

Decentring the Museum: Examining Young People's Perceptions and Experiences from a Sociocultural Perspective

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by
Laurence Brasseur
School of Museum Studies
University of Leicester

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Abstract

The relationship between young people and museums has been a topic of discussion since the late 1970s. Many developments have been observed in this respect, yet some museums still find it challenging to engage with young people. Furthermore, the debate surrounding this relationship is often underpinned by unhelpful generalisations about young people that impede thinking and practice; for example, that young people lack interest in museums or find them boring. Previous research has principally investigated the subject through an 'education and learning' lens and from a perspective that takes museums as the starting point. This thesis aims to enrich our understanding by taking a sociocultural perspective and by centring the focus on young people. The thesis, therefore, actively seeks to decentre the museum: theoretically, by using an interdisciplinary framework; and practically, by conducting fieldwork outside museums.

Through a qualitative approach, this study places young people's experiences and perceptions of museums in a wider social and cultural context. Focus groups were conducted with young people aged 12–21 in youth clubs in Luxembourg. This thesis reveals the complex and nuanced ways in which the focus-group participants think about museums in relation to their everyday lives. It also highlights the tensions and ambivalence underlying their perceptions and experiences. Furthermore, the study shows that the power inequalities that young people face in social life are likely to be perpetuated in the museum. Indeed, the participants' experiences of museums are shaped, in large part, by lack of individual choice. Visits that are enforced by facilitators, such as the school and the family, can create barriers to engagement. This thesis makes the case that it is important for museums and facilitators to acknowledge the diversity of young people, hear and value their points of view, and respect their autonomy and freedom of choice.

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Abbreviations

CRC – 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child

EU – European Union

ICCPR – 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR – 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

ORK – Ombuds Committee for Children's Rights

UDHR – 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

US – United States

We know of course there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'.
There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.

Arundhati Roy¹

¹ Extract from the 2004 Sydney Peace Prize lecture (The University of Sydney 2004).

Chapter 1

Introduction

It is a warm Saturday morning at the local youth club. Sunlight shines in through the many windows. The main room is a large open space with a door to a backyard. The walls are covered with posters, flyers and graffiti made by members of the youth club. There is also a billiard table, a pinball machine and a cupboard full of board games. Two young people (Kerry and Antoine), youth worker Liam and I are sitting around a large table waiting for two more participants. Kerry says she thinks they may be late because they went out the night before. The others laugh. On the table, there are jugs of lemonade and water. Liam is taking everybody's pizza orders for lunch later on. Gabriel and Danny arrive. Gabriel is wearing sunglasses; he says he is tired after his night out. The others are joking around. When everybody sits down, we begin the discussion. These four young people have come together on a Saturday morning to talk about museums.

Another bright day in a small village. I am heading to the local youth club. The youth workers, Danielle and Melanie, welcome me. They are proud to show me their new club house; the place has brand-new furniture, light shades of paint on the walls, and flyers and posters that provide splashes of colour here and there. Some young people are already sitting around a large table and chatting. The youth workers have organised snacks, sweets and drinks. The atmosphere is friendly, reminiscent of a tea party rather than a research setting. When the last young people have arrived, we introduce ourselves and start to talk about museums. The conversation is lively, with young people sharing many memories, ideas and suggestions. It is only when the discussion is over that some of them nibble on the snacks, which until then had been forgotten. Some of the young people leave, and others stay to chat. They say that they found the discussion interesting. Leaning against the wall, Emma remarks thoughtfully, 'I think the schools should come here too and ask us about our opinions on the school system. Because that's also about *us*, right?'

A Thursday afternoon in the centre of an industrial town. The weather is gloomy, but inside the youth club everything feels bright and shiny. When I walk in, two young people, Tina and Miguel, and the youth worker, Hannah, are busy doing paperwork. They give me a warm welcome and guide me to an adjacent room, where we sit down on beanbags around a small table. Just as we are

about to begin, a young woman arrives and peeks into the room. Her name is Brenda. Tina invites her to join us, as Brenda is a keen museum-goer. Our conversation about museums begins. Suddenly, Miguel, who has an appointment and is supposed to leave early, walks out of the room to make a phone call. After a couple of minutes, he comes back in and flops down onto a beanbag. 'I've made some arrangements,' he says with a broad grin, 'so I can stay longer.' An hour later, some other young people, books and notepads in their hands, walk in. Tina tells me they are a group of refugees who come to the youth club for a weekly language lesson, and explains that we have to leave the room. Nonetheless, the young people would like to conclude our discussion. We sit down near the entrance hall. When we have finished, Tina tosses her blue hair out of her eyes and says joyfully, 'It was fun talking about museums. I really enjoyed it.'

1.1 Research focus

The vignettes above portray scenes that took place in different youth clubs in Luxembourg in the spring of 2016. They show that a number of young people² participated in this study on museums and were willing to give up some of their leisure time to do so. The vignettes also convey the overall atmosphere in which the fieldwork was done: the ambience was friendly and warm, and many of the participants enjoyed taking part in the discussions. If we consider public opinion on young people and museums, these observations may appear surprising. Indeed, a popular view holds that young people generally lack interest in all things relating to museums. Is it possible that these views are unjustified?

Furthermore, the vignettes show that, as a researcher in museum studies, I went to the youth clubs to carry out the fieldwork for this study. Aiming to explore the various ways in which young people perceive and experience museums, this thesis shows why collecting data outside museums is useful,

² In this thesis, young people are defined as individuals between the ages of 12 and 21, which equates to the age range of the participants in this study. Section 2.2 discusses the rationale behind this definition in more detail.

necessary and illuminating. In effect, while museums are the point of departure for this investigation, the main focus is on young people and their voices. By speaking and listening to young people in their own places, it is possible to call into question the centrality of the museum. To put it differently, by decentring the museum it is possible to put young people's museum experiences in a broader sociocultural context, and, in doing so, to examine the role played by the institution in that context.

Young people and museums have been a topic of discussion since the late 1970s (see Andrews and Asia 1979 and O'Connell and Alexander 1979 for pioneering studies). The growing importance of audience-centred approaches and inclusionary practices, the rise of partnerships with schools, and an increased recognition of the rights and requirements of children and young people have all played a part in fostering an interest in the subject (Lemerise 1995; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Young-Bruehl 2012; Modest 2013; Timbart 2013; Drotner, Knudsen and Mortenesen 2017). For decades now, museums have steadily developed their programmes and offers aimed at young people. Simultaneously, on a more theoretical level, research has sought to develop our comprehension of young people's needs and wants with regard to museums. It is to this growing body of knowledge that the present study aspires to contribute.

The study addresses the following research questions:

- How do young people perceive, understand and experience museums?
- Which emotions do young people associate with museums and museum visits?
- Can museums genuinely be relevant to young people?
- What roles do the issues of power, representation and access play in the relationship between young people and museums?

In the following sections, I present the research aims and the knowledge gaps that this study addresses. Furthermore, I explain the rationale for this

enquiry and delineate how the topic is approached from an academic and a personal point of view. I then explain the importance and contributions of this study, before describing the Luxembourgish context. Although the scope and results of the study are not limited to Luxembourg, it is important to give an overview of the context in which the research has taken place. Finally, I conclude this chapter by outlining the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Research aims and knowledge gaps

Starting with the challenges that museums face on an international level in reaching and engaging with young people (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lemerise 1995; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Timbart 2013), this study seeks to explore the relationship between the two. It aims to find out whether there is a place for museums in young people's lives and, if so, how museums may fit into young people's broader social and cultural contexts. The focus is on young people: how they perceive, understand and experience museums. It explores these elements from a cognitive, emotional and sociocultural perspective. Rather than identifying these elements from the standpoint of museums, this study aims to revolve around the perspectives of young people and make their voices central.

To achieve this, I have chosen to decentre the museum: theoretically, by drawing on literature from a wider range of fields, such as youth studies; and practically, through my methodology. Most importantly, this approach allows me to investigate the power inequalities that underlie the relationship between young people and museums: an issue that can only be fully examined at a distance from the museum as an institution. Indeed, as I now explain, the gaps in previous research have to be addressed in theoretical *and* practical terms in order to generate new insights and make a contribution to the knowledge. By opting for a methodology that enables theories to be derived direct from the data, it is possible to put young people's experiences at the centre of the enquiry.

As the following sections show, the research gaps can be divided into two main categories. The first type of gap results from a (sometimes) narrow focus on museums and museum studies. The second emanates from the

methodological underpinnings. However, these two types of gap are not separate from each other; rather, they are related in many ways (for example, concerning the subject of power), and it is at this intersection that this study is situated. By drawing on a range of disciplines that are (seemingly) unrelated to museums and by taking an exploratory and qualitative approach, it is possible to add to the current knowledge in significant ways.

1.2.1 Decentring the museum

In discussions on the topic of young people and museums in everyday conversation and on social media, the idea of young people (and potentially any 'under-served' community) being 'challenging' for institutions or 'hard to reach' is common (see Birkett 2016). More than mere platitudes, these expressions account for an ethnocentric stance that is worth examining and calling into question. Indeed, if we describe young people as 'hard to reach', we are putting the museum at the centre and the people on the periphery; in other words, we are implying that the problem resides with young people, not with the institution. However, if we turn this point of view around, is it possible that museums, rather than young people, are hard to reach?

A number of studies have analysed the ways in which young people make sense of museums, often with a special focus on education and learning. In fact, education is one of the prevailing lenses through which research has viewed this age group. For example, it has investigated young people's interests, their preferred learning styles and the different learning outcomes resulting from involvement with museums (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Timbart 2013). In addition, the different educational approaches (for example, a participative approach) that allow museums to successfully engage with this age cohort have been explored.

Nevertheless, research findings are not limited to young people's needs and wants from an educational point of view. Studies have also examined how young people experience the social space of the museum; for example, how and with whom they like to visit (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lussier-Desrochers,

Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007; Kelly and Bartlett 2009). In addition, a great deal of research has focused on young people's attitudes to and images of museums (Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2013; Drotner, Knudsen and Mortenesen 2017). These aspects have been of particular interest to researchers because they relate to the widely held belief that young people have negative opinions about museums. Indeed, a widespread belief among the general population and certain museum professionals is that young people are not interested in museums (Timbart 2013). A number of authors, therefore, have examined the barriers that might prevent young people from visiting museums (Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2007; Whitaker 2016). Furthermore, researchers have tried to determine the influence that museums can have on young people's lives, especially in terms of a positive impact on their personal and social skills (Baum, Hein and Solvay 2000; Linzer and Munley 2015).

In previous research on young people and museums, the focus has generally been on museums or, to a lesser extent, the duo of museums and schools. For example, a number of studies have:

- concentrated on museum visitors in isolation, rather than including non-visitors (Linzer and Munley 2015);
- investigated school visitors rather than independent visitors³ (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979);
- collected data in museums and schools (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Timbart 2007);
- pivoted around literature from museum studies and cultural studies (Xanthoudaki 1998; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Whitaker 2016); or

³ The term 'independent visitors' is used to differentiate young people who visit museums in their leisure time from those who visit with a school (Xanthoudaki 1998).

- concentrated on one type of museum (often art museums⁴) (Xanthoudaki 1998; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Linzer and Munley 2015).

Therefore, a shift of emphasis was needed to shed new light on the relationship between young people and museums and to provide additional and complementary viewpoints.

This study looks at the museum from the outside. Rather than limiting the investigation to young people's perspectives and experiences of museums, the aim is to understand the place that these institutions occupy in their lives. The museum does not exist in a vacuum: it is situated in the cultural, social, historical and political landscape. This study, therefore, asks how this circumstance affects young people's engagement with and understanding of museums. It also seeks to understand the connections between young people's cultural and social lives. For example, it is widely acknowledged that many of the social and cultural experiences of young people are characterised by their (subordinate) position in relation to adults (Flasher 1978; Bessant 2012; Young-Bruehl 2012; Love and DeJong 2014; Gibson and Edwards 2016). By taking this into consideration, it is possible to establish the degree to which these tensions can be found in the relationship between young people and museums. It is then interesting to determine what these power inequalities can mean for young people's engagement – and non-engagement. For this reason, it is also essential to move away from seeing the museum from a school perspective. In this study, young people are considered in their own right – neither solely as (potential) museum audiences nor solely as students. Furthermore, the research was conducted in places where young people had chosen to go and where they were not compelled to participate. This was important for examining tensions resulting from power inequalities between young people (on one side) and adults and museums (on the other).

⁴ In this thesis, the term 'museum' is also used to describe art museums, which may be referred to as 'art galleries' in some parts of the world.

1.2.2 An exploratory study

The 'decentring the museum' lens pervades this study as much in conceptual terms as it does in methodological terms. Previous studies on young people and museums have relied on different methods of enquiry, but the questionnaire has been the preferred method for many (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2007; Drotner, Knudsen and Mortenesen 2017). This heavy reliance on quantitative methods can be explained by their ease of implementation, especially in terms of time and cost, and their capacity to analyse a large amount of data in a relatively straightforward way (for example, through quantitative data-analysis software). Most studies have not relied exclusively on quantitative methods such as questionnaires, though, and have instead used a mixed-methods approach (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007). In general, in those analyses the aim of such qualitative methods as focus groups has been to complement a primary quantitative survey.

Thanks to these methods, research has been able to generate extensive knowledge on the topic, expanding our understanding of young people and museums and providing a solid basis for further enquiry. However, it is important to bear in mind that methods are never neutral. Indeed, while a specific set of methods is usually chosen because of its ability to contribute to the research aims, this methodological choice also influences the final results. In quantitative surveys, for example, the researcher defines the options and responses from which the respondent can choose (see, for example, Timbart 2007). In questionnaires, these may include demographic questions, multiple-choice and closed-ended questions, and rating scales. Even if many questionnaires also include open-ended questions, the responses should not be confused with data that results from qualitative research: they serve to shed light on answers to existing questions, and they lack the necessary depth to add new insights *per se*. Similarly, the qualitative methods that are used in mixed-methods research generally help to explore the data that has been collected by quantitative surveys. In other words, they are considered to be the

auxiliary rather than the main element (see, for example, Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007).

For this study, the research method needed to allow for a degree of open-endedness, spontaneity and exploration. Taking a purely qualitative approach to understanding young people's engagement and non-engagement with museums this helped to examine areas that are not directly related to museums and have not yet been fully investigated. From the methodological angle, the museum was decentred in two main ways. Firstly, although the focus groups that I conducted for this study centred around the subject of museums, I also paid attention to being responsive to the research participants and being flexible enough to follow routes that emerged unexpectedly during our discussion. This had the potential to reveal areas of interest that neither I nor other researchers had conceived of. Above all, it opened up opportunities to explore how the participants' understandings and experiences of museums might be connected to other aspects of their lives and to explore the theories that were directly generated by these insights. Secondly, the fieldwork was conducted in young people's own places – places that were not connected to museums or other institutions (such as the school) where they were under adult authority and control. This allowed them to participate freely in the study. As the following chapters show, this practical distance proved to be helpful in conceptual, methodological and ethical terms.

Viewing these methodological elements within an interdisciplinary framework reveals that there is an intimate connection between the methodology and the theoretical framework of this study. Indeed, in addition to literature from museum studies (especially on museum education and visitor studies), I relied on literature from such diverse fields as youth studies, sociology, cultural studies, communication studies, psychology, cognitive science and law. While the museum studies theories were present from the start (due to my academic background in this field), many of the theories relating to young people and their social and cultural experiences (such as those relating to adultism) were developed directly from the views expressed by the research participants. In this way, the study is able to shed light on such under-researched aspects as representation, access and, most importantly,

power. Through its sociocultural approach, it provides a broad exploration of the relationship between young people and museums.

1.3 Rationale and approach

This study is the result of a combination of circumstances, interests and influences. I have been passionate about museums since my undergraduate courses in art history. Since then, I have been fascinated and intrigued by the politics of the museum, the way in which the museum acts as a site of contested power and the position that the institution occupies in society. My master's degree in museum studies further developed my love for museums and museum research. Undoubtedly, the foundation for this project lies partly in my master's dissertation, which explored the sensitive subject of individual and collective identities and the museum's social role through an analysis of two exhibitions held in Luxembourg in 2012 (Brasseur 2015).

In addition, tying in with my interest in how power is distributed in the museum and my personal belief in social justice and equality, I have naturally been drawn to such subjects as access, inclusion, participation and education. The commonality of these areas is that they put people at the centre. As Canadian researcher Michel Allard (1993: 773) expresses it, 'Sans le public, le musée n'existe pas', or, in English, 'Without the public, there is no museum'. I believe, therefore, that it is essential to make a concerted effort to render museums relevant and accessible to the widest range of people – especially those from the most vulnerable sections of society and those who may feel excluded from the 'traditional' museum. In doing so, museum researchers and professionals can all make significant contributions towards ensuring and fostering the human right of access to culture, which is declared in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN 1948).

Besides this conflation of personal and academic interests, four informal interviews with museum professionals in Luxembourg were at the root of the

present study.⁵ Indeed, an issue that was cited several times during these interviews was the difficulty that Luxembourgish museums face in reaching young people. The museum professionals seemed to be well aware of the problem; they reported that a number of ongoing efforts were being made at local and national levels, but with only moderate success. Some of the interviewees also expressed an attitude of resignation, implying that they believed that young people were simply not interested in museums. Other explanations, in their opinion, were related to structural and practical factors. The most notable of these was the fact that secondary school timetables make it difficult to allocate time for museum visits, because there would not be enough time for a visit within one subject period (although this barrier would not prevent young people from visiting in their leisure time).

Taking these intriguing remarks as a starting point, I began to look into research on young people and museums across the globe. It quickly became clear that the 'problem' was not limited to Luxembourg and that the relationship between young people and museums was potentially more complex than was generally perceived. Thinking back to my own cultural and social experiences as a child and as a young person, I became convinced of the importance of investigating the topic and contributing to a better understanding of young people's experiences. Moreover, I recognised that the research topic would have theoretical and practical implications, simultaneously informing academic research and cultural practice – an element that is particularly pertinent in the field of museum studies.

The rationale for the study blends with the way in which I approached the research topic. The aims, the researched community and my personal convictions called for an ethical, respectful and empathetic approach. The disempowerment that young people may face in their social and cultural lives is an unbroken thread in this thesis – from the literature review to the research

⁵ These interviews were conducted prior to this research project in 2013. Although they were a major influence on the conception of the research topic, they are by no means connected to this study.

process and findings. It was important, therefore, to develop a framework that would extend beyond museum studies to gain an understanding of young people's positions and experiences. My wider academic background (for example, in media and cultural studies) and the fields of enquiry that were opened up by the research topic helped to build an interdisciplinary foundation and provided the tools with which to carry out the investigation. At the same time, it was paramount for me to be mindful of my position as an adult and as a researcher. Reflexivity and self-scrutiny were necessary to mitigate the effects of the power imbalances that resulted from my privileged position in relation to the research participants (Best 2007; Leonard 2007).

In research, the framework and aims are often refined as we go along and as our understanding of the subject grows. The early stages of this research project raised questions and uncertainties about the most suitable methods of investigation. After identifying the research gaps, it was important to comprehend their origins. It was only then that I was able to grasp the extent to which the theoretical and methodological frameworks needed to form a whole in order to make a significant contribution to the field. I realised that a shift of emphasis was needed: a shift away from museums and towards young people. This shift was made possible by relying on different disciplines (the theoretical part) and devising a qualitative methodology that would put young people's voices at the centre and consider them as social beings rather than as (potential) museum audiences (the practical part).

To summarise, the rationale for this study developed from a set of circumstances and factors. Firstly, the study investigates the relationship between museums and young people: an age group that is traditionally challenging for museums to engage with. Secondly, it responds to my academic and personal interests in opening up the museum and enabling a wide range of people (especially the most vulnerable social groups) to access these institutions. Thirdly, through its topic and its approach, this study has the potential to influence academic research and museum practice. The rationale and my own values influenced how I approached the topic. As a result, an important aspect of this study is its consideration of the power imbalances in the research process and findings.

1.4 Significance and contribution

Broadly speaking, the intended contribution of this study can be understood in terms of cultural and social justice and equality. More specifically, the significance of this investigation is related to the following three main and interconnected lines:

1. A sociocultural understanding of young people and museums.
2. A reflection of how power operates in the relationship between the two, and what this may imply for museums.
3. A case for using qualitative research through a 'decentring the museum' approach and perspective to examine how young people (and potentially any other communities) engage, or do not engage, with museums.

Firstly, this study provides, through its theoretical and methodological frameworks, a sociocultural approach to understanding young people's perceptions and experiences of museums. An investigation of young people's position in a broad social and cultural context points towards the fact that their relationship with museums does not exist in a vacuum. To fully understand the subject, it is essential to consider young people from a wider perspective, without limiting the investigation to their relationship with museums. Up until now, young people and museums have mostly been researched from and for the perspective of education and learning. As a result, studies have focused on young people as visitors or as potential audiences, while paying less attention to the context in which their experiences of museums take place. In this thesis, however, I argue that to get the full picture of the relationship between young people and museums it is important to examine how young people's social experiences are linked to their cultural ones, most notably in terms of power imbalances. To do so, it is important for researchers to build on young people's voices rather than their own assumptions and theories.⁶

⁶ See Chapter 4 for more details about how theories emerged in the present study.

Related to this, and also of significance, this study deconstructs certain assumptions about young people's cultural practices. For example, it calls into question well-established notions, such as 'cultural participation', 'culturally engaged' and the definition of 'culture' itself (see also Willis 1990; Gibson 2001; Gibson and Edwards 2016; Taylor 2016; LaPlaca Cohen 2017). Most importantly, the study shifts the focus away from museums and onto young people, reclaiming a rethinking of traditional assumptions and definitions.

Secondly, the findings allow museums to learn as much about themselves as they learn about young people. Generally, society has dealt with the 'youth question' as a debate between tradition and modernity; that is, between fear of change and aspirations for renewal (Fornäs 1995; Cohen and Ainley 2000). Therefore, as argued by Cohen and Ainley (2000: 89):

[...] young people have had to carry a peculiar burden of representation; everything they do, say, think or feel, is scrutinized by an army of professional commentators for signs of the times. Over the last century, the 'condition of youth question' has assumed increasing importance as being symptomatic of the health of the nation or the future of the race, the welfare of the family or the state of civilization-as-we-know-it.

Consequently, for museums, a reflection on their relationship with young people can open up pathways to fresh and regenerative ideas. It has been argued, for example, that young people help museums to explore new methods and practices, and that they can become key partners in museums' development (Lemerise 1995: 405; Timbart 2013). More importantly, however, museums (not just young people) have much to gain from a fruitful relationship. It has been shown, for example, that youth programmes enable museums to deconstruct stereotypes and that engaging with young people has a positive impact on the attitudes of museum staff towards this cohort and other audiences (Baum, Hein and Solvay 2000; Linzer and Munley 2015). Thus, this study has the potential to enable museums to reflect on their praxis, notably in terms of power inequalities, which may facilitate their engagement with young people and other communities in the future.

Thirdly, the study advocates the use of qualitative and empathetic methods from outside the museum to research the ways in which people interact, or do not interact, with the institution. While quantitative visitor surveys in museums have a long-established tradition of counting visitors and defining them in terms of demographics, qualitative studies emerged at a later point in time in order to analyse how people use museums (see Hooper-Greenhill 1999a; Falk 2012). However, as described earlier in the context of research on young people and museums, qualitative studies are usually employed as an additional element in a mixed-methods approach, rather than as a stand-alone method of enquiry. At the same time, qualitative studies are necessary to gain a fuller picture of people's perceptions and uses of museums and, more broadly, of their cultural participation (Hooper-Greenhill 1999b; Kelly 2004; Taylor 2016). Moreover, as Hooper-Greenhill (1999c: 11) argues, only research from outside the museum can help to unravel the place that the institution occupies in people's lives. Finally, doing qualitative research in people's own places, such as conducting the focus groups in youth clubs for this study, allows researchers to listen to and engage with different people (visitors and non-visitors) on their own terms. Being open and responsive to the research participants makes it possible to explore new and unforeseen areas of interest and construct theories accordingly.

Overall, the implications of this study can be found on the level of a deeper understanding of young people's experiences and perceptions of museums, and, above all, how their cultural and social lives are related. By employing a qualitative framework, the investigation contributes to the comprehension of not only young people's relationship with museums but also young people themselves. As a group, young people are particularly prone to being stereotyped (by society and by museums); the findings of this research contribute to deconstructing some of these prejudices and promote a more nuanced approach to this heterogeneous group. On a theoretical level, this has direct implications for how museums understand and conduct research with young people (and other groups). On a practical level, it allows museums to rethink their praxis and their strategy for engaging with young people and other communities.

1.5 The Luxembourgish context

1.5.1 Country and population

Comparable to Oxfordshire in terms of size and population, Luxembourg covers 2,586 square kilometres and had approximately 600,000 inhabitants in 2018 (Information and Press Service of the Luxembourg Government 2018). The capital, Luxembourg City, is the most populous area, with about 120,000 inhabitants (Ville de Luxembourg 2018). Due to its central location between Belgium, France and Germany, the open borders of the European Union (EU) and its official multilingualism, Luxembourg also welcomes nearly 180,000 daily cross-border commuters from its neighbouring countries (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg [STATEC] 2018a). Luxembourg's reliance on a foreign workforce is not a new phenomenon; in fact, it can be traced back to the emergence of the steel industry at the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, similar to the situation in other European countries, the steel industry has largely been replaced by other work. In that respect, Luxembourg is renowned for its finance sector – even though the employment in this sector constitutes only 10% of the country's total workforce (Agence pour le développement de l'emploi [ADEM] 2018).

In addition to the cross-border commuters, the resident population of Luxembourg is also international. Indeed, almost 50% of its population is made up of non-nationals, which means that the country has the highest proportion of foreign citizens in the EU (Eurostat 2018; STATEC 2019a). In Luxembourg City, this ratio rises to 70%, and these non-nationals comprise people of 168 different nationalities (Ville de Luxembourg 2018). People from Portugal make up approximately one-third of the non-national population in Luxembourg, making the Portuguese community the most important in the country (STATEC 2019a).

The coexistence of the resident and non-resident populations is facilitated by Luxembourg's multilingualism. Besides the many languages spoken by various sections of the population, Luxembourg has three official

languages: Luxembourgish, French and German.⁷ These official languages are all taught in primary school. In secondary school, English is added to the curriculum and students are given the option to study additional languages, such as Spanish, Italian and Portuguese.

1.5.2 Young people's educational and social contexts

Formal education in Luxembourg is compulsory from ages 4 to 16. The school system – which is mostly public – comprises eight years of primary education (from ages 4 to 11) (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse [MEN] 2018a). Secondary education is provided for up to seven years, depending on the type. For example, general education and technical education, which prepare students for university and higher technical studies, have a duration of seven years. Vocational training, however, lasts for six years, of which the final three years consist of an apprenticeship where the students combine school and employment.

In general, after-school activities are not run by schools themselves and take place outside school time. Sport, arts and outdoor activities are attended by young people during their leisure time and are organised by various public and private organisations. Youth clubs, which provided the research setting for the present study, operate in a similar way: they are not linked to the school system and are not compulsory. Being open for all young people to attend whenever they want, they are considered an important player in non-formal education (MEN 2016). The role of youth clubs and youth work in Luxembourg is explored more fully in Section 4.5.2.

Although the location and details of the participants in this study have been anonymised, it is worth noting that the participants roughly reflected the overall ratio of nationals to non-nationals in the Luxembourgish population (see above). Approximately half of the participants were non-nationals or came from

⁷ The status of the three official languages differs slightly. Luxembourgish is the national language and French is the language used for legislation. Luxembourgish, French and German are all administrative and judiciary languages (Information and Press Service of the Luxembourg Government 2008).

households where Luxembourgish was not their first language. Although I did not aim to have a formally representative sample of the population in the focus groups, I did aim for diversity in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status by conducting research in various parts of the country: north and south of Luxembourg City and in the central region. Indeed, as I explain in Section 4.8, youth clubs are integral to their surrounding neighbourhoods and the young people visiting the clubs generally reflect the overall composition of the local community; for example, in their ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Returning to the subject of formal education, it is interesting to note that, even though Luxembourg has its own university, the majority of young people who move on to tertiary education study abroad (Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche [MESR] 2018). This can be explained by the long tradition of Luxembourgish students leaving the country for their studies. The University of Luxembourg was only founded in 2003; besides, although it has continuously developed its offer since its establishment, this remains limited in comparison with the variety of study opportunities available through universities in other countries. Most young people studying abroad do not travel far, though; the majority study in neighbouring Germany, Belgium or France. Many of them spend Monday to Friday at their university and return home at the weekend. A number of students study in other, mostly European, countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), Austria, the Netherlands and Portugal.

As of 1 January 2019, young people under the age of 24 account for 27.7% of the total population in Luxembourg (STATEC 2019b). According to the 2011 national census, 98.6% of young people under the age of 20 live at home with one or both of their parents (Willems et al. 2013). After the age of 20, the ratio of young people leaving their parental home increases steadily and at age 29, more than 80% no longer live with their parents. As the national census takes place once every ten years, these figures may have changed since 2011. Indeed, Luxembourg is regularly listed as one of the most expensive countries to live in and the increase of living costs, especially those related to housing, has been steady and particularly dramatic over the last decade (Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research [LISER] 2018). These circumstances may well have affected the age at which young people are able

to leave their parental home – especially given that the unemployment rate among young people between 15 and 24 years old is approximately 15% (STATEC 2018b).

Being a member of the United Nations (UN), Luxembourg has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989). This grants children (in legal terms, any person under the age of 18) a number of rights, which are ensured by the Ombuds Committee for Children's Rights (ORK). To do so, the ORK presents an annual report on the state of children's rights in Luxembourg, makes recommendations in cases where children's rights are not respected and has a say on laws concerning children (ORK 2018). In addition, the committee promotes children's freedom of expression and their participation in society (ORK 2014: 7). It also functions as a point of contact for children to submit grievances regarding their rights and acts as a mediator on their behalf (ORK 2014: 7). The ORK's range of missions testifies to the importance of its role in Luxembourg society.

At the age of 18, young people attain majority and have full legal capacity and responsibilities. With their majority, young people also obtain the right to vote. There have been attempts to lower the voting age to 16 in recent years, but these have not been successful.

1.5.3 Museums

The multiculturalism and multilingualism that characterise Luxembourg society are also infused in the museum sector. Indeed, as explained above, many of the country's museum professionals have studied abroad; consequently, they bring influences and approaches from different countries to their work. Museum thinking and practice in Luxembourg is varied, so it is difficult to summarise and define specifically. Approaches vary considerably between different museums. In general, we can observe that education plays an important role in Luxembourgish museum practice and that most museums offer a wide range of educational programmes for schools, especially primary schools. It can also be said that although museum practice in Luxembourg has developed significantly over the last few years, it remains 'traditional' in many ways. Even though

experimental approaches were observed in some museums in the past, Luxembourgish museum practice is far from the innovative approach taken in some museums in the UK and the United States (US), notably in terms of community engagement.⁸

Reasons for this may reside in the fact that the museum sector in Luxembourg is relatively young. Although the first museum, the National Museum of History and Art, dates back to 1939, the vast majority of museums have emerged over the last three decades and especially since 1995, when Luxembourg was the European Capital of Culture (Robin 2016: 3). Today the country counts between 50 and 80 museums, depending on the definition that is used. In his comprehensive analysis of the museum sector, Robin (2016) surveyed 66 institutions based on the definitions provided by the International Council of Museums and the European Group on Museum Statistics.⁹ With 11.7 institutions per capita, Luxembourg has one of the highest concentrations of museums in the EU (Robin 2016: 2–3). Although this figure appears to be fairly high, it is worth noting that the size of Luxembourg's museums varies considerably, ranging from 60 square metres to 80,000 square metres. In addition, one-third of the institutions open seasonally, typically during the summer months only.

Two of Luxembourg's museums – the National Museum of History and Art and the National Museum of Natural History – are owned by the state, while the others are owned and run by different public and private bodies. The largest group of museums is composed of those relating to science and technology, especially mining and manufacturing due to their important role in Luxembourg's history (Robin 2016: 5). Other common types include archaeology and history museums and art museums. In total, the museum

⁸ For two examples of contemporary practice in Luxembourg museums, see Brasseur 2015.

⁹ Most of the figures used in this section date from 2012. This is the last year when the Luxembourg government conducted a comprehensive survey of the museum sector using comparable statistical data based on data norms by the European Group on Museum Statistics (see Robin 2016: 2). Since then, official figures in Luxembourg rely mainly on museums' in-house surveys, for which each institution uses different criteria.

workforce is made up of 667 people, including paid staff, freelancers and volunteers (Robin 2016: 13–14). Museums occupy an important place in the public consciousness, especially because of their physical presence; many of them are familiar landmarks. However, in absolute figures, museums represent only a small proportion of the total culture and heritage sector, which employs around 19,000 people altogether (Robin 2018).

More than three-quarters of museums are located outside Luxembourg City, but it is the capital's museums that account for more than 50% of annual visitors (Robin 2016: 9). This can be explained by the fact that the capital's museums are usually the largest and that they are open during the whole year (as opposed to some regional museums, which are open seasonally). In addition, the capital undoubtedly draws the majority of tourists to the country.

The multicultural and, above all, the multilingual aspects, are also apparent in how museums communicate with their audiences. In fact, it is common practice for texts, audio tours and guided tours to be provided in two or more languages. However, although museums cater *in theory* for different audiences, their visitors remain segregated along ethnic and socioeconomic lines. For example, it has been noted that members of the Portuguese community visit museums in lower numbers than people of other nationalities (Robin 2016: 11). Although museum attendance has increased in recent decades, the majority of visitors continue to be from higher educational and socioeconomic backgrounds – similar to the situation in other European countries (Falk and Katz-Gerro 2016; Robin 2016). In addition, the museum workforce is not necessarily representative of the diversity of the Luxembourgish population. Although it has not (yet) attracted much attention in Luxembourg, the issue of workforce diversity in the arts and culture sector is increasingly being discussed in other countries, such as the UK (Arts Council England 2019).

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured as follows. This first chapter has introduced the overall framework of this study on young people and museums. The glimpses of a few

scenes that took place during the fieldwork plunged us into the heart of the investigation. These vignettes were not chosen at random; the aim of including them was to show how a number of young people gathered during their leisure time to participate voluntarily, and often enthusiastically, in fieldwork for a study on museums. Although the participants might not all have been overly enthusiastic about *museums*, they were keen to express their (positive and negative) opinions on the subject. Given the popular belief that young people lack interest in museums, the scenes from the fieldwork raise some questions about the validity of such stereotypes. Furthermore, the vignettes hinted towards the intricate intertwinement of the conceptual and methodological frameworks. Indeed, this study seeks to decentre the museum in both theoretical and practical terms in order to explore young people's perspectives and experiences of these institutions. It aims to generate a deeper understanding of young people's relationship with museums by considering, for example, how their social and cultural lives overlap. Therefore, many of the ideas and theories relating to youth that are discussed in this thesis are rooted in the research participants' accounts. In this introductory chapter, the research aims were articulated, and explanations were provided to show how these aims address a number of knowledge gaps in previous studies. After relating the research rationale and the approach to the subject from academic and personal points of view, the importance and implications of this study were made clear and the Luxembourgish context was presented.

Chapters 2 and 3 take a closer look at the literature on young people and museums. Chapter 2 explores the subject of young people and museums from a museological point of view. It investigates the different ways in which young people are defined and categorised in everyday usage and in museum and youth-related literature. These considerations are important, as these definitions and categorisations are constructions (rather than 'realities') that affect perceptions of and research on young people. The chapter then examines the reasons museums are interested in young people. Two main discourses are identified in the studies on the topic. These centre around firstly, the development of educational provision for young people, and secondly, the inclusion of young people in terms of representation and participation. As there

are both practical and theoretical aspects of the subject that is investigated in this thesis, the chapter reviews the contributions from the side of museum practice and from the side of research on young people and museums. The first section describes the different ways in which museums approach and engage with young people, focusing in particular on how power is distributed between institutions and young people. The approaches that are investigated are grouped under four different yet related headings: education, participation, open space and appropriation. The second section concentrates on the results generated by research on young people and museums. It explores five main themes that have emerged from previous studies: young people as a proportion of museum visitors; the images young people have of museums; young people's needs and wants; the barriers young people encounter; and issues relating to how young people and their culture are valued in museums.

While Chapter 2 prepares the ground for this study, it also reveals the limits of a purely museological approach to young people and museums. Therefore, Chapter 3 puts young people's museum experiences into a broader perspective and tries to locate these experiences in their wider social and cultural context. The starting point for the enquiry is young people, not merely as a museum audience but as a group of individuals who are affected by an unequal distribution of power. Besides, the origins of many of the theories outlined in this chapter can be traced back to the focus groups and have been investigated as a result of the fieldwork. The chapter thus reviews the literature that contributes to this enhanced understanding of young people in a broader context. It identifies the stereotypes and prejudices that young people are likely to encounter, and it discusses the pervasiveness of adultism in how society perceives and approaches young people. In particular, the general inclination to regard young people as objects of concern is likely to lead to patronising and paternalistic attitudes, in social and in cultural terms. The issue of rights and agency in the context of young people and museums deserves further consideration, and some of the approaches taken in this thesis need to be explained. All in all, the complexity of young people's lived experiences, including their different relationships with museums, calls for an increased awareness of intersectionality and interdisciplinarity in enquiries.

Chapter 4, then, provides a discussion of the methodological framework. It identifies how the framework addresses the gaps in previous research and how it contributes to the aims of this study. The chapter also provides a reflection on researcher positionality and its impact on the research process. Furthermore, the methodological approach, which is influenced by grounded theory and ethnography, is explained. As with the conceptual framework, the methodology and method seek to decentre the museum and put young people at the centre instead. The method used in this study was focus groups, which were conducted with young people aged between 12 and 21 in youth clubs in Luxembourg. Prime importance was attached to assuring that an ethical and empathetic approach was followed during the entire research process, from its conception to its implementation and finalisation. The final part of the chapter is devoted to a description of the data collection and analysis. Consistent with the overarching empathetic approach taken in this study, active listening (Rogers and Farson 2015) was helpful in collecting rich data and investigating the participants' emotions during the focus groups. The constant comparative method, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and adapted to focus groups by Krueger and Casey (2015), helped to generate theoretical categories that were close to the data.

Chapters 5 and 6 present and discuss the findings of this study. In a way that is reminiscent of Chapters 2 and 3, the first of these chapters takes a more museological perspective on young people and museums, while the second decentres the museum to offer a broader view. In Chapter 5, the accent is on the different ways in which the focus-group participants perceived and experienced museums. The chapter focuses on the diverse and nuanced ways in which the participants understood various aspects of the museum. For example, the participants showed that they had an elaborate understanding of the museum's complex roles and missions, as reflected in the images they had of museums. An important part of their museum experience revolved around learning in the widest sense, which encompassed being curious about the contemporary world, drawing links between the past and the present, making emotional connections and involving the body in the learning experience. The findings also indicate that learning and entertainment are not mutually exclusive

but intimately connected. In addition, they show that, contrary to popular belief, young people may well adopt a critical rather than an unambiguously enthusiastic position on digital technologies in museums. Furthermore, in the eyes of the participants, museums are places that can cater for social interaction as much as solitary engagement. Museums can also provide opportunities for restorative experiences.

Chapter 6, which aims to decentre the museum, takes an interdisciplinary perspective in order to discuss the findings. Drawing primarily on youth studies, it investigates participants' perceptions and experiences from social, cultural and political points of view. It picks up the theme of power that is discussed in Chapter 5. In the first section, the concept of relevance is explored and an analysis is provided of how relevance connects to participants' museum practices. In addition, the question is raised about the extent to which museums can foster relevant experiences for young people, who represent such a heterogeneous group. The second section provides a discussion of how the culture and values of museums often differ from those of young people. These different understandings explain, for example, ill-founded assumptions that portray young people as culturally disengaged. The third section of the chapter is dedicated to the power inequalities that underlie the relationship between young people and museums. For example, many young people experience museums through school visits. While these visits have the potential to bring museums closer to young people, they can also act as a deterrent if certain conditions are not met. Similar tensions, especially with regard to compulsory visits, underlie museum trips with other adults, such as parents. Indeed, this section argues that enforced museum visits can create a barrier to access. In addition, other direct and indirect barriers, such as the fear of not knowing and the fear of not having the right to belong, represent further hurdles to engagement.

Finally, the conclusion of this thesis gathers together the different threads of the study. It discusses how the research questions address gaps in previous research and how the study set out to provide an exploration of young people's perceptions and experiences from the perspective of decentring the museum. The findings are summarised and how they relate to the research

aims is discussed. Furthermore, the contribution of this research to existing knowledge and its implications for research and museum practice. The chapter then considers the limitations of this study and the need for future research, before closing with a personal reflection.

1.7 Conclusion

Young people and museums are often perceived as an unlikely duo. On the one hand, museums have traditionally reported difficulties in engaging with young people: a circumstance that has been observed for decades all over the world. Indeed, the first studies on the subject date back to the late 1970s; and while much has changed since then with regard to how museums approach and cater for young people, some of the challenges remain the same (see Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979). On the other hand, popular opinion holds that young people are not interested in museums and do not visit them – except, perhaps, on school trips. However, research has shown that, in some cases and places at least, these assumptions result from beliefs rather than from facts (Lemerise 1999). It becomes apparent that the youth question in museums is likely to be underpinned by suppositions and stereotypes. There also seems to be a general tendency to adopt a museum-centric and an adult-centric stance when discussing the relationship between museums and young people. However, by reversing this standpoint, listening to young people and considering the interconnectedness of their social and cultural experiences, it becomes possible to put that relationship into a wider context. For example, in many aspects of their social lives, young people lack agency and choice (voting rights are a prominent example) and are subordinate to adults. This study investigates the extent to which some of these processes can also be found in their cultural lives, notably in relation to museums. Thus, by focusing on the unequal distribution of power between young people and adults in society and in museums, this study contributes to our understanding of the ways in which young people engage, and do not engage, with museums.

The following two chapters are dedicated to reviewing the literature and analysing discourses on the subject. While the first chapter takes a museological perspective, exploring how museums and research have

investigated the topic, the second chapter takes an interdisciplinary approach. Together, they prepare the conceptual framework for this enquiry by putting young people at the centre and considering their overall context.

Chapter 2

Young people and museums: a museumological perspective

2.1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter, I explained the aims of this study and the gaps it intends to address. Chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated to the conceptual framework. In this chapter, the focus is on young people from a museological perspective: why have young people been a topic of interest, and on what terms have museums and research engaged with them? To answer these questions and to situate the present research, I draw on museum studies literature and on practical examples from the field. In Chapter 3, I move away from the museum point of view and focus on young people. By using literature from youth studies and prejudice studies, among others, I foreground the tensions underlying young people's relationships with adults, society and, ultimately, museums. It needs to be said that whereas the museological perspective has been a constituent part of this research project since its inception, many of the ideas and theories around youth that are discussed in Chapter 3 have emerged from the focus groups that I conducted for this study.

As shown in the following sections, the topic of young people and museums has been of interest to museums and researchers since the late 1970s. While the subject has been explored with only intermittent frequency over the last four decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in more recent years – most notably in non-academic contexts. Examples include:

- the mainstream media (Leimbach 2005; Dixon 2011; Junction and the Museum of London 2012);
- blogs (Teens in Museums 2017);
- conferences (Brasseur 2017a; Brasseur 2017b; Koszary 2017); and

- museum programmes, such as Takeover Day, Teen Twitter Takeover, Teens Take the Met!, Circuit, Young People's Guide to Self-Portraiture and Tate Collective.¹⁰

In this chapter I approach the topic from two complementary standpoints: research and practical examples. Before exploring the contributions made by research and the approaches taken by museums to engaging young people, however, let us consider the term 'young people' itself. How exactly do we define a young person, and what impact does our definition have on discussions about young people and museums?

2.2 Young people: a question of definition

The variety of terms used to describe young people is made apparent through an examination of museum and youth-related literature, museum attendance figures (age is a conventional way of breaking down visitor numbers) and everyday usage. For the online Oxford Dictionary (Oxford Dictionaries 2018), for example:

- youth is 'the period between childhood and adult age';
- a youth is 'a young man';
- a young person is '(in the UK) a person generally from 14 to 17 years of age';
- a teenager is 'a person aged between 13 and 19 years';
- an adolescent is a young person 'in the process of developing from a child into an adult';
- a kid is 'a child or young person'; whereas

¹⁰ Takeover Day and Teen Twitter Takeover allow children and young people to take on various roles in cultural institutions. At Teens Take the Met!, young people can join in with a night of activities at the museum that are open to them only. Circuit was a collaboration between the cultural and youth sector to facilitate young people's engagement with art. In Young People's Guide to Self-Portraiture, young people create digital content for other young people around different themes, such as race and gender. Tate Collective is a programme through which groups of young people are recruited by Tate to plan and develop museum events and workshops for other young people. A list of the events and programmes referred to in this thesis can be found in Appendix 1.

- a child is a 'young human being below the age of puberty or below the legal age of majority'.

Defining young people (to use a generic term) is further complicated by the different uses of the terms in society (for example, in legislation, a person remains a child until they reach the age of majority) and across languages and cultures. It becomes apparent that, as Bessant (2012) notes, 'all these categories (child, youth, young people, adolescence) are socially constructed and quite arbitrary'.

Apart from highlighting that the categories are variable and the terms are constructed and value-laden, the issues surrounding terminology and categorisation create a number of challenges when reviewing literature on museums and young people. An investigation of research in the field reveals that it is impossible to compare results accurately due to the disparities between the source materials. From the broadest to the narrowest age groups, categories and samples of young people for research projects range from, for example, 12 to 24 (Kelly and Bartlett 2009), 16 to 26 (Mason and McCarthy 2006), 13 to 23 (Drotner, Knudsen and Mortenesen 2017), 12 to 20 (Timbart 2007), 18 to 26 (Shrapnel 2012), 14 to 19 (Andrews and Asia 1979) and 15 to 17 (Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003). More importantly than making comparisons difficult, these large variations do not do justice to people's diversity. Indeed, grouping people together in loose ways does not take account of individual contexts and backgrounds.

These disparities do not make it impossible to analyse and draw on previous research. However, they do point to the importance of being wary of broad generalisations relating to young people and museums. Although I discuss the findings of the present study and compare them with those of previous research in Chapters 5 and 6, I do not make quantitative comparisons to determine the validity of broad generalisations. Rather, the discussion of the findings provides a nuanced analysis, highlights similarities and inconsistencies with regard to previous research, and points towards areas that need further attention.

In addition, even though young people are individuals with different identities, they are likely to experience similar age-related inequalities. In her article on age-based prejudice, Judith Bessant (2012), a professor of sociology and youth studies, states:

I use the broader category of young people in this article to signal a recognition of the masculine and essentialist character of the term 'youth', and to signal a recognition of the diversity of people aged 12 to 25, not all of whom necessarily share a common identity or experience by virtue of their age. Having said that I also operate on the premise that many young people do share the experience of persistent systemic disadvantage and age based discrimination along with unequal access to valued resources. For example, young people tend to be treated in biased and unfavourable ways which too fit the description of ageism. This can result in many young people confronting basic and persistent political, legal, social and economic inequalities, in finding themselves in asymmetrical power relationships, and in having many rights and access to valued resources denied as a matter of course.

Similar to Bessant's (2012) argument above, I use the term 'young people' in the present thesis because it acknowledges the heterogeneity of the group I am referring to: people between the ages of 12 and 21, which equates to the age range of the participants in this study. However, I clearly differentiate between young people who have participated in this study – whom I refer to as 'participants' – and young people as a general group of people. Indeed, the views expressed by the participants should not be seen as being representative of the views of *all* young people.¹¹

2.3 Why museums are interested in young people

Increasingly, museums are trying to engage with and be relevant to many different people and communities in a variety of new ways. Applying these endeavours to young people is often felt to be especially challenging by museums, and the issue has been investigated for almost four decades (see

¹¹ For a detailed discussion, see Chapter 4.

Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Xanthoudaki 1998; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2013; Drotner, Knudsen and Mortenesen 2017). The main perspectives on the relationship between young people and museums can be located in two different, yet related, discussions around accessibility and relevance. The first and most notable of these ties in with the museum's educational role in its widest sense. Indeed, the majority of the academic and non-academic literature on young people and museums has explored the topic with a focus on education and learning (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Xanthoudaki 1998; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007; Drotner, Knudsen and Mortenesen 2017). Several of these studies have examined young people's perceptions of museums, their interests and their preferred learning styles, with the aim of facilitating access and engagement through improved offers and youth-centred approaches.

The second discussion surrounding young people and museums reflects the current discourse on diversity, inclusion and participation. Rather than focusing on how best to cater for young people, a number of studies have shed light on the different values and understandings that underlie young people's relationship with culture and museums (Willis 1990; Gibson 2001; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Gibson and Edwards 2016). Seen from this angle, that relationship is inextricably linked with power issues and barriers to access, which are deeply entrenched and systemic. Thus, the question goes beyond the 'fit' or success of particular museum programmes to consider how young people can be culturally included in terms of representation, participation and access. Describing the cultural dimension of social exclusion, Sandell (1998: 409–410) writes:

In addition to exclusion from economic, social and political systems, individuals can also be excluded from cultural systems. Within the cultural dimension, one might consider three main elements:

- i. Representation – the extent to which an individual's cultural heritage is represented within the mainstream cultural arena;

- ii. Participation – the opportunities an individual has to participate in the process of cultural production; and
- iii. Access – the opportunities to enjoy and appreciate cultural services (which can incorporate both i. and ii. above).

Thus, the ‘youth question’ inevitably touches on the broad spectrum of learning, including such areas as knowledge, enjoyment and emotion (Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2003). However, it also broaches important questions about systems of power that pervade the relationship between museums and the public. The interest can be genuine only if museums are willing to consider the various dimensions of their relationship with young people, scraping away the surface to reach the imperceptible.

2.4 How museums approach and engage with young people

Museums around the globe have used a variety of engagement strategies to approach young people, and in this section I provide an overview of these. However, I give neither a historical overview nor an extensive survey of the large number of programmes designed for young people. Rather, I categorise the different relationships between museums and young people through the broad lens of power. For example, how much control is a museum willing to hand over? In other words, how much freedom does it give to its users? The categories that follow are not always clear-cut, and they are not mutually exclusive. There are examples that combine several approaches simultaneously (for example, the Teens Take the Met! event held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). In addition, some approaches and examples may be intended for school visitors, while others may be aimed at independent visitors or both visitor types. It needs to be said, though, that many museum programmes are directed towards school rather than independent visitors (Xanthoudaki 1998: 169; Timbart 2013: 22).

2.4.1 Education and learning

The educational approach is certainly the most common and wide-ranging to be found in museums. Notable examples include:

- formal and informal educational programmes;
- courses, workshops and masterclasses; and
- guided tours for young people.

Education is at the core of every museum. It can be formal; for example, during school visits that are part of the curriculum. In most cases, though, education in museums is informal, because it happens outside formal educational institutions and the curriculum. The notion of education – even when referring to informal education – is often associated with some kind of framework or structure, which may be delivered by museum educators, curators or artists (Hooper-Greenhill 1999c: 21). Therefore, for some people, the term ‘education’ itself may have negative connotations (Golding 2011: 722). People may associate it with a didactic and authoritative approach that is reminiscent of formal education. From this perspective, education may be perceived as reflecting a transmission model of communication, where the sender (the museum, the curator or educator) transmits a message to the receiver (the visitor) (Hooper-Greenhill 1999c; Hooper-Greenhill 1999d). Here, the receiver (the general public, in this approach) is considered passive and the knowledge (the message) is understood in positivist terms as an objective body existing independently of the learner. Power resides in the hands of the sender.

Therefore, in museums today, the accent is generally on learning rather than education. Learning is commonly perceived as an informal and active process that is completed by choice (see also Kelly 2007). Learning is personal; it is influenced by a variety of individual factors, such as social and cultural background, previous experience and attitude (Hooper-Greenhill 1999c: 21). It is also closely connected to emotions, enjoyment and entertainment; indeed, learning and entertainment build on and reinforce each other (Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2003: 8; Kelly 2007: 165). Learning opportunities in museums can offer a wide range of outcomes. A study on the impact of learning in museums,

archives and libraries by Hooper-Greenhill et al. (2003: 12) identifies the different learning outcomes (described as generic learning outcomes, or GLOs) reported by museum users and other respondents:

- increase in knowledge and understanding;
- increase in skills;
- changes in attitudes or values;
- evidence of enjoyment, inspiration and creativity; and
- evidence of activity, behaviour and progression.

Above all, then, learning is meaning-making and making sense of the world through interpretation (Hooper-Greenhill 1999c: 21; Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2003: 8). Interpretation is influenced by our position (or positions) in society, which is determined by, for example, our age, gender and cultural background. The focus on interpretation and the construction of meanings (constructivist learning theory) resonates with an approach that is radically different from the transmission model of communication (Hooper-Greenhill 1999d). As Hall (1991) shows, audiences are not passive receivers but active constructors of meanings, which may result in negotiated or oppositional readings of messages. Similarly, Hooper-Greenhill (1999c: 16) proposes a cultural approach to communication in which communication is recognised as a 'process of sharing, participation and association'. Hooper-Greenhill (1999c: 16) further explains:

From the perspective of the cultural approach, reality is not found intact, it is shaped through a process of continuous negotiation, which involves individuals in calling on their prior experiences to actively make their own meanings, within the framework of interpretive communities.

Indeed, interpretation is not only an individual but also a collective process. As we share some aspects of our identity (gender, age and so forth) with other people, we and they may interpret certain things in similar ways. This situation makes us members of interpretive communities. With regard to young people, we might say that they are part of an interpretive community that is formed by common experiences on the basis of age (for example, their shared

sociohistorical context and day-to-day experiences, such as the school). However, young people also belong to different interpretive communities: age is only one – not the sole – component of their identity (see also Bessant 2012). Particularly relevant to the present study is Hooper-Greenhill's (1999c) extension of Fish's (1980 quoted in Hooper-Greenhill 1999c: 13–14) original literary notion of interpretive communities to include the role of social positions and power relations. Hooper-Greenhill (1999c: 14) argues that our interpretive positions are determined by our 'social, intellectual and cultural opportunities' and situated in 'relations of advantage or disadvantage'.

From here, it becomes clear to what extent a constructivist and cultural approach to communication and education differs from the positivist stance underlying the transmission model of communication described earlier. It also becomes evident that education in museums is not neutral but is shaped by power. This has a profound impact on how museums conceive of their educational role – especially with regard to young people, who, because of their age, may be in a position of disadvantage (see Chapter 3).

2.4.2 Participation

As a notion that has gained increasing popularity, participation has become an umbrella term that covers several definitions and activities. For example, in studies on cultural participation, the term may be used interchangeably with words such as 'attendance', 'engagement', 'taking part' or 'consumption' (Van Eijck 1997; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2012; Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] 2017a; LaPlaca Cohen 2017).

In the context of the present analysis, I use the term 'participation' as exemplified by Nina Simon's concept of a 'participatory museum': an institution that 'invit[es] people to actively engage as cultural participants, not passive consumers' and 'a place where visitors can create, share and connect with each other around content' (Simon 2010: ii). This understanding of participation has two major implications. Firstly, it shifts the notion from passive audiences to active participants. Secondly, in doing so, it redistributes power. As Simon

(2010: 2) explains, a participatory museum does not provide opportunities for engagement in a unidirectional way, but actively creates opportunities for co-created experiences in multidirectional ways. Depending on the type of experience, the museum hands varying degrees of control and power to participants.

Indeed, a museum can provide different types of participation. According to Simon (2010: 187), participatory projects can be contributory, collaborative, co-creative or hosted; the differences lie primarily in the levels of engagement, commitment and control that the museum is willing to offer. The key is to allow for a variety of experiences. A common misbelief is that participatory experiences are primarily about participants expressing themselves and creating content. Drawing on social media theory, Simon argues that only a minority of participants are actually creators (Simon 2010: 8–13). The vast majority prefer to participate in other ways; for example, by commenting on or organising content, or simply by watching or attending events, without creating these themselves. Whitaker (2016: 5) also acknowledges different types of participation, but differentiates mainly between active participation (the fact of being directly involved) and passive participation (taking the role of a spectator or an observer).

With this framework in mind, we can see why participation is an enticing way for museums to engage with young people. However, genuine participation is not a mere technique for attracting new visitors; above all, it is a commitment to opening up the museum and to valuing young people in their own right. Participation in this sense ties in with the characteristics of youth work. YouthLink Scotland (n.d.), the Scottish national agency for youth work, describes three essential principles of youth work:

- ‘Young people choose to participate’
- ‘The work must build from where young people are’
- ‘It recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in a learning process’.

These defining features can also be applied to museums that are involved with young people in a participatory way.

In addition to the similarities between participatory museum experiences and youth work, there are synergies in collaborations between the cultural sector and the youth sector. Working with the youth sector helps museums to learn from those who are experienced in working with young people. Community partners (for example, youth organisations) can also act as facilitators, helping museums to reach young people. Furthermore, studies have shown that effective engagement comes from those institutions that see their community partners as ‘active agents and partners’ rather than ‘beneficiaries (or supplicants)’ (Lynch 2011: 20). As Sterling (1993: 43) explains, it is essential that ‘at every level the program will be “with” young people instead of simply “for” them’ (see also Kelly and Bartlett 2009). Events like Takeover Day and Teens Take the Met! and projects such as Circuit are pertinent examples of such an approach.

The outcomes of participatory projects are numerous for participants *and* museums. An extensive study on the impact of museum programmes involving young people, many of which were participatory, showed that, years later, participants reported positive short-term outcomes (for example, personal development and social capital) and long-lasting impacts (such as a lasting relationship with museums and culture, career development and social engagement) (Linzer and Munley 2015: 11). The same study revealed that these programmes also had a positive impact on the host institutions (Linzer and Munley 2015: 60).¹² For example, museum staff reported gaining new perspectives, being more open to innovations and experiments, and having a more positive attitude towards young people and other audiences (Linzer and Munley 2015: 60, 62). From this, we can see how participatory projects can help to address the clash of cultures described by Mason and McCarthy (2006).¹³

In addition, as described in Section 2.3, opportunities for participation contribute directly to tackling cultural exclusion (see Sandell 1998). Considering

¹² Similar impacts have been reported by Baum, Hein and Solvay (2000) and Modest (2013).

¹³ For an analysis of the cultural gap between young people and museums, see Chapter 6.

the range of participatory projects that are available to young people, the case studies described by Simon (2010) and the outcomes of Linzer and Munley's (2015) study, it can be argued that participation not only contributes to cultural inclusion but also influences representation and access. Indeed, participation in institutions can have a direct bearing on representation (for example, by acknowledging and including young people's culture(s) in museums) and access (for example, by facilitating experiences that are relevant to young people).¹⁴

2.4.3 Open space

The museum as a free or open space allows young people to take over the physical space according to their needs and wants. Notable examples relating broadly to young people (some also include children and young adults) include:

- Takeover Day, England and Wales;
- Teen Twitter Takeover, UK;
- Teens Take the Met! at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York;
- sleepovers, such as Dino Snores at the Natural History Museum, London; and
- after-hours events, such as Jurassic Lounge at the Australian Museum, Sydney, and Lates at the Science Museum, London.

These events illustrate that some institutions have opened up their space to young people, enabling them to use and engage with the museum in ways that are relevant to them. While these events may appear unconventional, they often complement, rather than replace, more traditional ways of using museums. Open-space events can place more emphasis on education or entertainment aims, and most combine aspects of both. For example, at Teens Take the Met! young people can attend a variety of activities, such as workshops, art-making, music and dance (The Metropolitan Museum of Art 2018). Indeed, as Kelly (2007) shows, education, learning and entertainment

¹⁴ The concept of relevance is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

are not mutually exclusive: they are closely connected and even build on each other.

An important aspect of the open space is that it offers young people different levels of participation: activities cater for creators in addition to attendees or onlookers (see Simon 2010). The approach is reminiscent of what Gurian (2006: 118–119) calls the museum as ‘mixed-used space’: a friendly location not only for regular museum-goers but also for visitors who are not familiar with the museum and for ‘lurkers’ (that is, people who have not yet decided whether to participate). Thus, opening the museum space in such a manner can help break down barriers and reduce threshold fears. Allowing young people to use museums in ways that are familiar to them rather than to museum professionals contributes to ‘desacralising’ the museum space and makes it less intimidating – especially for visitors who are not familiar with museums.¹⁵

The open space also understands the museum as a social space (Andrews and Asia 1979). In Gurian’s (2006: 118) words, this is a ‘congregant space’: a safe place where people can socialise with strangers. These open and social spaces are particularly important for young people. Remo Largo, a specialist in paediatrics and developmental psychology (Largo and Czernin 2011: 195), observes the scarcity of places where young people can meet with their friends and peers without being chaperoned or commercially exploited. Furthermore, many of the events mentioned above take place after hours, thereby offering opportunities that may fit better with young people’s schedules and expectations (Dahan 2013a). Indeed, studies have shown that late events often attract younger audiences (compared with traditional museum audiences) and that extended opening hours satisfy young people’s desire for social occasions (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2002; Shrapnel 2012; Culture24 2018; Stockman 2018).

¹⁵ See Duncan (1995) for a discussion of the museum as a sacred, cathedral-like space.

Most importantly, though, in the museum as open space, traditional power relations are reconsidered. As we saw in the previous section, through such events as Teens Take the Met! museums share power by collaborating with youth and community partners. In addition, events like Teen Twitter Takeover and Takeover Day allow museums to (partially) hand over the reins to young people. On Teen Twitter Takeover, young people take control of museum Twitter handles, communicating and engaging with museum-related content in their own ways (Kids in Museums 2018a). During Takeover Day, children and young people can take on various roles in museums, ranging from advisors and organisers of activities to front-line staff, curators and tour guides (Kids in Museums 2018b). Such takeover events provide opportunities to break down barriers and (positively) influence the image young people have of museums. They also allow young people to gain new skills and experiences; for example, in relation to careers in the museum and cultural sector.

While the term ‘takeover’ implies a seizure of control and a power reversal, it is in fact an event that is ‘controlled’ by the museum: it is the museum that sets the limits on the amount of power that is handed to the participants. However, this is not necessarily a shortcoming; constraints can have positive effects if they are meaningful (Simon 2010: 23). Simon (2010: 22–25) argues that participation can be successful only if the experience is scaffolded; that is, if participants feel confident enough to play a part in the project (see also Sterling 1993 and Modest 2013). Simon (2010: 22–23) explains that ‘[t]he materials are not the barriers – the ideas and the confidence are’. Similarly, a study on youth programmes showed that while freedom and ownership are important factors, at the same time it is essential to offer support and advice from experienced adults when needed (Larson, Walker and Pearce 2005).

As with the participatory approach, the outcomes of the open-space approach are twofold: they influence young people and museums alike. An open space may help young people to change their perceptions of the institutions, and it can help museum professionals deconstruct stereotypes they might attach to young people (Modest 2013: 106; Linzer and Munley 2015: 62–63). In addition, as noted by Kids in Museums (2018a), takeover days help

‘museums to see their collections in a new light and better understand their younger audiences’. An open space is a step towards sharing power and actively valuing young people: their voices, opinions, presence and ways of engaging with museums and culture. It also opens the museum’s doors to young people’s cultures; in other words, it ‘allow[s] “new” people and their informal meanings and communications to colonize them, the institutions’ (Willis 1990: 149).

2.4.4 Appropriation

In the case of appropriation, a group of people occupies the museum, generally without the institution’s permission. Therefore, the term ‘approach’ cannot really be applied here, as the museum is not the initiator. It is not an organised takeover event (like those described above) but a genuine appropriation of the museum by audiences to make their voices heard. In this sense, these protests and performances do not just call power relations into question – they overthrow them. Audiences appropriate the museum and seize power.

There are a number of well-known initiatives that are not limited to young people. Collectives, such as Occupy Museums, Decolonize This Place, Culture Unstained, and Liberate Tate, have hijacked the museum space to voice their concerns: most notably, on their vision of an ethical and just museum. While some movements consist mostly of artists, others, like the Art Not Oil Coalition, involve artists, museum-goers and activists (Art Not Oil 2013).

Bring Your Beer to Museumsquartier is an example of a youth-led protest regarding young people’s right to use the museum space (a courtyard, in this case) on their own terms. The Museumsquartier (MQ) in Vienna is a large art and culture complex, which has a vast courtyard that is open to the public. Particularly during the summer, people – especially young people – can be seen using the courtyard to relax on chairs and loungers, listen to music and skate. In 2009, however, the city of Vienna announced plans to forbid people from bringing their own (alcoholic) drinks and playing music, in order to reduce litter and noise. Following a call on Facebook titled Freiheit im MQ! Bring Your Beer to Museumsquartier (Freedom at MQ! Bring Your Beer to

Museumsquartier) (Freiheit im MQ! 2009), thousands of (mostly) young people gathered in the inner courtyard with their own drinks to protest against the planned ban. The rally was successful: after the event, the city of Vienna recognised the need to secure free public spaces for young people and cancelled the ban (Largo and Czernin 2011: 345).

The aim of the Bring Your Beer to Museumsquartier protest was to reclaim the space – in this case, both a museum and a public space – to voice young people's needs. As noted by Largo (Largo and Czernin 2011: 345), the need for gathering places for young people in urban areas is particularly acute. Furthermore, as stated by the event organisers, the justification for not accepting the ban lay in the fact that the MQ is a public space funded by taxpayers (Freiheit im MQ! 2009). This shows how deeply museums, as public institutions, are embedded in society and reveals that people feel they have a stake in these places. Furthermore, when museums are seized by audiences, as illustrated in the examples above, their nature as sites of power and contest becomes apparent.

2.5 Research on young people and museums: an overview

Young people and museums have been researched and discussed since the late 1970s. A review of the available literature from that period until today, mostly from Europe and North America, reveals five recurrent themes that are discussed: firstly, young people as a proportion of museum visitors; secondly, the image young people have of museums; thirdly, young people's needs and wants with regard to museums; fourthly, the barriers young people face to accessing museums; and fifthly, issues of legitimacy. Table 1 provides an overview of the main studies on young people and museums that were used for the present thesis.

Table 1. Chronological overview of research on young people and museums (selected).

| Author (date) | Title | Method | Age group | Country/ region |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Andrews and Asia (1979) | Teenagers' attitudes about art museums | Questionnaires and peer advisory council | 14–19 | US |
| O'Connell and Alexander (1979) | Reaching the high school audience | Questionnaires (probably) | High school students | US |
| Xanthoudaki (1998) | Educational provision for young people as independent visitors to art museums and galleries: issues of learning and training | Literature review | 14–25 | Europe and North America |
| Lemerise and Soucy (1999); also Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes (2003) | Le point de vue d'adolescents montréalais sur les musées ¹⁶ | Questionnaires and focus groups | 15–17 | Canada |
| Mason and McCarthy (2006) | 'The feeling of exclusion': young peoples' perceptions of art galleries | Questionnaires | 16–26 | New Zealand |

¹⁶ Young people from Montreal's perspective on museums [my translation].

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|
| Timbart (2007); also Timbart (2013) | Adolescents et musées: état des lieux et perspectives ¹⁷ | Questionnaires and focus groups | 12–20 | France |
| Kelly and Barlett (2009) | Young people and museums | Literature review and summary of reports | 12–24 | Australia |
| Shrapnel (2012) | Engaging young adults in museums: an audience research study | Case study and online survey | 18–26 | Australia |
| Linzer and Munley (2015) | Room to rise: the lasting impact of intensive teen programs in art museums | Mixed methods | 19–36 (at the time of study) | US |
| Whitaker (2016) | Hurdles to the participation of children, families and young people in museums: a literature review | Literature review (mainly) | Various | UK |
| Drotner, Knudsen and Mortenesen (2017) | Young people's own museum views | Questionnaires | 13–23 | Denmark |

2.5.1 Young people as a proportion of museum visitors

It is widely acknowledged that regular museum visitors – especially in Europe – tend to be from higher educational backgrounds and more affluent social backgrounds, yet the influence of age is more difficult to pin down (Falk and

¹⁷ Young people and museums: current situation and perspectives [my translation].

Katz-Gerro 2016). In his survey of German visitors and non-visitors, Kirchberg (1996) notes that age has a different effect according to the type of museum. For example, he reports that while younger audiences are more likely to visit natural history museums, older audiences are more likely to visit art museums. It is also known that the factors influencing museum attendance are interrelated and that they include ethnicity, gender and geography, among others (Bennett et al. 2009; Gibson 2010). Indeed, while regular museum visitors may share some characteristics, it is important to bear in mind that the make-up of visitors is highly dependent on the location, type and approach of the museum and the composition of the population. Because studies on visitor demography are subject to variations across time and place, they should not be seen as fixed and universally applicable.

That said, any discussion on young people and museums is likely to begin with an attempt to contextualise the matter in terms of attendance figures. However, figures from official sources (such as government statistics) and museum surveys do not allow us to establish a universal attendance ratio. Several factors complicate the comparison of figures across museums and countries and, as a result, the accurate determination of the proportion of visitors who are classed as 'young'. Firstly, the number of *visits* does not equal the number of *visitors*. By counting visits, figures do not differentiate between *returning* and *new* visitors. Secondly, different surveys use different classification systems. Age brackets might be segmented in different ways (for example, based on the corresponding admission charges) and school visits may or may not be distinguished from independent visits. Thirdly, attendance figures vary widely by museum type and location. While there may be cases where attendance figures suggest few young people visit a museum, this cannot be generalised. As Lemerise (1999) points out, young people do visit museums, but they visit different museums in different numbers. Indeed, young people's attendance may be influenced by a variety of factors; for example, location, national cultural policies and opportunities for participation (Lemerise 1999: 23).

Lemerise (1999) also notes that there are higher levels of attendance among younger (12 to 14 years) cohorts than among older (15 to 19 years)

cohorts. Similar observations have been made by Haan (1997 quoted in Xanthoudaki 1998: 162) and Bardes and Lorentz (2009). Moreover, in their study of young people's cultural practices in Luxembourg, Bardes and Lorentz (2009) identify a decrease in museum attendance with age alongside an increase in other activities, such as going to concerts and the cinema. Similarly, in France, Tavan (2003) notes that young people have busy cultural lives: for example, during a period of one year, 89% of 15- to 24-year-olds went to the cinema, as opposed to only 23% of those aged over 55.¹⁸

2.5.2 Young people's images of museums

Rather than concentrating on statistics and demographics, however, most enquiries have focused on more 'qualitative' aspects. A recurring theme in the available literature centres on young people's preconceptions of museums. Interestingly, and contrary to popular belief, the image they have of museums is not unequivocally negative. For example, Drotner, Knudsen and Mortenesen (2017) found that, for young Danes, museums were 'exciting' and 'educative' besides being 'boring'. A survey among Canadian secondary school students revealed that in general, they had a positive perception of museums and good knowledge of the roles and functions of these institutions (Lemerise and Soucy 1999: 364). Most of them also found it important to have a museum in a city (Lemerise and Soucy 1999: 361). Mason and McCarthy (2006: 26) showed that young people in Auckland, New Zealand had 'ambivalent images' but 'little immediate negative bias toward art galleries'. However, negative memories from childhood (for example, of compulsory and constricting school visits) resulted in many young people seeing museums as boring, and not expecting them to be pleasurable (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007; Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Octobre 2009; Whitaker 2016).

¹⁸ A more detailed discussion of young people's museum attendance and cultural practices is provided in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.2). In that section, the cultural gap between young people and institutions is explored more fully.

Therefore, even if the general perception of museums is not entirely negative, young people do not see museums as places ‘for them’ (Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2013). Rather, they perceive them as places for ‘people such as my dad’, ‘old people’ and ‘people who wear berets’ (Mason and McCarthy 2006: 26). It should be noted, however, that even though a few young people see museums as ‘old fashioned’ (Mason and McCarthy 2006: 26), this view is not necessarily restricted to this age cohort. Merriman’s (1989a: 155) large-scale survey of attitudes and uses of heritage in Great Britain showed that, for approximately one-third of the population, museums reminded people of monuments to the dead – a perception that became more common the less frequently respondents visited museums. As there is no contemporary data to allow for an exact comparison, and museums have changed a lot over the past three decades, it is not possible to establish the extent to which similar attitudes persist among certain parts of the population today. What we can say, though, is that other groups, such as minority-ethnic communities, might also experience museums as exclusionary places: in other words, places that are not for them (Desai and Thomas 1998; Dawson 2014).

In brief, even if in general, young people’s images of museums are not entirely negative, many young people do not deem museums to be relevant to their own lives (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Whitaker 2016). For them, museums are places that display things that are not particularly appealing (Mason and McCarthy 2006); they are places that one visits with the school or family, but not with friends (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lemerise 1995). However, given the choice, many young people would prefer to visit with family or friends rather than with the school (Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Timbart 2007).

2.5.3 Young people’s needs and wants

Much of the work by museum practitioners and researchers has focused on identifying young people’s needs and wants in order to create relevant environments. With regard to museums and other cultural and leisure activities, it has been established that for young people, it is important to:

- socialise and spend time with their friends (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Largo and Czernin 2011; Shrapnel 2012; Timbart 2013);
- be creative and be able to express themselves (Andrews and Asia 1979; Shelnut 1994; Xanthoudaki 1998; Largo and Czernin 2011; Dahan 2013b);
- do things actively and have new experiences (Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Shrapnel 2012; Timbart 2013);
- learn something new in an entertaining way (Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Mason and McCarthy 2006);
- be autonomous in their choices (Timbart 2007; Bardes and Lorentz 2009; Kelly and Bartlett 2009);
- do activities in the evening or at night (Black 2005; Bardes and Lorentz 2009; Largo and Czernin 2011; Shrapnel 2012; Dahan 2013a); and
- do or see things relating to the present, their lives and their interests, such as art, music, fashion or politics (Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Timbart 2013).

While all these preferences and needs apply to young people, it should be noted that they are by no means limited to this age group. For example, the desire for entertaining learning experiences also applies to adult visitors (Kelly 2007; LaPlaca Cohen 2017).

2.5.4 Barriers to access

Much attention has also been devoted to the barriers that may prevent young people from visiting museums, and the barriers that they may encounter when they do visit. It has been observed that while structural (or practical) barriers, such as those relating to money and transport, have an impact on young people's attendance, they are not the most significant hurdles (Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007;

Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Whitaker 2016). Rather, attitudinal and cultural barriers play a more important role.

Indeed, research has repeatedly mentioned that museums can intimidate young people and make them feel uncomfortable (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Timbart 2007). Visitors who are not familiar with museums are particularly likely to encounter such a 'threshold fear'; that is, unease or anxiety that may inhibit them from engaging in a new activity (Gurian 2006: 115). This feeling can be reinforced by intimidating architecture and an uninviting atmosphere (Fleming 2002; Gurian 2006; Mason and McCarthy 2006) and by the fear or not knowing or not understanding (O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Desai and Thomas 1998; Timbart 2013). Another aggravating factor is the feeling of not being welcome. In their seminal survey, Andrews and Asia (1979: 229) note that attitudes of staff can be crucial in this respect:

The students associated their worst experiences with patronizing and condescending attitudes of the museum staff, including guards who made them feel humiliated and who served to consolidate the opinion that museums were 'not for them'.

Accordingly, to create a comfortable environment it is essential that museums make young people feel not only welcome but also valued, respected and wanted (Sterling 1993; Shelnut 1994; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Linzer and Munley 2015).

In addition, creating museums for young people and overcoming the 'lack of correspondence' (Xanthoudaki 1998: 169) between young people and museums is not just a matter of offering adequate youth programmes; it goes further than that. As Mason and McCarthy (2006: 22) argue:

It is not simply a case of young people *choosing* not to go to museums, or indeed *correcting* bureaucratic shortcomings in museum programming in relation to youth preferences, but a more complex matter of considering the fit between different cultures – the culture of those who present art and the culture of those who might view it.

Mason and McCarthy's observations offer an interesting line of thought that shifts the focus from the 'superficial' or ostensible explanations (such as a lack of adequate youth programmes) to the underlying and less apparent reasons. Here, the barriers are seen as cultural, above everything else. Mason and McCarthy (2006: 23) explain:

Young people have their own art, a symbolic culture that finds expression in alternative images, music or fashion that is not reflected in the official art world. The formal types of gallery art deprive other art forms of their artistic status and legitimacy. There is therefore a clash between the culture of art galleries and museums, both in terms of the art culture that they display and their organizational culture (values, assumptions and ways of doing things), which is fundamentally at odds with the identity and culture of young people.

2.5.5 Value and legitimacy

The gap between young people and museums as described above touches on issues of representation and cultural exclusion (see Sandell 1998 and Section 2.3 of this thesis). The problem of representation is also closely connected to issues of legitimacy. In museums, young people's culture is not just under-represented; their culture and values are deemed to lack the *legitimacy* to be included at all. As Mason and McCarthy (2006: 29) argue:

When museums and art galleries exclude young people, they do so in the same way that they exclude other social groups, by failing to legitimize young peoples' values, identity and ways of doing things – in short, their youth culture.

Since Bourdieu's pioneering study in the 1960s, it has been widely acknowledged that culture is a site of social distinction (Bourdieu 2010; Dawson 2018). Certain forms of culture, most notably state-supported culture, are considered legitimate and of high value (Miles and Gibson 2016; Lahire 2018). This narrow understanding of culture becomes apparent when, for example, studies on the value of culture use the term as a synonym for culture that is funded by the state (Taylor 2016: 179). One of the results of this hierarchisation of cultural practices (Gibson and Edwards 2016: 196) is that individuals who do not engage with legitimate or 'high' culture are considered to be disengaged

(Taylor 2016); consequently, only a small proportion of the population is seen as culturally active. However, studies have shown that if we widen definitions of culture, we reveal a much higher percentage of culturally active individuals (Taylor 2016). Similarly, people themselves may have a much broader understanding of what culture represents (LaPlaca Cohen 2017). Thus, the problem does not reside in a seemingly disengaged population but in the definition of culture itself.

Research has revealed that issues of value and legitimacy are particularly pronounced with regard to young people's culture. For example, Gibson and Edwards (2016) have shown that adults and young people may not always value the same types of cultural practices. Furthermore, while some young people may not be highly engaged in legitimate forms of culture, many of them participate in everyday and commercial culture, such as concerts and the cinema (Willis 1990; Gibson 2001; Tavan 2003; Bardes and Lorentz 2009). In addition, a large proportion of young people pursue artistic hobbies, which have been expanded and made more accessible by digital technologies (Octobre 2009). Commercial or 'low' culture requires less cultural capital (Bourdieu 1993); in other words, less knowledge and cultural competence. However, it needs to be said that education and socioeconomic background influence youth participation in high culture and low culture (Gibson 2001: 483).

With regard to museums, it is widely acknowledged that a lack of cultural capital, or familiarity with the museum code, reinforces the feeling of being unwelcome and excluded (Merriman 1989b; Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper 1991; Fleming 2002; O'Neill 2002). In the words of O'Neill (2002: 35), 'The message is clear: if you don't know what it's about, if it doesn't reach you, you shouldn't be here, you don't belong'. Thus, insufficient cultural capital for museums and the culture that is displayed in museums, and the failure to have their valued culture recognised as legitimate, are two factors that may contribute to the exclusion of young people from museums.

2.6 Conclusion

In this second chapter, I have laid out the first part of the conceptual framework for the present study and explored the relationship between young people and museums from a practical and theoretical perspective. I began by problematising the notion of 'young people'. By drawing attention to the various terms used to describe young people and to the different ways of grouping them, I have shown how age categories are constructions rather than objective facts. In addition to creating a challenge when reviewing and comparing research on the subject, these distinctions and variations have an impact on how we view young people. As reiterated throughout this thesis, young people are not a homogeneous group and generalisations should be treated with caution.

I then explored why museums are interested in young people: an age group that is commonly described as being 'hard to reach'. It became apparent that the studies that have investigated young people, museums and culture are underpinned by two different yet related discourses. The first of these addresses the subject from an education and learning perspective, examining the ways in which young people engage with museums, their interests and their preferred learning styles. The second discourse is of a more social nature, and touches on such issues as inclusion and representation. Here, the focus is on power dynamics and how they affect the relationship between young people and museums.

I then picked up the notion of power to explore the ways in which museums engage with young people. The most common approach centres around education and learning. Here, power can be distributed in different ways, depending on how audiences are perceived by museums. While some approaches to education focus on didactic modes of transmission, others adopt a constructivist and interpretative stance. A second way in which museums engage with young people is to invite participation. Participation (notably as described by Simon 2010) can take different forms and relies on a redistribution of power; for example, through co-creation and collaboration initiatives. Being a

dialogical process, participation influences and benefits museums and participants equally.

This effect of mutual value also applies to the third approach, which conceptualises the museum as a free and open space. This allows young people to take over a place in a non-traditional way and in a manner that is relevant to them. Examples include takeover events, sleepovers and after-hours events, often combining different forms of engagement and levels of participation in accordance with how much control the museum is willing to concede. Here, the museum also fulfils the role of a 'congregant space' (Gurian 2006: 118); that is, a place where young people can meet with their peers. The fourth approach, appropriation, involves people seizing power and taking over the museum. Examples include protest groups and collectives that hijack the space to voice their concerns. In this case, the museum as a site of power and contest becomes obvious.

In the final part of this chapter, I provided an overview of the research on young people and museums. The review crystallised five main themes. Firstly, it appears that young people do visit museums, albeit in different numbers in different museums (Lemerise 1999). This observation, combined with other factors, such as different ways of segmenting visitors, accounts for the difficulty of establishing a universal picture of young people's attendance. Secondly, research has revealed that young people have mixed images of museums, not purely negative perceptions, as is commonly believed to be the case (see, for example, Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Mason and McCarthy 2006). However, although many young people recognise the importance of museums, they do not deem these institutions to be places for them. Thirdly, studies have revealed several needs and wants that museums must consider if they are to engage with young people in meaningful ways. For example, it has been demonstrated that young people want to spend time with their friends, learn something new in an entertaining way, and engage with subjects that are important to them and that relate to their lives (see, for example, Mason and McCarthy 2006; Kelly and Bartlett 2009). Fourthly, the barriers that young people face have been investigated. Most notably, it has been shown that although practical barriers do play a role, they are of less importance than

intangible cultural barriers (see, for example, Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003). Fifthly, and finally, a number of studies have shed light on issues surrounding the legitimacy and value of cultural participation, which can contribute to young people's exclusion from museums (see, for example, Mason and McCarthy 2006; Gibson and Edwards 2016).

By outlining the ways in which museums approach young people and the key findings from the research, I have also revealed the limits of a purely museological approach. Indeed, the analysis showed that young people need to be understood as more than a mere museum audience or visitor segment. Issues such as access and legitimacy highlight the need to consider young people in a wider social context. Therefore, in the next chapter I address young people from a broader point of view. The aim is to uncover the social factors that influence the relationship between young people and museums and shape the way in which young people are apprehended. An interdisciplinary enquiry that combines aspects of the social sciences, especially youth studies, and whose origins can be traced directly to the research participants' accounts, is used to enrich and enlighten the discussion.

Chapter 3

Decentring the museum: young people in focus

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the discussion moves away from the museological approach to young people that was described in Chapter 2. Instead, it takes young people as the starting point and investigates their positions and experiences in a much broader social and cultural context. Young people are the starting point of this discussion in a theoretical and literal sense. In this chapter, their experiences are framed in a youth-centred (rather than a museum-centred) way by drawing on literature that puts young people (rather than museums) at the centre. In addition, many of the ideas developed here originated during the fieldwork with young people; that is, they are rooted in the participants' own accounts of their wider museum experiences.

In Section 2.2, I highlighted the importance of defining the term 'young people', especially in a museum context. I showed that different terms (for example, 'youth' and 'teenager') have different meanings and connotations, and that these words draw arbitrary distinctions. In addition, we saw that the term 'young people' and related labels can refer to various age groups in research on young people and museums. However, the importance of language goes beyond issues of definition: an analysis of language also reveals the way in which discourse expresses and influences how society perceives young people.

A look at the different meanings of the word 'young' provides an interesting starting point. For the online Oxford Dictionary (Oxford Dictionaries 2018), the adjective 'young' can mean different things depending on the context, such as:

- 'having lived or existed for only a short time';
- 'not as old as the norm or as would be expected';
- 'relating to or consisting of young people';
- 'immature or inexperienced'; and
- 'having the qualities associated with young people, such as enthusiasm and optimism'.

The above definitions offer a glimpse of the different ways in which youth is conceptualised. Most notably, it shows that interpretations of being young can

be positive ('enthusiasm and optimism') or negative ('immature'): views that account for a number of stereotypes. It also shows that sometimes, being young is perceived as a diversion from the norm. In the following sections, I address these perceived stereotypes and the consequences of not responding to the norm.

In addition to drawing on pertinent literature, this enquiry relies on discourse analysis to generate valuable insights and points of reference. Moving away from a strictly museum studies or audience research approach helps us to see young people in a different light. I believe that examining the notion of young people from a non-museum point of view, or from one that is (seemingly) only distantly related, leads to a better understanding of the relationship between museums and young people. By drawing on concepts that highlight the power issues affecting young people, we can see the tensions that underlie that relationship begin to emerge. It becomes apparent that these issues are linked to young people's cultural practices and their engagement with museums.

Therefore, in this chapter young people are conceptualised not as a museum audience, but as a group that is subjected to the unequal distribution of power and is the target of prejudice. While these two issues relate to how young people are positioned in relation to adults, they can apply equally to how young people are situated in relation to museums. Indeed, as Flasher (1978: 518) points out, 'In some sense all adults are informal parent surrogates to all children with whom they come into significant contact'. Given that a museum is run by (and often for) adults, it seems plausible to compare its position to that of an adult.

3.2 Prejudice and stereotypes

Prejudice is generally understood as negative attitudes and conduct towards an individual or a group of people on the basis of their belonging to a particular social group (Augoustinos and Reynolds 2001; Sandell 2007; Dixon 2014). Difference, hierarchy and power are key components of prejudice, as the negative attitudes towards a certain group stem from a belief that the group is

different from and inferior to the norm (Young-Bruehl 2012). These beliefs vary with time and context.

Prejudice and stereotyping are closely related. As Hall (1997: 258) explains, stereotyping 'reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes "difference"'. It also 'symbolically fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong' (Hall 1997: 258). Stereotyping is about creating and maintaining power inequalities between the dominant group and the excluded: in other words, the Other. In our adult-centred societies, it is easy to see that power resides in the hands of adults: more specifically, the 'middle-aged'¹⁹ (Boyanton 2014). It is also clear that adults exercise their superiority over children and young people in social, political and cultural terms (Flasher 1978; Bessant 2012; Young-Bruehl 2012; LeFrançois 2014).

Prejudice operates on three levels: individual (or cognitive), social and cultural (Augoustinos and Reynolds 2001; Sandell 2007). The power of prejudice resides in the normalisation, legitimisation and rationalisation of the belief in the superiority of the dominant group; in other words, the norm (Hall 1997; Augoustinos and Reynolds 2001; Young-Bruehl 2012). Language (written and oral) is a prominent field in which this occurs (Sandell 2007). As Augoustinos and Reynolds (2001: 10) argue, 'It is through everyday language practices, both in formal and informal talk that relations of power, dominance and exploitation become reproduced and legitimated'. Therefore, discourse analysis offers one way of exposing prejudice in everyday usage.

To demonstrate the ubiquity and normalcy of age prejudice against children and young people, Bessant (2012) refers to a newspaper article in which a journalist complains about children during the school holidays in London (Bindel 2006). In this text, the author repeatedly uses pejorative terms to refer to children, such as 'little monsters', 'undisciplined, spoilt children' and 'hysterical children', and describes them as a general nuisance (Bindel 2006). Whether the piece is meant to be humorous or satirical is highly debatable, but

¹⁹ Indeed, older people are also the victims of age-related prejudice and discrimination (a prejudice commonly referred to as 'ageism').

it is a fact that the article uses discriminatory and abusive language and perpetuates stereotypes. Bessant (2012) points out that such comments are overtly published 'without any shame or embarrassment' and invites the reader to imagine the effect of the text if it had targeted other communities that commonly experience prejudice.

3.3 Adulthood

Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (2012), an academic and a psychoanalyst, argues that child-oriented prejudice is not obvious because it is deeply ingrained in society – an issue that is also applicable to many young people. According to Young-Bruehl (2012: ch. 1), harm to children (to which we could add young people) is often understood as a result of actions rather than attitudes. Even in the field of prejudice studies, prejudice against children and young people, generally referred to as 'childism' or 'adulthood', is not a subject (Young-Bruehl 2012: ch. 1). Young-Bruehl uses the term 'childism' because it directly alludes to the 'target of the prejudice' (2012: biblio. essay, ch. 7). While I agree that 'childism' better reflects the object of the prejudice (depending on how we define the term 'children'), I will, however, use the term 'adulthood' as proposed by Flasher (1978). From a purely linguistic point of view, we could argue that 'adulthood' gives prominence to the perpetrators rather than the victims. However, the term also highlights the norm against which all children and young people are measured: adults. Furthermore, it has the advantage of not focusing on children only, and, therefore, on a narrower age range; consequently, it includes young people too.

There are various reasons for the unfamiliarity of all these terms and the general lack of awareness of the prejudice against children and young people. Firstly, prejudice against children and young people is often seen as being legitimate (Flasher 1978; Young-Bruehl 2012). Young-Bruehl (2012: ch. 1) further states that there is a tendency in society to liken children and young people to wild animals, who need to be controlled by adults. Second, there is a general assumption that children and young people are deviant from the norm, which is used to justify the prejudice against them (Flasher 1978; Bessant 2008; Young-Bruehl 2012). It is thought that because children and young

people lack the capacities of adults, they are unable to make their own decisions and require adult policing (Flasher 1978; Bessant 2008; Young-Bruehl 2012). A complicating factor is that, as Young-Bruehl (2012: ch. 1) explains, 'The natural dependency of children has been one of the key reasons for the prejudice against them not being recognized as such or its being so easily rationalized'. Thirdly, Young-Bruehl (2012: ch. 7) argues that, similar to other groups that have been the victims of prejudice, children need first to become aware that they are not 'naturally inferior' in order to change the status quo. This is complicated by the fact that, in the case of children (and also young people), the different stages of social change 'have to be led by adults – the very group from which prejudice against children comes' (Young-Bruehl 2012: ch. 7).

As with other forms of prejudice, adultism is not a *knowledge* system but a *belief* system (Young-Bruehl 2012: ch. 1). It is an effective means for adults to impose dominance and control: 'Seeing others as so different that they constitute a separate species is a way of contriving reality [*sic*] in order to gain unfair power over them' (Flasher 1978: 517). Similarly, Young-Bruehl (2012: ch. 1) writes:

A prejudgment that one class of beings is privileged over another extends to the idea that the class is superior, and fit to rule or dominate over another (or even dominate over the whole ecology). The hierarchy asserted in childism is obvious: adults should rule over children; adults' needs should be privileged over children's needs. But 'on the grounds of what' is not as obvious.

A common justification for the prejudice lies, as described earlier, in the belief that children and young people do not yet have their full intellectual and moral capacities (Flasher 1978; Bessant 2008). Particularly for young people, there is a long history of perceiving them as objects of concern (or individuals 'at risk') who 'universally lack rationality, self-restraint and good judgment' (Bessant 2008: 355) and are 'at risk for antisocial behavior' (Zeldin 2004: 324).

This assumption is not only prejudicial but also highly problematic, due to the dynamic interplay between public opinion, public policies and research

agendas. As Zeldin (2004: 635) notes, 'Public beliefs and public policies reinforce each other'. It is not just public opinion that plays a role, though: research can also influence policies, laws and the lived experiences of young people (Bessant 2008). For example, such stereotypes as those described above have been used as the grounds for research and theories on 'the adolescent brain'. Some scientists and psychologists, such as Steinberg (2015), have used scientific methods to establish a relationship between young people's biological features and their comportment. For Bessant (2008), however, adolescent brain theory is a major problem when it suggests a straightforward relationship between biological attributes and the behaviour of a whole group of people. She reminds us that in the past, brain theories were used to claim the inferiority of certain groups of people and justify prejudice against them (Bessant 2008: 357). It is important, therefore, to bear in mind that research is never neutral: in fact, research can reinforce prejudice, and prejudice can dictate the research agenda.²⁰

While stereotypes about young people remain tenacious, research has shown that young people do not differ from adults in terms of antisocial or prosocial behaviour: 'Despite claims to the contrary, most young people are normal. Like the rest of the community "they" display an array of normal tendencies to ill-health, criminal behavior, community involvement, and political or moral beliefs' (Bessant 2008: 355; see also Zeldin 2004). Indeed, the pivotal point in this discussion is the underlying ethnocentrism and the resulting definition of what counts as the 'norm' or 'normal behaviour'. As Bessant (2008: 356) observes, 'What constitutes "responsible" or "good" conduct is subject to variability across time and space' and is 'socially, historically and culturally' constructed. A prominent illustration is how the notion of proper behaviour for women has shifted over time and place.

Furthermore, a major adultist assumption is that 'all adults are superior in all skills and virtues to all children' (Flasher 1978: 517). The fallacy of this

²⁰ See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of the ethical considerations relating to the present study.

stereotype about children – and young people – resides in its counterargument: if all children and young people were deemed to have certain (mostly negative) attributes, then all adults would necessarily need to be ‘models of restraint, good judgment, “pro-social” behavior, responsibility and moral conduct’ and ‘behave appropriately against the standards for pro-social behavior that young people ought to aspire to but fail to achieve’ (Bessant 2008: 355). We know that this is not the case. Consequently, rather than seeing children and young people as lacking capacities or capabilities, adults should value their uniqueness and respect them as human beings in their own right (Flasher 1978).

3.4 Patronisation and betterment

Prejudice and adultism can take a number of forms. As noted in Section 2.2, the term ‘youth’ conveys positive associations just as it conveys negative ones. Both account for stereotypes and can also give rise to patronisation. Young-Bruehl (2012: ch. 1) notes:

Like any prejudice, prejudice against children conveys disrespect and hatred as it takes its characteristic forms; but childism, like the other prejudices, may be suffused as well with envy. [...] Envy of the young for their youthfulness and energy cuts across all forms of prejudice. But prejudices can also convey patronization, a particular kind of disrespect that says the victims need help or rescue; the prejudiced person needs to tell them how to do things they would otherwise be unable to do.

Such patronising attitudes tie in with the stereotypical assumption that young people are as much a problem to other people as they are to themselves (Bessant 2008: 355). Adultism, therefore, is not limited to expressing itself by overly policing young people and denying their rights; it can also take more subtle forms under the guise of protecting, helping and healing. Here, the prejudice is justified by being in the so-called best interests of the young person.

Returning to the subject of the present study, patronising language and attitudes can be found, for instance, in public programmes organised by

museums and other cultural institutions. The value of cultural participation, for participants of any type (for example, ‘active’ and ‘passive’ participants)²¹ and of any age, is widely recognised (Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter 1993; Packer 2008; O’Neill 2010; Dodd and Jones 2014; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing [APPGAHW] 2017; Museums Association 2017; Wheatley and Bickerton 2017). Regarding young people, research has found that arts programmes can have several positive effects relating to personal development (Baum, Hein and Solvay 2000; Dutton 2001; Linzer and Munley 2015), social skills (Hughes and Wilson 2004; Wright et al. 2006), and health and wellbeing (APPGAHW 2017). It may be surprising, therefore, that patronising language can appear in precisely these programmes.

Following an analysis of the literature on the relationship between youth work and drama, Dutton (2001: 40) concludes:

It is not often in the literature that this convergence is analyzed and when it is, the perspective often comes from a deficit approach in which the attempt is to show how the arts can help *heal* youth rather than to demonstrate its simple effectiveness in helping youth to grow.²²

Similar observations have been made by Gibson (2001) and Gibson and Edwards (2016). For example, Gibson (2001: 488) remarks:

Up until recently youth arts policy has tended to be articulated in the language of disadvantage – youth need help accessing ‘the arts’; in the language of welfare – access to the arts will help disaffected youth; in relation to training new artists; and, in relation to building a new audience for the arts.

In their study of facilitated participation for young people in care, Gibson and Edwards (2016: 195) investigated programmes that sought to influence ‘individuals’ social, economic, mental, physical, educational and/or emotional

²¹ See Section 2.4.2 for a discussion of the different types of participation.

²² Dodd et al. (2018) observe similar ageist and patronising assumptions in how museums approach older people.

state or status and where the individuals enlisted [were] deemed to be in need or amenable to “betterment” through such participation’. In a related manner, Modest (2013: 107) points towards the need to ask young people if they are interested in taking part in programmes, rather than simply assuming that they are. In addition, he raises the question of whether such programmes in museums are aimed ‘more at achieving targets than fulfilling the desires of our target audiences’ (Modest 2013: 107). While arts programmes for young people certainly account for many positive achievements in the lives of those who participate in them, these examples also show that the underlying values can be patronising and paternalistic rather than, say, collaborative and egalitarian. A further issue worth considering is that certain art forms are deemed to be of higher value for the participants and their ‘improvement’; or, as highlighted by Gibson and Edwards (2016: 199), ‘that some activities [are] seen as better than others regardless of the individuals’ interests’ (see Section 2.5.5).

Another factor underlying this hierarchisation of cultural (and social) practices is tied to discourse relating to safeguarding, protection and policing. Regarding young people in care, Gibson and Edwards (2016: 200) note that the “risk management” of everyday participation, not only limits the agency of carers, but also the opportunities for young people to make decisions about their own everyday lives which allow them to develop a sense of their own agency’. Although special safeguarding issues apply to young people in care, the problem described by Gibson and Edwards (2016) is also apparent for other young people. While it is the responsibility of adults to care for and protect children and young people, disproportionate protection or ‘misuse of power’ (Flasher 1978: 517) can result in children and young people being overly controlled and policed. As Flasher (1978: 518) notes:

Many adults are overly occupied with policing children, rather than being occupied primarily with trying to perceive each child’s unique biological tendencies and unique experiences and then trying to facilitate their self and mutually fulfilling evolution. [...] Adults who choose to be overly concerned with their policing functions toward children, instead of helping those children learn to police themselves or set their own limits, may be further abusing their power.

It is only by having a certain amount of freedom and autonomy that children and young people can have real experiences and learn from them (Flasher 1978). Referring to the stereotypical view of young people as objects of concern, Bessant (2008: 358) suggests that ‘some young people are sometimes at risk not because their brains are different, but because they have not had the experience or opportunity to develop the skills and judgment that engagement in those activities and experiences supply’.

To summarise, patronising and paternalistic attitudes can be found on three levels of sociocultural participation:

1. When arts and cultural programmes approach young people in patronising and prejudiced ways by perceiving them as objects of concern that must be ‘healed’ or ‘fixed’ (Dutton 2001; Gibson 2001; Modest 2013; Gibson and Edwards 2016).
2. When the value of cultural participation is determined by adults and not by young people themselves (Gibson and Edwards 2016).
3. When overly protective and paternalistic behaviour and the abuse of power result in young people being deprived of their right to autonomy and freedom of choice and experience (Flasher 1978; Bessant 2008; Gibson and Edwards 2016).

Therefore, to avoid adultist attitudes, it is important to focus not only on deficits but also on empowerment and ‘positive youth development’ (Dutton 2001: 44). Moreover, programmes need to engage with young people on their own terms and recognise the value of their (cultural) practices (Willis 1990; Gibson 2001). In this sense, they need to follow one of the core principles of youth work; that is, to ‘build from where young people are’ (YouthLink Scotland n.d.). Furthermore, although adults have safeguarding responsibilities, this should not result in an abuse of power at the expense of children’s and young people’s rights – and also human rights. Indeed, Article 31 of the CRC (1989) clearly emphasises ‘the right of the child [...] to participate *freely* [emphasis added] in cultural life and the arts’.

3.5 Human rights and cultural rights²³

The issue of human rights, especially in the contexts of culture and of children and young people, deserves careful consideration. At various points in this thesis, I refer to the concept of human rights and how they can be tied to the museum experiences of the participants in this study. Three articles from international treaties are of particular interest in this respect. The first is Article 27 (1) of the UDHR (UN 1948), which states:

Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

The other two articles stem from the CRC. Article 31 (CRC 1989) echoes the above article of the UDHR by stating:

(1) States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

(2) States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 12 (1) of the CRC (1989) also relates to the topic of the present thesis. It stipulates:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child

²³ As Section 3.5 relies heavily on legal texts, in which individuals under the age of 18 are referred to as 'children', in this section I employ different terminology from that used in the rest of this thesis. For clarity, I use the term 'children' to refer to children and young people up to the age of 18. For those over the age of 18, I use the term 'young people'. This means that, in this section, the category 'children' includes the majority of participants in this study (who were between 12 and 21 years old).

being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Adultist attitudes, in social and cultural contexts, inevitably raise questions about children's and young people's rights and, by extension, human rights. However, due to the vastness and complexity of the human rights field (Stammers 2012), it is important to differentiate between the various ways in which human rights language may be used and, most importantly, to make clear how it is used in the present thesis. The following discussion explores the notions of rights and human rights from a general and cultural perspective and within the particular context of this study – for example, in relation to the age range of the research participants (12 to 21 years). By doing so, I clarify the approach taken in this study and explain why it is appropriate to use the moral and political language of human rights in this context.

3.5.1 The place of cultural rights

When it comes to defining human rights, there are several different positions, approaches and definitions. Some of these give rise to major disagreements between different proponents – depending on, among other things, the backgrounds of the advocates (law, anthropology and so forth). In his discussion on human rights, Nickel (2019) defines them as follows:

A human rights norm might exist as (a) a shared norm of actual human moralities, (b) a justified moral norm supported by strong reasons, (c) a legal right at the national level (where it might be referred to as a 'civil' or 'constitutional' right), or (d) a legal right within international law.

This set of definitions allows us to glimpse the different ways in which human rights can be understood. Nickel's list is not exhaustive, though, and the different aspects of human rights are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

One of the most prominent distinctions in the human rights field is undoubtedly the distinction between moral and legal human rights. In his analysis on the morality of human rights, the legal scholar Michael J. Perry (2013) explains that not every human right is a legal right (and not in every country) but that every human right is a moral right. For Perry (2013: 782), 'The

fundamental difference between legal rights and moral rights concerns the enforceability of the rights'. For some people, this distinction justifies the argument that 'moral rights are not really "rights" at all' because they cannot be enforced (Perry 2013: 782).

Any discussion on morality, or what is considered to be 'moral', inevitably involves references to particular sets of values – which may differ from one group of people to another. In a recent radio lecture, the former Supreme Court Justice Jonathan Sumption (2019) points towards the importance of distinguishing 'a fundamental human right from something that is merely a good idea'. He argues that human rights that are not fundamental and that are based on subjective values should not be assumed to be protected by law. They should, therefore, be dealt with through debate and a democratic and political process rather than through the courts. For Sumption (2019), there are only two categories of fundamental human rights:

First, there are rights which are fundamental because without them life is reduced to a crude contest in the deployment of force. So we have rights not to be arbitrarily detained, injured or killed. We have equality before the law and recourse to impartial and independent courts. Secondly, there are rights without which a community cannot function as a democracy, so there must at least be freedom of thought and expression, assembly and association, and the right to participate in fair and regular elections. Of course, democracies should confer many more rights than these but they should confer them by collective political choice and not because they are thought to be inherent in our humanity or derived from some higher law.

According to Sumption (2019), invoking human rights for issues that are not fundamental results in 'devalu[ing] the whole notion of universal human rights'. As outlined earlier, there are various ways of apprehending human rights and we can see how opinions are strongly influenced by the backgrounds of the proponents (such as law, in Sumption's case).

Returning to the field of enquiry of the present study, we can observe that the human rights discourse has grown in importance in the cultural sector

and especially in museums (Sandell 2011; Nightingale and Sandell 2012).

Sandell (2011: 138) notes:

Interestingly, over the last two decades, the influence of human rights in the field of culture has been pronounced, not least in the museum and gallery sector, where there has been an extraordinary proliferation in the number and type of projects internationally that have, in varied ways, deployed a discourse around human rights, equality and social justice to frame their approach to (and interpretation of) wide-ranging contemporary and historic events and subjects.

While a considerable part of the discourse in museums is based on moral human rights, many subjects also touch on legal human rights. For example, the subject of how disability is represented in museums is inextricably linked to both moral and legal human rights (for a discussion of disability narratives and representations in museums, see Sandell 2011).

Apart from the work around rights that is done in the cultural sector, there is the question about the place of cultural rights within a general human rights frame. As with the overall contention that marks the field of human rights, the role and importance of cultural rights is disputed. While some claim that cultural rights are less important because they are not fundamental (such as the rights to life and to liberty), others point towards the fact that human rights are, per se, indivisible and interdependent (Donders 2010; Anderson 2012). In addition, cultural rights have a legal base, as Anderson (2012: 216) reminds us:

International law and human rights theory are unequivocal in including cultural rights as an essential component in the indivisible and irreducible body of human rights. Yet serious discussion of the concept of cultural rights in plural, democratic societies is still relatively rare. Many states are signatories to the legally binding *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966) but most have ignored its requirement that they take steps to achieve the full realisation of the cultural rights of their citizens.

One reason the status of cultural rights is disputed is that the UDHR was later split into two separate and legally binding documents: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR 1966) and the International

Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR 1966). In addition, cultural rights have developed more slowly than other categories of human rights. One explanation for this lies in the vagueness of the term 'culture' and the lack of an official and agreed definition of 'cultural rights' (Donders 2010: 15, 18; Anderson 2012: 216). As Donders²⁴ explains, a further obstacle to the development of cultural rights is the ongoing debate between universalist and cultural relativist positions (2010: 16).²⁵

In spite of this, the preambles to the ICCPR (1966) and ICESCR (1966) make clear that all human rights are interdependent and indivisible. As such, all rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – have the same importance and value (Donders 2010: 15, 32). Anderson (2012: 221) even warns about the denigration of cultural rights:

[...] there are plenty of examples of where humans living under conditions of extreme deprivation, danger or duress have clung to their right to cultural expression, even at the risk of their lives. It would not be appropriate for those who may take their own cultural rights for granted to belittle their value for others who are not in so fortunate a position.

In addition, as Donders (2010: 32) remarks, 'cultural rights are true human rights that protect an essential part of human dignity'. She explains the close link between cultural and human rights (2010: 32):

The broad concept of culture, including not only cultural products, but also process-oriented aspects such as association, language, religion and education, implies that the category of cultural rights includes many different human rights. Cultural rights are the rights to create and enjoy cultural products and the rights to have access to and participate in culture, as well as the rights to freedom of association, expression, religion and the right to education. Cultural rights may also refer to the cultural dimension of human rights, such

²⁴ Yvonne Donders is professor of international human rights and consultant for UNESCO and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

²⁵ See Section 3.5.3 for a discussion of universalism and cultural relativism.

as the rights to private life, family life, housing and health. In other words, the category of cultural rights covers many different human rights. Cultural rights are more than merely those rights that explicitly refer to culture but include all human rights that protect or promote components of the cultural identity of individuals and communities as part of their human dignity. Cultural rights reflect the individual as well as the collective dimension of human rights and they have a multidimensional character. As such, they embody the indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of all human rights.

In a similar fashion, the human rights scholar Asbjorn Eide (2001: 292) notes:

As so often is the case within the international normative system of human rights, there are close links between the cultural and other rights contained in the International Bill of Human Rights. The right to education is in part a cultural right. The right to freedom of expression and information includes a right to cultural expression and access to and dissemination of cultural activities. Freedom of religion and cultural rights are closely interrelated. Freedoms of assembly and of association are essential to cultural activities.

Speaking from a cultural practitioner point of view, Anderson (2012: 220) argues that cultural rights encompass more than the common understanding of cultural rights being linked 'to indigenous peoples whose way of life is under threat, or artists and intellectuals in societies controlled by authoritarian governments'. According to Anderson (2012: 220), given that cultural rights 'cannot be distributed directly by the state in the way that is possible for basic commodities like food and shelter', this responsibility lies with intermediaries in the community, such as museums. Anderson (2012: 223) illustrates how museums could be instrumental in the development of cultural rights:

Through education and participation in cultural activities, children and adults can learn not just how to understand design, or to make a bowl, painting or film. By practising these activities in a public space, they can also learn that it is their right to participate in cultural activities. A model of learning, and of museums, which fails to encourage wider participation by the public in cultural activities, is antithetical to the development of

a strong and healthy democracy as well as contrary to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Anderson (2012: 224) further suggests that people have the following rights in the context of museums:

1. recognition of their own cultural identity;
2. engagement with other cultures;
3. participation in cultural activities;
4. opportunities for creativity; and
5. freedom of expression and critical judgment.

3.5.2 Children's and young people's rights and participation in society

So far, we have concentrated on the notions of human and cultural rights and the close connections between the two types. In this study, the focus is on young people aged between 12 and 21; thus, it is important to clarify how a rights framework can help to understand their relationship with museums. In terms of rights, a fundamental difference between children and young people (on one side) and adults (on the other side) is that the former do not enjoy the same civil, political, social, economic and – as I demonstrate in this thesis – cultural rights as the latter.

Many of the different types of rights are tied to the age of majority; that is, the age at which a young person is considered to be an adult and is granted full legal capacity. For most countries, including Luxembourg and the UK, the age of majority is 18. This explains why any young person under the age of 18 is considered a child in legal documents and in the CRC (1989). However, not all rights and duties are tied to the age of majority. In some cases, the age at which certain rights apply can be lower; for example, some countries make distinctions at ages 10, 12 or 16 for the age of consent in adoption procedures and for the age of criminal responsibility. In other cases, especially when it is not a legally conferred or 'official' right, no clear boundaries are set at a particular age. Children's and young people's rights to engage with culture and

museums – and, for example, to visit museums *by choice* – are not necessarily bound to a specific age. I return to the subject of children's and young people's rights in the context of museums in Section 3.5.4.

One of the most important and internationally recognised rights of children (and young people) is freedom of expression. In effect, Article 12 (1) of the CRC (1989) grants every child 'who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child'. Freedom of opinion and expression are also specified in Article 19 of the UDHR (UN 1948); this is considered by many to be a fundamental human right (Sumption 2019) and an integral part of cultural rights (Donders 2010; Anderson 2012). In 2014, the Luxembourg ORK called for the increased participation of children and young people in Luxembourgish society and emphasised their right to be heard. Similar to the CRC (1989), the ORK (2014: 37) stresses children's right to be heard in every matter that concerns them: 'Children have the right to be heard in questions or decisions concerning their personal and private life, as well as in questions concerning school, leisure and society'.²⁶

However, although Article 12 (1) of the CRC (1989) recognises children's right to freedom of expression and their right to be heard, the convention also states that children's views should be 'given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'. This means that children's opinions are not binding and that the final decision remains in the hands of adults. Tisdall (2015: 196) explains:

[Article 12] facilitates children and young people to be involved in decision making and a wide range of decisions ('all matters that affect them') but it does not discuss self-determination. According to Article 12, the decision-maker must give 'due weight' to the child's views, qualified by a judgement about the 'age and maturity' of the child, but ultimately the decision can be incongruent or against the child's views.

²⁶ My translation.

According to Tisdall (2015: 196), the absence of self-determination results from ‘the potential tension between Article 12 and Article 3’. Indeed, Article 3 (1) of the CRC (1989) states that ‘In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration’. As Tisdall (2015: 196) argues, ‘The discretionary nature of judging a child’s best interests can easily lead to adults silencing a child, or side-lining a child’s views, rather than fulfilling Article 12’s obligations’. As we have seen in Section 3.4, similar attitudes might exist in a cultural context. While some might argue that children and young people’s right to self-determination in a cultural context does not have the same weight as in a social or civil context, we have seen earlier that cultural rights are as important as any other type of rights. In addition, as the ORK (2014: 37) has noted, listening to and taking account of children’s and young people’s opinions is a basic attitude that should be applied to every aspect of their lives.

Seeing children and young people as individuals with rights and as social actors is a relatively recent phenomenon (James 2009; ORK 2014). A major shift in this respect occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, partly as a result of the social movements of the 1960s and their calling into question of hegemonic power structures (Raitt 2005; James 2009). Since then, rather than being seen as not yet fully developed adults, increasingly children and young people have been recognised as human beings in their own right. Despite all the developments in the field, however, adultist attitudes may still persist in some parts of society – even if less conspicuously than a few decades ago (see Bessant 2012; Young-Bruehl 2012).

Even today, the participation of children and young people in society is still likely to be the subject of debate. As Tisdall (2015: 196) puts it, ‘Participation is not necessarily comfortable and the results can be challenging’. We have seen that the subject of children’s participation features prominently in the CRC (1989). According to Tisdall (2015: 185), although children and young people’s participation was a theme before the advent of the CRC, the convention ‘galvanised adults to recognise children’s and young people’s *rights*

to participate, as part of a broader human rights agenda. This has encouraged changes in law, policy and practice to ensure children's rights to be heard [...].

As we have seen above, children's and young people's rights to participation infuse all aspects of their lives, including leisure and culture. Today, the rights of children and young people to access and participate in culture are widely acknowledged. For example, some museums and cultural organisations have issued manifestos on these rights, showing how museums and other institutions can accommodate and cater for young individuals (Kids in Museums 2019; Royal Alberta Museum 2019;). Similarly, UNESCO (2019: 1) declares:

The right of young people to access, enjoy and actively participate in cultural life is enshrined in international law, forming a key part of their cultural and human rights. Participation in cultural life is necessary for young people to gain an understanding of their own culture and that of others, which in turn broadens their horizons, strengthens their ability to peacefully resolve conflicts and fosters respect for cultural diversity.

In a similar way, the report on hurdles to participation for children and young people in museums by Whitaker (2016: 5) states:

In this report we assume true participation is the same as 'meaningful engagement' or engagement which is designed to enable and empower children and young people in becoming regular and comfortable consumers of what museums have to offer; and which, in the longer term, may contribute to a reduction in inequalities for the less advantaged and marginalised, and the development of personal and social skills, boosting of self-esteem, have a positive effect on health and well-being, and ultimately the enhancement of an individual child or young person's life chances.

The aims and benefits of children's and young people's cultural participation are widely recognised (see, for example, Chapter 2). Discussing their cultural participation in the context of human rights creates an opportunity to highlight inextricable links between their participation in culture and their rights to culture (and beyond). The rights framework also allows us to draw

attention to the fact that children and young people not only *have* various rights but also *exercise* these rights and have agency in many dimensions of their lives.

3.5.3 Rights and agency

When discussing children's and young people's rights, there is a tendency to focus on rights that are developed and facilitated 'from above' (that is, by society and adults) rather than on how agency is lived and expressed 'from below' (that is, by children and young people themselves). Although the terms 'above' and 'below' are problematic in their own ways (see Van Daalen, Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2016), they effectively convey the potential bias, or preferred 'point of view', of any rights discussion.

A recurrent issue with rights discussions is that they are often conducted in terms of binaries. Discussions on the relationship between culture and rights are strongly influenced by debates between universalist and cultural relativist positions. As a consequence, children's and young people's agency is often overlooked because conversations are marked and hampered by these debates. The problem resides, as Nieuwenhuys (2008: 6) explains, in that 'both abstract universalism and cultural relativism posit an essentialist approach to social phenomena, the difference being that in one case it is childhood and in the other culture that are perceived as an enduring phenomenon'. To summarise, universalism argues that human rights are 'a set of universally valid moral principles' and that they apply to all humans, including children and young people (Nieuwenhuys 2008: 5). The problem, especially in the case of children's rights, is that universalism assumes that only experts have the knowledge to create the conditions to implement rights, which excludes the possibility of children's own agency (Nieuwenhuys 2008: 7). Cultural relativism, on the other hand, assumes that childhood is not a universal and abstract concept (Nieuwenhuys 2008). Rather, it recognises childhood to be specific to the culture it is embedded in and argues that different sets of standards are needed in different contexts. This position rejects cultural intervention and recognises children's capacity for agency and action (Nieuwenhuys 2008: 6).

The problem here is that these actions are seen as peculiar to specific circumstances and not transferable to other contexts.²⁷

However, by distancing ourselves from discussions that pivot around universalist and relativist positions and broadening our point of view, it becomes possible to see people as ‘active subjects’ and rights as things that ‘exist through, with and in people’ (Stammers 2012: 276). Stammers (2012: 289) reminds us that children are not necessarily only victims (as children have historically been viewed) but that they can ‘be both victims and social actors with agency’.²⁸ Viewing children and young people through a positive lens allows us to see their capacity for agency and the many ways in which they interpret and enact their rights – in other words, their living rights. Power relations are not always clear-cut, and the simplistic dichotomy between powerful and powerless does not do justice to the lived experiences of many children and young people (on the complexity of power relations with adults, see also Tisdall 2015).

Considering how children and young people can be agents highlights the importance of not looking at their (human) rights in only a legal or an abstract sense. There are many examples of children’s and young people’s agency, even in the most challenging and problematic contexts (see, for example, the case study from Indonesia described by Van Daalen, Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2016). In the context of Luxembourg, the ORK (2014) gives a number of examples of how children and young people exercise their rights: from the context of school (peer-mediation and school advisory boards) to those of civic life (young people’s parliaments and city councils) and social life (television and radio broadcasting). Many of these examples can also be found in other countries, such as the UK. To these we can add, on a school level,

²⁷ However, the two positions are not necessarily incompatible. As Donders (2010: 16) states, ‘moderate forms of both theories exist’ (see also Sandell 2011).

²⁸ This is strongly reminiscent of discussions about how women have traditionally been perceived. See, in this respect, Raitt’s (2005) interesting article on the ways in which feminism has influenced the children’s rights movement, especially on the issues of voice and participation.

methods such as self-assessment and peer-assessment. On a social and political level, we can also include public movements initiated by children and young people, such as the recent school strikes about climate change. In addition, many of these examples show that children and young people are agents in not only their own lives but also the lives of others and society in general (James 2009: 41). James (2009: 42) explains:

It is not, however, just within the context of their peer cultures that children's agency – their ability to act creatively and to make things happen – can be seen taking place. Children live their lives in and between any numbers of social institutions; be it the school, the family, the legal system. It is these institutions which constitute the structure of society – that structured complexity which shapes the fabric of our everyday lives.

On the one hand, these examples show that children and young people have agency and are able to exercise their rights. On the other hand, they may also see their agency and rights limited. Indeed, while the examples above testify to children and young people having the power to shape their lives (and the lives of others), ways of participating are also often accompanied by obstacles and challenges (see, for example, Tisdall 2015 on the benefits of and problems with school councils). Even though children are increasingly recognised as subjects and agents of their own lives, Stammers (2012: 286) points out that it is almost 'utopian' to think that they are not confronted by 'structural constraint'. It is important, therefore, to 'adequately locate children's agency within the broader contexts of political, economic and cultural structures of power' (Stammers 2012: 286). The same applies to the agency of young people.

In effect, there is a significant relation between social structure and agency (James 2009: 42). The effects of structure on a child's or young person's agency can differ from one person to another. Indeed, a child or young person can have different social positions in relation to adults (for example, as a child to a parent or a student to a teacher). As James (2009: 43) argues, these social positions 'all offer different opportunities and constraints for children to act and, in doing so, exercise their agency'. However, age is just one aspect on

which power operates. As Stammers (2012: 290) points out, ‘recognising age as a fundamental axis of social power should not blind us to other fundamental axes of power – power organised politically, economically, around sex and gender, around ethnicity and around the control of information and knowledge.’ Agency, then, is inevitably determined by the interplay of these different axes of power. For example, a child or young person with a higher socioeconomic status will have different (often higher) levels of agency from a young person with a lower socioeconomic status.²⁹

3.5.4 The context of the research participants

The uneven distribution of power along different social axes is also apparent in the context of the research participants of this study. If we consider age, it is worth noting that the participants were between 12 and 21 years old – a significant age range, which may account for a number of differences between the participants.³⁰ Indeed, in some cases, there were differences in how they perceived museums or articulated their views. In addition, the age gap influenced the participants’ rights and agency with regard to their participation in museums and cultural activities. As I show in this thesis, many participants associated the museum with compulsion and lack of choice, and regretted that adults did not give more weight to their opinions (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of the research findings).

Certainly, 18- to 21-year-olds are generally more autonomous and freer to choose their cultural and leisure activities than their younger counterparts, notably in the school and family context. However, it is not only the legal age of majority that may account for the differences here. The concept of maturity, which is prevalent in many discussions surrounding children’s and young people’s rights, plays a role too. Often a child’s or young person’s degree of ‘maturity’ (which is determined by adults) is used as a reason (or justification)

²⁹ See also Section 3.6 for a discussion of how an intersectional and interdisciplinary lens is needed to understand the relationship between young people and museums.

³⁰ The rationale for the age range is explained more fully in Section 4.8.

for granting more rights or giving more weight to an opinion. Generally, older children and young people are considered to be more mature than their younger counterparts.

This concept has a number of direct consequences for children's and young people's rights and their capacity for agency in everyday life. For example, the Luxembourg school system allows secondary school classes to elect two representatives (*délégués de classe*), who represent their peers' interests in their school. In primary schools, however, this system of class representatives does not exist. In addition, the ORK (2014: 60) notes that only the class representatives of the upper secondary classes are given the opportunity to be heard and consulted by the class council³¹ and questions why this is not the case for the representatives of the lower secondary classes. The notion of maturity is also often used in a legal context, where it affects how a child's opinion is viewed and taken into consideration.³² For example, as mentioned in Section 3.5.2, Article 12 (1) of the CRC (1989) advises that 'the views of the child [are] given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' but that adults hold the power to decide. In addition, Tisdall (2015: 196) draws attention to the problematic nature of Article 3 (1) of the CRC (1989), which gives adults the responsibility to judge what is in the best interests of a child. Here, we can see how different types of rights – for example, in civil, social and cultural contexts – overlap. In all these contexts, the concept of maturity may be used to justify what is in the best interests of a child or a young person (for the cultural context in particular, see Section 3.4).

Although age accounts for some differences in how participants experience and enact their rights, it is not the only factor. As we saw earlier, age is only one 'axis of social power' (Stammers 2012: 290): power is also distributed according to gender, socioeconomic status, education, ethnicity and

³¹ Each class in a secondary school has a class council (*conseil de classe*), which is composed of the school director (or deputy director) and the different subject teachers of that class (MEN 2018b).

³² Custody cases are a prime example of this, in Luxembourg and in many other countries.

so forth. This means that, irrespective of their age, the participants in this study may have different levels of agency according to their different backgrounds and, for example, their awareness of their rights. Therefore, while the participants do not all have the same level of rights and agency in the context of museums and cultural activities – due to their age among other things – these differences do not impact the argument of the thesis. Rather, the various age ranges were helpful in examining the participants' perceptions and experiences of museums precisely because of their different points of view. For example, while the older participants may no longer be compelled to visit museums by their school or family, their reflections on their (not so distant) past experiences helped to understand the experiences of the younger participants, who did not necessarily have the same level of awareness of their rights or the same manner of expressing their thoughts.

To conclude, this section has shown how and why this thesis uses the moral and political language of human rights in the context of this study on young people and museums. On a more general note, we may also add that politics are indeed everywhere, including culture and museums, so any discussion about any type of rights is necessarily political (see, for example, Sandell 2002; Raitt 2005). In addition, as I show in Section 6.3.4, the language used to describe young people's (supposed) attitudes to politics and (supposed) attitudes to culture has similarities in terms of how it is informed by stereotypes and assumptions. There are numerous intersections between the discourses on rights, politics and culture; therefore, a broad and multifaceted perspective is needed to investigate the relationship between young people and museums.

3.6 Intersectionality and interdisciplinarity

In the previous sections, I have shown that approaching young people from a 'decentring the museum' perspective can help to broaden our understanding of their lived experiences. In addition, the example of the cultural practices of young people in care (Gibson and Edwards 2016) has reminded us that young people are not a homogeneous group: they have different backgrounds (social, cultural, economic and so forth), which influence their cultural practices and

their everyday experiences. Furthermore, the discussion of children's and young people's rights and agency has shown that power is unevenly distributed not only along the lines of age, but also around socioeconomic status, education, ethnicity and so forth.

In effect, a person's identity is not determined by age alone. Every human being has multiple identities; some of these identities are seen to be fixed, while others are more likely to change (Hall 1990; Woodward 2002). Furthermore, some identities are attributed, while others are appropriated (Identités Politiques Sociétés Espaces [IPSE] 2011). It is this complexity of being that makes it problematic to speak about homogeneous experiences, be it in social, cultural or other terms. While young people do share some experiences because of their age and because of shared backgrounds, it is also important to consider differences and variations.

In terms of the power imbalances that young people are confronted with, an intersectional perspective helps to broaden our understanding. The term 'intersectionality' was coined by professor of law Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe how sexism and racism interact and add up in black women's lives. Since then, the term has been expanded to include the intertwinement of other forms of oppression, based on, for example, a person's sexual orientation, disability and age (Bates 2014). Furthermore, a conflation of different forms of discrimination will aggravate the whole experience (Crenshaw 1989: 140; Bates 2014: 296).

As well as being relevant to feminist theory, intersectionality provides a useful lens for understanding the experiences of many young people (LeFrançois 2014). In his seminal paper on adultism, Flasher (1978: 523) writes that 'Female children are in double jeopardy'. However, for young people and children, intersectionality is not limited to a combination of adultism and sexism. For example, Young-Bruehl (2012: ch. 4) observes that 'One of the key reasons for the intensity of the childism of the 1970s and 1980s was its simultaneous intertwining with both sexism (and homophobia) and racism'. LeFrançois (2013) notes that adultism, sexism, classism and sanism can all interact in children (and young people) with mental-health issues. Consequently, we can see how

a multiplicity of factors – such as age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, health and socioeconomic status – shape children's and young people's experiences (see also Bessant 2012). We might say, for example, that young people from a minority-ethnic background or with a lower socioeconomic status face higher levels of prejudice and oppression than young people from a white background or with a higher socioeconomic status.

This multitude of factors also affects young people's cultural participation and museum attendance. Research has shown that there are wide disparities in how people from different backgrounds perceive and engage (or do not engage) with museums (Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper 1991; Peterson 1992; DiMaggio 1996; Kirchberg 1996; Bennett et al. 2009; Bourdieu 2010; Gibson 2010; Dawson 2014; Falk and Katz-Gerro 2016). While most of these studies concentrate on adults, it is highly probable that the disparities are no different for young people.³³ Although there is a scarcity of research investigating the impact of different factors (ethnicity, gender, religion, and so forth) on young people's museum attendance, it is known that there is a plurality of determinants (Lemerise 1999). This tangled web of different identities, backgrounds and experiences implies that there is a need for an interdisciplinary approach to studying young people and museums. Indeed, we can find demands emanating from youth studies for an interdisciplinary approach to research on young people (Jessor 1993); for example, combining youth studies and cultural studies (Cohen and Ainley 2000). Therefore, perspectives from such diverse domains as museum studies, youth studies, cultural studies, sociology and psychology, to name but a few, are necessary to fully grasp young people's perceptions and experiences of museums.

3.7 Conclusion

The aim of this third chapter was to decentre the museum in order to contribute to a better understanding of young people's experiences in social and cultural

³³ See Chapter 7 for a discussion on the limitations of the present study and suggestions for further research.

terms. Instead of viewing them as a museum audience, I conceptualised young people as a diverse community and investigated the power relationships that might underlie their relationship with adults and, by extension, museums. To this end, I undertook a review of the literature from areas such as youth studies and prejudice studies, which was further supported by discourse analysis. Many of the theories discussed in this chapter were directly rooted in the research participants' accounts and only came to the fore after data analysis.

In the first part of the chapter, I investigated the notion of prejudice. I showed that prejudice is a means of dominance and control that operates on the grounds of a belief in the superiority of one group of people over another group that is described as inferior and different from the norm (Hall 1997; Augoustinos and Reynolds 2001; Sandell 2007; Young-Bruehl 2012). Inequalities and abuse of power are justified by a supposed legitimacy. The 'us versus them' dichotomy is exercised through the mechanisms of 'othering' and stereotyping. Furthermore, the case of children and young people illustrates that prejudice may not always be apparent or recognised because it is normalised and legitimised in everyday practice.

I then explored adultism: in other words, prejudice and discrimination against children and young people (Flasher 1978; Young-Bruehl 2012). In particular, I highlighted the general tendency to view young people as objects of concern or as individuals who are considered to be 'at risk' (Flasher 1978; Zeldin 2004; Bessant 2008). Children and young people are sometimes perceived as being 'naturally inferior' (Young-Bruehl 2012: ch. 7), lacking the capacities and capabilities of adults (the 'norm'). These perceptions and beliefs may lay the grounds for policing children and young people to the detriment of their rights, autonomy and freedom of choice.

In addition, I showed that adultism can take the form of patronisation and paternalism. The underlying justification for this kind of adultist conduct lies in the beliefs that young people need to be helped, improved or fixed and that this happens in their best interests (Dutton 2001; Gibson 2001; Young-Bruehl 2012). Even arts and culture programmes, which generally have a positive influence on young people's lives, are not immune to paternalism. This

happens, for example, when programmes focus on ‘betterment’ (Gibson and Edwards 2016: 195) rather than, for example, collaboration or empowerment. Patronisation is also apparent when adults determine the value of culture for young people and limit their autonomy and freedom of choice (Flasher 1978; Gibson and Edwards 2016).

I then considered how a discourse around rights, especially human rights and cultural rights, and political language informed the approach taken in this thesis. As the field of human rights is a complex one, I explained the different ways in which they may be perceived and what place cultural rights occupy in this field. Given the subject of the present study, it was particularly important to investigate how young people’s (human and cultural) rights and agency can be conceptualised and understood – especially with regard to the research participants.

Finally, I drew on previous research to bring to the fore that young people are not a homogeneous group but a community of individuals from different milieus and with different identities, who share a number of common characteristics or circumstances. The intersections of their different backgrounds account for the variety in how power issues affect their social and cultural lives – and, ultimately, how they perceive and experience museums. I concluded by highlighting the need for an interdisciplinary lens in order to study and understand the relationship between young people and museums.

In the next chapter, I move from the conceptual framework to the methodological framework of the present study. I discuss how the methodology for this research project was developed and explain the fieldwork, data collection and analysis that was carried out. In addition to providing the tools needed to answer the research questions, the methodology contributes directly to the research aims. Indeed, in the next chapter I show that in this study the museum is decentred not only in theoretical terms (as we have seen in this chapter) but also in practical terms. Although this thesis investigates the relationship between young people and museums, the focus is on the former: it is only by understanding young people in their entirety and in context – not as

(potential) museum visitors only – that a genuine contribution to the current knowledge is made possible.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduced the overall framework of this thesis and explained how a ‘decentring the museum’ lens makes it possible to address the research questions. In Chapters 2 and 3, I provided the context of this study. In the first of these chapters I explored the relationship between young people and museums from a museological point of view, while in the second I approached the subject in a broader and interdisciplinary way. In this chapter, I discuss the methodological framework and its connection to the research questions. In addition, I show that the conceptual and methodological frameworks are closely related. Indeed, the methodology of the present study not only helps to answer the research questions but also contributes to the research aims by filling methodological gaps. Thus, the ‘decentring the museum’ perspective is applied to position this study in both theoretical and methodological terms.

Accordingly, in this chapter I explain how the methodology is situated in relation to previous research and how it addresses the aims of the present enquiry. Before outlining the theoretical approach, which is influenced by grounded theory and ethnography, I reflect on the role of the researcher in qualitative research. Because this study involves young people, an ethical and empathetic approach was of particular importance. I also discuss how the methodology was developed to put young people – rather than museums – at the centre. Finally, I outline the data-collection method (focus groups) and the location of the study (youth clubs in Luxembourg), and conclude with practical considerations relating to fieldwork, data collection and analysis.

4.2 Methodological rationale and research aims

Before exploring the rationale for the methodology, let us briefly summarise the main research questions of the present study:

- How do young people perceive, understand and experience museums?
- Which emotions do young people associate with museums and museum visits?

- Can museums genuinely be relevant to young people?
- What roles do the issues of power, representation and access play in the relationship between young people and museums?

From the early stages of this project, my aim was for the methodology and methods to be more than simple ‘choices’. They needed to be closely connected to the research aims; in other words, the methodology, methods and research aims needed to go ‘hand in hand’. The approach to data collection was very similar to the strategy invoked by Charmaz (2014) in her exploration of grounded theory. In fact, Charmaz (2014: ch. 2, sect. 1) states that:

My notion of grounded theory includes a basic methodological principle: our data collection methods flow from the research question and where we go with it. Thus, a particular data collection or analytic strategy cannot drive the research question.

Hence, the aim of the study – that is, to explore young people’s perceptions and experiences and make their voices central – required the methodology and methods to take this focus on young people into account. As stated in the introduction, the methodology and methods of the present study not only contribute to filling *knowledge* gaps but also address a number of *methodological* gaps and shortcomings in existing research on young people and museums.

A central feature of this study is its purely qualitative approach. A large share of the existing research on young people and museums has used a mixed-methods approach, in which qualitative methods (such as focus groups) are an additional feature (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007).³⁴ These studies have made it possible to generate a broad view of the topic and uncover the key aspects that define the relationship between young people and museums. However, as the qualitative methods were included as ancillary elements only, often to explore the themes that were generated by the quantitative data (see, for example,

³⁴ See Chapter 2, Table 1.

Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003), the full potential of qualitative research on this particular subject has not yet been exploited. In contrast with previous studies, the specific research aims of the present study required an entirely qualitative perspective. Therefore, I was able to explore the ‘depth’ rather than the ‘breadth’ of the relationship under study.

4.3 Reflecting on positionality

As social researchers, we are all ‘participant observers’ in the sense that we participate in and influence the social realities that we investigate; to put it differently, ‘there is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 15–16). With our assumptions, presence and interpretation, we shape and construct the social world and our research: from the initial planning and fieldwork to the analysis, the findings, and the conclusions we draw. In this study, for example, although the focus groups³⁵ were conducted in a natural setting, the sessions and conversations were not ‘natural’: they took place because of my intervention. Social and qualitative research – and research in general – is never a neutral process. As Mason (2002: 7) explains, ‘a researcher cannot be neutral, or objective, or detached, from the knowledge and evidence they are generating’. Consequently, qualitative research requires constant ‘critical self-scrutiny’ and ‘active reflexivity’ (Mason 2002: 7). Mason (2002: 5) defines reflexivity as:

[...] thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see.

For this reason, it was important to acknowledge my positionality and how it influenced the research process (Chiseri-Strater 1996). Positionality refers to how researchers are situated in the social world in terms of the different positions they hold; for example, their social class, gender, ethnicity and profession (Chiseri-Strater 1996; Qin 2016). During my fieldwork in the

³⁵ The method is described in more detail in Sections 4.7 and 4.8.

youth clubs, I was approaching young people not only as a researcher but also as a white woman from a (lower) middle-class background with Luxembourgish and Belgian origins. In addition, although I tried to be as open-minded and ‘unprejudiced’ as possible, my own experiences as a young person in Luxembourg inevitably shaped how I viewed youth clubs and the young people attending them. Indeed, as I did not regularly visit youth clubs myself, the youth work happening there and the relationships between young people and youth workers were unfamiliar to me. While this was certainly helpful in terms of adopting an unbiased attitude, it was also challenging because it meant that I had to enter ‘uncharted territory’ and find my ‘place’ within it in a relatively short period.

However, positionality is not limited to the different identities we have as individuals; it also encompasses how other people perceive us and how we *think* they perceive us (Chiseri-Strater 1996; Qin 2016). As our identities are created by difference (Brasseur 2015: 14), it is our relationship to the Other that shapes positionality (Merriam et al. 2001: 411). For example, during the fieldwork in youth clubs, the participants and gatekeepers perceived me as not only a researcher but also a student, which may have contributed to their desire to ‘help’ me in my endeavours. This was particularly helpful given that I was experienced in conducting interviews with individuals (that is, adults) but not with groups of (young) people. Thanks to the openness of the participants and the support of the youth workers, the doubts I had prior to the sessions (for example, about whether the participants would be willing to talk about their views and experiences of museums) were quickly dispelled after the first focus group.

The fact that my institutional affiliation was with a university and not a museum also proved to be helpful during the focus groups. In my introduction to the sessions, I pointed out that I was interested in *all* points of view and experiences, positive and negative. I also explained that I was not affiliated to any museum and that, consequently, the participants did not have to be ‘nice’ and their remarks would not offend me. As Nina Simon (2016: ch. 5, sect. 2) says with regard to her own experience as a museum director, ‘If you ask them

directly, some people will lie to be nice. There's no comfortable way to check a box that says, "I got nothing out of this."

Apart from external (or attributed) traits, positionality is defined by subjective factors, such as life experiences and the resulting values and assumptions (Chiseri-Strater 1996; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Qin 2016). For example, my personal belief in social justice contributed to my choice of the present research topic. I was also aware that this deeply ingrained conviction and my sensitivity to issues relating to it would equip me with a particular 'lens'. On the one hand, I embraced this lens because it enabled me to develop an approach to the study that corresponded with my beliefs and personality. On the other hand, I did not want that lens to obstruct my openness to the data. As I discuss in Section 4.4.1, one way in which I addressed this issue was to use tools that enabled me to stay close to the data and develop theories directly from it.

Positionality is also closely linked to power and representation (Merriam et al. 2001). As I describe in Section 4.6, my position as a researcher vis-à-vis the participants and as an adult vis-à-vis young people was pivotal in this study's ethical framework. Indeed, my (privileged) position as an adult researcher determined how I constructed and represented the participants' voices (see also Best 2007: 14). Here, it is worth pointing out that the participants were also positioned. They, too, occupied different positions and identities – of which age was just one – and may have understood and expressed language in ways that were different from mine.³⁶ My translation is thus not only literal (in the sense of translating data from Luxembourgish into English) but also symbolic: it is my own interpretation and construction of the participants' voices.

However, debates on how it is genuinely possible to represent truths or realities (for example, between constructivists and postmodernists) should not 'paralyse' qualitative researchers (Mason 2002: 6). Adopting a reflexive stance

³⁶ See Chapter 6 for a discussion of issues relating to young people's culture(s).

and addressing potentially critical issues does not undermine but enriches the quality of qualitative research. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 16) argue, 'to say that our findings, and even our data, are *constructed* does not automatically imply that they do not or cannot represent social phenomena'. Rather, reflexivity allows us to actively acknowledge our role in the research process, refuting claims of a supposed neutrality and thus making the process transparent and retraceable (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 18; Krueger and Casey 2015: 178).

4.4 Methodological framework

The framework of this study needed to take account of its exploratory nature and allow for thorough in-depth analysis. Indeed, the research questions required an open approach that would produce extensive data on young people's perceptions and experiences. The approach also needed to facilitate theory construction. Various elements from grounded theory and ethnography allowed me to develop an approach that was adapted to the research aims (see Kirk 2014 for a similar strategy).

4.4.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is an approach that allows researchers, in a systematic way, to develop theory that is rooted in the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014). Rather than providing a fixed set of rules, grounded theory offers a series of guidelines to help qualitative researchers generate theories that stem from the data. The aim of grounded theory is not to test hypotheses but to build categories from the data by using comparative methods and by simultaneously collecting and analysing the data. As Charmaz (2014: ch. 1, intro.) explains:

Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves. Thus researchers construct a theory 'grounded' in their data. Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis.

Since the 'invention' of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, the approach has been developed, criticised and adapted in various ways (Charmaz 2014; Denscombe 2014). Even Glaser and Strauss had different points of view, especially on positivism and the supposed neutrality of the researcher (Charmaz 2014: ch. 1, sect. 2; Denscombe 2014: 116–117). For the purpose of the present study, I was mostly influenced by Charmaz's (2014) constructivist version of grounded theory, which openly recognises the subjective and interpretative role of the researcher during the analysis and the construction of theories.

Four key aspects of grounded theory were the most influential in the context of this thesis: a closeness to the data; the constant comparative method; theoretical sampling; and rich data. Firstly, one of my primary objectives was to develop theories that would be 'close to the data' (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 103). Originally, grounded theorists were meant to delay the literature review to avoid being influenced or 'contaminated' by existing theories and ideas (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014). Today, however, most researchers using grounded theory agree that ignoring theories from the outset is counterproductive and simply impossible (Mason 2002; Charmaz 2014).

Indeed, no researcher operates in a 'theoretical vacuum' (Mason 2002: 181). I began this study by drawing on my background knowledge in museum studies and by engaging with the literature that was relevant to this project. The initial literature review enabled me to examine existing theories and identify gaps in previous research. It was also an exploratory and interdisciplinary exercise: reading widely in fields outside museum studies, such as youth studies, expanded rather than constricted my ideas. These preliminary readings in youth studies were largely unfocused, because their aim was to equip me with a sensitivity towards and basic knowledge of the topic. For example, some of the first papers I explored dealt with the relationship between youth studies and cultural studies (Cohen and Ainley 2000), arts programmes and youth development (Dutton 2001) and the differences between youth-driven and adult-driven youth programmes (Larson, Walker and Pearce 2005).

However, a considerable part of the literature in this thesis – for example, on the subjects of adultism, prejudice and patronisation – is drawn upon as a direct result of the data. Seeing the literature review as an ongoing process enabled me to stay open to new ideas and theories while I was listening to and engaging with young people's voices during the focus groups. Then, as I analysed the data, I was able to assess the concepts and theories and link them to the wider literature.

Secondly, to construct theories that are 'close to the data' (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 103), I used the constant comparative method. This method allows researchers to build codes and categories from the data. It is a key component of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014) and is one of the preferred tools for analysing focus groups (Krueger and Casey 2015). Through abductive (rather than purely inductive) reasoning, I oscillated between data analysis, conceptual abstraction and theory creation (Mason 2002; Charmaz 2014; Denscombe 2014). I discuss the constant comparative method in more detail in Section 4.9.2.

Thirdly, the sample of the present study is not representative of the population; it is relevant and purposeful for the research aims and the construction of theories (Mason 2002; Charmaz 2014; Denscombe 2014; Krueger and Casey 2015). This sampling strategy is appropriate for focus groups, as a certain homogeneity among the participants is required. Indeed, the participants need to have common characteristics – such as age, in the present case – to help the researcher investigate a particular topic (Krueger and Casey 2015: 81). Theoretical sampling, as understood by grounded theorists, means adapting the sample as the categories and theories develop (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Mason 2002; Charmaz 2014; Denscombe 2014). This implies collecting additional data that can fill gaps in order to build theories; for example, by revising questions or by going back to the original sample and asking additional questions (Charmaz 2014: ch. 8, sect. 1).

Consequently, as I began to identify the initial categories during the data analysis (which I started at the same time as the data collection), I adapted some of the existing questions and added new ones for my later focus groups,

while paying attention to maintaining consistency with the research agenda (Krueger and Casey 2015: 70). For example, after the first focus group, Jenny, the youth worker who had been present during the discussion, suggested starting future focus groups with a brainstorming session in which I would ask the participants about the words or ideas they associate with the word 'museum'. Jenny thought that the term was not too general or abstract for young people and that this introductory session would help to 'break the ice'. Because the participants were not all familiar with group discussions, especially in the presence of a stranger (me, in this case), some of them were a little shy to begin with. The brainstormer proved to be valuable advice. As I wrote in my fieldwork journal after a subsequent focus group:

The brainstorming session at the beginning of the focus group is a good idea. Even when the participants do not come up with *many* words, their answers generally cover a lot of ground. More importantly, the brainstormer makes participants 'jump' into the topic more quickly (as opposed to when my first question to them was about which museums they had ever been to). (Fieldnotes, Focus Group D).

The advice and insight of the youth workers was helpful in many ways. For example, after reaching a point of saturation following the fifth focus group (see Section 4.9.3), I conducted three additional interviews with youth workers. Although I do not consider these interviews to be part of the main data (which consists of young people's voices), they help to illuminate the categories that emerged from the focus groups (Charmaz 2014: ch. 8, sect. 1).

Fourthly, building theories that are grounded in the data requires strong and rich data. As Charmaz (2014: ch. 2, intro.) writes:

Rich data are detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives. Obtaining rich data means seeking 'thick' description (Geertz, 1973), such as writing extensive fieldnotes of observations, collecting respondents' written personal accounts, finding relevant documents, and/or compiling detailed narratives (such as from transcribed tapes of interviews). Researchers generate strong grounded theories with rich data. Grounded theories may be

built with diverse kinds of data – fieldnotes, interviews, and information from records and reports.

In this extract, Charmaz highlights the value of taking account of ethnography when building theories that are close to the data. As shown in the following section, Geertz's 'thick description' (1973) and ethnographic ways of recording the data (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) were especially relevant to the present study.

4.4.2 Ethnography

For Geertz (1973: 9–10), 'ethnography is thick description'. Thick description of social events goes beyond the superficial; it is the interpretation of 'a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures' (Geertz 1973: 7). By adopting a semiotic approach, ethnographers are able to ascribe cultural context and meaning to their observations. Geertz (1973: 28) explains that:

The aim [of thick-description ethnography] is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts [...]. Thus it is not only interpretation that goes all the way down to the most immediate observational level: the theory upon which such interpretation conceptually depends does so also.

Similar to Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2014) with their conceptions of grounded theory, Geertz (1973) argues for the construction of theories that are rooted in the field and in the data.

To make such interpretations and constructions possible, the basis – that is, the data – needs to be rich and detailed. In the words of Schultze and Avital (2011: 3), 'rich data, like rich soil, is also fertile and generative'. Therefore, to gather rich data, I drew on ethnographic methods of data collection – of which digital audio recordings were the main method. However, audio recordings alone did not offer a full account of the sessions. To record other aspects of the sessions, such as participants' non-verbal communication, I relied on fieldnotes (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 147–148). So that I could concentrate on the discussions during the sessions, I recorded these notes immediately after the focus groups. The fieldnotes allowed me to document the context in which the focus groups took place, such as the setting, the participants' pseudonyms, the

participants' body language, and any responses or incidents that I found noteworthy or intriguing. The following two extracts offer a glimpse of the fieldnotes I recorded after two different focus groups:

Focus group held at youth club D. The session was held at noon on a Saturday, before the club opened at 14.00. Sunny weather, everybody was cheerful (some were tired from night out). Session lasted for approximately one and a half hours. At the end of the discussion, Liam, the youth worker, ordered pizza for everyone (which I offered). There were four participants: Kerry (21), Danny (21), Antoine (17) and Gabriel (17). It was an interesting and lively discussion. Kerry is an arts student. Danny is a fan of Greek mythology (he's renowned for this among his friends) and talks very enthusiastically about it. He loves to visit museums that display Greek sculpture (e.g. in Berlin). Gabriel appears to be struggling at school. However, he made some of the most interesting comments and gave profound insights into a recent visit to the (renovated) WW1 museum in Verdun. (Fieldnotes, Focus Group D)

The discussion lasted for approximately one hour. Towards the end, the participants' concentration and motivation decreased significantly. This was a sign for me that we should draw to a close. Body language: most of them sat quietly around the table. Jim moved a lot in his chair, gesticulating etc. Jenny told me that he always wants to be the centre of attention. Philip was relatively quiet but he was attentive and he had some thoughts that he wanted to share. I just needed to look at him directly, as if I was talking to him alone; that encouraged him to speak. (Fieldnotes, Focus Group A)

These fieldnotes were part of my fieldwork journal (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 150–152). In a separate section, I recorded the personal feelings that I had experienced during and after the sessions, and I wrote down ideas and analytical notes as they emerged. These memos were an elemental part of the analysis and theory-building process. Memos are also an essential component of the constant comparative method that is used in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014). As Charmaz (2014: ch. 1, sect. 4) notes:

Memos form the core of your analysis and record how you arrived at it. You write memos throughout your research. Memos provide ways to compare data, to explore ideas about the codes, and to direct further data-gathering. As you work with your data and codes, you become progressively more analytic in how you treat them and thus you raise certain codes to tentative conceptual categories.

Memos represent an 'internal dialogue' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 151), which is necessary to develop ideas and theories in a reflective way. In addition, memo-writing provides a 'natural history' of the research process (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 152); it offers a rigorous and transparent means to make analysis and interpretation retraceable (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 151–152; Krueger and Casey 2015: 178). The following extract from my fieldwork journal shows an example of a memo. Here, I am reflecting on the feelings participants reportedly had during past museum visits.

Empathy – in various ways – seems to be a central/pivotal theme. The lack of empathy from facilitators (parents, school, museum guides) can result in negative feelings [...]. Being able to feel empathy (imagining and understanding how another person lives or lived) can result in deep emotions and positive feelings. Also, positive feelings may be linked to flow experiences. (Fieldwork journal, entry 16)

This extract shows the first ideas that emerged after I had read the sections of the focus-group transcripts that related to the different feelings participants had expressed. The memo illustrates the early stages of a process that eventually led to a more complex analysis and contributed to the themes on emotions and patronisation (discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively).

4.5 Decentring the museum in methodological terms

4.5.1 Putting young people at the centre

From the beginning, a key component of this study was its focus on young people and their voices. Therefore, it was important to decentre the museum, not only in theoretical but also in methodological terms. On the subject of museum audience research, Hooper-Greenhill (1999c: 11) remarks:

Looking out from over the museum ramparts has enabled the retention of the view that museums play a central role in people's lives. However, once research is conducted from outside the museum, in homes and places of work, or recreation, it becomes clear how marginal museums are to most people's daily existence. The only people to whom museums are of central concern are those who work in them. For everyone else, museums must be fitted into their busy schedules, their personal and social identities, their interests and agendas. For everyone except museum workers, museums are at a distance, out there, one of a range of social institutions that can be used or avoided at will. In fact, of all social institutions, museums are one of the easiest to avoid.

To explore young people's understandings and experiences of museums, therefore, it seemed to be important to conduct research in a 'neutral' setting; that is, in the sense of a place outside the museum. As not all young people may be very familiar with museums, it was important to locate participants in their own spaces: settings in which they, rather than I as the researcher, would feel comfortable. Youth clubs appeared to offer this type of friendly and familiar environment. An important feature of youth clubs is that they are places that young people go to by choice. By contrast, at school and (to some extent) in museums, young people are in a subordinate position (see also Leonard 2007: 153; Krueger and Casey 2015: 191). Youth clubs also allowed me to reach many different young people: for example, young people from a variety of social and migration backgrounds; students and school-leavers; and non-visitors in addition to regular and occasional museum visitors.

4.5.2 Youth clubs in Luxembourg

I chose my home country, Luxembourg, as the location for this study because it provides a compelling research context. As described in Section 1.5, Luxembourg is a small country that is characterised by its multiculturalism and multilingualism. Its cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity makes the country an interesting environment for the exploration of young people's perceptions and experiences of museums. In addition, the fact of being Luxembourgish and multilingual myself was helpful in contacting youth clubs, negotiating access and conducting field research.

There are currently more than 60 youth clubs in Luxembourg and the number is growing steadily (Entente des Gestionnaires des Maisons de Jeunes [EGMJ] 2018). Youth clubs in Luxembourg are aimed at young people between the ages of 12 and 26. The majority of youth club members (or ‘users’) are between 13 and 19 years old, and the average age is 17 (MEN 2016: 6). Most members are male, with only one-third being female (MEN 2016: 9). On average, 44% of young people visiting youth clubs are Luxembourgish citizens and 56% are non-national citizens (MEN 2016: 7). The proportion of non-nationals in youth clubs is slightly higher than it is in the general population (48% in 2017); however, the proportions for youth clubs and for the general population vary considerably across regions (MEN 2016: 8; STATEC 2019a). Concerning the socioeconomic background of club members, Jenny, one of the youth workers I interviewed, explained that the make-up of youth clubs generally matches the composition of the surrounding neighbourhood. Jenny also remarked that youth work varies widely from one club to another, as young people from different backgrounds (or with different socioeconomic statuses) may have different needs and concerns.

The origins of youth work in Luxembourg can be traced to the early twentieth century (Schroeder 2013). However, most of the professionalisation of youth work, and its development into its current form, has happened during the last 40 years. Since the 1970s, youth work has been linked to social work and social developments. For example, due to the substantial immigration that has characterised Luxembourg for more than a century, a large area of youth work has been devoted to the social inclusion of young immigrants. Indeed, the openness and accessibility of youth clubs make them preferred points of contact for young people who come from migration or socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Schroeder 2013).

Youth clubs in Luxembourg operate outside the formal education system; they are non-selective and are open to all young people. Youth work is thus considered to be *Offene Jugendarbeit*, or ‘open youth work’, which is distinguished primarily by young people’s voluntary involvement and their autonomous and spontaneous participation (Willems, Heinen and Meyers 2013: 39). Youth clubs offer a range of different services: from recreational activities

to guidance and information on aspects of life; for example, school, employment and family relationships (MEN 2016). They are also considered to be places of non-formal education in fields such as communication, creativity, social relations and health (MEN 2016). On the whole, Luxembourgish youth clubs were ideal places to meet young people on their own terms. In addition, their philosophy and way of working fitted in well with the research topic and the approach of the present study.

4.6 Ethical framework

As the study involved minors and took place in a natural setting (that is, an ordinary place that young people go to), ethics played a major role from the beginning. Thus, it was important to conceive of an ethical framework that would respect the participants and keep to the University of Leicester's Code of Practice for Research Ethics.

After receiving clearance from the University Ethics Committee, I had to negotiate access to youth clubs. The head of the Luxembourg Association of Youth Club Leaders proposed sending a call for participants to all the youth club leaders in Luxembourg on my behalf. However, this first attempt was not successful, as it did not prompt any replies. Subsequently, I accompanied the head of the association to a local meeting of youth club leaders to present my project. This resulted in one collaboration. In the weeks that followed, I made phone calls to a number of other youth clubs and visited them in person, which enabled me to secure access to more clubs. Gatekeepers were a key element in the process: those leaders who were interested in taking part in the project proved to be invaluable for organising focus groups and recruiting participants.

In accordance with my research aims and my personal convictions, it was important to conceive of a framework that would be characterised by an ethical, humane and empathetic approach to the research participants. In the case of young people, it is particularly important to pay attention to issues relating to power imbalances and adult authority, notably that of gatekeepers and researchers. The theme of adultism is a common thread in the present thesis; for example, adults' attitudes towards young people and their cultural

participation are repeatedly called into question (see Chapters 3 and 6). Adultist behaviour is not an issue that is limited to the research findings; there is also a risk of discriminatory and prejudiced practice in the research process itself. In academic contexts, it is particularly difficult to create a truly equal relationship between the researcher and the participants – especially when factoring in the ethical requirements concerning ‘vulnerable’ groups, such as young people. Therefore, it is crucial for researchers to be aware of power issues and to be reflexive about their privileged position (Best 2007; Leonard 2007). Discussing the issue of ‘studying down’ in childhood and youth research, Best (2007: 12) notes:

Consideration of the robust ways power is present as an active force at every stage of research – from the early conceptual stages, throughout data collection, to analysis – necessitates sustained and rigorous reflection on the part of the researcher. An acknowledgment of the imbalance of power in research requires careful attention to the ways our methods, our definitional boundaries, and our claims making construct a world and the groups in it as much as they express it.

Another issue to consider is the fact that often, children and young people are the object of research but are excluded from how knowledge is produced (Morrow and Richards 1996: 96; Best 2007: 14). Participatory and collaborative research projects can help to redress these unequal power relations. For the present study, in which the aim is to explore attitudes and relationships rather than to implement change, an approach such as participatory action research³⁷ would not have been meaningful (see Tzibazi 2013). Nevertheless, being conscious of my privileged position, I tried to address power inequalities in the following ways throughout the research project.

Firstly, I ensured that young people’s voices were the focal point of this investigation. In this research, young people’s voices have not been replaced

³⁷ Participatory action research is an approach based on collaboration between researchers and participants with the aim of implementing change (Baum, MacDougall and Smith 2006).

by those of adult proxies, such as parents, youth workers or facilitators in museums. Their opinions are valued in their own right and are not substituted by 'adult constructions' of youth (LeFrançois 2014: 48). The participants' views are also recognised as a valid basis for research – an issue that has been lacking in adultist research, as LeFrançois (2014: 48) explains:

When interviews are part of the research design, adults such as parents, teachers, psychologists, and social workers, often serve as proxies to direct interviews with children, as they are seen to provide more scientifically valid information about children's behavior, needs, and experiences than children themselves. This underscores and perpetuates deeply held adultist views of children as incompetent and vulnerable while producing research findings that are biased and of questionable validity.

Therefore, in the present study, the interviews I conducted with youth workers served only as a tool for aiding the analysis and interpretation. They provided an additional perspective by shedding light on the data, but they did not replace young people's voices and they are not part of the data itself.³⁸

Secondly, participation in the study was entirely voluntary. By choosing a location outside the museum, which young people go to by choice, the risk of participants being compelled to participate in the focus groups was significantly reduced. If the research had been conducted within the school setting, where young people are subordinate to adults, their participation would probably have been compulsory. Leonard (2007: 153) notes that 'Schools are often bounded and constrained social spaces. They provide a research context where the adult-child power imbalance is particularly acute'. Similarly, Morrow and Richards (1996: 101) point out that 'children who are required to participate in research in schools may not feel in a position to dissent, simply because most (if not all) tasks and activities are compulsory'. Therefore, it is important for researchers to obtain not only 'informed consent', but also 'informed dissent' (Morrow and Richards 1996: 101).

³⁸ Therefore, the term 'data' in the present study refers solely to the data from the focus groups.

Hence, to recruit participants I designed a poster (with the help of a young person), which was displayed in the participating youth clubs for several weeks before the session. The youth workers in the participating clubs also actively invited young people to take part. In addition, at the beginning of each focus group I made clear that the participants were free to leave the session and to withdraw from the study (see Appendices 2 and 3 for the project information sheets and consent forms).

Thirdly, I made sure that I adapted to the participants, rather than vice versa. For example, I used age-appropriate language and avoided scientific jargon before and during the focus groups. I also sought young people's advice whenever possible. For example, at the end of each session I asked for their feedback on the questions we had discussed. As setting up focus groups is time-consuming and complex, there are usually no pilot studies (Krueger and Casey 2015: 70). However, I pretested the intelligibility of the questions with a young person I am acquainted with³⁹ and I adapted the questions from one focus group to the next when I noticed that the participants had difficulties making sense of them.

Fourthly, to protect the participants' rights and guarantee their confidentiality, I anonymised all personal data except age and gender. In this thesis, the names of the participants and youth workers have been substituted by pseudonyms, and the names and locations of youth clubs have been removed.

Finally, at various stages of this study, I questioned how my voice and the voices of the participants were expressed and heard.⁴⁰ As stated above, issues relating to power imbalances between adults and young people are raised throughout this thesis: from the literature review to the methodology and, eventually, the findings. It was important, therefore, to constantly call my voice – as a researcher and as an adult – into question. Indeed, reflexivity is doubly

³⁹ This young person's responses are not part of the data.

⁴⁰ See Section 4.3 for a detailed discussion of reflexivity in this thesis.

important when an adult researcher conducts research with children and young people. Not only does the researcher control the voice of the participants, but also the adult controls the voice of the young people (Best 2007: 14). An abductive rather than deductive approach to data analysis enabled me to stay close to the data (that is, young people's voices) and develop theories directly from that data (for an overview of the main approaches, see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Mason 2002; Charmaz 2014; Denscombe 2014; Krueger and Casey 2015). In addition, throughout all the stages of this study, I was careful to avoid unfounded generalisations and stereotypes, thereby respecting the individuality of the participants and of young people in general.

4.7 The method: focus groups

The focus group is renowned as a technique that is used in market research. However, the origins of focus groups can be traced back to the 1930s, when social scientists began to look for interview techniques that would be more open-ended and less directive than questionnaires (Krueger and Casey 2015: 2–4). In effect, one of the first focus groups was conducted in the US during the Second World War to investigate morale among soldiers. During the economic boom of the 1950s, market research increasingly adopted the focus group as a technique to analyse consumer behaviour. It was only in the 1980s that focus groups were 'rediscovered' by academia and adapted for scientific rather than economic goals. Today, focus groups are used in a variety of settings, from market research to academia and the public sector (Krueger and Casey 2015: 175–184).

According to Krueger and Casey (2015: 6–7), focus groups have five basic properties:

- they involve a small number of participants (usually between four and twelve people, depending on the topic and purpose);
- the participants have a number of features in common;
- the discussions generate qualitative data;
- the discussions are centred around a particular topic; and

- the data contributes to a better understanding of the topic that is being explored.

The interaction and exchange that takes place within the group is a further characteristic that differentiates focus groups from other qualitative interview techniques (Acocella 2012: 1126). While the basic technique is always similar, approaches to focus groups can vary between sectors and settings. For example, focus groups used in academic research are underpinned by a more rigorous and methodical approach than those used in other settings (Krueger and Casey 2015: 178).

Focus groups, then, are particularly useful for investigating people's perceptions, ideas and feelings about a specific subject or issue (Krueger and Casey 2015: 7). The principle of the method is simple: 'focus groups work when participants feel comfortable, respected, and free to give their opinions without being judged' (Krueger and Casey 2015: 4). A friendly location and a certain homogeneity among the participants can create a safe environment for people to express their views and motivations – on which researchers can base their analysis. Focus groups also allow researchers to capture participants' views in their own language: a feature that is well suited to the exploration of young people's voices.

4.8 Fieldwork and sample

Between March and May 2016, I conducted five focus groups, with a total of twenty-four participants, in five different youth clubs. The focus groups were held in various parts of the country to reflect the diversity (in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status) of Luxembourgish society (see Section 1.5 and Appendix 4 for the record of participants). As stated earlier, the participants were recruited by means of a poster that was displayed in the participating youth clubs several weeks before each session. In addition, the youth workers at the different clubs approached individual young people and invited them to participate. It was important to ensure that the study would involve a wider range of young people than those who were enthusiastic about museums. Therefore, the youth workers and I explicitly called for participants who were

eager to share their positive *and* negative opinions and experiences of museums.

I intended to hold small focus groups of between four and six participants, as this would allow the young people to feel more comfortable and give them time to express and exchange their opinions (Gibson 2007; Acocella 2012; Krueger and Casey 2015). The actual sessions were attended by an average of five participants. The participants were between 12 and 21 years old, and the average age was 17 (see Figure 1).

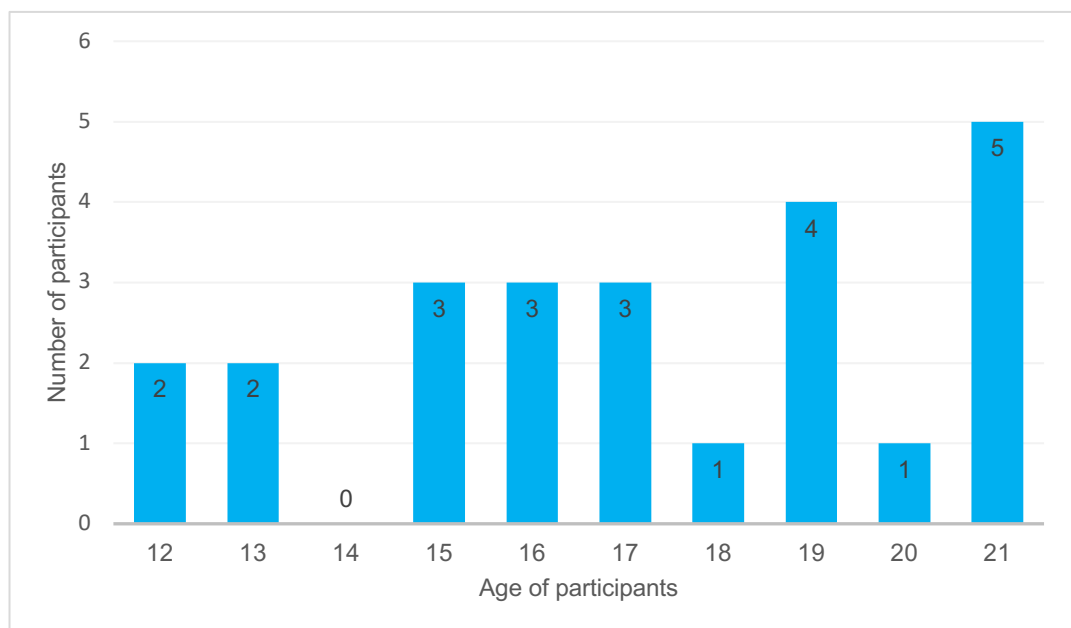


Figure 1. Number of focus-group participants by age.

For focus groups with young people, Krueger and Casey (2015: 188) recommend keeping the age range within two years due to large differences in terms of ‘interests, experiences, and socialization’. Initially, I envisaged that I would concentrate on young people between the ages of 16 and 18. However, due to the demographics of youth clubs in Luxembourg and the way in which these clubs operate, and to allow for a sufficient number of participants, I extended the age range. In case the analysis revealed gender-specific perceptions and experiences of museums, I initially recorded the participants’ gender. However, the sample size is too small to draw any conclusions, and it is not the aim of the study to make claims about statistical generalisability.

Due to the varied locations of the youth clubs I visited, the participants came from a range of social, migrant and educational backgrounds. I aimed for each focus group to last for approximately one hour, which is the recommended session time for young people (Krueger and Casey 2015: 191). In reality, the discussions actually lasted for between 55 and 80 minutes, which reflected young people's interest in taking part. After most of the focus groups, I stayed for a while and the young people often lingered to chat and tell me that they had enjoyed being asked for their opinions.

The discussions were semi-structured and mostly non-directive. In preparation for the focus groups, I compiled open-ended questions and sub-questions, funnelling from more general to more specific questions (see Appendix 5). The questions centred around:

- past experiences and the image of museums;
- 'think back' questions;
- 'thinking' and 'feeling' questions;
- the museum of the future; and
- a museum for young people.

Focus groups are 'social experience[s]' (Krueger and Casey 2015: 41). This meant that on the one hand, I had to be mindful of my research agenda and stay in control of the session (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 117). On the other hand, I had to be flexible enough to follow unexpected turns in the conversation, notably those that transpired from the participants' mental associations and flows of thought, as these could have divulged new areas of interest (Acocella 2012: 1132). The extract below shows an example of how a discussion about museums drifted towards the subject of amusement parks.⁴¹ The conversation – which involves Kate (19), Emma (18), Melanie (a youth

⁴¹ The theme of the relationship between learning and entertainment is explored in Section 5.4.5.

worker) and David (15) – began with a question about whether museums should try to be everyone (for example, children and adults).⁴²

Kate: Once, we were at a museum with dinosaurs and some of them moved! I was scared but I think it's really interesting for the children. [...] You think they're real! It was cool.

Emma: Yes, I think it's really cool for the kids.

[...]

Melanie: And at the end [of the visit] – we're still often talking about this – [there was] that 4D, where everything was vibrating!

Kate: Yes, yes! [enthusiastic] [...] We were in a cabin and we had to hold on to things. They gave us special glasses and suddenly, a fish appeared and the glass broke and all the water came in! Oh, it looked so real! We thought the water would get on us.

David: We were on a school trip and went to an amusement park where they had a thing about that earthquake in San Francisco [...] You were in a cabin, and you had to hold on to the things around you, because the room was moving up and down. And there was a big screen in front of you, so you could see everything. You thought you were in it! It was mega cool! That inspires people, you know. You say, 'Wow! I'm going to this amusement park because it's more interesting [than a museum].' And you're moving your body and you're using your head – and that helps you to concentrate on it.

Laurence: Do you think that helps us to understand and remember? Or is it just cool because it's in an amusement park?

David: No, no ... well, yes, it's cool because it's in an amusement park [...] but because you were moving up and down, it stays in your head. It helps you to remember it.

⁴² All quotations from the focus groups are my translation.

In addition, photo-elicitation helped to prompt memories and encouraged conversation and the exchange of opinions (Pink 2015: 88). To this end, I printed out a number of large-scale photographs representing various local and international museums. The photographs depicted different displays, architectural styles, learning programmes and events (such as sleepovers and discos) in museums.⁴³ The following extract shows a conversation that was triggered by a photograph of the Jurassic Lounge event at the Australian Museum. The discussion involves Erica (16), Josephina (15), Tim (13), Paula (19), Luca (21) and Vera (a youth worker).

Laurence [shows photo; laughter, all]: This is called Jurassic Lounge and it's an after-hours event at the Australian Museum in Sydney. There's music, art, food and drink and young people can dance and have fun in amongst dinosaurs and stuffed animals.

All, talking at the same time: Wow! Cool! Awesome! [...]

Laurence: Do you think this is a good idea?

Erica, Josephina, Tim, Paula: Yes!

Luca: I don't know...

Paula: I wonder if things get broken.

Laurence: Apparently, there's less damage on these nights than during the school holidays.⁴⁴

Luca: Prejudice!

Tim: But the people only go [to the museum] because there's a disco.

⁴³ Using photography prompts, we discussed the following events in the focus groups: Dino Snores at the Natural History Museum, London; Jurassic Lounge at the Australian Museum, Sydney; and Lates (silent disco) at the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. See Appendix 1 for details.

⁴⁴ See Shrapnel 2012.

Josephina: No, there's a disco *combined* with a museum.

Vera: When you're at the disco, you can also look at the things around you.

Tim: But who's looking when there's a party going on?!

Luca [looks at Tim]: Are you dancing with your eyes closed?

The youth workers also proved to be invaluable partners during the fieldwork. In addition to helping to organise the focus groups and recruit participants, they took on a supporting role during the sessions. To protect the participants and make them feel comfortable in the presence of a stranger (me, in this case), I ensured that a youth worker was present during each focus group. Before each session, I handed the youth worker a copy of my questions and explained how focus groups work. Although I was in charge of the moderation, I agreed with youth workers that they were free to intervene; for example, to help prompt conversations. While the youth workers usually remained in the background, they sometimes joined in to trigger memories; for example, by reminding young people of museums they had visited together. The fact that the group was made up of friends and acquaintances aided discussion about individual and shared experiences of museums that the participants might have had different opinions on.

4.9 Data collection and analysis

I recorded the focus-group sessions in digital audio format and transcribed the recordings.⁴⁵ Because of the research aims, I paid particular attention to non-verbal communication and emotions during the discussions; I recorded body language in my fieldnotes and tone of voice on the transcripts. Christophe's

⁴⁵ The language used during focus groups was Luxembourgish. To stay as close as possible to the data, I transcribed, coded and categorised the data in the original language (Luxembourgish) and translated the codes, categories and specific quotations into English during the memo-writing.

(19) comment, which I analyse in Section 6.4.2, shows how the notes on his body language help to elucidate his account:

The last museum I visited was [during our holiday] in Portugal last year. It was some kind of castle-museum. An old castle that they converted into a museum. I didn't find it that interesting because ... well, the castle was big, but there weren't many things in it [shrugs]. [...] I was only there because of my parents and because they dragged me in there. They didn't think they could leave me alone at home for half an hour [shakes head and rolls eyes].

I also made digital audio recordings of the interviews with youth workers. As they were not part of the data, I limited myself to an abridged transcription (see also Krueger and Casey 2015: 149). Given that the interviews with youth workers were conducted after the main fieldwork was complete, I was able to determine which extracts or quotations were relevant enough to be written down (see Appendix 6 for the interview questions).

4.9.1 Active listening

As the moderator of the focus group, my role was to pay attention to the topics that had to be covered, while encouraging interaction within the group and the free flow of the discussion (Gibson 2007; Acocella 2012; Krueger and Casey 2015). Respect, empathy and active listening were key aspects of that role. Active listening is a communication technique that was developed by psychologists Carl Rogers and Richard Farson in the 1950s. It is a way of approaching people in a sensitive and empathetic manner (Robertson 2005; Rogers and Farson 2015). As Rogers and Farson (2015: 11) explain:

By consistently listening to a speaker you are conveying the idea that 'I'm interested in you as a person, and I think that what you feel is important. I respect your thoughts [...] I feel sure that you have a contribution to make. I'm not trying to change or evaluate you. I just want to understand you. I think you're worth listening to [...]'].

For Rogers and Farson (2015: 10), the active listener needs be 'sensitive to the total meaning the message has to the speaker'; that is, the content that

the speaker is conveying and the feeling that is associated with the content. Besides, the speaker's communication is not limited to the verbal elements; non-verbal communication, such as body language and facial expressions, also need to be considered (Rogers and Farson 2015: 10).

Active listening is empathetic and respectful, as it entails the wish to see 'the world from the speaker's point of view' (Rogers and Farson 2015: 16). Whether it is innate or learned, active listening can support qualitative interviewing in many ways. In the present study, it allowed me to build a relationship of trust during the discussions, which was enhanced by the fact that the participants were familiar with each other. This resulted in the young people feeling comfortable enough to share experiences and feelings that were sometimes deeply personal. Besides, by encouraging a sensitivity to verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening directly contributed to gathering rich data.

In addition, the emphasis on feeling in active listening assisted my aim of researching young people's emotions with regard to museums. Paying attention to feelings and emotions during the focus groups facilitated the application of emotion coding to the data. As Saldaña (2016: 125) notes, the 'abilities to read non-verbal cues, to infer underlying affects, and to sympathize and empathize with [the] participants, are critical for Emotion Coding' (see also Chapter 5).

4.9.2 The constant comparative method

For the analysis of the data, I relied on the constant comparative method, which was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and adapted for focus groups by Krueger and Casey (2015). Glaser and Strauss (1967: 106) define the basic rules of the constant comparative method as follows:

[...] while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category. [...] This constant comparison of the incidents very soon starts to generate theoretical properties of the category. The analyst starts thinking in terms of the full range of types or continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major

consequences, its relation to other categories, and its other properties.

Krueger and Casey (2015: 154–155) recommend paying additional attention to four factors during this process:

- *frequency* (frequent comments but also rare and highly insightful comments or ‘gems’);
- *specificity* (detailed and specific accounts);
- *emotion* (accounts in which participants show feelings and emotions); and
- *extensiveness* (the number of times *different* participants make the *same* comment).

Given the small number of focus groups and the fact that I was able to remember each participant individually, I decided to use the classic (or manual) analysis strategy (Krueger and Casey 2015: 151–155) rather than a computer-based analysis; consequently, I immersed myself in the data. By focusing on the factors outlined above while comparing and contrasting codes and categories, I was able to zoom in and out of the data. It was possible, therefore, to analyse the participants’ comments on the micro level (such as individual occurrences and interactions) and on the macro level (such as wider social processes). As explained in Section 4.4.1, this abductive process enabled me to develop ideas and build theories – for example, those relating to adultism – from the participants’ views and experiences. The constant comparative method also allowed me to structure the data in a way that enabled me to answer the research questions. In Chapters 5 and 6, I discuss the findings of the present study; in Section 5.2. I explain how the structure of these chapters reflects the way in which I constructed the themes from the focus groups.

4.9.3 Saturation

I applied the constant comparative method to the data until my categories had reached saturation. In general, saturation refers to the point at which the data ceases to generate new information (Krueger and Casey 2015: 23). For the present study, I loosely drew on the concepts of theoretical saturation (Glaser

and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014) and theoretical sufficiency (Dey 1999) to determine the point of saturation. This means that the simple *recurrence* of similar ideas, or the ‘repetition of the same events or stories’ (Charmaz 2014: ch. 8, sect. 2), was not sufficient to determine saturation. Most importantly, the *relevance* of the ideas to the theoretical categories that they had produced determined saturation: that is, that moment when ‘no new properties of the theoretical category are emerging’ (Charmaz 2014: ch. 1, sect. 4).

As described in Section 4.4.1 on grounded theory, I revised and added certain questions for the focus groups as the theoretical concepts and ideas began to surface. After five focus groups, I reached the moment when the data was no longer generating significant additions to my theoretical categories. I could have stopped there; however, I felt that my interpretation of the data would be enhanced and strengthened by asking youth workers about their points of view on certain topics that had been discussed during the sessions. Their extensive experience of working with young people provided another angle to my understanding of the participants’ perceptions and experiences. This triangulation of data did not serve to validate or corroborate the findings. Instead, I perceived it as a reflexive attempt to address the research questions and as a means to add a further dimension to my ‘intellectual puzzle’ (Mason 2002: 190–191).

4.10 Conclusion

In this fourth chapter, I have presented the methodological framework of this study and explained how it is connected to the research aims. I have also shown how the framework addresses the methodological gaps in previous research and, in doing so, how it contributes to filling gaps in the knowledge.

Before investigating the methodological underpinnings in more detail, I drew attention to my role as the researcher in this qualitative study. I examined how my position affects how I approach, interpret and construct research. As a reflexive process, the acknowledgement of a researcher’s positionality contributes to transparency and, in doing so, improves the quality of the study.

After setting out those preliminary considerations, I described the methodological approach. Most notably, I showed how influences from grounded theory and ethnography allowed me to generate rich data and construct theories in close connection to the data. A further characteristic of the present approach is its aim to decentre the museum. Selecting a setting outside the museum put the participants and their voices at the centre. It was important, therefore, to choose a place where young people would feel comfortable and would not be compelled to participate. Youth clubs appeared to be a natural choice, as they permitted the participation of young people from a variety of backgrounds and with different relationships to museums. Youth clubs in Luxembourg, in particular, offered an interesting and rich context for the present investigation.

Given the specificities of this study, an ethical and empathetic approach to the research and the participants was of prime importance. I discussed the overall ethical framework and how ethics were handled in the study; for example, how access to youth clubs was negotiated. I also drew attention to the different issues that can arise in research with young people, and explained how I addressed them. I then described the method, the fieldwork in Luxembourg youth clubs and the composition of the focus groups. Finally, I explained the theoretical approach to, and the practical implementation of, the data collection, analysis and saturation.

Now that the conceptual and methodological frameworks have been elucidated, I will move on to the findings that this study was able to generate. In the following two chapters, I analyse these findings and discuss them in relation to previous research and contemporary social contexts. Chapter 5 is deeply rooted in museums; in that chapter, I examine the different ways in which the focus-group participants experienced and understood these institutions. I focus specifically on the diversity and tensions that underlie young people's images of museums, and their views on museums as places for learning and social spaces. In Chapter 6, I move increasingly beyond the museum's ramparts to examine these tensions from a sociocultural perspective. Indeed, a critical examination of the wider social processes reveals that the relationship between

young people and museums is often marked by relevance (and irrelevance), cultural discrepancies and power inequalities.

Chapter 5

A diversity of perceptions and
experiences

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I addressed the methodological framework of this study and explained how it contributes to the research aims. I also described the method that was used: focus groups with young people between the ages of 12 and 21. In Chapters 5 and 6, I present, analyse and discuss the focus-group participants' views on and experiences of museums.⁴⁶

These chapters are structured in a similar way to Chapters 2 and 3: while Chapter 5 takes a museological perspective, Chapter 6 takes a sociocultural perspective. While the fifth chapter considers the different ways in which young people use and understand museums, the following chapter focuses on the social, cultural and political dimensions that affect the relationship.

Thus, in this chapter I describe the variety of interests and needs expressed by the participants with regard to museums. I also show that young people's perceptions are nuanced rather than black and white, and I reveal their elaborate understandings of the complex roles and missions of the museum. The chapter is divided into three main themes that highlight the diversity – and even tensions – that underlie the participants' views and experiences; namely, the concept and image of the museum, the museum as a place for learning, and the museum as a place for social and solitary engagement.

5.2 A word on the structures of Chapters 5 and 6

As explained in the previous chapter, and to use Krueger and Casey's (2015: 41) words, 'the focus group is a social experience'. Focus groups are characterised by their informal nature, and their aim is to 'encourage participants to have a conversation in response to a question, building on one another's comments, rather than directing each comment to the moderator'

⁴⁶ In this analysis, I follow the advice of Krueger and Casey (2015: 160) by using modifiers, such as 'a few', 'some', 'many' or 'most', to show how many young people spoke about a particular issue. The use of these determiners aims to draw attention to the level of importance an issue was given, rather than to quantify the responses.

(Krueger and Casey 2015: 41). When people are deeply involved in a discussion, their flow of thoughts, ideas and associations may wander in various directions that are not always linked to the topic being discussed. This was no different in the focus groups that I conducted in the youth clubs. At certain times, the conversations were chaotic; for example, the participants would be joking about experiences they had together in the past (in museums and elsewhere) or they would be talking about an issue that came to mind and made sense to them (albeit not necessarily to anyone else). Sometimes the comments could be paths to unforeseen areas of interest; at other times, they would be irrelevant to the subject of the focus groups: the participants' perceptions and experiences of museums.

In these situations, it was my role as a moderator to determine the point at which to steer the conversation back to the subject being discussed. Furthermore, the participants did not always answer my questions in the way I had intended, or they provided an answer to an earlier question at a later point. The constant comparative method (described in Section 4.9.2) helped to untie this messiness. By breaking down the transcripts into individual parts, I regrouped, classified and coded the participants' comments. For all the variability of their responses, I was able to identify recurrent themes that were relevant to my research questions.⁴⁷ From there, I built the categories that I discuss in Chapters 5 and 6. Therefore, although the themes discussed in these two chapters are rooted in the data, the structured way in which I present them should be seen as my construction of the participants' accounts, rather than as a reflection of the 'raw' data from the focus groups.

5.3 Museums in young people's eyes

5.3.1 The image of museums

In my first focus group, one of the introductory questions to the participants was 'What is a museum?' It was clear that coming up with a definition was not

⁴⁷ For a discussion of variability in interviewee responses, see Sandell 2007: 79–80.

straightforward. Interestingly, even if the older participants had a more elaborate vocabulary to describe their ideas, differences in the participants' views were not necessarily age-related. Rather, their answers were influenced by their perceptions and past experiences of museums and by their general social and cultural backgrounds. This is particularly apparent in comments made by Leila. At age 13, she is one of the younger participants but she has an artistic family and has visited many art museums. The conversation below involves Jim (12), Leila (13), Marie (17) and Philip (12).

Laurence: If I were to ask you 'What is a museum?', what would you say?

Jim: A museum, that's where old things are.

Leila: Not just *old* things!

Jim: [pensive] Hm, yes, okay...

Marie: There are also things in a supermarket. [laughter, all]

Jim: Yes, well, [museums] *do* have things from the past.

Leila: Not necessarily.

Marie: I'd say, a museum is a place where things are exhibited.

Jim: Where the artists are dead.

Leila: My sister is also an artist and she's not dead and her things are in a museum. [laughter, all]

Jim: Yes, okay [laughs].

Philip: One thing is for sure, [museums] don't have things from the future. [laughter from the other participants] It's true! [annoyed]

Laurence: So, we can see art in a museum, from artists who are alive and others who aren't alive any more. We can also see old things, for example in a history museum...

Leila: It always depends which museum you want to go to.

During this initial focus group, I observed that some participants struggled to articulate their thoughts and I wondered if the question was perhaps too abstract. Therefore, following the youth worker Jenny's advice, from the second group onwards I replaced the question with an introductory brainstorming icebreaker. Here, I asked participants which words or ideas they associated with the word 'museum'. This method proved to be more suitable, given that it enabled the participants to contribute single words and ideas rather than come up with a full definition. Figure 2 shows the range of terms that participants spontaneously put forward.⁴⁸

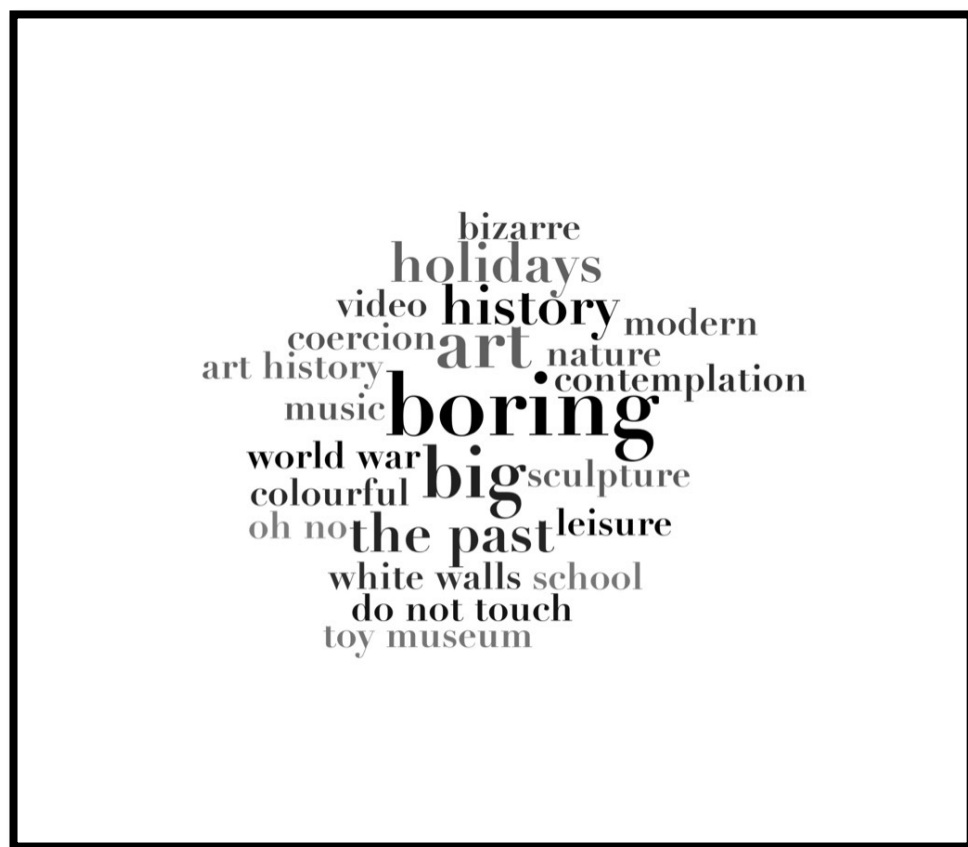


Figure 2. What do you associate with the word 'museum'?

Impressions of museums were discussed in complex ways at various points in each focus group, and this introductory question alone reveals the variety of ideas that the participants linked to museums. These ranged from

⁴⁸ In word clouds, such as the one shown in Figure 2, the size of a word represents the frequency of the word being mentioned.

descriptors that the participants generally attached positive values to, such as 'leisure', 'holidays', 'colourful', and 'contemplation', to more negative descriptors, such as 'boring', 'do not touch', 'oh no', and 'coercion'. Thus, the answers effectively convey the nuanced ways in which the participants perceived and engaged with museums.

While the term 'boring' was cited most frequently, the other terms associated with museums – such as 'art', 'history', 'the past', 'big', and so forth – outweighed the occurrence of 'boring' in number. The graphic shows that, contrary to popular belief, young people do not necessarily have an equivocally negative view of museums. These findings match those observed in earlier studies (Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2007; Drotner, Knudsen and Mortenesen 2017) discussed in Section 2.5.2. This complex understanding of museums explains why it was significant to examine the image of museums among the participants. The image – or, rather, images – that the participants had of museums was also interesting for a number of other reasons.

Firstly, to understand what an image entails, it is worth turning to Prince and Schadla-Hall, who point towards the importance of the public image of the museum (Prince and Schadla-Hall 1985). Prince (1985: 246) argues that an image is made up of a cognitive element ('the descriptive parameters of the image') and an affective element (the 'evaluative response'), which together create an attitude and generate – or do not generate – motivation for visiting. Of particular interest to the present study is the author's statement that these elements can be the result of first-hand or second-hand experiences. However, whereas Prince (1985: 246) asserts that 'received experience from *valued* [emphasis added] others is equally important', the present study shows that the image of museums is also influenced by *wider* second-hand experience: peers, hearsay and the media. For example, the focus-group participants often referred to films and advertisements when discussing museums. The blockbuster *Night at the Museum* was referred to several times in four of the five focus groups. The presence and ubiquity of the media – especially among young people – has certainly increased since the 1980s, when Prince was

conducting his study. However, even if second-hand experience is different today, this study corroborates its importance vis-à-vis first-hand experience.⁴⁹

Secondly, images of museums are not fixed and are subject to change. Prince (1985: 246) points out that ‘Such images are, by definition, dynamic with the result that a modification of any of the components that generate the image will thus modify the image itself’. Accordingly, if young people have a negative image of museums, this can always be remodelled through positive experiences.⁵⁰

Thirdly, the participants’ images of museums showed that they valued these institutions and thought that, theoretically, they were for everyone – irrespective of age and education, for example. On a practical level, however, it could be observed that, for most participants, museums were not seen as places for young people. This was apparent in all the focus groups, in a number of different ways. For example, when the participants were asked about what kinds of people they thought visited museums, their answers included children, adults, ‘elderly people who have knowledge’, history teachers, scientists, tourists, ‘people who have time’, and ‘boring people’. On balance, these audiences do not suggest that museums are a place for young people; indeed, young people were not mentioned at all.

These findings, again, are in accord with those of previous studies. For example, similar to the responses above, Mason and McCarthy (2006: 26) state that, in their survey, young people ‘said the gallery made them think of people such as *my dad*, *old people* and even *people who wear berets*’. The observation made in the present study also corresponds to work by Timbart (2007). While her participants thought that museums were for all age groups, they also estimated that museums were not places for young people (Timbart 2007: 434). Similarly, several studies have confirmed that even if the general

⁴⁹ Further research might determine the degree of its importance and what it might imply.

⁵⁰ See also Section 6.4.2. for a discussion on negative openings to museum visits and how these might be overcome.

perception of museums is not entirely negative, they are not seen as places for young people (Lemerise and Soucy 1999) and many young people find museums boring and do not expect them to be pleasurable (Andrews and Asia 1979; Timbart 2007; Kelly and Bartlett 2009).

5.3.2 Passive and closed versus active and open

The focus groups showed that there was an apparent dichotomy between a 'passive' museum environment and 'active' young people. For example, a number of participants associated museums with death; museums were said to display dead animals and works from dead artists. This observation is similar to the one made by Merriman (1989a: 155–156) about attitudes to heritage in Great Britain (see also Section 2.5.2). Furthermore, the focus-group participants repeatedly mentioned that museum visitors were expected to be quiet and that they were not allowed to touch the objects. In contrast, most participants wished for more interactivity and action in museums. Commenting on whether it was possible for museums to appeal to young people, one participant, Brenda (21), said:

Yes, I think things like these [the events depicted on photography prompts],⁵¹ because when you hear 'museum', you immediately think 'you have to be quiet', 'you mustn't talk too loudly', 'boring'. But if you organised a party like this in a museum – something that is the total opposite – then you'd find people who'd participate.

Similarly, lengthy visits, information overload and guides with a monotonous voice were deterring, whereas special events and multisensory experiences were enticing. Kerry (21), for example, thought that museums were not doing enough to appeal to young people and that they needed 'to put themselves in our [young people's] shoes'. Kerry also came up with the idea of organising birthday parties in museums, which shows that museums have some potential appeal.

⁵¹ For details on the photography prompts, see Section 4.8.

Late-night events, sleepovers and birthday parties at the museum, which generally appealed to the participants, should not be seen as a means of entertainment that distracts from the exhibits, but rather as a way for visitors to colonise, take over and appropriate the place. A common view among the participants was that they had to feel comfortable in order to enjoy or return (voluntarily) to a museum. For example, Danny (21) said:

I think [Dino Snores] is cool, because as soon as you sleep over at a place, you feel more comfortable there. And when kids feel comfortable at a museum, they'll enjoy themselves much more.

According to the participants, museums not only need to make them feel comfortable but also need to be relevant to their lives and their culture. A few participants briefly mentioned that they would find it interesting to see young people's art in museums. However, it was the idea of reshaping the museum space and overturning the traditional concept of the museum that was explored in greater detail by two participants, Miguel (20) and Tina (21):

Laurence: Do museums need to involve young people more? For example, as tour guides for young people or people in general? Or to curate an exhibition?

Miguel: Or [they could] open some workshops and provide a place where young people can make things.

Tina: At Japan Day⁵² in Düsseldorf, I saw people sitting at tables and they were being shown how to draw manga and so on. You could do more of that in museums, with young artists too. That could be fun with young artists, because here [at the youth club], we have paintings by young artists. You could ask *them*, for example. It wouldn't be a bad idea. But in other areas as well, not just painting.

Miguel: I'm thinking of Hariko⁵³ and that you could do more of that. Museums could provide a place for artists and young

⁵² Japan Day is an annual German-Japanese festival in Düsseldorf, Germany.

⁵³ Hariko is a project in Luxembourg (housed in an abandoned building at the time of this study), in which artists help young people to develop their creativity.

people who want to achieve something. At the museum, you'd be more in the context than at Hariko. And Hariko also offers dance workshops – that's an art form too. And if you offered things like that, then you could simply change the whole concept of the traditional museum, that you'd have fun going to the museum and doing something you like to do. If it's to play music, you could go there. And people who dance, they could also go there. Or to paint or make 3D design. [...] They could offer workshops for that, so that you can try out those new things.

Tina and Miguel explored how museums could provide a space for young people to make their art, pursue their hobbies and express themselves. At the same time, museums could use their expertise to guide, teach and help young people in their endeavours.

Miguel (20) also found it an enticing idea that museums could reach beyond their doors; for example, by setting up displays or exhibitions in schools:

The other day, I was at an open-door event [at a secondary school] and I thought it was cool that a museum showed part of an exhibition there and that they had asked the school to do it there. That way, you can see the exhibition while you're at school. It was in the main hall, and I think that's cool.

This extract adds to the conceptualisation of museums as open, rather than closed, spaces. The museum is not only more open on the inside (for example, by offering a space to young people, as described above) but also takes the 'museum' outside its doors. In every sense of the word, it is a museum without walls.

Consequently, the dichotomy as described by the participants is both active/passive and open/closed. A passive and closed museum is not a place for young people: it does not provide interactive or multisensory opportunities for engagement; it does not engage with young people's interests, lifestyles and culture; and it does not reach out. An active and open museum, on the other hand, enters a dialogue with the public rather than adopting an authoritarian attitude – this is reminiscent of the participatory and open-space approaches

described in Chapter 2. Above all, an open museum is a space that young people can colonise. As stated by Willis (1990: 149):

The recent successes of new initiatives and explorations in some museums and art galleries in attracting somewhat higher attendances and the continuing success of many libraries in providing a wider range of symbolic materials rest, not on extending an old idea to 'new' people, but in allowing 'new' people and their informal meanings and communications to colonize them, the institutions.

Willis' statement dates back to 1990, and it can safely be said that much has changed in museums in the last three decades. However, the reality is that many museums are still far from letting young people, or other communities, colonise their institutions. In the words of Reeve (2006: 52), 'Many museums are not yet ready for that kind of involvement or to share authority, any more than they are with ethnic groups and communities'. This experience was reflected by many of the focus-group participants, and the various aspects that underlie this experience are explored further in Chapter 6.

5.4 Places for learning

5.4.1 Being open and curious about the world

A large part of the discussion in the focus groups centred around museums being places for learning – a view that was shared by the majority of the participants. This perception of the museum was expressed in all the focus groups, and the participants put forward a range of views on what they could learn in a museum. Learning was seen as not only the primary reason for visiting museums but also something that the participants were actively seeking. In their opinion, visiting a museum allows them to learn something new, increases their general knowledge, develops their knowledge in a subject that they are already interested in, and, if the museum is abroad, enables them to learn something about the country they are visiting.

Apart from connecting museum visits with learning 'facts' and getting information, the participants linked these visits to a general thirst for knowledge.

The following quotation from Brenda (21) illustrates this openness and curiosity about the world:

You've got to be interested in things to visit a museum. It's the same with reading books: you've got to want to learn more. If so, you'll go out to learn more about something. Nothing's going to come to you if you live in a little box.

Tina (21) made a similar point about people visiting museums to escape their daily routine and broaden their horizons:

I'd say you go to a museum to open your mind. If you're the kind of person who just sits at your desk, just doing your own thing – and the same at home – then going to a museum is like [entering] a totally different world. That's how I'd describe it. Museums are also practical [sic] for people who have no clue about art or similar things.

For Tina and Brenda, visiting a museum is comparable to being transported into a different world – physically and mentally, in space and in time. Their views illustrate the enjoyment one feels when having a 'flow' experience – when learning happens out of curiosity and 'intrinsic motivation'. As explained by Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (1999: 151):

Flow activities lead to personal growth because in order to sustain the flow state, skills must increase along with the increased challenges. Flow involves the person's entire being and full capacity. Since flow is inherently enjoyable, one is constantly seeking to return to that state, and this need inevitably involves seeking greater challenges. In the process, flow activities provide a sense of discovery; we discover things about ourselves as well as about the environment. Flow activities, whether they involve competition, chance, or any other dimension of experience, provide a sense of discovery, *a creative feeling of being transported into a new reality* [emphasis added]. They push us to higher levels of performance and lead to previously unexperienced states of consciousness.

This curiosity and the feeling of being transported into a different world are not restricted to the present, though. Brenda (21) continued to explain why she visits museums:

I visit [museums] because I'm curious. I find it interesting to discover what the next painting is, what's around the next corner, how [the museum] is designed. Or to time-travel: to find out what it was like in the past, how they painted, what tools they had and so on.

Like Brenda, the other participants frequently referred to 'the past' when describing their museum experiences. The association between the past and museums has also been observed in other studies involving young people (Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007). Interestingly, however, the focus-group participants often linked the 'past' that they encountered in museums to their daily lives. Besides, it was often the participants themselves who made these connections – irrespective of whether the museum they were discussing had actively encouraged links between past and present.

5.4.2 Building links between the past and the present

Drawing on various research projects on young people and museums, Kelly and Bartlett (2009) report that young people are 'interested in the here and now and possible futures rather than retrospectives'. The researchers claim that one reason young people do not find museums 'relevant' is because 'they want to know about the "now" and look forward to the future and see that museums are retrospective'. I examine possible reasons for a lack of relevance in the next chapter (see Section 6.2), but in this section my focus is on learning and the 'retrospective' nature of museums mentioned above.⁵⁴

The focus groups revealed that the present is indeed central to young people's lives, and that many of their interests and concerns relate to the 'here and now'. However, the focus groups also revealed that the past plays an important role in the participants' museum experiences. The past, as depicted in a museum, was used by many participants as a means to compare the

⁵⁴ For the purpose of this study, I limit myself to the focus-group participants' experiences of the past in museums. See Jones (2011; 2014) for a discussion of the different ways in which other young people understand and engage with the past.

present with times gone by and, consequently, to put today's world into perspective. The following extract is from a discussion about the purpose of museums with Gabriel (17) and Kerry (21) in Focus Group D. I am referring to the Verdun Memorial Museum,⁵⁵ which Gabriel had visited on a school trip and told the group about.

Laurence: Can a museum have different purposes? The Verdun museum, for example. You learn about the background of the battle, but do you think it has any other purpose? Or is it just about providing the facts?

Kerry: I think it's also to scare people a bit. To say, 'Look how it was back then: behave yourself!' [laughs]

Gabriel: To show that we have better lives today than they did back then. For example, kids today: they have toy cars, plenty of dolls. But you saw [in the museum] that back then, they only had one small doll and one Lego brick. Nothing else. And also, how we eat today and how they ate back then: just water with potatoes – just plain, like that. The same with clothes.

In his description, Gabriel directly compared museum exhibits and stories with his, and other children's, contemporary experiences. Throughout the session, his descriptions of his visit to the Verdun Memorial Museum were intense. This emotional connectedness – apparent in Gabriel's verbal and non-verbal communication – allowed him to learn from his museum visit.

Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (1999: 155) note that:

[...] when we are intrinsically motivated to learn, emotions and feelings are involved as well as thoughts. For example, our wish to know about peoples in faraway places includes not only the desire for intellectual understanding but the desire to feel emotionally connected to them as well.

Similarly, O'Connell and Alexander (1979: 54–55) explain how engaging with young people's concerns (such as employment or family conflict) can contribute to creating links between 'the collections and the emotional and intellectual

⁵⁵ The Verdun Memorial Museum commemorates the 1916 Battle of Verdun and is located in Belgium, about 100 kilometres from Luxembourg City.

needs of the student'. Furthermore, the learning effect of Gabriel's museum visit was not restricted to factual information about the past. Indeed, an intrinsically rewarding experience – where the visitor is inspired to learn more – results in a 'growth of complexity in consciousness' (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1999: 157).

The learning experience and the development of consciousness are not limited to the time spent in the museum but continue long after the visit. Drawing on Falk and Dierking's contextual model of learning (2013: 26–30), we can see how Gabriel's experience resulted from the overlapping of three distinct contexts:

- Gabriel's personal context (his experiences, knowledge and interests);
- his sociocultural context (exemplified through his observation about 'kids today'); and
- the physical context of the visit (the objects and the overall 'atmosphere' of the museum).

In addition, Gabriel's experience happened in time, which is the fourth dimension of the contextual model of learning: before, during and after the visit. In Gabriel's case, this learning did not happen simply because of the 'past' that he was able to encounter in the museum, but through the interplay between the past, the present, relevance and emotions. Kerry's comment in the discussion above shows a similar interplay between the past and the present. For her, a museum visit is about learning not only *about* the past but also *from* the past by applying it to our present lives. As she said at another point in the discussion, a museum can help to 'shake people up'.

Learning about the past, and comparing it with the present, was mentioned in all the focus groups. The participants were particularly interested in learning about:

- past lifestyles (people's professions, homes and eating habits);
- objects, dinosaur fossils and artworks that are 'life-sized' and 'for real' (rather than depictions in school books);

- the evolution of contemporary objects (above all, devices that are commonly used by young people, such as mobile phones and video games); and
- the lives of celebrities who inspire them (such as musicians and sportspeople).

Although it was not the case for every participant, there was, nonetheless, a widespread interest in the past. This was especially true when participants were able to relate the past that they had experienced in the museum to the present and to their own lives. Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (1999: 154) make a similar point by noting that to engage interest, museum objects and experiences 'should not feel disconnected from one's own life'. For example, Kate (18) was very enthusiastic about an RMS *Titanic* exhibition she had visited during a holiday in Canada:

It was so cool at that *Titanic* [exhibition]. It was really cool because it's my favourite film and over there I was able to see everything for real. I even bought a book. I loved it. There was a telly showing you the ship under water. I'd love to go back. [sighs]

Kelly and Bartlett (2009) state that one reason for a lack of relevance is that museums are seen as backward-looking rather than forward-looking. However, my findings suggest that the past can be interesting if it is deemed to be relevant. Consequently, a lack of relevance would not result from the museum being 'retrospective' or backward-looking; rather, it would result from the museum showing a past that is not relevant to young people's lives or presenting the past in ways that make contemporary connections difficult.

5.4.3 Feelings, emotions and empathy

The emotional dimension of a museum visit, which was apparent in Gabriel's comments in the previous section, was also mentioned by other participants. Indeed, the focus groups revealed that museums can trigger a vast range of

positive feelings and emotions.⁵⁶ Firstly, the participants reported how they had engaged emotionally with the exhibits during their museum visits. As Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (1999) explain, emotions can provide opportunities for involvement and, accordingly, flow experiences. Danny (21), who is an aficionado of Greek mythology, recalled a recent visit to a museum:

I visited that museum in Berlin because it's a subject that I'm super interested in and that's why I paid attention to everything they said. I didn't ever want to leave! Unfortunately, we didn't have enough time to see everything [looks disappointed]. That was a real pity, especially because they told you so much stuff, about the Trojan War, how Zeus saved his brothers from Cronus, and so on. It was awesome. I didn't want to leave and I was sad when I had to.

Secondly, the participants reported feelings of fun and enjoyment when they were able to be active; for example, by taking part in hands-on or bodily activities. Marie (17) vividly remembered the activities she took part in at various science museums, and her excitement even infected Philip (12), who thought that most museums were boring.

Marie: Once, I was at a science museum in Germany and you could do lots of things. They could even simulate a free fall so you could see what it's like to float around in space!
[enthusiastic]

Philip: Wow! I'd love to do that!

Marie: That's how museums should be. I was also at another science museum in Belgium where you could ride a bike on a cord!

⁵⁶ An 'emotion' can be described as an 'individually experienced, culturally normative, and relationally enacted ensemble of intention, feeling, judgement, and performance that typically includes a distinctly embodied phenomenological component' (Cromby 2014: 555). However, clear definitions of and differences between emotions and feelings are debated in psychology and science (Cromby 2014). The concept that 'feelings' are conscious experiences whereas 'emotions' are latent or unconscious ones (Burton 2014) appeared to be particularly meaningful for this study. Therefore, this is the distinction that I am using.

The other participants: On a cord?

Marie: Yes, it was meant to explain the principle of the centre of gravity.

Philip: Did somebody show you how to do it? [perplexed]

Marie: No, they'd simply attach a rope to your belt and then you could ride the bike.

Thirdly, activities that invoked a thrill or a sense of risk – such as sleepovers and Halloween nights at museums – were also met with enthusiasm. The following extract illustrates the lively conversation between Emma (18), David (15) and Nick (19) on the topic.

Laurence [showing a photo of a sleepover in a museum]: Do you think it's important that museums organise events like these for young people?

Emma: Ooh, like in the film *Night at the Museum*! [laughter, all; general excitement]

David: Yes! Yes! I thought about that too!

[...]

Emma: That's so cool! It would also be cool to have, like, a witching hour in a museum that has paintings. You know, when the eyes in the paintings follow you or when the paintings begin to shake! [laughs] [...] I would be scared but I love the idea! [...] Often, they say that places are haunted and then you could do things like this.

Nick: Nobody would dare to go to a museum any more.
[laughter, all]

Emma: I think that many people would like to experience this.
An adrenaline rush!

Finally, for the participants in the present study, being transported to a faraway world and playing different roles (for example, by dressing up in historical clothes or singing next to a wax figure of a celebrity on a mock stage)

were synonymous with fun and enjoyment. For example, Nick (19), who has mixed views on museums, enthusiastically related a visit to Madame Tussaud's wax museum:

Laurence: Think back to the last time you went to a museum. How did it make you feel?

Nick: I think it was in London – that was cool, I had so much fun. That's the only [museum] I remember. Madame Tussaud's – really cool. We *all* had so much fun. It was great because you could enter a room and sing with a pop star. [...] It was awesome and interesting too. That's something I find interesting. Other museums don't interest me so much.

However, feelings and emotions, such as enjoyment and happiness, were not spoken about solely as outcomes of museum visits. In the previous section, we saw how an emotional connectedness allowed the participants to create links between the past and the present; in other words, between the museum and their day-to-day life. The focus groups revealed that empathy, in particular, is a strong vehicle for building connections and relevance. Gabriel's (17) account of his school trip to the Verdun Memorial Museum offers a powerful illustration:

The last museum we went to on a school trip was the one in Verdun. When they said we'd visit [the museum], I didn't fancy it. I thought, 'what are we going to do there?' And in class, I was kind of interested, but I didn't feel like writing and paying attention to what the teacher said. It didn't interest me, because I know that my life today is better and that we're safe. And when we were at the museum, they told us we weren't allowed to take pics, but I did it anyway. Seeing how the bombs exploded, and on the floor, there was mud everywhere, and we were able to walk through it, and we could put our feet – with our shoes on – in the footsteps of the people. But [the mud] was dry. And seeing the cars, how they were squashed ... Yes, I enjoyed [the visit].

The (translated) transcript alone might not do justice to the way in which Gabriel described his experience. It was an emotionally intense moment, and I was not the only person in the room to feel this. I was also able to observe how the

other participants in the focus group were captivated by his story – not least by noting their silence. The extract above shows effectively that a museum visit, in addition to being emotionally meaningful, can resonate with other young people well after the event.

In the previous section, I analysed one of Gabriel's (17) comments to show how he created links between the past and the present. I reproduce it here to highlight a further emotional aspect.

Laurence: Can a museum have different purposes? The Verdun museum, for example. You learn about the background of the battle, but do you think it has any other purpose? Or is it just about providing the facts?

[...]

Gabriel: To show that we have better lives today than they did back then. For example, kids today: they have toy cars, plenty of dolls. But you saw [in the museum] that back then, they only had one small doll and one Lego brick. Nothing else. And also, how we eat today and how they ate back then: just water with potatoes – just plain, like that. The same with clothes.

The museum visit not only allowed Gabriel to compare his life with the lives of children during the First World War but also enabled him to reconsider his attitude towards his own and other children's lives.

It is widely established that emotions can be a primary motivation for, and an outcome of, visits to museums and galleries (Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2003; Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2009). However, emotions are also an integral part of learning in museums, as Hooper-Greenhill et al. (2003: 8) argue:

Learning in cultural organisations is associated with creativity and innovative thinking, and there can also be seen the development of attitudes and values. In this way, learning is not separate from emotions. In fact, emotions can help people to learn more. Enjoyment, amazement or inspiration can provide the motivation to acquire facts and knowledge.

Particularly relevant to this study is the fact that previous research has identified emotions as an important part of young people's museum experience (Allard 1993; Timbart 2013).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hooper-Greenhill et al. (2003: 11) identify emotions as being part of a system of GLOs in museums. These learning outcomes cannot be measured by tests; rather, they are evaluated through the judgements visitors make about their own learning. The research team describes evidence for the 'change in attitudes and values' GLO as follows:

Change in feelings, perceptions, or opinions about self, other people and things, and the wider world. Being able to give reasons for actions and personal viewpoints. Increase in empathy, capacity for tolerance. Increased motivation. Values and attitudes are an integral part of learning. New experiences and information change or reinforce perceptions and feelings. [...] Empathy makes an important contribution to the development of values and attitudes. (Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2003: 15)

Given the development of personality and attitudes during adolescence (Largo and Czernin 2011), it seems reasonable to admit that museum experiences that allow for this specific GLO are particularly relevant to young people. In a subsequent study about learning in museums, Hooper-Greenhill et al. (2006) describe how teachers and pupils (of all ages) value the emotional engagement facilitated by museums. Hooper-Greenhill et al. (2006: 22) conclude that:

Museums provide high quality, creative and pleasurable learning opportunities for all children. The tangibility of the experience and the opportunity to access information and feelings through the senses, combined with the possibility of individual emotional engagement, makes the museum a powerful teaching tool.

To conclude this section, I would like to emphasise a final dimension relating to the power of emotions. As described by Johnny Saldaña (2016: 130), a qualitative researcher and an emeritus professor of theatre:

Yet, I myself resonate not just with scientific paradigms but with a piece of folk wisdom: 'Life is 20 percent what happens to you, and 80 percent how you react to it.' This suggests that we explore not just the actions but, with more emphasis, the emotional reactions and interactions of individual people to their particular circumstances.

Using the audio recording, my fieldnotes and my personal recollection of the event, I have applied Saldaña's (2016) emotion coding to Gabriel's (17) description of his visit to the Verdun Memorial Museum in order to highlight the non-verbal dimension of his account.⁵⁷ For ease of reference, I reproduce the extract, divided into distinct units or stanzas:⁵⁸

- 1) The last museum we went to on a school trip was the one in Verdun. When they said we'd visit [the museum], I didn't fancy it. I thought, 'what are we going to do there?' And in class, I was kind of interested, but I didn't feel like writing and paying attention to what the teacher said. It didn't interest me, because I know that my life today is better and that we're safe.
- 2) And when we were at the museum, they told us we weren't allowed to take pics, but I did it anyway.
- 3) Seeing how the bombs exploded, and on the floor, there was mud everywhere, and we were able to walk through it, and we could put our feet – with our shoes on – in the footsteps of the people. But [the mud] was dry. And seeing the cars, how they were squashed ...
- 4) Yes, I enjoyed [the visit].

If we now follow the different phases of his narrative, we can see how Gabriel's emotional journey started with initial reluctance and disinterest ('I didn't fancy it'; 'it didn't interest me'), moved on to rebellion ('we weren't allowed to take pics, but I did it anyway'), before turning into fascination ('seeing the

⁵⁷ 'Emotion Codes label the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant, or inferred by the researcher about the participant' (Saldaña 2016: 125).

⁵⁸ When coding a text, a unit or stanza marks a change in topic (Saldaña 2016: 19).

cars, how they were squashed ...'), and, eventually, enjoyment. While emotions and attitudes can create barriers to access (Dodd and Sandell 1998), this extract demonstrates that emotional and empathic engagement can also contribute to overcoming apprehension about, and a negative opening to, a museum visit – a problem that was commonly experienced by the focus-group participants. I examine this in more detail in Section 6.4.

5.4.4 Bodily experiences

Apart from a curiosity about the world and an interest in the past, the focus-group participants expressed their views on other aspects of learning in the museum. For example, the participants discussed the learning experiences they had had in museums by describing visits that they had enjoyed and visits that they had not enjoyed. In general, the participants appreciated it when museums offered learning experiences that were different from those that they were offered at school. For example, many participants had negative memories of school trips when the visit was mainly another version of classroom teaching (or teacher-centred education) delivered by either the teacher or a guide⁵⁹ who was 'teacher-like'. Remembering a school trip to a museum, Leila (13) said:

I find school trips [to museums] boring because there's always someone talking for two hours. But when you go alone and you can see the things for yourself... I don't know, I find that more interesting. [...] The last time we went to a museum with the school, we had to sit there for two hours and listen to how the guide told us about the history of the museum [rolls eyes]. I think they don't really care.

Most of the participants, however, valued the experience when museums offered different windows on learning from those provided by the school. Indeed, classroom learning does not always allow for a multiplicity of windows on learning specific subjects.⁶⁰ Museums, however, have different resources

⁵⁹ Due to its usage in Luxembourgish, the word 'guide' in this context includes both tour guides and museum educators.

⁶⁰ For different windows on learning, see Gardner (2011).

from the school, which makes it possible to cater for alternative or additional learning styles (Baum, Hein and Solvay 2000). Using their theory of multiple intelligences, Davis and Gardner (1999: 101) show, for example, how a single painting can present different 'entry points', such as narrational, quantitative, foundational, aesthetic or experiential windows on learning. For example, Danny (21) and Gabriel (17) thought that hands-on activities were particularly important:

Laurence: Is it important to be able to touch things?

Gabriel: Depending on the things, yes. For example, when I was at the museum in Verdun, they had weapons that you don't have any more today. You can look at them but you should also be able to touch them. Not firing them but touching them. [...] It wasn't possible because everything was in glass cases.

[...]

Danny: That was nice when we went to the natural history museum with the school. We visited the museum and then we had a workshop where we could use different sorts of paint, earth paint and so on, and that was cool, especially for primary school children. If children are only allowed to look without touching anything, it's boring. [...] I was always happy to visit the natural history museum because we could do things actively. When I think about it now, it wasn't anything special and it was often the same, but as a kid you don't notice that. You just find it cool.

In the participants' descriptions, positive learning experiences most frequently related to two types of circumstances. The first of these was when the participants were able to make a personal connection to the subject matter or, more precisely, they found the subject matter 'relevant'. The second was when the learning experience was bodily, kinaesthetic or (multi)sensory.⁶¹ Some of the participants' most vivid descriptions related to experiences: a free-

⁶¹ This experience relates to 'bodily-kinesthetic intelligence' (Gardner 2011: 217).

fall simulation and riding a bike on a cord at a science museum; a giant pin screen that enabled the participant to create a relief of her body; 3D animations in natural history museums; and an installation at a contemporary art museum, where visitors were invited to chew gum and then stick it to the walls.

Being able to ‘feel’ the museum experience can also help young people to engage with a subject. For example, Marie (17) described how she enjoyed a visit to the Bastogne War Museum⁶² even though she was not initially interested in the subject:

Marie: Last summer, I went to the Bastogne War Museum. It didn’t interest me, to be honest – I’m no fan of the Second or First World War. I don’t know what it was, but I found it was really well made. I think we had an audio guide ... They re-enacted plenty of shows [sic]. There was a room, when you entered, you had to sit on a tree trunk, and there was a forest and fog, and it was even colder in that room. They re-enacted something, I think it was a famous battle. It felt like you were really there.

Leila: I think that’s cool!

Marie: Yeah, it was really cool. The only thing I didn’t like in that museum was that a couple of things, they were too long. There’s a point when enough is enough.

Even Leila (13), who, in her own words, was ‘only interested in art museums’, found the idea of ‘feeling’ the museum experience and being transported into a different world appealing.

Other memorable bodily experiences that reinforced the feeling of being in a different world included ‘playing a role’ by dressing up in historical clothes or performing on a mock stage. This keenness to play roles and be carried into other worlds may be linked to what some researchers describe as young people’s ongoing search for identity (Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Largo and Czernin 2011; Dahan 2013b). It is reported that during adolescence, childhood

⁶² The Bastogne War Museum tells the story of the Second World War in Belgium. The museum is in Belgium, about 80 kilometres from Luxembourg City.

attachment figures (such as parents) lose their importance, while friends, peers and sometimes other adults gain in significance (Flasher 1978; Largo and Czernin 2011). This process calls for a redefinition of the self and a quest for self-discovery (Largo and Czernin 2011). Therefore, we could say that some young people want to learn as much about the world that they are living in as they do about themselves.

Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (1999: 155) point out that 'learning involves the use of sensory and emotional faculties, as well as intellectual ones' and that learners require a variety of opportunities for involvement in order to achieve the associated flow experience. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (1999: 154), these opportunities can be emotional (empathy; self-reflection), intellectual (rational; scientific; historical) or, as exemplified in this section, sensory (visual; aural; kinaesthetic). In addition, play is widely recognised to be an integral part in children's and adults' learning – in everyday life and in museums (Falk and Dierking 2000; Kelley 2016).

The emphasis that the participants placed on their bodily experiences in museums led to discussions drifting, on several occasions, to their experiences in amusement parks. Rather than steering the conversation back to museums, I deliberately let the young people follow their train of thought to see where it would lead us. I was especially interested in the similarities participants saw between museums and amusement parks, and how education and entertainment may be intertwined.

5.4.5 Learning and entertainment

On a number of occasions, the focus-group participants drew connections between museums and amusement parks. They compared the bodily experiences that they had enjoyed in museums (such as the ones described in the previous section) to those that they had had in amusement parks. However, it was not the entertainment factor alone that elicited their comparisons; the participants had the impression that themed attractions allowed them to learn something new. For example, David (15) recalled an attraction that was centred on the theme of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, and Luca (21) talked

about a roller coaster that was based on the theme of gas pipelines. The focus-group discussions on bodily experiences in museums reminded the participants of these attractions because of the similar experience of learning combined with entertainment.

David (15) explained how the kinaesthetic quality of the experience – that is, experiencing through movement – made it memorable and helped him to maintain concentration.

David: We were on a school trip and went to an amusement park where they had a thing about that earthquake in San Francisco [...] You were in a cabin, and you had to hold on to the things around you, because the room was moving up and down. And there was a big screen in front of you, so you could see everything. You thought you were in it! It was mega cool! That inspires people, you know. You say, 'Wow! I'm going to this amusement park because it's more interesting [than a museum].' And you're moving your body and you're using your head – and that helps you to concentrate on it.

Laurence: Do you think that helps us to understand and remember? Or is it just cool because it's in an amusement park?

David: No, no ... well, yes, it's cool because it's in an amusement park [...] but because you were moving up and down, it stays in your head. It helps you to remember it.

David's account is particularly interesting because he has learning difficulties. During the focus group, he repeatedly drew attention to the problems and demotivation he faces when reading texts – in school and at the museum. The experience in the amusement park offered him a window on learning that was better adapted to his needs. Ultimately, this made the visit enjoyable and memorable.

For the participants, learning and entertainment were not necessarily seen as being mutually exclusive. Learning in the museum was often described as being entertaining, in a number of different ways. This could be related to bodily experiences, role plays, being carried into a different world, or making new or unexpected discoveries. The large-scale study of Canadian secondary

school students mentioned previously (Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003) revealed similar perceptions of museums being places of learning and entertainment. However, this aspect was less emphasised by young people in the French study by Timbart (2007: 388).

Besides the similarities with the Canadian study, the findings of the present study are in line with those of Kelly (2007). Kelly (2007: 218) makes similar observations about adult visitors in Australia and concludes that the notion of 'edutainment' in museums is superfluous:

The term edutainment has long been problematic for museum professionals and, based on the findings from the present study, is probably redundant – learning in museums is *both* entertaining and educational. This study provides data that supports views in the literature that museums should be thinking about learning in the broadest sense, rather than narrowly focussing on education. Museums need to be clear that they provide visitor-centered learning experiences, rather than 'educational' or purely 'scholarly' ones. Museums should also not be concerned about their entertainment value and role, as results from this study indicate that adult visitors feel that entertainment *adds* to learning, not detracts from it. Overall, museums could promote themselves as places for enjoyable and entertaining learning experiences.

Similarly, a recent large-scale and representative study on cultural activities pursued by adults in the US – Culture Track '17 – shows that 81% of respondents rank 'having fun' as the highest motivator (LaPlaca Cohen 2017). However, it is closely followed by, among other things, 'interest in the content' (78%), 'experiencing new things' (76%) and 'learning something new' (71%) (LaPlaca Cohen 2017: 11). This demonstrates that while entertainment was important to cultural consumers in Culture Track '17, so was learning in various ways. LaPlaca Cohen (2017) and Kelly (2007) suggest that for the majority of people, entertainment and learning cannot be separated in cultural activities.

As far as museums are concerned, the comparison between Kelly's research on adults (2007) and the present study on young people also shows that some needs and wants are not necessarily related to age. The conception that 'entertainment *adds* to learning' (Kelly 2007: 218) could also be observed

in the focus-group participants. On a number of occasions, they referred to a desire for playful learning. For example, Tina (21) had some thoughts on how museums could become more appealing to young people:

To be interesting to young people, museums need to be more playful. I mean, not playful like for five-year-olds, but for young people between 12 and 16. They are interested in games [...] and playful learning. I think that's more fun than standing there [in the museum], listening to a stranger who's going on and on. There's a point when you stop listening. Like in school. I think that's one of the reasons young people aren't interested in museums any more. They think it's exactly like in school: it's super-boring.

Tina talks about 'playful learning'; she does not think playfulness or entertainment alone are interesting to young people.⁶³ Other participants expressed the need for more interactivity in museums, in the sense of playful learning, entertainment or bodily experiences. It is also worth noting that for many participants, the primary focus of interactivity was on bodily, hands-on and low-tech experiences rather than on high-tech or digital ones, as might often be assumed.

5.4.6 Ambivalence about digital technologies

Many of the enjoyable museum experiences that the participants described were related to the body. Indeed, few high-tech or digital experiences were reported in the focus groups. For example, my questions for participants included 'think back' questions, in which I asked them to recall museum visits and describe the experiences that they had enjoyed or had not enjoyed (see Appendix 5). Of the many positive memories, only a few focused on high-tech exhibits. However, it is impossible to determine whether the participants did not remember digital exhibits as being especially enjoyable or relevant, or whether

⁶³ This is also interesting because popular opinion often holds that young people are mainly interested in entertainment and enjoyment (see, for example, Section 6.3.4).

they had not encountered many of those exhibits in museums. This observation should, therefore, be interpreted with caution.

One digital device that was popular among some participants was the audio guide. While guided tours with a person were often dismissed due to their constraints and inflexibility, audio guides were praised. This was because of their flexibility (getting information on exhibits of their choice and at their own pace) and versatility (the availability of different languages). In addition, the participants appreciated the fact that audio guides deliver information in speech instead of in writing – and in a more flexible or ‘customisable’ format than a guided tour.

David (15), who is a football fan, gave a personal insight into why he enjoyed using an audio guide during a recent visit to the CR7 Museum (Museu CR7) in Madeira:

I was at the Ronaldo museum with my family, but I was running around with headphones on because, you know, when you're listening to something [through headphones], you can't hear what's going on around you. You're more focused on the things you read and see. But if you're with another person or your family [saying] 'Oh, David, come over here' then you don't have the time [to focus], and you keep hearing their voices. And when you're not good at reading in your head, and you've got people around disturbing you, it works better with headphones.

David's experience shows that audio guides can be an effective way of engaging people with reading disabilities (young people and adults alike), as they remove the barriers associated with text panels.

However, audio guides and other digital devices were not appreciated unanimously, and not all the participants had the same preferences. The following extracts from different focus groups illustrate some of the critical voices:

I'm quite against tablets, to be honest. At the *Star Wars* exhibition, we were wearing headphones with some kind of sensor, and when you were standing in front of an object [...]

they would tell you the stuff. I think that's nicer than looking at your phone screen all the time. (Tina, 21)⁶⁴

If I had to do it, I'd rather do a guided tour with a person. Those tablets and audio-things, that's too ... We're human and social beings after all! Please! (Kerry, 21)

I think the selfie thing these days ... You have to take pics and you have to make videos ... People forget to enjoy the moment and just live virtually. (Brenda, 21)

It is a common belief that, as so-called digital natives,⁶⁵ young people expect a successful museum visit to include high-tech devices. However, the focus groups revealed that this is not necessarily the case. Rather, the participants in this study were looking for a bodily experience and a level of interactivity – for example, through hands-on, low-tech or playful exhibits. These findings are in accordance with Kelly and Bartlett (2009). In their review of various studies on young people and museums, they conclude that programmes for young people should provide 'action based interactivity where visitors look, touch and explore without being "childlike"' (Kelly and Bartlett, 2009). They also state that:

Young audiences showed relatively low levels of interest in website, broadcast media or resource centre as means to access collections – their desire for a social venue and opportunity to meet and talk with people could be the reason for this. They also have access to this technology in other places – home, school, uni. (Kelly and Bartlett 2009)

This scant interest in digital devices may seem at odds with the ubiquity of technology in young people's lives. Indeed, recent studies show that young

⁶⁴ When extracts from different focus groups are presented together, participants' names are provided in brackets at the end of each quote. This distinguishes them from extracts of continuous conversations, where the names of participants and the interviewer appear at the start of quotations.

⁶⁵ The term 'digital natives' can be traced back to Prensky's (2001) article 'Digital natives, digital immigrants'. It is now commonly used to describe people who grew up with digital technologies (Oxford Dictionaries 2018).

people spend a considerable amount of time in front of screens (Robb 2015; Bodson 2017).⁶⁶ However, this does not prevent them from experiencing a number of barriers in relation to arts and culture websites, the most notable being inaccessible language and complex navigation (Moffat and Turpin 2018: 74). In addition, Kelly and Bartlett (2009) cite a desire for a social venue as a possible reason for low levels of interest. Yet, there may be another reason: one that is intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, to digital technologies.

During an interview with Jenny, a youth worker at one of the youth clubs, I asked for her opinion on participants' reservations about digital technologies in museums. She said:

I think that [young people] use technology for other things. I don't think it has to be everywhere. They use technology to communicate – with human beings. It's like if you were saying 'Computers only exist for homework'; then they wouldn't be interesting either. It *would* be technology – and it's often iMacs that young people want – but it wouldn't be interesting. [Young people] only use computers to chat, and for YouTube, and for things that are interesting to them. Basically, it's not about technology – it's about what you can do with it.

As a youth worker, Jenny has a nuanced understanding of youth culture, which adds a further perspective to the above discussion. Her final remark, 'it's not about technology – it's about what you can do with it', suggests that young people do not use digital technologies for the sake of doing so. They are a means of communication, and not an end in themselves.

These reservations about technology are not restricted to young people and museums, however. The Culture Track '17 survey has revealed various reasons why adults in the US either appreciate or do not appreciate technology in the cultural activities that they take part in (LaPlaca Cohen 2017). The marketing agency refers to this as the 'digital dilemma': audiences generally value digital technologies if they add to the experience (for example, by giving

⁶⁶ It should be noted, however, that this observation does not necessarily apply to young people only.

them additional information or enabling them to share their experiences), but they enjoy experiences without digital devices if they find them distracting or complicated (LaPlaca Cohen 2017: 22–24). These findings underline the necessity of viewing technology as a medium rather than as an end in itself. In Culture Track '17, the (adult) audiences showed that they embraced technology when it added to the communication of content (understanding, shareability) but rejected it when it distracted from content (LaPlaca Cohen 2017).

Returning to the subject of the present study, it appears that museums would be misguided to believe that the implementation of digital devices alone will attract more young people. Reflecting on how museums could appeal to young people, Emma (18) said:

Maybe museums should modernise a little. That might attract more young people. But they shouldn't lose ... let's call it their old-fashioned charm. They shouldn't be too high-tech.

The present study suggests that a digital experience is not what young people are primarily expecting from a museum visit. If digital technologies are not deemed to be relevant or useful, they are likely to be dismissed at worst or short-lived at best. However, if technology enhances a museum visit or helps to remove barriers (as in the case of David, mentioned previously), it can be a valuable tool to engage young visitors.

Consequently, the fact that the participants manifested scant interest, ambivalence or even rejection of digital technology in museums may not be the result of an extrinsic cause alone, such as young people being more interested in social venues. The explanation may also be intrinsic to digital technologies: their usage as a medium may be relevant or irrelevant to young people's lives. Furthermore, it is possible that these technologies are not what young people are primarily expecting from a museum visit. The focus groups demonstrated that participants sought bodily experiences rather than digital ones in museums. In addition, museums were seen as places for interaction – with people and objects. In this sense, the findings of the present study may help to deconstruct assumptions about young people's uncritical use of technologies.

5.5 Places for social and solitary engagement

5.5.1 The museum as a social space

When I asked the focus-group participants about their preferred types of museum visits, most of their answers centred on visits with their friends, best friend, family or partner; that is, people with whom they had close relationships. The reasons cited were common interests and the exchange of impressions and ideas. In addition, Tina (21) mentioned the importance of physically having someone to share the experience with:

I'd rather have someone come with me because you can share your thoughts. I don't mind going somewhere alone – I really don't – but imagine I want to say something but there's nobody there to say it to. If I talk to myself, people will think I'm crazy. So, if there's at least one person with you to listen ... They don't even need to speak!

The importance of spending time with a friend and discovering things together became clear in another of Tina's comments:

If [a friend] asks me, 'Do you want to come with me [to the museum]? I know you're not interested, but I want to go and I haven't got anyone to go with' then I'd say, 'Yes, no problem. You don't have to go alone.' And it'd be something new for me too. I think a lot of things happen that way. I don't think many people sitting at home would suddenly say, 'I could visit a museum!' [laughs].

Here, the museum visit becomes a shared social experience, where the primary motivation is not to visit the museum but to spend time with a friend.

Adolescence is known to be a period when it is particularly important to spend time with peers and build relationships (Flasher 1978; Largo and Czernin 2011; Dahan 2013b). From Tina's example, we could infer that bonds between friends may be strengthened through a museum visit.

This demonstrates that the museum can be a social space, or what Largo (Largo and Czernin 2011: 195) calls a *Freiraum*; that is, a non-commercial free or open space where young people can meet and socialise

(see also Gurian 2006). In fact, the possibility of museums being social places was recognised by one of the first studies on young people and museums, which was conducted in 1979:

Consistent with the view that school is a social environment, we found that the museum had the potential to be a social gathering place for students as well. [...] This age group considers the opportunity to socialize to be a major reason for the museum visit. It would therefore be a tactical mistake to ignore or disrupt the ongoing social process. (Andrews and Asia 1979: 227)

When thinking about the museum as a free or social space for young people and the fact that the 'ongoing social process' should not be interrupted (Andrews and Asia 1979: 227), it is worth noting that after-hours and late-night events in museums appealed to the majority of the focus-group participants.⁶⁷ Some researchers might link this to a biological explanation; namely, that during adolescence, the circadian rhythm or 'biological clock' is delayed. In practice, this means that young people feel the need to go to bed about two hours later than adults do (Largo and Czernin 2011: 152; University of California Los Angeles [UCLA] 2017). One could also argue that given young people's busy schedules, evenings might often constitute the only opportunities for social activities. Indeed, several studies have shown that evening events often appeal to audiences that are younger than those who traditionally visit museums (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2002; Shrapnel 2012; Culture24 2018; Stockman 2018). Consequently, if museums want to be welcoming to young people, it would be useful to be open at times that are convenient for them (Gurian 2006; Dahan 2013a).

5.5.2 Visiting with friends or alone

Evening events and ordinary museum visits both provide opportunities for young people to spend time with their friends. Most participants stressed that they would rather visit in a small group than in a large one (as happens during

⁶⁷ See also note 43.

school trips, for example). When visiting with a large group of people, the visit is considered to be too constraining, individual interests are overlooked and, as Miguel (20) pointed out, concentration is impaired:

I have been [to museums] all on my own, but often I go with one or two people. If there are too many [people with you], you can't concentrate because you want the group to stay together. You aren't really in it. But with one or two people, that's okay. And you don't feel alone ... so to speak.

Similarly, commenting on how they prefer to visit museums, Kerry (21) and Danny (21) said:

Kerry: Sometimes, it's better to go alone. You can take your time to look at things and there's nobody [saying] 'Let's go now'. If I had to visit with other people, then it would be with friends. Not with the school. Ugh! [makes a disgusted face] No way.

Danny: Yes, [school visits] are always so planned, 'Now we all look at this' and 'Now we have to go there'.

Kerry: Yes, and you have to go but you only have five minutes to look at that painting or that object, and then you have to go to the next one. [...]

However, every museum visit is different, and preferences for the preferred type of visit (alone or in small groups) may change. Like Miguel, Luca (21) visits museums regularly, on his own and with friends. He explained that sometimes, the museum's content ('museum context') can be more important than social interaction ('social context') or vice versa:

It depends on the museum. If it's something interesting, I want to take my time. So, I'd rather go with friends or on my own because I really want to look at things in detail. But if I don't find it interesting, then I don't care how many people come with me. As long as I have someone to talk to [laughs].

Social interaction proved to be an important part of the participants' experiences, yet it could sometimes give rise to certain tensions. On the one hand, social interaction can help young people to engage with exhibits and

enhance the museum experience. On the other hand, it can distract young people and prevent deeper engagement. This explains why some participants, such as Brenda (21), prefer to visit alone than to visit with friends who show no interest:

If someone comes with me [to the museum], then they should be interested and shouldn't act like a zombie: 'Ohhh nooo!' [mimics a zombie].

For other participants, such as Christophe (19), visiting alone is not only an option but also a preference:

I'd probably visit [a museum] on my own, because I'd really have time to let things sink in. [...] Yes, I think I'd go alone. Maybe with friends who you wouldn't need to stay with all the time.

5.5.3 Diverse preferences and needs

Previous research has shown that young people's preferred types of visits are, in order of importance: with friends; with family; with the school; and alone (Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Timbart 2007).⁶⁸ The findings of the present study confirm the preference for visiting with friends and family, but they do not support the preference for school visits over single visits (visiting alone). However, it is important to bear in mind that data from the focus groups does not allow for broad generalisations.

A possible explanation for this discrepancy might lie in age differences between samples. Lemerise and Soucy's study (1999) focused on 15- to 17-year-olds. The age range in Timbart's study (2007) was similar to that of the present study (12 to 20 years), yet the average age was somewhat younger. Indeed, in this study, the preference for single visits was mentioned more

⁶⁸ Timbart (2007: 522) points out that *preferences* do not necessarily equate with *experiences*. She notes that while her participants declared that they preferred museum visits with friends, few of them had actually had this experience. Similar caution must be applied in this study, as it was not always possible to ascertain whether participants preferred a type of visit *and* had actually experienced it.

frequently – albeit not exclusively – by the older cohort (20 to 21 years). Timbart (2007), however, observed no difference between younger and older participants in terms of their preferences for single visits.

Apart from the differences mentioned above, the findings of the present study are consistent with those of Lemerise and Soucy (1999) and Timbart (2007): that is, non-school visits were largely preferred over school visits. Timbart (2007: 519–520) notes that the latter were generally associated with constraint and the continuation of classroom learning; for example, having to fill in questionnaires may hinder the enjoyment of the visit. Guided tours were equally rejected by the majority of the participants in Timbart's study, as this type of visit was often experienced during school trips, and was therefore associated with school. However, Timbart points out that the guided tour was not completely rejected if the guide was dynamic and interacted with visitors. All these findings have been confirmed in the present study. A more thorough examination of participants' attitudes towards school visits and the implications of these is given in the following chapter.

It is widely acknowledged that museums are places for social experiences and interaction (McManus 1991; Vom Lehn, Heath and Hindmarsh 2001; Falk and Dierking 2013). The importance and influence of peers in young people's lives suggests that this is even more applicable to this age group (Flasher 1978; Andrews and Asia 1979; Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Largo and Czernin 2011; Dahan 2013b). It transpires from this study and from previous research that although young people are looking for social interaction during their museum visits, they also want to retain a degree of autonomy and freedom of choice. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that 'young people' are not a homogeneous group but a heterogeneous community made up of individuals with different preferences and needs. Further research is required in order to investigate the significance of single visits among young people. While this study does not allow for generalisations, it demonstrates that single visits are a possibility and even a deliberate choice for some young people.

Due to the depth of the conversations and the resulting rich data, this study highlights differences in preferred types of visit that were observed not

only *between* individual young people but also *within* individuals. The findings show that one person can have different preferences and needs at different times or in different places. Miguel's and Luca's remarks in the previous section suggest that this might be especially true for regular museum-goers. Through their experiences, they appear to feel comfortable enough to use museum spaces according to their needs.

5.5.4 A restorative experience

The focus-groups revealed that, apart from being places for social and solitary engagement, museums are thought to be places that enable one to take a break and recover from the stress of daily life. Miguel (20) gave a lengthy explanation of his motivations for visiting museums, of which I provide the following extract:

I visit museums to relax, because often it's difficult to find quiet places to be. And they're interesting at the same time. And all the colours that surround you! Even if it's just for an hour you enjoy it, because you know that when you leave, the stress will come back again and you'll have to do a thousand different things.

For Miguel, museums are not simply quiet places where he can take a break; they also help him to 'relax' – physically and mentally.

The museum as a 'restorative environment' is described by Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter (1993). The starting point for their analysis is attention restoration theory, which states that 'prolonged mental effort leads to directed attention fatigue (DAF)' and that 'to recover from DAF [...] it is necessary to rest directed attention' (Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter 1993: 726–727). Although not commonly known as DAF, this 'state of mental exhaustion' is experienced by most of us (Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter 1993: 726). In their study, Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter (1993: 727–728) discovered that a museum visit fulfils the four necessary conditions for a restorative experience:

- *being away* (an environment that is different from that of the daily routine);
- *extent* (enough space, physically and mentally, to spend time in);

- *fascination* (being interested without needing to make a mental effort); and
- *compatibility* (the environment and purpose must be mutually compatible and appropriate).

Drawing on interviews with museum visitors, Packer (2008) adds a fifth condition for a restorative experience: *being unhurried*. Packer (2008: 44) states that:

A fifth element, labelled here as ‘unhurried,’ was also identified in participants’ responses. In some of Kaplan’s work, feeling rushed or harried is presented as an *outcome* variable, the absence of which is indicative of a restorative experience (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989; Kaplan, Bardwell, and Slakter 1993). However, participants’ responses in the present study are more consistent with the conceptualization that being unhurried is a characteristic of a restorative *environment*—a necessary condition for restoration to occur.

Indeed, Miguel’s description appears to corroborate the five proposed elements of a restorative experience:

- museums provide places that are different from his everyday life (*being away*);
- he can spend an hour or more in them (*extent*);
- they are ‘interesting’ and there are many colours, which he can enjoy without making a mental effort (*fascination*);
- he knows that museums will fulfil the purpose of being ‘relaxing’ (*compatibility*); and
- he does not feel he has to rush – as opposed to the ‘stress’ and the ‘thousand different things’ that await him when he leaves (*being unhurried*).

Previous research on young people’s reasons for visiting museums (Andrews and Asia 1979; O’Connell and Alexander 1979; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2007) has not explored motivations that are based on mental restoration. In addition, it seems that museums themselves have not taken this aspect into consideration (Lemerise 1998;

Timbart 2013). Even if restoration and relaxation were not the most important reasons for visiting according to the focus-group participants in the present study, Miguel's account suggests that young people can have restorative experiences in museums.

In addition to a restorative effect, Packer (2008: 46) notes that museum visits can add to general psychological wellbeing. Both aspects – restoration and wellbeing – might have more importance for young people than hitherto envisaged. It is widely acknowledged that school can be stressful for many students, and Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter (1993: 726) note that students regularly experience DAF:

Although not identified by that name, the experience of DAF is a familiar one. Any time one has worked intensely on a project and subsequently finds oneself in a state of mental exhaustion, one has experienced DAF. The typical state of mind of students at the end of a semester is familiar example.

However, a restorative museum experience may be more readily accessible to regular museum visitors, such as Miguel. In their study, Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter (1993) discovered that experienced visitors are more likely to encounter restoration. The researchers suggest that a lack of comfort, wayfinding difficulties and 'less well-defined purposes' may be reasons for the quasi-absence of restorative elements in non-visitors' experiences (Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter 1993: 735; 739–740).⁶⁹ The present study, in addition to previous research, found that two common experiences among young visitors are feeling uncomfortable (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Timbart 2007) and not feeling 'at home' (Mason and McCarthy 2006: 29), which might explain why only Miguel directly referred to restoration as a motivation.⁷⁰ This lack of comfort among young people may be due to their limited experience of museums – similar to the non-visitors mentioned above –

⁶⁹ In Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter's (1993) study, non-visitors are defined as people who have never visited an art museum or have not visited an art museum since their childhood.

⁷⁰ One could argue, however, that the feeling of being transported into another reality – which was mentioned by some participants – points in a similar direction.

or to a feeling of not being 'welcome' or 'accepted' in the museum environment. Threshold fears and the cultural gap between young people and museums are discussed in Chapter 6.

5.6 Conclusion

This is the first of two chapters that present an analysis of the focus-group participants' perceptions and experiences of museums. In it, I have explored, from a museological point of view, the central themes that emerged during the focus groups in the participants' own words. Most importantly, the analysis has revealed that neither young people nor their views and experiences are homogeneous or straightforward. Indeed, the focus-group participants displayed a variety of perceptions and understandings, and demonstrated a nuanced comprehension of the roles and missions of museums.

I began by analysing the complex images that the participants had of museums. Overall, the analysis revealed that the participants had a rather positive image of museums, but that they did not see museums as places for young people. From their experiences, an apparent dichotomy transpired between a passive and closed museum (which is not a place for young people) and an active and open museum, which could become such a place by allowing young people to appropriate it for their own use.

I then showed how museums were perceived by the participants as places for learning above all else. However, the participants' understanding of learning was broad and sometimes unconventional; they saw museums as places to learn about the world we are living in, to broaden the mind and to transport them into different worlds. The participants also revealed an interest in learning *about* and *from* the past: learning about the way the past is linked to their lives today and, often, using the past to make sense of the present. In addition, emotions and feelings played an important part in the participants' museum experiences and how they learn in the museum. For example, emotions can help to build a connection to the objects on display. Emotional engagement also has the potential to bring about changes in attitudes and help

to overcome a negative opening to a museum visit – due to the visit being compulsory, for example.

Most participants enjoyed bodily experiences in museums, which were often connected to learning in one way or another. This chapter also demonstrated that the participants do not necessarily see learning and entertainment as being mutually exclusive; and, as Kelly (2007: 218) found in her research on adult museum visitors, ‘entertainment adds to learning, not detracts from it’. Furthermore – and this may counter certain stereotypes of young people – the focus groups showed that although the participants are looking for interactivity in museum, this does not have to be digital. Some young people were even critical of technology if it was not useful or relevant. For museums, this means that digital technologies have to be considered as mediums and not as ends in themselves. If they facilitate communication, they are more likely to be accepted in a museum environment and they may even help to remove barriers.

My analysis then focused on the museum as a social space. The focus groups highlighted the importance of, and sometimes tensions between, social interaction and autonomy during museum visits. It emerged that museums have the potential to be social spaces for young people, which they may want to visit with small groups of friends or even alone. This aspect reiterates the need to see young people as heterogeneous individuals rather than as a homogeneous group. Indeed, preferences relating to types of museum visits could vary not only from one participant to another but also within an individual. Young people, just like any other group of museum visitors, may have different needs and preferences at different times. In addition, the analysis showed that museums have the potential to provide restorative experiences to young people – a factor that has not been considered previously because it is not necessarily expected of this cohort. While mental restoration and wellbeing in general were not the most important reasons for visiting, they are possibilities that would be worth investigating in the future.

So far, we have concentrated on a museological approach to the participants’ views on and experiences of museums. A number of underlying

themes have begun to emerge, notably those relating to relevance, differing cultures and power issues. In the next chapter, I address the relationship between young people and museums from a more global point of view and examine the meaning and wider implications of these processes. Indeed, to fully understand how young people engage with museums, their relationship with the institutions can only be fully understood by considering it in a wider social and cultural context.

Chapter 6

Young people and museums through a sociocultural lens

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was the first of two that address the findings of the present research. So far, I have concentrated on the focus-group participants' views and experiences of museums by analysing their different forms of engagement and their expectations on an individual and a collective level. I have shown that their perceptions relating to such areas as learning and social interaction are highly diverse and underpinned by a number of tensions. In this chapter, I pick up the themes that emerged in Chapter 5 and examine the wider social processes that they implicate.

A critical analysis of the participants' experiences revealed that their relationship with museums was influenced by three central issues: relevance (and the lack of it); differing cultures; and power inequalities. For example, in Chapter 5 I showed that relevance to participants' lives was key to their engagement with museums, exhibits and the past. I also pointed towards potential differences between participants' culture(s) and museum culture, which is fundamentally also adult culture. Finally, I demonstrated how power relations – for example, between focus-group participants and facilitators – can influence participants' experiences of museums.

Some of the themes described above have also been touched on in previous studies on the relationship between young people and museums (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2007). However, there has been little in-depth discussion of the wider social processes that underlie this relationship. I am not implying that previous research has consciously omitted this or has deemed the issue too unimportant to investigate. Rather, as described in Chapter 4, I see the paucity of detailed investigation as inextricably linked to the methodological underpinnings.

Indeed, up to now, studies have been either quantitative or mixed methods (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2007). These approaches have generated a much-needed overall picture of the

relationship between young people and museums and have allowed for a degree of representativeness and generalisability. However, favouring breadth instead of depth results in paying less attention to certain themes or exploring them in less detail. By conducting a purely qualitative study, I have aimed to fill this gap. In addition, the interdisciplinary framework of this study allows for a better understanding of the relationship between young people and museums, most importantly with regard to the power issues that shape the ways in which young people and museums engage with each other.

Above all, it is the methodology of this study, particularly its reliance on grounded theory, that makes this contribution to knowledge possible. By deriving concepts from the data and building theories in an abductive way, it is possible to explore areas that might not have emerged from a deductive process that aims to verify – rather than develop – theories. What follows is an analysis and deconstruction of the wider social processes inherent in that relationship. By considering young people in their own right – not solely as museum visitors – and by exploring their experiences from a social rather than museological point of view, it is possible to shed light on the key themes of relevance, different cultures, and power inequalities.

6.2 Relevance

6.2.1 The concept of relevance

In Chapter 5, I argued that the past as presented in museums can be interesting to young people if they can connect it to their own lives. One could also say that young people enjoy exhibits about the past if they are ‘relevant’ and allow them to learn something new. In the focus groups, I also observed that positive learning experiences were often related to the participants finding what they encountered in museums relevant. Thus, relevance appears to be an important part of, and may even be a condition for, a (positive) museum experience. Given its importance, it would seem to be worth examining relevance theories. This may help to understand how individuals decide what is relevant to them; for example, in their leisure activities.

In the first place, it is important to define relevance, as the term can mean different things in different contexts and within different disciplines. Nielsen (2015) outlines the various ways in which relevance has recently been discussed in the field of museology. She states that relevance can relate not only to people but also to the relationship between people and museums (Nielsen 2015: 364). She argues that ‘the creation of relevance [is] essential on all levels of cultural work: in political strategies, mission statements, project creation, exhibition layouts and individual learning approaches’ (Nielsen 2015: 364).

The increasing interest in relevance among museums, especially in terms of visitor engagement, is notable in Nina Simon’s work. Indeed, the museum director and author devoted an entire book to the ‘art of relevance’ (Simon 2016). From her practitioner’s experience, she investigates relevance as a concept: not only for visitor (and non-visitor) engagement but also for the relationship between museums and the people they serve. For this kind of understanding, a theory of relevance put forward by cognitive science appeared to be the most meaningful to Simon; I believe that this is true for this study as well.

It is Wilson and Sperber’s (2004) theory of relevance that provides the basis for Simon’s (2016) exploration. The cognitive scientists⁷¹ set out the two factors that make a person decide which input, among a plethora of inputs, is relevant (Wilson and Sperber 2004). The first condition is that the input – defined as ‘a sight, a sound, an utterance, a memory’ – must generate a positive cognitive effect: ‘Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time’ (2004: 608–609). A positive cognitive effect is something that makes a significant difference to the world view of an individual; for example, by ‘answering a question he had in mind, improving his

⁷¹ In addition to cognitive science, Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber have a background in linguistics and social sciences, respectively.

knowledge on a certain topic, settling a doubt, confirming a suspicion, or correcting a mistaken impression' (2004: 608).

If we think back to the examples discussed in Chapter 5 and keep in mind the notion of positive cognitive effect, we can easily understand why the participants perceived some museum visits to be more relevant than others. Gabriel, for example, was able to link the museum exhibits and stories from the Verdun Memorial Museum to his present experiences (see Section 5.4.2). The visit allowed him to compare the lives of people during the First World War with those of people today. He might have had his previous views confirmed, or he might have corrected some assumptions; what matters is that the visit provoked a positive cognitive effect.

However, a positive cognitive effect alone does not create relevance. Wilson and Sperber (2004) identify a second factor for relevance; namely, a low level of processing effort. The researchers argue that to create relevance, challenges must be adapted to an individual's skills. This has similarities with such learning theories as the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978) and, in a related manner, flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1999). Hence, relevance is created by not only what the museum is about (its 'content') but also the manner in which the content is communicated (through exhibits, texts and facilitators). In other words, relevance is as much a matter of personal interest as it is a matter of effort. If visitors need to make too much effort to get something meaningful out of a museum visit, they are experiencing a barrier to engagement. At the same time, familiarity with a museum's content alone will not create relevance: visitors also need to be able to learn something new (Wilson and Sperber 2004; Simon 2016). In their theory of relevance, Wilson and Sperber (2004) talk specifically about intellectual effort. However, as Simon (2016) suggests, physical and experiential effort (known as 'structural barriers') may also affect relevance. For example, individuals are more likely to visit museums – and find them relevant – if getting to those museums requires a low rather than a high level of effort.

6.2.2 Relevance, memory and learning

A further aspect that emerged from the focus groups points towards the importance of museums creating relevance. The findings from the present study suggest that relevant experiences may play a role in making museum visits memorable. In one of my introductory questions, I asked the focus-group participants if they had ever been to a museum and, if yes, which one. Most participants had visited at least one museum in the past and many were able to name a number of different museums that they had been to, in Luxembourg and abroad. However, some participants said that they had visited a museum but they could not remember which one. Often, they had forgotten not only the name of the museum but also its location or what it was about (or both):

I remember I was at a museum, they had steam engines and other I-don't-know-what things. I can't remember what museum it was though [pensive]. I can't even remember if it was here or in another country... Blimey! [laughs] (Danny, 21)

If we link these answers to the participants' accounts of positive museum experiences, the data suggests that visits are remembered only if they are especially enjoyable (for example, through bodily experiences) or relevant (for example, through learning something new). Further evidence can be found in the responses to a 'think back' question in which I asked participants to recall things that they particularly liked or disliked during past museum visits. Their positive memories outweighed their negative memories in significant number and, in general, their descriptions of positive experiences were more vivid and detailed. For example, the following (abridged) extract highlights Tina's (21) enthusiasm for and detailed memories of a visit to an exhibition about Japan:

I was at a museum where they had an exhibition about Japan. There was a temple and a house, in which you could see how the people live over there. They had also built a miniature city, really tiny. I took thousands of photos because it was so interesting. I really wanted to see this. [...] My boyfriend came with me because we both love Japanese culture. I think he'll visit museums more often with me now [laughs]. [...] They had different workshops that you could attend too. You could see paintings and so on, it was fascinating.

Surprisingly, however, some participants reported having negative memories but not remembering exactly what they were about. They appeared to remember that a museum had left a negative impression without being able to recall the exact cause. As Leila (13) said, 'I remember that I was at a museum and that I didn't like it, but I can't remember which one it was'.

The positive cognitive effect and appropriate level of processing effort that characterise relevance strongly resonate with learning theories. For example, learning something new accounts for a positive cognitive effect, which means that it fulfils one of the requirements for relevance as defined by cognitive science. In addition, relevance and learning are related in so far that they begin before, happen during and continue after the actual visit. A notable example is Gabriel's experience at the Verdun Memorial Museum (see Section 5.4.2). This clearly illustrates the interaction between his personal, sociocultural and physical contexts, as laid out in Falk and Dierking's (2013) contextual model of learning. Moreover, Gabriel's experience was built up over time – before, during and after his visit.

6.2.3 Individual and collective relevance

One could argue that relevance, as hitherto defined, is a concept that can be applied to an individual rather than to a group of people. Indeed, a few focus-group participants felt that it was first and foremost individual interest that determined whether a young person wanted to visit a museum and, hence, whether they were likely to experience a positive cognitive effect. Referring to late-night events, Christophe (19) remarked:

I'm not sure if [those events] can really change anything. I think it depends on the person. You'll have some people who find it interesting and others who don't. For some people, [the events] will spark their interest and for others they won't. It's different for every person.

In a similar way, Gabriel (17) said:

[Museums] can't do things that suit everyone. For example, if they did a museum about art, you [looks at Kerry] would certainly go but I'd say, 'No, I won't, because it doesn't interest

me'. If there was a museum about Muhammad Ali, every boxer and every fan would go but it might not interest me at all. There will always be subjects that will interest people and others that won't.

However, the majority of the participants thought that it was possible for museums to appeal to and engage with young people in general in a number of different ways. It is true that young people are primarily individuals, with different concerns and interests. However, young people also share a historical background, which allows for some common experiences. Bessant (2012), a researcher in sociology and youth studies, notes:

[...] it doesn't actually make much sense to generalise about young people on the basis of one characteristic – their age. Like any age group young people are incredibly diverse, and do not all share the same interests and values or do the same things. [...] Having said that [...] we also need to recognise that many young people do have some common experiences. Like any group or age cohort, their lives are variously influenced and shaped by significant historic and cultural events that take place in the contexts in which they live. Historic events like war, natural disaster, economic recession or depression and policies designed to prolong schooling certainly influence the lives of young people who grow up in them. This shared status is complicated by other factors like ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, socio-economic status, geography and personal disposition that can compound, or mitigate the initial shared circumstances.

With these common experiences in mind, I asked the focus-group participants which topics they thought young people would like to see museums address. The question generated a vast and diverse array of topics, from which I identified two broad categories: 'the here and now' and 'activism'. Before exploring the first of these categories, it is worth mentioning that sometimes the participants disagreed on which topics they thought would be interesting to young people. For the most part, however, the themes were agreed on by the whole group.



Figure 3. Which topics do you think young people would find interesting in museums? (Part 1: 'the here and now')

The first category, which I have labelled 'the here and now', includes topics that relate to young people's personal interests and are part of their daily lives (see Figure 3). The following topics were cited most frequently: video games; fashion; cars, motorbikes and planes; graffiti; 3D art; dinosaurs; sport; cinema; mobile phones; manga; anime; brands (cars, fashion, etc.); photography; and food. Although most of the objects and activities in this category are ubiquitous in participants' everyday lives (the 'here and now'), it was not solely the contemporary aspect that attracted the participants. Many participants reported being interested in the history and evolution of video games, fashion, modes of transport, mobile phones and photography, and in biographies of musicians. The three conversation extracts below illustrate the interest that some of the participants showed in these subjects.

Extract 1; Focus Group A; discussion involving Jim (12), Philip (12) and Leila (13):

Laurence: If you could create a museum, what would it be like?
What would it show? What sort of things could you do there?

Jim: Modern!

Philip: You could fly [in the museum].

Jim: If you want young people to come, then [the museum]
should show old mobile phones but also new technology and
so on.

Leila: Yes, a comparison.

Laurence: Do you mean the history of mobile phones?

Jim: Yes, like how big mobile phones were at first.

Philip: HUUUUUGE! [pulls a face]

Jim: Yes, they were that big [shows approximately half a metre
with his hands] and they had an antenna! [looks shocked]

Philip: Afterwards they got smaller and smaller and now they're
getting bigger and bigger again.

Extract 2; Focus Group C; discussion involving David (15), Emma (18), Kate
(19) and Melanie, a youth worker:

Laurence: What subjects would you like to see addressed in
museums?

[...]

David: Cameras.

Laurence: Do you mean an exhibition about cameras?

David: Yes, in a museum.

Emma: Maybe also about photos!

David: About *cameras*. [determined]

Kate: Yes, what the first cameras were like! [enthusiastic]

David: [mimicking a museum guide] 'This was the first camera and this one is...'

Melanie: And then you could develop your own films in a workshop.

Kate: Exactly!

Emma: Yes, and there are different photography techniques so you could have different workshops.

Laurence: And you'd have a souvenir to take home with you.

David [speaks excitedly]: In the past, they had that roll [sic] when they took a photo and it made 'Whoosh!' [imitates the sound of an old camera flash] [...] And the man had to put his head under a blanket!

Extract 3; Focus Group C; comment by David (15):

Laurence [resuming a previous conversation]: David, previously you talked about the 'Ronaldo museum' you visited in Madeira. What do you think is the purpose of the museum?

David: [...] When you have your idol in front of you, and when this idol's Cristiano Ronaldo, then you can see... You know, he writes some of the things himself and in his museum, he shows how you can motivate yourself. When you read this, you're inspired and you say to yourself 'I'm going to try to act like him because he achieved something' and 'If he could achieve something, I can do that too'. So, you take a couple of tips from him and a couple of tips from other people [...] and then you're able to decide for yourself. When you're a fan, [seeing this] helps you a lot.

Due to the small sample size and the situatedness of the research, the range of subjects mentioned above cannot be regarded as potential topics of interest to all young people. If they are approached from a wider perspective, though, the findings allow us to identify three things. Firstly, they show the diversity of the participants' interests. Secondly, the participants' responses provide further support for the finding that the past, as presented in a museum, can be interesting to young people if it relates to their lives (see Chapter 5).

Thirdly, and most importantly, the topics described are familiar enough for participants to relate to, yet they allow young people, and may even encourage them, to learn something new. Due to the low level of effort (familiarity) and the positive cognitive effect (learning something new), these topics could be starting points for relevant experiences.

6.3 Differing cultures

6.3.1 Communication as a cultural barrier

The topics of interest described in the previous section are ubiquitous in young people's culture, yet they are not necessarily present in museums. As such, they hint at what Xanthoudaki (1998: 169), in her review of European and North American educational programmes for independent young visitors, describes as a 'lack of correspondence':

The reasons for young people's reluctance to choose museums and galleries as part of their entertainment were often found to be the lack of correspondence between the institutions' services on offer and youth interests, ways of life and needs.

This cultural gap is symptomatic of several underlying power issues in the relationship between young people and museums. Although Xanthoudaki (1998) did note some positive developments in museums and 20 years have passed since her study, similar observations about conflicting cultures have been made in more recent studies (Mason and McCarthy 2006; Timbart 2007), including the present research. Before moving on to examine how young people's and museums' cultures differ, however, I assess the importance of cultural versus other barriers, such as structural ones. I also show that cultural barriers can take different forms, such as the museum's communication with the public.

A number of studies have investigated the potential barriers that young people experience when confronted with museums. Most of the authors agree that structural barriers, such as transport and entrance fees, play a role, but that this role is not necessarily the most important (Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007; Kelly and

Bartlett 2009; Whitaker 2016). It is important to note that structural factors are highly dependent on the social context. For example, in places where museum entry is not free of charge or there are no concessions for young people, financial barriers may play a more important role. The same applies to more deprived or less affluent areas. For young people who do not live near to a museum, transport (time and cost) may also affect museum attendance.

The focus-group participants did not see money as a significant deterrent. Most participants did not know what the entrance fees for young people were, and the majority were not aware that some museums, such as the ones in Luxembourg City, offer free admission to young people. Furthermore, some participants were willing to pay a moderate fee if they thought that the museum was worth visiting. This is exemplified by David's (15) response to Emma's (18) comment:

Emma: The Louvre is expensive.

David: Okay, but it's the biggest museum in the world!

Similarly, distance and transport did not seem to have a significant effect on museum visitation. Indeed, the participants appeared to be fairly independent, even at a young age, and were not put off by travelling long distances if they were motivated to do so, as Miguel (20) and Tina (21) explained:

Laurence: Do you think it makes a difference if a museum is close to home or far away? Could that be an obstacle? I mean, 12-year-olds might not travel to Luxembourg City on their own ...

Miguel: Maybe not at 12, but at 13 or 14 you could go with friends.

Tina: To me, it makes no difference because I've been travelling around the country since I was 13. [...] Where the museum is wouldn't be a problem because you have regular trains or buses in every town and village in Luxembourg.

[...]

Miguel: In every town, there's at least one museum. There's one where I live and there's one in Esch,⁷² but I've never been interested in visiting them. But I could go if I wanted to. [...] It hasn't interested me because they don't talk about the themes that I want them to.

According to the focus-group participants, their reasons for not visiting museums were a lack of interest or a lack of awareness, rather than obstacles relating to money or transport. Their absence of awareness of what is on display in museums was primarily linked to a perceived lack of advertising – a finding that has also been observed by Lemerise and Soucy (1999) and Timbart (2007). Only a few participants remembered seeing museum advertisements, which they were clearly not impressed by: the participants found them 'dull', 'silly' and 'inadequate'.

This communication problem was especially clear in the responses to my concluding focus-group question. At the end of the sessions, I asked the participants if they had any direct recommendations for museums. A recurrent recommendation was to improve external communication with young people. Some participants remarked that museum advertisements are not appealing to young people; they should be 'flashier' and have more presence in 'young people's places' (such as schools, youth clubs, pubs, nightclubs, public transport and social media). These findings match the ones observed by Mason and McCarthy (2006). In the present research, Kerry (21), an art student, had particularly strong views on this subject; these are reflected in the following extract from the conversation she had with Danny (21) and me:

Kerry: Minimalism's no good for young people. [An advertisement] has to be 'flash!' It has to be 'bam!' It's got to be the first thing they see. It doesn't need to be beautiful, it just has to be 'snap!' When I look around here [in the youth club] ... That poster over there, it isn't very nice, but it stands out.

[...]

⁷² Esch (or Esch-sur-Alzette) is the second largest town in Luxembourg.

Laurence: [summarising participants' comments]: So, museums would design posters for those who like the traditional approach, but if they wanted to have different people coming to museums, they'd need to make different posters or advertise in different places, such as on buses?

Kerry: Yes, exactly.

Danny: It's true that if you made a poster that looked like graffiti, old people would think, 'Ah, that's just for teenagers', without even reading it. So, yes, you should have both.

Kerry: That's why, when you have a theme, you need to ask yourself who you want to bring in more. Who's my target group? – like you learn at school [laughs]. Who's my target group? Is it old people or is it more young people? And then you make your poster accordingly. There you have it!

A micro-level analysis of this extract and similar comments made in the focus groups would focus on participants' perceptions of museum advertising. We could deduce that the style of communication that is preferred by museums does not match the style that is favoured by the participants. In contrast, a macro-level analysis – which is the aim of the present chapter – points towards a greater difficulty lying behind this 'advertising problem': a communication gap and, ultimately, a cultural gap.

A semiotic approach and, most importantly, Hall's (1991) encoding/decoding model help to shed light on the cultural gap that lies behind museum advertising and communication. In his seminal text, Hall (1991) refers to mass-media communication in general and television specifically; however, his encoding/decoding model can be applied to most media formats. What is of particular interest to this study is how ideology and hegemonic discourses permeate systems of communication, and how the communication process can be understood as a 'complex structure of dominance' (1991: 117). The producers of messages are seen to operate within the 'dominant-hegemonic' code, and their communication is likely to be decoded as intended by audiences who are operating within the same code (1991: 125). As Hall (1991: 118) notes:

[...] the production process is not without its 'discursive' aspect: it, too, is framed throughout by meanings and ideas: knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about the audience and so on frame the constitution of the programme through this production structure.

In contrast, audiences who operate within their own system of values, outside the dominant framework, will negotiate or oppose the intended message. The reason for these different interpretations is a different positioning within a system of power: 'The lack of fit between the codes has a great deal to do with the structural differences of relation and position between broadcasters and audiences' (Hall 1991: 120). With reference to the data from the focus groups, I argue that the 'language' or communication used by museums, inside and outside the institution, often appears to diverge from the system that young people are operating in. The extract above – especially Kerry's remark that advertising needs to be 'flash!' and 'bam!' – illustrates that this communication mismatch results in not only negotiated or oppositional interpretations but also sheer invisibility. We could argue that when museums operate in the dominant system of values (or the 'dominant culture'), they fall outside the remit, or are 'below the radar', of those who are operating outside that system. Furthermore, those who are operating outside the dominant social system are often the 'disempowered': those groups that lack power because of their age, gender or ethnicity, to name but a few (Boyanton 2014: n.p.).

Communication, however, is only one aspect of the cultural gap between museums and young people. As Mason and McCarthy (2006: 23) argue:

There is [...] a clash between the culture of art galleries and museums, both in terms of the art culture that they display and their organizational culture (values, assumptions and ways of doing things), which is fundamentally at odds with the identity and culture of young people.

The culture of museums – and, hence, the potential for a cultural gap – pervades the different levels of an institution, from the inside (thematic approaches, displays, objects, stories and attitudes) to the outside

(communication and visibility). In the next section, therefore, I explore the way in which the cultures of museums and young people fundamentally diverge.

6.3.2 Young people's museum attendance

Before turning to cultural differences, it is worth digressing from the focus groups for a moment to examine how young people engage with museums and culture. Often, young people are described as being 'hard to reach' (see Birkett 2016 for a discussion of how this notion pervades museum discourse), and some museums report low levels of attendance among young people. In a similar vein, popular opinion holds that in general, young people are disengaged from and uninterested in culture. However, these conceptions are often ill-founded and based on stereotypes and assumptions. Furthermore, their existence points towards two fundamental problems regarding definitions of culture.

Firstly, studies have shown that young people's attendance is sometimes higher than that which is described or 'felt' by museum professionals (Lemerise 1998; Lemerise 1999; Timbart 2013). It is widely acknowledged that a large number of young people visit museums on school trips (Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Bardes and Lorentz 2009; Timbart 2013). However, it is difficult, or even impossible, to compare figures due to the different methods of segmenting visitors and visitation frequency in surveys (both independent and in-house).⁷³ In addition, some attendance figures relate solely to state-supported museums (for example, DCMS 2017b). Attendance figures may also differ from one country to another. For example, on the subject of young people's attendance, some studies, notably in France (Octobre 2009), have noted rising figures, while statistics from the UK point towards either stable (DCMS 2017a) or falling figures (DCMS 2017b).⁷⁴ The ratio of

⁷³ See also Section 2.5.1 for a discussion of attendance figures.

⁷⁴ *Taking Part survey: England child report, 2016/17* (DCMS 2017a) is a household survey of participation in culture among children aged 5–15. *Sponsored museums annual performance indicators 2016/17* (DCMS 2017b) is based on counts by museums (for example, for people under the age of 16).

independent to school visitors also varies. For example, while Xanthoudaki (1998) describes a lack of independent visitors in comparison with school visitors in European and North American museums, the Canadian study mentioned previously has proved the opposite to be true (Lemerise 1998; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003).

The beliefs and conflicting figures described above show that it is often difficult to distinguish facts from opinions and generalisations. Lemerise (1999) argues that young people *attend* museums, although to different degrees in different museums. She describes six factors that influence young people's attendance:

- Geography/location (higher levels of attendance in urban areas than in rural areas)
- Age (higher levels of attendance among 12- to 14-year-olds than 15- to 17-year-olds)
- Parental level of education
- National promotion of partnerships between schools and museums
- Opportunities for participation in museums
- Publicity and outreach (Lemerise 1999: 23).

Secondly, even if we agree that, in some cases, young people hardly ever visit museums, we should not deduce that they lack interest in cultural activities. For example, a study of cultural practices among young people (aged 6 to 19) in Luxembourg shows that although museum visits decrease with age, young people are not necessarily less culturally active (Bardes and Lorentz 2009). The researchers found that as soon as young people become more autonomous in their leisure choices, they simply favour other activities, such as concerts and the cinema. Similar findings have been observed in France (Tavan 2003). A decrease in museum attendance following early adolescence (approximately age 12–14) has also been observed in studies from other countries (Haan 1997 quoted in Xanthoudaki 1998: 162; Lemerise 1999). Consequently, we could infer that a *shift* in, rather than an *abandonment* of, cultural practices occurs. Furthermore, this shift may be temporary; one study

reports an increase in museum visits after the age of 20 (Haan 1997 quoted in Xanthoudaki 1998: 162).

This shift leads us to the final and most important point. It is essential for museums to understand young people's cultural practices – even if they do not involve museums – because this has implications for how institutions perceive and approach young people. In public opinion, a (perceived) lack of interest in museums is readily associated with a general lack of interest in and disengagement with culture. At that point, however, we encounter a fundamental problem: what exactly counts as 'culture', and who defines it?

6.3.3 Different understandings of culture and participation

Several studies have examined official accounts of cultural participation and questioned their adequacy for reflecting engagement with culture among people in general and young people in particular (Willis 1990; Gibson 2001; Gibson and Edwards 2016; Taylor 2016; LaPlaca Cohen 2017). From the focus groups, I was able to identify three key themes that relate to this: legitimate and valued culture; everyday culture; and active involvement.

Firstly, in his seminal 1960s study, Bourdieu argues that certain forms of elite or state-supported culture create social distinction (Bourdieu 2010; Miles and Gibson 2016; Dawson 2018). Even today, certain types of cultural activities are considered to be more valuable than others because they are considered to be legitimate (Gibson and Edwards 2016; Taylor 2016; Lahire 2018). Surveys and statements about cultural participation among the population are usually restricted to state-supported forms of culture – which, in turn, perpetuates the idea of legitimacy. Similar to the hegemonic systems of communication described earlier, the legitimisation of certain forms of culture accounts for ethnocentrism. Legitimisation by the dominant 'class' rests on a differentiation from the Other – that is, from those who do not participate in the 'legitimate' culture (Lahire 2018). As a consequence, people who do not participate in any of these 'valued' types of cultural activities are simply deemed to be disengaged or non-participant (Taylor 2016).

However, Taylor's (2016) reassessment of the Taking Part survey⁷⁵ demonstrates that if we take account of culture that is not supported by the state, participation among the population is much higher. In other words, when cultural participation is extended to 'free time' activities, such as gardening, eating out, going to pubs and spending time with friends, a whole new picture emerges:

[...] analysis limited to the cultural sector suggests that a majority of the population is culturally inactive; the new model developed here suggests that only a small minority are, and the size of that small minority is still likely to be exaggerated.
(Taylor 2016: 178)

Similarly, Culture Track '17 (LaPlaca Cohen 2017: 7–8) notes a 'paradigm shift', as audiences in that survey extended the notion of 'culture' to such activities as street fairs and experiences relating to food and drink. As stated by LaPlaca Cohen (2017: 8):

Audiences in 2017 do not place priority or meaning in whether an activity is 'culture' or not: it can be anything from Caravaggio to Coachella, Tannhäuser to taco trucks. But if 'culture' is no longer on a pedestal, then does it no longer have a purpose? We don't think so. We just need to articulate what gives the term meaning in this radically changed landscape.

Moreover, according to LaPlaca Cohen, it is audiences themselves who will build a new definition of culture.

In the focus-group discussions, we concentrated on definitions of museums rather than of culture, yet several comments pointed towards a different understanding of culture than the one that is commonly assumed by the cultural sector. For example, on several occasions, the discussions shifted back and forth between museums and amusement parks and between museums and zoos (see also Section 5.4.5). The participants often saw surprising similarities and relationships between these different kinds of

⁷⁵ Taking Part is a government initiative that surveys participation in culture and sport among adults and children in England (see DCMS 2016).

activities. In addition, the participants sometimes had ‘unconventional’ ideas about which objects should be exhibited and what topics should be covered in museums (see Sections 6.2.3 and 6.3.4). In a way that is reminiscent of LaPlaca Cohen’s (2017) ‘paradigm shift’, the participants’ accounts of museum experiences ranged from Madame Tussaud’s to the Louvre, and from a *Star Wars* exhibition to Claude Monet’s *Water Lilies*. While the participants seemed to be aware that certain museums and exhibits would be deemed to be ‘high culture’ rather than ‘low culture’, their perceptions and experiences moved naturally and easily between the two forms of culture. The following discussion of the participants’ ‘ideal’ museum highlights how their ideas cover a range of cultural forms. The conversation involves Kate (19), Emma (18), Nick (19), Christophe (19) and David (15).

Laurence: If you could create your own museum, what would it be like? What would it show?

Kate: Oh dear! [thinks for a moment] A bit of everything.

Emma: I liked what David said about the amusement park [laughter from the youth worker]. An amusement park in the museum, I’d like that.

[...]

Nick: I’d build a restaurant in the museum. [laughter from the other participants] Yes, that would be cool! You would eat and you would... [unclear].

Emma: Eat like an ancient Egyptian.

Nick: Yeah, perfect! [seems content with his idea]

Laurence: So that you could take a break and then continue your visit?

Nick: Yes... No, you could do everything at the same time. You would eat and look at the painting that’s hanging there... There would be a jungle and a couple of stuffed animals sitting [sic] around.

Emma: And maybe you could eat like an Egyptian, like they ate in the past.

The other participants: Oh, yes! [general enthusiasm]

Nick: Yes, something like that.

Christophe: Yes, some nice topics relating to different civilisations. Basically, history with food.

Emma: Maybe you could even dress like they did in the past.

Kate: Yes!

Emma: You wouldn't have to buy the clothes. You could just borrow them and give them back after your visit. It would be cool to dress like an Egyptian or a fair maiden.

Kate: A princess! [laughs]

David: Personally, I'd do something about the French Revolution. I'd show objects, an armour and images that would explain it. I'd also take two wax mannequins who would show how [the people] fought back then. Everybody would say 'Wow, cool!' [...] And I would [...] show a video of how the people lived back then, what the houses were like, how the politics were and so on. So [the visitors] would learn something about history. Why? Because it was the reality that happened [sic]. [assertive]

Consequently, if we were to extend the notion of cultural participation proposed by Taylor (2016), this would bring about a reconsideration of suppositions relating to a culturally disengaged youth – similar to those relating to a culturally disengaged general population. For example, a recurring theme in the focus groups was the importance of spending time with friends (see also Section 5.5). This was particularly evident in one focus group, when a discussion with Jim (12), Philip (12) and Leila (13) drifted towards the participants' other leisure activities:

Laurence: Would you choose a museum as a place to spend your free time?

Jim: No.

Philip: No. Maybe ... No.

Leila: It depends on the museum.

Jim: Maybe if it's a car museum.

Laurence: What is that you prefer in other leisure activities?

Jim: Spending time with friends. Doing things with friends.

Leila: I don't understand the question.

Laurence: What kinds of things do you like to do in your free time?

Leila: Seeing my friends.

Laurence: Where? Here at the youth club?

Leila: It doesn't really matter. As long as I can see them.

The importance of spending time with friends, and the influence this had on participants' choice of leisure activities, was mentioned in all the focus groups. These findings are in agreement with those of previous research (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Timbart 2007; Kelly and Bartlett 2009). It is widely acknowledged that friends play an important role in people's lives; even more so during adolescence, when young people become increasingly independent of childhood attachment figures, such as their parents (Flasher 1978; Largo and Czernin 2011). Consequently, it is worth taking this fundamental aspect of young people's leisure time into account when evaluating their cultural participation.

Secondly, while Taylor (2016) has concentrated on a different interpretation of the Taking Part survey for adults (that is, people aged 16 and over), several other researchers have explored young people's participation and models of cultural practices (Willis 1990; Gibson 2001; Octobre 2009; Gibson and Edwards 2016). Gibson and Edwards (2016: 196) indicate a 'hierarchised discourse of cultural value' relating to young people's cultural participation, with a divide between the types of cultural activities that are valued by facilitators and the types that are valued by young people. In a similar

way to Taylor (2016) and LaPlaca Cohen (2017), Gibson (2001) calls for the notion of culture to be redefined by young people themselves.

In his influential study, Willis (1990) argues that, rather than being culturally uninterested, young people are highly active in everyday culture: it is the 'common' and 'ordinary' culture that is of value and has relevance to their lives. Similar arguments have been developed by Gibson (2001) and Gibson and Edwards (2016). Gibson (2001) notes high levels of participation by young people in commercial culture; for example, their attendance at popular music concerts is significantly higher than that of adults. While engagement with legitimate or state-supported culture is highly influenced by the possession of cultural capital (Bourdieu 2010), commercial culture is said to be more readily accessible because a person does not require a high level of education to decode it (Bourdieu 1993; Gibson 2001).

In the focus groups, common culture appeared to be ubiquitous *and* valued, and it was intertwined with the participants' perceptions and experiences of museums. David (15), for example, emphasised the value of a museum like the Museu CR7⁷⁶ to teach and inspire people. Films like *Night at the Museum* influenced how some participants imagined their ideal museum. The majority of the participants felt that silent discos, sleepovers and scavenger hunts were activities that museums should aspire to. As shown in Figure 3, many of the exhibition topics proposed by the participants relate to common and commercial culture. In addition, some of the topics, such as video games, photography, mobile phones and 3D art, also often require young people's active involvement.

This leads us to the third point: active involvement. A number of studies have suggested that young people's cultural activities are marked by a blurring of boundaries: not only between high culture and common culture, but also between production and consumption (Willis 1990; Gibson 2001; Octobre 2009). Young people do not just pursue amateur cultural activities (such as

⁷⁶ Museu CR7 is a museum dedicated to the footballer Cristiano Ronaldo. See also Sections 5.4.6. and 6.2.3.

music and photography) in large numbers (Octobre 2009: 3); they also appropriate everyday culture and give it new meaning (Willis 1990). Octobre (2009: 6) identifies a 'privatisation' and a 'deinstitutionalisation' of young people's leisure and cultural activities, which is marked by the increasing prominence of 'bedroom culture'.⁷⁷ This means that due to the democratisation and ubiquity of new media and digital technologies, young people can consume culture (for example, through podcasts and streaming) and produce culture (for example, through social media and video blogs) at will in the private sphere. As argued by Octobre (2009: 6), this challenges the 'authority' of cultural institutions and schools and their 'monopoly' on access to culture.⁷⁸ That kind of active involvement, be it by creating a personalised avatar in a *Star Wars* exhibition or by producing and co-creating content in the museum space (as Miguel described in Section 5.3.2), points towards the need to reconsider traditional understandings of and, by extension, power relationships in, museums.

In this section, I have examined three key issues that relate to the data from the focus groups: definitions of legitimate and valued culture; the value of everyday culture; and the importance of active involvement. Taken together, these issues show that rather than blaming young people for not being interested in museums – and, generally speaking, in culture – we should blame the definitions of culture and cultural participation: these definitions do not accurately reflect, and even exclude the possibility of, young people's engagement (see also, in a similar vein, Dawson 2018).

6.3.4 Activism in museums

The gap between the culture of museums (and, by extension, adults) and the culture of young people may also be apparent in other ways. Data from the focus groups suggests that young people might have a different understanding of what constitutes valued culture and what role museums should play in

⁷⁷ My translations.

⁷⁸ My translations.

society. Figure 4 illustrates the second set of topics that the participants thought would be of interest to young people; I have labelled this set 'activism'.

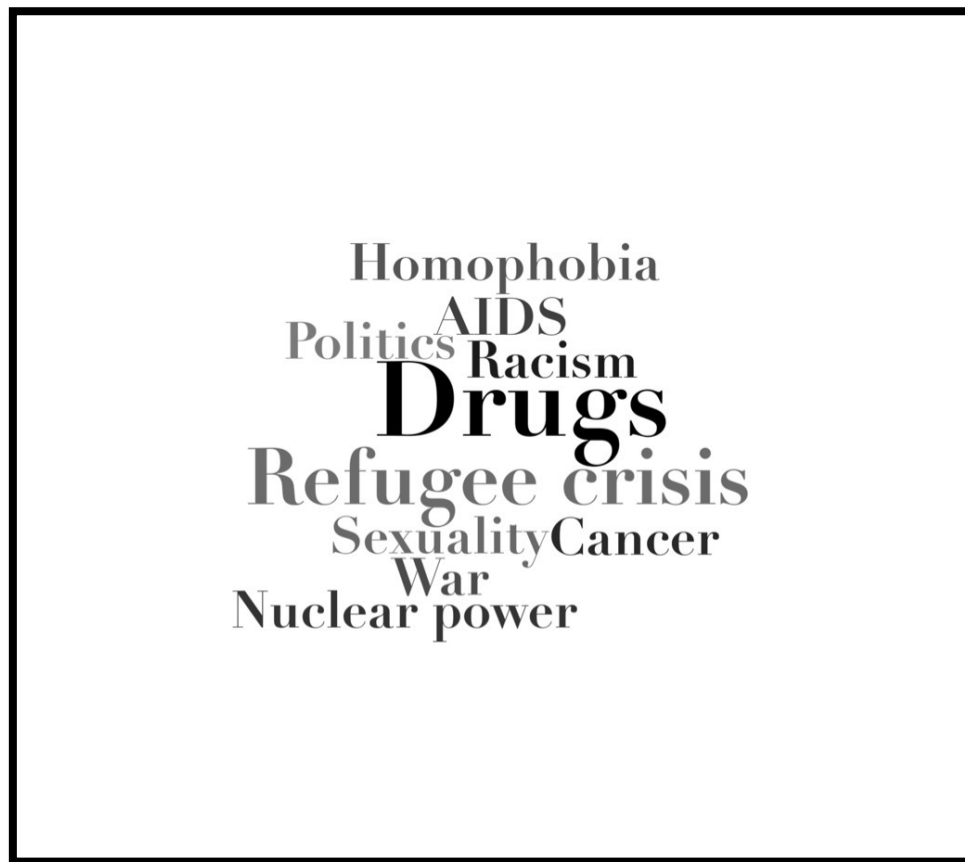


Figure 4. Which topics do you think young people would find interesting in museums? (Part 2: 'activism')

The topics that were raised by the participants are part of their everyday life, similar to the subjects shown in Figure 3. However, these topics connect to collective and global issues, rather than to the individual and personal interests. The topic that was most frequently mentioned was drugs, and many participants thought that it would be interesting to learn more about their history, uses and effects. Some of the topics – such as nuclear power, war and cancer – were said to be 'worrying', while others – such as homophobia, racism and AIDS – were referred to as needing increased public awareness. What all these topics have in common, according to the participants, is that by raising them museums could contribute to informing people (not only young people) and creating a better and fairer society. The three conversation extracts that follow illustrate the lively discussions that the participants had about these topics.

Extract 1; Focus Group D; discussion involving Gabriel (17), Kerry (21) and Danny (21):

Gabriel: At school, I have people in my class who still don't know what AIDS is. That's gross! And they say, 'It doesn't matter if I get AIDS', but they aren't aware of the consequences. That would be an interesting subject for young people, together with cancer and so on. So people would ...

Laurence: Do you mean to inform people? To tell them what it is?

Kerry: Because in schools, they don't do that enough.

Danny: But that thing with AIDS, that's also interesting for adults and grandparents who didn't learn about it at school. For those who don't know anything about it because AIDS was only discovered in the 80s. My grandparents, they went to school in the 50s and 60s. They didn't learn anything about it. Maybe they know what it is, but ... When it's interesting to young people, then everybody can benefit from it.

Extract 2; Focus Group D; discussion involving Kerry (21) and Danny (21):

Kerry: I think it's a shame: museums over here, it's all the same really. A museum about eroticism, that would be something to do over here. Then people would become [...] a bit more open-minded.

Danny: The thing is, Luxembourg is a small country with an old-fashioned mindset about these kinds of things.

Kerry: So you need someone to shake them up!

[...]

Laurence: Do you think that it's a museum's purpose to shake people up? Like the Verdun Memorial Museum we talked about before, or the museum about eroticism to open people's minds?

Danny: Yes, sure!

Kerry: Of course!

Laurence: What kind of topics could they do that with?

Kerry: Sexuality.

Gabriel: War.

Kerry: Homosexuality.

Danny: Racism.

Kerry: Yes, yes, yes!

Danny: In our country, above all, because we have so many nationalities, countries of origin and religions. [...] You really need that here, because you're always hearing about how some people are racist and it's a shame in a country like ours.

The discussion then moved on to the refugee crisis and politics. Danny and Kerry also emphasised that although museums should 'shake people up', they should do so in a respectful manner without hurting people's feelings.

Extract 3; Focus Group C; discussion involving Emma (18) and Nick (19):

Laurence [resuming a previous conversation]: What other contemporary topics would you find interesting?

Emma: Refugees. At school, we created an exhibition about refugees. I have to say that there were many people at the vernissage and also many young people. [...] Our aim was to make people think about the issue and I found that it was really successful. I think [in museums] there should be more about the things we hear in the news. [...] And the refugee crisis, that's something that concerns us all.

[...]

Laurence: What other topics would be interesting to young people?

Nick: Politics. Ah, you mean for young people? No, not politics then.

Laurence: You don't think so?

Nick: No! No, there aren't many young people who are interested in that. Okay, it's a pity ...

Laurence: But refugees, that's politics too, isn't it?

Emma: Yes, and I think that refugees will be a thing for a very long time.

Nick: Yes, yes. But young people, they simply aren't interested in politics. That's just the way it is.

Emma: Yes, that's the problem, really.

These longer extracts show that the participants saw museums as potential places for providing information and for activist practice; for example, by provoking visitors to think about contemporary issues and (possibly) change their attitudes.

Furthermore, the extracts demonstrate that young people are not necessarily apolitical, as is often assumed. Although some participants (for example, Nick) argued that young people are not interested in politics, this could be related to how they defined 'politics'. In addition, while some young people may be apolitical, others may not – to the same extent as adults. What is specific to young people, though, is the public perception of their supposed political disengagement. Similar to their assumed cultural disengagement, this perception is shaped by stereotypes rather than by concrete evidence. Pickard and Bessant (2018a: 7) explain that the public image of an apolitical and apathetic youth emerged during the 1990s. Since then, the image of young people being primarily engaged in superficialities and leisure pursuits has been perpetuated by the media, politics and even academia. However, in Pickard and Bessant's (2018b) recent publication, academics and activists present many examples of how young people around the globe are engaging with politics in creative and innovative ways.

In the introduction to their edited book, Pickard and Bessant (2018a: 8) also draw attention to the narrow definition of 'politics':

Importantly, the cases in this book directly challenge conventional understandings of the 'political' and the narrow and restrictive nature of those definitions of what counts as politics, which tend to exclude many of the actions described in this book. These conventional accounts of political participation are framed in ways that emphasise disengagement from 'real politics' namely party-based parliamentary and electoral systems (being a member of a political party and voting in elections). As the chapters in this book reveal, these restrictive

accounts are often abstractions that are remote from the ways so many young people actually think about and do politics.

The editors' discussion about the official definitions that exclude young people's political participation strongly echo discussions mentioned earlier in this chapter on young people's cultural participation (see Section 6.3.3). Both of these discussions about official definitions of legitimate participation (in culture and in politics) testify to the power that language has in creating, maintaining and perpetuating ill-founded stereotypes.

Returning to the subject of the participants' views on activist museum practices, the findings of the present study raise questions regarding people's attitudes towards the role(s) of museums. Comparing the present findings with those of other studies suggests that young people and the so-called general population may have different opinions about the presence of political and controversial topics in museums. When asked about the most important purposes of museums in terms of how they allocate their public funding, the participants⁷⁹ in a 2013 BritainThinks study (commissioned by the Museums Association) appeared to think that museums should not be political or polemical, but that they should be neutral and objective and present facts. Rather than taking an overt stand, museums could 'passively stimulate debate by presenting arguments for and against an issue' (BritainThinks 2013: 24). In addition, 'debates and controversy were seen as possibly undermining one of the core museum purposes, namely to provide a family-friendly, enjoyable and entertaining day out' (BritainThinks 2013: 21).

The majority of (adult) visitors in Kelly's (2006: 14–15) survey did not support the idea of museums 'tak[ing] an active political role to bring about change', yet they were in favour of these institutions not being 'afraid to change audiences' views on important topics'. Kelly (2006) and BritainThinks (2013) note that for their participants, it was important that museums presented facts in

⁷⁹ The report explains that 'Participants were recruited to be reflective of the UK as a whole, in terms of gender, age, educational profile, occupational grouping and ethnicity' and that 'half of the participants had visited a museum in the last year and half hadn't' (BritainThinks 2013: 8–9).

a way that enabled them to make up their own minds rather than dictating their views. One of these studies focused on adult visitors (Kelly 2006) and the other focused on the general population (BritainThinks 2013), and neither of them examined differences in attitudes according to age. A recent online survey by conference organiser MuseumNext, however, has revealed that there may be differences in opinion between younger and older adults (MuseumNext 2017; Richardson 2017). The survey asked a representative sample of the US population (aged 18 and over) about their attitudes to museums, politics and activism. It showed that people under the age of 30 were more likely than older age groups to support the idea of museums taking a stand on social issues. Those under 30 were also more likely to feel that taking a stand would make museums more relevant to them. Another factor that influenced respondents being in favour of activist museums was how often they had visited museums in the past 12 months, with the more frequent visitors being more likely to support the idea.

Considering all this evidence, and bearing in mind that the present study is not representative, it is conceivable that younger age groups might be more in favour of museums taking a stance on social issues. Taken together, all these studies – including the present one – also show that people’s opinions are not straightforward. The results are inevitably shaped by how respondents interpret words, such as ‘debate’, ‘challenge’ and ‘politics’. Other factors may include their familiarity with museums (frequency of visits) and their social, cultural and educational background. To develop a full picture of the possible age-related differences, additional studies are needed that consider a broad range of factors – not least, the way in which participants understand the terms being explored.

With the current level of knowledge, an explanation for possible age-related differences can only be speculative. On the basis of the broader literature reviewed for the present study, explanations might reside in how different age cohorts are affected by the social and political climate they experience (see, for example, Bessant 2012). Pickard and Bessant (2018a: 5) point out that the most vulnerable segments of the population, such as ‘the young, the aged and the poor’, are the most affected by local, national and

global crises (for example, austerity, recession, unemployment, climate change, racism and extremism). If age-related differences are proven to exist, the situatedness of young people in particular social, economic and political contexts and their resulting outlook on the future may offer some explanations.

For the focus-group participants in this study, their everyday experiences in multicultural Luxembourg may have heavily influenced their concerns. This may explain why certain topics, such as racism and the desire for more tolerance, prevailed over other contemporary subjects of concern, such as climate change.⁸⁰ Paired with their view of museums as places for learning (see Chapter 5), their choice of topics may appear to be ‘natural’. It needs to be restated, though, that young people are individuals with different interests, identities and backgrounds. All these factors influence how young people experience the place in which they live. Furthermore, when all these factors are combined, they may differentiate young people’s culture from the culture of museums.

So far in this chapter, I have focused on two central issues that underpin the participants’ experiences of and relationships with museums: relevance (and the absence of relevance) and a cultural gap. I have shown how systems of power and dominance inform the relationship between young people and museums; for example, through communication and valued forms of culture. I have also argued that perceptions about young people’s activities and attitudes (for example, with regard to culture and politics) are often influenced by stereotypes and assumptions. In the final section of this chapter, I focus on power and examine other ways in which power inequalities affect the relationship between young people and museums. I show how the attitudes of museums and facilitators, such as schools and families, can create barriers to young people’s engagement. In particular, I examine potential barriers resulting from school and compulsory visits, and barriers relating to threshold fears.

⁸⁰ These topics are also likely to change depending on the current social context. For example, had the focus groups been conducted after the school strikes about climate change in 2019, the subject of climate change might have been more prominent.

6.4 Power inequalities and barriers to access

6.4.1 Negative memories of school visits

In the focus groups, school was an important topic. The participants associated museums with school in several respects. For example, some of the positive museum experiences that participants described, such as those involving multisensory and interactive experiences, had taken place during school visits. In most cases, however, the association between museums and school was not a positive one. The majority of the participants stated that school visits were not their favourite type of museum visit. The reasons cited were the compulsory nature of the visit; a lack of choice before and during the visit; one-way and didactic communication by teachers, tour guides and museum educators; and the continuation of teacher-centred rather than student-centred learning.

For example, Tina (21) felt that one of the reasons young people do not like to visit museums is that ‘they think it’s exactly like in school: it’s super-boring’. Gabriel (17) was ‘kind of interested’ before the museum trip with his school, but he ‘didn’t feel like writing and paying attention to what the teacher said’. Tina (21) thought that guides ‘shouldn’t just stand there, like, super-weird, because that doesn’t make you get into it’. Similarly, Kerry (21) remarked that ‘sometimes, you can see that the guides, they’re not really into it. They just stand there, blah, blah, blah’. Jim (12) and Leila (13) compared some guided tours to boring lessons at school where the students are totally disengaged. For example, Leila said she thought that ‘there are teachers who talk so monotonously and then they’re surprised that the students talk to each other during the lesson. It’s just because everyone is bored!’ Interestingly, the negative perception of school visits seems to be present among not only students but also the wider public. Commenting on her preferences, Emma (18) said:

With school, it’s always a bit tricky because it sounds like you’re being forced to go inside [a museum]. But if you say, ‘I went to a museum with my family’, then people are like, ‘Oh, okay, where did you go? What did you see?’ If you say, ‘I went with the school’, then they’re like, ‘Oh, poor you!’ [laughter, all].

These findings broadly reflect those of previous studies, which observed similar reasons for preferring non-school visits (Andrews and Asia 1979; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Timbart 2007; Kelly and Bartlett 2009). Kelly and Bartlett (2009) argue that compulsory school trips and the ensuing schoolwork affect young people's perceptions of museums. For many young people, the academic and didactic nature of school visits hinders their exploration of museums according to their preferences and interests (Lussier-Desrochers, Lemerise and Lopes 2003; Timbart 2007; Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Octobre 2009; Whitaker 2016).

Although young people need a certain degree of autonomy when visiting museums on school trips, it is important that the visit provides clear learning goals (Timbart 2013). Leila (13), for example, recalled a school trip where her class had two hours of 'free time'. She related the 'mischief' that she then got into with her friends because 'it was just plain boring'. Allard (1993: 772) suggests that when planning a museum visit for young people, it is important to find 'a balance between absolute control and total laissez-faire'⁸¹ and, above all, to cater for active participation.

It is widely acknowledged that student-centred learning, active involvement and opportunities for participation are important features, if museums want to engage with young people (Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Dahan 2013a). It has also been established that partnerships between museums and schools, and combining formal (school) learning with informal (museum) learning, can have a positive impact on young people's lives (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Shelnut 1994; Lemerise 1995; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2006; Timbart 2007; Bunting 2013; Linzer and Munley 2015; Network of European Museum Organisations [NEMO] 2015). For example, museums can complement school lessons by providing interaction with objects, hands-on activities, creative workshops and co-curation initiatives. On a more personal level, museums can contribute to developing cognitive, emotional and social

⁸¹ My translation.

skills (Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2006; Timbart 2007). In addition, the informal museum setting allows young people to be 'free to think and play with ideas', something that is not always possible in a traditional school setting (Andrews and Asia 1979: 231–232). In a similar way, Timbart (2007: 516–517) argues that a museum visit can teach young people to question objects rather than to simply garner factual information about the items. Dahan (2013a) concludes that partnerships between museums and other institutions, such as schools, can help young people appropriate the museum space.

Despite all the potential benefits, however, the relationship between museums and schools is far from straightforward. Octobre (2009) illustrates this point clearly. She observes that, in France, over the years there has been an increase in young people visiting museums, notably on school trips. The downside of this trend is that children and young people are increasingly associating museums with school, which often leads to dislike as they grow older. Octobre (2009: 7) argues that making cultural activities educational does not necessarily help to foster a love of these institutions – rather, the opposite is true. We can see how trips to museums with school can be a double-edged sword. The few positive and many negative statements made about school visits in the focus groups illustrate their conflicting nature. The statements also show that the sole fact of visiting a museum with the school will not produce positive experiences and outcomes – what is crucial is how the visit is done.

We have seen that negative memories of school trips influenced the participants' perceptions of museums (see also Andrews and Asia 1979; Kelly and Bartlett 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that negative past experiences and the resulting memories create an attitudinal and emotional barrier to future visits. As Luca (21) remarked:

Maybe [the problem with museums] is that young people already go to museums with the mentality 'It'll be boring, I don't want to listen'.

While some barriers to access – including attitudinal and emotional ones – can be overcome by implementing measures such as staff training and audience

participation (Dodd and Sandell 1998), the barrier resulting from negative memories cannot be removed through ‘simple’ actions. Overcoming this particular barrier requires a great deal of effort from young people – and from museums. It can be compared to one’s image of museums, which (as described in Chapter 5) is made up of a cognitive and an affective dimension, both of which affect one’s motivation for visiting museums (Prince 1985: 246). Even if these images are flexible and may change (Prince 1985: 246), it would be preferable to avoid negative perceptions emerging in the first place. This would prevent the appearance of barriers to future visits and save effort on breaking them down – thus, making a museum visit an unprejudiced experience from the start.

6.4.2 Compulsory visits and lack of choice

While the attitudinal and emotional barriers resulting from negative memories will affect children and young people’s *future* visits, negative experiences can also create an *immediate* barrier. As explained in the previous section with reference to school trips, the compulsory nature of some museum visits was experienced very negatively by the participants. Compulsion was mainly a feature of school visits, but it also occurred on other occasions, such as family visits. Remembering his most recent museum visit, Christophe (19) said:

The last museum I visited was [during our holiday] in Portugal last year. It was some kind of castle-museum. An old castle that they converted into a museum. I didn’t find it that interesting because ... well, the castle was big, but there weren’t many things in it [shrugs]. [...] I was only there because of my parents and because they dragged me in there. They didn’t think they could leave me alone at home for half an hour [shakes head and rolls eyes].

The lack of choice that many participants experienced in relation to museum visits was apparent, and the theme recurred throughout the focus groups. The participants related how facilitators, such as teachers and parents, had enforced museum visits without consulting them. Furthermore, this lack of choice was experienced not only *before* but also *during* the visit, when teachers and guides adopted patronising or paternalistic attitudes. Notable examples of

this were didactic and teacher-centred museum programmes, and inflexible visits and schedules.⁸² For example, commenting on the things he particularly dislikes in museum, Philip (12) said:

I find it boring to look at those stupid paintings. The teacher's always standing in front of the picture saying 'That was written [sic] by this or that person in this or that century, and then this and that happened'. Something like that. And that's so boring!

Similarly, Danny (21) and Kerry (21) remarked:

Danny: Yes, [school visits] are always so planned, 'Now we all look at this' and 'Now we have to go there'.

Kerry: Yes, and you have to go but you only have five minutes to look at that painting or that object, and then you have to go to the next one. [...]

This lack of choice was not restricted to the participants' museum experiences. The following discussion between Brenda (21), Tina (21) and Miguel (20) powerfully illustrates the lack of choice young people face in their everyday lives:

Brenda: I think that especially when you're young, they never ask you what you like.

Tina: Yes, that's a real pity!

Laurence: Do you mean at school?

Tina: Yes.

Brenda: No, not just at school. Parents, too. And also in general. They aren't interested in what their kids like. They don't ask them any questions. Like, 'What would you like to do?', 'What do you enjoy?', 'Where do you want to go? We'll come with you.'

Miguel: But when [adults] do that, [young people] show more interest because they know, 'Ah, now I can make a decision

⁸² See also Section 5.5.2 for a discussion that revealed that most participants preferred to visit museums in a small group than in a large one (for example, during school trips).

about where I want to go'. Maybe they'd be more interested, because there are already so many places where they aren't allowed to make choices about what they want to do.

Later during the same focus group, Miguel (20) and Tina (21) returned to the subject of museum visits:

Miguel: As a young person, I think that when you choose to go to a museum, it's better than when you're forced to go.

Tina: Okay, but you don't *necessarily* have to visit museums.

Miguel: Yes, but when you make the decision 'I'll go', it's more valuable than when you're forced to go.

Tina: Yes, of course! Nobody likes being forced to do anything.

These extracts show just some of the many examples that illustrated how compulsion weighed on the participants' museum experiences. Highlighting the tensions underlying facilitated participation in cultural activities, Gibson and Edwards (2016) demonstrate that facilitators and young people often have a different understanding of what constitutes a 'valued' form of cultural activity. Similarly, Andrews and Asia (1979: 229) argue that many young people are not interested in museums because of their 'growing need for independence from family values which students associated with museum visiting'. As shown in Section 6.3.3, discourses on definitions of culture and participation are strongly hierarchised (Gibson and Edwards 2016) and, in general, the definitions are imposed from the 'top'; that is, from those holding the power to decide what counts as legitimate cultural participation.

One of the consequences of this for young people is the general belief by facilitators that participation in certain types of cultural activities will contribute to 'improving' young people's lives and help them to become 'better' individuals (Gibson 2001; Gibson and Edwards 2016). These beliefs tie in with the general stereotypical discourse on young people being 'objects of concern' or individuals 'at risk', who need to be protected or helped because they lack the capacities and capabilities of adults (Flasher 1978; Zeldin 2004; Bessant 2008; Young-Bruehl 2012). These stereotypical, prejudiced and uninformed views then serve to justify patronising and paternalistic behaviour towards

young people, which perpetuates the prejudice from which the behaviour springs (Bessant 2008; Young-Bruehl 2012).

These adultist attitudes and behaviours are ubiquitous in children's and young people's lives. Adultism is both a form of oppression and a system of beliefs that discriminates against children and young people because of their age (Flasher 1978; Bessant 2012; Young-Bruehl 2012; LeFrançois 2014; Love and DeJong 2014).⁸³ As with other forms of oppression, such as racism and sexism, adultism is characterised by the unequal distribution and exploitation of power. In adultism, the form of power is age, with middle-aged people being the empowered and children and young people being the disempowered (Boyanton 2014). In our adult-centred societies, where middle age is understood as the norm, children and young people are sometimes perceived, firstly, as adults who are not yet fully developed rather than as human beings in their own right and, secondly, as the possessions of adults (Flasher 1978; Bessant 2008; Young-Bruehl 2012). These beliefs then act as a justification for the control and policing of children and young people (Flasher 1978; Young-Bruehl 2012). They also serve to prevent children and young people from fully participating in society and having access to decision-making (Bessant 2008; Young-Bruehl 2012; Love and DeJong 2014).

The concept of adultism is important if we are to understand the relationship between young people and museums. The comments made during the focus groups show that compulsion is an integral part of many young people's museum visits. While the general dislike of being forced to visit museums has been mentioned in several studies (Andrews and Asia 1979; Timbart 2007; Kelly and Bartlett 2009), far too little attention has been paid to its significance. This lack of attention is not limited to academic research; it extends to everyday life. For example, it is taken for granted that adults determine which activities children and young people have to participate in. In addition, most adults (including parents, teachers and museum professionals) may not be aware of the problem that compulsion poses, as they are not

⁸³ See also Sections 3.3 and 3.4 for discussions relating to adultism.

affected by it. This is an issue – and, as I now argue, a barrier – that is specific to children and young people.

The limited participation in decision-making in society permeates young people's lives (Bessant 2006; Bessant 2008) and affects their leisure time and cultural activities. Adopting a Foucauldian notion of dispersed power, we can see that power is not exerted solely by the state; it also infuses ordinary institutions, such as the family and the school (Foucault 1988; Rabinow 2010). Sandell (1998) explains how the social, economic, political and cultural dimensions of social exclusion are reflected in museums. In this sense, the lack of power and the mechanisms of exclusion that might affect young people do not end with museums. Given that in some ways, as Flasher (1978: 518) argues, 'all adults are informal parent surrogates to all children', the various facilitators of museum visits naturally assume that it is their right to impose their will on young people and compel them to visit. The benefits of culture and the arts may serve as further justifications for patronising attitudes. As exemplified by Brenda's comment that adults do not pay attention to young people's opinions or involve them in decision-making, the focus-group participants have shown that this behaviour not only constitutes adultism but also demonstrates a lack of interest and empathy.

The compulsory nature of many museum visits is exacerbated by the fact that some of the rights of children and young people are not respected (for a discussion on rights, see Section 3.5). Indeed, Article 31 of the CRC (1989) clearly states 'the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate *freely* [emphasis added] in cultural life and the arts'. In addition, Article 12 recognises the right of children and young people to freely express their views. Thus, *compelling* young people to visit museums *without* consulting them in the first place goes against two of their basic rights.

As adults, we are rarely forced by others to do particular activities, especially leisure and cultural activities. Indeed, we might even find the idea of *compulsory* leisure or cultural activities paradoxical and counterproductive. It is by free choice that we visit museums: because we want to learn something

new, discover a new place, spend time with a friend or take a break from a stressful day. To what extent would being forced to do this affect our experience of the museum visit? Is it even possible for adults to imagine being forced to visit a museum?

For some participants, being made to visit a museum – for example, by teachers and parents – casts a shadow over the experience to come. Even more so, compulsion creates a barrier to access: it provides a negative opening to the visit, which affects the initial attitude of the young person towards the experience to come. Similar to the negative memories of certain school trips described above, the negative mindset that is created by compulsion forms an obstacle. In their accounts, the participants demonstrated that it is possible to enjoy a compulsory visit. However, before they can experience anything else at the museum, they need to make the effort to overcome the obstacle; that is, their initial negative mindset. Most importantly, compulsion is a barrier that must not be neglected. It adds to the other barriers to access that young people might face, such as structural and cultural barriers, so that overcoming each obstacle will require more effort by a young person if they are to visit a museum.

As stated above, a compulsory visit requires additional effort, yet it does not preclude an enjoyable experience. For example, Tim (13), who regularly visits museums with his family, commented:

I go to museums because my mum forces me to go. But if the museum interests me, I like to go with her. Sometimes I'm like, 'Do I really have to?' and she's like, 'Yes, we're going to a museum now'. But then, when I get there, it's usually okay.

Leila (13) also referred to visits enforced by her mother, although her circumstances were somewhat different from Tim's:

Usually we visit museums when we're on holiday. My mum always says, 'First we'll go shopping, then we'll go to a museum and then we'll go home'. No, because otherwise nobody would go to a museum. So, my mum's like, 'I bought you this and that and now you have to do something with me'.

Leila's example is interesting because rather than the visit being imposed on her by her parents, it is the result of a 'negotiation'. Leila's mother accompanies her on a shopping trip; in return, Leila visits a museum with her mother. On the one hand, it could be argued that mother and daughter negotiate their day out: both of them make compromises about their day, and a certain degree of free choice is respected. On the other hand, one might argue that the mother 'bribes' her child with shopping to secure her company at the museum, meaning that the mother ultimately imposes her will on the daughter (see also Flasher 1978).

This example shows that the boundaries between compulsion and a so-called negotiation may be blurred and hard to define. However, data from the focus groups suggests that facilitated visits other than with school (for example, with parents or youth clubs) allow more room for negotiation and free choice. Vera, a youth worker at one of the youth clubs, explained that the club regularly proposes a variety of excursions to its members, such as visits to amusement parks, concerts, theatres and museums. She stated that it is important to suggest new activities to young people – especially activities that they would not necessarily suggest themselves – to stimulate their interests and broaden their horizons. However, Vera also indicated that it is crucial to always allow for free choice during excursions: 'You have to promise [young people], "If you don't like it, then you can go somewhere else or we can leave together."'

The importance of proposing new activities to children and young people was also stressed by some of the focus-group participants. They thought that children and young people tend to do activities that they are familiar with and that they know they will enjoy. For example, after the discussion on compulsion and free choice that was referred to earlier, Tina (21), Brenda (21) and Miguel (20) remarked:

Tina: There are kids who always want to do the same things. I can understand that parents get fed up at some point, when their kid always wants to watch the same children's film [laughter, all].

Brenda: There was a time when I watched *Merlin* every day for three months! [laughs]

[...]

Laurence: So, do you think it would be a good idea to find some kind of middle ground because, as you said, when you're young you wouldn't think of visiting a museum? For example, if at school or at home they said, 'I'd like to go to a museum with you. We could go there or there: which would you prefer?'

Tina: Yes, that wouldn't be a bad thing.

Miguel: Like when you go to the cinema, but with museums. You go to the cinema and there are loads of different films, so you choose one. So, 'We're going to a museum; which one would you like to visit?'

All in all, it can be said that the participants saw proposals for new or unfamiliar activities, such as a visit to a museum, as a positive undertaking. However, the emphasis is on 'proposal': the visit to a museum should be a suggestion, not a dictation. To avoid adultist behaviour, it is crucial to allow for freedom of choice. However, while free choice can be implemented easily in a family context, it becomes more difficult when groups of young people are involved, as is the case with youth club and school trips. Nevertheless, even if different young people have different opinions and preferences, the group's participation in decision-making will add value to the upcoming activity. As Miguel (20) observed, 'when you make the decision, "I'll go", it's more valuable than when you're forced to go'. In addition, as Vera emphasised, it is important to make room for autonomy and free choice *during* the visit.

In summary, data from the focus groups suggests that although compulsion can create a barrier to access, free choice and participation in decision-making can help to mitigate its effects. One could say that the 'height' of the barrier created by compulsory visits varies according to the balance between free choice and participation in decision-making on the one hand, and between compulsion and lack of choice on the other.

In the first two parts of this section, I have analysed two barriers created by the power inequalities faced by the focus-group participants: negative memories of school visits and compulsory visits. I will now discuss a third barrier, which relates to what is known as 'threshold fear'.

6.4.3 The fear of not having the right to belong

To a large extent, the two barriers discussed previously are determined by the school's or family's (that is, the facilitator's) relationship with the focus-group participants and museums. The third barrier, however, directly concerns the participants' relationship with museums. A number of seminal studies on young people and museums refer to young people feeling uncomfortable in museum spaces (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Timbart 2007). The data from the focus groups provided no exception to this. It was apparent that a considerable number of participants had experienced – or were afraid to experience – various types of threshold fear; that is, the apprehension and discomfort one might feel when entering an unknown place. Gurian (2006) describes the types of threshold fear that unfamiliar visitors may encounter in museums; among others, these can be attitudinal (for example, not feeling welcomed by staff) and physical. As explained by Gurian (2006: 115), physical thresholds include direct barriers (such as physical obstacles) and indirect barriers (such as unintelligible signposting or the atmosphere created by the architecture).

Indeed, direct and indirect physical barriers were repeatedly mentioned in the focus groups. For example, some participants reported that they were put off by visual barriers, such as ropes and glass cases (even if most agreed that protection might be necessary for fragile objects). Some participants mentioned white walls that reminded them of hospitals. The following conversation shows the reactions of some participants to a photography prompt. The conversation involves Tim (13), Luca (21), Erica (16) and Vera, a youth worker.

Laurence [showing a photo of a museum space in which paintings hang on a white wall and are protected by a rope]:
What comes to your mind when you see this?

All: Oh, nooo!

Tim: I hate this. You just have to brush against [the rope] and there's already someone coming towards you.

Vera: But that's the way it is in many museums. It's the conventional model.

Luca: Criminal!

Erica: I'd touch everything on purpose.

Luca: I'm a criminal! [singing and laughing]

Laurence: Is that something that puts you off?

Luca: If there are only paintings, yes.

Laurence: Is it the paintings rather than the rope that you don't like?

Luca: Yes. It would be different if there was a skeleton behind the rope. Then I'd understand why there's a rope because it's quite fragile.

Tim: It's really weird because [the walls are] so white and then you just have this tiny painting.

Vera: It's a matter of personal taste really and it's more about the general atmosphere, isn't it?

Luca: Yes, yes. White is always so frightening, so empty. It makes the room empty. [seems pensive]

Tim: Yes, exactly.

Luca: You don't feel comfortable. It's like in a hospital. Everything is white there and you don't feel comfortable.

Uninviting spaces and architectural features (inside and outside) were also referred to. Some participants thought that old museum buildings were more inviting than contemporary ones, as the following discussion with Erica (16), Paula (19), Josephina (15) and Tim (13) shows:

Laurence [showing photos of an old and a new building]:
Imagine you're walking past these museums. Would you think, 'Oh, I could have look in there'? Maybe in one rather than the other?

Erica: I would go to the old one. It looks more interesting.

Paula: Yes.

Laurence: And the new one?

Josephina: It looks like a school [general approval by the group].

Tim: And you wouldn't want to go to a school.

Josephina: I think that one [points at the old building] tells like history [*sic*].

Similarly, while many of the participants believed that some museums needed to 'modernise' to appeal to young people, they did not necessarily mention the architecture. As we saw in Section 5.4.6, Emma (18) thought that museums should become more modern but that they should not lose their 'old-fashioned charm'. Gurian (2006: 117) notes that new and old buildings alike can seem uninviting if the space is not consistent with visitor needs and that 'the grand museums assert monumentality and present themselves as revered but not necessarily as comfortable icons'. While impressive architecture – especially in newly built iconic buildings – will trigger the interest of regular museum-goers, the opposite might be true for people who are unfamiliar with museums (Gurian 2006: 117). To them, monumental and imposing buildings will be intimidating and, possibly, irrelevant (see also Duncan and Wallach 1980; O'Neill 2002).

In the focus groups, several comments referred to physical thresholds, yet the majority alluded to attitudinal thresholds. For example, the participants thought of museums as places where people have to be quiet and are not allowed to touch objects. During a discussion on the roles and purposes of museums, Kerry (21) remarked:

I think that [museums] should provide a mix between seeing and touching things. It's always 'Do not touch!', you know. And you're like 'But I want to!' [...] At the Casino⁸⁴ – it was mega cool and fun – there was a big vase with chewing gum in it. You

⁸⁴ Casino Luxembourg – Forum d'art contemporain is a contemporary art institution in Luxembourg City.

were allowed to take as much as you wanted and then walk around the museum and stick it to the wall. Wham! It's those kinds of things [that you need]!

Although the participants mostly agreed that in theory museums are for everyone, they did not see museums as places for young people (see Section 5.3). Rather than being made to feel unwelcome by staff, there was something more ingrained in how participants felt about their 'place' in museums. Instead of blaming other people, some participants tried to explain – and even justify – their 'not belonging' by saying that they did not have the level of knowledge required. For example, during a discussion on guided tours in museums, Emma (18) and Kate (19) remarked:

Emma: A guide is there to give information. You can't just go into a museum when you don't know anything, and you're just like, 'erm, okayyy ...'

Laurence: You can't just enter a museum?

Kate: That's just normal. You don't enter a museum and you're like, 'erm, what's this here?' Just imagine that!

For Emma and Kate, it seemed unconceivable to enter a museum out of curiosity or interest, without being knowledgeable about its content. Their comments are also particularly interesting because there are no significant differences between the attitudes of the two young people – even though Emma's level of education is higher than Kate's. Similarly, many participants said they would not be interested in taking on a holiday job in a museum – such as working as a guide or an educator for other young people or the general public – because they thought that they did not have the appropriate level of knowledge. More importantly, however, they did not feel that they would be able to gain these skills in a short period of time. To them, the museum represented an insurmountable body of knowledge that was beyond the grasp of young people. The following extracts from different focus groups show some of the reactions to my question on whether the participants would be interested in working as a guide or educator during their holiday.

You'd have to learn *a lot*. You'd really have to learn *many* things. Otherwise you couldn't... (Nick, 19)

But you'd need to know something about these subjects. [looks confused] It's impossible to remember that after one day. (Jim, 12)

If I had something to say – why not? I have no problems talking to strangers. Sometimes I stutter but if the people don't mind, then I have no problems talking to them. I couldn't talk about something that I learned one day before though. It would need to be a subject that really interests me and that I already have something to say about. (Tina, 21)

Several studies have highlighted that the fear of not knowing or understanding can act as a barrier for people of all ages (O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Desai and Thomas 1998; Timbart 2013; Dawson 2014). It has also been argued that the museum as an institution, exemplified by its architecture, staff and collections, is susceptible to contributing to the feeling of exclusion (Andrews and Asia 1979; Duncan and Wallach 1980; Sandell 1998; Fleming 2002; O'Neill 2002; Gurian 2006; Mason and McCarthy 2006). Based on the data from the focus groups, the present study suggests that in addition to the fears of not knowing, understanding or belonging, individuals may experience the fear of *not having the right to belong*. This is an important differentiation from the fear of *not belonging*: as mentioned above, it subtly shifts the responsibility for not belonging from the museum to the individual. By doing so, it naturalises, and even justifies, the exclusion in the eyes of the individual – the young person, in this case. This is a cause for concern, as these beliefs mask the real problem of museum exclusion, which lies with the museum and the facilitators – not young people.

Consequently, it is crucial to prevent the emergence of these beliefs and to validate the legitimacy of young people's right to access and use museums. In her discussion of empowerment, Boyanton (2014: n.p.) refers to five basic conditions that are widely acknowledged to form the pillars of empowerment:

- *Safety* (having one's basic needs secured and feeling safe to express one's identity)
- *Belief* (believing in one's own capacities)
- *Resources/opportunities* (access to resources for self-fulfilment)

- *Autonomy/participation* (control of and contribution to decision-making)
- *Outcome* (validation of participation and positive change).

The concept of empowerment works on the basis that there is a social division between empowered and disempowered groups. These groups are divided by various types of power, such as ethnicity, gender, language and age; and empowerment is the process by which a group aims to redress these power imbalances (Boyanton 2014).

Returning to the fear and belief of not having the right to belong, the five conditions of empowerment offer a valuable starting point for redressing the power inequalities that young people might face. In particular, empowerment through self-confidence and participation in decision-making might foster the right to belong. Opportunities for empowerment have to be created by the empowered (museums and facilitators in this case), and those who are disempowered (that is, young people) must participate *voluntarily* in the process (Dolhinow 2014: n.p.). If young people are coerced into doing so, they might once again encounter adultism, and the possibility for genuine empowerment would be undermined.

Other researchers have also pointed to the importance of opening up museums to young people. Dahan (2013a: 68), for example, highlights the need to let young people appropriate the museum so that it becomes a familiar place. This suggests that young people can only feel confident about using a museum if they feel that they have a legitimate right to do so. To allow young people to appropriate or colonise museums, these institutions need to be prepared to break down conventional power relations and share authority (Willis 1990; Reeve 2006; Dahan 2013a). As stated above, empowerment comes through participation in decision-making, which can only be achieved when museums view young people as active players rather than passive visitors (Lynch 2011; Dahan and Timbart 2013). Several examples, notably in the UK and North America, show how museums can build relationships in the short, medium and long term through outreach, participation and representation (Dahan and Timbart 2013; Linzer and Munley 2015; Tate and Paul Hamlyn

Foundation 2017). Above all, however, it is the willingness of museums to listen to young people and view them as partners that will make a change possible (Cornwall 2008; Lynch 2011).

6.5 Conclusion

Following an analysis of the focus-group participants' perceptions and experiences from a museological point of view in Chapter 5, in this sixth chapter I have explored the wider social processes underlying and influencing the relationship between participants and museums. The analysis was aided by an interdisciplinary framework, which drew especially on youth studies and sociology. The three key issues that have been explored are relevance, differing cultures and power issues.

I began this chapter by exploring the concept of relevance, which is an increasingly popular concept in museums (Simon 2016) and museum studies (Nielsen 2015). A theory of relevance proposed by cognitive science proved to be particularly useful for the present study (Wilson and Sperber 2004). Relevance theory can help to understand how individuals decide what is relevant to them; for example, in cultural activities. Indeed, examples from the focus groups suggested that some experiences are more relevant than others, depending on the positive cognitive effect and the level of familiarity that the participants experienced. Data from the focus groups also suggested that relevance may play a role in making museum visits memorable and that relevance, memory and learning are closely connected.

Furthermore, while young people are first and foremost individuals with different interests, they are also linked through common experiences determined by the social, cultural and political context in which they live (Bessant 2012). The focus-group participants proposed several topics that they thought would appeal to a large number of young people. In Section 6.2.3 I analysed the first category I had identified from participants' answers: topics that relate to the 'here and now'. These subjects proved to be closely connected to young people's everyday lives; therefore, they may be a starting point for creating relevant experiences.

I also showed how systems of power pervade the relationship between young people and museums. I achieved this by examining the gap between the culture of young people and the culture of museums. Young people are likely to face multiple barriers when confronted with museums, and the focus groups revealed that cultural barriers play a more important role than, for example, structural ones. These cultural barriers might take different forms and pervade different aspects of museums, from the inside (for example, values and collections) to the outside (for example, architecture and communication). The participants' comments revealed that communication – especially by means of advertising – can be representative of a dominant system of values, in which young people might not see themselves reflected.

My analysis took a brief digression from the focus-group data to highlight some of the assumptions about young people's cultural engagement. This showed that facts about and impressions of young people's museum attendance often differ – and that sometimes, higher numbers of young people attend museums than are expected (Lemerise 1998; Lemerise 1999; Timbart 2013). However, attendance numbers may depend on several factors and may vary between museums (Lemerise 1999). In addition, studies have shown that adolescence often marks a shift in (rather than an abandonment of) cultural practices, such as museum visitation (Haan 1997 quoted in Xanthoudaki 1998; Bardes and Lorentz 2009). This finding has fundamental implications for the way in which young people's cultural engagement is perceived.

I also showed that official definitions of culture and so-called legitimate cultural participation do not adequately reflect young people's understandings and practices. For example, the focus-group participants valued and fluctuated unconsciously between 'high', 'low' and everyday culture. Their cultural practices were also defined by active involvement, in the sense of blurring the lines between the production and consumption of culture.

I concluded this part of the chapter by examining how participants view the role of museums in society. The comparison of data from the focus groups with data from other studies (Kelly 2006; BritainThinks 2013; MuseumNext 2017) raised the question of whether young people favour activist practice in

museums more than other people do. Furthermore, the analysis once again highlighted the stereotypes and assumptions relating to young people's political disengagement – prejudices that are similar to those underlying their perceived cultural disengagement.

Finally, I examined in more detail the power issues between young people and museums. It is widely acknowledged that partnerships between schools and museums can have a positive impact on young people's lives (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Shelnut 1994; Lemerise 1995; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2006; Timbart 2007; Bunting 2013; Linzer and Munley 2015; NEMO 2015). However, in reality, school visits to museums do not always allow for positive experiences. Taken on its own, a school visit will not automatically generate a positive impact if young people are not actively involved in some way. In addition, negative memories of school trips appear to create emotional and attitudinal barriers to future visits.

Some experiences, however, also create immediate barriers. The focus groups underlined that participants' visits to museums are often compulsory. Facilitators, such as the school and the family, impose museum visits on young people and justify the compulsion by the value they perceive in the visits. However, forcing young people to attend museums without allowing them to participate in decision-making amounts to adultist behaviour and does not respect some of their human rights (CRC 1989). Nevertheless, the focus groups revealed that while compulsion creates a barrier, its effect can be attenuated if a degree of free choice and involvement in decision-making is allowed for.

Finally, I analysed the threshold fears that participants encountered or were afraid of encountering in museums. In addition to the fear of not knowing and the fear of not belonging, participants referred to the fear of not having the right to belong. I concluded this chapter by examining different ways to empower young people and legitimise their right to appropriate museums.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I summarise the main research findings and show how they contribute to existing knowledge in museum practice and

research. I also discuss the implications on theoretical and practical levels, especially with regard to a better understanding of how power operates in the relationship between young people and museums. I then address the limitations of this study and consider directions for future research, before concluding with a personal reflection.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The relationship between young people and museums is an interesting yet complex one. As young people and museums both play important roles in society, how they relate to each other is a subject that reaches beyond the limits of the institution. Therefore, this study has taken a broader approach to explore young people's perceptions and experiences. The aim was to decentre the museum in theoretical and practical terms in order to centre attention on young people and their voices. Consequently, by situating young people's relationship with museums in a broader social and cultural context, and by investigating the subject in an interdisciplinary and qualitative way, it was possible to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding.

In this final chapter, I gather together the different threads of the thesis. I start by reviewing the main findings to analyse how they help to answer the research questions. I then draw my conclusions and discuss the contribution to knowledge and wider implications. I also consider the limitations of the study and the possibilities for further research. Finally, I conclude this thesis with a personal reflection on the research project.

7.2 Looking back

In this study, I set out to explore how young people perceive, understand and experience museums – from a cognitive and an emotional perspective – and to examine whether it is possible for museums to be relevant to such a heterogeneous group. In addition, considering the broader aspects of the subject, I aimed to uncover how the relationship between young people and museums is affected by power imbalances. The thesis has answered the research questions in two stages. In Chapter 5, young people's views and experiences were explored from a museological standpoint. In Chapter 6, the museum was decentred and the focus was on the wider social processes that underlie the relationship.

7.2.1 A museological point of view

The findings in Chapter 5 revealed two major strands: the variety of interests and needs of the focus-group participants, and the complexity of their perceptions of museums. Indeed, several aspects highlighted the diversity and even tensions that underlie the ways in which young people interact with museums. This complexity was directly apparent in the images that the participants had of museums. Their associations ranged from descriptors that were positive to descriptors that they attached rather negative values to. It became obvious that their views on museums were not 'black or white'. Rather, they were dynamic, detailed and influenced by a variety of first-hand and second-hand factors. A significant feature was that the participants recognised the importance of museums and thought that these institutions were, in theory at least, for everyone to enjoy (irrespective of age or level of education, for example). On a practical level, however, museums were not seen as places that were made for young people. In fact, the participants had a dichotomous view of museums, seeing them as institutions that could be either passive and closed or active and open. In their opinion, a passive and closed museum, which does not engage with young people on their own terms and is resistant to change, is not a place for young people. In contrast, an active and open museum, which allows young people to appropriate the space and reaches beyond its doors, is a place that young people can find relevant.

Many of the participants' museum perceptions centred on the institutions being places for learning – in the broadest sense of the term. In their eyes, learning inevitably implied the acquisition of factual knowledge, but it also entailed a curiosity about the world (past and present), an emotional and empathetic connection, the involvement of the body, and an interaction between entertainment and the learning process. Rather than being separate features, learning, play and entertainment were thought to be intimately connected, building on and reinforcing each other to create relevant experiences. In addition, the interactive experiences that the participants were looking for in the museum were bodily and hands-on, rather than high-tech and digital. Indeed, many participants had an ambivalent attitude towards digital

technologies. While they generally embraced digital technologies that enhanced the museum experience (for example, by allowing them to customise their visit or by removing the barriers created by text panels), the participants adopted a critical stance if they found them distracting or irrelevant.

A further polarity that emerged during the focus groups was the notion of the museum as a place for being with others and as a place for being alone. Most participants saw museums as social places; that is, places that they like to visit with friends, family or a partner to share experiences and exchange impressions. At the same time, many participants emphasised the need for autonomy during their visits. For example, they stated that they would rather visit in a small group (with one or two friends or relatives) than in a larger group (such as the school), which they considered to be too constraining. In addition to a longing for solitary moments during group visits, the participants related that visiting museums on their own made it possible to engage with the content on a deeper level and to have restorative experiences. Moreover, it was apparent that participants' preferences were fluid and flexible. Indeed, individuals may have different needs at different times, sometimes preferring social experiences and sometimes favouring solitary visits.

7.2.2 A sociocultural point of view

The analysis in Chapter 6 moved away from a purely museological approach to young people and museums. By considering the wider context of young people's engagement and by examining the question through an interdisciplinary lens, the investigation was taken to a sociocultural level. With this framework, it was possible to show that museums have the potential to be relevant to young people. Moreover, the analysis suggested that relevance is indeed important, as this may play a role in making visits memorable. However, it also reiterated that young people need to be viewed as individuals with different backgrounds, needs and wants rather than as an undifferentiated group. Relevance is created mainly on an individual level, as it requires a degree of familiarity with the museum content and the generation of a positive cognitive impact through a museum visit (see also Wilson and Sperber 2004; Simon 2016). That said, *certain* young people share *certain aspects* of their

background, such as the sociohistorical context in which they live (Bessant 2012). This circumstance enables them to be familiar with a number of common topics, notably in relation to their daily life, from which it is possible to create connections and relevance.

Furthermore, the investigation showed that the relationship between young people and museums looks different if attention is turned to how *young people* rather than *museums* and *adults* experience it. For example, the focus groups revealed that young people and museums potentially operate in very different cultural contexts. This becomes particularly apparent in the way in which cultural, rather than structural, barriers affect young people's engagement. The cultural gap that was most obvious in the participants' descriptions related to museums' communication and advertising. In addition, the analysis showed that museums (and society) may have different understandings from those of young people about what constitutes 'culture', 'participation' and 'engagement'. It must be remembered, though, that these considerations may be equally applicable to other communities and that people *within* a group may also hold different conceptions of cultural engagement. Therefore, rather than relying on stereotypes and claims about young people lacking interest in culture and museums, the notions and definitions themselves should be called into question. What counts as culture and as valued forms of engagement depends on whether we ask young people or institutions and adults (see also Gibson 2001; Gibson and Edwards 2016). Similar assumptions relate to young people's supposed absence of interest in all things relating to politics (Pickard and Bessant 2018a). Here, the focus groups raised, rather than answered, the question of whether young people might respond more favourably than the general population to museums taking a stance on social issues.

The most significant findings to emerge from this study are related to how power imbalances affect the relationship between young people and museums, and how they create barriers to access. These inequalities exist between museums and young people, and between facilitators of visits and young people. For the focus-group participants, the school was a particular source of tension. Indeed, even though it is widely acknowledged that

partnerships between schools and museums offer many positive outcomes (Andrews and Asia 1979; O'Connell and Alexander 1979; Shelnut 1994; Lemerise 1995; Lemerise and Soucy 1999; Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2006; Timbart 2007; Bunting 2013; Linzer and Munley 2015; NEMO 2015), the beneficial impact is not necessarily straightforward or unequivocal. In particular, the didactic character and teacher-centred approach of certain school trips, and the fact that these trips are compulsory, act as barriers to engagement. In addition, negative memories of school visits impact future visits, as they create apprehensions before a young person even enters the museum.

However, school visits are not the only instances in which compulsion is used. As I argued in Chapter 6, young people often lack choice in their everyday life, not least about their visits to museums. While the focus-group participants generally appreciated discovering new activities or places (such as museums), they also noted that adults make these decisions without consulting them. This often results in a negative mindset that hinders their enjoyment of an upcoming activity, such as a trip to a museum.

Apart from creating hurdles, enforced museum visits (and other compulsory activities in the museum) pose ethical questions with regard to young people's right to express their opinion and make decisions. Indeed, depending on the context, the denial of choice may testify to a paternalistic and patronising attitude – in sum, an adultist one – rather than a respectful and empathetic approach towards young people. The justification of an activity being compulsory because it is 'in the best interests' of the young person is a decidedly slippery argument.

Finally, the study also revealed the disempowerment that young people may experience when visiting museums. When describing the museum as a place that is not seen as being for young people, the focus-group participants reported the different ways in which museums intimidated them and made them feel uncomfortable. In addition to the fear of not knowing or not understanding, which is a barrier for some visitors regardless of their age (see, for example, Dawson 2014), the study found that participants experienced the fear of not having the right to belong. The fundamental difference, which makes the latter

an even greater cause for concern, is that it transfers the responsibility for not belonging from the museum to the person, which ultimately serves to justify the exclusion in the person's eyes. To put this differently, a person may accept that it is normal that they do not have the right to belong in the museum because they do not know or do not understand.

7.3 Contribution

This study is one of the first attempts to examine young people's relationship with museums from a perspective that is purely qualitative and that decentres the museum. By opting for a sociocultural (rather than, for example, educational) approach, the study has provided a deeper understanding of young people's perceptions and experiences. Indeed, discussions about young people and museums are often underpinned by clichés and generalisations, which hinder our thinking about the subject. This study moves beyond entrenched assumptions and extends our knowledge of the ways in which young people perceive and engage with museums. Unlike previous research, this investigation started with young people rather than museums and examined the relationship between the two through an interdisciplinary and intersectional lens. In doing so, the thesis has made an original contribution to museum thinking and practice and to research, especially in the fields of museum studies and youth studies.

In effect, by considering young people in their own right, not solely as a museum audience or visitor segment, it was possible to consider their museum experiences into a wider social and cultural context. As I argued in Chapter 1, neither museums nor young people exist in a vacuum. It is evident that the relationship between the two cannot be understood without considering the broader social landscape (which I have referred to in this thesis as the 'decentring the museum' lens). The findings from this study make several contributions to our understanding of the power issues that are evident in:

- assumptions about young people as an undifferentiated group;
- adultist attitudes and lack of choice; and
- the privileged positions of power held by museums and facilitators.

Firstly, as this study progressed it became apparent that the discourse on young people and museums was likely to be underpinned by generalisations and stereotypes. Definitions and arbitrary categorisations of young people account for the most obvious generalisations. Indeed, when we talk about young people, we assume that there must be some kind of homogeneity (of attitudes, experiences, needs and wants, and so forth) within a particular age group. This assumption, which is often taken for granted, obscures the fact that young people are first and foremost individuals with different backgrounds and characteristics, of which age is just one. Granted, some young people share a number of commonalities in their background (socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and so forth) and experiences (such as the school). However, these do not justify undifferentiated views of a highly diverse group of people.

Other notable assumptions relate to young people's supposed lack of interest in and non-engagement with museums. It is a widespread belief, even among some museum professionals (Timbart 2013), that young people do not visit museums and are not interested in them. However, previous research has shown that young people *do* visit museums, albeit in different numbers in different museums (Lemerise 1999). Indeed, a variety of factors influence young people's attendance, such as whether the museum is located in an urban or a rural area and whether the institution offers opportunities for participation (Lemerise 1999: 23). Further variations have been observed between younger and older cohorts (Haan 1997 quoted in Xanthoudaki 1998: 162; Lemerise 1999; Bardes and Lorentz 2009) and between independent and school visitors (Xanthoudaki 1998).

This study, which involved a number of young people who participated voluntarily in discussions about museums during their leisure time, complements earlier research. The sheer fact that the participants volunteered to take part is meaningful. In addition, the focus-group participants contributed to countering suppositions about their lack of interest by sharing a large number of vivid memories, lively views, strong (positive and negative) opinions and constructive suggestions in relation to museums. They also demonstrated the richness of young people's perceptions and experiences. Their accounts ran against popular belief in many different ways. For example, some participants

thought that the museum was a place for restoration, where they could take a break from their busy lives – a fact that may run counter to the view that young people need social and entertaining experiences above all else. In a similar vein, the participants showed that positive museum experiences did not necessarily include the use of digital technologies. Rather, they saw museums as places for interaction with people and objects. Digital technologies that were deemed to be distracting or irrelevant were likely to be rejected.

Secondly, as described earlier, this study revealed that many of the participants' views on and experiences of museums had been shaped by compulsion and lack of choice. This is significant and even paradoxical if we consider that often, museum visits are meant to be recreational. Moreover, it shows that children and young people experience museums in ways that are sometimes diametrically opposed to how adults experience these places. In fact, for most adults, being forced to take part in a cultural or leisure activity may be inconceivable and is likely to be deemed counterproductive. Given that we visit museums to have enriching experiences (such as learning something new or having an entertaining time), we generally expect this to happen when we are in a positive frame of mind. Thus, the specific circumstances that lie behind young people's relations with museums become apparent, and these need to be explored from a wider social perspective.

The qualitative and interdisciplinary framework of this study was most enlightening in this respect. It is widely recognised that a major part of young people's social and cultural life is influenced by their subordinate position in relation to adults (see, for example, Flasher 1978; Bessant 2012; Young-Bruehl 2012; Love and DeJong 2014; Gibson and Edwards 2016). As I argued in Chapter 6, this power inequality is also apparent in young people's relationship with museums, which poses a problem in their engagement and participation. Adultist attitudes from certain facilitators, such as teachers, members of the family and museum staff, are particularly problematic. When facilitators deprive young people of autonomy and freedom of choice, they actively contribute to creating an obstacle to engagement. Often, the compulsion is hidden in the rhetoric of culture and museums being a means for improvement in the so-called best interests of young people. Apart from concealing a patronising and

paternalistic attitude, such an approach actively impedes the value of cultural participation and adds barriers to those that already exist (such as cultural and structural hurdles). Although it is possible for young people to enjoy museums when a visit is enforced, this study has shown that it requires an additional effort, which, for some young people, may be the last straw – and one barrier too many to engage with museums at all.

That said, it is evident that it is not always possible to take full account of every young person's preferences and wishes when visiting a museum, especially on group and school visits. As mentioned earlier, the focus-group participants recognised the value of having new activities proposed to them, but they emphasised the importance of having a degree of choice. This can involve participation in the decision-making *before* the museum visit, as Miguel (20) suggested:

Like when you go to the cinema, but with museums. You go to the cinema and there are loads of different films, so you choose one. So, 'We're going to a museum; which one would you like to visit?'

It can also encompass autonomy and free choice *during* the visit. As youth worker Vera pointed out during her interview, this is possible when visiting in groups: 'You have to promise [young people], "If you don't like it, then you can go somewhere else or we can leave together."' While it might not always be possible to let young people leave the museum (most notably on school trips, where special safeguarding issues and other constraints apply), there are always ways to make room for agency. For example, some focus-group participants preferred using audio guides on tours rather than being part of a large group, because the devices enabled them to engage with their favourite exhibits in flexible and personalised ways.

In short, respecting young people's freedom of choice is equivalent to respecting and valuing them as individuals. Article 27 of the UDHR (UN 1948) and Articles 12 and 31 of the CRC (1989) clearly stipulate the right of every person and child to freedom of expression and participation in cultural life. From a more practical point of view, the core principles of youth work can offer a

valuable point of reference for all adult facilitators, as they advocate a youth-centred approach and recognise young people's right to participate voluntarily (YouthLink Scotland n.d.; Willems, Heinen and Meyers 2013).

Thirdly, it is clear that not every adult who plays a role in the relationship between young people and museums is overtly or overly adultist. Moreover, it is probable that most of them are not deliberately so. As this study has suggested, adultism (and the associated prejudices and stereotypes) is often subtle and less perceptible than other forms of discrimination – from an adult perspective, at least. As Bessant (2012) and Young-Bruehl (2012) argue, a major problem with prejudice against children and young people is that it appears to be normal because it is so deeply ingrained in society.

Some aspects of this normalisation are also apparent in the ways in which young people and museums have been researched. The ubiquity of several aspects relating to lack of choice was highly apparent in the focus groups, and the issue has been mentioned in previous research on young people and museums (see, for example, Timbart 2007; Kelly and Bartlett 2009). However, before the present study was conducted, the subject had not been investigated in detail. The reason probably resides in the fact that earlier studies often focused on education and were unable to explore certain aspects in depth due to their quantitative methodologies. Nevertheless, it is interesting that a factor that was so important in the eyes of the participants in the present study has not generated more curiosity in the field of museum studies. That said, a number of studies on cultural participation have highlighted that patronising and paternalistic attitudes may pervade arts and cultural programmes on various levels (see, for example, Gibson 2001; Gibson and Edwards 2016). In this sense, the findings of this investigation complement those of earlier studies by claiming the pertinence of this discourse for the field of young people and museums.

Considering the subtle ways in which adultism and age-based prejudice pervade the social and cultural landscape, and the position that the museum occupies within this landscape, the findings highlight the importance of adopting not only a youth-centred approach but also a change of perspective. It is by

listening to young people that we can begin to understand what the museum experience looks like from their point of view. To achieve this, all adults who play a role in the relationship between young people and museums need to become aware of their positions of power and call them into question. As Boyanton (2014: n.p.) explains, in our society, power tends to be unequally distributed, empowering some groups and disempowering others. Different types of power include ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and so forth (see also Stammers 2012). For example, it is obvious that power lies in the hands of white people, men and people from the upper classes rather than, say, people of colour, women or people from the lower social classes. When power is defined in terms of age, it is the middle-aged who hold power to the detriment of children, young people and elderly people (Boyanton 2014: n.p.).

When considering power imbalances, we can see how, on various levels, the power issues that young people might experience in museums overlap with those experienced by other communities. With regard to age, paternalistic attitudes have also been observed in some museum programmes targeted at older people (Dodd et al. 2018: 10). In addition, it is not only young people who may feel excluded from museums. Other groups, such as minority-ethnic groups, people with disabilities and LGBTQ communities, are also likely to experience the feeling of not belonging and see their narratives missing from museums (Desai and Thomas 1998; Dawson 2014; Research Centre for Museums and Galleries [RCMG] 2017; Sandell, Lennon and Smith 2018). The common stumbling block is always power. While young people's relationship with museums has its own peculiarities and dynamics, it can also be inscribed in a larger discourse of power inequalities in museums. Therefore, in a microcosm like the museum, in a confined space with its own problematic history of dominance and exclusion, it is important to look beyond the walls of the institution in order to avoid the traps of ethnocentrism and self-sufficiency.

7.4 Implications

The findings of this study have a number of implications for museum practice and research. On a practical level, they expand our knowledge about young people's relations with museums. In particular, the museological examination

presented in Chapter 5 sheds light on the nuanced and ambivalent ways in which young people view and experience museums. Indeed, through the in-depth analysis, it was possible to establish that young people have a variety of opinions and perceptions, and that these are complex and dynamic. By painting this intricate picture of their engagement, it was also possible to call into question some of the widely held assumptions about young people. The insights gained from this study may be of assistance to museum practice. In relation to current museum debates, the study has shown, for example, that the focus-group participants actively made links between their daily life and the histories they encountered in museums. This certainly adds to the growing appreciation in the museums and heritage sector that linking the past to issues of the present day can foster visitors' engagement.

On a broader level, the study has significant implications for the understanding of how power operates in the relationship between young people and museums. It has shown that in some cases, adultism, especially by means of patronisation and paternalism, infuses and influences the different ways in which young people perceive and experience museums. As stated above, there is a definite need for adult facilitators (families, teachers, museum staff, and so forth) to acknowledge this power imbalance and to value and respect young people's opinions and points of view. This involves, above all, a willingness to listen to and embrace young people's knowledge and contributions, and to involve them in decision-making. In general, museum educators are already familiar with youth-centred approaches, yet more effort needs to be made on other levels in the museum to ensure more sharing of power and the creation of more partnerships between young people and institutions, such as Takeover Day and Young People's Guide to Self-Portraiture.

However, it is important that these efforts are not tokenistic or symbolic but are thought of as genuine means by which to empower young people according to their own needs and wants. Modest (2013: 107) summarises this very succinctly: 'As government policies are implemented to encourage museums to play a social role in society, to what extent are these programs geared more at achieving targets than fulfilling the desires of our target audiences?' Modest (2013) also points towards the fact that museums need to

make sure that such programmes and efforts are not exploitative, and that they actually benefit young people rather than museums.

In addition, attention needs to be paid to not 'ghettoising' young people. As the focus groups revealed, for the participants, museums were (among other things) social spaces that they liked to visit with friends and other people, such as family members. Many participants also appreciated events and programmes that were aimed at young people, yet they did not necessarily want these to be for young people only. Therefore, there is a need to have programmes created by young people for young people (such as Tate Collective) but there is also a need for initiatives created by young people for the general public. In this way, young people can share their knowledge and skills with their peers *and* with other people, and make their contributions visible to a wider public.

Moreover, as shown by programmes such as Teens Take the Met! and Circuit, partnerships need not be restricted to individual young people and can involve the wider youth sector; for example, through collaborations with community partners, such as youth organisations. These alliances undoubtedly benefit both partners. The youth workers who were interviewed in this study highlighted the importance of culture in youth work and emphasised that engaging with cultural institutions (for example, museums and theatres) can make a difference to young people's lives. Museums, on the other hand, can benefit from the experience of those who work with young people on a daily basis and forge long-term relationships with the youth sector.

As other authors have also stressed (see, for example, Sterling 1993; Shelnut 1994; Kelly and Bartlett 2009; Tate and Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2017), it is important that museums work *with* young people instead of *for* them. This is not always the case, however. For example, some arts and culture programmes have approached young people as objects of concern that need to be healed, fixed or improved (Dutton 2001; Gibson 2001; Modest 2013; Gibson and Edwards 2016). Apart from being patronising and paternalistic, such attitudes testify to a unilateral way of conceptualising the relationship between museums and young people. This does not reflect its true nature. In fact, a

number of authors have drawn attention to how engagement with young people has benefited museums; for example, by deconstructing stereotypes that were held by staff about young people (Baum, Hein and Solvay 2000; Modest 2013; Linzer and Munley 2015). Interestingly, it has also been reported that working with young people had a positive influence on the attitudes of staff towards young people *and* other audiences (Baum, Hein and Solvay 2000; Linzer and Munley 2015). In addition, it has been argued that young people can bring fresh ideas to the museum, enable institutions to review their current practices and approaches (Lemerise 1995; Modest 2013; Timbart 2013) and allow new views on collections (Kids in Museums 2018a). Seeing the relationship as a two-way process makes it possible to realise that relevance is mutual, and that museums can learn as much from young people as young people can learn from museums.

Finally, this study has laid the groundwork for future qualitative research into the ways in which young people and other communities engage with museums. For example, the person-centred approach and the focus on listening have the potential to assist in our understanding of people's relationships with museums and the place that museums occupy in people's lives. To gain more understanding, it is particularly important for researchers to look for spaces that enable them to connect with people on their own terms. The combination of a 'decentring the museum' (or potentially any other institution or field) approach and an interdisciplinary framework can be applied to a variety of other contexts. Looking beyond the ramparts of one's field, both practically and theoretically, allows researchers to call into question its (perceived) centrality. It also enables researchers to think critically about their position as an 'expert' and the value of the other people's knowledge.

7.5 Limitations and suggestions for future research

The aim of this study was to provide an in-depth and critical exploration of young people's perceptions and experiences of museums. To achieve this, focus groups were chosen as the method of enquiry, as they would facilitate the exchange of different ideas and opinions. This method is particularly suited to explorative studies, because it allows researchers to be responsive to the

participants and to follow unexpected turns in the discussion. Considering its aims, this study was not designed to be measured against quantitative criteria. Rather than being a limitation, the small size and non-representative composition of the sample was a deliberate choice. Indeed, sampling for focus groups is always selective and purposeful, as the participants need to have common characteristics (such as age, in this case). In addition, due to the depth of enquiry and the use of various principles of grounded theory (notably with regard to analysis and saturation), the size of the sample was appropriate for the requirements of this study.

That said, focus groups do not necessarily have to be conducted using the traditional single-category design that was selected in this project. Depending on purpose, time and resources, focus groups can be conducted using multiple categories and layers (Krueger and Casey 2015). The scope of this study was limited to investigating young people's relationship with museums through focus groups based on a single determinant; namely, age. However, given the paucity of research on how other personal factors impact the relationship under study, it would be useful to conduct further focus groups that would enable researchers to compare and contrast the perceptions and experiences of young people who have different ethnic, religious, gender, socioeconomic or other backgrounds. For example, how do the experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds differ from those of non-refugee backgrounds? In any of the investigated scenarios, an interdisciplinary framework and a focus on intersectionality are of prime importance to understand the diversity of experiences in its entirety and situate the museum in this broader context.

In addition, the relatively broad age range used for this study – from 12 to 21 years – may act as a limitation on certain aspects. As I explained in Section 3.5, there are indeed differences concerning the rights and agency of a 12-year-old and those of a 21-year-old. As I explained in Sections 4.5.2 and 4.8, the age range used for this study can be traced back to several reasons, most notably the way in which youth clubs operate in Luxembourg. Initially, I envisaged conducting focus groups with young people between the ages of 16 and 18; however, because youth clubs are open to all young people between

the ages of 12 and 26 and I did not want to exclude too many young people who would be willing to participate, I extended the age range. Furthermore, this ensured a sufficient number of participants to run the focus groups. There are indeed significant differences in the rights and agency between the different ages; for example, a 21-year-old will not be forced to visit a museum in the same way that a 12-year-old would be. However, this fact does not affect the overall findings of this study. The aim was to analyse the mechanisms behind these enforced visits, and both the younger and older participants were able to shed light on this: the younger participants by relating their current experiences and the older ones by reflecting on their experiences with the benefit of hindsight.

A clear limitation of this investigation was its reliance on verbal communication – with the exception of the photographs that I used to elicit conversations and memories. Although I took account of non-verbal communication, such as body language and tone of voice, it was only possible for participants to express themselves in a verbal manner. It would be interesting to see to what extent the use of other methods of data collection would add to the findings. For example, such methods as drawing, photography and film have the potential to speak to different learning styles and allow for ‘livelier’ interaction between researcher and participants.

In addition, while this study expressly aimed to decentre the museum, conducting research on young people’s experiences during a visit could also contribute to an enhanced understanding of their engagement with museums. Possible methods could include observing young people’s movements and interactions in the museum, listening to their conversations (such as during visits in pairs), analysing and discussing young people’s photographs and videos of their visits (see, for example, Kirk 2014) and allowing young people to record their personal narratives by means of autoethnographies (see, for example, Gibson and Edwards 2016).

A final consideration relates to how the participants’ voices were included in this study. As I explained in Chapter 4, I paid particular attention to developing an ethical and empathetic framework for conducting research with

young people. I also tried to address power inequalities in various ways; yet the analysis and interpretation of the data were mine alone. I consider it a limitation that young people were not implicated more in the creation of knowledge. Future research could explore how we can go a step further to include young people and their voices in the different stages of academic research. Often, as researchers, we engage with young people's voices during the data collection but take full control of the subsequent analysis. We may use quotations to illustrate our findings, yet the final report and dissemination remains our sole responsibility. However, there are various examples of how children and young people can collaborate and participate in the research design, data collection and co-authoring of results (Best 2007: 14). Such approaches do not just account for more authentic or genuine findings: above all, they represent an ethical approach towards conducting research *with* children and young people, and they help to redress the power imbalance between research subject and research object (Morrow and Richards 1996: 96). I think that qualitative research, with its person-centredness and responsiveness, has the potential to explore this further.

The question, however, is not only about how we can find ways to collaborate with young people in practical terms. It is also about how we can incorporate their voices in a more thorough manner, without compromising codes of research ethics and without failing to meet legal requirements. This applies to all the communities we conduct research with, but studies involving vulnerable groups (such as children and young people) need to work within a particularly tight set of regulations and limitations. These rules and safeguarding obligations are undoubtedly important and necessary to protect research participants and guarantee their wellbeing. The problem is that the potential complications relating to ethics approval may also act as a deterrent to considering new methods of enquiry, however ethical they may be. We could argue that these obstacles affect not only researchers but also participants, who are supposed to be the prime beneficiaries of participatory practices.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ See also Bessant (2006) for a discussion of ethics and age-based discrimination.

For researchers, a sharing of power would involve informing participants about the study in a thorough manner and ‘recruiting’ them on the basis of their willingness to collaborate in the study. Researchers could also go a step further and develop a research question and project in conjunction with young people. It is essential, however, that these collaborations between researchers and ‘participants’, or rather ‘co-researchers’, happen on an equal-partner basis and are not exploitative. In this sense, they are very similar to participatory projects that take place in a museum context. As Modest (2013: 107) concludes in relation to a participatory programme at the Horniman Museum, the key issues in these cases are that young people are *interested* in participating and that *they* – rather than the institutions – benefit from the engagement.

7.6 A few concluding words

Besides developing my understanding of the relationship between young people and museums, this study has had a personal impact. Engaging with young people on their own terms and in their own places has been enlightening and humbling in many ways. Being unfamiliar with youth clubs, I had to step out of my comfort zone to enter an environment that was unknown to me. My experience was not comparable to the threshold fears that many young people face when visiting a museum; nevertheless, it gave me a taste of the effort it takes to enter a place that you are not familiar with. In contrast with many young people visiting museums, though, I had the opportunity to go to youth clubs by choice and I looked forward to the visit because it was relevant to my study. Moreover, the youth workers and the focus-group participants made me feel welcome.

In her book *The Art of Relevance*, Simon (2016) discusses the challenges that people may face when confronted with museums. To understand what it feels like to be an outsider, she invites fellow museum workers to visit places in which they do not feel at ease:

Go to an institution that makes you uncomfortable – a place you would never go willingly. Go to a boxing gym. Go to an uber-hip bar. Go to a place of worship that is not your own. Find a place where you feel an urge to bolt out the door the

minute you walk in. [...] If you find yourself resisting going to that bar or mosque, you're not alone. This is why so many of us stay in the swim lane of what's familiar to us. We don't seek out things that might be relevant but engender too much stress, effort, or uncertainty. If you feel that way about entering a particular community, folks in that community may feel the same way about coming to yours. The first step to being an open-hearted insider is feeling empathy for outsiders and their experiences. (Simon 2016: ch. 2.7)

In a sense, researchers and practitioners are very similar: their familiar fields and places, such as the realm of academia and museums, are not necessarily places that people on the outside identify with or feel comfortable in.

In a world that is in dire need of empathy, being more sensitive to other people's feelings and points of view can certainly benefit us all – in research, in museums and in everyday life. It was by listening to young people and attempting to understand their experiences that it became clear, for example, that often, it is not young people but museums that are hard to reach.

Appendices

1. Events and organisations mentioned in the thesis
2. Project information sheets (translated)
3. Consent forms (translated)
4. Record of participants, focus groups and interviews
5. Focus-group questions (translated)
6. Interview questions for youth workers (translated)

Appendix 1

Events, programmes and organisations mentioned in the thesis

| Name | Reference |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Art Not Oil Coalition | Art Not Oil. 2013. <i>Art Not Oil Coalition</i> . [online] Available at: http://www.artnotoil.org.uk [Accessed 28 October 2018]. |
| Circuit | Tate and Paul Hamlyn Foundation. 2017. <i>Circuit</i> . [online] Available at: https://circuit.tate.org.uk [Accessed 28 October 2018]. |
| Culture Unstained | Culture Unstained. 2018. <i>Culture Unstained</i> . [online] Available at: https://cultureunstained.org [Accessed 28 October 2018]. |
| Decolonize This Place | Decolonize This Place. 2018. <i>Decolonize This Place</i> . [online] Available at: http://www.decolonizethisplace.org [Accessed 28 October 2018]. |
| Dino Snores for Grown-Ups | Natural History Museum. 2018. <i>Dino Snores for Grown-Ups</i> . [online] Available at: http://www.nhm.ac.uk/events/dino-snores-for-grown-ups.html [Accessed 28 October 2018]. |
| Dino Snores for Kids | Natural History Museum. 2018. <i>Dino Snores for Kids</i> . [online] Available at: http://www.nhm.ac.uk/events/dino-snores-for-kids.html [Accessed 28 October 2018]. |
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Appendix 2

Project information sheets (translated)



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

School of Museum Studies
University of Leicester
19 University Road
Leicester
LE1 7RF
United Kingdom

Project Information Sheet for Participants and Parents/Legal Guardians

Project Title: TAKING RESEARCH OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM'S WALLS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Email Address: lb298@le.ac.uk

Date: 1 March 2016

I would like to tell you more about this project, who I am and why I am doing this research, and how you were selected for the project. I would also like to explain how I will use your data and protect your privacy and confidentiality.

Who is doing the research

Laurence Brasseur, PhD student, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, United Kingdom.

What the research is for

To develop a better understanding of young people's perceptions and experiences of museums.

How you were selected

You were selected to participate because you expressed interest in taking part in a focus group held at your youth club.

Your role in completing the research

A focus group is a group discussion, and the one you will participate in will last for about one hour. With other young people from your youth club, you will be asked to contribute to a discussion about what you think of museums and your experiences of museums so far. The questions will be asked by me, with the help of a youth worker from your club. The discussion will be digitally audio recorded.

Your rights

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project at any time before 1 of October 2016. If you are unsure or uncomfortable about any aspect of taking part, please contact me on the email address shown at the top of this letter to talk about your concerns or ask any questions about the study.

Keeping your information confidential

Any information you provide will be treated confidentially. Your name, the name of your youth worker and the name of your youth club will be made anonymous in any publication. Digital audio recordings will be stored securely for up to 7 years. After that, they will be securely disposed of.

If you have any questions about whether this research is being done in an ethical way, please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Dr Giasemi Vavoula, on gv18@le.ac.uk.

Thank you

Laurence Brasseur



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

School of Museum Studies
University of Leicester
19 University Road
Leicester
LE1 7RF
United Kingdom

Project Information Sheet for Youth Clubs

Project Title: TAKING RESEARCH OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM'S WALLS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Email Address: lb298@le.ac.uk

Date: 1 March 2016

I would like to tell you more about this project, who I am and why I am doing this research, and how you were selected for the project. I would also like to explain how I will use your data and protect your privacy and confidentiality.

Who is doing the research

Laurence Brasseur, PhD student, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, United Kingdom.

What the research is for

To develop a better understanding of young people's perceptions and experiences of museums.

How the young people were selected

The young people were selected to participate because they expressed interest in taking part in a focus group held at your youth club.

How the research will take place

The focus group that young people will participate in will last for about one hour. They will be asked to contribute to a group discussion about how young people perceive museums and their experiences of museums so far. With support from a youth worker from your club, I will ask the group some questions. The discussion will be digitally audio recorded.

Your rights

Your club's participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project at any time before 1 October 2016. If you are unsure or uncomfortable about any aspect of your participation, please contact me on the email address shown at the top of this letter to discuss your concerns or clarify any aspect of the study.

Protecting your confidentiality

Any information you provide will be treated confidentially. The names of young people, youth workers and youth clubs will be made anonymous in any publication. Digital audio recordings will be stored securely for up to 7 years and after this point securely disposed of.

If you have any questions about the ethical conduct of the research please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Dr Giasemi Vavoula, on gv18@le.ac.uk.

Thank you

Laurence Brasseur



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

School of Museum Studies
University of Leicester
19 University Road
Leicester
LE1 7RF
United Kingdom

Project Information Sheet for Interviewees (Youth Workers)

Project Title: TAKING RESEARCH OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM'S WALLS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Email Address: lb298@le.ac.uk

Date: 1 July 2016

I would like to tell you more about this project, who I am and why I am doing this research, and how you were selected for the project. I would also like to explain how I will use your data and protect your privacy and confidentiality.

Who is doing the research

Laurence Brasseur, PhD student, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, United Kingdom.

What the research is for

To develop a better understanding of young people's perceptions and experiences of museums.

How you were selected

You were selected to participate because you expressed interest in taking part in an interview about young people and museums.

Your role in completing the research

The interview that you will take part in will be either an individual interview or a group interview. The duration will be about one hour for individual interviews and about two hours for group interviews. I will ask you questions about young people's leisure activities, their experiences of museums and the relationship between young people and museums. The discussion will be digitally audio recorded.

Your rights

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project at any time before 1 October 2016. If you are unsure or uncomfortable about any aspect of taking part, please contact me on the email address shown at the top of this letter to talk about your concerns or ask any questions about the study.

Keeping your information confidential

Any information you provide will be treated confidentially. Your name and the name of your institutional affiliation will be made anonymous in any publication. Digital audio recordings will be stored securely for up to 7 years. After that, they will be securely disposed of.

If you have any questions about whether this research is being done in an ethical way, please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Dr Giasemi Vavoula, on gv18@le.ac.uk.

Thank you

Laurence Brasseur

Appendix 3

Consent forms (translated)



Research Consent Form for Participants

I agree to take part in the TAKING RESEARCH OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM'S WALLS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES study, which is research towards a PhD in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester.

Laurence Brasseur has explained the research project to me and I have read the information sheet about the project.

I understand the following:

I will be asked questions about what young people think about museums.

Participation in this study is voluntary, which means I don't have to take part if I don't want to.

Laurence will write about some of the things I have talked about, but she will not use my name or the name of my youth club.

I agree to Laurence talking with me and other young people today and recording the talk.

Only Laurence will listen to the audio recording. The recording will be kept private.

If I have any worries about our talk then I can talk about these with Laurence.

Participant's name

Signature

Date



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

Research Consent Form for Parents/Legal Guardians

I agree that my child, for whom I am the parent/guardian can take part in the TAKING RESEARCH OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM'S WALLS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES study, which is research towards a PhD in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester.

The research project has been explained to me and I have read the information sheet about the project, which I may keep for my records.

I understand that this study will be carried out in accordance with the University of Leicester's Code of Research Ethics, which can be viewed at <http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/committees/research-ethics/code-of-practice>.

Material my child/ward provides as part of this study will be treated as confidential and stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

By signing this form, I confirm the following:

I have read and understand the information sheet.

I am willing to allow my child/ward to participate in the focus groups.

I agree to the focus group discussion being audio recorded.

I agree to the researcher using my child's/ward's words when writing her report and related publications, and that these will be made available to the public and on the Internet.

I understand that my child's/ward's real name will not be used with his/her words in any reports and his/her details will be kept private. The names of the youth workers and youth clubs will remain anonymous as well.

Name of participant

Name of parent/legal guardian

Signature

Date



Research Consent Form for Youth Club Leaders

As the leader of the youth club, I agree that the workers and members of our club can take part – with parental consent for people under the age of 18 – in the TAKING RESEARCH OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM'S WALLS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES study, which is research towards a PhD in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester.

The research project has been explained to me and I have read the information sheet about the project, which I may keep for my records.

I understand that this study will be carried out in accordance with the University of Leicester's Code of Research Ethics, which can be viewed at <http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/committees/research-ethics/code-of-practice>.

Material the members of my club provide as part of this study will be treated as confidential and stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

By signing this form, I confirm the following:

I have read and understand the information sheet.

I agree to have focus groups take place at our youth club and that one of our workers will be present during the session.

I am willing to allow young people from our club to participate in the focus groups (with parental consent for those under the age of 18).

I agree to the focus group discussion being audio recorded.

I understand that the names of participants (young people and youth workers) will not be used with their own words in any reports and that their details will be kept private.

I understand that the name of the youth club will be made anonymous.

Name of youth club

Name of youth club leader

Signature

Date



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

Research Consent Form for Interviewees (Youth Workers)

I agree to take part in the TAKING RESEARCH OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM'S WALLS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES study, which is research towards a PhD in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester.

The research project has been explained to me and I have read the information sheet about the project, which I may keep for my records.

I understand that this study will be carried out in accordance with the University of Leicester's Code of Research Ethics, which can be viewed at <http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/committees/research-ethics/code-of-practice>.

Information that I provide as part of this study will be treated as confidential and stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

By signing this form, I confirm the following:

I have read and understand the information sheet.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and they were answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

I agree to the researcher using my words when writing her report and related publications, and that these will be made available to the public and on the Internet.

I understand that my name and my institutional affiliation will be made anonymous.

Name

Institutional affiliation

Signature

Date

Appendix 4

Record of participants, focus groups and interviews

Focus-group participants

| Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Focus-group code |
|------------|-----|--------|------------------|
| Antoine | 17 | M | D |
| Brenda | 21 | F | B |
| Christophe | 19 | M | C |
| Danny | 21 | M | D |
| David | 15 | M | C |
| Emma | 18 | F | C |
| Erica | 16 | F | E |
| Florence | 16 | F | A |
| Gabriel | 17 | M | D |
| Jim | 12 | M | A |
| Josephina | 15 | F | E |
| Kate | 19 | F | C |
| Kerry | 21 | F | D |
| Leila | 13 | F | A |
| Luca | 21 | M | E |
| Marie | 17 | F | A |
| Miguel | 20 | M | B |
| Nick | 19 | M | C |
| Paula | 19 | F | E |
| Philip | 12 | M | A |
| Sofia | 16 | F | E |
| Sydney | 15 | F | C |
| Tim | 13 | M | E |
| Tina | 21 | F | B |

Focus groups

| Focus-group code | Date | Number of participants | Duration (minutes) |
|------------------|---------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| A | 25 March 2016 | 5 | 55 |
| B | 14 April 2016 | 3 | 80 |
| C | 21 April 2016 | 6 | 70 |
| D | 7 May 2016 | 4 | 75 |
| E | 20 May 2016 | 6 | 65 |

Interviews with youth workers

| Pseudonym | Youth club (focus-group code) | Interview date |
|-----------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Jenny | A | 11 July 2016 |
| Monique | E | 21 July 2016 |
| Vera | E | 21 July 2016 |

Appendix 5

Focus-group questions (translated)

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Brainstorming icebreaker | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think of when you hear the word 'museum'? What do you associate with the word 'museum'? |
| Introduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been to a museum? Which one? Who did you go with (family, friends, school, etc.)? • What is a museum? What can you see in a museum? • Which types of museums do you know about? • Which types of museums (for example, art, history, natural history, science) do you prefer? Why? |
| Image of the museum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do people visit museums? • What kind of people do you think go to museums? • Are museums important? Why/Why not? • Should museums try to be for everyone? |
| 'Think back' questions; thinking and feeling questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think back to your visits to museums. Do you remember anything that you particularly liked or disliked? • Think back to the last time you went to a museum. How did it make you feel? |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would a museum need to make you feel for you to want to go back? |
| Museum of the future; a museum for young people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you could create a museum, what would it be like? What would it show? • How would you prefer to visit? On your own, with family, with friends or with school? Would you prefer a guided tour, an audio guide, or a self-guided tour with a smartphone or tablet? • What would a museum have to do to please young people? Is this even possible? • Which topics do you think young people would be interested to see in museums? • Would you be interested in taking on a holiday job in a museum, for example as a guide or an educator for other young people or the general public? |
| Conclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you could make any recommendations to museums, what would they be? |

Appendix 6

Interview questions for youth workers (translated)

Part 1: Making sense of focus groups

- After our focus-group session, did the participants talk about the discussion or about museums in general?
- Please think back to the focus group. Does anything in particular come to mind? Did the young people's views and experiences match your expectations? Did any of their statements surprise you at all?
- The focus groups revealed that many participants had ambiguous views on the use of digital technologies in museums. For example, some of them said that they would rather take part in a tour led by a person than use a tablet for a self-guided tour. One participant pointed out that 'we're human and social beings, after all'. As we know that digital technologies play an important part in people's lives, what do you think about statements like these? Do you think they represent a contradiction?

Part 2: Youth clubs and museums

- What sort of places do you visit with members of the youth club? Which factors influence your choice of recreational activities? What makes a successful leisure outing and why?
- How would you characterise your youth club's relationship with museums? Do museums actively get in touch with you? Does your youth club organise visits to museums? Why, or why not? Do you face any challenges when organising or during visits to museums?
- Compared with other outings, do you think museum visits offer young people anything unique? Do you see some sort of benefit in visiting museums?

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