

Design challenges in creative systems

THEORIES, METHODS AND PRACTICES
FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND INCLUSION

Edited by
Paola Cordera and Raffaella Trocchianesi

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PART 3

Art, Design and Cultural Institutions

10. Can cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design play a role in fostering social innovation?

Qing Yu, Suzie Attiwill, Luisa Collina

10.1 The new role of cultural institutions

Cultural institutions have been actively transforming themselves in recent decades to become more sustainable and inclusive. These ongoing significant waves of change are starting to redefine the role of cultural institutions in society, and therefore, it is useful to explore how and whether cultural institutions can play a role in the transition to social innovation, one of the defining aspects of contemporary global society.

Generally, cultural institutions are organizations within a culture that work for the interpretation, preservation, or promotion of culture (Mariotti, 2022). They encompass a wide range of entities, including museums, exhibition centres, galleries, theatres, etc. Historically, cultural institutions have played a role as elite institutions, where institutions are symbols of power and exclusive knowledge and preservation (Sandell, 2005) within cultural and sociological analyses, as means through which social inequalities have been constituted, reproduced, reinforced. The hierarchical arrangement of objects, the presentation

of partial and biased histories, the marked absence of (certain forms of. Current museology literature emphasizes that the role of cultural institutions should be transferred such that they become *agents for social change*. (Eid and Forstrom, 2021, p. 21). Museums, as a representative sector of cultural institutions, demonstrated the potential of their role as *agents for social change* at the International Council of Museums (ICOM) conference in 2019. The conference proposed an alternative definition of the museum as a pluralistic space that must work with diverse communities and create critical dialogues (ICOM, 2019).

However, Mirko Zardini, former director of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), in an interview entitled *Critical Condition*, says the role of contemporary cultural institutions is frustrating as they are not providing the critical debate/thinking that society needs. Most of them are repeating the traditional mode of an institution (Kafka, n.d.). This suggests that cultural institutions require further support in addressing social aspects, such as accessibility and audience development. Yet, when cultural institutions consider audience development, the number of visitors cannot be the only indicator of success (Bollo A., Da Milano C., Gariboldi A. *et al.*, 2017, p. 51).

This measurement cannot be considered in isolation when evaluating social innovation, as an increase in numbers may be an indication of marketing success rather than the impact of social innovation.

In this complex context, the question *Can cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design play a role in fostering social innovation?* seems critical in relation to the role of design.

By which means and approaches have curators and exhibition designers engaged in social innovation in cultural institutions? What are the factors that characterize exhibitions whose curators and designers have made social innovation a central concern?

In this chapter, we aim to explore exhibition projects in various types of cultural institution in the field of architecture and design, in order to extract and summarize information and create a preliminary horizontal overview of the research field. The selected examples can help in identifying possible common factors of social innovation through exhibition-making, in cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design. Five aspects, five factors, and several sub-elements are the results of this analysis. These have ultimately

been synthesized in a visual diagram that can be used as a referential tool for understanding the main characteristics and approaches of selected exhibitions that engage with the social innovation agenda.

10.2 Theoretical perspective

Social innovation and cultural institutions

Social innovation is a broad term that refers to the innovations and solutions of new ideas (designs, products, services and models) that address social needs, lead to new social relationships and enhance society's capacity to act (European Commission, 2013). In *The Open Book of Social Innovation* Murray *et al.* (2010) point out that social innovation is a relatively open field with open processes that can bring about changes and lead to new outcomes, relationships and forms of collaboration.

A number of organizations, networks and multidisciplinary teams that are dedicated to social innovation activities have been established worldwide, including think tanks, do tanks and social design labs. Examples include the global network Social Innovation Exchange (SIX), Australia's National Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) and the Centre for Social Innovation in Toronto. The Jockey Club Make a Difference Social Lab, in Hong Kong, made a *Global Social Lab Landscape Report* (Social Innovation Exchange, 2023), which looked at ten different social design labs in Asia and around the world.

From these social innovation organizations and labs, we can see that an increasing number of successful social innovation projects have been completed in the fields of social science, economics, business, policy, governance, health, service design, etc. The collaborative teams in these organizations and labs usually include designers who facilitate the process and play the role of design at multiple levels. However, projects in relation to cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design and exhibitions are still rare.

Similarly, in the discipline of design, the DESIS network – Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability – is a global cultural association that is actively involved in promoting design for social innovation in design-oriented universities. There are many clusters of projects and thematic areas in design for social innovation, but still fewer projects

related to cultural institutions. These phenomena indicate that there is insufficient investigation in cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design exploring social innovation, showing an under-researched facet.

10.3 Cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design

It is important to note that this study is conducted in cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design, rather than in other disciplinary areas. Cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design are part of the arts and culture sector, which is emerging as a particularly fruitful field for the development of social innovation (Cancellieri *et al.*, 2018, p. 79).

The Museum Is Not Enough, a recent book by the Canadian Centre for Architecture (Borasi *et al.*, 2019), explores the roles of contemporary cultural institutions and responses to the massive social dilemmas associated with the notion of social innovation.

Architecture is a way of reading and redefining the present, the society in which we're living and working (Allen, 2020). Hence, the focus on exhibitions and curatorial practice in architecture and design cultural institutions aims to explore the under-researched aspects of social innovation. In particular, considering that architectural and design exhibitions have the capacity to make statements, construct new meanings and stimulate critical discussions. Therefore, curating and exhibiting architecture and design in cultural institutions in relation to social innovation can be seen as a critical voice in terms of situating, provoking thought on, reflecting, and communicating the current social and environmental emergencies.

These statements resonate with the capacity of social innovation to improve social relations, solve social problems, meet social needs, create social connections (MacCallum, 2009; Moulaert *et al.*, 2010) and make things local, open and connected (Manzini, 2015). In this sense, cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design can act as social institutions that drive social innovation in a spatial and experiential formality and offer things that are different from other disciplines.

10.4 Example review and methodological frameworks

This study adopts the method of reviewing examples of work, and examines fourteen exhibition projects relating to social innovation in cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design.

The existing ambiguity about where and how cultural institutions can engage with social innovation through exhibitions leads us to choose a horizontal review of examples rather than a vertical review of cases. This horizontal-level review of examples aims for variety, rather than depth and detail. It can provide a landscape and overview of the research area, which can help to understand the current state of the art and address the research question.

In combination with analyzing the examples, we bring in the method of literature review to understand the methodological frameworks of the approaches to enabling social innovation and engaging the public. We notice that when it comes to curating exhibitions in cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design, there is a traditional top-down approach to decision-making (Bøe *et al.*, 2019; Baurley and Younan, 2021). Sandell (1998) points out, in *Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion*, that cultural institutions in the culture sector may contribute to social exclusion due to issues of access, participation and representation.

Regarding audience participation approaches, Nina Simon's *The Participatory Museum* (2010) raises similar concerns about accessibility, participatory spaces, and social connection. She further categorizes participatory approaches in cultural institutions into four types of project: contributory, collaborative, co-creative and hosted projects, which represent different levels of community and audience involvement and engagement in cultural institutions' programmes. *The European Commission's Report* (2017) re-identified three main audience categories regarding audience development: *audience by habit*, *audience by choice* and *audience by surprise*, based on Kawashima's approach (2000). These three categories represent three types of audience who usually, occasionally, or hardly participate in cultural activities for a variety of reasons related to social exclusion and accessibility. Therefore, this study looks not only at

aspects of the exhibition content, such as social issues, but also at the display format and approaches to curating and designing exhibitions that enable audiences to encounter the content.

10.5 Data collection

The fourteen projects were selected with a specific intention, by applying sampling criteria and maximum variation sampling in order to establish a credible, valid and reliable study (Patton, 2002). The sampling criteria were: exhibition projects based in cultural institutions, in the field of architecture and design, and relevant to the concept of social innovation. Maximum variation sampling was applied by selecting examples from a wide range of cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design, and from different geographical locations around the world. Examples were collected from four continents: Europe, North America, Asia and Australia. The types of cultural institutions included museums, galleries, exhibition centres, design centres, art centres and major temporary events (triennials, biennales, and design weeks).

Furthermore, the study drew on numerous data sources to examine each project. First, data were collected by reviewing academic literature, articles and reports related to the research area, and then the scope was broadened to include the institutional case study documents, official publications, websites, project publications and final project reports. Data and insights were also gathered from journal articles on the projects, public presentations, speeches, press interviews and articles, both printed and digital. Example review is an evidence-based research approach. By analyzing data from multiple sources, this review integrates and exemplifies different points of view of curators and exhibitors, and looks for patterns in different exhibition projects. Table 1 lists the selected projects and their data sources.

No.	Institutions	Institution type	Exhibition field	Exhibition name	Year	Curators/ exhibitors team	Main data sources
#1	Pavillon de l'Arsenal (Paris, France)	Exhibition centre	Architecture	Paris Habitat	2015	Javier Arpa Fernández	Institution website Journal review article Domusweb article
#2	Triennale di Milano (Milan, Italy)	Fondazione La Triennale di Milano	A&D	Home Sweet Home	2023	Nina Bassoli	Institution website Press articles and interview
#3	17th International Architecture Exhibition (Venice, Italy)	La Biennale di Venezia	Architecture	AIR/ARIA/AIRE	2021	Olga Subirós	Curator and project website Press articles
#4	18th International Architecture Exhibition (Venice, Italy)	La Biennale di Venezia	Architecture	Partecipazione Austrian Pavilion	2023	AKT & Hermann Czech	Biennale website Project website and publication Press articles
#5	18th International Architecture Exhibition (Venice, Italy)	La Biennale di Venezia	Architecture	Neighbours – Swiss Pavilion	2023	Karin Sander Philip Ursprung	Biennale website Project publication Press articles
#6	The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) (Montreal, Canada)	Research institution and museum	Architecture	A Section of Now: Social Norms and Rituals as Sites for Architectural Intervention	2021-2022	Giovanna Borasi	Institution website Project publications Press articles
#7	Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts (San Francisco, USA)	Arts Centre	A&D	Teddy Cruz & Fonna Forman – Visualizing Citizenship: Seeking a New Public Imagination	2017	Lucía Sanromán Martin Strickland	Institution website Project publications

Table 1.
Data sources.

#8	OCAT Biennale (OCT Contemporary Art Terminal (Shenzhen, China))	Biennale	A&D	Boomerang – OCAT Biennale 2021 – Park for the People	2021	Jason Ho (Mapping Workshop)	Institution website Public presentation Press articles
#9	Singapore Design Week + National Design Centre (Singapore)	Design Week	Design	Playground of Possibilities	2023	Jackson Tan (BLACK)	Institution website Project website Press articles
#10	Melbourne Design Week + The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) (Melbourne, Australia)	Design Week	A&D	The Silo Project	2023	Ancher Architecture Office, Corey Thomas, Josee Vesely-Manning	Institution website Project website Press articles
#11	Sydney Design Week + Powerhouse Museum with Tin Sheds Gallery (Sydney, Australia)	Design Week	A&D	Lacaton & Vassal: Living in the City	2023	Anne Lacaton Jean-Philippe Vassal Hannes Frykholm Catherine Lassen	Institution websites Press articles
#12	The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) (Melbourne, Australia)	Gallery	Architecture	The NGV Architecture Commission – pond[er]	2021-2022	Taylor Knights James Carey	Institution website Press articles
#13	National Museum of Australia (Canberra, Australia)	Museum	A&D	Inbetween: Cultural connections through design	2021-2022	Jefa Greenaway Tristan Wong	Institution websites Press articles
#14	Centre for Architecture Victoria Open House Melbourne (Melbourne, Australia)	Organization	A&D	Take Hold of the Clouds	2022	Tara McDowell Fleur Watson	Institution website Project publication Press articles

10.6 Data analysis

In order to compare the differences and similarities, all selected projects were analyzed within individual examples and cross-examples. Notably, all projects were developed within the last decade, and most were within the previous four years. Selecting recent examples ensures this review can reflect the current situation.

Through the literature review and analysis of examples, we can find some emerging tendencies of exhibitions in cultural institutions, in the field of architecture and design, moving towards social innovation. Architecture and design cultural institutions have found it challenging to exhibit architecture, i.e. the conventional products of architecture, such as buildings (Figueiredo, 2013). Hence, innovation is taking place within cultural institutions. There are emerging institutional initiative programmes for exhibiting architecture and design, such as associated research centres and architecture commissions by galleries, as well as innovative formats of exhibition, for example film as exhibition and programmes for visiting actual buildings. The content of the exhibitions is also strongly representative of responses to the current social/environmental emergencies. Exhibition design and curatorial approaches are related to mapping social issues and amplifying their visibility (Manzini, 2015, p. 121), increasing audience participation, enhancing accessibility, and extending exhibition places and spaces into the public realm. As a result, we have summarized this trend into five aspects, factors, and several sub-elements.

The purpose of using grouping as a way of analyzing exhibitions related to social innovation is to better understand the possible characteristics of exhibition design in architecture and design cultural institutions, and to reflect on the situation, rather than to evaluate their advancement. Table 2 shows the five aspects, factors, and their sub-elements. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the five aspects and use example no.1 to show how to read the diagram.

Label	Aspects	Factors	Sub-elements
●	Format	Display factor	Exhibition experience
			Interactive exhibits
			Spatial encounter
			Architectural ideas
			Narratives
			Material
●	Content	Representation factor	Contexts
			Scenarios
			Themes
			Groups i.e. Indigenous Communities
			Cultures i.e. Indigenous Country
			Social/political/environmental emergencies
●	Approach	Process factor	Contributory participation
			Collaborative participation
			Co-creative participation
			Hosted participation
			Mapping and amplifying
●	Place	Access factor	Expanding into the cities/communities/public spaces
			Reuse existing spaces/sites
			Visibility
●	Audience	Experience factor	Public awareness
			Public engagement
			Meaning making
			Critical discussion
			Audience by habit
			Audience by choice
			Audience by surprise

Table 2.
Aspects, factors, and sub-elements.

Format Content Approach Place Audience



Figure 1. Mapping the five aspects, factors, and their sub-elements.

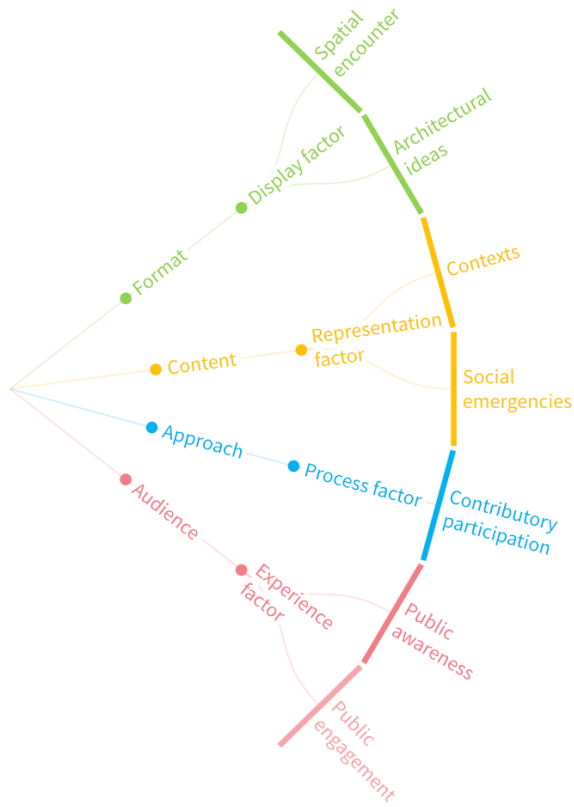


Figure 2. The positioning map of example no.1, using project no.1 as an example of how to read this diagram. Project no.1 involved four main aspects and factors, as well as several sub-elements within each group (from the inner circle to the outer circle).

10.7 Description of selected examples

In the face of unprecedented climate and environmental emergencies, the idea of social innovation in architecture and design has become critical in terms of thinking about how people, as societies and socialites, inhabit the world; that social is environmental. Examples 3, 4 and 5 at the 17th and 18th International Architecture Exhibition at the *Venice Biennale* bring design initiatives into the concerns about the emergencies. Through in-depth research into the project, Example 3 curator Olga Subirós explores the concept of air and its significance in our daily lives. The exhibition also engages visitors through immersive experiences and interactive displays in the exhibition spaces to raise public awareness. Examples 4 and 5 are the Swiss and Austrian pavilions, which foreground issues of audience participation, social exclusion and space expansion by engaging with neighbours and citizens (Sander and Ursprung, 2023; Scheppe *et al.*, 2023). These exhibitions also provoke critical debates about the boundaries and role of cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design.

Example 7 curator Lucía Sanromán's presentation of public projects by *activist architect* Teddy Cruz and political researcher Fonna Forman raises questions about politics and citizenship. It looks at how architectural projects have responded to them. Jackson Tan curates Example 9, an exhibition of experiential installations that discuss Singapore's most pressing environmental issues, showcasing innovative solutions and inspiring provocations through design. Example 2 at the Triennale di Milano presents a selection of drawings, photographs and films originally exhibited in Example 6 at the CCA. The two exhibitions resonate on different continents by highlighting the mutual concerns of social relations, which also question how architecture and design cultural institutions can reposition themselves to address present challenges.

Exhibition 8 is part of the *Shenzhen OCAT Biennale*. Curator and architect Jason Ho led students in his *Mapping Workshop* (Ho, 2017) to recreate the blocks – art installations originally made by artist Daniel Buren in a public park in 2011. The exhibition strategy is to engage residents and have them recreate these blocks based on how they use them. The exhibition is designed to be exhibited in a public

park to reach more audiences, help raise people's awareness of their living environment, and create a new meaning for the public space.

Example 1 is an institutional initiative – an architecture commission by the Pavillon de l'Arsenal for a social housing project. The curatorial approach is rooted in the local site and enables audience contributory participation. The team researched and curated by visiting many homes of local workers and residents and listening to their experiences (Arpa, 2015). Similar institutional initiatives can also be seen in Australia. As there is no specific cultural institution dedicated to architecture and design, the innovations in terms of exhibiting architecture and design are taking place within cultural institutions – the examples include *Design Weeks*, Architecture Commissions by galleries, the recent Swayn Centre for Australian Design associated with the National Museum of Australia, and the Centre for Architecture that is connected with the Open House programme.

For instance, example 12 is an architectural installation in the garden of the National Gallery of Victoria, as part of an annual architecture competition held by the gallery to activate and promote the public's engagement with architectural ideas. The architectural installation invites the public to move around the walkways and the pink water pond, representing Australia's inland salt lakes. In so doing, the installation aims to raise people's awareness of the impact people are having on the environment.

People are invited to sit and ponder – to imagine new futures and the critical relationship to land and water custodianship. It is an open and inclusive environment enabling visitors to reflect on the current environmental situation.

The *Design Weeks* are also innovative platforms for fostering design and architectural ideas to build a better society. Examples 10 and 11 are both architectural and design exhibitions in the *Design Weeks* (Melbourne and Sydney) that explore the adaptive reuse of existing spaces – former industrial grain silos and social housing – as interventions to collectively respond to urban renewal. Example 13 is an immersive and experiential film exhibition that presents a reimagination of the exhibition in the Australian Pavilion at the *2021 Venice Biennale of Architecture*. Most importantly, social innovation in Australia is also about connecting with Indigenous Communities and Country.

This exhibition highlights the importance of Indigenous people and diverse cultures. Example 14 is from the Open House programme, part of the Open House Worldwide Network, which aims to open up various places and spaces across Melbourne City for public engagement and encounter. The programme uses existing architecture to curate and exhibit, which is an innovative approach to encourage audiences to participate and reflect on the built environment, their relationship with nature, as well as interior and exterior spaces. Example 14 also held a curated exhibition entitled *Take Hold of the Clouds* in a series of heritage sites across Melbourne; the programme addressed accessibility for visually impaired people, from wayfinding to their publications (McDowell and Watson, 2022).

10.8 Conclusions and future developments

This chapter investigates whether and how cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design play a role in fostering social innovation. After reviewing the contextual literature and methodological frameworks at the intersection of social innovation and cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design, we find that the existing research is unclear on where and how cultural institutions in architecture and design can engage with social innovation through exhibitions. Therefore, the study conducted a horizontal review of fourteen exhibition projects across the globe. This study combines literature review with an inductive example review.

Based on the patterns that emerged, five aspects were articulated. The five main aspects are format, content, approach, place and audience, with five factors: display, representation, process, access and experience. The main aspects and factors are further subdivided into several sub-elements to summarize the underlying characteristics. In addition, a diagram was used to further visualize the five aspects, and then each example was briefly described.

The findings of this study conclude and confirm that cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design have the potential to promote social innovation, and their impact can benefit their stake-

holders and the wider public. Meanwhile, this research is a contribution to knowledge about the intersection between social innovation and cultural institutions. The outcomes also interpret the specificities of where and how social innovation can be achieved through exhibition design in cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design.

Although the findings are in fact summarized groups of aspects, they provide insights to help cultural institutions in the field of architecture and design, researchers, and practitioners improve their understanding of the current situation and develop strategies for promoting social innovation.

Future research can be carried out on a vertical level of case analysis, based on the current findings. Field observation research, interviews and exhibition-related design practice could continue exploring this matter to further develop these initial findings.

Authorship attribution

Sections: *The new role of cultural institutions, Theoretical perspective, Example review and methodological frameworks* have been edited by all three authors, while sections *Data collection, Data analysis, Description of selected examples, Conclusions and future developments* have been edited by Qing Yu.

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This volume focuses on the dynamic systems of creativity and culture within diverse design fields, merging theoretical reflections, case studies, methodologies, technologies, tools, and original practices. Twelve essays underscore design's role in sustainability, emphasizing local growth, community revitalization, and the co-creation of cultural, economic, and social values. In today's global society, crises in productive cycles, amplified by COVID-19, have accelerated change and influenced behaviors. Digital technologies have transformed the media landscape, bridging the gap between designers and stakeholders and expanding possibilities in both real and virtual domains. As a new era emerges, this book revisits concepts like *sustainable culture*, *inclusive sociality*, and *participation* in cultural heritage as a common good. It proposes a holistic approach to the Anthropocene Age's challenges, highlighting creative industries' importance in local development and community engagement. By adopting multidisciplinary approaches, the volume seeks to inspire new models for cultural engagement and community development, contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable future. It redefines issues like accessibility, multiculturalism, and inclusion, reshaping the social and political positioning of the cultural system.