ECHOES

EUROPEAN COLONIAL HERITAGE MODALITIES IN ENTANGLED CITIES

Amsterdam Museum Report #3

Visiting the Amsterdam Museum: Studying Visitors' Responses to Decolonial Practices

By: Csilla E. Ariese (University of Amsterdam)

Researched within Work Package 3 '*City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts*' led by Joanna Wawrzyniak (University of Warsaw).

UNIVERSITY OF HULL
UNIVERSITÉ RENNES 2
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW
AARHUS UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
ces Centre for Social Studies University of Coimbra
UNIRIO
University of Cape Town
復旦大學 文物与博物馆学系 DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND MUSEOLOGY
MUSEU NACIONAL DE ETNOLOGIA
MUSEU HISTÓRICO NACIONAL, RIO DE JANEIRO
MUZEUM WARSZAWY
AMSTERDAM MUSEUM
上海市历史博物馆 上海革命历史博物馆 SHANGHAI HISTORY MUSEUM SHANGHAI REVOLUTION MUSEUM
MUCEM Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée

Table of Contents

Visiting the Amsterdam Museum: Studying Visitors' Responses to Decolonial Practices

Dr. Csilla E. Ariese
University of Amsterdam

Introduction

This report was developed within the Horizon2020 project *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* as part of its work package 3 on '*City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts*.' This work package conducts in-depth, qualitative, comparative analyses of three city museums, each representing distinct positions within colonial history. The Amsterdam Museum forms one of these three case studies. The aim of this third report on the Amsterdam Museum is to assess visitors' responses to a selection of the museum's decolonial practices. In part, practicing decoloniality is dealing with direct colonial heritages and objects. However, decoloniality as a whole is "a process and a mode of through that goes deeper into untangling the current-day colonial hooks from the museum" (Ariese & Wróblewska Forthcoming: 1). Thus, as the core of this report will show, there are many ways in which the Amsterdam Museum can practice decoloniality, not always necessarily directly related to 'colonial' objects.

The Amsterdam Museum provides a case study from a city museum located in Western Europe. The third reports on the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum (Pozzi 2020) and the Museum of Warsaw (Głowacka-Grajper 2020) prepared in parallel present case studies of city museums from two different geo-political zones (East Asia and Central and Eastern Europe). A first set of reports focused on the history and evolution of these three city museums and the current state of the museum (Ariese 2019a; Bukowiecki 2019; Pozzi 2019a). These first reports provide a contextual background to the institutional histories, the histories of the cities, and the position of the museums within their local and national sphere. The second set of reports analyzed the ongoing practices and processes of decolonization, which can be identified to different extents at each of these museums (Ariese 2019b; Bukowiecki & Wawrzyniak 2019; Pozzi 2019b). These reports provided greater insights into the museums' efforts to engage in decolonization. Together with this final third set of reports, they ultimately form a nine-part final report of the research conducted on city museums within ECHOES.

This report begins with a foundational overview of the field of visitors studies, including the type of data that can be studied and how such data is gathered. It then specifies the visitors studies that the author designed and conducted in four exhibitions of the Amsterdam Museum during the end of 2019. Both observations and visitor tracking are described in detail. Following this methodology, the report briefly considers some observations of visitor behavior as noticed in the Amsterdam Museum over the course of the study. These observations show how the museum and its exhibitions take on different roles for different visitors. The core of the report reveals the results of the visitors studies in the Amsterdam Museum per each of the four exhibitions. Each of these section first presents the general data and results, to then analyze more closely how visitors responded to specific decolonial practices employed by the museum.

Reference this report as: Ariese, Csilla E. 2021. Visiting the Amsterdam Museum: Studying Visitors' Responses to Decolonial Practices. *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage in Entangled Cities* [Online]. Available at: http://projectechoes.eu/deliverables
Reference the dataset as: Ariese, Csilla E. 2020. Amsterdam Museum: Tracking Studies Results. *DANS: Data Archiving and Networked Services* [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-z2j-ehew.

The Field of Visitors Studies

Although visitors have been a central aspect of the public museum since the beginning, they have not always been a subject of study. With the exception of a handful of isolated studies, visitors studies did not become common until roughly the 1960s (Davidson 2015: 505). Over time, changing perceptions of the role of the museum have also resulted in new ideas about the role of visitors. For example, whereas initially persons visiting a museum would have been termed the 'public,' 'audience,' or 'spectators,' the growing idea that those who visit museum are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in a dialogue has led to the more widespread use of the terms 'visitor' and 'participant.'

For the present, Munley's five purposes of visitors studies remain relevant: to justify the value of the museum and its activities; to gather information for long-term planning; to formulate new exhibitions and programs; to assess the effectiveness of current exhibitions and programs; and, to construct theories to better understand how people use museums (Munley 1986, cited in Hooper-Greenhill [1994] 1999: 69). For these five purposes, a myriad of different methods have been employed by museums, depending on the scope and setting of the study, the resources available, as well as the sought-after results. The following will present a brief description of some of the main approaches in the field of visitors studies.

Possibly the most regularly employed method of visitors studies is the collection of basic demographic information. This sort of study might be done continuously by museum staff, for instance at the ticket counter. By asking each visitor's age, gender, postal code, etc. such basic demographic information could be collected from all visitors over long periods of time. This method requires little adjustment for the staff and can be employed continuously. The results might reveal which age or gender groups visit the museum on which days, the amount of visitors over a year, the popularity of certain temporary exhibitions, and so forth. However, this type of data reveals little about the visitors' experiences, preferences, thoughts, and what they may have gained from their visit.

One type of visitors study focuses on assessing visitors' learning type. Based on a study of classroom education, Fleming & Mills (1992) identified 4 modalities of learning which they termed the VARK-model.[1] These different learning styles are: visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic. Thus, whereas one person learns best by seeing, another may prefer doing. This type of study requires a greater degree of participation and investment of time from visitors as well as from the museum staff. Such a study needs to be designed beforehand and involve an ideally random selection of visitors who dedicate time to completing the study. Due to the ties to classroom education and pedagogy, such studies are most often developed and carried out by staff in the education department. It may involve giving participants information through different media and then assessing which they remember best. Studying visitors' learning types may be especially useful in the early phases of the development of a new exhibition or program. Understanding what medium of learning works best for the museum's target or typical audience is key to designing an exhibition that will get the message across. For this reason, many science centers which target families with young children (strong kinesthetic learners) are rich in exhibits that encourage physical interaction. Most exhibitions, however, deliberately use a combination of media to ensure that all learning types are addressed.

[1] Other models have also been developed with more than 4 learning styles, for instance adding social/interpersonal or logical (mathematical) learning types.

Instead of identifying visitors by their learning style, it is also possible to categorize visitors according to their social behavior when visiting a museum with another/others. Such social contexts can be studied through observing or monitoring visitors. Social interaction is an important part of museum visiting, and thus studying this – and creating opportunities for social interaction – is important. Dim & Kuflik (2014: 6) studied visitors in pairs and categorized them into 6 types: Penguins (they walk together, largely ignoring the exhibits), Geese (they walk together, but with one seemingly leading the other and setting the pace), Meerkats (they move from exhibit to exhibit together, standing side-by-side and each paying a lot of attention to the exhibit), Parrots (they move from exhibit to exhibit together, partially focusing on the exhibit, and partially on each other, interacting), Doves (they interact face to face, largely ignoring the exhibits), and Lone Wolves (visitors who enter the museum together and then split up). By focusing their categories on the physical positions in which these pairs stood in front of exhibits, they were able to develop a digital tracking system that automatically detected these types of social behavior. Naturally, other categorizations of social behaviors have also been developed. To an extent, these kinds of studies can be carried out through (automatic or in-person) observations. The results may be used to e.g. design exhibits that support interaction/reflection (for parrots), or to create a space where visitors can meet up after their visit and engage in a reflective activity (for lone wolves).

Falk (2006) developed a model which instead categorizes visitors according to their motivation for visiting the museum, which he defined as a typology of five visitor-identity prototypes. The Explorer is motivated by curiosity or a general interest in discovering more about the museum's subject matter. The Experience Seeker is interested in the main attraction that the museum is known to offer. The Professional/Hobbyist is interested in specific topics of the museum's full collection. The Spiritual Pilgrim comes to the museum to reflect, rejuvenate, or relax. Finally, the Facilitator is visiting to satisfy the needs or desires of someone they care about. Facilitators may be parents bringing their children to a museum, or a local acting as a guide to a visiting friend or relative. Such a study is most commonly approached through a questionnaire in which visitors are asked for the reason of their visit. The results may be used for communication/marketing strategies, or to adjust the museum to the motivations of its target audience. Knowing what visitors expect to get out of their visit is helpful for directing them to what they are looking for.

Additionally, the categorization of visitors can also be based on their movement types. Levasseur & Veron's (1983) ethnographic observations led to four types: the Ant (who tends to follow a specific path and spends a lot of time observing most exhibits), the Fish (who moves around the center of the room and avoids the exhibit's details), the Butterfly (who is guided by the physical orientation of the exhibits and regularly stops to look for more information), and the Grasshopper (who has a specific, possibly preselected, preference for some exhibits, spending a lot of time on them while largely ignoring others). Many museum observations have shown different movement patterns by visitors, some who prefer following a clearly guided route, others who move together with a social group, or those who are drawn to specific exhibits and 'hop around.' The right-turn bias is also a known circulation pattern, by which visitors move along the right-hand walls of galleries in absence of clear goals/strongly attractive exhibits/path indicators (Bitgood 1995). For these sorts of studies, tracking is the most convenient way of monitoring visitor's movement. This can be either analogue tracking on paper-based maps or digital tracking on the basis of visitors' cell phones, audio tours, or through the placement of beacons (e.g. Lanir et al. 2017). New exhibition designs can choose to play into visitor movement patterns, or

alternatively subvert these expectations through design choices and the layout of the exhibition spaces.

Tracking studies are valuable tools for identifying which exhibits have attraction power (i.e. catch the attention of relatively many visitors) vs. holding power (i.e. hold the attention of visitors for relatively long periods of time). They furthermore give insight into how long visitors spend in exhibitions or in the museum as a whole, indicating where time is spent or which areas are rarely visited. A tracking study of the Louvre (Yoshimura et al. 2014), for instance, confirmed visitor 'hot spots' such as the Mona Lisa, but also showed the museum which hallways and exhibits are less visited, confuse visitors, or have routing issues.[2]

A more complex study is required to apply Falk & Dierking's Contextual Model of Learning (2000). More of a framework, their model contains twelve key factors that influence learning in the museum. These factors include, among others, prior knowledge, expectations, group social mediation, orientation to the physical space, and subsequent experiences outside the museum. Falk & Dierking's research has shown that there is no single factor that disproportionately impacts the learning outcome of a museum visit, but that it is a combination of factors that are varyingly at play. In order to implement a study according to their framework, it is generally necessary to combine tracking or observation of the visitors during their visit, as well as interviews both before and after the visit. By combining pre- and post-visit interviews, it is possible to have visitors complete a Personal Meaning Mapping (PMM) exercise. PMM can take the shape of a question, drawing, mind map, or spider chart with emotions (e.g. Faria et al. 2020; see Figure 1). The latter, for instance, can reveal how the visit has impacted visitors' emotional wellbeing or whether they are suffering from museum fatigue. As this type of study can be adjusted to the specific questions the museum wishes to answer, the results can be manifold. They could be used most broadly to gauge whether the museum is fulfilling its mission.

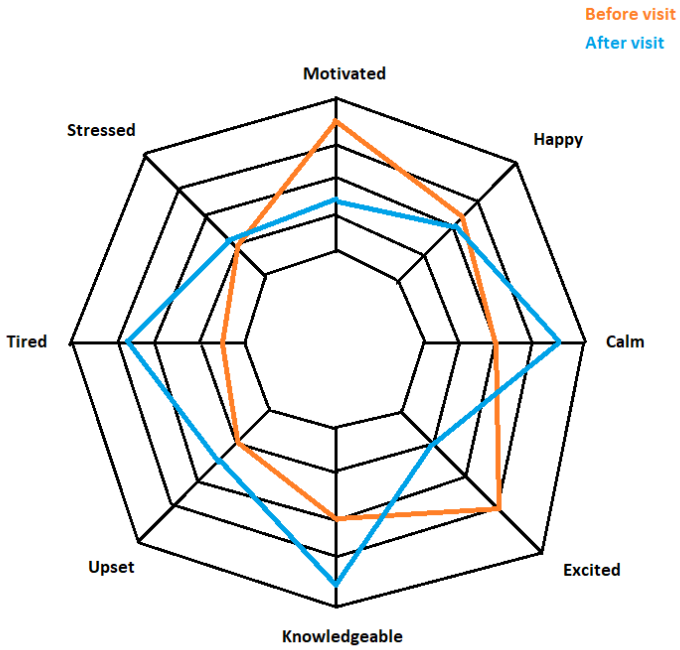


Figure 1: An example of a spider chart of emotions, before and after visiting. Image by Csilla E. Ariese, 2021.

[2] The research project and the resulting simulations and visualizations can also be viewed online: http://senseable.mit.edu/louvre/

The previous paragraphs have indicated which types of data can be gathered through visitors studies and how these may be used by museums. How are these types of data collected practically? Questionnaires are a common methodology. These can be very brief (such as gathering demographic data at the ticket counter), or long and in-depth. Questionnaires, whether paper-based, oral interviews, or digital, are most regularly filled out at the museum, before, during, or after a visit. Only rarely are visitors approached long after their visit with a follow-up survey or do surveys include non-visitors.[3] Tracking studies can be done with analogue techniques, as will be shown later in this report, or with automatic or digital tracking through mobile phones, beacons, audio guides, and so on. Automatic digital tracking allows for greater anonymity of the visitors and avoids the risk that the presence of in-person tracking staff influences visitors' movements. However, in-person tracking can provide more detailed information due to the observation of the tracked visitors. For instance, are they skipping through a gallery to use the restroom or is their odd pathing the result of following a museum guide? Observations can also lead to insights into visitors' conversations and whether the time spent in front of an exhibit is due to admiration, confusion, dislike, or completely unrelated to the exhibit. As such, observations can provide depth to various other methods of studying visitors. As a final example, focus groups are commonly used in the early stages of the development of an exhibition or program. Such a focus group study can be about the exhibition's content, to gauge learning styles, or to test whether the exhibition's message comes across. Before the opening of an exhibition, pilot walkthroughs, possibly combined with a questionnaire or focus group, are commonly employed to ensure there are no 'mistakes' or oversights in the exhibition. Although visitors studies can provide extremely useful information for the adjustment of ongoing exhibitions, they are still rarely used for this purpose. In practical terms, many exhibition budgets do not include funds for post-opening adjustments on the basis of visitors' feedback. For these reasons, many visitors studies held in ongoing exhibitions fail to impact those exhibitions directly, instead their insights are used for future programs and exhibitions.

Finally, any visitors study require careful consideration in terms of ethics. What kind of data is collected, how is this collected, who has access to this data, and so on. Are visitors given the opportunity to opt out during or after the study? Is it clear to visitors beforehand that they are part of a study or being observed? Especially for – covert – tracking studies, these are important issues. On the one hand, it is important for the study to be minimally invasive or disruptive to the visitor, on the other hand, it is important that the visitor is aware that the study is taking place. Whether the museum is undertaking a visitors study directly, or has invited a company in to do a funded study, or has provided access to a researcher for a study, these questions need to be clearly discussed beforehand.

[3] For an example of the latter, Fouseki & Smith 2013.

Methodologies of Visitors Studies at the Amsterdam Museum

As mentioned in the introduction, the author has studied the Amsterdam Museum since 2018 and prepared two previous reports concerning the museum's history and current state (Ariese 2019a) and the museum's ongoing practices and processes of decolonization (Ariese 2019b). These researches into the Amsterdam Museum (AM) have been conducted partially within the museum and have been, to an extent, co-designed with the museum. Staff of the AM participated in in-depth interviews for the second report and all reports and publications have been shared with the AM. From the beginning of the research project, the AM was also interested in knowing more about visitors' responses to their ongoing decolonial work and was therefore highly supportive in the planning and execution of the studies described here. Furthermore, they were particularly interested in learning more about visitors studies methodologies and their differing results, and as such highly encouraged the execution of many different types of visitors studies.

The main aim of this report was to assess visitors' responses to some of the museum's decolonial practices. Designing the studies therefore began with selecting the exhibitions in which decolonial practices have been employed. Ultimately, four exhibitions were selected. In each exhibition, tracking studies were conducted as well as observations.

Selected Exhibitions

Amsterdam DNA (2011) is one of the two permanent exhibitions currently housed at the museum's main exhibition site in the city center. It was designed as the AM's introductory exhibition which gives visitors a chronological, condensed overview of the city's history from its first settlement until today. Its walls consist of eye-catching infographics in black on a red background, which present stats, dates, demographics, events and so on. It is a relatively object-light exhibition and visitors are encouraged to use the audio guide which can be used to activate videos throughout. The exhibition contains a room which is painted gold and covers the period of 1600-1700. It is in this room that themes such as colonialism, slavery, and the plantation system are most overtly visible in *Amsterdam DNA*. The exhibition was selected for study on the basis of the contents and design of this room, as well as the knowledge of previous controversies that this room has triggered (Ariese 2019a: 20-22).

The *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century* (originally opened in 2014 as the *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age*; altered and renamed in 2019) and its embedded exhibition, *Dutch Masters Revisited* (2019-2020) were hosted in the AM's gallery within the Amsterdam Hermitage. This rental location has created the possibility for the AM to exhibit a selection of their well-known large group portraits, for which proper exhibition space is lacking in the AM itself. Originally, the core message of the *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age*, namely that urban citizenship was and is typical for the Netherlands, did not come across as intended. Despite critical perspectives worked into the exhibition, its general impression was one of glorification of the 'Golden Age' and its upper class citizens. The AM decided to change the exhibition, its marketing campaign, and its title – a change which was spurred also by public critique and a case of vandalism of an exhibition poster (see for more detail Ariese 2019b). Beyond these changes, the AM decided to include in the exhibition a temporary embedded exhibition that would rotate regularly. These embedded exhibitions would consist of the works of contemporary artists as a contrasting perspective to the historical group portraits. The first such exhibition was *Dutch Masters Revisited*. This exhibition, as well as the

Portrait Gallery in which it exists, were selected due to this juxtaposition of perspectives and narratives on the Dutch colonial era.

Save As…How to Collect the City (2019-2020) was a temporary exhibition housed at the museum's main exhibition site in the city center. The exhibition focused on the AM's collections, as well as gaps in the collections and what to collect in the future. Infographics showed visitors information about the collection, such as the division between types of objects, when most objects were collected, and some of the major collectors. The thematic exhibition was divided into themes such as 'The Built City,' 'The Generous City,' and 'The International City.' The final two rooms of the exhibition offered space for greater diversity and reflection. In the first of these rooms, the objects were grouped around the theme 'The Versatile City,' to "introduce our recent additions and changing points of view" (AM English panel text, 2019). This panel also explained how certain communities are less well-represented in the museum's collections than others and how the museum is now striving to collect more diversely. A part of this room was set up for the New Narratives project. Here, changing every month, current societal issues were tapped into on the basis of newer collection acquisitions. The final room of the exhibition, themed 'The Entire City,' actively sought visitors' participation to contribute objects to the collection or to offer their ideas on what should be added to the collection in the future. The exhibition was included on the one hand due to its deliberate inclusion of controversial societal issues and on the other hand because of its participatory elements.

Finally, *World–City* (2018) is the second of the two permanent exhibitions currently housed at the museum's main exhibition site. Thematically, it seeks to discuss the relationship between Amsterdam and the world and how these entities see each other. One of its thematic galleries titled 'Perpetrator and Victim' focuses on conflicts that the city and its population have been involved in throughout history, often from differing perspectives. This section includes objects related to WW2, Dutch colonialism in Indonesia and Suriname, as well as Amsterdam's counterculture movement Provo in the 1960s and the assassination of director Theo van Gogh in 2004 following the release of the short film *Submission* which was critical of Islam. The second half of this gallery, titled 'Religion and Tolerance,' contains a large infographic wall about the different religions practiced in Amsterdam. This is followed by the final gallery of the exhibition, 'World–City Revisited.' Sparsely decorated, the gallery contains only a few objects, most of which are made by contemporary artists who re-visualized some aspect of the city and its population. The exhibition was selected for study primarily due to the contents of the 'Perpetrator and Victim' section, as well as the final gallery and its intention to provide a space for reflection.

Tracking Studies

The primary method employed for the visitors study of the Amsterdam Museum was tracking visitors' movements. In each exhibition, I selected two rooms/galleries of interest: for *Amsterdam DNA* the 1st half of the exhibition including the golden room; for *Dutch Masters Revisited* the central room housing the majority of the exhibition and its immediate ante-room in which the exhibition begins; for *Save As* the final two rooms; and for *World–City* the final two galleries.

The first step was making the tracking sheets. Using the museum's original exhibition plans, I reworked these in photoshop to create simplified maps showing the walls of the rooms, the locations of panel texts (marked T), audio-visual materials (marked AV), and objects (marked O). Within the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century*, the objects related to *Dutch Masters Revisited* were marked O, and the historical paintings marked P to differentiate the two interwoven exhibitions.

These maps were then adjusted after a visit to all the exhibitions, as in all cases minor changes/rehanging had occurred since the original exhibition plan had been designed. Then, I added spaces to the sheets to record some basic information per visitor, such as their entry and exit times, their use of the audio guide, and whether they were visiting the galleries alone or not (see Appendix I). To ensure anonymity, and avoid mis-representations, I did not record any demographic information.

For each exhibition, I dedicated two full days (10:00-17:00) to tracking visitors. The planning of the tracking days was designed to cover both weekends and working days to allow for a diverse representation of visitors. Upon entry of a visitor to the first of the galleries included in the study, I started a timer, noted their entry time, and then covertly observed their movement through the exhibition, drawing their movement path on the sheet. Whenever a visitor would more than glance at an item and engage for it for over two seconds, I would circle that item and time their length of engagement. In order to be able to observe the visitor throughout the entire tracking area, it was always necessary to move with the visitor to an extent – especially to be able to see what item they were engaging with – while being mindful not to disrupt their visiting experience by following them too closely. Upon exiting the final gallery included in the study, I would fill out the rest of the sheet including their total dwell time. I then returned to the start and randomly selected the immediate next visitor to enter the gallery.

Following the completion of all the tracking days, I created a database in Excel whereby the information from each sheet could be logged. To differentiate the attraction power of items vs the holding power, I made two sheets for each exhibition. Including all the items per exhibition, I logged them as 1 for engagement or 0 for non-engagement per visitor, and then on the second sheet logged their total time of engagement per item per visitor.[4] As a result, I was able to collect all visitors' movement patterns per exhibition and have Excel calculate the collected results. These will be noted in the following sections.

Finally, by reusing my original tracking maps, I was able to develop heat maps for all of the exhibitions in photoshop. For the heat maps of the attraction power of items, I grouped the items according to which percentage of visitors had engaged with them. Each group received a color, and then each item on the map could be colored according to percentage of engaged visitors (see Appendix II). For the heat maps of holding power, I grouped the items according to the length of time with which the visitors – on average – had engaged with them (see Appendix III). To allow for easier comparison between the exhibitions, the same ranges were used for the color groups for each exhibition. However, this does obscure differences within a single color range.

Observations

Complementary to the tracking study, each exhibition was also the subject of an observation study for one full day. The same sections of the same exhibitions were observed that had also been tracked. Although many observations could already be made during the tracking of visitors, there was often no time to systematically record them or to focus on aspects such as visitor conversations. As such, the observation days proved to be fruitful additions to the tracking days. While security staff is often well-positioned to conduct observation studies, their work at the AM tends to have them walk through the exhibitions rather than stand in one gallery all day to

[4] The full database of results can be accessed through Data Archiving and Networked Services (DANS): https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-z2j-ehew

experience the ebb and flow of visitors. As such, they do not have the opportunity during their work to focus on a single gallery and engage in detailed observations.

For the observation studies, I took notes in a notebook. Unlike with the tracking studies, during which I walked throughout the gallery with a clipboard of tracking sheets, for the observation studies I was more stationary, selecting a bench or other seated location within the gallery. During a day of observation, I tallied all visitors entering the gallery, differentiating between organized groups and other visitors. On occasion, I wrote down fragments of visitors' conversations ad verbatim, noting which item elicited that comment. I furthermore noted observations about visitors behavior, movements, and peak times in the exhibition space. Additionally, I timed the audio-guide stops to have an idea how much time would be needed to listen to all the audio in a given exhibition section. The observations were used in the writing of this report to complement the tracking studies' results.

Ethics

The planned visitors' studies were openly discussed beforehand with various museum staff: the artistic director, the head of the project department, a project leader, a curator, a floor manager, and a marketeer. A first point of discussion was what kind of studies I was planning to conduct, and what kind of support I would be needing from the museum to do so. The museum was very eager for me to conduct many different types of visitors' studies, specifically because they were interested in learning more about different methodologies and what kind of information they might reveal. Thus, the project department was helpful in identifying which type of study would require which type of assistance from which department. A marketeer was involved to be able to set up online surveys, through Google Forms, on behalf of the museum according to my design. Finally, floor management was important because they logged all my planned days for visitors studies in the internal calendar system and briefed security and ticket counter staff each morning when a study would take place. As such, security and ticket counter staff were not only aware of my presence in certain galleries, but would also be able to answer any queries from the visitors.

Of course, tracking studies are best executed without visitors noticing – to avoid influencing their behavior – but as this is unethical I had agreed with the AM to openly conduct my studies. I received a large button with the museum's logo to wear and was otherwise recognizable by my clipboard or notebook as being in the exhibition space for a non-visiting purpose. I was also open about what I was doing when asked, although over the days of tracking and observations only 4 visitors inquired what I was doing and I openly showed them the tracking sheets. I was prepared to destroy any data collected from visitors who were opposed to being studied, but received no such requests. Finally, I tried to ensure that my studies were as minimally disruptive to visitors as possible, so that they could enjoy their visit as at any other time.

Limitations

Initially, I had outlined a plan to do many different types of visitors studies, specifically to test out different methodologies and to be able to compare their results and to see which information can be gathered best through which method. As such I had planned for the following studies:

a) Tracking studies in 4 exhibitions, 2 days per exhibition
b) Observations in 4 exhibitions, 1 day per exhibition
c) Observations during New Narrative Tours and Queer History Talks (both monthly events), 4 events each
d) Surveys over email (post-event) with participants of the New Narrative Tours and Queer History Talks, 4 events each
e) Surveys in-person (on a tablet) with visitors exiting 2 exhibitions,[5] 2 days per exhibition
f) Personal Meaning Mapping (on paper) with visitors before and after visiting 2 exhibitions,[6] 2 days per exhibition.

I had prepared the tracking sheets, the opt-in forms for the email surveys, the questions for the email surveys, and the questions for the in-person surveys in October-November 2019. All of the surveys I had pilot tested with members of the New Narratives team in mid-October and had made adjustments according to their feedback. The tracking and observation days in the exhibitions were scheduled into the AM's internal calendar. The email surveys for the two types of events were set up via Google Forms and linked to an AM account. The in-person survey was also set up via a Google Form and placed onto a personal tablet. Only the Personal Meaning Mapping sheets had not yet been designed prior to beginning the visitors studies.

I started by conducting the event observations, with a New Narratives Tour on 12 October 2019 and a Queer History Tour on 26 October 2019. During these two events I took notes of my observations and also passed around a voluntary opt-in form for a follow-up email survey, collecting the email addresses of 16 participants. November's New Narratives Tour was cancelled, and the other three events in November/December I was unable to attend due to conference and holiday travels.

I began conducting the tracking and observations studies of the four exhibitions on 9 November 2019 and completed the final tracking study on 21 December 2019. By then, I had spent 2 days of tracking in each exhibition, as well as 1 day of observations in all exhibitions with the exception of *Amsterdam DNA*.

At the start of 2020, I was diagnosed with a burn-out and was on long-term sick leave. As such, I was unfortunately unable to conduct the observations of more New Narratives Tours and Queer History Tours (study c), or to collect email addresses from their participants for the survey (study d). Thus, I have omitted the data from the 2 observed events entirely from this report.

A combination of factors led to the fact that this report now only contains data from the tracking and observation studies of the four exhibitions (studies a & b). I was unable to do any work at all for a period of six months during my sick leave. The exhibition *Save As* was closed on 1 March 2020 and dismantled, thereby eliminating the plan to do Personal Meaning Mapping in that exhibition (study f). Not long afterwards, the Covid-19 pandemic led to a first lockdown in the Netherlands and the Amsterdam Museum was closed from 13 March until 1 June 2020. Even following this lockdown, visitation was restricted and anti-Covid measures were in place. Due to the ever-changing travel limitations, the audience of the AM was significantly different than it had been during the tracking studies in late 2019, particularly due to the lack of foreign visitors. Furthermore, visitation was limited to a set amount per day with different routing in place in the

[5] These exhibitions would have been *Dutch Masters Revisited* and *Amsterdam DNA*.
[6] These exhibitions would have been *Dutch Masters Revisited* and *Save As.*

museum and reserved time slots. As such, the planned surveys (e) and PMM (f) would have been more difficult to execute and their data would have been incomparable to the studies a & b. *Dutch Masters Revisited* was closed on 18 October 2020 and replaced by a different temporary exhibition within the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century*. Finally, due to a second lockdown, the AM had to close again on 5 November 2020 and – by the time of writing in March 2021 – has not yet been allowed to reopen. Thus, I chose to only use the data I had gathered in 2019 and then only from the tracking and observation studies in the four exhibitions, as these were the only studies I had been able to complete fully, according to the plan, and under 'normal' visiting conditions. Certainly, these decisions and choices have greatly impacted this resulting report. Primarily, the wealth of different types of data that was collected was severely less than that which had originally been planned. I was much less able to test out different visitors studies methodologies and the report is therefore only focused on the results as they relate to decolonial practices, not also a comparison of which type of study could best be used to collect different types of information.

What Visitors Do in the Amsterdam Museum

The setting of a museum, and the context of a visit, give rise to many differing experiences and behaviors by visitors. For them, the role of the museum visit can be highly diverse. As such, the curatorial 'dream' visitor who thoughtfully explores an entire exhibition, engaging with every object and reading every panel, is a rarity. In truth, visitors use the museum and its exhibition spaces for all kinds of reasons. This was also true for the Amsterdam Museum and the visitors observed in its four exhibitions.

A majority of visitors to the AM are there together with another person/other people. For them, the museum also provides the setting for a social experience. Depending on that social experience, the role that the museum plays differs. In *Dutch Masters Revisited*, I observed two visitors who appeared to be friends that had not seen each other in a long time. Sitting on a couch within the gallery, they were discussing a recent house purchase and matters of mortgages and insurances. They did not directly engage with any of the objects in that hall. Seemingly, this particular part of the museum was little more than a backdrop for their conversation. In *Amsterdam DNA*, I observed two students who seemed to be on a first date. The museum functioned as a supposed 'safe space' to meet a stranger, as well as an ice breaker. A historical painting of a bird's eye view of Amsterdam provided a starting point for a conversation on where they had grown up in the city, while other objects triggered conversations about their families, current studies, and part time jobs. However, as they were becoming more comfortable with each other, they continued to move from object to object but paid less and less attention to them and more attention to each other. Of course, many visitors converse about the objects they encounter in the museum exhibitions. This can be small statements or exclamations: "wow, look at this!" "this is beautiful," or "have you seen this?" Sometimes visitors have deeper conversations, in which they bring together the objects in the exhibition and their own lives. As conversations tend to do, the topics discussed can meander, sometimes relating to the museum and sometimes not at all. Yet, these social experiences are clearly valuable to their participants.

Naturally, it is no surprise that the AM also provides ample opportunities for educational experiences. The exhibitions, their objects, and accompanying texts and audio-visual tools, all aim towards some kind of knowledge exchange. Whether this is factual historical knowledge, insight into art history, or guiding visitors' perspectives to discover new thoughts and make new connections. In *Save As* I observed a group of visitors discussing the museum's purpose of the exhibition, as they sought to identify the exhibition's key message and goal. Perhaps most obviously educational are the many group tours held in the museum, whether for a primary school group in *Amsterdam DNA* or university students studying public history in *Save As.* Led by museum educators, these tours provide a greater dialogue between the museum (through the guide) and the visitors. Visitors in the group can ask questions on the spot and have them answered. Doubly educational are the tours for people learning Dutch as a second language. On the one hand, in *Amsterdam DNA*, they learn more about the city they live in and on the other hand they are also learning a new language. Beyond organized groups, visitors with children can also ask for a booklet with activities, which guide the children to find and look at specific objects and learn about them. Finally, for the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century*, there is a unique audio tour – in Dutch only – created and spoken by well-known photojournalist Hans Aarsman. Quite remarkable for a museum, this tour is an hour long and consists only of a few, very long stops. Yet, it is totally riveting. Visitors will sit or stand and listen through the entire tour, letting Aarsman's perspective

guide them to look at various small, interesting details in the historical artworks. The tour is also highly humorous which no doubt adds to its success. All of these examples of educational tours and activities directly influence the movement of visitors within a given exhibition space. When following a tour guide, a booklet, or a directed audio guide, their own free roaming is limited.

For some, visiting the museum is a statement: I was here. These visitors will ensure that they photograph themselves or ask to be photographed. They may create a detailed record of their visit to share with others afterwards. Similarly, for some their experience is predominantly visual or aesthetic. In *Dutch Masters Revisited* I observed two visitors who came in immediately after opening hours. They were intent on creating a series of photographs, in which one of them posed with their back towards the camera in front of all the historical group portraits. Their movement through the exhibition was erratic as they went back and forth between the same paintings several times, and their engagement with the objects was visual – they had no interest in reading accompanying labels (see Figure 2).

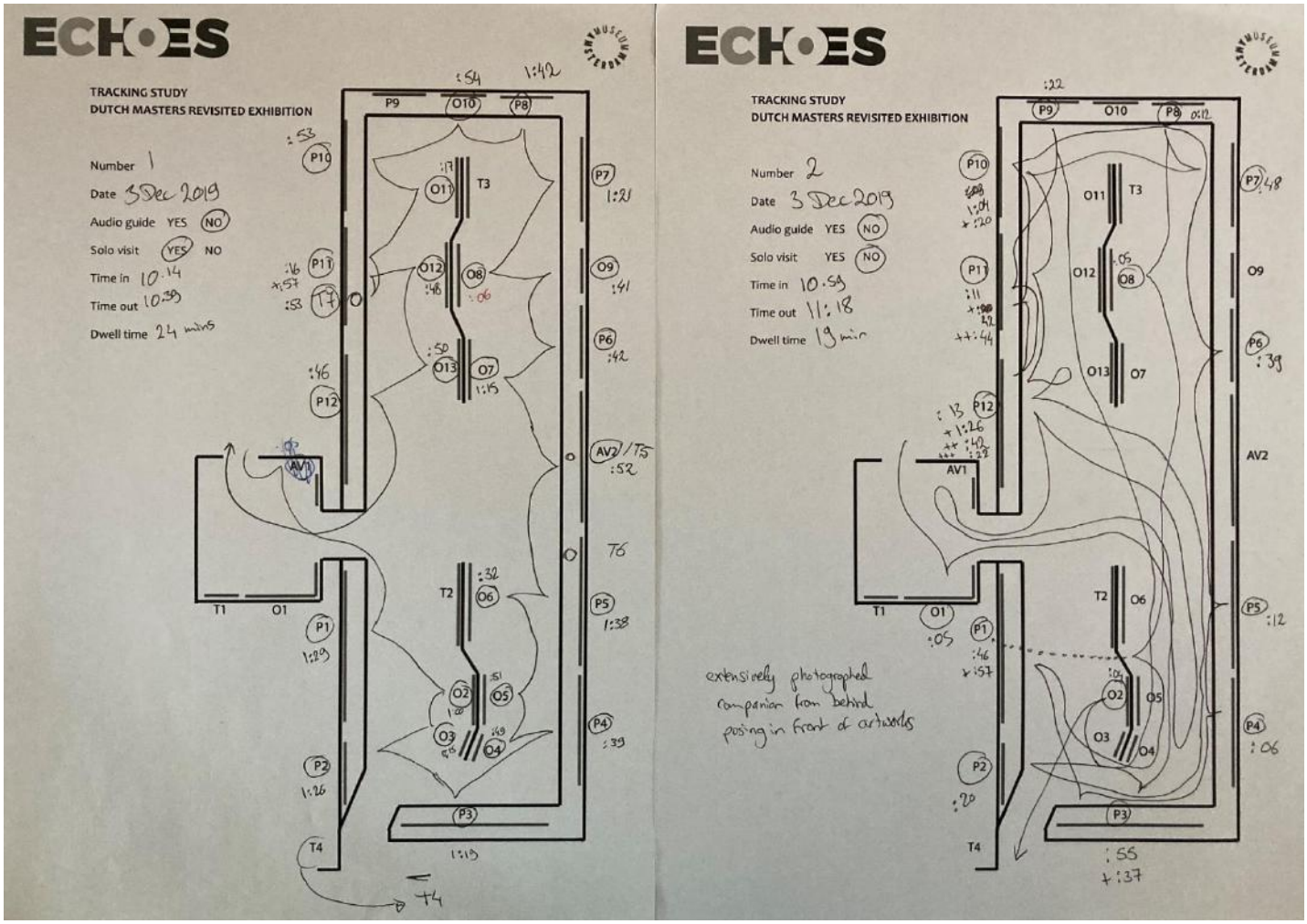


Figure 2: Two visitors in *Dutch Masters Revisited*, one taking a structured route, the other pathing erratically while taking posed photographs of their companion. Tracking sheets, 2019.

Finally, visitors do all kinds of other things when they are in an exhibition gallery. They are on their phones or waiting to meet up with their companions. They are grouped together to discuss what they will do after their visit, where they will have lunch or a coffee break. They are crossing back and forth because their audio guide does not work. In the case of the Amsterdam Museum, which has been compared to a maze due to its housing in dozens of former small buildings, visitors

may simply be lost: they are looking for another exhibition or are accidentally at the end when they are looking for the start (see Figure 3). In some galleries, visitors may just be cutting through rapidly on their way to a bathroom, barely noticing the exhibition at all. Movement impaired visitors may necessarily be back-tracking through an exhibition to get to the nearest elevator. In *Amsterdam DNA* I observed a grandparent with their toddler-aged grandchild walking through to reach the special children's exhibition, *The Little Orphanage*. The child was highly interested in all the objects in *Amsterdam DNA*, especially the globes, and wondered if they could see this instead. The grandparent replied "we'll come back here when you're a bit older."

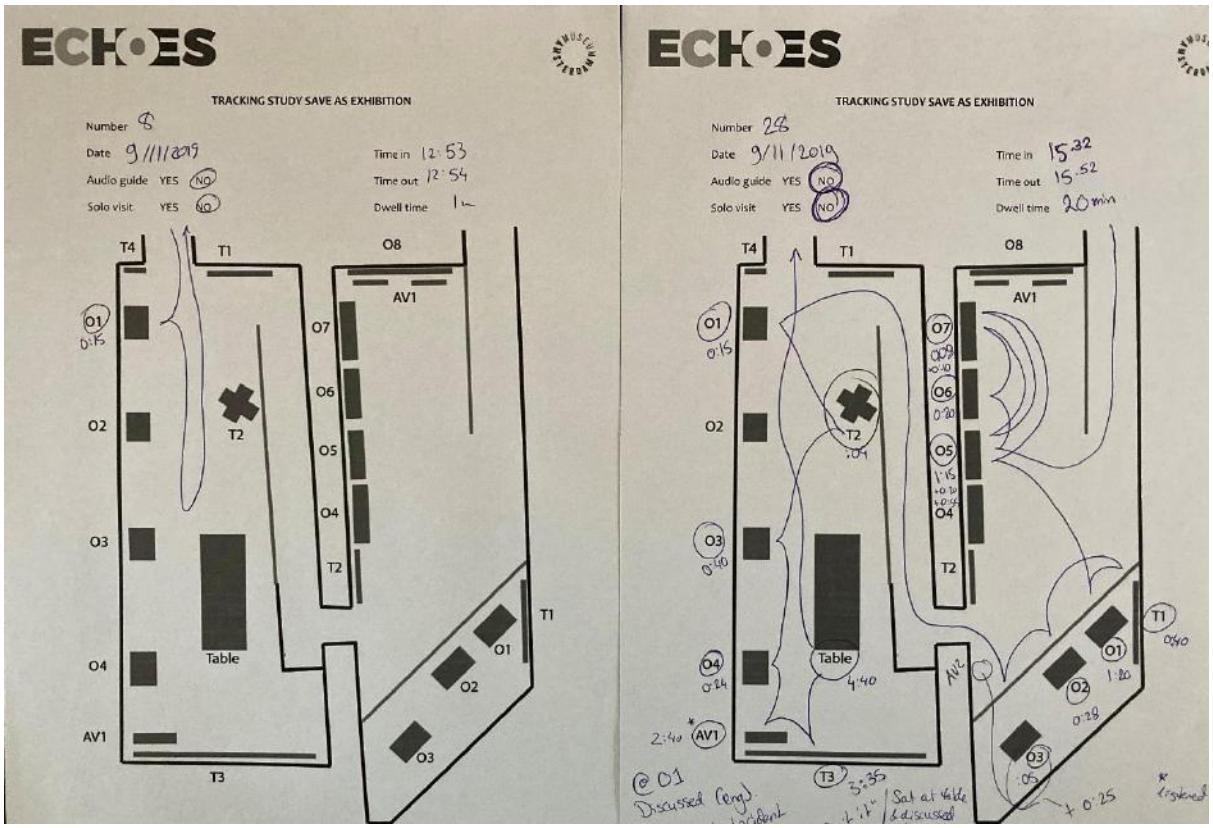


Figure 3: Two visitors in *Save As*, one entering at the end and leaving immediately, the other spending a long time in the exhibition and engaging with (almost) everything. Tracking sheets, 2019.

All of these visitor behaviors are common, even if they are not always what curators have in mind when they design an exhibition. Yet, we have all had or observed similar experiences. In one exhibition we may wish to read everything, while in another we take on the role of facilitator to guide out-of-town visitors past what we consider to be highlights. At some point, we may suffer from museum fatigue and only minimally engage with the exhibition at all, wondering when we can take a coffee break. Many of these behaviors can be easily observed and can help to better design exhibition spaces. For instance, the long sequences in the Aarsman audio tour could be supported by dedicated seating in front of the paintings discussed. Naturally, improving wayfinding is one of the aspects high on the Amsterdam Museum's agenda, but observations such as these studies can indicate where the main issues lie. Finally, tours, labels, and texts can also play a role in guiding social experiences and conversations, by providing suggestive questions for conversations, for instance.

Exhibition: Amsterdam DNA

Amsterdam DNA is a permanent exhibition that begins just above the museum's entrance and ticket desks. It is the starting point for most of the museum's visitors and is the first exhibition in the natural path provided by the museum. Visitors can skip this exhibition and go to the temporary exhibition or, if they wish to skip ahead to the other permanent exhibition *World–City*, they need to cut through the beginning and end of *Amsterdam DNA*. Once the visitor climbs the wide set of stairs to the start of *Amsterdam DNA*, the exhibition is all on one floor level in two long rectangular parallel galleries. This study included the entire first gallery, which is divided into two rooms. The exhibition was designed to provide a condensed overview of Amsterdam's history and its main target audience is tourists. It is purposefully intended to be a brief exhibition, a nutshell of history, that tourists may combine with other exhibitions in the museum or can explore in a single hour if they have a busy itinerary. The exhibition is also very suitable for organized group tours, not just for tourists but also for school classes as part of the history curriculum, or groups of Dutch language learners as a combined opportunity to improve language skills and local cultural knowledge.

The exhibition is generally well visited by both groups and individual visitors, especially due to it being the 'must-see' part of the museum. Perhaps most noticeable in the summarized visitors studies results (see Table 1) is the high percentage of audio guide users (80%). On the one hand, the audio guide for this exhibition is available in 10 languages.[7] This is a helpful tool for visitors who may not be able to rely on the written texts in Dutch/English. On the other hand, the audio guide is provided immediately after the ticket desks, where security or floor staff are always posted and enthusiastically recommend everyone to take the audio guide with them. Both on average and median, visitors spent 17.5 minutes in the studied half of *Amsterdam DNA*. Due to the circular pathing of the exhibition, and the exhibition being the start of a museum visit, visitors tend to walk through the entire space without fatigue, neither getting lost nor skipping rooms. The exhibition is also well-visited throughout the whole day, from opening until closing.

Table 1: Summarized results of the visitors studies in the exhibition *Amsterdam DNA*.

Visitors observed	none
Visitors tracked	30
Audio guide users	24 (80%)
Solo visitors	11 (37%)
Average dwell time in minutes	17.5
Median dwell time in minutes	17.5
Shortest dwell time in minutes	6.5
Longest dwell time in minutes	38
Least frequently engaged item	O13 – 0 engagements
Most frequently engaged item	AV1 – 26 engagements
Item with the lowest average engagement time	O13 – 0 seconds
Item with the highest average engagement time	T3 – 109 seconds

[7] Namely Chinese, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

The attraction power of the items in *Amsterdam DNA* was highly varied (see Page 20). A bust in the second room attracted no visitors at all (O13) and the panel text with the exhibition credits was viewed by only one visitor (T2). On the other hand, most visitors engaged with the video and audio point (AV1; 87%) that is located on the whole wall immediately at the top of the stairs where the exhibition begins. That this item is attractive is not surprising. Firstly, the visitor basically walks into it upon mounting the stairs – and it is a good place to rest for a few moments and catch their breath. Secondly, the moving images projected on an entire wall are an attractive eyecatcher. The exhibition contains no main text panels (although of course there are object labels), instead providing its core information in the form of infographics which spread across a chronological wall throughout the entire exhibition (see Figure 4). Of these, particularly the section T3 was very attractive, engaging 83% of visitors. There was an interesting division in attraction power notable in the audio-visual devices in the first room. The large video screens with audio points (AV1, AV3, AV4) and the interactive corner where you can photograph yourself in a lace collar (AV7) attracted a range of 63-87% of visitors, whereas the smaller computer screens that ask you to make a choice and thereby compile your own 'Amsterdam DNA' were noticeably less attractive (AV2 and AV6; 33 and 50% of visitors respectively). The exhibited objects across both rooms were varying attractive with no clearly discernible pattern in types, sizes, or styles of objects preferred. In a few cases the attraction power of certain items (such as screen AV1 in the second room; 67%) overpowered nearby items that were not within the most natural walking path (e.g. O1 and O2; each 17%).

Figure 4: One of the infographic walls in *Amsterdam DNA*, objects, and bell tower audio (T4, O4-O7, and AV5). Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

Perhaps surprisingly, the item with the highest holding power in the exhibition was a section of the infographic wall (T3; 1:49 min). Less surprisingly, this was followed by the three large video screens with their audio points. These videos, which are activated by the visitors' audio guide, naturally draw visitors in to see the full loop. In terms of museum objects, the historical painting of Amsterdam from a bird's eye view had the most holding power (O8; 1:07 min). This object is of interest to local residents and visitors from abroad alike, letting people identify where they are now, where they are living/staying, and other sites. Indeed, the artwork is protected by an extra layer of plexiglass as it is so inviting to pointing fingers. For other objects, to an extent the larger objects (a case of archaeological finds O3; a big painting O4; a wall of portraits O7; a wall of objects O14; or a group portrait O16) have a somewhat greater holding power, ranging from 38-54 seconds. Naturally, these items, sometimes consisting of multiple objects or detailed paintings, need some more time to take in. Smaller, singular items have slightly less holding power (mostly <30 seconds).

The Colonial Corner

Figure 5: The golden room in *Amsterdam DNA*. Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

The second studied room, painted in gold, roughly covers the history of Amsterdam during the 17th century. There seems to be a division in tone here, between the majority of the room which is golden, filled with paintings and portraits that depict wealth, power, and control (see Figure 5) and one different corner. The objects in most of the room show the growth of Amsterdam through its new canal belt with luxury houses for merchants, the charity of orphanages funded and managed by the well-to-do, a model of Amsterdam's expansive city hall, and silver goods. Although some of

the accompanying labels have been (re-)written to also note 'the darker side' of this history, the impression of the room is one of celebration, pride, and awe. Within this room, one corner continues the red walled infographic. This red wall encapsulates a 'colonial corner' (see Figure 6). Not only does a map on this wall show the trade routes of the Dutch, including the trade in enslaved persons, but it also details the sugar production process on plantations. Embedded into this wall is a diorama that has seen much controversy (AV3; see also Ariese 2019a: 19-20). The diorama is overlain with a projected video that shows a white plantation owner, his black female servant, their child, and a few black workers. As discussed in a previous report, some visitors are pleased that this history is being depicted, whereas others consider it a renewal of trauma and humiliation.

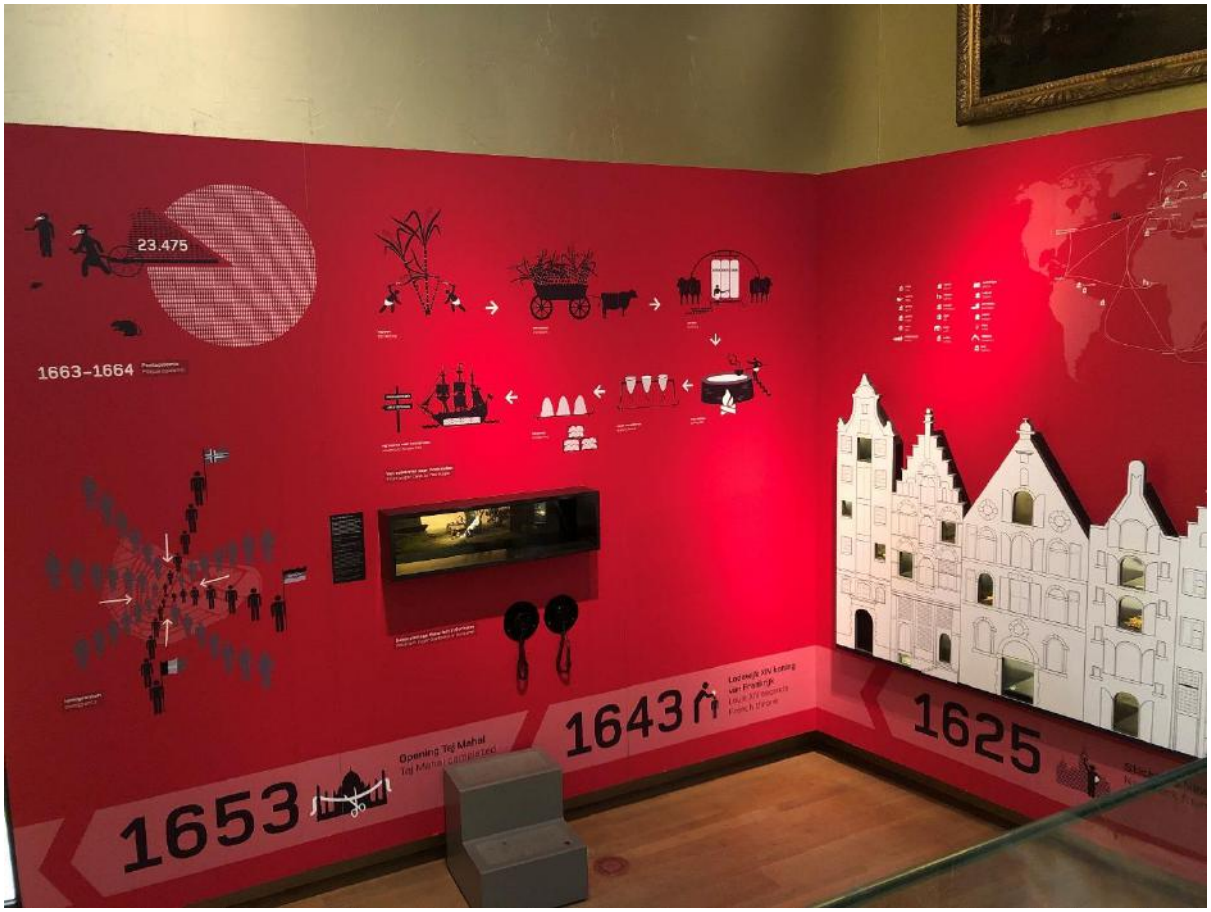


Figure 6: The colonial corner in *Amsterdam DNA* with its infographic wall, diorama, and model canal houses with spices (T1, AV3, and O17). Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

In *Amsterdam DNA*, the following decolonial practices were identified: creating visibility of sugar plantations and the trade in enslaved persons, and a limited decentering of the perspective of the 17th century as a 'Golden Age.' The lack of some other decolonial practices will also be considered.

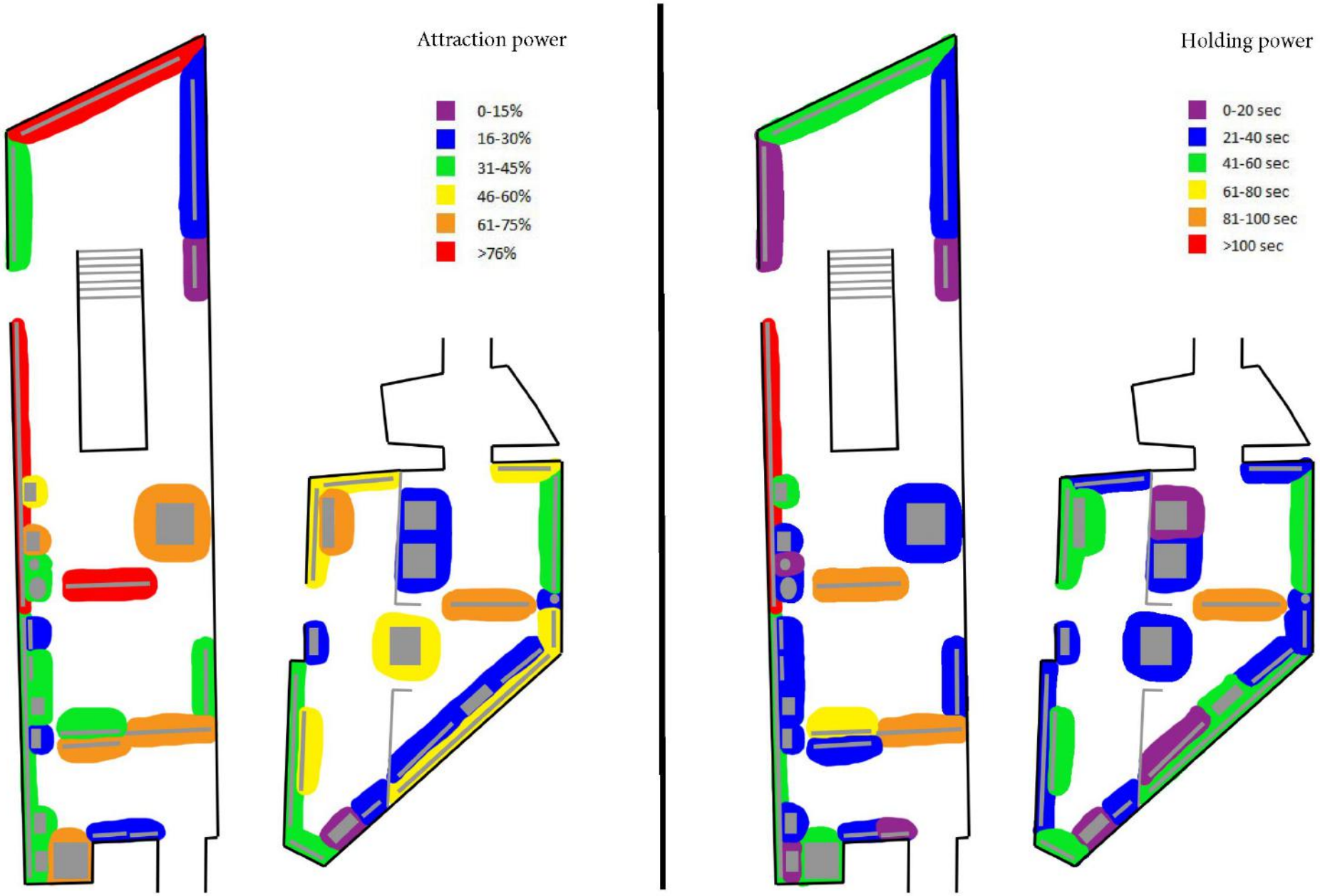
Firstly, the contents of the colonial corner creates visibility of the historical existence and workings of sugar plantations in the Caribbean, as well as the trade in enslaved persons that the Dutch were involved in. The corner contrasts with the rest of the room by showing what, and whose exploited, forced labor, was at the root of the wealth of Amsterdam. The tracking studies results show that the colonial corner was an attractive part of the room, with its three items engaging 50-63% of visitors. Only the large video screen in this room was more attractive (AV1; 67%), with the remainder of the items in the room attracting 50% or less of visitors. The colonial corner

was also decently effective at holding visitors' attention. On average, visitors spent 54 seconds engaging with the diorama (AV3) and also 54 seconds engaging with the infographic wall (T1). The model canal houses (O17), which contain spices and other goods that visitors can smell, were engaging for on average 28 seconds. Although adults and children alike interacted with these houses, the time of interaction was significantly shorter than with the other items in this corner. However, it should be noted that the holding power of the items in the colonial corner was comparable to the remainder of items in this room. Observations revealed mixed responses to the diorama, which was in line with feedback the museum has received over the past years from visitors.

Secondly, one can identify a limited decentering of the perspective of the 17th century as a 'Golden Age.' The original design of the room with its very obvious golden shine has proven difficult to decenter. Although some objects in the room have been replaced since the creation of the exhibition and some object labels have been re-written to present a less euphoric vision of the 17th century, the overarching impression of the room has been hard to change. Besides the overwhelming golden color, the video with which visitors begin their visit in this room is highly influential. The narrative of the video is one of fantastic trade, spectacular wealth, and power on a global stage (see also Ariese 2019a). Considering that the majority of visitors engages with this video (AV1; 67%; on average 1:28 min), it is to be expected that their view of the room is affected by it. Two items with re-written labels present counter narratives (O3 and O12). However, both were less attractive to visitors (50% and 30% respectively). Their holding times do indicate that visitors could have spent time reading the labels (40 and 34 seconds), which is positive in terms of hoping the counter-narratives were understood. Naturally, a questionnaire or PMM would have been helpful in assessing to what extent visitors responded to this limited decentering.

There are two issues to note regarding the decolonial practices in this room. On the one hand, there is a lack of empathy in the tone of the exhibition. The arrogant celebratory narrative of the video is not helpful in creating an atmosphere of empathy for those exploited by the colonial system. The diorama also suffers from a lack of empathy. If placed in a more empathic context, possibly also warning visitors that they might be strongly emotionally affected by the visual and audial aspects of the display, the diorama could be more positively evaluated. Instead, visitors now are left free to interpret the context and tone of the diorama, leading to vastly different experiences ranging from highly positive to deeply negative. On the other hand, the museum has failed in this room to transparently be vulnerable. Although much of the museum staff knows and agrees with previous visitors' critiques of this room, this is not apparent to new visitors. Indeed, the museum has in the past covered over part of the infographic wall that was considered offensive due to its depiction of an enslaved person in chains with an average sale price over their head. Due to the invisible removal of this image, visitors are left in the dark that the museum is aware of the problems with the exhibition and has worked on changes and improvements. The golden room and the colonial corner could highly benefit from the museum vulnerably showing its past short-comings in the design, content, and narrative of the exhibition, as well as openly and transparently revealing what has been changed and what more the museum would like to change – given funds and possibilities. It should be noted in closing that in the spring of 2021 new changes to this room were announced during an episode of the museum's online talk show, AM Live.[8]

[8] AM Live #8, 25 March 2021.


Attraction power
0-15%
16-30%
31-45%
46-60%
61-75%
>76%
Holding power
0-20 sec
21-40 sec
41-60 sec
61-80 sec
81-100 sec
>100 sec

Exhibition: Dutch Masters Revisited

The *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century* is housed in the Amsterdam Wing of the Hermitage Amsterdam across two floors. The exhibition opens with a large group painting and then traverses a series of smaller rooms before leading into a great hall full of more group paintings. Afterwards, the exhibition continues in a loop on a higher floor. This loop of small rooms, fringing the high great hall, offers occasional views down into this hall. The exhibition as a whole has a clearly indicated one-directional path that encourages visitors to experience the whole exhibition in order. The Hermitage Amsterdam also houses its own (temporary) exhibitions, but visitors can choose to buy a combi-ticket or a ticket for only a single exhibition. Visitors are free to select the order in which they visit the exhibitions which are not linked to each other. As a result, visitors are not generally fatigued at the start of their visit to the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century*.

At the time of this study, the exhibition also included the temporary exhibition *Dutch Masters Revisited*. This exhibition began in the anteroom of the great hall and was for the rest located entirely in the hall. The intention of the exhibition was to juxtapose the historical group paintings which feature white people – predominantly men – with modern photo portraits of well-known people of color taking on the characters of real historical persons of the color from (roughly) the 17th century. This juxtaposition was highlighted by the design of the exhibition, which placed the photos in the center of the hall with 'windows' through which the visitor could see the paintings (see Figure 7). Two photos were also hung between the paintings on the walls.

Figure 7: Overview image of *Dutch Masters Revisited* juxtaposed within the great hall of the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century*. Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

Table 2: Summarized results of the visitors studies in the exhibition *Dutch Masters Revisited*.

Visitors observed	238
Visitors tracked	34
Audio guide users	12 (35%)
Solo visitors	11 (32%)
Average dwell time in minutes	14
Median dwell time in minutes	12
Shortest dwell time in minutes	1.5
Longest dwell time in minutes	47
Least frequently engaged item	T4 – 0 engagements
Most frequently engaged item	O10 – 25 engagements
Item with the lowest average engagement time	T4 – 0 seconds
Item with the highest average engagement time	AV1 – 73 seconds

The visitors studies results of these two entangled exhibitions reveal the popularity of both exhibitions – and particularly their combination (see Table 2). On average, visitors spent about 14 minutes in the great hall and its anteroom, with the longest recorded dwell time at 47 minutes. The shortest dwell time of 1.5 minutes was a rarity: a visitor who entered the hall and perhaps changed their mind. The moment of entering the great hall often has a positive effect on visitors. After the previous small rooms, the great hall is surprising and impressive in its size as well as the amount and scales of the works exhibited. Thus, visitors exclaim "wow!" or "beautiful!" when they enter. Roughly a third of the visitors used the provided audio guide, which could greatly impact their visiting times as well as pathing and behavior. The audio guide could be used for a) a general guided tour of the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century* exhibition, b) a specific Dutch tour through the eyes of photojournalist Hans Aarsman, or c) a tour of the *Dutch Masters Revisited* exhibition. The latter was rarely used, perhaps because visitors did not notice the placement of the audio tour points, which were located next to the photos and not next to the label texts. The users of the Aarsman tour, however, most clearly had their behavior guided by the tour. The tour directs visitors from painting to painting and then spends several minutes discussing details in those painting. As a result, visitors will stand (or sit) still in front of the included artworks for long periods of time.

As a whole, the items in the studied exhibitions had a high attraction power (see Page 26). Notably, the photos of *Dutch Masters Revisited* were most attractive, ranging from attracting 47-74% of visitors. Comparatively, the paintings of the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century* were less attractive: 26-53% of visitors. Unsurprisingly, the selection of paintings discussed in the Aarsman tour had more attraction power than those not included. Least attractive were the various main panel texts of both exhibitions (0-38% attraction). Entirely unnoticed by visitors was the final text panel with the credits for both exhibitions. Possibly in part due to its placement, in the hallway after exiting the great hall, placed to the left whereas the route of the exhibition leads to the right, visitors completely missed this item.

In opposition to the attraction power division between the two exhibitions, the holding power of the paintings (ranging 33-63 seconds on average) was higher than that of the photos (ranging 21-47 seconds on average). Again, in part this is thanks to the Aarsman tour. However, observations also revealed that this is mainly because visitors engaged differently with the photos than they did with the paintings. The photo portraits led visitors to read the accompanying object labels – which contained the story of the portrayed character– and only secondarily to observe the photos themselves. The time spent on each photo was generally as follows: a few seconds of

observing the photo, attracted possibly by recognition of the well-known person acting as model; c. 25 seconds to read the object label; a few more seconds to observe the photo. On the other hand, the object labels of the paintings were rarely read and visitors instead spent their time engaging directly with the artwork. Considering the size of the artworks and the many people portrayed in each, it is not surprising that observing the paintings and their details takes time. An item with relatively low attraction power (38%) but high holding power (1:13 min on average) was the subtitled video showing the behind-the-scenes process of the making of the *Dutch Masters Revisited* exhibition, as well as short interview fragments with curators, models, and researchers (AV1).

Juxtaposing Perspectives

The design of *Dutch Masters Revisited* was intended to provide a juxtaposing perspective to that of the group portraits exhibited in the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century*. Visually, the photo portraits contrasted with the group paintings, not only by presenting people of color, but also by highlighting them as individuals rather than as groups. The accompanying biographies also revealed the complexities of personal trajectories, showing that people of color played out different roles in history, for instance that some were also involved in the trade in enslaved persons as perpetrators. These complex biographies were also very different than the descriptions accompanying the various paintings, which more commonly focused on a group as a whole or on their cause, such as the portrayed regents of a prison for women. The two exhibitions contrasted in content, information, style, and form. Yet, at the same time, the design of *Dutch Masters Revisited* clearly intended them to function together.

The following decolonial practices could be identified in *Dutch Masters Revisited*: increasing inclusivity of the museum's workings, creating visibility for historical people of color, decentering perspectives of the 17th century, and improving transparency of the exhibition-making processes and their actors.

Firstly, an important aspect of the exhibition was that it has been curated by someone who was not staff of the AM: Jörgen Tjon A Fong, founder of the cultural organization Urban Myth which creates interdisciplinary theater productions. Naturally, Tjon A Fong collaborated closely with the museum in creating the exhibition, but the core idea of the series of photo portraits had been entirely his own invention. Indeed, the pilot exhibition of his first 3 portraits a year earlier had inspired the museum to approach Tjon A Fong. With Tjon A Fong as guest curator, the exhibition project involved many actors that had not participated in the workings of the Amsterdam Museum before. Some of the studied visitors may have noticed this increased inclusivity in the behind-the-scenes video, but alas did not read about this in the exhibition credits panel. The results are therefore inconclusive as to the visitors' responses to this decolonial practice.

Secondly, the visibility of historical people of color was the key message of the exhibition. The photographs stand in sharp contrast to the historical paintings, which feature 253 white men and 12 white women in total. The *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century* thereby gives the biased and erroneous view that people of color either did not exist in 17th century Amsterdam, or were not present in any positions of power. Indeed, (archival) research that proves the presence of people of color in Amsterdam at that time was consulted for the creation of *Dutch Masters Revisited* (Ponte 2018; Ponte 2019). The inclusion of the large photo portraits (9 men and 5 women) effectively illustrates this fact. Due to the size of the photos, they are able to visually compete with the paintings and draw the attention of viewers: "this is so beautiful! I didn't see that the first time."

The results of the tracking studies shows that the historical people of color indeed gained visibility. During their visit, visitors noticed and engaged with the photographs. Of the tracked visitors, only 5 predominantly engaged with the historical paintings, whereas 19 predominantly engaged with the photographs, and the remaining 10 evenly engaged with both. Three of the visitors who engaged with the photographs were not attracted to any of the items of the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century*, but all of these people were only very briefly in the exhibition space (<4 minutes). Overall, the results show that historical people of color were or became visible to all the visitors. Indeed, with only 3 exceptions, visitors engaged with the *combination* of the two exhibitions. As one visitor remarked looking through a 'window' between two of the photo portraits "I like how this is done" (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Design of *Dutch Masters Revisited* (O7-O8) with a window on the paintings of the *Portrait Gallery of the 17th Century* (P12). Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

Thirdly, the question is to which extent visitors responded to the aim of *Dutch Masters Revisited* to decenter their perspectives of the 17th century. For this decentering, the object labels were highly important as they described the biographies of the historical people portrayed. These biographies showed complex personal stories which went far beyond the stereotypical dichotomies of black | white, poor | rich, enslaved | free, or powerful | powerless. Certainly, this decentering was effective for those well-known persons of color who modeled for the portraits and were therefore knowledgeable of the research relating to 'their' historical person. As rapper Typhoon reflected in the audio stop of the portrait of Elieser whom he modeled as:

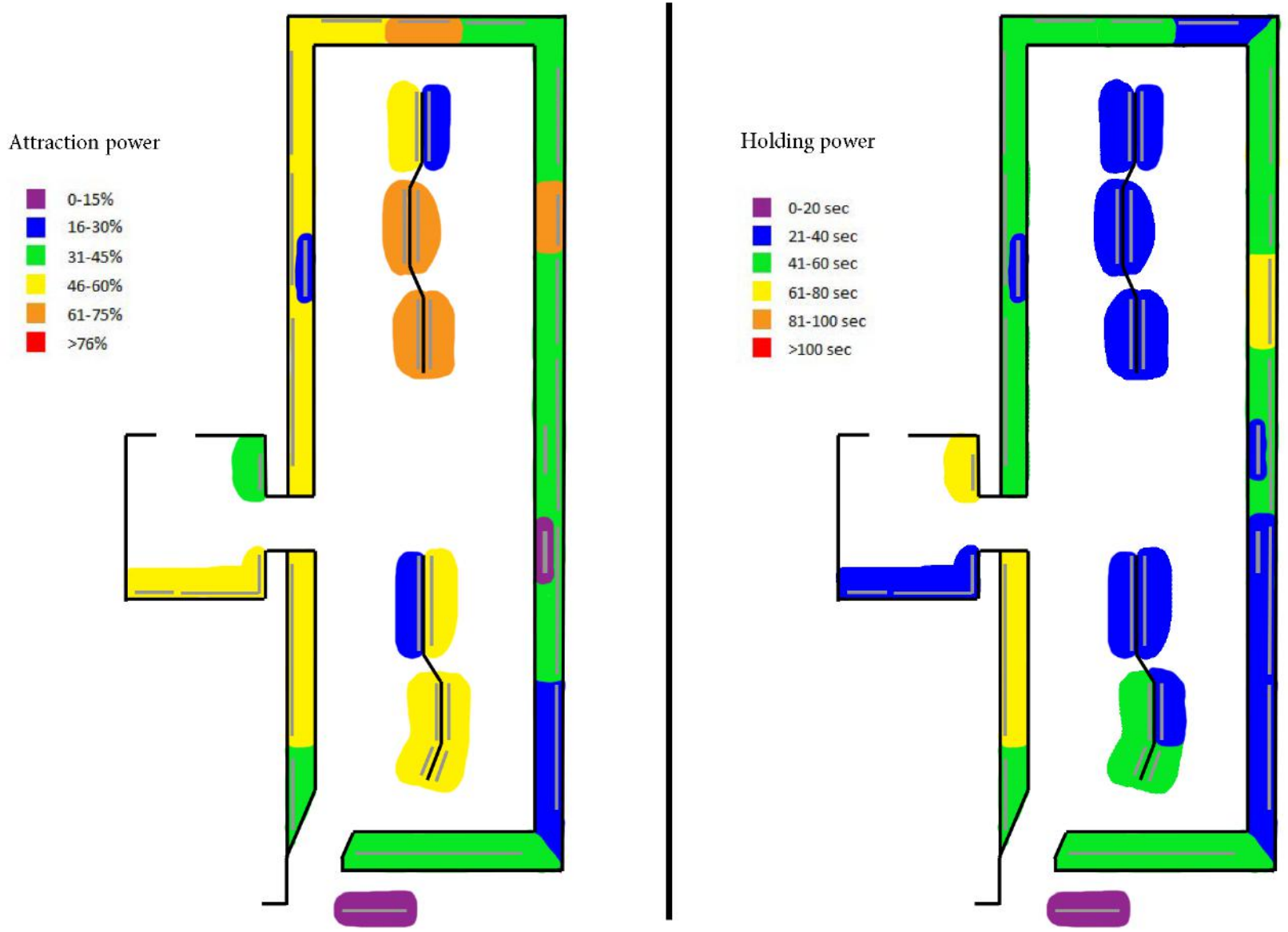
> *We discovered that in my family tree we had slave owners and slaves. That was kind of shocking to me, but at the same time I felt some kind of peace because I realized it's not up to my history but it is up to me to decide where I want to go.*

A similar change in perspective was also noted by events manager Donna Lewis in her audio stop:

> *My thoughts were that people of color at the time were slaves or poor. My thoughts weren't that they were free and like all the other people. The stories were unknown, also to me.*

The tracking results combined with the observations show that visitors who engaged with the photo portraits often also read the accompanying label texts. This is encouraging in terms of the possibility that their pre-existing perspectives may have been affected as a result. Unfortunately, I was not able to observe many conversations in this exhibition. In part, the size of the hall inspires visitors to whisper in hushed voices. At the same time, the setting does not support lengthy conversations, rather people point to things and make brief comments. However, one visitor in reading one of the *Dutch Masters Revisited* main text panels remarked with surprise "huh, was Middelburg a center of the slave trade?" The importance of the text panels and object labels in decentering was highlighted in another brief comment by a visitor. Looking at the first photo of the exhibition, without reading the label, they were quick to jump to conclusions: "if you're a slave and you have such a nice suit on, then it wasn't so bad." In fact, the photograph depicts Abram Petrovich Gannibal who was most likely born in present-day Cameroon. Captured by a neighboring state and gifted twice, he was freed by Tsar Peter the Great and in the Tsar's entourage he visited Amsterdam in 1716-1717 and developed a career as a soldier and engineer. At the portrayed time, he was certainly not 'a slave.' To summarize, the power of the exhibition to decenter the perspectives of visitors lies mainly in its written and spoken texts. Whereas the visibility of persons of color will have been improved for all visitors, decentering will have been limited to those who chose to engaged with the contextual material (in written or audio form).

Fourthly, regarding improving the transparency of the exhibition-making process and its actors, this was most noticeable in the behind-the-scenes video. As mentioned above, this video was only viewed by a minority of the visitors (38%) but had strong holding power, meaning that those who were attracted to it spent a significant time watching. Due to the fact that none of the visitors engaged with the text panel with the exhibition credits, other actors involved in making the exhibition will not have been clear to visitors. Thus, the museum had offered transparency, but the visitors did not respond to it. As an exception, the visitors *did* respond to the persons portraying the historical characters. Due to the fact that many of these persons are well-known or even famous in the Netherlands, Dutch visitors were quick to recognize them and point out former professional soccer player and current soccer manager Ruud Gullit or controversial politician Sylvana Simons. A survey may have provided more insight into visitors' responses to this transparency of the exhibition-making process.


Attraction power
0-15%
16-30%
31-45%
46-60%
61-75%
>76%
Holding power
0-20 sec
21-40 sec
41-60 sec
61-80 sec
81-100 sec
>100 sec

Exhibition: Save As

The temporary exhibition *Save As* was located in five building sections, all on the same floor level, grouped around a hallway with a stairwell. Visitors following the main path through the museum will have already seen the two permanent exhibitions *Amsterdam DNA* and *World–City* before they reach this temporary exhibition space. It is possible to take a shortcut through the museum to only visit this temporary exhibition, but observations indicated that only a minority of the visitors took this option. The two rooms included in the visitors study are parallel to each other and next to the hallway. As a result, they can be skipped entirely.

By the time visitors reach these final two rooms of the exhibition, they are often tired or lack concentration. They are at the very end of their visit. Some visitors choose to just quickly walk through these final rooms, to at least have 'done' everything. Other visitors, and particularly organized groups, may skip these rooms altogether if they have run out of time. The visitors studies results show that this part of the exhibition is on the one hand poorly visited and on the other hand visitors have very short median dwell times (2 minutes; see Table 3). The somewhat confusing layout of the temporary exhibition also means that some visitors accidentally enter these rooms first and quickly backtrack when they realize this is the end and not the beginning, influencing the tracking results. There was only a small amount of visitors who spent relatively long in the exhibition spaces, the longest time being 20 minutes. Although audio guides are available for this exhibition, only 17% of visitors studied actively used this tool in these parts of the exhibition.

Figure 9: The participatory wall (T3) and its embedded music video (AV1) in the exhibition *Save As*. Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

The attraction power of the items in these rooms was generally low (under 28%) with the exception of three objects: the participatory wall (T3; 37%; see Figure 9) and two cases in the New Narratives display (O1; 35%; O2; 37%). These will be discussed in greater detail below. Still, it is discouraging that no items were able to attract the attention of even a majority of the visitors. Particularly unattractive to visitors were the individual audio point in the New Narratives corner (AV2; 3%), the text panel with the exhibition credits (T4; 3%), and a display case containing only a card that asks visitors what is missing in the city's collections (O2; 4%).

In terms of the holding power, by far the longest time was spent at the table in the second room (on average 2:22 min; see Page 32). This table was intended as a place for visitors to fill out a card and write down what they were missing in the city's collections and what should be collected in the future. The cards could then be pinned to the participatory wall. Only 8 of the tracked visitors sat down at the table, but they did so for relatively long periods of time. Not all of them sat for the purpose of participating in the exhibition, instead the table was a place to rest, discuss the exhibition, or make plans for after their visit. A similar pattern of lower attraction and higher holding power can be seen with the tv screens that enabled visitors to search the museum's online collection database (AV1; 13% attraction power; 1 min holding power). Finally, a display case that also had good holding power (O5; 50 seconds) was one filled with many smaller items including their individual labels. Once attracted to this case, visitors would spend some time to review multiple items.

Table 3: Summarized results of the visitors studies in the exhibition *Save As*.

Visitors observed	150
Visitors tracked	78
Audio guide users	13 (17%)
Solo visitors	29 (37%)
Average dwell time in minutes	3
Median dwell time in minutes	2
Shortest dwell time in minutes	0.5
Longest dwell time in minutes	20
Least frequently engaged item	AV2 & T4 – 2 engagements each
Most frequently engaged item	O2 & T3 – 29 engagements each
Item with the lowest average engagement time	T4 – 3 seconds
Item with the highest average engagement time	TABLE – 142 seconds

Supporting Dialogues

The focus of this exhibition was on providing an insight into the structure and diversity of the Amsterdam Museum's collections. It specifically also drew attention to gaps, omissions, or biases in the collections. Throughout the exhibition as a whole, there were objects of directly colonial nature, for instance items brought to Amsterdam by colonial migrants or diplomatic gifts received by the city.

In the studied rooms, the New Narratives corner was dedicated at the time to the topic of Zwarte Piet and demonstrations against this racist figure who is part of the traditional Sinterklaas celebrations (see Figure 10).[9] By exhibiting comic books, post cards, playing cards, and a Zwarte

[9] For more about Zwarte Piet and linked (de-)colonial conversations in Amsterdam between 2010-2020, see Ariese 2021.

Piet mask, the displays, its accompanying labels, and audio points pointed out the racist legacies of colonialism that were casually funneled into harmful black caricatures and representations of Zwarte Piet. All of these items were roughly from the last 50 years, showing how 'normalized' these racist stereotypes were. A third display case contained items by artist Quinsy Gario from his project *Zwart Piet is Racisme* (2011) – purchased by the AM for their collections – such as spray cans, a stencil of the project's slogan, and a stenciled t-shirt.

Figure 10: The New Narratives corner and its Zwarte Piet displays (T1, O1-O3) in the exhibition *Save As*. Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

The final room's center point was the participatory wall. With clipboards and notes, the wall encouraged visitors to think about "what histories, objects and stories are we missing?" in order to create a collection that truly represents 'the whole city.' Blank papers with a short prompt were freely available so that visitors could write down their answers and clip them to the wall. The room contained few display cases, but some of these showed recent additions to the collections, such as a poem about home and being homesick by a migrant. Additionally, every Sunday visitors could come to the museum and donate stories or objects to the collections. The museum also approached certain persons specifically, such as artists or activists, to come and donate items on these days.

In the studied rooms of *Save As* the following decolonial practices can be discerned: creating visibility of and decentering racist heritages, increasing inclusivity of the museum's collections, and improving transparency about the problems with the museum's collections. For all of these practices, the museum supported opportunities for visitors to engage with each other in dialogue and also to engage with the museum in a conversation (whether indirectly through a note or directly with a staff member on Sundays).

What can the visitors studies results say about the visitors' responses to these decolonial practices? Firstly, in terms of the racist legacies illustrated in the Zwarte Piet exhibits, particularly the use of well-known children's comic books was effective at decentering. Visitors pointed these objects out to each other, having read them as children and now seeing them in a different light: "it makes me ashamed now" and "God, that is no longer possible nowadays." The relevance of the topic and the national polarization of the Zwarte Piet 'debate' ensured that visitors discussed these displays. The infamy of Zwarte Piet is even known abroad, so foreign visitors were able to discuss the topic or engage in a deeper conversation with their guide or local friend: "where can we see the Black Pete mask? Oh cool. I mean, not cool!" The timing of the exhibition coincided with the time of year when Sinterklaas traditionally 'arrives' in the Netherlands and the discussion is all the more visible in the media. Even more so, on 8 November 2019, a closed national meeting of the group Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP) was besieged by pro-Piet extremists with fireworks and weapons. Unable to enter the building, they proceeded to vandalize cars and windows in the area. Coincidentally, the following day I was tracking in the exhibition. Naturally, these violent events were also discussed by visitors: "disgusting, isn't it?" The tracking data shows that the displays were relatively attractive to visitors, although they did not necessarily spend a lot of time engaging with them. However, observations revealed that visitors continued discussing the topic for longer than they engaged with the displays.

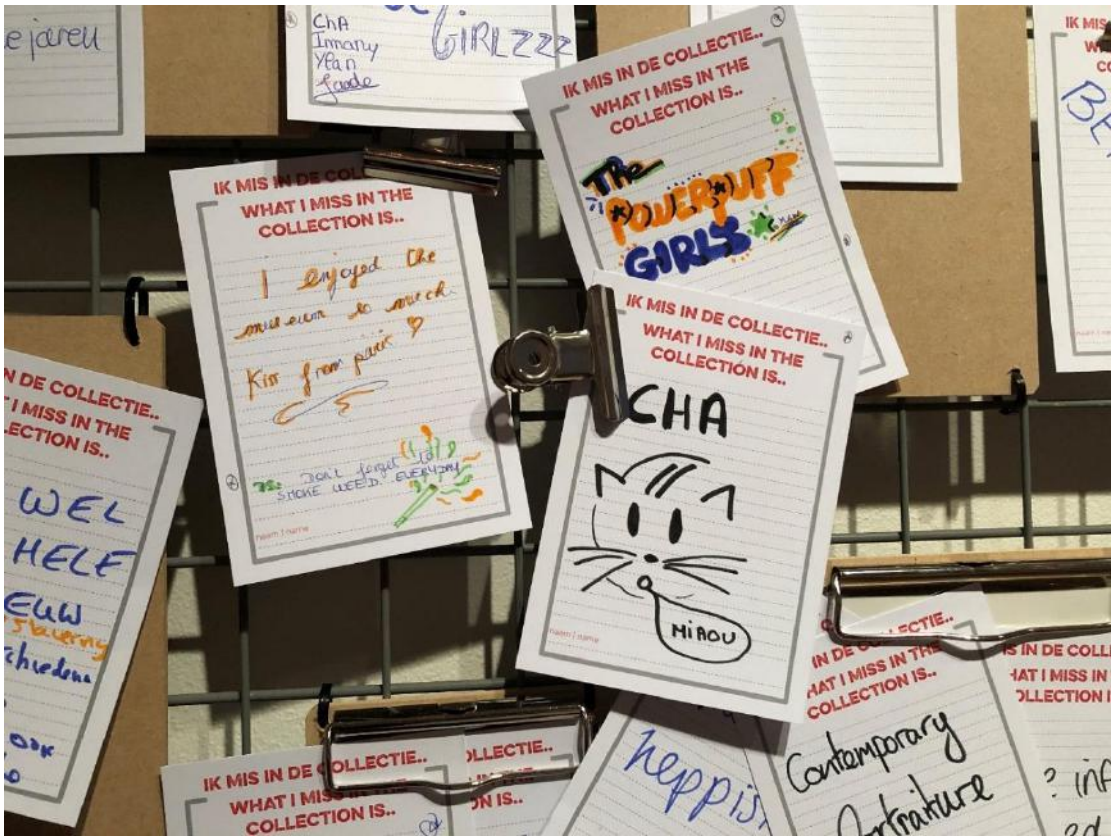


Figure 11: Visitors choose to participate in their own ways. Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

Secondly, regarding increasing the inclusivity of the museum's collections, the second room was clearly dedicated to this purpose. On the one hand with its participatory wall and on the other hand with its active program to receive – and exhibit – new donations to the collection. The participatory wall, as mentioned above, had relatively good attraction power as well as holding

power. Visually, the wall has a strong presence due to its size and many attached notes, drawing visitors closer for a better look. Visitors then discuss the notes of others, either agreeing or disagreeing with their suggestions: "yeah, the *Night Watch*,[10] then you're in the wrong museum," or "Heineken? Darling, that's already here." However, as has already been shown with other participatory elements in museums and more widely, people are far more likely to participate as spectators than as creators (see e.g. Simon 2010: 8-9). Thus, significantly more people were observed to read the items on the wall and discuss them, rather than write and add their own note. Furthermore, not all visitors engaged with the wall in terms of the (lack of) inclusivity of the museum's collections. Roughly half of the notes were like guestbook entries in which people signed their names to mark that they had been here or reflected on their visit as a whole (see Figure 11). Nonetheless, the participatory wall was also effective at sparking dialogues between visitors as well as offering visitors a way to 'reply' to the museum. One visitor who wanted to critique the New Narratives perspective on Zwarte Piet chose to do so on a participatory note (see Figure 12):

> *The story of the Black Pieters is <u>not</u> in itself racist and is another part of Dutch culture being destroyed by those who cannot see past those unfortunate examples where the depiction of the Black Pete looks like a black person, and should instead show a Spanish male who is smeared in chimney ashes.*

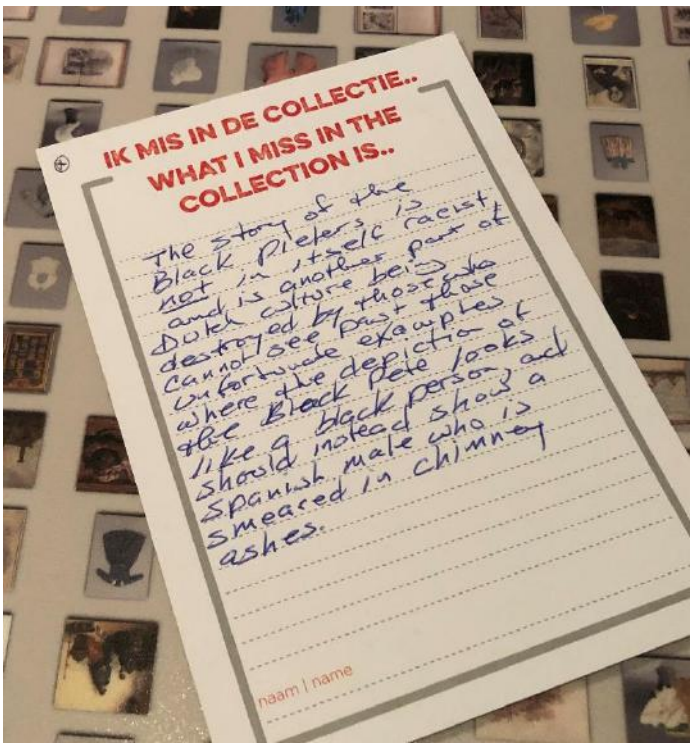
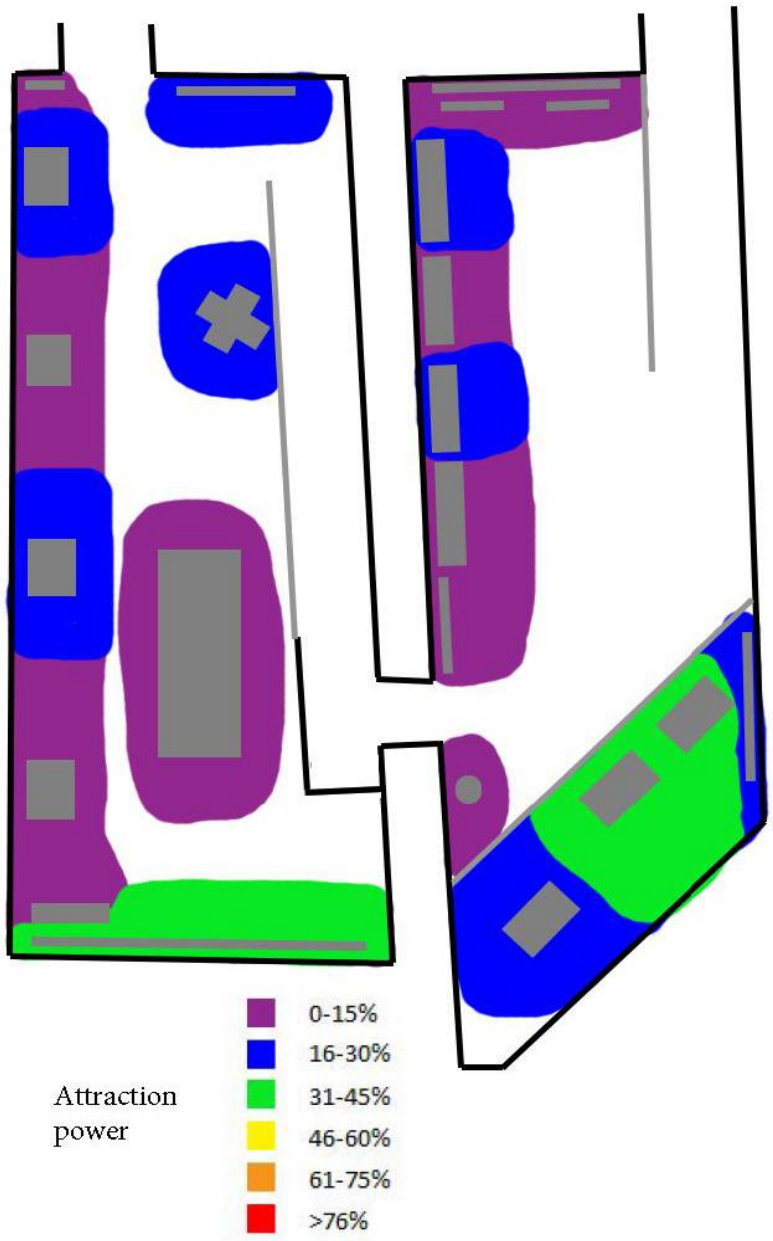


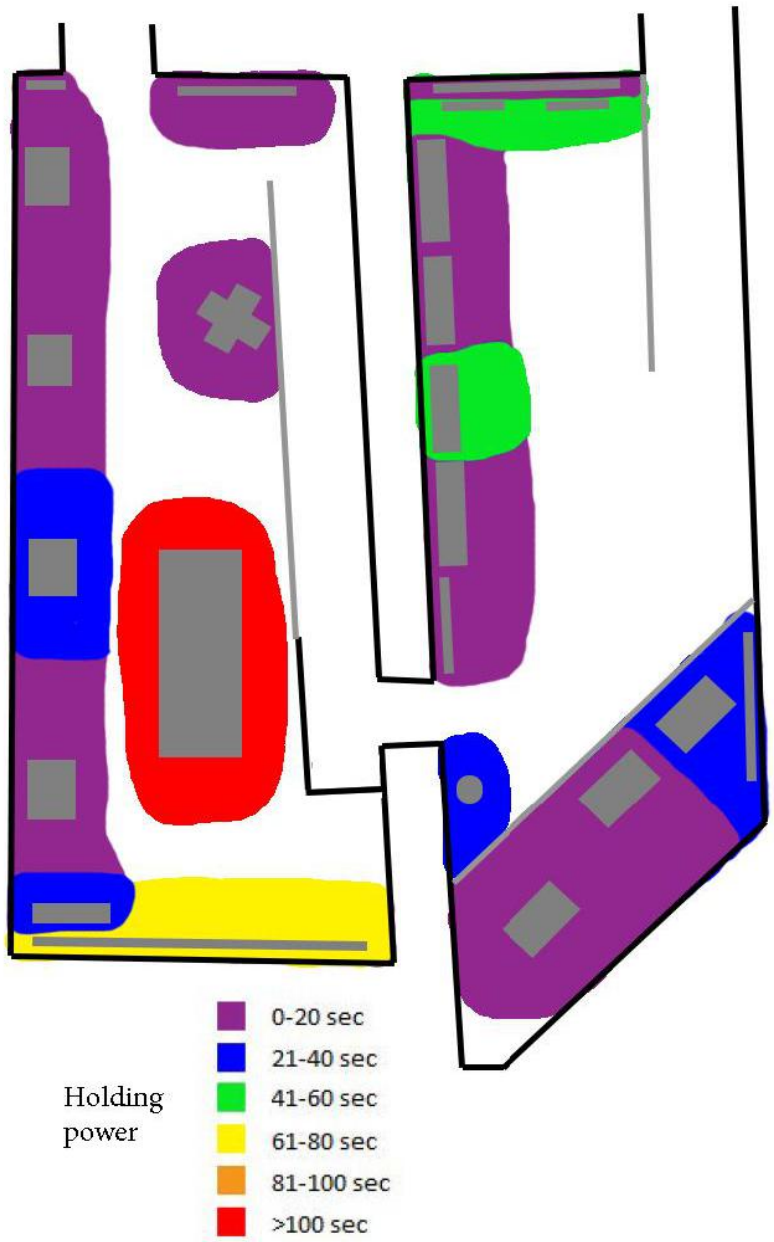
Figure 12: A visitor's critique of the Zwarte Piet displays. Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

As far as the program to receive new donations to the collection, this was less attractive to visitors. The empty display case with a card to consider what's missing in the collections barely attracted visitors and the other cases in this room with recent donations also had relatively low attraction and holding power. Furthermore, observations on a Sunday and a conversation with the staff member present to accept donations showed that this opportunity was appreciated by visitors mostly for the possibility to converse with the staff member in person about the exhibition and the collection, but only rarely involved accepting donations live.

Thirdly, improving the transparency of the museum about the problems with their collections, and the museum's vulnerability in being open about this, did not appear to be noticed by visitors. Although visitors who engaged with the participatory wall were willing to think along about gaps in the collection, the conducted visitors studies could not identify whether they further had any thoughts about the museum's efforts to be transparent and vulnerable. Exit survey could have been a way to identify the visitors responses in this regard.

[10] Rembrandt van Rijn's *The Night Watch*, 1642, is part of the *Amsterdam Museum*'s collections but has been on long term loan to the *Rijksmuseum* and has been on display there since 1885.


Attraction power
0-15%
16-30%
31-45%
46-60%
61-75%
>76%


Holding power
0-20 sec
21-40 sec
41-60 sec
61-80 sec
81-100 sec
>100 sec

Exhibition: World–City

The permanent exhibition *World–City* begins at the end of *Amsterdam DNA* and paths through several connected buildings of the Amsterdam Museum. The studied parts of the exhibition are the final three rooms, which are located in two long, rectangular galleries parallel to each other. Due to the structure of the AM, the pathing through *World–City* is, in principle, one linear route. However, prior to these final two galleries is a stairwell where visitors can ascend to the temporary exhibition. Therefore, it is possible for visitors to skip the end of *World–City*. On the other hand, connected to the Southern end of these galleries are two spaces that necessitate visitors to walk through *World–City*: the regents' room and bathrooms. The regents' room is the historical meeting room of the civil orphanage's regents and features original decorations and furnishings. It is the only period-room in the museum and a main attraction to many visitors. School groups and other visitors may just quickly traverse one of the final galleries of *World–City* on their way to the regents' room. Likewise, the location of the bathroom also attracts visitors who do not, or barely, engage with the exhibition as they walk through.[11] Thus, tracking results include dwell times of 1 minute (see Table 4).

Table 4: Summarized results of the visitors studies in the exhibition *World–City*.

Visitors observed	127
Visitors tracked	35
Audio guide users	17 (49%)
Solo visitors	16 (46%)
Average dwell time in minutes	7.3
Median dwell time in minutes	7
Shortest dwell time in minutes	1
Longest dwell time in minutes	25.5
Least frequently engaged item	AV1 – 1 engagement
Most frequently engaged item	O8 – 25 engagements
Item with the lowest average engagement time	T2 – 5 seconds
Item with the highest average engagement time	O8 – 67 seconds

Roughly half of the visitors to this exhibition used the audio guide (49%), although observations showed this was mainly at the beginning of the first gallery where an audio point introduces the concept and key message of the first section, 'Perpetrator and Victim.' Most visitors who visit the exhibition have started by visiting *Amsterdam DNA*, thus these final rooms mostly see visitors in the afternoon. Despite the pathing instructions, visitors do get lost in this part of the museum, either confused which of the two last galleries to begin with, how to get to the regents' room/bathroom, or where to find the temporary exhibition. Floor staff and security are prepared for these questions and regularly walk around this area to be able to give directions. The median dwell time of visitors was 7 minutes, with the longest dwell time 25.5 minutes. Tracking and observations showed that visitors spent more time in the 'Perpetrator and Victim' + 'Religion and Tolerance' gallery than in the 'World–City Revisited' gallery. This is also to be expected considering the differences in amount of items in each gallery.

[11] The time people spent in either the regents' room or the bathroom was not included in the exhibition dwell time.

Figure 13: Start of the section 'Perpetrator and Victim' of the exhibition *World–City*. Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

Figure 14: Overview of the section 'World–City Revisited.' Photo by Csilla E. Ariese, 2019.

The items in 'Perpetrator and Victim' and 'Religion and Tolerance' were generally quite attractive to visitors. With the exception of the moving images on a perforated divider at the entrance (AV1; 3%; see Figure 13) and an interactive screen to engage with the details of a religious painting (O15; 20%), all the other items in the gallery had decent attraction power, engaging a range of 31-71% of visitors (see Page 38). In contrast, in the 'World–City Revisited' gallery, only two items had strong attraction power, namely the main text panel (T1; 57%) and an apartment board with doorbells from the Bijlmer neighborhood (O1; 57%; see Figure 14). For the remaining items, the highest attraction power was 40%. On the basis of observations, it appeared that the relative emptiness of the gallery encouraged visitors to stroll through with little attention for the objects, rather than choose to take the time to engage with them.

One item with high attraction power also had strong holding power. The large, controversial painting[12] that had been made for the NSB (the Dutch National Socialist Movement, a Nazi political party) next to a video about the 1969 occupation by and eviction of student protesters from the Maagdenhuis university building (O8; 1:07 min; due to placement and the difficulty of tracking visitors, this was grouped as one item). As was also observed in other exhibitions, (looping) videos have relatively high holding power. Nonetheless, observations showed that the painting was also engaged with for longer periods of time. Alternatively, there were several cases that showed big difference in attraction vs holding power. For instance, the previously mentioned interactive screen (O15) which had very low attraction power, nonetheless had high holding power (57 seconds). Thus, those who chose to engage with this screen did so for relatively long. In 'World–City Revisited,' whereas visitors had been attracted to the main text panel (T1; 57%), it only held their attention for on average 20 seconds. Contrastingly, the video (AV1) playing opposite from this panel, while only attracting 34% of visitors, had strong holding power (1:03 min). This is also due to the fact that seating is available across from the video, providing visitors with an opportunity to rest or wait for others in their group. The contemporary artwork *Colonies* (Iswanto Hartono, 2017), made out of wire and casting a dark shadow on the wall behind it, had a holding power of 42 seconds, although only an attraction power of 14% (O2). As one visitor explained to another: "the lines in the shadows are very sharp, it reveals the underlying layer." Overall, the holding power of items in the second gallery was worse than the holding power of items in the first gallery.

Relating to Conflict

The key message of *World–City* is an examination of the perspective of Amsterdam on the world and vice versa. This examination or analysis is conducted thematically across the different galleries. For 'Perpetrator and Victim,' the concept is to showcase various conflicts across the ages in which Amsterdam was involved – or portrayed – as either victim or perpetrator. For instance, a map of plantations in Suriname indicating locations where colonial troops were stationed and where conflicts with enslaved persons and indigenous populations were fought out. Or a painting depicting a popular uprising/a forbidden demonstration in the neighborhood Jordaan to protest homelessness and the economic crisis (Chris Beekman, 1934). The aim is to present a more nuanced version of history in which Amsterdam and its population are depicted in varying gray tones in conflicts. Similar intentions can be discerned in the section 'Religion and Tolerance,' in which the religious diversity of Amsterdam is mapped out and a small selection of objects shows cases in

[12] *De Nieuwe Mensch*, Henri van de Velde, 1930-1939. During WW2 it hung in the office of NSB's leader Anton Mussert. On loan from the Rijksmuseum.

which religious tolerance was limited, for instance between Protestants and Catholics. Finally, in 'World–City Revisited,' the few exhibited objects are intended to illustrate Amsterdam's diversity – such as with the doorbells accompanied by names from many different nationalities, or a portrait series of inhabitants – or to display contemporary works of art that provide new perspectives on the pasts, like the artwork *Colonies*.

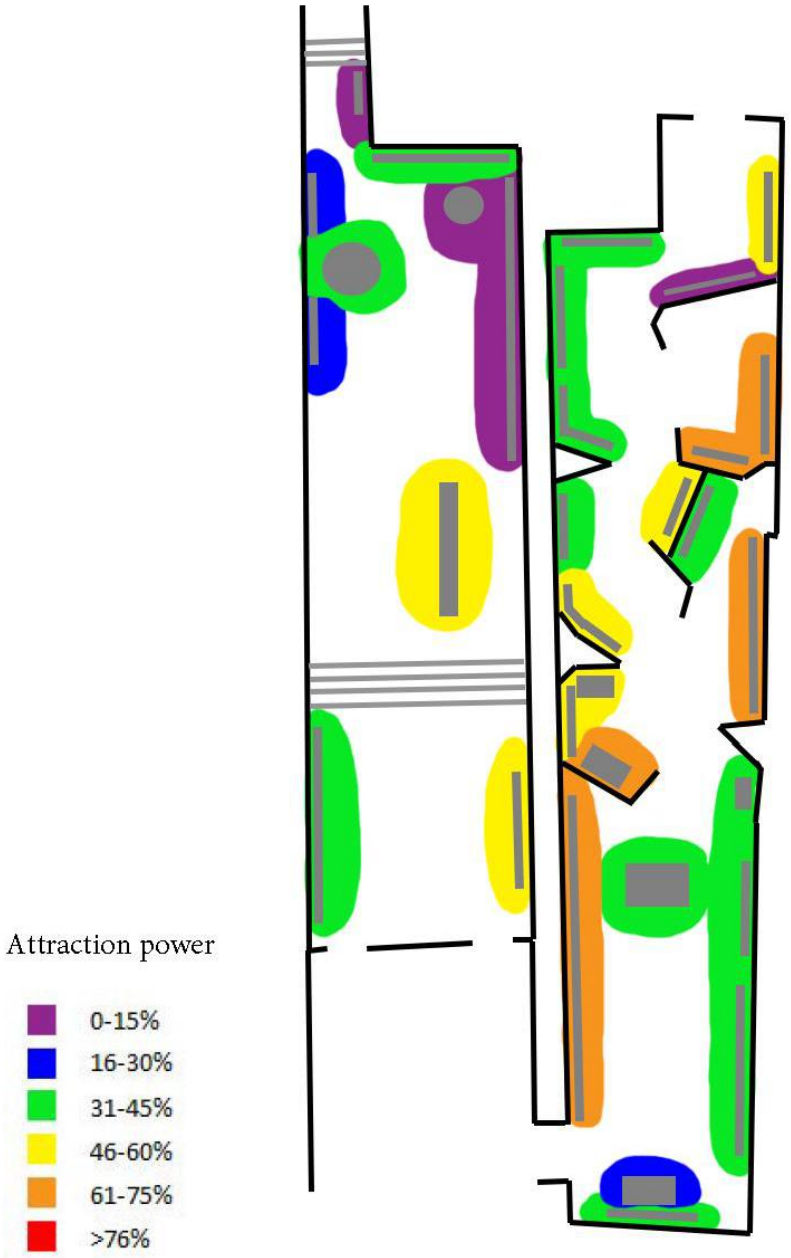
Identifying the decolonial practices in *World-City* leads to many examples of decentering as well as cases of increasing inclusivity. Although the exhibition illustrates the vulnerability and problems of Amsterdam and its population, it does not embrace vulnerability to the extent of engaging with any issues/problems of the museum or the exhibition itself.

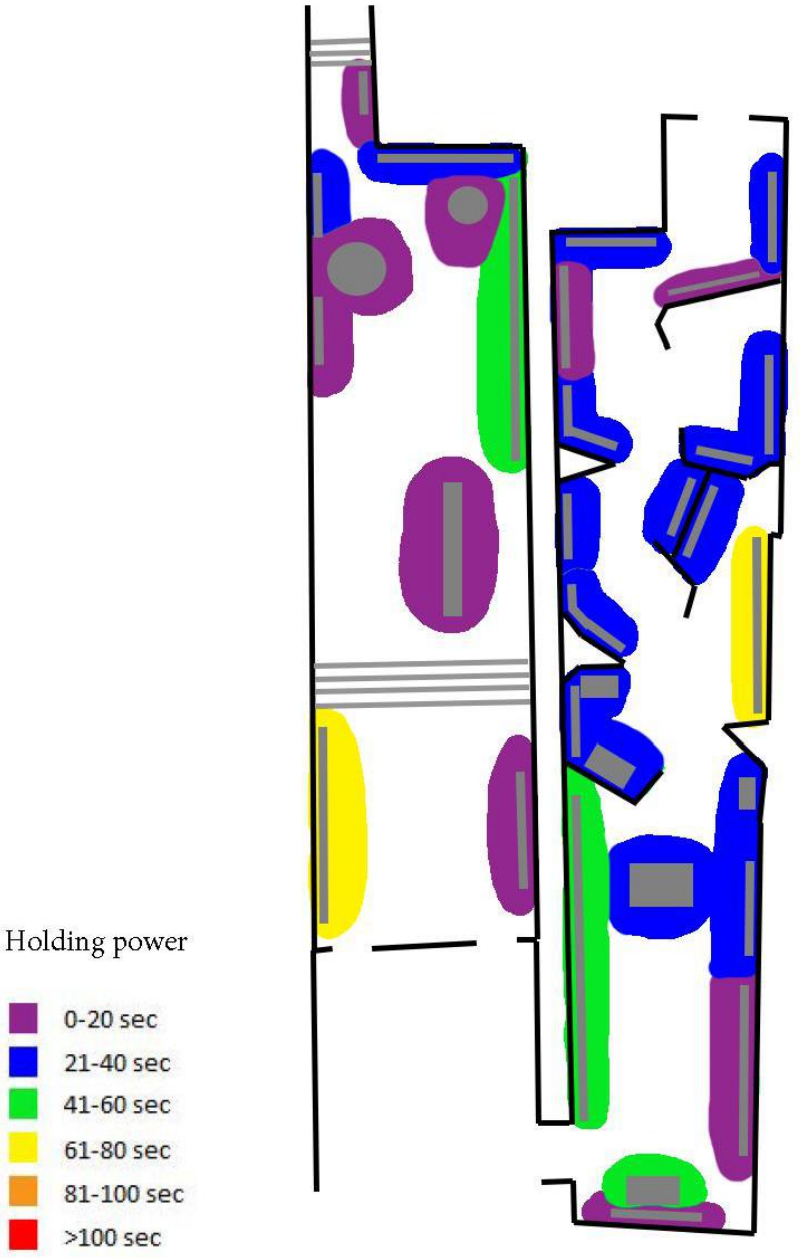
To begin with the increase in inclusivity, in part this is achieved through the inclusion of contemporary works of art that were either commissioned by the museum or otherwise acquired. These are all to be found in the second gallery. During one of the tracking days, an organized group tour of secondary school or university students specifically focused on this room and spent time with their teacher/guide discussing *Colonies* as an example. However, the remainder of the tracking results show that visitors did not respond well to these contemporary artworks. This may be due to the tendency of visitors to stroll through this final gallery of the exhibition with a lack of interest in general, or it might also be a matter of visitors not being prepared to respond to contemporary artworks in a museum and exhibition that consist predominantly of historical objects. Inclusivity was also increased by focusing on diversity in terms of culture (mainly in 'Perpetrator and Victim') and religion ('Religion and Tolerance'). By including information and objects that illustrate the diversity of Amsterdam's population, the exhibition aimed to also be more broadly inclusive to diverse visitors. Although the tracking and observation results show visitors' interest in these objects, only a survey could definitively explain this to be the result of visitors identifying with the cultural and religious communities displayed.

Decentering was the core aim of the 'Perpetrator and Victim' section and could be noticed on the one hand in the selection of objects and on the other hand in the contexts provided through the respective object labels. How did visitors relate to all these examples of conflict? As a theme, it was clearly attractive to visitors who not only were drawn to many of the objects displayed, but also frequently read their accompanying labels. The holding power of this part of the exhibition (O1-O11) shows that on average visitors took enough time for both reading and observing. In theory, the structure of the exhibition space with its niches and nooks hidden behind dark perforated dividers could have led visitors to walk through the main path and ignore objects in nooks. However, the tracking results show that this was not the case and visitors explored the entire exhibition space evenly. The diversity in the types of conflict as well as the types/ages of objects was also helpful in ensuring that there was 'something of interest for everyone.' Whereas one visitor took extensive photographs of the map of Suriname (O10) and studied it up close in detail, another pair of visitors had come to the museum specifically to see the display on the assassination of Theo van Gogh (O11). They explained to the security staff member who had guided them there, that they had been living in an apartment just above the assassination spot. They could see their apartment in the photograph on display and shared their story of the events of that day with the staff member.

Decentering was aided by the exhibition supporting conversations between visitors. The exhibition space is rather dark and with the dividers it creates a somewhat intimate atmosphere. Visitors can safely talk to each other without feeling like they are being disruptive or rude to others. Indeed, the exhibition is rarely full of many visitors at once, which is also helpful for encouraging

dialogue. Some of the histories on display were more accessible or well-known to Dutch visitors, which placed them in the role of facilitator to other visitors, for instance to translate a child's letter left at the Van Gogh assassination site to an English-speaker. Or, one visitor asked another "why was he a hero?" in response to a naval painting of Van Speyk purposefully blowing up a manned ship during war which is accompanied by a label that counteracts the traditional narrative in which his was called a heroic act (O4). Aided by the contexts provided in the object labels, as well as their contents which encourage reflection or reconsideration, dialogues between visitors were instigated. Through observing these dialogues, it can be confirmed that visitors responded to this decentering.


Attraction power
0-15%
16-30%
31-45%
46-60%
61-75%
>76%


Holding power
0-20 sec
21-40 sec
41-60 sec
61-80 sec
81-100 sec
>100 sec

Conclusions

This third report on the Amsterdam Museum presented the results of one of the three case studies within the ECHOES project focusing on city museums and colonial pasts. The report aimed to assess visitors' responses to a selection of the museum's decolonial practices across parts of four exhibitions. Tracking and observation studies were conducted in these four selected exhibitions and the results were presented and analyzed in the core of the report. The four studied exhibitions were not only highly different in terms of contents and design, but were also created by applying different kinds of decolonial practices. Consequentially, the responses of visitors also differed.

In *Amsterdam DNA* only a few decolonial practices could be discerned, such as a limited decentering of the perspective of the 17th century as a 'Golden Age' and the creation of visibility for the workings of plantations in the Caribbean. Although visitors frequently reacted to the visibility of the history of plantations, the lack of empathy expressed by the exhibition led to both highly positive and deeply negative responses. Furthermore, due to the high attraction and holding power of the opening video of the room, with an overly proud and celebratory narrative, it is questionable whether the limited intended decentering of some of the other objects comes across as intended.

In *Dutch Masters Revisited* far more decolonial practices were at work. Although all of these were crucial in creating the exhibition as it was, not all of them were equally noticed by visitors. For instance, the increase in inclusivity by having the exhibition created by a guest curator, as well as the inclusion of many external actors in the exhibition project, may have been noted by visitors in the behind-the-scenes film, but none of the visitors engaged with the exhibition credits label. On the other hand, the aim of the exhibition to provide visibility of historical people of color, as well as to decenter perspectives of the 17th century, were effective and visitors clearly responded to these. Both tracking and observation showed how visitors engaged with the juxtaposition of historical artworks and contemporary photographs.

Decentering was also attempted in the exhibition *Save As*, but in this case it focused on racist heritages. By using popular culture objects, such as comic books, that were charged with nostalgia and recognition, the exhibition supported dialogue and conversation between visitors whose perspectives were affected. As another practice, the museum increased the inclusivity of their collections, asking visitors for their input on what was still missing or underrepresented. By using participatory techniques, visitors responded to this practice. However, not unexpectedly, visitors were more likely to behave as spectators than as creators with relation to the participatory wall.

Finally, in the exhibition *World–City* the gallery concerning conflicts and religion was the part of the exhibition with which visitors engaged best in terms of both attraction and holding power. Again, we can identify the museum's aim to decenter and visitors responded to this by engaging with each other in conversations about the displayed objects. The contexts and prompts for reflection in the object labels were crucial for these dialogues. In contrast, the practice of increasing inclusivity by including the works of contemporary artists was not well responded to by visitors. Possibly for other reasons, such as the relatively empty design of the gallery, these artworks were only rarely, and for relatively short times, the focus of engagement.

Ultimately, the studies show that the Amsterdam Museum has applied decolonial practices in all of their exhibitions, although more so in their more recent exhibitions. While surveys and other visitors studies techniques could have provided more information and could have in some cases been more suitable to assess visitors' responses to decolonization, nonetheless the tracking

and observation studies are already able to provide certain insights in terms of visitors movements, behaviors, and interests. Finally, the Amsterdam Museum is haunted by its inaccessible structure and confusing layout and pathing, the major reasons for the museum to embark on a large-scale renovation project which will lead to a total redesign and completely new exhibitions opening in 2025. However, as one visitor optimistically noted "I don't mind getting lost in a museum, you always come across fun things."

As mentioned in the introduction, this report is written parallel to similarly framed reports on the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum (Pozzi 2020) and the Museum of Warsaw (Głowacka-Grajper 2020). Together with the previous two reports per museum (Ariese 2019a; Ariese 2019b; Bukowiecki 2019; Bukowiecki & Wawrzyniak 2019; Pozzi 2019a; Pozzi 2019b), these nine reports can be bundled into a qualitative, comparative analysis of the ways in which these city museums work through their cities' colonial pasts and thereby to identify diversified modalities and challenges for the representation of (de)colonial heritage in the contemporary world.

Acknowledgements

This work forms part of the ECHOES project which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 770248. The research took place as part of Work Package 3 '*City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts*' designed and led by Dr. Joanna Wawrzyniak.

I would like to thank our associate partners, the Amsterdam Museum, for their crucial part in this research and for providing access to the exhibitions. In addition, my gratitude to the staff members who responded so enthusiastically to a presentation of the preliminary results of this report and whose questions were most helpful in finalizing this report. Thank you to all the anonymous visitors who knowingly or unknowingly were tracked or observed for this study.

References

Ariese, Csilla E. 2019a. Amsterdam Museum(s): In Search of a History, an Identity, and a Future. *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* [Online]. Available at: http://projectechoes.eu/deliverables/ (Accessed: 20 March 2019).

Ariese, Csilla E. 2019b. Decolonizing the Amsterdam Museum: A Work-in-Progress to Becoming a More Inclusive City Museum. *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* [Online]. Available at: http://projectechoes.eu/deliverables/ (Accessed: 10 December 2020).

Ariese, Csilla E. 2021. Amplifying Voices: Engaging and Disengaging with Colonial Pasts in Amsterdam. *Heritage & Society*. DOI: 10.1080/2159032X.2021.1901335.

Ariese, Csilla E. & Wróblewska, Magdalena. Forthcoming. *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide with Global Examples.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Bitgood, Stephen C. 1995. Visitor Circulation: Is There Really a Right-turn Bias? *Visitor Behavior* X.1: 5.

Bukowiecki, Łukasz. 2019. Things of Warsaw and Things of the Past: Evolution and Priorities of the Museum of Warsaw. *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* [Online]. Available at: http://projectechoes.eu/deliverables/ (Accessed: 20 March 2019).

Bukowiecki, Łukasz & Wawrzyniak, Joanna. 2019. Dealing with Difficult Pasts at the Museum of Warsaw: Implications of Curatorial Memory Practices. *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* [Online]. Available at: http://projectechoes.eu/deliverables/ (Accessed: 1 October 2019).

Davidson, Lee. 2015. Visitor Studies: Toward a Culture of Reflective Practice and Critical Museology for the Visitor-Centered Museum. In Conal McCarthy (ed.) *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Practice* (503-527). Malden, Oxford & Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Dim, Eyal & Kuflik, Tsvi. 2014. Automatic Detection of Social Behavior of Museum Visitor Pairs. *ACM Transactions on Interactive Intelligent Systems* 4.4: article 17. DOI: 10.1145/2662869.

Falk, John H. 2006. An Identity-Centered Approach to Understanding Museum Learning. *Curator* 49.2: 151-166.

Falk, John H. & Dierking, Lynn D. 2000. *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira.

Faria, C.; Boaventura, D. & Guilherme, E. 2020. Personal Meaning Maps as an Assessment Tool for a Planetarium Session: A Study with Primary School Children. *Education 3-13* 48.1: 66-75.

Fleming, Neil D. & Mills, Colleen. 1992. Helping Students Understand How They Learn. *The Teaching Professor* 7.4: 44-63.

Fouseki, Kalliopi & Smith, Laurajane. 2013. Community Consultation in the Museum: The 2007 Bicentenary of Britain's Abolition of the Slave Trade. In Viv Golding & Wayne Modest (eds) *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration* (232-245). London & New York: Bloomsbury.

Głowacka-Grajper, Małgorzata. 2020. Visitor Studies at the Museum of Warsaw. *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* [Online]. Available at: http://projectechoes.eu/deliverables/ (Accessed: 10 December 2020).

Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean (ed.) [1994] 1999. *The Educational Role of the Museum*. London: Routledge.

Lanir, Joel; Kuflik, Tsvi; Sheidin, Julia; Yavin, Nisan; Leiderman, Kate & Segal, Michael. 2017. Visualizing Museum Visitors' Behavior: Where Do They Go and What Do The Do There? *Pers Ubiquit Comput* 21: 313-326.

Levasseur, Martine & Veron, Eliseo. 1983. Ethnographie d'une Exposition. *Histoires d'expo, Peuple et culture* 29-32. HAL Id: halshs-01484185.

Munley, Mary Ellen. 1986. Asking the Right Questions: Evaluation and the Museum Mission. *Museum News* 64.3: 18-23.

Ponte, Mark. 2018. An Afro-Dutch Community in Seventeenth Century Amsterdam. *Voetnoot.org*, 15 March 2018. Available at: https://voetnoot.org/research/ (Accessed: 22 March 2021).

Ponte, Mark. 2019. 'Al de Swarten die Hier ter Stede Comen' Een Afro-Atlantische Gemeenschap in Zeventiende-eeuws Amsterdam. *TSEG – The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 15.4: 33-62. DOI: 10.18352/tseg.995.

Pozzi, Laura. 2019a. A City, its History, and its Museum(s): Making the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum. *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* [Online]. Available at: http://projectechoes.eu/deliverables/ (Accessed: 20 March 2019).

Pozzi, Laura. 2019b. Decolonizing Chinese Museums? An Analysis of the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum through Project ECHOES Modalities. *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* [Online]. Available at: http://projectechoes.eu/deliverables/ (Accessed: 1 October 2019).

Pozzi, Laura. 2020. Visitor Studies at the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum. *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* [Online]. Available at: http://projectechoes.eu/deliverables/ (Accessed: 10 December 2020).

Simon, Nina. 2010. *The Participatory Museum.* Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0.

Yoshimura, Yuji; Girardin, Fabien; Carrascal, Juan Pablo; Blat, Josep & Sinatra, Roberta. 2014. An Analysis of Visitors' Behavior in the Louvre Museum: A Study Using Bluetooth Data. *Environment and Planning b: Planning and Design* 41: 1113-1131.

TRACKING STUDY AMSTERDAM DNA EXHIBITION

Number

Date

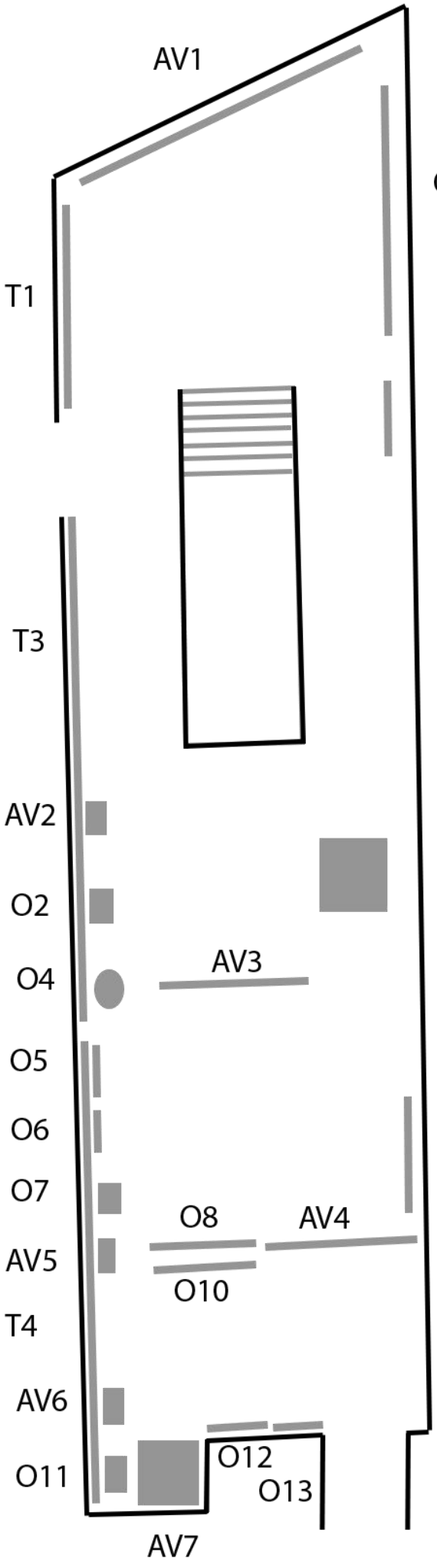
Audio guide YES NO

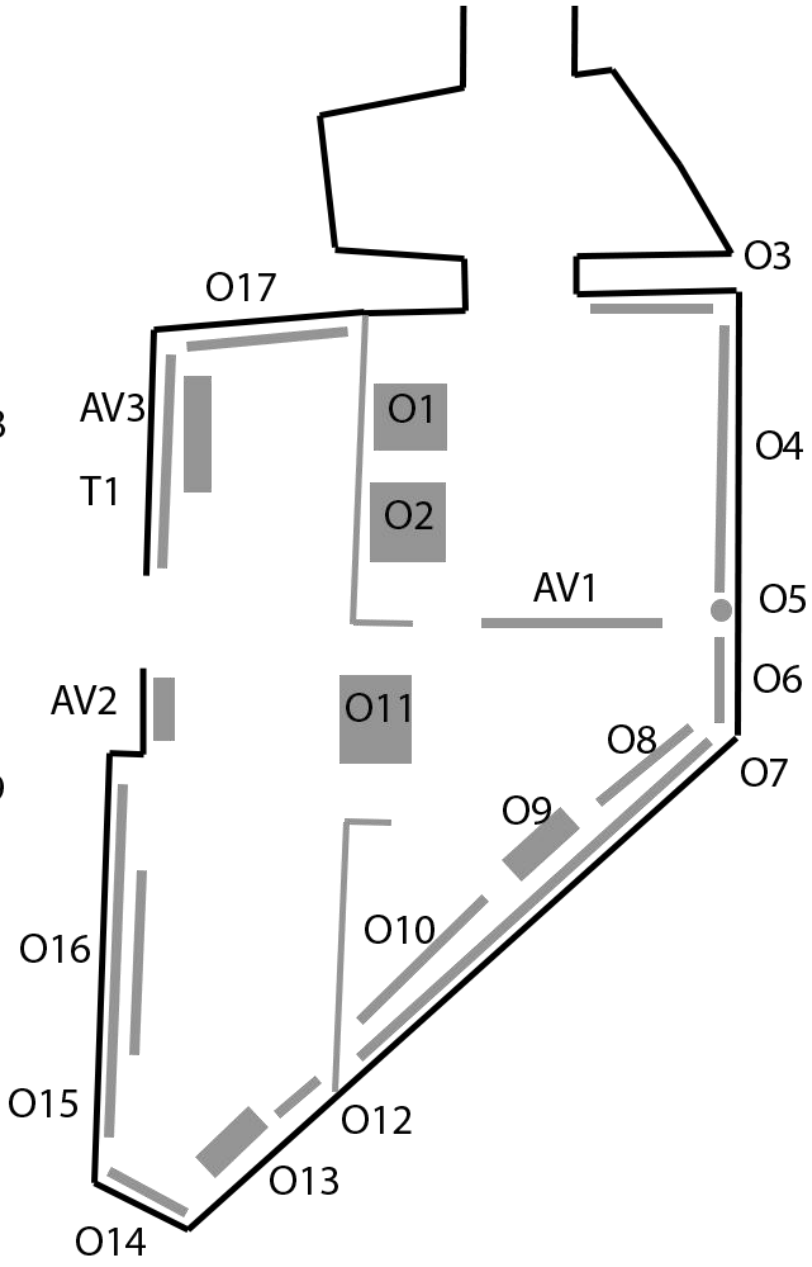
Solo visit YES NO

Time in

Time out

Dwell time





TRACKING STUDY
DUTCH MASTERS REVISITED EXHIBITION

Number

Date

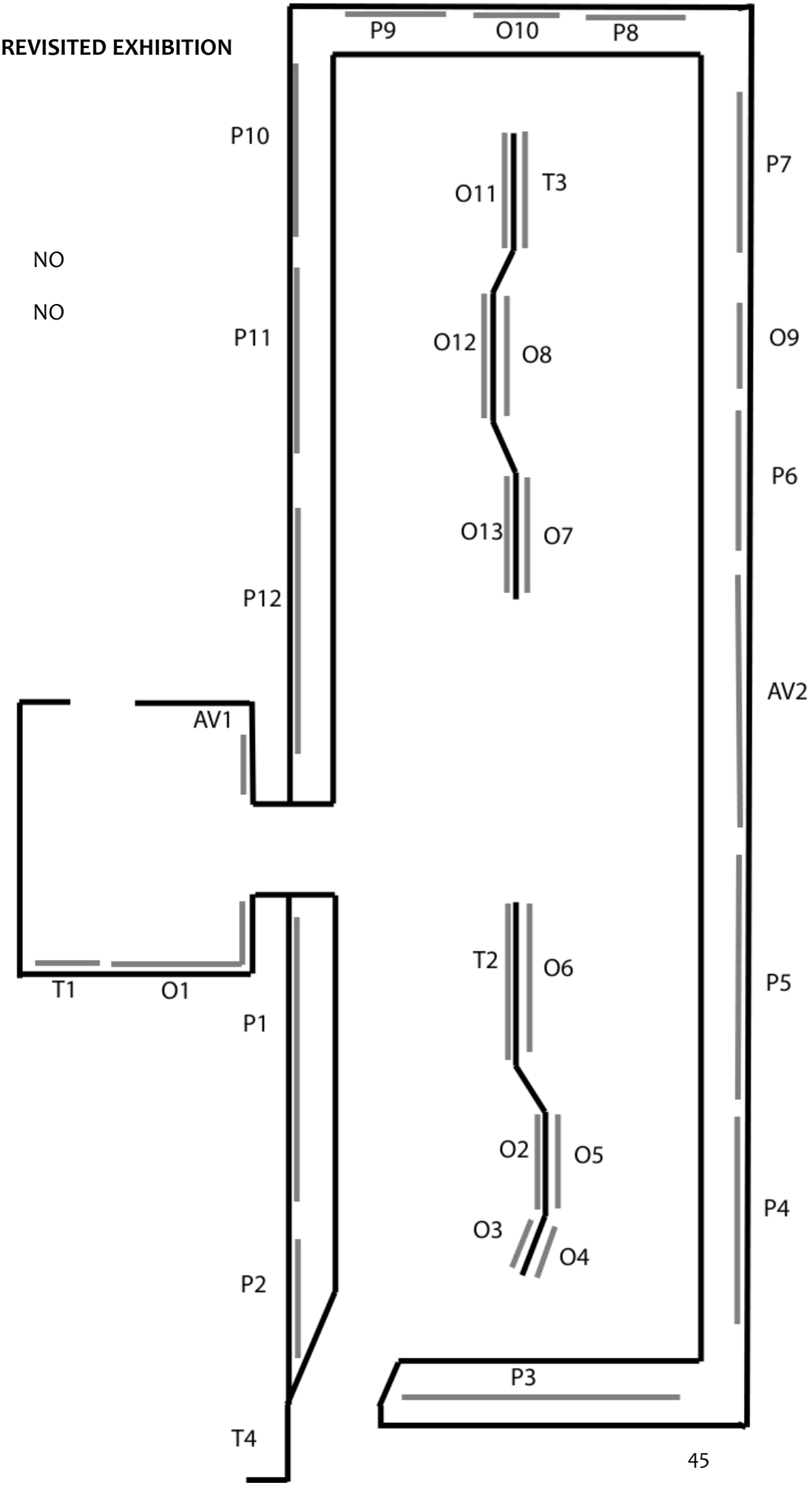
Audio guide YES NO

Solo visit YES NO

Time in

Time out

Dwell time



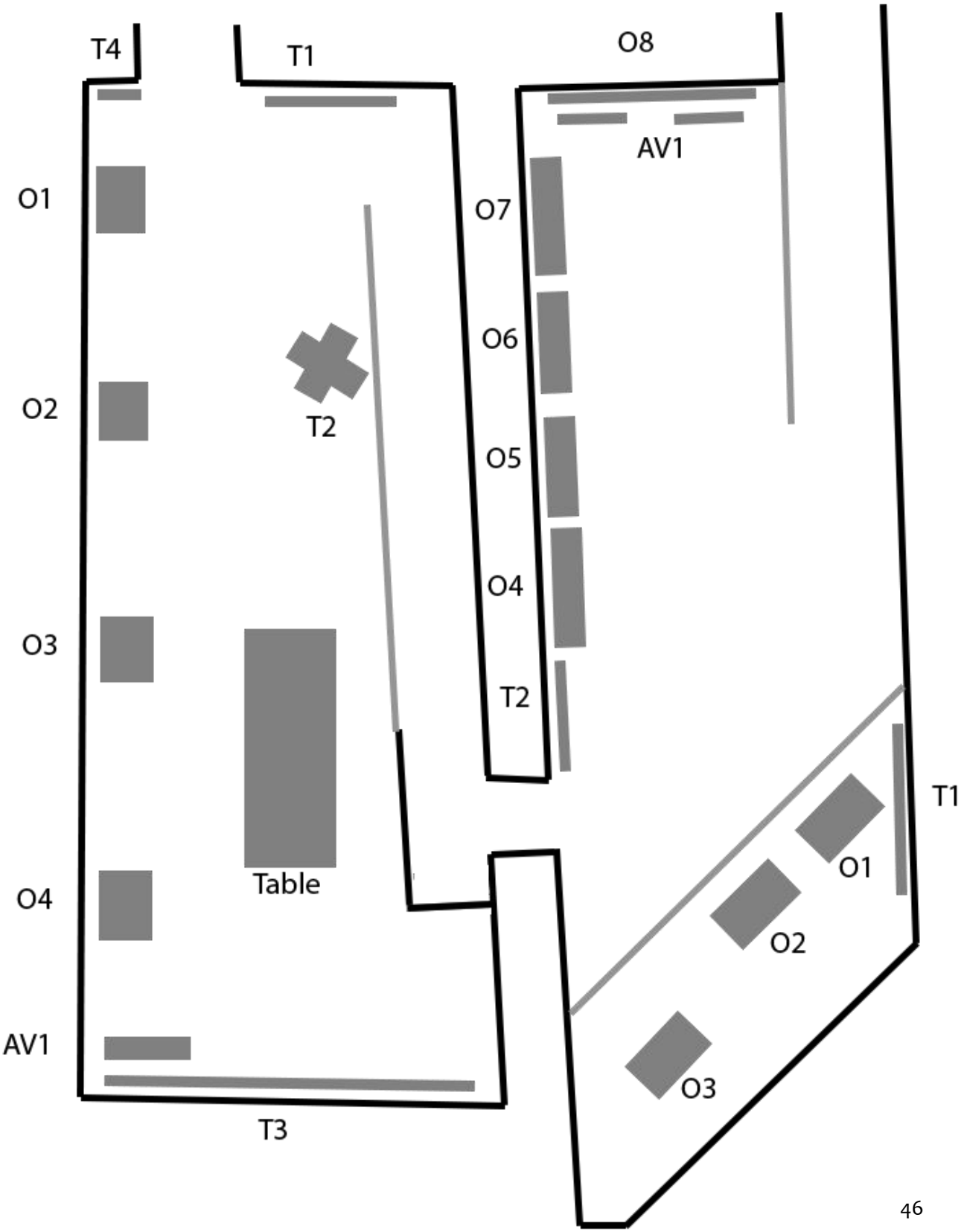
TRACKING STUDY SAVE AS EXHIBITION

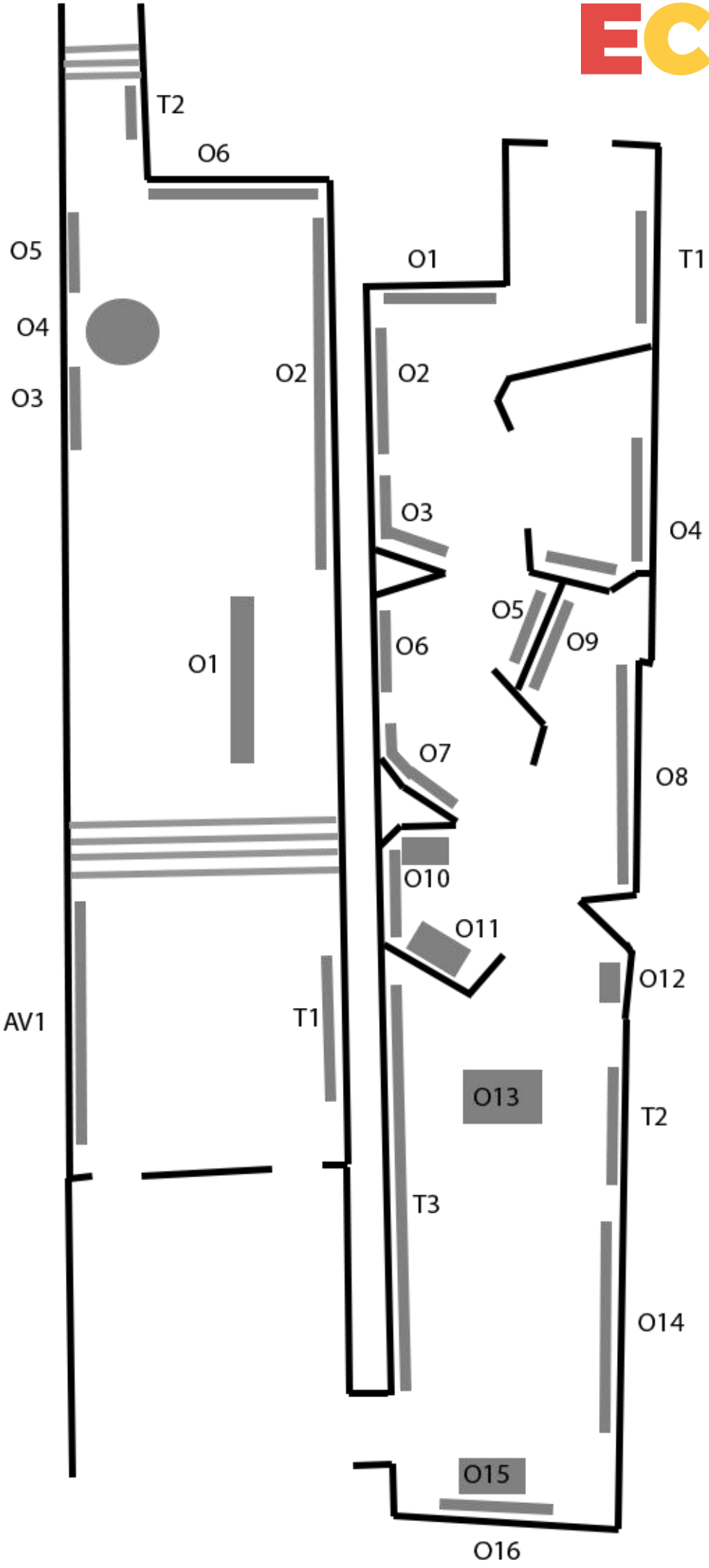
Number

Date Time in

Audio guide YES NO Time out

Solo visit YES NO Dwell time





TRACKING STUDY
WORLD-CITY
EXHIBITION

Number

Date

Audio guide YES NO

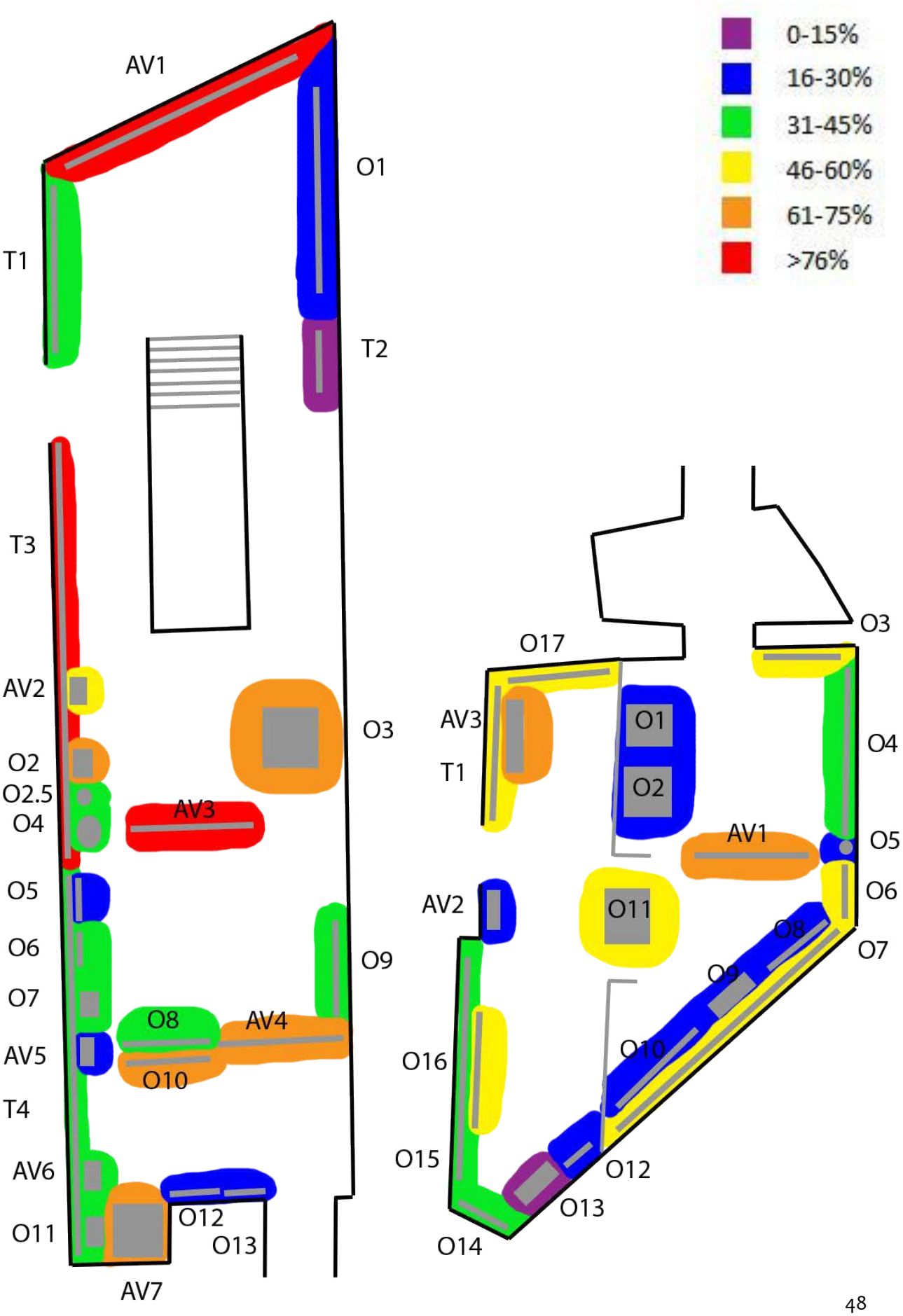
Solo visit YES NO

Time in

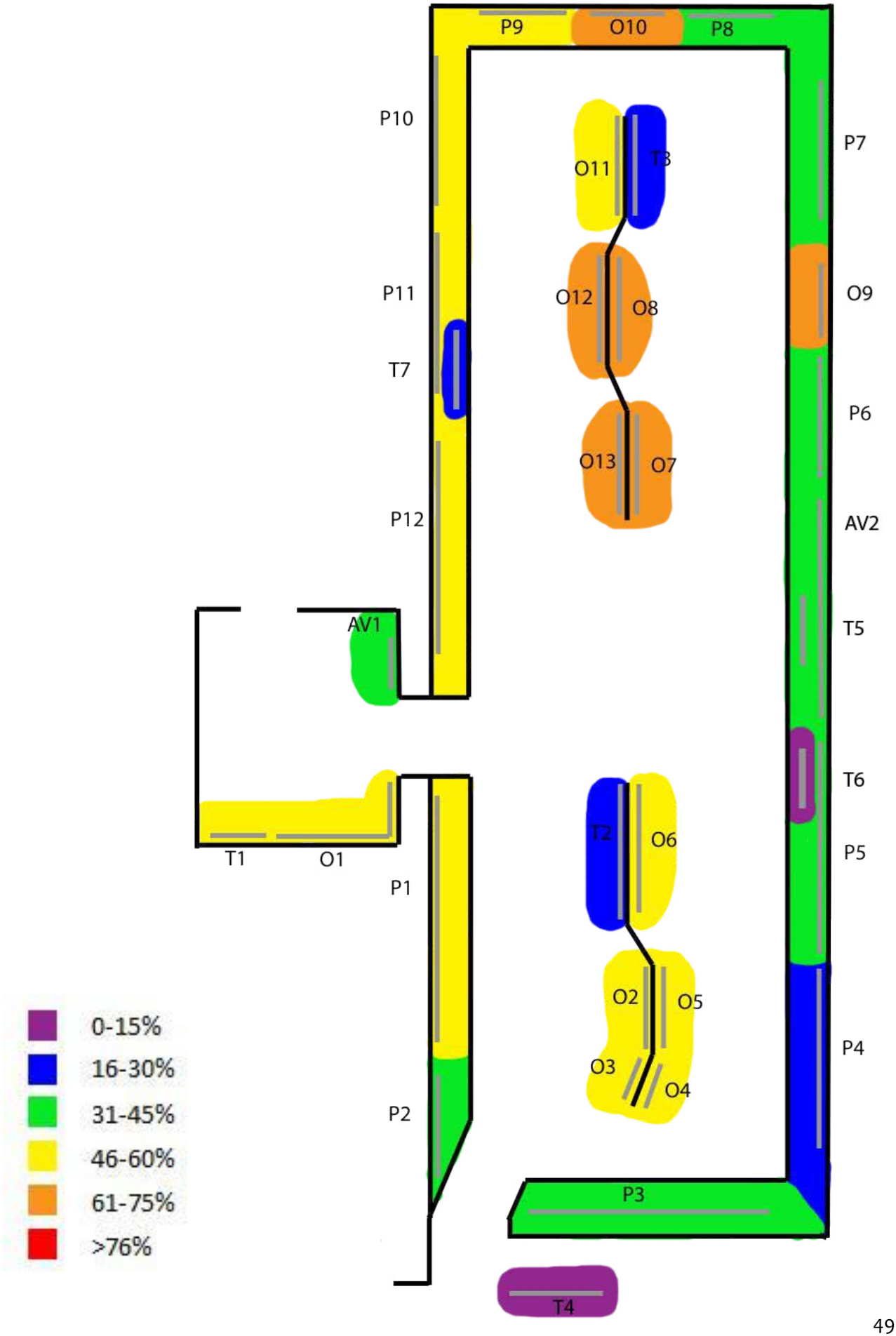
Time out

Dwell time

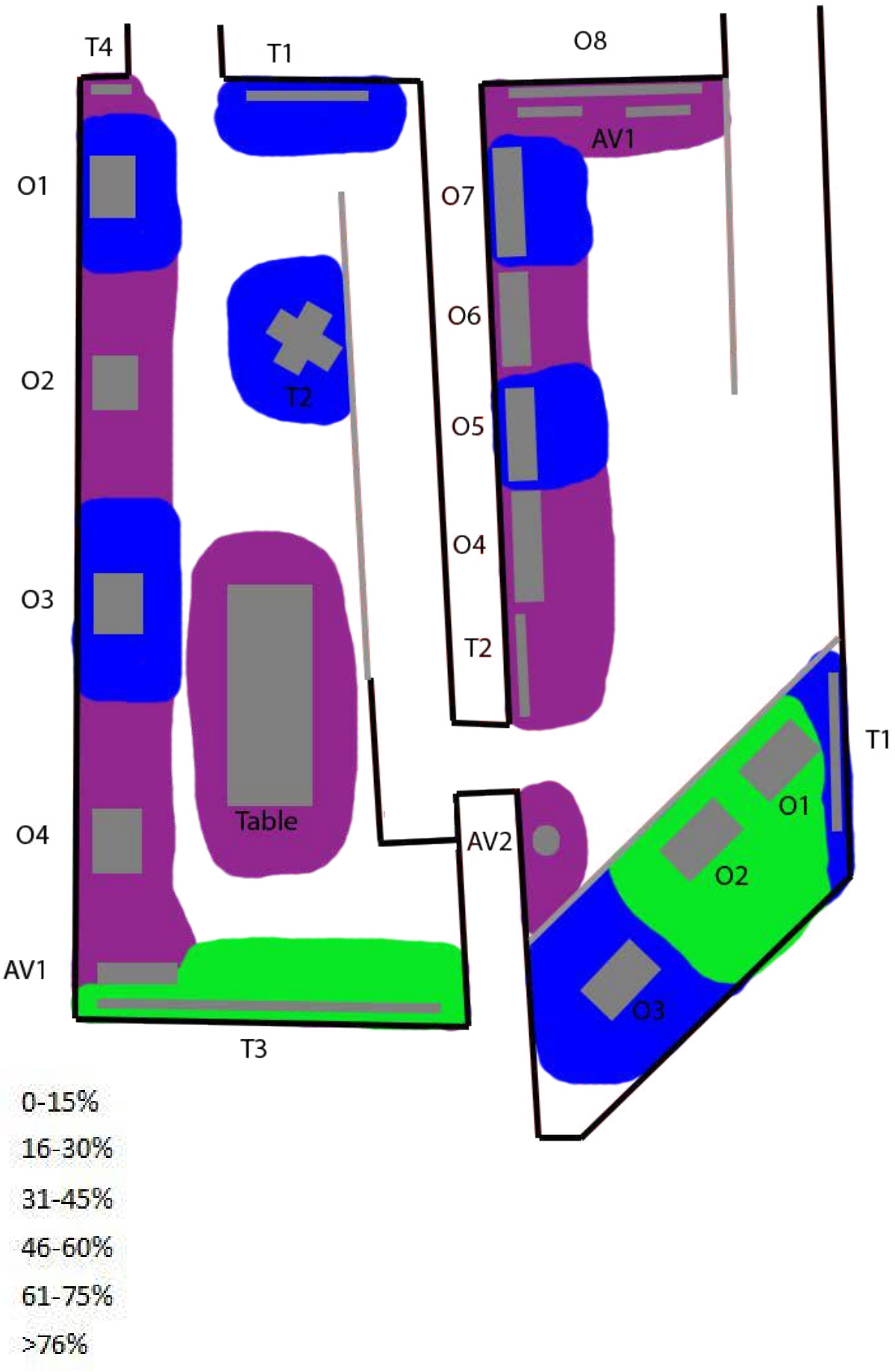
Amsterdam DNA attraction power



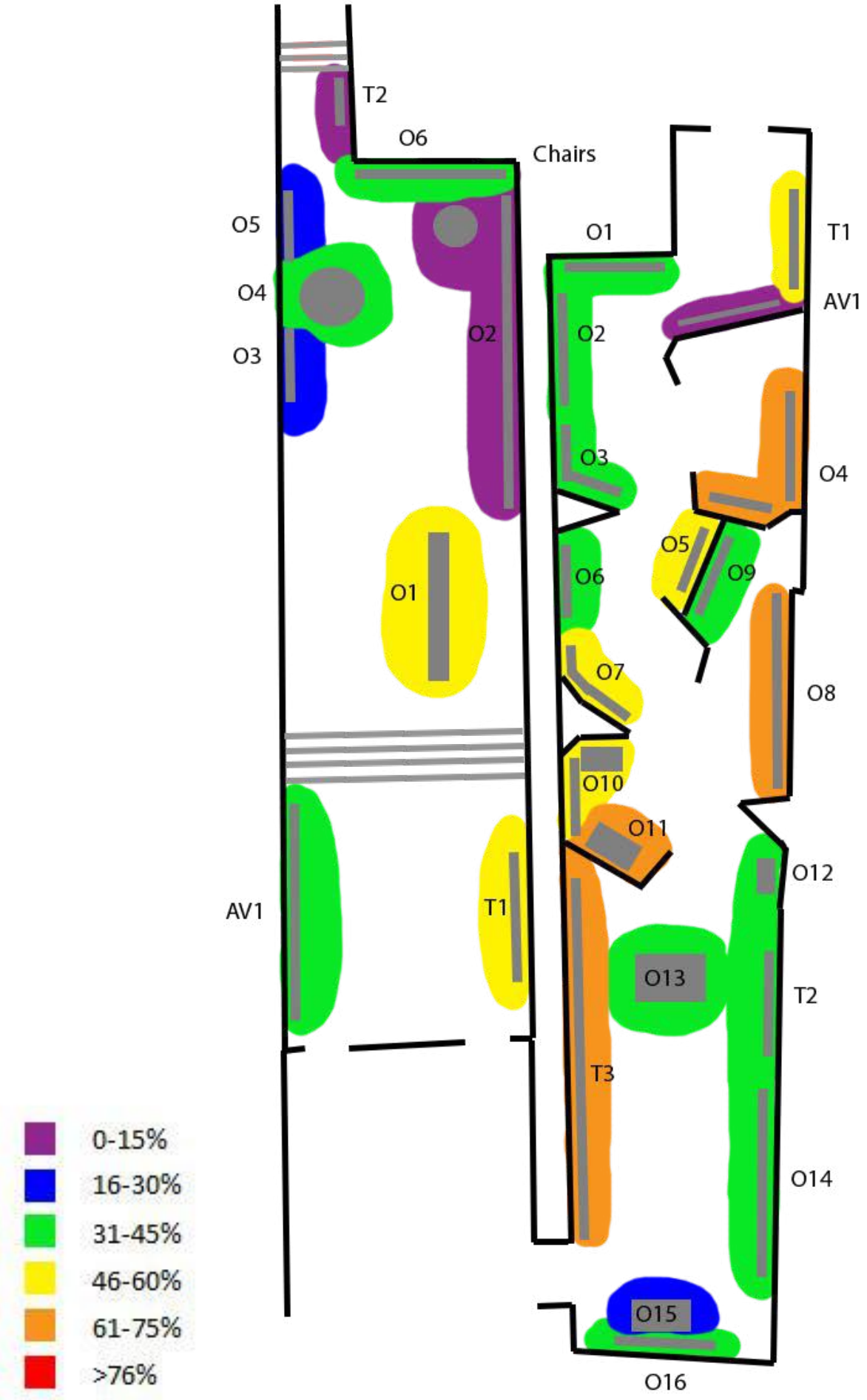
Dutch Masters Revisited
attraction power



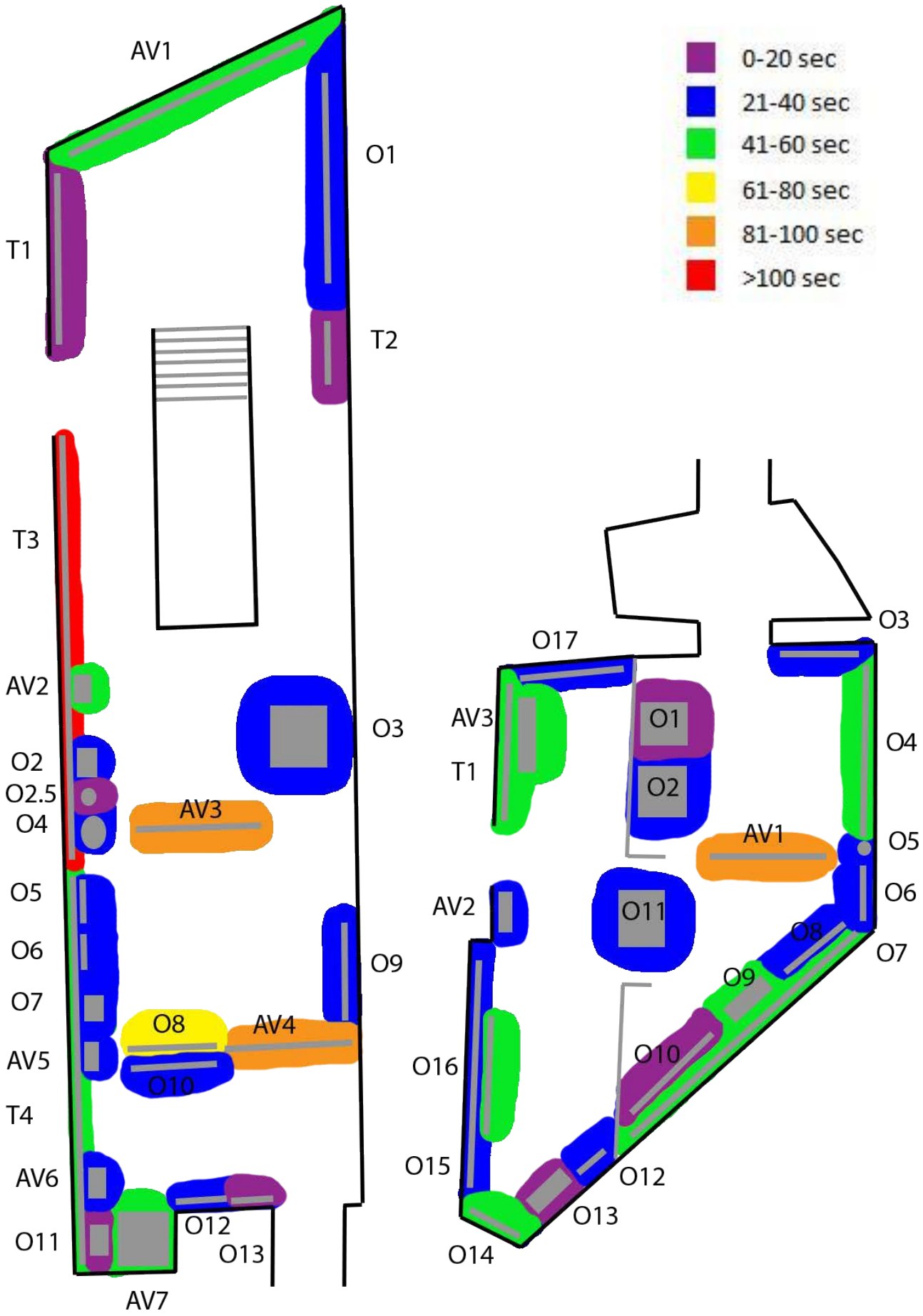
Save As
attraction power



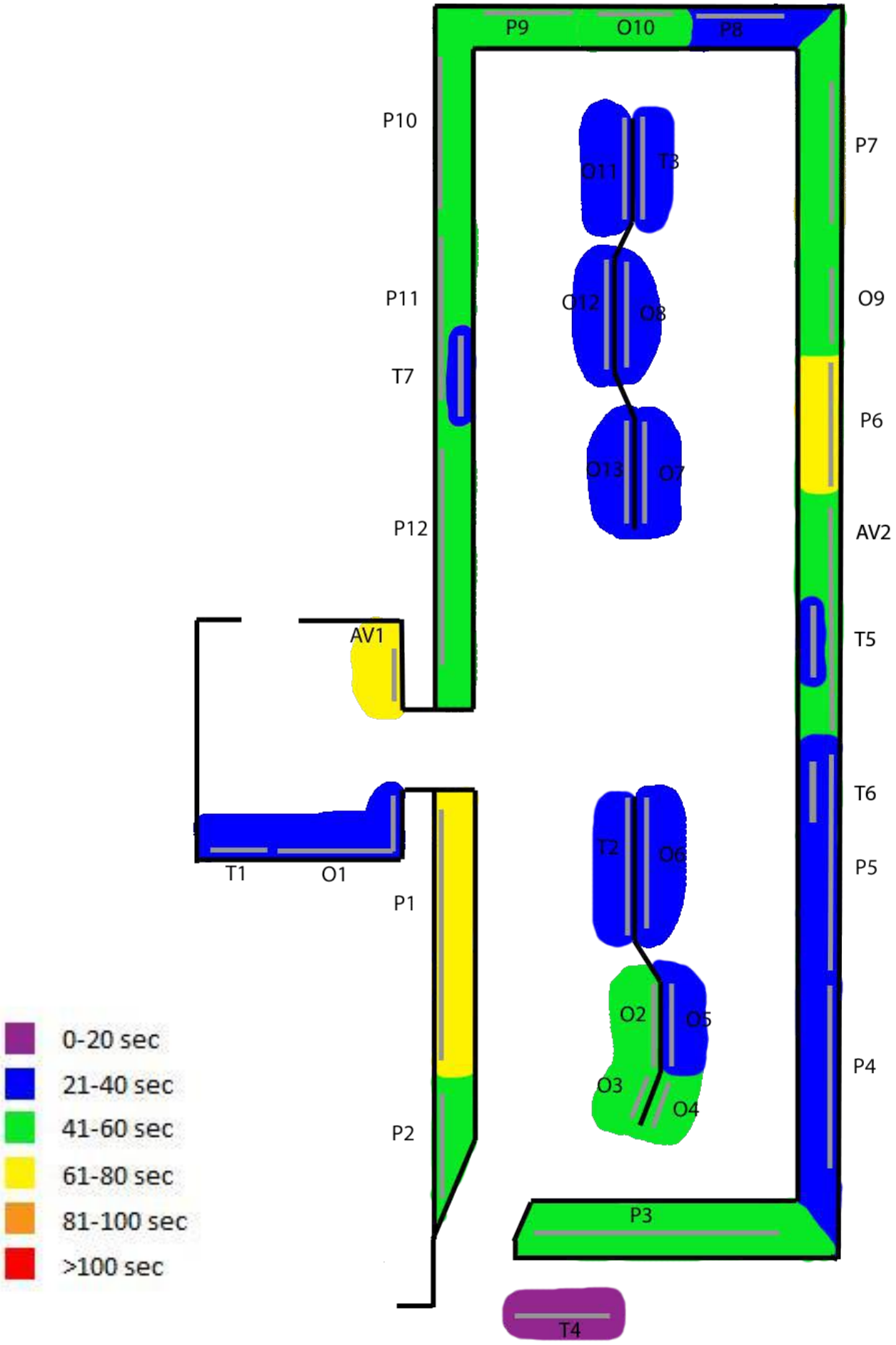
World-City
attraction power



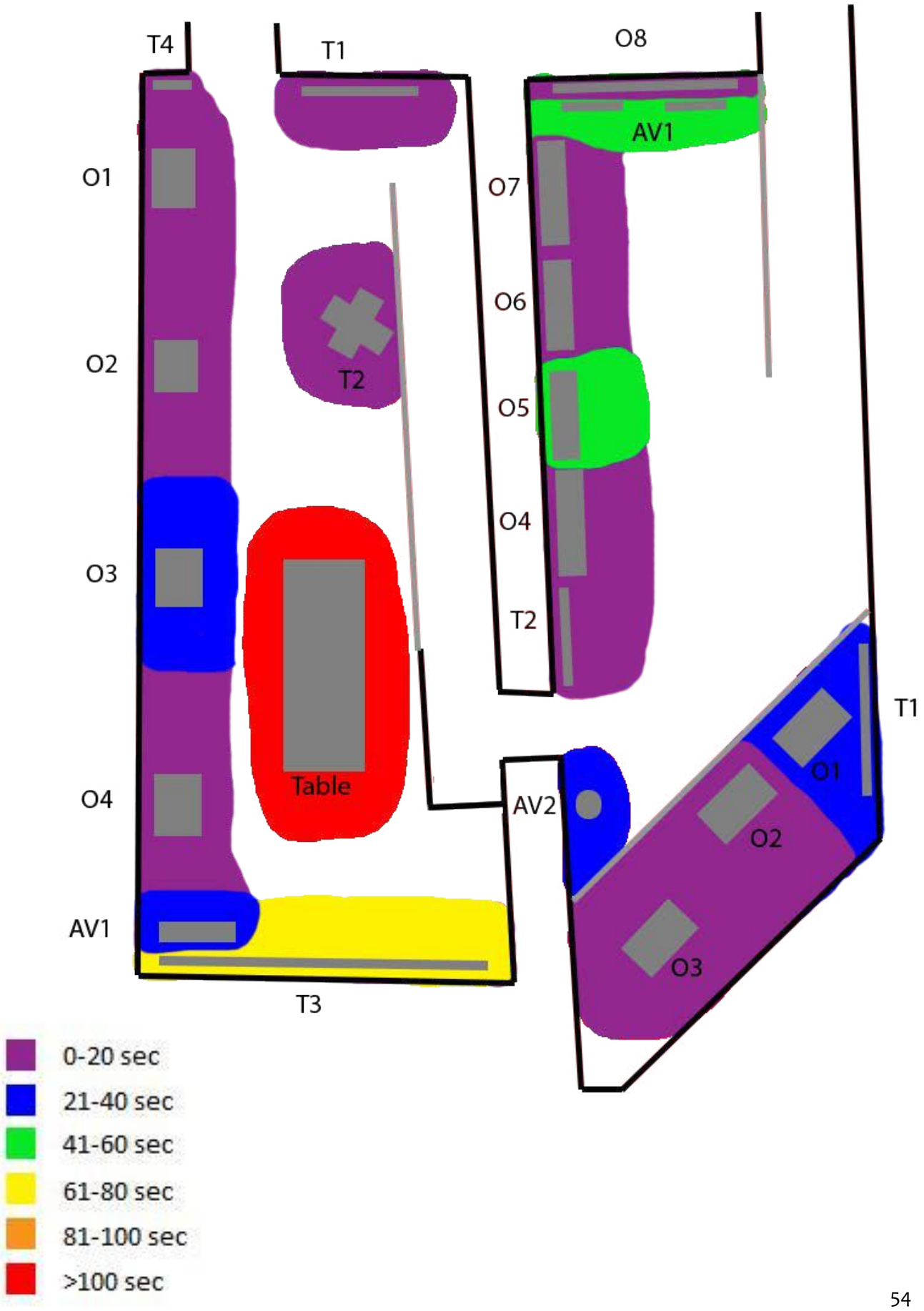
Amsterdam DNA
holding power



Dutch Masters Revisited
holding power



Save As
holding power



World-City
holding power