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ON THE COVER
The Montclair History Center reinterpreted its Crane House to more accurately reflect its rich and diverse history through the story of the African American YWCA that had used the house as its headquarters from 1920 to 1965. The multi-faceted initiative celebrates the important role the YWCA played in the history of Montclair and in the hearts of its members.

Photo Jack Spear Photography, LLC

INSIDE: TECHNICAL LEAFLET
How to Find and Use Legal Records
By John A. Lupton
Modern cities and the creative communities living in them are using social innovation processes to find new ideas for addressing challenges, to strengthen relationships, and to have social impact. Cultural heritage plays a role in these processes. For museums and other cultural heritage institutions, this trend offers both a warning and an opportunity.

Shkodër is a small city in the north of Albania, Europe’s poorest country. The city has been around since Illyrian times and has an impressive history, which can be appreciated in any of the city’s four museums and many heritage sites. Although the newly renovated city center and typical Balkan hospitality obscure it at first view, Shkodër has considerable social challenges, including high youth unemployment and limited career and educational opportunities for its people. In 2015, just out of the city center, the Arka youth center was founded to help the young people of Shkodër deal with these challenges. It does so, as youth centers tend to do, by offering them social relationships, workshops, and volunteer opportunities. There are movie nights with regional films, which attract a full house. There is a recording studio that broadcasts radio. The shelves on the walls are packed with bestsellers in Albanian, Italian, and Turkish. The center is starting an innovation lab (the sign is already on a door) and a business incubator for aspiring entrepreneurs. Importantly, and somewhat unexpectedly, the Arka youth center is starting a museum-quality gallery space, complete with lightning design and rooms named after local heroes. They do so because the people of the Arka youth center believe that one of the best ways to have a positive social impact is by fostering the cultural and creative skills of young people and by creating a cultural heritage destination that aims not only at tourists, but directly impacts the local community.

The Arka youth center is a typical example of a new kind of institution, which I see popping up all over the world. Unlike traditional cultural heritage institutions, this new kind of organization is primarily defined not by a collection or a mission, but by the relationship with its audience and the impact it aims to have in its community through culture, heritage, and the arts. The volunteers and staff of the Arka youth center believe their gallery space will help them in fostering creative entrepreneurship, innovation, and the education of their community. Like everything else they do, they take their gallery seriously; they aim to create a cultural destination that will compete with Shkodër’s existing cultural infrastructure. I believe this new kind of institution challenges the traditional cultural apparatus, and offers a new and better model for policy-makers and urban planners who want to strengthen communities and the cities they live in.
The Arka youth center is not unique. Triggered by worldwide social and technological changes of the past few decades, one can find examples of this new kind of cultural heritage institution. Sometimes, they evolve from existing ones. On other occasions, they develop independently to fill a social need that the existing cultural infrastructure does not address. I call this new kind of institution a “Social Institution,” to emphasize its social activism, the work it does together with its communities, and the social innovation it often strives to achieve. Social institutions will soon start to play an important role in our cities, our lives, and the cultural landscape. I believe they may ultimately replace traditional institutions. To understand why, we need to zoom out and look at the context in which this new kind of institution arises.

In his book *Connectography*, international relations expert Parag Khanna argues that in the past decades, what defines people and places has shifted. Khanna posits we are no longer primarily defined by where we live and the country we belong to, but by the connections we have with others around the world. Museum and heritage professionals in Manhattan may have more in common with and be better connected to their peers in Mumbai and Moscow than with the bankers living next door or a museum director in a small rural town in the Midwest. Using Khanna’s terminology, I suggest three concepts underlying the new kind of cultural institution mentioned in the introduction: Cities, Creative Communities, and Complex Challenges.

Urban life has become the norm. More than half of the world’s population lives in cities. In Europe and North America, this number is even higher; about three quarters of the population live in a city.

As a city grows, its potential increases as well. According to physicist Geoffrey West, who has done extensive research into the dynamics of large-scale human organizations, if a city grows larger, the amount of anything and everything it has grows disproportionally: wealth, job opportunities, ideas, crime. People even walk faster in larger cities.1

Cities have more cultural infrastructure and more museums. My hometown of Amsterdam has more than 100 museums, not counting the many small neighborhood museums that have sprung up in recent years. London has at least 300 and Moscow at least 562. In 2011 I met a woman from Washington, D.C., who wanted to visit a different museum in her city every day of the year. I don’t know if she succeeded, but it is mind-blowing that such a thing is even possible.

Urban life is also good life. According to the European Commission, “The quality of urban life in the EU is considered to be crucial for attracting and retaining a skilled labour force, businesses, students, and tourists.” Cities are sometimes more successful than the countries they exist in, and better connected to the rest of the world. At the same time, cities have their own unique challenges, including ones that threaten their future, such as terrorism, climate change, and growing inequality and poverty.2

Cities are home to creative communities. A creative community is a group of people who come together regularly (physically or digitally) to develop new ideas around a shared objective, interest, or set of values. John M. Eger mentions creative communities often link culture, arts, and entrepreneurship to meet real challenges in our society. Creative communities are not a new concept, but easy connectivity, digital tools, and disproportional growth of ideas in cities have made them much more diverse and omnipresent. It takes me less time and effort to set up a Skype call with museum professionals from all over the world to discuss a new project than to get the people living in my inner-city apartment block together for drinks. Younger generations are digital natives, and using the opportunities these tools offer is innate. Whether it’s using Instagram to advocate a social cause, organizing a large group of people over WhatsApp, or going to Kickstarter to fund an idea, these things are neither strange nor impossible to most creative communities.3

Some creative communities exist exclusively on YouTube or Snapchat, where they focus energy on creating memes and, in the case of some vloggers, money. Other creative communities, however, focus on having social impact on real challenges. The 2014 *Trendswatch* report from the Center for the Future of Museums showed how social impact is becoming the cornerstone of all business, and how this is threatening traditional cultural heritage institutions. “What if for-profit businesses become effective competitors in delivery of traditional museum missions?” the report asks. I believe it is not only for-profit business we have to worry about, but also creative communities who use their relationships, digital tools, and ideas to have social impact on real challenges, including those that museums traditionally aspire to address in their missions, such as safeguarding, promoting, and marketing cultural heritage.4
In 2015 a creative community in the small city of Utrecht in the heart of the Netherlands decided it had a personal responsibility toward the challenge posed by the current wave of refugees coming to Europe (especially from Syria). Rather than waiting for the local or national government to take action, they took to Facebook and used digital skills to raise the money for a restaurant, workshop, and cultural center aimed at making connections between refugees and host communities. Quickly, they raised more than €160,000 through crowdfunding. Their initiative opened in June 2016 under the name Restaurant Syr and aims to play an important role in the cultural landscape of Utrecht, where currently there are very few museums and other institutions that work actively with their communities to achieve social impact.

Similarly, in the tiny Italian community of Gualtieri (population: 6,500), a group of concerned citizens has worked for over a decade on the redevelopment of their Teatro Sociale. This theater never reopened after it had been closed for refurbishing by the local government decades earlier. Without waiting for the local authority’s permission and using its own resources, each year the creative community renovated parts of the theater and used it as a space for performances and meetings. Since 2011, the work of the volunteers has been valued in the area of €180,000, against the municipality’s €20,000 financial contribution (which finally became interested in participating in this effort). Not only did community members create a space to meet, work, and create art, they also renovated unique built heritage without anyone instructing them to do so.¹

The Bilbao effect has seen cities around the world scrambling to copy this success, with mixed and ever-worse results. What has happened since 1997 is that after the starchitect is paid, the impressive cultural project does not always leave something over (other than a maintenance bill and the need to program a place). The Bilbao effect also sees museums as an indirect tool for social innovation, through job creation and tourism revenues, rather than the direct tool for social impact they can be. Third, as Robert Bevan writes, “Concerns are being raised about imposing buildings that ignore the urban contexts in which they are built, fail to make any concessions to the human scale, and serve only as three-dimensional branding for their creators.” A shiny new building does not necessarily help communities. New insights even place doubt on the assumption the Bilbao effect had anything to do with the Guggenheim at all.²

I would like to argue that the Bilbao effect is very much like floppy disks and the dial-up modem: great for the 1990s but a bit outdated in the 2010s. A world in which creative communities work on social impact independently of the cultural infrastructure at hand needs cultural projects that do more than leave something over. Urban planners should no longer look at Bilbao to shape their policies and address challenges. They are better off looking in a completely different direction.

One place to look is the Rostov in the Russian Federation. As part of the Golden Circle of Russia, the Rostov Kremlin has about the brand recognition to a Russian person as the Guggenheim has to someone from the Western world. The monasteries and churches in this small town (population: 31,000) in the west of the country attract about 200,000 tourists each year, but lost their connection with the local population that saw these institutions as rich and aloof. Last year in Moscow I spoke with the director, and she explained that reconnecting with the local population was one of her prime objectives for keeping the Rostov Kremlin sustainable. To rebuild the relationship between institution and local community, she organized special nights for the local community where people could learn about and discover the collection, which consists of icons, oil paintings, porcelain, archeological findings, and more, in an unprecedented way. She organized courses on Sunday afternoons taught by the museum’s employees and a program to train local people to be tour guides. Instead of a distant fortress, the Rostov Kremlin slowly became a locally relevant, accessible institution, and also a source of income.
new relationships, and education in the community. This transformation also benefitted the visiting tourists, who are now welcomed by a friendly, supportive local population. Instead of being focused on its collection and architecture, the Rostov Kremlin is transitioning to a focus on its community and the social impact it can achieve together with them.

The potential for cultural heritage institutions to have social impact (the Rostov effect?) has been acknowledged by the United Kingdom’s Museum Association’s 2013 publication *Museums Change Lives*, which states, “Active public participation in decision-making changes museums for the better.” In other words, cultural heritage institutions that involve their communities meaningfully can impact their communities while at the same time strengthening their own institution. Others, like Gail Dexter Lord and Ngaire Blankenberg in their collection of essays *Museum, Cities, and Soft Power* argue that museums are “one of our society’s main adaptive strategies for managing change.” Cultural heritage institutions can play a pivotal role in many of the challenges we face, and to do so, they need to meaningfully involve communities.

**From Cultural Destination to Centers for Social Innovation**

When an initiative aims both to address a socially recognized challenge and to strengthen creative communities, it engages in social innovation. Social innovations are those that are both good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act. They do so by creating new social relationships and collaborations. Social innovation is a process in which communities work together with other stakeholders to achieve their objectives. Not entirely unsurprisingly, social innovation is a buzzword in civil society organizations, bureaucracies, and government, but it is also relevant to cultural heritage institutions. In *Design When Everybody Designs*, Ezio Manzini explicitly mentions heritage as an ingredient of the social innovation process. This process is “a creative recombination of existing assets (from social capital to historical heritage, from traditional craftsmanship to accessible advanced technology), which aim to achieve socially recognized goals in a new way.”

Museums and other cultural heritage institutions are ideal centers for such social innovation processes. Our collections, spaces, employees, and stories are powerful existing assets. Through our exhibitions, research, and educational activities, we are accustomed to combining our assets in new, creative ways. Where we could do much better is in actively aiming for social impact, and in building the social relationships and collaborations that strengthen our communities.

This focus on social innovation processes is not in opposition to the role cultural heritage institutions should play in society. It is an enrichment of what we do, and will ensure that our institutions remain relevant in a time of cities, creative communities, and real challenges.

An example of such a social innovation initiative is MuseoMix. Started in France by a collective of museum professionals, MuseoMix now organizes a series of creative museum remixes in Europe, Canada, and Mexico. A MuseoMix starts from a specific question in a museum—for instance, how the stories related to objects on display can be better told. Next, the museum and the organization invite local makers, tinkerers, and designers from the community of the museum for a weekend-long event in which they are asked to solve the question. Following a semi-structured approach that relies heavily on the creativity of the participants and their willingness to share and work together, teams build prototypes of their solutions. On the concluding Sunday, actual museum visitors test these prototypes.

MuseoMix is a startup bootcamp for museum interventions. In 2015, I participated in a MuseoMix at the Musée National du Sport in Nice, France. I was amazed by the quality and applicability of the solutions, as well as the speed at which a community of creatives can turn cardboard, off-the-shelf sensors, and Photoshop into new ideas for a museum. Also, I was impressed by the impact of the weekend on the museum: individual employees of the museum were required to go far beyond their job descriptions. They opened and reimagined display cases and remade their chain of command. As fun as it is, MuseoMix is also a crash course in social innovation for cultural heritage institutions.

The potential of engaging in social innovation processes is proven by the case of the Derby Silk Mill in Derby (popula-
The communities were given a leading role in this process. The Derby Silk Mill provided the location and facilitated the process, but the community had to bring in its energy, knowledge, and network to make ideas happen. Whether it was a conference or concert, without community involvement it did not happen. Through this social innovation process, the Derby Silk Mill not only managed to redefine its role in the city but, more importantly, built sustainable relationships with communities and achieved things none of the participants involved could have accomplished individually. The transformation process and its social impact were recently rewarded with multimillions in funding by the U.K. National Lottery Fund.

Both MuseoMix and the Derby Silk Mill are case studies in the Creative Museum Project, in which various cultural heritage institutions in Europe investigate the relationship between museums and creative communities, and the processes needed to have social impact with this relationship. The results of this project will be published and presented over the coming years, but a first review of the case studies indicates that cultural heritage institutions that are successful in connecting with communities and have real social impact with the participants involved could have accomplished individually. The transformation process and its social impact were recently rewarded with multimillions in funding by the U.K. National Lottery Fund.

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These case studies and the context of cities, creative communities, and complex challenges that trigger them contain a warning and an opportunity. The warning is that if you fail to build relationships with communities and work with them on relevant challenges, one day a group of creative people will start their own initiative to do so. Like the Arka youth center, Restaurant Syr, and the Teatro Sociale of Guatieri, these initiatives may very well use culture, heritage, and the arts in their social innovation processes, and become a competitor with stronger community ties. The opportunity is that lacking such competitors, cultural heritage institutions are a near-ideal starting point for social innovation processes.

With governments all over the world stepping back on financial involvement in cultural heritage, becoming such a new social institution offers a clear advantage in the quest for visitors, funding, and impact. Traditional cultural heritage institutions can embrace this opportunity by defining the social impact they want to have (if a mission statement hasn’t done so already) and by working with the communities they are part of, much like the Rostov Kremlin and the Derby Silk Mill have done. This is a process, and it may take years for an institution to make the transformation, but it will help all of us give culture, heritage, and the arts an undeniable place in our cities, communities, and the structure of our future societies.

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¹² Eurostat, “Quality of Life by Degree of Urbanisation,” European Union, March 2015.
¹³ See John M. Eger, The Creative Community: Forging the Links Between Art, Culture Commerce, & Community, California Institute for Smart Communities (San Diego: San Diego State University, 2003), 4.
¹⁹ MuseoMix happens each year in November and can be joined by anyone who is interested in the process. For more information: www.museomix.org.
²⁰ See Creative Museum Project, creative-museum.net. The social innovator Kennisland, a national nonprofit thinktank in the Netherlands, has identified in its work with communities on social impact: multidisciplinary teams, open, facilitation, stories, action-driven, starting from people, visible. See “Lab Practice: Creating Spaces for Social Change,” go.aaslh.org/LabPractice.