Engaging Generation Z in World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of the Netherlands

How to encourage active participation, visitation and co-creation of Generation Z to World Heritage sites?

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Contents

Preface

World Heritage sites serve as enduring illustrations of society's history. However, this does not imply that they necessarily reflect the society of today. They often narrate stories of developments that occurred centuries ago. While these stories remain highly relevant, it is crucial to engage younger generations, not merely by showcasing these sites to them, but by enabling them to see their own narratives reflected. Achieving this requires a deliberate and thoughtful approach. This publication seeks to explore strategies for effectively engaging younger generations.

As the site holder of the Van Nellefabriek in Rotterdam and the father of four children —enthusiastic members of Generation Z — I have personally experienced numerous discussions in which they questioned the relevance of World Heritage. For instance, they have wondered about the significance of a white concrete building and questioned whether commodities like coffee, tea, and tobacco, so commonplace today, warrant any special attention. I only wish I had reviewed the insightful presentations crafted by the students of NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences earlier. Their work would have greatly supported my arguments and helped me to articulate my points more convincingly.

It would, however, be a disservice to confine the students' impressive efforts to personal debates at the dinner table. Their work demonstrates that there are numerous effective approaches to en-

gaging and inspiring Generation Z. These insights are valuable not only to me but to the broader network of World Heritage sites across the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This publication offers a variety of starting points for enhancing the presentation of World Heritage, with the aim of connecting with younger generations and empowering them to make these historical narratives their own.

Enjoy reading!

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Heritage is everything from the past that we value in the present to preserve for our future generations. But what if our future generation is less interested in preserving and visiting heritage? What happens with the future of our heritage?

Across Europe, a trend is emerging: younger generations are visiting heritage sites less and less. From the medieval castles of France to the ancient ruins of Greece, historic landmarks that once drew steady crowds are now struggling to attract new generations of visitors. This decline in engagement is not just a cultural shift—it poses a real threat to the preservation and management of our shared heritage (European Travel Commission, 2022).

Heritage sites depend on visitor engagement for funding, upkeep, and relevance. Without a steady interest from younger audiences, these sites risk falling into neglect or becoming financially unsustainable (UNESCO, 2023). As we see this trend reflected in The Kingdom of the Netherlands as well, this is a risk for the World Heritage in the Netherlands. Our students of the Heritage Experience Management minor have been looking into this issue and explored ways to encourage active participation, co-creation, and visitation of Generation Z to World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

This publication explores options to make World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of The Netherlands relevant and attractive. How can they create meaningful engagements with younger audiences? Understanding this questions is essential—not just to sustain our cultural treasures, but to ensure that history continues to inspire future generations. To make heritage sites more resilient and future-proof.

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Introduction

World Heritage sites are invaluable cultural or natural landmarks, yet they face increasing challenges in attracting younger audiences. The COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted visitation and revenue, with Generation Z—who make up nearly 15% of the population—being particularly affected. To ensure the sustainability and relevance of these sites, it is essential to engage Gen Z by making heritage experiences more accessible, appealing, and meaningful to them.

In the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Dutch World Heritage Foundation (Stichting Werelderfgoed Nederland) has observed a noticeable lack of interest and awareness of World Heritage among young people. To address this, the foundation seeks to explore new strategies to encourage active participation, co-creation, and increased visitation from Gen Z. This effort is guided by the central question: **How can we encourage active participation, co-creation, and visitation of Generation Z to World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of the Netherlands?**

To tackle this challenge, students from the Heritage Experience Management minor at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences will work in teams to develop innovative solutions. Their objectives include:

1. Encouraging active participation, co-creation, and visitation from Gen Z to World Heritage sites across the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

2. Developing inclusive heritage experiences that appeal to both Gen Z and wider audiences.

By focusing on these objectives, this assignment aims to provide input for site holders of world heritage sites to remain meaningful and engaging for younger and future generations. Through the youth-centred perspective and approaches in the outcomes of this challenge, this publication seeks to aid the heritage sites in be(com)ing more inclusive and resilient - benefiting both the sites themselves and the communities they serve.

Students from the Heritage Experience Management minor at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences have worked, in small groups, on these objectives as an assignment. Through desk research and personal reflections of the objectives, they propose options to enhance Gen Z's connection with World Heritage sites, and created a sample experience for a specific World Heritage site in the Kingdom.

Short summary of the outcomes

To attract and engage Gen Z, heritage sites must rethink their approach. The key to success lies in **creating digitally integrated experiences**: Using technology to make learning immersive. **Encouraging participation and co-creation**: Giving Gen Z a role in shaping the heritage narrative. **Aligning with social values**: Incorporating sustainability, inclusivity, and activism into site experiences. **Leveraging social media**:

Ensuring heritage sites are **searchable, shareable, and trend-worthy**.

Gen Z & World Heritage

Understanding Generation Z and their engagement with World Heritage Sites

Who is Generation Z?

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is the first true digital-native generation. Unlike previous generations, they have grown up in an era dominated by the internet, smartphones, and social media. Their lives are shaped by constant connectivity, rapid access to information, and a preference for interactive, visually engaging, and socially connected experiences.

Gen Z is often described as idealistic, valuing inclusivity, sustainability, and ethical practices. They seek authenticity and social progress, supporting movements for climate action, diversity, and justice. Unlike previous generations that relied on formal education and traditional media, Gen Z gathers information through digital platforms and values participatory learning experiences.

Key characteristics of Generation Z

Digital fluency and technological engagement

Gen Z expects digital integration in all aspects of life, including heritage experiences. Traditional museum-style exhibitions with passive learning do not engage them. Instead, they prefer interactive tools like:

- Augmented Reality (AR) & Virtual Reality (VR): making historical narratives come alive.
- Gamification: engaging elements like interactive challenges or scavenger hunts.
- Mobile Apps & QR Codes: providing additional multimedia content.

Short attention spans and the need for instant engagement

Studies suggest that Gen Z's average attention span online is around 8 seconds, making it crucial for heritage sites to deliver information quickly and compellingly. Methods to capture and maintain their interest include:
- Bite-sized content through short videos, infographics, and interactive touchscreens.
- Narrative-driven storytelling rather than traditional fact-based information.
- Quick, immersive experiences that allow visitors to engage without feeling overwhelmed.

The influence of social media

Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube dominate Gen Z's information consumption and decision-making processes. They often decide where to go based on peer recommendations and viral content. For heritage sites, this means:
- Encouraging user-generated content (visitors sharing photos, videos, and experiences).
- Creating social media-friendly exhibits that are visually appealing.
- Leveraging influencers and digital campaigns to make heritage relevant.

Preference for experiential learning and active participation

Gen Z values experience over passive observation. Instead of static museum visits, they prefer hands-on learning opportunities. These include workshops and interactive exhibits that allow them to participate, co-creation activities where they can contribute to digital archives or site narratives, and live

storytelling and performances that make history immersive.

Generation Z's relationship with heritage

Despite valuing meaningful travel, Gen Z's engagement with heritage sites remains limited. Several factors contribute to this. (1) Outdated interpretation methods: many heritage sites rely on traditional, text-heavy approaches that feel disconnected from Gen Z's digital habits. (2) Limited digital presence: heritage sites often lack strong social media engagement, making them invisible to younger audiences. (3) Accessibility issues: high ticket prices, limited public transport, and lack of inclusive experiences deter potential visitors. (4) Lack of personal connection: Gen Z seeks relevance in their experiences. If heritage narratives do not relate to current social or environmental themes, they lose interest.

How Gen Z approaches heritage differently

Unlike previous generations who primarily visit heritage sites for historical appreciation, Gen Z sees heritage through a modern lens. They appreciate heritage linked to sustainability and ethical issues (e.g., sites with eco-friendly practices). They are drawn to diverse, inclusive storytelling that reflects multiple perspectives. They prefer interactive and participatory experiences over passive observation.

The role of digital tools in heritage engagement

Gen Z discovers heritage sites passively through digital platforms rather than actively seeking them out. This means heritage organizations must reach them where they already are—on social media and digital spaces. Strategies include:

- Pre-consumption engagement: promoting heritage through viral social media campaigns before they even consider visiting.

- Interactive virtual experiences: providing AR filters, 360° tours, and engaging digital content.
- Crowdsourced storytelling: allowing visitors to contribute to narratives through video submissions or live commentary.

Preparing for the next chapters

As the chapters ahead explore ways for World Heritage sites to engage and activate Gen Z participation, the insights above provide the necessary context. By understanding Gen Z's digital habits, social values, and experiential preferences, heritage organizations can bridge the gap between history and the future.
The challenge is clear: heritage must evolve to remain relevant. By embracing digital tools, interactive storytelling, and participatory engagement, heritage sites can ensure they do not become relics of the past but vibrant spaces of connection for the future.

Schokland and surroundings

Schokland speaks: stories of a vanished land

Unlocking the path to make an UNESCO heritage site THE experience for Gen Z

The Kingdom of The Netherlands is home to several UNESCO World Heritage sites, each rich in cultural and historical significance. However, these sites face a challenge in engaging Generation Z (individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s), a generation that thrives on digital interactivity, personalized experience, and emotional connections through stories. Traditional heritage presentations often fail to attract this specific generation. Therefore, it is essential to rethink how to create THE experience for Gen Z.

The challenge is to bridge the gap between the characteristics of Gen Z and their relation to an experience. A clear plan is written out to create THE experience for Gen Z, so that we can transform these historical sites of the Netherlands into must-visit destinations for the next generation of explorers. On top of that, we specifically unlocked a way to encourage Gen Z to experience Schokland in a fun and engaging way.

Ready to make UNESCO World Heritage sites unforgettable? Let's create an experience that Gen Z will want to share and remember!

Encourage active participation, co-creation, and visitation from Gen Z to World Heritage sites across the Kingdom of the Netherlands

How to create THE experience to remember?

It is time to turn these cultural gems into hotspots for the next generation of explorers. Gen Z is all about experiences that are fun, immersive, and meaningful.

Hook them with tech

Gen Z grew up with smartphones in their hands, so let's meet them where they are: *online*. Digital engagement is one of the most accessible approaches to reach Gen Z. Research shows that many of them visit heritage sites without even knowing they are UNESCO listed. So, the sites must get a digital presence with the use of social media. Another approach to digitalisation of the sites to enhance their experience through their phones. For example, interactive apps that guide them through the site at their own pace or QR codes with a recognisable UNESCO appearance, that unlock hidden stories or even AR filters that let them "see" history come to life. Imagine standing at a UNESCO World Heritage site, scanning a QR code, and watching a digital reconstruction of how it looked centuries ago. Such an experience is what makes history exciting for Gen Z.

Give them a reason to post

Gen Z loves an aesthetic ambiance. Create that Instagram-worthy moment to create an even bigger digital appearance. Sites should embrace their visual appeal and curate experiences that are camera-friendly to increase the digital appearance on social media. For example, create designed photo zones that frame the key landmarks or the perfect sunset views with historical backdrops. So, if you want Gen Z to do your marketing for free? Make the site visually irresistible.

History, but make it personal

Another aspect to create an irresistible experience is the use of storytelling. Gen Z want the real, raw, multi-perspective history and not just a textbook version. They are interested in more than just the facts. Gen Z wants to hear about people, stories, and emotions. This could be done in the old-fashioned way with guided tours. The tour guide must have a required amount of storytelling skill developed to immerse Gen Z into the stories on a deep emotional level. Another way, which is much more preferred by Gen Z, is self-guided tours. By allowing visitors to choose their journey, sites become more personal and meaningful. Gen Z values independence. They do not want to have guided tours, because they want options. Heritage sites should have thematic self-guided trails, allowing visitors to explore based on their interests. The heritage site could be brought to life by using first-person storytelling or interactive experiences, by choosing their own adventure.

Gamify the experience

A perfect way to create an unforgettable adventure is by gamifying the experience. History does not have to be passive! Turning historical narratives into interactive challenges, treasure hunts, and AR experiences makes learning fun. Imagine an AR-powered game where visitors compete to solve historical mysteries or uncover hidden artifacts. Another trend are pub quizzes. This could be implemented as THE end of an experience to check how much they learned in a competitive way.

Every UNESCO World Heritage site is unique in itself, and therefore it is understandable that not every approach to connect Gen Z with the site is reachable. However, if the heritage site does not adapt to at least one of the expectations, it risks becoming literally a relic of the past. But with the mix of technology, storytelling, or interactive fun, the site can be THE place where history and modern experiences could be remembered as THE experience.

Inclusive heritage experience for Gen Z for Schokland.

From old to bold: How could Schokland be fun and engaging for Gen Z?

One of the thirteen UNESCO World Heritage sites that the Netherlands has is Schokland, which was added in 1995 as the country's first World Heritage site. Once, Schokland was an island in the Zuiderzee; however, after the creation of the Noordoostpolder in 1942, it became part of the mainland. The area is an archaeological treasure, containing several historical layers revealing human activity from 10,000 years ago. Furthermore, in the soil, several prehistoric tools, house foundations, a 4,600-year-old burial site, and various other items have been found that have helped us to understand the history of the Netherlands as a country that lives on the border of land and sea. Because of this the Schokland area is highly protected as an archaeological monument. Due to this rich culture of many generations and its

significance to Dutch history, Schokland was granted its UNESCO World Heritage title.

Activity: Schokland Speaks: stories of a vanished land

After having researched Gen Z and what they value in a heritage experience, it is now time to create an activity for the UNESCO World Heritage site of Schokland. In order to create an engaging and interactive experience for Gen Z and wider audiences, the activity of Schokland Speaks has been created.

Discover Schokland: choose your path, shape your story

The Schokland Speaks concept expresses itself throughout a self-guided tour. Within this self-guided tour, visitors can choose their route themselves and interact digitally while walking through the landscape of Schokland using QR codes, speakers, or other touchpoints placed throughout the area. From these digital interactions, several storytelling

techniques can be used to make Gen Z interact and engage with the site. For example, visuals on mobile phones to showcase how Schokland looked like in various times in history, in the place that the visitors are standing, audio tools that tell stories of previous residents, or making it possible to have a conversation with them through several discussion options. Furthermore, in this self-guided tour, visitors cannot only choose which route they are going to take but also from which perspective they want to follow the tour. For example, perspectives from an archaeologist or a previous resident both provide different sides of the story. When doing the self-guided tour with several people, it is possible to follow the tour from two or more different perspectives at the same time if the visitors have more than one mobile phone available, making it also interesting for a larger group of visitors to do the tour together.

Schokland as THE experience for Gen Z

There are several reasons why this activity relates to Gen Z and how it makes them more attracted and engaged to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Schokland. The first and most obvious reason for this is the digital interaction and engagement that is happening through the self-guided tour. By scanning the QR codes and having activities available on mobile phones during the tour, this activity addresses the preference of Gen Z for having immersive and interactive digital experiences when being present at a heritage site. Furthermore, a key part of this tour that is relevant for Gen Z is that they are able to guide it themselves and be flexible. As mentioned previously, Gen Z wants to be flexible and independent and have different options when doing an activity. With the availability of different perspectives and several options for how the visitor can choose their tour themselves, this activity also addresses this interest. Lastly, Gen Z wants to hear about stories, authenticity, and emotions, not just facts. With the storytelling audio options throughout the

tour, visitors are able to hear the story from previous residents with real emotions and authenticity, creating a more personal and multi-perspective approach to introducing Gen Z to the history of the Schokland area.

A list of key takeaways to create THE experience for Gen Z

To engage Generation Z effectively and ensure the sustainability of World Heritage sites, we recommend the following SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) actions for site holders:

Implement interactive digital experiences
To satisfy Gen Z's desire for immersive, tech-driven experiences, create augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) experiences that let visitors engage with historical content. Within the first year, aim for at least 25% of visitors to interact with digital content. Collaborate with tech companies to develop affordable, user-friendly AR/VR solutions.

Host co-creation events
Create workshops where Gen Z can offer suggestions for upcoming displays or digital narratives, encouraging a sense of pride and increased interest in the historical site. Make sure each event has at least 50 Gen Z attendees. Make use of social media and internet channels to encourage and ease participation. Organize a minimum of two co-creation activities every year to guarantee ongoing participation.

Enhance social media
Plan how to incorporate social media and encourage Gen Z visitors to use YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to share their experiences. Tracking hashtags and user-generated content will help you increase social media engagement by 30% over the course of the upcoming year. To increase visibility, work with Gen Z-friendly influencers and content producers. To guarantee a timely impact, put the social media strategy into action within three months.

Provide multilingual and accessible experiences
To accommodate a diverse range of visitors, make sure that all digital content and printed guides are accessible in multiple languages and in accessible formats, including audio descriptions and subtitles. At least three language options should be provided. To create inclusive content, collaborate with accessibility specialists and translation services. In order to improve accessibility and engagement for every visitor, implement these features within four months.

Dutch Water Defence Lines

Engaging Generation Z with the Dutch Water Defence Lines: creating inclusive, interactive, and digital heritage experiences

Unlocking the path to make an UNESCO Heritage site THE experience for Gen Z

This chapter explores how to get Generation Z more engaged in World Heritage sites. This generation is growing up in the digital era which makes it harder to get their interest in visiting heritage sites, for example museums or old buildings. This generation is looking for authentic, immersive, and personalized experiences. Despite their interest in meaningful travel, their engagement with UNESCO World Heritage sites remains relatively low. This is because of the traditional methods being used to give the information at these sites that lack digital interaction and participatory elements, which do not meet the expectations that Generation Z has for these sites. Because of this there is an increasing need for heritage organizations to adapt and embrace innovative approaches to better engage this generation.

This analysis will look into the possibilities for world heritage sites, particularly for the Dutch Defence Lines, to make use of, for example augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and social media to create more interactive and inclusive experiences. This can create a pathway for active participation, co creation, and increased visitation by Generation Z because they are more familiar with this.

How to activate participation and co-creation for Generation Z?

To foster active participation and co-creation, working with interactive technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) can improve engagement with Generation Z. Augmented reality tours for example allow for self-guided immersive experiences that bring historical events and figures to life (Lu et al., 2023). This allows Generation Z to experience heritage sites in a dynamic and immersive way. Moreover, integrating interactive touchscreens can change traditional exhibits into immersive participatory experiences, making history more accessible and engaging. Or developing mobile games like Heritage Quests, where users solve site-specific challenges or historical riddles to earn rewards, makes heritage exploration both educational and entertaining (Ting et al., 2025).

Social media platforms are crucial in reaching Generation Z. Museums and heritage sites that have a trendy and relatable online presence can capture the attention of younger audiences (Carignani et al., 2023). For example, social media campaigns with engaging hashtags can motivate young visitors to share their experiences, which then can foster a sense of community over heritage.

Tailoring activity programs to the interests of Generation Z is important. Engaging with younger communities to understand their preferences can inform the creation of events and workshops that resonate with them (Stuedahl, 2018). Flexible spaces within heritage sites that serve as social places, study areas, or creativity zones can make these sites more appealing to younger audiences, as it encourages visitation outside the traditional tours.

Lastly, affordable access could remove barriers for Generation Z to engage. For example, a Generation Z Heritage Pass which offers discounts to entry multiple World Heritage Sites improves accessibility. Additionally, partnerships with public

transportation companies can motivate students to participate, as this saves them money (Collins et al., 2008). Moreover, loyalty programs rewarding visits, social media engagement, and co-creation efforts with exclusive experiences can build long-term connections between Generation Z and heritage sites (Nam & Thanh, 2024).

In conclusion, to engage Generation Z with World Heritage sites in the Netherlands, it requires using digital technologies and social media, creating participatory and co-creative opportunities, and tailoring experiences to their interests and values.

Sample experience for the Dutch Water Defence Lines

To make the Dutch Water Defence Lines more engaging and accessible for Generation Z, the proposed experience will focus on three key elements: interactivity, digital integration, and diverse representation.

Interactive and immersive storytelling

- Implement augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) experiences to bring historical events to life.
- Provide an app-based audio guide with interactive storytelling that allows visitors to explore different historical perspectives.
- Use projection mapping on-site to create engaging visual experiences that depict past events dynamically.

Digital engagement and social media integration

- Develop an interactive website and mobile app with game elements to improve visitor engagement.
- Introduce social media challenges where visitors can create content related to the site's history, such as reenactments or storytelling videos.
- Offer AR photo opportunities with historical figures and scenes to encourage social media sharing.

Accessibility and inclusivity

- Ensure multilingual options for digital guides and on-site information to cater to international visitors.
- Provide physical accessibility features such as ramps, clear signage, and sensory-friendly experiences for visitors with disabilities.
- Highlight diverse narratives, including the perspectives of civilians, soldiers, and communities impacted by the Dutch Water Defence Lines over time.

Educational and participatory activities

- Host workshops and live demonstrations where visitors can experiment with water-based defence strategies.
- Organize special events or themed days focused on sustainability and historical innovation, making connections to contemporary climate issues.

By integrating interactive storytelling, digital engagement, and inclusive accessibility measures, this heritage experience will make the Dutch Water Defence Lines more appealing to Generation Z. this also ensures that history remains relevant and engaging while preserving the site's cultural significance for future visitors.

Key takeaways for site holders

To implement a successful inclusive heritage experience, the following SMART recommendations are proposed:

- Develop a comprehensive digital and interactive visitor experience within 18 months to engage Generation Z with heritage, ensuring innovation and ensuring its success is measured by a 25% increase in online and on-site engagement.
- Enhance on-site and digital accessibility within 12 months by implementing inclusive features and tracking user feedback.
- Launch a targeted social media engagement campaign within 6 months, which aims to increase Generation Z participation by 30%, being monitored

through platform analytics and engagement rates.

Eise Eisinga Planetarium

Bringing the PAST to the FUTURE: The Eise Eisinga Planetarium Experience

World Heritage sites are important cultural and historical places, but they face the challenge how to encourage active participation, co-creation, and visitation from Generation Z in the Kingdom of The Netherlands. This generation is highly digitally oriented, enjoys interactive experiences and values inclusivity. To keep the heritage sites relevant for the future, it is important to find ways to encourage this generation's interest and involvement.

This chapter evaluates ways to better align heritage sites with the expectations and values of this generation.

As part of this initiative, a fun and meaningful experience is proposed for young visitors at the Eise Eisinga Planetarium. Practical recommendations for heritage site managers are provided, applying the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) approach.

Commissioned by Stichting Werelderfgoed Nederland (the Dutch World Heritage Foundation), this project aims to support heritage site managers in creating engaging experiences for Generation Z. By implementing these insights, heritage sites can remain relevant and captivating for future generations.

How to encourage active participation, co-creation, and visitation from Generation Z?

Storytelling

It's important to focus on relatability and authenticity when using narrative to engage Generation Z. According to research, Gen Z is especially attracted to authentic, unfiltered stories and favours companies and content producers who share values like openness, inclusion, and social responsibility (Prasanna & Priyanka, 2024). Digital storytelling is an effective method to connect with Gen Z, as it combines multimedia elements such as videos, images, and interactive features to create immersive experiences. This generation responds well to stories that not only inform but also involve them actively. Techniques like telling them to comment on something help to enhance engagement by allowing audiences to interact directly with the content. Given Gen Z's significant presence on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, brands and organizations should adapt their story-telling strategies to these digital spaces, focusing on short, visually engaging content that can quickly capture attention.

Short-form content

Short-form content is particularly effective for reaching Generation Z, due to their preference for quick, digestible content. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram, which are known for their short-form video formats, are highly influential in shaping Gen Z's media consumption habits. Research suggests that this generation's shorter attention spans make concise and visually dynamic content especially impactful. Additionally, interactive features such as polls, quizzes, and challenges can boost engagement by encouraging active participation. When creating short-form content for Gen Z, it is important to maintain a transparent and direct tone, as this generation is often skeptical of overly polished or corporate messaging. Since most of Gen Z engages with content on mobile devices,

short-form videos should also be optimized for mobile viewing, including quick loading times and user-friendly interaction (Prasanna & Priyanka, 2024).

A merged approach: promoting UNESCO World Heritage sites

A practical way to merge storytelling and short-form content strategies is to develop dedicated short videos for the 13 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in The Netherlands. During research on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, it became apparent that most content related to these sites was user-generated, often focusing on personal experiences rather than providing educational or historical insights. This gap in content presents a valuable opportunity to create engaging, informative videos that highlight the cultural and historical significance of these heritage sites, while appealing to Gen Z's digital preferences.

These videos could integrate digital storytelling techniques by combining dynamic visuals with historical narratives and interactive features such as "did you know?" prompts or quick quizzes about each site. For instance, a video about the Mill Network at Kinderdijk-Elshout could include an animated story about their role in Dutch water management, enhanced with behind-the-scenes footage and opportunities for viewers to participate through polls or interactive challenges. This approach would not only educate Gen Z audiences but also support cultural preservation and promote tourism by presenting heritage sites as both valuable educational resources and engaging digital experiences.

Besides education, this strategy creates active participation by encouraging people to interact with the content. Trivia and challenges make learning immersive, strengthening Gen Z's connection to these sites. It also promotes co-creation by incorporating user-generated content, such as personal stories, short videos, or themed challenges that turn

viewers into contributors. Finally, short-form content can drive real-world visitation by creating FOMO (fear of missing out) and showcasing unique site experiences. Location-based challenges, influencer collaborations, and exclusive on-site activities can transform digital engagement into actual visits. By blending storytelling with short-form content, this initiative makes UNESCO World Heritage sites more accessible and appealing to younger audiences, ensuring their relevance while promoting cultural heritage through digital-first experiences.

Sample experience for Eise Eisinga Planetarium

The Eise Eisinga Planetarium in Franeker is the oldest still working planetarium in the world, a unique example of innovative science from the 18th century (The Planetarium – Eisinga Planetarium, n.d.). Eise Eisinga built this mechanical model of the solar system in his living room, intending to make it available for everyone. Today it

is used as a heritage site that allows people to learn more about the stars, planets and Eise Eisinga.

The development of an inclusive heritage experience at the Eise Eisinga Planetarium for Generation Z requires an innovative approach that includes historical meanings, scientific insights, and digital technologies that connect to Generation Z. They have used various approaches, including interactive storytelling, social media engagement, augmented reality experiences and inclusive accessibility initiatives.

Interactive storytelling with social media Eise Eisinga's story can be made more engaging for Generation Z through interactive storytelling that actively involves them in the narrative. By incorporating young storytellers or featuring scientists who explain the historical significance of Eisinga's work, visitors can gain a deeper understanding of his 18th century innovations and his role as a luminary. Social

media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok provide an opportunity to extend this engagement beyond the physical space, using visually appealing short-form content to communicate scientific facts, behind-the-scenes footage from the planetarium, and the broader historical impact of Eisinga's contributions. By integrating interactive storytelling with digital engagement, heritage sites can effectively connect younger audiences with history in a way that feels both relevant and accessible.

Interactive experience and accessibility

Technology experiences can be interactive, such as virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR), which enhance the visitor experience by providing an innovative way to explore Eise Eisinga's planetarium. Through VR, visitors can engage with his work virtually, interact with star constellations, and explore the planets as shown in Figure 2. To ensure inclusivity and accessibility, the imple-

mentation of multilingual guides and audio descriptions for individuals with visual impairments is essential. Furthermore, a co-creation workshop involving Gen Z and local communities can provide a platform for diverse perspectives on astronomy and science, reflecting Eisinga's historical significance as both a scientist and a pioneer. By integrating advanced technology with inclusive storytelling, the planetarium can offer an engaging and accessible experience for a wider audience.

Brand message or slogan

A brand message or a slogan can help the museum to differentiate itself from others. They can show that they have unique experiences that they can't experience somewhere else. This makes it more interesting for Generation Z, as they have a lot of options. A slogan can also be used as a call to action that encourages visitors to act; by giving them the feeling that they miss something unique if they don't visit the planetari-

um. It can bring a feeling of urgency and curiosity, and it can create enthusiasm, which will benefit the museum by attracting not only Generation Z but also a wider audience.

For example: 'from 18th-Century curiosity to cosmic discovery'

In conclusion, by using modern tools like interactive storytelling, social media, technology experiences and a catchy slogan, the Eise Eisinga Planetarium can engage Generation Z with its fascinating history and scientific value. Interactive storytelling can makes Eisinga's story fun and easy to follow, while social media helps the planetarium reach a wider audience through eye-catching content. Additionally, VR offers a new way for visitors to explore the planetarium, making the experience even more exciting. Furthermore, a strong slogan will spark curiosity and help the planetarium stand out. Moreover, inclusive efforts like multilingual guides and co-creation

workshops ensure that everyone, from different backgrounds, can enjoy the experience. In the end, by using these approaches, the Eise Eisinga Planetarium can connect with younger generations, stay educational, and remain relevant in a digital world.

Key takeaways for site holders

The key takeaways for site holders focus on creating a more engaging, inclusive, and innovative heritage experience, especially for Generation Z, while preserving the core values of the site. The following SMART recommendations provide actionable, feasible, and effective strategies for enhancing visitor engagement, integrating modern technology, and ensuring accessibility at any heritage or cultural site.

Incorporate interactive storytelling with digital engagement
Specific: Create interactive experiences where visitors can engage with the site's

history through digital channels, like social media (Instagram, TikTok) or interactive displays in the museum. Use these platforms to share behind-the-scenes content, fun facts and short videos that attract a younger audience.

Measurable: Track visitor engagement by monitoring social media activity (likes, comments, shares) and participation in interactive exhibits.

Achievable: Work with digital content creators, local experts or historians to create engaging content that tells the story of the site in an interesting way.

Relevant: Generation Z is tech-savvy and engages heavily with social media. Using these platforms to connect with them helps build a broader audience and keeps the story of the site alive beyond its physical walls.

Time-bound: Launch the interactive storytelling campaign for an initial 6 months to measure performance, and thereafter amend or continue posting regularly to maintain engagement.

Enhance accessibility with technology and inclusive features

Specific: Introduce tools like Virtual Reality (VR) or Augmented Reality (AR) to make the experience more interactive. Also, add features such as multilingual guides and audio descriptions to cater to different audiences, including people with disabilities.

Measurable: Track how often VR/AR features are used and gather feedback from visitors about the usefulness of accessibility tools like audio guides or translations.

Achievable: Collaborate with technology companies to implement VR/AR and accessibility solutions. Train staff to help visitors with new technologies.

Relevant: Offering inclusive experiences helps reach a wider audience and ensures that all visitors, no matter their background or ability, can enjoy the site.

Time-bound: Roll out the accessibility tools within 12 months and review their impact after the first year to see how well they are working.

Create a strong brand message or slogan

Specific: Develop a catchy slogan that highlights what makes the site unique. It should speak to the curiosity and desire for discovery that is important to Generation Z, sparking their interest and encouraging them to visit.

Measurable: Measure the effectiveness of the slogan by looking at how much it is shared on social media, website visits, and ticket sales after its launch.

Achievable: Work with marketing experts or local youth to create a slogan that speaks to young audiences and reflects the site's core values.

Relevant: A good slogan makes the site stand out and attracts more visitors, especially by creating a sense of urgency or excitement about the experience.

Time-bound: Finalize the slogan in the next 3 months and start using it in all marketing materials within 6 months.

Colonies of Benevolence

Heritage hack: DIY Benevolence skills for today

How can we reinterpret the structured survival skills of the Colonies of Benevolence into modern sustainable practices while making heritage engaging and relevant for Gen Z?

1. Transform heritage interpretation into an immersive experience by teaching participants self-sufficiency skills practiced in the Colonies of Benevolence, allowing them to engage with history through hands-on activities.
2. Demonstrate how historical agricultural techniques, communal resource management, and simple craftmanship from the Colonies can be adapted into practical, environmentally friendly solutions for today's world.

3. Inspire Gen Z to reinterpret and share heritage through social media, DIY challenges, and innovative adaptations that connect history with modern lifestyles.

Gen Z, born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, is shaped by digital connectivity, environmental consciousness, and a preference for interactive, hands-on learning. Their relationship with heritage differs from previous generations, as traditional museum visits and passive history lectures often fail to capture their interest. Instead, they are drawn to immersive experiences, gamified learning, and DIY projects, which allow them to actively engage with the past rather than simply observe it.

How to encourage active participation, co-creation, and visitation from Generation Z to World Heritage sites across the Kingdom of the Netherlands?

World Heritage sites are a vital part of history and culture, but they often struggle to attract younger audiences, especially Generation Z. Traditional tourism approaches, such as guided tours and static museum displays, don't always align with how Gen Z engages with the world. As a generation that values immersive experiences, social interaction, and creative expression, Gen Z wants more than just passive sightseeing. They seek opportunities to interact, contribute, and share their experiences in meaningful ways. To encourage active participation, co-creation, and visitation, World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of the Netherlands need to embrace technology, provide creative engagement opportunities, and offer immersive experiences that bring history to life.

Engaging Gen Z through active participation

For Gen Z, simply visiting a historic site isn't enough—they want to be actively involved. One way to achieve this is through interactive programs such as short-term volunteering, internships, and youth advisory boards where they can contribute to preservation efforts or digital storytelling. Technology also plays a crucial role in making heritage sites more immersive. Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) can allow visitors to experience historical sites as they once were, interact with historical figures, or even play out historical scenarios. Gamification is another great strategy, incorporating digital scavenger hunts, interactive quizzes, or escape-room-style challenges to make learning about history more engaging and rewarding.

Encouraging co-creation and creative expression

Gen Z is a generation of content creators, and World Heritage sites should tap into

this by encouraging social media engagement and user-generated content. By promoting TikTok challenges, Instagram Reels, and YouTube vlogs, heritage sites can become more visible and appealing to young audiences. Organizing creative workshops in photography, digital art, music, or fashion inspired by historical sites can provide Gen Z with opportunities to co-create and leave their mark on cultural heritage. Hackathons or digital innovation challenges could also allow young developers and designers to create new ways of presenting history in immersive and interactive formats.

Making heritage sites more attractive and accessible

Heritage sites must ensure that experiences are convenient, exciting, and budget-friendly. Collaborating with influencers and digital content creators can showcase these sites in a way that feels relevant and engaging. Transforming heritage locations into hybrid

spaces—such as study hubs or remote workspaces—can integrate history into young people's daily lives. Sustainability is also important to Gen Z, so promoting bike-friendly routes, public transportation discounts, and eco-conscious tourism initiatives can make visits more appealing. Additionally, hosting themed festivals, concerts, or exclusive nighttime tours can create immersive experiences that turn history into something exciting rather than distant and old-fashioned.

For World Heritage sites in the Netherlands to attract more Gen Z visitors, they need to evolve beyond traditional tourism and focus on digital engagement, creative involvement, and immersive experiences. By integrating technology, encouraging co-creation, and making visits more dynamic, these sites can transform from static historical landmarks into vibrant, interactive destinations. Instead of viewing history as something outdated, Gen Z can experience it in a way that feels alive, relevant, and meaningful.

Presentation of an inclusive heritage experience, the Colonies of Benevolence for Generation Z

Interactive and multisensory learning
- Activities are designed to provide different learning styles like visual, auditory, and hands-on participation.
- Participants can decide between guided, independent, or observational engagement to explore the Colonies' historical practices.

Diverse perspective
- Different perspectives, like settlers, laborers, and reformers are highlighted and present both the aspirations and challenges of the colonial project.
- Critical thinking is encouraged through ethical discussions which explore the social implications of enforced labor and structured poverty relief .

Accessibility and inclusivity
- The Workshops feature audio guides, multilingual subtitles, and simplified reading materials to ensure inclusivity.
- The focus is on physical accessibility, ensuring that individuals with mobility needs can fully participate.
- To broaden the accessibility beyond physical visitors a virtual experience is available for remote engagement.

Connecting history to contemporary issues
- Historical skills taught at the Colonies, like sustainable farming, textile production, and resource-efficient building are reframed within modern contexts like urban farming, ethical fashion, and circular economies.
- Topics like sustainability, social reform, and self-sufficiency in today's world are encouraged.

Workshop and challenge activities: sustainable farming and self-sufficiency challenge

In this workshop, the Colonies' structured farming system, which was designed to make settlers self-sufficient is being connected with today´s sustainable agriculture innovations.

- Recreate historical farming techniques such as crop rotation and companion planting, which were used in the Colonies to maintain soil health and food security.
- Compare historical and modern self-sufficiency models, discussing how the Colonies' structured agricultural labor system compares to today's push for local, organic, and regenerative farming.
- Engage in a permaculture challenge, where they design a small-scale farm model inspired by 19th-century farming techniques but adapted for modern urban spaces.

Textile and clothing sustainability workshop

The Colonies of Benevolence trained settlers in textile production, for personal use and as a source of income. In this workshop the historical craft is being connected to today´s concerns about fast fashion and textile sustainability.

- Work with traditional textile techniques, such as weaving or simple hand-spinning, to understand how textiles were made in the Colonies.
- Experiment with natural dyeing, using plant-based dyes like those that would have been used in the 19th century.
- Repurpose old textiles using upcycling techniques, learning how settlers in the Colonies had to maximize limited resources—an approach that aligns with modern circular fashion initiatives.

Food preservation and zero waste challenge

Food preservation played a crucial role in ensuring that settlers could survive the seasons.

- Hands-on preservation activities, where participants learn traditional techniques such as fermentation (e.g., sauerkraut making), dehydration (drying fruits and vegetables), and pickling.
- Explore how zero-waste practices were essential in the Colonies, where every resource had to be maximized like modern sustainability efforts aimed at reducing food waste.
- Create a zero-waste meal, using preserved and repurposed ingredients, mirroring the necessity of resourcefulness in the Colonies.

Digital and social media integration
- Participants are encouraged to document the experience via social media. This way they can share their workshop projects and create tutorials.
- A hashtag campaign is created to encourage participants to share their journey with others online. This helps to create a sense of community.
- Virtual workshops are hosted, allowing remote participants to join activities and ask questions in real-time.

Co-creation and active participation
- Ideas of participants are included in how traditional skills can be adapted to modern challenges, which creates a sense of ownership.
- Group activities promote collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving.

Gamification and competition
- Hosting a "heritage hackathon" invites participants to develop innovative applications of historical skills for today′s world.
- Winning projects are displayed in a rotating exhibition and featured on digital storytelling platforms.

Key takeaways for site holders

- Leverage existing site infrastructure and community partnerships for seamless execution.
- Align the program with Generation Z's interests in sustainability, innovation, and digital interactivity.

- Launch a pilot version of the program within six months, gather participant feedback, and refine for long-term adoption.
- Set clear metrics to measure success, such as the number of participants, social media engagement (hashtags, video tutorials, posts), and the completion of challenges.
- Partner with artisans, environmentalists, or historical interpreters who can guide the workshops, ensuring that the historical skills are authentic and well-taught.
- Provide spaces for participants to share their work, participate in online challenges, or interact with each other, making the experience relevant to their digital-native lifestyle.

The Wadden Sea

Wadden Uncovered: a journey through time and tide

The Wadden Sea is a unique World Heritage site, known for its geological and ecological values. However, despite its status and importance, engaging younger generations particularly Generation Z remains a challenge. Traditional heritage experiences often fail to align with the expectations and digital lifestyles of this audience. This chapter explores how we can make heritage more appealing to Generation Z by creating heritage experiences that encourage active participation, co-creation, and visitation among Generation Z across the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The main question within this chapter is: How can we stimulate active engagement, co-creation, and increased visitation from Generation Z to World Heritage sites, with a special focus on the Wadden Sea? To answer this, we will explore the motivations and barriers that influence the relationship between Generation Z and cultural heritage. Additionally, we will explore innovative strategies that can make heritage sites more accessible, interactive, and meaningful for this generation.

This chapter aims to achieve two key outcomes. First, it will outline strategies to foster participation, co-creation, and visitation among Generation Z at World Heritage sites across the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Second, it will present an in-

clusive and engaging heritage experience specifically designed for the Wadden Sea. One that resonates with the values, interests, and digital habits of Generation Z. By doing so, this chapter seeks to contribute to a future where heritage is not just preserved but actively lived and shaped by new generations.

Understanding Generation Z and their interests

To encourage Generation Z to visit, enjoy, and take part in World Heritage sites in the Netherlands requires a new and modern approach. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z grew up with the internet and social media, making digital engagement an important part of their lives. They value experiences that are immersive, shareable, and meaningful. Traditional museum visits or guided tours may not always capture their interest, but interactive and tech-driven experience can. Additionally, Generation Z is highly aware of global issues such as

climate change and social justice, often preferring activities that align with their values. By offering experiences that connect heritage to modern concerns, such as sustainability and cultural diversity, heritage sites can become more relevant to this generations.

Digital engagement: social media and virtual experiences

One of the best ways to reach Generation Z is through digital platforms. Social media apps like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube are great for sharing stories. Short videos, behind-the-scenes content, and interactive challenges can make history more fun and engaging. Augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) can also make visits more exciting by allowing people to see historical events or how places looked in the past.

Encouraging visitors to create their own content is another great way to get Generation Z involved. Young people could

share their experiences online using special hashtags or take part in photo and video contests. The Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed mentioned how important it is for communities to help preserve heritage, and letting young visitors capture and share their own views can create a deeper connection to these sites.

Co-creation
Beyond online engagements, co-creation is another key strategy. Many young people do not just want to observe heritage but want to part in it. Hosting workshops on photography, filmmaking, re-enacting historical events can make learning more fun, interactive, and impactful. These activities provide opportunities for young people to express themselves creatively while connecting with history. Heritage sites can also work with schools and student groups to design new exhibits or events that reflect the interests and perspectives of a wider audience. By involving the public in the creation process,

heritage sites can foster a deeper, more personal connection to the history they preserve, ensuring that the next generation not only learns about the heritage but also actively participates in its storytelling and preservation.

Making visits interactive and fun
Making visits more interactive and personal can also improve the experience for Generation Z. Like mentioned before, traditional guided tours may not always appeal to Generation Z, but using games, scavenger hunts, and escape-room-style activities can make learning more exciting. Combining online and real-life experiences, such as live-streamed re-enactments or VR tours, can also make heritage sites more accessible to a wider audience.

Accessibility and inclusivity
Ensuring that heritage sites are open and welcoming to all young people is crucial. Offering student discounts, free entry days, and digital guides in different lan-

guages can make visits easier and more appealing. Creating comfortable spaces like lounge areas, pop-up cafés, or creative zones can also encourage visitors to stay longer, interact with others, and share their experiences online.

By embracing digital tools, hands-on activities, sustainability, and inclusivity, World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of the Netherlands can attract and inspire Generation Z. These efforts will ensure that these important places remain exciting, accessible, and valuable for young people, encouraging them to become active participants in the ongoing story of heritage preservation. In doing so, World Heritage sites will continue to thrive, maintaining their historical importance and inspire a deeper connection to heritage for years to come.

Heritage experience "Wadden Uncovered"

The Wadden Sea, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is an ever-changing landscape rich in natural beauty, biodiversity, and historical significance. However, engaging Generation Z with heritage sites requires innovative approaches that align with their values, digital habits, and desire for interactive experiences. To encourage deeper engagement towards the Wadden Sea area, we propose an Augmented Reality (AR) Exploration along the walking routes of the Wadden Sea.

Through QR codes placed at key locations, visitors can unlock AR filters revealing hidden marine creatures, shipwrecks, and stories that have shaped the region. This immersive experience will allow the users of Generation Z to experience the Wadden Sea and what it holds in its rich waters directly on their smartphones.

Aligning with Generation Z trends

Generation Z relies much on their mobile devices. You could even call them the digital natives. This increased use of mobile devices has also contributed to their decreased attention span and that is why

traditional information boards often fail to capture their attention. This generation requires interactive and immersive experiences to raise their awareness and interest in heritage sites like the Wadden Sea.

AR storytelling transforms learning into an engaging and visual adventure. Instead of receiving information through information boards, they can actively explore the past and present of the Wadden Sea through their smartphones, making education feel like an interactive journey.

This experience also taps into Generation Z's strong connection to social media. The ability to capture and share unique moments is crucial to their engagement, and the AR filters allow visitors to take photos with virtual marine animals, interact with shipwrecks, or overlay historical landscapes onto the present day.

Personalization and gamification further strengthen Generation Z's interest in the activity. Instead of a one heritage experience, visitors can unlock exclusive content, participate in challenges, and vote on future AR additions, making them co-creators of the experience. Environmental awareness is another key value for Generation Z, and this AR journey highlights the impact of climate change on the Wadden Sea's ecosystem. By visually demonstrating rising sea levels, disappearing islands, and changes in biodiversity, the experience transforms conservation education into an interactive call to action. Instead of simply reading about these changes, they can observe them through an overlay on their screen, comparing past and present landscapes in real time.

The AR experience bridges this gap by making the invisible visible. Visitors will be able to see how the coastline has shifted over time, witnessing disappearing islands and rising sea levels firsthand. Instead of simply reading about these

changes, they can observe them through an overlay on their screen, comparing past and present landscapes in real time.

Maritime history also plays a significant role in the identity of the Wadden Sea. Countless shipwrecks lie beneath its waters, hidden from view but rich in historical significance. Through AR, visitors can virtually "raise" these wrecks from the seabed, revealing their original structures, the stories of those who sailed them, and the trade routes that once passed through these waters. In addition to historical exploration, the experience will bring the region's biodiversity to life. Marine creatures such as seals, fish, and shellfish will appear in their natural habitats through AR projections, allowing visitors to witness the diversity of life that exists just beneath the waves.

Impact & future expansion

By combining heritage, technology, and storytelling, this experience encourages active participation and co-creation, ensuring that Generation Z is not just a passive visitor but an engaged explorer of the Wadden Sea. The project could expand to other World Heritage sites in the Kingdom, integrating AR as a standard tool for interactive heritage experiences.

This initiative aligns with Generation Z's digital behaviours, sustainability mindset, and desire for shareable, interactive experiences, making the Wadden Sea a must-visit destination for the next generation of heritage explorers.

Key takeaways: enhancing Generation Z engagement with the Wadden Sea

To successfully attract and engage Generation Z at the Wadden Sea, the following recommendations are structured using the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound). These recommendations provide practical, effective, and feasible actions for site holders to implement, ensuring

that the Wadden Sea remains an engaging and interactive World Heritage site for younger generations.

Implement augmented reality (AR) exploration along Wadden Sea walking routes

To create a more interactive and immersive experience, QR codes will be placed at key locations along the Wadden Sea walking routes. These will allow visitors to access AR filters that reveal marine creatures, historical shipwrecks, and the transformation of the coastline over time.

- **Specific:** Develop and install QR code-activated AR experiences at significant points in the Wadden Sea region.
- **Measurable:** Aim for at least 50% of visitors of the Wadden Sea engaging with the AR experience within the first six months, tracked through app analytics and QR code scans.
- **Achievable:** Utilize existing AR technology in collaboration with heritage organizations and technology partners.
- **Relevant:** Addresses Generation Z's

preference for digital, immersive, and shareable experiences while educating them on climate change and maritime history.
- **Time-bound:** Pilot the AR experience within one year, with an evaluation after six months to refine content and engagement strategies.

Leverage social media & user-generated content

To increase digital engagement and visibility, a dedicated social media campaign will encourage visitors to share their AR experiences online using a branded hashtag.

- **Specific:** Launch a social media campaign featuring visitor-generated content, contests, and influencer collaborations to enhance outreach.
- **Measurable:** Increase social media engagement by 30% within six months, tracked through post interactions, shares, and hashtag usage.
- **Achievable:** Utilize existing platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube,

working with influencers and local communities.

- **Relevant**: Aligns with Generation Z's content-sharing habits and enhances the digital presence of the Wadden Sea.
- **Time-bound**: Implement the campaign within three months of AR activation, with quarterly performance assessments.

Strengthen co-creation with Generation Z through workshops & feedback loops

To ensure that heritage experiences continue to evolve with Generation Z's interests, annual co-creation workshops will be organized to gather their input on new digital features and engagement strategies.

- **Specific**: Establish participatory workshops where Generation Z visitors contribute ideas for AR content, interactive experiences, and digital engagement.

- **Measurable**: Conduct at least three workshops per year, targeting 100+ young participants across different locations.
- **Achievable**: Partner with universities, student organizations, and cultural institutions to facilitate these sessions.
- **Relevant**: Fosters a sense of ownership and long-term connection between Generation Z and the Wadden Sea.
- **Time-bound**: Launch the first workshop within six months, with an annual review of feedback and implementation of new ideas.

Ensure accessibility & inclusivity for a wider audience

Making the Wadden Sea more accessible and inclusive will remove barriers to visitation and engagement, ensuring that all young visitors can fully experience the site.

- **Specific**: Implement student discounts, free digital guides in multiple languages, and create youth-friendly gathering spaces.

- **Measurable:** Increase Generation Z visitation by 15% within one year, tracked through ticket sales and digital guide downloads.
- **Achievable:** Utilize existing resources to introduce cost-effective accessibility measures.
- **Relevant:** Expands opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds to engage with the Wadden Sea.
- **Time-bound:** Implement accessibility initiatives within 12 months, with ongoing assessments based on visitor feedback.

By implementing these SMART recommendations, developing and introducing AR storytelling, social media campaigns, gamification strategies, co-creating projects, and sustainability-focused activities can help to make World Heritage sites, especially the Wadden Sea, more appealing to Generation Z. These strategies will not only increase visitation and active participation but also help Generation Z develop a stronger connection to cultural heritage, ensuring its preservation for future generations.

World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Heritage on campus: the annual fair bridging Generation Z and World Heritage

The challenge of engaging young people with cultural sites is not unique to the Netherlands, but it is a pressing issue. According to Eurostat's culture statistics on cultural participation, participation rates among young people have been declining, from 95.5% in 2015 to 86.9% in 2022 in the Netherlands for at least one cultural activity per year. More specifically, the percentage of the total population visiting a historical site at least once a year dropped from 61.4% in 2015 to 43.8% in 2022. Generation Z is typically defined as those born between 1997 and 2012.

Given the broad nature of Generation Z, this project will primarily focus on students, as they represent a significant and accessible segment of this age group. One of the main challenges we will be facing is how to present a heritage site without being at the site itself. Can we successfully convey the significance of a World Heritage location in a setting far removed from it? If context is key to understanding heritage, is it effective to present only fragments rather than the whole? Do we need to physically be on-site for a story to be worth telling, or

can we design action-based experiences that engage Generation Z more effectively than passive consumption? These questions are central to our approach.

Additionally, heritage has increasingly become a market. Commercialization is evident in museums and particularly in privately owned heritage sites, but is this true for UNESCO World Heritage sites? While these are designated for preservation rather than profit, they must still find ways to remain relevant to the eyes of the future generations. Understanding how Generation Z interacts with heritage before they even step foot on-site – what we might call pre-consumption – is crucial to creating lasting interest and deeper engagement.

Given these observations, the main question in this chapter is: How can World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of the Netherlands effectively spark the interest of Generation Z and encourage them to engage with cultural heritage?

Unlike the other projects in this challenge, which focus on single sites, this chapter is designed to be applicable to most of the 13 World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The goal is not just to increase visits but to create a sustainable model of engagement that makes heritage relevant, accessible, and exciting for young audiences—even before they ever set foot on-site.

Engagement: what makes a fulfilling experience of a heritage for Generation Z?

As we previously saw this generation is shaped by the digital world, where information is abundant but engagement is selective. However, once selected what will make a fulfilling heritage experience is not just passive observation, it is active participation, emotional connection, and personalization. Generation Z seeks experiences that feel relevant to their own life, experiences that are interactive, and shareable.

The ability to see oneself reflected in the story being told is a recurrent subject when it comes to storytelling and interpretation, and if in theory it is an understandable point, the fact that we are targeting singular individuals makes it rather difficult to set up. The answer lies in creating storytelling that feels personal by focusing on singular voices. An individual should speak to another. A heritage site should highlight lesser-known stories, local perspectives, and lived experiences. What was the life of an orphan like during the early stage of the Colonies of Benevolence? How did a fisherman's family experience the transformation of the Dutch polders? These perspectives make heritage feel tangible rather than abstract. Emotional connection is important, and another way of creating that link might also be by connecting history to contemporary issues. Drawing parallels between past encroachment of the waters in Schokland and its current situation. Historical struggles and present-day concerns help visitors see history as something that still shapes their world today. A customizable experience might also mean giving young visitors agency in their exploration. Self-guided digital tours sometimes make heritage more personal and immersive. To take this a step further, content could even be visitor-generated, allowing young people to contribute their own interpretations, reflections, or creative retellings of history.

Beyond storytelling, Generation Z prefers to do, not just see. A heritage visit should not be a passive experience but an action-driven one, where visitors engage with the site beyond reading plaques or listening to audio guides. Gamification is a keyway to achieve this. Imagine that at the Roman frontier visitors must be faced to Germanic tribes, making choices that impact their survival, this approach shifts the experience making exploration more dynamic and rewarding. Similarly, live-action roleplay or participatory theatre allows visitors to step into the past, interacting with historical dilemmas rather than just learning about them.

However a site holder needs to remember that the engagement process begins long before a visitor steps on-site. The way Generation Z interacts with heritage starts through pre-consumption, the digital experience that precedes a physical visit. The challenge is to make heritage part of their daily scrolling habits, whether through behind-the-scenes content, short-form storytelling, or interactive AR experiences. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (FAMSF) and the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) (Information today) have both already started experimenting with AR filters that allow users to try on historical clothing or digitally reconstruct lost heritage. Influencers have created serialized content, where TikTok videos are used to tell a historical event piece by piece, sparking curiosity and engagement.

Social experience is another defining aspect of how Generation Z interacts with heritage. Young people today see cultural experiences as inherently social and community driven. Whether it is co-creating content, attending live events, or participating in group challenges, they are far more likely to engage with heritage when it feels like a shared experience. Organizing heritage nights, university meet-ups, or interactive debates around contested histories can make heritage sites feel like vibrant spaces rather than static monuments of the past. In this sense, social media challenges, where users reinterpret historical events in their own words, remixing the past with humour or modern commentary, can be an effective way of bridging traditional heritage with contemporary digital culture. To address these challenges, we suggest the creation of a heritage fair, specifically designed to bridge the gap between Generation Z and World Heritage sites in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The heritage fair: bringing World Heritage sites to Generation Z

Hosting the heritage fair outside of traditional heritage sites is key to reaching a broader audience and democratizing access to heritage. While any heritage event would naturally attract individuals already interested in history, it is crucial to engage those who feel disconnected from it, those who believe heritage is not for them or lack prior knowledge. A central challenge is that many Generation Z individuals have lower attention spans (Bunag, 2020, para. 2) and do not actively seek out historical experiences. By bringing heritage to spaces that young people already frequent, such as universities, we lower the psychological and cultural barriers that might prevent them from visiting a World Heritage site on their own. This addresses an essential aspect of accessibility: the sense of belonging and relevance. Additionally, students from different fields may find unexpected connections with heritage when it

relates to their interests. For example, engineering students might be drawn to the water management systems of the Dutch Water Defence Lines or the Wouda Steam Pumping Station. Sustainable tourism students could relate to the environmental challenges faced by Schokland, while business majors might be interested in the connection between Willemstad, Curaçao and Portugal. Making heritage relevant to their fields of study can turn passive observers into engaged participants.

To maximize accessibility, the heritage fair would operate on a rotary model, moving between various university campuses and provinces across the Netherlands. This ensures that new students encounter the fair each year, preventing stagnation in audience engagement. Target locations should focus on cities with high student populations, such as Amsterdam, Utrecht, Groningen, Rotterdam, and Delft (Studiekeuze, 2024). If accessibility is a key barrier preventing

Generation Z from visiting heritage sites, it is equally unlikely they would travel to a fair in an inconvenient location. By hosting the event where students are already based, the opportunity to learn becomes significantly more convenient, and the social aspect encourages attendance. The fair would be held annually, allowing UNESCO World Heritgage sites to build long-term engagement strategies. The timing should align with academic calendars to ensure maximum student participation.

Each fair would feature one stand per heritage site, ideally covering all thirteen World Heritage sites, including the historic area of Willemstad in Curaçao. To make the event locally relevant, a nearby institution, such as a museum or historical centre, could also participate. Sites would be encouraged to design their stalls using the findings regarding our audience analysis. To provide some examples of interactive engagement methods, Van Nelle Factory could organise a 15 minutes role play game around trade in the 20th century, as for the steam pumping station, they could use Lego to build a miniature version of a pumping system, illustrating its functioning. By incorporating interactive elements, the fair ensures that visitors not only learn about World Heritage but also actively participate in it. The fair presents an excellent opportunity for UNESCO World Heritage sites to recruit volunteers and attract donations, reaching a younger demographic that is typically harder to engage. A heritage careers stand would introduce students to professional opportunities in the field, providing them with information on internships, volunteering programs, and potential career paths. Volunteering is one of the most effective ways to spark long-term interest in heritage careers while making young people more aware of the sector's challenges. To ensure the event is engaging and well-promoted, co-organization with student groups is essential. Collaborating with students from fields such as heritage management, event management, and history

would help generate excitement, spread awareness, and advise on relevant activities. While the fair should reflect local student interests at each university, maintaining a top-down organizational structure ensures consistency across all locations. This approach allows for scalability while leaving room for customization in each setting.

Additionally, while the primary goal is to attract more young visitors to UNESCO World Heritage sites, the fair also fosters collaboration between heritage organizations. By exchanging ideas on attracting visitors, securing funding, and improving site sustainability, the event strengthens the sector as a whole. One weekend annually in exchange for the largest promotional opportunity of the year for these sites is a valuable investment, with the potential to bring in younger demographics as supporters, volunteers, and future visitors. By integrating these elements, the heritage fair ensures that World Heritage is not just

something to visit, it is something that actively reaches young people, meeting them where they are and making history feel relevant to their lives.

Key takeaways for site holders

1. Pre-consumption is crucial and engaging with them, before their coming, through social media or fairs, is essential to sparking initial interest.
2. The most fulfilling heritage experiences for Generation Z involve emotional connection, and relevance to contemporary issues. This can be achieved through interactive storytelling, visitor-generated content, and immersive engagement tools such as AR and gamification.
3. Accessibility and convenience matter, and reducing logistical and psychological barriers to heritage engagement is crucial. Bringing heritage experiences to familiar locations (e.g., universities) increases participation and broadens outreach.

Develop a social media campaign with interactive short-form content

To enhance engagement and visibility, a social media campaign should be launched focusing on interactive, short-form content across platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels. This initiative will spotlight individual stories from the site, bringing personal and cultural narratives to a wider audience in an engaging and digestible format. The content strategy should include behind-the-scenes footage, user-generated content, and interactive elements such as polls and challenges to encourage active participation. To measure success, key engagement metrics, including views, shares, and comments, should be tracked consistently. The goal is to achieve a 15% increase in online interactions within six months, ensuring that the campaign fosters meaningful engagement and broadens audience reach.

Launch a rotating heritage fair in key student cities

A rotating heritage fair should be introduced, piloting the first event on-campus in two major student cities, such as Amsterdam and Utrecht, within one year. This initiative will create a dynamic, immersive experience that allows students to connect with cultural heritage in an engaging and educational way. To establish a sustainable model, partnerships with at least five universities should be secured within the first three years, enabling a structured rotation of the fair across different campuses. Post-event surveys should be conducted to gather feedback and measure impact, with a target of achieving an 80% satisfaction rate among attendees. Additionally, participation should increase by 10% annually, ensuring continuous growth and long-term success of the initiative

To assess the fair's effectiveness in promoting heritage sites, a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures

should be employed. Pre- and post-fair surveys can evaluate shifts in awareness and interest, while website traffic, social media engagement, and QR code scans can track digital interactions. On-site visits should be monitored through ticket sales, discount code redemptions, and visitor referrals, offering insights into the fair's direct influence on attendance. Furthermore, partnerships with local businesses and universities can indicate long-term community engagement. Feedback from heritage site representatives, attendee testimonials, and social listening will provide a deeper understanding of the fair's impact, ensuring that it continues to foster meaningful connections between students and cultural heritage.

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