

Culture Shock:

Tolerance, Respect,
Understanding
...and Museums

Main Report

clms





Image courtesy of National Museums Liverpool

Thanks

clmg could not have created this report without the knowledge, expertise and forbearance of some of the country's leading organisations in the field of cultural identity, cohesion and citizenship.

In particular, but in no particular order, we would like to thank our core group of contributors:

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- o Nicola Nuttall, Director of the Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries

clmg is a think-tank for the cultural sector; an R&D unit for museums and galleries; and a campaigner for the unique role of culture in society. We believe:

- The 2,500 museums and galleries in the UK are a national network of unique value:
 - o There are more museums than the big four supermarkets *put together*
 - o They hold around a *billion* artefacts in trust for UK society (enough to stretch the 385,000km from here to the moon, or roughly 17 things for every man woman and child in the country)
- Objects are there for people. Collections exist to be used
- Museums and galleries should be defined by what they do, as much as by what they hold
- Museum boundaries should be drawn around people, not buildings
- The uniqueness of museum learning lies in the engagement of learners; using real artefacts to motivate their learning experience
- Museums and galleries are one of the few remaining neutral public spaces where people can discuss, learn about, and reflect on life
- Museums have nothing to sell except understanding – something that makes them special in a material world where economics is king
- Museums are about the meaning in life, not the mechanics of it
- Culture is about stirring the emotions as much as soothing them; museums can challenge us by holding up a mirror to society
- *Museums and galleries can change lives*

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We are indebted to Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand, for the beautiful cover photograph: showing just how striking museums' work on cultural understanding can be.

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How to Get the Most from This Report

This full report unravels the ideas in the separate Summary document a little further, especially in terms of the values and principles that underpin our thinking. It was *designed* to be read together with the Summary. There are important ideas and examples that might get lost if you read it in isolation.

This full report is laid out thus:

- o The main arguments for museums' contributions to cohesion, identity and citizenship are in the main body of the text, along with our first ideas about what could happen if we turned them into reality
- o The margins are the place to look if you want to see what museums around the world are up to when it comes to these issues, some practical tips from people who have tried them, and for some cautionary reality checks to keep our feet on the ground and make absolutely sure what we say is possible, actually *is* possible



Image courtesy of National Museums Liverpool

Why Cultural Identity, Cohesion and Citizenship – and Why Museums?

The debates about cohesion, citizenship and cultural identity are really only a consequence of the flux of modern life affecting who ‘we’ are (wars, the rise and demise of ideologies, decolonisation, the fracturing of political boundaries and the construction of new ones, secularisation, the gender revolution, immigration, the shrinking of global time and space...there’s scarcely a bigger subject). The result of these swirling changes has become political and media dynamite in recent years as a consequence of events. The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain reported in October 2000 and was utterly mis-represented in the media (‘British is a racist word’ etc). Almost a year later and we’d had rioting in Burnley, Oldham, and Bradford, the razing of the World Trade Centre, and constant jingoistic reporting of asylum and immigration issues. And then of course the London tube and bus bombings in the summer of 2005.

These events have sharpened political resolve. We’ve had Sir Bernard Crick’s report on Citizenship, Ted Cattle’s report on community cohesion, Lord Clarke’s report on the Burnley disturbances, Sir Herman Ouseley’s report on Bradford, the Denham report on cohesive communities; the list is long. Some mention museums and galleries as cultural tools to fix some of the issues (for example, *Building Cohesive Communities: A Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion*, Home Office, 2001. That’s the Denham report).

These, and other reports, raise the tricky issues of how to define (or create) a sense of belonging; what we mean by communities when we’re talking about culture; how do we get those communities to understand each other; and how do we bend the parallel lines of different cultures to bring them together?

And then there’s the thorny issue of how precisely do we define culture, identity, citizenship, and cohesion. But there are actually some very good reasons for *not* trying to define it all too closely: (a) it’s impossible to do without putting people into pigeonholes they just don’t fit in to; and (b) because as soon as you try to codify culture, you fossilize it and the one thing we know about culture is that you can’t do that. Better to let society collectively define culture in real-time through real debate.

John Betjeman uses irony to teach us that you can’t (and shouldn’t even try to) pigeonhole a culture:

*“Think of what our nation stands for
Books from Boots and country lanes
Free speech, free passes, class distinction,
Democracy and proper drains.”*

Meantime, the literature (for example, from the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning) tells us the score: the highest scores of societal cohesion are consistently the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway; the lowest - Germany, Portugal and the USA. The UK scores just above the USA, so is very close to the bottom of this international league table. We need to move it up a few places.

All this is connected to museums by culture: how we define ourselves (identity), how we relate to others (cohesion), and how we relate to the state (citizenship) are all, at their heart, about culture.

At their heart, museums are all about culture too: their bread-and-butter skills are in collecting artefacts and stories about cultures, discussing and interpreting them with the public and generating debate, learning, enjoyment and understanding from them: *exactly* the processes and skills we need to explore the similarities and differences of identity in modern society, and nurture the roots of citizenship and cohesion. The universal values defined by the humans rights framework expresses it as: “...developing people’s capacity for mutual concern and empathy” which is reason enough for museums to pursue this course even if there weren’t any other reasons. And there are...



Example

Individual stories of real people are examined at the **Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York**. The museum is housed in a former tenement building dating back to 1863 and is located in one of the country’s most diverse neighbourhoods. Over 7,000 immigrants from all over the world lived in the building and the museum has recreated a number of the apartments to depict the lives of families who lived there, and their personal experiences of settling in America. Visitors are guided around the building on themed tours that allow the guides to link the historical experience to the present day, and encourage visitors to discuss contemporary social issues such as the use of detention centres to house immigrants. Trained facilitators are available for those who want a more detailed discussion. The tours also extend to the neighbourhood and examine the impact of past and present migration on the area surrounding the museum.



Reality Check

How will museums and galleries cope with the non-material aspects of culture, especially in the future when there will be much less of it about (how, for example, will museums and galleries represent the World Wide Web in the future?). If they are to successfully deal with culture (and especially other less material cultures than our own), they’ll need to embrace oral traditions, customs, languages, moral codes, values, ideas and aspirations. It’s about culture you can hear, see, smell and taste, as well as 3-D artefacts you can touch and put on display in a gallery. How will museums respond to these challenges? We need to know.

As Tom Bentley says in the DEMOS essay *21st Century Citizenship*: "...achieving equal dignity, protection or respect for each individual relies on recognising the reality of human interdependence, and the need for institutions which make co-existence and mutual respect positive, practical realities. That, at root, is what politics is there to do." Museums' charting of cultures can underwrite precisely that co-existence and mutual respect by delivering *understanding*. And it's much harder to hate, or worse, harm someone if you understand them: if you see them as a real person rather than some kind of embodiment of fundamentalist ideas (which is hardly ever true).

Other countries give us some good reasons for museums to be involved in these issues too. In Canada, for example, there is now a greater willingness to accept multicultural society. Efforts to foster a national consciousness based on the mosaic of Canadian society are a priority and, to this end, governmental subsidy to the cultural sector of museums, galleries, and the performing arts (seen as vital in this area) is amongst the most substantial anywhere in the Western world.

There's also the uniqueness of museums and galleries led, as they are, by art and artefacts – neither of which are tied to spoken or written language to make an impact. It means they're much better placed to cross the barricades between cultures because they can speak in 3-D without language getting in the way.



Definitions

The multiplex definitions of cohesion, identity and citizenship are a disadvantage and an opportunity. A disadvantage because it's hard to know if any two people are actually talking about the same thing, and an advantage because whilst the intellectual jousting about meanings is going on, museums can *show* what people mean with some eye-catching projects.

And if these weren't reason enough, there's a big need right now for help with the things that really matter to new arrivals beyond a roof over their heads. Effectively, there are a raft of organisations with the expertise to deal with migrants' practical needs (housing, healthcare, welfare) but almost none that touch on those people's needs for cultural, spiritual, social and moral inclusion in British society. This is something that is given almost equal priority by the people that know new arrivals best (the organisations at the sharp end of asylum, refugee, and immigration issues) but the practical needs make their day jobs so demanding that there's precious little space to tackle it. Museums are a ready-made solution to that need.

Lastly, it's a near-perfect fit: if you look at any academic courses in the field of culture, you almost always find that cultural identity is discussed in terms of: language; collective memory; written history; icons; gender; ethnicity; religion; post-colonial tension; regionalism, nationalism and localism. Spot which of these is museums day job? All of them. Their bread-and-butter work is collective memory, amassed by collecting icons, written history and other artefacts – all in the name of telling stories about religion, ethnicity, language, post-colonial tension and the rest.

Overall, it's an obvious match really. Cohesion, identity, citizenship and museums are all about the same thing: culture.



Example

At **Hackney Museum** in London, migration is the central theme of the museum, which was opened in 2002. They try to meet the current anxiety about the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers coming to this country by showing the historical context of migration, and that migration and settlement have always been a part of Hackney's history and the culture of the UK as a whole. The museum examines why people have moved to Hackney over the centuries: in search of work; better housing; or sanctuary.

The Suitcase Sculpture project at Hackney Museum, worked with a number of children from a local school to create sculptures that examined why they or their parents had moved to Hackney. Sculptures ranged from one developed by a child whose family had always lived in Hackney, to others depicting their experiences in fleeing conflict in their home country. Many of the sculptures are now on permanent display in the museum, alongside more conventional objects from the collection. In this way, the museum acts as an amplifier for the voices of the different people and stories that make up Hackney.

The museum also needed to collect artefacts that were reflective of contemporary Hackney society, however, their existing collection (like many smaller museum services) comprised a random collection of 19th and 20th Century culture as seen through the eyes of (mainly) Victorian collectors. So they facilitated a number of community collecting panels to help them to collect both tangible and intangible heritage, to reflect Hackney first-hand rather than what the staff at the museum thought might be representative. The museum put aside a collecting budget so that members of the community could nominate items that summed up particular aspects of their lives or experiences, and then go out and purchase them for the museum. Alongside this collecting, was a programme of oral history recording, collecting the stories of local people so that these could be used in displays, in education resources, and form a permanent record of the residents of Hackney in the early 21st Century. Communities themselves were trained in recording skills so that they were able to collect and record their own heritage. This has built trust and a growing long-term relationship with the groups and communities who are served by the museum.



V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum

Where Do We Stand? The Value of Culture

Although we've already said we don't want to fossilize cultural identity, cohesion and citizenship by trying to codify it, we ought to describe the values that underpin the work we think museums can do. Especially because, as we say later, no one is culture-free. Decisions about what goes in and what stays out of work on cultural identity, cohesion, and citizenship are affected by the culture of the decider. So we should say where we stand. Here goes:

- One of the most powerful arguments for how we might approach the issues of cultural identity is the one that regards identity as being more an illustration of our approach *to the future* than it is an inherited product of our ancestors. In the same way as it's nonsense to suggest working class parents can only produce working class children, it's also nonsense to propose that the culture you're born into is the only



Definitions

In 1982, the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT), adopted the celebrated broad definition of culture that led to the UNESCO decade of world cultural development (1988-1997): "Culture... is ... the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs."

Up Close and Personal

Other cultures are no longer far away in the distance but up close and personal, and we need some neutral public space to explore this calmly and positively. Museums fit the bill and can generate the curiosity based on understanding (rather than animosity based on ignorance) that the debate in this country so badly needs.

destiny open to you. This is just real life: ask any teenager if they'd like to turn out like their parents. We must not be shackled by the notion that culture is an absolute thing that you get from your parents and give to your children. And the point of this point? It's really to say that the way museums can tackle this is to make their work future-orientated; by facilitating debate and expression of values and beliefs for everyone to discuss, adopt or reject. It doesn't mean we should ignore the very powerful forces of how your family and your peers affect your culture; quite the reverse. But it does mean we shouldn't be tied down by it. Analysing the historical reasons for our behaviour is not an alternative to changing it.

- Getting our priorities right.....This work should not be about the denigration of the majority culture(s) of the UK. It should be about celebrating, discussing and understanding *all* cultures (including the most prevalent). It would be counterproductive to unduly highlight minority cultures and would defeat the point of debating culture *as a whole* (rather than as a function of the group tag you happen to be wearing at the time). This is especially true as people begin to pic'n'mix their cultural frameworks from all the sources available, not just hand-me-downs from their parents, and essential if we're going to discuss similarity properly, rather than reinforce difference.
- Cultural identity is also about a state of mind and heart. About how you feel in any situation, on any day, and what that means for you. Museums can help deliver all the parts of cultural identity for sure. But they need to help people put them together too. Not *tell* them how to put them together like a flat-pack, self-assembly identity they can make at home, but *help* them with some imaginative guidance, facilitation and on-demand support that treats people as creators rather than consumers of identity.



Example

A permanent display area called Horizons at the **National Museum of Australia** examines the peopling of Australia since 1788, examining the role migration has played in shaping Australian history. The museum claims the gallery presents migration as a strategy for Australia's economic and social development and places it in the broader contextual framework of Government policy. It does this by examining migration through personal stories, voices and histories. As you might expect, this is not the whole story of Australian history and Horizons is balanced with the First Nations gallery, examining the indigenous cultures of Australia and working with communities to ensure their cultural heritage is preserved and their stories told accurately and sensitively. Aboriginal people have a considerable input into many areas of the museum's operations too, rather than being corralled into one gallery.

- Culture in a broad sense is defined by issues of social group, religion, gender, nationality, ideology, politics, financial status, language, et al (rather than the ludicrously narrow shorthand of ethnicity which is so often used). It operates through a system of sanctions and rewards, totems and taboos, prohibitions and myths. It is complex and sometimes invisible (there's an example of this invisibility on the last page of this report). Any work we do must not be sound-bite oversimplification or a retreat into the political blind-alley of food, music and clothes. If we let our attention be diverted just to the exotica of different cultures, we will have learnt (and taught) too little.
- It's worth saying that again in a different way, just to be clear: this work should not be corralled by the issue of race. The cultural mix is more complex than that. Race is part of it, yes, but not the whole story and a cultural mix-up with race is not on the agenda. The wrong-headed simplicity that files people by skin colour or continent is just not tenable in modern society: talking about, for example, 'Indian culture' takes no account of: Hindu or Muslim; Punjabi or Hindi; rural villagers or city-types; or any other dimension you care to name; but it seems to be saying that these are all minor details compared to the in-born, absolute, unmovable, cultural essence given away by your skin. Are we really saying that culture is something you're born with rather than something you learn? No we're not because we know it isn't true. It's a flexible, fluid and malleable thing that changes throughout your life and from generation to generation.

? Definitions

Definitions are indeed the stuff of serious academic debate but, to put it more entertainingly, as someone in our research did:
"Cultures are like tooth brushes: it's nice to know the other fellow has one but you wouldn't necessarily want to use it."

- Like everything in life, culture is being affected by communications in a global media age. Trading always facilitated the exchange of products and services but more important than that, and more significant now, is the exchange of knowledge and ideas. All these things are eroding the historical barriers between cultures put up by geography, language, and the like.
- Foucault said that societies (and their cultures) could be defined by the people on the margins. Who's in jail, who's classed as mad, who's got no power, who's not allowed in. Museums' work should not only help us all understand other cultures *per se*, but hold up a mirror to the ones we're familiar with and help us reflect on them. We would be saying that a big part of what happens when you're exposed to other cultures is that *you come away with a better understanding of yourself*, a broader perception of others and the tolerance to link the two. Perhaps there are some things we'll want to change as a result.



V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum



Example

The **Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa** has a permanent Community Gallery. The museum works with a different community roughly every 2 years, enabling them to put together an exhibition about themselves. In the past, exhibitions have included displays by the Chinese, Indian and Dutch communities and, most recently, the Italian community for a display from 2005.

Close relationships with communities and in particular the Maori peoples is crucial to the success of Te Papa. In fact, the museum states that it is bicultural and biculturalism permeates all that it does. For this reason, Maori heritage is not represented in an 'add on' minority group style, but is integral to the whole museum. The bicultural approach is carried through to corporate level, and enshrined in the museum's policies. As well as employing Maori staff, including the museum's Director, there is an Iwi Relationships Manager who is responsible for all relationships with iwi (Maori tribes) and an Iwi Relationships Strategy. Iwi play a vital role and are directly involved in the permanent and temporary exhibitions in the 'Mau Whenua' displays, which explore Maori heritage at Te Papa. This ensures that the displays are presented with the mana (authority) of the people.

Te Papa also has an Iwi Exhibition Gallery that enables a different tribe (iwi) to tell its stories and present their taonga (Maori treasures) and heritage every 2 years (mirroring the 2-year turnover for 'migrant tribes' – the Chinese, Indian, Dutch, Italian, et al). For the duration of the exhibition, the iwi become the resident Maori tribe on Te Papa's marae (communal meeting house) represented by Kaumatua (Maori male elder) and Kuia (Maori female elder). Iwi believe that taonga held by museums are asleep until they are reconnected to iwi, whanau (families) and hapu (extended families) and so they let the whanau and hapu guide the museum rather than the other way round. Exactly the kind of democratic input we want to see in the UK (and that we're sometimes a bit complacent about in this country). The marae is a very important part of the exhibition and is much more than a recreation of a Maori space inside an exhibition gallery. It is a living and functioning communal meeting house and for the duration of each iwi's residency, the protocols and customs of that iwi will be observed. Ensuring that the protocols and the marae would work for all iwi was the subject of careful negotiation and is laid out in the Iwi Relationship Strategy.



Image courtesy of Hackney Museum

HINTS & TIPS

Get Your Research Right

Assume nothing, question everything and try to unlearn what you think you know. Research your community, in detail, in every cultural dimension. It will protect you from simplicity, and stereotypes, and give you evidence to underwrite your partnerships, funding proposals and measures of success. Use the census, national statistics from the Home Office and local stats from local authorities. But talk to people too – organisations, groups and individuals – the figures are always behind the times. You can never know too much about the people you'll be working with.



Example

The Migration Heritage Centre at the **Powerhouse Museum, New South Wales** was set up in 1998 as a joint initiative between the Premier's Department, the Community Relations Commission, the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts, the Heritage Office, and Tourism New South Wales. It is an organisation that brokers relationships between cultural institutions, Government and communities, bringing them together to engage in projects aimed at preserving communities' cultural and migration heritage. The focus puts the communities firmly in the driving seat by giving them the tools to collect and record their own heritage. They have developed a programme to help communities record migration heritage and organise training. Projects vary from collecting oral histories, to enabling communities to develop their own family magazine, and researching the popular culture of young migrant people in Sydney. The Migration Heritage Centre website has a number of online exhibitions and individuals and communities are encouraged to submit their own stories, photographs, experiences and exhibitions.

- It is sometimes said that political culture has now given way to cultural politics – we've moved from being a consensus-based mainstream to a rights-based multi-stream society. And the problem with that is everyone (and everygroup) relates upwards to the legislature and the judiciary but not sideways to each other. Therein lies the issue, as Ted Cattle put it in his report on rioting in the North in 2001, of people living: "parallel lives". Museums' social role could be to help bring them together again.
- Same but different....Working on cohesion, identity and citizenship is not about making everyone the same: we can have difference, and we want difference, but we want it based on understanding, debate and learning, not on pretending it doesn't exist or on fear of the unknown. Ted Cattle again...: "...the failure to communicate is compounded by the lack of honest and robust debate as people tip-toe around the sensitive issues of race, religion and culture." It's like being at a party where all the conversation is small-talk because no one dare mention politics or religion – everyone appears to get on, but it's superficial. That's not cohesion.



Definitions

Citizens by definition....The DfES advisory group on education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools defined citizenship as: "social and moral responsibility; community involvement; and political literacy (local, regional and national)."

- It sounds like a big claim but museums can help reclaim nationalism from the far right by revealing just how diverse our origins really are – even those like British or English that are falsely paraded as something unitary (stand up all you Celts, Romans, Danes, Norse, Angles, Saxons, Normans, Lombards, Huguenots, *et al*). It should be possible to discuss *social citizenship* – in other words citizenship based on shared membership of UK society – by this route. A bit like the best bits of the French model, where the right to belong is fundamentally a political one, unrelated to blood or soil.
- Putting on cultural blinkers would actually immeasurably harm British society. Being blind to the cues of other cultures would have hampered Shakespeare (whose sonnets were inspired by Italian poetical form, and many of whose plays are set in foreign lands with foreign characters) and Vaughan Williams whose quintessentially English music was built on French musical foundations (his tutor was Ravel). More recently, a cultural blind-spot would have excluded us from acupuncture or Chinese herbal medicine – healthcare solutions that work for many thousands of people a year in the UK. Cultural blindness would, in this sense, be just self-imposed social exclusion. You cannot hermetically seal a culture and it's time we stopped pretending you can.
- Getting real....Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, and others you can all name – all countries where healthcare, education, crime, income per head and other vital statistics are variously better than the UK. Hands up who wants to move there immediately? Then take France, Spain, the Canaries, and another long list – all countries with a better sunshine record than Blythly. Hands up how many people you know who have bought houses there for holidays or for retirement? Spot the point? (a) You don't suddenly up sticks because you can get better state benefits somewhere else; and (b) Migration is a two-way street.

- In Scotland, inward migration is a solution to critical mass in a population that is predicted to fall below 5 million by 2009. The First Minister has proposed a range of measures to encourage inward migration including a more efficient work permit system, visa extensions, and a government-funded scholarship scheme to recruit and hold on to more overseas students. He has said: "A more diverse, more cosmopolitan country is good for Scots. It will open minds and broaden horizons. It will stimulate ambitions and ideas..." Cultural and economic sustenance is also a key argument of the Home Secretary in favour of sensibly controlled and balanced migration to Britain.
- Acquiring a (national) identity is relatively swift when compared to finding meaning behind that identity, which is a lifetime's project. This is exactly the position refugees and other migrants are in – museums can help 'them' (and 'us') find the meaning behind the badge of a passport or a nationality.
- Multicultural society as an everyday experience is about living in a country that is more interesting, vibrant, cosmopolitan and lively and less insular, monotone, and dull. Relativism just doesn't work in this case – how could we justify the relative merits of a gun culture for example? It might be OK in matters of food, drink and music, but what about slavery, or beheading people for adultery? - are we saying these things are acceptable so long as they don't happen in our own back yard? Museums need to facilitate debate and choice about what is better and worse, not institutionally affirm all claimants to recognition respect and esteem. An equal right to recognition respect and esteem renders meaningless those very notions, because they're about choice; about what deserves to be recognized, respected and esteemed, and what does not.
- Suffering is so often a social virtue these days. How many people (and groups) do you know that are vying for attention by claiming their lives are busier/more stressful/worse than everyone else's? We're not after creating sympathy, victim mentality, or a compensation culture here; we're trying to create *understanding* between cultures, not a league table of suffering. It's something we'll avoid if we take a positivist approach of cultural *similarity* – explain, celebrate, discuss, argue, certainly; but we should try to avoid the divisiveness of competing for attention according to suffering.



Example

At **National Museums Liverpool** the Community Partnerships team spends much of its time building relationships. For instance, they have recently been helping a Caribbean group in Toxteth to collect and preserve a community photographic archive. In order to build and demonstrate trust, the museum has collected nothing from the exercise – the sole purpose is to enable the community to develop the skills to build their own archive for themselves. Such relationships can only be built through stable, long term funding and so it is fortunate that following a 3-year pilot programme funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, NML now has £150,000 funding from the Department for Culture Media and Sport to be used entirely as seed funding for social inclusion and community work.

National Museums Liverpool (NML) presents stories and the lives of individuals and communities in their own terms wherever possible. Often this will be in response to an approach from a community or an individual. Saranda's Story, for example, was a recent E-Communities project at NML. Saranda is a 13-year-old refugee from Kosovo who approached National Museums Liverpool saying that she wanted to write a book about her experiences as a refugee and living in Liverpool. The museum staff said that they might not be able to produce a book, but that they could help her express her story in a website (see www.museumofliverpoolife.org.uk/saranda)

The words and pictures put together by this teenage girl are more engaging and emotionally powerful than any number of anodyne official reports or hysterical press articles. It shows you her real life and what living in Liverpool means to her. The content of the site was decided entirely by Saranda and focuses on her life in Liverpool, rather than the Kosovo conflict, because that was what was important to her. The museum staff worked through an interpreter with Saranda's family to ensure that they were happy with the content of the site. As a result of the project, Saranda is now a young person's representative for UNICEF and very active in many refugee organisations for young people. NML have used the website as a basis for work with other teenagers through Youth Action for Refugees and staff are convinced that seeing someone of a similar age represented has dispelled some popular myths amongst several groups. In Saranda's story, other teenagers have seen their own lives reflected.

"Many people would like to know what my family and I have been through. No matter how many stories you hear or read you wouldn't have the faintest idea of how we felt having to leave our country and what we've been through before we came to England."
Saranda



Definitions

Back in 1966 UNESCO's General Conference adopted the Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation: Article I states that "each culture has a dignity and value which must be respected and preserved" and that "every people has the right and duty to develop its culture." – interesting to see the subtle changes UNESCO made 30 years later when, in 1996, it identified identity as: "Cultural references through which individuals or groups define and express themselves and by which they wish to be recognised; cultural identity embraces the liberties inherent to human dignity and brings together, in a permanent process, cultural diversity, the particular and the universal, memory and aspiration". UNESCO updated this in 2003 to cope with culture that isn't represented by material artefacts (a rather Western concept): "...practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with them – that communities, groups and in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage." To date, the UK Government has not signed up to this version of the UNESCO convention, which requires countries to prepare national inventories of intangible heritage.



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A Divided Society is One of Social Exclusion

Just as an aside, we might note that the flip-side of equality of opportunity of different cultures is social exclusion with which government, especially the Treasury, is so concerned: Of a £395bn annual spend by Government, £110bn is on Social Security and if elements of the Health, Education, Law and Order, and Housing and Environment bills are added to this, it could be argued that the costs of social exclusion account for around half government expenditure.



Example

In **Australia** by the late 1980s, the Government recognised that constructive approaches for the future of Australia depended on fostering a spirit of mutual respect and understanding, and charged its cultural organisations with the responsibility of driving this forward at national and local level. Each major museum adopted a cultural diversity policy, which underpins collections, interpretation, events, staff, and the representation of people from different cultural backgrounds on museum boards of trustees.

An important aspect was that these policies also looked at intellectual property – giving proper recognition of the communities' cultural ownership and intellectual property rights over their cultural heritage. In some cases museums entered into a cultural agreement with a community regarding the collecting and safeguarding of cultural heritage. These protocols enshrine the community's right to their own cultural heritage and an ongoing two-way relationship with the museum.

- No one is culture-free. Museums will need to remember that when facilitating any work on cultural identity. Decisions about what goes in and what stays out of things like exhibitions are decisions affected by the culture of the decider. No need to tie ourselves up in knots about this, but essential to realise it's there and take account of it.
- Citizenship in the legal and political sense (which is the sense in which most modern democracies created it) does not convey *belonging* so an emphasis on rights, democracy and diversity are not enough in themselves to create tolerance and harmony. That takes engagement, debate, and the understanding that flows from it – precisely what a museums' programme would be about.
- This is going to be a long job. As every good manager knows, you can change institutions and their structures and procedures very quickly but changing their organizational culture takes a long, long time – and that's just in an organization, never mind in society as a whole. Actually we can pursue this analogy a bit further – the tiny effect on organizational culture of hiring a few different employees should tell the press how little they should fret about the changes to UK society from immigration.
- We don't claim that museums can cure obesity or make trains run on time. We don't say that whatever the challenge, museums are the solution; but we do say that cultural identity is part of their core business and implicit in almost everything they do. Their potential contribution to the debate is colossal. Investing in it and making it *explicit* is what we're proposing: nothing more radical than that.



Definitions

Surveys of real people suggest citizenship is about: being part of the community; taking responsibility for yourself and the people directly around you; being a decent human being; your obligations and rights as an individual – and what you give to society (MORI/Institute for Citizenship Studies).

When you test citizenship in terms of interdependence though, the results are sobering. When MORI asked people to what extent we are all responsible for what happens – i.e. everyone can help make society function better, 94% of people disagreed! (MORI/Socio-Consult)

HINTS & TIPS

No Instant Experts

Curiosity is what museums are about. Apply this to yourselves. Immerse yourself in other cultures and learn as much as you want to teach. Staff development in this case might well include work-shadowing, mentoring, secondments and sabbaticals outside the museum gates as well as inside to get everyone to understand what it takes to be sensitive to other cultural perspectives. And allow the experts to take the field – allow your *audience* to shape the exhibition, the event, or the materials you're working on. Let them get to know you as much as you get to know them. Get them to be your interpreters and translators of language and cultural cues you won't spot, and work with the grain of social structures you can't see. If you need some outside help, try local government (many authorities have translation services) or the Refugee Council's list of interpreters from their website, or ethnologue.com for a picture of languages spoken across the planet.

Practice with Principles

So how does our knowledge of identity, cohesion, citizenship, and museums fuse with our values to create a practical framework with some principles built in? We explore some options here.

We may find most value in debating cultural *similarity* rather than difference. This could be done by taking a thematic approach to the things that define most human life: security, physical and spiritual needs, rights of passage, sex, birth, death, family, god(s) and nature. Of course people's different cultural responses to these would be discussed but in a way that would highlight unity rather than create enmity: every culture includes some form of cosmology, ethics, mythology, the supernatural, religious ritual, and a view of the soul.

Each person has his or her own take on these, which is why we should also take an individual approach to the work. Firstly because it will be more meaningful to everyone who is touched by it and secondly because you can't apply identikit lifestyles, values, and beliefs to *groups* of people without generalising so much that it becomes a one-size-fits-nobody stereotype. Take any simplistic group description like Muslim, or Gay. That of course is one dimension of each of those people's lives but it gives you virtually no clues about the rest of what makes them tick. Effectively, we should allow people to define cultural identity for themselves. We're most likely to find that, despite the modern pressures atomising our lives, we still have more similarities with other people than we have differences.

There is an argument that says that group culture is becoming meaningless anyway. It goes like this: As wealth in industrialised countries continues to grow (roughly doubling each generation), people don't co-operate as much as they did because they can buy their way out of material need, rather than having to share the load with others (their family, friends and local community). Hence the rising demand for housing as families atomise, and the creeping anonymity of modern life as many of our interactions with other people become financial transactions. It's also partly why post-modern values are appearing in young people (e.g. they want freedom of speech and expression, not just a decent standard of living). The legal system too is increasingly grounded in individualism and, in politics, progress is often equated with liberating the individual. All these trends are gnawing away at any kind of group cultural identity and we need to spot this to navigate our way around simplistic cultural work in museums.

These trends towards individualism go hand in hand with the increasing complexity of individual identity. That is to say, that people (especially younger people) pick 'n' mix their values, aspirations and frameworks from all sorts of different cultures. They are what we might call the *cultural entrepreneurs* and they're making it nearly impossible to predict people's reactions to an issue, given their attitude to another. That's more than a headache for your marketing department, it's a tough challenge for politics in its search for collective solutions to social issues, and a nightmare if you're a fan of old school political mobilisation as more and more people shun party identities. Single issues are where it's at, and people make their own mosaic of the issues that are important to them. This trend will be vital in shaping our work on cohesion, identity and citizenship – we'll need to build-in a personal dimension to all of it, not just talk trends, global issues, and groups.

We might take a cue from the cultural entrepreneurs when we're looking at who should *manage* museum projects on cohesion, identity, and citizenship. Those people that constantly update their religion, personality, behaviour, outlook, occupation, or political views as a result of different cultural experiences – dissolving and recrystallizing their lives as events affect them – might well make ideal candidates.

We might also focus our work on people who have successfully arrived in the country and been granted leave to stay either for work, as refugees, or for other reasons; as well as on the indigenous British population. This is a practical sidestepping of the frenzied debate around asylum and immigration numbers, not because museums are shy of the debate but because if we're going to invest energy in cohesion, identity and citizenship, we want as much of it as possible to produce positive results rather than be wasted on defensive media management. There are also many other organisations involved in the (immigration) numbers game and museums would be able to add relatively small amounts to that, but relatively huge amounts to understanding the cultures of the 60 million inhabitants of these islands.



Example

Hackney Museum for instance, and the Immigration Museum in Victoria look at themes – like work, leisure, and faith, rather than focusing on an exhibition say, centred on one particular migrant community and the issues affecting it. This doesn't suppress difference, but does even it up a bit with similarity. The majority present the positive side of migration, by showing it in its historical context and attempt to provide an antidote to some of the press hysteria surrounding the flow of people around the world.



Reality Check

Museums are way past the point where they treat different groups as 'foreign' and something worthy of study (like the 19th Century ethnographers did) but are they yet being inclusive enough? The traps principally lie in treating communities as a source of artefacts and stories but not giving them enough say in how those things are replayed by the museum. Keeping all the decisions in-house is not working and the best museums build relationships with their communities so that decisions are jointly taken. Like in the NHS, where the concept of the expert patient is gaining ground (on the basis that patients know their condition best but need expert guidance to help decide how to manage it), communities are not prepared to hand over their culture and accept whatever prescribed treatment it receives from the experts. This is not to say that experts (in this case curators) have nothing to say and no input to make. Indeed, their job of choosing what is relevant and what isn't is a skill that is too often hidden and will be in *more* demand if we are to help communities decide what's important about their cultural stories. Is museums' management approach capable of this? We think yes, but it'll need some work.



Example

The ***Immigration Museum in Victoria*** is one of a number of museums and heritage centres in Australia exploring the positive contribution migration has made to Australian society. The museum uses modern exhibitions (with plenty of interaction and doses of multimedia) to tell the story of Australia through the voices of real people who have moved there since the 1880s. The Museum is arranged into Leavings, Journeys, Settling, and Getting In, examining the different processes of migration and settlement.



V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum

**HINTS
& TIPS**
Get the People Right

More than money, more than time, more than dazzling artefacts, it's the people who lead your projects that will make them sink or swim. A good vacancy beats a bad appointment every time.


Example

At the *Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow*, a recent exhibition called Sanctuary aimed to raise awareness of the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, through the medium of contemporary art. The exhibition was undertaken to combat the negative press following the dispersal of some 10,000 people seeking asylum in Glasgow. The Gallery's work also extended into the community with outreach projects that began in October 2002. So far, over 1000 participants of various ages throughout many different communities in Glasgow have been involved. Work produced from these projects has been exhibited alongside work by international artists and was designed to make people think more deeply about human rights issues. Visitor comments show that the majority found the exhibition deeply moving and felt they understood far more about many of the experiences and issues facing those seeking asylum in this country. A programme of public events ranged from philosophical debates on asylum and the media, to storytelling events and theatrical productions with an international theme, to a two-day conference on the arts for professional refugee artists in exile. As a result of the conference, there is now a network for refugee and asylum seeker artists in Glasgow.

Then there's aiming the work at the boundaries *between* different social groups, ethnic groups, recent-arrivals and the indigenous population, individuals and society, et al. What we already know is that social capital is a good thing to have: those networks, relationships of trust and patterns of reciprocating help that bond communities together and underwrite collective action are the stuff of tolerance, respect and understanding. What we also know is that countries rich in social capital aren't always harmonious. Why? Because social capital has until recently mainly measured bonding *within* communities, not between them. So we ought to target museums' work at the boundaries between communities and between cultures to make the biggest difference.

We should also be training our cultural firepower on the inequalities (of education, income and the like) that we know erode trust and tolerance. Income inequality is a particular offender, but educational inequality is also a baddy, independent of income. So educationally poor communities display weaker social cohesion no matter how financially wealthy they are – a crucial link to museums' growing learning agenda too (because education tends to have a profound effect on people's socialisation and value formation).

We'll need to make certain that there is genuine engagement and debate between people and museums, and between people and people. Museums are often mis-understood as presenting culture as a set of shelves stacked with commodities to be browsed and consumed by passive audiences (mostly because people are so used to a retail model). This culture-u-like view of the cultural world is not what museums added value is. The added value lies in the space to debate, challenge and learn about issues; so we'll have to keep uppermost in our minds that a feedback loop and an input channel for people are vital ingredients. We're not selling shrink-wrapped culture from a delicatessen to anonymous consumers, we're reflecting, debating and creating cultural perspectives *with* them. Museums would be the network to initiate, facilitate, mediate and communicate people's stories in pursuit of cohesion, identity and citizenship. Democracy is the watchword for museums here.

Re-balancing analysis and action is going to be important: Recent times have been characterized by tons of work on highlighting the roots and the causes of injustice, racism, and the rest (one of the marks of the recent cultural debate is this propensity to analyse as a proxy for actually doing something to fix problems). Museums' work can and should be an antidote for this – helping people get to grips with *dealing* with the issues, rather than simply revealing their origins. Seeing how we got here is not a replacement for saying where we go next and museums should be able to confront the therapy culture of analyzing something as a substitute for tackling it.

Turning the previous point on its head would be a great way to explain what cultural differences feel like to British people when they're on the receiving end in a foreign country. Irish emigrants would have a lot to tell us on that score, but also British émigrés (the British diaspora if you prefer) sprinkled around the world as they follow their work, families, or sunshine. Museums could reach out to these people and replay their stories in the UK for the sake of understanding.

We might also stray into the European debate as it affects how we feel about losing our identity to a larger group than we're used to (big fish: small pond becomes small fish: big pond).

Some other big questions we might explore (as well as the personal things described above) are:

- Does trade liberalisation teach us anything about the direction we're heading in – what we might call 'cultural liberalisation'?
- Is cultural sustainability something we can develop in response to the loss of diverse cultures like we're losing diverse nature – as cultural diversity is to biodiversity? We know that cultures are disappearing from the planet like animals and plants under pressure from a globalising world. What do museums have to say about that?

The mix of *all* these things is most likely to depend on where in the UK you live, and we'll get to grips with the reality of that when we engage in real projects.

What Could Happen?

We've looked at where cohesion, identity and citizenship are coming from, we've said what our values are, we've described how things might work in principle, and we've spotlighted some of what *is* happening.

So what?

Well, it's what *could* happen that holds so much promise.....

What could happen broadly falls into two parts: listening; and story-telling. They're the input and output sides of what museums do best – collecting stories and artefacts; and replaying them through exhibitions, learning and interpretation. What's new about a lot of this work though is the way it could be done, using all the values and principles we've discussed to tune-in a lively, eye-catching, and influential programme across a range of new venues around the UK.

Let's be clear though, this is not a prescription; it's a description of how we would turn our values and principles into practice. It's a plan not a straitjacket; and with 2,500 museums in the UK, we'd expect these ideas to be the first, not the last, word. And yet, we wanted to say what we meant in reality, not hide in a bunker built from policy statements and rhetoric.

The pieces in our jigsaw would be:

- o Collecting new stories and artefacts via: personal museums; community collecting; international outreach; and a one-world programme
- o Story-telling and showcasing peoples' experiences via: culture boxes; culture gateways; cultural windows on the high street; and a blockbuster exhibition

Fitting the jigsaw together would look like this:



By story-telling *and* listening museums can create the two-way communication so badly needed in the cultural identity debate

In detail, each of these elements would develop something like the descriptions that follow.

Lab-testing the ideas is vital if we're going to see what happens for real. Like all innovations, we won't even know the right questions to ask until we try things out for the first time.

In total, test-funding all the elements of *Culture Shock* would reach something like 2.3 million people in this country with a strong message of understanding, respect and tolerance. We think a trial programme at this scale (lab-testing some strong ideas, with the spotlight on measuring success and the intention of growing-on the best and weeding-out the weak) would carry a price tag around £4.3m. That's a bit less than £2.00 per head – or about the price of a cup of coffee in London.

It's not something that *has* to be funded in one big chunk though. Each of the eight ideas will stand on its own and most are scaleable to fit the size and

HINTS & TIPS

Your Museum is Your Melting Pot

Forget what you know about segmenting your market; use your museum as a melting pot to bring people together. Take cross-cultural themes like work, leisure, love, humour, taste, religious rituals, ethics, and money to discuss what's the same as much as what's different when you're working on exhibitions or other programmes. And try to work with as big a variety of cultures as you can at the same time. The same variety in your collection means you can start almost anywhere and end up at modern-day cultural identity: stone-age tools leads to hunter-gatherer migration (for food) leads to other reasons for migration into and out of your locality – Roman invasion, Mediaeval taxation, farming disasters, industrialisation, 20th Century wars, 21st Century global refugee crises – the choice is almost limitless.



Example

The most recent UNESCO convention (from 2003 - we discuss it on page 9) demonstrates that, worldwide, there is an increasing recognition that communities are best placed to record and preserve their own cultural heritage and that professionals (like museums) can give them the tools to do so, the time to discuss it, and the space to display it.

The **London Museums Hub** for example, is working with local communities to collect and preserve their own tangible and intangible heritage. The project includes four London museums and five communities: Croydon Museum & Heritage Service with Yes Africa and Nile Volunteers; Redbridge Museum and ARIANA (an Afghan Community group); Ragged School Museum with the Somali Community; and Hackney Museum with the Kurdish and Turkish communities.

The projects will give a flavour of individual lives and collective cultural knowledge. Recently arrived refugees and people seeking asylum are working with the museums to identify, record and preserve their own heritage through short films, exhibitions, long-term archive planning, and cultural events.

Unusually there will be no public output from the projects, *unless the communities want it*. The focus is entirely on the process, enabling communities to decide what they wish to preserve, and shape how they will record and keep it. It's an approach that needs careful negotiation and part of the project is to develop joint agreements for the long term – to create a legacy where communities can affect what and how the museums collect and present their stories for the future.



V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum

HINTS & TIPS

Time Gentlemen Please

Give yourself twice as much time as you think you're going to need. This is vital because of the lengthy and crucial process of finding out where your audience live, work and play, making contact with them, and establishing the trust and strength of relationships you'll need to make anything happen in the first place, and make it stick later on. Don't *think* short-term, even though your funding might suggest it. The surest way to wreck people's confidence and create cynicism is to generate a highly visible project that gets people to engage with each other's cultures, only to have it taken away 9 months later.



Reality Check

How much difference can we really make? If the US example is anything to go by, maybe we might have to temper our ambitions.the level of social trust in different states and communities can be correlated with historical differences in social capital among the societies from which migrants originally came. Minnesota, for example, with its high levels of Scandinavian ancestry, enjoys markedly higher trust and social capital than comparable areas. The trick for museums will be to work on the *boundaries* because, as we discuss in Practice With Principles, social capital (at least until recently) tells you how much interdependence there is within communities but not *between* one community and another. Food for thought, but not an argument for doing nothing and risking some kind of multicultural meltdown.

shape of museums across the UK. The point is that the *ends* are clear (tolerance respect and understanding through museums) but the *means* can be crafted to fit individual circumstances, including investment from museums' own funds, as well as from outside, to make an impact.

Each of the elements is *designed* to complement the others: some collecting, some exhibiting; some personal, some general; some large scale, some intimate; some at home, some overseas; some reaching massive numbers of people but touching them lightly, some reaching smaller numbers and engaging them deeply; some bringing people to museums, some taking museums to people. *All* with cultural understanding at their heart.

There is also an element of *phasing* about these ideas. It makes sense, for example, to do the collecting and listening first and then build the exhibiting and story telling from that. This will preserve the sense (and the reality) of working *with* the kaleidoscope of different cultural communities to create stories of life in multicultural Britain. Trying to do the story-telling first would reinforce the illusion that institutions know best and relegate people with something to say to the position of consumers, not creators.

For this reason, and because it will take time to build the relationships between institutions and their communities, we propose that the ideas in *Culture Shock* be tested over 2 to 3 years at least. Trying to concertina the process into less time than that would be counterproductive: alienating the people we want to reach and setting up disillusion as the only exit strategy.

Results would flow from day one of a trial programme, but to make those results stick is going to take time. Short-cutting the work would short-circuit the understanding, tolerance and respect we set out to create.

Here's what the pieces in our jigsaw might look like:

- A personal museums programme where individuals create their own personal museums (facilitated by the professionals) as a way of making sense of their impressions of life in Britain, and as a forum to express their stories of displacement, migration, settlement and life in this country. On an individual museum basis, this could mean:
 - o recruiting someone into the museum to facilitate the process
 - o holding a series of local meetings with partner organisations, to find the best ways to communicate with the target audiences
 - o marketing the programme to individuals from a range of cultures
 - o holding a series of creative workshops to help people express their stories and collect their own artefacts
 - o exhibiting the results to showcase peoples personal museums and their perspectives on life in Britain
 - o meeting with other museums across the UK to consolidate experience and share practice

- A community collecting programme: the same as personal museums but on a community basis (families, faith communities, other definitions). The same game but for more than one player:

Naturally enough, this could be structured in a very similar way to personal museums, so at the individual museum level, it might mean:

- o recruiting someone into the museum to facilitate the process
- o holding a series of local meetings with partner organisations, to find the best ways to communicate with the target audiences
- o marketing the programme to a variety of communities from a range of cultures
- o holding a series of creative workshops to help communities express their stories and contribute artefacts
- o exhibiting the results to showcase community collections and the stories they tell
- o meeting with other museums across the UK to consolidate experience and share practice – beginning to mainstream this kind of work

- An international outreach programme to capture the stories of migration and settlement from British émigrés abroad (young and old, black and white, rich and poor, men and women) – to replay their stories inside the UK and reveal migration as a two-way street. To make this happen and replay stories through individual UK museums could mean:
 - o recruiting people to capture and replay overseas stories in the UK
 - o holding a series of meetings with overseas partner organisations, to find the best ways to reach the target audiences
 - o marketing the programme to a variety of communities in a variety of overseas countries
 - o holding a series of creative workshops to help communities overseas express their stories and contribute artefacts
 - o shipping the collections and exhibiting the results in the UK to showcase the experience of migration as told by British émigrés
 - o meeting with other museums across the UK to consolidate experience and share practice – beginning to mainstream this kind of work

- Culture Boxes: A programme of cultural welcome material for new arrivals in the UK (at a variety of scales from an individual-level portable culture pack to major exhibitions at museums around the UK and in other venues possibly including asylum accommodation centres, unravelling culture for everyone to discuss).

At the level of an individual museum, this might mean:

- o recruiting someone into the museum to facilitate the production of portable cultural materials
- o holding a series of local meetings with partner organisations and culture box creators, to develop ideas and find the best ways to communicate with communities
- o collecting stories and artefacts from different communities
- o developing portable materials based on new community stories, including:
 - o printed learning support
 - o new media interpretation to underwrite the real artefacts
 - o distributing and exhibiting the results in museums and other venues across the country
 - o meeting with other museums across the UK to consolidate experience and share practice – beginning to mainstream this kind of work

HINTS & TIPS

Plan Your Exit at the Entry Sign

Put as much effort into ending the project as you did into creating it. Where will your audience go next in terms of learning about unfamiliar cultures? What about your new relationships with partners? What will you do next? You need to know. Heading-off the disillusion of participants when your project ends doesn't necessarily mean extending it *ad infinitum*. It might just mean investing in other options for them: sustaining the theme of cultural understanding with some new people, with your previous participants becoming the teachers not the learners, for example. In any event, if you're not thinking of sustaining the ideas and the themes, you should think again about doing it at all.

HINTS & TIPS

Flexible Friends

Do know where you want to go with your project, but not necessarily how you're going to get there. This might grate a little with conventional management models of planning everything up-front but it's just real life, especially in a new area for museum work. You are unlikely to know even the right *questions* to ask before you've had a first go at this kind of work. Let your partners and your participants steer the course towards your destination. Don't let anyone tell you that a perfect plan is the way to start. Plans are like budgets – they're your best, in-advance, estimate about what you think will happen, they are not a straitjacket to hold you down. If you stay flexible, you'll be able to go round the barriers you meet, not crash into them.



Example

At the **Ulster American Folk Park**, the Citizenship Officer has used an extensive Migration Studies database as a resource for Year 8 pupils, called 'Moving On'.

In Northern Ireland, children move to secondary school in year 8, so the resources start by examining the personal issues affecting the children in moving on to a new school, and discussing what it means to belong.

The resources then look at the fate of Irish migrants in the 19th Century, where they went, the reasons they had for leaving and how we feel about them now, before moving on to examine migration *into* Ireland today. The resources are currently being piloted in an area where there is a high migrant population and where there has been negative publicity. The Citizenship Officer hopes that by presenting the positive flipside of migration and by looking at the historical figures who have migrated, who are often thought of as heroic, it will enable children to begin to think differently about migrants to Northern Ireland.



V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum

HINTS & TIPS

Invest Wisely

Funding an exhibition, event, learning programme, workshops, or whatever you're going to do to underwrite understanding between cultures is a responsibility that should be shared. External funds are certainly available from the likes of the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund, as well as private trusts and foundations. But that isn't all. Sustaining a programme of tolerance, respect and understanding implies investing museums' own resources and those of your partners (and their funders). It's hard to argue (credibly) that you believe in museums' capacity to change our cultural outlook, but not commit any resources to it. Partners should be the same and external funders will back that kind of commitment.

- A one-world international programme to take stories of life in Britain to peoples' home country museums – collecting stories in the UK and telling them in India, Pakistan, Iraq, Poland...name a country; there are no limits to the geography.

This work would effectively be running the international outreach programme in reverse – this time collecting stories in the UK and replaying them overseas. The process might well then be very similar at the museum level:

- o recruiting people to capture UK stories and liaise with overseas partners (as story-telling venues)
- o holding a series of meetings with UK partner organisations, to find the best ways to reach UK resident communities with stories to tell back home
- o marketing the programme to a variety of communities in the UK
- o holding a series of creative workshops to help communities express their stories and contribute artefacts to an overseas venture
- o shipping the collections and exhibiting the results in partner countries to tell the experience of migration to Britain
- o meeting with other museums across the UK to consolidate experience and share practice – beginning to mainstream this kind of work

- Culture gateways at points of entry – effectively using the vast wall and floor space at ports and airports to tell the story of people flows across the world at different times in history and today, at the point when they're about to fly (or sail) into someone else's culture, so they have identity on their minds.

Extending a museum's work to new venues like these would mean:

- o recruiting someone to manage the process at the host museum - especially liaising with partners, but also liaising with the source museum(s) over: conservation, curatorial, interpretation, design, construction, shipping, security, and insurance work
- o marketing the exhibition to passengers at airports, ports (and on board)
- o developing learning support materials in a variety of media (to continue the learning journeys started by the exhibition)
- o creating a feedback loop for *input* from passengers.



Example

The *Tenement Museum in New York*, in partnership with the New York Times, has recently published 'The New York Times Guide for Immigrants in New York', to help newcomers settle in and gain better access to services. The guide, which was compiled in conjunction with ESOL students, presents information on accommodation, employment, schools, banks and immigration support as well as the process of becoming an American citizen, in English, Spanish and Chinese. Throughout the book are woven the personal perspectives of recent and historical immigrants collected by the Tenement Museum.

HINTS & TIPS

Measure for Measure

Evaluation, like partnership, is something to be done because it works, not because you've been told to. Measuring changes (positive and negative) will give you a feedback loop of learning through the life of the project. Build it in at the start, don't restrict it to the end (when it's too late to fix things) and don't treat it as final judgment because you will miss the things that can't be easily measured (confidence, esteem, respect, friendship, trust, etc.). Take a look at the Inspiring Learning for All framework from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council at mla.gov.uk – it's a good way of setting the terms of what you'll count (and also shaping your project around the people that count – your participants). Be creative with how you record things too: using video and mobile phone technology will get you more buy-in from younger age groups and make the job easier than getting them to fill forms.

- A blockbuster exhibition at one of the major national museums to capture the attention of the public and the museum community, and reveal the natural fit between museums, cultural identity, citizenship, and cohesion.

This could effectively take the inputs of *Culture Shock* (personal museums, community collecting, international outreach and one-world) and turn them into an eye-catching showcase for all the issues of cohesion, identity and citizenship. It would be museums doing what they do best but with a much better developed partnership with the people who own the new stories of culture:

- o Curating the material to go into the exhibition, as well as importing some vital artefacts from overseas
- o Designing and building a user-friendly experience
- o Integrating learning, events, and dialogue into the programme (to stave off the static feel of inanimate objects)
- o Sharing the experience across the museum world to give others the confidence and the knowledge to tackle this debate

- Cultural windows on the high street – using, for example, travel agents' windows to exhibit stories and artefacts from other cultures (an everybody wins scenario: travel agents get lively window displays, migrants and residents get to tell their story, shoppers and window-shoppers learn something they didn't know).

This final piece in the jigsaw would, in essence, be a smaller version of the cultural gateways proposal, distributed to a larger number of venues, like travel agents, on UK high streets. At the level of a museum it would mean employing a similar process:

- o recruiting someone to manage the process at the host museum - especially liaising with partners, but also liaising with the source museum(s) over: conservation, curatorial, interpretation, design, construction, shipping, et al
- o developing learning support materials in a variety of media (to continue the learning journeys started by the exhibitions)
- o creating a feedback loop for *input* from the audience for the exhibitions
- o generating events around the changing exhibitions on the high street



Image courtesy of Brent Heritage Services

HINTS & TIPS

Partnership is About Relationship Quality

Work with organisations you like and you share values with. They're there because they know more than you about the audience you want to work with, or the subject matter of your exhibition project (like language), or something else you don't have yourself, not because the funding application had a box that said 'partners'. There are myriad groups to choose from: national, regional and local; specialists and umbrella groups; campaigners and bureaucrats. Just to give you a flavour, in London alone, there are 120 refugee community organisations and that's quite a specific category in itself.



Reality Check

Ours is an ambitious vision for museums. Is it too much? What about initiative fatigue? We take a cue from Michaelangelo who once remarked:

"The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it."

Yes, there are some imperfections in the UK museums network and some challenges to be tackled but do we think museums are up to the job? Yes.



Example

In *the Netherlands* the 'History of Our Own Surroundings Project' works with Dutch as second language speakers in a number of museums and archives. The participants visit museums to learn Dutch, but also to learn about the history of their new town. They centre discussions on objects, often everyday things, which helps overcome barriers of communication. They also examine the culture and stories that migrants bring with them, showing how they are part of the continuous development of Dutch culture. The visits are important in building a sense of belonging as well as helping students to gain practical language skills. Similarly, The *Tenement Museum in New York* also runs an ESOL programme for new migrants linked to themes such as housing conditions then and now, coming to the USA and health issues. In this country too, the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in London provides ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses for those newly arrived in this country, facilitated by trained ESOL tutors.



V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum

The Invisible Hand of Culture

Start with a cage containing five monkeys. Inside the cage, hang a banana on a string and place a set of stairs under it. Before long, a monkey will go to the stairs and start to climb towards the banana. As soon as he touches the stairs, spray all of the other monkeys with cold water.

After a while, another monkey makes an attempt with the same result: all the other monkeys are sprayed with cold water. Pretty soon, when another monkey tries to climb the stairs, the other monkeys will try to prevent it.

Now, put away the cold water. Remove one monkey from the cage and replace it with a new one. The new monkey sees the banana and wants to climb the stairs. To his surprise and horror, all of the other monkeys attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs, he will be assaulted.

Next, remove another of the original five monkeys and replace it with a new one. The newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment as he learns his behaviour from the group. Likewise, replace a third original monkey with a new one, then a fourth, then the fifth. Every time the newest monkey takes to the stairs, he is attacked.

Most of the monkeys that are beating him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs or why they are participating in the beating of the newest monkey.

After replacing all the original monkeys, none of the remaining monkeys has ever been sprayed with cold water. Nevertheless, no monkey ever again approaches the stairs to try for the banana. Why not?

Because as far as they know that's the way it's always been done around here.

Is that a good enough excuse? Who's responsible for this kind of culturally-ingrained behaviour? The original monkeys?; the new ones?; the people that used the hosepipe? How can it be changed? From inside the cage?; from outside?; who takes the first step?

We can learn a lot from these monkeys.

HINTS & TIPS

Culture for One Please

Personal stories, voices and histories are one of the most powerful aspects of what museums have to offer the world. Use them. Of course use them to make general points but don't de-humanise them in the process. The humanity of museum stories is the antidote to stereotypes. Help people see others as people not as 'others' by keeping it personal.

HINTS & TIPS

Use Your Networks

Research shows that there are only six people between you and any other person on the planet (you know someone, who knows someone, etc.). Remember this when you're wondering where to start. If you have a schools programme, you can take the citizenship curriculum route into cultural understanding, for example. Many schools will be multi-faith, multi-ethnic, multi-social, multi-everything and you could take the citizenship curriculum and use it as a bridge to talk with parents, families, communities and teachers about cultural understanding, community collecting, personal museums or whatever else you want to do. You might use schools as exhibition venues for the outputs of the work and add museums' uniqueness to the classroom experience: inspirational artefacts and stories.

If you would like to know more about this work
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Home Office
**BUILDING A SAFE, JUST
AND TOLERANT SOCIETY**

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