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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.

Contents List

Did you see ...?

- *Museums Journal* – page 2

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

- *Public perceptions of – and attitudes to – the purposes of museums in society* – page 2

Tackling social exclusion – Other Agencies

- “Poverty and Social Exclusion in the United Kingdom” – page 5

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

- *Museums and happiness ...* – page 6

Abbreviations and acronyms – page 8

Did you see ...?

Museums Journal

The April issue¹ has a range of key articles, including:

- Geraldine Kendall “In museums they trust”, which summarises research commissioned by the Museums Association into the public perception of the purpose of museums and their value to society [p17]² (also please see below)
- Helen Chatterjee “Can museums heal the nation?”, which briefly looks at some of the health and well-being work being developed by museums and galleries, such as Dulwich Picture Gallery “Good Times” programme³ [p18]
- Jan Pimblett “Archives are dynamic tools for social change”, which outlines some of the work that London Metropolitan Archives has developed with LGBT people, including regular events, the annual conference (the 10th anniversary one, “Brave New World” took place in February⁴), and the link between that and a photographic exhibition, “Fierce”, by Ajamu. Jan concludes by emphasising that “There is an obligation to integrate LGBT stories into the mainstream as part of the wider history.” [p19]
- Geraldine Kendall “Strategic thinking”, which is a valuable summary of the progress made in developing national museum strategies in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland (and outlines the key points in each of these) – and points up the fact that, so far, there isn’t one for England [pp30, 32-33].

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

Public perceptions of – and attitudes to – the purposes of museums in society

As mentioned above, the Museums Association has just published the results⁵ of research they commissioned into the public perception of the purpose of museums and their value to society.

¹ *Museums Journal*, April 2013. For further information, see: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news>.

² See: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/01042013-news-analysis>.

³ See: <http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.tv/education/good-times> and http://www.seapn.org.uk/content_files/files/work_with_people_with_dementia.doc.

⁴ See, for example: <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/visiting-the-city/archives-and-city-history/london-metropolitan-archives/news-and-events/Documents/lgbt2013-programme-web.pdf>.

⁵ *Public perceptions of – and attitudes to – the purposes of museums in society: a report prepared by BritainThinks for Museums Association*. Museums Association, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (2400 kb) from: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=954916>.

Museums were seen as trusted institutions: “Members of the public who took part, see museums as the guardians of factual information and as presenting all sides of the story.” [p3]

At the same time:

- “There exists a widespread sense that museums are under threat, due to lack of attendance, budget cuts or technological advance. This threat informs the public’s evaluation of the possible purposes of museums and their role within society.
- There is a consistent perception of museums’ current and essential purposes, and museums ‘spreading themselves too thinly’ is a concern. There is strong feeling that museums should concern themselves with what they are good at first and foremost. This stems from the idea that taking on additional purposes may undermine the essential purposes for which museums are presently revered.” [p3]

The research found that the public saw the “essential” purposes of the museum as being the care and preservation of heritage; holding collections and mounting displays; and creating knowledge for, and about, society.

“Priority” purposes included:

- Promoting economic growth through tourism, investment and regeneration
- Facilitating individual development through education, stimulation and building skills
- Promoting happiness and wellbeing (although: “Rather than being about broader objectives of mental health and wellbeing, this purpose was regarded by participants as being more about ‘entertainment’ for participants. This was inherently linked to a museum’s educative purpose, particularly in relation to the importance of active engagement in learning – as distinct from, say, a theme park or cinema” [p5])

Sadly, “low priority” purposes were also identified:

“Those purposes that aren’t objected to *per se* but are deemed to be low priority (and are often heavily qualified). Museums can seek to achieve these to an extent but, in doing so, resources should not be diverted away from essential or priority purposes. Additionally, if the museum is publicly funded, it should not, in furthering these purposes, perform specific roles already performed by other state bodies.” [p5]

These include:

- Fostering a sense of community
- Helping the vulnerable
- Protecting the natural environment.

Finally, the research identified “purposes challenged by the public”:

“Those that participants did not see as sitting easily with the essential purposes of museums. These potentially undermined the essential values of trust and integrity that people cherish with regards to museums:

Providing a forum for debate

Promoting social justice and human rights

- These purposes raised much discussion throughout the research process, and participants consistently agreed that museums were not appropriate environments in which to hold controversial debates. Rather, museums are regarded as places to go to find out factual and unbiased information and for people to subsequently make up their own minds about a particular topic.
- This is not to say that people felt museums cannot broach controversial subjects, but that they should remain neutral in the displaying of information, rather than act as a leader in telling people what to think.
- The role of museums is very much seen as having a moral standpoint, as opposed to a political standpoint. Indeed museums are seen as one of the last vestiges of trust (particularly in comparison to the government and the media which are seen as untrustworthy and agenda driven). The public want to keep their trust in museums by believing they are being given unbiased and non-politically driven information.
- In this sense, talking about these kind of roles and purposes requires very careful positioning in order to avoid diminishing public trust in museums.
- The public (negatively) interpreted these purposes as:
 - *Promoting a political/subjective viewpoint.*” [p6]

In the article referred to above, the Museum Association’s Maurice Davies says: “The sector is always going to be ahead of public perception.”

Justine Lukas (one of the research team) agrees and suggests that:

“... people are often averse to change, so such reticence should be ‘taken with a pinch of salt’.

What the survey has shown, she adds, is that if museums are to expand their brief over the next decade, it will require careful positioning to ensure the public remains inside.”⁶

This research is welcome in that the public perception of museums is such a trusted and positive one; and also as a reminder that much more work needs to be done to set out why museums (and other cultural heritage organisations) should take on a social justice role.

⁶ See: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/01042013-news-analysis>.

Tackling social exclusion – Other Agencies

“Poverty and Social Exclusion in the United Kingdom”

“Poverty and Social Exclusion in the United Kingdom is a major research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Launched in May 2010, two major surveys into the public’s perceptions of necessities and into living standards were carried out in 2012 ... PSE:UK is the largest research project of its kind ever carried out in the UK and has found very high levels of deprivation in the UK today.”⁷

The first results⁸ were published in March 2013.

The results show that:

- “Over 30 million people (almost half the population) are suffering to some degree from financial insecurity.
- Almost 18 million in the UK today cannot afford adequate housing conditions.
- Roughly 14 million cannot afford one or more essential household goods.
- Almost 12 million people are too poor to engage in common social activities considered necessary by the majority of the population
- About 5.5 million adults go without essential clothing.
- Around 4 million children and adults are not properly fed by today’s standards.
- Almost 4 million children go without at least two of the things they need.
- Around 2.5 million children live in homes that are damp
- Around 1.5 million children live in households that cannot afford to heat their home

Around one third of people in the UK suffer significant difficulties and about a quarter have an unacceptably low standard of living. Specifically, one in three people could not afford to adequately heat their homes last winter and 29% had to turn the heating down or off or only heat part of their homes. A third of adults considered themselves to be genuinely poor ‘all the time’ or ‘sometimes’. More than one in four adults (28%) skimped on their own food last year so that others in their households could eat. A quarter of adults said their incomes were below that needed to avoid poverty and 22% had felt embarrassed by their low income. More than one in five adults had to borrow money last year to pay for their day to day expenses and similar numbers find it a constant struggle to pay their bills or simply cannot keep up with their bill payments.

⁷ Taken from: <http://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/pse-uk-2012>.

⁸ David Gordon *et al.* *The impoverishment of the UK: PSE UK first results – living standards*. PSE, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (417 kb) from: http://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/attachments/The_Impoverishment_of_the_UK_PSE_UK_first_results_summary_report_March_28.pdf#overlay-context=pse-research/pse-uk-reports.

The situation is worse today than it has been for the past thirty years. Independent surveys of poverty using modern scientific methods were first conducted in 1983 and again in 1990, 1999, 2002/03 and 2012. Comparing the surveys shows that, in Britain:

- The number of people falling below the minimum standards of the day has doubled since 1983
- More children lead impoverished and restricted lives today than in 1999.” [p2]

PSE UK has also published three “Facts and Findings”:

- “Falling below minimum standards”⁹
- “Going backwards: 1983-2012”¹⁰
- “What do we think we need?”¹¹, which looks at what the public thinks should be a minimum standard of living.

Further research findings are to be published shortly (and this is the research project that has approached The Network to contribute a piece on the role of the cultural sector).

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

Museums and happiness ...

This new report¹² from Daniel Fujiwara (who wrote the recent report on the value of adult learning¹³) “measure[s] and value[s] people’s happiness as a result of visiting or participating in museum activity” [p5] using data from the *Taking Part* survey.

The report was commissioned by the Happy Museum Project whose proposition is that:

⁹ See: http://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/1-falling-below-minimum-standards?utm_source=PSE%3A+UK+2012+newsletter&utm_campaign=265fb05294-PSE_Newsletter_no_2_28_March_TEST3_28_2013&utm_medium=email.

¹⁰ See: <http://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/2-going-backwards-1983-2012>.

¹¹ See: <http://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/3-what-do-we-think-we-need>.

¹² Daniel Fujiwara. *Museums and happiness: the value of participating in museums and the arts*. The Happy Museum, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (371.22 kb) from: http://www.happymuseumproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Museums_and_happiness_DFujiwara_April2013.pdf.

¹³ Daniel Fujiwara. *Valuing the impact of adult learning: an analysis of the effect of adult learning on different domains in life*. NIACE, 2012. Available to download as a pdf (592.17 kb) from:

http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/v/a/valuing_the_impact_web_final.pdf. (For an assessment, please see *The Network Newsletter ...*, 138, October 2012, p5, http://www.seapn.org.uk/content_files/files/newsletter_ns_138.pdf.)

“... museums are well placed to play an active part, but that grasping the opportunity will require reimagining some key aspects of their role, both in terms of the kinds of experience they provide to their visitors and the way they relate to their collections, to their communities and to the pressing issues of the day.”¹⁴

This report states that other recent studies have taken an economic approach:

“There is a growing literature in economics on the value of the arts or being audience to the arts. These studies often use contingent valuation surveys, whereby people are asked their willingness to pay for a good or service in a hypothetical setting.” [p7]

This report takes a different approach:

“... whereby rather than asking for or observing people's preferences we look at the impacts of the arts on people's subjective wellbeing and health and attach values to these impacts. This is the Wellbeing Valuation approach, which has been recently developed and which now features as part of HM Treasury Green Book guidance^[15] ... and is hence prominent in government policy making^[16] ... The Wellbeing Valuation approach estimates monetary values by looking at how a good or service impacts on a person's wellbeing and finding the monetary equivalent of this impact. In the present context, we would look at the impact of, say, going to a museum on wellbeing.” [p7]

To do this, they looked at four areas:

“First, we look at whether involvement in museums impacts on wellbeing and self-reported health. Here, we look at four variables related to museums: (i) whether people go to museums in their free time, (ii) whether people volunteer at museums, (iii) the frequency of visiting museums, and (iv) the amount of time people spend visiting museums. Second, we look at the differential impacts associated with participation in and being audience to the arts (regardless of whether this is specific to museums). Third, we use results from these analyses to derive monetary values associated with museums and the arts. Finally, we assess the main barriers to involvement with museums so that we can better understand how to encourage more participation.” [p11]

Their key findings – which come with caveats – are:

¹⁴ See: <http://www.happymuseumproject.org/>.

¹⁵ Daniel Fujiwara and Ross Campbell. *Valuation techniques for social cost-benefit analysis: stated preference, revealed preference and subjective well-being approaches*. HM Treasury, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (870.89 kb) from: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/green_book_valuationtechniques_250711.pdf.

¹⁶ Paul Dolan and Daniel Fujiwara. *Valuing adult learning: comparing wellbeing valuation to contingent valuation*. BIS (Research Paper 85), 2012. Available to download as a pdf (442.99 kb) from: http://www.sustainableguernsey.info/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/https_bisdigital.zendesk.com_attachments_token_qokmcdy_kplybuub_name12-1127-valuing-adult-learning-comparing-wellbeing-valuation-to-contingent-valuation.pdf.

“We find that visiting museums has a positive impact on happiness and self-reported health after controlling for a large range of other determinants that may confound the relationship. We also find that participation in the arts and being audience to the arts have positive effects on happiness. The effect of participation in the arts is of the same magnitude as the effect of participation in sports if we control for health. Our valuation headline figures are as follows:

- People value visiting museums at about £3,200 per year.
- The value of participating in the arts is about £1,500 per year per person.
- The value of being audience to the arts is about £2,000 per year per person.
- The value of participating in sports is about £1,500 per year per person.” [p8]

Their final conclusions include:

“These are important findings with lots of implications for policy and future research. It creates a strong positive foundation and argument for the role of museums and the arts in society. As new waves of *Taking Part* will include time-series elements for some of the survey respondents we will be able to use panel data methods to better understand causality, but clearly we need some robust experimental methods where treatment or involvement in the arts and museums is randomly assigned across different groups so that we can infer causality with confidence - to verify our findings here and to re-assess some of the anomalous findings ... With careful planning it would be possible to derive more robust estimates of the impacts of museums and the arts on wellbeing and health using this technique. The UK Government is one of the leading governments in the world in terms of running randomised trials within policy interventions ... and hence experimental methods are becoming increasingly common and popular in public policy and wellbeing valuation can be carried out with data from randomised trials too.” [pp35-36]¹⁷

Abbreviations and acronyms

BIS = Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

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¹⁷ Thanks to Anne Harding for alerting me to this.