



The New Museology Discourse at the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum

Badra Sugara^{1,*}, Wardo², Titis Srimuda Pitana³

Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

badrasugara@student.uns.ac.id¹, wardo2013@staff.uns.ac.id², titissrimuda@staff.uns.ac.id³

^{*})Corresponding author

Keywords:

Discourse; New Museology;
Radyapustaka Surakarta;
Museum; Cultural Studies

ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive research, within the field of cultural studies, aims to explore the practice of New Museology discourse at the Radyapustaka Museum in Surakarta. The data sources included: informants, namely museum managers and visitors; the event location, the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum; and relevant documents and references. Data collection was carried out through field observation, document studies, literature review, and interviews with selected informants using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data validity was ensured through triangulation, and data analysis was performed using interpretive techniques based on generalized propositions. The results of this study showed that activities carried out at the museum, such as exhibitions, workshops, and similar events, are practices of The New Museology discourse at the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum.

INTRODUCTION

The long history of museums has produced fascinating records over time. However, the public still perceives museums as exclusive, mystical, old-fashioned, and repositories of outdated items. These views are not without basis. For many years, museums simply displayed their collections without considering the messages they aimed to convey to the public. Additionally, the concepts employed by most museums were seen as disconnected from the current developments of the times. The widespread digitalization, driven by rapid advancements in information and communication technology, has revolutionized many aspects of life—from the economy and politics to defence, security, and social and cultural life, including museums. This transformation is commonly referred to as modernization.

Modernization in museums refers to the integration of technology, design concepts, and interactive approaches that make the visitor experience more relevant and engaging for contemporary audiences. The modernization of museums began to take shape in the 19th century, driven by dissatisfaction with Traditional Museum concepts. The shift from traditional to modern concepts is known as New Museology, a movement initiated by Peter Vergo in the 1980s. This new perspective positions the museum as an institution focused on its social role, transforming it into a public media entity.

The shift from the traditional concept of museums to the New Museum model in museum management has become an intriguing topic in the field of museology. More than just discourse and

theory, the implementation of the New Museum concept is now seen as a necessity that must be adopted by every museum (Agung, 2024)

Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum, the oldest museum in Indonesia, was founded on October 28, 1890, in the city of Surakarta. It was established by a nobleman who served as the Patih (prime minister) of the Kasunanan Surakarta Hadiningrat palace during the reign of Pakubuwono IX, K.P.A. Sosrodiningrat IV, or K.R.A. Sasradiningrat IV (Munandar et al., 2011). The museum houses various cultural artefacts, including relics from the Kasunanan Surakarta Hadiningrat palace. As a result, the Radyapustaka Museum Surakarta is still considered a traditional museum to this day.

Given current trends, interest in visiting museums remains relatively low. In fact, without significant changes, the public may remain reluctant to visit. Therefore, museums, including the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum, need to make adjustments or even embrace fundamental changes. These changes could involve improvements in museum management, exhibition layouts, and the introduction of educational and innovative activities aimed at attracting more visitors.

Halpin (Agung, 2024) stated that the New Museum, as conceptualized in the terminology of New Museology, functions as a social arena. Similar to other social spaces, such as malls or amusement parks, visitors can browse, explore, shop, enjoy food and drinks, gain experiences, participate in programs and events, and more.

This study aims to explore the practices of New Museology discourse at the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum. New Museology emphasizes the importance of community involvement, social context, and visitor participation in the interpretation and experience of museums.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive qualitative research project within the field of Cultural Studies. According to Pitana (2014), the paradigm of cultural studies aligns with postmodernism, positioning research within a framework of critical thinking. The research was conducted at the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum. The data sources include: (1) informants, such as museum managers and visitors; (2) the event location at the Radyapustaka Museum in Surakarta; and (3) documents and related references.

Data collection was carried out through field observation, document studies, literature reviews, and interviews with selected informants using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data validity was ensured through triangulation. Data analysis was performed using an interpretive technique based on generalized propositions (summary interpretations and claims), where the facts were drawn from the personal experiences of the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, as cited in Aribowo, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

New Museology Discourse

La nouvelle muséologie (in French) is the original term for New Museology, referring to a new approach in the field of museology that emerged in the 1980s and developed into a critical discourse on the social and political role of museums. This is due to confusion in the dissemination of the French term, which was less familiar to English-speaking audiences.

This concept (New Museology) originated with a group of French theorists before spreading worldwide in 1984. Building on the works of several pioneers who had written groundbreaking texts since the 1970s, this line of thought emphasizes the importance of the social role of museums, their interdisciplinary nature, and a new approach to expression and communication (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010).

Given these dynamics, the French term “*la nouvelle muséologie*” is less familiar to global audiences, prompting the adoption of a new discourse “New Museology”, derived from English, a language widely understood worldwide.

Foucault argues that language generates and develops meaning within specific material and historical contexts. He seeks to uncover the historical conditions and rules that shape the formation of discourse and determine how people speak about objects. Discourse constructs, defines, and produces objects of knowledge in comprehensible ways, while simultaneously excluding alternative forms of reasoning. In this sense, discourse unites language and practice (Barker & Jane, 2021).

New Museology emerged to introduce a new philosophy about the function of museums and redefine their relationship with society and communities. The concept of the New Museum embodies a range of expectations and beliefs, forming a specific ideology and discourse that influence perceptions of the museum’s purpose. The degree to which museum staff understand these expectations and integrate New Museology into their daily roles plays a crucial role in shaping how museums fulfil their evolving functions. (McCall & Gray, 2013).

According to Hauenschild (2022: 76), the discourse of New Museology is essentially cultural and political rather than scientific. There are difficulties in defining the essential characteristics of New Museology, as there are no established rules or models only theories that are quickly contradicted by practice. In line with this, questions related to the nature and theory of New Museology tend to be avoided. It is undeniable that most of the available literature consists mainly of short articles. Comprehensive analyses of New Museology based on systematic and empirical criteria are still lacking.

The New Museology followed a discourse from the social, the social and the political, building up down-to-earth models in several communities and regions with financial, in some cases ominous, and character needs. On the other hand, the burst or transformation of the Unused Museology was not so much around a conceptual alter of the institution, but of its utilisation and fate for individuals. (Hauenschild, 1988, as cited in Hauenschild, 2022).

In this concept, the main focus is not on the collection of objects but on people. Although it is called “new” and is often associated with phenomena from the 1970s and 1980s, New Museology continues a tradition that has existed since the 19th century among museum professionals understanding the museum as an educational institution aimed at serving the needs of society. The differences between the Traditional Museum model and the New Museum model (*New Museology*) can be seen in Table 1.

This New Museum (New Museology) focuses on five key aspects. First, its goal is closely tied to everyday life and social development. Second, its fundamental principle is to address society in a comprehensive, broad, and territorial manner. Third, the structure and organization emphasize minimal institutional intervention, local funding, decentralization, participation, and teamwork, without major changes. Fourth, its orientation centres on the complexity of reality, interdisciplinary approaches, thematic focus, connecting the past with the present and future, and collaboration with local and regional organizations. Fifth, its mission encompasses collecting, recording, conducting research, curating, mediating, continuing education and evaluation.

The concept compares the forms of Traditional Museums with those of New Museums, which in this context are referred to as New Museology. Currently, the influence of New Museology has spread to various parts of the world, including the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum.

Table 1

The Difference Between the Concept of Traditional Museum and New Museum (<i>New Museology</i>)			
No	Aspects	Traditional Museum	New Museum/ New Museology
1	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve and protect a given material heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build identity; • Coping with everyday life; • Foster social development
2	Basic Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of the objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive and radical public orientation; • Territoriality/ Territory
3	Structure and Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalization; • Government financing; • Central museum building; • Professional staff; • Hierarchical structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little institutionalization; • Financing through local resources; • Decentralization; • Participation; • Teamwork based on equal rights
4	Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject: extracted from reality (objects placed in museums); • Discipline-oriented restrictiveness; • Orientation to the objects; • Orientation to the past 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject: complex reality; • Interdisciplinarity; • Theme orientation; • Linking the past to the present and future; • Cooperation with local/ regional organizations
5	Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection; • Documentation; • Research; • Conservation; • Mediation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection; • Conservation; • Mediation; • Continuing education; • Evaluation

Public and Museums in the Discourse of New Museology

The discourse of New Museum or The New Museology, refers to a contemporary approach to managing and presenting museums. Museums are no longer merely places for storing collections; they have evolved into inclusive social spaces. As public spaces, museums serve as venues for dialogue and discussion, offering platforms to address social, political, cultural, and environmental issues. Additionally, museums act as cultural meeting points, celebrating and honouring the diversity of both local and global cultures. They promote open access, ensuring that all segments of society can visit, including through the provision of facilities for individuals with disabilities and the reduction of entry fees.

This approach places the public at the centre, emphasizing interaction, accessibility, and participation, in contrast to the traditional model, which is often elitist and focused solely on collections. The concept of the New Museum highlights the roles of education and community engagement in current museum operations. Unlike the old museum concept, which adopts a deductive and restrictive educational approach due to limited space and time, the New Museum prioritizes a broader educational mission. Traditionally, museums have primarily engaged elementary school students in their development. However, their role has rapidly expanded to include various activities, such as workshops, exhibitions, events, and presentations. These developments manifest in three key areas: education, interpretation, and communication (Greenhill, 2007).

The New Museum places greater emphasis on temporary exhibitions rather than permanent ones. These temporary exhibitions offer several advantages, one of which is their ability to challenge the traditional notion that museums are merely spaces for displaying cultural artefacts associated with specific communities. This innovative approach aims to create dynamic environments that promote communication, learning, and social equity. (Murdiastomo et al., 2023, as cited in Karayilanoglu & Arabacioglu, 2016). Montien (2019) explained that the New Museum concept can be implemented through four changes, namely: first is exhibitions that focus on visitors, second is transparency of curatorial practices, third is community participation, and fourth is space design.

In line with this perspective, cultural studies encourages us to view museums as sites where meaning and cultural representation are negotiated. Museums are no longer merely spaces for the delivery of information from curators to visitors; instead, they serve as places where diverse social and cultural groups interact and shape shared meanings. This approach recognizes that each individual or group interprets the cultural objects on display in unique ways.

Cultural studies is the formation of discourse, referring to clusters or structures of ideas, images, and practices that provide a framework for discussing an issue, social activity, or the scope of a particular societal institution. This approach can manifest as both knowledge and related actions. (Hall, 1997, as cited in Barker, 2011).

Therefore, museums need to provide spaces where the audience can actively participate in the process of interpretation, rather than simply receiving the meaning imposed by museum administrators. Museum staff, such as public relations officers or museum guides, play a key role in fostering a more inclusive dialogue that embraces diverse perspectives and the sociocultural backgrounds of visitors.

The development of contemporary times requires museums to adapt to technological changes and digitalization. People are now accustomed to quickly and easily accessing information through digital platforms. Therefore, museums need to leverage digital media for promotion, marketing, and public relations activities. Marketing through social media, websites, and museum apps enables visitors to access a wealth of information about exhibitions and collections, helping museums reach a broader audience. Although technology has facilitated easier access, the human connection, the objects, and the direct experiences in the museum remain essential. In the context of New Museology, museums should serve as spaces for social and cultural reflection, where the public can feel connected to the past, present, and future.

Discourse Practices in the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum as a Representation of New Museology

A temporary exhibition is an event organized for a specific period, featuring a theme and showcasing collections, both original and replicas. In today's digital era, various innovations have been incorporated into the execution of temporary exhibitions. At the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum, temporary exhibitions combine traditional displays of collections (original and replicas) with digital visualizations, particularly immersive ones. This approach aims to attract museum visitors, especially the youth, and ensure that the messages conveyed through the exhibition are effectively received by them.

"Immersive" (Fig. 1) refers to an experience or situation that fully engages and envelops an individual in a particular environment or world. The term is often used to describe highly captivating experiences, such as those found in virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR), where users feel as though they are truly present within the virtual world. Immersive experiences can also encompass various activities that create a sense of involvement and depth, such as films, video games, or art, where visual elements, sound, and interactions are carefully designed to produce a profound and all-encompassing experience.



Fig. 1 Flyer on Instagram about the Immersive Exhibition
(Museum Radyapustaka Surakarta, 2024a)

Baudrillard argued that television lies at the heart of postmodern culture, characterized by the flow of simulation and facsimile, which is both satisfying and all-encompassing, creating a hyperreality in which we are overwhelmed by images and information. (Baudrillard, 1983a,1983b, as cited in Barker, 2011).

In its immersive exhibition, the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum showcased the theme of Panji, drawing from the museum's collection of Panji Masks and Manuscripts, including *Serat Panji Raras*, *Serat Panji Sekar*, and *Serat Panji Dhadhap*. The exhibition adopted the theme “SRADDHA,” an acronym for *Sekar*, *Raras*, and *Dhadhap*. Held as a temporary event from June 25 to 30, 2024, it attracted 2,336 visitors over six days.

Immersive experiences use technology to create visual, auditory, and tactile environments, allowing visitors to interact directly with collections or installations. The collections are brought to life through animated images, supported by narration and audio, fostering an emotional connection with the visitors.

Visitors experienced a unique atmosphere in this exhibition, which blended traditional and modern elements in both knowledge and technology. One visitor remarked, “Usually, museum exhibitions display collections of objects. However, here, in addition to viewing the collections, we can also see animations depicting the content of the ancient manuscripts” (Kusuma, personal communication, June 28, 2024). Other visitors also shared their experiences at the museum, “Yesterday, I saw some interesting information on Instagram about this event and invited my friend to check it out. In my opinion, it was both interesting and fun” (Ramadhani, personal communication, June 28, 2024).

In the era of Industry 4.0 and Smart Society 5.0, as we experience today, two-way interactions in museums have become a key element in creating an engaging experience for visitors, encouraging them to return for future visits (Fraser, 2007, as cited in Sadzali, 2021). This exhibition also features non-original collections or replicas, which serve as educational tools for visitors (Fig. 2). Replicas help preserve the original collections by protecting them from damage or wear, minimizing the risk of harm when handling the original items. For example, the *Wayang Beber* collection at the museum, made of paper, requires special care. Visitors are not overly concerned with the authenticity of the displayed objects; what matters most is their ability to interact directly and closely with them, such as by viewing and touching.



Fig. 2 The Use of Replica Collections in Exhibitions

Simultaneously, the Radyapustaka Museum of Surakarta organized a "Wayang Beber Drawing Workshop" for participants ranging from elementary school students to university students (Fig. 3). This activity complemented the series of events in the exhibition, as Wayang Beber is closely connected to the Panji stories.



Fig. 3 Flyer on Instagram about Wayang Beber Drawing Workshop (Museum Radyapustaka Surakarta, 2024b)

The exhibition and workshop also involved various communities, artists, cultural figures, and students from elementary schools to universities, who actively participated in performances, and exhibition preparations, and volunteered for the activities. The visitors were diverse, coming from various backgrounds and age groups, with a dominant presence of youth.

Another activity was "Srawung Centhini" themed "Babar Lakon Panji" followed by the *wilujengan* or *selamatan* for *Wuku Kulawu*, which took place on June 28, 2024 (Fig. 4). *Wuku* is part of the calendrical cycle in the Javanese and Balinese calendars, lasting 7 days. One complete cycle consists of 30 *Wuku*, each with its name. The Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum regularly holds the *Wilujengan Wuku* and *Srawung Centhini* activities on the 28th of each month, (chosen to coincide with the museum's founding date, October 28, 1890 AD). In addition, the event was further enlivened by performances of *topeng* (masked dance) and *kenrung* (traditional Javanese music and storytelling).



Fig. 4 Flyer on Instagram about Srawung Centhini and Wilujengan Wuku (Museum Radyapustaka Surakarta, 2024c)

This description aligns with the concept of New Museology, which emphasizes a subject-centred approach to reality and complexity, interdisciplinary methods, thematic orientation, the connection between the past, present, and future, and collaboration with local and regional organizations.

Traditional Museums emphasize collections, preservation, and the conventional presentation of artefacts, with the primary goal of preserving cultural heritage and educating visitors. In contrast, New Museology prioritizes visitor experience, interaction, and participation, aiming to foster connections between visitors, the museum, and art and culture.

A want to clarify (and abuse) the employments of the late twentieth-century advances counting replicas for the benefit of visitors, would flag in the portion that moves of accentuation in historical centre circles (Vergo, 1989).

New Museology highlights the importance of museums as spaces that connect the public with their social and cultural contexts, providing opportunities for interaction, dialogue, and critical reflection. At the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum, these principles are implemented through exhibitions that are not only informative but also interactive and immersive, incorporating technology to enhance the visitor experience. For example, exhibitions combine physical collections with animation and visual technology, helping visitors better understand the stories behind each object.

Additionally, the museum engages various communities, artists, and local people through supporting activities such as workshops and art performances. In this way, the museum not only serves as a place to view artefacts but also as a space for collaboration and active participation in cultural processes. The Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum also uses social media to promote its collections and activities, as well as to engage with a broader audience. This includes sharing information, photos, and videos that spark interest and encourage the audience to participate in discussions about the museum.

The perspective that should be considered in museum development is closely linked to social development. This development ranges from societal changes to advancements in technology that are needed by the public today. Adapting to these changes is crucial to ensure that museums do not appear monotonous with the same collections on display. Such stagnation can lead to a decrease in visitor interest. By embracing these changes, museums can remain relevant, dynamic, and engaging for a broader audience.

The success of the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum in facing the current global era is marked by its transformation into a more interactive space by involving the local community in exhibition planning, educational programs, and collection preservation. Visitors are no longer merely recipients of information; they also contribute to storytelling and historical interpretation.

By integrating New Museology into its daily practices, the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum has successfully created a more engaging and relevant experience for visitors, while also deepening their connection to the existing cultural heritage. Modernization does not imply abandoning traditional values. Instead, it serves as a means of preserving them in a format that aligns with contemporary developments. The Radyapustaka Museum, with its rich cultural heritage, has the potential to become a pioneer in integrating tradition with technology.

CONCLUSIONS

New Museology is a discourse of modernity in museums that continues to shape practices today. This discourse has influenced reform efforts in museology, including at the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum. The use of virtual media (including the digitalization of collections and immersive experiences), replica collections in exhibitions, thematic supporting activities, interdisciplinary approaches, and community involvement are hallmark features of New Museology at the Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum.

The Radyapustaka Surakarta Museum, one of the oldest museums in Indonesia, has undergone significant changes in the management and presentation of its collections. In response to evolving times and the growing needs of society, the museum has begun embracing the principles of New Museology. This concept goes beyond the preservation of collections and emphasizes the visitor experience, social interaction, and active participation in the cultural interpretation process. Which then becomes the identity of the community, a matter of pride.

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