

## VISUAL SUBMISSION: Museums, young people and reciprocal relevance

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It is widely acknowledged that young people are underrepresented in museums and art galleries – particularly as independent rather than school visitors (Xanthoudaki 1998; Mason and McCarthy 2006). To date, research has investigated the problem mainly by assessing young people's needs and interests and then proposing strategies that museums can implement to better respond to those needs.

This photograph (1), taken in front of the Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art (National Museum of History and Art) in Luxembourg City, views the issue from outside of the museum's walls. Although photography is not part of my research methodology, this image translates my research objective: to look at the museum from the perspective of young people themselves. Rather than simply focusing on young people's interests and attitudes, it questions the place of the museum in their lives.

The image is a literal and symbolic snapshot of teenage life: while two of the young people prefer to play sport and listen to music outside in the sun, one young girl tentatively opens the door to the museum. The sun is creating reflections in the glass; she cannot see through it. She seems to hesitate: is she wondering what awaits her inside that dark museum?

This moment represents the museum's opportunity to welcome her with open arms. It should not be fear or apprehension that guides the museum's attitude, but a desire to embrace young people and to open the dialogue on an equal-partner basis. The aim of my study is to explore whether there is a place for museums in young people's lives and, if there is, how museums can fit into young people's social and cultural environment. A truly welcoming museum would serve as an ideal starting point for building a relationship based on reciprocal relevance, which would certainly be enriching for both sides.

### Note

(1) This picture was initially taken for the PhDepictions photography competition organised by the University of Leicester in 2014. It was selected as the winning entry.

### References

Mason, D. and McCarthy, C. 2006. 'The feeling of exclusion': Young people's perceptions of art galleries. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 21, 20-31.

Xanthoudaki, M. 1998. Educational provision for young people as independent visitors to art museums and galleries: Issues of learning and training. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 17(2), 159-172.