

Between Art, Data, and Meaning

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Much of Dutch museum collections are a legacy of a colonial past. Because these exhibitions have power over societal perceptions of cultures and histories, museums increasingly aim to show visitors that the objects they see often have multiple cultural meanings and contexts attached to them. We call it **polyvocality**!

This Project

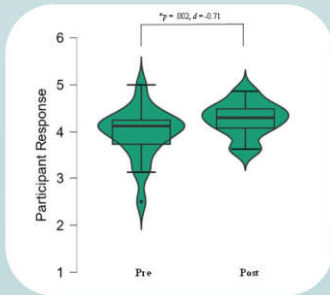
1. Developed a "polyvocal" VR experience of the Surinamese flag
2. Asked whether viewers of the exhibit (considering their different unique backgrounds) perceived the multiple, or even conflicting meanings of the flag's components – and were aware of this co-existence of meanings! We refer to this as **polyvocal view**.



Participant in Gaia Environment

We measured quantitatively & qualitatively...

- Whether participants hold a polyvocal view
- Whether the design was perceived as polyvocal
- If using methods like VR allows for an appropriate depiction of cultural resources



Quantitative Results

(1) Greater tolerance for ambiguity (MSTAT-II) predicts a higher polyvocal view *before* the experience, $\beta = .60, t(14) = 2.20, p = .045$

(2)* Participants significantly changed their polyvocal view from pre to post measurement. The experience altered how individuals regard the flag of Suriname *before* the think-aloud interview was conducted.

Example items from questionnaire

"I think there is not one universal way to tell what the flag of Suriname stands for, but multiple."

"I believe that it is important to hear every perspective about the flag of Suriname before judging its meaning."

Qualitative Results

The think-aloud interview revealed an **enhanced polyvocal view in response to certain features** within the virtual environment:

1. Voiceover Primer



Listen to this. audio bit from the VR experience. It seems that the voiceover "primed" participants to think polyvocally – making them reflect on their own relation to the flag and its meaning, e.g., their own knowledge about Suriname or flags as symbols for national identity...

2. Visual Contrast: Old and New Flag



Creating contrast between old and new & showcasing progression through time affected participants' polyvocal mindset: Some expressed a newfound understanding of the flag's meaning changing through time; for some it reinforced their pre-existing opinions on the importance of the new flag.

3. Emotional Triggers

The exhibit confronted visitors with different chapters of Surinamese history & different emotions were elicited...

Curiosity | Interest | Empathy | Excitement | Enjoyment | Disappointment | Confusion | Boredom | Sadness



4. Personal Testimony Enhancing a Polyvocal View



"I remember when I was a child, I was feeling very proud of having a star on my flag, because I don't see anyone else having a star"

"[...] when you're a child growing up in a postcolonial context, it's like you grow up with this idea of a united nation and how important it is to be united, but then I'm wondering if people who were there before, like parents or grandparents, they have such a different idea of it in a way."

"I mean the whole story about like how people attach very different meanings to this kind of very arbitrary thing of a national flag [...] make it fit to their own identity and then for a child it's about being special and for someone else it's about [...] the independence and for someone else it's about unity with different ethnicities."