

Research article

RETHINKING REINTERPRETATION: THE APPLICATION AND POTENTIAL OF THE IPOP THEORY IN DECOLONIALITY AND WIDER ENGAGEMENT FOR NEW MUSEUM AUDIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Globally, the application of museum interpretative theory is an effective way to communicate with diverse and democratic audiences. However, museums inadequately relate to their audiences, as the world in which they operate is volatile and in recent years has dramatically changed. Despite transformative efforts, museum interpretation does not always meet audience expectations. This is largely due to many challenges facing museums, such as a continued lack of interpretative expertise, funding not directed at widening public engagement and superficial consultation. Social and political issues to address decolonisation, multiple identities and inclusive narratives towards shared notions of nation building, social cohesion and museum change often compound these problems. The purpose of this paper is to explore the application of a (re)interpretation theory known as the IPOP theory to engage South African museum audiences better, and more inclusively. IPOP is orientated towards museum audiences' primary interests: Ideas (intangible), People, Objects and the Physical (tangible). As a model, it has never been utilised in a South African environment before, nor surfaced within local museological discourse. It offers a stimulating avenue of new enquiry for South African museology as well as heritage site reinterpretation. IPOP theory has been successful in both Western and non-Western contexts, so it has potential for Africa and the global south. The IPOP theory is introduced as a method and proposes practical benefits utilising a pilot study, which has already produced positive outcomes. The IPOP theory certainly has strong resolve in a South African museum (re)interpretative context and has further potential to unpack within the ongoing decoloniality discourse.

Key words: IPOP theory; interpretation; museum audience; engagement; guided tours.

INTRODUCTION

Interpretation in its broadest sense refers to the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness, deepen visitor experience and enhance our understanding of museums. These can include professional and popular publications, lectures, on-site installations, educational programmes, guided tours (ICOMOS Ename Charter 2004:1-17), and the re-evaluation of the interpretation process itself. Interpretation is inherently embedded within the South African Museum Association ethics, which align with international museum ethics (SAMA 2006:12-14; SAMA 2017). By definition, museum practice generally concurs that they are primarily responsible for the collection, preservation, exhibition, interpretation and promotion of all forms of heritage (ICOM 2017:1). Similarly, the newly proposed alternative ICOM definition states more forcefully, the social and political responsibilities of museums, including that, they are participatory and transparent and enhance our understandings of the world (ICOM 2019). Interpretation and communication are integrated approaches both in theory and practice as the communication of information to society by means of interpretation is an essential task of all museums (MacDonald & Alsford 1991:305). The foundations of interpretation are driven by a philosophy that charges interpreters to better help

audiences care for, appreciate, learn, understand and engage with museums and for them to discover the significance of museum resources and what the meaning and purpose of interpretation actually is (Beck & Cable 1998; Beck & Cable 2002:7-10). Interpretation, thus prompts the audience to explore the relationship of tangible museum resources to their intangible meanings, and shares the role and purpose of what professional museum interpretation is (Larsen 2003).

Yet, globally museums continue to be criticised as being 'static and non-engaging' (Dingli & Mifsud 2017:118) and lacking adequate engagement with visitors to ensure meaningful experiences. Moscardo (1996) refers to this as the 'mindfulness' model, where appropriate interpretation will help to nurture 'mindful visitors' who would gain new perspectives and a deeper understanding through their experiences. In recent decades, the 'mindfulness' theory has been applied to the tourism industry in the understanding of visitor experiences (Moscardo 1996, 1999, 2009). Similarly, museums in South Africa are struggling with wider interpretations and the visitor experience, as the challenge remains to convey layered information successfully, to communicate more deeply with visitors and to engage with audiences (Mazel & Ritchie 1994; Rankin 2013). Perhaps the 'mindfulness' theory ought to be applied to South African museums.

According to Rankin (2013), the lack of interpretation is perhaps due inter alia to a lack of transformation with regard to issues of decolonisation. Ever since 1994, museums have been deployed as part of the agenda for transformation, and reinterpretation has formed an important component (Rankin 2013:72). Unfortunately, even after decades of the new democracy, many museums have not adequately addressed reinterpretation and many museums remain viewed as icons of apartheid and the old regimes (Holmes & Loehwing 2016). To make museums more relevant to South African public memory, it is essential to reinterpret them and to implement reinterpretation plans as a management tool to increase their significance and bearing for their place in society. After all, museums hold the mandate to further knowledge and are compelled to, "...provide opportunities for the appreciation, understanding and management of the natural and cultural heritage" (ICOM 2017:23).

Ambrose and Paine (1993:67) suggest that reinterpretation is possible by means of "... explaining an object and its significance", which is in essence the definition of interpretation. Nonetheless, people visit museums for a multitude of reasons and motivations; it is no longer about the museum collection, but rather a greater need to have engagement that is more meaningful and nurtures the learning experience. It is against this background that this paper explores the transformative role of rethinking what is meant by reinterpretation with a focus on widening public engagement to new museum audiences by utilising the application of an interpretative theory known as the IPOP theory.

IPOP: A THEORETICAL MODEL TO INTERPRETATION

The acronym IPOP stands for 'Ideas-People-Objects-Physical', a theory or model first applied as recently in 2010 in the United States by the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of the American Indian as an innovative approach to better appeal to visitors and more inclusive of audiences (Pekarik & Mogel 2010). This model was later successfully employed and rolled out into other museums in the United States and expanded into Canada, such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Léger 2014:29; Pekarik & Mogel 2010:465). These institutions traditionally focused on the portrayal of non-Western or indigenous 'native' cultures within their museums. The aim was visitor-centred interpretation focused on "... devising a process that was genuinely transformative ... without any pre-existing limitations on content or presentation" (Pekarik & Mogel 2010:465).

Moreover, the IPOP theory was employed successfully out of Western museums and into Eastern museum contexts by Taiwanese museologists. IPOP was first employed in Taiwan in a newly designed interactive and innovative museum exhibit titled, "*Hao Shi Duo Mo*" conceptualised by five artists using the interpretive model during the 2015 Young

Designers' Exhibition (Tsau, Wu & He 2016:1231,1236-1238). This interpretative theory, devised originally for Western museology, has found wider benefits and global resonance with many museums. If correctly applied, it purposefully eliminates the need for singular narratives and instead focuses on personal affinities of the museum audiences, which are diverse and not restrictive. IPOP can therefore function as an interpretative tool and a management tool as indicated to transform, decolonise and reinterpret museums particularly since South African museums are in dire need to make shifts away from traditional perspectives towards more twenty-first century thinking museums.

Developed specifically for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. in the United States in 2009 and 2010, the IPOP model is viewed as a relatively recent postmodern theoretical framework for interpretation (Pekarik & Mogel 2010:465; Eder, Pekarik & Simavi 2017:251; Tsau et al. 2016:1231). By means of reinstallation and restructured museum displays, they aimed at finding ways to make displays more attractive for audiences, "... to improve the visitors' experience with the exhibition and more effectively interpret the objects on display" (Pekarik & Mogel 2010:465). As part of the research process, the exhibition team noticed that visitors tended to have strong personal orientations that shaped their interests. These interests in turn influenced their visitor experience within the museum. Hence, "... different people visit museums for different reasons" (Beghetto 2014:1). It is also important to note that how a museum exhibition is 'planned', is not always the same as when 'experienced' by museum visitors. While "... a well-designed exhibition creates an immersive experience for visitors", not all museum exhibitions manage to engage audiences successfully to become meaningful experiences (Beghetto 2014:1). The crux of IPOP focused on the four primary personal orientations that shape the way in which visitors and audiences experience museums: ideas, people, objects and physical –hence the quirky acronym 'IPOP' (Pekarik, Schreiber, Hanemann, Richmond & Mogel 2014:5). Museum audiences naturally are attracted to at least one primary category. Therefore, when creating and designing exhibitions with the IPOP model in mind, overall visitor satisfaction is expected to increase (Roberts 2015:8).

In simplified terms, IPOP can be explained as follows. The 'I' stands for ideas, which reflects 'knowledge as represented in informal perspectives and interpretations' (Beghetto 2014:2). Audiences expressing this type of personal orientation tend to want to understand the bigger concepts, thought processes and reasoning behind something (Pekarik et al. 2014:6). Within a South African context, the concept of 'ideas' has the potential to reflect particularly with aspects of intangible heritage and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). The notion of 'traditional ideas' is important within museum reinterpretation as IKS and traditional ideas were largely ignored prior to 1994, and since indigenous knowledge is unique to a given culture, society

or community museum reinterpretation can reach more democratic audiences. Raseroka (2008:243) confirms that information transformation is recorded in most traditional African ideas in the forms of folklore, oral histories, songs, stories, dances and local language and therefore encompasses IKS elements. Indigenous knowledge systems and practices can be easily embedded within museum reinterpretations and multiple narratives. Examples where reinterpretation (even without applying IPOP deliberately) have been implemented would include Freedom Park, a post-democracy legacy project in Pretoria, and a repository with an emphasis on indigenous knowledge that forms the heart of a technological-driven heritage site (Marx 2017:29). In addition, the reinterpreted displays include the San exhibition at the Iziko National Museums of Cape Town (Bredenkamp 2006:80; Rall 2018; Raseroka 2008:248).

The first 'P' in IPOP represents people, or the 'lives of others as represented in stories, biographies, videos, photographs, and audio' (Beghetto 2014:2). This means that the visitors and audiences would like to better comprehend the human connection or element of an object. For example, they would like to understand the human stories connected to a museum object and the social, political or historical context within which the object was created (Pekarik et al. 2014:6). Understanding the social factors behind indigenous knowledge is central to South African museum reinterpretations and wider African continental museums, as according to Abungu (2001:18), museums are indeed ideal spaces where "... the voices of the people they represent should be perceived and expressed".

In the IPOP theory, the 'O' is indicative of objects, namely 'artefacts as represented in the presentation, aesthetics, and descriptions of objects' (Beghetto 2014:2). Hence, the 'O' represents an interest in the craftsmanship involved in making an object, the aesthetic aspects of an object, the materials it is made up of and which are evident visually through the display in the museum (Pekarik et al. 2014:6). While tangible objects form part of the personal orientations of the IPOP theory, there has also been a shift away from the focus of physical objects towards the human factor and 'humanity' within the new museum definition (ICOM 2019). Likewise, South African museums have radiated towards a social shift towards people and their experiences including the intangible aspects of heritage, that is also expected to increase in significance in the coming years as expressed by Bredenkamp (2006:77-78, 79-80). Worldwide museums have largely moved away from the 'O' object interpretations to new museum practices of 'P' that revolve around the fact that "... the real importance does not lie in the objects themselves but in the way these objects embody the physical manifestation of social relations" (Pilcher & Vermeylen 2008:1). The recovery of indigenous knowledge practices and the need for museums to decolonise their objects within curatorial and reinterpretive ways is also emphasised by Pilcher and Vermeylen (2008).

The last 'P' or physical element is representative of "... physicality in movement, touch, sights, sounds, and smells" (Beghetto 2014:1-2). These are aspects where the other senses are necessary to experience an exhibition within a museum; the somatic and tactile elements of a museum exhibition are as significant (Pekarik et al. 2014:6). South African museums have introduced the use of physical elements, which appeal to the different senses for example by means of the tactile approach and an increase in the use of technology as a means of interpretation. This includes the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) within a museum setting. Chikonzo (2006:132,134) recognizes and demonstrates the usefulness of ICTs as a tactile experience in collecting, preserving and disseminating indigenous knowledge and this appears to be a growing and future trend in many South African museums.

IPOP: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

There are four subliminal choices that attract visitors to museum exhibitions or that shape their audience experiences, namely Ideas-People-Objects and the Physical (IPOP). The museum experience is generally represented by all four elements, as visitors tend to be more orientated towards a certain aspect as opposed to another. Thus, one preference is usually dominant, but all are present to 'varying degrees' (Pekarik et al. 2014:6; Roberts 2015:8). To practically employ and apply the IPOP theory of interpretation, Pekarik and Mogel (2010) extended the IPOP model with the introduction of three additional basic principles: the attract-engage-flip (AEF) method became referenced as the IPOP-AEF model. This became an even-more effective visitor approach to consider with even more perspectives for the museum audience (Pekarik & Mogel 2010; Pekarik et al. 2014; Tsau et al. 2016).

When employing the IPOP theory, the four elements can usually be flexibly combined in such a way that it creates "... conditions whereby visitors may have serendipitous surprises that 'flip' them into enjoying an unexpected experience, which in turn result in, "... important moments of opportunity, insight, and meaning that create memorable experiences" (Beghetto 2014:2). Visitors will already be enticed or attracted to museum exhibitions based on their dominant motivations. However, for visitor experiences to become truly meaningful, they need to actively (as opposed to passively) engage with the collections on display by responding to them through their five senses and finding what they were looking for in order to satisfy their needs. Once museum audiences are able to engage with a certain display at a deeper level, it allows for a more satisfying visitor experience. Only then can their attention be captured beyond their existing interests and they can be 'flipped' to an unexpectedly interesting experience that relates to another IPOP choice by suggesting alternative orientations to them through the interpretation of the display (Léger 2014:30-31).

The result is that visitors may have a strong positive reaction to an exhibition or interpretative visitor experience when they become 'flipped' to a "... different type of experience than the one that generally drew them" (Pekarik et al. 2014:9). Therefore, all visitor preferences or elements of the IPOP theory must be represented to allow for "... valuable and satisfying experiences by attracting, engaging and flipping museum audiences" (Pekarik & Mogel 2010:472-473). However, this can only truly be achieved when museum exhibitions have been well-designed, allowing for a meaningful self-exploration of a museum display, or when the interpretation of a museum exhibition occurs by a skilled interpreter who manages to "... [strike] the right balance between structure and improvisation" (Beghetto 2014:3; Pekarik et al. 2014:9). In this manner, visitors may enter a museum with one preconceived interest or notion, but instead are surprised or 'flipped' into experiencing a museum gallery in a different way, thereby generating a more meaningful visit (Beghetto 2014).

In addition to active interpretation at museums, there is frequently a "... gap between how an exhibit was planned and how it is experienced" (Beghetto 2014:1). The IPOP theory may serve to bridge this gap when implementing it during the planning stage for new or upcoming exhibitions. In this way, by attracting visitors based on the four 'primary areas of interest' (i.e. IPOP), an exhibition can be structured in such a way that the displays become even more engaging by representing different personal preferences for the audience (Beghetto 2014:2). Long term, this strategy may prove beneficial by allowing effective museum experiences even without offering personalised tours, but with self-interpretation through the displays as experienced by the museum audience (Beghetto 2014).

MUSEUM INTERPRETATION: WHO IS THE INTERPRETER?

Museums offer education to their audiences as interpretation is essential "... to foster contact between people... and objects: not to teach facts, but to sow a seed of interest, a spark of inspiration" (Ambrose & Paine 1993:37). Interpretation is among the traditional core functions of a museum that include "... conservation (collecting, curation and preservation), research, as well as communication (education, community-orientated programmes and exhibitions)" (Vollgraaff 2015:43,46). Education and communication to museum audiences has traditionally been the responsibility relegated to an education officer, but increasingly 'education' is not sufficient enough for an inclusive visitor experience and therefore interpretative officers are need to be trained in reinterpretation techniques and re-education may be required. Moreover, the purpose of interpretation beyond education and communication is to convey the deeper significance of a place or exhibition topic or theme, which requires interpretation that is more detailed. As Timothy (2011:228) suggests, interpretation is thus a vital part of the museum visit. Ideally, there should be at least one

interpretative and an educational officer at every museum in order to offer a quality service to audiences that meets their needs and adds value to their overall visitor experience (Ambrose & Paine 1993:37). The IPOP theory correctly applied, allows the museum visitor to also serve as the interpreter, not leaving interpretation relegated to a museum professional, but to the audience. Interpretation remains a form of provocative, entertaining and educational storytelling that provides interesting and accurate information, whether by an education officer or by the visitor's own personal interpretation (Timothy 2011:228-229, 231-235).

In most instances, tourist guides, education officers, curators, communities, educational officers or information attendants, who serve as interpretive staff at museums or heritage sites, carry out museum interpretation (Timothy 2011:238-244). Professional qualified and highly trained interpretive officers fulfil a vital role in conveying information to audiences in such a way that they will have a memorable experience. Furthermore, in order to attract funds, museums must be competitive to adapt to changing environments and to attract visitors in the first place (Abungu 2001:16; Van Aalst & Boogaarts 2002:195,198). Museum interpretation must be both educational and entertaining to be of interest to visitors at all times. Many visitors to a museum generally might "... prefer a short and effective (cost effective too) trip to a museum ..." and the accurate and current interpretation of the displays plays a key role in this regard, which will result in a once-off visit or even end in repeat visits to the same museum by the same visitor (Van Aalst & Boogaarts 2002:198).

Museum interpretation plays a vital role as museums are often signalled as "... vehicles of social change if rigorous, coordinated efforts are practiced to achieve this change..." (Marx 2016:25). It is through edutainment that audiences engage and for this purpose, new technologies must be utilised and museum galleries transformed and reinterpreted, even redesigned to provide ongoing audience experiences (Bredenkamp 2006:78; Marx 2016:25-26,29). Consequently, transformation is not the only way in which museums are reconceptualised and redesigned from the onset, but also how the information is transferred and reinterpreted to the museum audiences within wider museological landscapes or the 'museumscape' needs to be accentuated (MacDonald 2016:4).

Importantly, museum reinterpretation, particularly in South Africa, has to 'adapt or die' and the emphasis on indigenous voices and the utilisation of IKS and ICTs is used to engage museum visitors more meaningfully and thought provokingly (Marx 2016:25-31). Facing the 'adapt or die' rule, museums must be viewed as cultural 'memory-banks' and serve as living cultural hubs that are responsible for the reinterpretation of the collections, which is an ongoing or continuous process (Curtis 2005:50, 2006:117; Dingli & Mifsud 2017:118; MacDonald & Alsford 1991:305-307). Although the reinterpretation of cultural

heritage in museums is a significant issue, it is nonetheless also a 'painfully slow' and complex process, especially in a post-apartheid South African context (Crooke 2005:135).

REINTERPRETATION: PART OF THE DECOLONISATION PROCESS

Inherently, museums are important social learning spaces, which need to be communicated to audiences by employing interpretative strategies and learning theories. This means that museums as institutions are in a constant process of transformation, as Lundgaard and Jensen (2013:5) suggest "... even international museology demonstrates that museums are placed in a precarious situation of liberalism and decolonisation". A lack of transformation hinders the ability of visitors to deeply engage, as museums today operate and function very differently than they did just two decades ago (Craggs & Wintle 2016; Onciul 2015).

The decolonial call and restructuring of museums and tertiary teaching institutions is getting louder (Mamdani 2016:68; Mbembe 2016:29; Rall 2018:15). In South Africa, the campaign to decolonise universities first surfaced in 2015 with the Rhodes-Must-Fall movement, which encompassed a mass student protest to remove statues "... representative of colonial thought and knowledge" (Heleta 2016:1; Rall 2018:15). Most academic institutions, be they museums or places of tertiary education, were traditionally founded during the colonial and imperial ages. Obviously, this influenced the collection and exhibition policies and the Western narratives that were conveyed (Arinze 1998:31; Smith 2005:424). Ideally, decolonisation aims to dismantle such Eurocentric perspectives and to reinterpret public exhibitions more relevant to communities and more diverse audiences. In turn, the reinterpretation of museum narratives in the transformation process became necessary (Arinze 1998). Despite this post-democratic call for transformation and reinterpretation, the "... epistemologies and knowledge systems at most South African universities have not considerably changed" (Heleta 2016:1).

In fact, many museums have remained largely unchanged, emphasizing Western stereotypes which are in contradiction with modern African nations and thus irrelevant to the needs of current society (Abungu 2001:16; Arinze 1998:31-32). But, as part of the decolonisation process, museums need to not only "... balance the skewed cultural heritage ...", they also are required to "... actively preserve the collective history of [a] country ..." (Mdanda 2016:56). Across the board, this transformation or reinterpretation in the museum sector has not yet sufficiently occurred. Nevertheless, while many museums have attempted to 'come of age' in the face of socio-cultural and political change, they have unfortunately become embroiled in a crisis instead (Arinze 1998:33).

Following Arinze (1998), Mazel and Ritchie (1994), Mdanda (2016) and Rall (2018), several suggestions have been made on how to decolonise museums. These attempts range from the

renaming of museums to the "... building [of] new museums that are devoid of conflicting narratives ..." to the restructuring and inclusion of underrepresented topics and reinterpretive content in museums (Mazel & Ritchie 1994:234; Mdanda 2016:55). However, such 'simple inclusions' are insufficient means of transformation and it is apparent that better ways are needed to represent contested heritage, leading to a "... fundamental change in the discourse of museums" (Mazel & Ritchie 1994:234). Mazel and Ritchie (1994:235) offer some advice and suggest that progressive reinterpretation methods may offer different perspectives and narratives that are more 'objective'. It is imperative that museums heed the call to directly, "... address neglected themes in South African heritage ..." through reinterpretation to make existing collections relevant to current society (Vollgraaff 2015:43).

Unfortunately, the call remains unanswered as it is a "... common feature in African museums [...] that objects on display have remained in the same places for more than twenty years ..." and are remnants of the colonial era (Arinze 1998:34-36). The roll-on effect is that museum exhibitions become static, ageing and unappealing and they no longer convey relevant messages to the public (Arinze 1998:36). Without adequate funds to update museum displays and interpretation and to provide qualified interpreters, audiences will continue to fail to engage with museum collections and instead, become disengaged and dissatisfied (Black 2005).

In post-democracy, "... museums still grapple with their role in South African society" (Vollgraaff 2015:45) and even at the end of apartheid, early emerging democratic South African museums were "... criticised for their selected thematic focus and audience development that reflected the apartheid policies of the time" (Vollgraaff 2015:51). Unfortunately, museums have struggled to transform and remain considered as "Western-imposed institutions that do not contribute significantly to the needs of South African society" (Vollgraaff 2015:51-52). Mdanda (2016:55) claims that the need to restructure museums to make them more relevant to society is becoming increasingly pressing. Nevertheless, where does this restructuring commence, at policy level or with interpretation and which of the core museum functions should take precedence over another? After all, museum relevance is a subjective process (Nielsen 2015:364).

Decolonisation and transformation are subjective challenges, but avenues for rethinking about museum reinterpretation. Museums face the conundrum in restructuring, decolonising or be it transforming where museums have become arenas for dialogue, contestation and confrontation (Abungu 2001). Owing to a lack of resources and funding, it is often not physically possible to update museum exhibitions, but it is significant not only to reflect *what* is exhibited inside of museums, but also *how* it is communicated to audiences. Trained interpreters are key to reinterpretation museum strategies and naturally they should be proficient in the subject matter conveyed at museums to be able to provide visitors with a meaningful

educational experience (Ambrose & Paine 1993:37).

Furthermore, especially within post-apartheid South Africa, museum reinterpretation must be relevant to current and surrounding communities - a 'place for all' (Witcomb 2007:133-134). Museum objects are in themselves "... ambassadors of the country of origin contributing to the breakdown of prejudice and national parochialism" (Benson & Prinsloo 2013:30). Visitors require both interpretation and reinterpretation to be able to engage with displays and to gain more insight in order to relate and understand the significance of objects, the associated information and their place within a museum. Interpretation thus allows museum objects of learning to become talking points as visitors engage with objects and conversations develop around object-centred learning perspectives (Leinhardt & Crowley 2002:301-324).

In order to interpret museum objects, it is first necessary to identify the audience and its needs as a matter of priority. Once the aim of the interpretation (*what to say*), which depends on the needs of the audiences (*to whom*), is clear, the right technique to convey information needs to be chosen (*how to do it*). Thereby, the introduction of new technologies or museum props and new methods may prove useful (Ambrose & Paine 1993:68-69). This is where the application of the IPOP model is crucial as a tool of engagement to 'flip' the museum visitor experience and at the same time transform and decolonise by means of reinterpretation.

AN IPOP PILOT STUDY

The introduction and application of the IPOP theory in a South African museum environment was first applied at the University of Pretoria Museums. In 2017, Jeff Meade a former educator from the Smithsonian Institution in the United States volunteered his time and shared expertise to introduce the concept of the IPOP theory to apply it to a bespoke African context. Meade introduced key interpretation strategies, including Hein's constructivist museum (Hein 1995, 2005) and Falk's classification of visitor identities (Falk 2017:106-130). These learning theories indicated that museum education and tour programmes should rather be orientated "... away from a strictly curatorially-specialist stance towards a visitor-centered experience..." that allow for different interpretation approaches, thereby leading up to the IPOP theory. Practical applications were applied to the University of Pretoria Museums and the idea of the application of the IPOP theory was expanded into a preliminary paper, published in *InterpNews* in 2018 (Hoffmann, Meade & Tiley-Nel 2018:90-96).

To expand the discussion of the IPOP theory in a practical application a pilot study was carried out within a specific exhibition referred to as the *Letsopa* (meaning 'clay' in Sepedi) African ceramics gallery. The exhibition centres on the 'idea' of Mapungubwe ceramics (AD 1220-AD 1290), how they were used, who used them (i.e. the people), made them, how they

were made and why, thus expressing layers of 'excavated' meanings of ceramic making and their technology. The curatorial idea is emphasised by women ceramic makers (expressed as the 'people of the past' IPOP aspect) and the display resonates with contemporary ceramics made by the South African ceramicist, Nic Sithole from Mamelodi in Pretoria. The curation of the gallery introduced new research thoughts, and ideas about the technology of ceramic making and combines an awareness of shape, sense of 'object' and sense of audience to which one communicates. The reinterpretations within the gallery and narrative are distilled from archaeological technological research and analysis of the ceramics. The last element, namely that of the 'physical' experience of tactile exploration within the gallery is presented by audio-visual elements on short ceramic documentaries displayed on LED TV screens, enhancing the senses of sound and talking narrative. Included for the tactile experience are two larger-than life ceramic reproductions as touch models for school learners. The exhibition has received a provocative response and appreciation for the South African representation of its cultural objects as well as its people, as the exhibition is curated into a public space to express this. This multi-layered and IPOP approach of Ideas-People-Objects-Physical nevertheless allows for meaningful experiences through either self-exploration or guided interpretation (Hoffmann et al. 2018:90-96).

CONCLUSION

This paper introduced the IPOP theory to South African museology. It demonstrated that museum interpretation and reinterpretation is inextricably linked and critical to the continued discourse on transformation and decolonisation within a South African museum context. Furthermore, there is a dire need to engage deeper and more adequately with museum audiences. Therefore, museum interpreters need to be at the forefront of change to increase the relevance of South African museums to current society. The status of the interpreter, education officer or tourist guide is significant in the process of reinterpreting existing museums and in the planning of new exhibitions. In this manner, museum reinterpretation with the aid of the IPOP theory becomes increasingly relevant as it serves to enhance audience experiences. The application of the IPOP model within a South African context suggests potential in revisiting the transformation of museum exhibits by exploring new ways in which interpretation and reinterpretation can be utilised. It brings to the fore an innovative theoretical component to museum interpretation within academia, including new avenues of research enquiry for museology in South Africa. As museums in the twenty-first century, the challenges that museums face in order to stay relevant to all communities and society are constantly increasing and demanding. Museums need to rethink interpretive strategies, change and adapt to remain sustainable.

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