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## Storytelling, Cultural Heritage and Public Engagement in AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional

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### Abstract

AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional or Weekend@NationalMuseum is a 3-month pilot project organized by @Museum, a museum consultancy, for Indonesia's National Museum in Jakarta, from September to December 2013. In this Sunday family program, @Museum collaborates with the renowned Teater Koma to produce short mini-theatre performances on historical stories, taking inspiration from selections of 140,000 archaeological collections. The performance is delivered at the specific gallery where the related artefact is on display. The purpose of this preliminary case study is to describe how AkhirPekan@Museum Nasional program uses storytelling to engage the public's interest in cultural heritage. By examining findings from post-event questionnaires, this writing captures that most of the audience had been primarily attracted by the storytelling. This case study concludes that public engagement with cultural engagement can be secured through storytelling.

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### 1. Creating public engagement to cultural heritage in a museum through storytelling

For many, the remains of the past provide a sense of security in an uncertain world, serving as the thread of timelessness which runs through a rapidly changing environment (Prentice, 2005). Hence, heritage is about a special sense of belonging and of continuity. The significance of meaning of cultural heritage is an integral part of heritage management – the care and continuing development of a historical item, so that its significance is retained, revealed, and its future secured. One of many stakeholders in heritage management are museums - non-profit making, permanent institutions in the service of society and of its development, with the roles to acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of men and their

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environment (Hakiwai, 2005).

According to Lord (2007), museums can become cultural accelerators by being at the centre of the ongoing endeavour to create civil society. Newman (2005) proposes that museum plays the role of developing human capital - knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being. According to Haas (2007), psychologists, early learning experts, teachers and museum educators agree that museums offer children important learning experiences. Some even declare learning in museums is more effective for children than in schools. Research and case studies have been undertaken to show that museum visits from an early age have a positive impact on lifelong learning, social intelligence, and creative thinking.

In order to do so, museums should reach out to families. Haas (2007) examines that museums depend on family and school audiences in order to achieve high visitor numbers. One way is to use storytelling. Langelier (2004) explains that storytelling is an integral and consequential part of daily life because people make sense of experiences, claim identities, interact with each other and participate in cultural conversations through storytelling. According to Polleta (2006), cognitive and social psychology has documented how storytelling helps to make sense of the anomalous, how it elicits and channels emotions and how it sustains individual and group identities.

In Indonesia, storytelling has also been used to attract public engagement in cultural heritage. Veda (2011) describes Mystery of Batavia program as an example. Here, storytelling is used upon painter S. Harijadi's unfinished mural inside Jakarta's History Museum or Fatahillah Museum. AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional program - designed and implemented by the same producer - uses a number of different stories, instead of just one, to engage with the public. Hence, this program provides a richer source to be examined on how storytelling is used by the museum to establish engagement to cultural heritage.

## 2. AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional

Museum Nasional (The National Museum of Indonesia) popularly known as Museum Gajah (Elephant Museum) is an archaeological, historical, ethnological and geographical museum – home to a broad collections covering all of Indonesia's territory and almost all of its history, preserving the country's heritage for two centuries (Rosi, 1998). Yet, despite its outstanding collections, affordable ticket prices and prime location in Central Jakarta, this 235-year-old Museum Nasional received only around 208,000 visitors in 2011 - a meagre number compared to 847,000 visitors per year for National Museum of Singapore or 10 million visitors per year for Louvre Museum in France (Mariani, 2013).



Fig. 1. The National Museum of Indonesia. Source: Akhir Pekan Facebook page, 2014.

AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional or Weekend@NationalMuseum program is a 3-month pilot project organized by @Museum, a museum consultancy, from September to December 2013. The purpose of this program is to provide interaction between the museum and its visitors by creating an experience. @Museum produces six 15-20 minutes storytelling sessions by taking inspirations from selections of the museum's more than 140,000 archaeological collections. Storytelling sessions are delivered by Teater Koma - one of the most prestigious, longest-running theatre groups in Indonesia (Siregar, 2013).

The process of creating stories is derived from personal communication between the author with @Museum producer, Yudhi Soerjoatmodjo, on January, 24, 2014. Stories are developed by @Museum producer who creates plots based on the materials provided by National Museum team in the forms of official studies and research reports.

These sources of information comprise of factual information about the artefacts, their historical contexts, how they were first discovered, the artefact materials and other technical and/or chronological details. @Museum producer then creates plots of fictional stories by using factual information as anchors. Plots are developed based on situations and transitions of the events imagined as possible within the particular contexts and period. To ensure plausibility, the plots are consulted with National Museum research team.

After the plots are developed, @Museum producer writes brief story synopses for Teater Koma team who molds the synopses into dialogues for the actor(s). The stories developed adhere to a narrative structure of exposition - of the situation, rising action through inciting incidents that disrupt the actor(s), turning point where the actor(s) handle the incident, falling action as the actor(s) are resolving the incident and restoring harmony and resolution as all patterns of events accomplish its mission.

Since this is a collaborative, participatory process, both @Museum and Teater Koma are involved in crafting words for the scripts – discussed in face-to-face meetings and email exchanges. Also to add to the entertainment values, the scripts borrow contemporary popular vernaculars that are in trends at that time, taken for example from entertainment news or gossip talk shows. Some of the stories are also designed with audience interactivity in mind. This is done, for example, by inviting the audience to echo words or to answer questions from the actor(s) – a similar method of performance typically used in Betawi traditional theatre troupe.

This process results in the following 6 (six) storytelling sessions of “Keris Puputan Klungkung” (“The Klungkung Daggers”) (Teater Koma, 2014a), “Samurai Bersepeda” (“The Cycling Samurai”) (Teater Koma, 2014b), “Karamnya Kapal Tek Sing” (“The Drowning of the Tek Sing Junk”) (Teater Koma, 2014c), “Raibnya Celengan Majapahit” (“The Disappearance of the Majapahit Piggy Bank”) (Teater Koma, 2014d), “Kuda Perang Pangeran Diponegoro” (“Prince Diponegoro’s War Horse”) (Teater Koma, 2014d) and “Raksasa Bhairawa Pengasah Parang” (“Bhairawa, the Blade Wielding Giant”) (Teater Koma, 2014e). Each of the stories is delivered at the specific gallery where the related artefact is on display, the better to bring the audience in proximity to the very source of inspiration for each story. To follow up the storytelling sessions, a couple of museum guides are assigned to direct the audience to the showcased artefact and other complementary collection so they can learn more about the cultural heritage.

These storytelling sessions are delivered on Sunday morning at 08:30, 09:30 and 10:30 in coincide with Jakarta’s car free day program. After each session, the producer engages the audience in a group photo session as they cheer aloud: “Museum Nasional Hebat!” (National Museum is Great!) (Teater Koma, 2014f). At the end of the performance, audience can fill out questionnaires in exchange for pins as token of appreciation. @Museum team also interviews a sample of audience to capture their comments. The audience can also buy AkhirPekan T-shirts as souvenirs. Information regarding this program is delivered and managed through Akhir Pekan di Museum Facebook page and @museum\_weekend Twitter account. @Museum also uses YouTube to share video documentaries and audience comments (Teater Koma, 2014g).

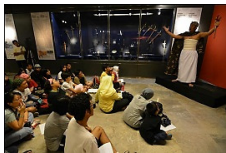



These six storytelling sessions are sometimes combined with craft day program comprising of ceramic, wood carving workshops and hand-made craft bazaar. Based on the observation and positive comments from the audience as well as a series of discussion between @Museum and Teater Koma, some of the storytelling sessions are repeated. It should be noted that even though this program exercises prior online booking, any visitors who happen to be at the museum at the time of the performance are welcomed – including a number of elementary and junior high students who came in large groups organized by their schools as part of their compulsory program.

It should also be noted that on September 11, 2013, four golden artefacts from ancient 10<sup>th</sup> an 11<sup>th</sup> century Mataram period were stolen from Museum Nasional, yet AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional programs are fully booked regardless of the unfortunate incident (Cokorda, 2013).



Fig. 2. (a) Akhir Pekan di Museum Facebook page with 1.757 likes; (b) @museum\_weekend Twitter account with 981 followers and 1,185 tweets; (c) @museum pins – each is produced in accordance to the storytelling performance; (d) @museum t-shirt.  
Source: AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional Facebook page (2014) and AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional Twitter account (2014).

Table 1. Story Synopsis

<b>The Klungkung Daggers</b>	
<p>On April 27, 1908, Dutch troops from Batavia came fully armed to conquer Bali. The Kingdom of Klungkung was determined to fight back against this foreign invasion. The King, Ida I Dewa Agung Jambe, was preparing his golden dagger for his fight to the dead as a true warrior.</p>	
<b>The Cycling Samurai</b>	
<p>Out of the blue, in mid-1945, the Dutch left Batavia in a hurry. Did this mean that Indonesia finally became independence? A young man told his story when Japanese troop came to Java with their bicycles and changed everything.</p>	
<b>The Drowning of the Tek Sing Junk</b>	
<p>The Chinese merchant vessel set sail in 1822 from China with a cargo of over 350,000 ceramic pieces, including teapots, plates, dishes, cups, cosmetic jars, oil lamps, tiny figurine ornaments and glass beads. When passing through the coast of Bangka-Belitung, “The Titanic of the East” hit a reef and sank. One survivor told his story.</p>	
<b>The Disappearance of the Majapahit Piggy Bank</b>	
<p>Javanese economy during Majapahit era in the late 8<sup>th</sup>-century rose and gold and silver coins were used for daily transactions. To prepare for rainy days, people made terracotta piggy banks to save their hard-earned coins. One day, one little girl found out that her piggy bank was missing. Who stole her piggy bank?</p>	

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### Prince Diponegoro's War Horse

Diponegoro was a Javanese prince and national hero who led an uprising against the Dutch in the 19th century. Alas, the Dutch army led by Captain De Kock finally arrested him and put him in exile in Makassar. In a reminiscence of his courageous master, his beloved horse – Ki Gentayu - told glorious battles they fought side-by-side.




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### Bhairawa, the Blade Wielding Giant

The giant statue of Bhairawa or The Annihilator was found in the bottom of Batanghari river. This was a story of how archaeologists uncovered the 4-ton statue and brought it to National Museum in 1937.




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Source: Soerjoatmodjo, 2014; AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional Facebook page, 2014

## 3. Result

This section elaborates findings gathered from the storytelling session. While questionnaires serve as source of numeric data, information of a qualitative nature is derived from audience comments posted on social media networks. A total of 1,388 visitors came to attend the program based on the guestbook documentation in the ticket booth and 1,165 of them filled out the questionnaires - with 71.25 % or 830 visitors are female and the rest are male.

Based on the questionnaires, it is known that most audiences visited the museum when they were still in their school years of elementary, junior and/or high school (431 visitors or 36.99 %). Textual analysis on comments expressed through social media network identifies one particular comment below describing his experience:

*“I felt as if I was listening to someone who had taken a time machine and shared his account on how people lived in the past... Suddenly I realized that the last time I set foot in a museum was four or five years ago...”*

It is clear that museum visit is mostly associated with school-related activities back when they were teenagers. Hence, what brings these visitors back to the museum? What is the basis of such public engagement with the museum? In terms of reasons to come revisit the museum, Teater Koma performance in AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional program is the main reason mentioned by 728 visitors (62.49 %). Other reasons are appreciating cultural heritage collected by the museum, mentioned 210 visitors (18.03%), and taking museum visit as part of their car free day activities (19.48 %). It is clear that the main attraction is storytelling sessions by a highly reputable theatre troupe – showing that storytelling leads to public engagement with the museum. Textual analysis on social media comments identifies the ones relevant to storytelling, as follow:

*“We watch Teater Koma in the Museum today. The story was exciting, fun and educational. Bravo!”*

*“A fun way to learn history and to visit the museum! Just watch Teater Koma performance in Museum Nasional this afternoon. Amazing!!”*

*“Keep up the good work, @museum\_weekend. I love how museums become more interactive and fun. Thanks.”*

According to the questionnaires, the storytelling sessions help them to further understand cultural heritage collected by the museum and to learn history better. This is shown in a 0-10 scales questionnaire questions. Those who choose 7-10 scales comprise of 53.99%, or 629 people, indicating that storytelling sessions help them better understand cultural heritage. In addition, the storytelling sessions stimulate their curiosity to learn more about the history according to those who choose 7-10 scale (512 visitors or 43.94%).

Audience also shares their positive experience with families and friends of the community. Based on the survey, the audience comes to AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional with their family and community (629 visitors or 53.99 %). Storytelling sessions attracts the audience to revisit the museum, relive their school experience and reinterpreted it in a contemporary setting with their family and community, as exemplified below:

*“11 years [sic] wedding anniversary – celebrate [sic] at Museum Nasional, watching performance from Teater Koma with our beloved son, what a great day...”*

*“I am glad that @museum\_weekend was packed with visitors. Parents would love to bring the kids here instead of the mall.”*

*“Kudos @museum\_weekend and Teater Koma for your fresh new ideas to bring families closer to the museum. Bravo!”*

By looking at the questionnaire results, it can be concluded that while Teater Koma serves the magnet that draws the audience to the museum, storytelling sessions they perform engage the public by providing entertaining and educative interactions. In other words, as Teater Koma attracts the public, it is the stories that engage the public.

In addition, the role of social media network in establishing public engagement to cultural heritage collected by the museum should not be overlooked. Social media network plays an integrative role in public engagement. Findings from the questionnaire show that 391 visitors or 33.56% find the information related to the program through social media. Per the end March 2014, there are 1,757 likes in Akhir Pekan di Museum Facebook page and @museum\_weekend Twitter account reaches 981 followers – and these numbers continue to grow. It seems that through social media networks, the audience can take part in the storytelling sessions by sharing their experience and expressing their emotion elicited by the stories.

Another social media network, YouTube, is also used by the audience who are not able to come to the museum. This is showcased in the following comments posted by the audience:

*“Please upload the video so we from Aceh can enjoy it from afar and ‘steal’ the idea from this program... Hopefully, a similar program can be held in Aceh museums.”*

*“I could not make it yesterday. Can I watch the video?... It was so unfortunate that I had to miss the storytelling performance because I had to do some works.”*

It should also be noted that social media networks are also used by the audience to express their support to Museum Nasional on the ongoing investigation of the stolen four golden artefacts. Those comments are as follow:

*“I hope those who stole the collection would listen to their heart and return them.”*

*“Hope the investigation would be over soon, and the artefacts could be again part of the collection and the Museum Nasional could improve its security.”*

*“Hope whoever did this would soon be caught and the collection be returned.”*

Based on the comments derived from social media networks, it seems that not only the storytelling sessions engage the public to appreciate cultural heritage but also they generate public support for better heritage management.

All in all, both quantitative and qualitative data captured how the public engagement with the museum is made possible through the use of storytelling - that also leads them to better appreciation for cultural heritage and support for better heritage management. Social media network also plays roles in maintaining public engagement and supports cultivated by these storytelling sessions.

#### 4. Conclusion

The case study of AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional showcases how storytelling is used to create public engagement with cultural heritage. Through storytelling sessions, this case study shows how a museum can carry out its role as cultural accelerator through a creative approach such as storytelling sessions. Further studies should be carried out to understand better how to engage the public to appreciate cultural heritage in the museum.

Lessons learned identified includes incorporating age, education and professional background of the audience especially parents of the family as well as parent aspirations regarding the roles of the museum and how their children can learn in the museum for further studies. Improvements regarding data gathering tools and methods are also noted for future development.

All of the abovementioned learning points are part of the idea that AkhirPekan@MuseumNasional is a pilot project to open doors for further explorations as well as studies to seek ways to engage the public with the museum and its cultural heritage collection.

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