

Cultural Value

User value of museums and galleries: a critical view of the literature

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Executive Summary

Whilst recent decades have produced a substantial body of data around the institutional value of museums and their instrumental contributions to economic and social policy, there are few studies focusing directly on the value of museum and gallery engagement for users and a similar dearth of systematic attempts to draw together and critically assess the body of research that exists.

This critical review of user experience in museums and galleries occurs as the role of the visitor within the museums and galleries is changing. We interrogate the existing body of research, asking questions of the data to get a better understanding of how users describe their experiences and to develop a taxonomy of user value. We analyse the methodological paradigms and frameworks within which the research data has been captured to provide recommendations for future research studies and to add to the generation of an overall framework to measure cultural value. Specifically we have sought to

- source and draw together existing studies within the public domain (predominantly within the UK but also internationally where appropriate) that that have sought to capture, describe, understand and evidence user value of visiting museums and galleries;
- gauge perceptions of this body of research amongst key stakeholders and research users that can inform the review process by highlighting perceived strengths and weaknesses, overlaps and gaps, trends and future directions;
- assess what existing studies can tell us about the value of visiting, participating in and engaging with museums and galleries for individuals and society more broadly;
- summarise the evidence base for value claims;
- critically analysis the methodological paradigms and frameworks, within which studies have been carried out; and
- reveal gaps and weaknesses within the existing corpus of research in this area that can inform the direction and focus of future research.

Researchers and Project Partners

The review was carried out by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) which is part of the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies. Each member of the core research team (Carol Scott, Jocelyn Dodd and Richard Sandell) has more than 20 years' experience of designing and carrying out visitor and non-visitor research in museums and galleries in a variety of international contexts. Two Research Assistants supported the project. Sarah Plumb conducted the bibliographic search and David Hopes provided administrative co-ordination.

Key words

Value, measurement, evaluation, culture, museum, policy evidence.

Approach

This review has been conducted in five stages. In stage 1, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (Appendix A) were conducted to capture perceptions of the

existing body of research. These interviews (Appendix B) assisted the research team to understand factors underlying the ways in which research users and critics view approaches to capturing cultural value, specifically with regard to the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature (Appendix C). They revealed a range of views about the existing body of evidence and its persuasiveness in making a case for cultural value and helped inform our approach to this study.

A bibliographic search and document capture in Stage 2 refined the scope of the critical review and gathered together studies within the public domain carried out by museums, governments departments, and university researchers within the last two decades.

Stage 3 reviewed the literature, summarised major issues, key methodological approaches and available evidence to provide a palimpsest on which to identify evidence and methodological gaps. In Stage 4, the core research team examined a draft report and identified areas for refinement, clarification and extension. Preparation of this final report and its dissemination is the outcome of Stage 5.

Parameters of the review

While museums and galleries are found in a range of governance and funding contexts, the majority of the literature that forms the substance of this review has been generated by the response in publically funded museums to a particular culture of accountability during two decades of economic and public sector reform. The vast body of literature generated over the last two decades means that the review has had to be necessarily selective. Notwithstanding that, every effort has been made to read as representatively as possible across the field.

Terms and definitions

Museum

The word 'museum' will be used throughout this review as an overarching term to refer to both museums and galleries. The definition of a 'museum' used in the context of this review is based on that used by the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment. ([ICOM Statutes art.2 para.1](#))

Outcomes and impact

Though 'impact' and 'outcomes' are frequently used synonymously in the literature, Poll and Payne (2002, 2) define outcomes as the direct consequence of an event or activity which tend to be associated with immediate effects. Impacts address the question, 'did it make a difference?' and refer to changes that have longer term results (Wavell et al 2002, 7).

Participation and engagement

The terms *participation* and *engagement* are, according to the Oxford Online Dictionary¹, virtually interchangeable. Synonyms for one (involvement, [taking part](#), contributing, [sharing](#), associating, [partaking](#), [joining in](#)) mirror those of the other. In recent years, the term *engagement* has assumed currency, perhaps because of its association with duration, commitment and more sustained and deeper levels of involvement.

Policy

The National Audit Office (UK) defines policy as 'the translation of government's political priorities and principles into programmes and courses of action to deliver desired changes' (NAO 2001, 1). Owen (2006, 23) describes policy as the '*the most pervasive form of social intervention*' by which a government outlines its intents and goals across some area. Policy '*provides direction for interventions that are implemented across a system of providers under the same organisational umbrella*' (Owen 2006, 24).

Public realm

Bennington (in Moore and Bennington 2011, 43) describes the public realm as that '*web of values, places, organizations, rules, knowledge, and other cultural resources held in common by people through their everyday commitments and behaviours, and held in trust by government and public institutions*'.

User

For the purposes of this review, 'user' refers to those who directly experience museum collections and programmes in the course of physical visits or through involvement in outreach programmes initiated by a museum or by a museum in partnership with other organisations.

Value

Value is the importance attributed to something- the perception of 'actual or potential benefit' resulting from engagement (Poll and Payne 2006, 2).

¹ http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english-thesaurus/engagement#engagement__4_2

2. Museums and users in a changing world

21st century museums are places of transition. The populations which they serve are increasingly diverse. Technology is altering the ways in which information is accessed and the processes by which culture is formed. As public institutions, museums are expected to be responsive and adaptive to these changes at a time when public investment is decreasing. Museums must compete for public resources by justifying the value they contribute to individuals and to society.

The literature of the last two decades has debated what value and whose values should define museums. Government policy and institutional response have dominated these conversations while the value that users attribute to museums is less clearly articulated, leaving a significant gap in our understanding.

Cultural values

Holden (2006) views cultural value as a combination of three modes of value each originating from the perspective of different stakeholder groups; government, cultural institutions and the public.

Governments are aligned with instrumental value and its focus on cultural contributions to social and policy objectives that have 'aspirations to contribute to a wider agenda of social change' (Davies 2008, 260). Public agencies such as museums and galleries are associated with institutional value. Through programmes, services and the ethos of public service, institutions can enhance the public realm and build trust in the institution (Holden 2006, 17). To users, Holden attributes intrinsic values, that '*... set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and spiritually*' (2006, 14).

Position and perspective impact on value. Instrumental and institutional values are created through planning and intent. Intrinsic value is experienced. While Holden's view is that cultural value is found in the combination of these three modes, in the period covered by this review providing evidence that instrumental policy and institutional practice have achieved intended outcomes has dominated the value and the evaluation agenda. Users' part in this agenda has been subsumed by other, over-riding purposes and their role defined as recipients of institutional initiatives and as respondents to evaluations and research seeking evidence of interventions. This purpose of this review is to balance the triangle- to add to what we know about instrumental and institutional value with an analysis of user value. We do this at a time when the role of the user in museums is changing. The nature of this change can best be described as one of increased agency.

The changing role of the user

It was the view of the late Stephen Weil (1997,4) that

In the museum of the near future, it will be primarily the public, and not those inside the museum, who will make ...decisions.

As museums adapt themselves to the needs of a new century, the user is playing a more important role than ever before, not only as a member of the visiting public whose 'use' of museums is an indicator of value, but as an agent of change.

The recognition of users as co-interpreters of meaning rather than as passive receivers of institutional messages has generated a corresponding research interest in the visitor experience- how prior knowledge, attitudes and values affect encounters, how a range of 'in situ' factors combine to construct the experiences people have (Falk and Dierking 1992; Silverman 1993).

More recent developments find users assuming roles as co-producers of programmes and exhibitions and '*...regularly participating and collaborating in dialogue and decision-making about the work of the museum/gallery*' (Lynch 2011, 1).

Moore (1995), Kelly et al (2002) and Horner et al (2006) also argue that, in a democratic society, the public are the ultimate authorisers of value because only the public can determine what is truly of value to them.

In spite of this growing trend to greater user agency, the value of arts and culture for much of the last two decades has been the subject of a complex political process in which governments with formal power to provide funds have made choices about what kind of value best reflects policy. The implications of these decisions, especially with respect to the institutional response which resulted, have directed value definition in the UK for much of the period under review.

Modernising government, measuring value and New Labour

We begin this section by acknowledging a combination of factors that have provided policy with a central role in defining value for the cultural sector. One of these was the overarching concept of 'modernising government' adopted by OECD² countries to reform post- WWII welfare economies from the 1970s. Cost savings were sought in a reduced public service which was expected to be more efficient in its management of resources and more accountable for their use. Governments looked to the private sector for models of economic regulation, adapting management by results, performance evaluation and budgetary control to the public service. This suite of reforms was packaged as the New Public Management (NPM) and, though initially aimed at economic efficiency, was eventually extended to include social policy under New Labour.

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

The modernising agenda was well entrenched by the time that New Labour took office in 1997. It was prescriptive, directive and effective in enabling the Labour agenda to be implemented as a whole-of-government initiative (PM /MCO 1999). Linking public funding to delivery of policy objectives, it established a rigorous regime of accountability to ensure *'that public money is being used appropriately to meet public objectives* (DCMS 1998, 3). It adopted a model of market-force economics based on 'use' values which privileged quantitative data and numerical measures for the assessment of policy achievement.

Central to Labour policy was the issue of social exclusion. Within months of the election, the Cabinet Office had established a Social Exclusion Unit (SEU 2001), which reported to the Prime Minister on ways in which government departments could work together to create a more equitable and inclusive society.

From the beginning, New Labour saw a role for culture in the delivery of social policy. Public culture was cast in the role of positive change agent, combating social exclusion by fostering 'active citizenship' through equitable access to and participation in a public culture fundamental to belonging to the mores, traditions, customs and ethos of a society. By encouraging participation, especially amongst marginalised groups, museums could contribute to the achievement of this objective.

This role was formalised in May 2000, when the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the Rt. Hon. Chris Smith, applied the policy of combating social exclusion to museums, libraries and archives. In his forward to the document, *Centres for Social Change: Museums, Libraries and Archives for all*, the Minister recognised the existing role of museums, libraries and archives as focal points for cultural activity in communities, providing people with a sense of their individual and collective identities and preserving and interpreting history.

But the evidence is that museums, galleries and archives can do more than this, and act as agents of social change in the community, improving the quality of people's lives through their outreach activities. This policy aims to stimulate and direct that role ... to encourage museums, galleries and archives to adopt a strategic approach to social inclusion (DCMS 2000, 3)

This policy development found considerable support in a sector that had, since the 1980s, been increasingly concerned with audiences and with exploring the potential for museums to extend access to new groups and to enrich the lives of their communities (Sandell 2002).

A culture of evaluation

The twin prescriptives of social policy and accountability created a context for evaluation and research that has had a long legacy. Evidencing policy impact was the primary goal

with guidance provided through a Magenta Book (CO 2004) and a Green Book (HMT 2003). Evaluation undertaken within a positivist framework sought direct causal links between policy interventions and intended outcomes.

With funding linked to policy delivery, a substantial proportion of the research and evaluation undertaken by and for museums was linked to the provision of evidence that museum programmes were delivering on social inclusion, civic renewal and lifelong learning. In the opinion of Selwood, this created a situation in which museums became, *'habituated to articulating what they deliver in terms of the attributes required by instrumentalist government policies* (Selwood 2010, 8).

The responses from the museum sector were actually more complex. Although the regulatory environment required compliance as a condition of funding, the sector was not quiescent. From the early 1990's, there was a growing concern around 'what' value was being used to define the worth of museums and how that value was being measured. Critics challenged the emphasis on utilitarian outcomes, describing them as reductionist. The application of market force economics to the cultural sector with its focus on 'use' values that can be assigned a price and quantitatively measured, effectively excluded non-use values including many of the socio-cultural benefits valued by society and the intrinsic values experienced by users not tradeable in markets.

Although there was a lively and robust exchange of views during this period amongst the heated debates, it is useful to remember that times of change are also the catalyst for new initiatives. During the New Labour years, the need for evidence constructed a central role for evaluation and research. New methodologies were initiated, partly in response to the policy context and partly because of an increasing interest in the user. The absence of baseline data with which to measure change was recognised and addressed. New Labour's cultural legacy remains in a sector with more experience and sophistication in evaluation, an appreciation of the need for evidence to make the case for value and a greater awareness of the user. It is also found in initiatives which began over a decade ago and which continue to be used.

Taking Part

One of these initiatives is the *Taking Part* survey commissioned under New Labour in 2005/6 by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in partnership with English Heritage, Arts Council England, Sport England and the then Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. It has had multiple purposes, providing baseline data about cultural participation and evidence of cultural (and sport) participation, particularly by a more diverse and representative public. Beginning as a face-to-face survey with adults over 16 years of age, it was broadened to include interviews with children 11-15 years in January 2006 and with children aged 5-10 in 2008/9. The survey captures demographic information, leisure and cultural participation data and ratings of satisfaction with these experiences. In recent years, it has been expanded to explore subjective opinions of individual wellbeing and variables associated with social capital in communities. An analysis of *Taking Part* data between 2005/6 and 2013 reveals increased museum

participation in all English regions and growing diversity amongst users (Tables 1 and 2 below).

Region	2005/6	2012/3
North East	42.0	52.7
North West	40.4	51.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	38.8	54.6
East Midlands	40.7	50.3
West Midlands	35.3	47.5
East of England	44.0	51.2
London	50.9	57.4
South East	43.8	55.7
South West	39.8	50.7

Table 1: Increase in attendance to museums and galleries 2005/6-2012/3 by region (DCMS 2013, Museums and Galleries)

Demographics	2005/6	2012/3
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
White	43.0	53.7
Black or ethnic minority	35.4	45.0
<i>Long-standing illness or disability</i>		
No	44.7	54.7
Yes	36.1	48.5
<i>Employment status</i>		
Non-working	36.0	46.1
Working	46.4	57.3
<i>NS-SEC</i>		
Upper socio economic group	51.9	61.6
Lower socio economic group	28.3	39.5

Age		
16-24	37.2	44.3
25-44	46.6	56.2
45-64	45.1	57.4
65-74	40.2	54.2
75+	25.2	36.7

Table 2: Increase in participation to museums and galleries 2005/6-2012/3 by socio-demographics (DCMS 2013 Museums and Galleries)

Generic frameworks

The pressure to deliver evidence against social policy contributed to the development of evaluation and research in the museum sector. In spite of extensive activity, early evaluation efforts were criticised. On the one hand, the failure to provide enough detail about the context of studies, their parameters and the populations for which they were intended compromised validity. *'Without these specifics, it is difficult to judge how much confidence to place in the findings and how to generalize from the empirical results'* (McCarthy et al, 2004, xvi). On the other hand, too much specificity utilizing 'case studies' and 'best practice' examples made generalization and extrapolation difficult (Allison and Coalter, 2001; Jermyn, 2001; Selwood, 2002). In many cases, measurement was confused with effort and effectiveness was interpreted through outputs rather than outcomes (AEGIS, 2004; Burns Owen Partnership, 2005). There were few longitudinal studies and fewer examples where methodologies were designed to be replicable across different institutions.

The development of generic frameworks (Generic Learning Outcomes GLOs, Generic Social Outcomes GSOs and more recently, Generic Wellbeing Outcomes) brought a level of structure to evaluation, providing a common methodology that could be applied across a diverse sector. Though they have been used extensively throughout the UK and internationally, generic frameworks are not without critics who suggest that they tend towards outcomes *'...which are simply most apposite to the requirements of the framework being used'* and a purpose *'which was to convince the Treasury to release more money for Renaissance and Strategic Commissioning'* (Selwood 2010, 5).

In spite of these claims, Graham's independent review of the GLOs (2013) finds that they have been applied to a wide variety of purposes in addition to evidence gathering for policy, citing institutional planning, programme commissioning and audience development.

Perhaps, most importantly, their foundation in learning theory has served to reconceptualise 'learning' in museums. Previously focused on recall and comprehension of museum messages, the current view is of users as 'making sense' and 'making

meaning' of their museum encounters. This has situated user engagement at the higher end of the cognitive and affective processes (Moussouri, 2002; Hooper Greenhill 2002).

Notwithstanding these important outcomes, one of Moussouri's initial recommendations (2002, 41) was that the GLOs should '*...start with a list of flexible and openly-defined learning outcomes and add to it as more research is carried out and new and different learning outcomes are identified.*' As the framework has now been in operation for a decade, the opportunity to revisit the GLO's within a different policy and evaluation context and to explore different and additional outcomes arising from new user research is touched on later in this review.

Outcomes

Pressed to deliver against the government's social agenda as part of funding agreements, museums were quick to report on the sector's contribution to policy. The National Museum Director's Council commissioned reports from Travers and Glaister (2004) and Travers (2006) detailing the economic and cultural value generated by UK museums. Arts Council England (2004) reported on the contribution of museums to the innovation and creativity needed for a competitive edge in the new knowledge and creative economies. The presence of museums in communities and their capacity to build social capital through intercultural understanding, neighbourhood regeneration, civil renewal and active citizenship was highlighted by ACE (2004) and Burns Owen Partnership (2005).

Although the top-down and directive application of policy through the New Public Management incurred criticism, the government's social agenda found considerable support in a sector that had already embarked on its own internal questioning and transition around issues of representation and interpretation. Central to this was the emergence of the new social history with its democratising agenda embracing those at the margins of society in addition to those at the centre. The work of museums in this respect and particularly with regard to addressing issues of social inclusion was underway when the GLAMM Report was published in 2000.

A new museology (van Mensch 1993; Vergo 1991) has placed humans in all their difference and diversity at the centre of interpretation. The didactic discourses on 'knowledge taxonomies' (Bennett 1989, 61) have largely been replaced with narratives. Certainty has given way to ambivalence and the recognition of unfinished social business (McDonald and Fyfe 1996). Different viewpoints on a subject are presented, with connections sought across diversity (Macdonald 2003, 9). Government policies of inclusion, diversity and social cohesion found a responsive environment in a sector which was already moving in similar directions. The literature is replete with calls to action, encouraging sector involvement in addressing social issues including inclusion (Sandell 2002, 2003), disability (Dodd et al 2004) and sexual difference (Levin 2010).

Belfiore and Bennett (2006) suggest that the vigour with which the New Labour government pursued its instrumental agenda served to animate a correspondingly robust response from the cultural sector. 'Value'- what it is, how it is defined, articulated and defended was on the agenda.

Concerns around the privileging of instrumental value culminated in the 2003 *Valuing Culture* Forum³, a sector-led initiative that served to turn the tide of the debate. It began by criticising instrumentalism as narrow, reductionist and privileged at the expense of other dimensions (Ellis 2003; Hewison 2003; Hytner 2003). The inappropriateness and inadequacy of numerical measures to capture the full range of values generated by culture and the absence of a holistic approach to measurement were correspondingly critiqued.

In her personal essay *Government and the Value of Culture* (Jowell 2004) published shortly after her attendance at the *Valuing Culture* Forum, the then Minister for the Arts, Tessa Jowell, seemed to embrace many of the intrinsic values of culture when she described it as satisfying the deepest needs (2004, 15), at the heart of what it means to be a fully developed human being (2004, 7) with an important part to play in defining and preserving cultural identity. A year later, with the publication of *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life- The Value of Museums* (DCMS, 2005), the user was granted a position on the stage.

Government needs to look beyond an instrumental framework. Government and museums need to articulate better the sector's worth, in response to a clearer understanding of the benefits for users and non-users, as well as their own needs (DCMS 2005, 32-33).

3.0 The User and Museums

Though a large literature exists, studies focusing on how users express their experience of museums and the value they attribute to that experience are rare. Research conducted by *Britain Thinks* for the Museums Association sought '*...to understand perceptions of and attitudes to the roles and purposes of museums in society*' (Britain Thinks 2013, 3) but did so with the purpose of informing the development of the Museums Association's 2020 strategic plan by asking public respondents to reflect on the most important purposes and roles that museums should deliver given the current climate for public funding.

The purpose of most studies covered by the period of this review is to assess the efficacy of policies or programmes with the user-as-recipient in a respondent role. An abundant practice literature exists in which new initiatives are trialled with users whose responses are critical to assessing effectiveness. There is a tendency for user experience to be interpreted by a third party- teacher, carer, community organiser, museum educator. While understandable when dealing with time-pressured professionals, vulnerable children and adults and people for whom English is not their first language, these proxies

³ Valuing Culture was organised by Demos in partnership with the National Gallery, the National Theatre and AeA Consulting and held at the National Theatre Studio on 17th June 2003.

insert another layer of interpretation which is not a substitution for hearing about the experience in the user's own words.

We begin the next section by situating the user within the museum and describing what makes this context unique.

The museum experience: what makes it different

We know that the museum experience is a social one which visitors share with others (Falk and Dierking 1992). It is mediated by peoples' prior knowledge, attitudes, values and life experience but, most importantly, it is an experience directed to, mediated through and defined by objects.

Snow (2002, 3) finds objects 'good to think with'. Corum (2002, 1-2) argues that they hold information internally that is part of 'part of a highly coded social language'. Mason (2002, 13) sees objects as witnesses to history, carrying 'the authority of this witness'. Objects take on new meanings in museums. Suspended between the world of their origin and the world of their placement in museums, they can be transformed into symbols representing other things and states of being. Froggett (2011, 67) describes the object as a 'symbolic third', mediating personal and collective meanings and triggering memories in ways that other information bearing materials do not (McManus 1993). The sensory qualities of objects allow them to be experienced viscerally and the 'embodied' impact can stimulate memory and reflection (Spector et al 2001 in Chatterjee and Noble 2013, 45).

I can't stress enough the impact of being "allowed" to touch the objects. Touch is such a primal sense, I understand there are thousands of nerves in our fingertips! I think touching the objects freed people up to be more open in their discussions (HMP 2013, 43).

The social and cultural meanings embedded in objects are a visual, three dimensional language of common understandings and shared knowledge (Dodd and Sandell 2001). The symbolic capacity of viewers is activated and enhanced together with their capacity for creative reflection on the self and on the other. This, then, is the context in which the user experiences the museum. How is that experience expressed and what value does it have for the user?

Exploring intrinsic value

When we talk about the value of arts and culture, we should always start with the intrinsic- how arts and culture illuminate our inner lives and enrich our emotional world. This is what we cherish (Arts Council England 2014, 1).

The term 'intrinsic' has already been used to describe the inherent qualities of objects (Mason 2002). It also refers to the subjective experience of individuals and with the intangible benefits to communities. Holden refers to both these dimensions when he describes

...all those wonderful, beautiful, uplifting, challenging, stimulating, thought-provoking, terrifying, disturbing, spiritual, witty, transcendental experiences that shape and reflect their sense of self and their place in the world [and] the rootedness that culture provides. This can play out in two ways – in a sense of place and geographical location, where cultural infrastructure can anchor local identities, and in a sense of belonging to a community, either a geographical community, or a cultural community of interest' (Holden 2006, 22-23).

The literature is replete with claims of intrinsic value and how users experience it. McCarthy et al (2004, 45) describe a '*state of absorption*', or '*focused attention*' that comes with '*captivation*' and the '*deep satisfaction*' that the '*pleasure*' of seeing an art work or having a cultural experience that is moving and meaningful can engender (McCarthy et al 2004, 46). There are many references to '*making meaning*' (Silverman 1993, 1995; Falk and Dierking 2000; Hooper-Greenhill 2002) and the discovery of '*personal beliefs in amongst universal truths*' (DCMS 2005, 6).

Feelings of '*wellbeing*', variously described as satisfaction, happiness, 'meaningfulness' (HMP 2013, 53) are conferred on the museum experience. McCarthy et al (2004, 48) claim that museums provide opportunities to discover '*new perspectives on the world*'. Holden (2004, 34) describes uplifting experiences that address our needs to experience '*the religious, the numinous and the sublime*'.

McCarthy et al are of the opinion that these individual benefits can 'spill over' and accrue to the public realm, connecting people '*more deeply to the world*', extending their '*capacity for empathy*' through drawing them into the experiences of people and cultures '*vastly different from their own*' (2004, 47).

Museums are credited with providing a forum for the '*expression of communal meanings*' (Holden 2004, 34) and opportunities for the '*creation of social bonds*' (McCarthy et al 2004, 50) that '*make connections between people*' and '*reinforce a sense of unity and identity*' (Holden, 2004, 34). Belonging and a '*sense of place*' (Newman et al 2005, 41) that '*anchors local identities*' (Holden 2006, 24) are further expectations. The public space of museums is associated with providing a voice for '*communities the culture at large has largely ignored*' (McCarthy et al 2004, 51) allowing us to say '*the unsaid*' (Selwood 2010, 35). Museums, it is argued, offer the prospect

...for us all to see our place in the world. This is all the more important as society changes, and new values of nationality and community emerge. The fixed points of history and heritage have an even greater meaning as our world becomes smaller, and our values develop (DCMS 2005, 3).

The claims are myriad. Supporting evidence does exist, but it is widely dispersed across a field of studies.

Active engagement

McCarthy et al's (2004, 45) claims of '*absorption*', '*focused attention*' and '*captivation*' are indicative of active engagement amongst users. It is this active engagement which is the foundation of '*meaning-making*'. Silverman's (1993, 1995; 1997) observations of users using their personal knowledge, attitudes and experience to interpret and make sense of museum encounters, Hooper-Greenhill's (1994) exploration of communication theory as a two-way process with implications for museum messaging and Falk and Dierking's (2000) identification of the non-linear, personally motivated and free-choice learning environment of museums have combined to significantly alter what we understand as learning in museums and what cognitive processes the user applies. The user is increasingly recognised as actively engaging with experience. '*It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world*' (Moussouri 2002, 17).

This review finds that museum users do not express their experience using terms such as '*making meaning*'. Rather, they do describe what processes they apply as they engage with the museum experience and try to make sense of these encounters. Their descriptions reveal that the processes that they apply are at the highest levels of cognition, well beyond the basic recall and comprehension that have traditionally been associated with learning in museums (Bloom et al 1956 in Moussouri 2002, 8). The evidence also shows that active engagement and making sense of things are not always comfortable experiences. Interpretation and meaning operate as a two-way process- in a sense, the objects '*talk back*'. Holden describes (2006, 22) the experience as potentially '*challenging, stimulating, thought-provoking, terrifying, disturbing*'. In the same spirit, this study finds users describing their experiences as, '*confronting*' and '*shocking*'.

The following examples have been selected from a wide array of similar instances where users describe *how* they engage with museums and what effects engagement can have.

Processes

evaluating

[Visitor to the Kilhope Museum, County Durham to see 'In Search of a Hidden Landscape' art exhibition, AHRC 2006, np]

A lot of people are very concerned about how superficial modern society is. We are sold packaged bits of thinking. This is not good for humanity. But people want to be given tougher stuff. They welcome a chance to think for themselves.

[Visitor to the Anne Frank House, Sandell 2007, 100]

You see one side of the argument and you're thinking, 'good argument, good argument', then you get the other side and think 'hold on – that's a good argument too'. And it really forces you to actually think about where you actually place yourself.

questioning

[Visitor to an exhibition about British involvement in the war in Afghanistan at the National Army Museum, Selwood 2010, 38]

while it's a testament to the show that it fuels strong feedback, its biggest achievement may be that it compels people to ask questions not just about the exhibition, but the war itself.

reflecting

[Senior visitor **B** to the National Museum of Ireland, Dodd et al 2012, 142]

I think we must always be reminded of our past. I think we blamed England for an awful lot of things, but I think museums show you that we had our own problems, even to go right back now. I'm talking going right back to the high kings of Ireland.

comparing

[Visitor to the Kilhope Museum, County Durham to see 'In Search of a Hidden Landscape' art exhibition, AHRC 2006, np]

The danger of historical tourism is that you buy into the spectacle. The art made you stop and think about the history. How did the miners live? How were they creative? The art makes the museum a much richer and more difficult experience.

[Visitor to St Mungo Museum, Sandell 2007, 85]

Well, you've got your own views before you come. The way you look at other faiths you tend to compare it with your own and think 'is that right or is it wrong?'

focusing

[Visitor to Wolverhampton Art Gallery, RCMG 2001, 20]

You need to really look don't you, and there's loads and loads of things you see if you look very closely at every bit of it. With this painting you'd probably need to, well all the little trees in the foreground and sort of somebody with an umbrella sort of on the edge, and the group of people there and lots of little trees and I'm sure you could spend hours looking at that and still find other things you hadn't seen, which is a lovely picture but for me personally it would be too big. But it's a nice one to come and look carefully at in an art gallery'

discovering

[Adult respondent in Cardiff, Britain Thinks 2013, 16]

I think the words 'I never knew that' sum museums up pretty well because you learn something new every time you go

Effects

challenging

[Visitor to Wolverhampton Art Gallery, RCMG 2001, 14]

I feel annoyed sometimes.., if an artist is trying put something across and it's just lost on me, it's just like I want to know but I can't see it, it's a little bit infuriating sometimes

[Visitor to Northampton Museum, Dodd et al, 2010, 103]

The display challenges assumptions we all make about disabled people. It also highlights how limited resources restrict people's choices and therefore impacts so much on people's everyday lives and quality of life...

confronting

[A parent of a deceased soldier at the Imperial War Museum in Selwood 2010, 39]

You see the cabinet and you see the closed panels and you know your son is there with well over a hundred others. Your heart beats and your body tightens and then you pull the panel and there he is: the multiple images of his smiling face, the absolute assuredness in that face that everything is as it should be. Then the full force of loss hits home.

enlightening

[Respondent in an evaluation of museums and galleries with mixed collections speaking about a science museum exhibition, Jenesys 2013, 26]

These people actually lived here. That's the best part, finding out about their everyday lives and how they existed where we live now.

shocking

[Teenage student A St. Thomas More's School, RCMG Part 2, 2002, 368]

We'd look at objects, slave whips...I was quite shocked, I knew it was cruel but I didn't know how cruel, I never could imagine... I thought about it in a different way. We

actually got to see it and experience what it would have been like. I did know quite a lot but I wasn't able to picture it.

changing

[Adult visitor to the Sackler Centre, reflecting on technical, cultural and social history, Victoria and Albert 2009, np]

It was about the evolution of the city place making- how buildings congregate and how a city grows. It made me think differently about my environment.

Wellbeing

There is an emerging literature (Staricoff 2004; Silverman 2010; Froggett et al 2011; Chatterjee and Noble 2013) highlighting the positive role that handling objects can play in mental and physical health, particularly in clinical situations and through specific museum programmes. This review finds that the museum experience generates feelings of wellbeing and enhanced self-esteem for the general user as well.

Wellbeing is variously described as life satisfaction, happiness and meaningfulness (HMP 2013). Ander et al (2011, 231) seek greater clarity and definition, citing the well-being hierarchy developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF 2009). In the NEF model, personal wellbeing encompasses positive feelings, life satisfaction, vitality, self esteem, competence, autonomy, engagement, meaning and purpose. Social wellbeing is aligned with supportive relationships, trust and belonging. Wellbeing embraces positive, internal emotional states and positive external relationships with others.

Positive feelings

enjoyment

[Visitor to the Paper Apothecary at The Beaney Canterbury, HMP 2013, 62]

Audiences for the Paper Apothecary were overwhelmingly positive, in the word of one visitor, 'spectacularly happy. The Beaney holds curiosities made all the better by The Paper Apothecary. A little wonder in a busy city'

pleasure

[Visitor to Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust, HMP, 2013, 61]

This is a beautiful piece of work and that's coming from someone that doesn't like Shakespeare. But the whispered prose combined with the magic of Peter's violin is something very special. It puts you in a better place for a while.

stimulation

[Respondent to evaluation of museums and galleries with mixed collections speaking about art exhibitions Jenesys 2013, 27]

Some of the artworks are so beautiful and evocative I just love it.

calm

[Looked-after adolescent in Platform art programme, Dodd and Sandell 2001, 38]

I have always liked art galleries because the atmosphere was calm compared with home.... It has shown me how to chill, I am much more relaxed and well happier!

alive

[Visitor to Wolverhampton Art Gallery, RCMG 2001, 13).

I think you learn new things, good experiences and it makes me feel alive when I look at art and things. Because I feel like I'm a working, functioning human being, even though I don't like a lot of what's downstairs, I will have learned something, it will have enriched my life in some way.

inspired

[Architect participating in a programme at the Sackler Centre, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2009, np]

I'm an architect so I came to see Terry Farrell. It's the stuff like this that gets me excited and sends me back to work thinking I can aspire to more creative heights.

uplifted

[Adult visitor to Wolverhampton Art Gallery, RCMG 2001, 14)

I think you spend most of your life living from one day to the next, thinking about bills, thinking about going to work, driving up and down the motorway or something, you go to an art gallery and you are living and experiencing art, it's a higher form of living, it's living in your head and it's challenging and it's what keeps the human race evolving.

healed

[Adult participant with mental health issues at Mansfield Museum and Central Nottinghamshire, Culture Unlimited 2008, 5]

This project has been fantastic for my recovery, to be able to work on something as big as this, and to see it through right to the end, it's a huge achievement for me. Seeing

my efforts here on the wall and knowing what we have been through to get here, it's amazing.

energised

[Divorced mother of three from the Wellhouse Women's Project, Glasgow, Hooper-Greenhill and Dodd 2002, 20]

I know it sounds a bit silly but it gave me more energy. I had more interests. It gave me things to look forward to.

Enhanced perceptions of self

changed attitudes

[Teenage student B St.Thomas More's School, RCMG Part 2, 2004, 404)

If I wasn't gonna try before, I would try now, because the sort of people who don't believe in Black people, I would try just to show them... It inspired me in a different way that I haven't been inspired before. It makes you feel that learning, pushing yourself, is actually worth something. Sometimes you think what's the point, but if you went to the museum, you think well it is actually worth something, that pride and dignity that they took away from the slaves it's worth giving it back to them

dignity

[A refugee visiting an exhibition about refugees at the Museum of London, Selwood 2010, 41]

The first thing I saw, I felt, was a refugee person can be something in this country -I felt proud of myself.

pride

[Young participant in the Birmingham 'Represent' project, Hooper-Greenhill and Dodd 2002, 20]

I would not be caught dead in a museum... [but] the project made us feel good, we had gained knowledge, we felt more confident and had our eyes opened to new things... when I was young my mum made me wear traditional African costume. I hated it and felt ashamed. Now I think museums should have things like that in them. I want my culture to be part of the mainstream culture. I want to see something positive about it, not all the negative things in the slavery gallery in Liverpool.

affirmation

[An 18 year-old bisexual girl visiting an exhibition about sexuality in Glasgow, Selwood 2010, 41]

Finally came to terms with it, and this exhibition helped as this is the first time I have actually written it down. Now I am SO EXCITED!!! Thank you!

confidence

[Disabled university student after undertaking an Open Museum placement, RCMG 2002, 22]

It's changed my ideas about myself - I've realised I can come out of a politics degree and hopefully go into the council, into the museums and so on.... It's made me see that the Council, anyhow, will give you a fair interview and won't go against me for the disability - that I can actually stand the same way as other people. ...I would actually feel capable now of going in and knowing I had something to offer a local group.

competence

[Participant in the Bensham Grove Community History project, Hooper Greenhill and Dodd 2002, 21]

We have worked together as a team, we have worked to deadlines, learnt new skills... digital photography, and oral history, we have created something for the community too.

Connection

It is believed that people's capacity to take part in the social, political, cultural and economic life of society is fundamental to active citizenship (Newman et al 2005, 44) and can be enhanced through cultural engagement (Jones 2010, 34).

McCarthy et al contend that benefits experienced individually can aggregate and accrue to the public realm, connecting people '*more deeply to the world*', extending their '*capacity for empathy*' through drawing them into the experiences of people and cultures '*vastly different from their own*' (2004, 47). This review finds users describing their museum experience as a series of connections made possible by feelings of empathy and understanding and through the activation of memory. These connections go 'beyond self' to make links with other individuals, other communities, other times, other places, other ideas and other events.

Connecting with the experience of another

[Doctor visiting Centrespace Dundee to see an exhibition on kidney disease, AHRC 2006, np]

I have never seen anything like this before. It gave me interesting insights into a patient's perspective.

Connecting with the past

[Student reflecting on history exhibition, Hooper Greenhill et al 2007b, 242]

Being in the conditions that there were at that time, you actually felt emotions that they would be feeling at the time and it's easier to understand how things were if you're actually doing it and seeing it... ..when like you heard that children and how they work and don't really get paid, little food, you sort of feel angry and sad about that. Especially with the children, you can sort of put yourself in their shoes and, you know, try and imagine what it was like for them.

Connecting with other cultures

[A young adult participating in a programme about understanding and appreciation of history, national identity and civic responsibility, Selwood 2010, 47]

Getting to know people from the other side of the world...learning about different cultures...when society becomes more kind of human to another society, they're less likely to bomb it.

Connecting with place

[Participant in the Greater Pollok Kist project in Glasgow, Newman et al 2006, 53]

I feel that Pollok is more interesting, it's like a diamond that's been uncovered, it's like they got all this information that they didn't know was there.

Visitor to the Kilhope Museum, County Durham to see 'In Search of a Hidden Landscape' art exhibition, AHRC 2006, np]

It gave a strong sense of communities living bleak and harsh lives.

Connecting the personal to the universal

[Teenage mother talking about her reaction to the painting 'The Madonna of the Pinks', Hooper-Greenhill et al 2007a, 73].

...you look at a picture and all these emotions come to you kind of thing. [R: What sort of emotions came to you?] Like loving emotions, like what is like to be a mother and how the artist seemed to like know what it was like and it was I don't know, it was really touching I thought...Well it's like the way she looks at the child and I look like that at Jack and I think, great he's mine and how much I love him and you can see it in her

eyes kind of thing. And I know it's only a picture and it sounds a bit funny, but you can see it in her eyes how loving it is.

Connecting with the local community

[Local resident reflecting on the impact of the hidden history project conducted through Reading Museum as part of the Happy Museum Project, HMP 2013, 80]

The Happy Museum activities have brought some residents out and perhaps this could be a starting point. Plans are afoot to organise reunions of East Reading residents. We are also looking forward to sharing the results of our research with displays and literature and a presence at the East Reading Carnival in June when large numbers of the community get together. This is certain to generate conversations, and so we are interested in taking this further and looking for opportunities to develop a history strand within future regeneration initiatives in the area'.

Connecting with difference

[Visitor to an exhibition about disability 'Daniel Lambert: An Exalted and Convivial Mind' at Stamford Museum, Dodd et al 2008, 85]

It reminded me to take the person as a whole and not concentrate on the disability – to celebrate what someone can do/did

[Visitor to Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery in Selwood 2010, 41]

This exhibition has completely opened my eyes to issues about homosexuality.

Connecting with the events and people that shape national identity

[Young Adult visitor to National Museum of Ireland, Dodd et al 2012, 151]

There's this wonderful honour, I don't take it away from them, of the 1916 leaders, but... You'd like time to have moved on where yes you acknowledge the fact... [But] it would be nice just to maybe just round off the edges a little bit.

[Young adult speaking about the National Museum of Scotland, Dodd et al 2012, 166]

When I look at a museum I normally look at the Mary Queen of Scots stuff. I never really figured out why but that was like basically the only history I was ever taught at school and because that was the only real history thing I ever learned I sort of cling on to that so it's good to have lots of Mary Queen of Scots stuff lying around.

Connecting with changing values

[Visitor to London, Sugar and Slavery exhibition at Museum of London Dockland, Spence et al in Scott, 2013, 108].

Growing up in Walthamstow [London], there were no coloured people. When I was about 10, I was at the front of Lloyds Park and I saw my first African, smartly dressed with a blazer with a City of London badge. I just stared at him. Today I feel bad about this. My feeling is that if people live here they must understand our ways, but we must understand theirs. There are good and bad in all nationalities.

The outcomes of these findings are summarised in Table 3.

Engaging	Wellbeing	Connecting
Processes	Positive feelings	with the experience of another
evaluating	enjoyment	with the past
questioning	pleasure	with other cultures
reflecting	stimulation	with place
comparing	calm	the personal to the universal
focusing	alive	the local community
discovering	inspired	with difference
Effects	uplifted	with national identity
challenged	healed	with changing values
confronted	energised	
Enlightened	Enhanced sense of self	
Shocked	dignity	
Changed	pride	
	affirmation	
	confidence	
	competence	

Table 3: Taxonomy of user experience in museums and galleries

Summary

There is a large body of evidence about the effects of museums on users. However, it is widely dispersed across a field of studies generally designed for other purposes. As users assume greater agency in museums and as institutions build audiences for the future,

the need for this knowledge will assume greater significance and needs to become the focus of dedicated studies. Moreover, this type of value- which we label 'intrinsic'- is an equally essential part of the evidence base for governments to understand the social return to individuals and communities from public investment in museums. The inclusion of intrinsic value as part of holistic framework for measuring value has foundered in the past on the perceived irreconcilable differences between qualitative experience and quantitative measures. These assumptions are being challenged. If emerging methods can bridge this divide, the potential for including an intrinsic dimension in a manner commensurate with government measurement models could provide a more holistic picture of the museum experience for important decision makers.

Finally, (although there is evidence of meaningful user experience, we have surprising little evidence that positive encounters *in* the museum accrue *to* the public realm and what kind of social difference and change might result.

There are three good reasons to attend to this evidence gap. As public funding contracts, the need to make the case for sustaining public investment is likely to turn to evidence of the public value of the museum experience beyond institutional museum walls, particularly in the area of wellbeing, social cohesion and belonging. Secondly, the importance of social impact is emerging as an equally strong movement within the museums' sector. This is evident in the social change theme of the 2013 International Council of Museums (ICOM) Triennial conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the recent combined conference of ICOM's the International Committee on Management and the Federation of International Human Rights Museums on the social impact of museums and the Museums Associations' 2020 Strategy focusing on social benefit. Thirdly, if we subscribe to the work of Mark Moore and his model of Public Value, the role of public institutions is to deploy their assets to 'make a positive difference in the lives on individuals and communities (Moore and Moore 2005, 17). If this is what museums should be doing, then we need evidence of what difference it makes.

4: Research and evaluation: the future

The evaluation environment is different in 2014 to a decade ago. A diminution in the target culture followed the publication of the McMaster Report in 2008. The language of public accountability has moved to include terms such as 'assess' and 'capture' as well as 'measurement' (Donovan 2013, 15). Value and significance are now discussed alongside impact and effect (Selwood 2010, 11). We think more about the public value that we can create for individuals and communities (Moore and Moore 2005). The tone of the discourse is more conversational than contested. The emerging field of wellbeing with its basis in public health and epidemiology has brought greater awareness of the benefits of experimental research involving large population samples, control groups and longitudinal studies (Staricoff 2004; O'Neill 2010; Chatterjee and Noble 2013).

In this environment it is timely to build on our existing knowledge and evidence base and to extend our methodological practice to make the user experience a research priority, to prove that user engagement with museums results in provable social impact and to explore the inclusion of intrinsic value in government measurement systems.

Capturing user value

In the light of the changing role of museum users as co-interpreters, co-producers and definers of value, the scarcity of dedicated studies that provide a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of user experience appears out of step. For museums, this information is important to build long term engagement, plan the strategic use of scarce resources and communicate effectively. From the perspective of governments, user experience is the foundation for understanding the return on public investment in museums and a form of evidence aligned with goals of wellbeing, citizenship and social capital.

Undertaking studies of this nature have logistical and methodological implications. Logistically, management and funding are both required. One option is to follow the model of this review and collate data from a widely dispersed literature field on a regular basis managed by a museum organisation funded by the sector. However, as the Culture and Sport Evidence review discovered, collecting evidence from a widely dispersed research base brings its own challenges.

One of the most time consuming and difficult things about trying to use research evidence is finding it in the first place. Given the breadth of the sector evidence is spread across a wide variety of sources. Not only does this add to the difficulty of finding evidence it makes it more likely that relevant evidence will be missed (CASE 2010, 32)

A second option is to generate a new programme of dedicated, large-scale studies that focus on value from the perspective of users, building on the relatively few (and largely small-scale, exploratory) studies that have attempted to do this. The second option more easily allows for research design that involves a cohort of non-users against which to compare values generated by different leisure experiences. Prioritising dedicated research into user experience has efficiency dividends and allows for methodological extension into the use of other research paradigms.

For objectives-based evaluations seeking evidence that interventions delivered intended results, positivism was an understandable paradigm choice. If, however, we want to better comprehend how reality is experienced from the perspective of users, extending the use of an interpretivist paradigm to our research requires consideration. Appropriately to the issues under review, interpretivism views human beings as creators who generate systems of meaning which they attach to things, relationships and events. It builds theory inductively using data gathering methods to capture reality as it is experienced and described by respondents (Sarantakos 1998, 55). It is not only appropriate to a major study about user value but could provide the valuable additional data that Moussouri (2002, 41) indicated was needed to continually refresh the

framework for the Generic Learning Outcomes ensuring that they were taking account of development in users own perceptions of how they 'make sense' in museums.

User experience and the public realm

The belief that user experience accrues to the public realm through a process of aggregation is a widely held but largely untested assumption.

Most obviously, one could simply talk in terms of the percentage of individuals/organizations in a population that are affected. Social capital is typically conceived of in such a manner, where a community with a higher percentage of individuals participating in civic groups and/or a greater density of such groups is considered to have greater social capital. Hence, if arts programs get more individuals involved in community groups, then they increase the community's social capital (Guetzkow, 2002: 16)

McCarthy et al (2004, 47) firmly believe that the intrinsic benefits of culture, experienced by individuals 'spill over' to the public domain. Guetzkow (2002, 16) is of the opinion that this is an unresolved area. Importantly, it needs to be tested.

In 2010, Jones (2010, 13) examined the assumption that the '*... more individuals participate, the greater the benefit of overall participation to society*' using *Taking Part* data as part of the Culture and Sport Evidence Programme (CASE)⁴. Of particular interest was whether cultural participation impacts on the building of networks and norms of trust fundamental to social capital in communities (Fukuyama, 2002). The research found a positive correlation between people who engage in cultural and sporting activities and 'trust' reporting that participants are 15% more likely to 'trust' others than those who do not participate (Jones 2010, 52).

The Culture and Sport Evidence Programme report of the same year also found positive correlations between cultural participation and student learning⁵ (CASE 2010, 29). Although it did not specifically examine museums in its 2010 review, the CASE programme used *Taking Part* data to determine whether there were positive correlations between sport and cultural participation⁶ and subjective well-being. It found in the affirmative (2010, 36) suggesting that a similar analysis of museum and gallery participation might yield useful results.

⁴ In 2008, the *Taking Part* data was used to explore the drivers, impacts and value of cultural and sporting engagement through evidence that government investment in these sectors was providing value for money.

⁵ This was the result of a database search and analysis of 11 quantitative studies in the UK and US rather than an analysis of *Taking Part* data.

⁶ Defined within the 2010 CASE review as 'attending cinema and going to concerts'.

Taking Part is a resource underutilised by museums. Both it and the *British Household Panel* (BHPS) (which was also used in the CASE review) are administered nationally, selecting representative samples of the population at regular intervals. The data is longitudinal, allowing for comparisons to be made over time and between users and non-users of museums.

Methodologically, *Taking Part* uses Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) in which an individual assigns a value to his/her their own well-being on a numeric scale. Advocates of the approach (Bakhshi et al, 2009; CASE 2010) argue that SWB captures peoples' experiences directly, rather than requiring proxy measures such as willingness to pay (WTB). CASE recommends adopting SWB as a standard measure allowing decision makers to assess'...*the relative benefit of different policy outcomes to be compared*' (CASE 2010, 38).

Given the user evidence found in this review and the emerging literature on a future role for museums as contributors to general wellbeing (O'Neill 2010) and improved mental health (Froggett 2011; Chatterjee and Noble 2013), mining the *Taking Part* data could provide national evidence that museum usage positively impacts individual wellbeing. An additional range of questions within the existing *Taking Part* survey cover other social dimensions such as cohesion (local and national belonging, trust, tolerance for diversity, capability to influence community decisions) that could be correlated with museum usage to build the case that museum participation accrues to the public realm.

Jones (2010, 20) is of the opinion that *Taking Part* could be extended to include other variables, a view with which this review agrees. As part of the 2010 CASE study, a stakeholder engagement exercise was conducted to identify the benefits associated with participation in culture and sport. The outcomes are summarised in the table below, illustrating that it is intangible and intrinsic benefits that are associated with engagement. The potential for cross- referencing museum participation with new variables such as community identity, citizenship, national pride and self-identity are myriad.

Individual	Community	National
achievement	bequest value	citizenship
continuity with the past	community cohesion	international reputation
diversion	community identity	national pride
escape	creativity	
expression	employment	
health	existence value	
income	innovation	
knowledge of culture	option to use	

self-identity	productivity	
skills/competency	reduced crime	
solace/consolation	shared experience	
	social capital	

Table 4: Benefits generated by engagement in culture and sport (CASE 2010, 36)

Measuring intrinsic value

Of all the issues that dominated the debates about measurement during the period of New Labour, the most vociferous centred on the absence of intrinsic values and the ineffectiveness of econometrics to capture them.

Donovan’s (2013) recent report explored methodological alternatives to econometrics based on a proportional model whereby the level of public investment is a determiner of what kind of measurement method is applied. While this holistic approach to measuring cultural value is welcome, the challenges of implementing it are captured by O’Brien (2010, 5) who acknowledges the importance of narrative (and other) accounts of cultural value but argues that, from a government perspective, qualitative data fails to represent the benefits of culture in a manner that is commensurable with competitive bids from other sectors with equal calls on the public purse. Econometric measures, he concludes, provide governments with a single, standardised system which enable equitable comparisons across competitive funding bids.

The application of econometrics to measuring intrinsic value is not an irreconcilable dilemma according to Bahkshi et al (2009). They argue that it is possible to assign numerical equivalents to personal preferences thus bridging the gap between the need to capture subjective states and convert these into measurable objectives related to public policy. In their opinion, stated preference techniques such as Contingent Valuation (CV), Willingness to Pay (WTP) and Subjective Well-Being do not ‘...merely record the fact that the public like the arts, but allow a figure to be placed on it’ (Bahkshi et al 2009, 6). These methods allow the *public* to allocate a numerical value to cultural activities and services and also capture the value placed on culture by non-users.

Significantly, they admit intrinsic value into the overall assessment of cultural value allowing decisions to be made on the basis of a more holistic view of museums and the value that results from public investment.

5. Conclusion

This review finds a substantial evidence base supporting the effectiveness of institutional initiatives and contributions to policy delivery. We have a well-developed literature about

users as learners and as makers-of-meaning. We know more now than we did two decades ago about the visiting experience and the variables that impact on it.

Experience of museums expressed directly in the users own words is, however, dispersed throughout this literature. Capturing it is a time-consuming process and its distribution across such a wealth of material means that, inevitably, some data will be overlooked. As users assume greater agency in museums, research that makes user value the purpose of studies is timely and overdue. This review has generated an initial taxonomy which could provide the basis for further testing using research paradigms appropriate to capturing systems of meaning expressed by users. Additionally, though this review finds that the experience of users in museums is positive, evidence that it accrues to the public realm and results in socially beneficial outcomes is patchy. Utilising the CASE and Taking Part data is one step towards generating evidence already available within the public domain that can assist with making the case for culture. Moreover, the data set is longitudinal and its model of sampling representative, enabling comparisons to be made across time and between users and non-users of museums and galleries.

Other literature reviews support the findings of this study. Galloway's (2008, iii) report to the Scottish Arts Council, concluded that there is methodological work to be done on research and evaluation methods for investigating '*the impact of arts on individuals*'. In addition, she found that '*[e]mpirical evidence showing how these individual level effects translate at group or community level appears scarce*'. Janet Ruiz (2004) commented on the lack of social impact evidence, adding that a contributing factor was the absence of clear, measurable objectives. She concluded that '*[e]valuation, particularly of social inclusion initiatives, requires clear formulation of project aims and should look for sustained changes in the community*' (2004, 29).

Finally, a holistic approach to modelling cultural measurement that captures the range of values generated by museums should include in its array of methodological options, the potential that stated preference techniques offer. As a method, its capacity to bridge the divide between funders' needs for comparable systems on which to assess competitive bids and the imperative to include the intangible benefits of culture in any comprehensive assessment of value is not to be overlooked.

The opportunity to embark on a new phase in evaluation and research is an exciting one. Freed to a large extent of the target culture and policy imperatives, there is an opportunity to be more exploratory. It is Mark Moore's view that the combined purpose of governments and public institutions is to use their assets to 'make a positive difference in the lives of individuals and communities' (Moore and Moore 2005, 17). To achieve this we need to know whether we are delivering value, what kind of value we are creating and what kind of a difference it makes to the users of museums and the societies in which we live.

6. Appendices

Appendix A- List of interviewees on the stakeholder panel

Mark O'Neill- Director of Policy, Research and Development, Culture and Sport Glasgow

Sara Selwood- Director Sara Selwood Associates

Lisanne Gibson- Senior Lecturer, Director of Research, Museum Studies,
University of Leicester

Elenora Belfiore- Associate Professor of Cultural Policy, Director of Studies of the
[Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value](#), University of Warwick

Andrew Newman- Senior Lecturer, School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University

David Anderson- Director General, National Museum of Wales

Maurice Davies- Senior Research Fellow, Department of Management, Kings College,
London.

Appendix B- Questions asked of the stakeholder panel

Preamble

The AHRC have funded a two-year Cultural Value Project which seeks to establish a framework that will advance the way in which we talk about the value of cultural engagement and the methods by which we evaluate that value.

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project/Pages/default.aspx>

As part of this project, we are conducting a critical review of the existing body of research in the UK about the value of visiting museums and galleries. Through interrogating the data, we seek a better understanding of what distinguishes the experience of engaging with museums and galleries, how people express these experiences in value terms and what kind of difference encounters with museums and galleries make.

In the first stage of this critical review, we are seeking perceptions of the existing body of research amongst a select group of key stakeholders and research users. In framing your answers to these questions, we are asking you to focus on UK research undertaken within the last 20 years that is available in the public domain.

1. Where are the strengths of this body of research?
2. What are the weaknesses?
3. Where are the gaps?

4. Are there specific studies which you consider essential to include in this review? What distinguishes them?
5. What do you feel are the main challenges that the museum and gallery sector face in making a case for value?
6. Any other issues that we should be aware of as we undertake this critical review?
7. How is the research / evaluation used by organisations?

Appendix C- Summary of responses to Questions 1 and 2

1. Strengths of existing research

- Better understanding of cultural participation
- Data sets offer potential for comparative international studies on participation
- Museum sector disposed to contemporary questions of access, participation, representation, education, outreach
- People are beginning to articulate the role of museums in 21st century society

2. Weaknesses

- Basis. A priori basis for evaluation –we seek proofs of value. '*Museums have become habituated to articulating what they deliver in terms of the attributes required by instrumentalist government policies*' (Selwood, 2010, 8) 'Locked into a positivist paradigm'
- Rigour. Need more experimental *research* that involves control groups, large population samples and longitudinal studies. Need to distinguish between aspirational claims (*museums change lives*) and evidence of actual effects.
- Generic frameworks. Override the particular. Lack distinctions between different cultural activities and reference to the subject matter or content which encompasses particular values or generates particular outcomes
- Use of evidence

Policy level: is driven, not by evidence, but by existing ideological values and beliefs which evidence is used to justify / evidence has rhetorical power rather than rigour

Sector level: Discomfort of sector with unanticipated outcomes of research which challenge existing convictions. What value does the sector place on research?

- Purpose: Lack of intellectual interest within the sector to reflect on what museums are here for, what their cultural value *is*.
- Ownership. Whose concept of cultural value- what do the users think?

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