

Dr Lee Davidson, Leticia Pérez-Castellanos

Cosmopolitan Ambassadors

International exhibitions, cultural diplomacy and the polycentral museum

SERIES IN CURATING AND INTERPRETING CULTURE

Summary

How are museums working internationally through exhibitions? What motivates this work? What are the benefits and challenges? What factors contribute to success? What impact does this work have for audiences and other stakeholders? What contributions are they making to cultural diplomacy, intercultural dialogue and understanding? *Cosmopolitan Ambassadors* first considers the current state of knowledge about international exhibitions and proposes an interdisciplinary analytical framework encompassing museum studies, visitor studies, cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations, cosmopolitanism and intercultural studies. It then presents a comprehensive empirical analysis of an exhibition exchange involving two exhibitions that crossed five countries and three continents, connecting six high profile cultural institutions and spanning almost a decade from initial conception to completion. A detailed comparison of both the intercultural production of international exhibitions by museum partnerships and by the interpretive acts and meaning-making of visitors, reveals the many complexities, challenges, tensions and rewards of international exhibitions and their intersection with cultural diplomacy. Key themes include the realities of international collaboration, its purposes, processes and challenges; the politics of cultural (self-)representation and Indigenous museology; implications for exhibition design, interpretation, and marketing; intercultural competency and museum practice; audience reception and meaning-making; cultural diplomacy in practice and perceptions of its value. This first-ever empirically-grounded, theoretical analysis provides the basis of a new model of museums as polycentral: as places that might produce a kaleidoscopic vision of multiple centres

and help to dissolve cultural boundaries by encouraging dialogue, negotiation and the search for intercultural understandings. Guidelines for practice include recommendations for successful international museum partnerships, exhibition development and maximizing the potential of museum diplomacy.



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International Exhibitions, Cultural Diplomacy and the Polycentral Museum

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About the author

Dr Lee Davidson is a Senior Lecturer in Museum & Heritage Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, where she specialises in visitor studies, international exhibitions, natural heritage and heritage tourism. Her interdisciplinary research has been published in journals such as *Leisure Sciences*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *International Journal of Travel Research* and *Visitor Studies*. She is the co-author of *Serious Leisure and Nature* (with Robert A Stebbins) and has contributed chapters to volumes by major publishers across the fields of museum studies, leisure, tourism and anthropology, including a chapter on visitor studies in the volume *Museum Practice* (published by Wiley-Blackwell in 2015).

Leticia Pérez-Castellanos is a professor at the Escuela Nacional de Conservación, Restauración y Museografía del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) in Mexico, where she previously coordinated the Post Graduate Studies Program in Museology and obtained her Master's Degree. Her focus is on visitor studies and international exhibitions. She was the Coordinator of Visitor Studies at the Interactive Museum of Economy (MIDE) in Mexico City, before becoming Deputy Director of International Exhibitions at INAH. She collaborated with the Ibermuseos Program in the implementation of the Observatorio Iberoamericano de Museos and more recently has taught in several programs in Spain, Brazil, Guatemala, and Chile, at academic and government levels. She is a key actor in strengthening the visitor studies field in Latin America, encouraging professionalization and publications in Spanish including the series *Estudios sobre públicos y museos*, which she coordinates.

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