EXARC JOURNAL 2022/1
13 Articles | Open Access

Reviewed Article:

Facilitated Dialogue: An Emerging Field of Museum Practice

Persistent Identifier: https://exarc.net/ark:/88735/10625

EXARC Journal Issue 2022/1 | **Publication Date:** 2022-02-25

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The notion of dialogue is considered essential in contemporary museology. Since the 1970's, when Cameron (1971) put forward the idea of museums as forums rather than temples, dialogue is linked to the process of democratization of museum functions and narratives and the inclusion of local communities (Sandell, 2002). Nowadays, "the idea of museum as a forum is widespread" (Kirschenblatt-Giblett, 2020). However, the term is usually vague as there is no specific content or practice related to the actual use of dialogue in museums. Recently, science and history museums are initiating facilitated dialogue-based programming to address a variety of present-day issues that affect society at large and/or local communities. As the field of facilitated dialogue-based programmes develops, questions around the aims, techniques, and challenges of such initiatives in museums emerge. This paper explores the theory and practice of facilitated dialogue in science, and history museums as well as its implications for the museum field.

> "Facilitated-dialogue programming sets a new paradigm of communication between museums and the public. It is an outcome of the discourse on the social role of the museum that has been taking place for decades and opens a path for the

Introduction

Almost 60 years ago, new museology's call for a re-examination of the very identity of the museum, of its functions and purposes, brought forward its social role and signaled a major turn by initiating new areas of museum practice and research (Vergo, 1989). Since then, the relation of museums to their social, economic, and political environment has been the subject of many studies. Terms such as social and cultural inclusion, democratization and social responsibility are central in the current museological discourse. Museums are not merely places of representation of knowledge anymore. They have evolved to places of mediation between knowledge and

structural inclusion of certain social science skills in museum interpretation as well as of a variety of institutional bodies, either public or private.

society and more recently they took on the role of negotiating scientific knowledge (Rodari and Merzagora, 2007). Regarding social responsibility these new functions require and encourage the development of new tools and skills.

Dialogue, a notion strongly connected to the concept of democracy, is central in the discourse as advanced within the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the Network of European Museums and UNESCO[1] (Postman, 1994; Bodo et al., 2009). Similar terms such as 'forum', 'civic discourse', 'deliberative conversations', are also very popular in the current museum vocabulary. They are often connected to the growing interest for the engagement of local communities in present social issues through museums' mediation, to the quest for polyvocality in museum exhibitions and to the learning processes taking place in the museum space (McCarthy and Wright, 2005; Valdecasas et al., 2006; Reich et al., 2007; Rodari and Merzagora, 2007; McCarthy and Ciolfi, 2008; Misu et al., 2012; Martins, 2013). Museums appear as 'inherently dialogic' (Simon, 2010; Ananniev, 2011; Brulon Suares, 2011), places of 'intercultural dialogue' (Bodo et al., 2009; Martins, 2013), able to 'establish a visual dialogue with the viewers (Cataldo, 2010, p.21). Experience as such, and specifically museum experience, is seen as inherently conversational, that is dialogic (McCarthy and Ciolfi, 2008). Such approaches usually refer to an imaginary dialogue, an intellectual, emotional or/and embodied interaction, stimulated by the power of museum displays to transfer meaning(s) to the visitors. They also entail the assumption that visitors respond to the mere view of the object in ways that are not always obvious. In this way, a conceptual 'dialogue' is initiated between the viewers and the objects, the past and the present. In this light, the use of the word 'dialogue 'can also be seen as a metaphor for the literal meaning of the word.

Recently, as museums are "rethinking the concept of accountability as social institutions" (Janes, 2007, p.134) and reach out to their communities, attempts to define dialogue in more concrete terms have resulted in the emergence of 'facilitated dialogue' programmes in museums of history and science.

Facilitated dialogue

'Facilitated dialogue' is a tool that has been used for a long time in activities associated with the field of social justice, therapy, learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Freire, 1996) and the larger field of communication and conflict management in education and administration (Isaacs, 2007; Wilgus and Holmes, 2009; Milz, 2018). It can be defined generally as a structured discussion between two or more persons coordinated by a neutral facilitator who helps parties to overcome communication barriers and promotes a productive conversation. There are several facilitated dialogue methods such as 'circle processes', 'world cafes'[2] and 'fishbowl'[3] . "Circle processes" involve a circular mode of conversation and highlight the symbolic aspects of talking or acting in circles in traditional cultures; world cafes follow the conversational mode of a 'community table', while 'fishbowl' refer to a conversation among members of a large group positioned in a way to encourage them to participate. The techniques involved aim to establish a safe environment through mutual respect and generous listening to address community conflicts.

In a museum context facilitated dialogue programs are developed in either history museums or science museums. It is a practice used to encourage community participation in present social and/or scientific issues through providing information and a space to discuss visitors' opinions and experiences. The dialogue may also involve decision-makers and interested parties. Thus, museums often become mediators between society and the official civic bodies that are involved in the issue being discussed.

Part of the facilitated dialogue process in museums can be characterized through Gadamers' notion of "understanding as dialogue where we test our fore-meanings against those of others and come to a consensus with others about a subject matter" (Warnke, 2011, pp.91-92). However, while a general 'ground-rule' usually involved in facilitated dialogue is 'openness' (Gadamer, 1960, p.359) to the other as person 'to be interested in' (Gadamer, 1960, p.361) to what she/he has to say, reaching a consensus is not always the aim or the case in a museum setting. Despite the diversity of topics introduced for a facilitated dialogue programme, often the scope of a concrete and visible impact is broadening the notion of museum learning, by adding the layer of essential participation in the broader context of civic affairs.

Several museums have included a definition of facilitated dialogue in their website. The National Park Service in the USA, for example, defines facilitated dialogue as "a form of interpretive facilitation that uses a strategically designed set of questions – an 'arc of dialogue' - to guide participants through a structured, meaningful, audience-centred conversation about a challenging or controversial topic".[4] Similarly, but with a greater emphasis on the democratic value of dialogue, the Smithsonian Institution along with the MUSEWEB Foundation state that "facilitated dialogue refers to a process 'led' by a neutral facilitator. Facilitators use a combination of questions, techniques, activities, and ground rules to ensure that all participants can communicate with safety and integrity. Because dialogue is a non-hierarchical mode of communication, facilitators also uphold equality among all participants." (Smithsonian Institution and MUSEWEB Foundation, 2016, p.4).

Two major organizations, The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, and the National Informal STEM Education Network (NISE Net) have been pivotal in developing facilitated dialogue projects and guidelines, in history and science museums respectively. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is a 'global network of historic sites, museums and memory initiatives that connects past struggles to today's movements for human rights'[5] with more than 300 members. It has developed the 'Arc of Dialogue' as a general guiding structure for facilitated dialogue programmes. The Coalition also supports its members with webinars.

The NISE Net "generates, develops, implements, and collaborates on projects that strengthen and advance informal STEM learning in communities across the United States". It also uses the term 'public forums', defined as an opportunity for participants 'to engage in thought-

provoking conversations about important issues surrounding nanotechnologies and their potential societal, environmental, and ethical implications'.

A civic mission attached to a core learning function underlies the majority of facilitated dialogue programming in both history and science museums. However, the context and intended outcomes differ.

Science museums

The development of facilitated dialogue programmes in science museums is associated with the political, social, and ethical dilemmas surrounding emerging science technologies. It also indicates a major turn in visitor engagement in museums. The engagement model, that succeeded the so-called 'deficit model' (which considered visitors in need of an authoritative voice to fill the gaps of their knowledge), encourages visitors to interact with the exhibits and engage in museum programmes. In this transition, the focus had already moved to the social implications of scientific research rather than the scientific content per se (Pedretti and Navas Iannini, 2020). However, the engagement model didn't seem to fully acknowledge the audience's competences or their importance for the development of science in contemporary societies (Collins and Evans, 2002). At the same time political and/or institutional funding bodies were not involved. To recuperate these shortcomings, the facilitated dialogue programmes sought to engage the public and the interested parties in a productive two-way dialogue in the museum space. This kind of engagement is considered fundamental for what is now called Responsible Research and Innovation (Owen et al., 2012), a notion that has gained wider recognition in Europe recently (Burget et al., 2017). It signifies the cooperation between various bodies and activities, science, and society, and aims at 'strengthening public confidence in science' and 'foster dialogue in a global context and research on ethics of science and technology' (Burget et al., 2017, p.2).

Public Engagement in Science (PES henceforth), a section of the "orthodoxy of 21st century science policy" (Stilgoe, 2007, p.16), also encouraged the development of facilitated dialogue programmes. PES is a term often cited in science communication and public policy literature. It refers to a "'dialogue' model in which members of the public and scientists are viewed as needing to listen to and learn from one another, thereby providing the public a role in science-related policy decision" (Bell, 2009, p.29). In 2009 the Center for the Advancement of Informal Science Education (CAISE), part of the Association of Science Technology Centers in Washington DC, published a report that included a conceptual model and examples of strategies and methods for institutions involved in non-typical learning to encourage the public's engagement with science and technology. The report distinguishes the 'generic' participation from the PES by emphasizing the aspect of mutuality in the learning process between the public and the scientists, and not just a one-way, top-down communication of knowledge. It also underlined that the importance of public engagement relies on the knowledge drawn from everyday experience and is founded in individual and collective values. So, it can unveil new perspectives and dimensions in the research process related to the implementation and the impact to societies. 'Mutual learning' and 'mutual respect' were key terms in defining the PES.

Facilitated dialogue programmes are linked to an attempt for a more structured PES (Bandelji and Konijn, 2015). Museum and science centres are considered as potentially active agents in the development of policies related to science and society (Kelly, 2006; Bandelji and Konijn, 2012; Brice, 2012). The dialogue-based programmes are also aligned with a new approach to the term 'technological literacy' that involves an understanding of the dynamics between science and society and a critical view of the related processes (International Technology Education Association 2000, National Academy of Engineering and National Research Council, 2002).

Major funding initiatives in Europe and the US reflect a broader acknowledgement of the need for an examination of scientific and technological innovations in relation to their political and social implications and the broader science and technology policies (Jassanoff, 2003). A great part of this examination involved science museums and science centres as the main mediators of science to the public.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, European Program Frameworks 5 and 6 aimed to explore the role of museums in this field. For example, the PLACES project lasted four years and established a network of 70 collaborations between local government and science centres that continue to develop science communication policies at local and regional level.[6] The VOICES project,[7] a collaboration between 27 science centres and museums across Europe, was the EU's first official attempt to actively involve citizens in setting the priorities of the Horizon 2020 research agenda. Public engagement with science within the Horizon 2020 agenda implied "establishing participatory multi-actor dialogues and exchanges to foster mutual understanding, co-create research and innovation outcomes, and provide input to policy agendas".[8]

The European Responsible Research and Innovation Tools (RRI Tools) programme has made various science centre's strategic hubs of this initiative with the ambitious goal of developing a toolkit for Responsible Research and Innovation (see Mejlgaard et al., 2012; Rask et al., 2012).

In 2000 the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology in the UK published a report on the relationship between science and society, noting that this relationship has reached a critical point with catastrophic consequences for the future of science and technology; at the same time, the report emphasized the need for major reforms (United Kingdom, 2000). In 2001, the European Union published the White Paper on Governance, which summarized the results of a working group focusing on "Democratizing Expertise". The Paper included new guidelines "on the collection and use of expert recommendations in the Commission in a way that ensures accountability, pluralism and integrity" (Commission of the European Community, 2001).

In the context delineated above, a facilitated dialogue programme is the practice that allows museums and science centres to become a direct link between the public and applied science (Chittenden, Farmelo and Lewenstein, 2004; Bell, 2008; Chittenden, 2011). So, museums enter the field of science and technology policies. Not only are they able to encourage a clear reading of complex scientific data and their potential impact when translated to policies; they also can create a space for public participation in scientific research and decision making (Chittenden

et al., 2004; Felt and Fochler, 2008; 2010). Moreover, they are able to perform an innovative function: they can allow the scientific community and the interested parties to form their own view of the public. In this way, the focus shifts from the understanding of science and scientists by the public to the "understanding of the public by scientists"(Lévy-Leblond, 1992, Chittenden, Farmelo, and Lewenstein, 2004; Bell 2008; Chittenden, 2011).

The citizen consensus conferences organized in Denmark in 1989, by the Danish Board of Technology, appear to be the primary model that influenced facilitated dialogue-based programming. Their aim was to bridge the gap between citizen, experts and politicians (Jensen, 2005) and promote technological literacy. In these conferences, the process lasted a few weeks and started with a question posed to a limited number of participants around an issue of current research. After being provided with relevant material the participants were engaged in a conversation to define unanswered questions. They had access to scientists who could answer technical questions if there was an answer. Then, the participants had yet another conversation among them to formulate some consensual proposals (Bell, 2009, p.24). Some adjustments were necessary for a similar implementation in a museum space, such as a shorter timeframe. Their example was followed in 1998 by Café Scientifique, the first scientific café in the UK, the Dana Centre in London in 2003 and the Darwin Centre at the Museum of Natural Science also in London in 2009 (Chittenden, 2011).

In 2002, the Science Museum of Boston was the first science museum in the US to develop facilitated dialogue programmes inspired by the above-mentioned citizen consensus conferences. It adopted a similar structure and appointed the role of a civic advisory board to the participants. A question regarding the social implications of a scientific issue, such as the presence of GMOs in schools, or the kind of energy provided, was addressed and the board had to form a decision. Scientists presented scientific data; a Q&A session followed. The participants were divided in smaller groups, and they had access to printed material and the Internet. In most cases scientists were available to answer questions. In the end the participants formed a consensus proposal, but this was not always the case. The programme evaluation had positive results but the need for more collaborative efforts that would involve institutional parties was apparent (Bell, 2008).

Dialogues on Nanotechnology

Nanotechnology was the subject of the first large-scale dialogue programmes in Europe and the US. Nanotechnology is not an obvious issue for public debate, as social awareness is minimal, and, when the dialogue initiatives started, there was no broader public issues related to the topic. It was therefore considered an ideal topic of discussion, as the public had not yet formed strong and “emotionally charged positions” (Bell, 2008, p.391).

In 2004 the European Commission launched a series of programmes called the *Nanotechnology Action Plan*. The aim was to design a strategy for the implementation of related policies at European level. The inclusion of the social dimensions of nanotechnology, and the dialogue with society was an essential element for meeting the relevant expectations and exploring the issues that arise (Laurent, 2012, p. 2). The emphasis on dialogue remained till the latest updates of the Action Plan in 2020.[9]

In the US, the opportunity for the development of large scale facilitated dialogue programming appeared in 2005, when the National Science Foundation (NSF henceforth) issued a call for the development of a network that “aims to foster public awareness, engagement, and understanding of nanoscale science, engineering, and technology” (Reich et al., 2007, p.210). To date, this is the largest funding of non-formal learning centres, amounting to $20 million (Chittenden, 2011). The call explicitly referred to public participation in scientific issues that have social, ethical, and decision-making implications, and stated that the creation of scientific cafes and forums was also an eligible category for funding (Bell, 2008, p.390). It led to the creation of the Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network (NISE Net) and the development of ‘Forums’, a series of facilitated-dialogue programmes in the institutions involved. The network connected five science museums (MoS, the Exploratorium in San Francisco, the Museum of Life and Science in Durham, NC, the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry in Portland, OR, and the Science Museum of Minnesota in St. Paul, MN) and other non-formal learning centres with nanotechnology and engineering research centres. It was formed on the base of learning objectives that did not aim only in raising awareness on the concepts and content of nanotechnology, but also in the development of the necessary skills for participation in the related public debate and the careful consideration of the issues under discussion. However, the programme did not include the co-shaping of relevant policies (Reich et al., 2007; Bell 2009), although there were examples of state administration officials involved (see Bell, 2009, p.34). The first phase of the programme had positive results, which in 2010 led to the renewal of the Network's funding for another five years (Chittenden, 2011). In the second phase of the programme, the National Science Foundation introduced the Broader Impact Criterion, which corresponds to public education and the promotion of scientific work (Chittenden, 2011, p.1555). This was the starting point for establishing mutually beneficial collaborations between research institutes and non-formal learning centres (Alpert, 2009). In addition, in 2010, the NSF began providing longer-term funding from five to ten years, encouraging the establishment of institutional partnerships and the development, and strengthening of the resulting network of programmes (Chittenden, 2011, p.1555). At the same time, it created a simple and well-tested model of systematic evaluation of dialogue programmes that can be easily applied in different museums.

In this context, the role of museums was considered essential for the development of anticipatory governance, a term used by David Guston and his colleagues at the Center for Nanotechnology in Society. Anticipatory governance is defined as ‘a broad-based capacity extended through society that can act on a variety of inputs to manage emerging knowledge-based technologies while such management is still possible’ (Guston, 2014, p.218)

According to Guston (2006, in Bell, 2008, p.391) anticipatory governance provides the capacity

1. *to understand beforehand the political and operational strengths and weaknesses of (knowledge-based innovations) and*
2. *to imagine socio-technical futures that might inspire their use. With nanotechnology, we like to think that we have a good shot at anticipatory governance because those of us concerned with its societal implications have gotten into the game both a little bit earlier than with other knowledge-based innovations and in a manner in which both we and our technical target audience have learned from recent histories of the ethical, legal, and social implications of GMOs.*

The NISE Net focused primarily on developing facilitated dialogue programming on the issue of nanotechnology. At this early stage of exploring possible ways of building it, different approaches were tested in different institutions to examine the range of possibilities available. In the group representing the five museums, the programmes lasted from 2.5 to 3.5 hours and included two or three keynote speakers to present the relevant data and possible nanotechnological applications, as well as to identify potential social impacts. The number of participants varied from 30 to 40 people.

The Forum Team, that had the responsibility to develop facilitated dialogues referred as 'forums', prepared material to help other museums. Central to this material is a 'Forum user manual' that contains basic information about the presenters, materials and layout, programmes promotion, pre-registration and communication with participants, staff needs, a description of the forum programme itself, information on coordinating discussions and ways to close the programme. Finally, it contains a complete toolkit and evaluation instructions. Currently the NISE website includes several guides for implementing dialogue programmes on a variety of topics. In general, the Forum programmes are learning experiences that last two to three hours. They begin with an initial presentation from scientists around scientific and socio-scientific issues that help contextualize the content and the background of the issues discussed. It then involves an in-depth discussion among few participants (not familiar with each other before the programme) who share their views on the development of nanotechnology and the ways it interacts with society, the environment and everyday life (Reich et al., 2007).

There is a significant diversity in the implementation of the above-mentioned dialogues:

- They may take place in the institution that hosts them, or elsewhere
- They may focus on the broader implications of nanotechnology or on more specific topics, such as nanotechnology and the environment.
- They may involve participants in in-depth discussions on an important topic or ask participants to answer multiple questions on a variety of topics.

Evaluation conducted on the Forum's programme showed that the necessary elements for the effective implementation of the programme are:

- The presentation and discussion of a range of perceptions and perspectives.
- Awareness of nanoscience and technology and their social and environmental implications.
- The feeling of being involved in a dialogue that is fruitful and meaningful (as it is a non-formal learning process).

The developments outlined above shape a paradigm shift: museum public programming moves beyond participatory practices as we know them, towards a notion of participation around emerging, and often contested, science and technology that takes into account public voices in a dialogue with scientists and decision makers in order to –ideally- embed them into research policies (Einsiedel and Einsiedel, 2004; Lowenstein and Bonney, 2004; Bell, 2008; 2009; Bandelji and Konijn, 2012; 2015;). According to Mayfield (2004, p.112), "science museums could become the live interfaces between contemporary research and the public, something no other medium can provide."

History museums

History museums can be ideal environments for creating spaces for negotiation, participation, and public intervention in current social issues (Skorton, 2018), due to their potential to act as meeting places for different cultural, religious, political and social groups.

The relevant literature refers to 'dialogue' as linked to intercultural communication and education (Logan, 2010), the preservation of cultural diversity, as underlined in Article 7 of the relevant UNESCO Declaration (Bouchenaki, 2010), the development of a peace culture (Logan, 2010) and the protection of human rights (Offenhäußer et al., 2010).

Attempts to define 'dialogue; in more concrete terms are related to community projects and to the dialogical processes found in museum exhibitions (Janes, 2009). These are usually addressed to specific groups and often involve representatives from institutional decision-making centres (local authorities, public services, research institutes, etcetera.). Usually, dialogue in cultural and history museums sets out to touch on aspects of a potentially difficult and traumatic past into the present, to enable community voices to be heard, and to develop strategies that will transform this experience into action in support of human rights. The aim is to find ways that will allow new readings of the topic in question, without the museum's decisive influence on the content of the dialogue (Morse et al., 2013).

Most of the projects that incorporate dialogue as a basic methodology for engaging the public are in museums that are members of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience[10] (henceforth Sites of Conscience). It is worth noticing the choice of the term *conscience*, linked to the moral dimensions of human actions and the feeling of guilt, instead of the term *consciousness,* linked to understanding and realization of something[11] , connects cultural heritage to its moral dimensions and the responsibilities they entail.

Sites of Conscience is an initiative of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum of NY, a museum that since 1994 has shaped a new example of conflict management in the present, encouraging dialogue through historical experience. As stated by the (former) director of the Museum, Liz Sevcenko (2010, 21):

> *Rather than reacting to conflict over our heritage sites defensively, we could perhaps identify the issues underlying the conflict and offer our sites as a resource for addressing them in as much as heritage sites have unique resources for helping people to deal with difference, examples of how people dealt with conflict in the past, a human connection to people in other circumstances and a trusted space for learning new perspectives.*

Therefore, Sites of Conscience focus on the practice of dialogue in order to "transform historic sites into places of citizen engagement, where visitors are invited and encouraged to address the contemporary implications of the topic interpreted at [each] site." (Abram, 2001; in Linenthal, 2006). The members,

> *hold in common the belief that it is the obligation of historic sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of our sites and its contemporary implications. We view stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting democratic and humanitarian values as a primary function* (Sevcenko and Ciardi 2008, 10).

Sites of Conscience define dialogue as "a mode of communication which invites people with varied experiences and differing perspectives to engage in an open-ended conversation toward the express goal of personal and collective learning".[12]

In 2010 the members started exploring possible ways for collaboration among heritage institutions that would lead to a national or local dialogue on difficult issues. In the United States, 13 institutions came together to discuss ways to encourage a dialogue on immigration. A year later, each institution developed a project that invited visitors to "walk in the shoes of immigrants who had shaped their heritage sites and learn the national debates in which those immigrants had taken part" in order to participate in a facilitated dialogue around the perspectives that history offers on present day issues (Sevcenko, 2010, p.23). Around that time a similar initiative took place in Europe. The European Sites of Conscience network currently involves 36 members, 14 of them museums. The initiative aims to shed some light on current controversies and develop projects that invite community members that face conflicts on immigration and national identities to use heritage as a starting point for facilitated dialogues (Sevcenko, 2010, p.24).

The Coalition's scope is not to reach a consensus around conflict issues through dialogue, but to encourage an ongoing contestation that can lead to personal and social empowerment (Sevcenko, 2010). It also considers the participation of decision-makers and the collaboration of civic institutions necessary. In this context it has introduced *Arc of Dialogue*, a model of facilitated civic dialogue, as an interpretative and learning practice in a museum context. *Arc of dialogue* is a dialogic structure that shapes a common experience among the participants through a series of questions designed to foster trust building and communication, allowing participants to interact in a more personal way. The model includes four stages: community building, sharing our experiences, exploring beyond our experiences, synthesizing, and closing the learning experience.[13] It serves as the basis for the development of facilitated dialogue programmes around a variety of social issues, such as racism, women's rights, race and policing, et cetera, that are accessible through the site's webpage *Front Page Dialogues.* Each themed dialogue model is accompanied by relevant material around the issue, a documentation of its necessity and a manual. Sites of Conscience suggest that museums should choose the questions stated in each phase of the dialogue to respond to the needs of the conversation. They should also develop new questions related to important aspects of the community, the place, the museum, and the participants' needs. Since March 2020, the pandemic led the Coalition to issue some guidelines around digitally facilitated –dialogues along with a model for the implementation of a digital dialogue programme on Covid-19 through a virtual meeting platform. No specially adapted guidelines are given apart from encouraging participants to keep their camera on.

As the pandemic is currently far from an end, such initiatives have the potential not only to inform the public but also to allow all related parties to understand, and therefore hopefully respond to, the uncertainties and doubts that often emerge from public policies and scientific information. The examples stated below explore the framework and the techniques followed in selected museums, mainly members of the Sites of Conscience. The selection was based on published material.

Lower East Side Tenement Museum, NY, USA

The role of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, an immigration museum, is pivotal in establishing facilitated dialogue as an indispensable component of the visitor experience that follows the guided tour in the museum. The objectives are:

1. *to engage visitors in a dialogue using stories from the museum tour as a starting point for them to share their own related experiences and challenge their assumptions and beliefs about larger contemporary immigration issues,*
2. *to help participants gain new perspectives on contemporary questions by looking at how these questions were answered in the past,*
3. *to develop a heightened awareness of visitors' involvement with contemporary immigration issues, and*
4. *to inspire visitors to become more active in learning about contemporary immigration issues* (Abram 2007, 60).

The ground rules of the dialogue are sharing and hearing, spirit of inquiry, diversity, and individuality (Abram, 2007, p.60).

The Museum also offers all personnel involved training in dialogical techniques that come from various fields (education, drama, dialogic art) and include 'generous listening', the use of 'neutrality technique', creating space for respectful conversations, listening techniques, etcetera.

Although the subject of discussion is inherently political, the Museum doesn't take a specific political stance, but "a stance for humanity" (Varma, 2017). During the discussions, facilitators do not take a position, but encourage participants to share their experiences. They form open questions, seeking answers that come "from experience and 'common sense'". There are no correct or wrong answers. In addition, when the group has a common view of something, facilitators often challenge it to encourage more approaches. Changes in visitors' previous perceptions are often observed (Varma, 2017).

The discussion on the occasion of historical and at the same time personal experience is considered to create a 'safe space' and facilitates the treatment of problems related to the present. According to J. Varma (2017), former Education Manager, "the Museum connects the past with the present, but the power lies in the ability to use these stories, which are historical but at the same time personal and individual, so we can bring the element of complexity to the examination and interpretation of human stories, and we invite our visitors to give their own interpretations".

To sum up, the Museum develops an interpretative strategy that focuses on creating a safe space for dialogue on sensitive themes. The starting point is the human stories of the past, as a part of the wider socio-political context of their time, linked to the personal experience of visitors and the corresponding context in the present. At the same time, the Museum emphasizes the process of discovering knowledge and maintains a neutral attitude, as far as possible, encouraging multi-layered and multidimensional readings. Dialogue in this case focuses on raising awareness on present social issues but doesn't aim to influence current policies.

The Levine Museum of the New South, USA

The Levine Museum of the New South is another example of a socially oriented museum that applies facilitated dialogue with a mission "to confront some of the most difficult issues facing us today in the historical context that deepens understanding, fosters empathy, and inspires action toward a better future".[14] The Museum's "programmes invite participants to deepen their understanding of critical contemporary issues through the lens of history and to engage with others in productive dialogue".[15]

In 2015 The Museum launched the bilingual interactive exhibition *¡NUEVOlution! Latinos and the New South.* Facilitated dialogue, under the title *Nuevodia*, was a part of the exhibition to fulfil the goals listed below:

1. *"Strengthen skill sets of cultural competencies, including the ability to communicate and work across differences as well as establish and sustain cross-cultural interactions.*
2. *Identify obstacles to access and inclusion, and within the dialogic experience and their community work, become agents for change to address those obstacles and strengthen their ability to lead across differences.*
3. *View dialogue as an important methodology for creating community-based leadership and to seek out opportunities for continued dialogues that address community issues. By interacting and sharing authentically across differences, participants will experience individual and group learning.*
4. *Take concrete actions toward crafting new models of interaction and/or increasing inclusive action at the individual, organizational or community level"* (Scuch et al., 2017, pp.25-26).

The program addressed to 'intact' groups (5-20 person from the same institution), paired groups (similar group/organizations) and sustained dialogue groups: past dialogue participants who "were recruited for their commitment to community building and interest in learning dialogue for leadership development" (Scuch et al., 2017, p.25). The Museum hired 13 dialogue facilitators and engaged three employees also as facilitators. They all attended training on dialogue techniques and used tools provided by Sites of Consciousness that focus on challenging previous perceptions, encouraging individual and group learning and promoting political action in a broad sense. Facilitators were trained to be neutral and to apply a combination of questions, techniques, activities, and rules to create a space where there is honesty, respect and safety.

The programme lasted two-hours. It combined a visit to the exhibition with a facilitated dialogue. Every week, a facilitators' evaluation meeting helped in re-examining elements of the programme, if necessary (Scusch et al, 2017, p.29).

Evaluation conducted on 66 programmes had positive results. Overall, the data collected showed that the project highlighted the importance of intercultural coexistence and communication. However, more time than the two hours of the programme and more opportunities for interaction between people from different racial groups was necessary (Scuch et al., 2020, p.14). Again, direct influence on current policies was not included in the programme's objectives.

"Race: Are we so different?", USA

Another example of a facilitated dialogue programme under the title 'Talking circles'[16] was included in the design of the travelling exhibition 'Race are we so different?' (Jolly, 2009). The exhibition was designed in 2008 by the American Anthropological Association as part of a broader educational programme, in collaboration with the Science Museum of Minnesota. It aimed to create and maintain a debate on the sensitive issue of racial identities and racism through an examination of the notion of race, racial stereotypes, meanings, and practices to which they are linked through science, history and everyday experience (Jolly, 2009). From 2007 to 2020, the exhibition was hosted in over 40 museums in the United States.

'Talking circles' is a traditional Native American practice suitable for all age groups (Running Wolf and Rickard, 2003, p.39). It is a way of communicating and learning with an emphasis on equal participation for all. Today it is widely used in the U. S. for educational and therapeutic purposes (detoxification centres, sofronistic institutions, etcetera) (Running Wolf and Rickard, 2003, p.39). Within the framework of the exhibition, 'talking circles' are facilitated dialogues for up to 20 visitors in specially adapted rooms next to the exhibition space. The dialogues are coordinated by trained personnel. In 2009 more than 4,000 visitors took part; nine out of ten participants would recommend this experience to other visitors (Jolly, 2009).

The aim of 'talking circles' is to establish a safe non-hierarchical, non-judgmental space where everyone can talk about a particular topic and is encouraged to share their personal experiences (Penn et al., 2008). The procedure involves the use of a symbolic object selected by the circle keeper, which passes through all participants, giving them the opportunity to express their opinion while they hold it.

In 2015, the San Diego Museum of Us, a cultural anthropology museum located in California, USA, incorporated a short version of the exhibition into its permanent collection. The Museum's mission is to "encourage human connections through the exploration of human experiences".[17] To this end, it focuses on alternative narratives that challenge preconceptions and encourage the emergence of new perspectives. The Museum takes a clear position on major social issues and promotes action, with an emphasis on human rights issues. Dialogue is one of the central methodologies for engaging the public in the context of organized programmes. The involvement of community groups is a priority, while in recent years emphasis is given to the issue of decolonisation (Lacy, 2018).

The Race exhibition was part of the Museum's institutional mission to create spaces for dialogue on important issues (Porter and Garcia, 2018). In this context, a dialogue programme was developed and evaluated, addressed to secondary school students and aimed at enriching the participatory and reflective methods of approaching science, history and contemporary race relations, which fall within the theme of the exhibition. The initial format of the project involved assessing students' understanding of the issue and creating a safe and comfortable environment that would encourage participants to express their views and share their experiences (Porter and Garcia, 2018).

The programme was developed based on the exhibition content and gave participants time to explore the exhibition space. *Arc of Dialogue* was adopted, as it offered a structure for coordinating the dialogue, starting with the introduction and development of a relationship between the participants, an exchange of experiences, and a tour of the exhibition space. The questions included in the programme became increasingly complex as students delved deeper into the exhibition (Porter and Garcia, 2018). It took time and several modifications for the programme to reach its goals. The modifications were based on the participants' feedback and included personal reflection from the part of museum personnel involved the addition of some extra activities and a re-examination of facilitators' training.

In the context of these modifications a re-appropriation of the space of dialogue as a "space of bravery" rather than a safe space took place (cf. Arao and Clemens, 2013). This transition is in line with some scholars' recognition of the inherent conflicts that exist in the process of negotiating the meanings of cultural heritage (Smith, 2006). Creating “brave spaces” is a learning method that addresses social justice issues, and it may involve exposing sensitive and vulnerable aspects of the participants (Arao and Clemens, 2013). The idea of “safe space” has been challenged by Boostrom (1998, p.399) who argues that “learning involves not just risk, but the painful abandonment of a previous situation in favour of new ways of seeing things”. The establishment of “brave spaces” is also linked to a strategy developed to encourage risk-taking in dialogues that focus on race and racism, called “brave conversations about race” (Arao and Clemens, 2013, p.140). The creation of "brave spaces" for debate is actually a subversion of the usual rules (see Arao and Clemens, 2013, pp.143-149).

The results of the project showed that dialogue strengthens the connection with the exhibition by creating space for the exchange of personal experiences. Activities, audio-visual and other exhibits helped in the multifaceted understanding of the theme. The addition of local elements and building partnerships with the community proved to be very significant. The evaluation yielded four main results: dialogue – based programming takes time, educators need to be learners too, structure must be flexible, talking is efficient but sometimes activities and personal reflection are necessary for audience engagement, and relevance is the key for success (Porter and Garcia, 2018).

In summary, the exhibition was a starting point for testing different ways of creating a dialogue with visitors around a difficult issue, such as race and racial discrimination. The detailed descriptions of this programme found in the literature show that adapting interactive models, such as “talking circles” which have been found useful in different contexts, requires a significant amount of work on the part of the museum, including training of facilitators, space, and significant changes in programming. The shaping of the structure, rules and content of the dialogue is also a dynamic process that requires constant rethinking, even of concepts that are taken for granted, such as the concept of "safe" space. As museums approach issues related to social and political sciences, the need to enrich their theoretical and practical tools becomes evident.

District Six Museums & Constitution Hill, South Africa

District Six Museum and Constitution Hill, both members of the Coalition, use facilitated dialogue as a central museum practice, to reclaim human rights. District Six Museum in particular uses facilitated dialogue as a part of a larger effort to prove that crimes against humanity occurred and bring perpetrators to justice or establish truth commissions (Sevcenko, 2010, p.24).

District Six Museum, a private museum in Cape Town is “working with the memories of District Six and other communities affected by forced removals and contributing to the cultural reconstruction and restitution of post-apartheid Cape Town”.[18] The Museum adopts a clear political position on sensitive and difficult issues. By encouraging readings and interpretations "from the bottom up" it seeks the close cooperation of

the local community and social movements and approaches dynamic issues of discrimination and rights violations. The director believes that "museums should seek to be places to explore legal, social, cultural and personal rights" (Bennet, 2012, p.9). However, the Museum is not limited to exploring these rights, but often seeks to protect and claim them, recognizing conflicts.

Facilitated dialogue is one of its main methodologies for community engagement. It is part of a variety of programmes and actions implemented with the collaboration or mere participation of members of the community (former and present), citizens' organisations, representatives of public bodies, social movements, schools, research centres and so on. According to the director of the Museum, B. Bennet (2012, p.8), emphasis is placed on highlighting different views and not on reaching a consensus that is "neither feasible nor desirable".

Constitution Hill also uses facilitated dialogue to address issues of democracy and human rights. It was founded by South Africa's Constitutional Court and is housed in a former prison, a place of confinement during apartheid. The permanent exhibition presents the history of the prison and the struggle for justice in the past and the present. The debate over the state of democracy after the apartheid period is still an issue and concerns many South Africans who have either benefited or suffered.

Lekglotla is the name of the main dialogue-based programming of the Museum. The word derives from the Sotho/Tswana dialect and broadly means “a nonhierarchical dialogue that is conducted in the form of a public gathering to decide on matters of group and social importance (Madikida et al., 2008). They are facilitated dialogues that focus on the most recent cases on human rights and constitutional legality examined by the Court of Justice. For example, on the issue of the legalization of gay marriage, the Museum organized an exhibition on the experience of LGBTQI communities in the past, under the apartheid regime, and in the present and organized 'lekgotla' for students and other groups (Sevcenko, 2011).

The lekglotla take place in a specially designed area and are offered in the following versions:

- Encounter lekglotlas: Facilitated dialogues between members of the public and decision-makers to encourage dialogue and public accountability.
- Dialogue lekglotlas: Informal dialogue between groups of learners or NGOs or community groups with a guest speaker who may or may not be responsible for decision-making or in a position of public responsibility
- Debate lekglotlas: they follow the structure of a debate
- Rapid response lekglotas: they deal with current, sensitive, issues raised mainly by Constitutional Court. They follow the structure of a talk show in which the audience can vote, thus providing feedback data.
- BUA! Speak out: this is a space for dialogue where young poets and artists present their work on issues such as democracy, social justice, freedom, anti-racism and anti-sexism. This programme is also adapted for children, in a specially designed space and is a great success.[19]

Lekgotla are both educational and political dialogues. For example, on Human Rights Day the Museum organizes a lekglota on the constitution and invites former prisoners. In August 2017, the lekglotla on democracy, freedom and social justice, with guest lawyer Thuli Mandonsela, a former public defender of the country, was directly linked to the political action taken by former prisoners at the time (Kruger, 2019, p.561).For the Museum, lekglotla is a way of providing citizens with the "necessary resources and space to define their own place in the changing reality of South Africa".[20] In this way, the Museum becomes a dynamic field for meaning making of political, social and human rights with the "conviction that dialogue, reason, interaction, negotiation and agreement give birth to the future" (Gevisser and Nuttall 2004, p.518).

The China Town History Museum, NY, USA

The example of the China Town History Museum, a so called ‘dialogue-driven’ museum introduces a new model of museum development that uses dialogue both in the design of museum exhibition and the exhibition itself. The goal is to create a responsible museum that engages visitors and critically involves them in its research and actions in a way that improves the city and community in the present and future. Experience from the Museum's operation has shown that an exhibition or a programme only achieves its goal when it is linked to visitors’ personal experience. However, according to John Kuo Wei Tchen, co-founder of the Museum, this approach to community history can be limiting, ignoring the multiple identities of individuals, and preventing connection to the bigger picture, to the broader political and social processes (Wei Tchen, 1992). To avoid such phenomena, the Museum attempts to balance local and personal uses of history with a broader understanding of the causes and ways in which history is connected to everyday life in the present. This perspective follows the view of historian Michael Frisch (1990) who argues that a one-sided emphasis on the role of the historian or the audience cannot be particularly productive. To create a comprehensive picture of historical processes, the interpretation of historical material needs to be seen as a collaborative process that is formed jointly by experts and non-experts. Besides, there are many factors that can significantly limit the study of the historian, even if he or she is interested in the public: institutional and organizational obstacles, perceptions such as the view of the study of public history as secondary to the academic field, and the often-unprofitable nature of such studies.

Alongside the usual interpretive media, the exhibition includes digital interactive exhibits that can encourage dialogue, such as timelines that visitors can fill in, memory programs, genealogical and biographical databases. Trained staff and volunteers work to support these exhibits. Through questions, databases, and photographs, they explore with the audience those elements of New York's Chinatown that are worth remembering. Creating exhibits that collect empirical data, such as the names of students depicted in an old school photograph, is an ongoing process. Of particular interest to the Museum is the creation of exhibits that allow the exploration of "difficult" and/or traumatic memories. (Wei Tchen, 1992).

Conclusion

To sum up, facilitated dialogue appears as an evolving museum practice that acquires some common characteristics both in science and history museums. It sets a fertile ground for the development of more equitable practices in museums: mutuality on sharing knowledge, learning from one another and respect to differing opinions and viewpoints. It also encourages changes in the exhibition design as it requires the provision of a special space and requires the training of museum personnel in dialogue techniques or the recruitment of facilitators. Collaborations with institutions, civic bodies and decision-making parties are essential for museums to fully embrace a civic mission, but they are not always involved.

In the case of history museums facilitated-dialogue programming broadens the interpretative scope so as they can include social justice issues; this is a new field of exploration for museums, which in some cases goes as far as the active assertion or reclaim of citizens' rights in the present. The aim varies from a learning experience among different people to visible changes in the public sphere. The latter bridges museum practice to the field of social activism.

In the examples delineated here, there is a clear distinction in the objectives set for facilitated dialogue between the American and South African museums. South African museums have a clear political stance and use facilitated dialogue largely as a vehicle for influencing the political agenda on current social issues. American museums keep a neutral stance and focus on the learning process. It seems that the difficult recent past of South Africa encourages Museums to engage in political action.

In the case of science museums, dialogue programmes signal an evolution from the "public understanding of science" to the "scientific understanding of the public" (Chittenden, 2011; Laurent, 2012). There is also a stronger political agenda behind these initiatives that provides generous funding and encourages partnerships between institutional bodies, the museum and the public. The focus on evolving science, rather than the certainties of science as we know it, is a challenge that requires a whole new attitude from the part of the museum, distant from any authoritative voice. As the discussion in this paper has shown, the development of facilitated dialogue programming has already produced plenty of material for future projects. However, engagement of various social groups is necessary, and more tools are needed in this direction.

Facilitated-dialogue programming sets a new paradigm of communication between museums and the public. It is an outcome of the discourse on the social role of the museum that has been taking place for decades and opens a path for the structural inclusion of certain social science skills in museum interpretation as well as of a variety of institutional bodies, either public or private. In this way facilitated dialogue programming broadens the scope of museum learning by adding the notion of civic participation in current affairs and creating a climate of reciprocity between the museum and the public. On-line facilitated dialogues, a newborn practice, able to attract a new and diverse audience, offers a new way of communication between the museum and the public. It also sets a new field for the exploration of museums' potential to affect the, constantly evolving, communities.

Acknowledgements

The paper is part of the author's post-doc research. The implementation of this postdoctoral research is co-financed by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund) through the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning", within the framework of the Act "Support for postdoctoral researchers/researchers - cycle B" (MIS 5033021) implemented by the State Scholarship Foundation (IKY), Greece.

1 http://www.unesco.org/culture/museum-for-dialogue/museums-for-intercultural-dialog/en/
2 http://www.theworldcafe.com/
3 https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/fishbowl-conversations
4 https://www.nps.gov/subjects/climatechange/toolkit-controversy.htm
5 https://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/home/
6 https://www.ecsite.eu/activities-and-services/projects/places
7 https://www.ecsite.eu/activities-and-services/projects/voices
8 https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/public-engagement-responsible-research-and-innovation
9 https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/685931
10 https://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/home/
11 https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/consciousness
12 https://www.sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Dialogue-Overview.pdf
13 https://www.sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Dialogue-Overview.pdf

14 https://www.museumofthenewsouth.org/who-we-are/

15 https://www.museumofthenewsouth.org/who-we-are/

16 The model comes from native North American Indians and also responds as 'healing circles' and 'peacemaking circles' (Umbreit, 2003). It has been introduced to Western culture in recent decades mainly by social rights activists (Umbreit, 2003).

17 https://museumofus.org/mission-vision-values/

18 https://www.districtsix.co.za/

19 https://www.constitutionhill.org.za/pages/public-programmes

20 https://www.constitutionhill.org.za/pages/public-programmes

Attachment(s)

Schuch et al, 2017, Nuevo Dia Evaluation Report Intact Group Dialogues (5.8 MB)

Keywords museum
heritage management
public

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Fig 8. Constitution Hill. Source: https://www.gauteng.net/uploads/legacy/uploads/_1200xAUTO_crop_center-c...

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FIG 1. MUSEUM OF SCIENCE, BOSTON. FORUMS. SOURCE: NISENET.ORG

FIG 2. MUSEUM OF SCIENCE, BOSTON. FORUMS. SOURCE: NISENET.ORG

FIG 3. DIALOGUE AT THE TENEMENT MUSEUM. INTERPRETER: ALEXANDRA DELARE. SOURCE AND COPYRIGHTS: THE TENEMENT MUSEUM

FIG 4. THE TENEMENT MUSEUM VISITOR CENTER. SOURCE AND COPYRIGHTS: THE TENEMENT MUSEUM

FIG 5. THE LEVINE MUSEUM OF THE NEW SOUTH, USA. VISIT TO THE EXHIBITION BEFORE THE FACILITATED DIALOGUE PROGRAMME. SOURCE: SCUCH ET AL 2017, 13

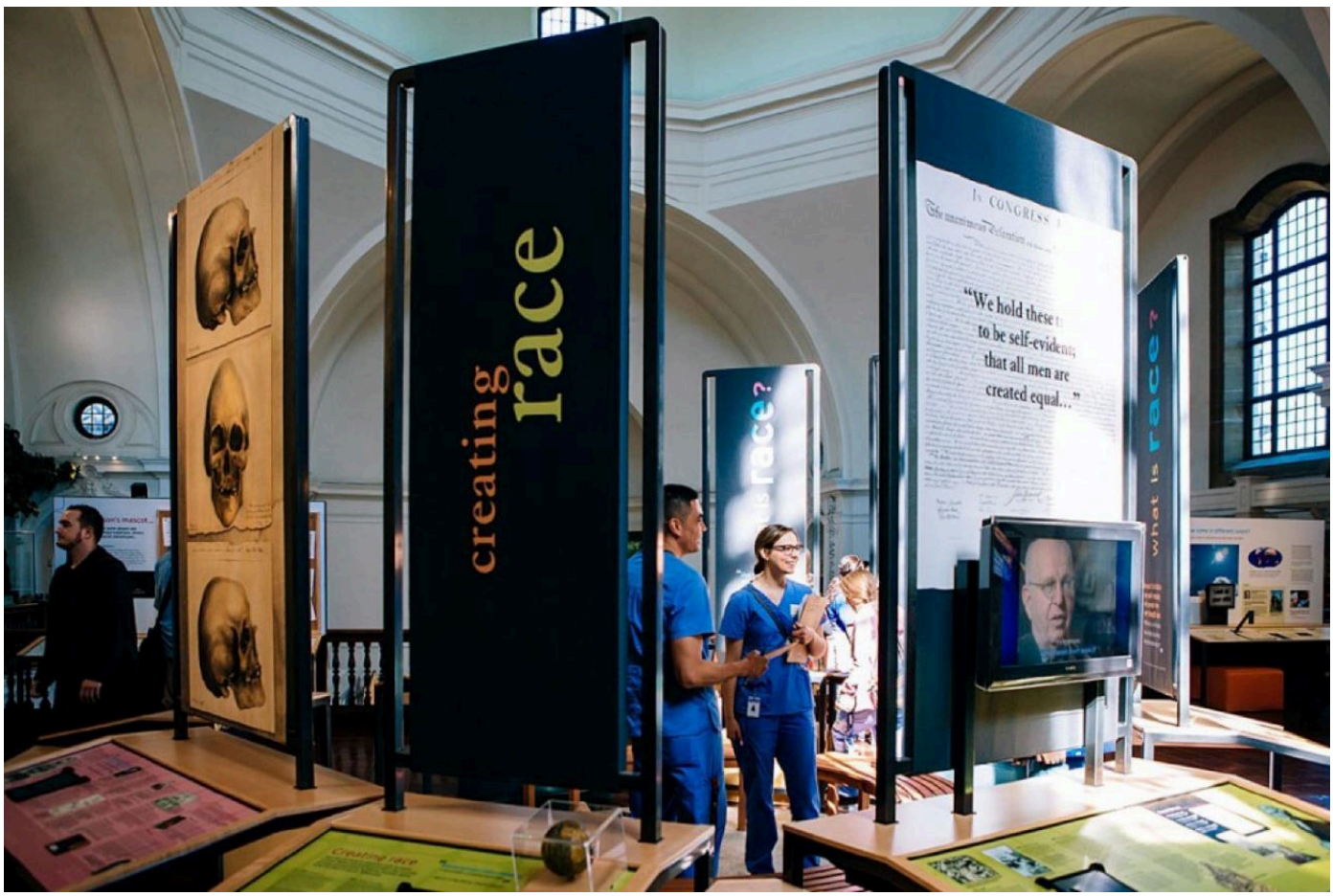

FIG 6. SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF US. EXHIBITION: RACE: ARE WE SO DIFFERENT? SOURCE: HTTPS://MUSEUMOFUS.ORG/EXHIBITS/RACE-ARE-WE-SO-DIFFERENT/

FIG 7. DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM. SOURCE: HTTPS://WWW.DISTRICTSIX.CO.ZA/

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