Foresight Research Report:
Museums as Third Place

Document Overview

The following research report is based on an adaptation of a common foresight tool: the *Framework Forecast* model developed by Dr. Peter Bishop, Chair of the *Studies of the Future* program at the University of Houston. The report is designed to provide an overview of key strategic issues relevant to the future of California communities and museums. We hope that this report will be of interest to California museum professionals working to improve service to their community and to plan for the future.

In the Spring/Summer of 2012 a team of museum professionals participating in the California Association of Museum's *Leaders of the Future: Museum Professionals Developing Strategic Foresight* training project conducted their own secondary (*desktop*) research on current conditions, trends, and plans for a *baseline forecast* that postulates the most expected future. The authors of this report include:

- David Bloom, VertNet Coordinator, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, UC Berkeley
- Ruth Cuadra, Applications Systems Analyst, Getty Research Institute (team leader)
- Johanna Fassbender, Education Director, Hayward Area Historical Society
- Elizabeth Welden-Smith, Curator of Education and Public Programs, National Steinbeck Center
- Shelby Graham, Gallery Director, Mary Porter Sesnon Art Gallery, UC Santa Cruz

The report is the first phase in the development of a baseline forecast and is intended to define the idea of "Third Places," explore emerging trends and possible futures, and create a framework upon which a baseline forecast can be presented. Concepts include:

- **Domain Definition:** Describes the main elements of this subject matter
- **Current Assessment:** Describes a current snapshot of the domain highlighting key stakeholders, timelines, and issues within society and museums
- **Trends/Projections:** Describes observable trends (changes over time) along with their direction and momentum
- **Plans:** Outlines stated and potential plans by leading stakeholders and outliers
- **Baseline Forecast:** Combines elements to reveal the most likely future(s) for this domain across different time horizons: 2015, 2020 and 2030

The working group and the CAM Foresight Committee will undertake the second half of this research to highlight alternative forecasting elements during Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. This second phase of research on alternative futures will include:

- **Ideas**: Descriptions of potential *breakthrough or breakdown* visions of the domain by leading evangelists and thought leaders
- **Events:** A spectrum of events (scheduled/planned; plausible; wildcards) that could alter the future of the domain
- **Emerging Issues:** An outline of emerging issue choices that must be made by individuals, institutions or public policy makers
- **Alternative Futures (Scenario Platforms):** Combined elements that create short alternative scenario platforms for the domain

Note:
Document includes embedded bracketed [hyperlinks] for: *Further Reading, Sources and Citations*

The *Museums as Third Place* domain refers to the study of people and place-based experiences.

Strategic Objectives: Museums as Third Place

✓ Ensuring California museums remain relevant to all communities who need engaging place-based experiences

✓ Providing context and resource materials for awareness, education, and professional training opportunities on how museums can continue to leverage their place-based assets

---

Introduction: Museums as Third Places

> *'Third space' isn't home, and isn't work - it's more like the living room of society at large.*
> - Michael Hickey

There are many scholars who have defined and written about the concept of "Third Place" (sometimes referred to as third space). We will highlight two of them below to better explain what is behind the idea of third place. Ray Oldenburg is an urban sociologist from Florida who writes about the importance of informal public gathering places. In his landmark 1991 book, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), Oldenburg explores why these gathering places are essential to community and public life. He argues that bars, coffee shops, general stores, and other "third places," in contrast to the first and second places of home and work, are central to local democracy and community's social vitality.

Oldenburg identifies third places, or "great good places," as the public places on neutral ground where people can gather and interact. In contrast to first places (home) and second places (work/school), third places allow people to put aside their concerns and simply enjoy the company and conversation around them. Third places "host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work." They promote social equality by leveling the status of guests, providing a setting for grassroots politics, creating habits of public association, and offering psychological support to individuals and communities [Source].

In his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), sociologist Robert D. Putnam warns that we have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and our democratic structures. Putnam warns that our stock of social capital—the very fabric of our connections with each other—has plummeted, impoverishing our lives and communities. Drawing on evidence that includes nearly 500,000 interviews over the last quarter century, he shows that we sign fewer petitions, belong to fewer organizations that meet, know our neighbors less, meet with friends less frequently, and even socialize with our families less often. Putnam shows how changes in work, family structure, age, suburban life, television, computers, women's roles and other factors have contributed to this decline [Source].

A more recent definition of "third space" was provided in May 2012 by Michael Hickey on the Rooflines blog [Source]. Hickey wrote, "[t]he vaunted 'third space' isn't home, and isn't work - it's more like the living room of society at large. It's a place where you are neither family nor co-worker, and yet where the values, interests, gossip, complaints and inspirations of these two other spheres intersect. It's a place at least one step removed from the structures of work and home, more random, and yet familiar enough to breed a sense of identity and connection. It's a place of both possibility and comfort, where the unexpected and the mundane transcend and mingle."

In trying to nail down a definition of a third space that we could work with, there was a consensus among the members of our domain group that "we know one when we see it," but it's hard to describe in full. We adopted the following key characteristics to describe the type of environment that forms the basis of the forecasts in this report.

A "third space" is:
- an informal social space aside from home or work;
- for people to have a shared experience;
- based on shared interests and aspirations;
- open to anyone regardless of social or economic characteristics such as race, gender, class, religion, or national origin;
- often an actual physical space, but can be a virtual space;
- easily accessible;
- free or inexpensive.

There are a wide variety of places in our society that are, or might be, considered to be third spaces, including:
- restaurants, cafés, and coffee shops
- beer gardens
- public parks and plazas
- farmers markets
- shopping malls and food courts
- online chat rooms
- outdoor fairs
- museums and libraries

Snapshot & Current Assessment

According to research by the Project for Public Spaces there are four key qualities that successful public spaces have in common: **sociability, engagement, comfort, and accessibility.**

This diagram defines these attributes in terms of the intangible/intuitive, qualitative, and quantitative aspects that museums can use to develop and evaluate their public spaces. [Source]

Many of the ideas included here are embodied in the references and definitions provided in the Introduction. Each of us can, no doubt, identify public spaces in our communities with these characteristics—including museums— that engage people successfully.

For many years, museums have been working to fulfill missions that are variously stated as being dedicated to collecting, preserving, researching, and exhibiting their collections. What role does the visitor play in this work? What factors affect whether someone visits, how long they stay, what they do when they visit, and whether they are inclined to come back?

The idea that museums need to be welcoming to their visitors, provide fun and interesting activities, and be attractive and accessible is not new, but the marketplace for third places is becoming more competitive. Increasingly, museums are learning from the experiences of other types of organizations and businesses that there can be great value in just providing a place to hang out for people who have similar interests.

Meetup.com, for example, makes it easy for anyone to organize a local group or find one of the thousands already meeting face-to-face. More than 9,000 groups get together in local communities every day, each with goals ranging from self-improvement to citizen democracy to just having fun. The usage statistics for Meetup.com are staggering: 11.1 million members, 2 million monthly RSVPs for meetups, 340,000 meetups per month, 105,000 local groups, 117,000 topics of interest, in 45,000 cities. [Source] This kind of participation tells us that people want to be out exploring what interests them with like-minded members of their communities.

Even without the assistance of Meetup.com, people are finding their way to concerts and poetry readings at cafés, story times and group workout at local malls, movie nights in town squares, and lectures and book clubs at libraries and bookstores. These kinds of activities and hundreds, if not thousands, of others like them in cities and towns across California, present significant competition to museums and other cultural and educational institutions for people's leisure time.

- The Camarillo Café is not an actual café, but a coffeehouse-style concert series held six times a year in the Camarillo Community Center.

- **Just KIDding Around** is a club run by the Bayfair Center mall in San Leandro that offers a weekly story time/crafts hour for children and weekend events for families.
- The **Atascadero Public Library** has an evening book club for adults who work during the day.
- **Humphreys Concerts by the Bay** are held during the summer months in the outdoor venue Humphreys Half Moon Inn & Suites on Shelter Island in San Diego.
- **Movies in the Park**, sponsored by the City of Rancho Cucamonga, is a chance for residents to camp out with lawn chairs and blankets to watch a movie under the stars.

Another example of successful community engagement in a public space was pioneered by University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) students and the Sesnon Art Gallery who partnered with the City of Santa Cruz through a UCIRA (University of California Institute for Research in the Arts) grant for pop-up art projects in empty storefronts and public courtyards in downtown Santa Cruz [Source].

"Beyond the Gallery" project from UCSC in downtown Santa Cruz, CA. June 2012.

Similarly, The Getty Center attracts atypical visitors with its Saturdays Off the 405 program that combines art and live music, once a month from May to October. In 2011, more than 27,500 people attended. [Source] Spotlight after Dark gallery tours entice attendees to see what the museum has to offer while they are on top of the hill above Los Angeles.

The above examples show that education doesn't always take place in an institutional setting; learning can happen by being present in a comfortable environment. Many currently underrepresented in museums may feel more comfortable with these third space environments that invite learning, socializing, or just hanging out with others or by themselves. Stress can be reduced through companionship and moments of quiet solitude. Third space experiences have the power to make those

unfamiliar with your organization or threatened/uninvited by traditional museum experiences more comfortable and give them a feeling that they belong there, too.

History & Key Milestones

As described above, the concept of "third space" reached mainstream awareness in the 1990s when urban planners and architects discovered that the number of public spaces in which communities could come together were on the decline. New shopping malls on the outskirts of big cities triumphed over the traditional and organically grown town squares and town centers. Business and public transactions and interactions moved to these new spaces leaving traditional public spaces less and less populated.

Since the 1990s, urban architects have tried to incorporate these realizations into their designs to create new public spaces. In recent years, museums have jumped on the third space bandwagon, realizing that modeling the concepts of third space would be a great way to reach new and expand existing audiences.

During this time, museums also realized that audiences were not just focused on educational experiences, but were interested in social experiences, too. Audiences wanted to participate in activities and share in conversations (*e.g.*, 'I have an opinion and my opinion counts'), an idea that has been promoted through access to new technologies and the rise of social networking. As a result, communities now perceive museum spaces as more than the museum itself, but as places to engage socially, emotionally, and intellectually.

Marketing information from the Outdoor Advertising Association of America [Source] shows that while outside the home or workplace, consumers are engaging with activities critical to marketers, such as using media and being reached by messages, socializing and influencing other people, and shopping and making purchasing decisions. Media use peaks in the early evening from about 5:00-6:30 PM, while socializing peaks from about 7:30-8:00 PM and shopping from 1:00- 4:00 PM. Therefore, museum stores and cafés could be very successful at providing a third space for a community if they were open and accessible during these hours.

In 2006, 22% of museums offered some kind of food service, yet there is a general lack of data on museum cafés and their impact on the visitor experience. Based on the prominent role of cafés and coffee houses as third space within society, museum cafés could play that role as well—with the added bonus of having galleries attached to them. It is probable, too, that museum cafés could become viable spaces for programming and outreach, in additional to their role as a source of revenue.

Third Spaces within Museums

Today, many museums offer special programming for audiences to engage with in non-traditional ways. This includes programs for young adults, such as Nightlife at the California Academy of Sciences or do-it-yourself *maker* stations, inspired by the "Maker" movement, at public libraries and music festivals, following the concepts of the "Maker" movement, which bring people for do-it-yourself creative experiences. [Source] Special programming for other audiences can focus on literacy, gang-prevention, or family building and can be offered by museums themselves or in partnership with other community and service organizations.

Third spaces are leveraged as an asset for service. Museums offer themselves as rental space for conferences, weddings, town-hall meetings, and other public and private ceremonies. Often, during museum expansion and construction projects, museums set up in temporary spaces to keep programs and exhibits available to the community. In fact, quite a few museums have been more successful with these programs and exhibits beyond the museum walls (*e.g.,* the Palo Alto Art Center [Source] and the Hayward Area Historical Society [Source]). After the completion of expansion projects, the challenge remains; how can museums create new third spaces and programs to bring these new audiences back through the doors of the museum?

Some museums, such as the University of Colorado - Museum of Natural History have created permanent spaces that offer opportunities for programming and provide an open space for use by members of their community. In the case of the CU Museum, the decades old Biology Hall was transformed into the BioLounge, "[a]n inviting, relaxing, and totally unique space [that is an] amalgamation of exhibit, cabinet of curiosities, coffee bar, lounge, and venue for science, art, and music….the BioLounge brings a new approach to the art and science of biodiversity."

(BioLounge, photos by David Bloom, 2012)

Prior to the opening of the BioLounge in 2009, the CU Museum struggled to attract its core audience: students. Between 1991 and 2008, museum attendance by university students remained constant at 100-300 students per month. Those numbers dwindled to double digits during the summer and winter vacation periods. Since the opening of the BioLounge (featuring free coffee and wifi), monthly attendance by university students has more than quadrupled to the range of 1,100-1,800 visits. During the spring semester reading period and final exams the CU Museum attracts more than 2,500 students monthly who come to write, study, and relax, and unwind.

Although no formal evaluation of the BioLounge has been conducted, it is clear from the attendance statistics, as well as by observation, that this space meets the four key qualities of sociability, engagement, comfort, and accessibility, previously described as essential for any successful public space.

Learn More:
- The Uncataloged Museum: Memorial Museums: Join A Conversation A discussion about interpretation in memorial museums in the context of idea of museums as a third space.
- Research Highlights: The Unbounded Museum Third space is defined as a hybrid concept that blurs the division between physical and virtual spaces in order to create a third, equally dynamic space that creates a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.

Trends/Projections

- Increasing use of social media marketing
- Increasing attendance based on self-identified interest groups
- Increasing attendance by non-traditional museum audiences such as younger people
- Increase in number of partnerships and collaborations among museums and other civic and cultural organizations
- More programs design to help rebrand museums to be fun, young and hip
- Increasing demand for using the museum third space to supplement traditional education opportunities by offering informal art/music/literature/science learning experiences outside of the classroom

Recently Completed Projects/Plans

- Dayton Institute to create 'gathering space': new space designed to appeal to non-traditional museum audiences
- New York Hall of Science unveils a dedicated Maker Space: a place for collaboration, community and cooperation in trying new ideas and learning from peers
- Skillshare San Francisco: a community marketplace where you can learn anything from anyone, anywhere. Skillshare's vision is to increase the global passion index by building a new world of education
- New York museums add cafés with fine dining experiences: competition with other entertainment and as revenue stream
- BMW Guggenheim: temporary public space and online forum encouraging dialogue about issues related to urban life

Baseline Forecast

Below are baseline forecast elements made by the domain group members concerning the area of museums as a third space for the years 2015, 2020, and 2030.

2015
- With decreased public and private funding available, some museums will have to merge with other cultural institutions or cut back on their own programming.

- Museums will have to develop new and exciting partnerships to help reach audiences.
- Museums will strive to offer a multiplicity of experiences and opportunities for engagement, both on and off-line.

2020

- The young people who went to the cocktail parties hosted by museums in their 20's will begin to bring their families, and become members and donors.
- Museums will put more focus on their café and outdoor or off-site spaces; these spaces will become programmed and take on a more independent identity from the museum to attract audiences that don't usually go to museums.
- To stay relevant museums will have to offer other non-traditional museum programs and services such as homework clubs, yoga classes, etc.
- As many as 35% of museums will offer food services (up from 22% in 2006), either by running their own café/restaurant or partnering with an already established café/restaurant nearby.

2030

- The number of museums that are entirely digital (online) will increase significantly.
- Some museums will begin to morph into "think-tanks" that are places to exchange ideas.

Articles to Explore More

- Creating the 'third' space in the 'Anywhere Working City': Smarter travel combined with alternative working practices could ease strains on infrastructure and transport and turn cities into smarter places to work and live.
- Piper backs Loungers expansion: "Cafe and bar" as third space -- is "third space" becoming a buzz-word in the world of investments?
- Anybeat: Your New Digital "Third Place" Online: Social media app uses idea of "third place" (not Facebook and not MySpace) to create your digital home.
- Data point: Consumers seek third-space experiences around food: Millennial generation is eager for third space experiences at retail food outlets such as Whole Foods.
- Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories About the "Great Good Places" at the Heart of Our Communities (by Ray Oldenburg)
- 21c Museum Hotels: Combining art and commerce, this hotel plus museum keeps visitors coming back and is expanding to more cities.
- Fourth Wall Studios does the 'Dirty Work' of innovation: "Transmedia" productions are being designed to engage viewers by crossing the boundaries between screen, phone, and tablets and turn viewers into players.
- Purpose Emerging as Important Driver of Engagement: "Purpose" is emerging as a powerful new driver of attraction, retention, and productivity. On average, 57% of respondents (64% Germany, 58% US, 48% UK) said they would favor joining an organization that has a clearly defined purpose.
- What's the Future of Work?: Exploring the impact on demand for space and workplaces.
- The Open Office Opens Its Doors in Coventry Village: Alternative workspaces that draw people out of their homes and give them more and better access to workplace amenities can help people be more productive and create community.