Collecting Contemporary Home Life

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Acknowledgements

I was riding my bike when the Dutch Research Council called to say that I’d been awarded a Museum Grant for my proposal on Collecting Suburbia. Doing a PhD was a long-cherished wish, the subject of home life had been on my schedule for a while and the planned four years seemed like a blissful eternity. In fact, out of sheer joy, I accidentally cycled through a red light!

It was Paul van de Laar, the then director of Museum Rotterdam and an endowed Professor of Urban Studies, who first encouraged me to conduct scientific research. I’m grateful for both this opportunity and his trust. Paul remained attached to the project as my first supervisor throughout the process. I likewise consider myself to be fortunate that Hester Dibbits was also willing to use her knowledge and experience of museums, material culture, and heritage and become my second supervisor. Many thanks for the lively discussions, your wholehearted encouragement and constant insistence that I must always keep an eye on the big picture.

Back then, our new museum had just opened and, as is often the case with fresh presentations in brand-new buildings, several changes had to be made. There was also a lot of work to catch up on. I would have completely understood if my colleagues were less than enthusiastic about my news, but they actually seemed genuinely happy for me. Accordingly, thanks must go to my colleagues from Museum Rotterdam. You took over part of my day job without complaint, occasionally enquiring about my progress while simultaneously maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

The four years flew by. On Fridays, I was able to work in Maria Grever’s room. Now and then, I also took the opportunity to have lunch and catch up with my fellow PhD candidates. I learned a lot from them about the ins and outs of the faculty. To everyone I shared the lunch table with: thank you. I’m also grateful to Maria, who made me feel welcome in the history department.

I participated with great enthusiasm in several of the thorough courses organised by the Erasmus Graduate School. These gave me, a ‘returnee’ to academia, a detailed update concerning the latest methods and techniques. I also enjoyed the contact I had with my peers in the broad field of Social Sciences and Humanities. The variety of subjects you offered gave me a kaleidoscopic view of current research; your input, whether hesitant or full of confidence, made participating in each course a great experience.

Particularly important were the people I interviewed for the case studies: Biba Mijailovic-Pavic and Tamara Schouwenaars from IKEA, Henry Draijer and Ferdy Rijs from Homestudios, Jeroen Atteveld and Jurriaan van Gent from the funda House. Not only were they very generous with their time during the in-depth interviews, but they also kindly answered follow-up questions and sent images of their evocative ensembles. Thank you very much for the inspiring conversations we had when discussing your home and interior ensembles from the somewhat surprising (to them) museum perspective!

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an in-person, planned expert meeting could not, unfortunately, take place, but was instead rescheduled for a later date and took place online. Many thanks to Sophie Elpers, who led the online discussion so well. I’m also grateful for the input, open questions, careful considerations and cordial support of Thijs Boers (Amsterdam Museum), Marjonke Kube (Museum De Voorde), Tessa Luger (Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency), Tim Smeets (Dutch Open-Air Museum), Nancy van Asseldonk (Reinwardt Academy), Merel van der Vaart (Stedelijk Museum Schiedam), Nicole van Dijk (Museum Rotterdam) and Els Veraverbeke (Huis van Alijn). Thanks also to Irene Cieraad, who was sadly unable to attend the rescheduled meeting, but nevertheless shared her thoughts with me via a comprehensive email. An extra thank you goes to Tessa, to whom I spoke a further time about designing a model or strategy. Somewhat in addition to this series, but no less inspiring, was my meeting with Neele Kistenmaker at Muzus in Delft, where we discussed the use of images of their evocative ensembles. Thank you also kindly answered follow-up questions and sent images of their evocative ensembles. Thank you also kindly answered follow-up questions and sent images of their evocative ensembles. Thank you.

The COVID-19 pandemic meant that the days, weeks and months converged. This gave me plenty of opportunity to work hard without distractions, but the contact with others became more two-dimensional and it proved difficult to unwind. Never before have I missed my fellow amateur musicians so much: to my friends at the Rotterdam Symphonic Wind Orchestra, our summer sextet The Six Provinces, the double reed ensemble Flux and the bassoon quartet Pogottesk - you are all so important to me when it comes to letting off steam and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

My father was shocked to learn that I’d written this dissertation in English. I was born with his love for Dutch. I continue to cherish that love, despite this trip into another language – also beautiful and, most importantly, more generally understood.

Finally, a huge thank you to my dearest Joost. Not so much because you monopolised the desk chair when we had to work from home, nor because you still use the ironing board as part of your workstation; even less because we had to be considerate during online meetings. Suddenly we were colleagues in our own home-office, which required the necessary flexibility from both of us. Yet without your care, your unconditional support and your indestructible optimism, this adventure would undoubtedly not have been half as much fun!
Contents

Introduction 14

PART 1 Theory 23

CHAPTER 1 Contemporary Collecting 25

1.1 Defining Contemporary Collecting 27
1.2 Purposes of Contemporary Collecting 33
1.3 Practices in Contemporary Collecting 35
1.4 Starting Points and Key Issues 43

CHAPTER 2 Home Life in Museums: The Period Room 45

2.1 Defining the Period Room 47
2.2 Histories of the Period Room 52
2.3 Valuation of the Period Room 58
2.4 The Period Room as a Model for Contemporary Collecting 63

PART 2 Comparative Case Study 69

Introduction to the Comparative Case Study 70

CHAPTER 3 IKEA’s Room Settings 79

3.1 Room Settings as Contemporary Period Rooms 80
3.2 A Series of Possible Worlds to Inhabit 84
3.3 Themes 94

THEME 1 Home frustrations 95
THEME 2 Swedishness 103
THEME 3 Inspirational images, functional solutions 107
THEME 4 Animated by life 115

CHAPTER 4 BAM’s Homestudios 123

4.1 A Collection of Future Homes 124
4.2 Experiencing a House Before It Is Built 126
4.3 Themes 142

THEME 1 Customer orientation 143
THEME 2 Eleven fictive households 145
THEME 3 Individuality and conformity 150
THEME 4 Experience, feel and dream 156

CHAPTER 5 The funda House 165

5.1 A Single House Co-Created with Millions of Visitors 166
5.2 A House Built of Data and Dreams 168
5.3 Themes 176

THEME 1 Big data as a bottom-up approach 177
THEME 2 Interpretation, expertise and subjectivity 182
THEME 3 Intertwining material and digital culture 184
THEME 4 The funda House as an evocative ensemble 187

PART 3 Strategy 195

CHAPTER 6 Collecting Contemporary Home Life 197

6.1 The Collection 199
6.2 Collecting 204
6.3 Reflecting 207
6.4 Representing 211
6.5 Connecting 216

Conclusion & Discussion 220

Summary 228
Samenvatting 232
Sources and Literature 236
About the author 250
Portfolio 250

PART 4 Reflecting 231

Contents
Introduction

Cultural-history museums have a rich tradition when it comes to home life. Their collections include interior ensembles and single pieces of designer furniture, architectural models and dolls’ houses, household tools for daily use and even banners protesting against rent increases. Although collections already in existence are regularly developed, updated and expanded with new heritage, there is little explicit or theoretical focus on the collecting of contemporary home life. This is remarkable, given that ‘home’ plays a key role in various scientific disciplines. Indeed, whether it be sociology, cultural anthropology, cultural or material-culture studies, social geography or design – they all specialise in the field of living. In Making Homes (2017), Sarah Pink et al. describe the importance of the home as follows: ‘Home is where we experience significant moments of our lives and celebrate the rituals that punctuate the cycles and rhythms of our social worlds. It is also, importantly, where the intimate and mundane aspects of our lives are lived out. It is the site of those activities that people do not tell others about, perhaps because they are private, because they do not think that they are worth mentioning or because they feel too painful to recount. Yet it is precisely how we habitually live our lives (...) that contributes to the key societal issues that social scientists and designers alike seek to confront.’

Collecting Home Life

One of the few examples where collection strategies for contemporary home life are the explicit subject-matter is Harriet Purkis’ Collecting Home Life in Different Contexts (2014). This is a chapter in a book on contemporary collecting in cultural-history museums. Purkis compares the ethnographic approach of the museums within the Home Pool of the former Swedish SAMDOK network to other perspectives. She first analyses how Swedish museums shifted their focus over three consecutive decades (roughly 1980-2020) from the everyday interiors of the average family to those of a variety of living cultures, and from objects to more intangible elements like consumption, identity and private space. She then compares examples from everyday life studies and material-culture research, demonstrating that expressions of direct relationships between homes and people’s identities, or between things in the home and people’s autobiographies, are inadequate in current collections. As Purkis concludes, museums should be in other museological disciplines to better relate those intangible elements of living to the material culture of the home.

Elin Nystrand von Unge also describes a project run by SAMDOK’s Home Pool in the context of contemporary collecting. In contrast to Purkis, Von Unge did not adopt a diachronic approach, but instead provides a detailed description of an early single project from 1979, including with images that show both the objects collected and the method of collecting. This collecting project is characterised as “a scattered whole”, which refers to the multitude of objects and the variety of “translations”; i.e., the inventory lists, photographs, floor plans and other materials. Unlike SAMDOK’s other projects at that time, the focus here was on the acquisition of objects, although Von Unge asserts that, in retrospect, the multitude of translations must be viewed as its most distinguishing feature. The extensive descriptions and photographs, she states, were intended to be “tools for understanding how it all fact became objects in and of themselves.”

In 2000, inspired by the early strategy of the SAMDOK Home Pool, the Detmold Open-Air Museum set out to collect a representative sample of six children’s rooms in Westfalen, Germany. Like the early ethnographic method, the focus was on selecting the participants. Its collection now comprises the totality of the objects obtained for each of the six rooms. For documentary purposes, the museum also conducted interviews and sourced floor plans and other materials. Unlike SAMDOK, however, the Detmold Open-Air Museum defined its own pragmatic framework. Seemingly relieved, the catalogue states that the collecting process did not have to take the views or conventions of any collaborative partners into account.

Contemporary Collecting

Although the Swedish Home Pool inspired the Detmold Open-Air Museum, and possibly also many others, the cooperative model that it once proposed as a joint approach to contemporary collecting has rarely been imitated. In Museum in a Troubled World (2009), Robert R. Janes suspects that the degree of collaboration required is simply too daunting for many individually oriented Western museums. My own view is that the necessary long-term commitment required and the heterogeneity of collections also play a part in this. Nevertheless, the growing uniformity of Dutch cities and the recurring plea to regard the Netherlands as one metropolis, as well as the increasing demands that museums should be in other museological disciplines to better relate those intangible elements of living to the material culture of the home.

The Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency advises on national monuments and valuable interiors at a national level, but this mainly involves historic interiors under threat. The agency’s criteria include unity, completeness, style purity, rarity and historical importance, and thus concern retrospective and art-historic perspectives. These criteria are not, however, particularly helpful in relation to the choice of contemporary objects from a social-historic perspective. Current discussions about collecting contemporary culture narratives described above could lead to the development by the country’s city museums of a joint perspective on the creation of an overarching collection of urban living culture. The Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency advises on national monuments and valuable interiors at a national level, but this mainly involves historic interiors under threat. The agency’s criteria include unity, completeness, style purity, rarity and historical importance, and thus concern retrospective and art-historic perspectives. These criteria are not, however, particularly helpful in relation to the choice of contemporary objects from a social-historic perspective. Current discussions about collecting contemporary culture narratives described above could lead to the development by the country’s city museums of a joint perspective on the creation of an overarching collection of urban living culture.

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on both the collections and methods of working at Museum Rotterdam. Some readers will easily recognise elements, while for others questions may arise. I regard this as a positive. Indeed, it is my hope that this dissertation will contribute to a more in-depth debate about collecting contemporary home life in cultural-history museums. At the same time, I would like to help museum professionals to develop a sound collecting strategy and perhaps even explore mutual cooperation in the field. At a more theoretical level, with my findings my empirical research will examine three and estate agents try to seduce potential buyers the museum, furniture stores, construction firms home life. This is remarkable given that, outside discussed in relation to collecting contemporary ensembles’, ‘immersive settings’ or ‘scenography’. Accordingly, the main research question of this dissertation is: What insights into the museological collecting of contemporary home life can be acquired from the ideas and practices identified in the study’s three cases?

**Overview**

There are three parts to this dissertation: the Theory, the Comparative Case Study and the Strategy. The first of these examines the two concepts underlying my research, i.e., contemporary collecting and the collecting of home life by museums.

Chapter 1 aims to establish starting points and identify important issues in contemporary collecting. As the topic is typically discussed at a higher level of abstraction and unrelated to domestic interiors, they often involve artists’ temporary installations or smaller assemblages in exhibitions, with the historically charged term ‘period room’ carefully avoided and reference instead made to ‘evocative ensembles’, ‘immersive settings’ or ‘scenography’.

Although the period room is an eminently museological way of contextualising objects in an immersive setting, the concept has never been discussed in relation to collecting contemporary home life. This is remarkable given that, outside the museum, furniture stores, construction firms and estate agents try to seduce potential buyers using modern period-room-like displays. Consequently, my empirical research will examine three cases where commercial companies construct such contemporary domestic interiors:

- **IKEA’s room settings**: the staged home interiors of world’s largest furniture retailer.
- **BAM’s Homestudios**: a limited collection of yet to be built houses, both exteriors and interiors, by the Dutch construction firm BAM.
- **The funda House**: a big-data dwelling created by combining information on actual purchases and web searches on funda.nl, the largest property website in the Netherlands.

These three cases reflect collections that differ in size, scope and materiality. Nevertheless, despite their differences, all the cases are representations of contemporary home life and are studied as a series of modern domestic ensembles that echo the concept of a period room. As an instructive comparative case study, the cross-case comparison aims to uncover successful strategies for collecting contemporary home life that can be used by social-history museums into the future.

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**Evocative Ensembles**

In my search for a strategy for collecting contemporary home life, my focus is on what is probably the most debated and most reviled museum tradition in relation to home interiors: the period room. Originating in the 1870s, these constructed home interiors soon became emblematic in presentations of both decorative arts and social history. Recent examples show a renewed interest in contextual displays, either as stylish artistic interiors or socio-historical depictions of everyday life. They often involve artists’ temporary installations or smaller assemblages in exhibitions, with the historically charged term ‘period room’ carefully avoided and reference instead made to ‘evocative ensembles’, ‘immersive settings’ or ‘scenography’.

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These three cases reflect collections that differ in size, scope and materiality. Nevertheless, the framework built to evaluate the cases and the selection of the cases themselves.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 then provide in-depth descriptions of the cases selected to replicate the museological way of contextualising objects: a period room: IKEA’s room settings, BAM’s Homestudios and the funda House. Each chapter has a similar structure. After a brief introduction, the methods and underlying ideas behind the ensemble(s) are presented from the company’s point of view, thus situating the staged home interior squarely in its original context. Next, the within-case thematic analysis highlights four case-specific themes that relate the case to museum collecting. Where the body of the case description contains relatively uncontested data, the themes are directed towards encouraging debate, i.e., they explore the issues from a museum curator’s perspective, aiming to understand the collecting of contemporary home life in a museum context.

In the third and final part of the book, the insights gained are used to build a strategy for museums in their collecting of contemporary home life and the findings made are discussed on a higher level.

Chapter 6 sets out to synthesise the within-case findings on a higher level of abstraction. Structured around the five wider, overarching themes of the previously established framework, the cross-case thematic analysis examines both replicative and divergent findings. In particular, it compares previous within-case outcomes, discusses differences and similarities and develops preliminary insights further. Each section concludes with a synthesis containing several recommendations regarding the collection of contemporary home life by city museums.

The final chapter organises the insights gained, thus initiating a strategy for a proactive contemporary collecting policy. Distinguishing between a number of levels and steps, it particularly highlights elements that merit further debate. Consequently, the Conclusion & Discussion should not be seen as a final piece, but as a starting point for additional conversations and, hopefully, closer cooperation in this field.

Throughout the book, examples from Museum Rotterdam are laid out differently. Arranged in order of acquisition and described in a number of keywords, they depict fragments of the museum’s cultural-historical collection relating to domestic interiors and home life. The illustrations visualise the museological paradigm that inspired my research and which, in fact, forms the fourth case in the dissertation. The choice of examples is, however, a personal one, and my fellow curators might well have presented a different series.
The double-box bed from the hunting lodge of Count Van Egmond, built between 1600 and 1610, was saved from demolition.
Wooden chair from the study of poet Hendrik Tollens (Rotterdam 1780-Rijswijk 1856).
The coronavirus pandemic in 2020 led many to feel they were participating in a historic event. Globally, cultural institutions of all kinds began to collect a vast array of material, often using social media to call on fellow citizens to get involved in the collection process. Huge numbers of objects were collected in just a few months, including photographs of changed rituals, Facebook posts by people in isolation, testimonies on new services offered by creative entrepreneurs, mandatory signs in the public space and face masks. Like many other institutions, Museum Rotterdam began to collect objects reflecting the suddenly changed life in the city. Motivated by a long-cherished desire to highlight the worlds of present-day homeworkers, one of our initiatives aimed to document what this was actually like in Rotterdam during the first lockdown. A number of blogs, written by the museum’s curators, aimed to encourage participation by providing examples and personalising the institution. Using the hash tag #thuiswerkplek010 (in which 010 references Rotterdam’s area code and ‘thuiswerkplek’ translates as ‘home office’), we invited the city’s inhabitants to capture and post images of their home office on social media, as well as share their experiences of working from home, maintaining contact with colleagues, home schooling and sharing space with family members.
Such a call on fellow citizens to capture everyday life and share their moments of happiness or concern with a museum seems far removed from previous collecting strategies, which have tended to focus on preserving an endangered past and favoured unique or important objects. In 1975, for example, Museum Rotterdam acquired stylish oak dining furniture and accessories from a grand home in the city. These items, which were made by the progressive furniture manufacturer Labor Omnia Vincit and were bought from a Rotterdam art tableau maintained previously acquired Louis Seize, neo-Rococo, neo-Empire and Art Nouveau collections. Home interiors are still acquired and preserved in a similar fashion. In the Netherlands, the Cultural Heritage Agency advises on valuable interiors, which in practice relates mainly to historic examples under threat. The agency’s website describes how it determines whether an interior does, or does not, qualify as cultural heritage, mentioning valuation criteria that include unity, completeness, stylistic purity, craftsmanship, artistry, condition, rarity, historic importance and narrative capacity. Although such criteria may be valid from an art-historic perspective, they are less appropriate for the contemporary collecting now being debated by museums of cultural history.

In current discussions about collecting, the viewpoint is both more ‘common’ and more ‘contemporary’. Indeed, today’s process is not so much about preserving the endangered past as it is about selecting the relevant present, which is no longer exclusively defined in terms of uniqueness, eminence or artistry, but also encompasses the ordinary and the everyday and their wide variety. It is important to note that most of the debate on contemporary collecting takes place at a higher level of abstraction, which is unrelated to home interiors or any specific area of interest. As a consequence, the rest of this chapter sets aside the domain of home life, instead turning the gaze to collecting the present on a meta-level. Examined first is what is understood by contemporary collecting and how this relates to collections and collecting in general. Next, the focus shifts to the purposes of contemporary collecting, before collecting practices and the controversies underlying relevant debates are addressed. It will be demonstrated that, although contemporary collecting by museums is now considered to be a key task, collecting practices, purposes, and even definitions, vary. In so doing, the aims are to establish starting points and identify important issues in contemporary collecting.

1.1

Defining Contemporary Collecting

Collections and collecting

Museums, collections and collecting are closely related. In fact, in 1946, the very first definition of a museum by the International Committee of Museums (ICOM) equated the institution to a collection. This definition has been revised repeatedly since then and is currently being reviewed again, although collections are still at its heart. Indeed, according to this international standard, acquisition, conservation, research, communication and presentation are considered to be core tasks, and all of them are applicable to collections. Although collections are fundamental to a museum, ideas on what they might include have changed over time. While a collection originally related exclusively to material culture, whether artefacts or specimens, today it could equally comprise aspects of an intangible cultural heritage. This marriage is not without its issues. Some argue that material objects are what is special about museums. Steven Lubar, for example, is clear in Inside the Lost Museum (2017) that museums need objects to provide evidence and tell a bigger story, with these objects being their distinguishing feature. In The Return to Curiosity (2016), Nicolas Thomas also considers material things to be at the core of a museum’s purpose. Thomas elaborates on the dual nature of objects, which combine physical immediacy with “significant ambiguity”, with the latter referring to the multiple meanings and types of knowledge that

1. The objects included in this ensemble were registered separately (documentation stored with the inventory number 31520). Additional information includes a separate entry in the accessions register on 15 May 1975. The results of the assessment of value are recorded in the museum’s database. The accompanying memo was written by curator Liesbeth van der Zeeuw in 2008 and revised in August 2018 as part of a statement justifying a deaccessioning proposal. Website https://www.cultureel-erfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/interieurs/waarderen-en-in-stand-houden-van-interieurs (last viewed 25 January, 2021).
2. Lubar 2017: 14-16.
objects can contain. "Material culture, in the museum setting, can be rich and suggestive", he writes, "but is also, paradoxically, unprescriptivethe stimulant and enables the imagination." Others have echoed this sentiment. Laurajane Smith’s adage that "all heritage is intangible" (2011), in *Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2020), for instance, Marc Jacobs argues that heritage is not about things, and warns against those who see intangible values as mere byproducts of monuments, objects or locations. Nevertheless, the safeguarding of material culture may be necessary. Jacobs concludes, not for its own sake, but to express the living, intangible heritage.\(^5\)

Materiality will be a recurring theme in this dissertation, but is not the only element highlighted in the concept of a collection. Indeed, it is also subject to critical engagement. A Companion to *Museum Studies* (2010) defines the concept of a collection as a set of material or intangible objects which have been assembled, selected, classified and preserved in a safe setting. Moreover, contextualisation has been pinpointed as the decisive break from traditional museology, giving its clarification that the meaning of objects is not static or inherent, but has to be understood as situated and contextual.\(^14\)

Visitor-orientation has also been recognised as an important driver behind museums’ growing interest in the present. As Elpers and Palm explain, the turn towards a more public-oriented museology, funding meant that museums had to attract more visitors. They therefore attempted to entice new and bigger crowds by connecting with contemporary topical issues. At a later stage, from the 1990s onwards, museums began to view the experiences of diverse audiences as reference points – first in relation to exhibitions and then also in terms of participation. The shift towards the notion of a public-oriented museum has led to greater engagement with people and coincided with a gradual move away from objects.\(^10\) Visitors were assigned different roles in this process. Akker & Legêne have summarised how the perception of them changed: from passive observers to users, i.e., people interacting with objects, and then to participants, namely people involved in the construction of meaning.\(^37\) This process has become even more apparent since museums engaged with intangible heritage in the 2000s. Although the concept of intangible cultural heritage does not dismiss material objects, its primary challenge is the celebration of the immaterial elements.\(^9\) It is living and is, by definition, situated in the present.\(^10\)

Finally, I propose a fourth development that places the institution even more in the here and now: activism. Recent publications highlight the soft power of cultural heritage and suggest that museums should be relevant to the communities they serve. While this kind of critical engagement was met with scepticism only a decade ago, attitudes are now slowly changing, as Robert Janes and Richard Sandell write in their preface to *Museum Activism* (2019): museums are showing an increasing willingness to take responsibility as "knowledge-based, social institutions."\(^19\) Such an overt strive for societal change certainly underlies the 2019 proposal for a new ICOM definition. Developed in discussions with numerous national and thematic committees, the revised definition concludes that museums intend "to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing." This idealist proposal is, however, controversial, and the vote on whether it will be accepted, scheduled for the Extraordinary General Assembly in Kyoto 2019, has been postponed. Meanwhile, the museological concept of cultural history, societal change is an underlying aim of contemporary collecting practices, as Elin Nystrand von Uenge asserts in her recent study *Samla samtid* (2019). Von Uenge argues that participatory collecting is conducted performatively, and since such practices require instant communication via social media, it is difficult to claim a presence in the public space. In short: museums need "to be present in the present."\(^20\)

The present and contemporary collecting

Democratisation, contextualisation, visitor orientation and activism have led to a growing interest in objects that can be regarded as important drivers of contemporary collecting. Yet how is the present understood? Furthermore, how can contemporary collecting be defined and what makes it different from collecting in general? As previous studies lack a common definition, it is vital to consider the meaning of contemporary within the concept of contemporary collecting. As far back as 1980, *SAMDOK* proposed distinguishing between the present and the contemporary, defining both terms as follows:

\(^4\) Thomas 2016: 49-53; quote from page 53.
\(^5\) Jacobs 2020: 47-49.
\(^7\) Macdonald 2011: 82.
\(^10\) Elpers & Palm 2014: 15-17.
\(^12\) Akker & Legêne 2016: 2-4.
\(^13\) Elpers & Palm 2014: 16.
\(^14\) Macdonald 2011: 2.
\(^15\) Elpers & Palm 2014: 16-17.
\(^16\) Purks 2014: 186.
\(^17\) Van den Akker & Legêne 2016: 8.
\(^19\) Janes & Sandell 2019: [xxvii].
\(^20\) Von Uenge 2019: 236-237, 238.
Previously acquired using an artistic perspective, today’s emphasis is on the coherence of the interior (1731-1733) and Van Belle’s family history.
By present day is meant the period which has a cultural structure largely similar to that of today, i.e., just now the period since about 1950, while contemporary is the present moment and – from the practical aspect – a year or so back in time.\(^{21}\)

These definitions have not, however, been widely adopted. A survey conducted by the UK’s Social History Curators’ Group in 2012 revealed that some respondents used a specific timespan – varying from three to ten years – to define contemporary, while others were less specific.\(^{22}\) An earlier, small-scale survey conducted by Rhys (2014) indicated an even wider time period, with responses ranging from the last five, 20 or 30 years to after WWII and an even broader definition of ‘within living memory’. Rhys himself then defined contemporary as “the current time”, “happening now” or “the immediate past”.\(^{23}\)

This variety is also found in the previously mentioned Die Musealisierung der Gegenwart, in which the authors attempt to define the present. In accordance with, but not referring to, SAMDOK, the introduction argues that cultural-history museums often regard the present as an open-ended period that starts with certain political, economic, social or cultural changes, which depend on the particular museum’s perspective. As a consequence, the present might start with the post-war reconstruction of the 1950s, the mass consumption of the 1960s or the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989.\(^{24}\) A distinction between ‘the present’ and ‘contemporary’ has not, however, been described.

In my view, the essence of contemporary collecting does not benefit from the establishment of temporal boundaries of the present or from distinguishing between ‘the present’ and ‘contemporary’; instead, contemporary collecting can be better understood in terms of the contrast to retrospective collecting, as suggested by Meijer-van Mensch & De Wildt in their contribution to Die Musealisierung der Gegenwart. While the latter implies historical distance in selecting mainly individual and de-contextualised objects, this is lacking in the former, where choices are made without a critical distance from the original context of creation or use.\(^{25}\)

It is precisely the absence of historical distance and the resulting issues with selection and assessing value that characterise the main conceptual challenge of contemporary collecting. The 2012 survey among social-history curators mentioned above expresses this anxiety:

> A common view is that all museum collecting is predicated on the idea that the material acquired has an innate cultural significance or value which justifies the institution bestowing special status on it, and dedicating the necessary resources to document, preserve and, in due course, display and interpret it. Furthermore, it has been assumed that such an assessment of cultural significance is often possible only after a period of time has elapsed and a consensus has formed. As a consequence, contemporary collecting usually means collecting material without this agreement from peers and so is an activity which presents risks (…)\(^{26}\)

As it has already become evident that meaning is contextual rather than inherent, it is improbable that something like “innate cultural significance” exists. Nonetheless, this quotation does suggest that the selection criteria used in retrospective collecting no longer suffice, and that cultural significance has to be assessed in a different way. Moreover, the second part of the quote hints that the selection of objects can be a somewhat objective process if steered by professional, curatorial expertise. It is precisely this conception that has been disputed over recent decades, and curators’ contested authority will feature in Section 1.3 as one of the key issues in debates on contemporary collecting. The next section, however, examines the purposes of contemporary collecting. If it is so difficult, why do museums want to embark on the process?

In defining contemporary collecting and examining the orientation of cultural-history museums towards the present, it is clear that this has largely been driven by the goal of increasing their social relevance and that new criteria are required if they are to achieve this new purpose. This section will argue that this purpose can be viewed on two levels: the development of inclusive collections and, at a later point, how such collections will be used.

**Inclusive collections: diversity & participation**

Although there are many reasons for the contemporary collecting practices of cultural-history museums, their purpose can be traced back to two basic ideas. In the first of these, the motivation is the desired outcome: creating a diverse, multi-faceted collection. In the introduction to Collecting the Contemporary (2014), Owain Rhys and Zelda Baveystock describe the rationale of contemporary collecting as follows:

> Contemporary collecting attempts to rectify past omissions, to give voice to those previously ignored, and to capture a fuller, more nuanced record of society whilst material is abundantly available. It seeks to future-proof the museum for as-yet-unknown exhibitions and research.\(^{27}\)

This goal originated in the desire to produce a more democratic depiction of society. Museums began to pay more attention to daily life around 1970 and, in doing so, both mass and popular culture slowly became part of their presentations and collections. Initially, criteria like ‘ordinary’, ‘common’, ‘typical’ and ‘representative’ were in much use when objects were selected. An analysis by Harriet Purkis (2014) demonstrates that these standards were not only applied to the items documented and collected, but also to the families represented.\(^{28}\) During the 1990s, the need arose to become more inclusive by not simply capturing the lives of ‘ordinary men’, but women, migrants and minorities, and everyone else who was hitherto unrepresented or misrepresented as well. This led to the recognition of issues related to gender, religion, income and other socio-demographic and socio-economic differences. Consequently, there was a shift in focus from the common denominator to cultural diversity. Moreover, recording the visible and tangible was no longer considered to be enough; documenting underlying values became more important in this process of contextualisation. Gradually, the gaze turned away from objects to the intangible and subjective instead, necessitating the inclusion of various social groups.\(^{29}\)

Although Rhys and Baveystock’s goal “to future-proof the museum” seems doomed to fail, contemporary collecting can be seen as a way to encapsulate a wide spectrum of voices in museum collections, acquire different kinds of materials and interpret them from diverse perspectives.

On the other hand, contemporary collecting has not so much been motivated by the result as by the process itself, namely a desire to involve target audiences in the act of collecting. The same handbook on contemporary collecting quoted above also includes an article by Terwey (2014) in which it argued that:

> Contemporary collecting can be seen less as a process for collections development, and more as an activity which places the curator as an agent within contemporary communities and networks, which can bring other benefits to the museum.\(^{30}\)

\(^{21}\) Rosander 1980: 1.

\(^{22}\) Terwey 2014: 71, 78.

\(^{23}\) Rhys 2011/2014: 16. On page 74-75, the author mentions that the questionnaire was sent to the museums listed as members of the Urban Social History Contemporary Collecting Specialist Subject Network. The answers of the seven respondents varied greatly and led to these conclusions. Examples from Elpers & Palm 2014: 9-10.

\(^{24}\) Meijer-van Mensch & De Wildt 2014: 88.

\(^{25}\) Terwey 2014: 79-80.

\(^{26}\) Rhys & Baveystock 2014: 15.

\(^{27}\) Although Purkis’ analysis focuses on the samaxon methods used within the Pool of Home Life, a comparison with Bodil Axelson’s study of 2014 reveals that her findings reflect the developments within samaxon in general. Since changes like democratisation, visitor-orientation and contextualisation clearly resonate in Purkis’ analysis, there is no reason to assume that such purposes and selection criteria are limited to Swedish museums.


\(^{29}\) Terwey 2014: 83.
These “other benefits” are to be found in the ongoing dialogue with the public. They range, according to Terwey, from research through to exhibitions, interpretations, communication, facility management and audience development.31 The desire to involve target audiences has become a major factor in visitor-oriented museums. Indeed, social-history and city museums throughout Europe want to become more relevant as centres of civic dialogue, as junctions and meeting places, or as reference points for urban societies.32 While conferences stress the value of museums as “institutions for empowerment and emancipation”,33 Nina Simon’s The Participatory Museum (2010) has provided the tools with which to actively involve visitors. In museum practice, as well as in museology, participation has thus become a key concept.

Participation was initially centred around educational programmes and exhibitions, but was quickly applied to other aspects of museum practice, particularly in relation to contemporary collecting. In 2011, the first annual meeting of ICOM’s newly-founded Committee for Collecting (COMCOL) was given the title Participative Strategies in Collecting the Present. The proceedings, published in 2013, mentioned the importance of enriching collections: networking and participation.34 While the document focuses on the latter, contemporary collecting as such seems to be treated as a familiar task and remains rather blackboxed. This may be because COMCOL is the international successor to the Swedish museum network SAMOX, and is thus embedded in the discourse on contemporary collecting. Despite this tradition, many of the “participative strategies” presented can be better described as experiments or best practices, since they suggest new possibilities for involving audiences, but lack the long-term planning that is essential to a sound strategy. Moreover, while the publication’s cover mentions “the participative practice of collecting”, the various case studies clearly demonstrate the absence of such a single method.

The motivations mentioned above – participation as a process, diversity as a result – not only underlie contemporary collecting, but must also, in my view, be regarded as two sides of what is nowadays often referred to as inclusivity. It is nevertheless important to note that where the former is essentially concerned with how to collect, the latter gives priority to the issue of what should be collected.

The intended use of collections

Currently, museums not only want to develop inclusive collections, but to also immediately use them (including during the collection process itself). In many cases, this collecting, its benefits were projected for the future: the reason for acquiring everyday objects was to preserve a nuanced representation of present-day life, as reflected in the title of SAMOX’s 1980 publication, Today for tomorrow. However, around 2000, the gaze of contemporary collecting became more focused on understanding, illuminating and, thereby grasping, the present.35 Sharon Macdonald, a professor of anthropology with a particular interest in cultural heritage and museology, went even further during the 2015 Falling-Walls Conference in Berlin, where she presented the project Heritage Futures and stressed that collecting and collections play an active role in defining and communicating present-day values:

Museums are not only about the past. They are also about the present, and they’re about the future. They’re where we put the things that we think especially matter from the past and from the present, so they are where we’re defining what we see as important values and identities from today. [And, further on:] What does matter to people, which objects, why, what kind of information that goes, goes with them? And these, these are questions really that matter much very much to us in society today. Because really this… When we grapple with these questions, we’re also grappling with… what kind of society do we want today. Whose voices, whose pasts, whose futures, whose are we keeping?36

Macdonald emphasises the importance of collecting in seeking to convince her audience that communication about the collecting process is essential, thereby urging museums to open up and play an active role in dialogue with others. However, it is especially interesting that collecting is perceived as both making history and, at the same time, shaping today’s society. This is closely related to the findings in Von Unge’s Samla samtid (2019). A case study describes the collecting practices behind Dokumentation 14:53, which is a digital collection of reactions to the 7 April 2017 terror attack in Stockholm. The project was initiated jointly by Stockholm’s city and county museums a few days after the atrocity, and also involved other cultural institutions, as well as city services, private companies and media channels. At first, the project was simply intended to capture the process of public mourning, but with the benefit of hindsight, Von Unge unravelled three underlying purposes: collecting a material (or digital) basis for history-writing, communicating this material during the collecting process, and being part of the act of collecting itself. Dokumentation 14:53 is thus making history of the ongoing present and, simultaneously, activating the collection by directly archiving and communicating the digital objects. Here, Von Unge refers to Aleida Assmann (Canon and Archive, 2008), who distinguishes between an active aspect of cultural memory practices (the canon), which transforms the past into a thing of the present, and a passive part (the archive), which collects and preserves the past as historical objects. In this case, canon and archive are activated at the same time, as is often the position with performative kinds of collecting.37

Practices in Contemporary Collecting

The previous sections set out to define contemporary collecting and examine its purposes, demonstrating not only an increasing orientation towards the present, but also a confusion of voices regarding the definition of contemporary collecting and its goals. Diverse reasons for contemporary collecting also emerged, as did various intentions concerning the uses of collections. Using some examples from museum practice, this section further examines the key issues in contemporary collecting. First, it is demonstrated that cultural-history museums are aware of the cost of collecting and that the fear of having large, unmanageable ensembles affects contemporary collecting policies – especially where they concern material culture. Second, the section contends that the early distinction between collecting and documenting still resonates in discussions about materiality in museums. The concept of post-material culture is suggested as a way of signalling the intertwinement between objects and their intangible elements, while simultaneously differentiating it from intangible cultural heritage. The final issue addressed relates to the decision-making process, in which the demand for compact collections is in conflict with the abundant availability of potentially relevant objects. Selection demands rational and active collecting policies, but the museum curator’s traditional authority has been disputed and new roles are being explored. Nevertheless, the question of “Who decides?” endures.

31 Meijer-van Mensch & van Mensch 2013: 8.
32 Meijer-van Mensch & van Mensch 2013: 8.
33 Depauw 2007: 183, and Jannelli 2013: 65 respectively.
34 Kessal, Kistemaker & Meijer-van Mensch 2012: 8.
35 Meijer-van Mensch & van Mensch 2013: 8.
36 Purkus 2014: 186.
Compact collections

The notion of what qualifies for inclusion in a cultural-historical collection has broadened and museums now strive to have comprehensive collections that encompass a diverse range of perspectives on both historic events and everyday life. Nonetheless, there is an equally strong desire to take a careful approach when choosing objects, and crammed depots are described with disgust. Nineteenth-century encyclopedic collecting is a spectre hanging over museums: like the hoarder, the compulsive collector lives in a dangerously overcrowded space with the objects they have acquired. Concerns about the stewardship of museum collections increased during the 1980s and 1990s, at a point in time when their disposal was taboo. The 1989 report on collection management in UK museums, *The Cost of Collecting*, calculated that collectors were living in a dangerous dependently overspill with the objects they have acquired. *The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands* (CBS), the Museum Association and not only preserve the past. In the Dutch heritage Monitor, in fact, assumes most objects are on display. Nevertheless, the latest publication states that only 43% of the items in museum collections are actually exhibited. In cultural-historical museums the number is slightly higher, while art museums are the main exception, with just 28% of their objects on display.41

Against this background, in which collections are measured against the yardstick of economic cost and immediate use, it is little wonder that the role of space-consuming three-dimensional (3D) objects has been questioned. Even as far back as 1968, that collecting, in the strict sense of acquiring objects (and everything related to it) swallowed up most of a museum's resources.42 Several initiatives expressed a similar fear of costly and unmanageable collections. A discussion on the disposal of museum objects thus began, slowly but surely leading to the acceptance of deaccessioning as an integral part of professional collection management. Attempts to review existing collections were developed.

The first step was to control the expansion of collections by limiting the acquisition of objects. In 2001, the well-known Australian guide, *Significance*, warned its readers that the "high cost of collecting and storing items in perpetuity means that museum curators must carefully evaluate the merits of accepting donations or making particular acquisitions", implying that there is no such thing as a free gift.43 Since then, the pressure to reduce the size of collections has only increased. While collecting was still considered to be a prerequisite in 2001, a decade later museums have the moral obligation to define their limits, as Birgit Donker – then director of the Dutch Mondrian Fund for Visual Art and Cultural Heritage – suggested in her 2013 Reinwardt Memorial Lecture.40

Today, the value of objects in a collection is also highlighted that the most common reasons why an object is in a depot is that it no longer fits within a collection, while other causes could be its poor condition, its role as a study object, or that it was given to museums instead of being acquired. In 2003, objects might not be exhibited, the Monitor, to Sola, Zeso, and very critical of this trend. "Many institutions share a similar unease about objects", he argues, and they give prominence to the narratives of particular groups. His contention is that although these themes function as heritage projects, they are not always concerned with enabling an historical understanding. Conn goes on to suggest that the absence of objects may testify to their "subversive and less controllable epistemological power", before concluding that museums such as those he refers to leave little room for debate and polyphony.44 It is, however, the particular need for inclusive, multi-faceted collections that Sola expresses, and that the building of enormous corpora of photos, stories and other expressions of intangible heritage. Due to the requirement that museums be visible, a variety of platforms and stages facilitate participatory collecting in plain sight. While it has become common to assess each 3D acquisition critically, constraints on size and scope are rarely placed on other items. Nevertheless, collecting in these areas is also about sharing, making things accessible, and excluding objects within the broader context of a collection. Consequently, a strategy for collecting contemporary home life has to be pragmatic about the stewardship of every collection, whether material, digital or intangible. In other words, collections have to be compact.

Post-material culture

In defining *collecting*, the phrase ‘tangible and intangible objects’ has been included in this dissertation without much comment thus far. Nevertheless, it is clear that the collection of ‘intangible’ and ‘object’ can sound strange. This section therefore examines the relationship between material culture and intangible cultural heritage in more detail, and also considers the factor of digital heritage. The concept of a *post-material culture* will be proposed as a way to not only reflect how physical objects are intertwined with their intangible elements, but to also distinguish this from intangible cultural heritage as it relates to living heritage. Early debates that differentiate between collecting and documenting still play a role in collection policies, and in these discussions materiality matters. When *Samoak* was established in 1977, the Swedish museum network from which it arose explicitly chose a name that was drawn from the word *samtidsdokumentation* in a way that emphasised documenting, instead of collecting, the present. This outlook enabled it to acquire a wide variety of materials and objects, to select and process ethologically, gather peripheral information, produce inventories, conduct interviews, take photographs and make research notes. This approach has been widely adopted by others, as reflected in the quotation below:

'It can be argued that the term contemporary collecting is rather referring to the collecting of objects only and therefore perhaps less suitable for catching the complex, multi-layered present day society. A more suitable term, offering more possibilities for collecting other evidence, such as biographical data and intangible heritage, could be “documenting the present”.45

Nonetheless, adhering to this distinction conceals the intangible dimensions of objects. Indeed, as ‘collecting’ in the 1970s and 1980s related exclusively to physical objects, new collecting practices logically required new terminology. Today, however, material objects are increasingly abstracted and conceptually transformed into signs and diversify the contexts of their meanings. Memories, photographs, manuals, stories, etc. are all acknowledged as reflecting the intangible aspects of objects, and it makes perfect sense to incorporate these contexts within the concept of collecting.

The intangible elements of objects should not be confused with intangible cultural heritage. “Mind the gap”, urges the recent companion *Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2020), warning that intangible cultural heritage is essentially a living heritage that is transmitted between at least two generations and is still being practised today. Moreover, it needs to be identified in close cooperation with its practitioners, whom have to be actively involved in the process.46 Intangible heritage only exists when it is being practised and expressed, and so the role of museums might not be limited only to the collection of physical objects. Instead, they need to be involved in the documentation of intangible cultural heritage, not only by collecting physical objects, but also by documenting the present day society. A more suitable term, offering more possibilities for collecting other evidence, such as biographical data and intangible heritage, could be “documenting the present”.45

38 Merriman 2008: 5.
40 Donker 2013: 34.
41 The latest publication is dated 17 April 2020, and is based on figures from 2018. Erfgoedmonitor, website https://erfgoedmonitor.nl, last viewed 3 February 2021.
43 Merriman 2008: 5.
45 Meijer-van Mensch & Wildt 2014: 89.
46 Deric 2020: 108.
particularly be one of collecting and preserving (if that is at all possible), but instead one of facilitating intangible cultural heritage.

Collections also increasingly include digital heritage, which seems to take a position midway between tangible and intangible heritage. Although attention has been paid to collecting and preserving digital objects in art and design museums, there have been only a few publications on this subject within the context of cultural-history institutions. Those on museums and digital culture in general tend to be concerned with the interactions between museums and visitors at exhibitions and on websites. The discussions contained within them relate to improving access for many different kinds of user, adding sensory experiences, developing diverse data structures for improved cataloging, or using digital technologies for the (virtual) repatriation of objects. Though Haidy Geismar’s Museum Object Lessons for the Digital Age (2018) describes digital as a new interpretive and imaging technology within museum practice, the book also makes a plea for this to be studied within the museum tradition of understanding the world through material objects. The digital, she argues, thus has to be considered not only as intangible, but as material in the first instance.49

While Geismar’s “object lessons” take the construction of knowledge as a starting point, Matthew James Vechinski studies collecting practices to suggest the intertwined of material and digital culture. In his chapter “Collecting, Curating, and the Magic Circle of Ownership in a Postmaterial Culture” (2013), Vechinski analyses the social networking site Goodreads, where readers discuss books and share information, building an online collection of books as part of the process. In this kind of collecting, he argues, the material and virtual overlap, just as books themselves can be material objects and immersive experiences. As such, Vechinski’s notion of building a collection refers to this coexistence and partial overlap of the digital and material as a post-material culture.49

Although the early distinction between collecting and documenting still resonates in discussions about materiality in museums, the concept of a post-material culture refers to how objects are intertwined with their intangible elements. In my view, this would also be an appropriate term for use in museology, given that it not only links new collecting practices to existing, historic collections, but also distinguishes them from intangible cultural heritage. Consequently, in referring to objects, ensembles or collections in this dissertation, I will do so with the concept of a post-material culture in mind, stressing their materiality if required.44

Contested authority

The combination of an abundance of contemporay, potentially relevant, objects (whether material, digital or intangible) and the increasing need for compact collections demands rational and active collecting policies. Curators have long conceived of connoisseurship as an important aid when it comes to selecting the ‘right’ objects for museums’ collections. Generally described in close relation to scholarship and expertise, connoisseurship refers to a skill that requires talent and training. In the words of Edith Mayo in “Connoisseurship of the Future” (1981), it is a gradually developed ‘inspired repatriation of objects’ that can also be used and developed in contemporary collecting. Discussing the problem of the sheer bulk of items relating to popular material culture and the ephemeral nature of artefacts, Mayo envisions another kind of curator and a different type of expertise:

I believe the museum profession must see the gradual emergence of a new breed of curator, and a change in emphasis from collecting of the past to a connoisseurship of the present and the future: a connoisseurship of anticipation.51

Almost 20 years later, in 1999, Linda Young urged curators to reclaim connoisseurship as a unique and special skill, but to also free it from previous elitist connotations.52 Such connotations are reflected in the intentionally created caricature of “the connoisseurial curator”, who is described by Macdonald and Morgan (2019) as someone “fully confident of his (...) superior, refined taste, which he exercised in the formation of highly selective collections” and who “threw the weight of his authoritative judgements at the museum, with no pretense that he could be known to the general public as an expert”.53 Yet the role of the curator in the process of selecting objects, as well as in describing and juxtaposing them, has been questioned. Indeed, it has become evident that actions like these do not occur without bias, and that collections embody ideologies. Hooper-Greenhill, for example, maintains that the curatorial voice was the only one to be heard in the traditional modernist museums that conveyed authoritative facts and histories. In the post-modern constructivist version, new professional roles have to be introduced, new voices heard, new narratives developed and new audiences differentiated.44 In search of more democratic practices, current models of curatorship accentuate collaboration with a variety of communities. References to ‘the relational museum’ and ‘networking, which requires the creation of multichannel networks in which curators and other museum professionals work. The idea of the curator as a connoisseur, scholar or expert has been replaced by a new role as collaborator, facilitator, mediator or broker.55

Today’s museum curators are well aware of their responsibilities. They have also come to realise that passive collecting strategies largely depend on the suggestions of already well-represented communities, whether it be residents donating items they have hitherto retained, or private collectors and auctioneers offering objects that might be of interest. Consequently, in their desire to engage new groups, museum professionals are exploring participatory strategies for forming their collections.

Sometimes, this approach results in a public call for objects. This strategy is generally adopted for a brief period of time, and is defined by a specific area of interest and certain conditions set by the museum relating to either contemporary or retro-much as participatory strategies. Two examples have already been highlighted: Museum Rotterdam’s call for fellow citizens to share their experiences of working from home during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, and Dokumentation 14:53, the digital collection of reactions to the terror attack in Stockholm on 7 April 2017. In contrast, The Great Donate at the Beamish Museum near Newcastle-upon-Tyne (UK) was retrospective in nature and specifically aimed at material objects. That project demonstrates both the potential and limitations of such a collecting policy. Beamish had initiated a strategy of unselective collecting as long ago as the late 1950s or early 1960s. This is a kind of participatory collecting avant la lettre. Its ‘you offer it, we accept it’ approach aimed to build a representative collection of objects relating to the working and domestic lives of ordinary people in the north of England. Over three million items were acquired, dating from the early 1800s to the 1930s. The strategy was abandoned at some point, but then revived in 2013 when The Great Donate initiative aimed to expand the collection to include the 1990s. With over 1,000 items donated in the first week alone, the response was much bigger than anticipated. Although the collecting process was unselective in principle, the curator had to refuse items in poor condition, objects that duplicated others already in the collection, as well as those not connected to the relevant part of England.56 Not mentioned in the study is whether the strategy actually achieved the museum’s goal of building a representative collection of objects relating to the working and domestic lives of ordinary people in a particular part of the UK.

Doubts about whether citizen participation can be compatible with museums’ collecting activities have also arisen. Angela Jannelli, for instance, writes about Stadtflabor (City Lab), an exhibition format based on the principles of co-creation among the inhabitants of the Historicisches Museum Frankfurt. Shared expertise underlies the approach: the cooperating partners are experts on the subject-matter and the museum professionals are experts at curating. However, this curating only concerns exhibiting – not collecting – with Jannelli describing the curators’ inability to select objects as follows:

It would be self-contradictory if we made participants feel that all are welcome, whatever their specific abilities and powers of expression, while simultaneously making judgments as to which objects are ‘worthy’ to partake of the collection.57

A final example of museum practice as it relates to contemporary collecting is drawn from Museum Rotterdam and illustrates several of the issues mentioned in this chapter. Echt Rotterdams Erfgoed (Authentic Rotterdam Heritage) is a participatory collecting project initiated by the museum in 2016 and builds on previously established networks. Its goal is to collect the city’s contemporary heritage, with the aim being not so much to expand the collection or contribute to an exhibition

50 Ibid 2013: 19.
51 Ibid. 13.
52 Young 1999: 141.
56 Based on the case study by David Rounce in Rhys & Baveystock 2014: 211-212, and on the website of Beamish Museum http://www.beamish.org.uk/explore-discover/open-stores/ (viewed 19 January 2018). Sometimes the information is inconsistent. The website suggests the practice of unselective collecting started in the 1990s, while the case study mentions the early 1960s.
57 Jannelli 2013: 71.
The Neo-rococo table is part of a large ensemble produced by the Rotterdam firm Schmidt & Co, which furnished a new build in 1869.
The project involves participants who are actively engaged in the cultural heritage. In the contemporary collecting process, collections that include objects in a post-material context and reflect the pursuit of richly varied collections and the goal of shaping long-term objectives with the aim of shaping them in a participatory manner (involving the public). This is especially the case with post-material culture, which requires a marriage between space-consuming material objects and their digital or intangible dimensions, demanding a yet-to-be-developed expertise. Consequently, collecting activities relating to post-material culture remain rather passive, or are limited to experimentation. Indeed, long-term policies are often lacking, and it seems that all the good intentions are, in fact, paralysing.

Authentic Rotterdam Heritage is a participatory collecting project initiated by Museum Rotterdam in 2016. The goal is to collect the city’s contemporary heritage as a way of connecting people, and it does so in a performative manner. Story Cafes function as a platform upon which various participants can “express” the active collection. The photo above shows such a meeting in June 2018, where Loving Day is celebrated with an event for youngsters with a variety of backgrounds. Source: Research database Museum Rotterdam (inventory number 1296). Photo Erik van den Akker (2018).

This chapter has focused on contemporary collecting by cultural-history museums on a meta-level. It reveals an increasing orientation towards the present arising from four different, albeit closely related, developments: democratisation, contextualisation, visitor-orientation and activism. Arguing that the essence of contemporary collecting cannot be found in setting temporal boundaries or by distinguishing between the ‘contemporary’ and the ‘present’, contemporary collecting is instead defined as it stands in contrast to retrospective collecting, involving the selection of objects directly from the contexts of creation or the first use. Although such objects can take many forms, the starting point of this study relates to a post-material culture, not intangible cultural heritage.

In shifting the focus to the purposes of contemporary collecting, it became clear that these goals are on two levels. First, the approach is motivated by the objective of developing inclusive collections, which can be traced back to two different basic ideas: the desired result (a diverse collection), and the preferred underlying process (participatory collecting). While the former is essentially concerned with what to collect, the latter gives priority to the question of how to do so. Both of these elements have to be regarded as two sides of what is nowadays often referred to as inclusivity. Second, the focus on the intended use of collections has shifted, or at least diversified. The adage of ‘collecting today for tomorrow’, which implicates the future use of contemporary objects, was replaced around 2000 by the desire to grasp the present, understanding and illuminating it at the same time. Nowadays, a performative kind of collecting reflects museums’ need to be present in the present, which is sometimes even formulated with the idealist undertone of contributing to a better future.

Contemporary collecting is a difficult, almost impossible, task for museums. This is because of the abundance of potentially relevant material, the pursuit of richly varied collections and the goal of shaping them in a participatory manner (involving as many inhabitants as possible), coupled with the lack of historical distance and up-to-date selection criteria and the demand for compact collections. Meanwhile, among curators, the many doubts about selecting the right objects and stories, and whether they are actually the right person to make that choice, lead to a very reserved approach to active contemporary collecting. This is especially the case with post-material culture, which requires a marriage between space-consuming material objects and their digital or intangible dimensions, demanding a yet-to-be-developed expertise. Consequently, collecting activities relating to post-material culture remain rather passive, or are limited to experimentation. Indeed, long-term policies are often lacking, and it seems that all the good intentions are, in fact, paralysing.
In 2001, Rotterdam celebrated being the European Capital of Culture. Festivities included the manifestation *At home in Rotterdam* where, for over six months, 24 iconic houses across the city could be viewed as furnished museum homes. I saw all of them and particularly liked the one belonging to ‘Aunt Nell’, the widow of ‘Cor’, a skipper. This house was located at a quay near the river and was now inhabited only by Aunt Nell, who was born in the early 1930s. When Nell married Cor in the 1950s, the housing shortage caused them to move in with his parents. This was far from ideal, especially after their first child was born. Five years later, they were allotted their first apartment together and used their savings to buy furniture and turn it into home. Two further children soon followed, who all left home as adults long ago. In 1996, Nell and Cor relocated to their current home at the quay. Sadly, Cor died shortly thereafter, but Nell decided to stay because the neighbourhood was familiar to her and one of her daughters lived nearby.
When the house was exhibited, the living room seemed to have grown along with Nell – it looked overcrowded with ‘stuff’ that was constantly being shuffled around and added to. The home’s interior was not intended to be congruent with the architect’s ideas, instead giving supremacy to those of its inhabitant. The chosen representative moment was neither the year the house was built, nor the point at which Nell and Cor had moved in; instead, the focus was the contemporaneity of 2001. During the manifestation, visitors were invited to take a seat, chat, leaf through books and magazines, or complete the jigsaw puzzle on the table.

Aunt Nell is a fictional persona invented by Marc Adang, a Dutch art historian, who wrote her life story and used it as a guideline in the construction of the interior. The ground floor apartment was not intended to be congruent with the architect’s ideas, instead giving supremacy to those of its inhabitant. The chosen representative moment was neither the year the house was built, nor the point at which Nell and Cor had moved in; instead, the focus was the contemporaneity of 2001. During the manifestation, visitors were invited to take a seat, chat, leaf through books and magazines, or complete the jigsaw puzzle on the table. Aunt Nell is a fictional persona invented by Marc Adang, a Dutch art historian, who wrote her life story and used it as a guideline in the construction of the interior. The ground floor apartment was not intended to be congruent with the architect’s ideas, instead giving supremacy to those of its inhabitant. The chosen representative moment was neither the year the house was built, nor the point at which Nell and Cor had moved in; instead, the focus was the contemporaneity of 2001. During the manifestation, visitors were invited to take a seat, chat, leaf through books and magazines, or complete the jigsaw puzzle on the table. Aunt Nell is a fictional persona invented by Marc Adang, a Dutch art historian, who wrote her life story and used it as a guideline in the construction of the interior. The ground floor apartment was not intended to be congruent with the architect’s ideas, instead giving supremacy to those of its inhabitant. The chosen representative moment was neither the year the house was built, nor the point at which Nell and Cor had moved in; instead, the focus was the contemporaneity of 2001. During the manifestation, visitors were invited to take a seat, chat, leaf through books and magazines, or complete the jigsaw puzzle on the table. Aunt Nell is a fictional persona invented by Marc Adang, a Dutch art historian, who wrote her life story and used it as a guideline in the construction of the interior. The ground floor apartment was not intended to be congruent with the architect’s ideas, instead giving supremacy to those of its inhabitant. The chosen representative moment was neither the year the house was built, nor the point at which Nell and Cor had moved in; instead, the focus was the contemporaneity of 2001. During the manifestation, visitors were invited to take a seat, chat, leaf through books and magazines, or complete the jigsaw puzzle on the table. Aunt Nell is a fictional persona invented by Marc Adang, a Dutch art historian, who wrote her life story and used it as a guideline in the construction of the interior. The ground floor apartment was not intended to be congruent with the architect’s ideas, instead giving supremacy to those of its inhabitant. The chosen representative moment was neither the year the house was built, nor the point at which Nell and Cor had moved in; instead, the focus was the contemporaneity of 2001. During the manifestation, visitors were invited to take a seat, chat, leaf through books and magazines, or complete the jigsaw puzzle on the table. Aunt Nell is a fictional persona invented by Marc Adang, a Dutch art historian, who wrote her life story and used it as a guideline in the construction of the interior. The ground floor apartment was not intended to be congruent with the architect’s ideas, instead giving supremacy to those of its inhabitant. The chosen representative moment was neither the year the house was built, nor the point at which Nell and Cor had moved in; instead, the focus was the contemporaneity of 2001. During the manifestation, visitors were invited to take a seat, chat, leaf through books and magazines, or complete the jigsaw puzzle on the table. Aunt Nell is a fictional persona invented by Marc Adang, a Dutch art historian, who wrote her life story and used it as a guideline in the construction of the interior. The ground floor apartment was not intended to be congruent with the architect’s ideas, instead giving supremacy to those of its inhabi...
Historical moment of truth

Despite the fact that the underlying typology of a period room is seldom described in museum displays or databases, the choices made in the selection of objects indicate whether the ensemble has been constructed as an artistic or social period room. Often, the ensembles provide clues about the chosen perspective, with time probably being the most important. Several essays in The Modern Period Room (2006), a book containing many examples of modernist domestic interiors from the interwar years, highlight the choice of a specific moment in time. In his introduction to the book, Trevor Keeble states that both artistic and social period rooms have their specific “historical moment of truth”. The moment of a room’s creation often best represents the intended design of an interior, and will usually be adopted in an artistic period room, with its emphasis on authorship and style. This also implies that prominence will be given to production as a key decisive factor. Objects added to the interior in later phases are considered to be threats to the original design. In contrast, the social period room acknowledges accretions, and thus consumption, as part of its definition. Generally, this type of room will stress diachronic qualities, meaning that a moment much later in time will be chosen to represent the interior, including the changes made to it.\(^\text{12}\)

The difference between the two concepts can be illustrated using two photographs of an interior ensemble acquired by Museum Rotterdam in 2007. Details of the image on the left were sent to the museum by email, along with a few older black-and-white photos of the living room, a detailed description of the furniture and additional information. All the furnishings were bought in 1953, when the family moved from the former Dutch East Indies to the Netherlands. Some pieces were produced at a now-closed Rotterdam factory, and all were chosen according to the principles of Goed Wonen (Correct Living), an important movement in Rotterdam post-war housing. Following the death of the occupant, the Rotterdam house was emptied and the heir approached the museum to donate parts of the ensemble. A few days later, my colleague and I visited the house and took the photo on the right, which shows the 1953 ensemble on offer and reveals a bit more of the interior. The tea set was displayed intentionally. It had also been bought in 1953, the heir told us, while any broken parts had been carefully replaced ever since. Immediately catching the eye is the central IKEA coffee table, which was a quite recent addition to the interior. Obviously well used, the table was regarded as not being consistent with the earlier furniture and so was not included in the left-hand photograph.

Discussing the intended acquisition, we (as the museum’s curators) chose to stay close to the time the room was created in 1953. The wood had darkened, the upholstery had been renewed and the teacups replaced, but these signs of age and use were accepted as almost inevitable. However, we acquired neither the very divergent lampshade, nor the contemporary coffee table – although, in hindsight, we could have made the argument for a diachronic approach in which the IKEA table was included as a later addition, and even as being a true heir to the Correct Living movement.\(^\text{13}\)

When James Deetz wrote in 1980 about the interpretation of artefacts in history museums, he agitated against the “selection of furnishings that have primarily aesthetic appeal”. Deetz advised museum curators to combine the old and the new, because he felt that ensembles needed to enhance our understanding of daily life: “Adherence to a strict time limitation in a period room’s furnishings overlooks the obvious fact that in the past, as today, people had both heirlooms and articles that were brand new.”\(^\text{14}\) This idea clearly favours the social-historical conception of the period room and simultaneously demonstrates opposition to the apparently dominant position of the artistic version. Is this justified? When and in what context did the period room originate? What was its innovative strength and how did the concept evolve? The next section will attempt to answer these questions by exploring the history – or rather histories – of the period room.

\(^{12}\) Keeble 2006: 2-3.

\(^{13}\) Both Cieraad (2014) and De Vreeze (2015: 14) have described IKEA in the Dutch tradition of Correct Living.

This artistic period room from 1761 illustrates the Rococo style and is a demonstration of civic pride. (Photo Karina Bogaerds, taken during the exhibition *A Rich Life*.)

various, incl. 9463, 11074, 11081, 11306, 35368 and 35495
Histories of the Period Room

In aiming to provide a brief overview of the period room's history, it soon became clear that the period room is a concept, or practice, that has been fiercely debated ever since its introduction in the 1870s. It is not only its valuation that has varied over time; even its origins have been interpreted from different perspectives. Clearly, there is no such thing as the origins; the period room originated in different contexts, following diverse trends. This section briefly explores the various histories of the period room. Starting with its origins in the 1870s, it considers turning points in its history and investigates the background of a renewed interest. Several recent examples illustrate different stages towards the period room and highlight recent conceptions.

Origins

Given the close relationship between the artistic period room and the art-historical perspective, the birth of the period room is, unsurprisingly, often linked to the rise of art history as an academic discipline. When the period room emerged at the end of the 19th century, the art-historical method of categorising architecture and applied arts into style periods reached a climax. Many art museums presented interiors, furniture and decorative arts because of their contribution to a history of style, thus giving style primacy over a range of other aspects, including function and clients. It is, however, generally accepted the period room does not originate from art history itself.

The origins of the period room have been interpreted from different perspectives, often revealing a specific interest of the author. At a 1963 seminar in the Winterthur Museum, which is famous for its American decorative arts displayed in a wide array of rooms, E.A. Parr compared the period room to the biological habitat group. Working as a senior scientist at the American Museum of National History, Parr was “fairly certain” that the habitat group was the period room’s predecessor. Both constructions have analogous curatorial motivations, he argued, namely “a growing anxiety to relieve the tedium of specimens in endless and ever-growing rows”, as well as “a desire to tell more about the life of species than its dead and stuffed remains alone can impart”.17 More recently, Parr and Van Beest in their Museum for Architecture and Design, Het Nieuwe Instituut (The New Institute), also placed the period room in the tradition of the habitat group. A leaflet there reflects on the artistic project Design Diorama by Studio Makkink & Bey (2016) and describes how period rooms have exploited the illusion of livingness or lived-in-ness to capture the audience, as dioramas did in natural history exhibitions.18 Although the need for a more contextual display at the end of the 19th century is widely acknowledged, not everyone considers the habitat group to be key to the period room’s conception.

The period room is also linked to the late-19th century exhibitions of world fairs showcasing the arts and industries from nations across the globe. Edward Kaufman, for example, mentions the kaleidoscopic collection of national pavilions in the 1867 Paris Exposition as a starting point for both the future open-air museum and the period room. He argues that the pavilions piqued an interest in traditional cultures and, increasingly, in the popular Art Nouveau of the period. Exhibits aimed to paint a picture of human life in evocative architectural settings, whether foreign or historic, and included a range of artefacts that were sometimes animated by people dressed in costumes or engaging in activities to bring the settings to life. Like many others, Kaufman also introduces the Swedish folklorist Artur Hazelius, who presented his ethnographical tableaux in various great exhibitions during the 1870s. Thereafter, Hazelius founded the Nordiska Museet (Nordic Museum) and the open-air museum in Skansen to house his ethnographic collections.19 Admitting that Hazelius was a pioneer in regional folklore museums, John Harris nevertheless notes that the period room has been placed on his innovations when the origins of the period room are considered. In Moving Rooms: The Trade in Architectural Salvages (2007), Harris demonstrates that there were many intertwining influences on the developing fashion for period rooms in European museums after the 1860s. The burgeoning interest in the collection and presentation of various decorative arts, the need for a more contextual display and the examples set by the private interiors of rich collectors all affected museum practices, where the aim was to transfer similar assemblages to their public gallery. So, when Amsterdam celebrated its sixth centennial in 1876, architect Pierre Cuypers installed several 17th-century period rooms at the Historical Exhibition of Amsterdam, combining old panelings and chimneypieces. In 1877, the Brothers van Heemskerck’s Heemskerkskabinet sold two panelled rooms from Dordrecht to the Nederlandsch Museum in The Hague; they were later installed in the new Rijksmuseum in 1885. In Leeuwarden, the Frisian Historical Exhibition of 1877 included a popular and much discussed Hindeloopen interior. According to Harris, these early Dutch initiatives “were probably far more important than the emphasis usually placed upon a tableau of the Madam Tussauds’ sort exhibited by Artur Hazelius in 1878 at the Paris World’s Fair”.20

Turning points

While a search for the period room’s origins must lead to the conclusion that various ideas have contributed to its rise, it also highlights the importance to the concept of contextual display. The nature of this contextualization becomes clearer in comparisons to both its predecessor and successor. In his 2009 inaugural address, Ad de Jong, Professor by Special Appointment of the History of Architecture and Applied Arts at the University of Amsterdam, did not search for the origins of the period room, but instead tried to establish turning points in the presentation of Dutch museum collections in general. Two of these turning points are directly related to the period room. The first change took place in the 19th century and is characterised as the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism, from encyclopaedic collections to collections focusing on identity. De Jong exemplifies this transition using two presentations by the Zeeuwscb Genootschap der Wetenschappen, the Academy of Sciences of the Dutch province of Zeeland: their 18th-century Hindeloopen interior and the 1882 regional ‘Walcher’ living room. These exhibitions presented nothing new, exotic curiosities in display cabinets to recreate the world in miniature, whereas the latter reflected regional identity in a genre scene, with individual objects being subservient to the overall image. The construction of such a characteristic regional interior reflects the 19th century intellectuals’ romantic interest in regional culture, De Jong argues, and fits seamlessly within the museological representation of the nation.21

The second turning point mentioned by De Jong relates to the transition of Romanticism to Modernism in the early 20th century. Unlike the previous period, Modernism viewed individual museum objects as autonomous works of art. Beauty was considered to be a universal concept, regardless of time and space. De Jong supports his argumentation with the opinions of, among others, the museum directors Adriaan Pit and Frisk Hesselink. Schmidt Degener, Pit was director of the former Dutch Museum for History and Art between 1898 and 1918. The museum was accommodated within the newly built Rijksmuseum, and Pit maintained that the lavishly decorated building would lessen the attention paid to the objects, as its ensembles would obscure the individual exhibits. During the later directorship of Schmidt Degener from 1921 to 1941, aesthetics became explicitly valued over history or documentation. Schmidt Degener presented only the highest quality artworks, rearranged the rooms – juxtaposing far fewer paintings in symmetrical compositions against neutral backgrounds, and removed the captions.22

A similar Modernist approach is described by Sally Anne Duncan in the article “From Period Rooms to Public Thrust” (2002), which concerns Paul Sachs, businessman, museum director and developer of Harvard University’s famous museum course. In the time between 1921 and 1948, each class attended discussions of various collections of decorative arts in different art museums, one of which related to the period room. The debates explored issues of context and authenticity, and questioned the practice of favouring a general museum audience over the tastes of the educated visitor. Proponents of the period room argued that the large majority of visitors have little museum experience or knowledge of the fine arts, but are able to relate the period room to their lives and understand it. Those opposed, including Sachs, asserted that a museum should offer a neutral backdrop, enabling visitors to focus completely on the object. As well as arguing that period rooms are inflexible, expensive and artificial, their opponents stressed that such genuflection to the average visitor would degrade the museum.23

Laan 2015: 2.
Shafrir n.d.: 1.
Harris 2007: 4-5, 123-124, Quote from page 4, Shafrir 1982: 123, This is what Hesselink’s remarks on p. 123; “Here in the Netherlands rather than in Hazelius’s tableaux should be seen the initiation of the European, and later the American period room.”
Ibid. 15-19.
Duncan 2002: 98.
The period room had become emblematic of a museological representation of both social history and decorative arts during the early 20th century, but the shift from Romanticism to Modernism resulted in their removal from many art museums. It is often stated that cultural-history museums followed later, finally dismantling their period rooms during the 1970s and 1980s, when the once innovative displays were perceived as static and old-fashioned. In reality, though, plenty of museums continued to collect and display domestic interior ensembles. They were, perhaps in a more reflexive manner, highlighting the period room’s subjectivity by, for example, basing it on a family biography or explicitly presenting it as a generalised construction in a raised or viewing-box-like setting. Nevertheless, the period rooms’ glory days were over, increasingly seen as old-fashioned, expensive to maintain, inflexible and not as authentic as previously thought. John Harris even called them ‘A scholarly embarrassment’, after research demonstrated that many rooms were, in fact, compiled of objects with a variety of origins. In his 2007 book, Moving Rooms, Harris described museum period rooms as being under scrutiny. His visits to the Swiss National Museum in Zurich and the Arts Décoratifs in Paris were a “saddening experience”, he wrote, whereas great interiors are in desuetude and the formerly admired sequence of objects. Several museums have invited artists to come in and refresh their thinking and approach. Even the authentic (and quite austere) Beuningkamer included the decor of a temporary installation by Daan Roosegaarde in 2014. His Lotus Dome consists of hundreds of ultralight aluminium foils, opening and closing in response to the warmth of passing museum visitors. This high-tech work of art had an impact on how visitors experienced the period room, but both remained separate entities. Some other new museum displays, however, grant fiction an explicit and very important role. An intriguing example of such an imaginative period room is Tomorrow (2013). This was a temporary site-specific installation by the artist duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, commissioned by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Tomorrow transformed the former Textile Galleries into the apartment of Norman Swann, an elderly and disillusioned architect. In the fictional film script written by the artists, Swann has fallen ill and intends to sell his London home. Visitors were invited to enter the apartment, explore the collection of art works and the models of Swann’s own visionary projects, and sit on the sofa and read the books and magazines. In doing so, the visitors played their role as a Peeping Tom, an invitee and a potential buyer at the same time. The trend towards fiction is remarkable. Authenticity and context had been crucial aspects in debates about the period room ever since it emerged. In recent publications, however, authors stress that it is always a construct, that it is never authentic in the sense of an existing or inhabited interior. Marjorie Schwarzer had even discussed its literary dimensions in 2008, comparing the reconstructed galleries as essential to reveal the beauty and convey the full meaning of decorative objects. Finally, alongside these artistic period rooms, the Folkemuseumætten (The People’s Home Museum) in Stockholm’s Nordiska Museet must also be mentioned as a recent example of a social period room. Installed in 2013, the apartment is constructed with the fictive Johansson family in mind. It approaches the period 1940-1970 with nostalgia by focusing on the improved standard of everyday living in Sweden. The apartment is not, however, related to collections, it plays a role in reminiscence projects and is the responsibility of the museum’s communication department. While authenticity used to be key, many new period rooms aim to be playful and interactive. Some recent experiments are focused on architecture and design, others on daily life; some give primacy to research, others to imagination. Several museums have invited artists to come in and refresh their thinking and approach. Even the authentic (and quite austere) Beuningkamer included the decor of a temporary installation by Daan Roosegaarde in 2014. His Lotus Dome consists of hundreds of ultralight aluminium foils, opening and closing in response to the warmth of passing museum visitors. This high-tech work of art had an impact on how visitors experienced the period room, but both remained separate entities. Some other new museum displays, however, grant fiction an explicit and very important role. 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Period rooms combine the literal and the literary. At once empathic, aesthetic, spiritual, and sensual, they propel us into worlds larger than ourselves and inside ourselves. (...) Their familiar context, the former London home of an elderly and disillusioned architect, evokes a larger story and our desires for connection and possession. (...) Museum curators would do well to remember this oft-times overlooked museum archetype as a powerful storytelling tool.

The qualities of the period room as an immersive medium have been emphasised repeatedly. The previously mentioned debates at Harvard University show that the period room was perceived as an easy-access formula for visitors with little museum experience as far back as the 1930s. Nonetheless, its diminished appreciation in the last decades of the 20th century largely arose from the reproach that it was “a form of fiction posing as history”. In contrast, Schwarzer highlights that recently installed period rooms that use the power of empathy, even when interweaving history and fiction, with examples including the bedroom in Daniel’s Story in the Washington National Holocaust Museum, the immigrants’ living quarters in the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, or Julia Child’s kitchen in the Smithsonian Institution.

Nowadays, the freedom to openly mix fact and fiction offers up new possibilities, supported by modern techniques. Under the heading “Scenography”, which is a term that addresses the performative aspects of exhibits, a 2016 article by Dijkstra Huis in the Dutch museum magazine Museumvisie discusses the new trend of adopting a holistic approach to exhibitions. The magazine provides examples in which objects are presented in theatrical settings and interactive elements create individual experiences. Immersive installations use sound, projection and virtual reality to stimulate the senses. New media are rapidly conquering the museum, converting the ‘white cubes’ into ‘black boxes’, as Dijkstra Huis remarks. He concludes that various disciplines contribute to the delivery of convincing narratives that are easily understood by the majority of the visitors and in which both objects and visitors play a key role. Although the term and even any reference to the underlying concept are carefully avoided, the analogy with the period room is striking.

25... 2007:145.
31 Laan 2015: [6].
33 Bryant 2009: 75.
Valuation of the Period Room

The renewed interest in the period room comes with its own valuation, which is linked to current ideas about collecting. This section explores the perceived core qualities of the period room, aiming to understand its pitfalls as well as its possibilities for collecting and representing home life. It is argued that contextualisation has gained importance once again, now involving coherent ensembles that contain not only material culture, but data and narratives as well. Representation is a second issue, and relates to both what and whom a period room represents. Although today’s social period rooms tend to stress the individual lives of their inhabitants, highlighting identity and diversity, the concept of personal identity is interwoven with historical, social and cultural values. Finally, a connection to visitors is an important element of the present-day valuation of the period room. While its immersive capacities are generally acknowledged and the opportunities to enable individual visitor experiences praised, the apparent absence of interactions with the objects on display requires a closer examination of this type of room’s connective qualities.

Contextualisation

The need for a contextual display led to the emergence of the period room in the late 19th century in Europe, and the innovation was soon adopted to stress popular life and regional identity, or to emphasise a history of styles. However, in the Modernist museum of the early 20th century, and in art museums in particular, context came to be perceived as a hindrance that was thought to obscure the immanent beauty of individual works of art, as well as the significance of individual objects. Yet the renewed interest in period rooms reveals a new valuation. While Modernism stressed the importance of contemplating the individual object against the neutral background of the museum, Chapter 1 has shown that material culture has now become less crucial. The post-modern museum is oriented towards visitor-centred experiences, in which meaning is considered to be contextual rather than inherent. Acknowledging that material culture inevitably has intangible dimensions, home life has gained in value over the artistic interior, as has visitor interpretation over object-orientation. How does this affect the ensemble?

In the wake of their much-discussed exhibition ZimmerWelten in 2000, the Detmold Open-Air Museum in Westfalen, Germany, collected six completely furnished rooms of children and adolescents of the period room, as it has visitor interpretation over object-orientation. Does this affect the ensemble?

The museum deliberately made no further selections, the catalogue states, because such a selection tends to focus on ‘valuable’ objects, with other aspects overlooked. In total, approximately 20,000 single objects were collected, inventoried, measured and preserved. But what then? Although described and (information-wise) accessible, the ensembles are now stored in the museum’s depot, not to be exhibited again, just like Aunt Nell’s living room. A second catalogue, ZimmerWelten, zwei (2010), provides an update, presenting new interviews with the participating photographers and a new visual presentation of the old ‘worlds’. It explains that the original ensembles will help to support this generation’s memory in the medium term, but that their main value is in the long-term objective of answering manifold, as-yet-unknown, scholarly questions. In this explanation, the catalogue is closely following the early adage of collecting today for tomorrow. Non-authentic constructions; they are, as Schwar 2010: 7. Carstensen & Richartz 2010: 4-11. Hoskins 2006: 40. Brumfiel & Millhauser, Lawrence-Zuñiga, Rotenberg, Rotenberg & Wall, and Wall in Museum Anthropology (2014) vol.37 / issue f.

Museums’ renewed interest in contextual presentations implies a revived interest in the collecting of ensembles. Contextualisation now relates to the explicit reconstruction of coherent ensembles that comprise material culture as research data and narratives. This can either be literal reconstructions (acquisitions of complete interiors), or constructions based on research, possibly even containing fictional elements, but nevertheless needing to carry meaning and reveal, for instance, social relations or subject-object relationships. Somewhat problematic, however, is the number of objects involved and the amount of work required. Although the ZimmerWelten catalogue states that the project has been achieved with a modestly sized facility like Museum Rotterdam, both the collecting process and the resulting collection would far exceed its finances, space and available staff.

Representation: cultural values & personal identity

The late 20th century depreciation of the period room was largely due to the realisation that many rooms were not as authentic as previously assumed. Elements had been adjusted to fit the dimensions of a museum’s space, ensembles were rearranged, furniture with a different provenance was mixed, original rooms were copied, et cetera. Today, however, many recent period rooms are openly non-authentic constructions; they are, as Schwar 2010: 7. Carstensen & Richartz 2010: 4-11. Hoskins 2006: 40. Brumfiel & Millhauser, Lawrence-Zuñiga, Rotenberg, Rotenberg & Wall, and Wall in Museum Anthropology (2014) vol.37 / issue f. carstensen & richartz 2010: 7.
The model of a large-scale urban expansion, given the name "City of the Future", was presented in 1955 but never realised.
The Period Room as a Model for Contemporary Collecting

In looking at museum practice, the period room can be viewed as an eminently museological way to contextualise objects in an immersive setting, rendering temporary installations such as the West Indian Room as a performative space and animating it with people's active pursuits like telling or (re-)creating stories. Moreover, the supposed immersive qualities of this appropriation, when, in fact, the essence of such a concept refers to its social character. Thus, the period room's veracity has been doubted because of its contested authenticity and lack of realism, recent constructions tend to focus on convincing narratives. Instead of presenting generalisations, they might reflect the individual lives of their inhabitants, whether real or fictive. The cultural values related to 'the typical' seem to make sense of the period room when, in fact, the essence of such a concept refers to its social character.

Connecting with visitors

As far back as the 1930s, the period room was perceived as an easily understandable type of display, connecting even visitors with little museum experience to objects. Contemporary period rooms stress their immersive qualities and value the power in the persuasiveness of the narrative. Fiction can evoke empathy and an even closer involvement with history, while modern techniques appealing to different senses add to the immersive possibilities. Interactive elements might thus create the individual experiences visitor-oriented museums are striving for. Nonetheless, the supposed immersive qualities of the period room require closer examination. In a museum setting, its connective qualities are mainly due to somewhat passive activities, such as looking, passing through or listening. Touching is often prevented or explicitly forbidden, and more active pursuits like telling or (re-)creating are generally not facilitated. So, while in the original setting of Aunt Nell's living room visitors were invited to sit on the chairs, leaf through the magazines and put together the jigsaw puzzle on the table, the musealisation of the ensemble has ended such practices. Jeremy Aynsley argues that the period room's strength is to convey "ideas of form and structure", but it is less effective at expressing function. According to Aynsley, attempts to consider function by turning the period room into a performative space and animating it with people are likely to widen the gap between past and present, stressing the historical distance instead of bridging it. How, and to what extent, does the period room then facilitate understanding, empathy and experience? What connective qualities underlie the constructed domestic ensemble? These issues require closer examination and will be addressed in Part 2.

exploration of the home lives of different families over the same period of time, instead stressing the individual circumstances and conscious, personal choices of the inhabitants. This also allows the museum to avoid the programme of presenting ‘the typical’ easily leads to the exclusion, neglect and marginalisation of not-so-common communities. However, by explaining economic, social, cultural or aesthetic factors that have influenced the personal choices, the rooms nevertheless suggest common practices and preferences, thus referring to shared values that surpass individuality.

Remarks on generalisation and the variety of individual choices refer to issues of representation, which also reflect an interest in objects as a means of identifying with other people, or disassociating from them. As far back as 1954, Mary Zeldenrust-Noordanus conducted psychological research on taste preferences in home decoration. Her research on the cultural values of the home in the early 1950s, as contemporaneous psychological research by Zeldenrust-Noordanus indicates. As one might expect, family portraits, images of her hometown and references to her husband's occupation largely contribute to the interior's preferences. In some religious decorations, Aunt Nell's great affection for the royal family is, however, rather atypical for Catholic households in the Netherlands. This is explicitly mentioned in the accompanying text to explain the mix of Mary statues and decorative earthenware commemorating important events during the reigns of the country's three successive queens, thus stressing the individuality of the interior. While the period room's veracity has been doubted because of its contested authenticity and lack of realism, recent constructions tend to focus on convincing narratives. Instead of presenting generalisations, they might reflect the individual lives of their inhabitants, whether real or fictive. The cultural values related to 'the typical' seem to have given way to diverse, individual life-stories, highlighting the personal identity of the inhabitants' interiors. On closer examination, however, personal identity and shared historical, social and cultural values are closely interrelated.

Connecting with visitors

As far back as the 1930s, the period room was perceived as an easily understandable type of display, connecting even visitors with little museum experience to objects. Contemporary period rooms stress their immersive qualities and value the power in the persuasiveness of the narrative. Fiction can evoke empathy and an even closer involvement with history, while modern techniques appealing to different senses add to the immersive possibilities. Interactive elements might thus create the individual experiences visitor-oriented museums are striving for. Nonetheless, the supposed immersive qualities of the period room require closer examination. In a museum setting, its connective qualities are mainly due to somewhat passive activities, such as looking, passing through or listening. Touching is often prevented or explicitly forbidden, and more active pursuits like telling or (re-)creating are generally not facilitated. So, while in the original setting of Aunt Nell's living room visitors were invited to sit on the chairs, leaf through the magazines and put together the jigsaw puzzle on the table, the musealisation of the ensemble has ended such practices. Jeremy Aynsley argues that the period room's strength is to convey "ideas of form and structure", but it is less effective at expressing function. According to Aynsley, attempts to consider function by turning the period room into a performative space and animating it with people are likely to widen the gap between past and present, stressing the historical distance instead of bridging it. How, and to what extent, does the period room then facilitate understanding, empathy and experience? What connective qualities underlie the constructed domestic ensemble? These issues require closer examination and will be addressed in Part 2.
script states that Swann is “burdened with his cultural heritage, his snobbish family background, and a home filled with antiques and paintings collected by his ancestors”.\textsuperscript{52}

With the renewed interest in period rooms on the one hand, and the museological focus on contemporaneity on the other, it is remarkable that debates on collecting contemporary interiors have overlooked the concept of a present-day period room. This is all the more surprising because, outside the museum, the retail sector is convinced of the irresistible appeal of today’s period rooms;\textsuperscript{53} furniture stores, construction firms and estate agents try to tempt potential buyers with modern period-room-like displays. In my comparative study (Part 2), I examine three cases in which commercial companies present contemporary period rooms and analyse them through the eyes of a museum curator. Aiming to develop a viable strategy for collecting contemporary home life by cultural-history museums, I will question what insights can be gained from these commercial domestic ensembles.
The doll's house made by carpenter W. Gelderman between 1941 and 1944 includes a store where coupons on the counter reflect the new normal.
PART 2
Comparative Case Study
Introduction to the Comparative Case Study

Driven by democratisation, contextualisation, visitor-orientation and activism, cultural-history museums are increasingly oriented towards the present, as Chapter 1 demonstrated. Indeed, contemporary collecting is now considered to be a key task by museums, to enhance visitor experiences and learning. As museums are striving to encapsulate a rich variety of perspectives on both historic events and everyday life. Nevertheless, the wish to choose carefully and maintain compact collections is equally strong, as expressed by the need to actually use collections and guarantee long-term stewardship.

As the comparative case study examines three cases in which commercial companies have constructed contemporary period-room-like ensembles for their own ends. By selecting examples that differ in aspects like size, scope and materiality, the case study offers maximum variation, thereby increasing the likelihood that it reflects diverse approaches. Through the selection of multiple cases and the decision to adopt a maximum-variation sampling strategy, the design of the study corresponds with the method advocated in Creswell & Poth's Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design (2018, 4th edition) and Yin's Case Study Research and Applications (2018, 6th edition).

My first goal when examining the cases is to understand the methods used by the companies and the ideas that underlie each example. As my intention is to develop a viable strategy for use by cultural-history museums when collecting contemporary home life, the museum context serves as a kind of fourth example. I use my experiences in this field to discuss museum practice, as well as explore the viability of the ideas suggested by the commercial domestic ensembles. Sometimes, examples are taken directly from Museum Rotterdam; on other occasions, they relate to different museums and heritage institutions.

As the comparative case study is instrumental and the cases are being used to question the collecting of contemporary home life, the museum context serves as a kind of fourth example. I use my experiences in this field to discuss museum practice, as well as explore the viability of the ideas suggested by the commercial domestic ensembles. Sometimes, examples are taken directly from Museum Rotterdam; on other occasions, they relate to different museums and heritage institutions.

Analysis

The comparative case study includes three main stages of data analysis and interpretation. The first involves providing a detailed description of the case and its original context, with the aim being to uncover the methods and underlying ideas of each company’s domestic ensembles. The perspective chosen and terminology adopted are the company’s, and relatively uncontested data is used to describe the ensemble in its real-world setting. As this is an instrumental case study, the analysis then seeks to establish important themes that relate the case to museological collecting of contemporary home life. The key issues presented here are directed towards debate and emerging questions for use in a museum context. This second stage blends an inductive with a deductive approach. In this, not only do I look for issue-relevant meanings based on each case's data, but I also guide the questions derived from the framework established previously. These questions, supplemented with an additional 'why-question', are as follows:

- What domestic ensembles has the company constructed?
- How has the company selected the objects and ensembles?
- What do the ensembles reflect?
- What do the ensembles represent?
- Why do the ensembles connect to the company’s products?
- Why has the company developed its ensembles in this way?

The final analytical and interpretive stage involves the cross-case theme analysis contained in Chapter 6 (Part 3). This analytic technique, advanced by Yin, enables me to compare initial within-case findings, discuss differences and similarities and examine preliminary insights further. As this is an instrumental comparative case study, Chapter 6 is the conclusive element, and sets out to answer the question of what insights into the museological collecting of contemporary home life can be acquired from the ideas and practices identified in the study's three cases.

Validation

Along with the use of triangulation as a validation strategy from my perspective as a researcher, it was also my view that it was important to seek feedback from the participants, as Creswell & Poth and Yin suggest. Consequently, to check my findings and interpretations, I sent my interviewees’ complete chapter before it was finalised. I particularly asked them to check their personal descriptions and reflect on the accuracy of the case description. I also included the themes to see if these analyses, which were undertaken from an entirely different perspective, gave rise to any
Main issues from Chapter 1, Contemporary Collecting

Practices:
- Compact Collections
- Post-material Culture

Purposes: Participation
Practices: Contested Authority

Orientation towards the present:
- Democratisation, contextualisation, visitor-orientation, activism
- Contemporary versus retrospective collecting

Purposes: Diversity

Main issues from Chapter 2, The Period Room

Contextualisation:
- Ensembles
- Material culture & data, narratives
- Meaning

Representation: cultural values & personal identity:
- Perspective: artistic and social period room
- Generalisation, the typical, cultural values
- Individualism, personal identity, diversity

Connecting with visitors:
- Immersion (understanding, empathy, experience)
- Interaction

Selected cases

A period room within the context of cultural-history museums usually refers to a single room, or a series of individual rooms, that can either be entered or viewed from one side. Generally, the period room is framed as part of a larger museum collection, which is a container that is explicitly not the original context. The period room thus attains the character of an imagined space, although the presented interior generally includes authentic historical objects and aims to convey a historical ordering thereof. The commercial domestic ensembles studied in this chapter belong to a similar imagined space. Unlike a museum’s period rooms, they do not aim to represent a certain era from the past, but to instead present contemporary (or even near-future) living. Three different cases have been selected to ensure variation in the approaches and ideas examined.

The first case is IKEA’s room settings. These constructed home interiors include single pieces of furniture in various home backdrops relating to function, lifestyle, budget and taste. Like a museum’s period rooms, they are presented as a series of accessible individual rooms framed within a larger collection. Stressing style and use simultaneously, IKEA’s staged interiors seem to be a combination of an artistic and a social period room. The physical resemblance between these rooms and IKEA’s room settings and the company’s global success were the main reasons why this case was chosen.

Widening the perspective from furnishings to houses, the second case explores Homestudios, a concept created by the Dutch construction firm Royal BAM Group, which operates internationally. Homestudios produces a limited collection of houses available for purchase, with buyer options on offer for both the exteriors and interiors. The Experience Centre focuses on the inside space and incorporates five different studios that guide customers through the process of buying their new-build property. One of these studios presents 11 model homes, which unify the available choices relating to spatial use and stylistic finishes. To keep house prices affordable while simultaneously meeting the needs of different clients, Homestudios has to balance standardisation with diversity, which is an issue that is analogous to museums’ interest in compact, but inclusive, collections.

The funda House is the final case. This is a virtual home developed by funda, the Netherlands’ largest property website. Its big-data house encompasses information taken from both actual purchases and the features searched for the most by visitors to the site. As a virtual house, this case is the furthest away from traditional museological period rooms. Its explicit use of big data as the prime building material was the main reason for this case’s inclusion, where consideration is given to not only a change of materiality, but also to the echoing of museums’ interest in a bottom-up approach.

These three cases reflect collections that range in size from the many objects sold by IKEA to the collection of 11 homes presented by BAM and the single house designed by funda. In scope, the collections include single pieces of furniture, entire homes and even projects with rows of houses. In terms of materiality, the collections include IKEA’s material objects, funda’s digital big-data house, as well as the objects and living spaces on offer at BAM’s Homestudios. Despite the differences, all the cases are representations of contemporary home life and can be studied as a series of modern domestic ensembles echoing the concept of a period room. What insights can be gained from these commercial ensembles? To what extent can they inspire city museums in developing a viable strategy for collecting contemporary home life?

Overview: Part 2

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide in-depth descriptions of the three cases, which have been chosen to reflect the museological concept of a contemporary period room: IKEA’s room settings, BAM’s Homestudios and the funda House. Each case has its own chapter, and each chapter adopts a similar structure.
The first section introduces the case, its issues, purpose and method. It does not concern the general approach, which has been described in the present section, but is instead about more detailed, case-specific matters.

The second section turns to the case and its context. It describes the commercial domestic ensembles, the methods and underlying ideas, as seen from the company's viewpoint. The case description is a body of relatively untested data.

Third, the within-case theme analysis highlights certain case-specific themes that relate the case to museological collecting. Looking through the eyes of a museum curator, the themes are directed towards encouraging debate and explore the case's viability for use in a museum context.

The cross-case theme analysis is part of Chapter 6. It examines both replicative and divergent findings across the cases, and aims to synthesise the within-case discoveries on a higher level of abstraction. Although this final analytical and interpretive step is part of the comparative case study, it also provides the main building blocks of the collecting strategy I will propose. I have therefore chosen to incorporate this analysis in the final part of my dissertation (Part 3).
Part of a dining room from 1921, the sideboard by Labor Omnia Vincit represents the sober design of Dutch Art Nouveau.
IKEA’s Room Settings

The ‘blue box’ that is IKEA Barendrecht is of a regular size and covers a surface area of circa 38,000 m². It is located close to two highways, the A15 and A29, and provides extra wide parking spaces near to the entrance for big family cars. While children can play in Småland, shoppers take the escalators up to the showroom on the second floor. The recommended route leads them through a maze-like display where they encounter a series of staged home interiors, arranged according to their spatial functions. After the living rooms, there are kitchens and dining rooms, home offices, bedrooms and children’s rooms. Each interior is carefully illuminated to create a specific atmosphere and suggests a particular lifestyle and taste. Notices describe the overall floor space and the cost of the items within it, while labels mention designers, dimensions and other facts relating to individual pieces of furniture. Although all the products have price tags, not much can be bought in the showroom itself. Bin-like containers are scattered across the floor, filled with cheap commodities like BUMERANG hangers, FEJKA artificial potted plants and SAMLA storage boxes, but the actual purchasing of items happens on the first floor. Here, shoppers can find all kinds of home accessories. Again, the products are grouped in functional sections (bedding, lighting, home decoration, etc.), but this time the abundance of mass-produced goods accentuates their affordability. The zig-zag routing, friendly lighting, low ceilings and the opportunity to see and touch the products create a homely atmosphere. This changes when entering the self-service warehouse, where the recommended route takes people past products piled high on numbered shelves bathed in cold light. Flat-packs reveal little of the actual products inside them, which have to be identified by their product codes. Here, customers can pick up their ready-to-assemble furniture, go to the cash desk to pay, and then load their purchases into their cars. In this area, every aspect – from self-service and flat-packs to the efficient storing of large quantities of items – expresses IKEA’s goal of selling home-furnishing products at low prices.
Room Settings as Contemporary Period Rooms

INTRODUCTION

Everything within IKEA's stores has been well planned and each detail carefully thought out, with all of these aspects contributing to the company's identity. Nonetheless, the staged home interiors within the IKEA showroom settings – must be regarded as their archetypal forms of display. The first-ever IKEA showroom opened in 1958 in Älmhult, close to where the founder, Ingvar Kamprad, grew up, and has housed the IKEA Museum since 2016. Its permanent exhibition is designed in an IKEA style, with short and simple descriptions, white peg-board and wood fibreboard construction materials, and an ample suite of PUR ALL corner bumpers. The museum showcases staff clothing from the late 1950s onwards, as well as several examples of early IKEA furniture, explicitly presenting the very first showroom as a "whole new type of shopping". Within this new ambience, the museum's written texts state, furnished rooms and carefully curatedatalogues inspired visitors, while co-workers greeted them, showed them around and offered interior design tips to suit their tastes and budget. Although the company stresses the innovative character of the room settings, IKEA was not the first furniture store to use such realistic examples. Indeed, Marilyn Friedman (2003) has demonstrated that modern design, especially Art Deco, was shown in room settings in New York department stores during the late 1920s. However, these exhibitions promoted the manufacture of quality products and cannot really be regarded as realistic in the sense of being affordable. Closer to home, the prestigious Nordiska Kompaniet (Nordic Company) department store in Stockholm had already taken steps in the IKEA direction. Housing had become a political issue in Sweden from the 1930s onwards, and government experts used books, courses, exhibitions and magazines to educate people and attempt to convince them of the appeal of a clean, simple, light and airy home. Nordiska Kompaniet also organised several courses on home furnishing between 1947 and 1965, and it was the first Swedish store to display furniture in a staged, but realistic, setting. These settings were IKEA's main inspiration, Sarolta Kockej and Iva Kristoffersson (2014) convincingly argue in Design by IKEA (2014), and Nordiska's artistic director, Lena Larsson, was even awarded a prize by her employer's competitor. IKEA was not the first to sell furniture through staged interiors, but its room settings have nevertheless evolved as a kind of trademark, featuring in both popular films and artistic projects. Indeed, I remember a scene from 500 Days of Summer (2009), in which the main characters pretend they are living in their own home while visiting an IKEA showroom. The sink in the kitchen is broken, but "that's okay," a man says, pointing to the next room, "because that's why we bought a home with two kitchens." Within each IKEA room setting, a person focuses on a funny bedroom scene: "Darling, I don't know how to tell you this... there's a Chinese family in our bathroom."4 Sandberg, meanwhile, mentions Mark Malkoff, who was allowed to move into a model bedroom in a New Jersey store for a week in 2008. Interacting with visitors and employees, Malkoff consistently pretended that he actually lived in the line. This combination of comedy and installation art produced a series of 25 videos, which attracted a lot of media attention.5 The staged interiors also feature in two IKEA commercials that were broadcast on US television in 2003. According to Sandberg, both show an uncomfortable family scene in which emotions are running high. Their depiction of contemporary period rooms sets up the notion that someone asks what they think about the room. The family's attitude then changes, saying that the rooms 'make them feel good' and so they are going to buy the furnishings.6 A connection between IKEA ensembles and museum displays has been identified earlier. Julius Bryant describes "feeling trapped in an unwinding nightmarish IKEA show".7 In turn, Sandberg mentions the powerful "scenic logic" of IKEA's interiors in his chapter about the interactivity of the model home (2011), although he does not use the specific term period room at any point. These IKEA store in Stockholm that looks like a world in itself. Inhabitants, he writes, a sense that is largely conveyed through traces of human presence. Sandberg relates this kind of housing theatre, this "culture of scenic immersion", to Scandinavian museums, model homes and commercial exhibitions in the late-19th and early-20th century.8 In Unpacking IKEA (2018), Pauline Garvey likewise describes IKEA showrooms as "tableaux vivant[s]" and agrees that their use is embedded in a regional – apparently meaning Scandinavian or even European – cultural tradition. In the previous chapter, however, I have already shown that this tradition of scenic immersion is not specifically Swedish or Scandinavian, but must instead be seen as a general museological concept that originated in Europe in the 1870s and was used a lot throughout the 20th century. As a result, IKEA's staged room settings, Garvey particularly mentions the traces of human presence and the recurring notion of design to invoke persuasive experiences.9 Finally, Irene Cierad directly links IKEA's room settings to a specific museum exhibition in her article on "IKEA and the Dutch Domestic Landscape" (2014). Questioning the company's innovative character, including its staged interiors, she refers to the 1947 exposition This is how we live in Sweden in the Stedelijk Museum, which is Amsterdam's municipal museum dedicated to modern art and design. This exhibition not only advertised well-designed and affordable Swedish products, but its presentation also foreshadowed the routine in later IKEA stores. Nevertheless, in contrast to IKEA, this IKEA show displays, visitors were not allowed to enter these staged interiors, Cierad remarks, ironically adding that "however much museum director Sandberg wanted to get rid of his historical period rooms, (...) he got staged interiors in return:"

Room settings as a possible source of inspiration

My goal in this chapter is not to trace the IKEA room settings back to their (museological) origins, but to instead understand them as a possible source of inspiration for the museological collecting of contemporary home life. As explained in the introduction to Part 2, I will examine IKEA's room settings as a collection of home interiors, consider the act of collecting, the kind of home life reflected, the people represented and the ways in which the ensembles connect with visitors.

My main reason for choosing this case is the what may, on the face of it, seem surprising physical resemblance between museums' period rooms and IKEA's room settings, although the approximately two million annual visitors to an average Dutch IKEA store would be much to the envy of many museums!11 Like period rooms, IKEA's constructed home interiors contain single pieces of furniture in various home settings relating to function, lifestyle and taste. Similarly, they are presented as a series of accessible, individual rooms framed within a larger collection. However, while museums' period rooms contextualise objects in the boundaries of period rooms present alternate contemporary home interiors. What characterises the room settings? What image of modern home life do they paint? Whose lives are they aiming to portray? How does the company construct its ensembles and select its products? And what can museums learn from IKEA's approach to contemporary exhibits?

A second reason for including the IKEA room settings in my comparative case study relates to their capacity to shift between the extremes of a global and a local market, all the while maintaining a national Swedish profile. How does this compare to the collections of city museums that combine a broad and cultural-historical interest in show homes with the particularist dimensions of their specific city? What might museums searching for a local identity learn from IKEA's struggle with Swedishness?

My final, important reason for examining IKEA's room settings concerns the ways in which the ensembles connect with visitors. Museums stress the role played by interactivity and their powerful narratives, but they generally lack the interactivity of IKEA's staged home interiors. What is the role played by interactivity in its ensembles? What other connective qualities underlie the narratives in its room settings? Are these qualities limited to commercial ensembles or might they inspire museums as well? If so, how do they affect museums' collecting policies?

Method

The popular films, artistic projects and scholarly publications mentioned previously represent just a tiny part of the overwhelming attention paid to IKEA. As my study is focused on contemporary

1. Recorded during my visit on 13 August 2017.
5. Sandberg 2011: 64.
6. Ibid. 63.
9. Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 72. Chapters 2 and 3 have showrooms as tableaux vivants and home staging as their respective subjects.
11. This visitor number compares to that of the Amsterdam Van Gogh Museum, which ranks in the top three of the most-visited Dutch museums.
museum collecting, I have ignored the numerous books and articles related to, for example, marketing and business studies, with my gaze instead on a cultural perspective. The recent publications by Sara Kristoffersson and Pauline Garvey in particular provide valuable insights into the company’s practices from a historical and cultural perspective. In Design by IKEA (2014), Kristoffersson aims to unravel the firm’s corporate storytelling from the late 1970s to the 2000s. Interviewing current and former employees, and using company documents like manuals and advertisements, Kristoffersson has adopted the company’s perspective. Garvey, on the other hand, focuses her anthropological study on the consumers. Unpacking Ikea (2018) follows furnishings from the outstanding Stockholm store to the buyers’ homes. In-depth interviews with a variety of householders reveal, for instance, the importance of interactivity in IKEA’s showrooms and its contribution to the concept of inspiration.12 A few other academic studies from different disciplines can also be related to IKEA’s room settings, such as the articles by Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti (2015) and Ledin & Machin (2019), which reflect on the ‘readability’ and interpretation of room settings from psychological and semiotic points of view, respectively. In my goal to relate the IKEA room settings to museological discourse, I have used both the museological literature and my own experiences as a museum curator to discuss the ideas emanating from this case.

Apart from the scholarly literature, various popular-media documents have proved to be insightful sources of information. Several articles in newspapers and magazines contributed to a better understanding, as did some audio-visual resources, with the BBC’s television documentary Flatpack Empire (2018) requiring explicit mention. I have also used many of IKEA’s company documents, including various annual reports and catalogues, its website, several background videos on the internet and promotional videos about customers’ frustrations with their home. Direct observations have also been made following several visits to the showroom.

Two expert interviews were important in giving me better insight into the methods used to construct room settings and their underlying ideas from a creator’s perspective. My January 2019 interview with Biba Mijaliwic-Pavic took place at the service office in Amsterdam, where she then worked as Deputy Country Communication & Interior (hereafter: Comin) Design Manager at IKEA Nederland. Biba started as an interior designer at IKEA, soon became a team leader and then Comin Manager at the Utrecht store. After a successful store renovation, she worked as a Learning & Development Leader within the Comin department, where she sought to secure and expand the knowledge level of her co-workers. In 2017, Biba was appointed Country Communication Manager at IKEA Netherlands. She thus works on a national level within the service office and is the main point of contact for the Dutch IKEA stores.

Aiming to focus on a local level and delve deeper into the actual process of constructing room settings within one of IKEA’s stores, in March 2019 I also interviewed Tamara Schouwenaar, Interior Design Manager at IKEA Barendrecht. Tamara told me about her team of interior designers who conceive all the room settings in the Barendrecht showroom. She described her main function within IKEA as more long-term and investigative, but she also assists or guides her team in the actual construction of the room settings. Although Tamara is still passionate about the design of these settings, she particularly values the long-term aspects of her management role, which encompasses the entire process from start to finish. After the first part of our interview, Tamara guided me through the Barendrecht showroom and showed me a variety of ensembles, clarifying the different approaches and the creators’ intentions. Later, I returned to the showroom floor to take some photographs of the ensembles we had discussed, and a number of these are included in this chapter.

Terminology

Although there are many parallels between IKEA’s room settings and museum ensembles, the differences between a museum and a furniture store have influenced my choice of terminology. Where it seems perfectly appropriate to use the word object to refer to a chair, table or desk in a museum context, it makes more sense to use product, item or even commodity in the context of an IKEA showroom.

Similarly, the terms public, audience and viewer have been much discussed in museology and all carry different connotations. Nonetheless, they are not really appropriate in the IKEA context, where people can watch, test and buy the furniture on display. In 2011, Sandberg suggested the term participant when studying those encountering the model home displays, but this has acquired so much museological meaning over the past decade that I prefer not to use it in a commercial context.13 Terms like customer or consumer, on the other hand, would stress the economic over the social aspects of what can be a day-trip enjoyed with others; indeed, as Garvey has shown, the latter forms an integral part of many visits.14 Consequently, like IKEA, I use the word visitor. In so doing, my intention is to adopt a neutral term that includes an enthusiastic shopper in a showroom, as well as a reticent, potential buyer viewing items on the internet.

In the overall context of my comparative case study, the IKEA ensembles are described as contemporary period rooms or period-room-like displays – which I use as an overarching term for the commercial domestic ensembles in the various cases. When trying to describe and fully understand a specific case, I consider it to be important to use specific language. In this circumstance, I adopt the term room setting, which is used by the IKEA managers I have interviewed. Although the distinctive term room set is contained in the URL of the company’s website and is used in the documentary Flatpack Empire and by Garvey (2018), my interviewees explicitly stated that they always speak of a room setting. When asked about using room set, they stood firm, but acknowledged that this would probably also be correct.15 Following on from this line of thought, I have chosen to use the company’s name using capital letters. Although there is much to be said for the alternative spelling, IKEA, especially when referring to the company as a cultural package from a consumer’s point of view, as Garvey does,16 I want to emphasise that I have adopted IKEA’s perspective in this chapter. This is also my main reason for using the company’s all-caps spelling of product names, which has the additional benefit of avoiding any confusion with people or places.

The IKEA perspective emerges particularly strongly in the next section, which aims to fully describe the company’s methods and underlying ideas. In choosing the makers’ point of view to describe the construction of the room settings, as well as the company’s all-caps spelling of ensembles squarely within the original context of an IKEA showroom, but also mirror curatorial expertise in the construction of period rooms. In so doing, I explore the methods and ideas that could apply to and inspire museum collecting.

12 Garvey also contributed to Design Anthropology and the section was published in 2018. Her chapter “Consuming IKEA and Inspiration as Material Form” is based on the same study as Unpacking Ikea.
13 Sandberg 2011: 78-79.
The stores have primarily been designed to sell as much as possible, which is primarily achieved by exhibiting items within the stores’ domestic interior settings. During our interview, Tamar Schouwenaars, the Interior Design Manager, confirmed that the products within the room settings are generally the ones that sell best. If some items need special attention, for example because there is a large stock of discontinued products, the company will take action and, sometimes, Tamara told me, displaying them within a room setting will be the best solution.27 Various contextual displays provide the products with either a functional or inspirational purpose, and the room settings are IKEA’s most conspicuous type of display. Replicating the museum period room, these constructed home interiors present pieces of furniture in various homes: the function relates to lifestyle and taste. Whereas the company’s product range contains circa 9,500 unique items, which are mass-produced and sold worldwide, the room settings contain the products that have been specifically selected to appeal to the local showroom’s visitors. The rooms may thus present a limited selection or, on the other hand, might include several of the company’s mass-produced items. In a tabloid sense, the sum of the room settings is more akin to a city museum’s collection than a singular product range. Constructing a series of room settings involves selecting products from a wealth of possibilities to create a variety of coherent interiors – a series of possible worlds to inhabit – and this broadly resembles a curator’s process of selecting objects and ensembles for a museum collection. How do the IKEA ‘curators’ construct their domestic ensembles and select the products? Who are they? On what information do they base their decisions? What are the room settings aiming to achieve? And why has IKEA developed these settings in this way?28

Constructing a room setting

IKEA’s store exteriors are clearly recognizable and, likewise, the layout is similar across the globe. Just as the product range is developed by the central organisation, IKEA of Sweden also advises individual stores about the selection and presentation of the products within a range. These choices have to sustain a general image that captures the ‘soul’ of the company while allowing necessary adaptations for the local market. The local store manager thus has some freedom in relation to the final selections and presentation.29 My interviewees formulated this explicitly from a converse perspective: although the Swedish database provides international examples, the local market often requires significant adjustments. So, individually, managers increasingly tend to produce their own layouts.29 Interior design manager Tamara accentuated the importance of a local approach: We have a kind of toolbox that contains a lot of information. We can get layouts from there and then fit and measure them in ours. So, we’re working with that, although recently we’re less and less because we want to have it more focused on our market. Because… What’s made in Älmhult is not, by definition, the Dutch market. From there, we still have a lot to tinker with, so sometimes we actually decide it ourselves – or often even.30

The first four or five room settings within each showroom play an especially important role. Recommendations made by the Common Store Planning Group for a new store’s layout cover about 90 per cent of these room settings, displaying the right mix of ‘Swedishness’ and adaptation to the local market.31 Together, they constitute the so-called showroom entrance, formerly called the “First impression”, which increasingly tend to offer in terms of style and function for every target group. The core areas – living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms – have to be represented, preferably

...
These four photographs illustrate the showroom entrance at IKEA Barendrecht in July 2018. A living room of 20m² was followed by a smaller room of 15m² that combined living and dining and then, thirdly, there was a much larger combination of a kitchen-diner and living area of 32m². The fourth room setting was found on the opposite side, and comprised a large bedroom and dressing room (surface area not mentioned).

Photos Mayke Groffen (6 July 2018).
with the addition of a secondary area, like a bathroom, children’s room or outdoor space. In contrast to the other sections, the showroom entrance now also includes a redesign of the entrance area. The documentary shows Rickylee holding a biography of extravert Ben, a single 29-year-old tattooist with an annual income of 30,000 to 39,000 pounds. She and her team use this script to create a connection to the room setting, which enables them to tell a convincing story and visitors to connect to their own lives at home. 37

Whether or not the approximately 60 room settings per store represent the home interiors of fictional characters or, more directly, reflect contemporary living circumstances, they all aim to offer visitors imaginative solutions to real-life challenges. Scenarios enable the team to make a social connection and to choose the right furnishings for future inhabitants, which should, in turn, appeal to certain visitors. In order to attract different visitor groups and sell as many furnishings as possible, the room settings have to be based on a variety of narratives. To this end, the process of creating a room always starts with a work brief. This contains information about the inhabitants of the room, including their age, income, activities and needs. These factors underlie the interior design drawing produced for each room setting.

Next, a visual identity is created, which is a moodboard-like visualisation of the general feel that the researchers are aiming to convey. The visual identity is then translated into a scenario, which depicts both the staged setting and the narrated story in quite some detail. This might describe a father or mother making dinner while their child sits at the dining table, half listening and doing some homework at the same time. The scenario is further developed from a functional perspective, and contains information on matters like living circumstances, spatial arrangements, solutions to problems and expressions of style. An inventory of needs generally results in a product collage, after which the room setting’s specific furnishings are chosen. 38 This is in contrast to museums, which

**Differentiating between “the many people”**

In order to attract a wide variety of visitors, IKEA’s interior designers’ approach to creating a room setting has to guarantee the development of a broad range of convincing narratives. These are situated in a number of spaces, such as living rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms, children’s rooms and home offices. Products are thus first grouped according to their spatial function. Internal considerations like a product’s life-cycle and what IKEA calls the “range balance” (i.e., a mix of new and proven products) are also taken into account in the construction of the various ensembles. Nevertheless, in appealing to “the many people”, IKEA uses three main ways to differentiate between them: taste (style groups); budget (price levels); and household (living situation).

As previously mentioned, a variety of living scenarios form the starting point for IKEA’s home visits. This interest in households and lifestyles began in the 1970s, when the company realised that its aspiration to display familiar ensembles required thorough insights into people’s habits and needs. More or less systematic research directed towards identifying real-life problems led to the concept of Livet Hemma (Life at Home), later called Living Situations, which came to function as a tool for monitoring the different stages of domestic life. 39 Today’s types of household make a primary distinction between those with or without children. These are further categorised into families with children under the age of 12, divided into two groups: baby/toddler and starting school.

Children older than 12 are categorised as teens & tweens or 20+. Households without children are

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32 Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 26:45 and 28:97].
34 Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 3:24, 13:01 and 42:18].
35 Ibid. [Part 1, 8:55].
36 Ibid. [Part 1, 19:14].
38 The description in this paragraph is based on several pieces of information obtained from interviews conducted on 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 38:53, 40:45, 42:03] and 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 6:33, part 2, 4:42].
Triptych by Peter Trouwborst showing the demolition of houses on Gaffelstraat (Oude Westen) in 1976.
T amara (the interior design manager at Barendrecht) explained, but today’s ageing population remains quite young at heart, and so there is often no need to differentiate in this manner.40

Different price levels are also distinguished to appeal to different visitors. Products within the room settings are sorted into the categories high, medium and low. These are not so much related to income, but to how much visitors are willing to spend in an IKEA store.41 A fourth price level relates to single products only: “breath-taking items” are priced extremely low to make them irresistible to customers and encourage impulse buying.42 These products, including the best-selling PLASTIS dish brush, are available in large quantities in bins or on pallets throughout the showroom.

Along with household and budget, the final main tool used to differentiate between IKEA’s visitors is taste, whereby products are categorised into style groups and stylistic expressions to incorporate the taste preferences of a wide variety of potential customers. Apparently, the stylistic expressions are applied at the interior designers’ discretion. They might, for example, give a popular modern style a minimalist appearance or create an interior finishing innovation. The products are simple, light, functional and well crafted. They’re sturdy and well used. IKEA has also added a few do-it-yourself tips, which explain how to paint your floor in a beautiful pattern, how to personalise the ANGALI cabinet and how to make a coffee table using four KNAGGLIG boxes, four MALL wheels and an MDF board.

Photo Mayke Groffen (July 2018).

The lifestyle of a young household with limited finances is reflected in this room setting at IKEA Barendrecht. A large banner promises “more for less” and calculates that all the furnishings can be bought for no more than €1,000. Furniture can be used flexibly to ensure the space’s 15m² are well used. IKEA has also added a few do-it-yourself tips, which explain how to paint your floor in a beautiful pattern, how to personalise the ANGALI cabinet and how to make a coffee table using four KNAGGLIG boxes, four MALL wheels and an MDF board.

Photo Mayke Groffen (July 2018).

The fourth room setting in IKEA Barendrecht’s entrance area is based on the living circumstances of a single woman aged 68. It reflects the Popular Traditional style, which is indicated by the many flowers, check patterns and bevelled edges. As Tamara, the IKEA interior design manager, remarked during our interview, this kind of over-decorating is in contrast to the clear and straightforward Scandinavian style.

Photo Mayke Groffen (22 March 2019).

Inspired by European interiors of the 18th and 19th century, the Popular Traditional style group is warm and welcoming. A decorative and internationally oriented style, popular traditional widens people’s perception of the IKEA offer. It mixes detailed decorative darker impressions with textile-intensive lighter moods.44

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Photo Mayke Groffen (22 March 2019).
The description in the video diverges slightly from the four main style groups mentioned in the scholarly literature. In 2018, Garvey thought it better to give them the names Traditional, Scandinavian, Modern and Young. Earlier, Kristoffersson (2014) had chosen Traditional (formerly known as Country), Scandinavian Modernism, International Modernism and Young. However, a footnote mentions the groups according to their categorisation in 2012: Scandinavian Traditional, Modern, Popular Modern and Popular Traditional. The names and precise descriptions seem to have varied slightly over time, but the 2012 classification closely resembles that in the 2017 video.

All of IKEA’s products are developed within the style groups. Moreover, all the room settings express one of these styles. Items are thus grouped in ensembles that, in turn, convey a Scandinavian Traditional, Scandinavian Modern, Popular Modern or Popular Traditional style. Although a room setting may contain items from different style groups, one principal style dominates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advocate the notion that all the products nates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advocate the notion that all the products nates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advocate the notion that all the products nates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advocate the notion that all the products nates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advocate the notion that all the products nates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advocate the notion that all the products nates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advocate the notion that all the products nates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advocate the notion that all the products nates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advantage to diverse real-life problems.

The current section relates the IKEA case more explicitly to museological collecting of contemporary home life. Four important themes within this case are examined to explore what museums can learn from IKEA’s approach. The first of these investigates the real-life problems the room settings are said to solve. In popular YouTube videos, IKEA claims to tackle the frustrations we have with our homes today, and its room settings similarly provide clever alternatives to challenging circumstances. What issues are raised? What solutions are suggested? Moreover, from which perspective are the ensembles constructed and how do they relate to time? According to the first theme, the IKEA approach is to provide imaginative solutions to diverse real-life problems.

The second case-specific theme of Swedishness highlights the room settings’ capacity to appeal to both a global and a local market, while simultaneously advertising a Swedish profile. This replicates the interest of city museums in building a collection that serves visiting tourists and local communities alike, as well as one that combines a broader cultural-historical perspective on urban life and a city’s particularist dimensions. Moreover, when it comes to a collection that is related to home life especially, how and to what extent can it be framed nationally or locally? What insights can museums searching for a local identity acquire from IKEA’s struggle with Swedishness?

The third theme further examines the contextualisation of objects in ensembles. Although the theme also relates to display techniques, my interest lies not so much in the presentation itself as in the way presentations affect collecting practices. The IKEA case shows how, in a contemporary setting limited to the specific cultural subject-matter of the home, different ensembles convey different values. “Inspirational images, functional solutions” compares the contexts provided by IKEA’s showrooms to those in museums and examines their underlying ideas. I will argue that museums must consider their display techniques in their collection policies, as well as pay special attention to coherent, functional ensembles where contemporary home life is concerned.

Finally, the fourth theme explores the museological issue of connecting objects or ensembles to visitors. The museum period room has long been perceived as an immersive type of display that connects even those with little museum experience to objects. Nevertheless, the sensorial repertoire of the period room is rather limited and lacks the interactivity of IKEA’s room settings. What role is played by interactivity in the IKEA ensembles? What other connective qualities underlie their room settings? Are these qualities limited to commercial ensembles or might they inspire museums as well? Moreover, if so, how would they affect museums’ collecting policies?

3.3 Themes

The previous section describes IKEA’s room settings in an attempt to understand the underlying ideas and perspectives. It demonstrates how interior designers use a fixed approach to construct the room settings, which enables them to tell convincing stories based on local living arrangements. Furthermore, it makes clear that categorisations of households, budgets and tastes are the main tools used to differentiate between visitors, while the narratives are situated in various functional spaces. It is also apparent that the ensembles aim to provide imaginative solutions to diverse real-life problems.

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Consequently, a different moment of truth, combined with a different attitude towards objects, entails a different meaning of home life in the ensembles. While it is difficult to change the aspect of object availability, it is relevant to further examine the home life that the ensembles represent. What issues are raised and what solutions are suggested by IKEA’s room settings? What do their “possible worlds” look like?

**Solutions for Real-life Problems**

IKEA began to conduct market research in the 1970s to gain insight into our habits and needs. Although this research is also used to both ensure styles are kept up-to-date and incorporate the preferences of a wide variety of potential customers, it is primarily directed towards identifying real-life challenges. The company has published the findings of its global research since 2014. These are set out in its annual *Life at Home Reports*, which combines research and theoretical qualitative work. In the 2019 report, for example, IKEA describes engaging with 150 people online, conducting in-depth interviews over 75 hours during home visits in six cities (Shanghai, Mumbai, London, New York and Amsterdam), and interviewing 33,500 adults in 35 countries across five continents. Last year, during the coronavirus pandemic, they interviewed 364 people in 37 countries virtually connected with 20 households and consulted four experts on interior design, sustainability, (in)equality and urban studies.

The first two *Life at Home Reports* concentrated on a specific theme (waking up) or space (the kitchen), but later versions have adopted a more abstract perspective. The 2016 report defined four key dimensions of home life (relationships, place, space and things), while that from the following year examined the interplay between them. This 2017 report described “common household battles”, which were presented as tensions that affect most of us worldwide, for example “the feeling of home starting within us vs. the outside creating it in its own way.”

IKEA’s room settings reflect on interior design, sustainability, (in)equality and urban studies.

Research has also been conducted closer to home to identify customers’ preferences and needs. Internet data have been analysed, models based on motivational lifestyle segmentation utilised and the company’s virtual home configurator. During my interview at the Service Office, Deputy Country Comin manager Biba Mijaivolic particularly mentioned the funda web site as a source when reconsidering house types and the nature of the homes on offer. Annual research is also conducted to gather information about potential customers in each store’s primary markets. Part of this systematic work involves the home visits made to customers in each IKEA’s surrounding areas. During these visits – for which people can enrol and get a gift card in return – interior designers record their thoughts and questions about the use of space. “Many people don’t expect they will face a challenge themselves,” the interior designer says. “It’s sometimes about the questions asked during home visits.”

Quite a few years ago, we started to use the ‘activity wheel’. The questions often function as a guideline as well. Then you’ll think about all kinds of solutions for that. It’s getting colder. Where do you store your summer things, and where do all the winter things come from? What happens? And what’s needed? We’ll question these aspects down to the last detail. This includes the various life stages. Parents with schoolchildren get back to their old routines in September, but people with older children may well choose to go on holiday then. So, many different things happen between summer and New Year’s Day. And then, a new period will start again.

In Barendrecht, Tamara added that the activity wheel relates to basic matters, like reading, sport, creating an outdoor living space or setting the table for a cosy dinner party. “You can think out-of-the-box and fantasise about all the possible things a person might do at home”, she said, “but, in fact, what we want to address the many”. In following basic activities across the seasons and applying them to the room settings, IKEA aims to present easily recognisable scenarios to meet their customers’ needs all year round.

The differences between the home visits and the global research are quite remarkable, and I have struggled to find a common thread in the two, but these seem somewhat trivial, mainly questioning the efficient and comfortable furnishing of a house. Allegedly, the biggest home frustration relates to the common sense of inhabiting the home – to want to keep while maintaining a tidy interior. The nature of the solutions is typical IKEA: not decluttering, but the purchase of a practical storage system instead. The problems raised in the *Life at Home Reports*, on the other hand, relate individual homes on a higher level of abstraction to our lives

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49 Pink et al. 2017: 27-28. This underlines the role of “inspiration” in this process, quoting from Garvey’s chapter *Consuming Ikea* (2010, 1st edition, p. 143): “(…) inspiration (…) does not necessarily imply transformation but rather gives names to a complicated process of possibilities”.
50 Sandberg 2011: 65.
51 Kristoffersson 2014: 63.
55 Ibid. 20-23.
56 Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 8:55-11:10].
57 Interview 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 18:40-29:29].
58 Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 17:04 and 30:18].
59 Garvey 2018 // Unpacking: 29.
60 Pink et al. 2017: 27-28. This underlines the role of “inspiration” in this process, quoting from Garvey’s chapter *Consuming Ikea* (2010, 1st edition, p. 143): “(…) inspiration (…) does not necessarily imply transformation but rather gives names to a complicated process of possibilities”.
66 Ibid. 20-23.
The glossy magazine Every Woman (2011) visualises Habiba’s future home in a neighbourhood overhauled by large-scale demolition and renovation. In accordance with the wishes of the participants, it was the future solution instead of the existing ‘home frustrations’ that was presented. Source: Museum Rotterdam, Exhibition Archive. Illustrations Caroline Ellerbeck (2011).
The postcard shows orphaned girls in a room for knitting at the Reformed Citizens’ Orphanage in Rotterdam in about 1920-1925.
Consequently, to prevent health problems, the family intended to get rid of all their possessions except the washing machine and dryer. They have outgrown the space, Habiba explained during the interview, and it is now used for storage. As the house is damp, everything is affected by mould. The outcome is [that] people feel more connected to the museum and the city. We emphasise the meaning of their activities and label it as heritage. Rotterdam and its residents to present this contemporary heritage. The city museum context alone causes [people] to randomise objects and produce a dramatically different environment, which is used as an alternative to the photographic recording of all the varieties of a product and the actual staging of interiors. Prior to the large-scale use of CGI, transporting real objects to the photo studio, photographing each product and building ensembles based on geographic preferences was very time-consuming and extensive. Now, however, different room settings that suit the global market can be created without changing actual

Habiba had invested in furnishing the house for 12 years, but had instead saved her money for the family’s new home, based on Habiba’s scrapbook session with an interior stylist and illustrator. As noted about Every Woman in an essay concerning collecting contemporary culture, “the process of setting up security, belonging (…), was more important than portraying or documenting reality.” Yet for an urban history collection, the actual situation is at least as important. In that respect, there may be a difference between presenting and collecting. Dreams of the future may help to clarify the current circumstances, but the collection should also provide a nuanced picture of the present.

Reflecting Contemporary Home Life in Museums

Museums do not easily relate to the future. Their interior ensembles play no part in a home-making process and the objects on display are not for sale either. The museum context alone causes an interior to be interpreted as a situation that had once existed or, at least, as one that might have done so. Although policies for contemporary collecting may include dreams of the future or ‘solutions’ comparable to IKEA’s room settings, museum collections should not overlook actual living circumstances, since they constitute the framework her of the intended use. As Habiba explained, “I haven’t done anything about the house since then”, she says in the magazine. During the research phase, interviews were conducted and the house was photographed extensively. One photo in particular arouses curiosity, showing a baby’s room filled with stacks of bags and boxes. Her daughter has outgrown the space, and Habiba explained during the interview, and it is now used for storage. As the house is damp, everything is affected by mould. Consequently, to prevent health problems, the family intended to get rid of all their possessions (except the washing machine and dryer) when they moved. New, inexpensive items had been bought over the past year, and everything was very well packed and being cleared until the move. Habiba had not invested in furnishing the house for 12 years, but had instead saved her money for the family’s new, long-awaited home.

This magazine article does not particularly concern the house’s deplorable conditions or the need to live for years in such an environment, but rather that the museum exhibit mainly relates to Habiba’s eagerly anticipated move to a completely renovated property. In accordance with the express wishes of the women who participated in the project, their existing circumstances were not the magazine’s starting point, but the future solution. A wish list was included and a double-page spread visualises the

### THEME 2

**Swedishness**

Social history and city museums throughout Europe are striving to improve their social significance, focusing on the relationship between the local community and the museum. Closely linked in this way, the emphasis tends to be on the value of museums as institutions for empowerment and inclusion. Simultaneously, city museums aim to attract tourists and serve as an ‘introduction to the city’, providing insight into its history and connecting visitors to its heritage. How can museums build an attractive collection for both target groups? Should they stress the particularist dimensions of the city, i.e., its uniqueness and exceptionalism, or concentrate on its universalist dimensions, sketching an image of its characteristics, whether or not they are different to life in other cities? And when it concerns a collection related to home life, how and to what extent can this be framed nationally or locally? One of the reasons for including the IKEA room settings in my comparative case study was the company’s capacity to shift between the two extremes of a global and a local market, while also maintaining a national Swedish profile. The ensemble is said to reflect an easier, more natural life, perceived as typically IKEA within Scandinavia and as typically Swedish or Scandinavian in the rest of the world. How does this compare to the collections of city museums that combine a broader cultural-historical interest in urban life with the particularist dimensions of their specific city? What might museums searching for a local identity learn from IKEA’s struggle with ‘Swedishness’?

#### Global Trends, Geographic Zones

IKEA pairs a global product range with showrooms attracting local visitors. While the former is based on research that charts macro-trends worldwide, additional work aims to differentiate between geographic zones, countries or even local markets. This means, for instance, that various editions of the annual catalogue were developed specifically for different geographic regions with different cultural characteristics. As stated, there are different images on different IKEA websites. A lecture from Martin Enthed, digital manager at IKEA, about the production of photo-real images provides insight into the amount of tweaking required to appeal to diverse audiences.

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60 Information retrieved from the museum’s research database and my personal notes.
62 For example, the 2010 conference City Museums on the Move discussed “the city museum or the community museum as an instrument for empowerment and emancipation”. Kessels, Kistemaker & Meijer-van Mensch 2012: 8. Another example can be found in the publication Authentic Rotterdam Heritage (part 2), which explains its approach as follows: “Every year, we [Museum Rotterdam Heritage] focus on a specific project with the involvement of Rotterdam residents to present this contemporary heritage. Together with Rotterdam people, we survey the meaning of their activities and label it as heritage. The outcome is [that] people feel more connected to the museum and the city. We emphasise the importance of their activities and Rotterdam residents become more motivated in their commitment to the city.” Van Dijk 2019: 8.
ComIn Manager Biba Mijailovic told me during our interview that "people live in IKEA Amsterdam very much focus on small rooms. Low prices are, of course, important, but they also focus on small rooms for people with a fat wallet. (...) In Hengelo it’s the opposite: people have less to spend, but they have larger houses. So, you’ll have to approach this differently. You may have a large living space, but you can’t automatically furnish it according to your own desires and fantasies. You have to consider the people who visit your store. What houses do they live in, what do they expect and what do they have to spend? And how can we create this for them, in the most imaginative and functional ways? Stores like IKEA Hengelo and Heerlen are located near to Germany, and in Germany they have different tastes and different needs regarding styles. Generally, the Dutch taste is quite sleek, more modern... more minimalist. In Germany they prefer a somewhat more traditional design, more prints and patterns, and more textiles. We’ll take all these things into account."^64

Consequently, local markets require local approaches to reflect real-world home situations and conform to local tastes. Nevertheless, "if you close your eyes and squat a little, it’s all the same", Biba stated, "and that’s for a good reason: it’s really about recognition."^65

When considering, for example, the way people live, IKEA Amsterdam very much focuses on small rooms. Low prices are, of course, important, but they also focus on small rooms for people with a fat wallet. (...) In Hengelo it’s the opposite: people have less to spend, but they have larger houses. So, you’ll have to approach this differently. You may have a large living space, but you can’t automatically furnish it according to your own desires and fantasies. You have to consider the people who visit your store. What houses do they live in, what do they expect and what do they have to spend? And how can we create this for them, in the most imaginative and functional ways? Stores like IKEA Hengelo and Heerlen are located near to Germany, and in Germany they have different tastes and different needs regarding styles. Generally, the Dutch taste is quite sleek, more modern... more minimalist. In Germany they prefer a somewhat more traditional design, more prints and patterns, and more textiles. We’ll take all these things into account."^64

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Within the actual stores, as Deputy Country ComIn Manager Biba Mijailovic told me during our interview, IKEA focuses on life at home on both a national and a local level. Although many aspects of what people need are the same everywhere, cultural differences are nonetheless given careful consideration. In the Netherlands, for example, very few houses have a separate dining room or a large kitchen diner; instead, it is rather typical for the Dutch to have their dining table in the living room, close to the kitchen. Yet even within a small country like the Netherlands, regional differences have to be considered. "To our visitors, an IKEA store is simply an IKEA store", Biba stresses, "but when paying attention, you’ll notice the differences between, for example, Amsterdam and Hengelo." Disparities relate to space and budget, as well as style, she further explained:

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Antoinette, Capri and Texas

While IKEA succeeds at combining the extremes of a global and local approach, ‘Swedishness’ is equally part of the company’s identity. IKEA’s products must be simple and straightforward as we are ourselves", Ingvar Kamprad stated in Testament of a Furniture Seller (1976), continuing that the items on sale must also be hard-wearing and easy to live with, reflect a relaxed and more natural life, and have a youthful accent that appeals to the young at heart. Moreover, the products should be perceived as typically IKEA in Scandinavia and typically Swedish elsewhere. The video on style groups, published online in 2017, confirms this profile, clarifying that while the Scandinavian Traditional style group is admittedly the smallest and has the fewest commercial opportunities, it is nevertheless essential "in supporting the unique IKEA identity and making sure that people everywhere perceive our range as typically Swedish, or in Scandinavia: typically IKEA."^66

Swedishness was also discussed in the interview with Tamara Schouwenaaars at IKEA Barendrecht in response to a small display in the back office, presenting rocks against a photograph of a Swedish landscape. "Swedishness is very important to me. It does not always have to be clearly visible, she explained, but "underlying values like simplicity and togetherness define our way of working and are also applied in our design language."^66

In Design by IKEA (2014), Sara Kristoffersson analyses the company’s corporate storytelling. The third chapter of her book explores the ideals, norms and values that are termed ‘Swedish’ by IKEA. Kristoffersson shows that its logo, with the yellow and blue correspondence to the colours of the Swedish flag, the food in the restaurants and the Nordic-sounding product names with their letters å, ä and ö serving as prominent Swedish markers. Other, less obvious, aspects of a Swedish way of working and are also applied in our design to nature, the allusions to the country as a harmonious and modern welfare state, and the nationally embraced ideals of clean, simple and functional design. Nonetheless, as Kristoffersson demonstrates, the emphasis on Swedishness was not part of the original concept. Indeed, until 1961, the company’s name was spelled with a French-like acute accent as Ikéa. Moreover, the early product names did not sound Swedish at all, with French, Italian or even American names being common – Antoinette, Capri and Texas, for instance. Furthermore, although the logo is now a prominent national marker, it was only introduced in 1983 or 1984, replacing a red and white variant. As Kristoffersson asserts, it was actually only after the brand started to expand abroad in the 1980s that Swedishness gradually came to represent the core of IKEA’s narrative, and it was the company itself that described many of its ideals as Swedish. Consequently, Swedishness is not so much discerned in the products themselves, as in the discourse and rhetoric attached to them. IKEA’s Swedish profile has been subjected to extensive criticism. Irene Cieraad, for example, concluded in 2014 that the company’s products are appreciated in the Netherlands due to their practicality and attractive pricing; their Swedish character, however, was going unnoticed. Even more critical was Ursula Lindqvist in her 2009 article “The Cultural Archive of the IKEA Store”, in which she exposed a wide variety of “hidden histories and repressed heterogeneities” within the company’s narrative of Swedish exceptionalism. Examples included Kamprad’s embrace of racial biology, IKEA’s “linguistic exclusiveness” and the resultant erasure of non-Nordic contributions, the marginalisation of immigrants, and the fact that the low prices enabling “the many” to buy products...
are achieved through the use of inexpensive labour in developing markets. IKEA's conception of Swedishness has thus been criticised because of its underlying valuing of Swedish exceptionalism and the consequential exclusion of certain groups. What can city museums searching for a local identity learn from IKEA’s struggle with Swedishness? And what insights does the case provide about the combination of universalist and particularist aspects of contemporary home life?

A City Museum's Local Identity
IKEA combines the global and local. Cultural differences are acknowledged on different levels (geographic zones, countries, local markets) and reflected in the company’s websites and stores. However, many aspects of what we need are similar worldwide, as seen in the international product range and the general image evoked by the showroom’s ensembles. As the IKEA case suggests, even greater similarity can be expected on a national level.

With this in mind, it seems viable for regional and national city and cultural-history museums, including open-air museums, to join their collecting efforts together in order to cover the common aspects of home life in an overarching, national collection. At the same time, city museums could then develop a local profile in which they examine their individuality (their local identity) in a nuanced manner. They could therefore stress the uniqueness of their city, their exceptionalism, knowing that the universalist aspects – the characteristics of Dutch city life in general – are preserved on a national level. Such coordination would result in far less overlap than is currently the case and, at the same time, lead to more comprehensive collecting of contemporary home life.

In relation to the local-identity aspect, it is important to note that profiles are generally not achieved through the use of inexpensive labour in developing markets. IKEA's conception of Swedishness has thus been criticised because of its underlying valuing of Swedish exceptionalism and the consequential exclusion of certain groups. What can city museums searching for a local identity learn from IKEA’s struggle with Swedishness? And what insights does the case provide about the combination of universalist and particularist aspects of contemporary home life?

The advantage of a collection of home life is that it is able to bridge specific and general features, and in doing so it not only connects the various communities in super-diverse cities, but also serves as a bridge to link tourists with the city’s history and contemporary heritage.

### Inspirational images, functional solutions

This theme further examines the contextualisation of objects in collections, both comparing the contexts provided by museums to the ensembles in IKEA’s showrooms and considering their underlying ideas. Although this section relates to display techniques and the general image evoked by the showroom’s ensembles. As the IKEA case suggests, even greater similarity can be expected on a national level.

With this in mind, it seems viable for regional and national city and cultural-history museums, including open-air museums, to join their collecting efforts together in order to cover the common aspects of home life in an overarching, national collection. At the same time, city museums could then develop a local profile in which they examine their individuality (their local identity) in a nuanced manner. They could therefore stress the uniqueness of their city, their exceptionalism, knowing that the universalist aspects – the characteristics of Dutch city life in general – are preserved on a national level. Such coordination would result in far less overlap than is currently the case and, at the same time, lead to more comprehensive collecting of contemporary home life.

In relation to the local-identity aspect, it is important to note that profiles are generally not achieved through the use of inexpensive labour in developing markets. IKEA's conception of Swedishness has, however, mainly been criticised because of its underlying valuing of Swedish exceptionalism and the consequential exclusion of particular groups of people. It should thus be learned that while a focus on local identity can create a sense of home for certain communities, others will feel excluded. This is the negative side of so-called ‘bonding performances’, i.e., presentations that focus on an intrinsic community to confirm or celebrate community values. In contrast to these, ‘bridging performances’ aim to connect outsiders and community. The advantage of a collection of home life is that it is able to bridge specific and general features, and in doing so it not only connects the various communities in super-diverse cities, but also serves as a bridge to link tourists with the city’s history and contemporary heritage.

### Museum Objects and Contexts

Chapter 2 has shown that the museological period room arose from the need for a contextual display and became emblematic of a representation of both social history and the decorative arts in the early-20th century. However, burgeoning Modernism prioritised the individual object and, especially in art museums, context was often perceived as a hindrance. Nevertheless, within the post-modern museum, visitors' relationships with objects have gained in importance, resulting in a renewed interest in contextual presentations. In her book Museums and their Visitors (1994), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill cites a study in which people were asked about their favourite exhibition techniques for three kinds of object: a piece of furniture, a sculpture and a small decorative art item. These visitors, who were carefully selected to represent a wide, representative audience, ranked four typical methods of display:

- The individual object with its label.
- A range of similar objects, each with their own label.
- The object in the context of a room setting or vignette with a brief general description.

While many aspects of what we need are similar worldwide, as seen in the international product range and the general image evoked by the showroom’s ensembles. These presentations that focus on an intrinsic community to confirm or celebrate community values. In contrast to these, ‘bridging performances’ aim to connect outsiders and community. The advantage of a collection of home life is that it is able to bridge specific and general features, and in doing so it not only connects the various communities in super-diverse cities, but also serves as a bridge to link tourists with the city’s history and contemporary heritage.

This came as no surprise to Graham Black, who stated in Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century (2012) that: “Representations or re-creations of original contexts can support visitor understanding”, continuing “particularly by enabling them to relate to their own experiences and expressions”. This argues that conversations around collections lie at the heart of visitor engagement and, although they create their own meanings, object displays affect conversations. Space, for example, emphasises an object’s importance, a group suggests associations and connections between objects, and providing original contexts aids understanding. “It is no surprise that modern museums use contextualisation through setting up room displays to encourage sales”, he casually remarks, because “people want to relate what they are viewing to their own lives – if they can imagine the objects in the context of everyday living, sales will increase.”

Later publications further examined the information contexts and techniques for expanding the scope from the display method to the museum itself, and then, even wider, to the museum’s discipline-specific value standard. In his article “Work, specimen, witness” (2015), Thomas Thiemeyer distinguishes between three types of object and connects them to specific scientific disciplines and corresponding display conventions. Consequently, he links the work to the fields of art studies and literary studies, which are based on aesthetic theories. Uniqueness and originality are emphasised by the seclusion of the object, which lends a piece of work an exclusive aura. Next, the specimen relates to the natural sciences. Based on

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76. Ibid.
77. Black 2012: Chapter 6 Conversations around Collections, 143-165; quotes from p. 149.
taxonomies, the core values of these objects are
systematics and representativeness. As their
meaning lies in the relationship between objects,
specimens are typically presented in serial or rela-
tional modes of display. Finally, the object as a wit-
ness is associated with the field of general history.
The authentic object functions as a source that
enables visitors to comprehend the past, and its
affective value increases when the object is di-
rectly connected to an important event or person.
Additional information places the witness in a
narrative that leads to the recognition of its
importance. These differences are not, however,
related to an object’s intrinsic value, but are the
result of curatorial practice. By changing display
conventions, Thiemeyer stresses, museums can
affect the value and meaning of the objects. As an
example, a painting can be presented in juxtaposi-
tion to other works of art in order to convey the
idea of a certain school, while a mass-produced
object can be displayed in isolation on a pedestal.

Thiemeyer considers these types of object in
terms of an historical approach related to different
museum disciplines. The IKEA case, however,
shows how, in a contemporary setting and limited
to the specific cultural subject-matter of the home
interior, different modes of display convey differ-
ent values. Although the IKEA stores do not present
their products as unique items (‘works’), instead
accentuating their affordability by offering them
for sale in large quantities, both serial and narrat-
ive contexts can be found in the carefully planned
showrooms. My interview with Tamara at the IKEA
showroom in Barendrecht demonstrated that the
presentation of “objects in the context of everyday
living” is not as unambiguous as Black suggested,
but alternatively involves various contextual per-
spectives.

IKEA’S Serial and Narrative Displays

The interior designer manager Tamara guided me
through the showrooms at the Barendrecht showroom
during our interview. Highlighting a variety of product
displays, she clarified how designers and visual mer-
chandisers contribute to the diverse ways in which
visitors encounter the merchandise, pointing out
different serial and narrative contexts for the items
on sale.

The serial modes of display in IKEA’s showrooms
are part of the visual merchandisers’ remit, and
encompass compacts, studios and shops. Com-
pacts are groups of similar products that enable
visitors to test and compare related items in a
range. Customers are encouraged to pick up and
choose their favourite pieces, whether it be a
chair, bed or sideboard. Just like the compacts,
studios and shops are designed to make it easy for
people to decide between various products. While
an IKEA shop generally sells smaller and simpler
home accessories, a studio explains the process
relating to the more complicated merchandise. Kit-
chens and PAX wardrobes, for example, are rather
complex items that can be planned in a studio,
either with or without paid services. The compacts,
studios and shops resemble Thiemeyer’s concep-
tion of the serial presentations of specimens inso-
far as they present a group of products (chairs) or
a certain system (the PAX wardrobe) in which the
individual item is subordinate to its generic qualities.

As well as the serial displays, the visual mer-
chandisers also design various types of narrative
display, such as the range coordination collage,
lounge area and activity podium. The first of these
focuses on one item and presents it in relation to
the other pieces in IKEA’s product range. Collages like
these can be found in a showroom’s compacts and
aim to have a high visual impact. The products
used are selected not so much for their function,
but for the colour and feeling they convey. More
extensive narrative presentations can be found in the
lounge area and on the activity podium. Both displays
present limited editions, new products or other ‘messages’ closely linked to a temporary
focus of attention. While the former can be found
at a showroom’s entrance, the latter are available
throughout. All of these narrative ensembles aim
to be inspirational, displaying the breadth of a col-
lection or highlighting a special offer, but they do
not provide the functional solutions that IKEA’s
interior designers seek to present.

While IKEA’s visual merchandisers produce
various types of commercial display, the interior
designers create three sizes of functional context
for the company’s products: home, room setting
and vignette. These contexts can be compared to
Thiemeyer’s narratives concerning objects as wit-
esses, all of which function in the same way setting the
products do not serve as an ontological link to the
past, but instead contain the promise of a better
future. The largest of the interior designers’ contextual
displays is the home, which is a representation of a
complete house. There were two different homes
on show during my visit in March 2019, covering
areas of 25m² and 35m², respectively. The largest
represented a recently built loft in Rotterdam,
where (future) inhabitants could choose the spatial
layout, including the location of the kitchen and
sanitary units. IKEA’s proposal for small-space
living was developed with trendy fluid living in
mind. The designers suggest a setting with a
central wet-room surrounded by a fully furnished,
but flexible, living area. Although the home is
based on an existing project, the photograph on its
outside walls does not reflect the actual premises;
similarly, the image featuring the inhabitants
presents a fictive couple.

IKEA’s most conspicuous functional narratives
are its room settings, which are this chapter’s spe-
cific focus and represent the company’s mid-sized
functional displays. The room settings are dis-
played as a series of, more or less, independent
tales, generally categorised according to spatial
function. Each setting aims to provide visitors with
imaginative solutions to real-life challenges experi-
enced in their own home life. They might, for
example, focus on a room with a slanted roof or on
creating the right conditions for living in harmony
with pets. Not all products in these rooms are available to buy on the lower floors,
although props are occasionally used to add more
personality, for example when a variety of old, his-
torical cameras in a cabinet hints at an inhabitant’s
profession. Although the homes’ narratives are
captured in texts and photography, the room set-
ings provide less layered information. The juxta-
position of products reveals the underlying story
(sporadically helped by props), while product
labels provide essential information like price,
dimensions, maintenance and location in the store.

Vignettes are the interior designers’ third type of
functional narrative. These displays stage part
of a room setting and can be found alongside
other presentations. Like the room setting, the
vignette is also styled and decorated functionally,
mentioning spatial dimensions and telling the stor-
ies of the (fictional) inhabitants. The vignette, how-

Situated in a compact, which houses a serial
presentation of dining tables and chairs, this
activity podium presents new products in a non-
functional, colourful and rather exuberant setting.
Photo Mayke Groffen (22 March 2019).

80 Ibid. 406–407.
81 Unless stated otherwise, this section’s descrip-
tion is based on the tour of IKEA’s Barendrecht
showroom. Comparisons between the showrooms
and Thiemeyer’s typology are, however, entirely
my responsibility.
Banner used by residents from the Delfshaven district during their protests against rent increases in 1977-1978.
The Photos Mayke Groffen (22 March 2019).

displays can be found among other cabinets and chosen to convey a specific atmosphere. Both collage occupies an area of 7m styled and decorated vignette on the right shows several range items, on the left displays a functionally IKEA LARSFRID showroom in Barendrecht. The range coordination cabinet, which provides a solution to where to put family photos 6m. This vignette presents a family situation and knick-knacks. Next to the vignette, on the bed with her head in a cloud of lamps, interpreted the product presentation nearby as another vignette expressing a different style. Certainly, its habitation felt less articulated, but as someone who favours a minimalist interior, I was not unhappy about the absence of photographs and souvenirs. In hindsight, I had missed the clues that marked the differences between the two display methods, including the divergent background colours and the text that explicitly mentioned its surface area. The presence of just one vignette sufficed to suggest an overall contextual display.

At the end of our tour of the showroom, Tamara characterised for me the different approaches of visual merchandisers and interior designers: she went to an activity podium, stepped on it and sat on the bed with her head in a cloud of lamps, thus highlighting the different narrative contexts. She then explained:

Look – we interior designers wouldn’t do this... [while demonstrating that the lamps are hung impractically low.] That’s the difference between visual merchandising and interior design, actually. This is a very pretty, really cool image, but you can’t do this at home. That’s precisely the point where our displays differ: an inspirational image versus a functional solution.

Meaningful Ensembles in Museums

In aiming to sell as many pieces of furniture as possible, IKEA stresses its affordability and therefore avoids presenting its products as unique items. Instead, the showrooms contain a variety of contextual displays, created by interior designers and visual merchandisers. The latter produce serial displays to enable the easy comparison of similar products, as well as narrative displays to present the breadth of the collection or highlight a temporary focus on certain items. Visual merchandisers thus aim to create inspirational images for commercial displays. Functional contexts, on the other hand, are the remit of interior designers. Their homes, room settings and vignettes represent three different functional-context sizes, all intending to offer functional solutions to present-day challenges. The interior designers’ narrative displays are habitable settings loaded with meaning, which requires a coherent arrangement.

Display conventions can be changed in both museums and showrooms: objects can be isolated, various series created and different stories told. Nonetheless, it is barely possible to create meaningful, coherent ensembles if they have not been collected from the start. Chapter 2 has already acknowledged that ideas of form and structure are communicated effectively within traditional period rooms, but that function is less easily conveyed. Could this be due to the dominant strategies that are adopted, which favour the collecting of individual objects? Museum databases are certainly designed to describe single items, which often results in the deconstruction of home interiors into individual pieces of furniture. This is a practice that can hamper how ensembles are viewed and hinder what is understood of them. Functional contexts are the most critical element, and museums must consider the collecting of coherent, functional ensembles as a starting point to ensure variety in their future displays. This also means that they must surely have to take possible future displays into account in their collecting strategies.

In relation to materiality, it is also important to note that IKEA’s differently sized functional displays contain diverse materials. The homes are explained more extensively by layered information: floor plan, texts and photos explicate the narratives suggested by the products. Room settings and vignettes rely almost entirely on the juxtaposition of objects, and my own confusion about the latter reminded me of the difficulty of deciphering the information implied in various contextual presentations. This leads to the preliminary conclusion that, in the acquisition or construction of meaningful ensembles, it is not only the objects, but also the research conducted and the data collected, that should be part of the ensemble, as should the narratives relating to them.

ever, involves just one product, such as a LARSFRID display cabinet or a HEMNES TV-storage combo. In its compact presentation, the vignette superficially resembles the range coordination collage, but where the collage simply aims to have a high visual impact, the vignette provides customers with functional solutions.

Asked by Tamara for my opinion on the first vignette we encountered, I found it rather difficult to identify the differences between it and another TV-storage combo on the right. I initially interpreted the product presentation nearby as another vignette expressing a different style. Certainly, its habitation felt less articulated, but as someone who favours a minimalist interior, I was not unhappy about the absence of photographs and souvenirs. In hindsight, I had missed the clues that marked the differences between the two display methods, including the divergent background colours and the text that explicitly mentioned its surface area. The presence of just one vignette sufficed to suggest an overall contextual display.

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intending to offer functional solutions to present-day challenges. The interior designers’ narrative displays are habitable settings loaded with meaning, which requires a coherent arrangement.

Display conventions can be changed in both museums and showrooms: objects can be isolated, various series created and different stories told. Nonetheless, it is barely possible to create meaningful, coherent ensembles if they have not been collected from the start. Chapter 2 has already acknowledged that ideas of form and structure are communicated effectively within traditional period rooms, but that function is less easily conveyed. Could this be due to the dominant strategies that are adopted, which favour the collecting of individual objects? Museum databases are certainly designed to describe single items, which often results in the deconstruction of home interiors into individual pieces of furniture. This is a practice that can hamper how ensembles are viewed and hinder what is understood of them. Functional contexts are the most critical element, and museums must consider the collecting of coherent, functional ensembles as a starting point to ensure variety in their future displays. This also means that they must surely have to take possible future displays into account in their collecting strategies.

In relation to materiality, it is also important to note that IKEA’s differently sized functional displays contain diverse materials. The homes are explained more extensively by layered information: floor plan, texts and photos explicate the narratives suggested by the products. Room settings and vignettes rely almost entirely on the juxtaposition of objects, and my own confusion about the latter reminded me of the difficulty of deciphering the information implied in various contextual presentations. This leads to the preliminary conclusion that, in the acquisition or construction of meaningful ensembles, it is not only the objects, but also the research conducted and the data collected, that should be part of the ensemble, as should the narratives relating to them.
One of the reasons for examining the IKEA room settings concerns the ways in which the ensembles connect with visitors. Chapter 2 showed that the period room has long been perceived as an easily understandable type of display, connecting even those with little experience to the objects within it. Museums highlight these rooms' immersive qualities and value the power of the persuasiveness of the narrative. Nevertheless, the sensorial repertoire of the museum period room is generally limited and lacks the interactivity of IKEA's room settings. What is the role of interactivity in the IKEA ensembles? What (other) connective qualities underlie the narratives in its room settings? Are these qualities limited to commercial ensembles or might they also inspire museums? If so, how do they affect museums' collecting policies?

**Familiar Narratives and… Surprise**

In search of what museums can learn from IKEA about connecting with visitors, my interviews addressed the essence of the company's room settings. My interviewees stated unanimously that it is the **familiar** that pervades each ensemble that characterises the room settings and distinguishes them from the interior ensembles in other firms' showrooms. Biba Mijailovic formulated this as follows:

*Other home-furnishing retailers construct beautiful spaces, beautifully styled and beautifully decorated... but they contain little life – and life is something we strive for, and it mainly has to do with the fact that we zoom in on life at home.*

As my interviewees emphasised, 'the familiar' is considered to be key to successful presentations. Reality underlies the room settings, including a variety of habits, seasonal activities, stages of life, needs and frustrations. And where IKEA starts by establishing similarities and trends in life at home across the world, further research aims to grasp this in different countries, regions and cities. Although familiar narratives lie at the heart of IKEA's room settings, the staged home interiors simultaneously aim to surprise visitors with something extra. Combining knowledge with creativity, the company seeks to provide ingenious solutions to inspire different groups:

*We have considerable knowledge of home life... of what it means to live small, how to organise, how to live with children - these are all facets we know a lot about. The surprising aspect is that we're able to create just the right 'sauce' to make customers think: 'Yeah, that's handy! I want to have that – it's just what I need in my life!' These are a kind of... tricks, you know. And I think, concerning life at home, this is also the element that enlivens a room setting.*

Familiarity and surprise contribute to the understanding of a room setting and to the act of exploring it further. As Colombo, Laddaga and Antonietti state in their psychological study on images of IKEA's room settings (2015), both of these factors are important in visitors' evaluations of a domestic environment. Their study draws on the psychological model of Kaplan & Kaplan, which describes comprehension and exploration as two consecutive steps in the examination of such an environment. While the former aims to help us understand the setting, the goal of the latter is to enhance this knowledge by action. As part of this process, the four factors determining a positive affective evaluation of the domestic environment are: **coherence** (the capacity to easily include the environment in a known scheme), **legibility** (the amount of information available to support comprehension and facilitate orientation), **complexity** (the presence of perceptual stimuli) and **mystery** (the features that invite further investigation). The study measures the influence of IKEA's room settings on their perceived appeal and the willingness to buy, comparing this to the living spaces presented by other brands. Overall, the images of IKEA's room settings were found to be less boring, and were also viewed as promoting more active explorations than the living spaces presented by other brands. Nonetheless, some of the rooms were regarded as too complicated to understand: their detailed presentation diminished their legibility and instead caused confusion.

Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti added the concept of 'restorativeness' to the model, defining a restorative space as *a place that allows people...*
to take their mind off and relax, that fosters positive affects and gives a break from [the] daily routine.” Focusing on key elements within restorative settings, they conclude that neither doors and passages, nor natural elements greatly influence the willingness to buy. However, human figures and everyday objects attract considerable attention and have a positive impact on their perceived appeal. Variation has an additional positive effect, while the attention paid to elements specifically related to children was even greater. While the presence of human figures and everyday objects attract considerable attention over a green space, alludes to traditional country living. Spatial effigies convey a sense of habitation. The MÖCKELBÄR dining table, for instance, is set for four people; the in-between AGAM junior chair indicates the presence of a child too big for a highchair and too small for a regular dining chair. By visitors opening kitchen drawers, checking the worktop’s height or testing the comfort of a sofa, the setting is further imbued with life. Photo Mayke Gröffen (July 2018). also been analysed by Per Ledin and David Machin, albeit in a different way. In their article in Visual Communication (2019), they use a semiotic approach to analyse the kitchens in IKEA’s catalogues from 1975 to 2016, arguing that a new semiotics of space evolved over time.88 Their model of analysis includes the kitchen on a level of representation, i.e., as a depicted environment with material objects. Apart from the framing of space by objects and shapes, the model foregrounds ‘interaction’ (the interaction of persons) and ‘indexing’ (the use of things as signs), which is a principle that is further explained by the example of “a table set with four plates and wine glasses [that] would indicate a dinner between adults, perhaps friends meeting.”89

Within museology, the principle of indexing is perhaps better known as the concept of the spatial effigy, referring to objects or arrangements that serve as traces of human presence. As Sandberg argues in Living Pictures, Missing Persons (2003), spatial effigies can convey a strong sense of habitation, while simultaneously allowing visitors to mentally position themselves in the room. His book contains an extensive exploration of the concept of the spatial effigy, also known as a ‘missing person’ or ‘abstent presence’, in relation to the late-19th century display practice of Scandinavian museums. In Sandberg’s later article on the interactivity of the model home (2011), he relates the practice of scenic immersion to the IKEA showroom.

Each of IKEA’s room settings is created with a detailed family scenario in mind. Sometimes, this is visualised in a direct manner, for instance using a large photograph to portray the (fictional) inhabitants and an (equally fictive) quote to invite visitors into the setting. More often, though, habitation is suggested through spatial effigies. Clothes in a wardrobe, some records on shelves and a pile of books on a bedside table might depict adult life in a bedroom. Similarly, a child’s drawing on a blackboard, the use of extra storage space and special furnishings around the dining table indicate the presence of children. All of these carefully arranged objects suggest a human presence and hint at certain aspects of family life. The ensembles convey a strong sense of habitation through the use of spatial effigies, which enable visitors to picture themselves in the room and connect to the items on display.

IKEA’s spatial effigies aim to establish an affective connection between visitors and the commodities on display, which is further enhanced by encouraging shoppers to test the furniture hands-on. Stickers urge people to press somewhere, look inside or lie on the bed. When these suggestions are followed, simple spectatorship is replaced by participation.90 IKEA monitors its customer flows and conducts interviews to increase its awareness of the room settings’ effects and to enable it to evaluate interactions. How do visitors move through the showroom, what do they see and what do they actually touch? “Sometimes, we show our visitors a photo and ask them if they’ve seen it”, interior design manager Tamara told me. “If the visitors haven’t noticed it, we did something wrong”, adding: “or, sometimes, we may have defined the wrong target group.”91 Clearly, interactions between visitors and room settings are the norm in an IKEA showroom. Indeed, particular attention is paid to ensuring that products are shown in the right circumstances and replaced if they are removed and that the room settings are kept in the appropriate order.92

Interaction is not limited to the agency of the products or room settings, but also extends to visitor behaviour. Although not mentioned by my interviewees, Pauline Garvey demonstrates that the sensorial interaction with products helps to enliven the room settings and accentuates the presence of others. In the chapter “Consuming IKEA” (2018), she stresses the importance of this interaction as follows:

“The rooms are uninhabited but the implied occupants of these living spaces are not entirely absent either. Rather, they are peopled in the presence of householders milling about, touching, comparing, and otherwise providing the injection of ‘family’ that the scenes might otherwise lack. Parents refer to their children lying on beds in IKEA showrooms in amused tones, as if they are being transgressive. In fact, IKEA management does not just tolerate customers sitting on beds, sofas, or at tables but positively encourages it.”93

Not only has the relationship with products been wrongly labelled as a solitary activity, Garvey argues, but the presence of visitors and their interactions also greatly contribute to the highly valued aspect of inspiration. Consequently, inspiration cannot be attributed to IKEA’s designers and their well-thought-out room settings alone, but is also derived from social practices and distributed agency.94
Change

From IKEA’s perspective, connecting with visitors not only requires familiar narratives and human presence, but also implies change. While museums’ interior ensembles are collected for long-term purposes, the lifetime of an IKEA room setting varies between one and three years, depending on its position in the store. Interior design manager Tamara explains:

They always say: you have to touch them [i.e., the room settings] within a period of two years. That’s impossible. So, I usually make a vitality plan at the start of the year to plan changes over three years. Well, the focus may shift over time, so possibly a few things disappear from the plan. Together with sales, I’ll decide on the rooms that will be altered and on more structural modifications. The first five we’ll change every year. And the first room setting within a core area, the living rooms for example, will be changed every two years. This is because we have to offer visitors something new – otherwise the showroom will lack vitality. Most people visit IKEA at least twice a year. We have to keep that in mind and offer them something new.96

Moreover, an IKEA room setting may also undergo a few minor changes during its lifetime, reflecting both seasonal activities and propagating partial refurbishment. The former includes the extra attention paid to gardens and balconies when spring is on the horizon; about the same time, tables are set to portray scenarios involving those related to children) and the use of spatial effigies animate the ensembles and affirm the previously established affective connection. The spatial effigies’ method is already firmly positioned in museums’ repertoires and, as the IKEA room settings suggest, should not be overlooked.

Connecting with Visitors

The essence of IKEA’s room settings has been described as the life that pervades each ensemble, which relates to several aspects of connecting with customers. Firstly, the ensembles combine familiarity and surprise to establish an affective connection between visitors and products. According to the psychological research by Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti, the opposites stimulate both comprehension and exploration. In order to connect to visitors, museums might therefore use the underlying model, in which coherence and legibility are paired with complexity and mystery, to construct their collections’ ensembles. And they would do well to remember that it is important to carefully balance coherence and easy-to-understand narratives with challenging features that encourage exploration.

Most room settings also convey a strong sense of habituation through the suggestion of human presence. A variety of everyday objects (especially those related to children) and the use of spatial effigies animate the ensembles and affirm the previously established affective connection. The spatial effigies’ method is already firmly positioned in museums’ repertoires and, as the IKEA room settings suggest, should not be overlooked.

Interactions with objects, and the involvement of other visitors in this, are also connective qualities in the IKEA room settings. Not only do these elements imbue life, they also contribute to the ensembles’ potential to explore function. Nevertheless, for museums, the interaction with objects challenges their commitment to preserving them; often, interaction and conservation are mutually exclusive. Replicas or 3D printing might offer temporal or educational solutions, but do not provide the ‘historical sensation’ museums strive for. In general, interaction with original objects is only possible when foreseen in collecting policies and by the acquisition of extra objects. Given the high value of experience and co-creation in modern museology, investigating ways in which people can interact with objects is therefore worthwhile.

However, the acquisition of extra objects to enable interaction with authentic materials does not erase the essentially different role of consumerism. Sandberg describes shoppers’ behaviour in an IKEA showroom as an acquired cognitive skill, in which visitors harmonise between spectating and participating. He writes:

When trying out a new mattress in a showroom, one does not simply observe it from a distance, nor does one go so far as to fall asleep on it. Instead, the usual response falls somewhere in between: potential buyers give the bed a tentative bounce or two or, at the very most, take off their shoes and lie down for a few awkward moments. (...) Shoppers in showroom situations are technically invited in a scene, yet their relation to the space is in many ways tentative. It is the realm of pre-ownership (...).99

Expectations in a museum environment are very different. Visitors consider the ensemble’s objects as cultural heritage, not commodities; they have learned to just look and not touch, and certainly not to handle objects on display. When boundaries blur, signs are used to explain what is expected – disturbing the immersive experience the ensemble has tried so hard to build. 

96 Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 2, 12:39].
97 Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 17:04 and Part 2, 11:38].
98 Baveystock 2008: 96.
99 Comparison used in analogy with the reasoning of Mensch 1999: 88.
100 Sandberg 2011: 64-65.
The cardboard box, produced in 1993 by a housing association celebrating its anniversary, is intended as a shelter for the homeless in Rotterdam.
My second case is Homestudios, which widens the perspective from furnishings to complete houses. The Homestudios concept was launched in May 2018 by Royal BAM Group (hereafter: BAM), the internationally operating Dutch construction firm. Homestudios’ most conspicuous element is its Experience Centre, which is located in a business area in the centre of the Netherlands. A large, modern building contains five different studios, as well as an almost full-scale ‘Introductory House’, which is a shell visualising the low-level finishes of a standard new-build. The five studios aim to provide prospective buyers of a new house with the knowledge, help and inspiration needed to make decisions about its spatial layout and finishes. In the Knowledge Studio, for instance, they can learn about practical kitchen layouts and identify optimal worktop heights, while so-called theatres use projections and moveable walls to provide insight into the effects of adding extra space. Another example, the Inspiration Studio, includes 11 model homes that unify all the available options in terms of spatial use and stylistic finishes. According to BAM’s press release, the Homestudios concept was introduced to inspire and assist clients during their customer journey, from their initial thoughts about buying a new house to actually living in their new-build home. Supported by the Experience Centre, as well as an online platform and a personal advisor, the press release promised to offer advice and guidance to prospective buyers at precisely the right times in the process. Clients are thus able to experience their future home before it has actually been built.
A Collection of Future Homes

INTRODUCTION

Although Homestudios was presented as a new concept in 2018, it had two precursors that had previously attracted my attention: the BAM Smart Collection, introduced in 2013, and its seemingly stress the personal identity of their inhabitants, reason for choosing the what is only a limited collection of houses? Who BAM resembles the interest of museums in compact, produce a manageable collection that has a wide in this comparative case study is history museums collect contemporary home life. perspective, with the goal being to contribute to the Homestudios' concept aims to connect with cus-
tomers' future home lives in a way that would be realise, as well as the ways in which the collections look like? Why have interiors been incor-
porated in a house-selling strategy? How has BAM connected architecture, living spaces and interior design?

This case focuses on BAM's collection of domestic ensembles, describing its content, the company's method of collecting and its underlying ideas. Themes address the issues of who the ensembles represent and the kind of home lives they reflect, as well as the ways in which the Homestudios' concept aims to connect with customers. As an instrumental case study, these key issues are discussed from a museological per-
spective, with the goal being to contribute to the development of a viable strategy for how cultural-history museums collect contemporary home life.

An important reason for including Homestudios in this comparative case study is BAM's need to produce a manageable collection that has a wide simultaneously meeting different customer needs mean that it is crucial for the company to balance standardisation with diversity – a problem that resembles the interest of museums in compact, but nevertheless inclusive, collections. How does BAM appeal to different customer groups with what is only a limited collection of houses? Who is included in its ensembles? Could its strategy inspire museums?

The issue of representation is the second reason for choosing the BAM collection in this case study. While the period rooms of today tend to stress the personal identity of their inhabitants, commercial model homes might want to have interiors that reflect more generally shared tastes and lifestyles. How do the model homes within BAM's Inspiration Studio aim to convey messages about customers' future home lives and interpreting the furn-
ished model home within this context. She describes model homes as meticulously construc-
ted messages, in which "carefully selected artefacts articulate carefully chosen values." Avitts concentrates on the majority of house types in the US around 2000, characterising them as mass-produced, detached, single-family dwellings built in a suburban area. These house types differ con-
siderably from the standard Dutch terraced home and, as a consequence, the precise spatial layouts and particular furnishings are difficult to transfer to the Dutch context, as is their specific marketing rhetoric. Her overall conclusions, however, are important as they contribute to the discussion of Homestudios' model interiors, and aspects of Avitt's approach will be applied in the within-case theme analysis.

Homestudios has received some attention in the popular media. Local news channel AT5, for example, filmed at the Experience Centre at the end of November 2018. In its audio-visual report, they explain the new concept, supported by images of the various studios. An article in a national newspaper from February 2019 also reported on a visit to the Experience Centre. Under the heading "Emerging: the new build without choice overload", BAM director Siekerman had his say, while photos showed how the Homestudios concept is actually used. Some of these photographs are included in this thesis with the permission of the photographer.

This chapter's main sources of information are company documents in different forms, created for either internal or public use, but always voicing the firm's ideas. They include press releases by BAM and its partners announcing new developments, on-location reports on the creation of new rooms and PowerPoint presentations providing background informa-
tion or goals in relation to new building projects, YouTube videos illustrating interior design styles, and websites explaining the Homestudios concept, highlighting results and announcing new develop-
ments. The fact that the three consecutive home concepts, including the two referred to above, were presented completely separately was, how-
ever, problematic. So, an existing version never referred to its successor, while a newer one never did so to its predecessor: different collections therefore coexisted and older versions were just gradually replaced. To enable me to get a good overview, the various information sources needed to be ordered chronologically, and I have main-
tained this chronological approach in the case description.

An interview with two experts together took place on 27 November 2018 at Homestudios' recently opened Experience Centre in Utrecht. There, I spoke to Henry Draijer and Ferdy Rijs in studio E, which is one of the individual cubicles within the Creation Studio, who supported what they told me with several PowerPoint presenta-
tions. Henry Draijer has worked as a Marketing and Innovations Advisor at BAM Housing (the present BAM Living) since 2013. The Smart Collection had just been launched at the time and Henry had contributed to the development of both the sub-
sequent Home Collection and the current Homestudios. Ferdy Rijs has worked at BAM since 2016, and had participated in the development of Homestudios as a Communications Specialist. The two experts wanted to be interviewed together because of the complementary expertise that each of them had concerning the issues I was raising. So, while Henry spoke about developing the Smart Collection into the Home Collection, Ferdy clarified the rationale behind Homestudios. Ferdy was also the one who introduced me to my tour of the Experience Centre. Later, to my horror, I discovered when I got home that my recording equipment only contained files of 0 bytes: somehow, my exten-
sively tested equipment had failed. Consequently, a literal transcription of the interview was impossible. To limit the damage, I immediately wrote down everything I could remember, aided by my photographs. I fished out the notes I had made during the interview over the next few days. In addition, Henry and Ferdy sent me their Power-
Point presentations and answered follow-up ques-
tions by email. I was therefore able to reconstruct the interview properly. In order to get information from another perspective, I also asked to speak to indirect sources, who provided me with information which I deemed valuable. However, all sources were provided with the permission of the interviewees. Furthermore, I have made use of online sources. Sources for interviews are marked with an asterisk next to the page number. The list of interviewees is included in the appendix.
The image of a trendy DJ embellishes the cover of the brochure introducing the BAM Smart Collection in 2013. This DJ, though, is a fashionable elderly lady mixing her records against a backdrop of contemporary architecture. The concept not only allows customisation, but also enables prospective purchasers to experience their future house before it is built. The prize-winning concept is based on the success of furnished model homes, which are, the managers asserted, the first to sell in almost every housing development. Fay’s interest in the history of such a comprehensive and experiential collection of homes, this chapter aims to explore its potential relevance to how museums collect contemporary home life. This section therefore follows the development of the Smart Collection and the Home Collection into today’s Homestudios, describing their main ingredients, methods and underlying ideas, as well as the changes made on the way. I will demonstrate that the Smart Collection initially concentrated on creating a coherent set of options for buyers (its collection), before gradually shifting the focus to the visitor experience, which became the distinguishing feature of Homestudios in 2018.

Smart Collection (2013)

The Smart Collection and the later Homestudios were developed by BAM in the Netherlands, although the company also operates in four other European home markets: Belgium, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Germany. Furthermore, the BAM Group is active in niche markets globally. According to the profile on its website, BAM’s two business lines – Civil Engineering and Construction & Property – employ approximately 20,000 people worldwide. In the Netherlands, two operating companies have been the drivers of Homestudios, the area developer AM and BAM Woningbouw (BAM Housing), later called BAM Wonen (BAM Living), although cooperation with external firms was essential to realise the concept. Benedict Kraus is introduced in the 2013 brochure as architect involved in the development of the Smart Collection. The text further explains that the collection is based on extensive market research that recorded the requirements of various potential buyers. These results were first translated into floor plans and then linked to three popular architectural styles: Old Dutch, 1930s and Modern. In reality, the Old Dutch and 1930s styles were initially available. Indeed, it was not until March 2014 that the Modern style was presented online, designed in collaboration with the Dutch home interior-design magazine vtwonen. The new-build house was offered in eight different styles, just like the other properties within the Smart Collection, and ranged from a starter house to a family house. In contrast to the brochure, however, marketing and innovations advisor Henry Draijer told me during our interview in November 2018 that the architectural styles were not so much based on market research, but also on the architect’s experiences of what clients actually like. Moreover, while the Old Dutch style had been the preferred style in the period prior to Amsterdam canal houses, the 1930s’ version was a reflection of the immensely popular dwellings of this period. Similarly, the standardised floor plans were primarily based on the company’s building experience. During an innovation trajectory directed towards conceptual building and product leadership, the company found that costly tailormade floor plans were essential to realise the concept. This limited number of options meant that BAM could offer customisation at a lower price in a shorter period of time.

Meanwhile, extensive market research was conducted for a second innovation process that focused on clients. One of the main outcomes was a finding that customers want to buy a ready-to-move-in house and are prepared to pay for it. Henry Draijer told me during our interview that most households prefer a higher level of finish than the basic one available on completion day. As it became evident from the research that clients would not trust either the builder or the estate agent as an interior advisor, BAM immediately sought to cooperate with a freelance interior designer, Victor Meuwissen. In close collaboration, BAM and Meuwissen together developed a concept for ‘Lifestyle’ products based on a limited number of Woonsferen (Living Atmospheres) and Leefwijzen (Lifestyles).

Five ‘Lifestyles’ were conceived to guide consumers in their decision-making concerning the layout of their new house. The first brochure from 2013 introduced these lifestyles and suggested a floor plan to accommodate them. ‘The Culinary Lifestyle’, for instance, suited sociable families who love to invite friends over for dinner. An extension could create extra space for cooking, and French doors could be added to provide an even lighter dining area. Of the five different lifestyles, two concerned the ground floor (‘Culinary’ and ‘Living’), and one the first floor and attic (‘Practical’). Accordingly, the various lifestyles were connected to spatial use and visualised through floor plans.

The so-called ‘Living Atmospheres’ played an equally important role in the ready-to-live-in concept. Five such atmospheres referred to five different times in history as the ‘Classic’, ‘Natural’, ‘Resolute’ and ‘Design’. Each style had a limited number of colours, forms and materials that were applied to the chosen finish. So, those who preferred the Classic living atmosphere could choose traditional kitchen cupboards, wooden flooring, and a colour scheme with subdued colours and rich taupe as a striking colour accent. Specifications were offered at three budget levels, relating to both the quality of materials and the level of finish. Clients could opt for a...
A spread in the first brochure on the BAM Smart Collection, presenting the Old Dutch architectural style. This is said to be based on 17th-century Amsterdam canal houses, with their wide and high windows accentuating the residential function on the ground floor. Individual buyers can choose their favourite house type and exterior from the options available within this architectural style. This kind of distinction appeals to the Dutch consumer, the brochure argues, who loves being able to point out: “Look, the one with the crow-stepped gable is mine!”


The Smart Collection contained various floor plans to accommodate buyers’ preferred lifestyles. This figure shows the three floor plans included in the 2013 brochure, sketching options for the ground floor, first floor and attic. The Culinary lifestyle, on the left, favours the kitchen (with island) and dining space; the lounge is limited to the corner on the bottom left side. The first floor offers ample space for the luxurious bathroom that is key to the Wellness lifestyle. Finally, the attic is divided according to the Practical lifestyle, where the optional dormer window creates a more functional space and extra walls provide separate bedrooms.


This screenshot from a YouTube video shows the interior designer Victor Meuwissen introducing the ‘Classic’ living atmosphere. He tells viewers about the background of the style, illustrates its characteristics, explains the available choices, and concludes by giving advice on decorating and furnishing the house in the Classic style.

This armchair from Rotterdam city hall was used by mayor Bram Peper from 1982 to 1998.
Home Collection (2014)

A press release in March 2014 announced the launch of BAM’s Wooncollectie, the Home Collection. Somewhat confusing is the fact that its predecessor, the Smart Collection, is not mentioned at all. Nevertheless, the concept of the Home Collection is identical to its forerunner. According to Henry Draijer, one of my interviewees, its name change followed the company’s shift in focus from its workflow and goal of building smart to individual clients and their future homes. Exteriors, lifestyles and living atmospheres were unaltered, and brochures concerning the interiors of various projects were very similar in appearance, with the same pictures used over and again.

The first vtwonen-houses actually built, which were designed in the new ‘Modern’ architectural style, were completed in IJburg (Amsterdam) on 30 September 2015. According to AMP’s proud press release, the completion marked the moment when a modern interior design was added to the BAM collection and was henceforth available to clients as the sixth living atmosphere. Nevertheless, even the new vtwonen living atmosphere was visualised in exactly the same format as the previous versions, suggesting the use of CGI. A further aspect in the development of the Home Collection relates to the simultaneous construction of an online platform. This was created in cooperation with actual consumers using interviews, focus groups, analyses of existing communities and usability tests. First called digitale huisdeur (digital latchkey), the resulting portal was eventually named ditismijnthuis.nl (thisismyhome.nl). Here, potential clients were informed about developments, by their personal advisors and prospective purchasers could meet future neighbours. Clients could therefore now gain access to relevant information at different points in the process.

Apart from the development of this platform and the expansion of the collection with the anticipated Modern style, the Home Collection, not least proved the appeal and success of the ready-to-live-in concept. In the period 2014 to 2018, most future inhabitants had actually chosen a higher level of finish, Henry Draijer told during my interview, with them all spending a considerable sum of money on the interior. According to the website ditismijnthuis.nl, over 40 housing projects were being developed as part of the Home Collection at the end of 2018.15

Launch of Homestudios (2018)

As I was preparing for my interview at the end of 2018 with Henry Draijer and Ferdy Rijs about the development of BAM’s Home Collection, I was taken by surprise when they kindly invited me to their recently opened Experience Centre. I had not seen any press release announcing the launch of Homestudios and had not found any reference to it on the fully functioning website thisismyhome, upon which the Home Collection was still available. Nevertheless, Homestudios did not fail to impress. The Experience Centre is located at a business park at the western edge of Utrecht, in the centre of the Netherlands, and is easily accessible by car and public transport. A large, modern building, covering a surface area of about 2,000 m², houses a total of beautifully designed studios. Often, the exhibits’ design language and their accompanying clear texts reminded me of a pleasant, well-thought-out and rather expensive museum environment. This was something I first thought was due to my personal background, but it later transpired that it contained some truth.

Five different studios at the Experience Centre aim to inspire people to buy a house built by BAM and support them during their decision-making. Homestudios’ first customers, 51 households buying a new build in Almere (a stone’s throw from Amsterdam), were welcomed to the centre in autumn 2018. The most striking aspect of Homestudios is the addition of the Experience Centre. In many respects, though, it still resembles the previous Home Collection: it still offers various exterior, spatial layout and finish options to prospective buyers; clients are still guided by a personal home advisor, as well as by specific expertise; and a digital platform (renamed Mijn Homestudios, i.e., My Home Studio) is being developed that serves as a planner, personal archive and place to meet both experts and future neighbours.16 However, the company’s cooperation with numerous different suppliers17 has resulted in the availability of a wide variety of home product samples on show. While kitchens, bathrooms, furniture and accessories were explicitly not part of the earlier interiors on offer in the Home Collecti...
The introductory house and five different studios provide customers with a plethora of information and inspirational stimuli, which help them to make choices. These choices form the basis for further advice to facilitate the buyers’ decision-making. Eventually, customers ‘create’ their future home. BAM thus gives its clients a realistic impression of their future property and guides them in the buying process as a way to sell functional houses.

Guided Tour through the Studios

At the conclusion of our interview at Homestudios, I was escorted round the Experience Centre by both Henry Draijer and Ferdy Rijs. Ferdy, who had participated in its development as a communications specialist, took the lead during the tour, explaining. This building, on a scale of 1:1, represents a house as it is normally finished on completion day, with bare floors and ceilings, roughly finished walls and a staircase that has only been primed. Apparently, not many customers expect a house to be finished to this low a level. Quite the opposite: market research indicates that approximately 45% of customers expect a new build to be almost completely finished. The Introductory House thus functions as a way to manage expectations and equally whets many clients’ appetite for the ready-to-live-in concept, promising convenience in the process of buying, building and inhabiting a new-build property. The first of the five studios within the Experience Centre is called the Kennisstudio (Knowledge Studio). Interactively, customers can learn about ergonomics in the kitchen and decide on their preferred worktop heights, establish their priorities regarding their flooring, and discover the optimal height of the toilet for them. With the help of projections and moveable walls, two so-called theatres visualise the effects of adding a dormer window to the attic and extending the ground floor by either 1.20 or 2.40 metres. Preferences can be saved on a personalised computer tablet, thus assisting customers with their decision-making along the way. Although the information provided in the Knowledge Studio is said to be brand-independent, all the examples on show are supplied by Homestudios’ associated partners.

The Creatiestudio (Creation Studio) is where future buyers shape their idea of a museum. The Customised virtually based on the client’s choices, and everything presented in a convincing manner. This vision of the 3D Studio remains speculative, although the few photos found on the internet provide a glimpse of what is on offer and do not contradict this viewpoint. Of primary importance is that customers see the effects of their choices and their future home before it has been built. The distinguishing feature of Homestudios is, in effect, its focus on the visitor experience. Whereas the previous Home Collection provided choices on paper with the help of a few physical samples, today’s Homestudios’ concept is designed to enable future buyers via experiences. Photos and CGI have been replaced with an impressive array of large samples of materials, fully furnished model homes and virtual reality. Future purchasers make their decisions by step by step, with each studio referring to the phase of the process in which the customers find themselves. The increased materiality of the objects on display, the hands-on exhibits and the explanatory texts together create a museum.

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The Inspiration Studio comprises four flats and seven houses. Each house has a living room and kitchen on the ground floor, and an upper level with bedrooms, a bathroom and attic. The photo shows two customers visiting the model homes. One of them measures the space that the table and chairs will occupy, assisted by the personal advisor on the left, who is recognisable from the badge she is wearing.

Photo Bram Petreaus (2019).

The Knowledge Studio encourages customers to discover, experience and learn. This photograph provides a view from the section related to bathrooms and toilets. Blue circles on the floor indicate spots where clients can retrieve information on their tablets and save their preferences. In this section, the choices relate to flushing and waste systems and bathroom lighting. The display on the right is designed to let buyers experience what toilet height suits them best.

Photo DST-experience agency.

View in the Creation Studio. While previous choices, established priorities and preferred styles function as a funnel, here is where customers make their final decisions. A large number of samples of materials, including doors, taps, floors and colours, enables them to compare various products.

Press photo BAM Homestudios.
The website of DST, one of Homestudios’ co-designers, has two photographs of the 3D Studio, thus providing a glimpse into the customer experience. All the individual choices made during the process are projected in three dimensions, enabling buyers to see their future.

View in the Cookery Studio, where a professional chef makes lunch with customers. Clients therefore have the opportunity to experience using various kitchen appliances and ask questions. Photo Bram Petraeus (2019).
Participants in psychological research conducted in 1954 revealed a preference for armchairs like Aunt Nell’s.
Themes

In an attempt to identify BAM’s underlying ideas and methods, the previous section described the development of the Smart Collection and the Home Collection into today’s Homestudios. Architectural styles, layouts, the standard of finishes and styles of the interiors can all be seen to be the main ingredients of the company’s contemporary collection of homes. Where it first focused on the creation of a coherent set of options, the Homestudios’ concept shifted the emphasis to the customer experience. In order to sell functional houses, consideration is given to the use of style and the selection of objects within the Inspiration theme. Just as museums are searching for complementary products and services is clearly expressed in the names chosen for the BAM collections. In 2013, the Smart Collection clearly referred to a smarter building process, while the later Home Collection name stressed the future lived-in properties of individual consumers. This transition is also noticeable in the January 2017 name change of the operating company from BAM Woningbouw (BAM Housing) to BAM Wonen (BAM Living). The process of transition affected the roles of the employees as well, as Henk Draijer remarked during our interview: where builders had discerned eight different residential phases, with ‘awareness’ preceding orientation, while the other stages are currently in the process of being further refined. Finally, the digital latchkey has been succeeded by Homestudios’ online platform, which was developed in consultation with actual buyers and used various methods of qualitative research to do so, including interviews, focus groups and usability tests.

The transition from a production-oriented construction firm to a customer-oriented approach with complementary products and services is clearly expressed in the names chosen for the BAM collections. In 2013, the Smart Collection clearly referred to a smarter building process, while the later Home Collection name stressed the future lived-in properties of individual consumers. This transition is also noticeable in the January 2017 name change of the operating company from BAM Woningbouw (BAM Housing) to BAM Wonen (BAM Living). The process of transition affected the roles of the employees as well, as Henk Draijer remarked during our interview: where builders had

4.3

Customer orientation

Visitor orientation has long been a major driver of museums’ interest in the present, with the result being greater engagement with the public. As argued in Chapter 1, visitors have been assigned different roles ever since the 1980s, changing from a passive audience to interactive users and then to participants.

The experiences of diverse visitor groups came to be viewed as reference points, which also contributed to a revival of contextual premises, and the concept of the museological period room, as Chapter 2 notes. However, the shift towards a public-oriented museum has proceeded in fits and starts. Indeed, it has proved to be difficult for museums to refrain from simply using their own perspective, their cherished collections or their main messages, and to instead position the visitor at the centre of exhibitions, let alone collections. Striving to reconnect with the public, museums have occasionally sought to learn from marketing and communication agencies, where everything appears to revolve around the customer. Consequently, it seems to be perfectly logical that an international construction firm like BAM would have incorporated a similar customer-centred approach.

An Excellent Customer Experience

The customer is at the heart of BAM’s Homestudios concept, which aims to offer guidance and experiences throughout the buying process – from the initial contact to actually purchasing and living in a property. In the 2018 press release announcing the launch of Homestudios, BAM states that its main aim is to provide an excellent customer experience:

Homestudios inspires and facilitates future residents through a unique digital and physical customer journey. The main starting point is to offer customers an A* grade experience, providing them with the right information and inspiration at exactly the right moment, and guiding them to their own personal homes.

BAM’s approach is partly based on customer need, as identified in a client-oriented innovation pathway known as De kliant centraal (Our Client at the Centre). Market research showed that customers were looking for support when making difficult decisions and, above all, convenience. The desire of clients was to buy a ready-to-live-in house with a high level of finishes, as well as their readiness to pay for it, led to the introduction of the Smart Collection in 2013. Even in that first series of new-build homes, the majority of buyers chose a ready-to-live-in finish. The company therefore rapidly adopted the concept and implemented it more widely, laying the name of the group of properties on offer changed to the Home Collection in 2014. The focus on clients also included charting customer relationships, with four residential phases distinguished, each of which had an appropriate verb assigned to it: orientation (captivate), interest (bind), buy & build (support) and home ownership (cherish). As Henry Draijer remarked during our interview: where builders had

24 Van den Akker & Legêne 2016: B.
26 Market research, conducted by Motivation, showed that 78% of customers would prefer a ready-to-live-in (‘woonklaar’) house and 69% were ready to pay for this. Only 8% would choose a house with the basic finish (‘behangklaar’).
27 Interview 27 November 2018.
28 Ibid.
Despite BAM’s emphasis on the customer, initial ideas about limiting house types and floor plans were actually the result of the firm’s efforts to improve its workflow. While the architectural styles adopted were primarily based on the BAM architects’ extensive experience of client preferences, the standardisation of floor plans followed a revision of the company’s common practices. Preceding the client-oriented pathway, the first innovation process was directed towards conceptual building and product leadership. Costly tailor-made designs – sometimes with only a few centimetres difference in the placement of walls – were translated into a limited number of basic floor plans, with the aim thus being to build in a smarter, more intelligent way. BAM further developed its concepts into product lines between 2011 and 2014, resulting in a limited collection of house types, floor plans and exteriors. In relation to the interiors, designer Victor Meuwissen developed a construct that combined five options for a property’s spatial layout with five interior design styles. It was in this way that the starting points for an easily attainable and affordable dream home (the ready-to-live-in house) were created. Thereafter, associated suppliers (with samples available in the Homestudios’ Inspiration Studio) were used to provide furnishings and other products from their ranges that reflect the prices and styles of the fully furnished model homes. Moreover, while the Utrecht Experience Centre focuses on a home’s layout and interior finishes, and prioritises the interests of individual consumers, BAM’s institutional clients are nevertheless still important to the company. Project developers, municipalities and investors first make decisions about the overall architectural style of a housing project; next, individual buyers can choose their preferred house type and specific exterior from a palette of options. These consumers thus also have to consider the issue of architectural style, with the Old Dutch and 1930s’ property types dominating, although there are several further options on a home’s exterior available. Many of the early Home Collection presentations that can still be found on the internet are targeted at institutional clients, with the focus on explaining the benefits of the Homestudios’ concept in terms of planning, cost, use, quality, sustainability, comfort, customisation and time to market. Even today, the website explicitly addresses project developers and builders in a section headed “Homestudios voor uw klanten,” which highlights the benefits of the concept to institutional clients.

Consultation and Institutional Clients
In the process of moving towards a visitor-oriented perspective, museums aim to involve visitors and residents in participatory collecting. Meanwhile, BAM’s approach is based on consultation, which is a strategy that seems to be less prominent in museological thinking. Following Nina Simon’s seminal publication, The Participatory Museum (2010), the experiences of visitors co-developed from co-development projects. In the former, experts and/or communities advise a museum, which then develops a new presentation of any kind; in the latter, museums and participants work together to co-create a new programme. In the development of Homestudios, market research was used to consult prospective house-buyers. Previously, such research had led to the new concept of a ready-to-live-in home, and BAM’s online platform was also developed in consultation with users. Though city museums sometimes question the authority of museum professionals in their pursuit of a visitor-oriented approach, BAM’s strategy is based on the company’s specific knowledge and that of its partners. In-house expertise from the firm and its associated architects was used for the standardisation of projects, while an interior designer was deployed to develop the customisation process – first as an independent expert, later as part of BAM. The selection of suitable suppliers was also an important task for Homestudios, with associated business partners now responsible for selecting products to match the various model homes. Homestudios’ customer orientation is expressed in its objective of providing an excellent customer journey. It can also be seen in its collections, which are based on the demands and preferences of individual buyers, as identified in market research and through sales figures, i.e., based on consultation instead of co-creation. Customer experiences and sales then measure the success of these contemporary period-room-like ensembles.

Another lesson to be learned from the BAM case is to not underestimate institutional clients. Municipalities, investors and project developers continue to play an important background role at BAM, although their presence is not that obvious in the company’s presentations. No houses are built, no collections are created without these institutional clients. Moreover, it is them that determine the architectural styles of the homes in which individual customers will live. Along with individual visitors, “institutional clients” are also very important to museums, although they are seldom mentioned as target groups. While funding contributors and sponsors are acknowledged in special projects, municipal governments also play a key role behind the scenes. For city museums, the granting of subsidies is essential for the performance of core tasks like collecting and collection management. Even though municipal councils and politicians have no direct influence on museums’ collection policies, their indirect impact is nonetheless considerable. It thus seems sensible to provide a more detailed explanation of the roles of such institutional clients in museums’ collection plans.

An important reason for including Homestudios in my comparative case study lies at the interface between collections and customers. In order to keep its houses affordable while simultaneously meeting different client needs, it is essential for BAM to balance standardisation with diversity. This problem replicates museums’ interest in compact, but nevertheless inclusive, collections. Who is represented in the ensembles? How does BAM aim to appeal to different groups of customers while maintaining a somewhat limited collection? Could its strategy inspire museums?

Compact yet Inclusive?
A crucial aspect of the BAM approach is to provide house-buyers with customisation and personalisation options while also ensuring that production is manageable and house prices are affordable. To achieve this balance, BAM developed a number of standard variations in the house types, lifestyles and living atmospheres on offer in its 2013 Smart Collection. Although today’s revised concept – Homestudios – provides clients with much more detailed information, it nevertheless still combines standardisation and diversity. Answering a follow-up question, Henk Draijer emailed:

30 Interview 27 November 2018.
31 Interview 27 November 2018, also shown in a PowerPoint Presentation from October 2014.
32 PowerPoint Presentation from July 2013.
33 Follow-up question answered by email, 9 January 2019.
With three architectural styles, eight floor plans, kids). In relation to the last two households, the mentions a lesbian couple without children and starting out, with no children “as yet”, another older, and several whose age has not been mentioned. A toddler, two eight-year-old twins, a few teenagers, represent families with children, including a baby, several whose age has not been mentioned. The contents of the matrix were sent to me by email on 14 January 2019. In 2002, both Bouma and Dijksterhuis wrote about the introduction of the so-called ‘at’ 40. In his response to this observation, Henry wondered whether the company should indeed have more of an eye on diversity than is currently the case. According to Ferdy Rijs, the matrix underlying the Inspiration Studio has been based on three different insights: BAM’s experiences with its Homestudios’ predecessor and the knowledge it gained from the buyers of its Home Collection; the shared experiences of its interior design team in relation to contemporary Dutch households. Indeed, both Jann van Eck and Victor Meuwissen (who previously worked explicitly as an independent designer, but has now been appointed Head of Interior Design) are mentioned as drivers of the matrix’s design; and, finally, the specific needs of IKEA consumers at various stages of life. Although this perspective was established by IKEA for its clientele in the Netherlands, my interviewee added that these findings were therefore relevant for the entire Dutch home-furnishing market. The translation of the matrix, with its various households and their preferences, into interior design concepts started on a functional level. “In the end, of prime importance to us is that our residents buy a fully functional house”, Henry remarked, “and that’s what we’re mainly aiming at”. So, it was only after deciding household needs that the functionalities were turned into styles fitting both the products and prices offered by BAM’s associated suppliers. Next, each supplier
In order to survive as a commercial concern, Muzus houses. The choice to target these groups seems to reflect mainstream households in the Netherlands, as well as to those with middle and higher incomes. Moreover, they lack cultural awareness. It is likely that the families reflect certain groups are excluded is always equally sensitive matter. Museums, and especially city museums, are held accountable for being inclusive. The accused decision that certain groups are excluded is always an extremely sensitive issue.

Museum Personas

The matrix underlying the model interiors within Homestudios’ Inspiration Studio combines the available house types with their variations in spatial use and stylistic finishes. Eleven fictive households provide the scripts to encompass all the possible house types with their variations in spatial use and stylistic finishes. The top three target groups (urban omnivore, active father and culture lover) represented traditional audiences, while the other two (the convenience seeker and colourful fighter) were groups the museum explicitly also wanted to reach. The city tourist was excluded from the original segmentation model, but was added to our matrix as a logical extension. Although the final personifications are abstractions, with fictive names and photographed models, many of the small images added were provided by the respondents, as were the quotes. Looking at them some five years later, Neele Kistenmaker concluded that the personas definitely required updating. “A persona like the colourful fighter really is no longer possible in today’s society,” Neele noted, asserting that the goal today would certainly be to include a much more diverse group, including not only fighters, but definitely also successful people of colour.

Was asked to select furnishings for the properties from its product ranges. Due to its previous careful consideration, the company was able to secure a complete and appropriate supply of items for consumers in the middle- and higher-income segments.

This image visualises one of the six personas developed by the research agency Muzus and Museum Rotterdam in 2014. The fictitious characters are described in five keywords in the column on the far left. Four other columns describe the personas’ social context, their relationship to the city of Rotterdam, favourite leisure activities and wishes regarding museum visits in general. Source: Museum Rotterdam, Exhibition Archive (2014).

Could the use of personas, updated and adjusted to represent life at home, contribute to a more inclusive collection policy? These personas might relate to households instead of individual persons – just like those of BAM, only better suited to a city museum’s target groups. They would instead be based on city demographics and loaded with meaning by various respondents, thus resulting in characters that are abstract and personal at the same time. Can persons be created without being too much of a cliche? Could they help a museum’s collection to reflect the home life of various communities? I therefore recommend a future study of whether an approach like this could involve meaningful interactions between visitors, citizens and contemporary collections in city museums.

Ibid. Description based on museum documentation, personal memory and an interview conducted on 27 June 2019 with Neele Kistenmaker. The definition of ‘personas’ is derived from the online edition of the Macmillan Dictionary, viewed 14 June 2019.

Ibid. 43

Ibid. 44

Ibid. 45

Ibid. 46

Ibid. 47
Commercial model homes may, however, be aiming than empty houses. As Avitts writes:

Right from the first Smart Collection to the present-day Homestudios, @am’s concept has been based on the success of furnished model homes. While this was initially done with floor plans and CGI, the current Experience Centre is equipped with a 3D model of a typical home. However, in this section of my study turns to these properties in the Inspiration Studio. How does their visual vocabulary help customers to connect emotionally to their future home? What messages are conveyed and what kind of home life is reflected?

The Inspiration Studio’s Visual Vocabulary

The 11 homes within the Inspiration Studio represent all of the house types that @am builds in various locations throughout the Netherlands. Showing properties either with or without an extension, with floor plans of all the available options, the model homes exemplify the various layouts. Customers can thus view a model home that corresponds to their future property, experience the options in the different spatial arrangements, and weigh up the pros and cons of, for instance, the Living and Culinary variants. Along with house types and spatial arrangements, style is the Inspiration Studio’s most eye-catching tool for helping customers to envision their future home. According to the Homestudios’ website, the model homes are designed to offer visitors a familiar environment – a space in which they recognise their personal tastes, wishes and dreams. Though Avitt’s Live the Dream describes just two templates from which merchandisers create the American model home interiors, according to the style description of 20 January 2020, the house is one of the largest homes, and has a generous floor plan that includes a large extension measuring 6.0 by 12.40 metres. Due to the limited height of Homestudios’ building, the house is arranged over two floors, although in reality it would have three. Nevertheless, the house feels very spacious. An open-plan ground floor combines the kitchen, dining room and living room in a typical modern Dutch configuration. The kitchen is at the front of the house, in accordance with the Living house type. In the quite formal living room, the few, but large and stylish and presumably expensive, pieces of furniture communicate distinction and grandeur. The matrix sent to me after my visit to Homestudios states that the house has been designed for a family with three children; it is aimed at the middle and higher end of the market, and the matrix labels its feel as ‘International Design’, which matches the current Slick & Stylish style.

From a curatorial perspective, it is noticeable that the rather minimalist interior avoids being overly personal. In fact, there are no family pictures in sight and the shelves of the impressive sideboard have not completely match the empty. The shelving unit near the kitchen has just a few books and decorative vases. There is no reference at all to the three children in this fictive household. Two empty wine glasses on side tables work as spatial effigies: they invite the presence of two adults, relaxing in comfortable armchairs – albeit too far apart to converse. Spotlights and ambient lighting affirm the suggestion of a somewhat later time of day, as does the large, flat-screen television, clearly offered for sale by one of Homestudios’ suppliers. Further storytelling accessories include flowers and plants, expressing homeliness, although their artificiality has, in my opinion, a slightly detrimental effect. Eye-catchers is the enormous reproduction of The Threatened Swan, a mid-17th-century masterpiece by Jan Asselijn from the collection of the Dutch Rijksmuseum (National Museum). The choice of this imposing ‘angry bird’ stands in stark contrast to the pleasant impressionism Avitts mentions as being the most selected genre for the fine-art paintings in the form of prints in the homely setting. The style description on Homestudios’ website, added in January 2020, explains this finishing touch purely from a decorative point of view. Like many old masters, the text states, this print contains “the hues so characteristic for the Slick & Stylish living style”.

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famous painting also aims to convey quality and status; it might even add a sense of tradition to the predominantly minimalist home.

Although the home interior shows visitors a space in which they can recognise their personal tastes and aspirational lifestyle, it is not very detailed. The few, but large, pieces of furniture communicate different stories. Some accessories, such as the flowers and wine-glasses, suggest occupancy, but the sideboards and drawers are empty and relatively few sensorial stimuli have been added. This scenario is articulated through the introductory text more than its storytelling accessories. Press photo BAM Homestudios.

The B.A.M. interior designers are explicitly mentioned and quoted within Homestudios. Their expertise is acknowledged in the showroom’s texts, the online explanations of styles, blog posts and online advice about the creation of a personal home, often with a portrait-type photo added. More than in typical model homes, then, style is explicited.

**Styles and Storytelling Accessories in Museums**

Model homes are based on the notion that furnished properties with decorated interiors, including those that are deliberately constructed, articulate cultural values more than empty houses. Spatial arrangements, styles and selected objects form a visual vocabulary that appeals to groups of visitors, helping them to connect emotionally with the property on display.

In the museological period room, style and taste are charged concepts, directly relating the interior ensemble to the traditional art-historical type of room. Many city museums focus on social period rooms, ensembles that are meant to represent everyday life, and want to know very little about the stylistic perspective. Yet style and taste seem to be important aspects in connecting interior ensembles and visitors. This can certainly be taken into account in collecting strategies without making style the sole point of departure. Where IKEA integrates style implicitly in its ensembles, B.A.M. turns it into an educational tool and teaches visitors to understand styles and to apply them in their future home. The latter approach is within the remit of museums, where the challenges lie, on the one hand, in the selection of a variety of styles in the process of collecting, and on the other in ensuring that ‘unattractive’ interiors are not just passed by when presented to visitors, but are viewed with different eyes. In so doing, the social and artistic period rooms converge, even if they have a different purpose.

While museums present their objects as cultural heritage, as things worthy of preservation, Homestudios present theirs as commodities, things that can be bought. In order to speak to a wide variety of buyers, the Inspiration Studio’s interiors aim to balance individuality and conformity. In contrast, recently constructed period rooms in museums often intend to address issues of representation, reflecting the individual lives of their inhabitants, whether real or fictive. These ensembles are commonly packed with personal details, aiming to convey the idea that the residents have just walked away. This enormous amount of detailing was expressed in “Everything except your PIN code”, which was the intriguing title of a lecture on the new acquisition policy of the Nederlands Openluchtmuseum (Dutch Open-Air Museum). Yet would it perhaps be better to strive for a less detailed basis in our collection policies, in which more space is left open to the visitor himself? To what extent do storytelling accessories add valuable information, and where do they prevent people from easily empathising with the narrative?

**Lecture by Hans Piena (2012), curator at the Dutch Open-Air Museum, explaining the museum’s new collection policy to professionals in the field of home interiors as cultural heritage.**

Mentioned on the following website: [https://www.cultureel erfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/interieurs/documenten/publicaties/2019/01/01/overzicht-eerdere-interieurplatforms](https://www.cultureel erfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/interieurs/documenten/publicaties/2019/01/01/overzicht-eerdere-interieurplatforms).
Ron van der Ende created this relief (2002) of the Parkflat. In 1958, it was considered to be the best possible realisation of the standards promoted by *Goed Wonen*. 
Experiences are key in BAM’s house-selling strategy. Even at the start of its Smart Collection in 2012, two managers declared that its project-selling concept had been based on the success of furnished model homes, which are the first houses sold on almost every housing development. “That’s because one can really experience the house like already living there”, they explained in the regional Business Magazine. Architectural drawings showed the available future exteriors and floor plans, visualised the options for the spatial layout, but the new concept emerged most clearly in the images representing interior styling and the finishes in the house: they painted aspiring buyers a picture of their future home, aiming to convince them that their dream property is, in fact, obtainable and affordable. By choosing extras, the house could be customised according to buyers’ specific wishes, and on completion day they should be able to move straight in, with no DIY required and without having to visit a large number of showrooms. They would also have complete certainty over costs. Not only was the collection of home-interior images intended to sell BAM’s ready-to-live-in concept, it also aimed to convey a convincing idea of a future home life. BAM proudly stated in Business Magazine: “Time and again, one can add a layer of finishing to the interior and thus add experience.”

The launch of Homestudios in 2018, however, seems to indicate that the experience provided by only photographs and CGI did not ultimately suffice. Images are a part of the decision-making process they have been replaced with impressive amounts of samples of materials, the extensive use of virtual reality and 11 fully furnished model homes. Homestudios is explicitly designed to offer prospective buyers a realistic impression of their future home and guide them through experiences. As Mario Broos, director of one of BAM’s operating companies, said: “You’ll experience your new house before you’re actually living there.” While today’s claim is still the same as in 2013, the degree of realism has increased enormously.

As experience is highly valued in the desire of museums to connect to visitors, the current theme examines the conspicuous aspect of experiences in Homestudios. It considers the principles that underlie the concept and the project. The three main steps used to establish an experiential connection between customers and the products on offer. Finally, the theme turns to the question of what museums might learn from Homestudios’ ideas and practices. It is argued that a contemporary collecting strategy has to consider the visitor experience, with Homestudios’ infold concept of knowledge, inspiration and creation suggesting an interesting direction for museums’ collecting policies.

### Experience Principles

The Homestudios’ concept spans the entire (prospective) buyer journey and includes the Experience Centre, as well as an online platform and personal advice. The journey starts online. A digital platform presents each of BAM’s building projects and provides detailed information on the exteriors and layouts of the new-builds for sale. After a house is bought, a personal account on My Homestudios is created, serving as a planner, personal archive and platform and includes future neighbours. At a certain point, the buyers are invited to the Experience Centre. Welcomed by their advisor, the visit begins by activating the personalised tablet that saves information on all the decisions made during the tour. Customers are guided through the Introductory House and the various studios, their decision-making supported by the interactive exhibits, personal advisor and additional expert advice. They prepare lunch with a professional chef and enjoy eating it in the company of fellow buyers. At the end of the day, they get tailored advice in the Creation Studio, where they can compare samples of all kinds, review their choices and link them to their online account. If customers collect ideas and formulate their personal vision for their future home, such as kitchen ergonomics, bathroom layout and home automation. With the help of projections and moveable walls, the effects of adding layered, multi-sensory participation in trying, discovering, comparing, cooking (tasting and smelling) and, finally, choosing. Storytelling can be found throughout in the combination of narrative texts, objects and interactive exhibits, while face-to-face encounters are scripted from the individual visitor’s point of view. During my tour there, the construction, route and personal advice. The journey starts online. A short piece of text at the heart do the talking first. From experience, the brain will follow automatically.

- **Sensory perceptions** – The more you appeal to the senses, the better you enter the hearts and minds of your visitors. (...).
- **Layering** – Reading, watching, listening. Or just playing, trying, thinking, discovering for yourself? Experience is in line with different learning styles of visitors and allows for layering.

It is not hard to see how these principles underlie Homestudios’ Experience Centre. With the customer journey as the starting point, the five studios, image, text and personal advice. The visitor is presented with layered, multi-sensory participation in trying, discovering, comparing, cooking (tasting and smelling) and, finally, choosing. Storytelling can be found throughout in the combination of narrative texts, objects and interactive exhibits, while face-to-face encounters are scripted from the individual visitor’s point of view. During my tour there, the construction, route and personal advice. The journey starts online. A short piece of text at the heart do the talking first. From experience, the brain will follow automatically.

- **The recipient at the centre** – Always put yourself in the position of your target audience. (...).
- **Storytelling** – It is an imperative. No story, no experience. (...).
- **Co-creation** – (...). When people co-create their experience, they are more engaged and focused. Even more so when they can personalise their experience.
- **The encounter** – One-on-one contact remains the most effective form of communication (...).
- **Reason and emotion** – (…) But try to let your heart do the talking first. From experience, the brain will follow automatically.

Museums might learn from Homestudios’ museum exhibition’s A-text, encourages buyers to discover, experience and learn. “Here you will gain insight into the practical, ergonomic, and comfortable organisation of your house”, it reads, so “be curious and ask questions” in reading, trying and comparing, customers can learn in an interactive manner about changing, exploring their new home, such as kitchen ergonomics, bathroom layout and home automation. With the help of projections and moveable walls, the effects of adding a dormer window to the attic and extending the ground floor can also be visualised. Along the way, buyers set priorities and save preferences on a personal tablet, which is linked to their Homestudios account.
Next, the Inspiration Studio contains 11 fully furnished homes set within decor that is very exhibition-like in the explicit language of boards and battens. The result is a somewhat abstract, uniform architectural setting that immediately directs visitors’ attention to the use and furnishing of the interior space. “Experience, feel, and dream,” the introductory text advises, adding: “Here you’ll find the inspiration for combinations of styles, colours, and materials. Look, feel, and sense the atmosphere. Use your imagination.” Of the five studios, the Inspiration version most resembles the idea of a museum with several contemporary period rooms. A showcase at the entrance to each model home provides a mood-board-like atmosphere, while accompanying text reveals the underlying script. This text easily compares to the introductory text advises, adding: “Here you’ll bring ideas to life,” the text promises. Consequently, inspiration at Homestudios is not found in the Inspiration Studio, as well as online, provide expert tips and tricks on this subject. There, style is not just intended to appeal to a variety of people, but is also used in an educational way to encourage them to create a personal home. The texts found in the Inspiration Studio, as well as online, provide expert tips and tricks on this subject. Consequently, inspiration at Homestudios is not so much the result of extensive interactions with products or interpersonal connections with other visitors, but instead steered by expert guidance. Creation is the final step in the Homestudios’ concept. Advised by experts, buyers imagine their future home in the Creation Studio. There, the text urges clients to combine, create and decide. The knowledge acquired previously and the inspiration on offer are now used to create a home. “Here you’ll bring ideas to life”, the text promises.

Previously set personal priorities, preferences and preliminary choices can be viewed on the large computer screens in the studio’s individual cubicles. Customers can check and reconsider their choices, supported by the large number of samples available in the studio. While earlier choices served as a funnel, this studio enables customers to make their final decisions.

The Museum as a Creative Technology
The increased materiality of the objects on display, the hands-on exhibits and the explanatory texts all relate Homestudios to the museum. Even its name associates it with the concept of a museum as a studio or laboratory. Answering a follow-up question, Henk Draijer clarified that the name ‘Homestudios’ most importantly refers to the museum’s works of art, create their own masterpieces and share them on its website. Moreover, a museum’s B-text, describing the homes’ inhabitants, introducing the designer and explaining the layout and style of the house in less than 200 words. The inspiration to be derived from the Homestudios is also hard work. Finally, a studio also suggests the notion of working together, implying a participatory approach.

The Inspiration Studio relates primarily to the spatial principles. Style is also an important tool to connect visitors to the home interiors. Here, style is not just intended to appeal to a variety of people, but is also used in an educational way to encourage them to create a personal home. The texts found in the Inspiration Studio, as well as online, provide expert tips and tricks on this subject. Consequently, inspiration at Homestudios is not so much the result of extensive interactions with products or interpersonal connections with other visitors, but instead steered by expert guidance. Creation is the final step in the Homestudios’ concept. Advised by experts, buyers imagine their future home in the Creation Studio. There, the text urges clients to combine, create and decide. The knowledge acquired previously and the inspiration on offer are now used to create a home. “Here you’ll bring ideas to life”, the text promises.

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biannual design competition invites people to create a new masterpiece based on the museum's collection. Prizes include money and a feedback session with a well-known artist or designer. Rijksstudio is a fine example of Nicholas Thomas' plea to consider the museum both as a method and a creative technology. In his book *The Return of Curiosity* (2016), Thomas discusses museums as both valuable sources for reflection and creative technologies with which visitors might create new things. First, he describes the museum as a method, which he characterises using three specific moments or acts: discovery, captioning and juxtaposition. Discovery relates to the selection of objects, which, although prompted by a particular interest, is ultimately determined by curiosity and unexpected encounters. Captioning then refers to the act of giving meaning to an object, which can coincide with the literal writing of a caption or can be the result of implying meaning by context. Finally, juxtaposition is the development of arguments by the composition of objects in mutual relationships. In the next chapter, Thomas argues that this museum method is an activity of discovery and reflection in which everyone can participate:

Yet entering collections, finding things, connecting and juxtaposing them is emphatically not a set of activities that specialists of whichever kind monopolize. The ‘museum as method’ is a business that ordinary visitors and others interested in collections can make their own, motivated by very diverse interests and to very varied effect. (...) Artworks and collections do not just inspire, as museum advocates routinely, if rightly, claim; the collection is more particularly a technology that, quite simply, enables people to make new things [emphasis by Thomas].

Homestudios' trifold concept of knowledge, inspiration and creation matches ideas about the museum as a studio, laboratory or method, and suggests an interesting direction for museums' contemporary home life collecting policies. Knowledge and inspiration tie in well with the existing view of museums and the role that collections play within them. Where interactions with objects served to connect visitors with interiors in the IKEA case, at B.A.M.'s Homestudios the link is established in a different way. With many material objects in fairly static ensembles and the use of props in interactive displays, Homestudios and museums are not so different. Moreover, Homestudios' expert guidance resembles the deployment of guides, educators or curators in museums, albeit applied much more intensively due to B.A.M.'s strict admission policy. However, as the B.A.M. case indicates, besides knowledge and inspiration, creation must also be recognised as an important aspect of the visitor experience. To this end, B.A.M. not only built an online platform, but also invested in facilitating material research and actively supporting decision-making. Museums might also present their collections on a connecting platform, as done by Rijksstudio. Thomas' museum method, including discovery, captioning and juxtaposition, could be pivotal to this, although it mainly concerns the use of existing collections. Could something similar be possible in the process of collecting? Could the sharing of museum ensembles in the form of, for instance, images, attractive descriptions and stories about collecting give rise to a multi-perspective discussion on contemporary home life? Could it lead to visitor suggestions of things not-to-be-overlooked, private ensembles that shed a new light on museum collections, or potential new perspectives that should be added? And could this also give direction to the expansion of a contemporary museum collection?

Rijksstudio was launched in October 2012, then containing about 125,000 images. In March 2019, 662,651 works of art were included along with 463,129 groups - so-called studios. The latter included 100,839 studios added by the museum itself. Website https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/zoeken?p=1&ps=12&st=Collections&ii=0, last viewed 14 March 2019.

Thomas 2016: 17.

Ibid. 101-110.

Ibid. 117.

The Creation Studio contains several cubicles equipped with large screens for buyers to view the individual choices made during their visit. A large space next to these booths provides customers with a variety of samples available for comparison. This is where the clients make their final decisions. This photo shows two buyers comparing samples. Source: dst-experience agency.
This nest of tables, produced at a now-closed Rotterdam factory, satisfies Goed Wonen’s 1953 demand for furniture with a light and airy feel.
The final case in this study is the funda House, a big-data home developed by the property website funda. As the largest such company in the Netherlands, funda has about 90 per cent of the country’s housing supply on offer on its website. In 2016, it had a million visitors a day, adding up to almost one billion houses viewed every year. Two architects were invited to design a property based on the big data collected by funda on the homes these visitors viewed. The funda House was presented on 24 January 2017 as a property not created with bricks and mortar, but instead “built of data and dreams”. The home was based on the website’s best-selling properties on the one hand and the features searched for the most by visitors to the site on the other. The outcome was a terraced house with a spacious, castle-like feel to it – a terraced castle, as it was named.
As an occasional recreational visitor to funda, i.e., not looking for a property but enjoying browsing the product portfolio, I noticed the big-data house soon after its presentation in January 2017. Fascinated by the concept and its architectural renderings, I could not help wondering if it was really what a contemporary home would look like if future buyers had their say. How many people had been involved in the creation of this conceptual property, and who are they? Could this explicit use of big data as an instrument build the home material also be attractive to museums, given the resemblance to their interest in a bottom-up perspective? Would it enable museums to collect the ideas of more residents in their collections than is normally feasible in small-scale participatory projects? Answering these questions was why I was persuaded to include this case in my study.

A further key reason relates to the house’s existence as a digital object, a virtual model home questioning the living preferences of the average website visitor. Of the three cases in this study, the funda House is the most dissimilar to traditional museological period rooms. This material factor became more important in June 2019, when funda announced its intention to expand the concept and extra text; and the websites of the two architects used various examples of previous design-focused studies concerning people and their living preferences. For the funda House project, Jeroen worked closely with architect Dingeman Deij, who has his own firm. The two met during their training at the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture and since then have worked together on several schemes. Jeroen said that their synergy is especially prominent in the initial phases of such schemes, including the imagination and invention of concepts, and characterised their cooperation as “One plus one equals three”. As housing is Heren 5’s main strength, it was largely responsible for developing the funda idea. Sometimes after the interview, it became clear that Dingeman Deij was also actively involved in visualising the interior of the funda House, and so he later answered some additional questions on this subject via email.4

Due to the different expertise of data analysts and architects, the interviews with Jurrian van Gent and Jeroen Atteveld had slightly different focuses: that with the former concentrated on the underlying data and the development of algorithms, while that with the latter emphasised translating the data into an architectural concept. Not only did the interviews provide valuable insights into the methods used and the underlying ideas and their development, they also raised interesting questions about the roles of curators and guest curators in a parallel museum context.

**Method**

Like the other cases in this study, this one benefits from my use of a mixed-design method. Although no scholarly research on the funda House has been published to date, it has nonetheless attracted a great deal of attention in the popular media. Along with business documents, I have therefore used these popular texts, websites, images, videos and audio files to gather information. The launch of the funda House on 24 January 2017 triggered a flood of media coverage. Articles in newspapers and magazines, short interviews on radio and television and blogs on various websites quickly responded to the new housing concept that was cleverly revealed by funda. Its press releases outlined its intention to expand the concept and actually build the house, which it had previously and explicitly said it did not want to do. What are the potential consequences of this change from digital big data to bricks and mortar? Do the concept and meaning alter in view of this development? What insights can be gained concerning born-digital objects when considering the funda House from the perspective of a museum wanting to collect contemporary home life?

The final reason for including the funda House in this comparative case study is the interest museums have in compact collections. While the IKEA room settings and BAM’s Homestudios have already hinted at their feasibility, the funda case seems to suggest the possibility of a truly XS collection: a single house that represents the ideal home of the general Dutch population. Why has funda for years been to create a compact home from the enormous amount of data available to it? What ideals have emerged from the comparison between purchases and searches, and what cultural values does the funda House represent?

**Conclusion**

This chapter studies the funda House as a constructed home with a domestic interior that aims to represent a modern version of home life; or, in museological terms, a contemporary period room. The case has not been selected just for the sake of it, but because it is instrumental in exploring viable options for how museums can collect contemporary home life. Consequently, I examine the ensemble constructed by funda, how it was created; the website and the house aims to connect to visitors, the home life reflected and the people embodied. In so doing, I am replicating museological issues relating to collections, the act of collecting, ways of connecting and key aspects of representation.

In my efforts to describe and fully understand each of the three cases in the study, I have taken care to use terminology specific to it. Consequently, the company’s name in this final case is written throughout the chapter using all lower-case letters (i.e., funda). Furthermore, the project’s name is also described according to the company’s preferred spelling: the funda House.

Although the term *visitors* was used in the IKEA case to include both website visitors and show-room shoppers and *customers or clients* peopled BAM’s Homestudios, the term *visitors* is adopted in the funda case to describe those who visit the website funda.nl. This group includes both ‘fun’ viewers (those just surfing the site for recreational reasons) and ‘serious’ home-seekers (prospective buyers or, less often, tenants). A differentiation between these groups is made in the chapter, if required.

Finally, the funda House is described as a big-data, digital or conceptual house. These terms stress different aspects of its nature depending on its development over time (from the initial idea to the blueprint of the actual house) and the context within which it is situated. Sometimes, I stress the data from which it originates, its materiality or its final design. Such situational differences will be expressed in my characterisation of the funda House.
A House Built of Data and Dreams

CASE DESCRIPTION

The explicit use of big data as a prime building material sparked my interest in the funda House. While many museums create rather small-scale and intensely mentored projects as a way to involve residents in the heritage of the contemporary city, the funda House seems to propose an alternative bottom-up approach. Its primary goals of stimulating debate, encouraging various parties to make better use of the available data, and advocating a more demand-driven approach bear a resemblance to the aims of museums to improve their relevance, become centres of civic dialogue and honour community-driven initiatives. The next section explores what museums might learn from the funda House.

Celebrating fifteen years of funda

Ever since its creation in 2001, funda.nl has been the largest property website in the Netherlands. Founded by the Nederlandse Vereniging van Makelaars (nvm), a branch organisation representing about 60% of Dutch estate agents, the website originally only included properties offered by its members. This changed in 2007, when funda opened up to other estate agents as well. Over 5,000 agents are now represented, with the website now offering for sale (or rent) over 90% of all the available houses in the country. As a platform, funda aims to serve estate agents and consumers in equal measure. With a ‘top-of-mind’ brand-awareness figure of 93% and around 43 million unique visitors a month, the website has become the go-to destination for finding a home.

While some are serious in looking for a place to live, many others – including a category of self-confessed funda addicts – are just there for fun, without any intention to buy. In order to distinguish between the serious and fun visitors, funda had previously developed an algorithm based on their distinctive behaviour on the website. This algorithm records each visitor’s journey based on their distinctive behaviour on the website and links the interactions to a single, anonymous individual. Each interaction is weighted, depending on its value in predicting an actual sale. Viewing photographs rates rather low, because almost everyone does this; watching a video or downloading a brochure indicates a higher level of interest and results in a higher score, as do sending an email or contacting the estate agent. The algorithm, Jurriaan van Gent told me, thus allocates a particular score to each visitor. If a house is revisited on the website, the preference for this house is reinforced. Each anonymous individual gets a unique daily score for every house viewed on the site. After defining the cut-off point, funda is then able to distinguish between serious visitors and dreamers.

In probing the wishes of serious home-seekers, the algorithm can, for example, provide insight into the amount of interest per dwelling or the houses competing with each other. The company has also developed a tool to aggregate the data (then called ‘market scanner’, now ‘demand scanner’). In relation to the Netherlands overall, these aggregated data have identified that most of the serious home-seekers are looking for a detached house. A comparison with actual transactions, however, revealed a discrepancy: while the majority show significant interest in a detached property, a much lower number of transactions take place with a terrace or a garden.

Key to the concept of the funda House has been the remarkable disparity between dreams, demands and reality. The company’s big data suggest that consumers have to compromise repeatedly; while their dream is of a castle with more than ten rooms on a plot of over 1,500 m² for a price upwards of two million euros, the serious home-seekers seem to manage their expectations, i.e., they show interest in a six-room, albeit detached, house on a 150 to 200 m² plot for a price between €225,000 and 250,000. In reality, the dwelling sold the most is a terraced house with five rooms on a plot of 100 to 150 m² costing from €175,000 to 200,000. The question, therefore, is: "Does Holland build what are the Dutch are really looking for?"

Underlying the notion of a house founded on data was the strong suspicion that there was disparity between supply and demand. The question ‘Does Holland build what are the Dutch are really looking for?’ broadly expresses the main idea as it was formulated retrospectively in funda’s annual report over the course of 2017. According to architect Jeroen Atteveld, although he was contradicted by Jurriaan, the idea of the funda House may also have been motivated by the website’s goal of gaining a foothold in the market for new build homes. In this sense, the idea was commercially driven, Jeroen assumes, adding that he nevertheless strongly favours the concept of reconsidering the standard new build. As a tech company, funda, of course required help from architects to design a home. To this end, the firm chose to organise a competition, eventually appointing the firm Heren 5 Architects, which had previously conducted research on living requirements and housing preferences. Indeed, Jeroen Atteveld had actually used various examples of earlier design-thinking studies during our interview. ‘Doing research on the way people want to live is in itself an interesting exercise,’ he confided funda addicts – are just there for fun, without any intention to buy. In order to distinguish between the serious and fun visitors, funda had previously developed an algorithm based on their distinctive behaviour on the website. This algorithm records each visitor’s journey on the site and links the interactions to a single, anonymous individual. Each interaction is weighted, depending on its value in predicting an actual sale. Viewing photographs rates rather low, because almost everyone does this; watching a video or downloading a brochure indicates a higher level of interest and results in a higher score, as do sending an email or contacting the estate agent. The algorithm, Jurriaan van Gent told me, thus allocates a particular score to each visitor. If a house is revisited on the website, the preference for this house is reinforced. Each anonymous individual gets a unique daily score for every house viewed on the site. After defining the cut-off point, funda is then able to distinguish between serious visitors and dreamers.

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Heren 5 subsequently appointed the firm Heren 5 Architects, which had previously developed an algorithm to aggregate the data based on all those queries on our site and all the interactions people had pleaded for more transparency through the publication of Data and Dreams. These sources provide overlapping information and sometimes present different details; the information is mainly complementary, not contradictory.

In 2018, for example, Consumentengids published an article about funda’s representation of houses. It revealed shortcomings on the website and gave readers concrete advice on ways to check the information provided. Previously, the Vereniging Eigen Huis (Own Home Association) had pleaded for more transparency through the equal treatment of all real estate agents, whether members of the nvm or not. Mulder 2012, quote from the plea by the Own Home Association mentioned above.

During an interview, Jeroen mentioned: ‘Huis (At Home), a publication including photographs of people in their homes before and after demolition and other building transformation processes [year of publication unknown]; Nestelen in de stad (Nestling in the City), about families with a desire to live in city apartments (2013); and Stadsverte- ranen (City Veterans), a study on ageing happily in the city (2016). Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [04:06, 06:21, 07:51].

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was: would the architects be able to design a house that fits within the dimensions and cost of a standard terrace, but better reflects present-day consumer demands? A terraced castle

The conclusion reached by the architects Jeroen Atteveld and Dingeman Deijs based on searches on funda.nl was that people are essentially looking for a sense of freedom and space. In particular, as Jeroen told me in our interview, search terms like ‘bungalow’ or ‘stables’, as well as the common ‘plot size’ and ‘outside area’, must be regarded as indicators of a clear desire for space in the very densely populated Netherlands. Consequently, in their efforts to convey the sense of a castle within the limitations of a standard property, the architects designed a terraced house with a spacious, grand feel to it – a terraced castle.

Describing the idea behind the funda House, Jeroen Atteveld explained the layout of a castle as having one or two grand meeting rooms with thick, enveloping walls that accommodate the auxiliary spaces in the so-called ‘poché’. Inspired by the castle dream of the visitors to funda.nl, the architects produced an alternative layout within the conventional building envelope. This consists of a large open space, intended to be a grand living room, and a poché with much smaller supporting spaces. Functional rooms, such as the bathroom and bedroom, have thus been designed to be compact, much smaller than these rooms in a normal terraced house. Simultaneously, each room has been given a strong identity to emphasise the striking difference from a conventional property. According to Jeroen Atteveld:

At some point, we asked ourselves: couldn’t we create one single space to be the beating heart of the funda house, with a poché to cater for all those different rooms we need to live comfortably? And we also... at some point we said: yes, it’s also very important that those rooms are really characterful and distinctive. They don’t all have to be that large. Actually, I believe that’s precisely part of it... those rooms being different from the standard... say... bedrooms in just any terraced house. Well, otherwise it would be impossible to obtain this highly valued grand living space.

Funda presented its newly designed house on 24 January 2017 as the first-ever Dutch big-data property, a home “built of data and dreams”. Since then, the funda website has contained a link to a short video that visualises the process of creating the house, sketching out its underlying ideas and introducing the concept. High-quality architectural renderings with intriguing names can also be found on the website, accompanied by brief descriptions. The ‘walk-in bath’ and the ‘see-through attic’ are introduced here, as well as reinterpretations of older concepts like the box bed and a tower room, the latter now featuring an upright dormer window. Moreover, various links take interested readers to additional background information on the process of data analysis and interpretation. Finally, a section with frequently-asked-questions provides insight into the project’s motivations and goals. While my interviewees stressed the importance of advocating a demand-driven approach, the funda website accentuates its aim to stimulate debate and encourage “other parties” to make better use of the available data. It also explicitly states that funda does not intend to design any other houses of this kind, nor build or sell the one discussed.

From big data to blueprint

Despite the explicit statement that it did not intend to build or sell the house conceived from its data, on 4 June 2019 funda announced a U-turn. While the architects had always been keen to build the property, funda was less so: as a tech company, it had neither the ambition nor the interest in turning the virtual house into a physical building. Its aims were simply to make a statement about the importance of data, stimulate debate and advocate a demand-driven approach. However, the many positive reactions in the press and on social media, as well as the enthusiasm voiced by consumers, builders, estate agents and other chain partners persuaded it to facilitate the process, as Jurriaan van Gent told me. According to Jeroen Atteveld, the architects had always made the case for the manifestation of their design, which would enable them to test their ideas, influence public opinion and provoke further discussion. These differences between funda and the two experts show that diverse parties can have a range of interests, which is an issue that may also affect the outcomes of a museum’s collecting chain. A team had already been assembled to construct the property at the time of my interviews in early July 2019. This consisted of funda and the two architects (Atteveld and Deijs), the builder and developer Van Wijnen, and Nieuw Wonen Nederland, an organisation of nvm-agents specialising in new builds. A municipality where the project would be located was to later complete the team, with cities invited to enrol in a competitive process before 5 August 2019. The short video Ontdek de kracht van de keten (Discover the Strength of the Chain) introduces the project’s partners, their involvement and their individual aims. The overarching objective is formulated as an adaptation of the original goal behind the funda House, and is described in the video in 2019 as follows:

Now we’re ready for the next step: from big data to blueprint. We are really going to build the funda House. (...) Our goal: further demand-driven project development through intensive co-operation between all chain partners in a local new development, based on each other’s data, knowledge and expertise.

The deadline for applications from municipalities was initially postponed to 30 September 2019. Then, between October 2019 and January 2021, the website carried an announcement stating that this phase had come to an end: “The selection procedure has now started and in-depth discussions are taking place”. However, by the end of March, this had disappeared.

Although the change in materiality from big data to bricks and mortar has not yet occurred, my within-case theme analysis nevertheless returns to the transformation from a ‘digital concept-for-disscussion’ to an ‘actual house-to-be-built’. Three other themes, focusing on either the method or the result, also examine the funda House as a constructed home that resembles a contemporary period room, simultaneously shifting the perspective from the funda case to the museum context.
Funda presented its big-data house in January 2017. This was based on a combination of the best-selling properties on its website and the most sought-after interior designs. The outcome was a terraced house with a spacious, castle-like feel, i.e., a ‘terraced castle’. The image shows a vertical section of the funda House within a row of traditional homes.

In 2017, the funda House was presented as the very first Dutch big-data home. The newly designed house needed to fit within the dimensions and cost of a standard house, but also needed to better reflect the demands of present-day consumers. With their terraced castle, architects Jeroen Atteveld and Dingeman Dieijl aim to convey a sense of freedom and space within the limitations of a typical Dutch terraced property. The architectural renderings presented in these images have been created as a way to visualise the new concept.

Images 1 and 3 situate the funda house within a row of similar properties. Its frontage (1) guarantees privacy, but the open masonry nevertheless provides the residents with light and a street view. The rear facade (3) suggests openness, with two-storey-high double doors to the garden.

The cross-section (2) shows the grand living room surrounded by various small rooms, reminiscent of a castle’s great hall with its supporting spaces in the poché.

A high-ceilinged entrance hall leads to the extraordinary light and large living room (9), which includes an open-plan kitchen and built-in storage space. The open landing (8) affords a view through the house, while simultaneously connecting all the rooms.

To achieve the grandeur of the living room, the other rooms are necessarily small – ‘compact’ is the word used by the architects. All of these rooms have been given a tantalising name and a characterful and distinctive design.

The ‘see-through attic’ (4) enables daylight to shine down into the living room. The attic has been furnished as a children’s room, playfully integrating the slanted roof in the design.

While the ‘box-bedroom’ (5) exemplifies both the small size and privacy of the individual bedrooms, the ‘walk-in bath’ (7) stresses the level of luxury and comfort that the funda House offers to the whole family.

Finally, the tower room (6) has been designed as the master bedroom. It has an en-suite bathroom, a wardrobe (stored under the bed), and a tilting dormer window with a glass ceiling to offer sky views.

The case description above highlights how the celebration of funda’s 15th anniversary led to the construction of the funda House, a big-data home designed by two architects and a data analyst and co-created with millions of visitors. Prompted by the disparity between dreams, demands and reality, the newly designed ‘terraced castle’ aims to meet present-day demands while also fitting within the dimensions and cost of a standard house. It also hints at a future in which the big-data home will become a normal part of a row of houses. While the previous section encompassed a variety of home interiors to appeal to a variety of customers, the current case proposes a single home to represent the ideals of the Dutch population in general. Aiming to expose the disparity in supply and demand, the funda House offers an alternative that nevertheless fits within standard building practices. What kind of alternative does the newly designed house suggest? What image of contemporary home life does it paint? This theme traces the cultural values embodied by the house, addressing both exteriors and interiors, and questions the lack of immediate interest in common objects and ensembles at the moment of collecting.

The first theme explores the use of big data as a bottom-up approach and an alternative route for museums in relation to contemporary and participatory collecting. While many city museums aim to include a wide spectrum of voices by giving visitors and residents an active role in collecting projects, funda’s big-data house departed from ‘warm data’ to ensure that it was more inclusive. I will argue that the use of big data is an opportunity to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting, and I will therefore propose an alternative, communal approach.

The second, closely related, theme discusses the interpretation and expertise required to develop a future vision on the basis of visitor searches. It demonstrates that the use of big data risks path dependency, that interpretation is crucial and that expertise is needed to prevent a process of designing ‘more of the same’. What strategies have the data analyst and architects developed to prevent history from mattering too much in the development of a new proposal? How do their roles compare with those involved in museums’ collecting strategies? And what can be learned from the funda case regarding the museum curatorial voice in particular?

Materiality is the subject of the third theme and concerns the change from a virtual model home to an actual house. The intertwining of ideas, language, images and models, as well as its possible future realisation, indicate that the funda House cannot be fully understood without its digital counterparts. Moreover, the case suggests that contemporary collecting necessitates the inclusion of digital objects to build coherent ensembles, to an actual house. The intertwining of ideas, language, images and models, as well as its possible future realisation, indicate that the funda House may seem to many museums.

Finally, the fourth theme focuses on the result and dwells on the funda House as a constructed home explicitly replicating the idea of a museological period room. While the previous cases encompassed a variety of home interiors to appeal to a variety of customers, the current case proposes a single home to represent the ideals of the Dutch population in general. Aiming to expose the disparity in supply and demand, the funda House offers an alternative that nevertheless fits within standard building practices. What kind of alternative does the newly designed house suggest? What image of contemporary home life does it paint? This theme traces the cultural values embodied by the house, addressing both exteriors and interiors, and questions the lack of immediate interest in common objects and ensembles at the moment of collecting.

Big data as a bottom-up approach

The funda House’s explicit use of big data as its prime building material was the main reason for selecting this case. While many museums create rather small-scale and intensely mentored projects as a way to involve residents in the heritage of the contemporary city, the funda House seems to propose an alternative, bottom-up approach. Although the big-data house started as just a general idea about using the information that funda had been collecting for 15 years, the company eventually came to be an advocate for a more demand-driven approach within a somewhat conservative and supply-centric construction industry. In retrospect, architect Jeroen Atteveld formulated the aims as follows.

Well, like I said, this [terraced] house is still being produced, it’s being built everywhere. Family structures change, households change, but the same house still sells. Why? Is it because people really want it? Is it because they don’t know anything better? Is it because there are no alternatives? Are we looking as far ahead as we need to? These are all questions that go with it, and... and the funda House has been an opportune moment to dwell on them and to connect them to such a design.26

In the process of designing a property that would better meet the demands of consumers, the funda House uses the website’s big data as a starting point, presuming that the combination of actual house sales and information-seeking behaviour would provide insight into the wishes and requirements of Dutch residents. Moreover, when it was announced that the conceptual house would actually be built, two and a half years after it was proposed, the company publicly endorsed their belief in the use of big data to uncover what customers want, even though the outcome differed from the original expectations of experts and consumers alike. As Maaike Arns from the construction firm Van Wijnen said in the funda video:

Well, yes, we do believe that the addition of big data in a housing development and realisation process might eventually lead to a different kind of house than first conceived, and maybe even what the resident imagined. So... that it will generate new insights that, yeah, may eventually surprise everyone, but perhaps offer even nicer homes to eventually live in. 27

Visitor Participation and Representation in the Museum

Just like the construction industry, the museum is often perceived to be a conservative stronghold cleaving to its former authority and paying too little attention to visitors’ demands. In terms of museum collecting, the authoritative voice of the curator is questioned and a redefinition of roles proposed, suggesting a shift from the idea of curators as experts to one where they are collaborators or brokers.28 Many city museums aim to encompass a wide array of voices and perspectives in their collections by giving visitors and residents an active role in collecting projects. Nevertheless, these museum professionals have identified that experiments with participatory collecting present challenges. As an example, participants might submit, often old and precious, items they assume would be of interest to a cultural-history museum, as they are similar to the objects they see presented in exhibitions or online. It is also quite difficult to acquire contemporary objects, even when these are sought out in a straightforward manner, because contributors can be reluctant to donate such items or may be unaware of the significance of objects that play an important role in their contemporary, day-to-day lives. Another issue that is commonly described by museum professionals is the proferring of very personal objects that have very little relevance to the lives of other people.

A well-documented experiment in participatory collecting, which touches on many aspects of the collecting process, involves the projects Give & Take (2008) and, in 2009, Wonderkamers (Room of Marvels). In the experiment, the city museum of Zoetermeer invited residents to donate objects that symbolised a characteristic aspect of the town and to explain their choice. A great deal of time
was invested in an intensive collaboration with fewer than 100 participants. Although the museum was happy with the authentic stories the experiment delivered, the 86 objects collected did not tell a coherent, let alone complete, story of Zoetermeer. To make matters worse, the resulting exhibition failed to attract many visitors. One of the conclusions was formulated as a rhetorical question: “To what degree is the general public really interested in objects that not long before were still stacked in their neighbours’ attics?” This small group of objects is still treated as a separate entity in the museum’s collection—a Fremdkörper, one might critically say.

At an international museum conference in 2008, Zelda Baveystock, then a lecturer in Museum Studies at Newcastle University, addressed current museological thinking about representing and the representation of visitors. Many participatory collecting projects are based on the notion that people need to see their own lives mirrored in museum collections, but Baveystock opposes the idea that museum relevance can be found in representation on an individual level. The participatory process can be valuable for contributors, she argues, but the outcomes of this kind of contemporary collecting are of little significance to others if a broader historical context is missing.

Should museums pay less attention to individuals or small groups of participants in their contemporary collecting strategies, instead trying to find common ground on a higher level of abstraction? Could big data, made accessible by partners, help to establish the broader context required to start collecting?

**Warm Data versus Big Data**

The architects Jeroen Atteveld and Dingeman Deij had previously conducted research on the living requirements and housing preferences of future residents. They had worked with “family portraits, mental maps and, simply, a good conversation with local residents and future inhabitants,” which are strategies that resemble something similar to “warm data.”

Moreover, the architects felt strongly that some kinds of socio-demographic data could all too easily lead to exclusion or stereotyping, when their intention was to design a house for much more flexible living. In a brief paraphrase of Jeroen Atteveld’s argument, a contemporary terraced house should enable today’s manifold ways of living. In this sense, the funda House departed from diversity while also aiming for inclusion.

Consequently, funda’s big-data house provided the opportunity to transcend the individual, personal level and propose an alternative, communal perspective. To develop this broader idea, the architects had to free themselves from warm data, specific target groups and existing people.

In Jeroen’s argument, partly out of necessity and partly by choice, the funda House departed from socio-demographic diversity while having the goal of achieving inclusion. Seemingly surprised, Jeroen concluded that they took an entirely different approach, having not spoken to a single website visitor or future resident, but nevertheless managing to design a home that appeals to many people.

**An Alternative Collecting Strategy**

Although the notion of warm data is much more closely related to present-day museum practices, which aim to establish personal relationships, involve intensive collaborations with individual participants, and the collection of personal objects or stories, the funda case suggests that the use of big data could give museums an alternative collecting strategy. This may be an opportunity to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting, instead finding common ground at a higher level of abstraction. It would thus be valuable to explore whether such an approach provides a broader context that speaks to residents, producing a collection in which they can either recognise or oppose themselves.
The home-office where politician Pim Fortuyn carried out most of his work, photographed after his murder on 6 May 2002. Among the items preserved are his chair and his desk, as well as the items on it.
House was very much about, well, all these data funda has been collecting... can't we somehow use them to look forward, to see what we can do with them in the future? So, regarding the data, you could say... if you enter these data in a model, as it were, you actually won't want to end up with the same house that all those people have bought till now. Consequentially, funda's data were not necessarily suited to the development of a future vision based on visitor searches. On the contrary, the risk of designing the same average house was as great as museums being offered objects that their collections already contain: a real and present risk that is not only mentioned in participatory projects, but has also been encountered as an everyday reality in my own email contact with potential donors. Meanwhile, the terraced house as 'town' house) – it is the same type of property, but quite different from, for instance, a palace with its modernist extension – it's the same concept, but citizens have different demands. And to what extent can big data be used as a tool to avoid path dependency and develop a vision for an up-to-date collecting policy? By looking more closely at the roles of the data analyst and the architects in the funda case and applying them to the museum context, this theme explores the effects of interpretation, expertise and subjectivity in the process of collecting.

**Avoiding the Pitfall of Path Dependency**

During our interview, the architect Jeroen Atteveld described the funda House as an ambassador of a demand-driven perspective. Nevertheless, both Jeroen and the data analyst Jurriaan van Gent stated that using funda's big data to develop a future vision is not an obvious approach. Instead of finding new, surprising insights, the data could just as easily lead to 'more of the same'. After all, very many terraced houses have been built in the Netherlands, so these are the houses many people are looking for", Jurriaan told me.40 Jeroen stressed likewise:

> When looking for a house on funda, almost all the houses on offer... they are, simply, existing dwellings. And it is, of course, quite difficult to generate from this existing market a wish for future building. (...) And the story of the funda

Consequently, funda's data were not necessarily suited to the development of a future vision based on visitor searches. On the contrary, the risk of designing the same average house was as great as museums being offered objects that their collections already contain: a real and present risk that is not only mentioned in participatory projects, but has also been encountered as an everyday reality in my own email contact with potential donors. Meanwhile, the terraced house (rijtjeswijk) could have been called a tussenwoning (a 'linked' or 'town' house) – it is the same type of property, but has a different emotional value.

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be found in the wide variety of interconnecting voices through which collecting becomes part of networked practices, something occasionally referred to as the ‘networked’ or ‘relational’ museum. Collecting requires conscious choices concerning perspective, transparency and reflexivity. Yet the funda case shows that someone still needs to make a choice after all, a choice that is by definition context-bound. So, why not entrust the curator with this task?

Where the previous themes have focused on method, examining the use of big data as a bottom-up approach and the interpretations required to prevent path dependency, the final two turn to the result: they consider the funda House as a constructed home, explicitly replicating the idea of a museological period room – albeit a contemporary version. The theme in this section, meanwhile, considers the materiality of a collection. As a virtual model home built by asking average visitors to the funda website about their living preferences, the funda House is the furthest away from the traditional museum ensemble of the three cases in this study. This factor gained in importance when funda announced its intention to actually build the house. What consequences can a change in materiality, from big data to bricks and mortar, have? Do the concept and meaning alter in the development of a digital concept into a real house?

On the funda website, an animated house – intended to be viewed using virtual-reality glasses – encourages visitors to watch a video about the funda House. The property has been presented as a conceptual model, a virtual house “built of data and dreams”, ever since its introduction in January 2017. To communicate its ideas, the funda House largely relies on the high-quality architectural renderings that are not only included in the introductory video, but were also circulated as part of the press release and published in the media. These are the visuals (in a way, the materialisation) of this case’s period room.

The animation not only suggests intangibility, but the website also explicitly states that funda does not intend to build or sell the property, nor design any other houses of this kind. Nonetheless, funda announced a U-turn in June 2019 regarding the construction of the property. To this end, a team was put together and municipalities wanting to enable demand-driven housing by having the property built in their area were invited to register. In the view of my interviewees, not much will change during the process of actually building the funda House. Of course, as Jurriaan van Gent told me, house prices are very dependent on both location and the scale of production, which will affect the overall cost, but the intention has always been, and remains, to design a home that fits within an average budget. To bring the concept to life, the project’s partners are aiming to build a row of houses that includes at least one ‘funda House Original’. The others in the terrace, so-called ‘funda Houses Local’, will be adapted to reflect local preferences, i.e., they will be based on the latest local data instead of national data from 2016. As both Jurriaan van Gent and Jeroen Atteveld stressed, this small series of conceptual houses may therefore vary, but their overarching theme must match the concept of a demand-driven approach based on big data. To them, this realisation of the funda House seems to be just the next step in a process, and is a step that is fully in accordance with the original idea. Indeed, the architect is even imagining possible further stages, like testing the actual use of the house or monitoring real home life to generate new data that can be used in a future design. However, the deadline for municipalities to enrol was postponed – the selection procedure apparently delayed – and the message about the intention to build the funda House had disappeared from the website by the end of March 2021, as had the video.

Looking at the funda House from the perspective of a museum aiming to collect contemporary home life, the combination of ideas and concepts, language, digital objects and materiality is noteworthy. The conceptual design of the house, its language, digital objects and materiality is notable. The conceptual design of the house, its language, digital objects and materiality is notable.


Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [12:11 and 36:42].

Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [40:33].

Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [41:20].

renderings, a 3D-printed model (held up for view by one of the partners in the 2019 video Discover the Strength of the Chain), and the eventual built property are all named the funda House. This makes a strong case for the preservation of material and virtual culture in post-material culture, as suggested by M.J. Vechinski in his article about Goordrinks, a social network relating to books. Vechinski further contends that collecting does not, by definition, entail the “ownership and control of physical objects”, with online information instead able to provide an alternative to collecting material items.50

Material artefacts traditionally form the core of cultural-history museums’ collections. In the funda case, since a house is obviously too large, my museum would probably choose to collect the 3D model, adding the images and video presentation as well. Yea, call it an ‘option house’ – a basic home adaptable to specific expertise, as well as resources.

In contrast to Vechinski, and more in line with UNESCO, Haidy Geismar pleads for us to consider the digital as also being material, not intangible. Her book, Museum Object Lessons for the Digital Age (2018), aims to place digital media within a historical and material museum context. Defining object lessons as “arguments about the world made through things”,51 an important part of the book relates to the construction of knowledge and the role of museums as institutions that both produce and represent it. The object lessons Geismar describes explore the innovations that digital media entail, as well as older ideas and techniques upon which they are based. For instance, a deaccessioned box, once used to store lantern-slides, could be studied from the perspective of knowledge-making, visual perception and shifting values at a time long predating digital. Conversely, a newly created digital pen for use by visitors to the Cooper Hewitt Museum is embedded within a tradition that addresses reproduction technologies in the decorative arts.52 The digital is not separate from the analogue, Geismar states, but must be understood as part of a material trajectory.53

Digital heritage seems to take a middle position between intangible and material culture, in which digital objects combine ideas and matter, trans-sience and physicality. Nevertheless, collecting digital objects in city museums is, in my experience, still problematic. Articles and books on museums and digital culture (or digital heritage) are certainly being published, even more than it is possible to read,54 but most of them relate to the interaction between material objects and visitors, not to collecting. Instead, they include articles on: virtual museums to which anyone can contribute; providing access to many different users; the use of new media in the museum; the addition of sensory experiences; the creation of immersive and interactive environments; digital repatriation; and the development of different data infrastructures to connect a detailed knowledge of individual objects with conservators who have detailed virtual scale.55 Archives have been working with e-deposits for some time now, and in museums for art and design the importance of digital objects is acknowledged as well (however problematic their conservation might be). Nevertheless, many city museums still hesitate when it comes to collecting digital heritage. Although the funda case suggests that contemporary collecting necessitates the inclusion of digital objects to form coherent ensembles, it remains a daunting prospect for many smaller institutions.

Once we had a kind of ‘option house’, because... yeah, the Dutch are hard to capture in just one... so, we wondered: couldn’t we design one basic house into which all sorts of things can be plugged, and done, and...? But eventually we had the feeling this would be, in fact, very weak - because it would also be good to design one... So, we wondered: couldn’t we design one... so, we wondered: couldn’t we design one basic house into which all sorts of things can be plugged, and done, and...? But eventually we had the feeling this would be, in fact, very weak - because it would also be good to design one... So, we wondered: couldn’t we design one basic house into which all sorts of things can be plugged, and done, and...? But eventually we had the feeling this would be, in fact, very weak - because it would also be good to design one... So, we wondered: couldn’t we design...
Apart from this quantitative argument, and part, the spectacular solution, but gains in meaning and a similar view of the average terraced dwelling.

A follow-up question, however, revealed that it had been architect Dingeman Deijis who was primarily involved in the interior’s materialisation. According to his email, their major concern was indeed to emphasise the difference between the standard house and the funda House, which included highlighting the spatial qualities of each room as well as its unique character. As an example, the bathroom’s tone-on-tone bluish-green tiles create a world apart, with its overall design accentuating space, while the colour simultaneously refers to water and the room’s use. The attic, often the space that is finished least, has also been given a special character, with a high-quality finish of warm and durable wood. Moreover, Dingeman Deijis explained, the daylight entering the living room through the see-through attic is warmly coloured due to the reflection of the wood.

Even though funda’s data do not extend to home interiors, the property website advises prospective sellers and estate agents on the presentation of the houses on offer. Various funda webpages give advice on, for instance, the colour of the walls (“white, white and white!”) and suggesting there is lots of storage space (“the shelves should be half-empty; stuff can be stored elsewhere”); it also has tips on photographing interiors successfully under the header “less is always more.”

The share of terraced houses is much larger than the share of apartments. And we also felt that it [i.e., the terraced house] would be a kind of translation in architecture, having a front door facing the street, a garden with a back entrance, these are such Dutch living concepts... they’re ingrained in our culture, in my opinion. And in the Netherlands, we have no culture of families living in apartments, which is pretty common – quite normal in, for example, Paris, New York and London.

Several architectural renderings visualise the newly designed funda House as integrated within a row of typical Dutch homes, clearly demonstrating how well it fits within existing building practices while simultaneously stressing its divergent character. One of the visuals on the special webpage contains an image with a slider: moving the slide to the left replaces the cutaway funda House with a similar view of the average terraced dwelling.

The funda House, the Hemnet House is based on big data emanating from visits to the country’s largest property website. Data scientists analysed over 200 million website clicks, and Hemnet then asked two architects, Bolle Tham and Martin Videgård, to design the country’s most-wanted type of home. The result was “a 1.5 storey home featuring a red wooden facade and a private rooftop terrace.” The architects explain the underlying ideas behind the Hemnet Home, as they describe it, on their website. The property combines Swedish statistics, including surface area, layout and price, with two national icons: the falun-red wooden cottage and the white functionalist box. The resulting cube thus reflects the wishes of consumers as well as cultural values. As the website of Tham & Videgård states, the house echoes “history, local sources, crafts and national building traditions”, and simultaneously stands for “modernity, optimism, industrial development, the welfare state and international ideas.” Benefitting from differences between Swedish and Dutch housing traditions and archetypal homes, the comparison can be furnished as expensively or cheaply as desired, just like any other house. Obviously, tailor-made furniture, cabinets or details are, generally, more costly than mass-produced furniture.

Funda is obviously aiming to sell the house as a commodity. Data analyst Jurriaan van Gent pointed out that these illustrations are just meant to communicate the space on offer. He also noted that the renderings could have just as easily shown a classic interior, but added after a little while: “When you increasingly see... the difference is a bit... it’s almost become the common type [of interior].” From Jeroen Atteveird’s slightly different perspective, however, interior drawings accentuate the extraordinary design. Admittedly, these drawings did not originate from big data and the eventual furnishing of the house was not considered to be that important; nevertheless, designing specific and distinctive rooms was crucial, and it was just as important to emphasise their outstanding design through the use of innovative names as well as interior renderings. The drawings of the interior, which were produced by specialists at De Beeldenfabriek (The Image Factory), help to create a vision that is strikingly different from a conventional house. As Jeroen stated:

At the moment... the first floor of an ordinary terraced house always contains “bedroom 1”, “bedroom 2” and “bedroom 3”. And we were like, well, these rooms are named in such a generic way, that you don’t actually know what it’s about. So, we said: it would be really good if each bed-room had a strong identity of its own... if you could, somehow, identify with those spaces. And that has been the starting point for the domestic interior, that’s why every space should be really different. So... the spatial perception, but also the...
The architectural renderings of the funda House present an interior furnished in a remarkably similar way: it is very white, empty, Modernist and rather minimalistic. Many of the items on display allude to design, such as the Alessi kettle, Apple laptop computer and white Revolt chair – a famous Modernist design by Friso Kramer dating from 1953, but reintroduced in 2014. Even the books relate to art, architecture and design, with titles referring to Alvar Aalto, Arne Jacobsen and Jasper Johns, the cities of Chicago and Rotterdam, and subjects like fashion, graphic design and home interiors. In museological terms, the funda House must thus be regarded as an artistic period room, displaying the architects’ vision of space and freedom, and also highlighting a certain modern style, quality and taste.

The room was created to enable the agency’s employees, clients and visitors to experience the material world of the average German. It has been used for meetings and discussions on a daily basis and continuously updated, leaving nothing to chance. The main goal was to familiarise people with its fictive inhabitants, Sabine, Thomas and Alexander Müller, who represent the standard family, according to statistics. Their names are the most common, just like the location of the house and the family’s daily routines. The Müllers live in a rented apartment of 89.4 m², laid out over three and a half rooms and situated in a block of flats built between 1949 and 1978. Over time, regular minor changes kept the interior up-to-date, with more fundamental makeovers in 2009 and 2016. During the last transformation, a modern grey sofa replaced the former yellow corner sofa, carpeting gave way to laminate flooring, and the laptop and smartphone were within constant reach. Motivated by research showing that at least one piece of furniture always endures, the coffee table has remained unchanged since 2004.

Jung von Matt’s typical German living room gave rise to comments of all kinds, some questioning its accuracy, others remarking on the tastes of the average German family. Thomas Thiemeyer used the interior to explain the symbolic meaning of commodities according to Pierre Bourdieu’s magnum opus _La Distinction_ (1979), stressing the subtle social messages the objects convey based on inherited value judgements.

In the context of this study, the German period-room-like ensemble serves as a counterpart to the funda House’s interior. First of all, the interior points to the cultural differences between the neighbouring countries – differences so large that it is difficult for me to place Jung von Matt’s successive interiors in their social-historical context. Moreover, the German interior was intended to be a social period room, a concept in which the interior changes over time and adapts to use. The funda House, meanwhile, sprung from an artistic idea, expressing the architects’ vision and stressing the moment of creation.


Jung von Matt 2006: [1-4]. In later descriptions (2009, 2016), the name of the son, Alexander, had been changed to Jan, while an article in the Westdeutsche Zeitung (2013) mentions only a daughter, Maria. Similarly, Sabine is also later called Claudia.

Jung von Matt 2016: Pressemitteilung and Projektbeschreibung WoZi 3.0.

Thiemeyer 2018: 44-47.
Reflecting Home Life in Museums

Aiming to represent the ideal home of the many, funda used the archetypal Dutch terraced house and minimalistic interiors as its starting points. The new house seamlessly complies with existing building practices and its interior also reflects expectations of modernity. However, such a ‘common’ design means that differences need to be emphasised to attract attention and even provoke discussion. Comparisons with the Hemnet House of Clicks and Jung von Matt’s interior clarify some of the values underlying the funda House, suggesting different housing traditions, archetypal homes and interior decorating, thus loading the standard terraced home with meaning and character.

The need to stress differences in order to experience and appreciate the contemporary design is also indicated by the visual slider that funda introduced on its website. This alludes to a quintessential problem in museums’ contemporary collecting policies, which is the sometimes-uninspiring ordinariness of everyday life at the time it is lived. Common objects are grouped in ordinary ensembles, which lack immediate interest right at the time of collecting. Although this is not a problem when collecting is understood as preserving today for tomorrow, it can be an issue when collecting functions as a performative act, as is the preference today (see Chapter 1). The funda case suggests that the addition of an alienating element might help us to understand the meaning of contemporary home life. Inserting an element of estrangement from the familiarity of the contemporary home would be in line with Irene Cieraad’s repeated plea regarding, what she calls, “the anthropology of domestic space”.

Whereas traditional cultural anthropology has thrived on differences between ‘us’ and ‘the others’, the study of contemporary domestic space would profit from the addition of an historical dimension, she argues in a lecture recorded on YouTube. For city museums, it would be logical to link a contemporary acquisition directly to the historical collection, whether this is done in a playful way using, for instance, a visual slider, or by presenting it in combination with a 3D historical ensemble. Such a historical and museological comparison helps to create immediate distance from everyday life, urging museum professionals and participants to reflect on the intended acquisition and clarify its perceived interest. Conversely, the explicit addition of a contemporary home interior breathes new life into an existing collection. Regular reinterpretations of historical collections open up new perspectives, encourage polyvocality and retain the dynamism of existing ensembles.

In 2004, advertising agency Jung von Matt constructed “Deutschlands häufigstes Wohnzimmer”, the typical German living room. The main goal was to familiarise employees and clients alike with Sabine, Thomas and Alexander Müller, fictive inhabitants representing the standard family, according to statistics. Regular adjustments kept the interior up-to-date, while versions 2.0 and 3.0 refer to the living room’s major makeovers in 2009 and 2016. Comparing the 2016 interior to that of the funda House increases awareness of the different cultural values, as well as the different underlying concepts. Source: Jung von Matt (2016).

See, for instance, Cieraad 2006: 3 and 2017: [12:29]. Cieraad 2017: [7:00-12:40].
In Part 2, chapters 3, 4 and 5 provided in-depth descriptions of the three cases chosen to replicate the museological concept of a contemporary period room: IKEA’s room settings, BAM’s Homestudios and the funda House. Each chapter was directed towards understanding the methods and underlying ideas behind the company’s ensembles, as well as exploring their viability for use in a museum context. Moreover, each chapter highlighted certain case-specific themes and discussed them in relation to the prevailing thinking and discourse on museological collecting and the representation of contemporary home life.

The present chapter aims to synthesise the within-case findings on a higher level of abstraction. It examines both replicative and divergent findings across the cases, thus comparing initial within-case findings, discussing differences and similarities, and examining preliminary insights further. The cross-case theme analysis is structured around the five wider, overarching themes of the previously established framework: the collection, collecting, reflecting, representing and connecting. This framework, albeit slightly amended for the purpose of the current cross-case comparison, is reintroduced below to remind readers of these themes, questions and issues.

As an instrumental comparative case study, Part 3 aims to identify successful strategies for use by city museums in their collecting of contemporary home life. To this end, I build on the findings of the cross-case theme analysis to propose an approach that is discussed in the final chapter.
The Collection

The starting point in my search for a strategy for collecting contemporary home life was domestic ensembles, which replicate the concept behind museums’ period rooms. My goal in selecting three cases with collections that differ in scope, size and materiality was to encounter a variety of approaches. It thus seems appropriate to first examine the firms’ ‘collections’, which is a term that clearly reflects the museological perspective adopted in this cross-case comparison. The concept of collections is fundamental to museums, although notions of what they may contain have changed over time. City museums now strive to create multifaceted collections, which include various perspectives on both historic events and everyday life. Paradoxically, the fear of having collections that are too large and unmanageable has led to a reluctance to actually acquire objects, especially space-consuming material items. Size therefore matters. Collections not only have to be diverse, but compact as well.

This section compares IKEA’s room settings, BAM’s Homestudios and the funda House from the museum perspective on collections that are explicitly related to the field of housing culture. In the context of this comparative case study, the collections of these commercial enterprises can be loosely defined as coherent and meaningful sets of objects, assembled, selected and presented to reflect contemporary home life. What do these collections comprise? How do they look? Which domestic ensembles have the companies constructed, what objects have they selected? The theme compares the scope, size and materiality of these collections, while also reflecting on the reasons why the ensembles are composed and the purposes they serve. My concluding synthesis then formulates the insights acquired, relating them to the collecting of contemporary home life.

Scope, size and materiality

IKEA Room Settings: Single Pieces of Furniture in Functional Contexts

At first glance, the IKEA collection can be likened to its product range, i.e., a series of items grounded in so-called ‘democratic design’ and reflecting the company’s identity. Approximately 9,500 unique products cover the entire home environment and serve a global market. On further inspection, however, the range more closely resembles an art museum’s collection of unique designs. The room settings in a store are composed of the company’s actual mass-produced commodities, which are selected from the product range to appeal to a local showroom’s visitors. On the one hand, a limited selection of products is on display, while on the other several of the same mass-produced items are also present and available for purchase. In this sense, the sum of the room settings is more akin to a city museum’s collection, reflecting local needs and tastes at a particular point in time, not through unique designs, but via common, mass-produced objects. Moreover, like a museum’s period rooms, the IKEA versions are presented as a series of individual rooms framed within a larger collection.

The somewhat typical Barendrecht showroom accommodates about 60 room settings. These are primarily grouped according to their spatial function, with three core areas defined: the living room, kitchen and bedroom. During my first observational visit in 2018, approximately 20 room settings related to the kitchen, 15 to the bedroom and another 15 to the living room (albeit sometimes combined with a kitchen). The room settings can also be grouped in other ways, for example based on underlying styles, budgets or households. However, in terms of the size of the IKEA collection, the area where visitors enter the showroom is of particular relevance, with four or five room settings on immediate display that are tailored to the regional market and epitomise all IKEA has to offer. The items in these rooms can therefore be viewed as representing the minimum size of the IKEA collection, i.e., in museum terms, it is the company’s ‘core collection’.

Room settings are IKEA’s most important strategy for selling as many individual pieces of furniture as possible. The staged home interiors provide imaginative solutions to familiar, real-life problems. Visitors encounter a series of possible worlds to inhabit, in which functional narratives are paired with the high attention-value of the presented products. So-called ‘homes’ do not rely on the juxtaposition of objects alone, but also include floor plans, text and photos to explicate the narratives, thus making the whole easier to understand. Along with these functional narratives, the showroom also contains other contextual displays, like the inspirational ensembles created by visual merchandisers. As can be argued from the IKEA case, changing display conventions might alter the

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In 2011, Erno Wientjens photographed some of the residents of Roggestraat, including Tonny and her grandson.
meaning of objects – they can be isolated, various series created, different stories told – but it is not really possible to create meaningful, coherent ensembles if objects have not been collected right from the start.

**SAM’s Homestudios: A Collection of Future Homes**

The Homestudios collection consists of a limited number of options for homes that will be built in the Netherlands by SAM, the Dutch construction firm. The collection comprises three architectural styles, eight floor plans, three standards of interior finishes and five interior design styles. There is no local differentiation: taken together, the options available are expected to meet the needs of the many SAM customers in the country.

Although the collection relates to the possible exterior and interiors of the prospective new builds, the available architectural styles are in fact within the remit of institutional clients like project developers and municipalities. Homestudios’ Experience Centre focuses on individual buyers and then, in particular, on interiors: on layouts and space, finishing and interior design. One of its studios contains 11, almost full-scale, model homes, which are the available options in terms of spatial use and stylistic finishing. The Inspiration Studio can thus be regarded as a synopsis of Homestudios’ entire collection, reducing its size to 11 dwellings. Nevertheless, this still adds up to a significant collection of at least 11 combined living rooms and kitchens, 11 bathrooms and 22 bedrooms.

At an object level, the model homes present the products of SAM’s associated partners. All the furnishings on display are available to buy, from floors to dormer windows, from paint to individual pieces of furniture. Unlike IKEA’s room settings, which aim to sell individual pieces of furniture, Homestudios’ model homes serve another goal: supporting buyers to make decisions about their future property. In helping clients to envisage their home, while simultaneously being a good fit with current standard-build properties. At a higher level, the funda House serves as an advocate for a demand-driven approach to project development, which is a greater degree of abstraction than that seen in SAM’s customised building practices.

Ever since its introduction in January 2017, the funda House has been presented as a conceptual model, a virtual house “built of data and dreams”. The express use of big data as its prime building material and its existence as a mainly digital or virtual model mean that this case is the furthest away from the traditional museological period room. Consistently discussed using carefully chosen words and visualised through a series of digital architectural renderings, the funda House vividly evokes its underlying ideas. Various videos and website images present the newly designed home, while a 3D model is part of a more long-standing architectural tradition. This shows an overall intertwining of ideas and concepts, language, materials and digital objects, demonstrates its coherence and provides proof of the requirement to regard it as an ensemble composed of different materials.

**Synthesis**

Domestic ensembles can provide objects with different meanings.

The cross-case comparison first demonstrates that ensembles can serve diverse goals, enabling objects to function at different levels: they can highlight individual objects or, in contrast, accentuate a context for use; they can reveal a functional cohesion and allow visitors to experience space; and they can even initiate a debate about housing. Moreover, and particularly important to museums, they also have the ability to imbue objects with a variety of different meanings.

Functional relationships need to be collected from the start.

Linked to the issue of contextualisation, the analysis had also discovered that it is difficult to create meaningful, coherent ensembles if their constituent parts have not been collected from the start. An object can be placed on a pedestal in isolation and an inspirational image can be comprised of unrelated items, but a functional context is less easily created. If museums want to represent home life in functional ensembles, they must consider coherent narratives in their collecting policies. Furthermore, these contexts not only have to include material objects, but underlying narratives and research data as well.

A relatively small collection can represent contemporary home life.

The comparative case study provides an indication that a relatively small collection suffices for representing contemporary home life. Indeed, reducing the companies’ collections to their essence reveals that they vary in size from 11 model homes to the representation of either a single house or even four or five individual rooms. Although the contents of 11 homes would exceed the pragmatic space limitations of an institution like Museum Rotterdam, the periodic acquisition of up to five coherent ensembles ought to be acceptable, especially if the collecting is conducted in collaboration with other museums.

Contemporary collections require post-material and digital culture.

In relation to materiality, the ensembles present a variety of objects. While IKEA’s room settings focus on material culture and can be easily compared with traditional museum ensembles, SAM’s Homestudios combine material culture with virtual reality, personal advice and a digital platform. Nevertheless, increased materiality distinguishes the Experience Centre from its predecessors. Many samples of materials and fully furnished model homes replace the CGI of the company’s previous Smart and Home Collections, thus making a strong case for the inclusion of material culture in a collection. The funda House is a born-digital ensemble presented in videos and websites, expressing its ideas about freedom and space through digital architectural renderings and a consistent language, simultaneously using a 3D-printed model to position itself within an architectural tradition. This shows an overall intertwining, urging us to consider the house as a coherent ensemble composed of different materials. Although the preservation of digital objects requires museums to have specific tools, skills and knowledge, it is surely unimaginable not to include them in contemporary collecting.
Collecting

It is not only the result that counts in contemporary collecting; the process of ‘doing’ the collecting is just as important. Curatorial authority has been contested ever since it became evident that collecting is not a neutral act. In search of more democratic practices, current models of curatorship accentuate collaborations with a variety of communities. Participatory strategies are explored to engage new social groups and, as Chapter 1 argues, the desire to involve residents in the process of selecting materials for an ensemble is not one of the main drivers of contemporary collecting. Set out below, this overarching theme addresses the act of collecting. It first compares the processes used by the three companies in the comparative case study to create ensembles and select products. What collecting strategies have the firms chosen? Who has been involved in the process of creating and selecting? Who decided on the objects and to whom did the residents of the future? Normally used to deal with‘warm data’ of specific target groups, these insights are outlined in the concluding section, which aims to synthesise the findings from a museum perspective.

Strategies, participants and decision-making

IKEA’s Room Settings: A Method to Create Diverse Ensembles

At IKEA, the central organisation determines on the product range, store layout and annual commercial theme. To capture the soul of the company, IKEA of Sweden also advises on the selection of products and their presentation in the showrooms all over the world. However, the international advice often requires extensive changes to ensure that the products recommended appeal to local visitors. As a consequence, individual stores tend to create room settings tailored to the needs of the local market. This process of choosing the ‘right’ products from a wide variety of options in order to create a series of coherent, relevant home interiors broadly replicates the process whereby curators select objects and ensembles for a museum’s collection.

The construction of IKEA’s room settings involves all the disciplines available to a store, but it is the interior designers who actually invent, draw and build the interiors. Home visits provide them with essential information about the actual living situations, habits and needs of local residents. Underlying the room settings, therefore, are the shared models that provide the designers with a way to come up with attractive solutions. To guarantee crucial diversification, the designers adhere to a method in which the work brief, visual identity, scenario and product collage all precede the final choice of items. Contrary to what is the norm in museums, the company starts by defining the characteristics and interests of its target markets and then brings the process to an end by selecting the objects.

IKEA’s process of creating ensembles thus aims to construct divergent, though clearly recognisable and convincing, narratives. Local residents, who can apply for a home visit, are consulted in this process, but they are not involved any further. Although the research relates to local living situations, the room settings are explicitly not a result of co-development with residents, instead being created through the expertise and creativity of IKEA’s interior designers and constructed within the company’s framework and using its product range. Sales indicate whether the room settings are appealing to the target market, as do the results of occasional retrospective evaluations that use interviews to measure the constructed rooms’ effectiveness.

BAM’s Homestudios: Customer Consultation and In-house Expertise

Like the IKEA method, Homestudios’ strategy is also based on consultations with potential buyers. Advance market research resulted in the concept of a ready-to-live-in house, while BAM’s online platform was developed in consultation with actual buyers. Customer satisfaction and sales figures function as clear indicators of the success of the scheme.

One major absence of a participatory approach, the individual customer is the fulcrum of the Homestudios concept. Client orientation is reflected in both the goal of providing an excellent customer journey and in the collection, which is built on the wishes and preferences of the target groups. However, where city museums might question the authority of museum professionals in the pursuit of a visitor-oriented approach, BAM’s strategy is based on in-house expertise. The construction firm’s knowledge and experience were employed to standardise floor plans and architectural styles, and it also used an interior designer (first as an independent expert, later as part of the organisation) to enable it to offer customisation. Furthermore, Homestudios’ carefully chosen partners are now responsible for selecting the specific products furnishing the Experience Centre’s model life rooms.

Notwithstanding the focus on individual customers, institutional clients continue to play a background role. Although their presence may not be particularly obvious in Homestudios’ presentations, without municipalities, investors and project developers no houses would be built and no collections would be formed. Moreover, it is the institutional clients that determine the overall architectural style of the homes in which individual house-buyers will live.

The funda House: A House Co-created with Millions of Visitors

While the direct involvement in the room settings of both BAM’s Homestudios and IKEA, this is mainly limited to consultation. The funda House, however, is a reflection of a higher level of participatory collecting. After all, the interactions of nearly a billion visitors with the houses on offer on funda.nl produced the big data upon which the newly designed house is based. Echoing museums’ interest in a bottom-up approach, the express use of big data as a prime building material was the main reason why I included the case in this study.

Fifteen years after the launch of its property website, funda decided to use the data it had been collecting and sought the help of architects to create a novel home. The architects had in fact themselves previously questioned the design of conventional housing and shared funda’s interest in exploring a new concept to meet the needs of the residents of the future. Normally used to dealing with ‘warm data’ of specific target groups and real people – and similar to a museum’s approach to participatory collecting – their focus now shifted to big data. Partly out of necessity and partly by chance, the demographic data used, was explicitly not taken into account. This proved to be essential to the development of the so-called funda House, providing an opportunity to transcend the individual, personal level and instead propose an alternative, communal idea.

The funda case also demonstrates that big data do not, by definition, secure an objective decision-making process. Indeed, to avoid the pitfall of path dependency, the architects moved to a higher level of abstraction, magnifying the contrasts between dreams and reality and translating general ideas into a specific and emotionally charged concept. In the process from data to design, the voices of funda’s website visitors were combined with those of a data analyst and the architects. It became clear that the result was affected not only by the data used, but also the expertise involved, the involvement level adopted and even who was doing the interpreting. When the many positive reactions prompted funds to announce that it would actually build the house, chain partners entered the process as new participants striving to further the development of the demand-driven project. Although the intention to produce a row of funda Houses can be viewed as just the next step in the process, it nevertheless means that there will be new choices that are, once again, context-bound and will change the ensemble.

Synthesis

Make the roles of ‘institutional clients’ in collecting policies explicit.

Despite all the efforts of the three commercial companies to focus on individual consumers, it became clear that institutional clients, like chain partners, project developers and investors, also play their part in the background. These clients are very important to city museums, although they are rarely identified as target groups. Exhibitions mention the contribution of special funding and sponsors, but municipalities also play a key role behind the scenes. Their granting of subsidies is essential for the performance of core tasks like collecting and collection management, while fellow institutions also affect the boundaries of a museum’s collection policy. Although the influence is only indirect, it nonetheless seems sensible to specify the roles played by such institutional clients in a museum’s collection policy and thus provide a better understanding of networked practices.

Consider both co-developing and consultative collecting strategies.

Where many city museums now endeavour to produce collaborative or co-creative projects, the collecting strategies adopted by the three commercial firms in the study involve consulting their target groups through home visits, market research and data analyses. Within museums, the distinction between consultation and co-development (referring to the participants’ advisory and cooperative roles, respectively) was initially seen as indicating only a methodological difference, but it now seems to have developed into a hierarchical distinction with “progressive steps towards a model of ‘maximum participa-
Over the past decade, the issue of who decides has become increasingly prominent, resulting in a greater appreciation of co-creation. This case study demonstrates that the three companies use ‘only’ consultative strategies to acknowledge their clients’ demands. It is thus clearly time to let go of the traditional hierarchy and instead decide on a case-by-case basis which method of collecting is the most appropriate and how it affects a collection.

Start by defining households and end by selecting objects.

If museums want to create a variety of ensembles, they could start their contemporary collecting by defining the characteristics and interests of the households or communities they aim to include, and end it by selecting objects and constructing ensembles. Loosely following the museum method and adjusting it to the museum context, this strategy is closely related to the personal approach familiar to museums and may enhance both visitor orientation and diversity.

Big data can provide museums with an alternative collecting strategy. Although present-day museum practices are orientated towards personal relationships and intensive collaboration, resulting in the collection of individual objects or stories, big data provide an opportunity to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting and instead find common ground on a higher plane. It is certainly worth exploring whether such an alternative strategy could produce a collection with a broader base, in which residents and visitors can either recognise or oppose themselves.

Contemporary collecting requires museum expertise.

Finally, all three cases suggest that in-house expertise is indispensable and objectivity is only ever apparent. Even when using big data, and thus including many voices, interpretation is crucial, expertise is required and the outcome is susceptible to the influence of personal ideas. Objectivity is an idée fixe; the reality is that any method of collecting requires some kind of ‘curatorial voice’. A transparent way of collecting, based on a clear strategy and explicit criteria, offers opportunities to collaborate in different ways, and at different times, with different partners – both colleagues and external stakeholders. Reflection on the collecting process is also necessary to interpret a collection’s significance at a later stage. Collecting thus requires continuity, a conscious choice to adopt a variety of perspectives, transparency, and reflexivity. For all of this, museum expertise is required.

6.3 Reflecting

Contemporary collecting, Chapter 1 argues, is not so much about preserving an endangered past as it is about selecting the relevant present. Furthermore, this relevance is no longer exclusively defined in terms of historic importance, uniqueness or eminence, but also encompasses ordinary, everyday life and its broad tapestry. These two extremes gained in meaning when the artistic and the social period room were distinguished, each with a different perspective on home life, each with its specific historical moment of truth. Yet when constructing ensembles, loosely following the museum method and adjusting it to the museum context, this strategy is closely related to the personal approach familiar to museums and may enhance both visitor orientation and diversity.

Perspective

The constructed domestic interiors of museums are generally categorised as artistic or social period rooms. The social perspective is mainly chosen to reflect the typical lifestyles of large groups of people, stressing not the intended design of an interior, but its everyday use and the gradual changes that occur. In contrast, the artistic perspective tends to underline the original design, emphasising its uniqueness, quality or the impeccable taste of the room’s inhabitants. The funds House and Homestudios’ model homes both adopt an essentially artistic perspective. The former quite literally displays the architects’ vision of space and freedom, its architectural drawings untroubled by either actual use or unintended accretions. The virtual outcome highlights a minimalist, modern style, with a bespoke interior permeated with art, architecture and design. Similarly, Homestudios’ model homes express coherent styles, which have been developed by BAM’s interior designers to appeal to the tastes of a varying group of ‘customers’. The designers explain the five different interior styles to future residents and give them advice on creating a personal and stylish home. Here, style is both a means to create coherent home interiors and an educational tool to help customers make decisions about their future dwelling. Style is also an important aspect of IKEA’s room settings. Four style groups create different atmospheres and each room setting expresses a specific version, just like the model homes at BAM’s Experience Centre. However, unlike Homestudios and museums’ artistic period rooms, IKEA does not explain its use of styles to the showroom’s visitors. The main objective is to create coherent interiors that attract different visitor groups and prevent boring uniformity. In line with the artistic perspective, the room settings accentuate design, quality and good taste, simultaneously suggesting that all IKEA products work well together. On the other hand, the room settings also resemble museums’ social period rooms by accentuating familiarity and the everyday use of the interiors. The artistic period rooms stress functionality, authentic living situations and real people’s needs. Consequently, the room settings are a combination of the social and artistic period rooms, with attention paid to use and style at the same time.

Time

A significant difference between the artistic and social perspective in museums’ period rooms is seen in the choice of a specific moment of truth. Whereas the moment of a room’s creation emphasises design and authorship and best represents the artistic perspective, a later point in time is usually chosen in the social period room to accentuate changes in how it is actually used. In its examination of museum practice, Chapter 2 also established that the period room is generally used to contextualise objects in a historical setting. The three commercial home interiors studied here, however, were specifically chosen because of their contemporary context. How do these ensembles relate to time? How does contemporaneity affect the choice of a particular moment of truth, the selection of objects and the construction of ensembles?

Present-day living situations form the starting point of IKEA’s room settings, although the staged...
Values

Representation was identified in the study as an important aspect of the renewed interest in museums’ period rooms, and relates to the tension between a desire for a better and improved cultural values and personal identity. Cultural-history museums tend to favour the social over the artistic perspective, yet generalisation – a characteristic element of the social period room – is now viewed very critically. Democratisation and visitor-orienta-
tion led to an attempt to attract new and diverse visitors as project, with museums increasingly focused on cultural diversity. In this process, personal iden-
tity (and its diversity) gained in importance. Many recently constructed period rooms represent indi-
vidual life stories that highlight the individuality of the inhabitants. Is this similar to the commercial home interiors, or is the depiction of more gener-
ally constructed interiors) articulate cultural values more than empty houses. As Avitts argues in Live the Dream (2006), spatial arrangements, style and chosen objects form a “visual vocabu-
larv” that appeals to different groups of visitors. The model homes offer clients a space in which their future home, Homestudios explicitly relates to the future. A visit to the Experience Centre starts at the Introductory House, where bare floors and roughly finished walls display the typical new-build’s basic finishes. Managing expectations and, at the same time, interesting buyers in a higher standard of finishing, the Experience Centre offers an inspiring process that guides the buyer in buying a home and moving in. The various studios then support the client in making decisions about their yet-to-be-built house. Unlike the IKEA room settings, however, the model interiors in the Insipi-
lation Studio do not so much suggest a home as a work in progress. Instead, they visualise the future dwelling in its finished, peaceful state, marking the start of the buyer’s new home life.

IKEA Room Settings: Local Challenges, Worldwide Trends and Swedishness

A wide variety of detailed scenarios underlie the IKEA room settings, helping the interior designers to centre offers a convincing image for buying a home and moving in. The interpretation of contemporary home life is largely based on local home visits, which are part of IKEA’s more or less systematic research. This includes questions about basic activities and the use of space and often has a seasonal aspect. The aim of the home visits is to encounter everyday problems, which have been given the name “home frustra-
tions”, although they seem rather trivial and mostly relate to the efficient and comfortable furnishing of a house. At the other end of the scale, global research, conducted annually and presented in Life at Home Reports, aims to identify worldwide trends that will affect life at home in the future. These trends relate to the issue of social life on a higher level of abstraction, addressing, for instance, basic emotional needs or the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for future living. It can be assumed that changing global trends result in amendments to the com-
pany’s overall strategy or provide the input to further development of its product range. Meanwhile, the home visits serve to connect the international collection with the local market. While IKEA combines the extremes of both a global and a local approach, ‘Swedishness’ is also part of the company’s identity, resembling the focus of city museums on the particular dimen-
sions of urban life. IKEA’s products and ensembles are intended to reflect an easier, more natural life, which is perceived as typically Swedish. Indeed, the 2017 video on style groups clarifies that while its design has lost its first commercial opportunities, it is essential “in supporting the unique IKEA identity and making sure that people everywhere perceive our range as typically Swedish or, in Scandinavia, as typically IKEA.” As Kristoffersson demonstrated, the emphasis on Swedishness was not part of the company’s original concept, only gaining in importance as the firm expanded into global mar-
kets. Furthermore, Swedishness is not so much found in the products themselves as in the disc-
course and rhetoric attached to them. This Swedish profile has been extensively questioned and criticised, not only because of its commercial opportunism in its design, but also because of its underlying value of Swedish exceptionalism and the exclusion of certain groups of people that is the result.

IKEA’s Homestudios: A Basic Visual Vocabulary

At Homestudios, the model homes in the Insipi-
lation Studio present all the house types on offer by the centre in a total view and spatially, and use interior design up to the highest level of finishes to connect with cus-
tomers. From the first Smart Collection to today’s Homestudios, the concept has been predicated on furnished model homes, which are in turn based on the idea that home interiors (including deliberately constructed interiors) articulate cultural values more than empty houses. As Avitts argues in Live the Dream (2006), spatial arrangements, style and chosen objects form a “visual vocabu-
larv” that appeals to different groups of visitors. The model homes offer clients a space in which they must be able to recognise in floor plans and layouts the lifestyle to which they aspire. Personal taste is manifested in the five interior styles, which are used to differentiate between customers. Centred on the idea that a certain style appeals to some visitors and simultaneously alienates others, these styles serve as a funnel to enable clients to make decisions easily. Inspection of the objects within the model homes’ interiors quickly reveals that the underlying scenarios are less constructed and presented in a very detailed way. Some items suggest occup-
ancy but, in comparison to IKEA, there are rela-
tively few sensorial stimuli or storytelling acces-
ories. There is just enough detailing to give an interior some individuality, but not so much that it would obstruct conformity. Visitors should be able to envisage their future home, unhindered by too much detailing or character. While museums present their objects as cultural heritage, as things with a history worthy of preservation, the Homestudios present theirs as commodities.

The funda House: Searching for a New iconic House

With its goal of representing our ideal home, the funda House adopts the owner-occupied, terraced property as both a realistic proposition and impor-
tant cultural value. The funda data, which relate almost exclusively to owner-occupied homes (comprising almost 60% of today’s housing stock), reveal that the terrace house is the type of property that sells the best, especially outside cities. Along with this quantitative argument, the architects who designed the funda House also considered it as an “architectural mirror of Dutch cul-
ture, although I would argue that it is only in com-
parisons to other countries, for example Sweden’s Hemmet House of Clicks, that it can be appreciated in this way, rather than taken for granted as some-
ting boring or commonplace.

Although the architects and data analyst con-
fidently chose the terraced house as a template for the funda project, it is not immediately obvious how to depict the interior. The inside of the prop-
erty was not based on big data, but primarily aimed to achieve a maximum contrast with the average Dutch interior. Its characterful and dis-
tinctive rooms highlight the differences between a standard new-build and the newly designed funda House. Simultaneously, the drawings express the architects’ vision of freedom and space through their portrayal of a bespoke interior in a white, minimalist style that reflects a general Dutch modernism. Although it is stated that the interior “serves as inspiration only”, it is never-
less an important aspect of the property. While the illustrations of the exterior demonstrate that the funda House has a history worthy of preservation, the drawings of the interior rooms direct the attention towards its individuality and convey the sense of space and freedom pursued in this ‘terraced castle’.

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5. My transcription of the video IKEA Style Groups. Inter IKEA Systems 2017: [1:45].
Synthesis

Style can be a powerful tool, even in interiors constructed from a social perspective. While city museums tend to prefer a social type of period room to reflect the everyday lives of ordinary people, all of these cases in the study adopt a more or less artistic perspective in their contemporary ensembles. Style is used to highlight newness, create coherence and differentiate between visitors on the basis of their tastes. As hybrid forms of period room, they combine style and narrative with everyday life, which is clearly relevant to a city museum’s contemporary collecting strategies. Although challenges may lie ahead in relation to the categorisation and subsequent selection of tastes, the explicit use of style to construct a contemporary interior could add coherence, ensure variety and link new ensembles to existing collections. In this way, social and artistic period rooms converge.

Museum collections relate better to the present than the future.

The study’s cross-case comparison revealed that the three cases examined, which were specifically chosen because of their contemporary context, all look ahead to a point in the (near) future, even if they are grounded in the present. Loosely following Sandberg, their ensembles can be regarded as a series of possible worlds that one might inhabit. Museums, on the other hand, do not easily relate to the future. Moreover, their interior ensembles play no part in a home-making process and the objects on display are not for sale. The museum context alone causes interiors to be appreciated. A similar problem in the contemporary collecting policies of museums is acknowledged in all three cases in the study; different households and diverse living situations, as well as personal stories are emphasised, although occasionally its presentations are too complex to comprehend. On the other hand, funda has kept the interior of its house fairly white and empty, while Homestudios’ model homes also prioritise conformity over individuality. Based on this research, I would now be tempted to resist too much detailing and instead only collect an interior’s essential elements.

Create tension and spark interest.

The importance of a certain tension between everyday reality and the constructed ensembles is acknowledged in all three cases in the study; diversity and taste need to be stressed for the domestic interiors to be appreciated. A similar problem in the contemporary collecting policies of museums is the sometimes-uninspiring ordinariness of everyday life at the moment it is lived. As a result, ensembles may not always attract immediate interest at the time they are collected, which can be problematic when collecting functions as a platform for everyday life at the moment it is lived. As the comparative case study suggests, magnifying differences, adding surprise or inserting an element of estrangement from the familiarity of contemporary home life might help visitors to understand the meaning of an ensemble. City museums can achieve this effect by choosing extremes, clearly different households and diverse living situations, which together paint a picture of urban reality. It would also be logical for these museums to link an intended contemporary acquisition directly to the historical collection. This would help to create immediate distance from everyday life and encourage reflection; from the converse perspective, the regular addition of a contemporary home interior could breathe new life into an existing collection. Indeed, regular reinterpretations of historical collections open up new perspectives, encourage polyvalency and keep existing collections dynamic.

Join collecting efforts.

In acknowledging cultural differences on diverse levels, while also reflecting similarities through its international product range and the general images evoked by its showrooms’ ensembles, IKEA combines the global and local. BAM’s Homestudios and the funda House affirm that even greater similarity can be found on a national level. With this in mind, it would seem to be a viable option for local, regional and national cultural-historical museums to combine their collecting efforts in order to ensure that the common aspects of home life are covered in an overarching collection or platform. At the same time, city museums could develop a local profile in which they examine their local identity in a more nuanced way. They could therefore stress the uniqueness of their city, their exceptionalism, all the while knowing that universalist aspects – the characteristics of city life as a whole – are preserved on a national level. Such coordination could ensure far less overlap than is currently the case and, at the same time, lead to more comprehensive collecting of contemporary home life.

Combine a local identity with a supra-local interest.

In relation to the issue of a local profile, it is important, finally, to note that profiles are generally not inherent in objects and collections, but are devised and adjusted in accordance with commercial opportunities and social or political demands. They might offer a clichéd image, as well as one that changes over time, but the most important thing is that focusing on a local identity creates a sense of home for some communities, but makes others feel excluded. This is the negative aspect of so-called ‘bonding performances’, i.e., presentations that focus on an intrinsic community to confirm or celebrate community values. In contrast, ‘bridging performances’ aim to connect outsiders and community.8 The advantage of a collection of home life is that it is able to link specific and general elements, not only connecting the various communities of super-diverse cities, but also serving as a bridge to connect tourists to the city’s history and contemporary heritage.

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Target groups and methods of differentiation

IKEA Room Settings: “The Many People”

Differentiated by Household, Budget and Taste

With a target group defined in a global context as broadly as “the many people”, diversity is essential at IKEA. A variety of familiar narratives underlie its ensembles in order to inspire different visitors. These narratives are situated in several domestic environments, where the kitchen, living room and bedroom have been defined as the core areas. The room settings take the spatial functions of objects into account and then use three main tools to differentiate between the many people: household, budget and taste. Households are sorted by types of living situations, which are related to the different stages in life. Today’s typology makes a primary distinction between households with and without children. This is followed by further categorisation relating
to either the children’s age or to the binary choice of single or together. The typology is based on the company’s own research and deviates from national or local classifications. It must be noted, however, that the work brief, which is the first step in the collection process, may also cover socio-demographic characteristics.

Next, budget is translated into four price levels (low, medium, high and breath-taking), all of which link the budget not to the visitor’s income, but to product prices and the money someone is willing to spend instead.

Taste is the final tool IKEA uses to differentiate between its customers. To reflect a broad variety of global taste preferences, all the products are categorised into four main style groups, which are weighted in relation to their commercial possibilities. So, Popular Modern is the largest style group and Scandinavian Traditional the smallest.

**BAM’s Homestudios: Buyers of a New Build and Institutional Clients**

The Homestudios’ concept is orientated towards individual buyers of a house that will be built by BAM in the Netherlands. The company uses a limited set of variables to differentiate between its customers, which suggests that it is, to some extent, influenced by IKEA. Nevertheless, its first variables, i.e., house type and layout, are unrelated to any staged interiors and primarily defined by the new builds on offer. The eight different house types and five layout variants match the limited set of floor plans from which the buyers choose.

BAM suggests this relates to the three standards of finish on offer and is somewhat similar to IKEA’s four price levels. In both cases, the budget does not relate directly to income, but to the money that clients have available to spend. As the Homestudios’ concept is directly linked to the purchase of a house, the price levels can nevertheless be expected to relate to some degree.

Taste also plays an important role. Five interior design styles with names like “Colour & Rich” or “Rustic & Serene” aim to cover a broad range of preferences. As Homestudios is designed as a funnel to connect emotionally to the houses on display. Where Homestudios is based on background variables, is worthy of further exploration.

**Synthesis**

Develop suitable methods of differentiation.

While it makes sense for commercial firms to target groups of relatively well-off households, museums seem – especially city museums – are committed to representing society better in their collections. The accusation that people are excluded is always unwelcome, and favouring a certain elite is perhaps even more sensitive. It is simply unacceptable for museums to focus exclusively on home-owners; other residents must also have a place in collections. This also means that museums cannot rely on the differentiation methods used by the commercial firms in this study, but must instead determine their own, possibly with reference to official local or national standards.

Identify substantial variables to define diversity.

All three of the commercial cases considered here come from seeing the need for a diverse user base, but diversity is rarely defined as ‘cultural diversity’ unlike the position in museums. An example of this is the 2020 verdict of the Rotterdamse Raad voor Kunst en Cultuur (the Rotterdam Council for Art and Culture) on local cultural institutions. While acknowledging that museums focus on colour and origin, the Council made a plea for this diversity to also include age, gender, sexuality and disability. Apart from the question of whether the Council is correct in its observation, it must be noted that funda does not want to be restricted in relation to such socio-demographics. In the other two ensembles, the households that are distinguished resemble basic demographic categories, albeit that the groupings in both of these cases tend to view age as irrelevant. So, at IKEA, an earlier differentiation between “starting-out singles” and “singles” is now largely ignored, while the BAM matrix equates couples without children to empty nesters aged over 50. The other tools used to distinguish between visitors, like the money they are willing to spend, their tastes and preferred floor plans, shift the attention from socio-demographic to more substantial factors. Such an alternative, namely targeting a limited number of distinguishing features relevant to the topic instead of just using background variables, is worthy of further exploration.
This imaginative model by Agnes Roothaan reflects the artist’s optimistic view on the resilience of a troubled neighbourhood.
Connecting

In today’s evaluations of the museological period room, the concept has been praised for its immersive qualities and its potential to enable and support individual visitor experiences. The renewed interest in period rooms seems to suggest that such ensembles can deliver convincing narratives that are easy to understand, evoke empathy and connect visitors to history. Nevertheless, as Chapter 2 argued, the apparent absence of visitor interactions with the objects on display requires a closer examination of their connective qualities. What connective qualities underlie these constructed domestic ensembles? After presenting the findings across the cases, discussing differences as well as similarities, I relate the ensembles’ connective qualities to the museological concept of social objects and propose a refined model. I also argue that a contemporary collection strategy has to consider the visitor experience and I suggest a trifold conception to incorporate in museums’ collecting policies.

IKEA Room Settings: Affective, Interactive and Interpersonal Connections

The life that pervades each IKEA ensemble has been described as the essence of the company’s room settings and relates to several aspects of connecting with visitors. On the first level, the rooms’ familiar yet varied narratives aim to establish an affective connection between visitors and products. IKEA’s ensembles aim to provide solutions to real-life problems and use variations in style, price and living situations to prevent uniformity and inspire different individuals. Most ensembles also convey a strong sense of habitation through the suggestion of human presence, referred to by Sandberg and Garvey as the concept of “spiritual effigies” and by Ledin & Machin as the principle of “indexing”, which facilitates visitors being able to envision themselves in the room and connect to the items on display. A positive affective valuation of IKEA’s ensembles was also identified in Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti’s psychological research, insofar as the easy-to-understand narratives are constructed through interpersonal narratives and presentations, and especially when everyday objects and human figures were included. Although the study was based only on images representing domestic environments, it also valued the presence of perceptual stimuli. In the actual showrooms’ constructed home interiors, the abundance of perceptual stimuli is even larger and the invitation to investigate even more explicit.

On closer inspection, a second type of connection can be found in the interactive link between visitors and products. When people follow the suggestions made to press or look inside something, or just to try the furniture, the room settings’ affective qualities are played out and the room becomes interactive. The staged interiors stimulate interaction and value the testing of products over just looking. Although this interactive connection is designed by IKEA, the room settings’ agency is not based on display techniques alone, but is also evoked by the presence and activities of visitors to the showrooms. Garvey highlights this inter-personal aspect as an important part of the inspiration IKEA aims to provide and argues that it falls partly outside the remit of the company, because “(...) inspiration is embedded squarely within a nexus of social practices and distributed agency rather than being evoked purely through the choreographed actions of management.” Nevertheless, the room settings facilitate those interpersonal connections, which can be seen as a third kind of link.

6.5

IKEA's Homestudios: Affective and Experiential Connections

While Homestudios provides prospective buyers with options relating to both the exterior and interior of their future home, its Experience Centre concentrates on the latter. Just like the room settings at IKEA, the model home interiors are designed to offer visitors a familiar environment in which they can recognise their personal tastes and aspirational lifestyles. Moreover, while “inspire” is the word typically used by IKEA to describe the effect it wants its room settings to have, this is echoed in Homestudios’ collection of 11 model homes, which has been given the name the Inspiration Studio. Consequently, in focusing on home interiors and using a variety of familiar narratives to inspire a diverse group of clients, BAM aims to establish an affective connection between customers and the company’s products.

In comparison to IKEA’s room settings, Homestudios’ model homes are far less detailed. Scenarios are articulated through introductory texts, layouts and furnishings, rather than storytelling accessible to themore advanced visitor. Interpersonal connections with other visitors are not a common feature of the model homes, but face-to-face contact with experts is. Home advisors guide future residents through the Experience Centre, facilitate their decision-making and might even coach them in developing a personal style. Where IKEA’s style groups simply intend to appeal to a variety of visitors, BAM’s Homestudios’ concept explains the styles, encourages buyers to recognise themselves and gives “tips & tricks” for creating a harmonious personal home interior.

The connection sought by Homestudios is not directly linked with the individual pieces of furniture that are displayed in the room settings. Admittedly, all the products on display are available for purchase, but Homestudios’ main goal is to guide customers through the house-buying procedure. The staged home interiors have to enable clients to think about their desired finishes, feel the spatial qualities of diverse layout options and so experience their future homes before buying. The Inspiration Studio is explicitly part of a wider process that aims to establish an experiential connection when buyers visit the five different studios. Principles relating to experiences underlie the Homestudios concept, and three main steps help buyers to make their individual decisions: gathering knowledge, finding inspiration and using both to create a future home. While the first three studios (Knowledge Studio, Inspiration Studio and Creation Studio) were named after these steps, the Cookery Studio focuses on a separate element, applying all three stages to the kitchen. Then, by presenting individual choices in virtual reality, the 3D Studio supports the overall process of creating a house before buying. The immersive presentation is intended to help clients to finalise the details of their property by letting them experience the effects of all their decisions before their home is actually built.

The funda House: Affective and Promotive Connections

Like BAM’s Homestudios and IKEA’s room settings, the funda House first aims to establish an affective connection. Its ensemble is based on actual house purchases made by visitors to funda.nl, as well as data on the houses and features viewed the most. The outcome, the terraced

Synthesis

Redefine the connective qualities.

The various kinds of connections the companies are aiming to establish resonate with the qualities Nina Simon attributes to “social objects” in her fourth and eponymous chapter of The Participatory Museum (2010). Simon builds on the notion of object-centred sociality, which is derived from cognitive sociology and was disseminated by Jyri Engeström in a blog in 2005. Engeström argues in the blog that successful social networks are built on the blog that expensive social networks are built

11 — Surprise and change are also elements that both of my IKEA interviewees described as ways of connecting with visitors. I have highlighted these aspects in the cross-case theme on Reflecting, Surprise and change, but they could also have been accentuated in this one.
around specific shared objects, like photos on Flickr, events on Upcoming.org and URLs on (the former) del.icio.us. 10 When Simon introduces the concept of social objects into museology, she refers firmly in collections, defining objects as physical items and distinguishing between those that are active, personal, relational and provocative. 13 Although active objects do not play a role in my comparative case study, the other qualities are easily recognisable in the affective, interpersonal and provocative connections the commercial ensembles want to establish. Interactive and experiential qualities can be identified as useful additions to this range of social or connective qualities. Moreover, the comparative case study leads me to propose that the existing model should be refined and the terminology slightly adjusted to identify (besides active qualities) affective, interactive, interpersonal, experiential and provocative attributes as connective instruments.

Establishing an affective connection is a crucial first step. The cross-case theme analysis demonstrates that affective connections are an essential first step in relating visitors to products. In all the cases, this connecting starts with the establishment of an affective relationship by presenting objects in a recognisable, familiar narrative. While a complete understanding of the ensemble is served by coherence and legibility, added elements of complexity, surprise or alienation (as proposed in the cross-case theme “Reflecting”) can also lead to exploration, creating a higher level of comprehension. 14 Everyday objects and (a suggested) human presence, especially of children, further strengthen the social qualities of ensembles. Striking a balance between these factors produces easy-to-understand narratives that stimulate further investigation. This could also serve as a model for museums, helping them to create ensembles that establish affective connections with visitors.

Think about a future display during the process of collecting. Although the subject of connecting is closely related to the presentation of objects and ensembles, museums need to think about a future display as early as the collecting phase. After all, the value of objects in a collection is nowadays measured by their actual use. Different methods of connecting require different engagements with objects and will therefore affect collecting policies.

If, for example, interaction is desired, the actual employment of objects has to be taken into account during the process of collecting. Nevertheless, even though the acquisition of extra items might rod it firmly in collections, defining objects as physical items and distinguishing between those that are active, personal, relational and provocative. 13 Although active objects do not play a role in my comparative case study, the other qualities are easily recognisable in the affective, interpersonal and provocative connections the commercial ensembles want to establish. Interactive and experiential qualities can be identified as useful additions to this range of social or connective qualities. Moreover, the comparative case study leads me to propose that the existing model should be refined and the terminology slightly adjusted to identify (besides active qualities) affective, interactive, interpersonal, experiential and provocative attributes as connective instruments.

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Conclusion & Discussion

In exploring viable options for how city museums can collect contemporary home life, this dissertation relates to two main concepts, contemporary collecting and collecting home life. These were investigated in Part 1. After Chapter 1 established the main principles of and controversies concerning contemporary collecting, Chapter 2 proposed the period room as a model for collecting present-day home life, arguing that its recent reappraisal is closely linked with highly valued aspects of contemporary collecting. Next, the dissertation relates to two main concepts, contemporary and collecting home life. These three cases from outside the museum context: three period-room-like ensembles with which a furniture retailer, construction firm and estate agent try to tempt consumers to buy. Each of these commercial cases is first described in its original context and then analysed from a museum perspective, examining the insights that could be gained from them. Part 3 begins with an overview of the insights and gaps found in the previous chapter, I will emphasise the main points here and, in particular, highlight the issues that merit further debate.

Towards a proactive collecting strategy

The starting point of an active collecting strategy is the field of contemporary living culture is the desire to periodically expand an existing collection with objects and ensembles that paint a picture of home life in the present – not guided by what happens to be on offer, but prompted by a rational and proactive collection policy. In this study, the context for such a strategy is formed by city museums and cultural-historical collections that have an interest in contemporary homes, or, more broadly, home life. Three main steps are distinguished below, which together form a cyclical process in which the selection of objects and ensembles gradually becomes more concrete. Ultimately, the actual acquisition proposals can be assessed using a valuation method and further action can then be undertaken as appropriate.

Such a strategy is based on the premise that contemporary collecting requires museum expertise. This certainly does not exclude cooperation, and nor does it implicate the caricatural and pretentious connoisseurship of the past. I want to emphasise that the act of collecting in a city museum requires a commitment to current residents and future users, as well as a commitment to helping to select and preserve heritage, make it accessible, interpret it and reflect on the entire process. Moreover, returning to the questions posed earlier, this includes the responsibility of museum professionals to identify what is worth preserving and make decisions about it. Although the curator’s authority has been contested, with the point made that collecting is not a neutral act, the notion of a wholly objective way of creating a collection is an idee fixe, as I concluded earlier. Even if large numbers of visitors are involved in the process, interpretation is still necessary, expertise required and the outcome is inevitably susceptible to personal ideas and beliefs. The process of collecting can, however, be more transparent, the criteria explained, various collaborations entered into, and both the act of collecting and criteria that distinguish right from wrong understood. Transparency, a conscious choice of varying perspectives, continuity and reflexivity all require museum expertise and need to be embedded in a museum’s collecting policy.

Step 1: Determine the substantive and pragmatic starting points

The first step in the type of contemporary collecting process referred to above is to establish the policy framework and determine both the substantive and pragmatic principles behind the proposed acquisition. Referred to as “The Collection” in the scheme underlying the substantive case study, this step is subdivided into matters pertaining to scope, size and materiality. As the cross-case synthesis concluded, ensembles can imbue objects with different meanings, making it important to determine the scope of an intended acquisition. Does it concern a home’s interior, the daily life taking place inside it, or is it (for instance) about the furniture in a new environment? Taking the need for compact collections as a starting point, the synthesis further concluded that a selection of four or five ensembles can provide a reasonable impression of contemporary home life at a particular point in time. Furthermore, along with size and scope, a museum also has to consider any special requirements or restrictions regarding manageability, an important aspect of which is materiality. My main plea regarding the policy framework concerns materiality. It is important in a contemporary collecting strategy that contextualisation forms part of the construction of coherent ensembles that combine material objects with their immediate contexts. Including a variety of materials not only contributes to more layered ensembles with different sensual qualities, but also helps to ensure they are understood more completely. Although the intertwining of material culture and intangible elements requires further examination, it does not mean that these elements should be at the heart of museums’ collections. In an attempt to encompass the lived experiences of as many individuals as possible in the heritage of everyday life, curators currently collect large numbers of personal stories from many different locations. This produces a mountain of data of a very personal nature, sometimes without any sense of cohesion or an overarching context, or with selection criteria that remain unclear. When websites, archives, books and radio programmes all acquire personal stories and contribute to the shaping of cultural heritage, museums can no longer be considered as the only place to embark on this quest.” They shared the need to have a proactive collection policy, although doubted the possibility of establishing a shared model and favoured a process-based strategy instead. This chapter therefore not only concludes my dissertation, but also builds on the discussion described. It must not be understood as a final conclusion, but as the start of a further debate.

Step 2: Develop method and criteria

Once the substantive and pragmatic starting points have been established, a more precise collecting strategy can gradually be determined. This relates to both the method of collecting and the substantive and pragmatic principles referred to using the terms ‘collecting’, ‘representing’ and ‘reflecting’, with questions about how a museum aims to collect, whom it wants to represent and what kind of home life it plans to reflect. As these three elements are closely related, they must be approached and weighed together.

How to Collect?

When it comes to the method of collecting, previously subdivided into strategies, participants and decision-making, a museum first defines its own contribution and determines how it wants to relate to other stakeholders. For example, who will be approached for collaboration? To what extent will the collection criteria be predetermined? How will these decisions be made? A museum’s role can be fulfilled differently per project, depending on matters such as the objectives, available in-house expertise and resources. Along the way, the actual process must be recorded, including the precise roles the participants play and why particular decisions are made.

It is striking that collaborative and co-creative projects still set the tone in the debate about collecting, even though they are not necessarily the most appropriate. Co-developed collecting projects often strive to achieve a kind of ‘maximum participation’, based on the notion that the rele-
vance of museums can be found in representation on an individual level. A variety of short-term, small-scale projects feature residents working intensively with a museum, with individual participants contributing personal objects or stories. Representation at such an individual level is not, however, feasible. Indeed, perhaps even more importantly, the results have little relevance to others if an overarching context is lacking. Moreover, from a resident’s point of view, participation is a right, not an obligation, and even if citizens do not want to participate actively, they must know that their interests are represented. We need to take a fresh look at the ways in which our collecting strategies do justice to many different residents. Consultative strategies, including market research and the use of big data, should be regarded as serious alternatives to co-developed temporary collections. Real-life insights from small-scale projects could enhance the relevance of such alternatives could provide opportunities to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting and instead find common ground on a higher level; or, at the very least, consideration should be given to whether different strategies could produce a collection in which residents and visitors can either recognize or oppose themselves. Museums should make case-by-case decisions about which method of collecting is the most appropriate and how this affects the collections that are produced.

Such reconsiderations could also lead to the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders and participants in the collecting process: not only individual city residents and visitors to museums, but also external experts, companies, ‘institutional clients’ like municipalities, and fellow heritage bodies. The possible roles of various stakeholders could then be examined, and the network mapped out, at the start of the process of updating a contemporary collection.

**Whom to Represent?**

It is not only the method of collecting that deserves re-evaluation; the concept of representation should also be re-examined. I have argued that representation at an individual level is neither feasible nor desirable. Nevertheless, a collection that reflects only a very limited segment of the population is also unacceptable. A city museum’s ensembles should be a reasonable representation of the city in which the museum is located, as well as one with which many different people can identify. Finding a balance between individual identities and shared values is crucial in this. In the scheme underlying the cross-case comparison, this dilemma involved both ‘reflecting’ and ‘representing.’ The latter aspect of this pertained to diversity, and it is clear that the three companies investigated focus on target groups as well as megatrends and differentiation.

As the cross-case theme analysis concluded, while it makes sense for commercial firms to target relatively well-off households, city museums have a commitment to achieve a more accurate representation of society; consequently, museums must develop their own methods of differentiation. What is interesting, however, is that the companies examined attempted to attract as many different customers as possible while using only a limited number of substantive variables. In contrast to the museum sector, in which diversity is primarily defined as cultural, the variables distinguished in the cases do not so much relate to the rather static issue of age, but rather to the dynamic issues of the products on offer: the type of house, the function of a space, the style of furniture or interior decoration and the price of the items available to purchase. As the use of socio-demographic variables in a collection strategy can be restrictive, especially given the increasing diversity in cities. It may therefore be attractive to follow the example set by others and consider using an even smaller number of collection-related variables to differentiate between visitor groups. Diversity thus becomes less dependent on visitor backgrounds and more focused on distinctive characteristics within collections or sub-collections.

Balancing individual identities and shared values also relates to the issue of representation. Where museums sometimes collect in great detail, thereby explicating the individuality of real or fictive inhabitants down to their smallest elements, the importance of finding an equilibrium between individuality and conformity has emerged. Although the ensembles of the three commercial firms are not definitive, I am inclined towards avoiding too much documentation and thus collect the essential, visible parts of an interior in an overall narrative that is coherent and easy-to-understand, adding just a few storytelling accessories to facilitate exploration.

As a final topic for discussion in this regard, I suggest that personas, which should be especially constructed to represent family life at home, would contribute to a more inclusive collection strategy. Such fictitious characters may relate to householders instead of individuals – just like those in Homestudios, but better suited to a city museum’s target market. They could therefore be based on city demographics and loaded with meaning by a variety of respondents, resulting in character families that are abstract and personal at the same time. It is certainly worth investigating whether this would help museums to reflect a number of different contemporary home lives.

**What to Reflect?**

Representation not only concerns the people included in a collection, but also the kind of home life reflected. One of the difficult issues when developing a contemporary collecting strategy involves making decisions about a specific angle and subject-matter. The commercial ensembles in this case study combine a focus on ordinary, everyday home life and the artistic perspective of design and style. In doing so, they highlight newness, create coherence and differentiate between their visitors through taste. In this way, they depict a series of aspects. It cannot be said whether these issues or social topics are avoided. For city museums, however, social subject-matters can be a relevant starting point for any periodic collection updates. Issues previously mentioned include working from home during the coronavirus pandemic, home life in a neighbourhood facing large-scale demolition and renovation, as well as topics related to safety, privacy or sustainability. Although research into subjects like these will generally use insights from existing studies, museums may have to invest in local research to sharpen a local profile and apply it to a collection of post-material culture.

The comparative case study has further suggested that collections of contemporary home life benefit from being an antidote to the sometimes uninspiring ordinariness of everyday life. In order to be appreciated, all three of the companies scrutinised make an effort to create tension between everyday reality and their constructed home interiors. As is nowadays preferred, when contemporary collecting is not only perceived as ‘collecting today for tomorrow,’ but also as a performative act, enabling too much documentation to work an immediate interest. Magnifying differences, choosing extremes, adding surprise or inserting an element of estrangement could achieve this and also improve what is understood of an ensemble’s relevance.

City museums can do this by constructing a few ensembles simultaneously and choosing clearly different households and living situations as a starting point. They might also seek acquisitions to their historical collections, providing a diachronic comparison that delivers both a temporal context for the contemporary home interior and makes it part of the existing collection. Regular reinterpretations of historical ensembles open up new perspectives, encouraging polyvalency and ensure that the dynamism of current collections is maintained.

**Step 3: Encourage active engagement with collections**

Having a proactive contemporary collection policy means that a performative form of collecting contributes to the desire museums have to actually be present in the present. Although museums tend to adopt a predominantly longer-term perspective when building a collection, there is added value in making an ensemble immediately visible and, preferably, ensuring it is a topic of conversation and debate. To this end, connecting visitors to objects and ensembles is crucial.

Relating visitors to collections starts with the ensemble. It is certainly worth exploring whether representing objects in a recognisable context. As the case study demonstrated, contextual ensembles must primarily be comprehensible, which means that they need to fit easily within a familiar context and contain enough information for them to be ‘readable.’ Added elements should then stimulate evaluation, implying the inclusion of perceptual stimuli and features that invite further investigation, like mystery, surprise or alienation. A suggested human presence, especially in relation to children, also enhances the affective qualities of ensembles. Striking a balance between comprehension and exploration results in easy-to-understand narratives that encourage evaluation, perhaps serving as a model for constructing ensembles that establish affective connections with visitors.

Depending on the engagement with objects envisioned, any intention for an interactive, inter-personal, experiential or provocative relationship to follow on from the affective connection may influence collecting policies further. As a consequence, a collection strategy needs to consider the use of an acquisition, with a decision made about whether or not it will affect the objects and ensembles to be collected in the future.

If a connection to visitors is to be achieved, acquisitions must actually be displayed, whether online or offline. Museums mainly do this by presenting objects in the physical space, or by making them accessible on their websites as part of a collection. Sometimes, more active engagement with collections is encouraged, for example by organizing regular meetings or setting up a digital platform in such a way that ensembles can be used as creative technology. The Rijkstudio
website, for instance, encourages the application of digitised, famous artwork from the Rijksmuseum. In doing so, it makes use of the notion of discovery, captioning and juxtaposition which, according to Nicholas Thomas, underpins the "museum method". Something similar is conceivable with the objects in collections relating to home interiors. Indeed, it would certainly be worth investigating whether contemporary furnishings and floor plans can also give rise to an interactive way of 'looking' and prompt a multi-perspective discussion on contemporary home life.

**Final remarks**

As noted earlier, this chapter should be understood not so much as a final conclusion, but as the start of an ongoing debate. I would therefore like to develop this strategy further in collaboration with other cultural-history museums. An investigation of whether such a method can be generalised and incorporated within the existing, commonly used, valuation method is therefore recommended.

Finally, I am of the view that museums of cultural history should develop a joint perspective on forming an overarching collection of contemporary home life in the Netherlands. Such a vision may initially be limited to a joint valuation framework, which could be created in conjunction with a proactive collection strategy. In essence, this involves the development of a shared 'language', a combination of good questions and substantive criteria, which each museum can apply to its own collection policy. In the longer term, harmonising such policies would be advantageous. In view of the increasing uniformity of Dutch cities, I am inspired somewhat by SAMDOX and the collections of my study's three cases to suggest that local, regional and national museums could unite their collecting efforts and, at the very least, design an umbrella platform in which home life is central. Such coordination at different levels should result in considerably less overlap, while also leading to a more comprehensive collection of contemporary home life.
Residents in a student house in Kralingen in 2018, as photographed by Malou van den Berg for the series *Rotterdam 6.30 pm.*
Chapter 2 shifts the focus to collecting home life, and highlights the period room as an eminently museological way to contextualise objects in an immersive setting. Modern evocative ensembles use new techniques and emphasise different qualities. Nevertheless, they are unmistakably part of the same tradition – even if the term ‘period room’ is carefully avoided. The revaluation of the underlying concept in today’s museum presentations is closely linked with the current highly valued aspects of contemporary collecting, including the demands for contextualisation, representation and connecting people to the museums they visit and their potentially rich history. It is from this that debates on collecting contemporary interiors have overlooked the notion of a present-day period room. This is especially surprising since, outside the museum setting, furniture stores, construction firms and estate agents try to seduce potential buyers using modern period-room-like displays. The third theme focuses on the contextualisation of objects and argues that museums should consider the collection of coherent functional ensembles as a starting point to ensure variety in future displays. Finally, the fourth theme explores the connective qualities of period rooms, which are traditionally renowned for their ability to connect strategies to collecting them to the vast sensory repertoire offered by IKEA.

Widening the perspective from furnishings to houses, Chapter 4 examines Homestudios. This concept was created by the Dutch construction firm BAM and consists of a limited collection of houses available for purchase, with buyer options on offer for both the exteriors and interiors. Architectural styles, layouts, the standard of finishes and styles of the interiors are the main ingredients of the company’s contemporary collection of homes, and the first theme addresses the involvement of clients in building these ensembles. Just as museums are searching for compact, but inclusive, collections, Homestudios has to balance stakeholder desires by bringing them to the vast sensory repertoire offered by IKEA. The tension between cultural values and personal identity is discussed in the third theme, where BAM – much more than museums – seeks a common denominator and is cautious about the degree of detailing of the model interiors. While the company initially focused on creating a coherent set of options, its Experience Centre shifted the emphasis to the customer’s involvement. Prospective buyers are now escorted through five different studios and are guided by a personal advisor in making their decisions. The last theme relates to the striking aspect of experiences and links the trifold concept of knowledge, inspiration and creation to the notion of the museum as a creative technology.

Chapter 5 examines the funda House, a virtual home developed by the property website funda. The house is based on a combination of the best-selling properties and the features searched for on the site. Prompted by the idea of co-creation, the first theme analyses the use of big data as a bottom-up strategy and argues that it provides an opportunity to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting. Asking if big data can support a more objective collection process and serve as an alternative to curatorial authority, the second theme finds that interpretative or meaningless, expert-driven expertise is still required and the outcome remains susceptible to personal biases. Materiality is the subject of the third theme, which is inspired by the difference between traditional museological period rooms and this house “built of data and dreams”. The theme suggests that the funda House cannot be fully understood without its digital counterparts and calls for a closer look at collections in a material trajectory. Finally, the fourth theme focuses on the cultural values underlying the outcome of the funda project – a terraced house with a spacious, castle-like feel – and concludes that the collection of common objects grouped in ordinary ensembles would benefit from adding an element of estrangement. In this, museums’ historical collections can play an important role.

Part 3 / Strategy

In the third and final part of the dissertation, the insights gained are used to build a strategy for how museums can collect contemporary home life and are discussed on a higher level. Chapter 6 sets out to synthesise the within-case findings at a greater level of abstraction. Structured around the five wider, overarching themes of the previously established framework, the cross-case analysis examines both replicative and divergent findings. In particular, it compares previous within-case outcomes, discusses differences and similarities and develops new, preliminary insights further. Each section concludes with a synthesis containing several recommendations regarding the collection of contemporary home life by city museums. The framework below briefly sets out the research questions and the important issues related to the themes.
The final chapter organises the insights gained, emphasises the main points and highlights the issues that merit further debate. Distinguishing between a number of levels and steps, the aim is to provide an impetus for a contemporary collecting strategy. The starting point is the desire for periodic expansions of existing collections with objects and ensembles that paint a picture of home life in the present – not guided by what happens to be on offer, but prompted by a rational and proactive collection policy. Such a strategy is based on the premises that contemporary collecting requires museum expertise and that curators bear the responsibility for this. Absolute objectivity in this process is impossible, but transparency, continuity, reflexivity and a conscious choice of varying perspectives can indeed be embedded in a museum’s collection policy.

The first step in this contemporary collecting process is to determine both the substantive and the pragmatic principles behind a proposed acquisition. Along with the scope and intended size of a new collection, a museum also has to consider any special requirements or restrictions regarding manageability. My main plea is that while museums should (continue to) focus on material culture, they should also combine these material objects explicitly with their immaterial elements. Where today’s emphasis is still on individual items, museums should pay more attention to the different and changing meanings of their collections. The expression of how objects, images, language, research data, underlying ideas and meanings are interwoven could be improved.

A more precise collecting strategy can gradually be determined in a second step, which relates to the selection criteria as well as the methods employed. When it comes to the latter, I argue that representation on an individual level is neither feasible nor desirable, concluding that consultative strategies should be viewed as serious alternatives to co-developed projects. In relation to the former, two main questions arise: whom does the museum want to represent and what type of home life does it want to reflect? It becomes clear that the issue of representation involves striking a balance between individual identities and shared values. The case study also demonstrates that diversity can include a focus on a limited number of collection-related, substantive variables, rather than on socio-demographic characteristics. Concerning the issue of what a collection reflects, it seems that while the three commercial cases examined in this dissertation depict a somewhat carefree life, city museums can instead choose societal subject-matters as a relevant starting point and place them as part of a diachronic perspective. Above all, a specific point of view must be formulated from the start.

The third step sets out to encourage active engagement with objects. In line with the notion that collections must actually be ‘used’ in order to be relevant, it is essential to connect visitors to objects and ensembles. This starts with the establishment of an affective relationship. Depending on the engagement envisioned, any intention to establish a further relationship, whether interactive, interpersonal, experiential or provocative, can influence collecting policies. As a consequence, a strategy must consider the future use of an acquisition, with decisions made about whether or not it will affect the objects and ensembles to be collected.

These three distinct steps form a cyclical process wherein the selection of objects and ensembles gradually becomes more concrete. Ultimately, the actual acquisition proposals can be assessed using a valuation method and further action can then be undertaken as appropriate. Consequently, it is recommended that such a proactive collection strategy should be developed further in collaboration with various cultural-historical museums. It should also be incorporated within an existing, and often used, valuation methodology. In the longer term, museums should additionally develop a joint perspective on forming an overarching collection of contemporary home life in the Netherlands.
Het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur

Samenvatting
Culturhistorische musea hebben een rijke traditie op het gebied van wooncultuur, maar hoewel zij hun collecties verder ontwikkelen, is er weinig expliciete of theoretische aandacht voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur. Bestaande criteria voor het waarderen van interieurs, zoals compleetheid, stilzijverheid, traditionele stijl en historisch belang, verraad een retrospectief perspectief en overweldigend kunst-historisch perspectief. Bij veel cultuurhistorische stads musea is het perspectief echter ‘aldaaderaarder’ en ‘eigentijds’: het gaat er niet zo zover om datgene te bewaren wat dreigt te verdwijnen, maar om datgene te selecteren wat relevant is voor het heden – en die relevantie is allang niet meer uitblijvend gedefinieerd in termen van bijzonderheid, maar omvat ook het gewone, het aldaadgaar en de grote verscheidenheid daarbinnen. Paradoxaal genoeg gaat de overvloed aan potentieel relevante voorwerpen gepaard met een vraag naar compacte en goed beheerbare collecties, waarbij het ontbreken van actuele criteria het verzamelen van eigentijdse objecten extra lastig maakt.

Deel 1 / Theorie
Dit proefschrift verkent verschillende strategieën voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur door stads musea met een cultuur- historische perspectief. Deel 1 onderzocht hoe de beide concepten die ten grondslag liggen aan het verlangen om inclusieve collecties te ontwikkelen. Dat laatste wordt soms gemotiveerd door het gewenste proces (participatief verzamelen), soms door het beoogde resultaat (een diverse collectie) en soms bijdragen aan een toenemende oriëntatie op de casuestudie maximale variatie en neemt de kans omvang, reikwijdte en materialiteit hebben, biedt bovendien aan een uiters gereserveerde houding.

Hoofdstuk 2 verlegt de aandacht naar het verzamelen van wooncultuur en argumenteert dat de stijl kamer een bij uitstek museale manier is om objecten op een aansprekende manier van context te verbinden met het heden – en die relevantie voor het heden is vaak onmiskenbaar in de mate van detaillering van de model. Dit proefschrift verkent verschillende strategieën voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur op basis van het bekendste onderwerp, de wooncultuur.

Deel 2 / Vergelijkende casestudie
Het tweede deel onderzoekt de eigentijdse woonensembles van drie commerciële bedrijven in de interieur. Architectuurstijlen, indelingsvarianten, bouwen huizen, waarbij kopers verschillende functionele oplossingen bieden voor herkenbare problemen. Deze "woonfrustraties" staan centraal in het eerste thema, dat het huiselijk leven zoals dat in de room settings wordt geschetst in museaal perspectief. Het tweede thema onderzoekt in hoeverre dergelijke gegevens een objectief alternatief voor de "autoritaire stem" van de conservator. Interpretatie blijkt ook hier echter cruciaal, expertise vereist en het resultaat afhankelijk van de inbreng van slechts enkele personen. Materialiteit vormt het derde thema, dat ingeven is door het verschil tussen de traditionele stijl kamers in musea en dit huis "gewoonte". Dit alternatief voor de ‘authoritaire stem’ van de conservator. Interpretatie blijkt ook hier echter cruciaal, expertise vereist en het resultaat afhankelijk van de inbreng van slechts enkele personen. Materialiteit vormt het derde thema, dat ingeven is door het verschil tussen de traditionele stijl kamers in musea en dit huis "gewoonte". Dit alternatief voor de ‘authoritaire stem’ van de conservator. Interpretatie blijkt ook hier echter cruciaal, expertise vereist en het resultaat afhankelijk van de inbreng van slechts enkele personen. Materialiteit vormt het derde thema, dat ingeven is door het verschil tussen de traditionele stijl kamers in musea en dit huis "gewoonte". Dit alternatief voor de ‘authoritaire stem’ van de conservator. Interpretatie blijkt ook hier echter cruciaal, expertise vereist en het resultaat afhankelijk van de inbreng van slechts enkele personen. Materialiteit vormt het derde thema, dat ingeven is door het verschil tussen de traditionele stijl kamers in musea en dit huis "gewoonte".
De collectie
Welke woonensembles hebben de bedrijven gecollecteerd?

Verzamelen
Hoe hebben de bedrijven hun objecten en ensembles gekozen?

Reflecteren
Wat reflecteren de ensembles?

Repräsenteren
Wie representeren de ensembles?

Verbinden
Hoe verbonden de ensembles de bezoekers met de producten of collecties?

Thema | Onderzoeks vraag | Kwesties
---|---|---
De collectie | Welke woonensembles hebben de bedrijven gecollecteerd? | Omvang en reikwijdte, Materialiteit
Verzamelen | Hoe hebben de bedrijven hun objecten en ensembles gekozen? | Strategieën, Participanten, Wie beslist?
Reflecteren | Wat reflecteren de ensembles? | Perspectief, Tijd, Culturele waarden, persoonlijke identiteit
Repräsentieren | Wie representeren de ensembles? | Diversiteit, Doelgroepen, Differentiatiemethodes
Verbinden | Hoe verbonden de ensembles de bezoekers met de producten of collecties? | Kwaliteiten, Gebruik

Deel 3 / Strategie
Het derde deel van deze dissertatie gebruikt de opgedane inzichten om een strategie te ontwikkelen voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur in cultureel-historische musea en bediscussieert de bevindingen op een hoger abstractieniveau.

Kernvragen:
Wie representeren de ensembles?
Wat reflecteren de ensembles?
Hoe verbinden de ensembles de bezoekers met de producten of collecties?

Omgang en reikwijdte
Materialiteit
Strategieën
Participanten
Wie beslist?
Perspectief
Tijd
Culturele waarden, persoonlijke identiteit
Diversiteit
Doelgroepen
Differentiatiemethodes
Kwaliteiten
Gebruik


De derde stap is gericht op het stimuleren van een activatie omgang met objecten. Aansluitend bij het idee dat museale collecties daadwerkelijk moeten worden ‘gebruikt’ om relevant te zijn, is het essentieel om bezoekers te verbinden met objecten en ensembles. Dat begint met het vestigen van een affektieve connectie. Als de aanwinst daarnaast bedoeld is voor interactie, het aangaan van interpersoonlijke relaties, het laten beleven van een ervaring of het uitlokken van een reactie, heeft dat gevolgen voor het verzamelbeleid. Al tijdens het verzamelproces moet daarom rekening worden gehouden met de voorgenomen wijze van presentatie.

De drie onderscheiden stappen vormen dus een cyclisch proces waarin de keuze voor specifieke objecten en ensembles geleidelijk gemaakt wordt. Concreet verantwoordelijk voor het verzamelen en verkopen werden ingebracht in een bestaande waarderingsmethodiek worden getoetst en verdere actie kan worden ondernomen. Het verdient dan ook aanbeveling om een dergelijke strategie voor een proactief verzamelbeleid verder uit te werken in samenwerking met verschillende cultureel-historische musea en te incorporeren in een bestaande, veelgebruikte waarderingsmethodiek. Daarbij zouden musea op langere termijn een gezamenlijk perspectief moeten ontwikkelen op het vermogen van een overkoepelende collectie eigentijdse wooncultuur in Nederland.
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Grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO). Amsterdam, for which she undertook internships at The results have been presented in exhibitions and publications, and have also contributed to the museum's contemporary collection policy. In 2016, the domestic interior became a spearhead when Mayke started her research on collecting contemporary home life as an external PhD candidate at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, funded by a Museum Rotterdam since 2000 and is responsible for collections relating to Rotterdam’s businesses, technology and personal lives. In recent years, she has made extensive historical collections accessible through research in a variety of areas, including housekeeping, historical production processes, toys, personal hygiene and public health. The results have been presented in exhibitions and publications, and have also contributed to the museum’s contemporary collection policy. In 2016, the domestic interior became a spearhead when Mayke started her research on collecting contemporary home life as an external PhD candidate at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, funded by a Museum Grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO). Mayke has previously worked as: an historical researcher in the field of environmental soil research for the municipality of Rotterdam; the registrar for the corporate collection of the printing firm Vrijdag in Eindhoven; guest curator at the Textile Museum Tilburg; a researcher at the former Haags Gemeentemuseum; and a scientific staff member at the Social Historical Centre for Limburg. She obtained her master’s degrees in Cultural Studies (Museumology) and Art History & Archaeology at the University of Amsterdam, for which she undertook internships at the Allard Pierson Museum, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem.

About the author

Mayke Groffen has worked as a curator at Museum Rotterdam since 2000 and is responsible for collections relating to Rotterdam’s businesses, technology and personal lives. In recent years, she has made extensive historical collections accessible through research in a variety of areas, including housekeeping, historical production processes, toys, personal hygiene and public health.

Portfolio

Courses followed during the PhD project

2016

- Making you research proposal work for you, October 2016 – January 2017 (2.5 ECTS)
- Doing the literature review, November 2016 – March 2017 (2.5 ECTS)

2017

- Your personal PhD work-life balance: How to do less, but achieve more. January 2017 (1 ECTS)
- English Academic Writing for PhD candidates, February 2017 – May 2017 (2.5 ECTS)
- Professionalism and integrity in research, September 2017 (1 ECTS)
- Open interviewing, November 2017 – March 2018 (1.5 ECTS)

2018

- Self-presentation: presenting yourself and your research, March – April 2018 (2.5 ECTS)
- Shut up and write, November 2018 (1 ECTS)

2019

- Photovoice, May – June 2019 (1.5 ECTS)
- Visual exploration of scientific literature with VOSviewer, December 2019 (1.5 ECTS)

2020

- Participatory action research (PAR), April 2020 (1 ECTS)

2021

- Making an academic poster that stands out, April 2021 (1.5 ECTS)
- Maximize your visibility as a researcher!, April 2021 (0 ECTS)

Research output during the PhD project

2017

- Conference presentation “Collecting Suburbia: The Period Room as an Inspiring Concept?” at the SIEF Congress “Ways of Dwelling” in Göttingen (Germany), 26–30 March 2017. (SIEF: Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et Folklore)
- Conference presentation “Collecting Suburbia” on my PhD-research at NWO’s Smart Culture Conference in Amsterdam, 23–24 November 2017.
- Conference presentation “The Period Room as a Model for Contemporary Collecting” at the COMCOL Conference “Guardians of Contemporary Collecting & Collections” in Umeå (Sweden), 5-9 December 2017.

2018

- Conference Poster “Collecting Contemporary Home Life”, presented at the conference “40 Years of History” at Erasmus University Rotterdam, 9 November 2018.

2020


Museum objects acquired during the PhD project, selection (in Dutch)

2016 (from September)

- 91590 Emaillen reclamebord “Rotterdamsche Kolen Centraal” (1930-1940)
- 91579 Doos gloeilampjes Verenigde Industriëen Rotterdam (1950-1965)
- 91561 Wandbord firma A. Holders (1950-1960)
- 91560 Miniature schoolkijksie (1972)

2017

- 91575 Naamplaat “De Rotterdammer” (1930-1940)
- 91576 Asbak van hoedenfabriek Grabo (ca. 1950)
- 91561 Gasmeter van ERMAF (1908)
- 91560 Poppenwieg uit Rotterdamse kinderkamers (1949)
- 91569 - 91682 Leermiddelen Rotterdamse Volksmuziekschool (ca. 1955)
- 91563 Demontabele kinderstoel (1955)
- 91564 Gipsen matrijs voor bedrukking van huurzakken (1900-1913)
- 91565 Verpakking pijnstillers (“Slikkertjes”) van Clezo (1940-1960)
- 91566 Serie van 12 foto’s van Malou van den Berg, “Rotterdam 18:30 uur” (2016)

2018

- 91568 Harmoniumloper van de firma Joh. de Heer (ca. 1930)
- 91569 Opdracht aan Malou van den Ber voor nieuwe serie van 24 foto’s, vervolg “Rotterdam 18:30 uur” (2018)

2019

- 91822 Houder met lachgaspatroon (2019)
- 91714 Tegel en zwempdiama Sportfondsbad Rotterdam (1951)
- 91607 - 92003 Rotterdamse speeljassen (1960-1969)
- 91732 - 91742 e.a. Van Nelle: geschenkartikelen met Piggelmei (1915-1997)
- 91865 Keukenmachine gespaard met Premie-van-de-Maand-Club (ca. 1965-1970)

2020

- 91852 Model metrotrein voor kleurkeuze treinstellen (1965-1966)
- 91900 Figuurzaammodellen woninginterieur (stofdoekkistje, cactusreikje, schemelamp, pijpenrek), uitgegeven in Rotterdam (1930-1939)
- 91913 Flesje Akker Abdijsiroop (1918-1930)
- 91912 Vijf miniaturertegels in een verpakking van Driessen chocolade (1960-1975)
- 91913 “Detective LegoPuzzel No.2 van Remolux” (1938)

2021 (till June)

- 91920 Vrouwelijke maandverbanden (1945-1946)
- 91932 Stoel “Bits and Parts” van Boris Lampen, 3D geprint tijdens tentoonstelling “Echte Rotterdammers” (2014)
- 91955 - 91959 Bal, kleding en kunststof stoepranden om buiten te spelen (2017)
- 91963 Grokwit van RotterZwaai (2017)
- 91966 Schoteltentoon (2015)
- 92007 - 92013 Geboortekoffertje Maastad Ziekenhuis voor baby’s die ter adoptie worden afgehaald (2015-2017)
- 91924 Damesrijwiel R.S. Stoekis (ca. 1925)
- 91961 Twee mondkapjes door Gemeente Rotterdam verzonden aan medewerkers tijdens de coronacrisis (2020)
With a renewed interest in evocative ensembles on the one hand, and a museological focus on contemporaneity on the other, it is remarkable that debates on collecting contemporary home life have overlooked the concept of a modern period room. Outside the museum context, however, furniture stores, construction firms and estate agents try to tempt potential buyers using modern period-room-like displays. This book examines three such commercial cases: IKEA’s room settings, B A M’s Homestudios and the funda House. Aiming to develop a viable strategy for how cultural-history museums collect contemporary home life, Mayke Groffen analyses these cases from a museum curator’s perspective and explores what insights can be gained from them.

Mayke Groffen works as a curator at the City Museum of Rotterdam. She received a Museum Grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO) to conduct PhD research at Erasmus University Rotterdam.