Whose Stories Are Told?

Curating Inclusion and Urban Equity in London's Museums

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Introduction

Background
London is one of the most diverse global cities, with more than 40 percent of its residents born outside the United Kingdom and over 300 languages spoken across the city. Chinese, South Asian, and African-Caribbean communities have long shaped its cultural life and public memory.

Research Gap
Despite this diversity, museum exhibitions often fall back on reductive framings. Chinese heritage is frequently spectacularized, South Asian traditions are "festivized," and Afro-Caribbean histories are politicized. These tendencies raise questions about how far curatorial practices genuinely support inclusion.

Research Questions
RQ1. How does curatorial inclusivity affect cultural integration in London's museums?
RQ2. What roles do spatial justice perception and exhibition legitimacy play as mediators?
RQ3. How does cultural capital influence these relationships?

Methodology

This research employs a **mixed-methods design** that brings together qualitative, computational, and quantitative approaches. **Semi-structured interviews** with curators, cultural mediators, and members of London's Chinese, South Asian, and African-Caribbean communities are used to capture lived experiences of inclusion, fairness, and institutional legitimacy. To examine the language of curatorial practice, exhibition texts, catalogues, and wall labels are analysed through **Latent Dirichlet Allocation**, which reveals recurrent themes and discursive patterns. Survey data are then evaluated using Partial Least **Squares Structural Equation Modelling**, allowing the study to test how inclusivity shapes perceptions of spatial justice and legitimacy, and how these perceptions, in turn, influence cultural integration.

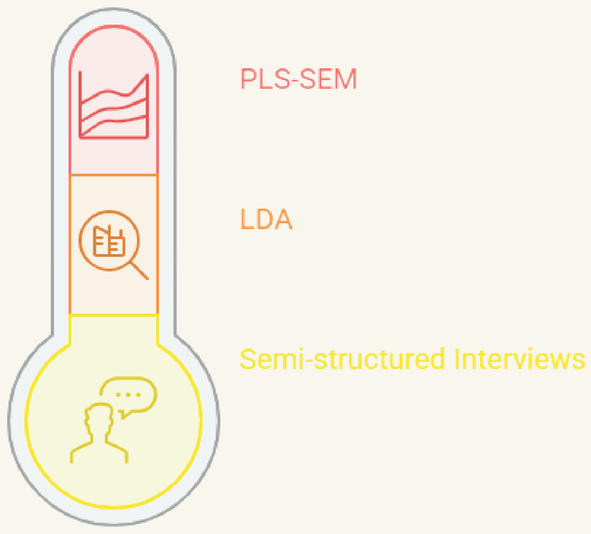


Figure 1. Mixed-methods design as a thermometer.

Structural Equation Model
Tests how exhibition inclusivity affects cultural integration, mediated by spatial justice perception and exhibition legitimacy.
PLS-SEM (N≈150–200) with Likert-scale survey data.

Key Hypotheses
H1: Inclusivity → Integration
H2: Inclusivity → Spatial Justice
H3: Inclusivity → Legitimacy
H4: Spatial Justice → Integration
H5: Legitimacy → Integration

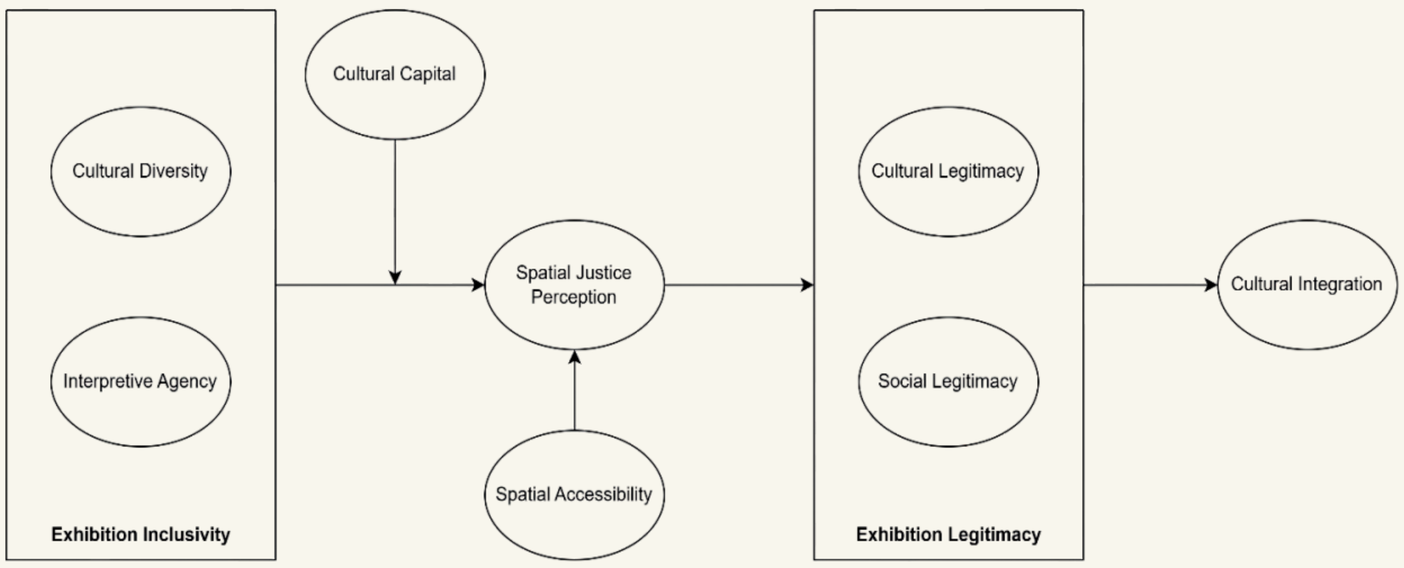


Figure 2. Proposed Structural Model for Exhibition Inclusivity and Cultural Integration

Expected Results & Conclusion

Curatorial Inclusion Indicators

Discursive
Narrative framing, representational balance, and alignment with community voices. Indicators coded from curatorial texts, catalogues, and thematic analysis.

Spatial
Accessibility through location and transport, symbolic cues in design and signage. Data from GIS mapping, census, and field observation.

Experiential
Visitor agency, cultural recognition, and engagement depth. Measured with interviews, participatory observation, and feedback surveys.



Figure 3. Indicative map of African communities and major museums in London.

Conclusion
This proposal suggests that curatorial inclusivity shapes cultural empowerment and spatial fairness in London's museums. The indicative map highlights an uneven geography. This spatial distance points to potential barriers in accessibility, recognition, and symbolic belonging. While preliminary and illustrative, such patterns underscore the importance of analysing how institutional centrality contrasts with community locations, and how these spatial dynamics affect perceptions of justice and legitimacy.

- National museums
- Community-led institutions
- Major African communities

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