach positions and social media engagement. This 'hierarchical control' prevents staff members from using social media to its full extent (Kist, 2021, p. 287), limits the possibilities of collecting outputs of participatory projects (Boersma, 2023) and restricts processes of shared decision-making (Zwart, 2023). Working further down the hierarchical ladder means continuously negotiating restrictions and finding loopholes to enable participatory practices and ensure more sustainable outcomes. Hence, even if non-hierarchical collaboration in participatory projects could be achieved by the practitioners involved, hierarchical structures within the museum's institutional context continue to define the work 'on the ground', limiting both internal and external processes.

### **3.2**      *Personal connections*

Personal connections are the social ties that evolve and are actively shaped through repeated social interactions such as participatory activities in museums. The term describes shared interests, feelings, and experiences that connect people with each other. Although museums are commonly communicated as moving from being *about* something to being *for* someone (Weil, 1999), it is the social aspect of doing something *with* other people which is central to participation. Thus, interpersonal connections are both a motivation for and a potential outcome of participation in museums. Recognising connections while also acknowledging differences between participants, as well as between participants and facilitators, gives space for possible relationships to develop over time.

The past decade was marked by a discursive shift towards addressing challenges of building and sustaining personal connections: moving from Simon's (2010, p. 25) cocktail party metaphor, which suggests the museum practitioner should act like the host of a cocktail party to connect individual experiences with collective

engagement, to Munro's focus on 'doing emotion work in museums' (2014), and Morse's 'logic of care' (2021). While Simon (2010, p. 25) recommended designing 'successful social experiences' by intuitively adapting the role of a party host, Munro shifted perspectives by valuing practitioners' affective labour as a professional skill and as key to the perceived social impact of participation. Morse heavily built on this approach, highlighting the attentive, sensitive, genuine, and embodied character of care practices in community engagement while clearly distinguishing it from social work.

Much in line with this, our research highlighted the crucial role of personal connections and the related challenges within participatory museum contexts. Our studies confirmed that one of the main motivational factors to participate in museum projects is the social aspect, even if the type of relationship expected varied widely. Depending on the project's outset and composition of participant groups, the hope for connections can range from 'making new friends' (Boersma, 2023, p. 102) and 'meeting new people' (Zwart, 2023, p. 193) to more short-lived relationships such as 'carsharing' encounters (Mucha, 2022, p. 189). The importance of connection building as a motivation to participate has also been observed from a position of social 'need' and longing for contact, which, especially during the pandemic, came to the attention of museum practitioners. Kist (2024) showed how outreach staff catalysed connections between participants, staff, and objects to enable participants to challenge social isolation. Furthermore, stronger social ties between participants and professionals during projects improved creativity and collaboration. As Mucha (2022) noted about mixed groups of hackathon participants, 'more social and spatial closeness between the team members created an atmosphere of understanding, direct communication, and safety, in which they could better develop ideas together'.

Our findings also touch upon the various ways practitioners 'do' emotion work in participation projects. Contrary to the idea of mechanically designing or even controlling social connections between participation, Boersma points out that 'friendships and other informal relationships can result in a distributed network where the museum no longer sits at the centre of engagement' (Boersma, 2023). However, at the same time, the museum is in a way responsible for providing (safe) spaces or 'engagement zones' (Onciul, 2015) where people can come together. It is a difficult balancing act between the clear responsibility of hosting museums to use their infrastructures to facilitate meetings, while at the same time practising openness and allowing for relationships to grow organically and surprisingly within this space. For these organically grown relationships, the end of a project marks a crucial moment. One of our studies evidenced that personal connections rarely persisted outside of a project's timeline, as the museum stopped providing the spaces and reasons to meet. The continuation of personal connections was not deemed part of staff's professional roles, leaving them no time or means to maintain relationships after a project ended (Boersma, 2023). Zwart (2023), referencing Henke (1999; 2019), further discusses how maintenance work of participation involves embodied work. She argues that this distributed practice as a 'networked body' is crucial to the practitioners' interpersonal contact with participants, both

within a project, as well as in between projects and over the course of various projects. The repeated efforts of one or several practitioners in creating personal contact with (different) participants and each other supports the museum's ability to 'do participation'.

Expertise around relational work in participatory projects is growing, yet this practice remains challenging within the internal logic of many museum organisations. Old-fashioned project-management methods and rigid project timelines limit the potential for an acknowledgment of professional emotion work and organically grown relationships.

### 3.3 *Transparency*

The ways in which transparency has been considered crucial for museum practices have been tied to concerns of ethics and trust (see Marstine, 2011; 2013). 'Radical transparency', in Marstine's words, should be a concern and goal for museums to act ethically. From her position, participation as a form of 'sustained community engagement' would be a way to achieve transparency, as it could offer ways to be transparent about the work of the museum and involve external stakeholders in processes they might otherwise be left out of (Marstine, 2013, p. 2–3). In turn, Lynch (2013) interprets transparency in relation to the need for practitioners to reflect on participatory projects. 'Radical transparency' to her, is about being radically honest about what goes well and does not (*ibid.*, p. 11).

In our studies, transparency is highlighted as crucial to participation in order to achieve participatory goals such as empowerment (Boersma, 2023), to lower barriers to participation (Kist, 2022), to smoothen workflows within the institution (Zwart, 2023), and to foster socio-affective spaces (Mucha, 2022). Together, our work suggests a manifold interpretation of transparency. We argue for pursuing transparency in three contexts: within the participatory project, within the institution as a whole, and within the institution's societal context.

First, transparency about institutional processes within and around a participatory project can contribute to trust between practitioner-facilitators and participants (Liew & Cheetham, 2016). Boersma posits that '[p]roject roles, collaborative practices and methods of recognition [are] key for empowerment', but even more important is transparent communication about decision making (2023, p. 223). Providing transparency about how decisions are and have been made ensures that participants remain informed about their sphere of influence in the project. Along a similar vein, Mucha emphasises how transparency about institutional processes external to the project can strengthen 'engagement zones' for participation. In the examples she provides, professionals explain their (personal) discomfort with some institutional collections and collection practices to the participants. According to Mucha, such transparency between professionals and participants allows for productive conversations in which 'professional knowledge and affective practices can meet' in a participatory project (2022, p. 183). As such, our understanding of the function of transparency in the case of participatory projects elaborates on what Runnel et al. (2014, p. 229) call 'information literacy' in participation. They define that in order

to participate ‘one needs to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the institution, participation possibilities, boundaries that might allow or disallow participation’ (ibid., p. 230). Our research shows that there is an important role for the professionals involved in providing such information, through transparency in communication.

Second, transparency is something to look for outside of direct interactions with participants, as a value to strive for inside the institution. Zwart (2023) observed misunderstandings about the particularities of participatory work across the museum staff participating in her research. In the same way that participants require knowledge about the institution (Runnel et al., 2014), professionals need to know what is going on in the participatory projects, even if they are not directly involved themselves. Expanding on Liew and Cheetham’s description of trust in participation (2016), we point out this can be achieved through transparency. Liew and Cheetham address different relationships of trust – of the institution in the participant, between participants, and of the participant in the institution (ibid.) – all of which rely on transparency. Beyond the scope of the participatory project, transparency is fundamental between colleagues within an institution. This principle ensures that practitioners are up to date on the different work processes within the museum, and, during a participatory project, how these processes might be affected by the involvement of participants.

Finally, as a third area of transparency in participation, we look at the institution’s outward-facing role. Here, it is useful to come back to Marstine’s interpretation of ‘radical transparency’ (2013) as an ethical goal of the museum: transparency about the museum should be offered to the public. As aforementioned, participatory practices could help achieve this goal in the first place. As participatory projects *are* museum work, such public transparency of museum practices should be offered about participation too. In her research, Kist (2024) explored this outward-facing transparency, emphasising how social media motivates a new state of transparency for museums, increasing the ability of local communities and networks to hold institutions accountable and further, to address user needs. Providing transparency through social media can threaten the ‘safe space’ of participants and challenge participant confidentiality (Boersma, 2023), yet a controlled and ethical approach to transparency can demonstrate the different experiences in participatory projects and lower barriers for (future) participants to engage.

Transparency is a fundamental principle of participation to be developed and applied within participatory projects, within the museum organisation, and within its public role. As such, we see transparency as a multivarious tool and principle shaped through and for the interaction between participants, practitioners, and the institution. Furthermore, we task the responsibility of transparency in and of participation to the practitioners involved. Although challenging to maintain, transparency is something they should continuously strive for within the changing environment of a project, organisation, and societal context.

### 3.4 *Reflective practice*

Reflective practice, as we observed in our research, is grounded in the ongoing production of knowledge, needing a space to be created (often through ‘exploring’ or



'doing' participation together) and a willingness to listen, acknowledge, share, and put this knowledge into action. It is about continuously, critically contemplating and evaluating practices in relation to each other, analysing their impact on participation, partners, participants, staff, and the museum itself, whether before, during, or after the project. Significantly, these facets of reflective practice are entangled with and reliant on the other principles discussed previously – the ability of staff to work non-hierarchically, foster social connectivity, and be transparent – and the internal museum structures that support this.

Practitioners' engagement in reflective practice is widely recognised in the cultural sector as an important component of facilitating participation and community engagement if these are to have a real contribution to social goals and social change (Lynch, 2011; Axelsson, 2018; Museums Association, n.d.). Reflecting on practice can help practitioners stay on track by enabling them to identify problems and solve them as they arise, helping to meet participants' (changing) expectations, ensuring staff practices are aligned with institutional social values, and addressing the power relations between practitioners and participants. In turn, reflection enables staff to continuously improve aspects of their participatory practice (and overall work in the museum), from ethics to inclusion.

While sometimes reflective practice is positioned as the act of an individual professional practitioner (Museums Association, n.d.), as we observed in others' (Lynch, 2011; Chynoweth et al., 2020) and our own research, a reflective practice is necessarily and significantly cultivated at the nexus between staff, partners, participants, but also, ideally, as part of the institutional conditions.

Importantly, as we saw in our case studies, to integrate reflective practice into participation, staff must be willing to first and foremost, explore 'doing participation' together, being open to failure. The ability to work together is reliant on both social relationships with participants and staff, and a non-hierarchical context in which staff and participants are not limited by 'organisational red tape'. As Zwart observed in her fieldwork, reflective practice out of critical consideration of what is 'good' participation could also act as a factor in slowing down project development (2023). This means that in preparation or planning stages of participatory projects, critical reflection could turn into a hesitation to act. As Lynch points out, reflection is not always about critique but a method of co-exploration to 'challenge habits of the mind' associated with implicit power relations (2011, p. 444). However, it requires commitment from staff and participants, as well as a supportive institutional context (Martin, 2019). This institutional context might be built on internal practices of evaluation and reflection. A commitment to reflective practice is therefore ultimately grounded in institutional willingness to take risks. In Kist's research (2021), a restrictive approach to using social media for engaging with community members and participants hindered staff and users from discovering how social media could be a part of participatory projects. As such, a supportive and trusting institutional base that is non-hierarchical is essential to support staff and participants in doing and learning together through reflexivity.

Simultaneously, in 'doing participation', staff must be open to consistently listening to their participants, partners, and colleagues. This requires integrated communication and feedback mechanisms that underpin the principle of

transparency, such as regularly shared evaluations (Boersma, 2023), informally checking in with participants (Kist, 2024), reflecting together with colleagues (Zwart, 2023), and welcoming confrontations or discomfort through for example, hackathons (Mucha, 2022). As Boersma (2023) suggests, a reflective approach, based on regularly shared evaluations, allows museums and participants to explore shared goals and meet or reconfigure expectations. Reflecting with participants at different stages of a project can facilitate more positive outcomes, as the process is monitored and discussed, and expectations are ‘managed’ along the way. Similarly, in Kist’s research, after trying out engagement activities with participants and partners on social media, and checking in with participants during this process, staff came to understand the value their work could have for socially isolated individuals (2024).

Listening through different communication channels, enables staff to take the next steps to integrate and share this feedback with colleagues to reshape or adapt practices, but ultimately, it is the institution’s responsibility to adapt and change:

Although exchange and collaboration with audiences and participants is crucial for this process, they cannot bring about institutional change, rather – it is the task of those working within institutions to reflect on their museum practices in relation to discomforting feedback.

(Mucha, 2022, p. 150)

In our studies, reflective practice is based on co-creating knowledge through ‘doing’ or working together, sharing knowledge and listening, and a commitment to action. The principles discussed here, of being non-hierarchical, enabling social connectivity, and transparency, and the underlying museum systems and structures that support these, are essential to enact reflective practice. In our projects, the conditions for reflective practice encompassed institutional trust in staff; willingness to take risks; time and space to try, share, and adapt practices and perspectives, acknowledging and hopefully shifting implicit power structures (Lynch, 2017); and the ability to embed communication and feedback processes into participatory projects and internally throughout the organisation.

#### **4 Discussion**

In consideration of these four principles for participation, we turn to the museum organisation and address how support and enhancement of transparency, personal connections, non-hierarchical collaboration, and reflective practice could extend to internal museum structures and routines. In doing so, we expand on literature in the museum sector regarding ideals of participation with individuals and groups outside the museum, to emphasise the dependency of this ideal on the internal workings of the museum institution. As observed throughout the research underpinning this chapter, the four principles are often absent from the ‘backstage’ of the museum. In this discussion, we point to the often-overlooked link between the

internal organisation and participatory practices, emphasising the need for these principles to be integrated 'on the ground' so that they can be put into practice when working with participants.

We propose these internal shifts as necessary developments in working towards an institution that is de-centred in relation to its public and dedicated to continuous learning and caring for people (and their objects, stories, and memories). The following institutional imaginings are not intended to be read as a formula or checklist, but rather as a novel idealised provocation for contemplating how these principles may be integrated internally in different institutions. As such, we recognise that many of these changes and suggestions may raise unforeseen challenges, and may be difficult, even impossible to implement – particularly for institutions that are slow to change. With these limitations in mind, we suggest a new perspective on three domains of museum organisation that these principles cut across: the routine of day-to-day museum work; the role(s) of museum practitioners; and the development of museum infrastructures.

#### *4.1 The routine of day-to-day museum work*

Drawing from our study of participatory principles across our case studies, we found that there are many aspects of day-to-day museum work where these principles are largely absent or not deemed relevant. As addressed by some of the practitioners we spoke to, the 'organisational red tape' reinforces hierarchies between different museum departments, creates a segmented rather than integrated practice across the institution, and limits the opportunities for processes of trial and error. Everyday museum work is often defined by ongoing projects and tasks, all of which require but rarely allow room for reflection. Rather than limiting the application of reflective practices, such as project evaluation and introspection of the institution's role and position, to participatory work, museums would benefit from integrating these practices beyond project timelines, formats, and goals. Equally, personal connections between staff can support non-hierarchical collaboration and transparency about internal organisational processes. A more proactive approach to these principles as part of everyday work would allow practitioners to develop a shared learning environment that prioritises empathy and social connectivity. In practice, this could translate to regular catch-up sessions, shared evaluation of individual and collaborative work, continuous critical reflection on positionalities, and making time and space for colleagues to build personal connections. Integrating these principles as part of the work routine, in turn, makes it easier for practitioners to implement them in participatory projects. However, we recognise the impact these suggested changes to daily working practices would have on the whole team and their individual routines and that they can potentially challenge standard ways of working, including ingrained habits and norms. While such changes can therefore be very difficult and slow, a shared organisational culture that embraces and supports change and inspiring examples can help.

#### 4.2 *Flexible roles of museum practitioners*

Besides reflecting on the institution's role and position, the roles of museum practitioners and the hierarchies between them need to be reflected on and revised to allow for a more agile organisation. As often argued, museum practitioners are not social workers (e.g. Morse, 2021), yet in addressing social issues and working with people who are marginalised, they need to employ related skill sets, knowledge, and empathy. With the aim of instigating change and making it visible in organograms, museums sometimes invent new job titles but run the risk of burning out the newly hired 'change agents' often faced with an institution not truly willing to change. Instead, we suggest more flexible team roles to be taken on by museum practitioners to facilitate this change. The following roles can be assumed by any member of staff, regardless of their job title:

- a planner (responsible for communicating and keeping in line with the time plan and budget);
- a catalyst (responsible for bringing the project forward and considering the various stakeholders' needs);
- a moderator (responsible for reflective and affective practices, such as moderating conversations and meetings, ensuring all people are listened to etc.); and
- a mediator or person of trust (someone outside of a project team, who mediates conflict where necessary and can be addressed if problems arise).

In addition, practitioners and participants with specific expertise for this project form an action team. Ideally, these roles are interdisciplinary, bringing together people across departments, and are re-negotiated for different projects and day-to-day work. As the basic principles underlying this practice are self-organisation and shared responsibility for the process, this approach will help break down hierarchies between individual staff members and departments. Built into this approach is transparency about the challenges, workload, and skills necessary for specific roles and tasks within projects and the organisation at large. Moreover, it allows organisations to integrate continuous reflection on work processes and brings about a constant reconfiguration of relations as well as plenty of opportunities to build new ones.

While we have emphasised the benefits of creating flexible staff roles, our suggestions can contradict existing hierarchies within museum teams and thus, we recognise that it can seem like an insurmountable challenge to overcome rigid organisational structures. Alternative, flexible roles may also challenge established institutional job descriptions and expectations regarding workload, as articulated by the public, management, and politics. Moreover, remuneration might be connected to job roles and associated levels of responsibility, raising critical questions about changes to payment if a flexible job role approach is implemented. While challenging, a flexible job role approach raises key questions that further spark critical reflection on the internal application of participatory principles and how they are supported.

### 4.3 *The development of museum infrastructures*

The everyday routine work and the flexible roles of practitioners require the modification of existing museum infrastructures as well as the creation of new ones. Museum infrastructures – ranging from organisational structures to online spaces for participation, and from financial systems to the tools available for collaborative working – also need to embed the principles of non-hierarchical collaboration, personal connections, transparency, and reflective practice. To support the internal integration of these participatory principles, museums should have certain communication tools at their disposal to make information accessible and transparent, and to open up spaces intended for shared, non-hierarchical learning. Such tools and spaces would further support the building and maintenance of personal connections and allow time and room for reflective practice as an integral part of museum work. Aspects of museum infrastructures, including available tools, spaces, and dedicated time, are necessary not only to enact participation but also to reflect, socialise with colleagues and participants, and share (participatory) learnings. Non-hierarchical collaboration with participants or internally within teams of practitioners cannot be made possible without a revision of the museum's organisational structure, as processes of decision-making can usually be traced upwards along the organogram of an institution. While reflective practice encourages constant evaluation and negotiation of these infrastructures, at the same time, the potential of reflection, too, relies on these infrastructures. Thus, the willingness to develop museum infrastructures is a prerequisite for integrating these participatory principles in the day-to-day work and allowing for more flexible museum practitioners' roles. The application, adjustment, and removal of the 'organisational red tape' rely on institutional investment into the slow and sometimes invisible work of reflection, communication, staff training and development, and organisational restructuring. However, vice-versa, implementing solely infrastructural changes, such as changing the composition of departments, without reflecting on organisational culture will likely not bring about meaningful change. As we suggest throughout this chapter, the principles of non-hierarchical relations, social connectivity, transparency, and reflection must be applied to and underpin changes to these different domains of museum work, as well as to the infrastructures that support them.

We deem these institutional changes necessary to develop a museum in which participatory memory work sits at the heart of the institution. The principles we defined in this chapter are central to participation and can be a significant means to rethink the inner workings of the organisation. Breaking down hierarchical structures internally allows for non-hierarchical collaboration with external stakeholders. Personal relationships should be acknowledged as part of a project as well as day-to-day work. Transparency about processes and decision-making cannot be achieved in participatory work until it defines the internal workings of the institution. And finally, reflective practice is only possible when the institution and staff are committed to continuously reflecting on their own work and position. The principles we outline here can be crucial starting points for a participatory institution that is dedicated to continuous learning. Building on the challenges encountered

by practitioners and participants across the diverse case study contexts that underpinned our research, these principles can act as a set of stepping stones towards the non-hierarchical, personal, transparent, and reflective museum.

## 5 Conclusion

This chapter envisions yet another ideal museum by arguing for a fundamental shift in our focus from ‘inside-out’ to ‘outside in’ when examining participation work. While acknowledging the challenges involved, we argue that when implementing this change of perspective, the strive for this ideal museum can make a real difference on the ground support and sustain truly participatory work that benefits all participants. To achieve this, we propose that the participatory principles which surfaced across our research projects should be integrated into the internal workings of the organisation. As we have shown, the principles of non-hierarchical collaboration, personal connections, transparency, and reflective practice are essential but are not the only ones that sustain and encourage participatory practices. Other principles, such as for example, representation, safe spaces, and maintenance as a practice, are equally relevant. The principles that are the focus of this chapter, however, tie together our findings across diverse institutional and cultural contexts, allowing for a thorough analysis of their meaning and importantly, allowing us to propose these principles as scaffolding for their potential integration inside the organisation of the museum.

Previous literature in the museum sector has investigated and highlighted the importance of some of these principles for participation with the public in various ways. For instance, regarding non-hierarchical collaboration, many academics have critically appraised and created suggestions for working with participants in ethical ways (Lynch, 2017; Morse, 2021). Similarly, social connectivity has been discussed and identified as a priority for participants’ well-being and connected to other participant-oriented goals (Simon, 2010; Silverman, 2010). Transparency and reflection too, are often catered towards addressing external public groups, making evident the workings of the institution to participants (Marstine, 2013), and enabling staff reflection on participatory practices with the public (Lynch, 2011; Chynoweth et al., 2020). Comparatively, through this chapter, we significantly expand on these externally focused understandings by drawing on these principles to create idealised provocations for initiating changes across different museum domains that constitute integral aspects of the institution’s inner workings. Crucially, we also synthesise and extrapolate from our research findings to suggest how these participatory principles might be integrated into the routine of day-to-day museum work (rather than limited to participatory projects); feed into a more flexible approach to the roles of museum practitioners; and in turn, shift museum infrastructures to better facilitate participation.

We believe that turning the outside in helps envision a museum that embodies its practices: a way of working that foregrounds non-hierarchical collaboration between staff members is more likely to break down the persistent hierarchies between museums and their public (and participants); an organisation that prioritises personal connections has more chances of utilising them to support participatory

practices; an office that makes transparent its decision-making and existing structures will be less likely to conceal this information from external stakeholders; and, a workplace where reflection is a regular practice will not neglect or forget to reflect on the work done in collaboration with participants. Vice versa, the suggested changes to the internal workings of the museum should enable the institution to become de-centred in relation to its public. The ability to learn and share, experiment, socialise, build social skills, and be supported by institutional resources and structures is a prerequisite for a networked institution that is dynamic and remains in flux. The integration of participatory principles 'on the ground' promotes continuous learning within the institution as well as an extended notion of care as part of museum work. It helps build a museum that understands participation and the institution's relationships with its public as essential.

## Note

- 1 A book based on Kist's thesis research will be published as part of the same book series, Participatory Memory Practices: Digital Media, Design, Futures - due to come out in October 2024; the original thesis is deposited at the University of Glasgow's: <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/82812/>.

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