Exploring the Transformation of Museums into Cultural Hubs: A Case Study of Design Society, Shenzhen, China

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Abstract

Drawing from conceptual discussions of museums over the past five decades, this thesis investigates a newly emergent global trend for institutions to identify themselves as 'cultural hubs', in particular via a case study of Design Society in Shenzhen, China. Literatures in museum studies and visitors studies were reviewed in developing a theoretical framework, and the development of Chinese museums was also included for a contextual understanding of the case study. Surveys, interviews, document analysis, observations and autoethnography were carried out to examine the concept and practices of Design Society and its visitors' experiences.

As a new institution, Design Society tries to transcend traditional boundaries associated with museums by identifying itself as a cultural hub. This study demonstrates that cultural programmes at Design Society provide multidimensional experiences for visitors. The object experiences, sensory experiences, transformative experiences, physical experiences and social experiences had by visitors demonstrate the desired characteristics of a cultural hub which is visitor-centred, experience-driven, and where opportunities for visitors to interact, co-create and share are considered important. However, as Design Society struggled to articulate and communicate its identity, 'cultural hub' was perhaps not the most helpful concept for them to utilise, especially in a context where historically narrow definitions of a museum dominate.

The development of institutions like Design Society may have a profound impact on museum theory and practice, although it is still too early to judge whether they dilute or serve to reimagine the notion of a museum, at a time when that notion itself is in flux. Nevertheless, this thesis deepens our understanding of visitor experiences, testing a revised model for exploring its parameters within these contexts.

Keywords

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Abbreviations

CMG – China Merchant Group

CMSK – China Merchants Shekou Holdings

ICOM – International Council of Museums

SWCAC – Sea World Culture and Arts Center

SZDW – Shenzhen Design Week

V&A – Victoria and Albert Museum

Chapter 1   Introduction

1.1   Context of the Study

As museums around the world are reopening or planning to reopen their doors after months of closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this research could not be timelier or more crucial. It appears to be a pivotal moment for cultural institutions and the cultural sector globally.

The pandemic has had serious impacts on cultural institutions – and still affects them profoundly. Around the world, approximately 90% of cultural institutions were forced to shut their doors during the crisis (ICOM 2020; UNESCO 2021). The UK alone has been facing a 'cultural catastrophe' (Creative Industries Federation 2020, para.1), losing up to £77bn of revenue and 400,000 jobs in 2020, according to estimates from research conducted by Oxford Economics (Oxford Economics 2020, p.3). In light of all these challenges, museums and cultural institutions are strongly encouraged to boldly rethink and to experiment with 'new and hybrid models of cultural fruition' (ICOM 2021a, para.4). This crisis, as ICOM (2021a) states, is also a catalyst for 'crucial innovations that were already underway'(para.3). This is precisely what this research is trying to explore and investigate: new notions, practices and the visitor experience in these contexts.

Museums have undergone immense changes since the emergence of institutionalised modern public museums during the 17th and 18th centuries. In recent decades, museums have seen a particular level of diversification (Marstine 2006, p.3) and the evolving transformation can be found in different aspects and to various degrees: missions, roles and definitions, functions, programmes, management and organisation, physical buildings and online presences. This evolution of museums is pressured by both internal factors, such as professionals' attitudes and beliefs and museums' capability and resources, and external factors including social, economic and political environment and emergent issues (Ross 2004; Anderson 2004; Wu

2011; Dewdney et al. 2013), for example, the lack of funding, the explosion of technological innovations and the need to adapt to evolving visitor expectations. In summary, as the field of museum studies expands, there is 'a growing recognition of the complexity – and often ambivalent nature – of museums' (Macdonald 2007, p.5).

This study will focus on exploring such complexities, namely the transformation of museums into 'cultural hubs'. In 2019, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) declared that a key trend in museum transformation is that they are 'increasingly grow[ing] into their roles as cultural hubs' and chose the theme 'Museums as Cultural Hubs' for International Museum Day 2019. The theme for each year is generally considered 'at the heart of societal concerns' (ICOM 2019a, para.2). ICOM defines 'cultural hubs' as 'platforms where creativity combines with knowledge and where visitors can also co-create, share and interact' (ICOM 2019a, para.1). It argues that once 'static', museums are now reinventing themselves as institutions that are more 'interactive, audience focused, community oriented, flexible, adaptable and mobile' (ICOM 2019a, para.1). A wide body of research and much conceptual debate exists about what constitutes a museum, what roles museums fulfil in society and how they might develop in the future, as well as how they function practically day-to-day. However, very little research examines the contemporary trend towards museums as 'cultural hubs'.

The term of the 'cultural hub' has becoming increasingly popular over the years and new institutions are being created as cultural hubs worldwide. It is a relatively new concept for both museum professionals and visitors (Art Fund 2018, p.18). However, once having had the term explained, visitors showed a strong interest in the concept of a 'cultural hub'(Art Fund 2018, p.19).

The term itself tends to be used vaguely and the few existing definitions tend to focus on different aspects of the cultural hub (ICOM 2019a; Art Fund 2018). The lack of research into this concept suggests our knowledge and understanding of the transformation of museums needs to be expanded through more research. Instead of offering a definitive definition, this thesis aims to explore different ideas of the 'cultural hub' and especially via a case study of Design Society, a cultural institution in Shenzhen, China established in 2017. The reason that

Design Society has been chosen to be the case study will be explained below, and a detailed introduction to the institution will be presented in Chapter 5.

The understanding of the concept of the cultural hub is expected to be deepened through this case study and furthermore, this study will undoubtedly contribute to the growing field of museum studies. Besides researchers, this study will also be of interest to those who work in the cultural sector, including but not limited to museum practitioners and policymakers.

1.1.1 Choosing Design Society in China as a Case Study

There are several reasons why this thesis chooses to examine the transformation of museums using Design Society in China as a case study. This section gives a brief explanation, and in Chapter 4 the research design will be justified and explained in detail.

Design Society makes a robust case study in exploring the idea of the 'cultural hub'. As a new institution, the journey of its establishment and ambition in purposefully creating a boundary-transcending cultural institution reflects the development of museums over the past few decades. Especially as an institution created in China where object-oriented museums have been dominant, the case study of Design Society allows the author to interrogate museum's paradigm shift from 'object-centred' to 'visitor-centred' since the emergence of the 'new museology' described in Chapter 2. Moreover, the nature of Design Society is different from the majority of the Chinese museums which are state-owned. The hybrid model which combines cultural programmes and commercial retail is interesting to explore further, as this is an interesting and important characteristics of cultural hubs. Rather than focusing on a specific aspect of Design Society, however, this research aims to look at all of these aspects holistically.

Several other reasons also contributed the author choosing Design Society as a case study. First, broadly speaking, this study provides much-needed exposure of Chinese museum practices among the global transformation of museums. It will be the first to explore the trend of museums as cultural hubs within China. Wu (2011) argues in her study that not enough attention has been paid to Chinese museums in the international field of museum studies,

where the English language is dominant. For example, the book *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World* edited by Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (1996) includes case studies from the UK, Canada, America and Germany, but no non-western countries. In a more recent book*, The International Handbooks of Museum Studies* (2013), the editor expresses an intention to bring scholars together across the world; however, voices from Asia, Africa, and South America are still missing. In a later edition of that book, the editors did acknowledge there are many more ideas and debates outside their case studies. There are examples of overseas scholars such as Varutti (2014) and Lord (2019) who have conducted research on Chinese museums, but more research should be done as Chinese museums are still underrepresented in the international museum field (Wu 2011). This lack of research on Chinese museums leaves significant gaps in knowledge and understanding of the global museum field (Wu 2011).

Second, this study of Design Society is also closely relevant to international scholarship. When reviewing the change and development of global museums, the Vice President of Art and Culture at the Royal Ontario Museum, Chen Shen (2019, p.1), observes that museums in China are the fastest growing globally over the past century, in both their scale and momentum. The phenomenon of a 'museum boom' has fascinated the media around the world (see The Economist 2013; Georgia 2016), however, not enough scholarly works look into the recent development of museums in China. Another way that this study could be of interest to international museum scholars and practitioners is due to the manner that Design Society was born out of an international cross-cultural collaboration between a Chinese organisation and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London. The input from V&A in various aspects, from the overall concept of the institution to the creation of exhibitions and activities, undoubtedly contributed to the delivery of the experiences at Design Society. Therefore, the findings of this study – for example, what Design Society offers and what experiences its visitors have – could be important and valuable despite the case study being conducted exclusively in China.

Lastly, from a personal level, I also had advantages as a scholar, as Design Society is located in Shenzhen, a city where I grew up and lived for more than 10 years. I was able to communicate and connect with both staff and visitors, sharing a common cultural background

and knowledge of the local context. This has helped me in gaining access, building trust and securing opportunities to do multiple fieldtrips collecting data to understand Design Society as a cultural hub, from its inception to its final delivery and opening to the public.

In summary, this investigation will certainly contribute to the knowledge of the contemporary trend of museums being defined as 'cultural hubs' while also adding to the broader understanding of Chinese museums. Although not a typical example of the main body of museums in China – which are regional museums (see Wu 2011) – the establishment and the model of Design Society reflects a specific context that has not been introduced to the international museum field and could also reflect a possible future trend for museums in China and beyond. More detailed background information of Design Society will be presented in Chapter 5.

1.1.2 Research Questions and the Scope of the Study

This thesis sits within a body of international museological discourse and rethinks the potential of the 21st-century museum through the concept of the cultural hub. It is rooted in the field of museum studies which is itself an interdisciplinary field (Simmons and Latham 2020). The approach it takes to museum studies research is a pragmatic visitor-centred one, as it aligns with the concept expressed by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000):

> To hold research as separate from practice is not, to me, as useful as producing research that will begin to change or influence practice. I feel strongly that academic research, at least in this area, should be forced to confront the real world. (p.xi)

Dewdney et al. (2013) call for similar approaches in the book *Post-Critical Museology.* In this book, they expressed how theoretical concerns and practical 'knowledge and understanding' that 'future practitioners might draw upon in a rapidly changing world' should be equally important (p.2).

Encouraged by the intention of 'post-critical museology', this study was also designed in a way that aims to advocate 'a break with the theoretical critique of the representational

museum and a call for a return to empirical and pragmatic research' for museum studies (Dewdney et al. 2013, p.42). In this thesis, both the transforming roles and functions of museums and the day-to-day practice within the museums will be examined and discussed, while featuring a visitor-centred approach. The key research questions and a brief explanation of the scope of the study are presented below.

RQ1: What is the background behind the transformation of museums into cultural hubs and what theoretical lenses and approaches are best suited in analysing cultural hubs? How can this transformation be understood in the Chinese context?

RQ2: What does the concept and the formation of Design Society contribute to the understanding of the transformation of museums into cultural hubs?

RQ3: What experiences do visitors get in cultural programmes at Design Society? How can an analysis of the visitor experience contribute to an understanding of the transformation of museums into cultural hubs and provide valuable insights for museum professionals?

RQ4: [How] Can the case study of Design Society be extrapolated to other museums and the cultural sector as a whole? What insights are provided for future museum programming?

There follow a few clarifications on the scope of this study. Firstly, this study is not a comprehensive organisational study of Design Society as an institution. It only investigates Design Society as a visitor destination in the context of exploring museums' transformation into cultural hubs. For example, the collaboration between Design Society and the V&A, although part of a fascinating phenomenon of the proliferation of institutional collaborations between museums in China and museums overseas, will not be extensively investigated and will only appear as necessary background information, as it is not the focus of this study. In the future, however, the investigation of this collaboration would make an interesting and valuable research project.

Secondly, this research will not produce a theoretical model for analysing museum experiences. Data on visitor experiences were collected and analysed in a way to contribute to the understanding of museums transformation into cultural hubs. However, suggestions for modifying existing models are offered as a reflection from this study for future researchers.

Thirdly, this study does not aim to seek findings that are applicable for all different types of museums. There is a great diversity in terms of the themes of museums' collections, which includes but is not limited to art museums, history museums, science museums and community museums. Some museums might find this study less or more relevant than others. That said, this study does try to look beyond the specific types of museums and strives to explore some common aspects of the change that museums are going through.

Lastly, this study focuses on a specific time period of Design Society, from the preparation period (before December 2017) to the initial opening period (December 2017 to February 2018). The fieldwork data in this research were collected during Design Society's initial opening period, December 2017 to February 2018. Design Society has been changing and evolving since, which could be an interesting topic for future retrospective research. An update on latest developments – before the submission of this thesis – will be included in the last chapter as a reflection.

1.2   Overview of the Study

This thesis has eight chapters.

Chapter 1 is the introduction to the thesis.

Chapters 2 features a literature review outlining the context of the study. It firstly underpins the transformation of museums by reviewing the discourse of the 'new museology', the paradigm shift of being 'object-centred' to 'visitor-centred', the challenges museums confront and then the emergence of the concept 'cultural hub'. It then explores how 'experience' is becoming increasingly important in museums and highlights the importance of studying the visitor experience as a theoretical framework in understanding museums.

Chapter 3 is a review of the background of Chinese museums. It provides necessary context in understanding the case study of Design Society.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology for this research. It introduces the rationale behind the design of the research methods and then reports the methods used for gathering data: document analysis, surveys, interviews, observations and autoethnography. Sampling, validity, the practical challenges of the data collection and the analysis of the data are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 examines the concept and the setup of Design Society and draws key insights from the case study in understanding the transformation of museums into cultural hubs. The information provided in this chapter also helps the understanding of the visitor experiences detailed in the next two chapters.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore and analyse the visitor experience of the exhibitions and public programmes at Design Society. In contrast with Chapter 5, these two chapters provide insights into museums' transformation into cultural hubs from a visitor-centred perspective.

Chapter 8 brings together the findings from Chapter 5, 6 and 7 and summarises the conclusions in light of each research question. The significance of the research is reflected upon. This chapter also looks beyond the case study and discusses broad implications for the sector, possibilities for future museums and reflections drawn from the latest update to Design Society. Finally, the limitations of the research and recommendations for future research are addressed.

In summary, this thesis is an important addition to the field of museum studies. It identifies gaps in the current knowledge of museum studies, with research conducted in a less represented Chinese context. A new institution – both recently established and novel in its approach – was studied. Original data was generated from the empirical research and new innovative method was applied to explore similar previous research questions. Insights and critiques are provided based on existing theories, models and methods. New connections were created and, most importantly, this thesis advocates for the significance of examining visitors' perspective in museum studies.

Chapter 2   Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

As introduced in Chapter 1, this thesis aims to explore museums transformation towards cultural hubs in the 21st century, examined through the case study of Design Society in Shenzhen, China. This chapter will review the related terms, concepts, theories, facts and figures from literature and other sources in providing the context in understanding museums' transformation towards cultural hubs. It firstly establishes the historical context of this study by reviewing the development of the museum since the emergence of 'new museology' in the 1970s, and then maps out the recent challenges which led to the introduction of the concept of 'cultural hubs'. In making sense of this emerging concept, the theoretical framework of the visitor experience is introduced at the end of the chapter. The history of museums is not the focus of this thesis, but some of the key factors that account for current trends and states of the museum will be examined in this chapter.

2.2   The 'New Museology'

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the field of museum studies has been marked by the word *'new'* or *'re'* (Wu, 2011, p.21). Alongside Vergo (1989)'s *The New Museology,* Wu (2011) lists several further examples of scholarship demonstrating this: *New Museum Theory and Practice* (Marstine, 2006), *Rethinking the Museum and Other Meditations* (Weil 1990), *Reinventing the Museum* (Anderson, 2004) and *Re-Imagining the Museum Beyond the Mausoleum* (Witcomb 2003). This list continues with many other 'new's (see Trulove 2000; Message 2006; Newhouse 2006; Caroline and Reeve 2018) and 're's (see Macleod 2005; Sandell et al. 2010; Trofanenko and Segall 2014). These publications demonstrate that in the past four decades, museum scholars and professionals have felt urged to constantly challenge

and contemplate the definition, concept and practices of the museum. Answers to the question 'What is a museum?' will continue to be contested as society changes and institutions are expected to have new social commitments. Reviewing relevant movements in museums from the late 20th century provides insight for examining their current practices and imagining the future.

In the 19th-century museums, the visitor was considered passive, and the form of communication museums deployed was an 'authoritative linear communication' (Hooper-Greenhill 2004, p.xi). One milestone ushering in a wave of change confronting this status quo in the museum field was the proposal of 'new museology' in the 1970s (van Mensch and Mensch 2011). The term 'new museology' was first developed by French theoreticians and was introduced in English literature at the end of 1980s by Peter Vergo (Desvallées and Mairesse 2010; Vergo 1989). The word 'museology' can be defined as 'the philosophy of the museal field' (Deloche 2001, cited in Desvallées and Mairesse 2010, p.56) – in other words, as Desvallées and Mairesse (2010) put it, it is 'all the efforts at theorisation and critical thinking about the museal world'. 'New museology' is a museology that has emerged out of 'widespread dissatisfaction with the 'old museology' (Vergo 1989 p.3), with a desire to make a difference in the museum field. In his renowned book *The New Museology* (1989), Peter Vergo urges that:

> Unless a radical re-examination of the role of museums within society – by which I do not mean measuring their 'success' merely in terms of criteria such as more money and more visitors – takes place, museums may well find themselves dubbed only 'living fossils'. (p.3)

Beyond Vergo's critically acclaimed edited collection, 'new museology' is now often viewed as an umbrella term that includes various theories and perspectives in museum literature (see Marstine, 2006; Message 2013). Although not exhaustive, Table 1 below by Zhen (2001) provides a useful summary of 'new museology' compared to traditional museology:

Table 1: Difference between traditional museology and new museology by Zhen (2001, p.26). Translated by the author.

Subjects	Traditional museology	New museology
What should be the centre of the museum	Objects	People
Priority	Methods, techniques	Purpose, theory
Theoretical foundation	Collection management, preservation techniques, display design, history	Museum should serve the society and its development. Apart from methods and techniques, political science, sociology, pedagogy and other subjects should be referred to.
Development strategy	Academic research, professionals as centre, elitism	Visitors' needs as centre, populism, participated by professionals
Mission	Reinforce mainstream culture, increase cultural literacy, improve social acts	Respect multiculturalism, concerns for environment education and community, emphases on lifelong learning, raising visitors' cultural awareness
Exhibition (display) approach	Static, clearly classified, content focused on the past; academic atmosphere is strong, not much opportunity for visitor to participate; exhibitions are normally didactic; time period for exhibitions relatively long	Dynamic, employ themed units in exhibitions, content focus on present and future, adapt technology, encourage participation. Exhibitions are inspirational, considered entertainment and leisure. Apart from exhibition, there are multiple other ways of communication. Consider the permanent exhibition should be updated every seven years.

As the table demonstrates, the 'new museology' features multiple theoretical discussions. Indeed, as McCall and Gray (2014) put it, the 'new museology' has become 'a specific ideology and discourse' that includes a wide range of expectations and beliefs (p.3). While 'new museology' calls for change in many aspects of museums – such as focusing more on the environment, community and ethnic minorities (Xi 2019) – this thesis focuses mainly on

the shift from being 'object-centred' to being 'visitor-centred', whilst acknowledging that other topics are also closely connected concerns.

As the term new museology is used widely in museum literature, it has been criticised for being too abstract: it does not offer either a 'blueprint for change', or 'a manual for survival' (Stam 1993, p.280). It is valuable that 'new museology' provided rough outlines for the future direction of museums by introducing 'a new philosophy' on the operation of museums. However, it left out the question of 'how to get there' for the museum field itself, as Stam (1993, p.281) notes.

The social role of museums has been frequently discussed within 'new museology' literature. Vergo realised that museums had been disconnected from society, and he tried to shift the priority of theoretical discussion about museums from 'how to exist' to 'exist for what'; this has had a profound impact on many scholars' works to this day (Yin 2018, p.55).

Prior to the 'new museology' movement, museums were institutions that were 'exclusive' and 'socially divisive' (Ross 2004, p.84). Gradually, as traditional museology was considered increasingly irrelevant, 'new museology' emerged out of political and economic pressure (Ross 2004, p.85), emphasising the social role of museums more than ever before (Desvallées and Mairesse 2010; Stam 1993). With more attention on the social role of museums, there was now more work to be done in looking at an essential part of the museum: the visitors. While 'new museology' raised concerns about practice across museums, visitors and their experience were not a significant part of the discussion.

As museums were urged to transform into 'more socially responsive cultural institutions(s) in service to the public' (Anderson 2004, p.1), the core of the museum had to change: from what Vergo calls 'living fossils' – collection-based, object-centred institutions – to visitor-centred ones. The next section will specifically discuss this paradigm shift.

2.3 The Paradigm Shift: From 'Object-centred' to 'Visitor-centred'

In 1999, less than three decades after the rise of the 'new museology', US museologist Stephen Weil (Weil 2002) noted the shift that museums have been undergoing from 'being *about* something' to 'being *for* someone' (p.28). More specifically, he described it as a transformation from 'an establishment-like institution focused primarily inward on growth, care, and study of its collections' to an institution looking 'outward to concentrate on providing primarily education services to the public' (p.28). This paradigm shift can be described as evolving from object-centred institutions to visitor-centred institutions (Weil 2002; Ross 2004; Black 2005; Ballantyne and Uzzell 2011; Ballantyne and Uzzell 2011; Samis and Michaelson 2017). This shift has been considered an essential philosophy of the new museology (Zhen 2001) and in practice, many museums started to change their focuses in response (Hein 2000). This transformation seems pervasive, but it requires careful unpacking. There is a danger that it could be over-simplified to a divide between objects and visitors (Marroni 2017)

Marroni (2017) argues that both objects and visitors are 'indispensable elements' of the museum experience, and deeper and more complex discussions could be ignored by creating an 'artificial rift' (p.12). It is useful to examine both as the implications are more than merely shifting the priority from one thing to another.

The literal meaning of being 'object-centred' is that 'objects' are the priority of the museum, and their efforts and activities serve that agenda. An 'object-centred' museum is defined by its relationship to 'objects': curators are 'keepers' and their greatest assets are their collections (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, p.138). The problem of the object-centred museum, as Hudson (2014) recognises, is that these museums '[feel] under no obligation to change to serve the public' (p.136). In his article The Museum Refuses to Stand Still Hudson (2014) depicts what a museum that prioritised collections looked like:

It existed, it had a building, it had collections and a staff to look after them, it was reasonably adequately financed, and its visitors, usually not numerous, came to look, to wonder and to admire what was set before them. They were in no sense partners in the enterprise. The museum's prime responsibility was to its collections, not to its visitors (p.136).

Consequently, these museums have a disengaging and passive environment that cares about collection more than visitors' needs. Thus, in a 'media-saturated, hyperconsumer society' the shift from 'being about something' to 'being for someone' does prompt the question: do museums still need objects? (Conn 2010). Conn (2010) noticed that for many museums nowadays, the role of objects is 'clearly a reduced one' and in some other cases, objects were replaced by, for example, audio-visual devices (p.20).

While museums are shifting away from being object-centred, it is necessary to recognise the changing role of objects and examine how visitors perceive their experiences of the objects. Depending on the nature of the museum, the role of the objects in the function of museums varies (Conn 2010):

> In some cases, objects continue to play a central role in the function of the museum; in others, their role is clearly a reduced one; in still others, objects have virtually disappeared from galleries, replaced by other didactic devices—audio-visual, interactive technologies, and so on. (p.20)

Although the definition of a museum 'has grown elastic' (Conn 2010, p.20), objects still remain a basic component. This is one commonality across multiple museum organisations, including ICOM, the Code of Ethics for Museums from the American Association of Museums (American Alliance of Museums 2000), the definition from the UK's Museums Association (The Museums Association 1998) and The Chinese Museum Regulations (The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2015).

Conn (2010) reminds us in his book *Do Museums Still Need Objects* that 'objects endure':

> Whatever else can be said of them, objects endure. And in that endurance they offer people the simple pleasure of looking at and the thrill of being in the presence of real

things, made by human hands through time and across space or fashioned by nature in all its astonishing variety. Museums filled with objects may provide an education or lessons in moral uplift, but perhaps more than anything they offer the opportunity to see things in three dimensions—things that are beautiful or odd or horrifying or consoling. Museums—some of them anyway—may not need objects anymore, but without objects we all may miss the delights and surprises that come with looking. (p.57)

Marroni (2017) also argues that museums which feature objects should not simply be considered 'traditional' or 'uninterested[ing]' (p.12). This thesis will contribute to this discussion with empirical evidence through examining the role of objects and visitors' experience of objects in the case study of Design Society.

Meanwhile, it is also essential to unpack the meaning and implications of the visitor-centred museum as it will contribute to the interpretation and understanding of the case study of Design Society. There are many ways museum professionals and scholars interpret 'visitor-centred' museums. Black (2005) describes 'visitor-centred' as the 'taking into account of the personal' (p.3). Ballantyne and Uzzell (2011) identify 'visitor-centred' museums as institutions that 'spend much of their time and money exploring visitor motivations, needs, and satisfaction in order to attract them onsite through the marketing and delivery of satisfying experiences'.

To understand 'visitor-centred' museums, it is useful to seek insights in business concepts and viewpoints, as some museum scholars have already performed effective exploration. For example, Dewdney et al. (2013) use terms such as 'consumption', 'commodities' and 'consumers' in discussing museum shops, museum collections and visitors:

The museum visitor is assigned a place in the system through patterns of consumption within the museum. The visitor as consumer appears in various guises: as collector, as shopper, as café visitor and as online viewer looking at museum websites that display the highly-prized commodities that museums have managed to acquire'. (p.286)

Furthermore, Dewdney et al. (2013) continue to point out that staging visitors as 'members of the public' could be problematic:

> When museum visitors are staged as 'members of the public', a politics of remoteness displaces visitors' role as consumers, placing them instead at the centre of a 'resolved image of the public'. Museum authorities, cultural policy-makers or others claiming authoritative roles, as 'spokespersons' or 'community leaders', can thereby state what should or should not be 'in the interests of the public'. Set against this is a politics of the proximate where different people articulate their own interests and needs'. (p.286)

Therefore, Dewdney et al. argue that 'it is only in the role of individuated *consumer* that museum visitors come close to articulating their heterogenous demands' (p.286, my italics). Similarly, Simon (2016) also uses the term 'customer' in examining the 'visitor-centred' museum (para.2). Her insights are that there are two different versions of the 'visitor-centred' museum: the 'customer-centred' museum and 'user-centred' museum. She lists a few characteristics that a 'customer-centred' museum would have: engage curiosity, cater to different visitors, offer immersive powerful environments, offer genuinely interesting learning experiences, and acknowledge visitors' desire for comfort and variation (para.5). From these characteristics, traces can be seen which resonate with the 'new museology' and the shift to 'being for someone'. This is a museum model that is in immense contrast with the old-fashioned disengaging museum that Hudson (2014) described. However, interestingly, Simon (2016) also expressed how 'customer-centred' museums could go wrong in some cases: 'instead of human-centered, they become commerce-centered institutions, overly focused on the shop, the restaurant, the spectacle, and the highest ticket price the market can bear' (para.4). This reflection provides a helpful perspective when examining the case study of Design Society. This will be reflected upon further in Chapter 5.

The discussion above on 'visitor-centred' museums provokes further questions. For example, should museums be providing entertainment if that is what makes them popular? If so, what role should education have? What, then, is the unique selling point of museums compared to other leisure sites such as theme parks? These questions will be discussed in the next chapter

when the theory of 'experience economy' is presented, and they will also be considered in the findings chapters and further reflected upon in the concluding chapter.

As noted above, when museum visitors are considered and discussed as 'consumers', 'customers' or 'members of the public', the meaning and implications vary. These terms are not neutral but loaded terms. Therefore, before beginning the section on emerging cultural hubs, it is necessary to state and clarity on the lexical choices this study has made. On the majority of occasions, this study commits to the term 'visitor' rather than 'audience', 'user', 'participant', 'member of the public', 'consumer' or 'customer'. There are several considerations informing this choice.

First of all, as mentioned above, this study is primarily a museum studies thesis. Terms such as 'consumer' or 'customer' would be more appropriate if this were a thesis rooted in marketing, tourism and hospitality. However, whenever it is helpful and insightful, theories from these fields will be referred to and applied, as they are closely related to the approach and the case study of this research.

Although 'visitors' and 'audience' are usually used interchangeably, to me personally, it indicates the reception of media content, as audience studies in disciplinary context for the study (a School of Journalism, Media and Culture) refers mainly to studies of media audiences. Also, the word 'audience' itself is already a collective noun – 'the assembled spectators or listeners at an event' (Oxford University Press 2008). Walhimer (2018) defines museum audience research as 'understanding the entire visitorship of a museum as a group' and museum visitor research as 'understanding the individuals that visit a museum' (para.4) which allows the exploration for the heterogeneity of the individuals. Just as Marstine (2006) notes that 'museums are about individuals making subjective choices' (p.2), and Morris (2014) agrees, stating 'no two visitors ever go into the same museum', this research tries to study visitors as individuals.

The term 'visitor', defined as 'a person visiting a person or place' (Oxford University Press 2008, p.1616), emphasises the physicality of the in-person experience. In comparison, 'audience' could indicate either physical museum visitors, or people who browse the online

content of a museum before actually visiting (Ham 2016), or those who never even intend to visit physically. The visitor study section in this research is not a longitudinal one exploring the long-term impact of museum visits. Rather, the focus is to explore visitors' immediate reflection on their experiences while still in the museum, which is why 'visitor' as a term is more accurate and appropriate in this research as it captures the temporariness of the visit: 'the signification of 'visitor' is that he [sic.] *has* a place to return to' (Malkki 1995, p.206). Visitors are only in the museum temporarily and they will return to their home and life outside of the museum afterwards.

The other term, 'user', has becoming increasingly popular when talking about participation in museums, and sometimes it is used interchangeably with 'audience' and 'visitor' (see Simon 2010). It is especially preferred when discussing engagement that is enabled by digital technologies (Kidd 2014), signifying 'a philosophical shift' from 'audiences' and 'visitors' to the 'self-ness' that is being recognised as the centre of the engagement (p.57). According to Simon (2016), 'user-centred' museums are those where 'visitors are active participants, invited to contribute to and co-create the experience' (para.2). 'User-centred' museums are what Simon's book *The Participatory Museum* (2010) are all about – 'a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content' (p.i). Although such engagement is featured in the case study of Design Society, this research did not set out to only investigate such engagement. Overall, as the nature of the study is exploratory, I do not want to assume visitors at Design Society are 'audience' or 'user'.

In summary, this section has outlined the paradigm shift of museums from being object-centred to visitor-centred institutions and has discussed what it means to be a visitor-centred museum. The next section will focus on the emergence of the concept of the 'cultural hub' through a brief content analysis of mass media materials.

2.4   The Changing Landscape

The previous section discussed one aspect of transformation, both in theory and in practice, in the museum field since the 20th century. This section continues the discussion of museum

transformation into the 21st century, with a specific objective of exploring concepts and terms related to cultural hubs.

2.4.1 Challenges Museums Confront

Compared to the changes and transformations museums went through in the 20th century, the need for museums to change at the beginning of the 21st century seems more urgent. Museums are found 're-orientating themselves through imagining afresh what they can become; familiar practices are being reassessed and tired philosophies are being overturned' (Hooper-Greenhill 2007, p.1). Fleming (2009, cited in Black 2012) describes this requirement of change as 'to change or die':

> We are witnessing a complete renovation of our cultural infrastructure. Those 'bricks and mortar' culture houses, citadels of experience, towers of inspiration, that for so long have stood steadfast as symbols of cultural continuity and comfort, while the streets around them have whizzed and clattered to multiple disruptive transformations, are being turned inside out . . . this wholesale renovation is born out of an urgent requirement to change or die, and it is just beginning. (p.1)

Black (2012, p.1) identifies that the challenges museums confront in the 21st century come from two interrelated trajectories: challenges due to general societal changes and challenges that directly question the traditional roles of museums. Societal changes, according to Black (2012), include the impact of new technology and demographic and generational change (pp.1-3). These factors themselves are interrelated; for example, the generation of young people born into the digital age could be understood as 'digital natives', while 'digital immigrants' from an older generation could have a hard time navigating the digital world (Wang et al. 2013, p.409). Although the reality is often far more complex, these could be challenges that many types of organizations face, and museums are no exception. However, they are critical challenges that museums must seriously consider and actively respond to, in order to maintain their relevancy.

There are also a few specific challenges in the museum context pointed out by Black (2012, pp.3-7): 'financial uncertainty', 'loss of certainty about what museums are for', 'a decline in attendance by traditional audiences and continuing failure to engage new audiences', 'the challenge of the World Wide Web', and 'inertia'. These direct challenges will be discussed further as part of the development of the context for this study and returned to repeatedly in the following sections in both this and later chapters.

Financial uncertainty has been an enduring issue for museums in many Western countries in the past ten years, and economic crises have affected museums' financial situations to various degrees (Lindqvist 2012, p.1; Black 2012, p.4). In his book *Art and The Global Economy*, John Zarobell (2017) discusses financial issues in two models of art museums: state-run museums which are the European model, or non-profit art museums, the American model (Zarobell 2017, pp.29–30).

For state-run art museums, governments set up funding based on the thinking that 'these institutions preserve the glory of human creation, while acknowledging the magnificence of the state that has assembled such treasures and taken on the responsibility of preserving them' (Zarobell 2017, p.29). Before presenting the issue of public funding cuts, it is necessary to acknowledge that museums, particularly those in this model, could be considered deeply problematic in the sense that they, like prisons and schools, are 'instances of state power as it is embodied in the built environment' (Lord 2006, p.2). Such critiques unquestionably have their place but will not be discussed here as they are beyond the scope of this thesis. The focus of this section is on the challenges museums confront, and it is essential to discuss state-run museums among the context of financial challenges, as many museums across all continents belong to this model to some degree, if not fully. Furthermore, this model of state-run museums is also relevant for the discussion of the context of the case study of Design Society, which will be interrogated further in Chapter 5.

Public funding, upon which state-run museums rely, is rife with uncertainty (see Skinner et al. 2009; Geraldine 2018; Kalia 2019). Moreover, for museums in indebted Western nations, public funding is estimated by some to decline continually (Black 2012, p.4). In 2018, ICOM issued a statement on the necessity for adequate public funding and warned that public

funding cuts could threaten 'the very existence of museums in many parts of the world' (ICOM 2018, para.1). In recent research conducted by the UK's Museum Association, it is reported that local authority investment, traditionally one of the key sources of financial support for museums in the UK, declined 27% in the 2010s (Museum Association 2021, p.5).

State-run museums are not the only ones that struggle financially. Non-profit art museums, known as the American model, also confront financial uncertainty. They operate via collective public support including membership fees and access to endowments meant to bring long-term financial stability (Zarobell 2017, p.30). However, the funding sources for this type of museum are not as secure as state-run institutions, and they also struggle with other challenges such as 'the rising costs of collecting, storing, and maintaining art' (Zarobell 2017, p.30). Therefore, much of the energy of non-profit art museums is dedicated to fundraising activities.

In 2022, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic makes the discussion around funding challenges more relevant than ever. ICOM's third Covid-related survey in 2021 showed that the economic impact on museums was 'substantial' (ICOM 2021, p.9) and the long-term impact 'remains constant' (ICOM 2021, p.13). The fundamentals of museums' financing issues are not only a flawed business model (Antrobus 2010, cited in Black 2012, p.4), but also directly links to the very definition of museums, which is 'in flux' Zarobell (2017, p.30). This naturally leads to the second direct challenge for museums: 'loss of certainty about what museums are' (Black 2012, p.4). This state of being 'in flux' has seemed to define the development of museums in the 21st century so far, as the very definition of what constitutes a museum has been challenged. To illustrate his point, Black (2012, p.5) lists current functions of a range of museums:

- A cultural treasure house
- A leisure and tourism attraction
- A source of local pride
- A resource for informal and structured learning
- An income generator

- An agent for physical, economic, cultural and social regeneration
- A memory store for all in the local community, relevant to and representative of the whole of society
- Accessible to all – intellectually, physically, socially, culturally, economically
- A celebrant of cultural diversity and promoter of social inclusion, with a core purpose of improving people's lives
- A place of dialogue and toleration, and a community meeting place, committed to promoting civil engagement
- Proactive in developing, working with and managing pan-agency projects
- An exemplar of quality service provision and value for money
- All of the above?

Other than a list of current functions represented by different museums, this is more of a list of expectations from different positions from which one could view museums. It could be from the position of central or local government, certain ministries within government, local communities or certain groups of people with different backgrounds, individual visitors, and so on. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) also made a similar list discussing the question of 'what is today's museum' and argued that complaints against museums moving away from being traditional object-centred institutions signal 'a crisis in museum identity' (p.138). These lists clearly demonstrate how museums in the 21st century are expected to be institutions of many things, if not all things.

In fact, the uncertainty and ambiguity in defining the 'museum' has become an issue in the global museum community, reflected through the controversy over ICOM's redrafted definition of the museum during its General Conference in Kyoto. The last official definition was adopted by ICOM in 2007, and over time the ICOM executive board felt that the current definition 'fails to reflect and address the profoundly dissimilar conditions under which museums work across the world, as part of diverse societies marked by conflicts and by continuous and rapid change' (Sandahl 2019, p.i).

The revised definition, which was subject to vote by its members during the 2019 ICOM General Conference, reads as follows:

> Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.
>
> Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing (ICOM 2019, para.3-4).

This proposed definition, which emphasises 'social justice, environmental awareness and political advocacy', was 'dramatically rejected by its own membership' during the Kyoto conference (Robinson 2021, p.1163). Members were deeply concerned with several aspects of this definition, including its stress on the political role of museums and its prescriptive description of the museum (Fraser 2019; Robinson 2021). Robinson (2021) argues that the debates around this definition 'signal a deep divide at the heart of the museum community worldwide' (p.1164). Although the museum definition, as Sandahl (2019, p.i) puts it, is 'the backbone of museums', there seem to be increasing difficulties in constructing an encompassing definition that museums from all parts of the world can relate to and with which they can agree. This issue around the distinguishing features and the ambiguous definition of museums will be explored further when analysing Design Society as an institution and visitors' experience with the objects.

The third and fourth challenges Black (2012, p.5–6) presents are 'a decline in attendance by traditional audiences and continuing failure to engage new audiences' and 'the challenge of the World Wide Web'. These two challenges in fact interrelate in many ways, especially in terms of the challenge of engaging young people, who have ever-increasing options in how their time can be spent, many of which are enabled by the internet. With the challenge that the digital world brings, the 'repositories of material culture' will confront questions such as

these: 'why do you need a museum when you can have virtual access to millions of cultural artefacts online?'; 'why visit a museum at all when there is so much competition in the marketplace for leisure and cultural activities?' (Black 2012, p.5). Or, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) states, it worries museums that they 'will be bypassed as boring, dusty places, as spaces of death – dead animals, dead plants, defunct things' (p.139). These tensions and concerns will be investigated in the case study of Design Society in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

The last challenge, more a conclusion than a separate challenge, is 'inertia' (Black 2012, p.7). Black continues to argue that the 'transformational shift in public attitudes, expectations and behaviour' requires museums to take action, to grasp opportunities and to respond flexibly and rapidly (p.7).

There are obviously many other challenges different museums confront that are not covered by Black (2012). For example, for object-based museums, Hein (2000, p.9–12) recognises that one issue is space limitation. This problem of space is partly due to the nature of many museums having been created to collect physical objects. Again, like the financial challenges discussed above, one could determine that the root of this problem is beyond the limited space itself. Just as Stephen (2003) argues 'space is not simply a layout problem' but 'a complex cultural phenomenon' (p.317). The financial questions museums confront, amidst the challenges and changes discussed in this section, essentially relate to how museums are changing towards more visitor-centred institutions: 'So the question of financing is finally a question of audience. Who values what your museum does? Who is able to enjoy the benefits of it? Whose interest is served by the museum's activities (both collecting and exhibiting)?' (Zarobell 2017, p.35).

Both the societal challenges and the direct challenges presented above apply to different degrees in different cultural contexts. For example, most state-owned Chinese museums do not experience financial challenges nearly as sharply as museums in the UK. However, even with the unique cultural context, there are similarities with the rest of the world emerging in China.

The concept of the museum is never static and is constantly being 'transformed and re-imaged' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p.1). Amidst the challenges mentioned above and in

following sections, the landscape of the museum has changed, with new approaches and new institutions emerging in response (Zarobell 2017, p.30). The uncertainties museums confront could lead to more than one possible future, and meanwhile new considerations continue to emerge. For example, through conducting an exploratory Delphi study[1], Pauget et al. (2021) proposed three possible scenarios on the future of French museums in 2030: 'deepening of the educational and social mission; a managerial and development perspective to address severe budgetary constraints; and a reinvention of the museum around the emergence of hybrid equipment and a participatory approach involving new governance characteristics' (Ibid, p.7–9). The third scenario suggested in Pauget et al. (2021)'s study is the closest to the one this thesis set out to explore and examine. The next section will narrow the discussion down to a particular concept, the 'cultural hub', as a potential 'reinvention' of the museum 'as a type of hybrid local institution' (Pauget et al. p.9).

2.4.2 The Emergence of Cultural Hubs

> As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, the very definition of what constitutes a museum is not only changing, but is being challenged by the creation of a range of new institutions calling themselves museums. (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.25)

Besides the challenges mentioned in the previous section, Falk and Dierking observe that the definition of museum has also been challenged by new institutions themselves. This section will focus on one of the emerging concepts of museum development: the 'cultural hub'. In this research, the 'cultural hub' as an increasingly popular concept in the cultural sector is explored and examined as a potential landmark indicating a possible wave of change over the next few decades.

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[1] As a research method, Delphi 'aims to collect and organize expert judgments through iterative processes based on successive questionnaires' (Pauget et al. 2021, p.1). In the case of Pauget et al. (2021)'s research, this involved 99 experts including people who work in the museum, government, academia, tourism, and media industries.

The term 'cultural hub' was the chosen theme of both ICOM's International Museum Day 2019 and ICOM's Kyoto 2019 General Conference. It was considered a significant trend in that museums were 'increasingly grow[ing] into their roles as cultural hubs' (ICOM 2019a, para.2). This transformation involves museums becoming platforms that are 'more interactive, audience focused, community oriented, flexible, adaptable and mobile', where 'visitors can co-create, share and interact', as articulated by ICOM (2019a, para.1). ICOM (2019a) also argues that this transformation 'will have a profound impact on museum theory and practice' (para.2). The impact of the 'new museology' and the paradigm shift from being 'object-centred' to 'visitor-centred' can be easily seen in these statements. However, besides these factors, the concept of a 'cultural hub' remains unclear.

For both museum professionals and cultural consumers, the concept of the 'cultural hub' is relatively new (Art Fund 2018, p.17). There is no common definition of a 'cultural hub', and it has been loosely used to refer to many different things. This makes it difficult for the sector to take the concept from theory to implementation. The large number of ways in which the term has been used is also a barrier to sharing knowledge, particularly between academia and industry. Differences between the way that this term is used can lead to misinterpretations and thus confusion as to how to implement the concept in the museum sector. This also prevents institutions, public and private sector bodies and policymakers from forming a clear picture of a 'cultural hub' which is needed to implement associated practices. A brief historical background of the emergence of the concept of the 'cultural hub' will be presented in this section.

As a growing topic, the concept and the practices of cultural hubs are rarely explored in the academic field. There is an urgent need to examine both what the term has referred to and the context of its usage. This background information contributes to locating this study in a wider context.

The goal of this section is to provide a brief analysis of the ways in which the term 'cultural hub' has been used in order to set the scene for the case study of Design Society. News media was chosen as a source for gathering information as scholarly work on the term 'cultural hub'

is extremely limited[2]. This analysis provides useful information on the emergence of the concept of 'cultural hubs'. Notably, further research could be done on this topic, such as a full and detailed content analysis, but that is not the essential goal of this research and will not be addressed in this study.

Firstly, the term 'cultural hub' has become increasingly favoured since the 1970s, as demonstrated in Figure 2.1[3]. A steep rise started to appear around the beginning of the 21st century.

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[2] Instead of using academic databases such as Google Scholar or Scopus, the Nexis (www.nexis.com) database was chosen because, as mentioned in the main text, dedicated research on the concept is extremely limited. The news articles, however, provide useful information that aids understanding of the emergence of the concept of the 'cultural hub'. The Nexis database includes a collection of various global sources including newspapers, newswires, press releases, magazines, and journals. I understand that content from news media is a different type of source and there are limitations in using them here. The results are limited to the way that the database works, and the content from news media provides limited depth in underpinning the emergence of cultural hubs. What I wanted to achieve here is to examine the change in popularity of the concept of the 'cultural hub' and to investigate the context in which it has been used. These findings will aid understanding of the case study. The figures generated from the content analysis of these news articles demonstrates the above points clearly.

[3] Within the Nexis database, a search was carried out on term 'cultural hub' with the search words "cultural hub" and "culture hub," and the search type 'term and connectors.' Duplicate articles were filtered out by grouping articles by 'moderate similarity.' Also, 'cultural hub' was searched as a complete term rather than two separate words. 'Culture hub' was searched as an alternative term, as these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. The result of this, as seen in Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2, is that this search retrieved a large collection of more than 25,000 news articles.
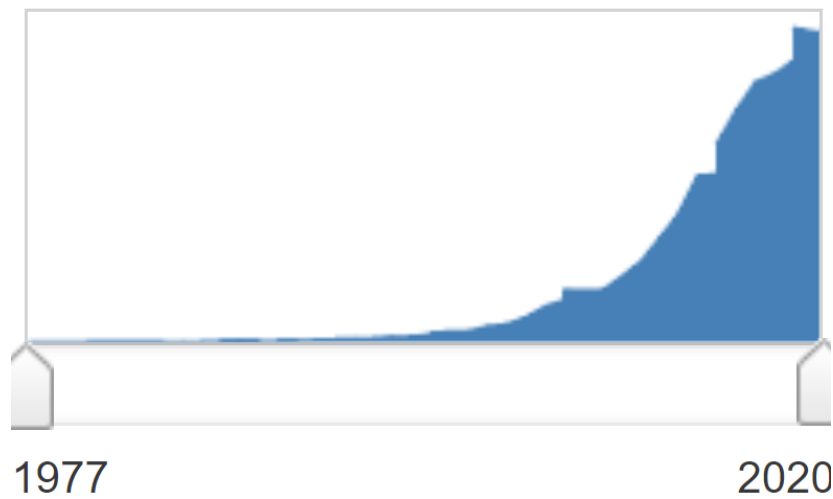
Figure 2.1: Screenshot from search of 'cultural hub' in the publication of newspapers globally on Nexis database. (Scale: 0-10,000)

Furthermore, it is a term that is widely used across all the continents, as Figure 2.2 shows. This figure, however, can only be treated as illustrative rather than representative, since Nexis is a US-based commercial service, so does not have the complete archive of all newspapers across the world. This search was also limited to only English-language publications.
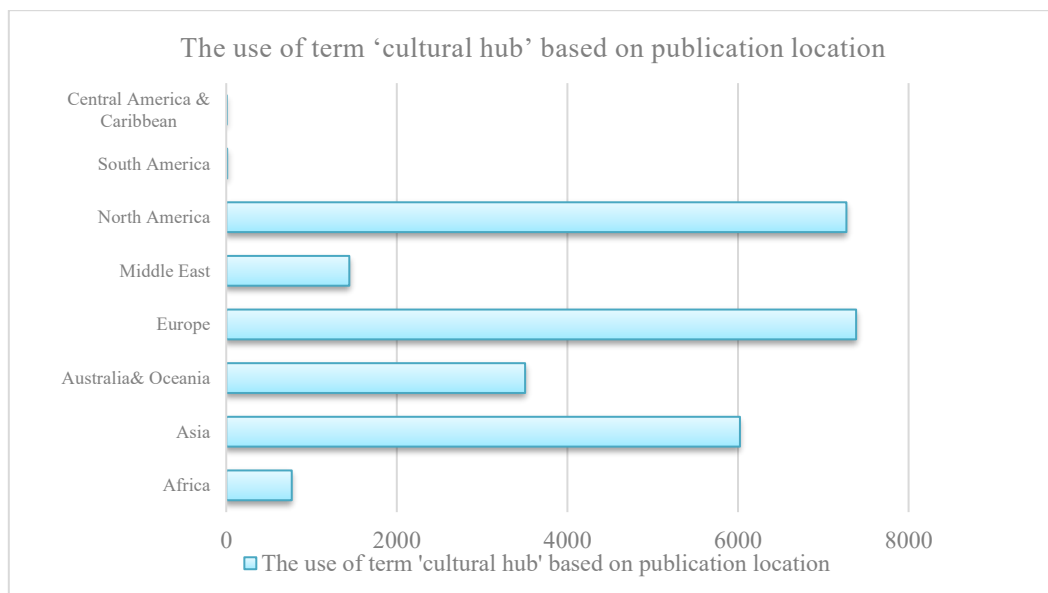
Figure 2.2: The wide usage of the term 'cultural hub' from an analysis of news articles from Nexis archive

The third noteworthy point is the 'looseness' with which the term 'cultural hub' has been used in news articles. As Figure 2.3 shows, even among a small sample of 163 news articles

there were more than 20 different items that the term was used to refer to, ranging from a café to a country and from an individual institution to a complex that houses various institutions[4].

In terms of function, a 'cultural hub' has or is expected to provide cultural programmes such as exhibitions, music performances and films. Educational facilities and events/spaces for socialising also feature in the list, while catering services and retail/shops are also included in many cases reported in the news articles. Cultural or museum programmes, however, still seem to be the core focus; it tended to appear most frequently among the reported 'cultural hubs'. This will be examined in the case study in Chapter 5 when the offerings of Design Society are discussed and analysed.

Another interesting point is that the majority of these articles reporting on 'cultural hubs' have the overall theme of reporting regeneration programmes or future developments of a particular administrative area. It appears that the term 'cultural hub' has become a buzzword in the cultural sector and urban planning, which relates to the desires and expectations people have for an area or an institution. As mentioned above, the amount of academic research dedicated to the concept of 'cultural hubs' is relatively limited. Research both on the exact term 'cultural hub' and on similar areas with similar focus will be presented below.

One of the few pieces of research was commissioned in 2015 by Art Fund, a British national charity for art, which defined a cultural hub as follows:

> A clustering of cultural venues such as museums, galleries, and performance spaces with secondary attractions including food and retail (Art Fund 2018, p.2).

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[4] It is not feasible to examine the large-scale archive in its entirety. For this reason, several sampling strategies were employed. To achieve a manageable sample, the publication language was narrowed to English-only, publication type was limited to 'Newspaper', 'Newswires & Press Releases,' 'Web-based Publications' or 'Magazines & Journals'. As shown in Figure 2.1, the curve starts to increase dramatically from the beginning of the 21st century, therefore a few discrete time periods were used in sampling: from 1977–2000, and then blocks of five years until 2020. For each block, the top 50 results sorted by 'relevance' were downloaded and read. This means a total of 250 articles were reviewed, and among this collection 163 eligible articles were selected for analysis.
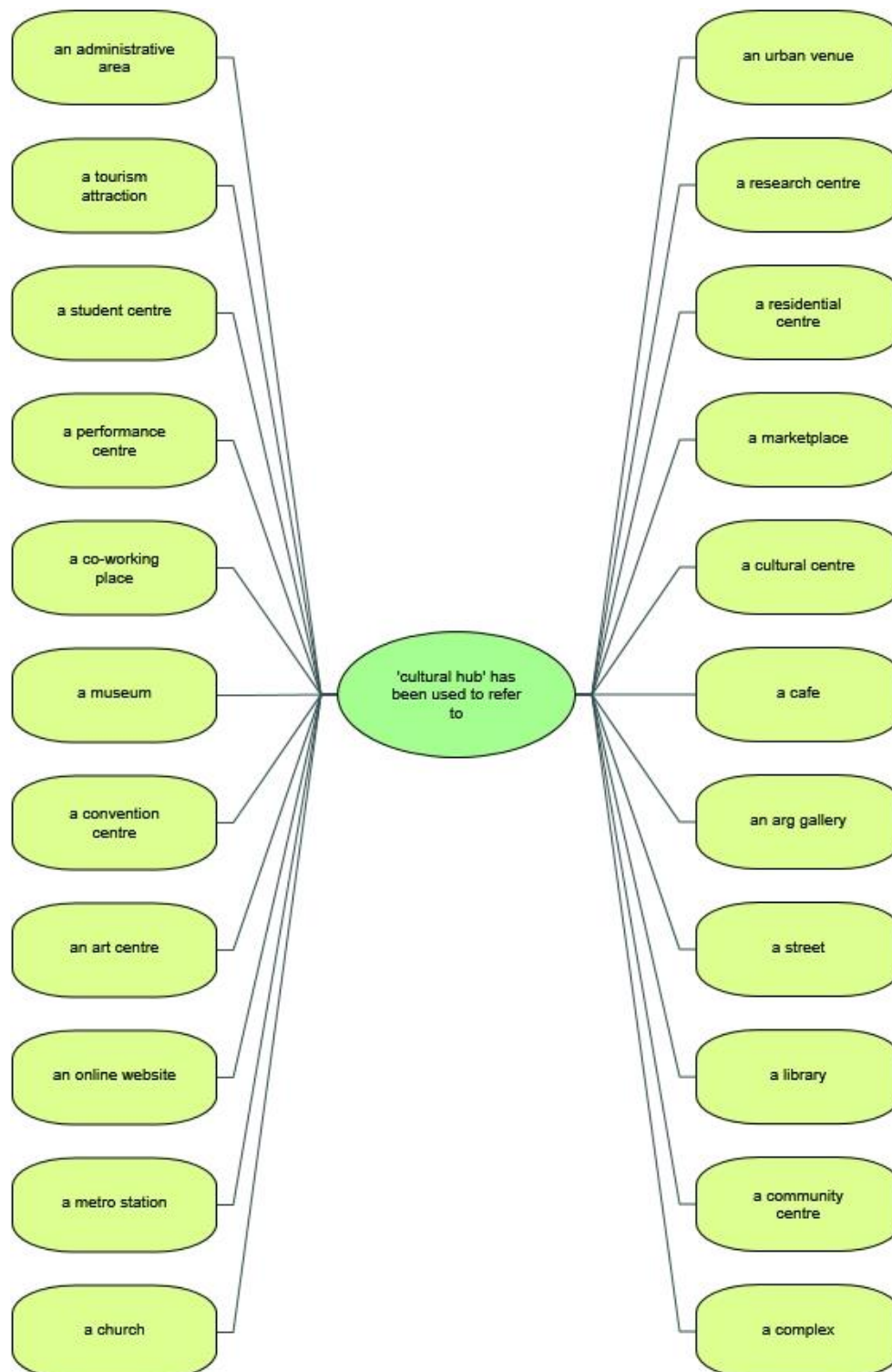
Figure 2.3 Items that the term 'cultural hub' refers to among the selected sample of news articles from Nexis.

Compared to ICOM's relatively general and abstract description of a cultural hub, this definition by Art Fund is more pragmatic and industry-facing. It emphasises one of the

characteristics of cultural hubs – the fact that they are multidimensional. It understands a cultural hub to be a dynamic combination of different venues. The primary aim of Art Fund's research is to provide 'actionable insights' to help institutions increase their number of visitors and transform 'from [a] venue to [a] multidimensional experience' (Art Fund 2018, p.5).

The background of that research is the rise of cultural hubs across the UK, including Cornwall Museums Partnership, Bath Museums Partnership, Coastal Culture Trail, Museum Mile London, Yorkshire Sculpture Triangle and Art in Yorkshire (Art Fund 2018). Although recent years have seen a number of these cultural hubs being launched in the UK, the research demonstrates that only around a third of the people working in the marketing departments of museums or galleries were aware of the term. Black (2012) proposes a similar understanding of such cultural complex which he identifies as 'social hubs' (p.39). The examples Black gives are Tate Modern, Nottingham Contemporary, the Turner Contemporary in Margate and the Hepworth Wakefield. The approach of combing galleries, shops, restaurants, performance and screening spaces and other activities and transformed them into 'a focus for evening activity' is evidence of what cultural institutions propose in responding to the changing demands of visitors in the 21st century (Black 2012, p.39).

The above two studies contribute empirical evidence for the development of the concept of 'cultural hubs'. However, both only examine cultural hubs in the UK. More research needs to be done to look at examples of cultural hubs in other countries in order to contribute to a bigger picture, as this research does in exploring a case study of a cultural hub in China.

On a global level and with a similar focus on the arts, Zarobell (2017) also notices the development of a hybrid model that is in many ways similar to what Art Fund defined as 'culture hubs':

> …the new hybrids emerging today trace an epoch of dynamism within the museum field whose effects have only began to emerge. The growth of countless institutions worldwide that do not fit into this model challenge not only its centrality but is coherence in the contemporary world. (p.31)

Such institutions are defined by Zarobell (2017) as those that are 'not collecting museums but exist in order to present artistic events for a temporary run to attract tourist and engage new approaches to the presentation of works of art' (p.15). A few examples Zarobell (2017) gives are as follows:

> …the Louvre opening branches at Lens in the Pas-de-Calais department in northern France and in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates; privately funded museums opening in capital cities like Beijing, Mexico City, and New Delhi, where they compete with state-supported institutions; and New York's non-profit Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum expanding into a global brand. (p.30)

Adding to this list of examples, one of the most recent cases was in November 2019, when France's Centre Pompidou unveiled its expansion into China with a large waterfront museum in Shanghai (Holland 2019). The ultimate example of such global trend, according to Zarobell (2017), is the West Kowloon Cultural District in Hong Kong:

> Though the city and the national government are supporting the creation of the cultural complex including a public museum (M+), the idea is for the entire complex to be self-funding with monies generated by the real estate and other commercial components of the cultural complex. Though most art museums engage in commercial ventures such as restaurants and museums stores, this is a new approach. Shops, restaurants, and condos in West Kowloon will pay for the museum. The tail wags the dog. (p.31)

As Zarobell (2017) observes, 'shared interest in the economic developments in the arts' is clearly detectable in the development of these institutions (p.9). It is fair to say that, as these institutions actively try to transcend boundaries and build something new, it is not only established challenges within the museum field but also economic interests that drive the transformation of museums.

Building on the hybrid, multidimensional nature of the cultural hub, more potential features of a cultural hub contained in ICOM's description are: 'flexible, adaptable and mobile' (ICOM 2019). As mentioned above, museums are making changes due to visitors' negative

perceptions of museums being 'frequently out of date' (Black 2012) and lacking in new content and activities, a cultural hub is expected to be the opposite of that. When searching for clues as to the future of museums in 21st-century France, Greffe et al. (2017) proposes looking to 'event-driven' strategies. This is one proposed solution, as French museums face challenges improving their image and making connections with their local community (Greffe et al. 2017). Simon (2012) also suggests that society is shifting towards being more 'event-driven' (p.47). Events attract both regular visitors and those who are not necessarily interested in the main theme of a certain museum. Events of different types, sizes and intensity levels could enrich the image of a museum and 'demonstrate that the museum is a dynamic, buzz-worthy place' (Simon 2011, para.9). By organising new events constantly for visitors, there is 'always something new' in the museum (Greffe et al. 2017).

For cultural hubs that adopt this strategy, events could become another core pillar of content alongside exhibitions. Consider Tate Modern, for example: 'Exhibition and Events' is one of three columns on the 'What's on at Tate' page of its website. The types of activities are diverse in form: performances, late-night activities, workshops, courses, film, food and drink pop ups, tours, talks and so on (Tate 2019). These events are mainly in a 'social setting', and often attract special visitors rather than casual attendance (Simon 2011, para.9). Events could be at varying scales, but the difference it makes is that it gives visitors a sense that 'something is happening' in a way that permanent exhibitions rarely can (Simon 2011, para.8). Therefore, besides the offerings from programmes such as exhibitions, activities and events will be one of the other main areas of visitor experience explored in this study. Visitors' experiences of activities and events at the cultural hub Design Society will be analysed in Chapter 7. Prior to that, in Chapter 5 of this thesis, the events and activities themselves will be presented and discussed in detail.

Besides the multidimensional, hybrid, and flexible features of cultural hubs, another important aspect is found in the word 'hub', emphasising collaboration and the social aspects of different entities. Compared to 'museum', the word 'hub' indicates more public involvement and participation. The definition of a similar term '*creative* hub' could also advance the understanding of cultural hubs. A 'creative hub' is defined by Nesta (2018), a

UK-based innovation foundation, as 'a physical or virtual place that brings enterprising people together who work in the creative and cultural industries' (para.2). According to the European Creative Hubs Network, a 'creative hub' works as a convenor, 'providing space and support for networking, business development and community engagement within the creative, cultural and tech sectors', and the potential of these hubs is to revive the economy or change society (Matheson and Easson 2015, p.4). The vital role of 'creative hubs' is to 'connect, communicate and collaborate' (Matheson and Easson 2015, p.4). A 'hub' is a term derived from a metaphor of 'wheel, spokes and hub', as Ridley-Duff and Bull (2019) explains: 'The hub exists to support and maintain relationships between different parts of a wheel for it to function to its full potential' (p.429). This explanation shows the function of a 'hub' in co-ordination and connectedness. This feature will also be explored during the case study of Design Society.

The Art Fund research also revealed that despite not being fully engaged with the term 'cultural hub', the concept had 'significant appeal' to 'cultural consumers' (Art Fund 2018, p.15). They could be drawn to a cultural hub for 'one main thing' but all the other elements play a role in the whole visiting experience (Art Fund 2018, p.28). As the idea of the cultural hub is emerging, the changes in the landscape of the museum could be seen as 'unprecedented, unexpected, and unacceptable', especially to those who felt they 'knew what museums were, how they should be, and what they should be doing' (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p.1). It is therefore necessary to investigate closely and to explore what changes have been happening in these institutions, both conceptually and empirically.

The next section will introduce the theoretical frameworks that guided the investigations and explorations in this study.

2.5   The Visitor Experience as a Theoretical Lens

As section 2.4 reviewed some of the challenges museums confront in the 21st century and identified the emergence of cultural hubs as a signal of change, a more focused approach is needed when examining a specific case study, which in this thesis, is Design Society. Before

introducing the chosen theoretical framework, it is important to present the wider context that led to the choice.

While museums are continuing in the paradigm shift towards being more visitor-centred institutions, an important notion is also increasingly occurring in the museum world. In 1998, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) noted that the term 'experience' 'has become ubiquitous in both tourism and museum marketing' (p.138). This is even more so the case in the 21st century – for example, the National Museum of Qatar's publicity materials describe it as 'a new immersive experience' and '1.5 kilometres of experiences' (Rea 2019, para.3). In fact, it seems to be one of the most popular words within the cultural sector in promoting museum practices: 'experience has become a buzzword in marketing—and now it's museums' favourite noun, too' (Rea 2019, para.1). In writing about future museums, Silvers (2018) argues in the #FutureMuseum project created by the international museum magazine Museum-iD:

> Museums that cling to traditional, authoritative models will lose audiences on a dramatic scale to new types of experience-driven, guest-centered, organizations that we can't even imagine today.

In Art Fund's research (2018), experience was also considered one of the core offerings of a cultural hub, and one aim of that research was to help museums and galleries transform 'from venue to multidimensional *experience*' (p.7, my italics).

These examples make a consideration of 'experience' necessary. In fact, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett considers that the 'self-conscious shift in orientation away from the museum's artifacts and towards its visitors is signaled by the term "experience"' (1998, p.138). Hein (2000) also points out in her book *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective* that museums are becoming 'experience-oriented'. Compared to object-centred museums, Hein (2000) observes that museums have been engaged 'in an entirely new enterprise aimed at eliciting experiences in people' (p.127). In fact, Hein (2000) concludes that museums, alongside the businesses that were the target audience of Pine and Gilmore (1998)'s concept of experience economy, have become manufacturers of experience as well. Similarly,

Walhimer (2015) maintains that 'museums are in the experience business' (p.14). Walhimer continues, 'the presumption in some quarters is that visitors are no longer interested in the quiet contemplation of objects'. Instead, they want to have an 'experience' (Walhimer 2015, p.14). To further understand what it means for museums to be in the 'experience business', it is helpful to review what the 'experience economy' is.

Marketing museums as 'experiences' is an example of what Pine and Gilmore (2013) call 'the experience economy', an economic mode in which 'goods and services are no longer enough to employ the masses' (p.32). In 1998, when Pine and Gilmore first published their famous article 'Welcome to the Experience Economy' in *Harvard Business Review* (1998), they indicated that we were entering an age of 'experience', when 'staging experience' was becoming the next competitive battleground for businesses and also the most relevant to the needs of customers (see Figure 2.4).

According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), 'experience' had become something that consumers 'unquestionably desire' (para.2). Pine and Gilmore described a typical 'experience' product, Build-A-Bear Workshop, where customers stuff, stich, fluff, name and dress their own bear and then get to take it home with them. The other example given by Pine and Gilmore (1999) is the experience Disney World offers: 'Most parents don't take their kids to Walt Disney World only for the venue itself but rather to make the shared experience part of everyday family conversations for months, or years, afterward' (p.13). As Pine and Gilmore (2013) conclude, although lacking tangibility, people greatly desire experiences due to the fact that 'the value of experiences lies within them' (p.26).

The Progression of Economic Value
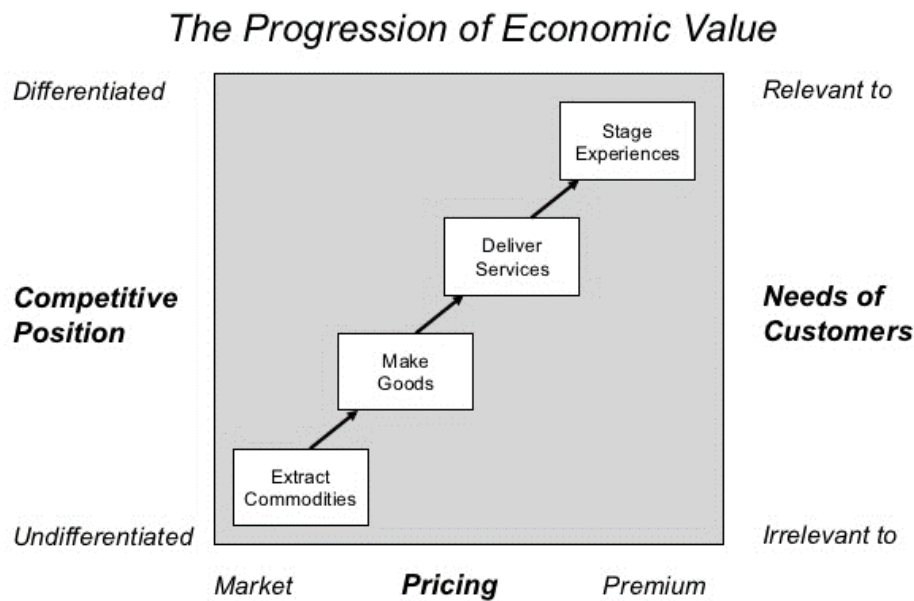
Figure 2.4: The Progression of Economic Value by Pine and Gilmore (1999, p.22)

In academic research, Pine and Gilmore's theory is widely recognised as relevant in tourism studies (Oh et al. 2007; Mehmetoglu and Engen 2011; Antón et al. 2018) and also in museums studies (Kidd 2018). Kidd (2018) contends that many museum and heritage institutions nowadays try to position themselves within a market where 'members of the public are seemingly, and increasingly, willing to pay for cultural encounters that are out of the ordinary' (para.3). However, all of the above still lead to the question of what kinds of experiences this 'experience' that museums offer to the visitors constitute (Kidd 2018). From where museum professionals can start thinking, planning and acting to transform their institution towards the desired future of experience-centred ones?

When applying Pine and Gilmore's theory of experience economy in the museum context, it is important to recognise the business context of the theory where 'the needs of customers' (see Figure 2.4) tend to drive the development of theories and models, and 'customer experience' is a central theme (see Reason 2016; Pennington 2016; Clatworthy 2019; Villani 2019). However, this is not the case with studies on museums. Although the studies on visitors are generally increasing (Kotler and Kotler 2000), taking visitors into consideration does not necessarily equate to taking their voices more seriously. For example, although

undoubtedly crucial, visitors' perspectives were almost neglected in the ICOM committee's proposed definition of museums at the ICOM Kyoto Conference in 2019 (see section 2.4.1). Rao (2019) is concerned with whether the committee is 'well-verse[d] in practice' or 'in what visitor thinks' and wonders how much the definition is 'grounded in visitors or practice' (para.3-5). It is simply not enough to only discuss the 'experience' from an institutional perspective and assume that what researchers think is significant is also significant for visitors. While museums confront challenges and uncertainties, it is more important than ever to meet visitors where they are and explore their experiences (Kelly 2004).

As remaining relevant to 21st-century visitors is the key for museums to 'survive', visitors' experiences provide rigorous and immensely useful evidence for museums in understanding their current practices and improving their future programming (Black 2012; Simon 2016). Our understanding of developing new museum spaces, exhibitions and programmes, diversifying and increasing visitors, and ultimately why people visit museums and the impact of their visits, can be enhanced through studying visitors (Jones 2015, p.539). It has been argued that to understand what visitors are doing in the museum is an 'urgent and primary task' when considering the future of museums (Dewdney et al. 2013 p.205), as it could potentially change how institutions make assumptions about visitors when designing their programmes (Volo 2009). Falk and Dierking (2016, p.106) also argue that the work of researching visitor experience 'illuminates the challenges of trying to control the visitor experience' for many museum professionals.

Although the subject of visitor studies has been expanding in general, Kirchberg and Tröndle (2012) notice that empirical studies on the visitor experience are rare among the body of academic work in museum studies, regardless of the fact that 'audience visitation is one of the core purposes' (p.435):

> We may conclude that the bulk of museum studies literature concerns cultural, historical, or critical analyses of the museum as an institution: its societal role, its politics and management issues, its function as a place for learning, leisure, and self-actualization and its curatorial and collecting issues. Rarely are the experiences of museum visitors a focus of interest (p.436).

There are others, for example Francis (2015, p.121), who considers that there is 'an abundance of publications' on the visitor experience in museums, although no further example or statistics are given to demonstrate this point. There have been increasing numbers of visitor studies in recent years, but still there is 'a lack of knowledge about the visitor experience,' as both 'theoretical and empirical museum studies have not reached their potential in impacting exhibition design' (Roppola 2012, p.9). According to Mccarthy and Ciolfi (2008, p.248), museum studies have been conducted within 'underdeveloped or under-articulated conceptualisations of [the] visitor experience'. In their study, Kirchberg and Tröndle (2012) give an extensive list of examples of the lack of visitor studies in the UK and the US, with several examples of important collections on museum studies in both countries and few studies on visitor experience. Ironically, as Kirchberg and Tröndle (2012) noticed, in Anderson (2004)'s book *Reinventing the Museum*, the author John Cotton Dana 'laments the absence of visitors in museum thinking', yet there are only six out of 34 articles in this volume that consider 'the public and their needs as museum visitors' and two out of the six focus on visitor experience (Kirchberg and Tröndle 2012, p.436). This lack of studies on the visitor experience in academic collections is one of the important drivers behind my decision to approach the case study through exploring visitor experiences.

Potential reasons for the lack of such studies are thought-provoking. Kirchberg and Tröndle (2012) synthesised potential reasons for the absence of visitor experience from several previous studies and concluded that one of the reasons is museums' sceptical attitude towards visitor studies. Although Francis (2015) claims that it is common nowadays for museums to have at least one staff member who works on representing visitors' views, Reussner (2010, in Kirchberg and Tröndle 2012, p.436)'s research shows that few museums are concerned with visitor studies. Museums fear that the results of visitor studies would bring them 'a loss of authority and control, as well as the declining significance of their importance as arbiters and interpreters' (Reussner 2010, in Kirchberg and Tröndle 2012, p.436). Such attitudes could impact the advancement of both internal visitor studies and external ones including academic research and industry research. For example, scholars who wish to study visitors may find access to museums difficult to gain. Additionally, empirical studies on visitor experience are

time- and money-consuming, and there are also methodological difficulties in analysing experiences, as Shettel (2008, cited in Kirchberg and Tröndle 2012, p.436–437) notes. This explains why researchers would focus on other areas when studying museums than examining the visitor experience. However, those who have attempted to understand the visitor experience have done so extensively.

Falk and Dierking's work (2016) is considered 'the first really successful attempt' that 'revolutionized the field' (Simmons and Latham 2020, unpaged). Both Falk and Dierking have been a 'towering presence in the field of visitor research and museum studies' (Francis 2015, p.121) since the publication of the first edition of *The Museum Experience* in 1992, which was the first book to discuss museum visits from the 'visitor's eye view' (Falk and Dierking 1992, back cover). Falk and Dierking's research of the museum experience can be viewed as a product of the new museology discussed in section 2.2, as it 'positioned itself as one of the first books to put the visitor squarely at the heart of the museum experience' (Francis 2015, p.121).

There are two main contributions from Falk and Dierking's work in understanding the visitor experience. Firstly, they examine the 'totality of the experience' in a chronological way, analysing visitor experience from before the visit (why they visit), during the visit (how they visit) to after-visit memories (the outcomes of the visit) (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.23). This gives the visitor experience both boundary and structure for more focused research in visitor studies. For example, motivation or expectation alone could be an area of study in exploring museum visitor experiences. The second main contribution is built upon the chronological understanding and develops a 'contextual model of learning' which distinguishes these four dimensions of the museum visit experience: the personal context, the sociocultural context, the physical context and the time context (Falk and Dierking 2016). Falk and Dierking's model is one possible way of understanding the museum experience. The complete picture of the visitor experience is still in development but building upon previous studies as researchers begin to understand the museum experience more clearly (Falk and Dierking, 2016, p.131). As this research is interested in the visitor experience rather than visitors' expectations or their after-visit memories, the 'during the visit' part of Falk and Dierking's book will be the main focus.

The 'during the visit' section of Falk and Dierking's study has four chapters, with two chapters on the physical context, one chapter on the sociocultural context and one chapter on the interplay of contexts. These chapters all provide valuable empirical evidence and insights into understanding the visitor experience. A few themes Falk and Dierking discuss directly apply to analysing visitor experiences of museum programmes at Design Society: the visitor experience of exhibitions and the visitor experience of public programmes.

Visitor experience of exhibitions has been the spotlight among museum-related research for the past century, as Falk and Dierking (2016) note. They suggest that viewing the 'museumy' things is the main reason most people visit museums and has the greatest influence on the visitor experience, despite visitors' background or the type of museum (ibid, p.104). It would be interesting to see if this is the case in a new cultural hub institution. Another interesting finding from Falk and Dierking (ibid, p.104) is that even without knowing what exactly is on display at the museum, many visitors know what to expect generally. This indicates that visitors tend to have a set of concrete ideas of what kinds of experience they expect to have. Similarly, it would be interesting to explore whether the experiences visitors have in a cultural hub are largely as they expected, or if there are surprising components that they did not expect to encounter.

When viewing and experiencing exhibitions, 'visitors, not the museum, are in control', as Falk and Dierking (2016, p.105) firmly argue. On objects, Falk and Dierking (2016) discover that among the dozens of objects on display in an exhibition, visitors tend to only focus on a few things and their choices depend on 'what is most visually and intellectually compelling to the visitor' and 'what connects to the visitor's prior knowledge and interest and what supports his identity-related visit needs' (p.109). In addition to what has been discussed in section 2.3, examining visitor's experiences of objects would provide new insights in the ways visitors view objects in the context of cultural hubs, especially in comparison to digital media.

Digital media is another important theme in Falk and Dierking (2016)'s discussion of exhibitions. Moving on from objects, Falk and Dierking (2016) point out that 'The era of multidimensional, multi-sensory experiences has arrived' (p.119). Although their research

demonstrates that digital media is not the main driver for people, Falk and Dierking do consider digital media 'a critical component of interactivity', especially for digital natives who grew up with digital technology (p.119). It is therefore agreed that digital media is an important option for some, for example Millennials. They continue to state that digital media makes museums more accessible and such 'media-rich exhibitions represent a strategy for creating museum-comfort today for tomorrow's museum-going public' (p.119). It was also noticed that, for some institutions, media are given increasingly important roles in that they essentially became 'the object' (p.120). This theme will be examined when studying visitors' experiences at Design Society in Chapter 6, as one of the exhibitions being studied was especially media-rich.

As mentioned earlier, though visitor experience of exhibitions has been the spotlight of visitor studies, there is another important component of the museum experience that has been studied less: museum programmes. Although for the public, the word 'museum' still tends to be strongly associated with objects and exhibitions, in reality, these only represent one part of the visitor experience (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.170). Besides exhibitions, another increasingly important aspect of museum practice was also studied by Falk and Dierking (2016, p.166): programmes. In fact, they argue that this aspect of museums 'can be, and actually [is]' transforming the field much more than exhibitions (p.167). Growth has been seen in public programmes over the last twenty years (p.168). Many of these programmes were designed for children and they 'almost always' bring positive influence on the children's families (p.169).

Falk and Dierking's work in the thirty years since the first edition of *The Museum Experience* (1992) has been ground-breaking. However, just as Falk and Dierking (2016) themselves admit, there is 'remarkable complexity' in the museum experience and their work is merely 'a brief introduction' (p.24). There are limitations to their research and there are still gaps to fill in this field.

Their model, which was first called the 'interactive model of learning' (1992) and updated to the 'contextual model of learning' (2016), is illuminating in illustrating the complexity of the museum experience (such as how there are three dimensions of contexts, yet they are all

integrated). Certainly, it also contributed to the understanding of the common visitor experience. However, it offers limited information about how to repeat such research in a different setting, as critiqued by Jones (2015). While excerpts were quoted extensively in the book, it didn't provide details about the way that interviews were conducted or how the data was analysed. Also, this model of understanding visitor experiences using the chronological framework requires immense time and effort in both looking for participants and in conducting the research itself. Therefore, this model is not particularly effective in understanding the visitor experience for a specific research project or for a specific institution to understand their visitors' experiences. This is why this study choose to focus on visitors' immediate responses, which is the 'during the visit' part of Falk and Dierking (2016)'s model.

Secondly, Falk and Dierking's approach to collecting data has the potential issue of being obtrusive. If a participant was to be interviewed prior to, during and after a visit – for example, the interview Falk conducted with a visitor at the California Science Center (p.69) – it has to be somewhat obtrusive to the visitor's experience and may also potentially impact the accuracy of the data collected, as it leads the researcher away from a visit in a natural setting (Schmitt 2016, p.56). If the visitor has already been informed that they will be studied during or after their visit, the way they visit and engage with the exhibition or programme may not be as natural as it could be. Visitors might be paying extra attention than they usually would to the exhibition just because they knew they were participating in a research project. As will be presented in Chapter 4, considerations around this issue are factored into how the research methods of this study were designed.

Thirdly, to gain data of the experiences at the museum (the 'during the visit' period), Falk and Dierking conducted interviews with visitors some time after the visit. For example, the interview they conducted with the visitors at the California Science Center (p.103–104) was a few weeks after visitor visited the museum. This could be problematic, as visitors might not remember as accurately compared to if the interview was conducted right after the visit (see Murre and Dros (2015)'s research that replicated Ebbinghaus' classic 'forgetting curve' experiment and shows significant difference between data collected directly after the learning

and days later). There might be specific motivations, understandings, feelings and interactions that visitors had on the day that they are not able to recall clearly or accurately after days or weeks. If asking a few weeks, months or even years later, visitor's responses should represent their 'remembered experience' rather than their actual 'immediate subjective experience' (Packer and Ballantyne 2016, p.134). Exploring the long-term memory of visitors' experiences of the museum is a different topic to visitors' experience on the day of the visit. Therefore, this study collected the data from visitors in the exhibition gallery and the public programme space in situ. The details will be provided in Chapter 4.

Another potential limitation is that although Falk and Dierking (2016, p.114) state that there are other dimensions of the visitor experience beyond 'learning', their 'contextual model of learning' considers the museum experience primarily a 'learning' experience. Their work thirty years ago (Falk and Dierking 1992, p.81) already called for a holistic understanding towards the museum as 'gestalt'. However, in the 2016 edition, their arguments still fall mostly into the context of learning. Black (2012) also argues that the nature of the museum experience is 'complex' and 'holistic', therefore a holistic approach is needed to understand experiences. Packer (2008) argues that the museum experience is about more than just 'learning', however broadly it is defined. It is undeniable that the educational value of museums should not be neglected – however, when exploring cultural hubs, it is limiting to still discuss visitor experience within the context of learning. There are also sometimes more negative or ambiguous experiences, for example frustration, boredom, disappointment or indifference. Hence, more researchers in the field are starting to explore a wider range of experiences beyond learning (Packer 2008).

Although it is agreed by many that it is important to study the visitor experience, the field itself has been hindered by 'a lack of common vocabulary' and 'a unifying conceptual framework' (Packer and Ballantyne 2016). Many scholars have attempted to examine complex visitor experiences by trying to categorise and group them.

One of the earliest and most important empirical studies on visitor experience was conducted by Pekarik and her colleagues in the Smithsonian Institution (Pekarik et al. 1999). Through years of research in an ongoing project, their team aimed to study what experiences visitors

value in museums. They began their research empirically, asking visitors to tell them about 'satisfying visits' to different kinds of museums (ibid., p.153). It is a shame that they didn't include the details of this process – for example, how they recruited their participants, what interview questions they asked and how alternative phrasings were tested and how patterns were identified. Through the conversations they had with visitors, they developed a four-category classification of visitors' satisfying experiences, an empirical list of experiences that individuals seek and generally find in museums, as Figure 2.5 shows:

Object Experiences	Cognitive Experiences	Introspective Experiences	Social Experiences
Seeing "the real thing"	Gaining information or knowledge	Imagining other times and places	Spending time with friends/family/other people
Seeing rare/uncommon/valuable things	Enriching my understanding	Refelcting on the meaning of what I was looking at	Seeing my children leaning new things
Being moved by beauty		Recalling my travels/childhood experiences/other memories	
Thinking what it would be like to own such things		Feeling a spiritual connection	
Continuing my professional developement		Feeling a sense of belonging or connectedness	

Figure 2.5: Pekarik et al. (1999)'s satisfying museum experiences model

One of the most important contributions of this study is the categorisation and description of the list shown above, including four types of experiences and 14 sub-items. Identifying the components of visitor experience is a useful approach as it does not only contributes to the conceptualisation of visitor experiences but also provides insights to allow institutions to enhance their visitor experience (Kim and Ritchie 2014). The 14 items included proved to be an effective tool for Pekarik et al. (1999), as visitors found it easy in identifying with the

items provided when they were asked what they found satisfying in exhibitions or museums. Pekarik et al. (1999) also found from their study that although there are differences related to particular museums, exhibitions and visitor characteristics, 'the profile of most satisfying experiences in a particular museum is relatively stable' (p.162). Therefore, this framework could be used as a valid tool in analysing visitor experiences. It is a valuable start in examining the visitor experience in museum environment.

Although Pekarik et al. (1999) made a great step forward in researching visitor experiences in museums, more empirical research is needed in developing and modifying this model for a few reasons. Firstly, in their study, Pekarik et al. (1999) didn't address that the four types of experience are not necessarily mutually exclusive and could have crossovers. This could place barriers in producing analysis and implications from the results, especially for museum professionals. Secondly, their research was conducted among the Smithsonian museums, which are distinct in many ways when compared to other museums, as Pekarik et al. (1999) recogonise. Similar research could be conducted in different contexts, and further empirical testing would potentially improve the framework. Thirdly, since this list was developed more than twenty years ago, it would be interesting to explore what has changed and what has not since then. Pekarik et al. (1999) do consider the list as unfinished and encourage more researchers to continue their line of research. This research contributes to continuing that exploration, but in a new institution and within a new context. Through studying the visitor experience at Design Society, this thesis both utilised and tested this key framework in the field.

Pekarik et al. (1999)'s framework was generated from empirical research in the museum context only. However, as museums are evloving, the framework might not be suffiencient in categorisng some experiences that are either emerging or more common than they used to be decades ago. Therefore, a more comprehensive framework needs to be introduced alongside this framework which has been produced for visitors in a broader context beyond museums – one helpful in analyisng Design Society as a non-traditonal cultural institution.

In 2016, Packer and Ballantyne published an article, 'Conceptualizing the Visitor Experience: A Review of Literature and Development of a Multifaceted Model', in the journal *Visitor*

Studies. This is a milestone among studies of the visitor experience. Packer and Ballantyne (2016) reviewed 18 previous studies, including Pekarik et al. (1999)'s, and it takes an important 'first step' toward building 'a shared vocabulary' in describing and analysing visitor experiences (p.128). One of the ways to further understand the visitor experiences, as mentioned above, is to identify its components. After considering the different emphasis and definition of the visitor experience, Packer and Ballantyne (2016) propose a multifaceted model of visitor experiences which they hope could be applicable to a wide variety of contexts (see Figure 2.6).

Physical experiences
movement, action, energy
physical stimulation

Sensory experiences
perceptual, aesthetic, object,
sensory responses to surroundings

Restorative experiences
escape, relaxation, revitalisation, rest,
freedom, liberation, peace and comfort

Introspective experiences
contemplation, imagination, reflection,
thoughtfulness, introspection, internal dialogue

Transformative experiences
inspiration, capability, mastery, accomplishment,
fulfilment, self-knowledge, sense of importance, creativity

Hedonic experiences
excitement, enjoyment, fun,
amusement, indulgence

Emotional experiences
surprise, respect, joy, pride,
nostalgia, awe, love, caring, empathy

Relational experiences
social interactions, belonging, sharing,
friendliness, companionship, connectedness

Spiritual experiences
spiritual connection, reverence, transcendence,
connection with sacred, communion with nature

Cognitive experiences
intellectual, learning, novelty, discovery, exploration,
understanding, concentration, involvement, choice

Figure 2.6: Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s multifaceted model of the visitor experience

The reason that Packer and Ballantyne (2016) choose the term 'facet' instead of 'dimension' or 'components' is that 'dimension' or 'components' do not suggest the entirety of the experience (p.135). 'Facet', within an analogy of 'cutting a gemstone', indicates that each facet is to be 'observed and appreciated' as they reveal a unique feature of that gemstone as a whole (Packer and Ballantyne 2016 p.135). Also, compared to 'type' or 'category', 'facet' places less emphasis on the exclusivity of each experience. The choice of the term 'facet' implies that although each aspect has its own characteristic, all facets are on one diamond, the holistic visitor experience (p.135). This echoes what both Falk and Dierking (2016) and

Black (2012) suggest, which is to view a visitor's experience as a whole. Packer and Ballantyne (2016) consider that these ten facets of visitor experience together constitute a model which is 'more comprehensive and/or more universal than any of the typologies previously suggested' (p.135).

As the facets identified are more comprehensive and universal, Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s model provides a broader conceptual structure and practical guide for this research identifying and analysing visitor experiences at Design Society. This enables a fuller understanding of visitor experience to be explored as not all experiences identified fit into Pekarik et al. (1999)'s framework.

However, despite its strengths, Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s framework have some limitations. Packer and Ballantyne (2016) did not think this framework an exhaustive set and consider further research needs to be done. Similar to Pekarik et al. (1999)'s framework, Packer and Ballantyne (2016) did not specifically address how the framework can be most beneficial for museum professionals, especially where experiences on this list overlap with each other. Besides, Packer and Ballantyne (2016) did not give a clear definition or full explanation of the sub-categories of each facet. For example, under the facet of 'physical experience' there are only a few keywords – 'movement', 'action', 'energy' and 'physical stimulation' – and no further explanation of what these refer to respectively. The comprehensiveness of this model is its strength, but it also could be a disadvantage when being employed to analyse data. As no clear explanation of each facet is given, the boundaries are not clear, and many experiences seem to overlap with each other. Thirdly, since this is a universal model which can be applied to many types of visitor experience, including tourism and all kinds of leisure activities, it means that it is not a research device specially designed to investigate museums and it does not take into consideration the specific context of museum experiences. There might be major cross-overs between museums and other tourism or leisure activity experiences, but to better serve the purpose of researching museums, the unique experiences or themes of experiences occurring in museums visits should not be neglected. Lastly, unlike Pekarik et al. (1999)'s framework which was established from empirical research and was tested in practice, Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s framework is a conceptual construct. Therefore, as this study builds on the

literatures in examining museums, the four types of museum experiences identified by Pekarik et al. (1999) will be used as a primary framework. The 'ten facets' model developed by Packer and Ballantyne (2016) will be compared alongside. While applying these two models, this study also tests the models' strengths and shortcomings. Recommendations for enhancement of the model will be offered at the end of the findings chapters.

2.6   Summary

This chapter of the literature review firstly traced the development of the museum chronologically since the emergence of the new museology. From their origins as object-centred institutions, visitors increasingly gain more importance as museums navigate their way in the modern world. As the challenges museums confront in the 21st century were discussed, the new trend of the reinvented museums, and in particular the emerging concept and practices of cultural hubs, was chosen to be the focus of this study. It then highlighted the context of museums becoming a part of the experience economy and the importance of researching visitors' voices which led to the introduction of the theoretical framework of the visitor experience in analysing the case study of Design Society.

Before introducing the methodology of this study, the next chapter will provide an introduction to museums in China and their historical background and will discuss recent studies published about them. This will not only help the reader to understand the case study better, but also provide important context in discussing the transformation of museums globally.

Chapter 3   Museums in China: From the Imported 'Museum' to the 'Museum Boom'

3.1   Introduction

Chapter 1 briefly discussed why this study chose to examine the transformation of museums into cultural hubs through a case study in China. This section expands on that logic and further introduces underrepresented Chinese museums. It first provides a brief historical review of Chinese museums and discusses the concept of the museum in China. It then describes the recent developments of Chinese museums with a call for more future research at the end. This information will help the reader in understanding the context for the case study. It also provides valuable cultural context in making sense of the visitor experience.

There is a wide variety of museums in China, including general museums, history museums, art museums, historical houses, archaeology and heritage sites, folk (including religious) museums, natural science museums, industrial heritage museums and museums covering special themes (Duan, p.10). In terms of the total number of museums, in 2020 China was among the top five countries globally, with 5,788 officially registered museums (Ying 2021). Of these 5,788 museums, 67% are state-owned[5]. The rapid growth of Chinese museums has drawn attention from both media and scholars globally. However, before exploring the drastic growth, it is important to trace the historical roots of Chinese museums.

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[5] This is calculated by the author according to the statistics provided by Ying (2021).

3.2   Encountering the Idea of the Museum

The concept of the modern public museum did not exist in ancient China. For China, the modern public museum is an 'imported good' and therefore has a relatively short history, around 100 years (see Kahn 1998; Wang 2001; Duan 2017; Varutti 2014). Until the second half of the 19th century, when the concept of the museum was introduced from Western Europe, there was not such a developed and structured concept in Asia, particularly in the Far East (Wan-Chen 2012). The first museums in China appeared towards the end of the 19th century, created by Western missionaries and researchers (Varutti 2014).

As a concept that originated from the west, museums are considered carriers of modern culture and a sign of marching towards modernity (Wang p.72). By the second half of the 19th century, a Chinese military and political movement was initiated by scholars and officials within the Qing empire who saw a need to 'emulate the technologies, organizational hierarchies, and cultural traditions' in an attempt to preserve the Qing empire, or else it might 'slowly erode away' (Qu 2016 p.150). The effort is remembered as the Self-Strengthening Movement (in Chinese 'yang wu yun dong' (洋务运动), which literally means 'Foreign Affairs Movement'). According to Qu (2016), the realisation of such reforms suggests that 'China had begun to take its first steps towards modernizing and adapting to the new world order' (p.150). It was during the Self-Strengthening Movement that several pioneering intellectuals proposed to the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) government the idea of building museums in China, which failed due to the collapse of the movement itself. However, this movement did generate more interest in the west, and while more government officials and intellectuals encountered modern science and culture in Western Europe, the value and impact of museums started to be considered (Wan-Chen 2012).

Not long after the failure of the Qing empire's Self-Strengthening Movement in 1905, the first Chinese-founded museum was built by Zhang Jian (see Wang 2001; Denton 2013). This first public museum was called Nantong Museum ('Nantong bo wu guan'), in today's Jiangsu Province, China, in 1905 (Wang 2001; Claypool 2005; Varutti 2014). The opening of this museum, according to Varutti (2014), 'contributed to cultural reforms that would see China enter the world stage' (p.27). As Sung (1986, p.47), cited in Wan-Chen (2012, p.19), notes

that Qing dynasty intellectuals assumed that museums were 'scientific in nature', which could 'enlighten visitors', and therefore as a place where advanced western science and culture could be encountered, museums were believed to positively influence social progress. Since then, Chinese intellectuals considered education one of museums' fundamental roles (Wan-Chen 2012, p.19). The history of how museums were introduced to China as a part of the effort to catch up with western modernisation could contribute to some extent to how the government and the public perceive the museum as an institution. This will be further discussed later in this section when recent museum literature in China is examined.

3.2.1 The Concept of 'Bo Wu Guan (博物馆)'

When the idea of the 'museum' as an institution was first introduced to China in the 19th century, it had over ten translations due to the diverse forms of museums (Duan 2017, p.2). This section will discuss the translated Chinese terms and reflect on them, as they give context on the institutional development and visitors' perception of the role and function of the museum in China.

The modern translation of 'museum' in Chinese is 'bo (博) wu (物) guan (馆)', which consists of the three characters, as shown in brackets. The character 'guan (馆)' means 'a place' or 'a building'; it appears as an affix which refers to cultural or sports places such as libraries, stadiums, etc. There are two ways of looking at 'bo (博)' and 'wu (物)': as two individual characters or as a collective term, 'bo wu (博物)'.

Wan-Chen (2012) takes the etymological approach to understand the reception of museums in China, which is undoubtedly helpful. She notices that, despite 'bo wu guan (博物馆)' being a neologism at that time, in Chinese literature 'bo wu (博物)' originally meant 'having a fine understanding of the reasons for things' (p.17), or 'broad knowledge of things,' according to Denton (p.17). In the context of bo wu guan (博物馆), the emphasis is the 'broadness' of the knowledge one could encounter in a bo wu guan. In the 19th century, as Wan-Chen (2012) suggests, 'bo wu (博物)' mainly connoted natural history, which was a

new subject that helped broaden Chinese people's understanding of the world. While Wan-Chen (2012) takes a historical approach to understand 'bo wu guan (博物馆)', both Varutti (2014) and Duan (2017) understand 'bo (博) wu (物)' as two separate characters. Varutti (2014) explains that 'bo (博)' refers to a large number, and 'wu (物)' refers to things or objects. Therefore, this leads to a literal meaning of 'bo wu guan (博物馆)' as 'a place with large number of things or objects'. Duan (2017) considers the translation of 'bo wu guan' to capture two main characteristics of museums, with 'bo' signifying diversity and pluralism, and 'wu' meaning 'objects', the foundational resources of the museum (p.3).

China is one of the oldest civilisations with a rich heritage (Duan 2017, p.34). It also has a long history of preserving and researching cultural heritage, despite the concept of the modern museum having been imported from the west (Wang 2001, p.59). Collecting and researching cultural relics has been of great interest to emperors, elites, officials and literati since the Shang dynasty (ibid., p.59). Similar to the translated term 'bo wu guan (博物馆)', the actual notion of museum objects appeared relatively late in China, according to Varutti (2014). Compared to 'object', the term 'cultural relics' – which in Chinese is 'wen wu' – is used much more extensively in China. The concept of 'object' bears different connotations in different cultural contexts. The word 'objects' cannot simply translate to a matching Chinese word. The term 'wen wu' has a historical connotation of 'anything coming from the past' (Varutti 2014, p.9). Therefore, it does not refer to every object, but only those that are 'ancient'. 'Zhan pin' is now more often used to describe objects on display – which often refers to contemporary objects and installations. 'Zhan pin' does include 'wen wu' but does not emphasise the 'ancientness' of the objects. Duan (2017) argues that collection is one of the core elements that differentiate museums from other institutions (p.53). In practice, one of the criteria to name an institution 'museum' in China is that it must have a certain number of objects in its collection (see The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2015; Duan 2017)

Today, not only rich people in China like to participate in auctions; the general public also shows a sweeping interest in collecting artefacts such as ancient furniture, painting and porcelain (Wangyi News 2021). As Duan (2017) explains, it is part of the cultural history that

Chinese people are 'ya hao bo gu' (p.53), which means that seeking to know more about ancient history is an 'elegant interest'. Therefore, it is obvious that 'wu' (objects/artefacts) has a significant role in Chinese museums. In fact, Duan (2017) argues that viewing objects tends to be one of the most important experiences that Chinese visitors expect to have in museums. He continues to explain that the reason for 'bo wu guan' being chosen and becoming the most popular translation reflects how people in China view the essence and characteristics of a museum: cultural relics ought to be the foundation of a 'bo wu guan'. People would expect to see 'wen wu' – objects that are ancient, as explained in the previous section. 'There is growing emphasis on aesthetics, on the unique and intrinsic characteristics of objects' (Varutti 2014, p.39). For these reasons, the orientation away from object-centred institutions to visitor-centred institutions has its own Chinese context. As mentioned above, the term 'bo wu guan', especially its emphasis on 'wu' (objects), can be limiting to what museums in China can refer to and include, which potentially hinders new institutions in reinventing themselves. 'Place with large number of objects' is deeply ingrained in the term 'bo wu guan' and is ingrained in the perception of museums too. The English word 'museum' is a much broader term which encompasses many types and forms of institutions, but 'bo wu guan' narrowly refers to museums that are mostly collection based.

It is noteworthy that as a concept introduced to China from the west, 'the museum' arrived in the domestic context without much resistance and became almost seamlessly matched with the term 'bo wu guan'. One Chinese scholar compares the Confucius temple in Shandong (the birthplace of Confucius) with the Musaeum in Alexandria, which was dedicated to the Muses, and considers the Confucius temple the oldest museum in China (Wang 2001, p.57). This comparison is problematic as the Confucius temple is largely a temple for the function of worshipping and offering sacrifices, which is very different to the nature of a public museum (Duan 2017, p.1). However, it is a vivid example which shows that the concept of the museum is not only fully embraced in China but is considered something noble and respectful. This is demonstrated by the efforts have been made in striving to trace the Chinese version of the history of the museum and relate the temple that is used in memorising and worshipping one of the most profound figures, Confucius, to the concept of the museum. This

historical background and the cultural traditions provide context in understanding the rocketing growth of museums in China.

3.3   The Museum Boom in China

In developing countries and regions with rapidly growing economies, as Wu and Wall (2017) suggest, 'it is expected that more public facilities, including museums, will be made available for their citizens' (p.40). China is among the countries with the fastest museum growth (Duan 2017). After the 'opening up' policy in the 1970s, China started to open to the outside world after a long period of being 'closed-door'. In 1982, China became a member of ICOM and started to adapt to an international museology standard (see Varutti 2014). Although the research aspect of museums in China is not as developed as in western countries, Lord and Blankenberg (2015, p.146) notice that museums in China are 'playing an increasingly active role in China's contemporary cultural ecology'. This is also agreed by other scholars (see Denton 2013; Lu 2014; Lord et al. 2019).

Economically, the contribution of Chinese museums to the national economy grew significantly at the start of the 21st century, from 6.75 billion RMB (£755m) in 2001 to 26.33 billion RMB (£2.945bn) in 2011, a growth of almost 300% compared to a 10% growth rate in the economy as a whole (Lord and Blankenberg 2015, p.147). As Denton (2013) points out, the recent increase of museums in China cannot be understood solely in political or ideological discourses, as it is also the result of a growing consumer market for culture globally.

Since the 'reform and opening-up' agenda issued in 1978, museums in China underwent stable and dramatic growth, which is described by Marzia Varutti as a 'fever' that demonstrates the ways that museums are 'perceived, conceived and evaluated' under the cultural policies in China (2014, p.2). According to the latest statistics, by the end of 2020, China had 5535 registered museums nationally (National Cultural Heritage Administration 2020).

The process of urbanisation in China has been a dramatic one since the late 1970s (Yew 2012, p.283), and it is expected that around 70% of the population will be living in cities by 2050 (Lord and Blankenberg 2015, p.147). With this pace of development, place-making has become the new kind of urban competition for local governments 'who seek to outdo each other' (Yew 2012, p.281). One of the focal points of such competition is creating 'attractive urban design' (Lord and Blankenberg 2015). Museums are often included as a way for local governments to show off their performance. For example, since the 1990s the city of Shanghai has had the urban plan of building 'public cultural centres' in each of its 20 districts, which include museums, libraries, cinemas and youth centres (Varutti 2014, p.1). Similarly, Duan (2017) explains that 'a museum, a library, a theatre, an urban planning exhibition centre and a plaza with water fountains' is a standard combination of what a local government in China builds to showcase local development. The growth of museums in China is like a prism that reflects the high-paced transformation of the country (see Zhang 2015; Varutti 2014). Just as Duan (2017) believes, the urbanisation competition among cities within China objectively helped the development of museums in China overall.

The boom in museums does not only occur at a provincial level, but also in smaller cities and counties (Wu, 2011; The Economist 2018). He (2015) also emphasises the existence of large numbers of museums at a local level. Building grand museum buildings is becoming a popular trend in China, and it is not rare to come across provincial museums over 100,000 square metres and, at the city level, museums over 50,000 square metres (Duan 2017, p.41).

Jeffrey Johnson, director of Columbia University's China Megacities Lab, calls this phenomenon of nationwide mass construction of new museums 'museumification' (The Economist 2013, para.2). 'We've seen museum-building booms elsewhere," Johnson says, "but nothing of this sustained magnitude and pace'. As early as 1998, Kahn (1998) observed that China, among a few other Asian countries, had 'become perhaps overly fixated on the notion of the museum as a monument to civic pride' and that this 'resulted in the erection of positively enormous buildings'.

Wu (2011, p.98) considers that the reasons behind the rapid nationwide growth of museums are as follows: policy change, developments in tourism, regional development and changes in staff. This is very likely to be related to the assessment criteria of the government, from central to local government, which takes cultural projects into consideration. Another reason for the booming museum sector could also be how the government views the nature and the symbolisation of the museum – which for example as a sign of development from its introduction as a part of modernisation for China as mentioned earlier.

As mentioned in the previous section, more and more western museums are changing from governmental and private sectors to the non-profit sector (Lord and Blankenberg 2015, p.11). However, in 2020, 67% of the officially registered museums in China were state-owned (Ying 2021). Despite the boom of the establishment of new museums, Lu Jiansong (2016), the director of the Department of Cultural Heritage and Museology in Fudan University in China, admits that the quality of the exhibition in museums in China is not satisfactory and the majority of exhibitions fail to attract visitors (p.5). One of the reasons for this, Lu argues, is a lack of research on exhibition design and planning in general in China. Only in the past two decades have people begun to think how to improve not only the quantity but also the quality of museums (Lord and Blankenberg 2015). The main missions of Chinese museums have been researching and displaying artefacts (Wang 2001). It is only recently that museum education and visitors have begun to be discussed more (Duan 2017, p.107). Besides quality, and with the number of Chinese museums rocketing at an incredible rate, a key question that needs further exploration is whether 'the proliferation in numbers of museums can allow for a proliferation in perspectives' (Macdonald 2015, p.486).

As well as the new museums being built, the free admission policy is also noteworthy. Starting in 2003, museums in China began to implement free admission, and by 2016 over 87% of museums in China offered free admission under the government's cultural policy (Duan, 2017, p.103). While many museums in western countries have been affected by reductions in government financing, Chinese museums do not have the same struggle (see Lord and Blankenberg 2015). The 'financial situation is not a primary struggle for many museums at the moment… thanks to the generosity of the Chinese government', pointed out by Wu (2019). An interesting contrast is that since a free admission policy was implemented

in the UK, the number of visitors has not increased dramatically (Duan 2017, p.102) which shows that admission cost is not the main concern that prevents British visitors from going to the museum. However, in China, taking provincial museums as an example, the free admission policy resulted in almost two times more visitors than before (2017, p.104). According to Lord and Blankenberg (2015, p.147), the population who previously were put off by the admission charge, such as rural migrant workers and urban low-income people, increased greatly because of the free admission policy.

3.4   Chinese Museology

Compared to the development of museology in western countries, Chinese museology is 'a relatively young discipline' (Varutti 2014, p.35). For this reason, this research has relied greatly on western literatures throughout the discussion and analysis. As well as being a young subject, the works by Chinese scholars tend to have an emphasis on the historical aspect (Varutti, 2014; Lu, 2016). Museum studies did not become an official academic discipline in Chinese universities until the 1980s (Lu, 2017). Lu (2017) reveals that while the number of museums in China tripled since 2000, the discipline of museum studies still maintains the status that it had in the 1980s to the 1990s.

Varutti (2014, p.5) notes that the literature considering museums in China is relatively under-developed, especially works that publish in languages other than Mandarin. This statement, however, is criticised by Falkenhausen (2016), who suggests that 'published Chinese scholarship in museums studies is ample enough to fill an entire library' (p.220). By saying this, Falkenhausen refers to works that were published in Chinese, and mostly domestically in China. As a western academic, Varutti's work has inherent weaknesses, and she has admitted this frankly at the beginning of her book: 'my language skills were not advanced enough to enable me to conduct structured research interviews in Chinese, nor to read specialised literature without help'. Varutti (2014) failed to address some of the key developments in museums studies in China, which the majority of the publications are in Chinese. For example, the new museology which was discussed in Chapter 2 is now one of the most

popular topics among Chinese museum scholars (Yin 2018, p.54). While the new museology that emerged in western countries encourages people to challenge the authority of the museum, Varutti (2014) claims that museums in China mostly remain in an 'authoritative, monodirectional paradigm' (p.4). However, I consider it overly ambitious to make a sweeping representative claim about what 'museums in China' are like, considering the complexity and vastness of different regions of the country. As the landscape of museums in China has become increasingly complex in recent decades (Varutti 2014), new museums and new practices are waiting to be observed and studied by museum scholars. Varutti (2014)'s own book has limitations in this sense, and Ma (2017, p.294) also points out that the book overly emphasises the political purposes of the museum. Ma (2017) argues that 'there might be significant local variations' and that the discussion and conclusion will not apply to all museums in China (p.294). If one goes to a coastal city like Shenzhen, which is 'geographically and psychologically distanced' from the political centre, there is subtle insightful analysis to be gained, He argues (2015, p.56). This is one of the main reasons this study chooses Design Society as a case study.

This is the same weakness that Christina F. Kreps expressed in the beginning of her book *Liberating Culture* (2003), which features a cross-cultural perspective on museums. Kreps (2003) queried her failures in seeking the 'distinctive qualities' in an Indonesian museum she was working with, concluding the reason was her familiarity and solid belief in the western model of museums, which hindered her from recognizing valuable differences in practices from other cultures:

> I had failed to see the museum's distinctive qualities because of my own entrenched preconceptions of what constitutes a museum and museological behaviour (p.ix).

Despite its weaknesses, the value of Varutti's work is still critical. While analysing museums in China, Varutti (2014, p.4) helpfully points out that it is 'neither obvious nor necessarily appropriate' to locate Chinese museums within a literature of western museum studies that is dominated by the representation or viewing of museums as tools of social control (p.4). This makes Varutti's work a timely and valuable addition to the existing scholarship. Varutti (2014)'s book *Museums in China* is based on ten months of field research during 2008–2009

and 2012, during which Varutti visited 56 museums of different kinds (a full list of the museums appears on p.165–166) and conducted interviews with numerous museum professionals. Zhang (2015) maintains that this book 'provides a valuable theoretical introduction for scholars' (p.239). Ma (2017) also considers it 'a significant and helpful reference' for scholars who want to know more about museums in China.

As topics on Chinese museums – including their unprecedented growth – receive increased attention from western scholars (Zhang 2015), there are few book-length works that focus on museums in China. These include Tracy Lu's *Museums in China: Power, Politics, and Identities* (2014), and *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* by Kirk Denton (2013). Another recent addition to this list is *Museum Development in China: Understanding the Building Boom* (2019) edited by Gail Dexter Lord, Guan Qiang, An Laishun and Javier Jimenez. These works all make their own unique contributions but much more work is still needed regarding Chinese museums.

3.5   Call for Research on Chinese Museums

Chinese museums 'have not been paid enough attention and have not been sufficiently studied in general', contends museum scholar and the Deputy Director of Cultural Exchange Centre of Nanjing Museum, Heng Wu (2011). It is understandable that the books mentioned in Chapter 1 did not include cases of Chinese museums given how languages barriers can prevent knowledge exchange in academia. One of the other contextual reason could also be what King (1997) calls the 'post-colonial, transnational cultural system' (p.6). This can also be viewed from an ideological perspective, as Kreps (2003) notes:

> Yet until recently, non-western models of museums and curatorial practices escaped the attention of western scholars and museologists. This lack of attention can be seen as not only a reflection of an ideology that views the museum and museological behaviours as uniquely western, but also a belief in the superiority of western, scientifically based museology and systems of cultural heritage preservation (p.1).

Historically, it is taken for granted in the west that museums are a purely western concept, but Simpson (1996, p.107) argues this is not entirely accurate. If collecting and displaying are the most important functions of museum practice, the concept of a 'museum' can be seen in nearly all cultures (Kreps, 2003). It is undeniable that for many Asian countries, like China, modern museums are 'western imports' that have been 'grafted' to them since the 20th century (Kahn 1998). However, the overwhelming leading role of western museums is gradually changing; Dewdney et al. (2013) contend that countries from all parts of the world will 'have a role'. China alone is writing a significant new chapter in the history of museums' global development, Zhang (2015, p.237) explains. Wu and Wall (2017) argue that, compared to well-researched western countries, more research should be done in emerging destinations with consideration of their specific social and cultural context.

In the 21st century, an international perspective is needed in the global museum field more than ever before. Among the increasing international collaborations that have been formed since the 1990s, partnerships between China and the west are visibly booming, ranging from short partnerships, such as exchanging exhibitions, to long-term ventures (Movius 2019). This phenomenon itself calls for more studies on Chinese museums within the field of international museum studies.

Although valuable in many ways, visitors' voices are missing in Varutti's book. She asserts that most museums in China have become instruments of the authorities, leaving little space for audience's varied and alternative interpretations. As Ma (2017) points out, while it is true that Varutti suggests that most Chinese museums serve as tools to 'legitimise political authority', her analysis seems to imply that visitors in China are 'passive recipients of official ideology'. He (2015) also questioned this point, arguing that Varutti's work assumes visitors 'to be mere recipients of ideological edification'. While being 'visitor-centred' is not a new ethos any more for museums in the west, it was only recently that museums in China started to pay more attention to their visitors (Wu 2019). At the same time, visitors in China 'are no longer considered passive recipients of political propaganda, but rather cultivated, open-minded and affluent individuals who demand better experiences of art learning and appreciation' (Zhang 2015, p.239). Even given how comprehensive Wu (2011)'s research is, she admits that a limitation of her research is that she did not manage to collect data from the

visitor side due to time constraints and the choice of focus. It is therefore important for more research to explore the visitor experience in Chinese museums. In 2019, museums in China welcomed a record-breaking 1.2 billion visits in total, suggesting that museum-going is becoming one of the sweeping fashions in China today (Ying 2021). By exploring visitor experience in a 'cultural hub' in China, this research provides new and rich evidence that contributes to a fuller picture of museum visitors in China.

3.6   Summary

This chapter briefly outlined the background of Chinese museums in order to help the reader in understanding the case study in the later chapters. It started with a historical review of the Chinese museums since the concept of the modern museum was introduced, and then discussed the translated term 'bo wu guan (博物馆)' and the significance of objects in Chinese museums. After that, the recent museum boom in China and the developing of Chinese museology were described. It finished by addressing the lack of research on Chinese museums and visitors in the field of international museum studies.

As the previous three chapters mapped out some of the key developments of the museum, it is clear that there are gaps that require more research. By carefully studying Design Society and its visitors, this thesis will contribute to the three major gaps identified: a lack of research in cultural hubs as new institutions, a lack of research in the visitor experience in museums and a lack of research on Chinese museums (in English) and especially on unconventional cultural institutions and visitors in China.

The next chapter will introduce the methodology of this study.

Chapter 4   Research Methodology

4.1   Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the transformation of museums into cultural hubs by looking at the case study of Design Society in Shenzhen, China. The previous chapters reviewed and discussed literatures addressing museums' transformation into cultural hubs by exploring a range of concepts, discussions, debates and practices. As Chapter 2 to Chapter 3 attempted to answer RQ1, this chapter provides a description of the methodological approach adopted for the study in answering RQ2 and RQ3:

RQ2: What does the concept and the formation of Design Society contribute to the understanding of the transformation of museums into cultural hubs?

RQ3: What experiences do visitors get in museum programmes at Design Society? How can an analysis of the visitor experience contribute to an understanding of the transformation of museums into cultural hubs and provide valuable insights for museum professionals?

The next section will provide discussions that underpin the methodological choices in answering these two questions. In-depth examples of how these methods worked in practice are provided. Then, the processing and analysis of the collected data are explained in detail. Finally, the limitations and ethical considerations of the research project are addressed.

4.2   Choosing a Research Design

While it is important to grasp the broader picture of museums' transformation into cultural hubs, it is equally important to assess examples of evolving institutions in order to develop a comprehension of some shared characteristics and rationales despite differences in context.

Therefore, a case study was chosen as part of the research design of this project. Unlike methods that aim to provide generalisations, this case study is intended to provide a level of detail and understanding similar to the ethnographer Clifford Geertz (1973)'s notion of 'thick description' (p.310), which allows for the thorough analysis of the complex and particularistic nature of distinct phenomena. A case study, according to Tight (2017), could be viewed as 'a method, approach, style, strategy or design' (p.20).

While cross-case methods seem to be a more common choice for researchers, this research consists of a single case study of Design Society in Shenzhen, China. The important issue, according to Dyer and Wilkins (1991), is not the number of cases, but whether the researcher is capable of describing and understanding the context of the institution in question well enough that it is understandable to the reader. Siggelkow (2007) recognises that a single case study can provide robust descriptions of an observed phenomenon. Deeper understanding of the subject can be gained with limited time and resources, while multiple case studies can be too expensive and time consuming to implement (Baxter and Jack 2008, p.550). Just as Tight (2017) rightly concludes, the case study in this thesis 'represents a way of pursuing a particular research project' that is of interest for its own sake (p.21). Focusing on a single case study to research also gives a researcher the ability to look at subunits within a larger case (Yin 2003, p.42).

As stated in Chapter 1, Design Society was chosen to be the case study due to its potential to provide timely and up-to-date evidence on the development of museums. As a new institution, Design Society is itself a phenomenon reflecting the new dynamics of museums in the 21st century. Chapter 5 will be devoted to answering RQ2.

In answering RQ3, a qualitative approach was selected in order to understand the visitor experience at Design Society, as it features an inductive style of research with 'a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of reporting the complexity of a situation' (Creswell and Creswell 2018, p.4). The design of the data collection and analysis was informed by a social constructivist worldview which understands the meaning individuals take from their experiences has complexities, and such complexities are to be explored rather than be narrowed into a few simple variables (Creswell and Creswell 2018). In exploring the visitor

experience, I agree with Falk and Dierking (2016) that 'each visitor's experience is different; each person brings his own unique personal and sociocultural contexts' (p.105).

In answering both questions and due to the nature of the field of research, data from multiple sources were collected to explore the complex and interrelated phenomena in context. This data includes interviews, surveys, observation notes, documents, visual materials and autoethnography. This use of multiple methods is also known as 'triangulation', a concept that can refer to the combination of different data sources or different ways of collecting data (Flick 2018), which has become increasingly common in social science research. Different sources of data can contribute to a more holistic understanding of a particular phenomenon since the object of study is examined from a number of perspectives (Saks and Allsop 2012). Therefore, many agree that triangulation strengthens a study by increasing its validity and making the findings more robust (see Yin 2012; Patton 2014). Clarke and Dawson (1999) also state that using a combination of methods gives the researcher more confidence in their research findings when compared to a single-method approach. It is especially common to employ triangulation in case studies (Gerring 2007).

Although case study as a research design is expected to explore 'a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context'(Yin 1981, p.59), to 'catch the complexity' of the case (Stake 1995, p.xi) and to be done holistically and in an open-ended way (Verschuren 2003, p.137), Tight (2017) argues that 'most researchers do not have indefinite time to devote to a piece of research', which is particularly the case with doctoral researchers. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that case study as a research design does not indicate that all available aspects of the object of study will be examined by the researcher. Since the nature of this study is exploratory, it made no systematic attempt to collect data from a 'representative' sample, especially for the visitor experience part. Instead, participants chose to be involved in the research. Information about the participants' gender, age, educational background or socio-economic status was not collected. As the study on the visitor experience is primarily qualitative, it is not representative of the whole population, and therefore cannot be generalised in the same way as certain other studies. This will be reflected upon further in the conclusion chapter.

Just as the preliminary considerations of the research design were discussed above, specific methods to seek answers to the research questions also will be explained individually. When considering data collection, many factors contribute to the selection of specific methods. These factors include the detailed schedule, availability and access, nature of the space, content of the programme, visitation, and constraints of the setting. Different methods were used at different sites to best fit the setting and collect the most valid and reliable data. In studying RQ2, data from document analysis, interviews, and observation was used. To answer RQ3, surveys, interviews, observations and autoethnography were used. In the following section each data collection method is discussed, and reflections on the need for triangulation will be presented to justify the decisions made.

4.3   Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The above explanation of the research design sets the stage for further discussion of the steps involved in data collection. This section aims to document the data collection process and introduce the specific types of data collection used in this project. The ways the information was recorded and stored will also be documented in this section. Before the official data collection, a two-week pilot study was conducted. The main data collection stage happened eight months after the pilot study and it lasted three months. The pilot study helped the researcher in preparing for the data collection in many ways.

4.3.1 A Pilot Study

The pilot study occurred in April 2017 at the venue of the Shenzhen Design Week 2017 (SZDW) (see Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2), an international design event that attracted 100,000 visitors (Shenzhen Design Week. 2017). This was eight months before the official opening of Design Society. After a few months of initial communication, the Founding Director of Design Society, Ole Bouman[6], agreed to host me to conduct research at Design Society. In May 2017, a month before SZDW, he invited me to attend the event as Design Society would

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[6] Mr Ole Bouman led the project of Design Society from January 2015 and retired as Director of Design Society in December 2020.

be participating in the form of a mini exhibition. The director hoped that I could use this opportunity to gain insights into visitors' expectations of Design Society. I considered this an invaluable opportunity to set up a pilot study. The study was carried out at Design Society's temporary SZDW exhibition gallery where nine interviews and 303 surveys were undertaken.

Design Society as an institution was in its infancy then and the exhibition at SZDW aimed to introduce itself as a new institution to the public. The exhibition was in a three-floor building in Shekou Value Factory (Figure 4.2) , and Design Society provided an introduction to itself and a preview of what it would be offering the public through information boards, videos and installations (see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4).

The pilot study proved to be necessary and extremely helpful. As mentioned in Chapter 2, gaining access from museums to conduct visitor studies could be difficult due to museums' reserved attitude. In practice, there are still many aspects needed to be carefully considered about how the research will be conducted after gaining access, including but not limited to communication with the staff, and the timing and physical arrangement for the actual data collection.

Through the pilot study, there were a few things that I wanted to achieve. First, I wanted to gain more context of both the institution and the local visitors. Prior to the pilot study, all the information I had on Design Society was via the publicly available information from the media. Although I grew up in this city where Design Society is located and share the language with local residents, I have never done research with visitors. I hoped through this opportunity of the pilot study that trust can be built between myself as a researcher and Design Society staff, to prepare for our communication in the official fieldwork period. Most importantly, I wanted to use this chance to test the proposed research methods, interviews and surveys, ahead of the data collection. The section below will discuss how these proposed methods were tested in the pilot study and provide summaries at the end of each method. The details of the pilot study and the considerations on modifying the research methods are included here to demonstrate the non-linear process of how the methodology of this study was developed.

Figure 4.1: The promotion sign of Shenzhen Design Week at a local underground station in Shenzhen. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.2: Shenzhen Design Week's main venue, Shekou Value Factory. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.3: Design Society's three-floor exhibition during Shenzhen Design Week. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.4: The model of the upcoming architecture of Design Society displayed at the exhibition for Shenzhen Design Week at Shekou Value Factory. Photo by the author.

4.3.1.1   Interviews

The first method tested in the pilot study were interviews. Interviewing is one of the most recognised research methods in the social sciences (Davies, 2002). The interviewing technique tested in the pilot study were qualitative semi-structured interviews. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) define qualitative interviews as: '…attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world' (p.3). Denscombe (2010) and Patton (2002) both agree that interviews are the appropriate data collection method when researchers need to investigate 'people's opinions, feeling, emotions and experiences' (Denscombe 2010, p.173). As a data collection method, interviews also produce direct first-hand data from the interviewee and expand the researcher's understanding of the topic (Denscombe 2010). Both Pekarik et al. (1999) and Falk and Dierking (2016) used interviews in exploring visitors' experiences, therefore interview was considered one of the main data collection methods in this study. This plan had to change and adapt for the main data collection stage after gaining important insights from the pilot study, as explained below.

During the two-week study time, nine semi-structured interviews were carried out with visitors who visited the exhibition by Design Society at SZDW. Some of the interview questions were prepared in advance and are detailed below, but I was also prepared to be flexible and hoped to give interviewees opportunities to speak more widely in response to questions I raised. These interviews were all conducted at the exit of the exhibition space and lasted from two to 15 minutes. The participants were chosen arbitrarily using non-probability sampling. The interview data was audio recorded for a permanent record. Field notes were taken directly after each interview to record non-verbal communication, contextual factors and an initial analysis.

The prepared open-ended questions were:

> 1) What do you like about your previous museum visits?

> 2) From what you have seen at this exhibition about Design Society, what do you expect from this institution when it opens?

3) What kind of experiences do you hope to have at Design Society that are different to your previous museum visits?

The first question invites visitors to share their personal experiences of their previous museum visits and the section question aims to explore visitors' perception of Design Society from what they had seen at the exhibition. The third question is to explore visitors' expectations and desires for a cultural hub like Design Society.

4.3.1.1.1   Interview in Practice and Reflection

At the beginning of the SZDW, I made relatively equal efforts to obtain interviews and collect surveys. As the testing progress, I made notes and started rethinking my strategies in allocating my time between the two methods for pragmatic reasons. The decisions made before the fieldwork did not always apply in practice. Firstly, the rejection rate was very high when I approached visitors and explained that I wanted to interview them for research purposes. During this period, I approached 41 visitors and only nine visitors agreed to be interviewed. Within the nine interviews, only two interviews were longer than 10 minutes. This showed that the method itself might not be fruitful and productive for the local context and especially at the exit of the exhibition gallery.

I had not expected the high rejection rate before entering the field, but gradually realised the potential reasons for this. Firstly, doing interviews would be difficult in the context of a city, especially a city like Shenzhen where everyone is bustling around at a quick pace. Shenzhen is famous for its reputation of being efficient; 'Shenzhen speed' is a phenomenon in the history of its development. Even for a leisure activity such as visiting Shenzhen Design Week, many people had a tight schedule and were not willing to be disrupted by unplanned interviews. I observed that when visitors did agree to participate in the interview, their answers were short and many of them seemed in a hurry and were just hoping to get through the questions as soon as possible. As the interviews were not previously scheduled and interviewees were only visitors to the site, they often had their own plans and were not eager

for a long conversation. Thirdly, some of the visitors tended to be awkward in articulating experiences and feelings due to the personal communication nature of the interview.

As a researcher, I made every effort to make them feel comfortable and relaxed, including directing them to a corner of the exhibition where our conversation would be more private. As Gideon and Moskos (2012) suggest, the quality of interviewees' responses may be affected when other individuals are present while interviewing in public. I had Denscombe (2010)'s suggestions on good interview practices in mind: 'being attentive', 'sensitive to the feelings of the informant', 'tolerate silences', 'adept at using prompts', 'adept at using checks', 'non-judgemental' (p.182–184).

However, compared to the surveys which will be presented in the next section, participants were much more passive in sharing and responding to questions, and were more reticent in general. As a researcher, I realised that interviews might not be the best way of studying visitors' experiences for this study, although this observation could be applicable. Experiences are personal, therefore face-to-face verbal conversation might not be the best way to explore visitors' experiences. Fourthly, interviewees' answers tended to have a lot of homogeneity and the answers tended to be very generic and lack of depth. One reason could be that interviewees simply gave answers that sounded educated or were what they thought the research desired, while another reason might be they were not comfortable in sharing personal experiences in this particular setting and were just providing non-personal answers without much detail.

In summary, what I previously considered an effective method in gaining in-depth understanding turned out not to work well in this setting due to the difficulty of recruiting willing interviewees on site. Furthermore, the quality of the interviews was not satisfying either, and few common themes emerged. This suboptimal result called for an adaptation of my strategies for collecting sufficient data within a limited time in the main data collection stage.

However, interview still features as one of the research method in the final data collection period as it is suggested that 'triangulation should be used' (Denscombe 2010, p.189). Compared to interviews, surveys seemed to be a much more fruitful and appropriate method

within the local context and for this specific topic. Reflection on this will be further discussed in the next few sections.

4.3.1.2 Surveys

Walter (2010) defines survey research as 'the collection and analysis of respondents' (people, organisation or other group who respond to the survey) answers to the same set of structured questions'. Surveys are useful and effective for gathering information from a larger number of people on topics such as thoughts, attitudes, opinions, feelings, behaviours, beliefs, values, potential actions, decision-making processes and needs (see Walter 2010; Gideon 2012; Shaughnessy et al. 2015; Nelson and Cohn 2015). Specifically, surveys are frequently used for studying museum visitors by providing insights into their 'learning, thinking and experiencing' (Nelson and Cohn 2015). Surveys are useful when examining varying perspectives from across a range of different participants, which is exactly what this project required. Also, as noticed by Shettel (2008, in Kirchberg and Tröndle, p.437) that data collection methods used in visitor studies could be sometimes too obtrusive. As discussed in Chapter 2, I also raised questions while critically reviewing Falk and Dierking (2016)'s research on the visitor experience. Therefore, particular thoughts have been considered to reduce the interruption as much as possible for both collecting the meaningful data and for the case study institution. This is another important reason in choosing survey as a method besides interviews to be tested in the pilot study.

In practice while designing the survey, an installation I encountered as a visitor to Wellcome Collection in 2015 has been inspiring. Although not academic research, the form of survey in inviting visitors to talk about personal experiences worked effectively (see Figure 4.5). Visitors were interested in looking at them and to participate in providing their own answers. For these reasons, surveys were originally designed as another method for the triangulation purpose. It ended up becoming the main data collection method in the final fieldwork.
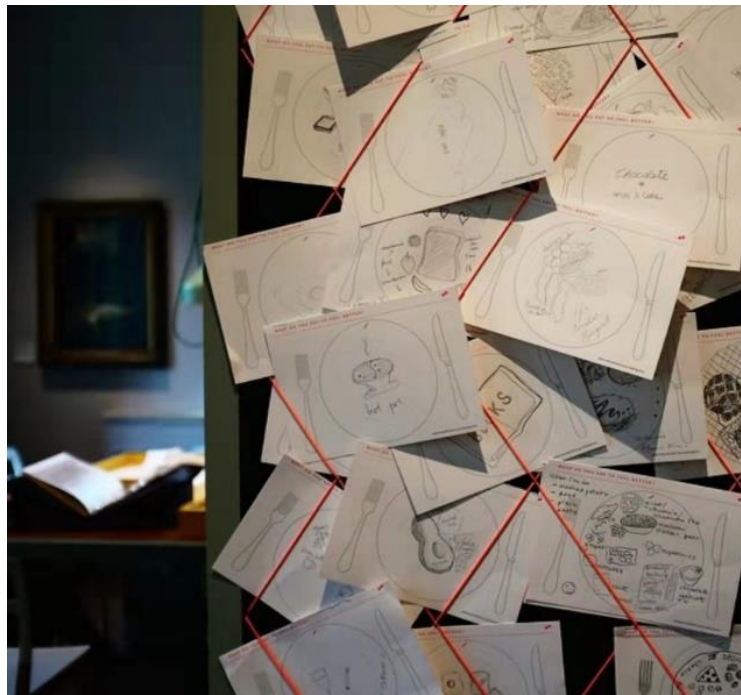
Figure 4.5: An engagement titled 'What do you eat to feel better?' at Wellcome Collection, London in 2015.
Photo by the author.

Following a constructivist view, open-ended questions were used in the survey so that visitors could share their views (Crotty 1998, cited in Creswell and Creswell 2018). Open-ended questions were chosen instead of multiple-choice questions because they would 'allow more flexibility', and visitors would be able to 'think through and provide a more detailed answer', according to Gideon (2012). Especially as Design Society was still in its preparation stage, it seemed counter-intuitive to limit respondents' answers in a way that may not accurately reflect their actual thoughts. The survey was carefully designed around open-ended hypothetical questions to allow spontaneity and exploration.

Respondents were asked to share what their expected experiences would be for a future visit to the institution. In order to prompt respondents to address this topic, three questions were designed as a guide, and visitors were asked to choose whichever one they preferred. Question A is a completely open-ended question with no key verb, while the other two questions each have a different verb added. These two verbs were derived from reviewing literatures and Design Society's official documents. As discussed in Chapter 2, while learning has been considered the primary outcome of museum experiences, it might not be sufficient

to explain the value and benefits of the museum experience (Packer 2008). Therefore, 'experience' was provided as an alternative option to 'learn'. By offering these, I wanted to test how well these types of choices between a collection of questions work in practice:

Question A: When visiting Design Society, I would like to…

Question B: When visiting Design Society, I would like to LEARN…

Question C: When visiting Design Society, I would like to EXPERIENCE…

The surveys were designed to be anonymous to help participants feel that they could be more honest (see Figure 4.6). Age was the only demographic information that was asked in the survey as it was of interest to Design Society. In the final fieldwork, demographic information was not gathered either, as it is not the direct focus of this research. The experience of the visitor is the primary focus for this research. However, incorporating demographic information may be helpful for future research, depending on the research aim.

Figure 4.6: A sample survey collected from the pilot study. It says, 'Shenzhen design, go abroad'.

In total, 303 surveys were collected from the pilot study, of which 230 were valid. These data were not included in the final data analysis but they did provide helpful information and insights for the researcher.

4.3.1.3   Surveys in Practice and Reflection

When the exhibition team from Design Society was preparing for the three-floor exhibition, I discussed my ideas for surveying visitors with the staff at Design Society and they agreed to integrate the survey process into the exhibition by using the textile installation at the end of the exhibition (see Figure 4.7). The idea was that visitors would be invited to fill in the surveys and completed ones would be displayed on the installation using a paper clip. This concept worked well in practice (see Figure 4.8,

Figure 4.9, and Figure 4.10). When the exhibition was opened to the public on the week of the SZDW, while I was inviting visitors to fill the surveys, the volunteers on the site were helping to collect the completed questionnaires and clip them onto the textile installation. The exhibition team was very supportive of this plan and was pleased that through adding the research responses, the space became more engaging, as visitors conversed about the displayed answers.

Several insights were gained about using this method during the pilot study. Methodologically, surveys proved to be a feasible and productive method for collecting data from visitors in the busy exhibition gallery. Most visitors were interested in participating when I invited them and explained the purpose of the survey. While visitors fill in the survey, they have their private time and space for thinking the answers. Compared to interviews, surveys are much more productive in collecting data from a wider range of visitors. Also, considering how short the timeframe was, the total amount of surveys collected and the valid ones amongst them were satisfying. As each survey sheet a participant chose to answer only had one question, the level of 'cognitive burden' (Gideon 2012) was relatively low, which contributed to the willingness of visitors to participate when compared to interviews.

Although most visitors agreed to participate when asked, the rate of the invalid questionnaires among the total number is relatively high (25%). Just as Gideon (2012) suggests, one of the

limitations of an open-ended question is that participants may provide irrelevant information that does not answer the question. The other limitation of the approach is that the answers tended to be 'short and cursory', with no chance for follow-up to let them clarify their responses (Nelson and Cohn 2015). Despite these limitations, however, the quality of the survey could be controlled somewhat by the researcher when compared to online surveys, since the surveys were completed by face-to-face invitation. An online survey might be able to get a large number of responses, but the quality is harder to control. Overall, the survey results from the pilot test were satisfactory, and therefore it was decided to be employed as a primary method during the main collection stage.

Figure 4.7: Pre-visit to the exhibition with the exhibition team from Design Society before the opening of the SZDW. Photo by the author.
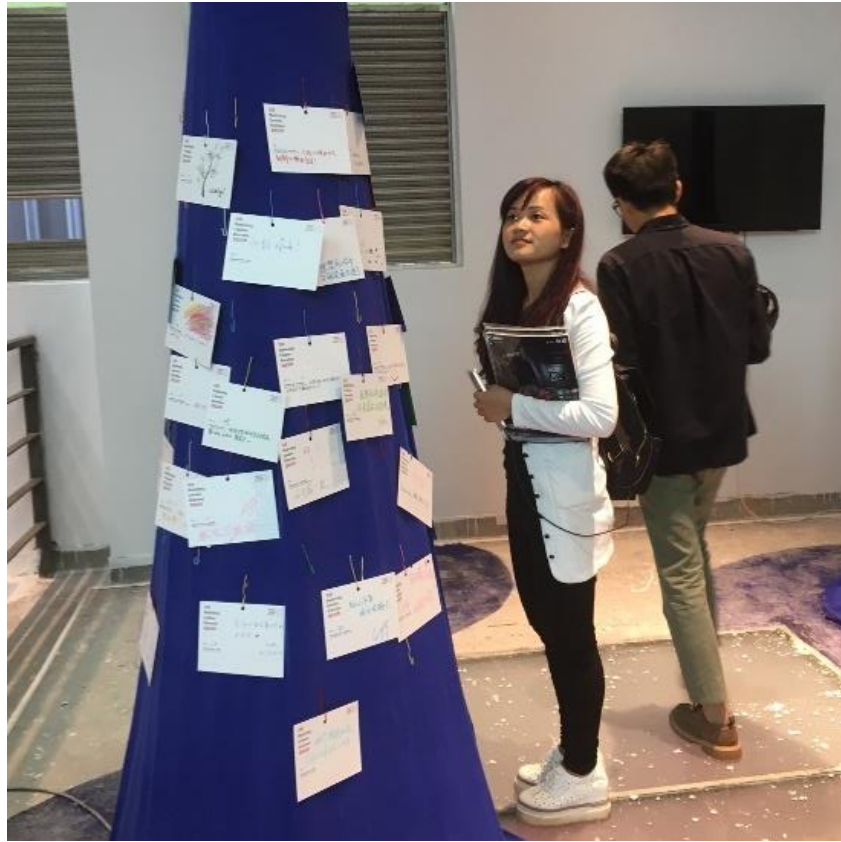
Figure 4.8: A visitor looking at other respondents' surveys after hanging her own answer. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.9: A few visitors looking at the surveys displayed on the textile installation. Photo by the author.
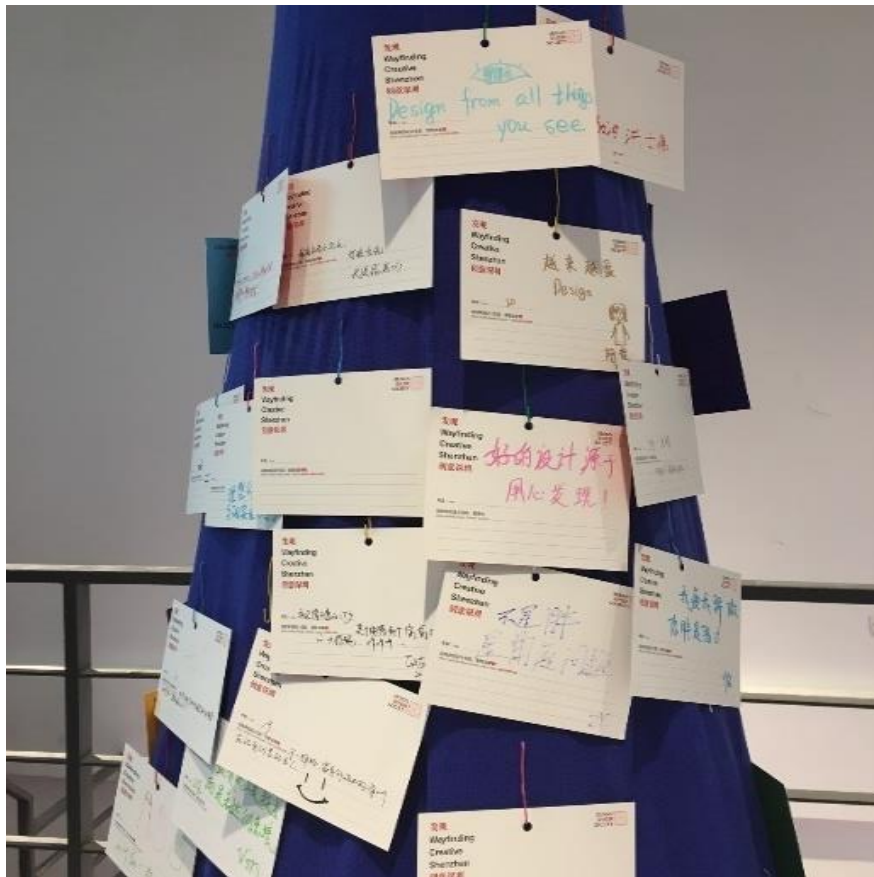
Figure 4.10: A close-up of the survey answers displayed on the installation. Photo by the author.

In summary, this pilot study proved to be an essential part of the research process. The testing helped the researcher in optimising the design of the research methods and the way that visitors would be recruited. Through the pilot study, I also familiarised myself with the in-person context of the case study and gained insights into how Design Society positioned itself and how members of the public responded to the concept of Design Society, a new cultural hub in the city. It was also a chance for me to get know the staff that I would be working with in the final data collection stage. During the pilot study, I had the opportunity of meeting them both formally and informally. The trust built between us enabled the smooth process of the data collection eight months later.

4.3.2 Final Fieldwork

The final fieldwork took place between November 2017 and February 2018 at Design Society in Shenzhen, China. Using the outcomes of the pilot study, the final fieldwork was designed using these methods: surveys, interviews, observations and autoethnography. Each employed method is documented and discussed below. In total, the results presented in this thesis are based on the valid data that was collected from this stage, including 335 valid visitor surveys, 15 interviews with visitors, 4 interviews with staff, 40 hours of observations, and an autoethnography piece which reflects my experiences as both a visitor and a researcher. Various forms of documents including Design Society's official website and print materials were also collected as data sources. Data collection for document analysis lasted longer since as the analysis progressed, new documents were searched and reviewed.

4.3.2.1   Surveys

As an effective way of 'finding what people are thinking, feeling or doing' and being 'especially useful for exploratory studies' (Walter 2010, p.179), surveys were chosen as one of the key methods in the main data collection stage. Although it was already one of the planned data collection methods, the findings from the pilot study contributed to the decision to make surveys one of the main methods. The results from the pilot study also prompted more critical thinking regarding the design of the survey questions.

In contrast to the pilot study surveys, which examined visitors' expectations and opinions, surveys of visitors to the actual site of Design Society explored their experiences in answering RQ3. Similar to the pilot study, open-ended questions were also used. In current survey research, closed-format questions are more common than open-ended questions (Stoneman et al. 2012, p.850). Open-ended questions are sometimes included in surveys, but as Stoneman et al. (2012, p.854) argues, they are rarely used by analysts to explore the richness of the responses. Closed-format questions can easily generate data since they take a shorter time to analyse and do not require transcribing or coding. However, closed-format questions tend to generalise visitors' experiences and often fail to show the richness and unexpected elements of visitors' experiences. In comparison to closed-format questions,

open-ended questions have two potential advantages: 1) they allow the respondent to use their own 'frame of reference', which leads to a 'more heterogeneous set of perspectives' than closed questions; and 2) a greater amount of information can be generated (Stoneman et al. 2012, p.853). These two advantages intersect to some degree. Instead of letting visitors choose from a set of pre-determined options to best describe their experience, I argue that in investigating visitors' experiences it is important to enable them to describe, comment and reflect in their own way – whether through words, drawing or a combination of both.

The survey questions for capturing visitors' experiences at Design Society were informed by the literature in Chapter 2 and the pilot study. A survey with a set of four questions was designed and visitors were asked to choose only one question to answer, as this technique worked well in the pilot study due to not placing too great a cognitive burden on visitors and at the same time enables a variety of answers in mapping out a more comprehensive picture of the visitor experience. The content of the survey questions was informed by Packer and Ballantyne (2016) and Pekarik et al. (1999)'s model on visitor experiences:

> Question A: What did you enjoy the most during today's visit?
>
> Question B: What did you realise during today's visit?
>
> Question C: What surprised you during today's visit?
>
> Question D: I want to share with ____ about my visit today: _____

The overall goal of providing a choice of questions is to prompt as wide a spectrum of experiences as possible and to prompt interest in participating in the survey. Examples of collected data are as shown in Figure 4.11. During the data ordering process, each visitor's survey was given a file name for referencing purposes, for example 'Visitor-S65' or 'Visitor-WS6'. The letter in the file name represents the answer's category: E-Enjoy, R-Realise, S-Surprise, and SH-Share. If it is 'Visitor-WS6', the 'W' indicates that the survey was collected from the workshops rather than from the exhibitions. This list of four questions is not a comprehensive list, and more empirical research should test the effectiveness of these and

other questions in collecting data on the visitor experience. These four questions were designed due to the reasons below.
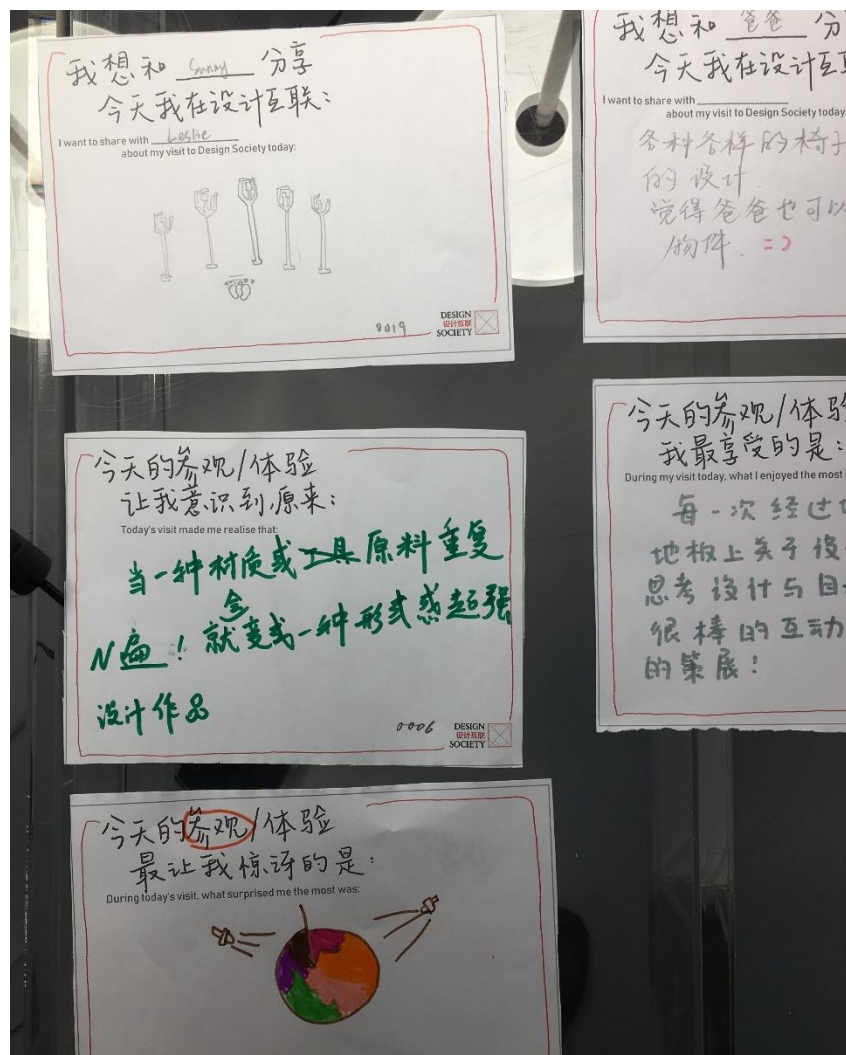
Figure 4.11: Examples of the final survey form. Photo by the author.

The first question ('enjoy') aims to capture experiences of 'enjoyment' that visitors found satisfying, which is what Pekarik et al. (1999)'s research set out to discover. The question aims to help visitors to recall what they found satisfying during their visit, which could include many categories of experiences such as 'object experience', 'social experience', 'physical experience', 'sensory experience', or 'cognitive experience'. Many museum surveys use this single question to measure visitor satisfaction; however, this was not this study's main purpose, as it sought to explore the richness and multidimensionality of visitors'

experiences. In addition, three other questions were composed to help visitors share their experiences. The second question ('realise') aims to prompt reflections on 'introspective experiences' and 'transformative experiences' addressed in Pekarik et al. (1999) and Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s framework. The third question ('surprise') explores visitor's unexpected experiences at Design Society, which could potentially reflect visitor's perceptions of and expectations for visiting Design Society. This question was informed by the results from the pilot study, where visitors expressed strong interest in 'exploring new things'. It was also designed to capture the 'cognitive experience' and 'emotional experience'. The final question ('sharing') uses a statement tone instead of a question, aiming to prompt reflection through writing to a real-life or imagined audience. It invites visitors to communicate their experiences without being limited to the three categories above. The survey questions deliberately avoided the word 'learned'. As discussed in Chapter 2, I agree with Packer (2008) that there are more experiences to explore beyond 'learning' regardless of how broadly it is defined. The space for answers on the survey sheet was not lined, which indicated the answers could be in any form and was not limited to text. In summary, these questions were designed as a set of tools to capture visitors' multifaceted experiences in a new cultural hub.

In practice, the place that I invited visitors to participate in the surveys was located at the 'reflection area' of the exhibition Minding the Digital (see Figure 4.12). I previously envisioned the exit point of the exhibition galleries as the place to conduct surveys. However, the exit point was also the entrance and there were already security screening stations set up there. Due to pragmatic reasons, it was not possible for the visitors to have a place to sit to complete the survey at the exit of the exhibition galleries. One of the staff at Design Society generously and creatively proposed that I could use a set of the exhibits as my 'survey station': a set of furniture made by Opendesk (opendesk 2018) in displaying the open source spirit in the design industry (see Figure 4.14). Once I prepared all the materials (survey sheets, pens, a brief introduction of the research project), the survey process followed three steps. In the first step, once a visitor agreed to participate in the survey, I would first ask whether the visitor had been to the exhibition Values of Design prior to coming to the

Minding the Digital exhibition which will be introduced in detail in Chapter 5. I only proceeded with visitors who had been through both exhibitions. The second step was that I would then introduce the four survey sheets to the visitors and explain they just needed to fill one of them. They would go to one of the desks and sit down to complete the survey. Finally, once they completed the survey, they would return the survey sheets to me as instructed. At the same time, there was also a table set up with the survey sheets and the information sheet containing both the introduction of the project and the instructions, as shown in Figure 4.16, for visitors to complete the process themselves while I conducted observation or interviews in other locations or while I was in the public programme space. Mixing both ways of recruiting the participants, I was able to collect abundant data while also ensuring that the survey participants were not only those who volunteered their opinions.

The location was not ideal, as it was not a technical exit survey as it was between the reflection area and the exit of the exhibition and there were still a few installations being exhibited, it had multiple benefits. Firstly, the comfort of being able to sit down and fill in the survey is very important, an experience learned in the pilot study. Secondly, for considerations for the environment in welcoming visitors, the research itself posed minimum disruption, as the desks and the chairs were already part of the exhibition. Thirdly, the surrounding areas of the survey location contributed to the willingness in participating and contributing high-quality answers. The whole reflection area was at nearly the end of the Minding the Digital exhibition and lots of space was provided for visitors to rest and reflect (see Figure 4.13). Therefore, when visitors reached this point of the exhibition, they tended to slow down and not rush. Fourthly, as both the space allowed and the staff in the Design Society were supportive, I was able to use a creative means similar to what I had done in the pilot study, which is to have a space to display other visitors' survey answers as an engagement in itself and to also encourage visitors in providing their own answers (see Figure 4.17). The space was even sufficient for a group of visitors to complete the surveys together (see Figure 4.18 and Figure 4.19).

Figure 4.12: The 'reflection area' (the second floor) of the exhibition Minding the Digital. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.13: Another angle of the second floor of the exhibition Minding the Digital. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.14: The open-source furniture displayed in the exhibition Minding the Digital. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.15: The exhibits of the open-source furniture were transformed into my 'survey station'. Photo by the author.
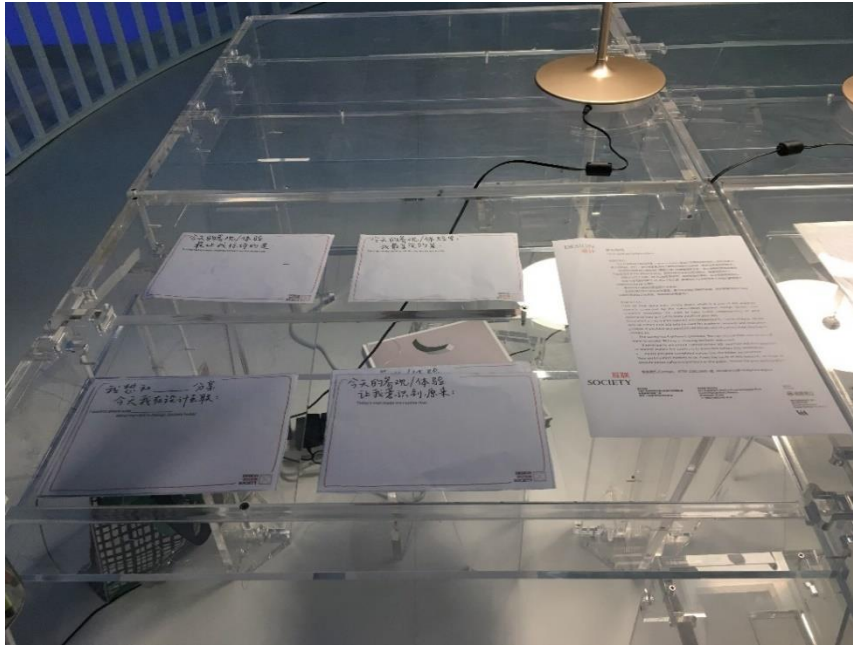
Figure 4.16: The self-serve 'survey station'. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.17: The board kindly provided by Design Society upon my request, which was used to display survey answers from visitors. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.18: Participants filling in the survey. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.19: Participants filling in the survey. Photo by the author.

Besides exhibitions, this set of surveys questions were also used in exploring the visitor experience at the public programmes. It mostly took place at the dedicated studio room which will be introduced further in Chapter 7. Visitors who participated the workshops were invited to complete the survey at the end and similar steps were applied in asking for their consent.

In total, 427 surveys were received and 335 of them are valid. The analysis of these surveys will be presented in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

4.3.2.2 Interviews

As discussed in the pilot study, interviews as a way of collecting spontaneous data from visitors did not work as planned, but it was not completely abandoned as it is still an effective tool for understanding museum visitors' experience and a source of data for triangulation purposes. Interviews with visitors followed Nelson and Cohn (2015)'s approach and were designed to be unstructured without 'a scripted list of questions' (Nelson and Cohn 2015, p.29). 15 interviews with visitors were conducted during the final data collection period. Questions asked were similar with the four survey questions but in a more flexible way. As visitors describes their experiences, more follow up questions were asked in response. Visitors were approached at various locations in the building including the exhibition gallery, workshop rooms, offices and public spaces within the building. My advantage as a researcher is that I am a native Chinese speaker with a near-native command of English, which enabled me to interview the majority of visitors and staff who spoke Chinese or English. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed to create an accurate account of what was said. Since the interviewees – both visitors and staff – were international, it is critical that the interviewer (the author) spoke the language of the people being interviewed (Gideon 2012).

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with four staff members to answer RQ2. The interviewees including the Director of Design Society, the V&A Curator of the exhibition Values of Design, the V&A Learning Manager for the Design Society project and the Learning Manager from the Design Society team. The interview questions were tailored to

each interviewee depends on their role and the topics covered were around the development of the concept of Design Society, the progress Design Society made and the role of exhibition and public programmes.

The interviews were referred as either 'Visitor-I01' with 'I' indicates interview, or 'Staff-I01'. In this way, the data from interview can be clearly separated with survey data.

4.3.2.3   Observation

Besides surveys and interviews, I was also interested in exploring visitors' behaviours at Design Society as they 'naturally occur', without any intervention, through the use of observation (Flick 2018, p.312). Beyond verbal or written formats, 'direct observation of the phenomenon of interest is a particularly fruitful method' (Patton 2014, p.27). For the museum context specifically, 'observation provides a rich, holistic view of all that takes place during a programme or how audiences interact with a museum product' (Nelson and Cohn 2015, p.29).

During the three months of fieldwork, I spent over 40 hours observing visitors at Design Society at different times of the day and week and at different locations, but mainly in the exhibition galleries. Observation also occurred at specific areas of the exhibition, based on themes from initial analysis of the survey data. For example, one interesting theme that many visitors mentioned was their experience of taking photos at Design Society. Based on these responses, I observed areas where visitors tended to stay and take photos and took fieldnotes with rich descriptions.

Fieldwork also included participatory observation in seven workshops which will be introduced in detail in the next chapter. These participatory observations were especially fruitful as I had the chance to do follow-up interviews right after the workshops. By pairing observation with interviews, I was able to watch visitors do something and then ask them about it, as 'observation is good at finding what people DO, which can be a useful supplement to what they THINK' (McKenna-Cress and Kamien 2013, p.241).

However, the limitation of using observation in pursuing the research questions in this project is obvious, as 'not everything can be directly observed' (Patton 2014, p.27). Therefore, the next section introduces another data collection method that was used in this project, which to some degree filled a gap in the in-depth, nuanced and rich information that I was seeking in answering RQ3.

4.3.2.4   Autoethnography

This research also incorporates a reflexive methodological practice by adding an autoethnographic essay. Reflexivity has become a 'benchmark' in recent sociological research, and the agency of the researcher has been recognised as 'an active ingredient in shaping meaning in the design, execution and interpretation of data', Dewdney et al. (2013 p.225) argue. Reflective research methods allow the agency of the researcher 'to be acknowledged as a constituent of knowledge formation' (Dewdney et al. 2013, p.225).

The emerging trend of using autoethnography represents an increasing shift toward self-reflexivity in all realms of writing. Individual voices are being increasingly accepted in qualitative research within the humanities and social sciences, and the amount of autoethnographic texts is similarly expanding (Muncey 2010, p.35). Although multiple qualitative methods were used in this research, none provide great detail from a first-person perspective.

In the introduction to *Auto/Ethnography*, Reed-Danahay (1997) defines autoethnography as 'a form of self-narrative' that places the self within a social context (p.9). She states that it is essential for an autoethnographer to be a 'boundary-crosser' with 'dual identity' (1997, p.3). The shifting identity of an autoethnographer, in her view, opens new ways of writing about social life. To Ellis (2004), autoethnography is a method which connects the personal to the cultural and social. She describes her perspective of autoethnography as follows:

> I start with my personal life and pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call 'systematic sociological introspection' and 'emotional

recall' to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story (p.xvii).

As a museum visitor myself, apart from my identity as a researcher, these questions emerged in my mind: What about *my* experience? What happened to *me* when I visited Design Society as a visitor? At first, I had doubts about how valuable my personal experiences might be, but as Carolyn Ellis, an autoethnography pioneer, describes in her book *The Ethnographic I* (2004), "…with understanding yourself comes understanding others." Her works on autoethnography confirm that although experiences can vary, when using autoethnography as a research method 'the goal is to enter and document the moment-to-moment, concrete details of a life' as 'that's an important way of knowing as well' (Ellis 2004, p.xvii).

Employing autoethnography is an innovation in museum studies, since autoethnography itself is a 'latest and still emergent' qualitative research approach (Patton 2002, p.84). In Richardson (1999) words, qualitative writing suck as autoethnography is a form of 'creative analytic practices' (p.660).

As museums are growing more visitor-centred, it is important to recruit first-person narrative as a data source, but my review of the existing literature found this source of data to be missing. Goodall (2000) considers autoethnography 'creative narratives shaped out of a writer's personal experiences' that could be addressed to both academic and public audiences. This advantage of being academic and at the same time accessible to a public audience increases the potential impact of the research.

My contention is that autoethnographic approaches should be more common in this field as they make unique contributions not provided by other research methods. As a form of empirical investigation and as a mode of methodological enquiry, I will use autoethnography as an important alternative source for triangulation in examining visitors' experiences. It is valuable to have personal experiences recorded in detail in order to know more about the visitor-museum relationship. In other words, if I do not understand my own experience first, how can I have a better understanding of other people's experiences through indirect approaches such as survey or interview?

For ethnographic and autobiographical writing, questions such as 'who speaks' and 'on behalf of whom' are vital to ask (Reed-Danahay 1997). In writing the autoethnography, my identity was constantly shifting between a museum visitor and an academic researcher looking closely into museum exhibitions from an analytical perspective. Autoethnography, together with the material gathered from visits and related museum theories, provides a unique insight into examining visitors' experiences at Design Society. The main purpose of utilizing autoethnography is to test this method in empirical research and provide an alternative source of data in answering RQ3.

The full autoethnography essay which describes my experience at one of the workshops at Design Society is attached in the Appendix A. It was written right after attending the workshop and the essay was imported in the NVIVO and was coded alongside of the survey and interview data. The reason it is not included in the main body is that it is a relatively different type of data compared to all the other data.

4.3.2.5   Document Analysis

This research also used documents as a complementary data source in answering RQ2. Institutional documents are commonly used in qualitative research (Bowen 2009, p.27). Through reviewing documents, the researcher gains understanding and meaning through the data just like other qualitative research methods (Bowen 2009, p.27). Documents that can be analysed include both printed and electronic versions and the content can be either text and images (Bowen 2009, p.27). The data that document analysis yields could be excerpts and quotations (Labuschagne 2003, p.101). The analytic procedure includes 'finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesising data contained in documents' (Bowen 2009, p.27).

The type of documents examined in this study included webpages, blogs, newspapers, printed brochures, photographs, institutional reports, project records, press releases, and secondary data collected from third parties. Some of these are public materials and others are

unpublished internal documents. All the documents referred to in the thesis were cited with footnotes.

The reason that document analysis is selected in analysing Design Society is because as a method it is 'particularly applicable' in studies 'producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation, or programme' (Bowen 2009, p.29). Also, Bowen (2009) continues to explain that '[d]ocument analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation' (p.28). He adds that '[t]he rationale for document analysis lies in its role in methodological and data triangulation, the immense value of documents in case study research, and its usefulness as a stand-alone method for specialised forms of qualitative research' (Bowen 2009, p.28). This method was also chosen for practical reasons. As a doctoral research, document analysis offers efficiency as it requires 'data selection' instead of 'data collection' (Bowen 2009, p.31). The researcher also benefits from the availability of the documents as many of them are in the public domain and are accessible at any time (Bowen 2009, p.31).

4.4   Data Analysis

Finally, all the data was reviewed and organised into codes and themes. This process, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain, is both inductive and deductive, as a researcher cross analyses the themes within the collected set of data until a satisfactory set of themes are established. This emergent design also applies to the research process as a whole.

Data collected in this study is primarily in the form of surveys, interviews, fieldnotes from observation, autoethnography essays and documents. Much of this data was not immediately accessible for analysis but required some processing; interview audio recordings were transcribed, valid surveys were selected, and field notes were expanded and transcribed. The raw data then went through the process of 'data condensation' which included 'selecting, focusing, simplifying, and/or transforming', and which ultimately made the data 'stronger' (Miles 2020, p.31).

The qualitative software NVivo12 was used to perform these steps. In the beginning, I managed the data manually, which was very difficult due to the form and the amount of the data. I attended a workshop on NVivo12 and consulted the speaker about my project. After learning more about what NVivo12 can do, I decided to import all of my data and do the analysis within the software. NVivo12 does not only provide a great solution in storing the data in one place, but it also allows great flexibility in the process of condensing the data. The use of 'nodes', a unit that can be used in coding data into themes, is the most helpful in this project.

It is worth mentioning that the majority of the data collected were in Chinese and the data presented in this thesis were translated by me. I acknowledge that translation cannot be viewed as original data and in presenting the data, I have worked to the best of my knowledge in translating the original ideas.

For the survey data, two rounds of coding were employed. In the first round of coding, all data were coded using a combination of Pekarik et al. (1999) and Packer and Ballantyne's models (2016), which includes 11 facets, as shown in the Figure 4.20. The limitations of both models were discussed in Chapter 2, and this study will reflect on potential improvements to the framework.

In the second round of coding, the coded data was reviewed again and through further analysis and interpretation, the 11 facets of experiences from the coded data coalesced into themes. Adaptions were made to the data ordering and analysis, and suggestions were made for refining the frameworks for future research embedded in a museum context. These themes are reported in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.
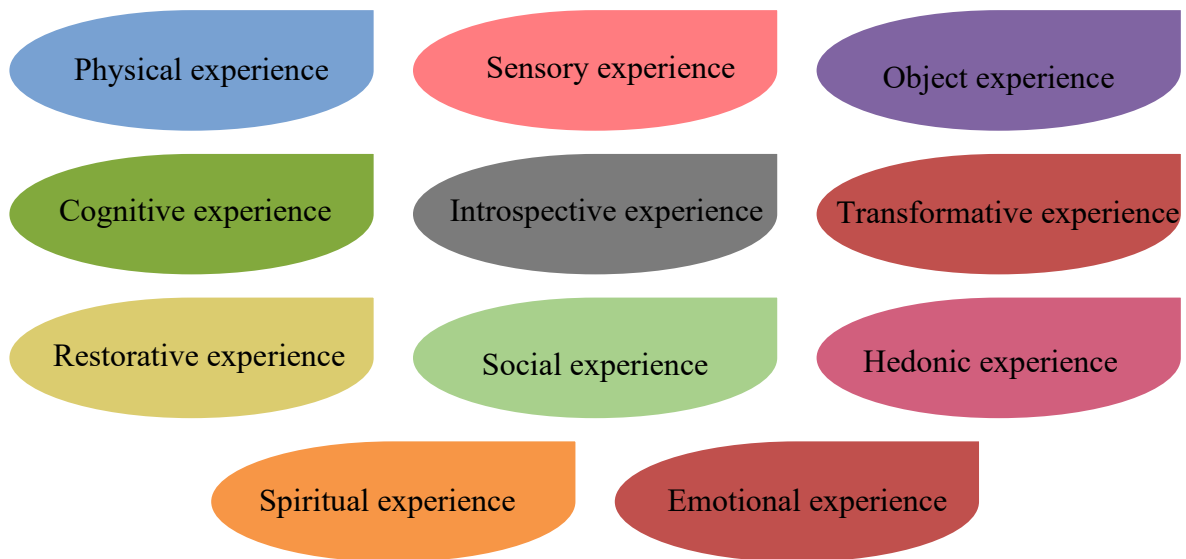
Figure 4.20: The first round of coding – 11 facets of experiences

4.5   The Researcher's Role

Before moving away from the details of the research design, I must address my role as a researcher, as I was required to make active choices while conducting the research. I developed a personal interest in museums as a visitor at a very young age. Growing up in China, I have visited many different types and sizes of Chinese museums. However, it was during my master's degree studies in the UK that I developed an academic interest in museums. While studying in the UK, I visited museums of many types and seeing how they engaged their visitors stimulated my curiosity in exploring museums through academic research.

During the first year of my PhD programme, I came across information about an upcoming institution in China that was collaborating with a British museum, with the ambition of becoming a leading design museum in China. I decided to change my previous research plan and dedicate my doctoral research to study this case, which was interesting and appeared to be worth exploring further. Coming from China, I care about the development of museums in China and hope this study will contribute to the collection of research on Chinese museums. Choosing to approach the case study with a highlight of the visitor experience is also a

reflection of my personal convictions of the importance of a visitor-centred perspective to museum studies. If visitors are to be the centre of museums and could make museums thrive, how could their voices be absent? Capturing and analysing visitor experiences can provide robust evidence revealing that the design and programming in new institutions contributes to the understanding of the changing trends and the nature of museums. Most importantly, it can do so in an intimate way as narrated and illustrated by visitors themselves. Lastly, as Hooper-Greenhill (2000) puts it, this approach also derives from an 'empathetic concern' (p.ix). As a frequent museum visitor, myself, I have always been fascinated by what visitors do in museums, what their experiences are and how different those experiences are to my own.

The planning for Design Society dates back to 2013, and its official opening was 2nd December 2017. I started to follow its progress in 2014 and was the only researcher who successfully obtained access for academic research until the end of my fieldwork. I designed a pilot study and witnessed the opening of Design Society. Thus, I was able to closely observe the birth of this institution during its inception period from 2015 to 2018. This will be further reflected upon in Chapter 5.

Before conducting this research, I had no previous connection with anyone in Design Society. Permission to research Design Society and its visitors was obtained after a few months of correspondence between me and the director of Design Society. The permission statement is attached in the Appendix C. As repeatedly mentioned in the previous sections, gaining access to do visitor research could be difficult due to many reasons. In some studies in which researchers are able to collect abundant data it is because of the contacts they have (for example see Pauget et al. 2021), which in some ways could potentially introduce bias into the research. Therefore, although it is time consuming, there is the benefit of approaching the research object with no previous connection.

As a researcher, I endeavour to keep my focus on learning from the institution and the visitors rather than looking for agreement with my own understanding or the ideas expressed in the literature. However, a completely neutral perspective is not possible, and both my experiences and identity as a researcher may shape the direction and approach of the research

design and the interpretation of the research data. These factors will be reflected upon in the following sections and in the conclusion chapter, where research limitations are discussed.

4.6   Ethics

Just like much other qualitative research, my project inevitably involves contact with human subjects, which requires the researcher to consider potential ethical issues. Before entering the field, I discussed the ethical issues with both of my supervisors, and my ethical forms were approved by the ethics review committee in the School of Journalism, Media and Culture. The research was conducted in accordance with Cardiff University's Research Integrity and Governance Code of Practice (2018) and ESRC's Framework for research ethics (2015). The whole data collection process in this study was permitted by the organisation (Design Society) in full awareness of my research ambitions (see Appendix C for field access permission issued by Design Society). Periodically, reports were submitted to the institution to communicate the progress of the research.

Visitors and staff who participated in interviews or surveys were fully briefed about the 'purpose, methods, and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks and benefits, if any, are involved' (ESRC, p.4). The brief also included how much time and effort would be involved for participants and the anonymity of the data, and they were given the option to withdraw at any time. For the data collected from interviews, oral consent was given by all the interviewees who were audio recorded. As participation was entirely voluntary, the right of people not to participate was respected, and no one was forced by any means to proceed. At the end of each interview or questionnaire I also offered my contact details to the participant in case they were interested in reviewing the final completed research.

As the questionnaires were anonymous, recorded or written consent was considered unnecessary. Visitors were given oral information on the intended use of their contribution before they proceeded to participate in the questionnaire. The documents used in this research were also appropriately and ethically acquired with acknowledgement of copyrights and permission when necessary.

4.7   Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in this study and explained and justified the choice of each method. The combination of methods provides an implementation guide for future research both in similar and different fields requiring new insights, understanding and knowledge about phenomena. This study employed adapted methods of data collection to fulfil the requirement for richness of data, as well as an adapted data analysis method to enable refinement of conceptual frameworks. The evaluation and limitation of this research will be fully discussed in Chapter 8. In the next chapter, the case study of Design Society will be examined from an institutional perspective, and the experiences it offers will be presented and discussed.

Chapter 5   Design Society: A Case Study

5.1   Introduction

From Chapter 2 to Chapter 3, some of the key transformations in museum development in both western and Chinese contexts were discussed and the trend of museums growing into cultural hubs was highlighted. Chapter 4 outlined the methodology of the research project, and briefly introduced the case study of Design Society. In this chapter, through a detailed and intensive analysis of the single case, I will answer RQ2:

> What does the concept and the formation of Design Society contribute to the understanding of the transformation of museums into cultural hubs?

Document analysis and interviews are the primary research methods for this chapter, and it includes two sections. The first section presents the findings from critically appraising and synthesising the key institutional documents. By relating to some of the literature cited in previous chapters, it positions Design Society in the context of museums' transformation into cultural hubs. The second section presents what Design Society offers to its visitors. The information and discussions both deepen and broaden the understanding of Design Society as a new cultural institution in China. Apart from answering RQ2, the important information as well as historical background provided in this chapter also contribute to the understanding of the visitor experience at Design Society (which will be presented in Chapter 6 and 7).

5.2   The Concept of Design Society

This section tries to answer an important question, 'What is Design Society?', through three sub-sections: the concept of Design Society and its corporate set-up, its collaboration with the V&A museum, and the geographical, economic and sociocultural context of its location.

Documents are used in providing context, critical information and tracking change and development of Design Society (see Bowen 2009). The data from interviewing the staff will also be presented.

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the characteristics of a cultural hub is that it tends to be multidimensional and multifunctional. Design Society seems to be exactly one such institution. This is how Design Society introduces itself on its official website, under the question 'What is Design Society':

> Design Society is *many* things. Its identity lies in its capacity to combine, connect, cross-fertilize and, by doing so, transcend cultural territories and boundaries as we know them. It is many things, and at the same time it is clearly a *new* thing that requires its own name to go beyond the sum of its parts: hence Design Society. (Design Society 2020a, para.1, my italics)

> As a visitor destination Design Society runs the Sea World Culture and Arts Center. A must-go for the culture- and design-hungry in Shenzhen and beyond, connecting audiences of different ages and background with design.

> For such a visitor, it may look like a comprehensive design *museum*. It features multiple galleries, presenting groundbreaking designs from the past, present and future. It has studios and education spaces, catering to the public's need for leaning and interpretation.

> For another visitor, Design Society cultivates a genuine *civic and community center*, comprising a theater and many other event spaces, big and small, programmed by Design Society and others inspired by the many possibilities to use this venue and urban landmark. Around, inside, and even on top of the building, generous public and park space welcomes visitors to discover, play, experiment, interact, share, and create together. Or shop and be nurtured *in multiple ways* across the building. (Design Society 2020b, para.4-6, my italics).

> More than the sum of its parts. Design Society (Design Society 2020b, para.9).

It is worth examining these statements further. Before discussing these critical statements, the set-up of Design Society will be explained first for contextual understanding,

The way Design Society was set up is novel in many ways, both in the Chinese and the western context. It is a vivid example of the new emerging 'hybrid' institutions that do not fit into the typical existing models as discussed in Chapter 2 (Zarobell 2017). Design Society was founded by China Merchants Shekou Holdings (CMSK), a Chinese state-owned company which ranks 385th among the Forbes 2021 'Global 2000 world's largest public companies' (Forbes 2021). As shown below, CMSK is a part of China Merchant Group (CMG), which will be introduced in section 5.2.2 as it provides unique historical insights into the establishment of Design Society.

Here is an introduction to the founder of Design Society, CMSK, from its official website:

> China Merchants Shekou Industrial Zone Holdings Co., Ltd, a flagship subsidiary under the China Merchant Group (CMG), a leading state-owned enterprise under the direct supervision of the central government, is dedicated to comprehensive urban development (China Merchants Shekou Industrial Zone Holdings [no date], para.1).

> CMSK…strategically positions itself as "China's leading city and industrial park developer and operator" (China Merchants Shekou Industrial Zone Holdings [no date], para.3).

> Committed to be "the better life carrier", CMSK develops comprehensive solutions for urban development and industrial upgrading and also provides diversified products and services covering the full life cycle (China Merchants Shekou Industrial Zone Holdings [no date], para.4).

The fact that the founder CMG is primarily a developer and a commercial company makes Design Society an interesting case study. The interest in economic developments in the culture and arts is detectable in the development of Design Society, confirming what Zarobell (2017) observes, as discussed in section 2.4.2. Although owned by the state, the core of CMG is essentially a business company. This nature of Design Society, especially given its

collaboration with V&A, makes it an institution that sits more within the context of what Zarobell (2017) calls 'a global phenomenon' that reflects 'both the growth of the international bourgeoisie and the turn to individual, non-state actors, who are more potent in the current neoliberal economic climate' (p.15). This phenomenon might be more visible in some parts of the world than others. In the context of China, as discussed in Chapter 3, it is an emerging trend that is only starting to become more visible.

'Establishing a *museum* in Shekou' has been the vision of CMSK for 17 years as it hopes to bring 'culture and leisure to its citizens' (Design Society 2020a, para.1, my italics) However, the establishment of Design Society is not a straightforward process. In fact, it had a complex trajectory. One of the reasons is that there is tension between the brand of Design Society and the venue Sea World Culture and Arts Center (SWCAC). This tension lasted till this day and will be reflected further in the conclusion chapter.

One of the changes while Design Society was preparing for its launch was a name change: from Shekou Design Museum to Design Society. Yin (1994, cited in Bowen 2009) argues that even subtle changes can reflect substantive developments in a project, and this is definitely the case as shown below.

During the founding period, Design Society was initially considered to be 'the first design museum in China', as indicated on both the press release from the developer (China Merchants Group 2014), and that of the founding partner V&A (Cormier 2017b). It was designed with the concept of being a 'museum' and Shekou Design Museum was used as a working name, as also shown in multiple media sources at the time (for example, see Hadley 2014; James 2015). The information on Design Society has been updated as the concept of the institution has evolved, but the fact that it was considered to be a 'museum' can also be traced through some media coverage during 2014–2017, as the early media coverage on Design Society mostly describes it as a 'museum' (see Seow 2014; Harris 2017).

In 2014, this project of collaboratively creating a new institution was initiated (Cormier 2017a). CMSK held a press conference in 2014. The press conference was for the occasion of celebrating the beginning of construction of the SWCAC building. The Chinese title of the press release refers to 'Sea World Culture and Art Center Press Conference' while the

English title below reads 'Shekou Design *Museum* Press Conference' (my italics), as shown in Figure 5.1.
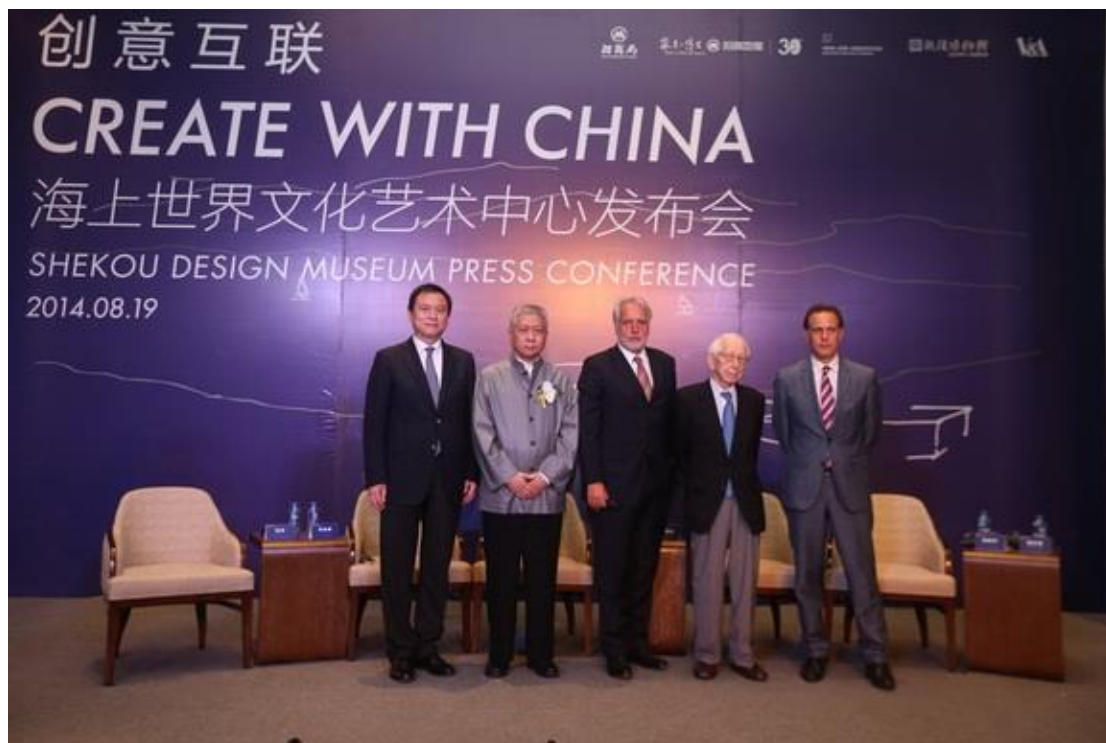
Figure 5.1: The press conference before the completion of Design Society's building, SWCAC. The background board has 'Shekou Design Museum' as the English translation of SWCAC.

In 2017, it opened to the public, renamed as Design Society (Jessica 2017). This trajectory of creating a museum ended up with the brand-new name Design Society and a brand-new venue, SWCAC. The exact reasons and the discussions involved in this change are unknown – be it marketing strategies, leadership decisions or pragmatic reasons. This exploration of the names of the institution indicates a stage of exploring its identity. In December 2017, when Design Society opened its doors to the public, it was marketed as 'Design Society', although occasionally SWCAC also appears in some of the official materials. This has been changing since. The relationships between key stakeholders are illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 5.2. In contrast to most museums in the west which are usually run by a committee, the team of Design Society was appointed by its developer, CMSK.

Table 2: Design Society's stakeholders and their descriptions

Term	Nature
China Merchant Shekou Holdings (CMSK)	A Chinese state-owned company; the founder and the developer of Design Society and SWCAC
Sea World Culture and Art Centre (SWCAC)	The physical building where Design Society is housed
Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A)	A British design museum that is also the founding partner of Design Society
Design Society	An institution/cultural hub/platform
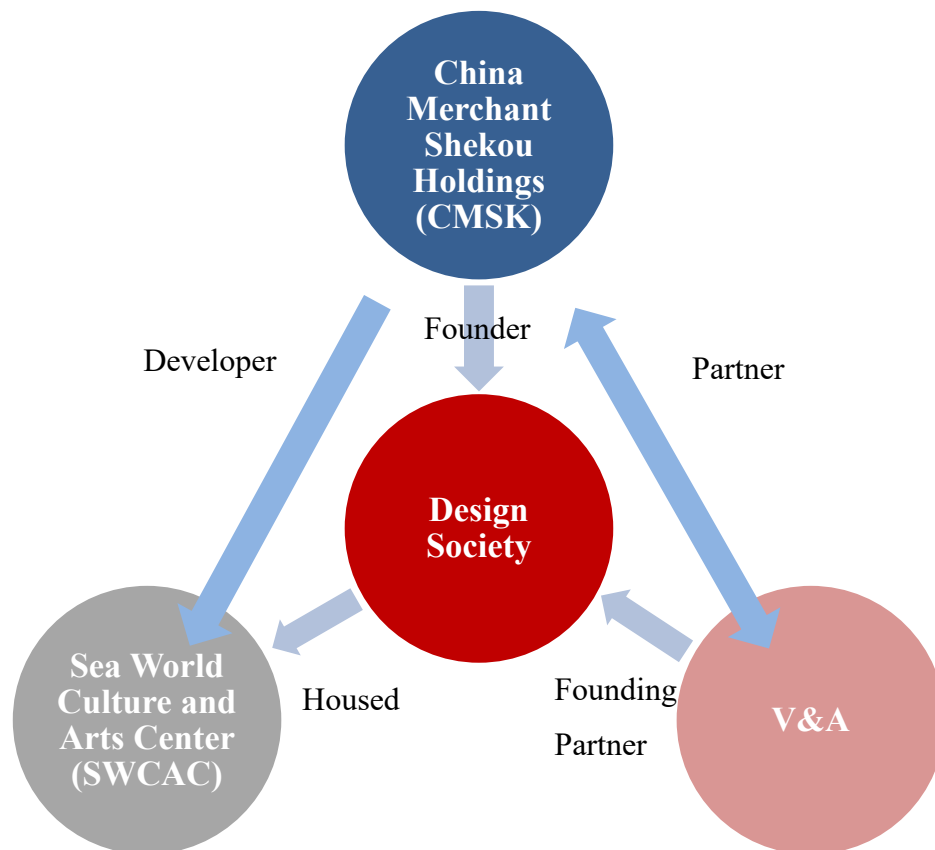
Figure 5.2: An illustration of the relationship between different entities related to Design Society made by the author during the fieldwork between 2017-2018.

With the information provided above, it is now interesting to return to those statements from Design Society presented at the beginning of this section and examine them further. First of all, these statements show that Design Society tried to be a new thing that cannot easily be labelled or categorised as one of the conventional cultural institutions. Those statements are perhaps not definitions that would typically be found on a cultural organisation's website. It is clear that the creators of Design Society had the ambition of creating an institution that 'transcends' cultural territories – for example, territories that define what a museum is. Just as Macleod et al. (2012) state, in the 21st century the reality of museum design is increasingly 'multidisciplinary', 'multifaceted' and 'complex' (p.xix), and Design Society is an example of such trend.

Design Society's Chinese name is 'She Ji Hu Lian (设计互联)', with 'She Ji (设计)' meaning 'design', and 'Hu Lian (互联)' meaning 'inter-connections'. Linguistically, to visitors, either the Chinese name or the English name Design Society signifies a museum. The majority of the museums in China nearly have 'bo wu guan (博物馆)' in their names. Is Design Society a museum? The director of Design Society Ole Bouman's answer to Financial Times was that Design Society is not a museum, and 'the idea was to build something that is not just a store, an archive, but to create something new' (Heathcote 2017, para.2).

According to ICOM's definition, Design Society does not qualify as a museum. Design Society did not start with the function of acquiring and conserving; however, according to ICOM's defintion of museum in 2007 (ICOM 2007), a museum should have at least four main functions: 'acquire, conserve, research, communicate, and exhibit'. Acquiring and conserving were not among Design Society's aims. In fact, Design Society started off with no collection (Qian 2020), which makes it not strictly a 'museum' according to most official definitions of museums across the world. Even ICOM's most recent controversial definition still lists 'collect' and 'preserve' artefacts and specimens as part of museum's core work (ICOM 2019b).

In a legal sense, Design Society cannot be a museum under the Chinese Regulations as an institution has to have a collection of certain numbers of objects to name themselves a

museum in China (see The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2015). The regulation is especially strict on the requirements of an institution to name itself a 'museum'. If in the beginning, the institution had wanted to name itself 'Shekou Design Museum' yet had not reached the standard for collection, this could be one of the reasons in the change to its original plan. However, there are things that are limiting the institutions officially registered as museums in China. The regulation referring to 'bo wu guan' also sets rules on the range of things that museum can do, which will be an interesting topic to explore further in future research. For example, there is less flexibility in holding pop-up events. In the interview with the director of Design Society, Bouman said that while the team was preparing for its opening, they wanted to reimagine the idea of a 'museum' and giving it a new name was one of the steps:

> We want to do more than what 'bo wu guan' in China is currently involved with. Design Society wanted to be flexible in what it does, such as organising events that is not common in 'bo wu guan' in China. Also, Design Society is an institution that wants not to be restricted in the perception of a 'bo wu guan' – as it is often having a perception of being 'object-centred' (Staff-I04).

There are issues to discuss beyond the literal name of the institution. Although not a museum according to the majority of the current available definitions, the establishment of Design Society and its model and practices shines a light on many current issues confronted by museums and the possible future trend of museums. 'Cultural hub' is a novel term within the cultural sector, as discussed in Chapter 2. It is both a new concept and a new trend within the sector. Design Society has used the similar term 'culture hub' to describe itself and its founding partner, the V&A (see Figure 5.4) also uses 'cultural hub' in describing Design Society. As indicated in the previous chapters, the concept of the cultural hub has been identified as a new trend for museums by multiple sources, and it is still a fluid and ambiguous term. Studying Design Society as a case study contributes to the understanding of the concept and the meaning of the cultural hub.

www.designsociety.cn ▾

Design Society - New Culture Hub

Design Society is a new cultural platform that generates a diverse public programme with the mission to activate design as a social catalyst. **Design Society** ...

Figure 5.3: Google webpage search result for Design Society
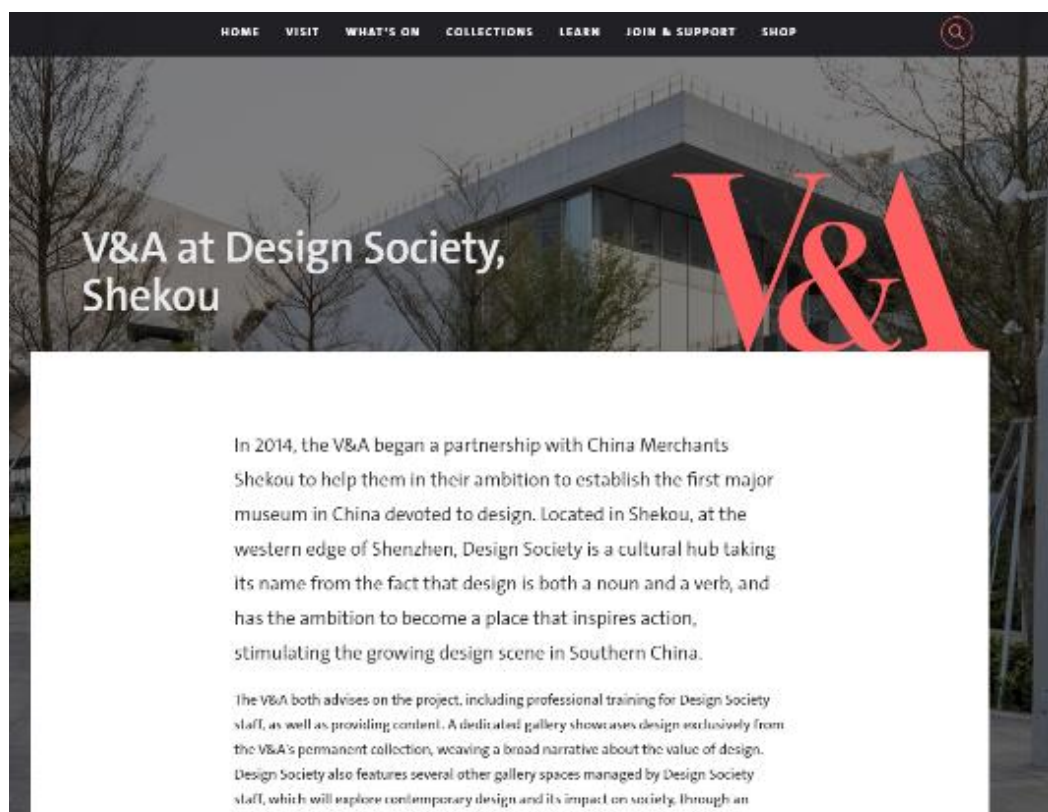
Figure 5.4: V&A's Design Society webpage

As quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Design Society explained that as a 'new thing' it felt that it required its own name to go beyond 'the sum of its parts' (Design Society 2020b, para.9). 'There is a good reason that this is called Design Society – to give people the perception that this is not just a museum', says Bouman in the interview (Staff-I04). This could be understood as a way in avoiding the 'frequently out of date, negative perceptions' of the museum (Black 2012, p.5). Especially in the Chinese context as explained in Chapter 3, 'bo wu guan' in China has tended to emphasise artefacts and the research and conservation of them, rather than education or communicating to the public. When Design Society claimed

that it is not a musuem and therefore came up with the name of 'Design Society' for itself, one way of understanding this is to distinguish that it is not a 'bo wu guan' within a Chinese context, as 'bo wu guan' in China centres on objects. These strategies can be seen as a move to improve the image of the museum in broader markets, which is identified as one of the solutions that have been found in French museums (Greffe et al. 2017).

As a cultural hub, without literally being called a 'bo wu guan' or operating under Chinese museum policies, Design Society still has some of the most important features of museums and performs typical 'museumy' programmes such as exhibitions and workshops. 'We are doing the same things that any museum is doing: to present culture through exhibitions, and to communicate through publishing, our website and social media; Also, through researching ways of curation that lead to innovation, and hopefully contribute to the production of culture', says Ole Bouman, the founding director of Design Society (Museum Review 2018, cited in Design Society 2018, para.47, my translation). Also, Design Society tend to positions itself as a museum when engaging with the discussions relate to museums (see Design Society 2018; Design Society 2019). This poses interesting contradictions. In one way, Design Society is trying to avoid the potential perception of the traditional museum by distancing itself from the term 'museum'. It allows the institution to take from that concept what works for it and presumably to leave the rest.

On the 'About' page of its website (see Figure 5.5), there are three tabs that visitors can choose to find out more about what Design Society is about: 'Design Society', 'SWCAC' and 'Design Society Team'. The building of Design Society, SWCAC is listed as an independent category that parallels the introduction of the institution, pointing to its importance – see also the SWCAC logo on Design Society's website, highlighted in Figure 5.6. These demonstrates that the architecture of SWCAC is seen as an important part of Design Society and one of important factors to attract visitors. In an interview with the director of Design Society, Ole Bouman commented on the timing of the opening of Design Society in 2017, that although 'there is still a lot to do', 'there is *already a great building*, an exhibition gallery programme, a certain acknowledgement of the platform function, a brand recognition…' (Staff-I04, my italics).

Figure 5.5: Design Society website 'About' page (highlighted by the author)
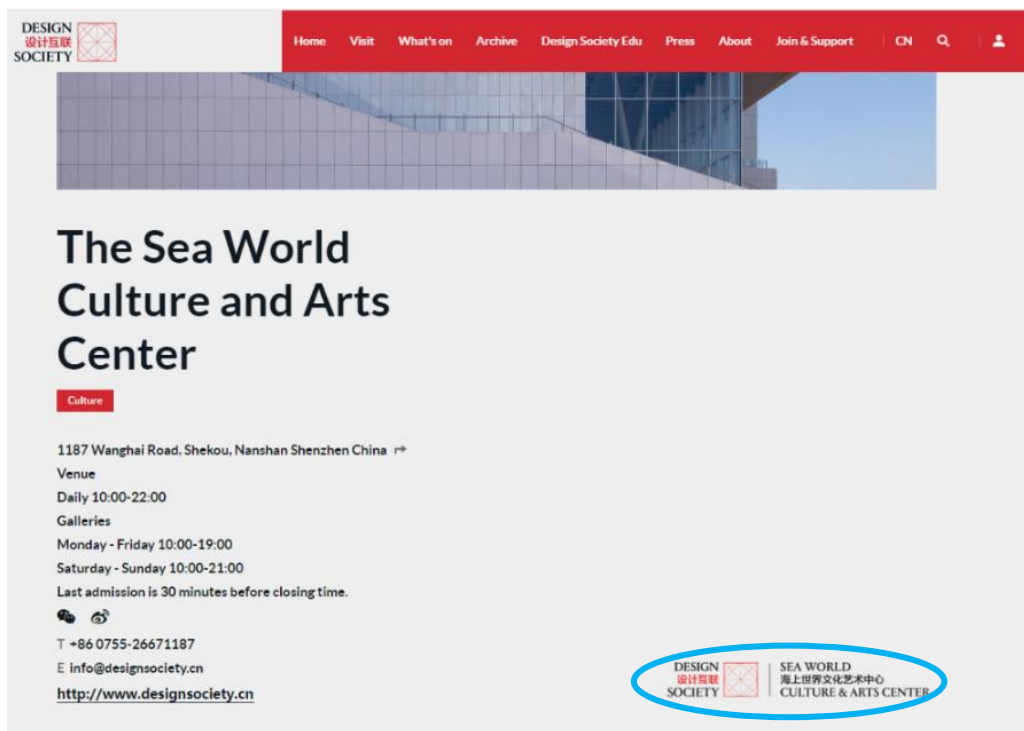
Figure 5.6: Design Society website with SWCAC logo (highlighted by the author)

This shows that in the beginning, SWCAC seemed to be a separate brand to Design Society, as it is introduced independently. The same strategy is employed by Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain. On their website, under the 'Explore' tab, 'The Building' is listed as an individual item too (Guggenheim Bilbao 2020, see also see Figure 5.7). This phenomenon of highlighting the

value of the museum building will be discussed further in the following section, where architecture as an important element of a visitor destination for institutions such as Design Society (see Figure 5.8) and Guggenheim Bilbao is demonstrated.

For visitors, the relationship between Design Society and SWCAC could be confusing, as the institution and the building have different names. For first-time visitors, the name 'Design Society' makes it hard to identify what exactly it is. Also, person A might know Design Society as 'Design Society', while person B refers to Design Society as the name of the building, SWCAC, where Design Society as an institution is housed. Furthermore, on the other hand, it still uses the term 'bo wu guan' in attracting visitors and to stay relevant, as the concept of the museum is a popular, recognisable and well-established one. This contradiction could result in struggles in the consistency of communication and in building the identity of the institution, which will be reflected in the latest update in the final chapter.

Design Society as a new institution in the 21st century is an example of how museums could completely orient themselves away from owning a collection and the function of acquisition or preserving, but keep some of the eqully important features of museums. It is one of the new institutions that do not have 'traditional characteristics of museums', for example collections, as Falk and Dierking (2016, p.25) describe. This form of institution that does not own a collection but hosts exhibitions, as Zarobell (2017) observes, could be one future for art exhibitions. The model of Design Society could possibly be another form of museum, or it could be considered that demonstrated by Design Society, museums continue to develop and expand in the forms of exhibitions and public programmes in new institutions that do not own objects themselves but spend most of their effort in welcoming visitors with exhibitions and public programmes. These institutions might not fit the current definition of museums, but their emergence demonstrates the value of exhibition and public programmes as a form of cultural engagement and leisure activity.

Figure 5.7: Guggenheim Bilbao's website (highlighted by the author)

Figure 5.8: SWCAC, the building of Design Society. Photo by Design Society.

Alongside the relationship between the building SWCAC and Design Society, the partnership between Design Society and the V&A is also important in understanding the establishment of Design Society. The next section will provide more information on the partnership between Design Society and V&A.

5.2.1 The Collaboration with the V&A

One characteristic of a 'hub' is seeking and facilitating collaboration. From the beginning, collaboration was rooted in the setup of Design Society, as demonstrated by establishing V&A as a 'founding partner' in 2014 (Design Society 2017; Victoria and Albert Museum 2016). Sun Chengming, the vice president of China Merchants Property Development said that 'V&A is our ideal partner as it has professional experiences in running a design museum and its understanding on China will bring different dynamics to the programme' (Fu and Fang 2014, para.2). In the words of the deputy director of V&A from the video that introduces the V&A Gallery on Design Society's website, the idea of the collaboration was to 'try and bring the V&A's experience and expertise to China in setting up Design Society' (Design Society [no date]). The vice director of Design Society, Zhao Rong emphasised that, the 'invisible' and 'soft' parts are in fact the foundation of the collaboration (Pengpai 2020). Sarah Green, the learning manager of the V&A Shenzhen team who led the creation of a learning policy for Design Society and public programmes at Design Society explains further about the collaboration:

> The vision was always that this is a collaboration. It wasn't about moving V&A to Shenzhen. It was about working with our colleagues in Design Society, drawing on the best practice from V&A, using some of our methodologies, but it was specific, and appropriate to the context in Shenzhen (Staff-I02).

Although the initial contract is only five-year between V&A and China Merchants Group, the V&A Shenzhen team was involved in many aspects of Design Society's programming. The collaboration did not only remain at the level of borrowing objects and having the benefit of marketing due to being associated with the V&A. Zhao explains the collaboration as follows:

Our collaboration with the V&A covers many aspects. The foremost is to research and allow this 166-year-old British institution to make real connections with contemporary industrial and social development in China. In doing so, we joined forces and became one collaborative team. Collaboration with the V&A enabled us access to their practice standard and operation experience accumulated over more than 100 years and helped us to form a real international, professional, and young team. What's more important while working alongside with the V&A is that it provided us a very fresh and alternative point of view to observe the reality of the design and industrial development of design in China, to enrich the research perspective of the programming of Design Society (Pengpai 2020, my translation).

For the public, the visible part of the collaboration includes, for example, the dedicated V&A gallery (see Figure 5.9) which showcases objects exclusively from the V&A's permanent collection.

Figure 5.9: The V&A gallery in Design Society. December 2017. Photo by the author.

This partnership is described as a 'pioneering one' by both Design Society and the V&A, as it is the first of its kind between a Chinese state-owned company and a British cultural institution. This collaboration demonstrates the potential for the openness and connectedness of a cultural hub. The collaboration between these two institutions, and also collaborations that Design Society has formed with other parties, might be of interest for researchers for its cross-culture and collaborative nature, but it will not be the focus for this study.

5.2.2 Shenzhen: The Specific Local Context

As the organisational setup of Design Society illustrated, there are some specific contexts of the city where Design Society is located worth highlighting. Firstly, a brief introduction to China Merchants Group (CMG), the headquarters of China Merchant Shekou Holdings, will be provided here. As Walhimer (2015, p.14) argues, most often the culture of a particular museum can be traced back to the personality of the founder, and the founder's personality and vision are embedded in the culture of the museum as it develops. Exploring the history and the nature of China Merchants Group (CMG) provides insights to the understanding of Design Society. CMG is a Chinese state-owned enterprise and has an important place in modern Chinese history (Zheng et al. 2018). It was established in 1872 as the first business enterprise in modern Chinese history. CMG made several firsts, such as establishing China's first Chinese bank, China's first modern merchant fleet, and China's first insurance company (China Merchants Group 2015). CMG was 'deeply involved in the reform and opening-up' and promotes 'social progress with commercial success' (China Merchants Group 2015). As Qin (2018, cited in Chen) summarises: 'China Merchants Group appeared in almost every significant move of China's reform and opening-up with its pioneering spirit of not fearing to be a "first"' (p.164). To a degree, this background explains why it was China Merchants Group that initiated establishing this novel institution and formed a pioneering collaboration with the V&A. The spirit of China Merchants Group is very much in the blood of Design Society too, as the director Ole Bouman said in the interview: 'Trying things out is a goal in itself. Creativity is a matter of trying things out. There is a spirit of creativity in Design Society' (Staff-I04).

Another important context is that the design industry was developing rapidly in China, and this was especially the case in Shenzhen. For decades, China has been known as the 'the world's factory', playing an important role in the manufacturing industry globally. Shenzhen is one Chinese city with an intensive manufacturing background. However, today the 'made in China' scene has been shifting to 'designed in China', as the design industry thrives in Shenzhen.

Shenzhen as a city is also known for its pioneering spirit, similar with the pioneering spirit of CMG. The growth of the city was tremendously impacted by the Chinese government's 'reform and opening-up' agenda which was first implemented in 1978 – a reform of the economic system and an opening up to the outside world. It is also used today to describe an ongoing process (Hsu 2018):

> Reform began with the implementation of the household responsibility system and creation of incentives among state-owned enterprises. Opening-up started as foreign trade and investment was encouraged. Trading companies were established in order to control exports, which provided foreign exchange to finance imports. Exporting firms were allowed to retain some of their foreign exchange earnings and to obtain special loans (p.9).

Shenzhen – photographed in Figure 5.10 and shown on a map in Figure 5.11 – is arguably 'the world's fastest growing city' and 'has developed into an international metropolis from scratch withing 40 years' (Hu 2021, p.iii). Hu (2021) continues to introduce the background of Shenzhen as follows:

> This sort of rapidity in a city's growth is rare in the modern world and in history; it has created a Shenzhen phenomenon. Shenzhen was first designed as a 'window' to open China and to access the world. Now it is a 'window' for the world to approach China, in particular to understand China's city making and urbanisation (p.1)

Figure 5.10: The locally well-known slogan "Time is Money, Efficiency is Life" of Chinese economic reform originated from Shekou, Shenzhen. Photo by Shigao Jiang (Jiang [no date]).

Figure 5.11: A map showing Shenzhen

As one of China's most dynamic cities, Shenzhen has a strong reputation for innovation and technology due to its 'fast prototyping industry, extensive partner networks and supportive government' (Lin 2020). Many describe Shenzhen as China's Silicon Valley (see Guardian

2014; CNN 2018). This provides context as to why a 'new thing' such as Design Society would emerge from Shenzhen.

The innovative location does not only contribute to the establishment of a new institution, but also provides keen visitors. An interesting finding from the ground research carried out by the joint work from Design Society and V&A demonstrates that there is a huge appetite for design in China, which is the dedicated theme of Design Society (V&A 2016). When Bouman was asked why Design Society was located in Shenzhen, he replied:

> If there's any place that you can aim for 80% of the population to feel the creative spark, that is Shenzhen. It is a tolerant city, it is a city of books, it is a city where everybody is a 'Shenzhener' the moment you are arriving… there's certain confidence in the power of many people rather than only the very few.' (Staff-I04)

Design Society identifies itself as a 'not-for-profit institution' (Design Society 2020c, para.4). In fact, the inclusion of commercial programmes is designed to be a way of sustaining itself as Design Society strives to establish 'a niche of cultural enterprise' (Design Society 2020c, para.2). The commercial programmes held in SWCAC are supposed to be sources of income to ensure the sustainability of the entity and the income of the commercial programme intended to support the operation of Design Society include 'donations, grants, sponsorships, membership fees, admission fees, venue hires, ad sales, unit leasing, parking, the Design Society store, partnerships, consultancy, training programs and commissioned research' (Design Society 2020c, para.4-7).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, newly designed museums have less space for the function of 'collection', and instead they have an increased emphasis on providing public space. The ratio varies with different museums as the nature and mission of each museum is different, but a general trend is also obvious – museums are dedicating more open space to the public. This is certainly the case with Design Society as 'every aspect of the buliding was crafted to reflect its function as a premiere public institution' (Design Society 2020e, para.1). As Design Society's website states, SWCAC was created to 'fulfil a civic role' and to make 'public space for the community' (Design Society 2020c, para.14). Besides offering its

building and surroundings for the public to enjoy, the public space at SWCAC also offers free public programmes. In summary, the publicness and openess of Design Society makes it resemble a commonly-defined museum when compared with other commercial organization and spaces.

In 2017, during my pilot study when Design Society as a concept was presented to the public as its building was still under construction, I heard some interesting comments from a member of the Design Society staff. While she was explaining to confused visitors what Design Society is, she asked: 'Have you been to the K11 in Hong Kong? Design Society is kind of similar, apart from that for K11, the ratio of commercial and culture is 7:3, for design Society is 5:5'. K11 recognises itself as 'world's first Museum-Retail concept and a hybrid model of art and commerce' which created a business model that 'merges art and commerce' (K11 2021, para.1). Also in Hong Kong, there is an example that is similar in many ways to Design Society. M+ in Hong Kong was analysed by Zarobell (2017) as 'a new approach' (p.31). Although a public museum generally supported by the city and the national government, M+ is expected be funded by the cultural complex that it belongs to, which includes shops, restaurants, and condos at West Kowloon (Zarobell 2017, p.31). M+ aims to 'overcome previous museums models in a variety of ways' (Zarobell 2017, p.54). The establishment of institutions such as Design Society certainly provokes further conversations and discussions about 'What is a museum?' in the 21st century, which will be reflected on in the conclusion of this thesis.

Interestingly, Zarobell pointed out that this model is 'not top-down but structured along the desire and interests of the audience', and the design of incorporating multiple functions in the building is to 'appeal to the broadest audience' (p.55). This could be the intention behind Design Society's identity in trying 'to combine, connect, cross-fertilize' and 'transcend boundaries', especially regarding how museum tend to be perceived in China as discussed in Chapter 3.

The next section will move on from the conceptual discussions and introduce some of the practices of Design Society within a specific timeframe. Unlike the above, the next section will be more descriptive as it provides background understanding for Chapter 6 and 7.

5.3   Visiting Design Society Between 2017 and 2018

The section above presents discussions and analysis on the concept and the key context of Design Society. This section will introduce the five main aspects of what Design Society offered to its visitors at the time when it first opened to the public. It is worth flagging up that what follows will be quite descriptive in tone. The information, however, will provide context for the analysis presented in the following chapters.

As a new cultural hub, Design Society opened its doors to the public on 2nd December 2017. It is located in the Shekou area of the city of Shenzhen, which benefits from its closeness to Hong Kong, one of the most popular travel destinations in the world, and it is also not far from the local residential area. Because of the convenience of the highly connected underground system in Shenzhen and the established Shekou Sea World Plaza urban area (see Figure 5.12), Design Society attracts local residents as well as domestic and global tourists.

Figure 5.12: Shekou Sea World Plaza Urban Area

5.3.1 The Building

The discussion in the previous section shows that the building of Design Society is seen as an important part of the institution for visitors to enjoy. The building of Design Society, the SWCAC, was designed by the Pritzker Architecture prize-winner Fumihiko Maki and his studio Maki and Associates. The site area occupies 26,161 m² and the total floor area is 73,917 m². It has four levels above ground and two levels below ground, including three main galleries, a theatre, various sizes of spaces for public and commercial programmes, and outdoor public spaces including a rooftop garden and the park around the building[7].

In general, as the role of museums evolves over time, the functional design and the allocation of the space of the museum building changes accordingly. Hein (2000, p.18) predicts that future museum buildings tend to 'de-emphasizes their function of collection and preservation and instead stress public programming and performance'. This is exactly the case for Design Society, which has a significant amount of space dedicated to public use; and there is no cost to wander around the building if visitors want to appreciate the architecture. The space that is open to the public is 'generous', as Bouman commented; 'you can visit the building for free, you can walk around, go to different levels, go to the roof garden or the landscape park around the building, you can touch, smell, view – there's a lot of design for free' (Staff-I04).

As mentioned in the last chapter, both Design Society and Guggenheim Bilbao could be categorised by urban planners as 'landmark museums' (Lord et al. 2015), which are expected to bring significant economic impact. SWCAC bears the same expectation, as Lin Shaobin, the director of CMSK, noted in an interview: 'Shenzhen needs an architectural masterpiece. We expect a permanent and classical masterpiece that has impact on the city'(Sina News 2014, translated by the author).

Besides the building, Design Society offers various programmes and experiences which will be introduced below. It is important to note that the programmes and experiences mentioned below were the ones that were available to the visitors during the fieldwork of this study.

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[7] More information about the building including the floor plan can be found from Maki and Associates (2017) and Sea World Culture & Arts Center (2022).

5.3.2 Exhibitions

During the fieldwork period of this study, from the opening of Design Society in December 2017 to February 2018, the main exhibitions available were Values of Design and Minding the Digital, which were marketed as 'grand opening exhibitions'. Values of Design was in the V&A Gallery, curated by a dedicated team from the V&A, and Minding the Digital was in the Main Gallery, curated by Design Society. There was no fare option to visit only one exhibition. The only option was buying a combined ticket of ¥80 (around £9), giving visitors access to both exhibitions. Both exhibitions were temporary, with Values of Design open for 20 months and Minding the Digital for six months.

Figure 5.13 to Figure 5.17 are promotional posters for the two exhibitions. It is interesting to analyse what information is given in the posters. For Values of Design, the feature images are objects in both posters (see Figure 5.13 and Figure 5.14). As mentioned previously, Design Society does not have its own collection, so the collaboration with V&A enables visitors to have access to objects that were previously housed and displayed at V&A, London. As a novel institution, exhibitions in Design Society are not 'objectless'. More interesting findings on visitors' experiences of objects will be described and analysed in Chapter 6.

V&A Gallery: Values of Design

Values of Design was a site-specific exhibition curated and designed for the V&A Gallery at Design Society (see Figure 5.15). It aims to broadly explore the relationship between notions of value and design:

> By identifying several key values that have been driving design processes all over the world throughout the past two centuries, the objects in the exhibition either support or question these value claims, triggering the audience to reflect on how they value design themselves (Design Society 2017a, para.1).

The exhibition consists of seven main themes: Performance, Cost, Problem solving, Materials, Identity, Communication and Wonder. These themes became the framework of the

narrative of the exhibition. Each theme has a dedicated area with objects displayed and a historical perspective was chosen in its narratives:

> For instance, a seventeenth century Iranian astrolabe and a contemporary Swiss Army Knife will be paired to highlight the drive to combine multiple functions into a singular object. Nineteenth century silk shoes, a paper dress from the 1960s, and a Stella McCartney H&M Jumpsuit from the last decade, will draw a longer historical trajectory about the value of low-cost design(Design Society 2017a, para.6).

Around 250 objects dating from 900AD to the present, originating from 31 different countries, were presented, together with objects that have local relevance such as Shenzhen school uniform. The exhibition was on one single floor. Most of the objects were displayed in glass cases. The seven thematic sections were also complemented by strips of audio-visual 'moving wallpaper' made up of imagery. The exhibition also included two major audio-visual installations with seats in front of them.

Figure 5.13: Poster of the exhibition Values of Design. ©Design Society
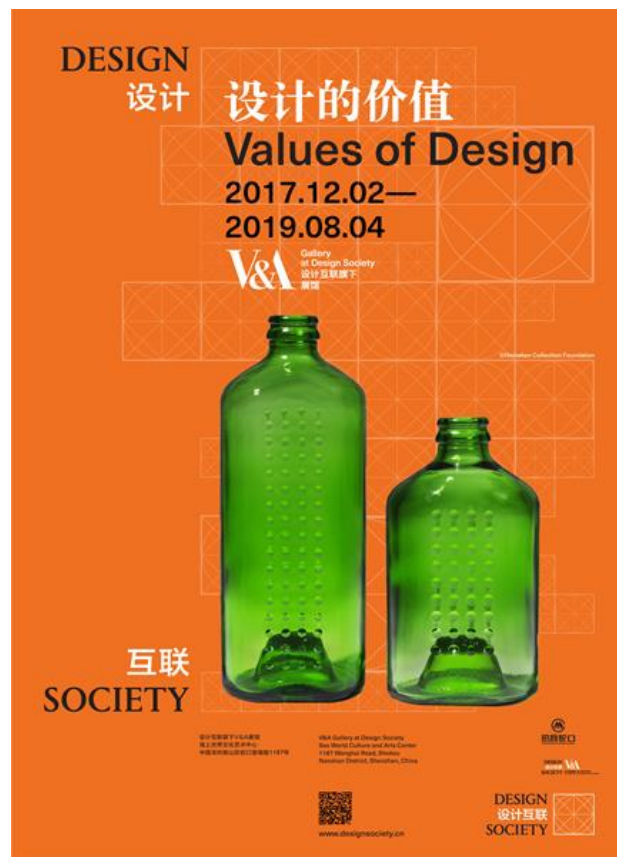
Figure 5.14: Poster of the exhibition Values of Design. ©Design Society

Figure 5.15: Values of Design exhibition. ©Design Society

Main Gallery: Minding the Digital

The poster for Minding the Digital features an abstract image derived from the red, green and blue colour model (RGB colour model), see Figure 5.16).

Curated by Design Society's own team, this exhibition has a clear contrast with Values of Design. While Values of Design features historical objects, Minding the Digital is all about the present and the future. If Values of Design is a journey to the past, then visitors soon discover that Minding the Digital is a journey to the future. Around 60 objects and installations, either domestic or international, were showcased to support the exploration of how the field of design responds in an era of digitalisation:

> It is timely to reflect on how design can mediate between technology and human values in the future… the exhibition illustrates how digital design is inspiring new ways of making things, connecting with the others and with society at large. It demonstrates creative possibilities in embracing the digital future (Design Society 2017d, para.4).
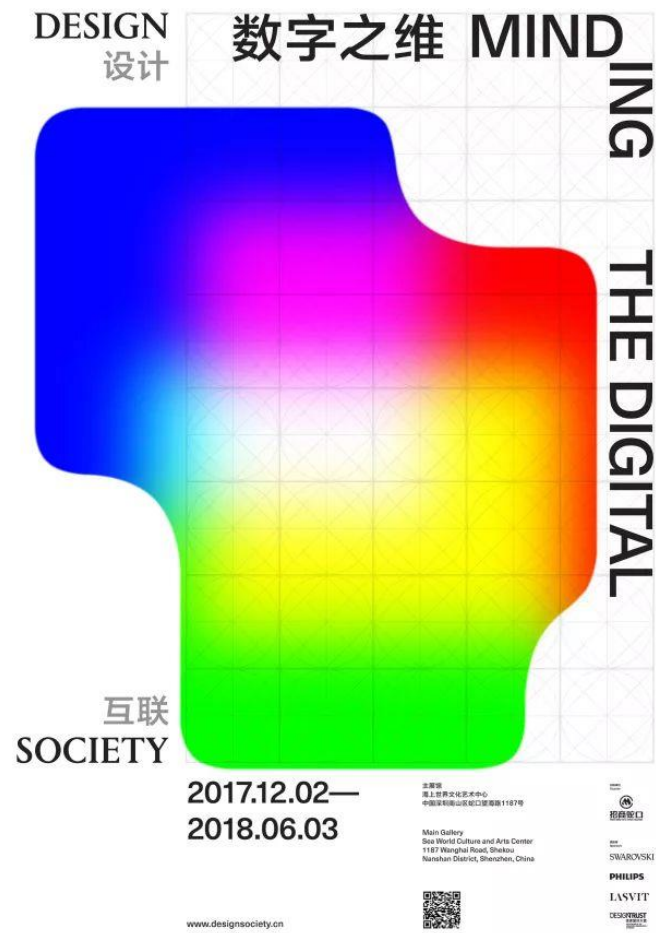
Figure 5.16: Poster for the exhibition Minding the Digital. ©Design Society
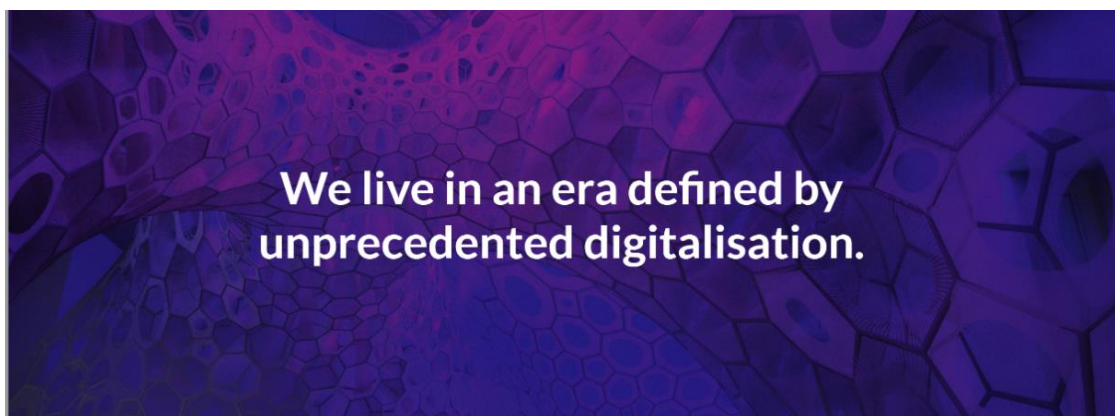
Figure 5.17: The leading preface of the introduction of Minding the Digital on Design Society's website

Three sections were presented: Digital Encounter, Digital Interactions and Digital Participation. Digital Encounter discusses 'the interplay between human and machine intelligence in design, questioning whether they will complement or contest in the digital era'; Digital Interactions illustrates 'the growing intimacy and empathy between us and design objects and interfaces, juxtaposed with alternative design practices which reinvigorate connections between us, the others and our history'. The last section, Digital Participation, 'invites the audience to experience the power of design as an innovative force in the industry and also our communities' (Design Society 2017d, para.5-7).

Figure 5.18: The entrance of Minding the Digital. ©Design Society

The second floor of the exhibition is a large open space, highlighting a 'reflection area' that was intended for visitors to read, reflect and rest[8]. This area, however, turned out to be used creatively by visitors who turned it into a perfect spot for portrait photography, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Among the 60 works displayed in Minding the Digital, there were more than ten large installations that occupy a single room in the exhibition space and half of these large

[8] From a Design Society internal document on exhibition design.

installations are interactive ones. Further details of the installations will be offered in the following chapters when discussing visitor's experiences.

5.3.3 Performances

The Mountain View Theater in the SWCAC, located on a third-floor foyer, is a 328-seat auditorium which could host lectures and performances (see Figure 5.19). During the first six months since Design Society's initial opening, this theater was mainly used for guest talks. Performances such as a piano recital, a concert, and a show have been held since[9].

Figure 5.19: Mountain View Theater in SWCAC. ©Design Society

5.3.4 Public Programmes

Events are another important part of Design Society's programme, as they create 'buzz' for the destination (Staff-I04).

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[9] See the list of past performances Sea World Culture & Arts Center (2021b)

There are many formats of events that Design Society offers, including both 'well-known' ones such as workshops and lectures, but also events such as 'some improvised talks in the cafes, the movie screening outside of the building and dance performance too', as Bouman commented on the diversity of the events at Design Society (Staff-I04).

During the fieldwork, I participated in six workshops that Design Society offered to the public. Each workshop will be briefly introduced below to give background information for the data presented later in Chapter 7.

Brilliant Badge

This workshop was designed to accompany the exhibition Values of Design. It was a drop-in workshop and visitors were encouraged to participate in four steps: exploration, thinking, making and showing. Participants were encouraged to find inspiration in the exhibition gallery and create a design using pens, scissors and different types of paper. After finishing their pattern, volunteers used a badge maker to help them make their design into a badge that they could take home.

The promotional poster for this workshop explains the intentions in relation to Design Society's mission: to explore shapes, colours and words in communicating a message that you feel strongly about (Design Society 2019). The workshop invited participants to experience life as a designer and to complete a challenging design task.

Fabulous Fashion

This workshop was also designed to accompany the exhibition Values of Design. Participants were given three steps to follow: 'exploration, design and display' (Design Society 2019). This workshop encouraged visitors to search the Values of Design exhibition for inspiration before designing an outfit using various materials provided for a wooden mannequin model. Different colours, shapes, patterns and textures of materials were provided. There was also a 'mini fashion shoot' at the end of the session where photographers took shots on participants' design on a professional stage. Like the Brilliant Badge session, this workshop invited participants to experience life as a designer and to complete a challenging design task as well.

A Letter Through Fingertips – Universal Design Workshop

The aim for the workshop was to help participants familiarise and practice social care through experiencing the design process (Design Society 2017c). In this workshop, participants were first invited to play a game. Through the game, the concept of 'empathy' was introduced, which led to the theme of the workshop: universal design. The participants were then introduced to a specific area of universal design: designing for blind people. They were also introduced to the braille writing system and given a plastic board to make a sign for blind people following the instructions given by the presenter.

Paperart Table Lamps with STICKYLINE

This workshop was led by an artist from STICKYLINE (Stickyline [no date]), a creative design group from Hong Kong specialising in making paper art products and installations. They are experts in using computer programs to design two-dimensional paper patterns which can be transformed into three-dimensional objects through folding.

During the workshop, designer Soilworm Lai firstly introduced the design and previous projects completed by STICKYLINE, then revealed the creating process and the meaning behind their installation On/Off in the Minding the Digital exhibition, which was based on the issue of light pollution. Then came a hands-on opportunity in which visitors were encouraged to make their own paper lamp following STICKYLINE's process and using materials designed by the artist. This workshop is the one that an auto-ethnography was produced (see Appendix A).

Street Museum with Yona

This workshop was held for a group of university design students. The presenter of the workshop was Yona Friedman, a French architect and designer. Using simple construction units, this workshop encouraged co-creation and conversations. It was mainly hands-on – students were guided to use the provided circular metal ring unit to explore how it could be assembled into a skeleton. It advocated Yona's 'mobile architecture' theory, which encourages everyone's participation and creativity (Design Society 2017c).

Homemade Furniture with Opendesk/Openmake

This workshop was a series of two sessions in two locations aiming to let visitors explore the open-source spirit in the design industry as well as experiencing the entire design process first-hand, from manufacturing with numerically-controlled machine tools to final assembly. The presenter of the workshop were Gary Rohrbacher and Anne Filson, designers for Openmake. Opendesk is a design company committed to providing creative and sustainable designer furniture for the world. Their products are manufactured locally through digital design technology.

The first session involved visiting Chaihuo X Factory and the purpose was to learn about CNC cutting and machines. Visitors watched the process of cutting a 'rotational stool' and started sanding the cut pieces in preparation for the next session, held at the learning space in Design Society. Designers introduced the thinking behind the 'rotational stool' and then visitors got to complete their own piece of designer 'rotational stool' in a few steps, including painting, polishing, drilling and screwing.

In Chapter 7, the visitor experience of these workshops will be presented and analysed.

5.3.5 Commercial

The tours of the building I observed during the fieldwork often mentioned that there were two major 'arms' which were designed with different architectural features: the commercial arm and the cultural arm. The idea is that the commercial arm should not only financially support the operation of the cultural programmes but also 'diversify the cultural experience' (Design Society 2020e).

When Design Society opened to the public in December 2017, the commercial arm at Design Society was not fully occupied and the function of the building was not fully realised yet. 'It was at a level that you could confidently share the results so far with the world, but still so much to do', as Bouman, the founding director, explained in the interview (Staff-I04). The commercial part of Design Society included a café, a Chinese restaurant, a designer clothing store, a private gallery, and a Design Society store which sells products related to the

exhibitions, designer brand products, as well as Design Society and V&A merchandising. New merchants continue to be added over the years while some of the merchants have left.

From what has been described above, Design Society matches the Art Fund's idea of a cultural hub: 'A clustering of cultural venues such as museums, galleries, and performance spaces with secondary attractions including food and retail' (Art Fund 2018, p.2). In exploring a 'cultural hub', the original intention was to examine visitors' experiences of all these aspects in the cultural hub for a holistic understanding and especially on the hybridity of the institution. However, when I arrived for the fieldwork[10], I realised that changes had to be made in my original research plan after assessing the status of the field. As described above, although construction of the building was completed, the hybridity of the institution was not fully activated and matured, with the majority of the commercial arm vacant, and the multi-purpose theatre also had limited programmes planned. In contrast, the cultural programmes which include the two major inaugural exhibitions and a series of public programmes planned for the first six months were relatively more established and ready for visitors. More experiences could be available in the future, as Bouman noted in the interview: 'there will be more and more buzz' (Staff-I04).

Factoring in the practicalities of working with an institution and the time and resource I had as a doctoral student, I decided to focus on exploring visitor experiences of exhibitions and public programmes at Design Society. Therefore, the first question in RQ3 changed from 'What experiences do visitors get at Design Society?' to 'What experiences do visitors get in cultural programmes at Design Society?'. In examining these more traditional museum-like programmes in a cultural hub, important findings and insights will be provided in the next two chapters, which makes the investigation align more with the definition of a cultural hub according to ICOM (2019).

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[10] At this point, the opening was already two months delayed from what was originally announced.

5.4   **Summary**

Since not much research has looked at cultural hubs as a careful case study with 'thick description' (Geertz 1973, p.310) and analysis, this study contributes to filling this gap. This chapter firstly examined the concept of Design Society which includes how it describe and position itself, its ambission, corporate setup, collaboration with the V&A and the socio-ecnomic context of the city it is located. The literatures reviewed in previous chapteres were drawn into the dicussions in understanding the overall concept of the institution.

As the combination of grand architecture and museum programmes such as exhibitions and workshops become a popular combination in creating iconic cultural institutions, they are being viewed as 'an active part of the capitalist world' (Ayala et al. 2020, p.46; also see Zarobell 2017). This and many other statements made about institutions like Design Society often appear as assertions without empirical research and evidence. Through analysing the concept of Design Society, attempts of trying to explore the possiblities of creating a new cultural institution that is not bounded by the common definition of the museum were recognised. These attempts themselves are meaninful experiments in exploring the possiblities of cultural institutions in the 21st century, espcieally in the Chinese context.

This chapter presented what I consider significant in examining the concept of Design Society. As the importance and value of exploring the visitor experience was argued in Chapter 2, the next two chapters will focus on examing visitor experiences of the cultural programmes at Design Society. This will provide much-needed voices from the visitors and key insights in understanding the case study of Design Society.

Chapter 6   Visitors' Experiences of the Exhibitions

6.1   Introduction

This chapter focuses on the visitor experience of the exhibitions and the next chapter will focus on the visitor experience of the public programmes at Design Society. In this chapter, the visitor experiences investigated were from two major exhibitions in Design Society: Values of Design and Minding the Digital, which were both introduced in Chapter 5. The main data sources were visitor surveys, while interviews and observations served as an alternative source for triangulation purposes.

As explained in Chapter 2, the framework from both Pekarik et al. (1999) and Packer and Ballantyne (2013) guided the structure of key ideas. Once all the survey data from the exhibitions (256 responses) were coded through the 11 facets of experience (see Figure 4.20), four themes were identified from the second round of the analysis, as shown in Figure 6.1. This is a weighted diagram, with the size of the square representing how many surveys belong to that theme. Theme 1 'object and object-related experiences' and Theme 2 'sensory, physical and related experiences' are the two biggest themes, while 'transformative experiences' and 'social experiences' also made the list. Clustering these experiences enables a better and more focused understanding of the dataset in answering the research questions. For museum professionals, through these four themes, insights could be drawn in improving and rethinking the design of exhibitions in a clear and purposeful way. These four themes all differ in nature, and the discussion around them generates different observations, insights, and implications. The categorization of the data into these four themes also further contributes to the conceptualisation of the visitor experience in museums.
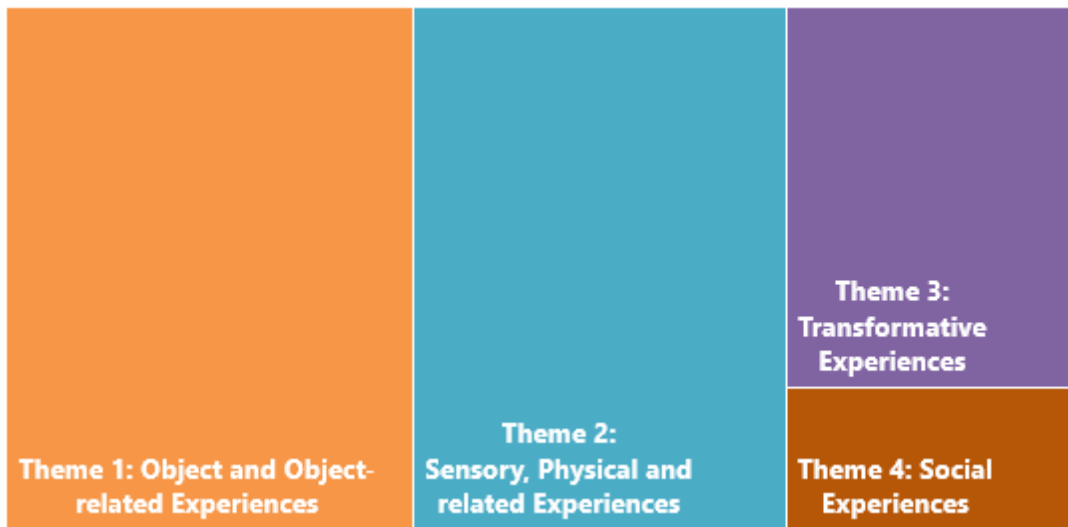
Figure 6.1: Four themes of visitor experiences from exhibitions at Design Society from data analysis of surveys

Theme 1 focuses on experiences around objects, which includes many facets such as experiencing the object and the cognitive experience generated by closely examination of objects. Similar to Theme 1, Theme 2 is comprised of experiences clustered around sensory and physical experiences. The experiences presented in Themes 1 and 2 feature discussion of offerings with different dynamics and natures, and by contrasting these two themes, insights could help museum practitioners when planning future exhibitions. Theme 3 focuses on experiences that could potentially motivate changes in visitors. Theme 4 emphasises the social aspects of visitors' experiences when visiting exhibitions.

These four themes are presented in the next four sections in turn, with the most mentioned themes presented first. Each section will discuss the key term(s) of the theme, review the data and then conclude with a discussion of the issues in relation to the research questions. The letter in the labels of the data extracts indicates which survey question elicited the response: E-Enjoy, R-Realise, S-Surprise, SH-Share. I-Interview indicates data from the visitor interviews.

6.2   Object and Object-related Experiences

The theme of 'object and object-related experiences' describes a cluster of experiences around objects displayed in the exhibition. This theme contains the largest segment of the survey data set, at 38%. More than 80% of these experiences were from the exhibition Values of Design, in which the majority of the exhibits were objects.

Data coded to this theme includes two types of responses: 1) responses that directly mention a particular object or objects in general) 2) responses that did not directly mention a particular object/objects but were clearly prompted by the encounter with an object. Ninety-seven visitors' responses were coded under this theme. Installation artworks are not included in this theme as they will be discussed as an individual theme in section 6.3.

Object experience is a category of experience in Pekarik et al. (1999) but is only a sub-theme under 'sensory experience' in Packer and Ballantyne's model (2016). Pekarik et al. (1999)'s research was conducted in museums, which explains why object experiences would be primary. In contrast, Packer and Ballantyne's model (2016) is designed for analysing experiences in a range of visitor attractions in which objects may not necessarily be a primary theme, for example a holiday resort experience. However, object experience in the museum context is often more than merely a 'sensory experience'.

While many museums, especially heavily object-oriented museums, are striving to transform themselves from 'object-centred' to 'visitor-centred' institutions, the data from this study shows that visitors who goes to Design Society still show great interest in objects. In fact, object experiences were valued highly, with over 30% of the visitors surveyed choosing to describe their experiences related to an object/objects. These visitors tend to have rich, multi-faceted experiences from their encounter with an object. These experiences clustered into five sub-themes and will be reviewed below. Four of the sub-themes were previously identified in Pekarik et al. (1999)'s research.

6.2.1 Seeing 'The Real Thing'

A physical encounter with the real object is still a relevant and appreciated experience at Design Society. The survey responses show that seeing actual objects in person provided enjoyment to visitors:

> I cannot believe it has Zaha's piece here. This has made my trip. Very pleased to see that the consciousness of the architecture in China is geared to international standards. (Visitor-E53)

> What a surprise! I got to see Peter Behrens's kettle! Oh, my goodness! (Visitor-E30)

Both visitors recognised the objects that were created by famous designers and the opportunity to be physically close to such originality sparked emotional responses. This confirms the widely-acknowledged belief that 'real' or original' matters to people (Penrose and Penrose 2020) and authentic objects tend to promote engagement (Bunce 2016). Visitors might not be interested in knowing what a museum is doing with its collections, if it has one, but they do pay attention to the objects displayed in the exhibitions and seek to connect with them. The above responses shows that authenticity is one of the ways that visitors could be connected through objects. In Penrose and Penrose (2020, p.1247)'s words, authenticity enables an 'embodied connection'. Seeking and appreciating the 'realness' of the object reflects the culture of modernism, which relies on seeing evidence with one's own eyes (Dudley 2010).

Interestingly, Trilling (1972, cited in Penrose and Penrose 2020) argues that the reason people begin to have an interest in pursuing authenticity is because 'the truth is under threat' (p.1246). It is surely not hard to find digital images of these objects, or even replicas of these objects. However, from the responses above it is obvious that is the opportunity to be in contact with the objects in an exhibition setting make the visitors assume the authenticity of the objects and therefore that they have 'experienced' the authenticity of the objects. Also, it is the physical aspects of the experienced authenticity that brought excitement to these visitors, which confirm that the authenticity of the object could remain relevant to visitors in

this digital age (Vayne 2012). As Vayne (2012) argues, authenticity of the objects can still be one of the 'big selling points' for a museum exhibition.

However, it is also noticeable that this perceived authenticity is made possible where visitors already have previous knowledge related to the objects. This means that these objects would not necessarily bring the same embodied connection enabled by their proximity for every visitor. This indicates that when including famous objects in an exhibition, it is also important to consider whether such pieces would resonate with many visitors, and to what extent. However, sometimes visitors could enjoy the objects in other ways despite not having personal connections with the objects, for example the following two sub-themes.

6.2.2 Seeing Rare/Uncommon Things

For visitors that might not be so familiar with the subject of the exhibition, which in this case is 'design', other ways were found in appreciating the objects. For example, Visitor S21 shared their appreciation of the same object mentioned by Visitor E53 – the high heels designed by Zaha Hadid (Figure 6.2):

Figure 6.2: Object 'FLAMES' in Minding the Digital
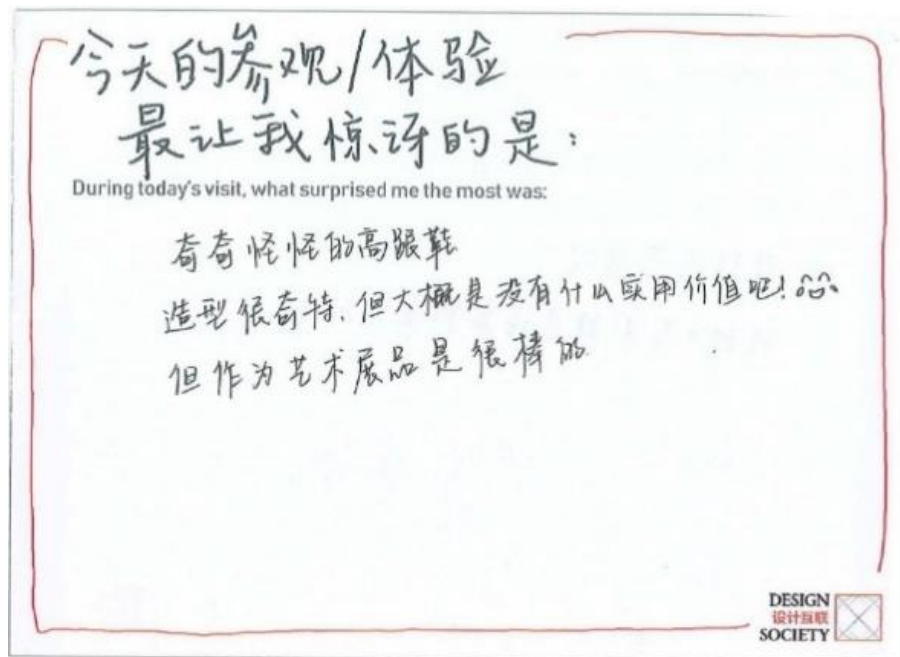
Figure 6.3: Visitor-S21

> What surprised me the most was those bizarre high heels. The design is pretty
> wonderful, but they are probably not that practical. But as a piece of art, it is brilliant.
> (Visitor-S21)

Interestingly, the same object – the high heels designed by a famous designer – could be
appreciated in two ways as presented above: for a visitor who know the designer and adores
her, it is the authenticity and the possibility of being physically close to the objects that are
valued. For another visitor, although not knowing the background behind the objects, it was
appreciated as a piece of artwork and the practical value of it was also evaluated by the
visitor. This response shows that visitors' attention can be captivated by things that are
uncommon or unusual, just as Kidd (2018) states that people are keen to pay for an
experience that is 'out of the ordinary'. Encountering objects that are not easily seen in
everyday life certainly is such an experience.

6.2.3 Seeing Valuable Things

Besides the authenticity and the uniqueness of the objects, in Pekarik et al. (1999)'s
framework, seeing 'valuable things' is also a satisfying sub-theme under the object

experience. The responses presented in the paper do not clearly reveal what 'value' means. In this study, however, visitors' responses show that 'seeing valuable things' is an important and complex cluster of responses that deserves to be unpacked further as an individual sub-theme.

Case Study: Experiences of the object 'LifeStraw'

Several visitors collectively reflected on their experiences of seeing the 'valuable' object LifeStraw (see Figure 6.4 and Figure 6.5), providing a great case study to explore this sub-theme. Their responses provided examples of the ways visitors respond to valuable objects such as LifeStraw. LifeStraw (see Figure 6.4) is an object displayed under the theme of 'problem-solving' in the exhibition of Values of Design. The exhibition identifies 'problem-solving' among other six themes as one of the values of design. It is displayed as an example of how design can solve real-life problems.

Figure 6.4: LifeStraw in the exhibition Values of Design. Photo by the author.

Figure 6.5: The interpretation panel for LifeStraw. December 2017. Photo by the author.

I was pleasantly surprised by LifeStraw – such a small thing but is able to purify 1000L water! It can save lives. I wonder how much does each cost? (Visitor-S88)

One of the most meaningful products was the simple water filter device. Although it was invented a while ago, I got to learn about it today at this exhibition. Very comforting to know that children in Africa can easily get clean drinking water because of this invention. I want to figure out a way to donate more of this product for them. (Visitor-SH2)

What I enjoyed the most is the meaningful product, the tube-looking water purifying device. It could offer convenience for people at areas that are lacking clean water resource, such as Loess Plateau[11]. (Visitor-E64)

Although it was a general assumption that 'nobody reads the labels' (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.109), these responses above confirm that 'good labels can attract, communicate, inspire, and help visitors get what they are seeking' (Serrell 1996, p.118). In the case of this study, visitors do pay attention to the text panels (which suggests that the text panels are well designed/the topic is of interest to the visitors) and they ponder upon what they see.

These three visitors considered LifeStraw a valuable object as they found it 'meaningful'. This differs from the data extracted in the first sub-theme which demonstrated that visitors were thrilled to encounter famous designers' works and that enjoyment arose from their

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[11] Loess Plateau is a 640,000 km^2 (250,000 sq mi) plateau in north/northwest China (Wikipedia 2020).

previous knowledge of those designers. In the case of LifeStraw, however, without pre-visit knowledge, visitors were able to discover the value of the object from reading the contextual information provided by the label of the object. The label includes a short paragraph of text and a photograph of actual use of LifeStraw (Figure 6.5). The quoted responses above demonstrate that visitors gained cognitive experience by learning about the lack of clean water in parts of the world and then learning what LifeStraw is, what it can do and who it can help. These cognitive experiences then led to further introspective, emotional, hedonic, and transformative experiences. They are empirical examples of how visitors 'make the cognitive leap to the intended "big ideas"' (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.119).

Getting to know the facts about LifeStraw led Visitor-S88 to emotional and hedonic experiences: they were surprised by the capacity of this small device. It also led to an introspective experience – by reflecting on the meaning of what they saw, they were comforted to think that 'it can save lives'. The perception they gained also stimulated inquiry as they asked the cost of a LifeStraw. This response is additional evidence confirming how real objects captivate curiosity and engagement (see Bunce 2016).

Visitor-SH2 was thrilled when encountering this 'meaningful object' and had the emotional experience of feeling comforted by realising the value the object has in making a real impact. These experiences also inspired this visitor to desires that potentially leads to action, which is a great outcome and can be categorised as a transformative experience: they were considering a real-world donation of this product to people who need it. Transformative experiences are further defined and discussed later in this chapter.

Visitor-E64 enjoyed the experience of getting to know about the object LifeStraw. From learning about this object, they made the connection to a possible domestic use of the product – at the dry land Loess Plateau in northwest China that struggles to access clean water resources. This is another transformative experience as the visitor made connections between what they encountered at Design Society and real-world situations. The enthusiasm visitors had while encountering objects designed to solve problems shows that these visitors were passionate about learning things that are relevant and transformative. Just as Smith (1989)

notes, apart from their historical value, displayed objects could also offer a chance for visitors to compare and understand cultural differences and societal change better.

Other Examples of Seeing Valuable Things

Another way of finding value from the objects, reflected by visitors at Design Society, was to rethink some ordinary, everyday objects. Here are a few examples of how visitors found value in pondering upon the objects they encountered:

> I was surprised by the IBM typewriter. We are so used to computer keyboards now and I never realised how hard it was to type in the past. If you want to change a font, you need to change a different core. How fast technology has developed! (Visitor-S91)

> I never know how fibreglass as a type of material was produced until today. I never paid much attention to materials and the techniques on producing them in the past. I tend to take them for granted. (Visitor-S49)

> In an era in which technology develops at such a swift pace, an era that technology products update so quickly, things such as Walkman could make it into an exhibition as an exhibit. Maybe a few years later iPad could end up in an exhibition gallery too. Every day has its surprises. (Visitor-R8)

Visitor-S91 connected the object into its modern equivalent and reflected on it. From the inclusion of the old-fashioned typewriter in the exhibit, they were surprised to realise how hard it was in the past for people to type and how much technology has developed since. The cognitive experience of learning about the traditional typewriter led to introspective experience – it heightened their awareness of societal changes. The value of the object, in this case, does not necessarily come from the object itself but from the visitor introspectively engaging with it. Visitor-S49 had a similar experience. They realised that material actually plays an important role in design, which they had never thought about previously. The information Visitor-S49 learned about the production of fibreglass highlighted the importance of the role of material in their mind. For Visitor-R8, it is clear that the value of the object he/she mentions, such as a Walkman or iPad, does not lie in the object itself but in the

thoughts that arose from seeing these objects displayed. Therefore, these objects could also be considered valuable in how they could change and update visitors' thoughts, perceptions and perspectives. The value of the objects that is appreciated by visitors does not necessarily come from their historical or materialistic value, but from the personal connection that visitors make with the object. The exhibition Values of Design is full of objects from daily life that a visitor may own, but when presented in a new narrative, visitors discover new ways to view and understand the objects. These new connections could lead visitors to think about their own possessions in a new context. The objects themselves might be ordinary and from everyday life, but they too can create meaningful engagement if they are well presented (Vayne 2012). Also, it is worth noticing that the ordinary objects gain 'museum reality' when they are 'reborn' in the museum (Hein 2000, p.69). The institution and the environment of a museum itself ascribes value.

A visitor shared his personal connection with one of the objects in the exhibition in an interview. The object he was talking about is the school uniform in Shenzhen displayed under the theme of 'identity' in the Values of Design exhibition (Figure 6.6). This is what the visitor reflected:

> It's incredible to find Shenzhen school uniform in the glass case. It reminded me of one time when I was in Canada, I saw a boy wearing the (Shenzhen) school uniform shorts, I was so excited to see that since I'm pretty sure he was from Shenzhen. I shouted at him across the campus: "Hey, are you from Shenzhen?" He said yes, and we chatted a bit. It felt like I went back home. (Visitor-I04)

Figure 6.6: Shenzhen school uniform in the exhibition Values of Design. December 2017. Photo by the author.

What Visitor-I04 shared was a very personal and emotional recollection that was prompted by seeing something ordinary displayed as an object in an exhibition case. Falk and Dierking (1992) note that one of the ways that visitors make sense of what they see is by attempting to personalise. Localisation is one of the methods in relating to visitors, which is found through multiple objects in the exhibition of Values of Design. 'Successful exhibits facilitate the visitor's ability to personalise objects and ideas', as Falk and Dierking (1992) explain.

The above examples show that visitors gain rich experiences from seeing valuable objects, although objects themselves could be ordinary and common in visitors' everyday lives. These responses once again demonstrate the importance of good visitor-centred interpretation and communication in which objects are not the centre, but the visitor's experiences are. Objects do not speak for themselves – it is the effective communication and the overarching story of the exhibition that forms personal connections with visitors. Many elements could help visitors in understanding the objects, for example label texts, graphs, audio-visuals and photographs, with language and wording being the key element of their effectiveness (McManus 1996).

6.2.4 Being Moved by Beauty

Visitors tend to be drawn to exhibitions that are visually compelling (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.108), and this is also true for the visually compelling objects within an exhibition. For example, Visitor-S82 was moved by the beauty of the 1960s dresses and shoes displayed in Values of Design. They drew the dress and shoe on the survey sheet (Figure 6.7):
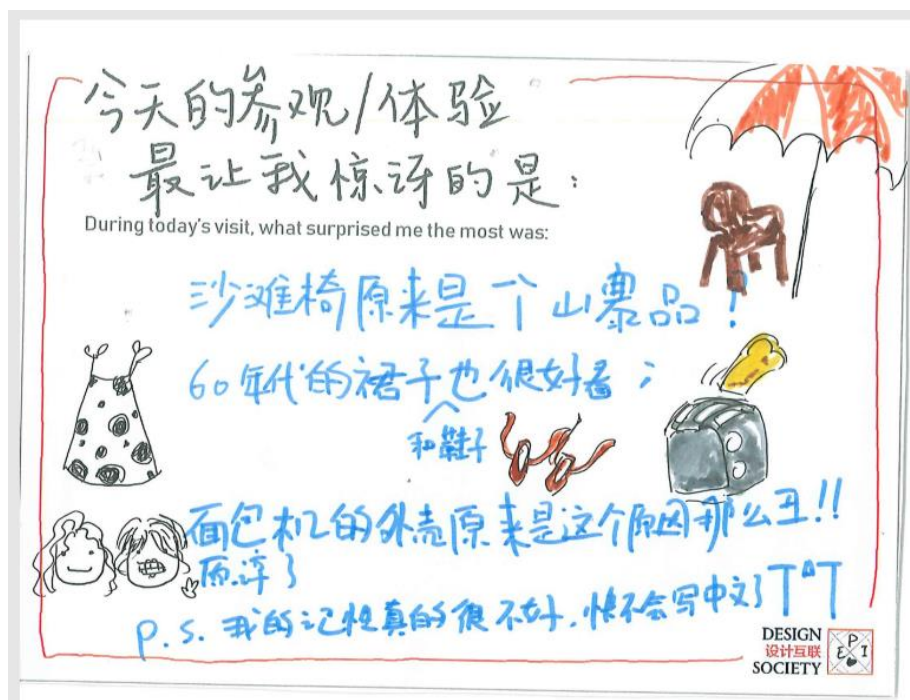
Figure 6.7: '…the dresses and shoes from the 60s are surprisingly stunning…' (Visitor-S82)

There is so much going on in this survey sheet above. The visitor did not only give their answer through words, but also through drawings. The fact that they could recall the objects and were able to illustrate them shows how intense the experiences of these objects were.

The experience of seeing beautiful objects could also lead to social experiences:

> 'That dress was truly stunning', says my friend Coco. We saw the exhibition at Design Society today and Coco was impressed by that Christian Dior dress. Being able to see pretty things together, commenting on them and spend a great afternoon together. Very happy! (Visitor-SH8)

Visitor-SH8 expressed how enjoyable it was to be able to appreciate and comment on 'pretty things' together with their friend. This is an example of objects that Simon (2010) calls 'social objects' – objects that facilitate engagement between people and provide opportunities for conversation. The social aspect of the response will be discussed further in Theme 4.

6.2.5 Object Experience and Exhibition Design

One interesting sub-theme (with 9 participants) emerged is not in Pekarik et al. (1999)'s research. Interestingly, without specifically asking, many visitors commented on the exhibition design on the survey sheets instead of talking about their personal experience as the survey questions ask. These answers do not directly address the survey questions, but themselves are very interesting. The reasons these answers were given could be that they reflect what Falk and Dierking (2016, p.104) observe as discussed in Chapter 2: visitors to Design Society knows what to expect in general and are familiar with the format of the exhibition. They assume such survey is about evaluation of the exhibitions and therefore provide comments and opinions of the exhibition design.

> The visual effect and the display of the exhibition is pleasant and enjoyable. It did not only focus the objects like the other exhibitions. There were a lot of benches for taking a rest! Very V&A! (Visitor-E101)

> Wonderful!! Five different themes, a lot of thought-provoking objects. Where does the meaning and the values of design lie? (Visitor-E11)

> I enjoyed the diversity of the objects. The classification is very interesting. If the process how these objects were selected in the preparation period and also how they were transported here can be provided, then it will be more interesting. (Visitor-E12)

> Some experience and advice from seeing the exhibition: because the objects in the exhibition are diverse, if the font could be more consistent it will be better as a whole. The connection between individual areas could be tighter. Other aspects are all good. (Visitor-SH22)

Visitors above reflected on the visual effect, the themes, the classification of the objects and the text font of the exhibition which are elements of the design of an exhibition. These comments show that these visitors have extensive experiences of visiting exhibitions and therefore they could give their judgement on these two exhibitions at Design Society. The perception of the cultural hub might not be as important for visitors as exhibitions, which is what they are familiar with, regardless of being in a cultural hub or in a museum.

Interestingly, these visitors who commented on their experience of the objects in general also tended to comment as if they were giving a review of the quality of the exhibition. This type of response is distinctive when compared to visitors sharing their sensory experiences, and the different types of responses will be further compared and discussed in the next theme. For these visitors, object and exhibition seem to be two elements that are inseparable, and for them, a good exhibition means a collection of 'through-provoking', 'diverse', well-classified objects.

6.2.6 Discussion and Summary

This section reported visitors' experiences that centred around objects in exhibitions at Design Society. It described five sub-themes, with four of them already identified in Pekarik et al. (1999)'s research. It is interesting that more than 20 years later, most experiences identified by Pekarik et al. (1999) at the Smithsonian museums remain the same in exhibitions in a new institution in China. It shows that Pekarik et al. (1999)'s research into visitors still remains relevant today and some of the ways that visitors value about objects didn't change. When opportunities in encountering objects were provided at the exhibitions at Design Society, visitors engage almost the same way as they engage exhibitions in universally defined museums. This could also be because visitors have learned to consume a museum and to perform a museum visit from their past museum visiting experiences.

As discussed in the literature review, objects are historically the core component of the museum experience and one of the basic elements of museum work (Falk and Dierking 2013; Wood and Latham 2013). While it is advocated that museums should orient away from

object-centred models to the new museology, it is important to carefully rethink and assess the role of the object in both museums and exhibitions. What does it mean to be not object-centred but visitor-centred? The visitor experience data from Design Society show that visitors in the 21st century still value object experiences, even when they are not in a museum but in a cultural hub.

In the context of Design Society, objects are used in exhibitions to communicate with visitors, and the exhibition of the Values of Design appears to be successful in doing so. As discussed in Chapter 5, although in its founding period Design Society decided to change its name from 'Shekou Design Museum' to 'Design Society', distancing itself from the stereotypical heavily object-oriented 'bo wu guan', the survey data shows that a large portion of visitors still engage with Design Society, a cultural hub, as a 'museum' and engage with its exhibitions as 'museum exhibitions' since object and object-related experiences are such a prominent theme.

It is clear that object experience as a category of experience led to other experiences across multiple facets and dimensions, demonstrating that objects were engaged with in different ways and at different depths. This multifaceted engagement proves that objects as a category of offering is powerful and highly valued by visitors. Among these experiences, the large volume of cognitive experiences that visitors reflected on through their encounters with the objects shows the strong expectation of learning opportunities at Design Society. Therefore, just as I argued in Chapter 2, the problems that museums confront are never about objects themselves. It is not objects that made museums 'living fossils' (Vergo 1989, p.3) Objects should be primarily used in exhibitions to 'gain visitor attention, to hold it and to encourage reflection' (Black 2005, p.271). The survey result demonstrates that the value visitors found in the objects often came from contextual interpretation of the objects in the form of text – the efforts made by the curatorial and the exhibition design team. A successful, effective interpretation is essential in delivering object experiences as it enables and facilitates visitors to personalise, whether by absorbing information; being excited, surprised, or comforted; or by thinking about reality and taking action. To achieve this, there are ways, for example, doing audience research and making efforts in personalising the interpretation is one of the ways that visitors make sense of the objects (Falk and Dierking 1992).

Admittedly, not all museums are moving towards becoming a cultural hub like Design Society. While many museums, especially heavily object-oriented museums, are considering ways to transform themselves from 'object-centred' to 'visitor-centred' institutions, they should undoubtedly start with their existing resources. Just as Hein (2000) says for such transition for object-oriented museums: '…but it takes collection seriously as a *means* rather than an *end* – and by no means the only means to that end' (p.8, my italics). The survey results from Design Society demonstrate that visitors valued object experiences highly. However, this could also be due to the Chinese context, as introduced in Chapter 3 in which objects have been the centre of the museum work and are regarded highly. Visitors in China also consider object experience one of the most important experiences in museums (Duan 2017). Visitors who go to the exhibitions at Design Society could already expect to gain something from objects, just like they did in many of the other exhibitions in Chinese museums.

For institutions such as Design Society which may not have their own collections or are not heavily object-oriented, this study shows that offering object experiences could be one of the options in future programming, as people who come to institutions that are not traditional 'museums' do still treasure their experiences of objects among other experiences. Although there are potential challenges that such institutions could encounter, for example to have travelling exhibitions such as Values of Design, situations like the COVID-19 pandemic could pose major interruptions for transporting objects from other places. In summary, a sustainable way needs to be explored and experimented.

Without knowing what museum experience will be like in 10 or 20 years, at least at the time of this research, with many virtual ways available to engage with objects, visitors at Design Society still seem to value their 'simple pleasure' of looking at things in three dimensions and 'the thrill of being in the presence of real things' (Conn 2010, p.57). It would be interesting to explore and compare the virtual or digital object experiences with the physical object experiences in exhibitions in the future.

In the next section, the second most mentioned theme of experiences will be displayed and discussed.

6.3 Sensory, Physical and Related Experiences

This theme includes experiences visitors had from digital installations at the exhibitions at Design Society. Data coded to this theme includes two types of responses: 1) responses that directly mention one or multiple installation[s]; 2) responses that did not directly mention a particular installation/installations but were clearly prompted by the encounter with an installation/installations. This theme is the second largest in the survey data set, with 89 (35%) visitor surveys from exhibitions coded under this theme. It is only around 1% less than Theme 1, although it clearly contrasts with the nature of the experiences described in Theme 1.

Wang (2020) observes that museums in the 21st century 'have witnessed the various senses playing increasingly instrumental roles in visitors experiences' (p.14). Across the humanities and social sciences, scholars have also been turning their attention to sensory experiences (Wang 2020; Howes 2014). Such work has expanded to the field of museum studies, creating a new area called 'sensory museology' (Howes 2014, p.259). These studies tend to focus on an individual sense, for example touch (Black 2005; Pye 2007; Howes 2014), sound (Voegelin 2014), smell (Stevenson 2014), taste (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1999; Mihalache 2014) and embodiment (Leahy 2012; Dudley 2010) In this project, Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s model was particularly helpful as it includes 'sensory experience' as a main category. It allows the researcher to explore and analyse such experiences from a more holistic view.

Two specific installations will be featured as case studies to explore this cluster of experiences. Other sub-themes outside of these two case studies will follow.

6.3.1 Case Studies of Visitor Experiences from Sharevari and ANIMA II

Two installations, Sharevari and ANIMA II in the Minding the Digital exhibition, stood out as more than 40% (36) of visitors reflected on one or both of these installations among all the surveys that were coded under this theme. These recurring responses demonstrated the significant interest that visitors had in these two installations and provided a valuable, nuanced data set for exploring this theme. Therefore, this theme will present the data and analysis of the responses from these two installations as detailed case studies. Six sub-themes were identified from the study of these two cases.

Before introducing visitors' responses, it is helpful to provide more information on these attention-drawing installations and the wider context of such installations.

Case Study 1: Sharevari

Sharevari was a semi-circle of mechanical instruments made from crystal and glass, as Figure 6.8 shows. The exhibition Minding the Digital positioned it under a sub-title of 'Can interaction experience be designed?'. It could be controlled by a visitor's gestures as if the visitor was the conductor of an orchestra[12]. As the visitor stood at the middle point of the semi-circle, the mechanical elements hit the crystal bell according to their movements. It was easy to use and navigate – visitors simply needed to stand in the circle and move their hands, arms and body to create different sound effects. Participating visitors could engage their senses of sight and sound together with their body movement, thus inviting them to participate as active performers. As an installation, Sharevari was intentionally designed to produce an 'immersive experience' for visitors, as the introductory wall text at the exhibition reveals (Figure 6.9): 'Surrounded by the vibrations of this incredible instrument, audiences will hear original compositions by Suzuki as well as conduct their own harmonies via a network of sensors, making Sharevari a unique and *immersive* experience.'

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[12] More information on Sharevari see Yuri Suzuki ([no date]).

Figure 6.8: Sharevari. © Yuri Suzuki.

Sharevari explores the use of crystal as an acoustic material. Surrounded by the vibrations of this incredible instrument, audiences will hear original compositions by Suzuki as well as conduct their own harmonies via a network of sensors, making Sharevari a unique and immersive experience.

The Japanese artist created this installation for the Swarovski Designers of the Future Award.

Figure 6.9: The exhibition wall text on the installation of Sharevari. December 2017. Photo by the author.

Case Study 2: ANIMA II

ANIMA II was also an '*immersive* installation' with 'fluid, shimmering patterns flowing on the surface of a luminescent orb suspended in space, tones oscillating, encompassing the room'[13] (See Figure 6.10, my italics). Unlike Sharevari, ANIMA II had a dedicated room which was completely black, and the only source of light was from the installation itself. As visitors approached the sphere, the pattern, texture and colour of light on the surface changed while sound was also presented in the background.

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[13]See Nick Verstand (2014).

The description wall text of Anima II (shown in Figure 6.10) in the exhibition was as follows:

> ANIMA II, meaning soul in Latin, is an *interactive* installation that investigates communication between human inner emotion and the external physical world. This sphere represents an intelligent and emotional entity. It communicates by interpreting audience reactions and responding with an array of audiovisual expressions inspired by Chinese 'Wu Xing' philosophy.

Figure 6.10: The demonstrative picture of ANIMA II from the artist's website. © Studio Nick Verstand.

Before presenting visitors' experience of these installations, it is important to discuss the context of the emergence of these installations as it is closely related with Design Society's ambitions as a cultural hub.

Both of these two installations included in Design Society's inaugural exhibition were designed to offer 'immersive experiences'. In the following paragraphs the concept of the 'immersive experiences' will be discussed, which contributes to understanding of visitors' experiences of them.

Immersive experiences as a concept have not been clearly defined, and can broadly include 'mixed media approaches, installation art and performance' and immersive technologies such as 'mixed' (Kidd and McAvoy 2019). Although there is no agreed definition, one of the common features of immersive experiences is that they are often discussed together with the

rising digital technologies. Immersive experiences are predicted to be a future trend that could potentially 'transform the way we communicate, work and play' (Mateos-Garcia et al. 2018, p.8). In the UK, immersive experiences are already an economic reality that generates sales, and the benefits of utilising immersive experiences include increased 'competitiveness' and 'visibility' (Mateos-Garcia et al. 2018, p.7).

The inclusion of immersive experiences could be seen as 'vital in the race to 'prove' public worth, impact, accountability and relevance' (Kidd 2014, p.2) Including such experiences is often seen to associate an institution with innovation and as 'a pioneer and sector-leading' (Kidd and Nieto (2019). Offering what visitors 'unquestionably desire' (Pine and Gilmore 1999, p.97) seems to be one of the strategies for a successful transformation. The trend of offering such experiences is a part of museums' transformation from institutions who rely on external fundings to 'active players in the economic sector of culture' (Grincheva 2019, p.1).

In articulating their goals for the exhibitions, Design Society said the exhibitions they offer will remain 'fresh, current and relevant' (Design Society 2017, p.29). The display of the digital technologies throughout these installations meet all of these three goals. What the founding director Ole Bouman says echoes this statement: 'We are telling a story of pioneering rather than consolidation' (Design Society 2017, p.19). For institutions like Design Society, embracing installations that utilise the latest digital technologies (in the cases of Sharevari and ANIMA II, the digital technologies used were sensor technologies and holographic projection) shows its willingness to connect with the world, reach new visitors, and brand itself as an innovative institution.

The contexts discussed above would help the interpretation of the visitor's experiences of these two installations. In total, 36 visitors mentioned their experiences with Sharevari and ANIMA II in the survey. Interestingly, among these visitors, more than half chose to describe their experiences through drawing (see Figure 6.11 to Figure 6.16):

Figure 6.11: Visitor-E6

Figure 6.12: Visitor-E60

Figure 6.13: Visitor-E7

Figure 6.14: Visitor-SH21

Figure 6.15: Visitor-SH19
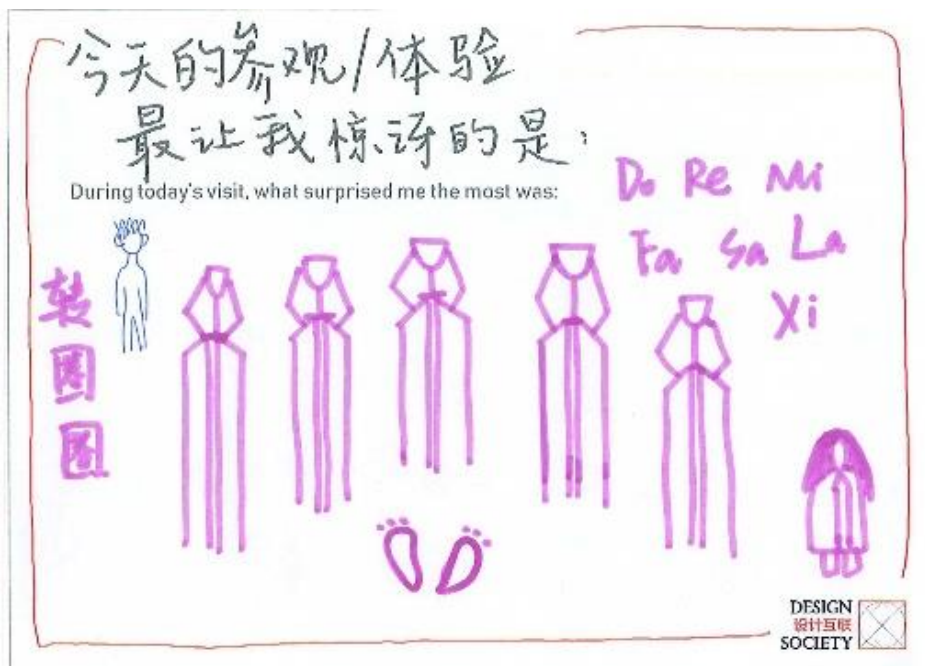
Figure 6.16: Visitor-S10

These drawings are very vivid and accurate, which possibly indicates the intensity of the experience for visitors (Pekarik et al. 1999). Unfortunately, this assumption could not be confirmed verbally due to the limitations of the surveys. However, respondents who used words rather than pictures did describe how joyful and wonderful their experiences with the installations were, as illustrated below.

6.3.2 Playful and Enjoyable

Just as Pine and Gilmore (2011) proposed, these staged experiences met visitors' desires; 20 visitors indicated their experiences with either or both of the installations were enjoyable and playful, while 14 visitors said their experiences with these two installations were the thing(s) they enjoyed the most. For example, both Visitor-SH58 and Visitor-S19 expressed how much fun it was engaging with the installation Sharevari:

> It is such a fun and playful experience of composing music (with Sharevari) (Visitor-SH58)

> That creating music installation is so much fun! (Visitor-S19)

The 'fun' of experiencing these installations was greatly valued by the visitors quoted above. Compared to traditional museology, new museology considers that exhibitions should consider entertainment and leisure, as shown in Chapter 2. Falk and Dierking (2016) also discussed digital media in their research – however, both of the installations introduced above are outside of the type of digital media they examined. Many of the installations in the exhibition Minding the Digital were more about providing an experience than acting as tools in supporting visitors in achieving a certain cognitive experience and they were created to provide 'out of the ordinary' experiences. These experiences could be seen as products of the rise of experience economy. Although there are concerns about museums being turning into theme parks, Falk and Dierking (2016) argue that '[d]eveloping museum experiences that are entertaining and enjoyable does not mean trivializing the experience or mission of the institution' (p.114). If museums want to compete with all the other activities that people choose to do in their leisure time, it is important to provide such fun experiences. As Design Society position itself as a cultural and leisure destination, it is not surprising that it curates

exhibitions that include installations that are playful and fun – just as Design Society states in its ambition that it wanted to provide exhibitions that are 'multifaceted and exciting, which promote active participation'(Design Society 2020g, para.2). Although conversations around 'edutainment' has been going on for a while, there are many examples of successful museums who do invest their resources in providing fun content and activities. Falk and Dierking (2016) listed a few examples at the end of their book: the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, the Franklin Institute Science Museum, the Dana Center of the Science Museum, MUSA. Visitors have diverse interests, and having fun is definitely one of them. Entertaining museum experiences 'actively engage visitors intellectually, emotionally and physically by inviting them to participate', as Falk and Dierking (2016, p.114) convincingly argue.

6.3.3 Awe and Wonder

As was intended, visitors were awed by how full of wonder these installations were:

> There was a ball in a room. It is wondrous. When you open the curtain and enter the room, the colour on the ball will change its colour. (Visitor-E76)

> The installation that you could move your arms and create sounds is so cool! (Visitor-S17)

> How wondrous it is that you could create music by body movement and sensor device. (Visitor-R24)

> It's surprising how Anima II could bring you into an experience of the fluid and to perceive the fragile relationship between invisible things and self. (Visitor-S32)

> Sharevari is just perfect! (Visitor-S30)

> It (Sharevari) made me feel that as if I was in a different world. (Visitor-SH58)

Visitor-S17, Visitor-R24 and Visitor-S32 all consistently expressed their awe at the ability and scope of the installation. Visitor-R24's words demonstrate vividly the importance of

action and movement. Also, specifically in the case of Sharevari, some degree of control in the experience brought much excitement. This will be further discussed in the next section.

Designing experiences of 'awe and reverence' should be what museums strive for, as Falk and Dierking (2016, p.114) assert. These emotional experiences of awe and surprise could come from encountering the uniqueness of the installation and also their distances to the everyday life. Visitors could also be amazed at how these installations employed a combination of different technologies which appeared to be both innovative and creative. As previously stated, digital technology hopes to attract visitors and increase engagement, and the data from Design Society exhibitions confirms again that the 'cross-section of art and technology' could greatly 'strike awe and wonder in participants'[14]. These practices that combine art and technology are also estimated to grow in the future (Davies and Dyer 2019).

6.3.4 Ownership and Participation

Another interesting observation is that when participants drew their experiences of these two installations, they tended to draw themselves in the picture too (see Figure 6.17). This self-inclusion indicates a sense of ownership of the experience – that this moment belongs to them and they had some degree of control over their experience. Kidd and McAvoy (2019) propose that immersive experiences could change the relationship between visitors and the physical space they occupy, and perceived ownership of the space and the experience is one example of such change. Visitors drawing themselves also demonstrates that they consider themselves participants rather than spectators in such experiences. This kind of ownership is also described through text in the survey responses:

> The immersive ball is quite fun. It's a moment that only belongs to me. The combination of the visual and the audio was a wonderful experience. (Visitor-E21)

> This afternoon I got to see that spinning ball all by myself and it felt like I owned that room. (Visitor-E22)

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[14] Also see Puffer Fish ([no date]), one of the contributors in creating Anima II.

The above responses show that the experience of the digital installation is influenced by the physical context, as also previously observed by Falk and Dierking (1998, cited in Falk and Dierking 2016, p.120). Just as Visitor-E22 reflected, a space that is set aside is important in creating a private experience that gives visitors a sense of ownership, which is greatly cherished by visitors. This is obviously also impacted by the flow of the exhibition – even with a set-aside space, if the exhibition is packed with visitors, it makes it impossible for visitors to have such special experiences and for the installation to be enjoyed in this way.

The nature of these drawings differ significantly when compared to the occasional survey drawings from the object experience: object experience respondents did not ever include themselves in the drawings. Owning their experiences and viewing themselves as active participants is something exclusive to this theme of experience. For example, when visitors were experiencing Sharevari, they could have been reimagining their identities in those moments and becoming immersed in a temporary identity as a symphony conductor. They also tended to draw the multisensory elements (see Figure 6.17) – for example, the music notes record the sense of the sound from the experience. For these visitors, these are the vital parts of their experiences.

Figure 6.17: Visitor-E45 (left) and Visitor-E33 (right)

6.3.5 Taking Photos as a Sensory and Physical Experience

Taking 'instagrammable' photos – photos to share on social media is becoming a popular behaviour in museums (Stylianou-Lambert 2017; Putra and Razi 2020; Budge 2020). '…it is not enough just to be there. You must also be able to share it' (Black 2021, p.25). The act of taking photos was also found in Design Society. It was first identified from the initial analysis of the surveys where 9 participants talked about their experiences of taking photos at Design Society. I then followed up with observation and interviews to further explore this sub-theme. In this sub-theme of sensory experience, taking photos will be explored as a sensory and physical experience, while in the next section, taking photos will be explored as a social experience.

All the survey data related to taking photos at Design Society show that a large part of visitors' sensory and physical experience is 'realised' or 'mediated' by taking pictures at the exhibitions, as if it is a new way of looking and experiencing. This phenomenon is categorised as 'social photography':

> …a subset of photography, evolved through the capacities of twenty-first century digital technologies (for example, smart phones), and the introduction of social media in the mid-2000s. (Budge 2020, p.4)

Although there could be moral panic associated with taking photos in the gallery, it is similar to what was discussed above: when fun and entertainment is provided in museums, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is weakening its mission. Instagrammable moments in a cultural institution like Design Society are not limited to exhibitions and art installations. Other aesthetic features, such as the architecture, provide picture-worthy backgrounds that speak about visitors' experiences. From my observations, taking photos in the exhibition gallery was one of the most frequent visitor behaviours seen during the fieldwork at Design Society. According to my observation notes, visitors who took photographs in front of an installation tended to pause at these spots between two to 15 minutes. Figure 6.18 is an observational photograph taken by me. Figure 6.19 and Figure 6.20 were pictures taken by the visitors and they have kindly given me permission to use them in this thesis.

Figure 6.18: Observation photograph of a visitor taking photo for her friend in front of Sharevari. January 2018. Photo by the author.
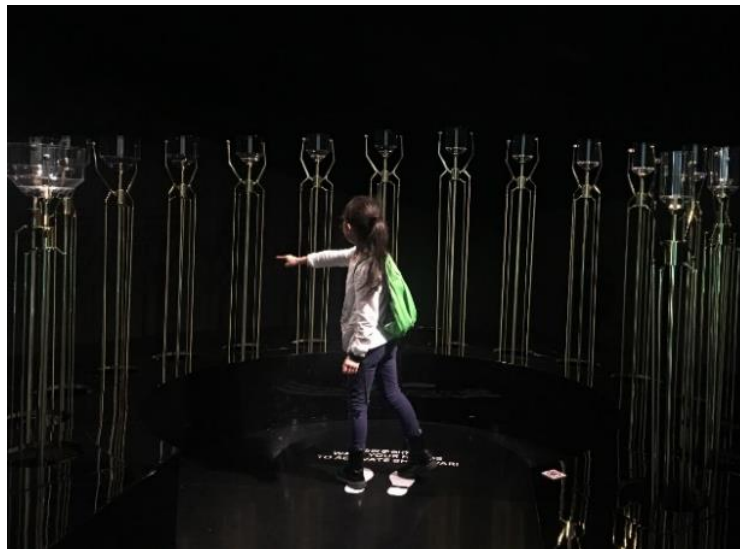
Figure 6.19: A visitor experiencing the installation Sharevari. January 2018. Photo taken by this visitor's parent. The visitor's parent has kindly given her permission for using the photo in this thesis.
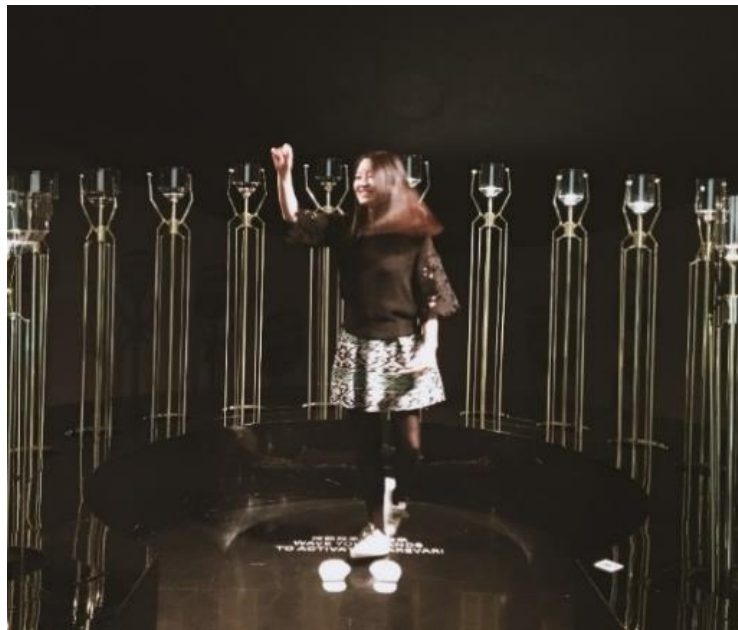
Figure 6.20: A visitor enjoying her 'conductor moment'. February 2018. Photo taken by this visitor 's friend. She has kindly granted permission for using this photo in this thesis.

The visitors in Figure 6.18 were friends who experienced Sharevari and then each took pictures of the other while they posed in front of the installation. They stayed around seven minutes, which included checking back and forth with the other one to see whether the picture they took was satisfactory. The visitor in Figure 6.19 was visiting with her mother. While this visitor played with Sharevari, her mother took pictures of her from different angles. The visitor in Figure 6.20 had fun with Sharevari and at the end asked her friend to take a picture of her while she moved her arms like a conductor. These visitors were greatly entertained by and immersed in their photo-taking experiences. It seemed like they entered another reality and temporarily forgot the reality.

Data extracted from other areas of Design Society are provided below, relating to the experiences of taking photos as both a sensory and a physical experience. Visitors' comments from the survey show they greatly enjoyed photo-taking experiences. The aesthetic value of the exhibition gallery seemed to be the primary value when seeking opportunities to take photos:

> The white theme of this gallery space is very beautiful. A good photo can be produced without making too much effort. (Visitor-E76)

This is THE PLACE to take photos! (Visitor-E31)

One interview with a group of visitors showed that for them, taking satisfying photographs was their main agenda for the visit:

Author: What is your favourite part of the visit at Design Society today?

Visitor-I08: Taking photos.

Visitor-I09: Yeah, taking photos definitely.

Author: Do you consider today's visit a satisfying one?

Visitor-I10: As long as we can take some good photos.

(Both Visitor-I8, Visitor-I9 and Visitor-I10 agreed and laughed.)

These visitors above are not just snapping along while they visit. They are actively composing, moving around and choosing the best composition, angle and background. Visitor-I10 says 'as long as we can take good photos', which suggests there is a certain standard that they are looking for. So does Visitor-E76 and Visitor-E31. They evaluate the gallery space and consider it an ideal place in taking photos that are 'good'.

The results above demonstrate that for many visitors, an instagrammable exhibition is important and enjoyable at the same time. The acts of finding spots for taking photos itself is a form of participation. Falk and Dierking (2016) assert that media is not the main reason that visitors come to museums; however, from the strong interest in taking photos in the exhibition galleries shown above, it almost seems possible that being able to take photos could be one of the main drivers for the visitors in visiting exhibitions in Design Society.

Despite complaints by some visitors and 'the popular belief that social photography interferes with the seeing and experiencing of museums' (Budge 2020, p.63), Dornan (2016) argues that Instagram 'allows museums to create new kinds of mutual engagement' (para.1). These experiences could be seen as experiences of co-creating or re-creating the institution's offerings – which is what a cultural hub meant to facilitate, according to ICOM (2019a). Like

the reflective wall in the exhibition gallery of Values of Design, although not specifically designed for the purpose of visitor photography, visitors found creative ways to use it and created value from it.

6.3.6 Frustration When the Sensory Experience 'Fails'

As much as visitors expressed their passion for the sensory and physical experiences in the exhibition, frustration was also a sub-theme that was repeatedly referred to by visitors when the experience 'fails'.

One issue surfaced from the data which shows that, compared to object experiences, sensory experiences have more of a risk to 'fail' due to their nature; installations often stopped working and required maintenance. When an exhibit was not working, visitors' experiences could be negatively affected, as their expectations were not met:

> Technology is highly unreliable. Hope this can be fixed soon. It is broken. (Visitor-S09)

> Those interactive ones were broken. iPad always appeared on the wrong page. The design is good, but the experience was poor. In a word, not worth the price. (Visitor-S49)

A visitor also mentioned in an interview how frustrating it can be when installations break during their visit:

> I think these exhibitions are very good… It's probably because it's the opening day, everything still works. Lots of places like science museums, sometimes you go there with great expectations, but when you are actually there, things were all broken and can't be used. Lack of maintenance. Very disappointing. Then you don't want to go there anymore. (Visitor-I02)

Several visitors also expressed their confusion about information that the installation wanted to convey:

> I didn't really get what this is about (ANIMA II). (Visitor-S11)

It is unknown what Visitor-S11's exact expectation was from the encounter with this installation, but there could be two possible reasons why they seemed confused. It could be that this visitor was looking for a clear learning outcome instead of an experience – and what the installation had to offer did not deliver that for them.

The installations that offered sensory experiences may be what really captivated visitors' curiosities and motivated them to visit the exhibition, but these experiences could sometimes be unreliable. Complaints of this type were not found from the object experiences, which adds unexpected advantage in an age that digital experiences are becoming increasingly common. These occasions reflected by visitors from the survey could be uncommon incidents; however, the possibilities of disappointing visitors should be seriously and thoughtfully considered in museums' day-to-day operations, especially in regard to the maintenance of digital installations.

What is also interesting to note is that the visitors did not respond to the intended expressed goal of the installation itself. For the case of Sharevari, the artist wanted to explore using crystal as a material for a musical instrument, and for ANIMA II, the artist wanted to encourage meditation upon philosophical being. These concepts or related ideas were absent from the responses. Reasons for this could be the framing of the survey question, or that there was no in-depth follow-up. However, from the data collected it appears that in the case of these two installations, the senses seemed to overtake the artist's intentions. This, however, did not seem to bother every visitor in enjoying their experiences while not necessarily know what the installation was actually about. This will be further discussed in the next section.

6.3.7 Discussion and Summary

As this theme is the second largest from the survey data set, Design Society's visitors demonstrated their strong interest in sensory, physical and related experiences after the object experiences. Sensory experience was not one of four experiences in Pekarik et al. (1999) which suggests how museum experiences have been changing in the past few decades.

Interestingly, experiences described in this theme are largely different from object experiences and are relatively new for traditional museums. The popularity of this theme suggests that sensory and physical experiences could be considered one of the characteristics of cultural hubs that visitors seek. Unlike Theme 1, Theme 2 is more about senses and physical movement, which primarily prompts hedonic and emotional experiences rather than cognitive, introspective or transformative experiences. These intellectual experiences were rarely mentioned by visitors after their sensory and physical encounters. This difference calls for future research because, as raised at the beginning of this theme, the existing ways of evaluation might not be sufficient to fully capture such experiences. Also, compared to existing extensive research on the impact of object experience, more investigation and theorisation is needed for a more holistic understanding of the multisensory and physical experiences in the exhibitions.

This sub-theme easily shows that visual experience, especially photography experience, is still overwhelmingly valued by the visitor. Many other publications try to stress the importance of the other senses and argue that museums should go beyond the visual. However, this study has shown that visual experiences play a fundamental role, just as when Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1999) talks about the experience of taste and says 'our eyes let us 'taste' at a distance' and by seeing, other senses could be engaged imaginatively (p.3). However, these experiences work more effectively when other senses are added to the visual. In fact, when other senses of experiences are added, a unique experience is created that is more than a simple sum of the parts, as it provides immersion for the visitors.

Cultural institutions' interest in adding multisensory and physical experiences has increased in recent years as these kind of experiences are seen as the 'hope' for attracting more visitors, new groups of visitors, and providing better engagement (Kidd and Mcavoy 2019). For some institutions, media are given increasingly important roles so that they essentially became 'the object' (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.120). However, these ideas and practices are not without resistance, as some people consider offering experiences that are similar those offered by theme parks would make museums 'suffer in the comparison and lose their identity' (Lord 2007, p.113), or 'being looked down upon' (Macdonald and Alsford 1995, p.129). Another concern people have is that museums would not be as competitive as for-profit theme parks

(Lord 2007) as these type of experiences can be expensive (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.121; Kidd and McAvoy 2019). However, the findings at Design Society show that it is clear that multisensory and physical experiences were greatly enjoyed by many and there is richness and nuance in such experiences.

Firstly, in terms of providing more meaningful and higher quality of engagement, adding immersive experiences could potentially transform an institution from 'museum' to 'cultural hub' by becoming more engaged, visitor-centred and accessible to visitors. Adding these experiences will potentially refresh the reputation of the institution, increasing visibility while also adding strength in competing for public's attention.

When discussing digital media in exhibitions, Falk and Dierking (2016, p.119)'s visitor research indicates that the addition of the digital experience provides visitors opportunities in engaging with 'varying degrees of depth of information and options that facilitate individual flexibility and choice'. It is about offering the choice for people who would find it interesting. These could be people who are familiar with such provision, or people who find them exciting and fascinating. Making digital media available is important, especially in determining how certain groups of visitors form their perception of the institution. For example, young people would be drawn to such exhibitions and consider the institution itself not a traditional museum.

Hostility should not be held against such experiences; as has been discussed above regarding digital technologies and immersive experiences, they are already becoming an aspect of nearly every part of our lives. This is 'even truer when we consider younger visitors to our institutions' (Lord 2007, p.113) given that these experiences are multi-sensory, fun and playful. This potential could be illustrated in the interview below with a group of three visitors to the exhibition Minding the Digital.

> Author: Do you think there are any differences between here and a museum?
>
> Visitor-I03: Here has a lot of fun. (It is) really modern. Museums are boring. People our age would prefer to come here rather than go to a museum. (Visitor-I03)

What Visitor-I03 said is thought-provoking. If these fun, sensory and physical experiences can attract non-visitors who consider museums to be boring 'but are active consumers of entertainment, including theme parks' (Zbuchea 2015, p.485), it is a step of progress towards museums becoming more 'interactive, audience focused' cultural hubs (ICOM 2019a). The ambition of Design Society is to offer cultural programmes that are 'diverse, animated, relevant, participatory' (Design Society 2020b, para.2), which largely echoes the vision ICOM provided for cultural hubs. Choosing to provide experiences such as Sharevari and ANIMA II demonstrates such ambition. Offering such experiences could also be considered as some of the defining features of a cultural hub, and one feature could be offering new, emerging and inspirational experiences. Falk and Dierking (2016) also propose that 'multi-media and multi-sensory approaches are often beneficial' (p.114). Through adding experiences that incorporate the latest technologies, the institution could be seen as willing to explore cutting-edge, new and creative things. The data proves this, as visitors at Design Society tended to consider it a 'cool' and 'pioneering' place (see Visitor-S34). For example, Visitor-S34 expressed their view on the exhibitions at Design Society:

> Can't believe this kind of exhibition is available in China too. It's fun and enables interaction… it enables me to closely approach and experience what's the world's popular and pioneering design products and design concepts. (Visitor-S34)

Such sensory experiences are not only applicable in institutions like Design Society. It has been pointed out that it could be used for traditionally object-centred history museums too, as recognised by Chinese scholar Fengjun Wang (Wang 2021).

In summary, it is therefore important for museum's future programming to consider the possibility of providing fun, interactive and immersive experiences which engage multiple senses and encourage physical participation. However, as this research did not address the demographics of the visitors, it therefore could not demonstrate statistically how adding these experiences could attract certain groups of visitors. Future research could further explore this area.

Besides the advantages, there could be some challenges in providing such experiences. Firstly, as shown above, visitors could be easily disappointed if technical issues were not

solved quickly, and it largely undermined what it was designed to offer. Secondly, not everyone appreciated installations that were either designed to be or appeared to be instagrammable. There were complaints from one of the interviewees that she considered the behaviour 'unbearable' and that those who were taking photos were in the way as she moved through the exhibition gallery (from an interview with Visitor-I06). As a result, this visitor could not have her desired visiting experience of an uninterrupted exhibition. Thirdly, these experiences tend to be expensive. But just as Falk and Dierking (2016, p.121) state, there are likely to be inexpensive and more common in the future. As new digital technologies constantly emerge at a rapid speed, it provides both challenges and opportunities for museums (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.122).

Fourthly, as mentioned above, some visitors find it frustrating that they did not understand or gain new knowledge or information from the installations. This shows that the type of learning these visitors were looking for was mainly narrowly defined as cognitive learning. The disconnect between intention and response presents both opportunities and challenges for cultural institutions. The Curator of the exhibition Value of Design Brendan Cormier said this in the interview: '…we have to be very careful that we are being interactive but also being meaningful' (Staff-I01). While providing interactive sensory experiences, institution could provide opportunities for visitors in further exploration, for example by providing additional supporting materials. In summary, a cultural hub must realize the importance of clearly stating and communicating its mission and goals so that visitors know what potential outcomes they could have from their visits.

This is an interesting topic to explore when comparing the offering of multi-sensory installations of Design Society to Wang (2020)'s study of the multi-sensory area in an exhibition in a folk museum. The purpose of the multi-sensory area in the folk museum was meant to 'arouse the empathy' for the local natives and to provide realistic recreated scenes from their lives (p.6). Multiple senses were used to support the exhibition's narrative and to bring visitors closer to real daily life. However, the immersive experience of the installations in Design Society were designed and delivered in a way that led visitors further from reality – as an escape. This is apparently appreciated by some and disliked by others, which indicates

that managing expectations and clear communication could potentially solve some of the visitors' conflicts. These responses show the challenge of positioning these experiences in a learning context; while some cultural institutions utilise these experiences primarily for educational purposes, not all necessarily do. This challenge needs to be explored and researched further, but meanwhile the definition of learning need to be more fluid and expanded too, as Packer (2008) suggests.

Another challenge, as mentioned above, is the evaluation and research of the impact of such experiences. More methodologies need to be tested, explored and updated according to the specific characteristics of the experiences (Kidd and McAvoy 2019). Institutions that are already considering adding such experiences may question adding these projects as they can be expensive (Kidd and McAvoy 2019). The data collected at Design Society contributes evidence to support some purposes, but because the nature of this research is not quantitative, purposes such as increasing visibility and providing additional revenue could not be measured, although it would be an interesting and helpful topic for future research projects. In summary, before making assertions, as Kidd and McAvoy (2019) argue, a better and more nuanced understanding of direct return on investment from such experiences is needed.

While analysing the data from this theme, there was also another interesting methodological observation: it is fascinating that visitors chose to depict their experience through drawings versus text. It not only implies the possibility of the inability of language to describe such immersive and multisensory experiences, but also proves that encouraging drawings as a form of response enabled visitors to capture, evaluate and theorise their experiences. This visual response implies that traditional research methods and models such as interviews and surveys which work mainly with text could be insufficient to capture multisensory digital experiences. This insufficiency is confirmed by Peng (2019), who questioned the appropriateness of existing tools in understanding and evaluating the emerging formats of experiences, and argued that in-gallery experiences such as VR, AR, and multi-touch senses are 'very different from traditional interactives'. The above examples of visitors choosing drawing as the means to reflect on their experiences could lead to an innovative toolset for measuring and analysing experiences from newly emerging trends.

The next section will describe and discuss the third theme from the survey data: transformative experiences.

6.4   Transformative Experiences

This theme captured participants' experiences of change – their transformative experiences. Fifty-eight (19%) visitors' reflections were included under this theme. Some of these experiences were from introspective experiences, when visitors looked inwardly and the 'self' was the focus. Other experiences focused outwardly, and they reflected visitors intention to apply what they had encountered into a real-world situation, where the outside world becomes the focus of change.

Design Society emphasises the offering of transformative experiences, as it: 'creates a space for action that invites people to create and make the future' (Design Society 2020f, para.1) These experiences visitors reported also to some degree reflect the emerging trend of 'activist museum' or 'museum activism' in both practice and theory, in which museums do, or are expected to, recognise their social responsibility and empower change (Janes and Sandell 2019; Bergevin 2019). Activist museums are 'inherently impact-oriented' (Bergevin 2019, p.14), which is the case for Design Society in many ways as it has aimed to be the catalyst of societal change since its creation (Design Society 2020d). However, the context of these 'changes' talked about by Design Society are not exactly equivalent to the activist museums being discussed in the western context, which focus on 'promoting and garnering support for positive socio-political outcomes' (Bergevin 2019, p.14). As a type of experience, transformative experiences are gaining importance as museums move to an era of aspiring to 'change lives' (Museums Association 2013).

Transformative experiences were absent from Pekarik et al. (1999). Packer and Ballantyne outline transformative experiences as inspiration, capability, mastery, accomplishment, fulfilment, self-knowledge, sense of importance and creativity. The definition I have used in coding the transformative experience is experience of changes 'in one's knowledge, self-

perceptions, beliefs, assumptions, goals, and behavioural intentions', and the possible outcomes include not only 'new knowledge' but also 'new perceptions, values affiliations and behavioural plans' (Garner et al. 2016, p.342). This definition is particularly helpful in the way that it considers increasing one's knowledge a transformative experience too, as then much of the visitor's cognitive experience could be categorised under this theme, which helps in answering the research questions.

6.4.1 Transformed Thoughts towards the Outside World

Some visitors shared how they were inspired by the exhibition:

> [Today's visit made me realise that] ordinary things have their special value when you spend time observing them. (Visitor-R93)

> I realised today that the things from the past could be so adorable. I reckon people from the past were adorable too. I want to go back to the past and get to know them. (Visitor-R81)

> Can't believe that boring things in life, through organising and decorating, could look so artistic! (Visitor-S51)

> [Today's visit made me realise that] Design and arts could bring us so many inspirations. Here is my key word for my art creation: odd, creative and love. (Visitor-R70)

Visitor-R93 was inspired to view the world differently – to (re)discover the world through spending time and observing so that even ordinary things they usually did not notice could have some special value. Also, through visiting the exhibitions, visitors had changed thoughts towards both life and the world in general. Many visitors reflected on the changes in their deeply-held views and attitudes towards 'life' and 'world' in general:

> [Today's visit made me realise that] Life is rather wonderful after all (Visitor-R57)

> Life is full of wonders! (Visitor-S22)

> Life is brilliant! (Visitor-S24)

> [Today's visit made me realise that] The world we live in is an amazing world. (Visitor-R60)

> I suddenly found out that there are so many people living purposefully and thoughtfully (Visitor-E101)

> Seeing the future intertwines with the past made me think that each day at present is so great. (Visitor-SH24)

> Didn't realise that world is pretty wonderful. (Visitor-R33)

> Everything is possible. (Visitor-R65)

> [Today's visit made me realise that] Young people should live well. Life is good. I am good too. (Visitor-R61)

These visitors did not mention a particular exhibit. Instead, they chose to reflect on their overall experience of the exhibitions at Design Society. These experiences seem especially meaningful when reconsidering the value of the cultural institutions which were closed to the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. Values of the visiting an institution like Design Society have been demonstrated from these responses as visitors came to the conclusion that 'life is wonderful' and had a general sense of hope about the present and the future. These experiences are beyond 'learning', and possibly cannot even be captured by asking a question about 'what have you learned?'. Although these responses could be results derived from learning new things. Also, since these responses are relatively personal, it could be difficult to capture them through verbalization in a face-to-face interview, which again shows the benefit of conducting surveys.

6.4.2 Affirmation of Values, Ideas, Experiences, Goals and Behaviours

The above data demonstrated changes in an obvious sense, but affirmation of a person's core commitment could also be a part of their identity development within transformative experiences (Garner et al. 2016). Below are some examples:

> Shenzhen has the real strength of being a city of design. (Visitor-R75)

> If we continue to work hard, we could one day impress others too. (Visitor-SH67)

> Design itself is a kind of religion. (Visitor-E86)

> Design could satisfy my hunger. (Visitor-R79)

One aspect of the transformative experience is gaining affirmation of the views and attitudes visitors already hold. Their encounters at the exhibition strengthened those beliefs. Some visitors appear to gain confidence from the subject of the exhibition and were encouraged by what they came across:

> [What I enjoyed the most from today's visit is that] I could confirm once again that what I have been working on is right and worthwhile. (Visitor-E21)

> No matter how hopeless and unpromising the career as a designer is, I still wanna do it'. (Visitor-E69)

Both Visitor-E21 and Visitor-E69 expressed how they gained affirmation through what they came across in the exhibitions. Visitor-E69 drew their ideas in a more graphic way, which is shown in Figure 6.21. Their responses shows that through visiting the exhibition, Visitor-E69 reclaimed their determination of how much they wanted to pursue a career in design regardless of the difficulties.

Figure 6.21: 'No matter how hopeless and unpromising the career as a designer is, I still wanna do it' (Visitor-E69)

Many visitors also have their thoughts changed on specific ideas, concepts, or perceptions towards a specific thing:

It [the robot] came here to just to comfort us that AI is adorable and poses no threats! (V-S46)

Visitor-S46 had their thoughts changed on AI, which they previously perceived as dangerous and were concerned about. By viewing the installation artwork, they were comforted, at least for a moment, by the installation demonstrating other possibilities and aspects of AI which differed from their perception.

Many visitors reflected on their perception of 'Design', the main theme of both exhibitions at Design Society. They also expressed how they became more interested or motivated to learn more about the themes of the exhibitions.

The exhibition Minding the Digital and Values of Design have deepened my understanding on design (Visitor-E37)

Everyone could participate in design. (Visitor-E57)

Design is not only for the purpose of looking good, but it consists of a lot of other values. (Visitor-E56)

[I realised from today's visit that] good design will never be out-of-date. (Visitor-R17)

[I realised from today's visit that] designers are not just abandoning reality as I imagined. They are big on being environmental-friendly, they work with digitalisation, and they connect human with nature. Their original purpose is not only for just grabbing eyes and to shock the world. They are limited in many sense. (Visitor-R34)

As a non-professional person I realised that the dimension of design is not only about looking good. (Visitor-S56)

[I realised from today's visit that] our life is becoming better because of the work of design. (Visitor-R41)

[I realised from today's visit that] optimization is the core of design work. (Visitor-R6)

The essence of design is the exploration of different materials. (Visitor-S86)

[I realised from today's visit that] design is so wonderful. It is hard to image how the world will be like without design. (Visitor-R83)

There were actually people pondering the pros and cons about design (Visitor-S54)

I am 13 this year. I hope I could become a designer one day. This exhibition made me realise that 'design' could in reality be very diverse. (Visitor-S64)

The word 'deepened' was used by Visitor-E37, which is one of the examples of how the content of the exhibitions can potentially make an impact in the ways visitors consider certain topics. It is also interesting that Visitor-S56 shared their previous view on the topic 'design' prior to the visit and reflected how it had changed through visiting the exhibitions. Visitor-

S64 clearly stated how their understanding of the concept of 'design' had been changed by visiting the exhibitions at Design Society and design as a topic turned out to be more diverse than they thought. Again, these responses all relate to the immediate experience from visitors' short-term memory of the exhibition. It is not within the scope of this study to find out how much of these experiences could transform visitors in the long term. However, it is clear that, at least from the immediate responses, there are many positive responses that suggest potential transformation for visitors. These experiences could be one of the first steps.

6.4.3 Renewed Thoughts on Self

Through their encounters at the exhibition, visitors looked inward and expressed their deeply-held attitudes and beliefs. This introspection goes beyond the first two themes – beyond learning about objects and beyond the sensory experience.

Visitor's increased motivation gained from their visit can be very personal and insightful:

> It is a great thing to maintain your curiosity and keep being refreshed. Since wonder is the original motivation for designers, I want to tell the future me: Maintain your curiosity and passion for the world. (Visitor–012)

Through such experiences, a visitor's identity in the world could be changed in a small but significant way by (re)considering and incorporating information in relation to the self:

> (I realised from today's visit that) I will be the next person who change the world. (Visitor-R67)

> (I realised from today's visit that) the merging of art and technology could create massive and beautiful sparks. My understanding on art is only the tip of the iceberg. There is a long way to go. I will continue to learn. (Visitor-R16)

> (I wanted to share that) I created music today. (Visitor-SH13)

> I should always look towards the exploration of my senses. (Visitor-S80)

Interestingly, the two responses below are slightly negative at the first glance. Visitor-R5 perhaps realised how much they didn't know about the topics these exhibitions cover. They could be overwhelmed with the information that was loaded on them. For Visitor-R36, their reflection could be from being exposed to the artwork and art installations and felt a lack of confidence when thinking about their own ability. However, although the realisation of both of these visitors appear to be negative, it could also potentially motivate a positive beginning. For example, maybe Visitor-R5 decided to learn more about the areas that they didn't know before. For Visitor-R36, realising they are not as talented at art as they think also might not be a completely negative thing. Maybe they could start to explore a different talent in a different area. Visitor-E22 vividly drew the process of how her perceptions towards design has been transformed through visiting the exhibitions (see Figure 6.22). The tangled lines represent their muddled perception and the two wavy lines represent their much clearer understanding towards what design is about.

(I realised from today's visit that) I know nothing. (Visitor-R5)

(I realised from today's visit that) I am not that talented at art. (Visitor-R36)
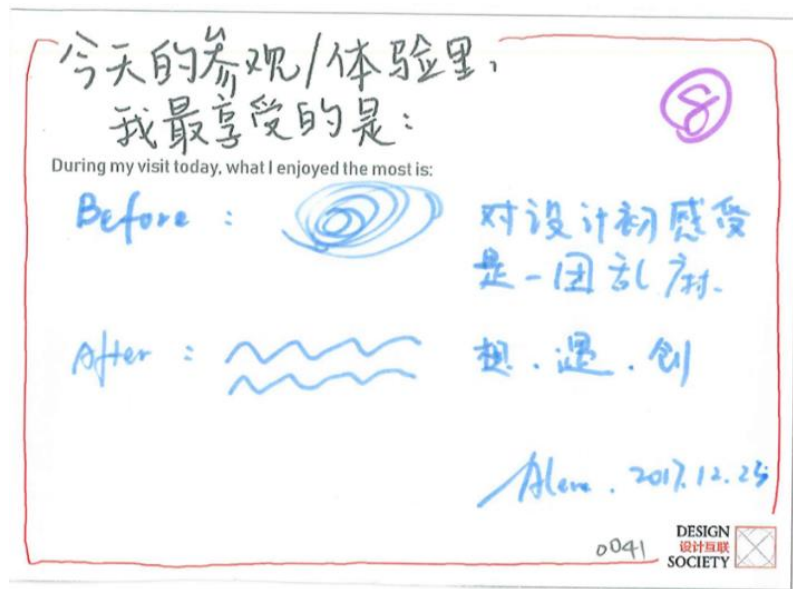
Figure 6.22 'Before: my perception towards design was muddled. After: [design is about] Think, Encounter and Create' (Visitor-E22)

While the above visitors commented on their general exploration of their thoughts, some visitors shared more detailed thoughts on changing their goals and behaviours. Some of them are about the visitors themselves, and some of them are about making a difference in the world:

> [Today's visit made me realise that] coding is overwhelming. I am going to learn about interactive design when I go back. (Visitor-R89)

> One of the most meaningful products was the simple water filter device. Although it was invented a while ago, I got to learn about it today at this exhibition. Very comforting to know that kids in Africa can easily get clean drinking water because of this invention. I want to figure out a way to donate more of this product for them. (Visitor-SH2)

> I want to be a designer. (Visitor-R11)

> Design is truly pretty cool. I hope I can learn more about things that are related with design. (Visitor-SH63)

> Design is so interesting. I need to study hard, study arts, then I will have opportunities in the future to do what I like. (Visitor-S43)

> I have been charmed by the designers. Although my subject is nothing to do with design, I wanted to carve a niche of my own. Come on! (Visitor-SH66)

> Hope I can be a part of the art! (Visitor-SH69)

Although it is unknown whether it was a particular text or a particular theme of the exhibition which led Visitor-SH69 to this exclamation, their response shows they were potentially motivated to do something differently after walking out the door of the exhibition. After being presented with the exhibition, Visitor-S43 came up plans for the future: to study hard in the arts. Without longitudinal studies, it is uncertain whether visitors put these plans in place outside of the institution, but these comments show a seed has been planted.

For visitors who are not yet 'designers', the exhibition seemed to motivate them to explore the path of becoming one in the future:

> I'm going to be a designer (Visitor-R04)

> Design is such an interesting subject. I will study hard now and learn more about arts so that I can have chances in the future to do the thing I truly enjoy. (Visitor-R27)

> I was really attracted to the charm of the designers. Although what I do now has nothing related to design, but from the visit today I could see some connections between my work and design. Hope I can achieve more in my own field in the future! (Visitor-E35)

Visitor-R04 tied their experience of the exhibition closely to their personal development. They showed their understanding of the subject of the exhibition and their interest in developing the career of being a 'designer'. In comparison, Visitor-R27 and Visitor-E35 not only showed interest but also had deeper thoughts and more precise directions for their next steps. These reflections above are powerful examples of the transformative experiences people could receive from an exhibition.

6.4.4 Discussion and Summary

Transformative experience happens when visitors are actively engaged. The quotes above demonstrate that visitors had different dimensions of transformative experiences from the exhibitions at Design Society. The visiting experience produced changes in their ideas, attitudes, and perceptions, both about themselves and also about the world.

Hooper-Greenhill (2007) argues that visiting museums has the capability to bring shifts or changes in attitudes, which can then contribute to the formation of values that inform how people make their decisions on how to live their lives. Although the formation of attitudes or values is a long-term process and the effects of visiting museums are hard to measure, from visitors' immediate reflections, hints can be found as to how their visit could potentially contribute to changing their attitudes and values. These immediate subjective experiences are the original materials which can lead to takeaway messages or remembered experiences

(Packer and Ballantyne 2016). Among these reflections on a particular exhibition, some visitors expressed a significant impact on their thinking during the visit. It is worth clarifying, however, that since this study is not longitudinal, the data shows only immediate, short-term impacts on visitors.

As reviewed in Chapter 2, museums are in the process of becoming more visitor-centred and some are becoming cultural hubs. Indeed, the evidence for transformative experience suggests that Design Society's programmes engaged visitors beyond the purpose of cognitive learning. What Design Society strives to achieve is to become the 'catalyst of societal change' – this from the survey means facilitating visitor experiences that transform ideas into actions that they could take beyond the context of the museum.

The transformative experiences had by visitors demonstrate that opportunities for visitors to develop their own thoughts and make their own connections were created through the exhibition content. For example, Design Society stated that through the exhibition Values of Design, visitors would be triggered to reflect on how they value design themselves (Design Society 2017a). The data shows that visitors did indeed reflect on the values of design from a personal perspective, and that for many visitors, their understanding was changed by the exhibition. The transformative experiences show the potential impact that cultural institutions could make. The sense of well-being, renewed thoughts and a sense of hope.

Notably, changes reflected in the responses at Design Society tended to centre around personal improvement rather than on socio-political change as in the western context. It would be an interesting topic to explore further on the difference of the transformative experiences in different cultural and political contexts.

By transforming from museums to cultural hubs, institutions could actively incorporate such experiences into their planning, although more research is needed in this area as little is known about the potential factors leading to engagement in transformative experiences. The transformative experience could in fact be what makes a cultural hub different from a museum: that it does not offer only mimetic education but encourages meaningful engagement that could potentially lead to renewed values, attitudes and perceptions and could

inspire creativity. This is definitely the case in the workshops and events that Design Society offers, as the flexibility and level of participation provides the possibility for such experiences to emerge. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

6.5   Social Experiences

This theme describes experiences of spending time or interacting with people with whom visitors either travelled to Design Society or encountered at the exhibition. Nineteen (7%) visitors among the 256 valid surveys chose to comment on their social experiences, which is the smallest theme among all four.

The social aspects of a museum visit have been studied by many researchers, and they are considered important and highly influential ((Paris and Mercer 2002; Tröndle et al. 2012; Falk and Dierking 2013). Falk and Dierking (2016) did the research on social experiences mainly through observing visitors' conversations (see p.146–147). They recognise that museums serve as a 'backdrop' that supports the social interactions (p.148). Although, sometimes, social experiences could even be 'dominant'. As Falk and Dierking (2000, p.101) propose, for many adult visitors the social aspects of their visit became the 'take-away messages' from the day's visit. Tröndle et al. (2012)'s study on visitors also confirms this view. They identified that for those who visited and frequently chatted with others, their primary enjoyment of the exhibition visit was its social aspects. Statistically, this result does not seem to support the literature's conclusions concerning the dominance of the social experience for visitors. I reflect on the reasons for this result in the summary section.

Social experience is a category that is recognised in both Pekarik et al. (1999) and Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s framework. Social experiences are one of the four experiences identified by Pekarik et al. (1999), and they included two sub-themes under this category of experiences: 'spending time with friends/family/other' and 'seeing my children learning new things'. In Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s framework the corresponding theme is titled 'relational experiences' with the sub-themes of social interactions, belonging, sharing, friendliness, companionship, connectedness'. This study chose to use Packer and

Ballantyne's sub-themes in coding the survey as they are more comprehensive than Pekarik et al. (1999)'s sub-themes.

This theme will unfold from three sub-themes: visitors who reflect on their social experience with their companions, visitors who reflect on experiences of encountering other visitors at the site, and finally, reflections on the social aspects of visitors taking photos at exhibition galleries.

6.5.1 Spending Time with Others

Among visitors who reflected on their social experience, the majority described their experiences with the person/people with whom they came, their companions. In the survey, some of them expressed how in general they enjoyed time spent with their companions:

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most was) The time we spent together. Just two of us. (Visitor-E16)

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most was) Mr. Hu is with me today. (Visitor-E14)

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most was) Very happy I got to visit here with John and Daisy. (Visitor- E43)

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most was) …the long overdue catch up with Xiaoye (Visitor-S81)

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most was) I can't believe I get to spend time with LL in Shenzhen! (Visitor-S17)

'Togetherness' is highlighted in the responses above, and the institution serves as a background to provide a platform and space for experiences that, for example as Visitor-S81 says, enable visitors to 'catch up' with their friends/families. For these responses, follow-up questions would be needed for the institution to know where they could improve in

facilitating such experiences. Future research could also focus on this area and carry out more nuanced and detailed research on the factors that foster such experiences.

Other visitors described what they did together as a group during their visit: taking photos, 'experiencing design', seeing exhibitions, and appreciating and commenting on objects:

> I came here with my brother today. It's such a beautiful place. A great day. We took a lot of photos. (Visitor-SH16)

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most is) Closely experiencing what design is with Xiaolongnu! So happy! (Visitor- E34)

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most is) Being able to see exhibitions together. (Visitor-E54)

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most is) Seeing exhibitions with the girl I like! The happiest thing is to see an exhibition together. Really enjoyed it! (Visitor-E99)

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most is) We took many beautiful photos. Design Society is very wonderful, and I like here. I hope I can come back in the future. Enjoy with Aron. (Visitor-E73)

> Technology is so charming. The hands of my girl is so warm. (Visitor-R3)

> 'That dress was truly stunning', says my friend Coco. We saw the exhibition at Design Society today and Coco was impressed by that Christian Dior dress. Being able to see pretty things together, commenting on them and spend a great afternoon together. Very happy! (Visitor-SH8)

Two visitors chose to draw their social experiences. Visitor-E98 drew a simple sketch of two people under the question of 'During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most is' (Figure 6.23). Under each figure is a surname, possibly the surname of this pair of visitors. For this visitor, their main enjoyment of the visit seemed to be the time they spent together with their friend/family visiting Design Society with them that day.
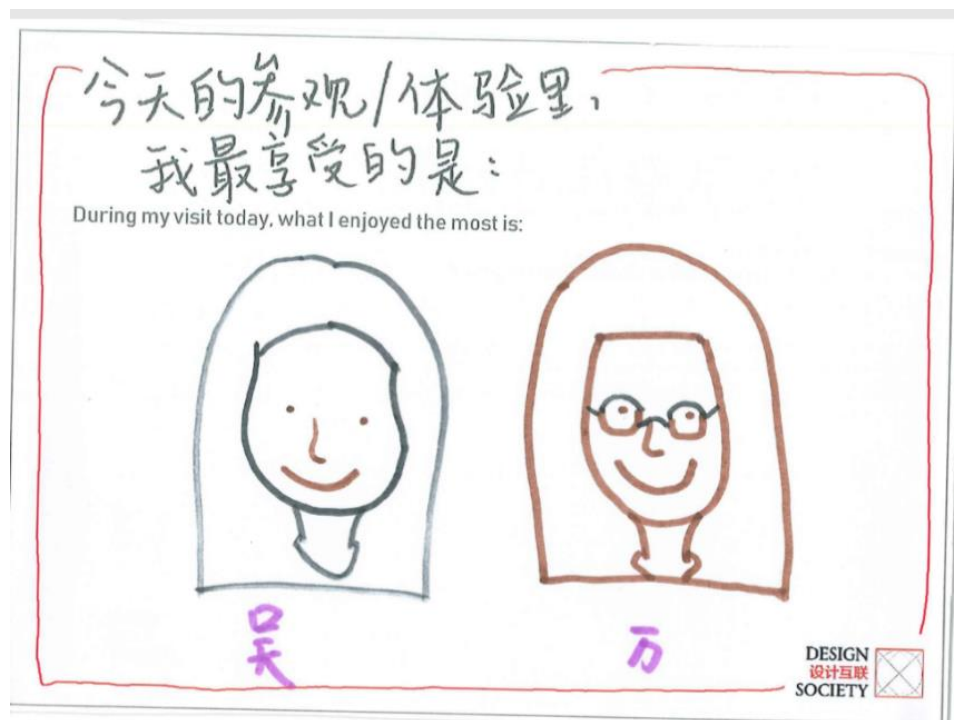
Figure 6.23: Visitor-E98

Visitor-E5 captured a moment she shared with his/her father at the exhibition space through drawing (as shown in Figure 6.24). The words on the survey say 'I enjoyed walking on the transparent glass corridor, but my dad was scared to do so! Ha-ha.'

Among the social experiences reported by visitors, two specific activities seem to generate social experiences: taking photos and encountering certain objects. Theme 1 previously mentioned how objects are a tool and source for creating social experiences. The activity of taking photos as a social experience will be discussed in section 6.5.3.
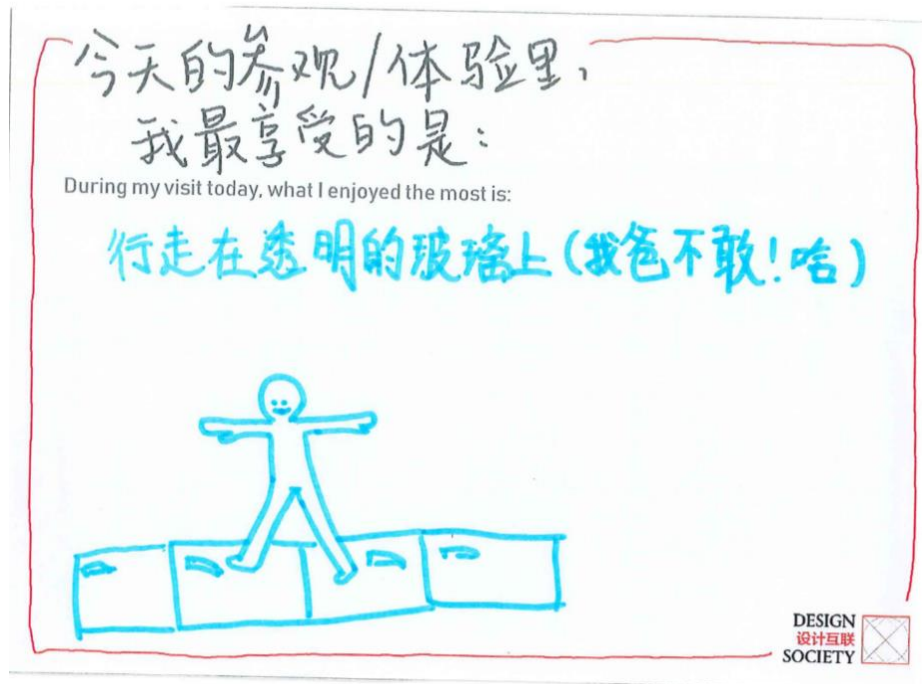
Figure 6.24: Visitor-E5

The responses displayed above all clearly referred to the companions that visited the institution with them that day. Noticeably, their social experience is identified as the most enjoyable part of their visit as it was their answer to the survey question of 'During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most is'. This result is consistent with Tröndle et al. (2012)'s findings that if art museum visitors have social experiences during their visit, those social experiences are normally the main source of their enjoyment of their visit.

6.5.2 Spending Time Alone

Falk and Dierking (2013) identify that visitors, even those who visit alone, in general cannot avoid having social experiences, as they will be in contact with other visitors and staff from the institution. Some visitors enjoyed visiting alone, while others seemed to wish to have some sort of social interaction with others in the same space.

An interesting subject for further consideration and development is how cultural hubs could impact people who view the site as a place to create social experiences. For some visitors, for example those desiring social experiences centred around dating, some argue that cultural

destinations could be used as a 'catalyst for emotional and creative exchange' between visitors (see the project of Acht, a social app that combines dating and museum visiting presented by Peçaibes et al. 2018). Other visitors, who do not necessarily wish to have spontaneous social experiences while visiting alone, hope they can come with someone in mind next time:

> I'm finally here! It's a great place. Next time hope I can come with you. (Visitor-SH53)

> I've seen a lot of special things here today. Hope next time I could come with you to see other exhibitions. Ha-ha. (Visitor-SH46)

> There's a lot going on here. I hope I don't have to come by myself next time. (Visitor-S23)

In summary, from the survey results of people who shared on their social experiences, they clearly either fully enjoyed the social aspects of their visit or wished to have social experiences during their next visit. This data proves that visitors enjoy the social interaction at Design Society and see it as a place with possibilities for creating social experiences in the future when visiting again.

6.5.3 Taking Photos as a Social Experience

Taking photos as a behaviour was discussed in Theme 2 where it was examined as a sensory and physical experience. In this theme, the social aspect of the data from taking photos will be presented and discussed.

Taking photos is a social experience greatly enjoyed by visitors:

> (During today's visit, what I enjoyed the most is) taking photos with Lao Wang. (Visitor-E102)

> Wow this is a great place to take photos! (Visitor-S91)

Some visitors who visited alone wished they had a partner who could take photos for them:

> I came here on my own today and I wanted to find someone to take photos for me here! (Visitor-R8)

> I'm generally satisfied with my visit today except that I'm in need of a partner that is good at taking photos. (Visitor-E)

> (During my visit today, what I enjoyed the most is) We took many beautiful photos. Design Society is very wonderful, and I like here. I hope I can come back in the future. Enjoy with Aron. (Visitor-E73)

Frustrations could also be associated with taking photos:

> I want to say that my friend's photography skills need to be improved (Visitor-SH102)

> I am not really good at taking photos, but my friend kept asking me to take photo for her! (Visitor-S92)

> Jiang, I think you need to make some effort so that you can take better photos. (Visitor-SH103)

> Having good photo taking skills is very important. [sad face emoji] (Visitor-S80)

Below in Figure 6.25 to Figure 6.27 are some observed images of visitors taking photos in the exhibition galleries at Design Society:

Figure 6.25: Observation of a group of visitors taking photographs of each other with one of the visual media items at Minding the Digital as background. February 2018. Photo by the author.

Figure 6.26: Observation of a visitor using a professional camera to photograph his partner at the 'white ladder' space at Minding the Digital. January 2018. Photo by the author.

Figure 6.27: Observation of visitor photographing her friend in front of an installation at Minding the Digital. December 2017. Photo by the author.

These visitors' responses show that 'social experience' can be satisfying when the visitors are happy with the photos they took. At the same time, however, these experiences could also be disappointing when visitors were not happy with the quality of the photo taken by their companion(s). Observation showed visitors seemed to consider taking photos an important part of the visit and that they slowed down when they found a desirable spot to take photos. According to my observation notes, they paused their visit and took photos at these spots between around two to 15 minutes. Further investigation would be interesting to determine the motivation for taking photos and how these were later used. Posting on social media is likely a common way to use photos taken at the exhibition space, and it is easy to find such photos when searching Chinese social media such as Little Red Book and Weibo. Apart from the act itself being a social experience, the utilisation of photos during or after the visit could produce other social experiences in the digital world.

6.5.4 Discussion and Summary

This theme demonstrated the social experiences visitors had at Design Society. It is surprising that social experience is not mentioned more often than the results of the survey show. As discussed in Chapter 2, the social aspect of the visiting experience is extremely important, as the root word 'hub' indicates the function of bringing people together. The social, connecting feature of cultural hubs should be one of the important features besides the multidimensional aspect. A cultural hub, compared to a traditional museum, emphasises the possibility of facilitating and making social interaction happen, where visitors can 'co-create, share and interact', as ICOM's description of 'cultural hub' states (ICOM 2019a).

One reason that social experiences were not mentioned as much in the data gathered at the exhibition gallery could be the nature and the setting of exhibitions, especially when compared to workshops, which will be presented in the next chapter. Undoubtedly, Design Society is enthusiastic about its role in creating a platform that facilitates social experiences, as their ambition is to be a 'podium for civic life'(Design Society 2020c, para.2) and it aims to 'serve society' and provide space and programmes that welcome visitors 'to discover, play, experiment, interact, share, and create together' (Design Society 2020f, para.5).

Although for many visitors social experiences could be as important as the exhibits themselves (McManus 1987), there were fewer responses on this theme from the survey at Design Society. The possible reasons could be as follows. Firstly, it could be that the survey question was not phrased in a way that encouraged reflection on social experiences. It could also be because visitors were not comfortable talking about their social experiences in general in this specific cultural context. For future research, one specific question could be considered to add to the questions asked in the survey in this project, or to seek other data collection methods in collecting data on social experiences. Secondly, it could also be that participants did not recognise social experience as one of the experiences they gained and were unaware of it. For example, when asking about what they enjoy the most, participants could tend to seek answers in what they saw rather than the interaction with people with whom they came. Another aspect of the interpretation could be that visitors do recognise the

value of social experiences, although they are not the main purpose of visiting Design Society. These assumption calls for demographic studies and different ways of data collection. Finally, there is always the possibility that the institution could do better at facilitating such experiences, despite how ambitious they are in their statement in terms of offering such experiences.

6.6   Summary

As can be seen from the results presented above, this chapter unpacked the experiences visitors had at the inaugural exhibitions at Design Society. Interestingly, this study confirms the main types of experiences identified by Pekarik et al. (1999) at Smithsonian museums and many of Falk and Dierking (2016)'s findings, which is another 'classic example of two independent investigations converging on similar findings' (p.156). This shows that visitors engage with exhibitions at Design Society in almost the same way as they do in a museum, although they also tend to embrace the chances of trying novel experiences, for example participating in the Shareveri installation.

Objects and object-related experiences were mentioned the most, which indicates that object experiences remain appealing to visitors entering a cultural hub. This shows that visitors are not generally discouraged by object-based exhibitions. Again, objects are not the problem. However, this does not mean that any object-based exhibitions will easily produce engagement. Throughout the visitor responses, it is clear that the reason visitors were able to have multifaceted experiences from encountering objects is because they were attracted by the exhibition and their attention was held by the content. A well-designed object-based exhibition which allows visitors to be engaged intellectually, emotionally and visually can be greatly enjoyed. The interpretation, communication and design of the exhibition all contributes to the successful delivery of engaging object experiences. Therefore, for museums to transform into cultural hubs, the key tasks are with the team involved with the contents. Making content understandable and digestible is the main challenge for museum professionals. The results of this research also show that although the installations in the

exhibition are favoured by visitors, installations are not always the most popular elements that visitors recall. This confirms Falk and Dierking (2016, p.109)'s observation.

Visitors' appreciation of sensory and physical experiences to some degree indicate the general trend for cultural institutions, although there are challenges presented in including those experiences. In adding such experiences, the experiences that the exhibition provides increased in variety. Particularly in the age of social media, these type of experiences provide social-media-friendly materials for visitors' to share, as discussed above.

Visitors' reflections on transformative experiences show another feature of the cultural hub – institutions that want to be impactful and lead to changes in society. These experiences also show the degree of engagement, as they are great demonstration of how museum can facilitate changes both in thinking and in action. The last theme, social experiences, shows how Design Society as an institution can facilitate social experiences through what it offers. Social experiences, however, do not seem to be facilitated as much as in public programmes, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In the next chapter, visitors' experiences from six workshops will be analysed and discussed in themes. Although the data were collected in a different setting with different nuances, most of the themes presented in the next chapter have been covered in this chapter. Therefore, there will not be as much theoretical discussion on the themes themselves, and the focus will more on the data and the interpretation of the data itself.

Chapter 7 Visitors' Experiences of the Public Programmes

7.1 Introduction

Apart from exhibitions, public programmes have become an increasingly important way for museums to engage their visitors (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.172). For Design Society, public programmes are another important pillar of its cultural programming and therefore this chapter is dedicated to examining visitors' experiences at the public programmes (workshops and events) that were briefly introduced in Chapter 5. It will be a shorter findings chapter, using and building on the themes established in Chapter 6. Similar to Chapter 6, data extracts were labelled as Visitor-WE12, or Visitor-A where 'W' indicates workshop survey data, 'E' indicates the survey question 'Enjoy'0 and 'A' indicates autoethnography data. Results are presented in themes in terms of the percentage that they appear out of 79 responses. Just as with the survey results in the previous chapter, these percentages are indicative only and should not be considered holistic figures that are in any way generalisable outside of the current sample. Illustrative segments from the survey are cited to represent the voices of participants. Workshops are a different setting to exhibitions in terms of their communication, environment, size and time. These nuances and differences will be highlighted and interrogated further. As explained in Chapter 4, data from interviews will also be displayed wherever the commonalities were identified and where they support understanding of the themes identified in Figure 7.1.
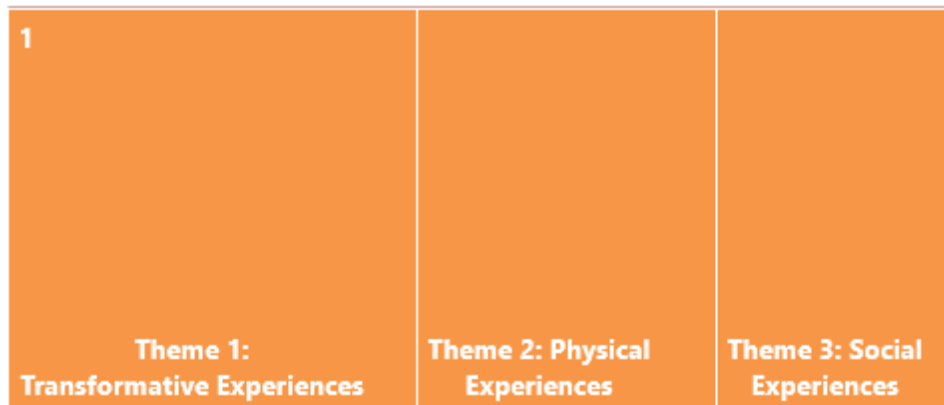
Figure 7.1: Three themes of visitor experiences from workshops at Design Society

In general, public programmes were appreciated by visitors, with 53% of respondents (40 out of 76 total) sharing various ways they enjoyed the workshop. The ways that visitors reflected upon their experiences at the workshops indicate that workshops and exhibitions at Design Society create different types of experiences and reflect different ambitions of Design Society. Here are a few examples of how visitors enjoyed the format of the workshop:

> It's amazing how design and art can be communicated in this form. What's even better is that I get to take what I made home! This has been inspiring. (Visitor-WS18)

> I really enjoyed the status of being able to focus on doing just one thing at the workshop (Visitor-WE12)

> The workshop form is wonderful: the speakers shared meaningful information and it benefited and appreciated by others. Creativity is passed on from them to us through the workshop. (Visitor-WE48)

> [The workshop today made me realise that] art is something that could be participated by anyone (Visitor-WR59)

Most visitors also identified specific elements from which they took pleasure – for example, performing hands-on activities or doing something together with their companions or family members. The use of active language – for example words such as 'focus', 'doing',

'communicated', 'shared' and 'participated' – suggests that workshops at Design Society are open spaces that encourage participation. Also, visitors used words such as 'creativity' and 'inspiring', which demonstrates that workshops seem to be a form of programmes that closely echoes Design Society's statement on 'stimulates creative thinking' (Design Society 2020b, para.3) and the concept of the cultural hub where visitors are encouraged to 'co-create, share and interact' (ICOM 2019a).

Three themes were identified from the data collected at six workshops: transformative experiences, physical experiences, and social experiences (see Figure 7.1). These themes will be explained and discussed in light of the research questions and existing literature. The connections between themes will also be presented wherever they were identified.

7.2   Transformative Experiences

Almost half of the visitors reported that they had transformative experiences at the workshops, with 34 visitors (45%) reporting some kind of changes in their 'knowledge, self-perceptions, beliefs, assumptions, goals, and behavioural intentions' (Garner et al. 2016, p.342). The workshop organisers would be pleased to know that they made real impact on visitors' perceptions and ideas, in some cases firmly or long-held perceptions. Visitors found such experiences pleasant, exciting and comforting. Participants talked about how the workshop led them to 'realise', 'think', 'reflect', 'see a different perspective'. Their responses in support of this theme are given below.

7.2.1 Transformed Thoughts Towards the Outside World

This is the same subtheme as in the transformative experiences theme in Chapter 6. A number of visitors mentioned how their thoughts towards the outside world had been changed by attending the workshop.

Changes in knowledge (for example, from the workshop STICKYLINE):

> I learned that stone could be the original source material for making paper and light could penetrate paper! (Visitor-WE21)

Changes in beliefs/assumptions:

> I realised that it is actually not that hard to make a piece of furniture (Visitor-WR44)

> It is possible for kids to make large-scale things. Everything is possible. (Visitor-WR41)

> I really didn't know how many things paper as a material can do! Paper can be made into lampshades and it is not even that difficult! (Visitor-WR20)

> I realised that the act of protecting the environment can be simple. If only I use my brain and hands, something beautiful will happen. (Visitor-WR17)

Visitor-WR44 assumed it was hard to make a piece of furniture by themselves, but their assumption was changed through making a stool at the Homemade Furniture with Opendesk/Openmake workshop. Maybe in the future this visitor would have less fear about putting furniture together, or anything else than involves 'making'. Visitor-WR41 assumed it was impossible for children to make large-scale pieces, but witnessing the whole process of their children making a stool changed their assumption. This could result in a change to parents' decision-making in the future, and the possibility of letting their children try more 'big things'. This is an example of the impact from participating in the workshop. Visitor-W20 now views paper differently – a multi-functional material that could be reimagined. Visitor-WR17 was liberated from the assumption that only grand projects count towards protecting the environment. In future they might pay more attention to small things and how those things count towards a greater impact. Furthermore, they also came to conclude that nothing will happen if they do nothing, but something will appear if they do make an effort to think and practice. The experience of that workshop seemed to have boosted Visitor-WR17's confidence in general.

For the visitors above, the workshops at Design Society played a highly significant transformative role. It is interesting that these learnings visitors had were realised through 'doing', which is a drastic comparison to the didactic communication paradigm before the emergence of the new museology, as discussed in Chapter 2. The workshop opportunities

provided by Design Society demonstrate a significantly different type of programming compared to object-centred museums: they facilitate active learning and transformations which could be very different for individuals depending on their personal life experiences. Such programmes serve as a 'nudge' in opening up discussions and actions for the future. As Design Society states, it is dedicated to 'elevating the quality of life and the positive transformation of contemporary lifestyles', and above all a quality of being 'inspirational' through all their programming (Design Society 2020f, para.6). The availability of the transformative experiences could be one of the key characteristics that differentiate object-centred museums and visitor-centred cultural hubs, as it demonstrates an open democratic institution that has broken with the past. In particular, such offerings contrast with the didactic function of museums in China (Varutti 2014).

For some visitors, through attending the workshop, certain stereotypes or inherent ideas were replaced or renewed, which could lead to high level of emotional engagement:

> I thought 'lifelong learning' was merely a slogan until I saw a lady in the workshop today who was my grandma's age. Everyone was patient with her, and she was also very keen to learn. Whenever she had questions, she would call on the artist. She called him 'teacher, teacher'. I am very moved by this. (Visitor-A1)

The above quotation is taken from my autoethnography essay. When I was a participant at the workshop, the encounter with this lady at the workshop was unforgettable. She stood out from all the other participants as the workshop room was full of young people. However, her genuine desire for learning and the ways that her needs were accommodated at Design Society impressed me – it was a vivid demonstration of what lifelong learning looks like in a cultural hub. This is also a demonstration of Design Society's value in practice: 'To champion inclusivity and open access for all audiences, and seek out opportunities for experimentation, sharing, participation, and co-creation' (Design Society 2020a, para.6).

My transformative experience demonstrated by the quote above was that my perception towards 'lifelong learning' had been changed. I had previously considered it a mere concept in an ideal world until I witnessed how a senior lady participated in the workshop environment. Interestingly, this transformative experience was achieved at the workshop

through observing other participants, which shows linkages between transformative experiences and social experiences. The fact that the workshop was accessible to everyone and the nature of staying in the same space for a period of time made this happen. This will be discussed further under the theme of social experiences later.

7.2.2 Transformed Thoughts Towards Self

In addition to changes of thoughts toward the world, several visitors also had renewed thoughts towards themselves:

> I didn't realise that I am actually pretty competent! The workshop dug out the artistic gene that hasn't been activated since my childhood. (Visitor-WR11)

> This is the first time I participated in making something independently. It is full of surprises. When you are doing something in an area that you are not too good at, even a tiny achievement is a precious gift. (Visitor-WS49)

> The moment when the lamp switched on, I was so excited. Really couldn't believe I can do something that looks this good. (Visitor-A1)

Visitor-WR11's response demonstrates how, through participating in the workshop, their confidence was built, as the word 'competent' suggests. Also, the use of the action word 'activated' demonstrates a real impact of the workshop through helping the visitor to recall positive memories. For this visitor, the workshop programme served as an opportunity to experiment with 'creativity' – something that is important in ICOM's definition of cultural hub – 'platforms where creativity combines with knowledge'(ICOM 2019a). For Visitor-WS49, words such as 'first time' and 'surprises' indicates that the experience was for them new, refreshing and unexpected. This could indicate that programmes such as workshops are not expected, if visitors expect Design Society to be a museum rather than a cultural hub. They also mentioned words such as 'independently', 'achievement' and 'precious gift' which demonstrate that by 'doing' and 'making' at the workshop, they gained a sense of achievement that they will cherish. Again, as with Visitor-RW11, the workshop was a chance

for Visitor-WS49 to experiment, especially in an area that they were not so competent. For Visitor-A1, the workshop provided something that brought excitement through their efforts to make the lamp and then to see the fruit of their hard work. They were surprised too, as they could not believe they could actually achieve something like making a lamp from the pack the artist provided.

As the examples above illustrate, workshops seem to frequently deliver transformative experiences through providing opportunities to attempt and experiment. Being open and creating opportunities for experimentation is one of the core values of Design Society (Design Society 2020a). These opportunities might not be easily found in visitor's daily life and such opportunities were seen as surprising and precious for the visitors. These reflections are encouraging, as they show real vibrancy of Design Society as a cultural hub. Visitors gained what they intended from the setting of workshops – they were triggered in creative thinking and action (Design Society 2020d).

In some ways, this aligns with the current notion of 'museum activism' (Janes and Sandell 2019; Bergevin 2019) in that Design Society has ambitions, and succeeds in many instances, to empower potentially meaningful change in individuals, just as discussed in the theme of transformative experiences in the last chapter. That said, it does not do so with a view to produce 'positive socio-political outcomes' per se, or with communities in mind rather than individuals. Nonetheless, these transformative experiences reflected upon by visitors still contain real and meaningful changes.

Also, unlike from exhibitions, transformative experiences visitors had at workshops were more specific. This could be due to the nature of the workshops, where topics and the activities tended to be designed in a more focused way and the amount of information was limited compared to an exhibition with hundreds of objects and installations. Therefore, it is easier for visitors to recall and articulate what they gained throughout the workshop. This contrast shows that these two forms of cultural programmes provide various layers and dimensions of experiences. From what exhibition visitors shared, they tended to have broader, more abstract introspective transformative experiences, while these experiences were not found from workshops.

However, changing one's perceptions and ideas can be hard, therefore it is not always easy for these experiences to happen. Some visitors expressed fear towards participating in workshops:

> Personally, I think if I learned a bit of painting or drawing, it would give me much more confidence in doing this (designing a badge). I have some creative ideas such as images and concepts in my mind. But if I cannot jot it down, it is a pity. I often feel this way – feeling powerless that I can't express myself a visual way. (Visitor-WI15)

> I don't want to do it because I think I'm not really good at it. What my colleague did was very delicate with lots of details. I knew I can't do anything like that. (Visitor-WI8)

> The idea of 'making something' or doing crafty things makes me deterred. I know I am not good at doing that kind of stuff deep down. (Visitor-A1)

The reflections above show the nuances of how visitors approach opportunities of doing and making things at a workshop. It seems there are additional hurdles for some when it comes to the creative process and taking ownership and participating. These reflections show that it can be important to intentionally facilitate transformative experiences and encourage participation, as it will not always happen automatically. Design Society – or those who lead the workshops – perhaps need to do more to put these people at ease.

From the above examples it is easy to see that transformative experiences did not occur independently. In fact, most participants who described transformative experiences at workshops reported physical or social experiences as well. The connections will be discussed further in the next two themes.

7.3   Physical Experiences

Physical experiences are another important category of experiences and were mentioned by 25 visitors (33%). The definition used in coding is from Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s

articulation of physical experience which includes four sub-themes: movement, action, energy and physical stimulation. For the context of workshops, these themes translate as hands-on activities that encourage visitors to physically interact. Evidence from this category of experience will be presented below.

As briefly introduced in Chapter 5, all six workshops where the data samples were collected involved hands-on opportunities – for example, making a paper lamp (STICKYLINE workshop), making a badge (Brilliant Badge workshop), or making a stool (Homemade Furniture with Opendesk/Openmake workshop). These activities were overwhelmingly appreciated by visitors and they tended to express a sense of ownership and achievement:

> [What I enjoyed the most today] was the process of making the paper lampshade by myself. The whole hands-on process. (Visitor-WE15)

> [What I enjoyed the most today] was the sense of achievement through making something myself. (Visitor-WE21)

Visitors particularly enjoyed the unusual physical activities that they had never done before and highly appreciated the opportunity provided. For example, in the Homemade Furniture with Opendesk/Openmake workshop, there was an activity to make a wooden stool from ready-made pieces. These pieces needed to be put together using a screwdriver and required being coated with a layer of oil in the last step (see Figure 7.2). The visitor responses above have proven the positive results of how Design Society aims to design their events including workshops – to facilitate 'hands-on experiences' and 'critical making' that 'everyone can understand and participate'(Design Society 2020a).

Figure 7.2: A participant putting screws in at the Homemade Furniture with Opendesk/Openmake workshop. January 2018. Photo by the author.

Interestingly, several visitors described their experiences of 'screwing' and 'painting':

> Today I put together a chair and put some painting oil on! (Visitor-WE52)

> Putting in a screw is pretty cool and it is not easy to do. (Visitor-WE53)

> The last step of painting the oil on the chair seems to be the most interesting step. It is much more fun than I thought. (Visitor-WS56)

> Putting the screws in is such an enjoyment! (Visitor-WE54)

Putting screws in could be a common job in daily life, but it also might not be the case for some as the job could be done by others while they never had chances to experience it. This seemed to be the case for many participants at the Homemade Furniture with Opendesk/Openmake workshop, as they collectively chose to reflect on these types of

physical activities. The experience of assembling and the oiling the stool were repeatedly shared, which shows how much visitors valued the physical elements of the workshop.

Interestingly, among the responses from this workshop, not many respondents mentioned the open-source spirit of design that was shared in the first half of the speaker's presentation. This could indicate that learning through doing is more powerful than conceptual learning. However, the lack of reflection on the open-source spirit could also be due to the nature of the survey, where visitors chose to reflect on things that were easy to articulate.

These physical experiences did not occur independently, and it often led to transformative experiences, as discussed in the first theme:

> Putting a screw in is not as easy as I thought. (Visitor-WS51)

> [The workshop today made me realise that] any simple things could be joined together and be made into a new thing. The key is that you have to try with your hands and be creative. (Visitor-WR71)

> I can do it too as a girl. By doing all the screwing and painting I feel I will be much more confident in buying flatpack furniture in the future. Putting things together, even paining, is not as hard as it sounds. It's nothing mysterious! (Visitor-WR26)

This confirms the assumption that 'hands-on' activities typically lead to 'minds-on' effects (Caulton 1998). Through 'giving it a go', a lot of previous perceptions were changed. For example, putting in screws was perceived as 'easy' (Visitor-WS51) and 'mysterious' (Visitor-WR26), but these perceptions were completely changed after experiencing the action of screwing themselves. These physical experiences could sometimes bring powerful realisations just as Visitor-WR26 reflected: she recognised that these jobs are not limited to men, and this was only demystified through doing and experiencing them first-hand.

For some visitors, the physical experiences were also largely enjoyed because of it was achieved with others:

> The most remarkable thing was to build a piece of art with our own hands with friends. In this process, you need some energy and learn from others. The experience today will be of help for future reference. (Visitor-WE74)

> Being able to build a piece of art with friends is an excellent experience! (Visitor-WE72)

Visitors expressed excitement that they could take what they made at the workshop home:

> We can even take away what we made! (Visitor-WE18)

> Our lamp lit up and proved to work! We can even take it home! (Visitor-WE27)

Visitor-WI13 shared that the output they get to take home has collection value:

> This badge we made today can be taken away which is great. At home, my daughter makes a lot of crafts and it is all over the place and she doesn't have a place to display it. But what she did here I think we will keep it for her. It has value to keep and can become a memorable object. She likes doing this kind of hands-on stuff. We'll definitely bring her back. (Visitor-WI13)

It is interesting that being able to take something that they made in the workshop home produces joy. What Visitor-WI13 said reveals some clues for such joy – having something to take home is to some degree similar to buying a souvenir. It is an object to extend the memory of the experience, a keepsake to remind them about the experience itself. This is similar to what Kent (2010) observed about the experiences visitors have at the museum shop. It 'offers a return to the everyday world of familiar objects that can be picked up, played with and returned or bought at will', as Kent (2010, p.75) argues. To some degree, it is almost a form of object experience where visitors get to create an object with their hands and claim ownership of it. These can be a typical part of memorable experiences, similar with what was mentioned in Chapter 2 where Pine and Gilmore (1999) analysed the example of Build-A-Bear Workshop. This is also relevant for workshop experiences at Design Society where visitors were encouraged to make things and then take them home. This compensates

for the fact that there are limited opportunities in the exhibitions for co-creation and could in a way satisfy the desire of owning objects as visitors 'think what it would be like to own such things' when encountering objects in the exhibitions (Pekarik et al. 1999).

From the above data extracts, it is clear that visitors find physical experiences in the workshops satisfying, although it was missing from Pekarik et al. (1999)'s framework on satisfying experiences in museums. A reason could be, firstly as Pekarik et al. (1999) recognised, the museums they investigated were not a representative sample that allows generalisations for all situations and settings. Hands-on approaches were more common in science centres in early 20th-century Europe and North America and have subsequently spread to museums and heritage sites (Caulton 1998; Braund and Reiss 2004). It is possible that the idea of hands-on activities was much more popular in the 21st century compared to the past, as visitors have become increasingly unsatisfied with being passive in museums.

Another interesting observation is that hands-on activities were not only enjoyed by children, which is another thread of the development of hands-on approach that could be found in the first children's museums in the late 19th century in USA (Caulton 1998; see also materials from Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums). Although the survey and interview did not ask the age of the participants, the study collected most of the data from adult participants in the workshops due to limited resources. This shows that these hands-on experiences were significantly relished and appreciated by adult visitors.

The fact that the design of Design Society's workshops involving physically 'making things' reflects a latest concept of the 'maker culture' (Blikstein 2018). The results above have shown a great level of engagement and proves that Design Society values nurturing future makers (Design Society 2020d). The results from the sample of this study demonstrate that such hands-on activities are hugely popular, and through such activities visitors achieve unique experiences that they could not have had from exhibitions, for example the opportunities of physically making things and take them home.

7.4   Social Experiences

The museum experience is first and foremost a social experience, as Falk and Dierking (2016, p.171) argue. Just as in the survey results from exhibitions, social experiences were also identified as a key theme with 20 visitors (26%) referring to them in the workshop. Unlike the social experiences reported from exhibitions, the social experiences mentioned by participants were not only limited to their own companions and family members but extended to interactions with the presenter/speaker/host of the workshop and other visitors. These social experiences out of their own visiting group particularly demonstrates the ambition of Design Society in cultivating a genuine civic and community center (Design Society 2020g).

As explained in Chapter 4, this study uses the sub-themes from Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s framework in capturing social experiences: social interactions, belonging, sharing, friendliness, companionship and connectedness.

7.4.1 Spending Time with Others

This is the same sub-theme under the theme of social experiences found in exhibitions mentioned in the last chapter. Visitors reflected that they enjoyed spending time with the person/people they came with:

> I really enjoyed how I could help my friends when they didn't understand a certain step in making the paper lamp (Visitor-WE31)

> Seeing how my friends were doing things clumsily was so funny. We also discussed issues such as crafting and modelling. The conversation has a tendency to go very deep. Thanks for an opportunity to experience all of these with friends. (Visitor-WE37)

What Visitor-WE31 has reflected about the experiences of helping their friend at the workshop indicates how workshops as a setting enable flexible ways of engaging, for example as not only participants but also as helpers for others. Simon (2010) has written on

how social experiences can be better facilitated, which is similar to the workshop settings where visitors can have multiple ways to interact – 'as spectator, helper, or partners' (p.90).

Social experiences at workshops also included 'seeing my children learn new things' from Pekarik et al. (1999)'s framework, which was absent from the responses from the exhibitions. For example, Visitor-WE14 shared these words:

> Seeing how my older son was trying to solve his problem when he found his paper lamp did not end up like what it needed to be was remarkable. It was also amazing seeing my little girl try to colour/draw on the paper lamp and decorate it. (Visitor-WE14)

> [What I enjoyed the most] was seeing my kids making things with their hands. It's their first time making furniture. It will be excellent if this workshop could make them have more interests in design. (Visitor-WE40)

> [What I enjoyed the most] was making things with my family. (Visitor-WE57)

> Teamwork is very important. The feeling of accomplishing something together was amazing. (Visitor-WE77)

As Visitor-WE14 and Visitor-W40 reflected, workshops provide visitors an opportunity to witness and understand how their children learn. These opportunities bring them joy. Previous research also suggests that the public programme does not only provide a positive experience for the children and adults together but could also further influence the way they interact and communicate later in their lives (Falk and Dierking 2016, p.170).

In general, not much literature has specifically focused on this theme of experiences. It would definitely be interesting for future research to explore the nuances and implications of such experiences in family groups, especially for institutions such as Design Society that consider young families as their target visitor group. As discussed in the theme of physical experiences in this chapter, the opportunity of physically making things not only provided satisfaction in itself, but it also created an opportunity for social experiences that were also treasured by visitors – especially when the results were visible and tangible, and in some cases could be taken away. This shows that physical experiences could be a particularly fruitful category of

experiences worth considering when cultural institutions plan their events. The tangible results of the participation serves as a 'social object' (Simon 2010) that helps in building shared conversation and memories between participants.

7.4.2 Social Interaction and the Social Environment

Some respondents also shared social experiences which did not come from the visitor's own companions or family members, but from the social environment provided by the workshops. This was a benefit of the nature and the setting of the workshop – a more private and intimate environment that enabled and encouraged social interaction with others. In the case of Design Society's workshops, the interactions were with the workshop speaker/presenter and other visitors (see Figure 7.3 and Figure 7.4). These social experiences show that a workshop as a space and event provides unique opportunities that exhibitions do not facilitate, or only facilitate with a visitor's own companions or family members.

Design Society's workshop space is in a dedicated studio room in which two walls of the room are completely transparent. The transparent walls has the value of being open and could show non-partipants outside of the workshop what was going on within the workshop, which demystified the process and encouraged future participation.

Figure 7.3: The designer demonstrating participants how to put together the rotational stool at the Homemade Furniture with Opendesk/Openmake workshop. January 2018. Photo by Design Society.

Figure 7.4: An artist explaining how to connect the metal rings together at the Street Museum workshop. December 2017. Photo by the author.

Here are a few examples of how visitors enjoyed their close engagement with the speaker/guest of the workshop:

> [What I enjoyed the most today] was to build the ring-shaped architectural shape with Yona. (Visitor-WE66)

> Working with a foreign architect is so cool. Although we speak different languages, we work seamlessly. (Visitor-WE60)

> The workshop today was so fun! The coolest was to have a discussion with a master in the field. (Visitor-WE65)

> It's so cool that we can have face to face communication with the big icons. (Visitor-WE72)

> I can't believe that the 90-year-old sir Yona could carry heavy metal rings with us today. I have so much respect for him. I was worried whether he's ok with it or not. (Visitor-WS62)

> When the artist was speaking, I could tell he was a very humble person. His attitude made me concentrates even more. (Visitor-A1)

> Then the artist came to my table. He saw I was frustrated and wanted to help. He brought a tool with him and showed me how to undo the staple. While he was doing it, he emphasised that 'Make sure whenever you do this, always use this tool to unnail a staple. A lot of people tend to use their own hands but that is really easily to hurt your hand.' That's basically me! I always just use my hand to unnail a staple. But from today I know how to protect my hand and could possibly avoid many potential accidents in the future with awareness. At that moment, I almost thought that was the most precious thing I had learned today! I think he knew this from experience since his artwork constantly deals with paper. Maybe he hurt his finger when he started doing paper art as well, and he learned how to do it in a better way. (Visitor-A1)

For Visitor-WE66, Visitor-WE60, Visitor-WE65, Visitor-WE72 and Visitor-WS62, being able to have a chance to interact face-to-face with professionals, especially ones that have an established reputation, brought great enjoyment and a sense of privilege. These workshops that aim to 'turn professional design practice and creative culture into events that everyone can understand and participate' are themselves democratic as they 'demystify the design process' by creating opportunities for communication between artist and practitioners such as Yona Friedman (Yona Friedman [no date]) and Design Society visitors.

The last two quotations were taken from my autoethnographic essays in which I reflected upon my engagement with the artist at the workshop STICKYLINE. These reflections show that there could be meaningful social experiences between visitors and the workshop leaders through various ways: speculating, observing and direct communication. These again demonstrate the diversity and the flexibility of workshops as a form of programmes.

Another type of social experiences was generated from the community-like environment of the workshop where visitors were in the presence of others. This sense of community was highlighted by some visitors:

> [What I enjoyed the most] was the moments we were putting the pieces together under the sun while everyone looks very committed. (Visitor-WE63)

> I've really enjoyed making things with a group of people. (Visitor-WE47)

Being in the workshop with a group of people appeared to be a satisfying and enlightening experience. The combination of social and transformative experiences was uniquely possible in workshops in part because participants were in the same space together and given similar tasks, which enabled visitors to learn from each other. The accessibility and openness of the workshop made the above experiences possible. Other visitors, such as Visitor-WR64, also reflected how the accessibility itself contributed to a new perspective:

> Art can be participated by ordinary people. (Visitor-WR64)

These experiences are exactly what Design Society intended for visitors to achieve, and it is how it describes its workshops in general: 'Here, anyone can experience, learn, and enjoy creativity that is accessible to everyone'(Design Society 2017c). These events were also

promoted with the phrases 'co-create' and 'co-learning' which not only encourage doing something together between the institution and the participants, but also between participants and other participants. Visitors' responses above show that Design Society's workshops have turned 'the museum rhetoric of community engagement into practice and create a space that is truly inclusive' (Barnes and McPherson 2019, p.257).

Compared to the social experience in exhibitions, visitors were able to engage face-to-face with people outside of their own companions and family members. In the case of Design Society workshops, these social interactions were with practising artists, designers, performers, architects, researchers, other professionals and other visitors in the workshop. Workshops as a form of cultural programmes appear to be an ideal place for museums to realise their missions to bring the community together and offer opportunities for co-creation and social interactions.

7.5   Summary

Throughout this chapter, visitors' experiences of the public programmes at Design Society were presented and discussed. This contributes to the lack of research in the visitor experiences of public programmes in museums, as most of the research on the visitor experience relates to exhibitions. In summary, public programmes at Design Society proved to be an effective format to provide distinctive and valued visitor experiences including transformative, physical, and social experiences. Visitors' experiences from the workshops show that as a form of museum programme, it bears the characteristics of the vision that ICOM (2019) had for cultural hubs, where visitors can 'co-create, share and interact' (ICOM 2019) and these characteristics appear to be found in public programmes more frequently compared to the visitor experiences in exhibitions. Just as mentioned in Chapter 2, Falk and Dierking (2016) consider public programmes an area of museums that has seen a dramatic transformation. The Learning Managerat Design Society, Xuan Pan said in the interview: 'Public programmes is the most direct way for us to communicate with visitors. When they visit exhibitions, the opportunity of face-to-face communication is not there. But when they

came here, we get to know their feedback. It think this is why public programmes as a format is so important in an institution. Public programmes is also an important way in communicating what Design Society is' (Staff-03). The Learning Manager from V&A, Sarah Green expressed similar ideas: 'the public programmes are about allowing people to become active participants' (Staff-I02). The responses from the visitors confirm that a co-creating, visitor-centred approach will 'result in experiences more responsive to the needs and desires of its visitors' (Tony et al. 2018). The results of this study demonstrate how important public programmes are as a major pillar of the cultural programming at Design Society. Producing regular events to attract visitors is identified as one of the solutions as French museums face the contemporary challenges (Greffe et al. 2017).

'For all participants to achieve something' is the goal of Design Society's workshops (Design Society 2017c). As a form of the museum programme, workshops also reflect the foregrounded societal role of the museum, which was envisaged by the new museology to shift the focus of museums' practices from collections to people, just as Design Society emphasised: 'Design Society is not here to serve itself, but to serve society'. These public programmes reflect this mission statement, as they are primarily created for the benefit of the public. The analysis of the three themes above has demonstrated that the majority of participants had positive outcomes, whether that be enjoying time spent with others, participating in fun physical activities or some real transformation in their thinking. While it is not easy to generalise from this particular study, seeing how positively workshops at Design Society were received does validate that creating events could be one effective strategy for future museums in attracting both faithful and new visitors, whilst contributing to the regeneration of the museum space and the sustainability of their finances (Greffe et al. 2017). Public programmes as an alternative format of engagement also provide some exclusive experiences that visitors cannot easily find in the classic format of exhibitions, although they are becoming increasingly interactive.

Packer and Ballantyne (2016) and Pekarik et al. (1999)'s framework in understanding visitor experiences provided important directions in analysing the rich and diverse experiences visitors had from public programmes. This study confirms the importance of using these frameworks in similar future works and once again highlights the need for nuanced and

contextualised approaches in investigating visitor experiences. The visitor experiences illustrated above also reinforce Packer (2008)'s argument about beneficial outcomes of museum visits – which is definitely beyond 'learning', which is discussed most frequently in the existing literature.

In the final chapter, I will synthesise the findings across Chapter 5, 6 and 7 and highlight the ones which speak to the transformation from museums to cultural hubs. An evaluation of the research will be given, and the limitations will be reflected on. The implications will be discussed and recommendations for further areas of research will be given at the end.

Chapter 8   Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to better understand the transformation of museums into cultural hubs. This final chapter aims to offer a summary of the main research findings while also evaluating the study by highlighting its key findings, contributions, wider implications and limitations. An update and a reflection on the case study is provided. Recommendations for future research will also be offered at the end of the chapter.

8.1   Summary of the Key Findings

The investigation of literature shows fundamental changes in the theoretical and critical thinking within the museum field in the last five decades. The rise of the new museology was identified as the beginning of a movement in museums' transformation and, as a result, a large volume of published studies started to rethink the purpose and the role of museums. One aspect of these discussions has been a shift from being 'object-centred' to more 'visitor-centred'. Although transforming from object-centred museums to visitor-centred museums could not represent every aspect of the transformation that museums have undergone in the past decades, it is one of the most important and profound shifts in museums thinking about their role and value in society. In further examining this shift, this study reviewed major challenges that museums confront. While museums orient themselves towards these challenges, new institutions are also being created in responding to these challenges. The emerging concept of the cultural hub was chosen in understanding the development of museums in the 21st century. This concept has comparatively received very limited attention in academic fields. However, the brief content analysis of media materials in Chapter 2 reveals that the term itself is becoming increasingly popular globally. It also suggests that the term 'cultural hub' is used loosely, as it could be referring to many things. Meanwhile, cultural hubs are being created around the world and there is a lack of empirical research of

this territory. Moreover, the review of the shift from object-centrism to visitor-centrism led to the introduction of the economic context of the 'experience economy' and the significance of exploring the visitor experience. These theories and framework formed the structure and the approach in analysing the case study of Design Society. The examination of Chinese museums in Chapter 3 also highlighted important contexts such as their object-oriented tradition and the recent museum boom in China caused by both top-down policies and growing consumer markets. In summary, Chapter 2 to Chapter 3 answered RQ1 and provided contextual understanding for the case study.

While attempting to answer RQ2 in Chapter 5, the complexities of the environment that incubated Design Society and the boundary-transcending ambition of the institution since its birth were illustrated. This provides alternative evidence to the oversimplified perception of these type of institutions in previous studies and discussions. Design Society's partnership with V&A shows the connecting and the collaborative characteristics of a 'hub' while the socio-economic background of Shenzhen explained some of the external reasons why a pioneering institution could emerge in that part of China. The complex setup of Design Society might not be common, but it does illustrate that it involves many parties to establish a pioneering institution such as Design Society. This study also found that the trajectory of how the name of the institution evolved over time confirms the challenge of the loss of certainty that present museums are confronting. Furthermore, as Design Society and its physical building SWCAC were created with two separate names, the identity of the institution appears to still be in an ongoing process of exploration, if not in identity crisis. From a contextual perspective, China not allowing much flexibility for the definition and operation of museums could also be one of the reasons for Design Society to be a cultural hub and trying to transcend boundaries that defines cultural institutions.

The study then moved on to explore the visitor experience of the exhibitions and the public programmes at Design Society which answers RQ3. RQ4 was also partly answered in the discussions of the implication in studying these visitor experiences. The surveys, interviews and observations data collected from two main types of cultural programmes at Design Society – exhibitions and workshops – were examined and more than ten facets of

experiences were revealed by the data collected. The analysis of the data from exhibitions revealed four main themes of visitor experiences, and the findings are as follows.

Firstly, the result of this study shows that object experiences are surprisingly still one of the core experiences appreciated and enjoyed by visitors in a cultural hub offering multifaceted experiences. The popularity of the object experience demonstrated how objects could be used in an institution that is ideologically far from being object-centred with primarily values being its visitors and their experiences. The experiences visitors could have from encountering objects are much more than cognitive experiences. However, these rich, multifaceted experiences were not achieved from just displaying objects, but from the visitor-centred perspectives in designing the exhibitions and creating the interpretations which enabled visitors to have personal connections even without much previous knowledge of the objects or topics of the exhibition. Despite Design Society's desire to move away from being a 'bo wu guan', the research findings show that visitors to cultural hubs still tend to engage willingly with the notion of the 'museum' and 'museum exhibition' while gaining great satisfaction from their object experiences.

The second biggest theme, 'sensory, physical and related experiences', was only slightly less popular than object experiences, which echoes the wider trend of museum exhibitions. The analysis shows that including multi-sensory and immersive experiences, which often involved digital technologies, not only resulted in fun and playful experiences, but also led visitors to perceive the institution as being a pioneer and an innovator. Visitors' willingness to engage with new technologies and trends were clearly shown from their responses. These multisensory, embodied, immersive experiences also provide new ways of participation through photography, as great interest was shown in this through both surveys and observations. By facilitating such experiences and making visitors feel completely comfortable engaging in this way, Design Society demonstrated that as a cultural hub it is keen to provide opportunities for visitors to interact and co-create in their own artistic ways. As interest in adding such experiences continues to grow within cultural institutions, opportunities abound for successful engagement and marketing benefits. These types of experiences, however, do come with challenges. They are often expensive, can easily fail and

can bring frustration to both visitors and institutions. Also, for those who seek a particular set of learning outcomes, these experiences could be disappointing, as the examples in the case study shows that visitors did not have as much as cognitive experiences with digital technology compared to their interactions with objects. It is important for the institutions to consider the various needs of the visitors and manage their expectations.

The third theme from the exhibitions, transformative experiences, focused on the potential impact the institution's offerings had on visitors. It was important as both a theme that aligns with Design Society's ambition and one that is becoming increasingly important but not included in Pekarik et al. (1999)'s framework. The data in this theme demonstrates that the cultural programmes at Design Society had an effect on visitors thoughts and mind about both the outside world and self. Different visitors were affirmed about what they already knew or believed, inspired by new ideas and motivated to make changes in real life. Data analysis showed that visitors actively seek such experiences from a cultural hub, demonstrating a potential strength of a cultural hub beyond being a mere visitor destination.

The fourth theme from the exhibitions is social experiences. Although expected to represent a large part of overall responses, it was not the case statistically. Visitors did reflect on how they enjoyed spending time with others, but it was not mentioned as much as the first three themes. Interestingly, one of the most mentioned social experiences was taking posed photos in the exhibition gallery, which demonstrates how sensory experiences are often connected with social experiences or preferred to be had in a social context.

Using a similar approach as that used for the exhibitions, the analysis of the data from public programmes revealed three main themes: transformative experiences, physical experiences and social experiences. Although the theme titles are similar, visitors' responses do reflect nuances compared with experiences from exhibitions. A lot of these workshop experiences were derived from 'making' and 'creating', which is an element absent from the exhibitions. The format of the workshops themselves was appreciated by visitors, as they were able to do things uncommon from their previous museum experiences. It also involved direct participation where visitors were able to have face-to-face opportunities with staff, other visitors, and the artists themselves. The transformative experiences visitors had at workshops

was the largest among the three themes which demonstrates how this particular format of cultural programmes is effective in facilitating such experiences. The physical experiences were also different with the physical experiences of visitors from exhibitions. These physical experiences were mostly hands-on rather than the embodied. Visitors were able to make and create things and such opportunities were considered out-of-ordinary experiences. The making process gave visitors a sense of achievement, especially when they could take what they created home. Social experiences at the workshops were also slightly different from exhibitions. The environment of workshops created opportunities for visitors to not only have an enjoyable social time with the group the came with, but also provided chances to engage with the staff, hosts and other visitors.

With the flexibility the workshops offer, visitors could be exposed in a variety of topics, engage with hosts from diverse backgrounds, and be involved in various forms of hands-on activities. These experiences from the public programmes reflected Design Society's desire to serve its visitors and communities and be devoted to lifelong learning. The vision of a cultural hub where 'creativity combines with knowledge' and where 'visitors can also co-create, share and interact' (ICOM 2019a) was demonstrated in the format of workshops at Design Society.

The visitor experience from various cultural programmes at Design Society is an empirical example of what ICOM visioned a cultural hub should be – where visitors are the focus and the institution becomes a place that features opportunities to co-create, interact and share. As a cultural hub, the findings show that cultural programmes at Design Society alone provide a multidimensional experience, not in the sense of being a hybrid venue as how Art Fund defines cultural hubs, but in the sense of visitor experiences. In this way, the transformation from museum to cultural hub is about rethinking and reimagining ways to better reach out to visitors and provide programmes that create genuine connections with them. This requires further unpacking around the implications of studying emerging cultural hubs which will be discussed in the next section which is an attempt in answering RQ4.

8.2   Contributions and Implications

This study contributes to the research in a few areas in the field of museum studies. It is significant in five main ways:

Firstly, this study contributes to a body of scholarship that has been concerned with understanding museums in the 21st century – their boundaries, roles, functions, practices and visitors. By exploring Design Society as a cultural hub and by investigating visitors' experiences of Design Society, this study adds to the increasing body of knowledge of the evolution of museums. It deepens understanding of the concept of the cultural hub, and the challenges and the opportunities that museums and ultimately the whole cultural sector confront in the 21st century. With the impact of Covid-19, some of the challenges museums confront will only become greater, which makes studies such as this one even more valuable. Although it presents arguments mainly from a museological perspective, it at the same time spans many disciplinary boundaries by drawing upon theories from tourism studies, visitor studies, economics, psychology and Chinese studies, which makes the study interdisciplinary.

Secondly, this thesis is particularly important as it coincides with the general direction of museum development toward being visitor-centred while competing with other types of leisure activities and options. This study advocates for the visitor experience as a theoretical lens in researching and understanding the museum. It argues that visitors' own experiences provide rigorous and immensely useful evidence in both understanding current practice and thinking about the future of museums. As museums are transforming into cultural hubs, the ways experiences were understood and examined need to change as well. For this study specifically, two important frameworks were brought together in understanding new institutions.

By employing Pekarik et al. (1999)'s and Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s frameworks in examining visitor experience at Design Society, this study was not only informed and benefited from them, but also tested their efficiency and validity in empirical research, especially for the purpose of studying new institution in new context. These frameworks individually provided useful direction in organising and making sense of the data, especially

in identifying important emerging themes such as sensory experience and transformative experience. Furthermore, the combination of them proved even more helpful in the exploratory study on the visitor experience at Design Society.

However, after the first round of coding with the combination of the 11 facets as shown in Figure 4.20, it was clear that data reduction was needed for further analysis as there was too much overlap between the 11 facets. This is because some of the facets themselves are very similar which makes it difficult when using them to code and sort the data. For example, it is difficult to differentiate an introspective experience with a transformative or cognitive experience when a visitor reflected that they learned something new about themselves. Also, responses coded as emotional, restorative and spiritual experiences were very limited compared to other facets, therefore they were not presented as an individual theme in the finding chapters but were incorporated in the larger themes. The data coded by the 11 facets was then merged, clarified and rearticulated in order to fully explore visitor experience in Design Society and more generally cultural hubs. The final themes presented in the finding chapters had more exclusivity than the 11 facets which aids in the development of discussions and implications. This could also be a productive way to produce insights specifically for museum professionals as demonstrated in the summary sections in Chapter 6 and 7. In summary, this study demonstrated that these two frameworks were useful in expanding the area of research on the visitor experience, especially in identifying different facets or category of experiences. However, they are not universally applicable in their entireties and the researcher needed to flexibly adapt them to suit the individual case.

Thirdly, this research contributed to turning more attention to museums in non-western contexts. This study contributes to diversification of the fields of museum and visitor studies, where western contexts and perspectives have traditionally dominated. The specific context – such as the rapid growth of Chinese museums, strict museum regulations, the object-centred scene and various findings on ways Chinese visitors approach and engage with cultural programmes – provides unique insights for future research and future museum development, both in China and beyond. Also, among the existing studies which were written in English language on Chinese museums, there is no extensive research on non-traditional forms of

museums, especially in the format of a detailed case study. By examining Design Society as a case study, this project contributes to the knowledge and understanding of the current status of museums and cultural institutions in China.

Methodologically, this thesis represents an original contribution in studying visitor experience in several ways. Firstly, this study used a mixed-method approach and collected 427 completed surveys (with 335 of them valid), 40 hours of observation, 15 visitor interviews, four staff interviews, and one autoethnography essay. These empirical data are valuable, both in answering the research questions in this study and for future research as a reference. Secondly, this study used two innovative methods in collecting data, open-ended surveys and autoethnography.

Previously, most research on visitor experience has used interviews as the primary data collection method. This research experimented with open-ended surveys in a pilot study then selected this technique as a primary method for the final fieldwork. The open-ended survey was designed to help visitors reflect upon their immediate responses to their visits. The fieldwork proved that although the set of survey questions had their limitations – which will be reflected on later – it was a productive tool in prompting visitors while not interrupting their experience too much. The blank space in the survey that allowed visitors to use either words or drawings, or a combination of both, also proved to be successful, allowing them to describe their experiences in a more comfortable form. Many participants drew their immersive experiences vividly which indicates that this method is especially effective at encouraging visitors to reflect on their immersive experiences at the exhibitions.

The innovative use of autoethnography proved to be appropriate and useful as an alternative method of gathering data. The author has experimented with using autoethnography as a primary method in her previous research on understanding museum exhibitions (Hu 2017). In this study, autoethnography was used as a secondary method in providing data to existing themes that were identified through all the other methods. Chapter 7 demonstrated how autoethnography as an emergent qualitative method can be used in studying visitor experience in museums. Although the autoethnography essay only described my experiences

from one of the workshops, it provided data with depth of insight that other methods cannot necessarily achieve.

Additionally, the pilot study in this research proved to be necessary and productive in preparing for the main data collection period. This empirical experience indicates that conducting a pilot study should be considered, especially when researching a new institution in a new context.

The methodology of this study, in summary, lays the groundwork for a more open approach to examining visitor experiences. It will be useful and relevant for researchers, scholars and students in the field of museum studies in designing their methodology for future studies.

Lastly, this case study of Design Society makes a unique contribution considering that, at the time of its inception, no other researcher at the time was studying Design Society. The effort made to gain access to study Design Society enabled the researcher to capture and examine some of the interesting developments and complexities from Design Society's pre-opening stage to the inaugural period. Especially considering the changes within Design Society in the past few years since its inaugural period, which will be further described in the next section, the opportunity to examine the institution and collect visitor data representing that specific period of time was invaluable.

On the whole, the exploration of the practices and the visitor experience of Design Society provided interesting insights for museums in potentially increasing their impact and outcomes both now and in the future. In developing cultural programming, an institution should consider different facets of experiences in accordance with its mission and goals. This study has showed that both exhibitions and workshops are valued forms of cultural programmes, although with different potentiality and focal points in terms of realising an institution's ambitions. More generally, the study of visitors' experiences at Design Society shows several important implications. Firstly, the popularity of and enthusiasm towards object experiences shows that it is worth rethinking and working on improving this experience with whatever resources the institution has. The results of this study show that object experiences can still be as relevant as other experiences, if not more. The equal popularity of sensory and physical

experiences shows that such experiences have the potential to contribute to the perception of the institution and may help attract new – especially young – visitors. For future programming, it is important to find a balance between rethinking the existing model of offering traditional object experiences and the embracing of other experiences discussed in Chapter 6 and 7, especially emerging sensory and physical experiences and the flexible and mobile experiences that workshops and events can offer beyond the traditional form of exhibitions.

The emergence of Design Society, as discussed in this study, is a reflection of both the general transformation of museums and the specific socio-cultural and economic context. In understanding this cultural hub, both Art Fund and ICOM's definitions proved to be useful. Chapter 5 shows how Design Society was created to be a hybrid cultural hub as defined by Art Fund where different types of experiences – for example museums, theatres, retails and dining experiences – are provided in one place. However, while this study focused on the visitor experience of the cultural programmes, the findings demonstrate that Design Society aligns with the concept of the cultural hub defined by ICOM. As various visitor experiences discussed in both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 became possible at Design Society, the shift from what has been traditionally understood or defined as museums to something new was demonstrated. These might be small steps among the evolution of museums globally, but they are important for exploration in the Chinese context.

For Design Society as an institution, this research was particularly timely. By focusing on visitors' experiences, some of the initial findings were fed back to staff and acted on as a valuable reference for the institution's planning and programming. The overall outcomes are perhaps applicable more broadly and could assist other museums to better understand their impact on visitors, further enabling them to provide better and richer outcomes. For those at the stage of crafting the blueprint for a new museum or any type of cultural institution, this research provides real evidence and analysis that can inform their decision-making and planning.

The transformation of museums, however, does not stop at becoming cultural hubs. Museums ought to change and evolve continually and take on new functions and roles as society itself

continues to change. As mentioned in Chapter 2, while many museums have space issues, Design Society might not have this concern. Yet, it still experiences other problems, such as borrowing objects or arranging travelling exhibitions. This appears to be especially difficult due to delays and uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In summary, this study contributes to discussions about the future of museums while highlighting visitor perspectives. It aims to open up new perspectives on museums in the 21st century. Theoretically, it offers original and robust intervention in the field of international museum studies, diversifying its lexicon, scope and methods. From this research, a radical new way of thinking about museums both present and future is urged. In practice, the results of this study can aid museum professionals and policymakers in rethinking museums and their practices.

8.3   Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Firstly, this research focused on examining cultural programmes at Design Society, which are only one aspect of the visitor experience. It would be interesting to investigate visitors' experiences of the other facilities and parts at Design Society and to analyse how they contribute to the totality of visitors' experiences – for example, the experience of the building, café, and stores as described in Chapter 5. In both Pekarik et al. (1990) and Packer and Ballantyne (2016)'s models, different facets of experiences appear to be equal. However, Ritchie and Crouch (1996)'s model on analysing destinations illustrates that not all experiences are equal, and that some are more important than others in contributing to visitor experience. It would be interesting to find out the motivations for visitors to go to a cultural hub, how different types of experiences connect with the experiences from museum programmes, and whether a model of the core experience could be identified in cultural hubs.

For research methods, although the open-ended survey was efficient in generating data, the quality of the data was not able to be fully controlled by the researcher. Some of the surveys only have a few words which makes them hard to interpret due to the lack of context. The

survey questions also have some limitations and are not an exhaustive list for prompting visitor to reflect on their experiences. More theoretical exploration and empirical research is needed in developing and improving effective survey questions for studying visitor experiences. The survey questions in this study were broader than just asking what was satisfying; questions were also developed around the words 'realise', 'surprise' and 'share'. However, for future research it would be interesting to explore negative visitor experiences, for example what was disappointing, boring or frustrating.

Additionally, this research did not investigate the demographics of the visitors, but it would certainly be an interesting topic for investigation in future. For example, questions such as whether a cultural hub is mainly for younger visitors or could it span generations would be interesting to research further, particularly as Design Society promotes lifelong learning. I also recognise that connecting with the local community is one of the other important features of cultural hubs, but this research did not explore this theme due to the limited timeframe.

Many aspects contributed to the development of Design Society as an institution. For example, Design Society is a cultural institution initiated and invested in by a real estate developer whose vision and ambition could shape the identity, function and operational model of the institution. The nature of CMSK, the developer of Design Society, as a state-owned company in China would be interesting to explore further since they are different with private owned companies. Future research could explore these aspects of Design Society or other similar cultural institutions and examine the developers' perspective of what a cultural hub could and should be, especially in relation to the museum context in China.

This research has the potential to inform museum professionals and policy-makers on future directions for museum development and the ways members of the public participate in cultural institutions. By highlighting a visitor-centred approach, this study will hopefully encourage researchers in continuing exploring and work collaboratively in advancing the field both theoretically and methodologically in the future. Also, through reading this thesis, I hope more scholars could develop an interest in exploring museums especially emerging ones in non-western contexts so that more meaningful discussions could happen. As Design Society is only one case study and it is not sufficient to tell whether the idea of a cultural hub

is a sustainable one, especially in the long term. Further studies on this topic are needed both in theory and practice, and in other cultural contexts.

8.4 An Update and Reflection on Design Society's Current Status

> 'Of course, it's not finished. Any institution needs to evolve over time. Especially with the institutions with far-reaching ambitions' (Staff-I04).

The founding director of Design Society said the above in interview when I was finishing my fieldwork and about to leave Shenzhen. Much has changed since then.

Although it started with 'no collections', Design Society began collecting objects through curating the latest exhibition 'Values of Design: China in the Making' and 'its future collection will reflect the development of the institution and the areas that it concerns the most', according to Zhao Rong, the vice director of Design Society (Pengpai 2020). It is uncertain how the collection of Design Society will be developed and used in the future, but it would be interesting to examine and follow up on this topic.

The tension that was mentioned in Chapter 5, between 'Design Society' and SWCAC, has lasted to the time of writing. In fact, from the available documents, it increasingly seems that SWCAC is being promoted much more than Design Society when it comes to the interaction with visitors, while Design Society as a brand is fading more into the background. In December 2017, when Design Society opened its doors to the public, all of its social media accounts were under the name 'Design Society'. In 2019, after two years of operation, the social media name of the institution was changed from 'Design Society' to 'SWCAC'. Now in 2022, both Design Society and SWCAC have their separate websites and social media accounts.

One possible reason could be due to branding and marketing concerns. From a visitor's perspective, the changes seem understandable as 'SWCAC' connotes a physical space (an art

centre) and an institution, while 'Design Society' does not have the connotation of a physical place. Without further knowledge, visitors would not necessarily consider Design Society a physical space when they first hear the name. The ambiguity and seemingly interchangeable name of Design Society and SWCAC to an extent shows that current vocabulary is not sufficient to describe it, as a cultural hub, in a simple, consistent way. Whatever happens in the building of SWCAC is programmed by Design Society. SWCAC indicates a physical place where there will be buzz and activities in diverse formats, while Design Society is both a destination and a platform. If the building were called Design Society, then the platform function would possibly be limited, underestimated or overlooked.

If this research had been conducted in 2022, it would probably be a different thesis in many ways. However, as this research focused on a particular timeframe, it not only investigated the emergence of a new institution, but also became a document and witness to a period of developments, changes and history. As the institution seems to lean towards identifying itself with the term 'culture and art center', the tension in discussing what Design Society is and whether it is a museum may soon not be there any more since 'culture and art center' is much more common and much less boundary 'transcending' compared to 'Design Society' or 'cultural hub'.

Although Design Society appears to be increasingly described as a 'venue' (see SWCAC 2022), this venue of SWCAC remained active in 2021. They hosted 48 exhibitions, 144 performances, 283 events and welcomed more than 1,000,000 visitors. The commercial arm of the SWCAC is also much more occupied than 2018, with a merchant list including three restaurants, one private gallery, two furniture shops and six educational institutions. Its current introductory statement is as follows:

> SWCAC is the first ever cultural hub in China that combines exhibition, performance, education and commerce. It is an important cultural destination in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macau Greater Bay Area, continuing to provide unique cultural experiences. (SWCAC 2021)

Did the innovation and the effort of trying to do something new result in failure? Maybe for Design Society, SWCAC, CMSK and the V&A it is still a process of learning. There might

be factors that are unavoidable in these situations, for example as discussed in Chapter 3, there might be political and sociocultural reasons which make China not necessarily ready for the flourishing of the concept like Design Society. For museums in China, it is hard to operate outside of the governmental system. However, it is also equally hard to operate within the system if an institution wants to transcend boundaries. Given the challenges museums and other cultural institutions confront, especially due to the current situation relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is vital to continue to think about what draws people to an institution, and what makes institutions sustainable in the long term.

There are some real-world impacts from this research. One staff member from the learning department started doing visitor experience research on the public programmes. They didn't plan to do such research beforehand but saw the potential value after hosting me during my fieldwork. This is another example of Design Society's spirit of innovation: 'Trying things out is a goal in itself. Creativity is a matter of trying things out. There is a spirit of creativity in Design Society' (Staff-I04).

It is unclear which direction Design Society / SWCAC will head in the next ten or twenty years, but the beginning of a journey is always fascinating (see Figure 8.1). The Covid-19 pandemic and concepts such as the metaverse have already profoundly changed the world and our everyday life. Likewise, the role of museums will continue to change. However, there are always things to be learned from the past, from visitors, and from investigating cases elsewhere. That is what this thesis advocates for.
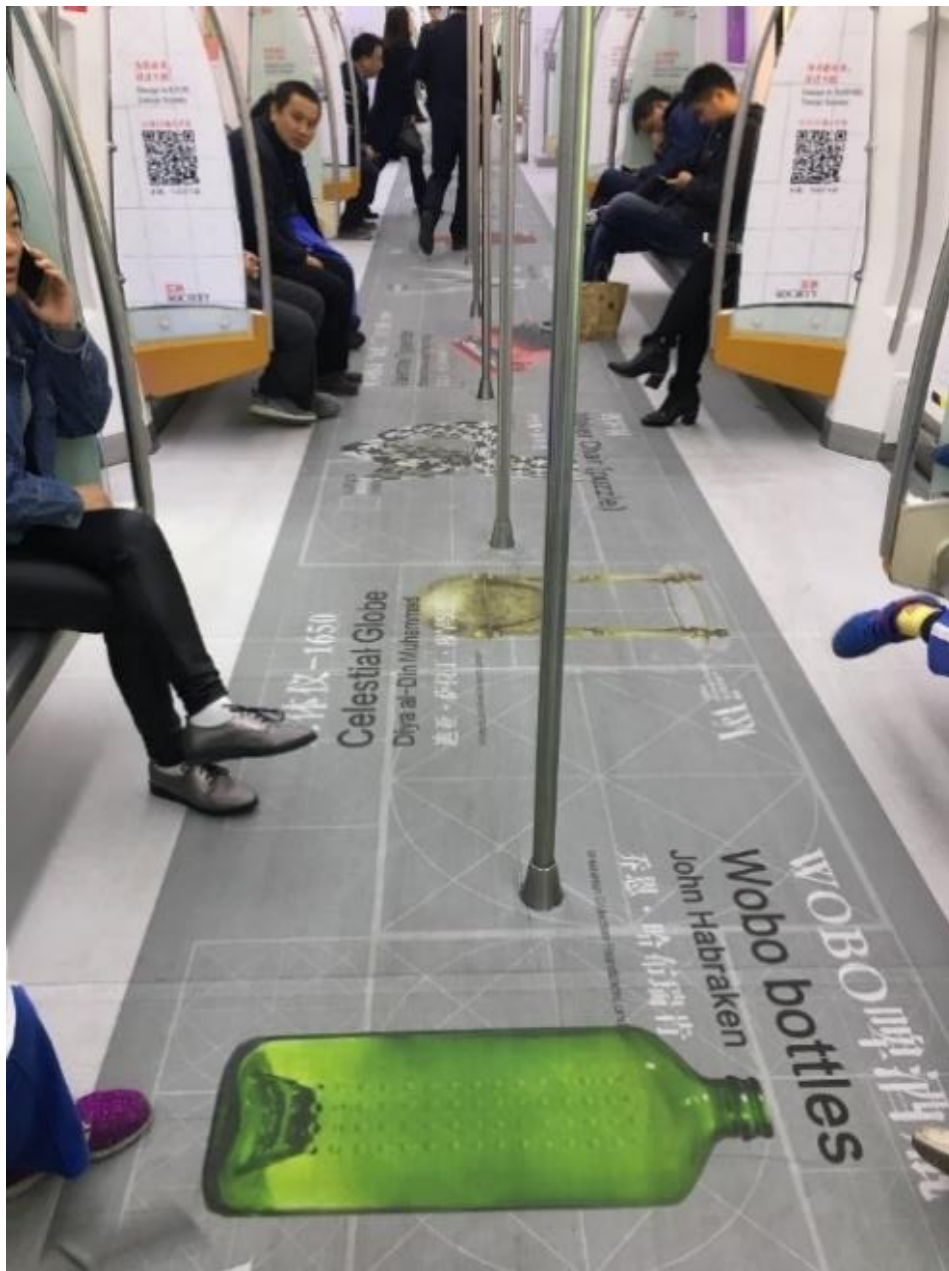
Figure 8.1: In December 2017, just before the opening, the advertisement of Design Society's exhibitions was in many underground trains in Shenzhen. December 2017. Photo by the author.

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Appendix A – Participating in the Workshop STICKYLINE: An Autoethnography

The idea of 'making something' or doing crafty things makes me deterred. I know I am not good at doing that kind of stuff deep down. By saying 'deep in my heart', I guess my certainty comes mainly from previous horrible experiences and other people's comments. I clearly remember how my mum always talks about a small incident when I was in nursery. It was a crafts activity at the open day of my nursery and kids in the nursery were trying to make animals by sticking ready-cut parts together on a piece of white paper. Tracey sat by me at the same table; she was my best friend in nursery (she still is one of my best friends to this day) and she is one of those kids that is 'talented' in doing crafts. My mum said, after we had finished sticking parts of the paper and it was time to let parents see how their children did, she always remembered how tidy and clean Tracey's paper was and how good an elephant she had stuck together. In comparison, my piece of paper looked dirty and had glue here and there, with the elephant's nose disconnected from its head, etc. That is probably the earliest comment I can remember about my 'hands-on' skills, and also somehow probably one of the most influential comments that has the most impact on my self-knowledge about my 'hands-on' skills. I was kind of 'labelled' and it confirmed that there are people in this world really good at 'hands-on' things – but I am just not one of them.

Above is what I normally would think of when I see a promotion of a workshop or think about the idea of doing hands-on activities in public. Doing it in public is an issue – I am scared of the consequences, which could be people's expressions, the way they look at what I end up making. The worst is honestly commenting on it. I do not really mind doing hands-on things. I know I am not good at it, but I do enjoy doing it. I do sew and sometimes paint or do paper art at home, where when I fail, I can chuck it and start over, or just simply forget about

it and then go and do something else. There is something about doing 'hands-on' things in the public that triggers deep fears in me.

When I saw the new post on Design Society's WeChat about a workshop called 'STICKYLINE – making a paper lamp', I decided to register and participate in it as a visitor (initially only for research purposes). I ended up really enjoying it, surprisingly. I messaged Yoyo, my university roommate, to register and go with me. She was always doing some little crafts in our dormitory, so I knew she would like to go to a workshop like this, and we had not caught up for a long time since we graduated. Life could be so busy when we started working. The freedom of university time was gone and it became extremely hard to catch up with old friends.

She happened to have no plan on Saturday so my plan of going to the workshop with a friend to ease my nerves and also to catch up worked!

It is a bit weird to meet someone you have not seen for a long time in a workshop. I mean, normally people do this in a coffee shop or a restaurant. It was two o'clock and the workshop started on time. The presenter was a gentleman with long hair – matching his identity of 'an artist', I thought. He was from Hong Kong, so his Mandarin was not that good. Sharon, who works for the learning team, was the translator for the workshop.

The first session of the workshop, the artist Liang, one of the founders of STICKYLINE, introduced how they started doing art and the projects they did in the past. It was pretty amazing what they did. I was particularly fascinated by the paper costume they did for Lin Yilian, a famous Chinese singer. I have seen people making costumes with paper, but they were either silly or didn't look that good. But when I saw the picture he showed, I was impressed. I could not even believe it was made out of paper. Then he introduced their installation which was part of the Minding the Digital exhibition – On/Off. He introduced the original idea and how it developed in time. Before this, I did notice the installation on site but did not know the meaning of it by looking at it. Through his explanation I understood a bit more – that it is a piece of art concerning the issue of light pollution. It is always fascinating hearing about the process – step by step, how artists came up with ideas and how those ideas became a piece of artwork.

When the artist was speaking, I could tell he was a very humble person. His attitude made me concentrates even more. Soon after he finished introducing STICKYLINE, the second session was about to start – making a paper lamp. The material, he explained, was the same material they used for On/Off – a type of paper made out of the ground stone powder. It is pretty amazing think about how hard stones can be turned into bendable paper.

Pretty much all we needed to do was folding paper and using staples. It couldn't be too hard, I thought. But soon after I started to staple pieces together, I noticed that Yoyo was doing a better job than me. She was doing it more carefully and slowly, stapling it accurately in the place that it was needed. I did not pay attention to details that much, and then when I was about to staple the last piece, a defect appeared. I could not staple the whole piece closed since the previous ones were done with errors. I was a bit frustrated and thought that it seemed like what happened today was just another re-enactment of what happened in the nursery about twenty years ago. Yoyo stopped making her lamp and offered me help – she pointed out the parts I did wrong. OK, I thought, pretty much all I needed to do was to pull out these staples and do it again from the beginning. I started to pull one of the staples – it was not easy and almost hurt my fingers.

Then the artist came to my table. He saw I was frustrated and wanted to help. He brought a tool with him and showed me how to undo the staple. While he was doing it, he emphasised that 'Make sure whenever you do this, always use this tool to unnail a staple. A lot of people tend to use their own hands but that is really easily to hurt your hand.' That's basically me! I always just use my hand to unnail a staple. But from today I know how to protect my hand and could possibly avoid many potential accidents in the future with awareness. At that moment, I almost thought that was the most precious thing I had learned today! I think he knew this from experience since his artwork deals with paper. Maybe he hurt his finger when he started doing paper art as well, and he learned how to do it in a better way.

During the workshop, there was also a senior lady who participated in this workshop. She was really focusing and careful when she was making the lamp. I thought 'lifelong learning' was merely a slogan until I saw a lady in the workshop today who was my grandma's age.

Everyone was patient with her, and she was also very keen to learn. Whenever she had questions, she would call on the artist. She called him 'teacher, teacher'. I am very moved by this. Maybe not only by the spirit she has, but also the possibility of letting lifelong learning happen. Learning for her is possibly less utilitarian but rather an enjoyment.

After my second try finally enabled me to end up with a reasonable piece, I put the light bulb in the lamp. We took turns and tried to plug it in. The moment when the lamp switched on, I was so excited. Really couldn't believe I can do something that looks this good. I think the material is very important – it has limited ways for me to go really wrong. When I got home, the first thing I did after dinner was to try to hang the lamp up somewhere. My mum was asking – what is 'that thing' in the bedroom? I said, that is a lamp I made today. She was well impressed, and since then, she named that lamp 'the lamp Nan made'.

Appendix B – 参与说明 Information Sheet for Survey Participants

亲爱的观众，

此处所摆放的开放式问卷是英国卡迪夫大学的学术研究人员进行在设计互联观众调研的一部分。我想要更好地了解您在展览中的体验，倾听您体验中的细节。

完成的问卷将被扫描收录以便研究人员的后期整理和分析。本次调研的数据成果将只会被用于学术研究和评估目的。 若您对参与过程有任何疑问，敬请联系我们。

- 请确认您已去过设计的价值和数字之维两个展览
- 问卷分为四个问题，您可以选取其中的一到四张进行填写。文字或者图画皆可。
- 若参与填写的对象为 16 岁以下的儿童，烦请监护人/学校负责人为他们解释每个问题后再让他们参与填写。
- 填写完毕后请放在旁边的文件夹里。
- 您的参与是完全自愿的。

您的反馈对我们来说非常重要。通过这些观众调研的成果，设计互联将努力为公众提供更好的文化体验。感谢您的积极参与！

Dear visitors,

The open survey sheets on the table here is a part of the research that is being conducted conducting by a researcher from Cardiff University in the UK. I want to have a better understanding of your experience here and get to know more details of your visit.

Completed surveys will be scanned and categorised for future analysis. All the data we collect here will only be used for academic research and evaluation purposes. If you have any questions on the process of participation, feel free to contact us.

- The survey has four different questions. You can choose from one to four of them to answer. Writing or drawing are both welcomed.
- If participants are schoolchildren (under 16), could we ask their guardian or teacher explain the questions to them first before they write/draw.
- Please put your completed survey into the folder we provided.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.

Your participation matters to us. The result of this research will help Design Society provide better cultural experience to the public. Thanks for your participation!

联系方式 Contact

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