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

Number 217, March 2019

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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.

Contents List

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Did you see …?

Museums Journal

The March issue includes:

- Caroline Parry "Civic museums facing crisis", which looks at the current funding gap, and also at some possible alternatives, such as funding from public health [p6]
- Rob Sharp "Rebranded NLHF ushers in a new era for heritage sector", outlines the new, simplified funding procedures (but also questions whether having one big fund means that there will be a future emphasis on big projects as opposed to smaller-scale, interesting pieces of work) [p7]
- Geraldine Kendall Adams "Does levying an entrance fee always pay off for museums?", which looks at the pros and cons of charging for entrance [pp12-13]
- Joe Hill "Galleries must care for their communities" ("Comment" column), which looks at a different role for the new wave of regional galleries built at the tail-end of the Labour government, which now face funding challenges. Developing new partnerships, they "[…] are now more focused on being open and safe spaces for their communities, driving skills agendas around the arts and business development, as well as leading the tourism and place-making ambitions for their regions – and often the country." [p14]
- "Voxpop" column: "Do we need a new approach to workforce diversity?", which answers resoundingly 'yes', and outlines some of the challenges [p15]
- Patrick Kelly "Belfast stories", which looks at the work of small, volunteer-run museums that are exploring local communities' experiences of the Troubles [pp26-29]

ARC Magazine

The April issue[1] includes an interesting article, "From gatekeepers and guardians, to participation and democratisation", by Sally Middleton and Abigail Hartley, which looks at archivists' ethical dilemmas.

For example:

> "[…] what about care leavers – children who have been in care, protected and provided for by the state? What happens to their records on leaving care? Sometimes they get lost. Often they end up in some sort of archive. We have seen how the records are essential when investigating historical child sexual abuse. Archives often have an odd dynamic with the organisation they are part of, the people who are represented within the records, and the people who use them. It is a tugging back and forth which forces us to address what our purpose is, and how best to fulfil it." [p14]

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[1] *ARC Magazine*, 356, Apr 2019. Further info at:
https://www.archives.org.uk/publications/arc-magazine.html.

The article also includes an example of a dilemma which the authors ask us to think through – and it's one that is very relevant when we start thinking about 'activist organisations':

> "Recently, a community group came to see us, representing an action group opposing the local authority's move to evict them from a community hall, so that the land could be sold. The group wanted to gather evidence as to the building's importance in the life of the local community. The hall had been a focus of community life since the 1920's – coronation parties; VE Day; Jubilee celebrations; fi reworks to mark the 2012 London Olympics. Could we give the group access to historical records, including photographs of the community hall? Yes. Could we help them fight the local authority, by providing 'evidence' of the importance of the building to the community in which it sits? No. There is a fine line, here. It is about access, democracy, representation, and rights and responsibilities. When does an archivist become an activist? Is it a line we should ever cross?" [p14]

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

Empowering collections

The MA has just published this major report[2] which is based on the research from the Collections 2030 project[3].

The report starts by outlining the challenges facing collections – these include:

- Culture – for example: "A culture has developed in museums which means that work with collections and work with audiences often occur in silos. There is also a tendency among staff to treat all collection items as having the same value and to put a premium on documentation and preservation. This can limit the ability of museums to experiment with

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[2] *Empowering collections*. Museums Association, 2019. Available to download from: https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1262818.

[3] "The Collections 2030 project comprised two research phases.
The first research phase ran from February to September 2018. It consisted of more than 50 interviews with leading museum professionals and academics, exploring ideas for the future of collections. This work informed the publication of the MA's Collections 2030 discussion paper in September 2018, which invited wider consultation from the museum sector.
The second research phase ran from September 2018 to February 2019. It involved processing the responses to the discussion paper, as well as considering other recent literature on collections management and use. The consultation received 76 formal responses, the majority of which were joint institutional responses from museums across the UK. The remainder of responses came from individuals, academics, funders and sector support organisations.
The recommendations made in this document are based on our analysis of the consultation responses and other recent developments in the field." [p27]

new approaches to making collections accessible, empowering and relevant." [p4]

- Relevance
- Size – for example: "Most museums hold substantial collections of material on display, in storage or on loan to other organisations. Many report concerns about how to manage these collections over the course of the next decade." [p5]
- Digital accessibility
- Resources and skills.

The report then goes on to argue that museums need their collections to be empowering; relevant; and dynamic; for each of these broad aims, it makes a number of recommendations:

<u>Empowering collections</u>

- A culture change in museums and collections practice, which includes:

    o "[…] museums should work towards more integrated and fluid internal structures that enable all staff to work with collections and communities and to share their expertise in both areas
    o museums should consult regularly with audiences on how collections are researched, presented and used, and should align their collections work with the overall mission and vision set out by the museum; a diversified workforce will also contribute to this culture change
    o sector bodies should promote a flexible approach to collections care and documentation […]
    o funders should develop new funding streams which encourage a use-led approach to collections practice; this funding should encourage public participation alongside professional knowledge and expertise, and ensure that collections play a part in health and wellbeing, placemaking and active citizenship projects." [p10]

- A proactive approach to the democratisation and decolonisation of museums

- A focus on reinterpretation of out-of-date displays

<u>Relevant collections</u>

- Research to understand public expectations of collections

- Strategic collecting in partnership with communities

- A strategic approach to online collections

- Use collections projects to create social impact, embed knowledge and build legacy:

- o "Collections projects are an opportunity to involve communities in co-curation, create long-lasting knowledge and institutional change. However, many collections projects – especially those with external funding – are carried out over two to three years, which is often too short to develop strong community ties and results in the loss of knowledge and expertise after the end of the project. We encourage funders to consider longer-term projects of up to five years." [p17]

<u>Dynamic collections</u>

- Support partnerships and knowledge sharing

- Improve training and funding for the rationalisation of museum collections

- Improve transparency and accessibility of museum collections online

- Explore shared storage solutions.

The report is illustrated with a handful of brief case-studies, for example on the University of Sussex project, "Making African connections – decolonial futures for colonial collections".

This is an important report that places a new focus on how collections can be developed and shared at a moment when there is a dire need for more resources in many museums. As Maggie Appleton (President of the MA) says in her introduction to the report:

> "Collections are what make museums unique. They are a powerful record of our present and a window to the past through which we can make links to today and tomorrow. We know that engagement with them inspires and lifts us, and can have profound positive impact on our health and wellbeing. But this does not happen on its own. It needs our talented and dedicated people to use their knowledge and creativity to make our collections sing, to uncover their stories and to ensure they are relevant and empowering. And we cannot do it alone; we can only harness our collections to best effect by working with our communities and those who bring different perspectives and specialist skills." [p2]

Recommended.

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

"Transforming Society"

> "Bristol University Press and Policy Press have launched 'Transforming Society' a space where research and critique can create positive social change.

Articles, interviews, briefings for policy makers, reviews and podcasts tell the stories at the heart of the research, helping the work to have an even greater impact on the way people think about the world."[4]

The aim of this new resource[5]:

"[…] is to have impact, from bringing research to a place where it can affect national, local or global policies, to changing the way one person views the world.

It features the stories at the heart of the research, from authors, editors and other contributors, around subjects in and related to the social sciences. Articles, interviews, briefings for policy makers, case studies and podcasts celebrate new research and researchers at any stage in their career, from anywhere in the world.

This is a space to share bold thinking and help shape our understanding of the challenges we face. Who knows if we will make it out of the echo chamber, but we will try."[6]

Amongst longer new posts on the website are:

- Sam Friedman <u>and</u> Daniel Laurison "How does class affect who gets to the top: 10 ways to break the class ceiling"[7]

- David Morgan "Snobbery" [podcast][8]

- Tania de St Croix <u>and</u> Louise Doherty "Valuing young people, valuing grassroots youth work"[9].

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

Engaging Libraries: learning from phase 1

This report[10] has just been published by the Carnegie UK Trust.

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[4] Source: email from Bristol University Press, 11 Apr 2019.
[5] See: http://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/?utm_source=Bristol%20University%20Press%2FPolicy%20Press%20sign%20up%20list&utm_campaign=a7558a9a07-Monthly%20Newsletter%20Apr%2019&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f395de8081-a7558a9a07-129850705.
[6] Taken from: http://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2019/04/09/transforming-society-evidence-impact-and-social-change/.
[7] See: http://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2019/04/08/10-ways-to-break-the-class-ceiling-2/.
[8] See: http://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2019/04/13/podcast-david-morgan-on-snobbery/.
[9] See: http://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2019/04/03/valuing-young-people-valuing-grassroots-youth-work/.

"This report outlines learning and reflections from the Engaging Libraries programme, a partnership programme between the Carnegie UK Trust and the Wellcome Trust […]

Engaging Libraries was a pilot programme, aimed at giving public libraries in the UK and Ireland the opportunity to test out creative public engagement projects on health and wellbeing. It did so through providing project funding and by encouraging and facilitating participating libraries to engage with one another while developing and delivering their projects. Engaging Libraries worked with 16 public library services over the course of a year to deliver 14 projects. These projects were delivered by library services in collaboration with a wide range of partners." [p3]

The key points from the project were:

- The role of public libraries in public engagement [and see the "Taboo breaking" point below]

- The importance of working in partnership, and, in particular "[…] libraries need to be clear and confident in how they describe the value of their project, the benefits of working with a public library and the ask of their partner. Clearly defining the roles of the library and partners and clarifying expectations of each other at the outset is also very helpful." [p3]

- New skills, knowledge and approaches were developed: "Key reflections from the programme were that staff should proactively seek out opportunities to learn from partners through training, and look into other training opportunities that could be available. Staff involved in projects should also share skills and knowledge with others within the library service to help sustain activity. Strong support and buy in from senior staff within the service is critical for opening up training opportunities and avenues for sharing learning within the library service." [p3]

- The benefits of working within a network

- Inhibitors and enablers: "Inhibitors to success included logistics, reaching intended audiences, and conveying a clear understanding of their project to others. Engaging Libraries also highlighted the need for continuing support and skills development around evaluation, data capture and impact assessment. A key factor which enabled the success of projects was libraries' USP as a safe and trusted space that connects people to ideas as well as to one another. This played a crucial role in enabling and encouraging people to engage with challenging topics that they may not have in another setting. Some success factors came from the programme's format, such as the way in which additional funding opens

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[10] *Engaging Libraries: learning from phase 1*. Carnegie UK Trust, 2019. Available to download as a pdf from: https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2019/03/26153308/Engaging-Libraries-Learning-from-Phase-1.pdf.

up the opportunity to be innovative and take risks and the cultural capital of having external funders' backing. Again, the requirement to work in partnership also led to libraries making 'unusual friends' with new partners. Successful projects also embraced opportunities for gaining new knowledge and skills, had strong buy in from senior managers and effectively used marketing and promotion to attract participants to their activities." [p4]

Amongst the interesting overall learning points was the realisation that libraries can be:

- "Taboo breaking: Engaging Libraries demonstrated that libraries can be a space for discussion and debate about subjects which can be taboo or difficult to talk about such as death, body image and mental health. As safe, trusted spaces public libraries were the ideal venue for engaging people on tricky or touchy subjects.
- Experimentation and risk: Engaging Libraries revealed that public libraries embraced the opportunity and have the appetite to experiment and be creative with public engagement activities. Libraries also worked in diverse partnerships across different sectors and disciplines.
- Safe space: Engaging Libraries showed that funding opportunities can be valuable in giving public libraries the space and permission to forge new partnerships as well as build on existing links, reaping benefits for the library, its community and partners." [p2]

The report briefly outlines all the projects, and then has more detailed case-studies of them within the text.

This is an important report which pulls together key learning and 'messages' from the project. Recommended.[11]

Abbreviations and acronyms

MA = Museums Association
NLHF = National Lottery Heritage Fund

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[11] Source: email from Carys Dawson, Libraries Development Advisor, MALD, 27 Mar 2019.