

“Judging Exhibitions” by Beverly Serrell

Evaluating exhibitions in a team

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Introduction

Judging Exhibitions was developed in a series of workshops between 2000 and 2003 in Chicago (USA) and published in 2006 as *Judging Exhibitions. A Framework for Assessing Excellence* (Serrell 2006). This framework (Serrell 2006: 42–46) serves as a practical guide for a standardized procedure of analyzing and assessing the excellence of exhibitions from a visitor-centered perspective.¹ Exhibitions are evaluated in terms of how well they meet the ‘Criteria’ set down in the framework for the assessors at the moment of their visit. They explicitly refer to the overall visitor experience: “We would judge exhibitions by how it felt to be in them” (Serrell 2006: 5). The criteria are broken down into different features, here called ‘Aspects’. An exhibition is not expected to meet all the aspects listed in the framework (Serrell 2006: 17); rather, they reflect individual facets of the criteria and provide supporting evidence for the evaluation. The main concern is to ensure that the criteria and aspects describe valuable visitor experiences: “[They] are related to creating comfortable, engaging, reinforcing and meaningful educational experiences for visitors” (Serrell 2006: 17).

The special feature of this approach is its implementation in a team: the framework provides the members of the group with a shared vocabulary that they can use to evaluate their personal visitor experience first on an individual level. Subsequently, they compare their results and draft joint statements regarding the quality of the exhibition. The discussion about the exhibition’s quality (‘Excellence’) that emerges in this process is the actual goal of the analysis. Every discipline associated with museums (curatorial, design etc.) has its own ideas about what constitutes a successful exhibition. The framework and the accompanying discussion are not intended to replace the various professional viewpoints, “but to augment them with a deeper understanding of the experience itself” (Serrell 2006: 24). In its application, the framework takes into account that the judges generate subjective results

1 The framework is open access and available for download at Serrell 2025.

and brings these together in a productive way. A judge can be anyone with some degree of expertise about exhibitions (see below). What is crucial here is taking a visitor-centered perspective (see chapter 3.2 Focus). Beverly Serrell's team identified a successful visitor experience as a basis for rating an exhibition as 'excellent'. The analytical guidelines she created are designed to work in a broad range of exhibition settings.

The authors of this article adapted Serrell's framework as part of an extensive research project at the DASA Arbeitswelt Ausstellung Dortmund (DASA Working World Exhibition in Dortmund) to investigate storytelling in exhibitions (conducted from 2017 to 2023). The centerpiece of this project is the evaluation of the DASA special exhibition *Pia sagt Lebwohl. Eine Ausstellung über die Arbeit mit Tod und Trauer* (*Pia Says Goodbye: An Exhibition about Dealing with Death and Mourning*). The method described here was adapted in the context of the DASA evaluation: since the researchers themselves were involved in the curation of this exhibition, it was necessary to include an outside perspective on *Pia Says Goodbye* in the form of Judging Exhibitions. In contrast to Serrell's approach, where the judges select the case study on their own initiative, in the DASA adaptation, the framework was modified to a commission as part of a self-evaluation. The evaluators selected the judges according to their own criteria and invited them to visit the exhibition in Dortmund to evaluate its excellence.

In order to apply the method in the context of this exhibition evaluation, the evaluation team translated the framework into German.² The translation of the English terms was to be carried out in such a way that the original idea of the criteria would be retained, but that at the same time the German-speaking experts would have a common vocabulary at their disposal that was as comprehensible as possible. This led to some discussion within the evaluation team regarding certain finer points. Particularly, the translation of 'meaningful' (German: 'Sinnstiften') remained a compromise until the very end.³ Some details were modified also in terms of content. For instance, the aspect 1.c) "The lighting, temperature, and sound levels were appropriate" (Serrell 2006: 44) was split into three different aspects in order to be able to evaluate lighting, temperature and sound levels separately. Semantic issues also emerged during the process of translation that prompted the members of the evaluation team to fundamentally reflect on their self-image. "Excellent judge" was translated as "(exhibition) expert". While the English word 'judge' semantically covers both the meaning of 'assessing, evaluating' and the role of, for instance, an ad-

2 The German version translated by the DASA research team (Jana Hawig, Ria Glaue, Patricia Dobrijevic, Paul Marx) is available at: https://www.dasa-dortmund.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente_pdf/DA/Anhaenge_Forschungsbericht.pdf, 62–68 (06.03.2025).

3 The alternatives discussed were 'Relevanz herstellen' (establish relevance) or 'Bedeutbarkeit' (significance).

judicator in a law court, the German word 'Richter' is more strongly associated with the latter. To avoid misunderstandings, a translation was chosen that emphasizes the role of the assessor as a knowledgeable expert, rather than giving the impression of someone passing a final judgement on the exhibition. This also aligns with how Serrell wants the term to be understood: "Judging is a process of thinking, forming an opinion, deciding on the relative value or worth, and holding up something against standards, guidelines or criteria" (Serrell 2006: 164). Another issue was the term 'excellent' that was not carried over in the translation.⁴ Particular attention was paid to the translation of the four criteria (German: 'Dimensionen') as the core of the content-related engagement with the exhibition to be assessed:

Fig. 1: The four criteria from the framework. These form the core of the evaluation of an exhibition's excellence. Excerpt from Serrell 2025: 1.

1. Comfortable

An excellent exhibition helps the visitor feel comfortable—physically and psychologically. Good comfort opens the door to other positive experiences. Lack of comfort prevents them.

2. Engaging

An excellent exhibition is engaging for visitors. It entices them to pay attention. Engagement is the first step toward finding meaning.

3. Reinforcing

In an excellent exhibition, the exhibits provide visitors with abundant opportunities to be successful and to feel intellectually competent—beyond the "wow" of engagement. In addition, the exhibits reinforce each other, providing multiple means of accessing similar bits of information that are all part of a cohesive whole. Visitors are confidently on their way to having meaningful experiences.

4. Meaningful

An excellent exhibition provides personally relevant experiences for visitors. Beyond being engaged and feeling competent, visitors find themselves changed, cognitively and affectively, in immediate and long-lasting ways.

Aim of the method

Judging Exhibitions is designed to foster discussion and learning among participants with the help of a shared vocabulary to enhance their understanding of an exhibition's excellence. Agreement on a consensus is not necessarily the goal of Judging Exhibitions but rather an exchange of different opinions (Serrell 2006: 145). The target group of the analysis is therefore not a stakeholder of the exhibition's institution,

4 This had originally been developed with a certain amount of tongue-in-cheek during the many years of development in Serrell's grassroots group, see Serrell (2006, 10).

but the participants themselves.⁵ The method is aimed at anyone with professional experience of exhibitions, because a certain ability to express oneself is necessary to be able to talk about an exhibition (Serrell 2006: 10).⁶ Serrell mentions further fields of application of the method, including as a teaching tool for students of museum studies (Serrell 2006: 78–83) or also as “in-house exhibition development” (Serrell 2006: 73–77) with possibilities for application during the design phase of an exhibition or also in formative and summative evaluations. The latter is exemplified in the case study below.

The method can be applied to almost all (museum) exhibitions. Serrell emphasizes that exhibitions for very young children are also suited for the framework. The prerequisite is that “the target audience includes adults and the exhibition directs interpretation at them as facilitators for an educational experience”, which the judges can follow-up on (Serrell 2006: 22). Serrell explicitly includes a chapter on the possibilities of using the framework with art exhibitions (Serrell 2006: 84–87). During the development of the framework, there were reservations about its use in exhibitions that focus on the aesthetics of art objects and dispense with any kind of explanatory texts. Serrell confirms this difficulty but argues that this applies independently of art exhibitions: “If there is a low diversity of formats (e.g. graphics, text, audiovisuals, models, phenomena) or sensual modalities (other than sight), Framework users would have fewer specific elements to discuss, but they’d still be able to talk about their overall experiences” (Serrell 2006: 85).

The framework is designed primarily to be used on its own, since it takes a holistic approach and defines a conclusive process from beginning to end. At the same time, it can be combined with other methods (see case study). However, the framework is not a substitute for examining visitor reactions, but can usefully complement existing visitor studies (Serrell 2006: 106).

Step-by-step guideline

The following five steps provide a structure for applying the method. Serrell does not prescribe any particular time frame, leaving it to the members of the group to organize the process themselves. She does, however, recommend allowing at least two hours for the first meeting and the second follow-up meeting. The step-by-step

5 If the analysis results are processed and published as an exhibition analysis, additional target groups can be addressed.

6 The composition of the group therefore depends on the situation, and according to Serrell, is guided only by the criterion of the language skills required for exhibitions. Expertise on the topic of the exhibition alone is not a requirement. Accordingly, whoever selects the group also defines which specific knowledge the judges need to have to be considered ‘experts’.

guideline below is modelled on the specifications and wording of the framework to facilitate the transfer.

1. "First meeting"

Before visiting the exhibition, the participants come together for a first joint meeting to familiarize themselves with the framework and the concepts and to get to know each other (if they haven't met yet). Particular attention is paid to ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding the criteria and aspects. Participants should be provided with a print-out of the framework. The meeting does not necessarily have to take place at the venue of the exhibition.

2. "Personal notes (call-outs)"

The experts visit the exhibition on their own. Everyone can decide for themselves how often they want to visit the exhibition. The notes ('call-outs') are taken during and after the first exhibition tour and are spontaneous, affective statements which need to be supplemented by a reflection: "your feelings and emotional reactions to what you are experiencing – along with some analysis for why or what made you feel that way" (Serrell 2006: 52). The approach is exploratory and not guided by the framework. However, the experts are expected to explore the exhibition from the perspective of a visitor. In the process, they note their thoughts and impressions regarding the exhibition experience.

3. "Assessing the aspects"

The framework specifies a total of twenty-six different aspects for all four criteria that are assessed after visiting the exhibition. The assessment is carried out individually on the basis of the call-outs and according to the following system that does not provide for neutral ratings (Serrell 2006: 56):

Fig. 2: The judges are invited to assess the twenty-six aspects according to this rating system of the framework. Excerpt from Serrell 2025: 4.

After visiting, leave the exhibition and then assess the Aspects—the evidence defining each Criterion—listed below. Using your Call-outs as a reference, think about to what degree each Aspect was appropriately present or not present in the exhibition. Using the following guidelines, put pluses and minuses in the right-hand columns.

++ Excellent, a wonderful example	— Not quite there	NA Does not apply (Not all Aspects apply to all exhibitions.)
+ A good example	-- Self-defeating	

Fig. 3: The figure shows specific assessments of the aspects by three different participants regarding the exhibition Pia Says Goodbye. The experts have added personal comments to some of the features in order to clarify them. Source: participant E, participant B, participant A, participant B, framework of the DASA research project. 2020, unpublished, 4–5.

1. Merkmale „Wohlfühlen“		
a) Räumliche und konzeptionelle Orientierungsmöglichkeiten waren gegeben.	++	
b) Es gab bequeme Möglichkeiten, sich zu erholen.	+	
c) 1) Die Beleuchtung war angemessen.	+	
c) 2) Die Temperatur war angemessen.	+	
c) 3) Das Geräuschlevel war angemessen.	–	
d) Alles war in einem gepflegten Zustand und funktionierte. <i>Das meiste einleuchtend</i>	+	
e) Ausstellungselemente waren leicht zugänglich. Sie konnten problemlos gesehen, gelesen oder genutzt werden.	+	
f) Interaktionsmöglichkeiten und deren Funktionsweise waren leicht verständlich. Die Besucher*innen wurden ermutigt, selbst auszuprobieren.	++	
g) Die Autorschaft der Ausstellung ist klar ersichtlich. Die Ausstellung verrät, wer spricht und was Realität oder Fiktion ist.	+	
h) Die Ausstellung heißt alle Menschen willkommen, unabhängig des kulturellen Hintergrunds, des ökonomischen Status, des Bildungsniveaus oder der körperlichen Fähigkeiten.	+	
3. Merkmale „Bestärken“		
a) Die Ausstellung war nicht überfordernd. Die Anzahl der Dinge, die man tun oder sehen konnte, war genau richtig.	++	
b) Herausfordernde oder komplexe Stationen waren so strukturiert, dass Besucher*innen diese lösen konnten und im weiteren Erkunden der Ausstellung bestärkt wurden.	–	
c) Die Ausstellung war in sich logisch aufgebaut. Einem verständlichen roten Faden konnte leicht gefolgt werden.	+	
d) Die Informationen und Vorstellungen der Ausstellung ergänzten und verstärkten sich gegenseitig. <i>ideell</i>	+	
e) Die Ausstellung baute auf sich selbst auf. <i>ist aus sich selbst verständlich</i>	++	
2. Merkmale „Anregen“		
a) Die räumliche Umgebung sah interessant aus und lud zum Entdecken ein.	++	
b) Ausstellungselemente haben mich aufmerksam gemacht und mich dazu verleitet, langsamer zu werden, sie zu betrachten, zu interagieren und Zeit mit ihnen zu verbringen.	++	
c) 1) Ausstellungselemente haben Spaß gemacht – sie waren herausfordernd, unterhaltsam, faszinierend und intellektuell anregend.	+	
c) 2) Ausstellungselemente haben Spaß gemacht – sie waren körperlich und sinnlich anregend.	+	
d) Ausstellungselemente haben soziale Interaktion gefördert und begünstigt. Besucher*innen wurden ermutigt, jemanden zu sich zu rufen, etwas vorzulesen, auf etwas zu zeigen und sich über die Ausstellungselemente zu unterhalten.	+	
e) Die Erlebnisse wurden über eine ganze Bandbreite von Formaten (Grafiken, Texte, Objekte, audiovisuelle Medien, Medienstationen, lebendige Dinge, Modelle, etc.) und Sinnes (sehen, hören, bewegen, fühlen, etc.) ermöglicht.	++	
f) Es gab interessante Dinge zu tun, unabhängig des vorherigen Wissenstands der Besucher*innen.	+	
4. Merkmale „Sinnstiften“		
a) Ideen und Objekte der Ausstellung waren relevant und konnten in das Besuchererlebnis integriert werden – unabhängig von Vorkenntnissen oder der Motivation der Besucher*innen.	+	
b) Die Ausstellung machte deutlich, dass ihr Inhalt bedeutsam ist. Die Inhalte waren zeitgemäß, wichtig und boten den Besucher*innen Anknüpfungspunkte auf individuelle Wertevorstellungen.	+	
c) Die Inhalte sprachen allgemeine menschliche Interessen an und scheuten sich nicht vor tiefen oder kontroversen Themen.	–	
d) Das Ausstellungserlebnis fördert eine Veränderung im Denken, Fühlen und der Wahrnehmung der Menschen. Ausstellungselemente regten an, Vorstellungen und Einstellungen zu ändern und/oder Maßnahmen zu ergreifen.	–	

4. “Rating the criteria”

The assessment of the aspects then feeds into the individual rating of each of the four criteria. The ratings 1 to 6 can be given and are defined as follows:

Fig. 4: Following this rating system, the fourth step of the framework asks the judges to rate the individual criteria. Excerpt from Serrell 2025: 5.

- Level 1 Excellent—Consistently good Aspects (+’s), with many excellent (++)
- Level 2 Very Good—Consistently good Aspects (+’s) with very few or no misses (–’s)
- Level 3 Good—Mostly good Aspects (+’s), but with some misses (–’s)
- Level 4 Acceptable—A balance between good Aspects (+’s) and missed Aspects (–’s), or a few noteworthy things
- Level 5 Misses Opportunities—Mostly missed Aspects (–’s), but there may be a few good Aspects (+’s)
- Level 6 Counterproductive—Mostly self-defeating (– –’s), with many missed Aspects (–’s)

The ratings should be backed up by a brief freely formulated rationale.

Fig. 5: Example of a judge's assessment of the criterion 'Comfortable' in Pia Says Goodbye. The person awarded level 2 and motivated this by stating that, all in all, they felt comfortable, even though they found some rooms too cold. While there were sufficient places to sit, the sound level in one particular room was experienced as too loud. Source: Participant E, framework of the DASA research project. 2020, unpublished, 6.

1. Wohlfühlen	
Note	Begründung:
2	Die ganze Ausstellung war ansprechend gestaltet und lud zum Verweilen ein. Obwohl es mir in einigen Räumen zu kalt war, habe ich mich nicht unwohl gefühlt. Es gab auch genügend Sitzmöglichkeiten. Lediglich im ersten Raum waren mir die Raumsounds zu laut.

5. "Comparing the assessments – follow-up meeting"

Afterwards, the participants come together to present and discuss their individual assessments. Serrell recommends starting by all the participants filling in the ratings in the provided grid (Serrell 2006: 61) (Fig. 6) and then picking the most interesting points, for example big differences in ratings, to kick off the discussion. There is no joint rating, but listing a maximum of five positive and/or five negative features of the exhibition that everyone can agree on, helps to formulate the final result (Fig. 7). The framework is designed to emphasize positive aspects. If not many of these can be found or agreed on, there is a strong likelihood, according to Serrell, that the exhibition was not particularly 'excellent' (Serrell 2006: 63). At the end, the participants return once more to their individual ratings of the criteria and reflect on whether they would change them or not. Here one should keep in mind that "[c]on-sensus is not the goal, but it is interesting to see if and why people want to change their minds about something" (Serrell 2006: 63).

Fig. 6: In the fifth step of the framework, the judges compile their ratings and record them in this table, as shown here in the example of the exhibition Pia Says Goodbye. Their initials have been anonymized. Source: participant B, framework of the DASA research project. 2020, unpublished, 7).

Initialen der Expert*innen	Wohlfühlen	Anregen	Bestärken	Sinnstiften
1.	2	3	2	4
2.	2	3	1	4
3.	2	3	2	3
4.	3	2	1	2 3
5.	2	2	3	2 4
6.				

Fig. 7: The judges have to reach a unanimous decision at the end of the framework, as here in the example of Pia Says Goodbye. They decided to assign the statements to the four criteria of the framework and the story-telling method. For each statement, they mention positive as well as negative aspects. Source: participant D, framework of the DASA research project. 2020, unpublished, 7.

Übereinstimmendes Urteil
Diskutiert Besonderheiten der Ausstellung, basierend auf euren Erfahrungen und erlebten Gefühlen – sowohl positive als auch negative. Schreibt sie auf:

1. Orientierungsmöglichkeiten und Aufenthaltsqualität waren sehr gut, aber die Diversität der Zugänge sowie die Glaswürdigkeit einiger Stationen ist ausbaufähig.
aus angeregten
2. Face-to-face-Angebot werden geboten, allerdings keine intellektuelle Herausforderung und wenig inhaltliche Tiefe.
3. Die Ausstellung ist extrem niederschwellig und konzeptuell leicht abgefracht, aber es ist die Komplexität und Diskretion der Entscheidungsprozesse.
4. Sinnstiftende Fragen werden aufgeworfen und werden (in den Stationen) die eigene Gefühlswelt berührt, aber es fehlen konstante Themen, Multiperspektivität und diesbezügliche Erörterungen.
5. Storytelling spielt eine stringente Rolle, aber die vielseitigen Identifikationspunkte müssen komplexer ausgestaltet werden, um die Resonanz und die Abgrenzung zu integrieren.

Möchte nach der Diskussion jemand seine Bewertung ändern? Wenn ja, ändert diese in der Tabelle oben.

Two elements are essential for the focus of the method: the first is to show, as much as possible, an open mind and a willingness to compromise for a collaborative exchange of ideas, the second is adopting a visitor-centered perspective (Serrell 2006: 25–29). The visitor-centered view aims to expand the experts' professional perspective and, at the same time, reveal overlaps in the assessment. It serves to identify features that meet the visitors' needs and expectations and enable them to have "positive learning experience[s] in the exhibitions" (Serrell 2006: 164). The framework's criteria support this focus and address the exhibition's overall educational performance that comprises all aspects of one's own user behaviour, for example:

- Do I feel comfortable here as a visitor? Do I feel being spoken to?
- Does the content or the presentation enthuse me?
- Does the visit encourage me in any way or does it perhaps even generate a new sense for me?

Or in Serrell's words: "The tool asks you to be you: A person who, like most people, wants to be comfortable, wants to feel respected, wants to feel the time is well-spent. [...] And, most of all, a person who, as a museum professional, can explain these responses – both the personal and the universal – in terms that your colleagues can understand and discuss" (Serrell 2006: 26).

The method does not require any technical equipment. All that is needed is:

- the framework as the central tool and guideline,
- a group of six to ten professionals,
- a suitable exhibition,
- a quiet room for discussion.

Putting the group together and selecting the exhibition are the most important preparatory steps. Serrell recommends six to ten experts as judges. In case there are plans to further use the produced material, it is necessary to obtain the consent of all participants and inform them about data protection aspects. The entire process takes one to two days not counting arrival and departure days. The exhibition can be visited independently of each other. However, the preliminary and follow-up meetings should take place as a group and be scheduled shortly before and after visiting the exhibition. The method does not provide for any particular post-processing after the second meeting. Instead, the added value of this analysis lies in the repetition: for Serrell, using the framework repeatedly is particularly effective for familiarizing oneself with the method and thus improving the experts' ability to talk about exhibitions. Already during the second meeting, a further exhibition can be selected for analysis (Serrell 2006: 64). Depending on the situation, the results can also be integrated in final or evaluation reports (Serrell 2006: 69).

Case study

The method was first applied in a German translation in March 2020. This was done as part of a research project by the DASA Working World Exhibition in Dortmund, Germany, on the effect of storytelling in the special exhibition *Pia sagt Lebewohl – Eine*

Ausstellung zur Arbeit mit Tod und Trauer (Pia Says Goodbye: An Exhibition about Dealing with Death and Mourning).⁷ In this storytelling exhibition⁸, visitors accompany the fictional protagonist Pia as she goes through the process of mourning and burial after the death of her grandmother, and in doing so, learn about professional fields in which the end of life is part of people's daily work. In order to determine the impact and the assumed effects of storytelling, the exhibition was evaluated summaratively while it was running. This evaluation was carried out using a two-phase mixed methods research design on the basis of complementarity (Kuckartz 2014, 58). The aim was to identify the effectiveness of narrative for visitors' learning experience.

The explorative first part of the evaluation served to describe and assess the exhibition as well as the visitors' user and perception behaviour. For this purpose, the DASA team conducted, in addition to Judging Exhibitions, an overt, non-participatory observation of visitors and standardized written survey. In this context, Judging Exhibitions served to obtain an unbiased description of the general excellence of the exhibition that was independent from the evaluators, as well as to identify variables that might impair the effect of storytelling. In the final comparison of the different evaluation data, some findings of the Judging Exhibitions analysis overlapped with those of the written survey: both experts and visitors evaluated the exhibition's orientation and its narrative approach as essentially positive. In other instances, the results provided by the experts were able to supplement those of the non-participatory observation, as they were able to classify their own visitor behaviour, which also emerged in the observation, thanks to their expert knowledge.⁹

Care was taken to ensure that the selected experts represented a variety of specialist backgrounds in the fields of museum studies and practice (design, curation, education, research). In applying the method, the DASA research team did not primarily aim to promote the experts' professional development. Rather, it was the experts' outside perspective on the quality of the special exhibition *Pia says Goodbye* that was the focus of the research interest. Even though Serrell's method is designed to be used slightly differently, it was possible to apply it without any fundamental alteration in the evaluation. The only modification to the process was organizing an additional final discussion after the second meeting, in which the experts presented their results to the DASA team members involved in the research project.

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- 7 The project 'Potentials and Limits of Storytelling as an Educational Method in Exhibitions' (2017–2023) includes not only the evaluation discussed here but also a fundamental definition of exhibition narratives as part of the PhD project by Jana Hawig in museum studies at the University of Würzburg.
 - 8 Its special feature consists in strategically incorporating suitable narrative elements that aim to enhance the visitor experience.
 - 9 The evaluation results of *Pia Says Goodbye* are available at: <https://www.dasa-dortmund.de/angebote-termine/angebote-fuer-fachbesucher/forschungsprojekt-pia-sagt-lebwohl> (06.03.2025).

Method reflection

With its framework, Judging Exhibitions offers a tool that enables a structured assessment of exhibitions and nuanced statements about the exhibition's excellence. Implementing it in the group affords an intensive exchange on overarching exhibition standards that does not aim for consensus, but rather for reflection on the active shared change of perspectives. On the one hand, the method offers the potential to structure the exchange on exhibitions, on the other, the final joint evaluation provides nuanced statements about the excellence of an exhibition and can positively influence future exhibition planning. However, Judging Exhibitions does not claim to replace visitor studies in the form of empirical social research.

The method is easy to manage in terms of time and personnel. Beyond personnel and travel costs, no further costs arise. The latter can be reduced if the preliminary and follow-up meetings are set up as well moderated online-events. The implementation itself – in particular the meetings – is however a very intensive process that requires commitment and the ability to reflect from the participants. Especially understanding the aspects and their function is more challenging than it may seem after a first reading of the framework. At the same time, this is an opportunity to share thoughts about the quality of exhibitions via conceptual discrepancies, agree on definitions and incorporate further aspects. In addition, this kind of structured exchange about exhibitions is an unfamiliar approach for many museum practitioners that requires a certain amount of openness. If that is the case, the experts benefit from a new way of looking at exhibitions, particularly when taking the visitor-centered perspective into account.

As part of the DASA research project, Judging Exhibitions supplemented methods of empirical social research with a specific evaluation goal and supplied important and valuable findings about the exhibition excellence of *Pia Says Goodbye*, which were also correlated with visitors' assessments. For the exhibition makers of DASA their own exhibition was independently deconstructed beyond empirical research. After some initial confusion about their role (expert vs visitor), the experts arrived at five joint statements in the discussion based on the framework. The subjectivity of the individual assessments was moderated by finding compromises in the group. The implementation with only five instead of six to ten external experts, as recommended by Serrell, can be endorsed without reservation, as already a group of this size was able to embark on an intensive discussion about the assessment of exhibition excellence. One has to take into account, however, that the composition of the group also influences the atmosphere during implementation as well as the joint result, depending on the discipline and individual understanding of roles. This constant readjustment of a group, including the calibrating of concepts, is a specific feature of the method and part of the process.

It has been shown that adaptations of existing analytical approaches can be undertaken quite boldly, because in this case, Judging Exhibitions functioned as a commissioned project. The inclusion of other methods – as in this case study – also offers many possibilities for exploring the quality of exhibition visits. In addition, the format would be a conceivable tool for quality management, for generating funds or for launching a competition.¹⁰ In contrast to Serrell's original intention, the method could also be adapted for interested visitor groups, so that exhibition education, visitors and exhibition studies would be combined. Regardless of this specific application, Judging Exhibitions manages to assess general exhibition excellence. The group-dynamic process also allows for the inclusion of individual viewpoints. This represents a sustainable way to sensitize museum practitioners to visitor-centered needs. You too can be an "excellent judge"!

References

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¹⁰ In Germany, structured evaluation methods such as these are particularly valuable for funding applications, as cultural institutions often have to prove that their exhibitions appeal to visitors and have educational value in order to receive financial support.