

Do museums merit the vast sums of money spent on them?

By Sarah Liew Min Yi (16S35)

Museums are hardly on the top of the list of activities you would think of doing when wondering how to spend your free time. Museums today are often associated with the ideas of “boring” and “information overload”, especially by the younger generations, who see no value in visiting museums. Yet, countries spend millions of dollars each year on museums, by offsetting the price of museum tickets, or funding operations and research projects. If such large amounts of money are being spent on museums globally, indeed there must be some value in them that majority of the general public are unaware of. Personally, I think that museums are essential to society, as they challenge us to reflect on our past so that we may progress, are hubs of education and research, and also develop and instil values in us. Hence museums are worth the heavy funding they receive.

Many do argue that museums are becoming irrelevant in society today, where information can easily be found online without the inconvenience of making a trip to a museum. The advancements in technology allow information, pictures and even artefacts to be captured virtually through programmes such as 3D technology, thus making museums obsolete. However, one cannot fully trust the information presented online and may have to filter through many pages before finding accurate sources, which can be highly inefficient. It would be much easier to pay a direct visit to a museum, where the information presented has high credibility and further explanations can be found in the museum guides which are available to visitors. Museums facilitate hands-on learning, and this can be more engaging than online learning. For instance, the Museum of Toronto showcases fossils of dinosaurs and other extinct species, with information of where they were located and what their diets and lifestyles must have been like. This information was made known through the research of scientists working at the museum, who were only able to carry out their projects and make new discoveries through the funding of the museum. Therefore, museums present opportunities for research and better learning experiences, and merit the large amounts of funding spent on them.

Furthermore, museums represent a preservation of culture, of which history and art are intertwined and serve important roles in our future development. History museums showcase our past, reminding us of our cultural traditions and major events that have impacted our current way of life. Art museums also portray this, as art is often used as expression of our way of life. For example, the Singapore National Gallery recently held an art exhibition about the British colonial legacy. The art pieces, ranging from paintings to sculptures to literature, showed how those in the past had responded to British colonial rule, either with discontentment or respect for the British. This shows that art and history collections in museums can express the views of the public, and by showcasing them to new audiences, can challenge them to think about their own stand and reflect about the issue. This develops critical thinking and will affect future decisions they make as they learn to consider situations with a pinch of salt. Therefore, museums do merit the vast sums of money spent on them, as they challenge society to reflect and think critically through the art and history displayed.

In addition, museums can develop mindsets and instil values in the people. US army museums showcasing new advanced military weapons and machinery, coupled with stories of brave battles fought

in the past, would indeed fill the hearts of US citizens with national pride, and a sense of nationalism that they belong to a powerful country. On the contrary, tourists visiting such US army museums would nonetheless develop a sense of awe too, but also a sense of fear towards the USA's military power, which can help deter other countries from threatening the USA. Another example is that of the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore. This museum showcases artefacts of Asian cultures, such as their ethnic costumes and handmade pottery or silverware. This exposes Singaporeans to the cultures of our nearby neighbours, contributing to the development of an open mindset towards foreigners. This is essential to our society so that we may live harmoniously even as there is an influx of foreigners into Singapore. Thus, museums are worth the funding they receive, as they play significant roles in shaping the mindsets and values of people to better the society.

Lastly, museums are important sources of inspiration to youths today, especially those in the arts scene. In Singapore, careers in banking, law and medicine are often the most emphasised. Many parents here are conservative and pressure their children into pursuing such "prestigious" careers. If their children wanted to pursue something unconventional such as the arts, most parents would not approve. This is due to the lack of confidence in the local arts scene, where artists often struggle to find a stable income and many eventually give up their dreams. This is where museums play a significant role. The emergence of new art museums in recent times, such as the Art Science Museum and National Gallery, shows how this apprehension towards the arts is shifting. These art museums often curate works of local artists, helping them to get a footing in the arts industry and showcasing their talents to a larger audience. Museums are thus essential in supporting the Singapore arts scene, and with a better outlook in the arts industry, many young artists may be inspired to pursue their passion in the arts. Over time, this would contribute to a bustling arts scene in Singapore. Therefore, museums play an important role in the arts scene to support and inspire, and hence merit the vast sums of money spent on them.

In conclusion, museums are highly essential to our society. They facilitate research and education in ways that technology cannot, and encourage visitors to think critically to make better decisions. Museums also shape societal values and mindsets, and can inspire youths through the support they provide in the arts sector. Despite the heavy bills they incur from their daily operations to their research projects, the benefits they bring to society make them definitely worth funding. Therefore, museums do merit the vast sums of money spent on them.

Comments:

Overall, Sarah, this is well-written and a joy to read. You have covered a range of arguments and provided appropriate examples for support. A little too Singapore-centric though. More references to museums in other countries and how they have evolved over the years to stay relevant would be good. Nevertheless, a good job!

