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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Working with culturally diverse communities

The V&A have recently published this report[1] on their "Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership" project.

In March 2010, the V&A and the University of Leicester organised a major international conference, "From the Margins to the Core?", the papers (and videos) from which were published[2] earlier this year. The project, "Capacity Building …" was referred to during the conference, and this report – which is drawn from the evaluation report – sets out the key learning from this important work.

This cross-departmental project, funded by the HLF, had the following aims:

- "Uncover and explore the hidden histories of the V&A's collections (in particular those of relevance to the African Diaspora) and their connections with contemporary culture and faiths
- Develop new collections which reflected in particular black and Asian UK theatre over the past 50 years, and childhood in the East End of London
- Encourage new, diverse audiences to access the V&A
- Increase intercultural and interfaith understanding and contribute to social inclusion and cohesion
- Provide relevant, accessible learning opportunities and resources, which attract and take account of the needs of different audiences.
- Develop mutually beneficial partnerships with black, Asian and minority ethnic organisations
- Provide opportunities for individuals from diverse communities to volunteer, gain work experience or find employment in museums
- Provide a platform to celebrate, explore and enhance respect for diverse heritages."[3]

It had three strands:

1. 'Hidden Histories' related to the museum's collections
2. 'Access, learning, social inclusion and cohesion' focused on audiences
3. 'Partnerships, capacity building and cultural ownership' was largely concerned with the development of equitable partnerships with black, Asian and minority ethnic organisations, building capacity within those organisations and the V&A.

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[1] Eithne Nightingale (ed). *Capacity building and cultural ownership: working with culturally diverse communities*. V&A, 2010. Further information from: e.nightingale@vam.ac.uk.

[2] See: http://www.vam.ac.uk/res_cons/research/conferences/margins_to_core/index.html.

[3] Taken from: http://www.hlf.org.uk/ourproject/Pages/CapacityBuildingandCulturalOwnership.aspx.

There was a fourth, overarching objective which was "to contribute to change within the V&A and to heritage-wide policies and practices over the longer term." [p3]

The report looks at all four, giving an outline of the work that was developed, then drawing out key lessons learned and the impact that the work has had on visitors to the V&A and its staff.

These included, for example:

- "Improved interaction of people from culturally diverse audiences with V&A collections
- Increased pride of people in their own heritage due to their increased knowledge and understanding, and the recognition of their culture by a respected public institution …"

And:

- "The role of individuals within the museum in advancing the diversity agenda is critical ... the loss of key staff can have a critical impact on sustainability. More sustainable than relying on a few individuals would be the development of a cultural diversity network and a strong social framework of people incorporating visible champions across multiple departments …
- Visitor analysis showed a concentration of visitors from London and the South East. The museum may need to consider how cultural diversity can be delivered through its regional policy
- There is evidence to support the value of targeted marketing and the use of networks to reach and build relationships for specific events with the communities of interest
- To achieve sustainability of project outcomes, the V&A may need to connect diversity objectives to other corporate priorities such as income generation and build expertise across the 35 departments as knowledge and application of diversity is not consistent across the organisation."

Significantly:

> "The discovery and recognition of the importance of the African collection in the museum has changed attitudes and museum policy, and provided a focus for increased interaction with the African diaspora."[4]

This is fascinating, and, as Eithne concludes:

> "We may have reversed over a hundred years of history through the change of policy and practice with regards to the African collections but other changes may take a little longer. What is self-evident is that we are on a journey where diversity becomes central to all that we do." [p107]

Recommended.

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[4] These quotations are taken from:
http://www.hlf.org.uk/ourproject/Pages/CapacityBuildingandCulturalOwnership.aspx.

Capturing outcomes from regional Museum Hubs' community engagement activities

MLA have just published this report[5] which evaluates "outcomes from Regional Museum Hubs' Community Engagement activities, using the Social Return on Investment method where appropriate." [p3]

Headline findings are:

- Museums are working with partners and engaging with their communities in new ways
- Museums are delivering real value to communities (assessed via the GLOs and GSOs)
- Museums are changing and are working with community partners

In addition:

> "The SROI method was utilised in about one third of cases, these being those cases where use of the method was appropriate and feasible. The social values generated by Renaissance investments related mainly to volunteering, learning, employability and confidence building. SROI calculations were undertaken in respect of 5 of the case study projects, with 3 of the 5 generating an SROI ratio greater than 1 (i.e. the benefits generated outweighed the costs of delivery)." [p5]

The report includes key challenges and learning points which are looked at in some depth within the evaluation.

Finally, it also comes up with recommendations for the museums sector (and MLA itself). For the museums sector, the recommendations are:

- "Hub Business Plans tend to describe loose aspirations to engage with particular groups, whereas they ought to set out detailed justification for doing so and for pursuing the courses of action proposed. The practicalities of engaging target groups and sustaining that engagement need to be fully considered in advance, including the testing of new partnerships to ensure that they can be relied upon to make the contribution envisaged by the museum.
- Partnership working might be aided by entering into written agreements which set out each party's roles and responsibilities, as well as the target outputs, outcomes and impacts from which all partners (or the interests they represent) can derive benefits.
- Deploying existing staff to 'do' community engagement places unreasonable expectations on those individuals and is unlikely to always deliver desired outcomes. Where this approach is adopted as part of a

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[5] ERS Ltd. *Capturing outcomes from regional Museum Hubs' community engagement activities: final report*. MLA, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (380 kb) from: http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Renaissance_Community_Engagement_%20Final_%20Report_November_%202010.pdf.

strategy to instigate cultural change within a museum, it ought to be supported by appropriate training and guidance in all cases.

- Seeking to engage particular groups may be aided by employing staff who are themselves from those groups (acknowledging the potential contribution of MLA's Diversity Programme); seeking to engage groups via particular types of project may be aided by employing staff with a background in those types of projects rather than the museums sector ..." [p7]

In parallel, there is also a brief evaluation of activities in non-Hub museums.

The main report is supported by eight appendices, published separately:

- List of Renaissance-funded museums[6]
- List of stakeholders consulted[7]
- The detailed case studies[8] which give a real 'feel' for the pieces of work and the ways in which they met GLOs and GSOs
- Findings from non-Hub museums[9]
- The logic model and evaluation framework[10]
- A brief paper on SROI[11]
- The SROI impact maps[12]
- A list of output data[13].

This is a very useful evaluation of where community engagement has reached, with a range of important learning points and recommendations for future development.

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[6] See:
http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Community%20Engagement%20Appendix%201%20-%20Renaissance-Funded%20Museums.pdf.
[7] See:
http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Community%20Engagement%20Appendix%202%20-%20Stakeholder%20Consultations.pdf.
[8] See:
http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Community%20Engagement%20Appendix%203%20-%20Individual%20Case%20Studies.pdf.
[9] See:
http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Community%20Engagement%20Appendix%204%20-%20Findings%20from%20Non-Hub%20Museums.pdf.
[10] See:
http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Community%20Engagement%20Appendix%205%20-%20Logic%20Model%20and%20Evaluation%20Framework.pdf.
[11] See:
http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Community%20Engagement%20Appendix%206%20-%20Social%20Return%20on%20Investment.pdf.
[12] See:
http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Community%20Engagement%20Appendix%207%20-%20SROI%20Impact%20Maps.pdf.
[13] See:
http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Community%20Engagement%20Appendix%208%20-%20Output%20Data.pdf.

Tackling social exclusion – Other Agencies

The forgotten age …

The Centre for Social Justice [CSJ] has just published the interim report[14] of its Older Age Working Group. An executive summary[15] has also been published.

Gavin Poole, the Executive Director of the CSJ, writes in the Preface to the main report:

> "This is a two-part review. Here we present the nature and scale of the challenge our new Government faces if it is to tackle poverty and social exclusion in later life ... The second report, to be published next year, will set out a reform agenda based on this analysis. We are fully aware of the extreme public expenditure pressures that the next years entail, and the review will take these adverse circumstances into account. But let us be clear, our current economic context means it is even more important that we get this right once and for all." [p8]

The main interim report runs to 252 pages – the following refers to the summary version.

The report begins by celebrating older age – and includes some fascinating statistics, for example that "… over 55 year olds control 80 per cent of the nation's wealth …" [p2].

It then looks at the changing demographic picture, and goes on to highlight the ways in which the "older population has been one of the largest 'political footballs' in Westminster for too long." [p2]

It then concentrates on the various aspects of poverty and social exclusion, especially:

- Money issues (eg fuel poverty); pension and benefits issues; the patchy access to advice that many older people have
- Community issues, including social breakdown; the physical environment; loneliness, isolation and social exclusion; crime; transport
- Lifestyle, including health/diet/alcohol/exercise; volunteering; digital exclusion
- Housing
- Care, including social care and unpaid care.

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[14] *The forgotten age: understanding poverty and social exclusion in later life – an interim report by the Older Age Working Group chaired by Sara McKee*. Centre for Social Justice ("Breakthrough Britain" series), 2010. Available to download as a pdf (2710 kb) from:
http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/20101122_Publications_Older%20Age.pdf.

[15] *The forgotten age: understanding poverty and social exclusion in later life – executive summary*. Centre for Social Justice, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (459.92 kb) from:
http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/20101122_ExecSumm_OlderAge.pdf.

This is a major report. It is clear that our sector can contribute much to this agenda; although our role has not been fully recognised so far, let's hope that next year's final report will include some examples of good practice from libraries, museums, archives and the cultural & heritage sector.

The Big Society

Cutting it: the 'Big Society' and the new austerity

The New Economics Foundation [nef] has just published this critical guide[16] to the Big Society.

> "In July 2010, nef produced a briefing, *'Ten Big Questions about the Big Society and ten ways to make the best of it'*[17]. It drew such interest and so many requests for more that we have produced this updated and expanded response, which takes fuller account of emerging plans for government action as well as the public spending review. It also reflects what we have learned from a wide range of charities, community groups and government officials at meetings they convened to discuss what the 'Big Society' could mean to them." [p5]

It begins by outlining the derivation of the Big Society idea – rather worryingly, Steve Hilton (the PM's director of strategy)

> "… refers enthusiastically to *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, who urges the Republican Party to learn from John Ford's westerns about the 'social customs that Americans cherish – the gatherings at the local barbershop and the church social, the gossip with the cop and the bartender and the hotel clerk'." [p11]

The document then goes on to look briefly at 'the new austerity' and suggests that:

> "The 'Big Society' idea goes hand in hand with deep cuts in public spending. The cuts are only feasible alongside a strategy for shifting responsibility away from the state – to individuals, small groups, charities, philanthropists, local enterprise and big business." [p2]

It says that there is no "master plan or blueprint for the 'Big Society'" [p2] (again, Steve Hilton is quoted as stating that it is "ambitious to the point of

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[16] *Cutting it: the 'Big Society' and the new austerity*. nef, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (503 kb) from:
http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/Cutting_it.pdf.
[17] *Ten big questions about the Big Society and ten ways to make the best of it*. Nef, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (238.18 kb) from:
http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/Ten_Big_Questions_about_the_Big_Society.pdf.

recklessness: nobody knows if it can be done". [p11[18]]), but the nef paper then identifies some of the stepping-stones towards building the Big Society, including:

- The 'Big Society Bank'
- 5,000 new 'community organisers'
- The 'Big Society' Network[19], [20],[21]
- National 'Citizens' Service' for 16 year-olds[22]
- 4 'vanguard communities' – Liverpool, Eden Valley in Cumbria, LB of Sutton, Windsor & Maidenhead.

The paper then goes on to identify some "strong, sensible ideas" [p2] in the Big Society, including:

- "Encouraging citizens' involvement and action
- Recognising that everyone has assets, not just problems
- Building and strengthening social networks
- Using local knowledge to get better results
- Offering ways of transforming the welfare state." [p2]

However, at the same, it identifies some "big challenges" [p3] – these include:

- "Social justice, equality and cohesion. Not everyone can take part and benefit as easily as everyone else, because the conditions that make it possible are not equally distributed ... The combined effects of localisation and fiscal retrenchment threaten to undermine the Government's tenet that we are 'all in this together'.
- Economic policy and spending cuts ...
- Dangers of a shrinking state. Together, plans for a 'Big Society' and spending cuts on an unprecedented scale seem to mark the end of the post war settlement. We move from pooling responsibility through the machinery of a democratic state to dividing it between individuals, groups, localities and organisations in the private and voluntary sectors. It is not clear how the rights of individuals will be protected, essential services guaranteed, or those who are poor, powerless and marginalised defended against those who are better off. If the state is pruned so

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[18] This is a quotation from: http://blogs.ft.com/westminster/2010/01/the-steve-hilton-strategy-bulletins/.

[19] "The Network is a group of citizens frustrated with the problems of modern Britain – from social isolation to community disintegration – and seeking to enable people to get involved in local solutions. Through this site, we hope to share ideas, actions and debates about 'big society.'" See: http://thebigsociety.co.uk/.

[20] The "Big Society Network" has just announced the nine areas that will be working with them on "Your Local Budget", a programme aiming to give people much more of a say in how local authority budgets are spent – see: http://thebigsociety.co.uk/your-local-budget/your-local-budget-pioneer-areas-announced/.

[21] The Government has also just launched "The Big Society Award" – see: http://www.number10.gov.uk/bigsocietyawards.

[22] The twelve organisations that have been selected to run the NCS pilot programme next summer have been announced by the Cabinet Office – see: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/newsroom/news_releases/2010/101110-national-citizen-service-pilots.aspx.

drastically that it is neither big nor strong enough to do this, we shall end up with a more troubled and diminished society, not a bigger one.

- Impact on community and third-sector organisations ...
- The role of business. The doors are open for big corporations to take over state functions – by providing backroom support and running services. There are dangers that for-profit businesses will change the ethos, purpose and outcomes of services, with negative effects on the quality of life and opportunities of those who are most in need. There are also worries that big business will drive out smaller non-profit organisations, which could otherwise provide contracted-out services with more flexibility and local knowledge.
- Where – and how – does the buck stop? If power is devolved and responsibility shifted from the state to the private and third sectors, who can be held accountable …?" [p3]

Finally, nef itself comes up with some suggestions for making the best of the Big Society – these include:

- "Establish clear goals. The overarching goals of the 'Big Society' should be social justice and well-being for all, anchored in a shared understanding of how the 'Big Society' will help to achieve them.
- Make sure everyone has a fair chance to participate and benefit ...
- Move towards a much shorter working week ...
- Make co-production the standard way of getting things done. There is no point shifting functions to independent organisations if they replicate discredited models of planning and delivery. Co-production offers a route to more empowering, effective, preventative and cost-efficient services. 'Providers' and 'users' work together with carers and others in an equal and reciprocal partnership, pooling different kinds of knowledge and skill. Professionals will need to change the way they operate – working with people, rather than doing things to or for them.
- Make it accountable and measure what matters. People should know how responsibilities are shared out and how public resources are expended, to what purpose, by whom and with what results. There should be clear lines of accountability and appropriate methods of assessment, redefining efficiency and success. What should count are not just short-term financial effects, but the wider and longer-term impacts on individuals and groups, on the quality of their relationships and material circumstances, on the environment and on prospects for future generations.
- Make it sustainable. The 'Big Society' must be sustainable in environmental, social and economic terms. That means, for example, decarbonising services, planning for future generations and focusing on prevention.
- Underpin it with a broader economy, a stronger democracy, and a strategic state …" [p4]

This is a clear and readable assessment of the pros and cons of the Big Society, and is vitally important to us if we are to understand how our own areas of work can fit into this overall scheme. Highly recommended.

Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide

The Government has just issued this basic, outline guidance[23] to the localism agenda, which is very useful if you want to understand the driving forces behind it.

> "This guide is not a formal consultation document. Rather, in advance of a progress report due to be published next year, it sets out the thinking that underpins the Localism Bill and which forms the basis for further action across Government." [p3]

> "… we are using this guide to set out a gold standard for decentralisation: six essential actions, which are embodied within the Localism Bill and will be used to drive decentralisation across Government." [p5]

The guide argues the case for decentralisation, and then details the "six essential actions" that need to be taken for localism to work:

1. Lift the burden of bureaucracy
2. Empower communities to do things their way
3. Increase local control of public finance
4. Diversify the supply of public services
5. Open up government to public scrutiny
6. Strengthen accountability to local people. [taken from pp2-3, and p12]

Important background reading.

Abbreviations and acronyms

DCLG = Department for Communities and Local Government
HLF = Heritage Lottery Fund
V&A = Victoria & Albert Museum

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[23] *Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide.* DCLG, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (683 kb) from:
http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1793908.pdf.