MUSEUMS AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

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Prologue

Participatory Governance in the Museum Context

Following the CAM triennial symposium *Taking it to the Streets*, held in Glasgow in May 2014, a number of delegates from throughout the Commonwealth were invited to participate in a one day workshop on participatory governance in the museum context. The workshop began with a discussion what participatory governance meant to participants. Their postings are summarized below:

As Facebook would describe it: It's Complicated / Public Consultancy / Comfort Zone Slogan for Top-Down Management / Required by Funding Body (cynical ☺) / How to Implement?!? And make it work/LAST? / Participatory Governance means re-visioning participation as a PERFORMATIVE PRACTICE / Transparency of processes and inclusivity / Who is involved and who decides? / Robust mechanism for including public/community voices in decision-making at all levels / FUN / EQUITY / DYNAMIC INTERACTION / RIGHTS RESPECT / DISCUSSION / DELIBERATION / SHARING / STAKEHOLDERS / INCLUSION / INVOLVEMENT / OPENNESS / PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE … involving various Audiences/Stakeholders / INCLUSIVE / being open to diversity of ideas, values & methods / cross-cultural OUTREACH / BOTTOM-UP → VARIES ACROSS CONTEXTS (UNIQUENESS) / INVOLVEMENT OF COMMUNITIES / involvement of youth / EVERYONE CONTRIBUTES / PARTICIPATORY GOVERANCE IS When once in a while museums ALLOW communities to participate in MUSEUM ACTIVITIES / COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT / multiple perspectives / DEMOCRACY / Democratic participation / Not everyone wants to participate in governance / increasing AGENCY OF PUBLICS/CITIZENS within MUSEUM CORE ACTIVITIES / COMMUNITY PARTICPATION / SUSTAINABILITY / OWNERSHIP / COLLECTIVE DECISION MAKING / Local People Shaping their museum / SHARED DECISIONS / CONSCIOUS DECISIONS / CONSENSUS / DISSONANCE / REFLECTS COMMUNITY/COMMUNITY SELF-ORGANIZATION / Dynamic Solidarity / OWNERSHIP / Involvement Discussion Management / EMPOWERING / Influence / Process of collaboration cooperation / GIVES MEANING TO VISITORS (AS VISITORS HELP MAKE EXHIBITIONS) / MANAGEMENT BOARD / INCLUSIVE CURATORIAL LEADERSHIP / Power-Sharing / Distributed Leadership / Letting go of power /

As evidenced, delegates' understanding of participatory governance was that it is very much about encouraging and enabling citizens to engage with the state and the market for the purpose of collaboratively making decisions. Participatory governance can result in policy change, social transformation and responsive institutions. There is increasing recognition of the need to use or create proactive spaces for citizens and many examples of the ways this might be achieved.

Following this discussion, Jeremy Silvester of Namibia presented a case study of the vital importance of the Baobab tree in the Ombalantu community. The primary matter was whether the Baobab Museum can provide a space for debate on the issue of deforestation – which could lead to participatory governance in forestry legislation – or whether the purpose of the museum is still to be viewed as a tourist attraction.

Participants then discussed the potential role of museums in the United Nations' Post-2015 Development Agenda: How museums can use their assets – their expertise, collections, exhibitions and programmes – to work with people to address contemporary challenges and specifically contribute to legislative change, as some had very effectively with the Millennium Development Goals. Finally, participants discussed potential participatory governance initiatives that could be undertaken by museums and the role for CAM in organizing regional workshops and/or demonstration projects. This workshop provided an indication of participants' current understanding of the concept of participatory governance and their willingness to explore the potential for museums to engage in the democratic process in this way.

Methodology

The study began with a meeting of representatives of the partnering organizations, Susan Burrows-Johnson and Wendy Aitkins of the Galt Museum and Archives, Ann Ramsden of the Musée Heritage Museum, and Catherine C. Cole of the Commonwealth Association of Museums, at the Red Deer Museum May 30, 2014.

From June to September, work focused on two aspects concurrently, the literature review and survey of museums and community engagement. Because the concept of participatory governance is more familiar in the development field than the museum context, the literature review considered sources beyond museology and the survey addressed themes beyond participatory governance. The summary of the literature review and survey analysis were developed in October and submitted for consideration. An Interim Report was submitted in November 2014 and a report about the survey was published in the December issue of ICOM News at: http://icom.museum/media/icom-news-magazine/icom-news-2014-no4/

The draft Final Report was discussed by the partners at a meeting February 7, submitted to the partners and the CAM board for feedback at the end of February and revised accordingly. The partners presented a workshop on the topic at the Canadian Museums Association conference in Banff in April 2015.

Museums and Participatory Governance

Museums have changed from organizations based on what they have
to organizations defined by what they do.
Stephen Weil

Introduction

Stephen Weil made this astute observation more than a decade ago but it applies today more than ever. Engagement has become the pervasive term for what museums do,[1] what think they do, or what they think they are supposed to do. It now encompasses everything from collaborating with specific cultural (i.e., source or origin) communities, to developing exhibitions and public programmes that are issue-based rather than object-centred, to transforming minds, to extensive audience promotion and retention, and to social media initiatives. This trend is seen, heard and felt throughout many regions of the developed and developing world. As the Museums Association in the United Kingdom boldly asserted in *Museums Change Lives*, a vision document that resulted from a series of public consultations:

> Every museum should commit to improving its impact on society. Every museum can play a part, however small, in improving health and wellbeing, helping to create better places and championing a fairer and more just society. Every museum should have the ambition to change people's lives.[2]

Yet what is engagement, or more specifically community engagement? Is it sufficient to say that engagement is, or should be, the primary public dimension of museums? Do museums have multiple responsibilities to society as they fulfil their traditional function as custodians of the past and involve communities be they of place, interest or identity? What does it actually mean to be engaged? At the same time that the trend towards community engagement has grown, there has been a corresponding focus on the role of museums in society, in particular how they can contribute to social responsibility.

The purpose of this research project was to shed light on these questions with the expressed aim of focussing on the convergence of community engagement and social responsibility, a concept known as *participatory governance.* This is a form of community involvement which seeks not only to inform the public through collections, exhibitions and programmes but to engage citizens in policy discussions, formation and change. While perhaps not as aspirational as the Museum Association vision above, the museum is nevertheless conceived of as a proactive and participatory space. Accordingly, this report consists of three components. First, it provides a continuum that illustrates different approaches to engagement. There is a stream that is principally taken up with process considerations and a stream in which content is the critical factor. While the various approaches, or stages in each stream have

[1] Stephen Weil. *Making Museums Matter.* Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2002.
[2] *Museums Change Lives: The Museum Association's Vision for the Impact of Museums.* London: Museums Association, 2013. http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1001738.

particular attributes they are not mutually exclusive, with overlap possible within and across streams. Museums may also go back and forth between stages, depending upon the nature of the project, i.e., museums may still choose to produce object-centred exhibitions depending upon the topic. The report identifies and analyses a range of approaches and affinities, noting for example that collaboration is a major process consideration when museums engage with various communities. In the content stream engagement seems to proceed from an object-centred emphasis to an idea-centred process and a commitment by museums to social responsibility.

Process Stream

Audience Development →	Participatory Museums →	Community Consultation →	Working Together→	Shared Authority

Content Stream

Object centred →	Issue-based →	Relevance →	Social Responsibility →	Public Debate

Second, the report pays particular attention to participatory governance regarding it as the convergence of process and content concerns to the extent that it could be said to be at the intersection of community engagement and social responsibility. The report considers definitions and issues specifically associated with participatory governance as it relates to museum mandates, collections, exhibitions, and programmes both within the context of Alberta/Canada and the Commonwealth. Participatory governance is a concept that may not be familiar to many museologists because it resides primarily in the development literature. It refers to a democratic process in which citizens are politically active not only through the ballot box but in determining the very formation and implementation of policies and programmes affecting their daily lives. This is a form of engagement to be sure and one which the report attempts to advance as a viable option for museums in both the developed and developing world.

Integrated in these components of the report are the results of a survey about the degree to which museums are taken up with engagement, social responsibility and especially participatory governance conducted during the summer of 2014 through the auspices of the Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM).

The report concludes with a series of recommendations that focus on the need for museums to become disengaged if they are to specifically engage in participatory governance and to have a meaningful and effective social role in their respective communities. This is by no means a paradoxical move, especially given the many examples provided. Nor is it a disingenuous or cynical conclusion in light of what may be limited prospects especially for participatory governance. It is to recognise that most museums, large and small, with various mandates and contents, located in various regions of the world, have to disengage from, if not dislodge, existing assumptions or conditions if they are prepared to commit proactively to engagement.

Community Engagement

Engagement Is Not New

Whether engagement is a current fashion or necessity, it also has a history. Looking back over the past century, engagement is by no means a recent idea. It is instructive to begin by referring to three historical instances which pertain to the aims and aspirations of museums today particularly within the context of this research project as they are taken up with process and content. First, as far back as 1909, as founding director of the Newark Museum in the United States, John Cotton Dana was strongly committed to the idea of engagement for he believed museums to be first and foremost institutions dedicated to not only educating the public but contributing to the development of an enlightened citizenry. Dana's perspective is a well-known chestnut of museological history but often not recognised is the political and social time in which he espoused his position. The progressive politics of Theodore Roosevelt, who finished his tenure as US president in 1908, were still very influential, including the recognition that government institutions and civil society organisations were necessary for a robust democratic society. The progressive philosophy of John Dewey in particular was also influential evidenced by his work *Democracy and Education*[3] and other treatises published in the early 20th century. This situation is in marked contrast to today for, as evidenced in the literature review, many civil society organisations, including those in the cultural sector, feel under threat in both the developed and developing world. The vulnerability is both financial and political as many governments and private funders are reducing their financial commitments per se or withholding support if aims are not deemed compatible or considered too activist. At the same time, many governments' programmes and institutions are faced with either flat or declining support.

Dana's vision is further addressed some 60 years later in Duncan Cameron's landmark article "The museum, a temple or the forum,"[4] which is still copiously cited today. Cameron, who later became a CAM president, asks whether a museum should be a cathedral of culture or be more akin to the Greek agora, a space for debate and the exchange of ideas. Like Dana, Cameron raised this issue in a period when modern democracies in North America and Europe were taken up with transformative social changes. But this time institutions, including universities, were under fire for many of their policies and their irrelevance. There was an ardent belief that they could be more socially constructive and contribute to, in Pierre Elliott Trudeau's words at the time a 'just society,' once again a political climate very different from today. Indeed, many political analysts, both journalistic and academic, currently express great concern for the hefty decrease in political engagement as evidenced, at least, in Canada by low voter turnout at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.[5]

A key lesson learned from both Dana and Cameron is that museums cannot go it alone if there is a desire for the engagement that both envisioned which also suggests some kind of collaboration within the wider public sphere. To be fair, and as confirmed by the literature review, many museums in

[3] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education. New York: The Free Press, (1915), 1944.*
[4] Duncan F. Cameron, "The museum, a temple or the forum," *Curator*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 1971, pp. 11-24.
[5] See, for example, Allen Gregg, "On Authenticity: How the Truth Can Restore Faith in Politics and Government." *The Gordon Osbaldeston Lecture*, University of Ottawa, 2011.
http://www.ppforum.ca/sites/default/files/gfo_2011_allan_gregg_speech_final.pdf

Canada, the Commonwealth and elsewhere are involved in many kinds of alliances and partnerships whose mandate is public engagement but even in these instances there is a need to distinguish among the kinds of engagement and to see them in a broader political and cultural context. The third historical example helps to further advance this consideration.

Pushing the clock ahead almost another 20 years, Cameron himself was faced with the very contrast he articulated in his seminal article. In 1988 as a cultural highlight of the Olympics in Calgary, and as is well-known, the Glenbow Museum, where he was director, mounted *The Spirit Sings*, a large and impressive exhibition to celebrate the cultural legacy of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The Glenbow made use of its substantial permanent collection and also borrowed significant pieces from collections in major museums in Canada, the US and Europe. It was by many accounts a remarkable curatorial achievement. However, the exhibition quickly became a political flashpoint as the Lubicon, a small First Nation in northern Alberta, boycotted the exhibition to draw attention to actions on their land by Shell Oil, the show's principal sponsor, as well as to their outstanding land claim. This action quickly resonated throughout Canada and abroad and a number of lenders to the exhibition withdrew. Questions were asked about how the show was assembled, who was consulted, and ultimately who made decisions about how and why First Nations and their cultural legacy were represented. The Glenbow insisted that it had consulted with Aboriginal groups throughout the curatorial process but this was not enough to dispel concerns about the exhibition's purpose and process from many quarters of the museum community and beyond.[6]

The exhibition became a watershed about whether consultation was adequate or whether a more genuine collaboration was required between Aboriginal peoples and museums which extended to First Nations contemporary artists who began to question their relationship to and between art galleries and the wider viewing public. The impact was also felt throughout the larger arts and heritage community with issues such as trust and ownership and the museum's responsibility to a range of cultural communities at the centre of the debate. Simultaneously, these matters were being addressed in Australia, New Zealand and the US, and to a lesser degree in the UK, and for the next decade the debate not only continued but broadened to encompass issues such as social inclusion. In Canada the immediate response was a Task Force on Museums and First Peoples spearheaded by the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations.[7] There were also numerous community-based exhibitions, conferences and anthologies all of which were evidenced, for example, by the Smithsonian's landmark set of publications.[8] Suffice it to say, there was a groundswell of discussion in the museum world about the possibilities of engagement that stretched from small and local museums to major initiatives by major institutions. By the late 1990s, however, the enthusiasm seemed to subside in

[6] For an account of the Glenbow's position and a critical response see: Julia D. Harrison and Bruce Trigger, "'The Spirit Sings' and the Future of Anthropology,'" *Anthropology Today,* Vol. 4, No. 6, December 1988, pp. 6-10.
[7] *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples.* Ottawa: Canadian Museums Association and Assembly of First Nations, 1992.
[8] Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display.* Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991; Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kraemer and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture.* Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

Canada.[9] In the United States, the American Association of Museums launched its Mastering Civic Engagement project[10] while initiatives continued in the United Kingdom reinforced by instrumental cultural policies of the Labour government which encouraged museums to be socially relevant and community-focused, and so too in Australia with the National Museum of Australia and other major institutions leading the way as confirmed by the literature review.

This historical background is in marked contrast to the current situation in Canada and increasingly elsewhere. As noted at the outset of the report engagement has become the general term to define just about any involvement a museum has with an increasingly diverse public. In some cases, public engagement has replaced what was once called public programming as if to suggest some kind of greater commitment or involvement.[11] In the survey of engagement conducted for this project, upwards of 70% of total respondents indicated in several questions that they had outreach programmes and other audience-directed activities, with the greatest majority of these identified as educational initiatives. The survey also found that the incentives for establishing such programmes came equally from the community and the museum. There was also an overwhelming recognition that communities and their attendant needs and interests have changed over time. However, when asked if the museum routinely engaged origin or source communities in any related projects, only about 50% answered said 'yes'; yet this represented only about one-third of the total respondents as 25 skipped the questions.

One may conclude from this finding that when asked about a specific form of engagement the numbers are significantly lower. This further confirms, that today at least, for the modest sample, that the visions of Dana and Cameron, the challenges generated by *The Spirit Sings* and the assiduous activity that followed are not the standard or rule for museum engagement, whatever its form. Again, this is not to suggest that the museum sector is bereft as the literature contains initiatives in areas such as public history, environment and health and certainly with respect to the relationships between indigenous people and museums, which to recall the continuum could be process or content-driven or a combination of both. To now elaborate the report first turns to process approaches and stages.

[9] The next major exploration of these issues occurred in Canada at a symposium organised by the Canadian Conservation Institute in 2007 and its resulting publication *Preserving Aboriginal Heritage: Technical and Traditional Approaches. Proceedings of Symposium 2007*, https://www.cci-icc.gc.ca/resources-ressources/publications/index-eng.aspx

[10] American Association of Museums (now American Alliance of Museums), *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums*. Washington: AAM, 2002.

[11] For a critical study of the mixed results of an engagement strategy along these lines at the Royal Ontario Museum, see: Susan Ashley, "Engaging the world: Examining conflicts of engagement in public museums," *International Journal of Cultural Policy, Vol. 20. No. 3,* 2014, pp. 261-280.

The Process Stream

From Audience Development to Participatory Museums

Audience Development encompasses a broad range of activities from traditional museum interpretation and education activities, such as curriculum-based school programmes, to initiatives aimed at reaching new and specific audiences such as economically disadvantaged groups, disabled persons, culturally diverse groups including recent immigrants, youth/students and seniors. In the latter cases many museums have replaced the words education and public programmes referring to them as community or public engagement; some also use these terms to embellish the traditional designations. Yet there is an underlying imperative whatever the programme or intended group. Like other cultural institutions, museums are increasingly preoccupied with maintaining and/or expanding their attendance. The crass phrase 'bums in seats' so prevalent in the performing arts and in many institutions of higher education well applies to museums, i.e., 'torsos through turnstiles', as they also now count attendance in every facet their of their activities from exhibitions, school tours, lecture and film series, to website hits, Facebook friends and Twitter followers. All users may well be engaged, even enlightened, but primarily as individual consumers and not necessarily as participants in some kind of community-driven initiative even though they may be affiliated with a particular group.

Consumption may not only be mistaken for engagement, it also calls attention to the purpose and scope of participation in the next stage on the process continuum. In her highly influential book, *The Participatory Museum,* Nina Simon presents a range of a range of possibilities and challenges that museums face in this regard particularly within the context of technological changes.[12] Indeed, one of the drivers of engagement whether in its process or content variations is the impact of social media. The reaction is partly competitive and partly out of necessity as museums are understandably compelled to use communications tools such as Facebook and Twitter to promote their activities and to maintain, if not expand, their audience base. Many museums have gone further and developed their own apps as well as using other social media such as Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, Yik Yak and Medium to encourage user-generated content. All such 'connection' is deemed to be engagement in an explicit sense by museums – or at the very least a sign of its 'withitness' for lack of a better term.

The consequence of this primarily consumptive direction is that it may obscure specific possibilities for using social media in more integrated, if not creative, ways. To illustrate, in Namibia, digital media are serving as a bridge to preserve knowledge about heritage between rural Herero communities and their youth who are increasingly migrating to urban centres.[13] A more critical matter may be divergence. As Nina Simon explains in a subsequent work:

[12] Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*. Self-published, 2010.

[13] Nicola J. Bidwell and Heike Winschiers-Theophilus, "Extending connections between land and people digitally: Designing with rural Herero communities in Namibia." in Elisa Giaccardi, ed. *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture.* London and New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 197-216. For other examples, see: Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, eds., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World.* Philadelphia: Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, 2011.

> No matter how innovative your museum is on the Web, the core service of most museums is still based in the physical building. The more the online functions of a museum deviate from the onsite experience, the more your work will be seen as tangential to the mission of the institution. Now is the time to align your experiments and innovations to the core mission of your museum, and to demonstrate that your successes can be translated to the physical galleries, exhibitions and programs.[14]

From Community Consultation to Sharing Authority

There are other approaches or strategies that may lead to, encourage or induce participation and one surely is community consultation – the third stage of the process continuum. Many museums of course undertake it as part of the research and design component of exhibitions and programmes in order to receive input from communities of place, interest and practice. The consultation can take various forms such as focus groups, public meetings and advisory councils with the latter almost pro forma if a particular exhibition or programme is directed at a culturally diverse public or if the question of whose voice is taken into consideration. For example, are community members' views always filtered by curators or do they speak directly through collections, exhibitions and programmes? Community consultation is also not confined to the process stream of the continuum as content may be the determining factor. For example, a museum recognises that an historical exhibition may generate different reactions by various communities and in the name of public engagement sets up an advisory council or other mechanisms to facilitate responses in the preparation of and during the run of the exhibition.[15] However this approach to engagement and other types of community consultation usually falls short of working together, the next stage of the process stream.

One assumption that goes with any kind of collective endeavour is the need for collaboration. However, it has not always been the norm in the arts and heritage sector, as in many other fields and levels of government where organisational autonomy, sector boundaries and other territorial concerns have been considered sacrosanct. Even the initial three examples did not explicitly presuppose its importance; in fact in the case of *The Spirit Sings* the lack of collaboration was the principal factor that precipitated the dissent that ensued. Today, the opposite increasingly prevails with collaboration mentioned as one of the necessary elements of any successful engagement. One hears the language of collaboration in the corridors of governments, foundations, throughout the corporate sector, in universities and other educational institutions, social and health agencies and other not-for-profit arenas. Whether the locus of interest is cultural engagement or another form of community activity, the kind of collaborative framework that ensues may matter a great deal. Take, for example, the current and extensive interest in resilience by civil society organisations and governments that focuses on their own sustainability and on the people they serve or assist.[16] Working together is deemed central if not

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[14] Nina Simon, "Going Analog: Translating virtual learning into real institutional change," in J. Trant & D. Bearman, eds. *Museums and the Web: Selected Papers from an International Conference.* Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics, 2009, pp. 13-21.

[15] Ashley, *op. cit.*

[16] See, for example*, 100 Resilient Cities*, a program of the Rockefeller Foundation exploring how selected cities, of varied sizes across the globe face major social, environmental and economic challenges. http://www.100resilientcities.org/#/-_/ and a research and practice initiative on the challenges of resilience facing

essential in the conception, formation and delivery, and support of initiatives yet museums and other heritage organisations seem largely or entirely absent from this conversation. It may well be that their traditional mandate and content are distanced from such developments, yet as will be noted as well in the social responsibility stage of the content stream, resilience may be an example of an immediate and relevant concern that lends itself to attention by museums. What is also evident is that museums need to seek out a range of community organisations with which they can work, many of whom may not recognise a museum as a possible and willing partner.[17]

The very beginnings of what turned out to be a multi-faceted community collaboration provides a further perspective on what is entailed in working together. In early 2000, at the instigation of the Kamloops Art Gallery, several cultural organisations along with Thompson Rivers University, the municipal government and several social agencies, met to discuss the possibility of undertaking a project on the future of the arts in Kamloops. In her opening remarks, Jann L.M. Bailey, Executive Director of the Gallery, observed: "We are all doing it well but not together." This observation became a lightning rod for The Cultural Future of Small Cities, a five year initiative on why arts and heritage flourish in small urban centres, with initial partners and other organisations working together on research studies, exhibitions, performances, conferences, publications, city planning charrettes, service learning, and other opportunities for students.[18] The degrees of engagement by local citizens varied relative to the project, study or event from community consultation in the case of the planning initiatives to involvement in decision-making around exhibitions.

An ever present concern was the degree and type of collaboration. For example, in terms of the overall initiative collaboration was organic in the sense that it arose out of evolving or emergent conditions or opportunities, whereby the gallery, the university and other partners came to realise that they could work together more effectively to accomplish the goal of relating to the community of Kamloops. Yet there was also an element of self-interest for collaborating also meant receiving financial and human resources as a result of participating in the initiative. Individual projects, such as exhibitions, also had organic and self-interested aspects based on purpose while others were instances of normative or mimetic collaboration. As to the former some of the research work was subject to ethical standards and guidelines mandated by the initiative's principal funder the Community-University Research Alliance programme of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. As to the latter, some projects, such as community mapping, were modelled after other initiatives in other communities with the expectation that if it worked there it might work in Kamloops. It is important to point out as well that in all these instances collaboration also entailed people from diverse backgrounds and fields and with varying interests working together including artists, academics, historians, curators, planners, social workers, educators and local citizens. Engagement, then, for both individuals and partner organisations

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youth in several developed and developing countries which includes several collaborative projects http://resilienceresearch.org/research/projects/pathways-to-resilience.

[17] Cole, Catherine C. and Lon Dubinsky, *Tracing the Place,* a report suggesting potential collaborations between museums, galleries and social service organizations in Edmonton, Edmonton: City of Edmonton, 1997.

[18] For an account of the project see: Lon Dubinsky, "In Praise of Small Cities: Cultural Life in Kamloops BC." *Canadian Journal of Communication*. Vol. 31, No. 1, 2006, pp. 85-106.

also implied hopefully learning about and coming to respect each other's boundaries, agenda and ways of working while continuing to collaborate.[19]

Collaboration can underline additional purposes when it comes to museums and galleries working together with communities, including attempts to sustain a partnership over an extended period of time. To illustrate, in her analysis of the current UK initiative Our Museum, which is supporting 12 pre-selected ongoing community engagement projects, Bernadette Lynch defines many of the efforts as 'empowerment lite'. She acknowledges that the specific museums are certainly reaching out and engaging with various cultural constituencies, in attempt to ensure 'embedded participation'. But she questions the extent to which the participating groups and organisations are empowered, i.e., how much ownership they have of the process and the outcomes to the point of being truly a collaboration that involves involve sharing authority.[20]

Her observations lead to the fifth and final stage of the process stream. Are museums prepared to share authority when it comes to the development and presentation of collections and exhibitions?[21] Does such collaboration also extend to other initiatives and as well to the overall governance of a museum? Or does power ultimately rest with the museum rather than the community, however defined, even if the museum professes openness to engagement on many levels? Lynch provides another perspective given her direct involvement in an exhibition on racism at the Manchester Museum involving several community partners.[22] In a detailed account of its purpose and process she and co-author Samuel Alberti claim that the project resulted in a "breakdown of the very trust that the project was intended to promote"; and despite, as they acknowledge, "years of community engagement at the museum."[23] They conclude by proposing sharing authority and ultimately co-ownership of the project. As they explain:

> For these encounters are also spaces of possibility, in which power can take a more productive and positive form. Participation in museums can be dynamic and surprising. What is called for is a radical trust in which the museum cannot control the outcome. There may be unanticipated consequences in relinquishing authority in this way but, as we have seen, there are unanticipated consequences even when the museum does not.[24]

What is proscribed may not work for all museums, especially those which are risk adverse, as it is not just a matter of sharing power but allowing for uncertainty. Given the precarious economic environment, many museums like other educational and social organisations may want to avoid any

[19] Ibid., see especially pages 98-101. For a discussion of collaboration within the context of the developing world see: Ghazala Mansuri and Vijayrendra Rao. *Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?* Washington: World Bank Policy Report, 2013.

[20] Bernadette Lynch. *"Whose Cake is it Anyway?" A Summary Report.* Paul Hamblyn Foundation, 2009. http://issuu.com/paulhamlynfoundation/docs/phf_museums_galleries?e=1112503/3358986#search

[21] The notion of sharing authority has been advanced in many fields for several years. One of the earliest and still compelling is offered by historian Michael Frisch. See: *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany: State University of New York, 1990.

[22] Bernadette Lynch and Samuel Alberti, "Legacies of prejudice: racism, co-production and radical trust in the museum." *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2010, pp. 13-35.

[23] *Ibid.,* p. 18.

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 30.

other potentially destabilising condition. Yet as the authors point out there will always be consequences, including the unanticipated or unintended. This contingency suggests that some museums would be neither rash nor ill-advised to engage in sharing authority in at least some of their initiatives.

The Content Stream

Whatever type of community engagement museums opt for, whatever kind of process they seek to implement, the matter of content will inevitably present itself as an additional consideration or as a core factor. The content stream of the continuum takes up the latter by examining several concepts and issues and by introducing five stages. As with the process stream, there are overlaps and intersections with respect to the museum's intentions and purposes as they pertain to a range of communities of interest, place and practice.

From Object-Centred to Issue-Based Museums

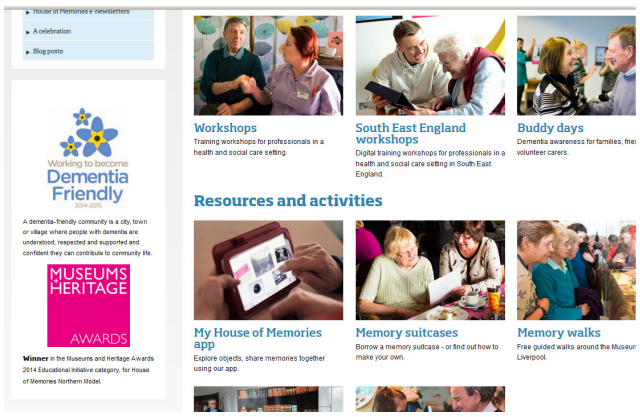
In the beginning was the object and other tangible heritage that gave rise to the birth of the museum – an exclusive or sacred space for the possessions of the powerful. Whether art or objects gained through fieldwork, wars, colonial domination or acquisitions by wealthy patrons or the state, museums became storehouses of cultures often not their own. Increasingly there was a focus on broader acquisition, preservation functions and collections-related research. Today specimens, artefacts and artworks remain understandably at the core of most museums whether they are local, specialised, modest or major and/or state institutions that cover the full breadth of human and natural history and contemporary culture. As the literature review confirms, museums studies and attendant fields are replete with curatorial approaches and typologies which seek to not only interpret objects but to make them more engaging and relevant to an increasingly diverse public.

Granville Boys high school students of Pacific Islander descent during a visit to the collection store in 2009. Courtesy: Australian Museum.

In 2009, the Australian Museum established a working partnership with the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice, Fairfield Office, to enable at risk youth from Pacific communities to interact and reconnect with culturally significant artefacts. The museum is custodian of one of the world's most significant Pacific cultural collections and worked to build cultural awareness among youth from Pacific communities in NSW and to challenge beliefs and perceptions that being a "warrior" is synonymous with being violent. The program uses creativity and imagination to re-connect Pacific Islander men who have come to the attention of the juvenile justice system with their culture, and to help them to build a positive self-identity. The Pacific diaspora community is over-represented in the juvenile justice system in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. There is evidence of growing broader community concern about violent crime within this community, and growing recognition that cultural dislocation can be a major contributing factor.
Frank Howarth and Dion Peita "Pacific Youth Cultural Reconnection Project," *CAM International Online Journal,* Singapore 2011, http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/publications/conference_publications/Howarth&Pieta.2011-05-27%200930%201-3.pdf

Yet the status of the object is not entirely secure, at least in its conventional forms, given, once again, the capacities and capabilities of the internet and more specifically social media, where it can be reproduced in an age dominated by ubiquitous copying, downloading and streaming. Nonetheless, a recent survey indicates that Canadians have a high regard for museums as trustworthy sources of knowledge whereas the internet was trusted the least by survey respondents. As well, and as traditional

as this may seem, the artefact commanded significant authority, 'the real thing', as many respondents termed it.[25] Moreover, museums and the majority of their contents are still and will remain analogic. This is certainly implied in Simon's position noted earlier and reinforced by Victoria Dickenson who points out that "a museum remains intensely physical, embodying its purposes in objects, space and place."[26] She goes on to suggest that material culture and museum practices, such as classification and curatorship, may significantly contribute to the conversation about the interactions between people and information. This said, museums may well get more than they wish for. The very idea of the museum has spilled over into various fields and practices to the extent that according to David Balzer everything now seems ripe for curating.[27]



House of Memories is an award-winning programme offered by National Museums Liverpool, which provides resources to people living with dementia and their carers. It provides participants with information about dementia and equips them with the practical skills and knowledge to facilitate a positive quality of life experience for people living with dementia. House of Memories offers dementia awareness training for professionals, as well as buddy days for families, friends and volunteer carers and other resources, activities and events. This program has drawn a lot of attention to dementia and its benefits may go beyond the individuals touched by the programme to changing the way society approaches dementia.
For more information go to:
http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/learning/projects/house-of-memories/index.aspx

Nonetheless while the object remains central, intangible cultural heritage is increasingly important and particularly in indigenous contexts where the continuation of a cultural tradition is more important than the preservation of the object. The object is not as important as knowledge about the object, and indeed sometimes the destruction of the object is integral to cultural tradition, for example in some First Nations' ceremonies. Many museums are also now taken up with issue-based exhibitions and programmes. As content-driven approaches both have contributed to the re-conceptualising of the museum as a space and its authoritative role as a knowledge-driven organisation in an information saturated world. Increasingly, many museums have realised that they need to make collections and exhibitions relevant to their audiences through interpretation, by starting with the audience's understanding of a subject and drawing them into it providing more information. Specifically, notions of social responsibility have gained credence in recent years with museums addressing many contemporary issues including: social justice, criminal/restorative justice; human/animal rights; peace; health: HIV/AIDS, malaria prevention; literacy; dementia; the environment, climate change, sustainability; national/local identity. In some cases this has come about through government agendas,

[25] Lon Dubinsky and Delphin Muise, "Museums as In-Between Institutions: Can They Be Trusted," V. Gosselin and P. Livingstone, eds., *Museums as Sites of Historical Consciousness*: *Perspectives on Museum Theory and Practice in Canada.* Vancouver: UBC Press, (in press).
[26] http://www4.ischool.utoronto.ca/news-events/colloquium/victoria-dickenson-being-analog-in-a-digital-age-museum-studies-colloquium
[27] David Balzer, *Curationism: How curating took over the world and everything else.* Toronto: Coach House Press, 2014.

whether in the form of global priorities, such as the current discussion around the Post-2015 UN Millenium Development Goals, or national policies, such as those in the UK which favour socially instrumental initatives of museums. An issue-based approach is also not confined to specfic exhibitions and other displays; in recent years entire museums have been established in physical and/or virtual modes such as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the International Slavery Museum at National Museums Liverpool, museums of (im)migration, including one under development in the UK, and 'sites of conscience' throughout the world which are much more issues-based than traditionally conceived historical locations or monuments.[28]

An issues-based focus calls attention to the museum as a space where actual engagement takes place, and how it occurs, to also recall the various stages of the process stream. The importance of space, both existent and potential, is a recurring theme throughout the literature, be it museum specific or references to the work of other civil society organisations. The range is considerable from the museum conceived of as a welcoming, inviting or safe place in a given community to the museum as a particular space for contestation, conciliation and dialogue about content whether object-centred, issues-based or perhaps most desirably a combination of both. The latter conceptions also take into account social inclusion and the capacity of a museum to be a hybrid and multi-vocal space.

To recall, many of these characterisations were initially encapsulated in Duncan Cameron's notion of the museum as forum and also by scientist Ursula Franklin's concept of museums as «*Le Bistro des Idées*» (idea café) which she advanced almost twenty years ago.[29] As noted earlier too, the ubiquitousness of the internet and the emergence of social media have propelled many museums to give greater prominence to their virtual spaces. Yet once again the physical aspect of the museum, like a library, cannot be taken for granted as a valued-added resource in any community. Still, museum personnel alone can advance it only so far in their attempts to make content the focus of engagement. They must be willing to collaborate not only with predictable or obvious partners, such as a school, but with a range of local organisations and groups, some of whom may not even recognise the museum as a potential resource. Consider as an illustration, this study in the development component of the literature review that explores the barriers to citizen engagement especially faced by people with low income. Here is a telling passage.

> In addition to learning circles, participants spoke of the need for shared community spaces. A range of physical spaces are important: gathering places (e.g., internet cafes), artistic places or 'cultural sanctuaries', recreation places (including lower priced recreation centres, access to local schools in summer, and bike lanes, green space and community gardens (with sheds and bathrooms), and places for children (e.g., play days).[30]

[28] For an indication see: https://humanrights.ca/; http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/; http://www.sitesofconscience.org/; http://migrationmuseum.org/

[29] Ursula Franklin. «Le Bistro des Idées,» *Muse,* Vol. 15, No. 4, 1998, pp. 9-10.

[30] Frances Ravensbergen and Madeline Van der Plaat, "Barriers to citizen participation: The missing voices of people living with low income," *Community Development Journal,* Vol 45, No. 4, October 2010, pp. 389-403.

Given these suggestions the point is not that museums are or should turn into community or recreation centres. But consider them as gathering places and cultural sanctuaries in the lives of a particular social and economic group that lack access to a range of services and opportunities. Just as a museum may be a resource for this constituency, the group will have, despite its lack of financial resources, assets and gifts as John McKnight terms them,[31] including their life experiences that can contribute to the stories the museum seeks to tell and the social issues it is prepared to address.

From Relevance to Social Responsibility to Debate

In the above study poverty is the social issue that is front and centre and as such it points to relevance, the next stage of the content stream. Why it must be asked would or should a museum focus on this issue? What is the intent? The answer increasingly for many museums is relevance. It has evolved from making a connection to the visitor's current knowledge or perspective, to having a social purpose tied to the museum's traditional mandates, to perhaps even making a qualitative difference in their respective communities. Relevance can take many forms such as the transformation of a space, providing historical exhibitions with a contemporary frame or instances in which a specific and highly-charged issue, such as injustice or climate change, precipitates an initiative. Looking across to the process stream it also must be asked what kinds of engagement lend themselves to relevance? Could relevance be the driver of audience development that is particularly invested in content? Or is community consultation or sharing authority more appropriate, if not necessary? For example, what might contribute to the goal of engaging particular groups be they an increasingly large segment of the population, such as seniors, or more defined groups such as a source community that heretofore had little or no connection with a

The Right Excellent Bussa. Credit: http://www.barbadosparliament.com/gallery_museum/show_gallery

The Barbados Museum of Parliament and National Heroes Gallery explores the development of democracy in Barbados and the role played by the island's people through traditional exhibitions, artistic interpretation and modern interactive museum experiences. The Heroes Gallery aims to inspire young Barbadians to become involved citizens by showing national heroes who rose above their own circumstances to make a difference to the nation. For example, in 1816 Bussa, who had been born a free man in West Africa, captured by slave merchants, sold to the British, and transported to Barbados in the late 18th century, led the largest slave revolt in Barbadian history. Although defeated by the British Bussa's Rebellion became the first of three that shook public faith in slavery in the years leading to emancipation.

[31] John Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets.* ABCD Institute, Evanston: Northwestern University, 1993.

museum? These are complex matters which get to the very heart of the relevance *of* museums and their relevance *for* whom.

Here are two very different illustrations which convey the range of possibilities and challenges. The first is a study by Susan Crane, albeit almost twenty years old, of an exhibition that was predicated on having relevance for visitors yet as the author points out it had unintended consequences. This is a matter, to recall Lynch and Alberti, that also must also be taken into account when weighing process considerations.[32] The exhibition in question is of 'masterpieces' of Pacific Northwest First Nations' jewellery at UBC's Museum of Anthropology. As Crane notes:

> …the visitor book was crowded with complaints. One visitor angrily recorded: 'I expected to learn something from this exhibit, not be confused by it.' This response echoed throughout the book. Visitors complained about the tags in each display case which asked them to think about why the artifact was being included in a 'masterpieces' exhibit.[33]

Margaret Okonkwo, Curator of the National Museum of Unity, Enugu, Nigeria makes a case for the role of museums in promoting an environment of tolerance and peace. She describes the challenges Nigeria faces with over 250 ethnic groups, multiple religious beliefs, varied exposure to western education, different languages and cultures, varied climatic zones and resulting distrust, hatred and rivalry. She describes the National Museum Lagos' art competition for handicapped children titled *What Peace Means to Me* and the subsequent CAM international exhibition of children's art. She states that, "Of all the programmes and measures adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria to stem the tide of tribal differences, the museum as an educational institution has proved to be the most effective – with the use of tangible and intangible heritages harboured in the museums"

Margaret Okonkwo, "The Museum as an Instrument for Engendering Tolerance and Understanding Among Children of Different Tribes in Nigeria, *CAM International Online Journal and Archives*, Stanger, South Africa, 2009.

The exhibition was the work of anthropology students enrolled in a museum studies course, whose principal goal was to encourage visitors "to think about how knowledge is constructed" and in doing so "offer them an opportunity to create new meanings." Based on the responses, Crane suggests that the opposite occurred. "Like a distorted radio signal transmission what the visitor expected was not received." What the visitors wanted were clear authoritative explanations, to the point that, as Crane put it: "At stake is the trustworthiness of the museum as a memory institution. If a museum 'messes with your mind,' is memory, particularly historical memory, fundamentally at risk?"[34] Supported by the museum, the students evidently wanted viewers to be engaged to the extent that the exhibition might be more relevant in terms of making their own interpretations. In a way it was an attempt to encourage visitors to share authority but this was apparently stymied by visitors themselves who were expecting received wisdom.

The second illustration focuses on the purpose of relevance particularly within the context of the developing world. In a recent CAM presentation Michael Gondwe explains that the Museums of Malawi

[32] *Op. cit.* Lynch, p. 30.
[33] Susan Crane, "Memory, distortion, and history in the museum," *History and Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 1997, p. 45.
[34] *Ibid.*

> …are today not just object-based but also human-based. As such, museums not only believe they have an opportunity to instigate change but also a responsibility to do so. Today the Museums of Malawi have become agents of change for development. They mirror events in society and become instruments of progress by calling attention to actions and events that will encourage development in society.[35]

He goes on to describe a collaborative project on the ancient art of spinning and weaving in the southernmost part of the country aimed at reviving this technology and trade in an effort to spur economic development. As he concludes:

> The Tisunge Lower Shire Heritage Centre and the Museums of Malawi have revived traditional cotton weaving technology and linked it with income generating skills. They have helped the people at large, children and adults alike, in appreciating their indigenous skills and knowledge, which has taught them alternative means to fight poverty and unemployment. Social economic development is enhanced through informal learning and self-reliance instilled among the people. Community partnerships have been fostered and tourism promoted.[36]

This is surely an initiative which conveys both the relevance of museums and the relevance for a particular community. Significantly, Gondwe also emphasises the Museums of Malawi have a responsibility to engage in such action given the social and economic challenges faced by the country. This latter position serves to introduce the next stage of the content stream.

Social Responsibility

Much of what has been termed community engagement has an underlying social aspect. The term 'community' implies the interaction, and increasingly inclusion, of various groups, be it developing new audiences, writing or rewriting a specific cultural group's history or initiating what have traditionally been called outreach programmes. However, when the social is combined with a sense of purpose a museum is not only expected to relate to its community(s) in some way, it has, to recall Gondwe, a *responsibility* to do so. David Fleming in a recent opinion piece suggests that the idea of social responsibility is also not new, and is in fact 'natural', reaching back to the museum's initial role as a custodian of culture. Yet he sees significant changes noting that today museums work very hard to understand their audiences including assessing why they do not engage particular individuals and groups in an effort to be socially responsible. For him, museums can have the greatest impact by "promoting greater inclusion and social harmony," noting for example the work of the Federation of International Human Rights Museums (FIHRM) which he founded.[37]

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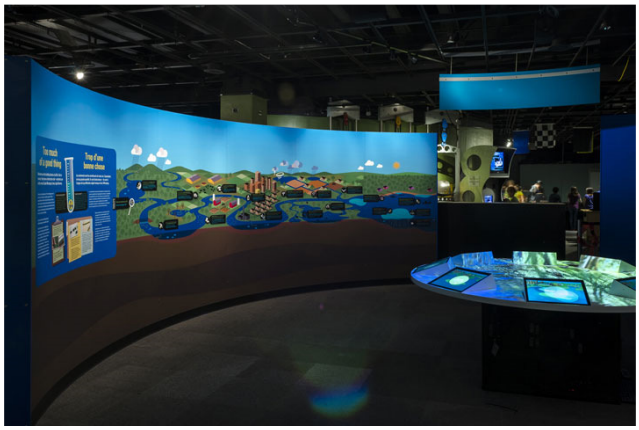
[35] Michael Gondwe, "Enhancing Social Economic Development: The Museums of Malawi Case Study." Singapore, 2011. CAM *Online International Journal and Archive*.
http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/publications/conference_publications/Mike%20Gondwe.pdf

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] David Fleming, *ICOM News*, No. 1, 2011.
http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/ICOM_News/2011-1/ENG/p8-9_2011-1a.pdf

Others go even farther afield, such as Lois Silverman who maintains that museums can engage in a broad range of socially responsible purposes that respond to the personal needs of people such as the physically disabled or mentally challenged or other marginalised groups, such as at-risk youth. For Silverman, the likely partners for museums are social service and health agencies and other helping organisations while the response can be proactive, preventative or therapeutic.[38] These roles are not without criticism as some museum professionals consider them too much like social work and too little related to museological functions. Robert Janes provides a compelling perspective that complements Fleming and Silverman. In a series of publications, he acknowledges several current challenges, both local and global in scope, to which museum exhibitions, collections and expertise lend themselves, such as environmental stewardship.[39] But social responsibility, in Janes' view, is more than a matter of enlightened purpose; it is also in the interests of museums as he regards them as cultural institutions that are increasingly 'irrelevant' and in some cases on the verge of 'collapse' if they do not become engaged with their respective communities. Janes further contends that if museums are to effectively move on the social responsibility front, promoting or facilitating a particular issue is not sufficient. They must also have certain capacities to carry out their aims that may necessitate organisational change and development.



Lake Winnipeg is threatened by the increase in algal blooms which cover the water in thick greenish slime. The lake is relatively shallow and a large amount of land drains into it, making it difficult to find solutions. The Manitoba Museum, in Winnipeg, Canada is actively participating in the effort to 'Save Lake Winnipeg' and on World Water Day, March 22, 2014, the museum launched *Lake Winnipeg: Shared Solutions. The H_2O Solution* is a combined virtual reality/ video simulation and museum exhibition about pure water science.

For more information go to: http://manitobamuseum.ca/main/visit/science-gallery/lake-winnipeg-shared-solutions/

It is instructive to cite two recent Canadian initiatives which adeptly make use of museum resources to facilitate community involvement and focus on social responsibility. In the case of the Museum of Vancouver, about five years ago it created several new positions including a Curator of Contemporary Issues. These positions are primarily tasked to developing exhibitions such as *Rewilding Vancouver* which explored the city's ecological past in an effort to explore current and future green issues affecting the city of Vancouver, British Columbia.[40] Among other outcomes, the exhibition caught the attention of

[38] Lois Silverman, *The Social Work of Museums.* Routledge: New York and London 2009. For a specific illustration in the area of health and medicine see: Paul Camic and Helen J. Chatterjee, "Museums and art galleries as partners for public health interventions," *Perspectives on Public Health,* Vol. 133, No. 1, January 2013, pp. 66-7.
[39] See, for example, Robert Janes, *Museums in a Troubled World: Irrelevance or Collapse*. Routledge: London, 2009.
[40] http://www.museumofvancouver.ca/exhibitions/exhibit/rewilding-vancouver.

city planners and plans are now underway to develop related exhibitions and programmes. Last year, the Manitoba Museum inaugurated *H20/Shared Solutions,* a permanent and very technologically sophisticated installation which focuses on Lake Winnipeg, one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world and in particular its prospects for sustainable development.[41] The initiative has several partners including the International Institute for Sustainable Development which happens to be headquartered in Winnipeg, and lent its expertise and is involved in several information-sharing programmes associated with the initiative. This expanded the knowledge base which in turn gave it further legitimacy resulting in the museum playing a relevant, socially responsible role in the conversation on sustainable development.[42]

To put these various perspectives within the context of the project survey, a substantial majority of respondents indicated that museums should address contemporary issues yet there was significant variance when it came to questions about specific conditions. For example, only half of the respondents said museums should use their expertise to address government policy issues; a remaining third skipped the question. Part of the explanation may lie in the fact that many museums, in both the developed and developing world, are state museums or heavily supported by it. As will be noted later this finding has particular implications for the prospects of participatory governance. Yet when asked if museums should have an advocacy role in addressing contemporary issues 70% answered 'yes' although the number of respondents who skipped the question was higher. When asked whether museums should be objective and impartial in the analysis and presentation of information, a resounding 85% answered 'yes' although the number who skipped the question was consistent with answers to other questions. This kind of response suggests that museums must be responsible in what they do and what they convey and applies not only to advancing social issues and ensuring their relevance but to their legitimacy as cultural institutions.

It might be asked at this point how social responsibility differs further from other forms of engagement addressed thus far in this report. One is the way it engages content. As has been emphasised, engaging in social responsibility entails drawing particularly on the professional expertise of museum staff and on the museum as a storehouse of knowledge be it, for example, about the natural environment or the social history of a given community. This is not to suggest that other forms of engagement do not value or use content. However, the emphasis is equally or more inclined toward cultivating audiences or collaborating with various communities in an effort to recognise and present their knowledge which

[41] http://manitobamuseum.ca/main/visit/science-gallery/lake-winnipeg-shared-solutions/.

[42] This initiative may have particular implications for museums in the developing world engaging in social responsibility. First clean water, the content focus, is one of the most pressing environmental and health issues for many countries. Second, the collaboration suggests that museums may need to search out partners that, as noted earlier may not necessarily have heritage organisations on their radar. See, for example, the One Drop Foundation, www.onedrop.org. Based in Quebec, it has ongoing clean water projects throughout the developing world, including in India. Along the same lines, other types of content-driven initiatives may have possibilities. For example, World Reader is a non-governmental organization which advances literacy by providing digital readers and related services and which held its annual summits in April 2015 in Ghana and Kenya. www.worldreader.org.

heretofore may have been excluded from the museum. Content does matter but it is much more entwined, and understandably so, with process. Social responsibility also requires attention to procedure, as Janes maintains above, but content is all important and bound up with the museum as an authoritative source of knowledge.

The Challenge of Public Debate

When a museum engages in social responsibility there is also the likelihood, if not the potential for public debate – the final stage of the content stream. For example, if a museum chooses to address a contemporary issue such as social injustice or climate change it may be met with disagreement, perhaps even outrage on the part of the viewing public as there are a range of opinions about these issues with respect to their impact and prevention. Governments, including the museum's funders, and the private sector, including corporate sponsors and an array of civil society organisations, may also respond and in some instances vigorously. Opinions will be invariably tied to the perception of the museum's purpose and positioning. There will be calls for the museum to limit itself to its professional expertise and to be impartial in its presentations of an issue, a position strongly expressed in many studies, including the project survey. Others will be more moderate i.e., objectivity is still expected but the museum can function as site for debate – thus echoing once again the long held tradition of museum as forum.

Volcano on Simbo Island, Solomon Islands. Credit: Tony Heorake.

Tony Heorake, Director of the Solomon Islands National Museum outlined three decades of efforts by the Solomon Islands National Museum (SINM) to educate local communities about the negative impacts of economic activities on the environment in a cultural policy void. Activities such as logging impact communities that often become victims of internal (tribal) conflicts, and lead to destruction of cultural and heritage sites, devastation of arable lands, loss of biodiversity, and empty promises. Through the National Site Survey project (NSS), administered by the Museum's Archaeology Research Unit, museum officers travelled around the country undertaking surveys and impact assessment studies and conducting workshops on the revival of cultures and traditions. Since 2010 the SINM has been collaborating with researchers studying the impact of climate change and how people have developed strategies to mitigate its impacts on their livelihoods in the Choiseul and Makira Ulawa.

Tony Heorake, "The Roles of Museums and Cultural Centres in Educating the Public about the Effects of Climate Change," *CAM International Online Journal,* Singapore, 2011, http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/publications/conference_publications/Heorake.The%20Roles%20of%20Museums.pdf

The literature review also contains instances in which controversial and debatable issues are at the crux of what should be the museum's role in society. Fiona Cameron's work which will also be addressed later in the report, confirms the public's reluctance to the museum as activist. Cameron concludes that at best museums can be 'brokers' of knowledge in debates about 'hot topics,' such as climate change.[43]

[43] Cameron Fiona and Landes, Ann. "Museums and science centres as sites for deliberative democracy on climate change," *Museum and Society*, Vol 9, no. 2, July 2011, pp. 136-153.

Moreover, and in contrast a lack of debate can result in dissent given the experience of *The Spirit Sings* and Lynch's account of the Manchester Museum exhibition on racism referred to earlier. While the concern in both cases was with process, it now seems that debate is also a function of the very content a museum chooses to address. But given the analysis and examples provided what if community engagement intersected with social responsibility and debate? What if process considerations aim at engaging the museum more directly in the democratic process, whereby it becomes a space for policy expertise and formation taken up with legislative change? At issue is nothing less than participatory governance and the report now turns to consider its parameters and its potential for museums.

Participatory Governance

We lost stuff. We gained a community.
Naheed Nenshi

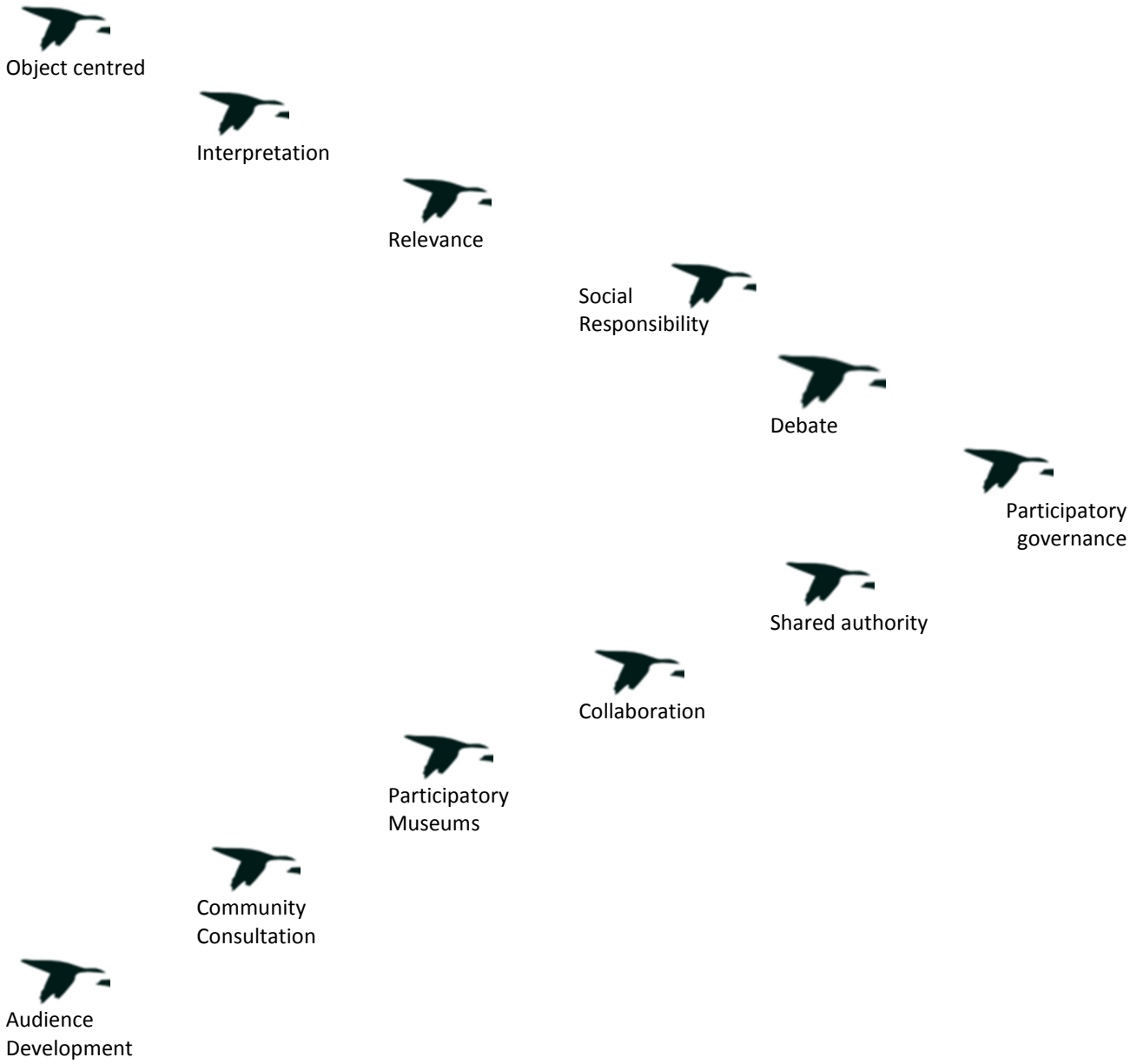
The Mayor of Calgary made this observation when speaking about the great flood of 2013 to a symposium at the McGill Institute for Studies in Canada in September 2014. He was referring to the momentous efforts by citizens, both city workers and volunteers, to address the calamity. This is not a case of participatory governance per se, let alone through the confines of a museum but it does speak to the mobilisation of people i.e., working together for a common purpose, which according to the Mayor made Calgarians aware of their capacities to act, to change circumstances for the better. When questioned by an audience member, the Mayor wondered if such engagement might directly lend itself to the regular day to day challenges of the city as it continues to grow rapidly and face a range of policy issues with respect to the planning and provision of services and resources. If this were the case, it would certainly be a form of participatory governance with individuals and associations, including conceivably cultural organisations, engaged in policy deliberation and implementation. The situation would be more than consultative or a form of lobbying based on self-interest, such as tax concessions. Rather, it would be citizens coming together not only to provide a voice but to act in the public interest.

Many scholars and policy makers like the idea of participatory governance but the majority also consider it a chimera. They are aware of its successes such as attempts by the City of Sao Paulo, Brazil in the late 1990s and early 2000s to institute 'participatory budgeting' in an effort to allocate financial resources in this huge metropolis. But they also point to how the process eventually became mired in party politics and bureaucratic entanglements thus becoming no different than other means of involving citizens in a governmental process.[44] More recently, and as noted earlier, the prospects for participatory governance across fields and subjects and across levels of government, according to the literature review, seem even more remote due to the precarious state of civil society organisations. It is more than a matter of diminishing resources; it is also about power as governments and the markets occupy more and more space locally and globally.

Nevertheless, participatory governance remains a compelling process and objective especially in the developing world and it is increasingly subject to expectations and forms of accountability more suitably applied to government agencies and programmes and for-profit entities.[45] As for museums, there are several instances, if not experiments, in participatory governance although as the literature review indicates they are rarely specifically named as such. Still, several intentions and trappings are present with reference made to engaging museums in contemporary issues and attendant policy research and formation.

[44] See, for example, Kees Koonings, "Strengthening citizenship in Brazil's democracy: Local participatory governance in Porto Alegre," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 23, No 1, 2001, pp. 79-89.
[45] John Gaventa and Rosemary McGee, "The Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives," *Development Policy Review, Vol. 31, July 2013, Supplement s1,* pp. s3–s28.

As the following model illustrates, participatory governance is the intersection of the process and content axes. Like Canada Geese flying in formation, museums move forward and backward along each axis, and participatory governance may lead or fall behind with other priorities moving to the fore.



In order to provide a conceptual framework, here are a few variations on participatory governance each of which begins with a possible issue(s) followed by the suggestion of an appropriate process of deliberation and implementation. First, there are issues that relate specifically to the operations and professional responsibilities of museums and the wider arts and heritage sector such as definitions of and guidelines for cultural property and/or legislation affecting not-for-profit and charitable organisations. Museums could be working together in a truly collaborative way with service organisations to effect legislation. Second, issues may also relate specifically to the operations and

professional responsibilities of museums and to the arts and heritage sector but have ethical, cultural or economic implications for a wider public that may include specific cultural groups. An example: laws and guidelines regarding the protection and trafficking of human remains. Museums could be working with other civil society organisations or a national museum as a public agency could take leadership with the intent of providing research and documentation as well participating in the formation and implementation of policy guidelines or specific legislation.

A more contentious example is issues of social, economic or cultural import, both immediate and long term, that are tied to the convergence of a museum's contents and expertise and its civic and civil responsibility. Museums could, and some do, work with other organisations and individuals on sensitive areas such as environmental conditions, social justice and human rights.

The Matter of Advocacy

While organisations dominate the deliberative process, the last variation especially also refers to the participation of individuals. One of the essential tenets of participatory governance is the engagement of citizens in the very making of policy that directly affects their lives and the lives of others, what John Gaventa and others have termed 'citizen-led change.'[46] It is important to emphasise that is by no means lobbying; it is quite the opposite as the process is not intended to satisfy a vested interest but to attend to issues that are in the broader public interest. Despite this objective there is a significant amount of hesitancy, if not avoidance, by museums that are concerned it may be regarded as a form of advocacy and therefore impact a museum's charitable status. Indicative are some of the results of the project survey.

1. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they do create dialogue on contemporary issues; however 26% of respondents skipped this question.
2. Fifty-four percent of the roughly 80% who did respond indicated that their museums use their collections, exhibitions, programmes and expertise to address government policy issues.
3. When asked whether museums should use their collections, exhibitions, programmes and expertise to engage citizens and inform voters about contemporary issues, 31% declined to answer and 77% of respondents said 'yes'.
4. Sixty-eight percent of those who answered the question of whether museums should choose the topics of their exhibitions and programmes with an advocacy goal in mind agreed; however 38% of respondents chose not to answer this question.

These findings indicate that various aspects of participatory governance are in fact occurring and in the case of the last response advocacy is clearly evident in several instances. Yet a high degree of reticence can be explained by the significant percentage of respondents who did not answers the questions, thus reducing substantially the overall number who favour some form of participatory governance. It is possible that language may be an issue yet skipping the question can also be construed as avoidance with addressing the matter or else a straight 'no' would have easily sufficed. These findings are

[46]For an example of work currently being done especially the recent conference held at the Coady International Institute where Gaventa is currently director
http://www.coady.stfx.ca/knowledge/publications/conferences/citizen_led_innovation/.

consistent with other studies which also found reluctance to engage in what was ultimately considered as political activity of some sort and in these instances museums were expected or required to be impartial. Both Bandelli and Cameron found this in their projects that explored the role of museums in addressing scientific issues. In particular, Cameron's project on climate changed provided this sombre conclusion.

> …there was a strong view amongst visitors that institutions ought not to be a site of direct decision making regarding the management of the risks of climate change. Visitors were firmly of the view that the museum or science centre is not the proper place for political decisions on policy, rather it should be a place where information is available, which may – at the audience visitor's discretion – be taken up for the purpose of understanding and choosing policy options.[47]

These various conclusions are reflected in a more recent UK study of what people think about museums and what they should be doing. They suggest even bleaker prospects for participatory governance on the part of the public when respondents are asked to rank what they think are the museum's roles and priorities.[48]

Name of purpose	*Spontaneously suggested*	*Necessity level*	*Rank in budgeting exercise*
Care and preservation of heritage	Yes	Must do	1st
Holding collections and mounting displays	Yes	Must do	2nd
Creating knowledge for, and about, society	Yes	Must do	4th
Promoting economic growth through tourism, investment and regeneration	Yes	Should do	3rd
Facilitating individual development through education, stimulation and building skills	Yes	Should do	5th
Promote well-being and happiness	Yes	Should do	8th
Protect the natural environment	No	Can do	6th
Foster sense of community	Mixed	Can do	7th
Helping the vulnerable	No	Can do	9th
Promoting social justice and human rights	No	Should not do	10th
Provide a forum for public debate	No	Should not do	11th

Is there a silver-lining to all this reluctance, if not specific dismissal, conveyed in this UK survey which gets to the heart of what participatory governance can entail? Can a proper balance be struck between

[47] Andrea Bandelli, et. al., "The need for public participation in the governance of science centers," *Museum Management and Curatorship,* Vol. 24, No.2, June 2009, pp. 89-104; and Cameron and Landes op. cit. p. 137.
[48] *Public Perceptions of – and Attitudes to – the Purposes of Museums in Society.* A report prepared by Britain Thinks for the Museums Association, 2013.

becoming proactive and maintaining the traditional mandates of museums? One positive response actually comes from the project survey. When asked what were the reasons for limiting their advocacy roles, the lack of resources was the most common reason cited by 50% of respondents; followed by nearly 40% saying it was a government institution; 30% concern with offending a portion of the community; 28% institutional mandate; 27% management; 24% charitable status; and nearly 20% funders/sponsors. These findings do not wash away all of the concerns but the lack of resources, which we assume to be both human and financial, may account for both reticence and avoidance to some degree. Many museums, in Alberta, the Commonwealth and elsewhere may not believe that they are able to carry out such initiatives given diminishing expectations and support that in many cases increasingly applies to their core functions. Yet on a positive note, perhaps engagement, and specifically participatory governance, can be conceived of as more integral to the everyday work and workings of museums.

Returning to the variations in the project survey and to the types of collaboration introduced earlier, here are two illustrations of how participatory governance may be adapted by museums that are primarily driven by their expertise and capacity for generating useful knowledge. A not-for-profit, nongovernmental museum with its attendant contents and programmes could be a platform, for its professional staff, other experts (including academics), individual citizens and possibly other not-for-profit and nongovernmental organisations to research, deliberate and advance policies with the hope of implementation by government. For museums which regard this role as advocacy beyond what is conventionally or legally permitted, the rationale may be found in the participation of experts in and outside the museum, and other citizens for whom self- or a vested interest are not at issue. The justification also can reside in the trust and authority accorded museums as sources of knowledge.[49] An organisation that best approximates the museum in this participatory fashion is the public policy think tank, such as in Canada the Institute for Research in Public Policy, Canada West Foundation, or Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives which are not-for-profit and charitable organisations. More akin perhaps are universities, large and small, which in addition to their core functions and structures have a myriad of centres and institutes, many of which are taken up with policy-driven concerns. In any case there are variations on these models. For example, a museum, with its attendant contents and programmes that is a public, i.e., government agency, such as a national or provincial museum, collaborates with other government agencies and private organisations, including for-profit entities, as well as individual citizens and/or experts to research, deliberate, advance and implement policies. Ansell and Gash call this 'collaborative governance.'

> A governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engages non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets.[50]

[49] Dubinsky and Muise, *op. cit*.
[50] Chris Ansell and Alison Gash. "Collaborative governance in theory and practice," *Journal of Public Management, Research and Theory*, 18, 2009, p. 544.

Ansell and Gash distinguish this policy process from inter-governmental departmental co-operation because a spectrum of participants is directly involved in decision-making and "not merely 'consulted' by public agencies." They emphasise other criteria including that this 'forum' is initiated by public agencies and meets collectively. They are also keenly aware that it is difficult to define any type of governance and draw on several sources in the administrative and policy literature to provide this definition:

> Collaborative governance is therefore a type of governance in which public and private actors work collectively in distinctive ways, using particular processes, to establish laws and rules for the provision of public goods.[51]

Ansell and Gash's perspective suggests that museums could well be engaged in participatory governance as one of the public or civil society actors that are primarily instrumental. Yet extensive work on participatory governance for almost 30 years, has convinced John Gaventa that process must take into account other conceptual considerations and practical realties especially if initiatives are to occur at a local level, such as a municipality. As he explains:

> For much of this period, the concept has referred to participation in the social arena, in the 'community' or in development projects. Increasingly, however, the concept of participation is being related to rights of citizenship and to democratic governance. Nowhere is the intersection of concepts of community participation and citizenship seen more clearly than in the multitude of programmes for decentralised governance that are found in both Southern and Northern countries. Linking citizen participation to the state at this local or grassroots level raises fundamental and normative questions about the nature of democracy and about the skills and strategies for achieving it.[52]

By way of a conclusion the report now turns to Gaventa's several propositions for local governance, which he has developed with several colleagues, and their implications for museums. Gaventa maintains that the overall challenge is "to construct new relations between people and their governments." It would be naïve to suggest that museums are a panacea but they are surely civil and cultural organisations that could serve as a bridge, if not a proactive space, for participatory governance. Gaventa also advocates "working both sides of the equation" noting "it may be necessary going beyond 'civil society' or 'state-based' approaches, to focus on their intersection, through new forms of participation, responsiveness and accountability." Again, museums may be well positioned especially since many cross the state/civil divide. A municipal or national museum, for example may also operate as a not-for-profit entity and some, depending on the state, may be sufficiently arms-length from it. For Gaventa, these new relationships also put citizenship at the very centre of local governance.

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[51] *Ibid.*, p. 545.

[52] John Gaventa, *Towards Participatory Local Governance: Assessing the Transformative Possibilities.* Prepared for the *Conference on Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation* Manchester, 27-28 February, 2003; London: Zed Books, London, pp. 25-41. Subsequent passages are from the same text. http://www.sed.man.ac.uk/research/events/conferences/documents/Participation%20Papers/Gaventa.pdf.

> With the re-conceptualisation of participation as a right of citizenship, and with the extension of the rights to participation beyond traditional voting and political rights, comes the search for more direct mechanisms of ensuring citizen voice in the decision making process.

Yet Gaventa realizes that such idealism must be tempered, if not informed by, practical realties. Referring to a Commonwealth Foundation study, he acknowledges that in the past there were intersections but that the relationship between the state and citizens "tended to be mediated and achieved (or thought to be) through the intermediaries, elected representatives and political party structures." Here again, museums may have potential as alternative sources and sites for participatory governance. Gaventa does not mention museums per se but another of his propositions is in the form of a caution which museums or any other potential spaces must take into account.

> While the creation of new spaces for participatory governance holds out the possibility for transformative change, far more needs to be learned about how such spaces work, for whom, and with what social justice outcomes.

Gaventa's call for evidence is well-founded as he notes that there is not a substantial amount about the effectiveness of participatory governance as he envisions it. In this respect the museum and heritage literature offers at least one study that acknowledges several pitfalls and challenges. Shadreck Chirikure et. al. provide an analysis of attempts at participatory management of several heritage sites in Sub-Saharan Africa that well applies. For them, the experience was "unfulfilled and at best experimental" owing to factors such as the needs of the local communities were not "universal and homogeneous" while the interests of the local communities and the professionals did not often coincide.[53] Chirikure et. al., also contend that the initiative was in the end perhaps too ambitious given the expectations and resources. While the context here is the developing world, all the observations are also germane to developed nations, especially the latter as it chimes with another critical observation made by Ansell and Gash. They stress the importance, if not the attainability of "small wins that deepen trust, commitment and shared understanding" when it comes to the possibilities of participatory governance at the local level.[54]

Returning to Gaventa, his final proposition is "the need to assess the realities of power relations in participatory spaces."[55] To what degree, for example, is sharing authority really occurring or in his words what is "the extent to which new spaces for participatory governance can be used for transformative engagement, or whether they are more likely to be instruments for re-enforcing domination and control?" Museums must also ask these questions with respect to process and content. What is it they seek to change, how, with whom and for whom? The questions not only must inform the new relations with people and institutions that Gaventa begins with; museums, once again, must assess their own

[53] Shadreck Chirikure et. al., "Unfilled promises: Heritage management and community participation at some of Africa's cultural heritage sites," *International Journal of Heritage Studies,* Vol. 16, No. 1-2, January-March 2010, pp. 30-44.
[54] Ansel and Gash, *op. cit.* p. 543.
[55] Gaventa, *op cit.*

capacity for participation. For Gaventa, and recalling potential for other forms of engagement noted in the report, space is a critical factor. For participatory governance he suggests three possibilities that can well apply to museums. There are 'closed spaces,' in which museums engage in decision making as full participants but 'behind closed doors,' akin perhaps to Ansell and Gash's 'collaborative governance' with shared authority occurring but with a limited number of actors. There are 'invited spaces' in which efforts are made to widen participation, through broader consultation, for example. As Gaventa puts it:

> to move from closed spaces to more 'open' ones, new spaces are created which may be referred to as 'invited' spaces, i.e. 'those into which people (as users, as citizens, as beneficiaries) are invited to participate by various kinds of authorities.

There are 'claimed/created spaces.' For Gaventa this is the most ideal site for governance – "spaces which are claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders, or created more autonomously by them." Here museums may have a double contribution: they may be less powerful actors in the sense that rarely, if not at all, are they considered within the context of participatory governance. They also as publically committed organizations have the potential to widen citizen participation. As Gaventa concludes, citing his colleague Andrea Cornwall,

> These are also 'organic' spaces which emerge 'out of sets of common concerns or identifications' and 'may come into being as a result of popular mobilisation, such as around identity or issue-based concerns, or may consist of spaces in which like-minded people join together in common pursuits'.[56]

It is common pursuits that are perhaps the very basis, the rationale, for participatory governance, if not all forms of engagement in and through museums. Individual citizens and various groups may bring different histories, purposes and processes to their need and desire for engagement. However, they do share common interests with respect to matters of preservation and change to which museums are ideally positioned to respond.

[56] Andrea Cornwall in Gaventa, *Ibid.*

Conclusions and Recommendations

Today, a major, if not the most prevalent, concern for most museums, large and small, is doing so much with so little. The challenge applies to everything from maintaining the building, collection and staff, to mounting exhibitions, to delivering programmes, to implementing marketing strategies. Engagement, in its traditional and least risk adverse forms, does not alleviate this situation but many museums deem it a necessity to keep their doors open and to meet public expectations, however varied. Engagement in its more activist phases, both on the content and process side, is seen as less of, or not an option due to assumed complexity and the substantial resources required. Yet as the report indicates, more activist forms of engagement can provide a museum with a renewed purpose that combines its traditional role with initiatives that are community-driven and socially responsible.

Looking back at the range of examples of how this might happen, and particularly with respect to participatory governance, the report concludes with five recommendations aimed at getting museums to begin thinking, if not thinking more, and hopefully acting. The suggestions are by no means easy as they require putting aside some sacred cows of museums and the museum profession. If anything they recommend that museums disengage from certain assumptions if what they are seeking is proactive engagement. They also necessitate facing further challenges with respect to the role of museums as civil society organisations and to changes in the broader cultural landscape.

1. *Museums should speak* about *people rather than* for *them.*

There is a need to be aware of what Michael Ames calls 'counterfeit museums' and what John McKnight refers to as 'counterfeit communities'. Ames contends that museums must continue to acknowledge that they have a history of speaking for other people rather than speaking about them. Attempts over the past twenty-five years of working with source or origin communities, while laudable in many cases, still does not guarantee that the latter are speaking in their own voice. As Ames explains:

> If [museums] are to serve as important mechanisms for empowering local communities to define, recognize, and develop their own indigenous heritages, they should first consider a potential contradiction contained within this initiative: museums specialize in the representation of other peoples, while people have the sovereign right to represent themselves. Left unresolved, this contradiction could produce counterfeits of good intentions.[57]

Ames' caution is not limited to indigenous peoples; museums at any stage of the process or content stream, but particularly in the case of sharing authority, must be acutely aware of not only who is speaking and who is not, but how they are being heard and what they are saying. John McKnight expresses a similar caution when it comes to other organisations working with or in communities.[58] He is wary of professionals and their institutional affiliations such as the criminal justice or health systems

[57] Michael Ames, "Counterfeit Museology," *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 21, 2006, p. 171.
[58] John McKnight, *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits.* New York: Basic Books, 1995. For a more recent exposition see: John McKnight and Peter Block. *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighbourhoods.* Bennett-Koehler, 2012.

that may speak for neighbourhood groups or other local entities with the best of intentions but who may be underrepresenting or misrepresenting them. This is also good advice for museums as they set out to engage potentially with a whole range of organizations in the public and private sphere. Yet recalling Ames, it comes with an assumption that contradiction or resolution may be a necessary component. As Jeremy Brent observes: "Engaging with community is a practice full of ambivalence, but always one full of hope."[59]

2. *Museums should consider dismantling organizational silos between curatorial and public programmes/education.*

Museums must take a hard look at how they operate which may require dislodging the very silos which characterise the organizational structures common to most. As noted earlier, Janes maintains that if museums are to effectively move on the social responsibility front promoting or facilitating a particular issue is not sufficient. For him, organisational change is also required. In this respect, and for other forms of engagement, it may be incumbent to put aside the long held divide in most museums between curatorial responsibilities and functions on one hand and the public programmes/education side, or what is increasingly called public engagement, on the other. In many instances museums put together teams comprising staff from both areas, especially in the case of major exhibitions with extensive programming. However, in these cases a hierarchy generally persists and along with it long held assumptions about what curators and educators do or should do.

The perceptions go something like this: from the museum's standpoint curators have authority over and responsibility for the content of an exhibition, even if it happens to entail sharing authority with a particular community. Educators, or other staff in public-driven activities, are responsible for designing and delivering programmes to suit the exhibition. Across the divide there may be information sharing and advice offered, but not necessarily taken. This divide further demarcates content and process considerations which is perhaps the nub of the dilemma. Traditionally, curators are the guardians and creators of content about which educators may not be expected to know or in fact do not know much about, whereas educators are assumed to know about ways of knowing and learning – matters which curators may know very little or nothing about or indeed care to. This may appear as a shaky model of expertise and implementation yet it has served most museums surprisingly well for decades, if not a century in some cases! But as the analysis and examples of the report imply this divide, institutionalised as it is, does not lend itself to engagement especially in its more complex forms and stages. Engagement requires not only close collaboration but an understanding of, and respect for, both process and content on the part of all museum staff that territorial concerns and professional pigeon-holding cannot suffice.

3. *Museums should acknowledge that they are inherently political in what they choose to collect and exhibit, in what engagement they pursue, and may develop ideologically-driven exhibitions and programmes within the confines of their legal and funding status.*

[59] Jeremy Brent, *Searching for Community: Representation, Power and Action in an Urban Estate.* Bristol: Polity Press, 2009, p. 261.

If organisational challenges and the issue of authenticity are not enough, museums must also put aside another long held view which is that they are not political. In putting forth this recommendation, the various survey findings noted are taken into account, for example, that museums should be objective in their work and should stay clear of ideologically-driven exhibitions and programmes that are sure to have a political bias. Even if museums are to abide by such directives they are nevertheless political in terms of what they choose to collect and exhibit and what engagement they pursue. Choice is the operative word as selection of any kind implies exclusion or inclusion and as such is political in one way or another. Acknowledging this political dimension of museum practice is a critical starting point for considering the kind and extent of engagement. This being said, the choices that a museum does make must proceed with full awareness of the legal and financial limits of advocacy as set down by various countries with respect to their charitable and not-for-profit sectors. In Canada, for example, no more than 10% of a charity's resources may be allocated towards advocacy.

4. *Museums should share resources with partners in order to work together effectively, to be socially responsible and potentially engage in participatory governance.*

As noted at the outset of the conclusion, a prevalent concern for museums large and small is the need to do so much with so little. The impact ranges from budgetary uncertainty to diminishing expectations about their activities, to low staff morale. As noted in the report, it also tends to make museums risk adverse when it comes to more activist engagement be it process or content driven, and certainly with respect to the possibilities of participatory governance. Nonetheless, there is a mythic side to the lack of human and financial resources in that it may be more perceived than real. This is in no way to make light of precarious funding or staff reductions yet where engagement matters, even in its most complex forms, sharing resources with respective partners and communities is a precondition. If anything, working together, being social responsible, or engaging in participatory governance may bring with it human and financial resources that are unexpected. If this sounds like self-interest it is but with the proviso that museums must maintain purposes that go beyond their own preservation.

5. *Museums should recognise that many individuals and groups are preserving, exhibiting and writing their own histories providing opportunities for museums to commit themselves to more complex forms of engagement and the prospect of participatory governance.*

Finally, there is a need to recognise that some of the traditional roles and responsibilities of museums are now undertaken by other community organisations or initiatives. Whether driven by the availability of social media specifically or the internet generally and/or by the availability of alternative physical space, many groups are preserving, exhibiting and writing their own histories. Some come with professional expertise; other initiatives are more grass-roots oriented; in either instance local museums may well be circumvented. The principal reasons are: a group or project deliberately chooses to go it alone to maintain its authority; the museum chooses not to be involved; or these projects are beyond the mandates of existing museums. The situation is problematic but also provides an opportunity as far as engagement is concerned. On one hand it compels a museum to ask once more what is its mandate or role in a given community. On the other, rather than seeing itself displaced or marginalised, the museum has the chance to commit itself to more complex forms of engagement and ultimately to the prospect of participatory governance.