

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Did you see ...?

Information Professional

The February issue includes:

- Rob Mackinlay “Special agent for library development”, an interview with Sir Nicholas Serota¹ [pp20-23]
- Gavin Carville “Divided society – digitising the troubles”, which looks at a new archive project² [pp40-41]
- Caroline Varney-Bowers “Getting through a tricky period”, which looks at Norfolk Libraries’ scheme to help tackle period poverty³ [pp46-48]

Museums Journal

The February issue⁴ includes:

- “Put more info online”, a brief news item about the call from VocalEyes for museums to improve their accessibility information⁵ [p5]
- Caroline Parry “Coventry cites museums as key to City of Culture win”, which also reports that youth and diversity will be the central themes [p11]
- Nick Merriman “Accurate data on audience demographics is way forward” (“Comment” column), which argues that better data on use is required to demonstrate that museums are reaching a wider audience” [p14]

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Culture is digital

As Matt Hancock, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, says in the Foreword, this new report⁶ from DCMS:

¹ See also: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/?page=nicholasserota>.

² There is now a “Divided Society” website at: <https://www.dividedsociety.org/> (NB you need to register to use the site). There is also further info on the BBC News website, see: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-42768231>.

³ See also: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/?page=TrickyPeriod&hhSearchTerms=%22period+and+poverty%22>.

⁴ For further info about *Museums Journal*, see: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal>.

⁵ Further info about this at: <http://vocaley.es.co.uk/help-improve-the-state-of-museum-access-2018/>.

⁶ *Culture is digital*. DCMS, 2018. Available to download as a pdf (4550 kb) from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686624/TT_v3.pdf. It is also available in HTML (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-is-digital/culture-is-digital>), and

“[...] is the culmination of the Digital Culture Project which I launched in April 2017 with the #CultureisDigital online consultation.” [p5]

The Project/consultation’s aim was to bring together the successful stories of how:

“[...] culture and technology can work together to drive audience engagement, boost the capability of cultural organisations and unleash the creative potential of technology.” [p8]

The report looks at the whole of the UK.

The report has three key themes (each with a chapter in the report):

1. Audiences: using digital technology to engage audiences
2. Skills and the digital capability of cultural organisations
3. Future Strategy: Unleashing the creative potential of technology.

It has also highlighted three policy priorities:

1. Digital infrastructure for culture
2. Innovation
3. Collaboration and partnerships.

It seems helpful to include here the summary of policy commitments in full, as they are the crux of the report.

“Audiences – using digital technology to engage audiences

1. Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund will ensure that funded organisations get better at collecting, using and sharing audience data, including:

- a. Collecting and understanding data on the reach and impact of their digital and nondigital work and using it to drive their audience engagement strategies ensuring it is done on a consistent basis across the arts and heritage sector;
- b. Encouraging the use of integrated databases, such as Audience Finder, and the sharing of audience insight research, so that all businesses in the sector can better understand digital and physical audiences

2. The Space and The Audience Agency will work with arts and cultural organisations, Nesta, the BBC and other content publishers and partners to develop a metrics framework and best practice guidance for arts and

there is an Executive Summary (6490 kb) at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686725/Culture_is_Digital_Executive_summary_1_.pdf.

cultural organisations to use when planning and assessing audience engagement across different digital platforms.

3. In order to further broaden cultural engagement and empower communities to share their voices, views and creative content digitally, Arts Council England will ensure that its Creative People & Places programme makes use of digital communications and platforms and that the analysis and learning from the projects are widely shared.

4. We will encourage recipients of UK City of Culture and Cultural Development Funding to include ambitions to enhance digital audience engagement in their local place-shaping and growth strategies.

Skills and the digital capability of cultural organisations

5. Arts Council England, working with the Heritage Lottery Fund and partners, will create and pilot the use of a Digital Maturity Index for the cultural sector, to enable organisations to understand and benchmark their own digital capability and set plans in place to make improvements.

6. Arts Council England, working with the Heritage Lottery Fund and partners, will work together to create a Digital Culture Code; a set of guidelines and principles which cultural organisations should sign up to in order to demonstrate a commitment to developing their own digital maturity and the maturity of the wider cultural sector.

7. Arts Council England will set-up a Digital Culture Network, investing £1.1m over two years to create a network of expertise and sharing of best practice across each region in England in order to increase its sectors' digital skills and capability. The Network will:

- a. Produce and deliver packages of support to increase the digital maturity of organisations and improve digital skills within organisations;
- b. Look to partner with technology organisations to deliver training regionally reflecting key regional trends and needs;
- c. Facilitate partnerships and collaboration between its funded organisations and the tech sector and others;
- d. Provide targeted support to leaders to increase the digital maturity of their organisations, including the creation of a digital board bank and guidance of digital criteria for senior leadership appointments.

8. In order to build the digital capability of the sectors it supports, the Heritage Lottery Fund will:

- a. Fund a £1m campaign which will run over two years, to attract high-quality projects to build the sector's digital capacity, starting in 19/20 with a grant budget of £500k p.a.;

b. Make digital a key feature throughout the Heritage Lottery Fund's Business Transformation programme, with a particular focus on upskilling staff.

9. In order to support the cultural sector in its understanding of Intellectual Property:

a. The Intellectual Property Office will work with the British Library's Business & Intellectual Property Centres and representatives from the cultural sector to develop guidance and training so that cultural organisations can better understand the Intellectual Property framework and its relevance to them.

b. The Space will lead work with cultural organisations, cultural rights holders and seek guidance from the Intellectual Property Office to develop a Cultural Digital Rights Code of Practice.

Future Strategy: Unleashing the creative potential of technology

10. The National Archives will work with culture sector representatives to develop a new strategic approach to the digitisation and presentation of cultural objects, for example, looking at the common standards needed to make our nation's great cultural assets more interoperable [7], discoverable and sustainable.

11. The National Gallery and the Royal Opera House will open up new opportunities for the culture sector to experiment with new technology and cultural content:

a. The National Gallery, working with data partners like Nesta, will create an Innovation Lab so that cultural organisations, and in particular museums, are able to make best use of advanced digital technologies in enhancing visitor experience and creating content, and can develop best practice in collaborating with the technology and academic sectors.

b. The Royal Opera House will create an Audience Lab to work with diverse talent, developing new skill sets to create innovative content using emerging technologies. The Audience Lab will strive to develop cross-sector collaborations to open up new experiences for audiences.

12. The Royal Shakespeare Company, the BBC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council will share selected Research & Development prototypes and technical assets and will offer related capacity building and innovation support to cultural partners of all sizes across the UK. This commitment is aimed at mitigating resource issues,

⁷ "Interoperability refers to the basic ability of computerized systems to connect and communicate with one another readily, even if they were developed by widely different manufacturers in different industries." [note on p16]

reducing duplication and encouraging innovation through collaboration.”
[pp15-17]

The report concludes:

“This report is the first of its kind and, as such, is a call to action to practitioners and organisations across the cultural and tech sectors. Here, we propose an approach to support the whole digital culture ecology: our audience is both the world-leading and the small, voluntary led organisations in communities; technology companies ranging from start-ups and scale-ups to large and multinational tech companies; those working at the cutting edge of technology development and those using more basic digital tools. We encourage cultural and tech sector organisations to support the proposals set out here and work together to unlock the opportunities for Digital Culture. There is more to be achieved and we hope that individuals and organisations will use the framework of this report to coordinate themselves and the expertise and enthusiasm that we have seen over the last year.” [p17]

This is an important report, and it reflects on developments across the cultural sector, especially in the creation of increased digital access to collections and to heritage.

For us, the key areas are “Reaching more people” and “Reaching new audiences” [pp19-24], and these seem to me to be disappointing.

In “Reaching more people”, the report really is looking at reaching greater numbers, without really focusing on which people and why; however, there is a small positive element in the libraries case study example:

“Some local authorities are innovating further and developing these digital library services to address social isolation and foster community engagement. For instance, projects in Lewisham, West Sussex and Hampshire are piloting loans of devices like tablets to older people and the disadvantaged, providing access to digital reading and other cultural opportunities that might not otherwise have been available.” [p20]

“Reaching new audiences” begins by looking briefly at the findings of the “Taking Part” surveys, and then focuses on some ways of engaging digitally with young people. This is important, but limited.

There is immense scope for digital technology to reach more people and new audiences by focusing on the needs of disadvantaged communities and individuals and seeing how these needs can be met digitally. This is, to me, the real power and potential of technology, and this report does not really tackle this.

Well worth reading – but, for me, ultimately disappointing.

Health & Wellbeing issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Cultural participation and wellbeing: what do the data tell us?

This “Dossier”⁸ was published in January.

From the information on the websites, it’s quite difficult to unravel who exactly this Foundation is, but, if I have pieced it together correctly, then here goes!

““la Caixa”, was founded on April 5, 1904 by the Catalan lawyer Francesc Moragas Barret with the support of various Catalan civil institutions. It was created with the aim of encouraging savings and retirement planning, objectives which today might appear to be merely financial but were, in that historical context, clearly intended to help the working poor to achieve a measure of financial independence and security [...]

Starting in 1917, “la Caixa” began to allocate part of its earnings to social projects and, in 1918, decided to integrate Welfare Projects into its organization to ensure that they would be managed efficiently and professionally. Rather than providing charity, the idea was to provide a range of social assistance, cultural, and civic services that would improve people's quality of life. Over the years, these innovations were recognized in Spanish legislation.”⁹

In addition:

“Through the Foundation we continue working to achieve a society with more opportunities. By promoting social initiatives, investing in research and education and spreading culture and science. All this to continue helping those who need it the most.”¹⁰

In terms of the Social Observatory of “la Caixa”:

“The Social Observatory of “la Caixa” aims to be a reference point by contributing diagnoses of social reality and tendencies, and placing a special focus on the Foundation’s major spheres of activity: social inclusion, education, science and culture.”¹¹

They publish a series of “Dossiers”, of which, so far, there have been four¹².

⁸ *Cultural participation and wellbeing: what do the data tell us?* “la Caixa” Foundation (“Dossier” no.4), 2018. Available to download as a pdf (4030 kb) from: https://observatoriosociallacaixa.org/documents/22890/112710/Observatorio_Social_la_Caixa_Dossier-4_eng.pdf/5383f824-01e7-5401-1366-67dd220008f1.

⁹ Taken from: https://www.fundacionbancarialacaixa.org/informacioncorporativa/historia_en.html, where there is a lot more information about the organisation.

¹⁰ Taken from: <https://obrasociallacaixa.org/en>.

¹¹ See: <https://observatoriosociallacaixa.org/en/presentacion>.

¹² Details of the four “Dossiers” at: <https://observatoriosociallacaixa.org/en/dossiers-listado?categories=>.

“This new edition of the Dossier focuses on the social importance of culture being accessible and integratory [...]” [p3]

The “Dossier” is in five parts.

Part 1 is the Barometer which includes ‘context indicators’ on, for example, Culture and the economy; Culture and participation; Culture and quality of life; Cultural values and attitudes; Culture and education.

Part 2 is ‘Articles’ which includes two pieces:

- Juan Prieto Rodríguez, María José Pérez Villadóniga and Sara Suárez Fernández, “Cultural consumption: a question of taste or of price?”

“The study analyses the role played by education and income with regard to cultural participation in three activities of a very different nature: going to the cinema, attending live performances and visits to sites of cultural interest.” [p18]

- Nela Filimon, “The impact of culture and leisure on the happiness of Spanish people”

“What is happiness and how is it measured? No consensus exists on a unanimous definition of the concept, whose meaning, furthermore, has evolved over the course of time. It seems indisputable, however, that happiness depends on many factors, prominently including participation in cultural and leisure activities, whether in an individual or shared way. This study presents some relevant results, in both the international sphere and in Spain, which show empirical evidence regarding this relationship.” [p28]

Part 3 is an interview with Jen Snowball (Professor, Department of Economics and Economic History, Rhodes University) which looks at the value of culture and the contribution made by sustainable cultural development to social wellbeing.

Part 4 is a review of Victoria M Ateca-Amestoy *et al* (eds). *Enhancing participation in the arts in the EU: challenges and methods*. Springer, 2017¹³.

Part 5 is “Best Practices”, which looks at “A performing arts-based programme that integrates social, educational and cultural action” [p47].

I found this a bit dense, but some of the discussion of the importance of culture for wellbeing is well worth reading.¹⁴

¹³ For further details, see: <http://www.springer.com/gb/book/9783319090955>.

¹⁴ Source: BOP Consulting *Newsletter*, Mar 2018.

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Museums Taskforce. *Report and recommendations*

This report¹⁵ was published on 1 March.

“The taskforce was convened by the Museums Association (MA) in summer 2016 ‘in response to the increasingly difficult financial situation that many museums in the UK face’. Chaired by Laura Pye, the head of culture for Bristol City Council, it comprised 15 senior museum professionals representing all four UK nations.

Its aim was to ‘provide an independent voice to advocate for museums across the UK, using research and evidence to make the case to funders, politicians, stakeholders and the public’.

The report makes a series of recommendations for museums as well as governments and other stakeholders, focusing on funding, collections and relevance – three areas that the taskforce says are ‘critical for the future of the sector’.”¹⁶

The report focuses on three areas (relevance, collections, and funding), with the main emphasis on relevance (and this is where this assessment will focus too):

“In an age of ‘alternative facts’ and contested versions of history, museums provide the material evidence of our shared past and can use that evidence to host debate and discussion on contemporary topics and to prompt reflection. Museums help us negotiate the complex world around us; they are safe and trusted spaces for exploring challenging and difficult ideas.” [p4]

The report identifies key ways in which “museums can help make people’s lives better”:

- “Museums enhance health and wellbeing.
- Museums are inclusive organisations that often work with vulnerable and marginalised communities.
- Museums contribute to life-long learning and inspire self-expression and creativity, helping to develop valuable, transferable skills.
- Museums entertain and inspire audiences, bringing communities together and informing individual and collective identity.
- Museums help to create a sense of belonging by working with communities and encouraging active public participation.

¹⁵ Museums Taskforce. *Report and recommendations*. Museums Association, 2018. Available to download as a pdf (57.6 kb) from:

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1246941>.

¹⁶ Taken from the MA News, https://www.museumsassociation.org/news/28022018-museums-taskforce-calls-for-consistent-funding-levels?dm_i=2VBX,NSF3,27LU0M,2G2U1,1.

- Museums help to revitalise local economies, creating jobs and offering a wide range of employment, training and work-experience opportunities.
- Museums are integral to place-making and help to create better places for us all to live and work.” [p4]

This is followed by recommendations for Governments, stakeholders and sector bodies; and for museums themselves.

In terms of museums, it recommends that they should:

- “work with staff, volunteers and audiences to create bold mission statements that clearly communicate their relevance to the communities and audiences that they serve
- strive to understand demographic and technological changes and address these through engaged dialogue and partnership, contemporary collecting and programming in order to remain relevant
- work in collaboration and partnership with community groups and third-sector organisations in order to reach new and diverse audiences.” [p4]

Probably rightly in the current climate, the report is very positive, but this section does suggest areas where some museums are less successful.

In terms of the section on collections, the most interesting recommendations for us are:

- “Museums should work with their communities to develop contemporary collecting plans that reflect the diversity of modern Britain.
- Museums should work with communities, volunteers and others to ensure their knowledge and expertise contributes to understanding and managing collections” [p6]

In terms of funding, most of the Museums Taskforce's specific funding recommendations are made in separate statements for each nation, which were originally published between February and May last year. These are available as separate downloads¹⁷.

“The funding statements for England and Wales say that there is an ‘urgent need’ for the relevant government ‘to develop a strategic approach to museums and their funding’.

The statement for Northern Ireland says that ‘museum functions are strengthened where there is a collective strategic approach including central and local government and a broad range of strategic bodies’.

And the statement for Scotland urges the country’s government to continue to consult widely with museums to ensure the ‘alignment and synergy’ of the government’s culture strategy, which is currently being

¹⁷ England, see: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1246932>.
Northern Ireland, see: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1246935>.
Scotland, see: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1246933>.
Wales, see: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1246934>.

developed, and the national strategy for museums and galleries, which Museums Galleries Scotland is set to begin consulting on later this year.”¹⁸

This is an important analysis of the current position of and tasks facing museums – recommended.¹⁹

Incidentally, Laura Pye was one of the people who was quoted in *The Network Newsletter* coverage²⁰ of The Mendoza Review²¹; the recently-published report, *Why collect?*²², calls for increased investment in museums and their collections, and is critical of Neil Mendoza’s report. According to the MA:

“In the report, which calls for increased investment in museums and their collections, Cannadine highlights a 13% fall in public spending on museums and galleries in England from 2007 to 2017, the imbalance of funding for museums inside and outside London, the poor salaries in the sector and the pressures faced by the Heritage Lottery Fund because of declining National Lottery income.

‘The Mendoza Review may not accept that this deeply depressing picture amounts to a full-blown crisis in our museums and galleries, but it scarcely describes a flourishing sector, for there are clearly problems aplenty which need addressing,’ Cannadine writes.

‘Yet the only solution to these problems and challenges that the Mendoza Review comes up with is the proposal to ‘use existing funding in the best way possible’, and to distribute it ‘in a more joined up and strategic fashion’, thereby creating ‘an environment that enables England’s museums to do their best work’.

‘But how can they be expected or feel encouraged to do ‘their best work’ when funding across the sector, by both central and local government, is insufficient and has been diminishing in real terms for the best part of a decade, and when staff morale in many museums and galleries is as understandably low as it currently is as a result?’²³

¹⁸ Taken from: https://www.museumsassociation.org/news/28022018-museums-taskforce-calls-for-consistent-funding-levels?dm_i=2VBX.NSF3.27LU0M.2G2U1.1.

¹⁹ Source: Museum Association update, 1 Mar 2018.

²⁰ *The Network Newsletter*, 200, Oct 2017, <http://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Newsletter-NS-200.pdf>, pp12-14.

²¹ Neil Mendoza. *The Mendoza Review: an independent review of museums in England*. DCMS, 2017. Available to download as a pdf (2080 kb) from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673935/The_Mendoza_Review_an_independent_review_of_museums_in_England.pdf.

²² David Cannadine. *Why collect? A report on museum collecting today*. Art Fund, 2018. Available to download as a pdf (17540 kb) from: <https://www.artfund.org/assets/downloads/why-collect-report.pdf>. See also brief summary at: <https://www.artfund.org/news/2018/02/15/why-collect-report>.

²³ Simon Stephens “Collecting report criticises Mendoza Review”, MA News, 16 Feb 2018, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/16022018-collecting-report-criticises-mendoza-review?dm_i=2VBX.NKUJ.27LU0M.2FFV6.1.

Abbreviations and acronyms

DCMS = Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
MA = Museums Association

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