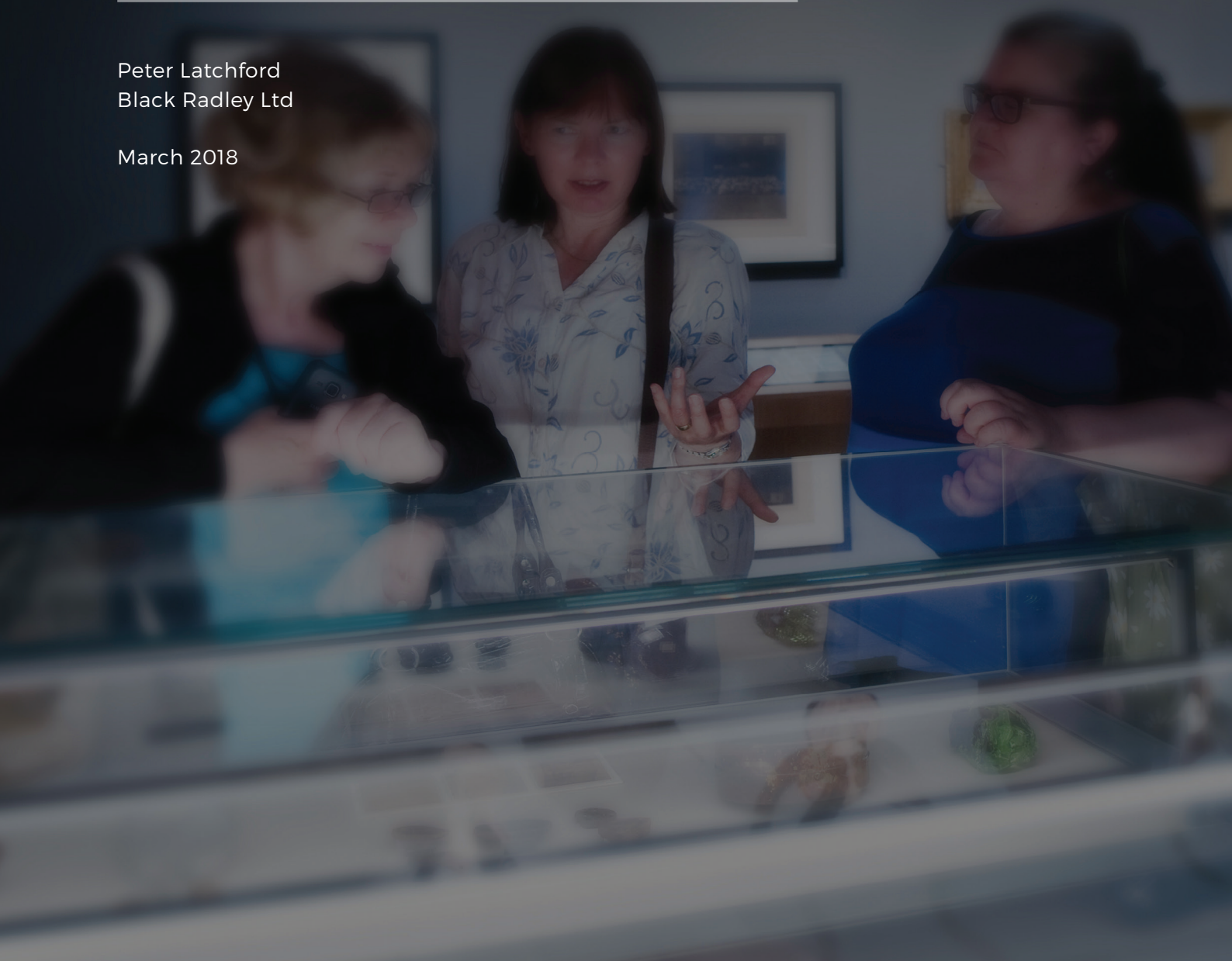English Civic Museums Network

The Future of Civic Museums:
A Think Piece

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The English Civic Museums Network (ECMN) was established in 2015 to bring together senior museum professionals from organisations with similar backgrounds and governance structures to explore the potential for forming a mutual support and development network, focusing on developing a strategic response to long-term public funding issues. The network represents over 40 museum organisations and members meet up to three times a year.

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The views expressed in this think piece are those of Professor Peter Latchford OBE, Chief Executive of Black Radley Ltd, who was commissioned to write this as an independent piece of work. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the ECMN or the NMDC, or any individual member of the two organisations.

Contents

Executive Summary

All museums have a civic role, but civic museums are those that have a particular emphasis on the relationship between a place and its people. They have their roots in the reform movement of the nineteenth century; and they have the potential to rediscover a contemporary reform catalyst role.

We live in a complex and chaotic time, characterised by increased wealth, inequality and unhappiness. Our public services are shaped by cure, rather than prevention, and as a result are increasingly unaffordable. Our focus on the individual has left us feeling isolated in our communities. We are overwhelmed by information and other stimuli, and have trouble making sense of our lives. Government seems remote. Yet we know that strong relationships in society keep people well, happy, purposeful and successful. And we know that, to strengthen relationships across society, we need to strengthen democratic processes, move public services to a more inclusive model, and to invest in our cultural life. To act on this knowledge, we need a new movement, a new enlightenment.

A catalyst for this enlightenment needs to have the following characteristics:

- **Trusted**
  able to link the civic with the civil, to strengthen a place-based sense of belonging and a revitalisation of democracy;
- **Bridging**
  supporting the development of networks between communities, specialisms and social classes;
- **Participative**
  encouraging inclusivity, engagement and involvement;
- **Innovative**
  experimental, cross-fertilising creativity across disciplines;
- **Development enabling**
  encouraging economic progress and balanced, respectful, and evidenced research/development/debate;
- **Storytelling**
  able to turn facts into meaning, the provision of unconditional spaces in which anyone's story can be told;

with the following enabling features:

- **Scale**
  sufficient geographic breadth and the variety of activity to allow for the development of real evidence of what works;

- **Complex adaptive**
  a varied group of autonomous players working cooperatively towards the same clear vision.

Civic museums could be the reform catalysts needed. They have many of these characteristics, but are constrained by a number of factors.

Most pressingly, civic museums face an immediate funding crisis, substantially more threatening than the challenging one facing museums in general.

Many are also characterised by a weak financial model, governance inflexibility, an under-developed collective view of themselves as a movement, and some unhelpful defensiveness concerning collections and competition.

We make the following five recommendations for how civic museums can rediscover their role as **reform catalysts**:

1. Agree a collective purpose;
2. Agree a simple performance metric;
3. Agree a collective research framework;
4. Remodel philanthropy;
5. Move to flexible governance.

We make the following six recommendations for how the immediate **funding crisis** should be weathered:

1. Make the prevention case;
2. Develop national partnerships;
3. Cross sell;
4. Compete;
5. Change LEP funding policy;
6. Build endowment funds.

We make the following nine recommendations for underpinning progress **enablers**:

1. Strengthen the business/financial model;
2. Rethink the employment model;
3. Drive up commercial performance;
4. Be ready to change the stewards;
5. Take on the collections myth;
6. Embrace failure;
7. Be careful about structural change;
8. Approach commissioners with evidence;
9. Toughen the policy environment.

1   The Role of Civic Museums

What Are Civic Museums For?

There is no formal UK *civic museum* category or definition. All accredited museums are required to take on what is, to all intents and purposes, a local civic responsibility. But a civic museum is surely more than just a museum that undertakes some civic activities. National museums, for instance, have a civic responsibility but, for the majority, this is less of a priority than their contribution to the wider intellectual, cultural and visitor economy life of the country.

This section looks at what it means to be a civic museum.

Numbers

In the UK there are up to 3,000 bodies that may be called museums. 1,722 of these are formally recognised by the Arts Council as accredited museums. There are 14 national museums in England, owned and operated by the state, 5 national museums of Scotland, 7 museums within National Museum Wales, and 4 national museums in Northern Ireland. There are 800 independent museums, 517 local authority museums, 153 National Trust museums, 79 University museums, and 64 military museums.

In England two years ago, the English Civic Museums Network was established. This is an informal group of mainly local authority owned, or ex-local authority owned, organisations, comprising 52 members. They oversee perhaps 200 museum sites in total. These are typically at the larger end of the spectrum, excluding those that are not national museums.

Transformation

In the UK during the early nineteenth century, new ways were sought to educate and enlighten working class people. The Factory Acts of the period had reduced industrial working hours, giving workers greater free time: the concern was that this time should be well spent, rather than on *intoxication* and *vice*. Supported by the Museums Act of 1845, the middle of the nineteenth century saw a wave of museums established in the major conurbations. A good proportion of the organisations that now might be called civic museums originated in this way.

We are living through turbulent times. The UK population faces a wide range of deep rooted political, socio-economic, and philosophical challenges. The need for reform and for enlightenment is at least as pronounced now as it was in the nineteenth century.

Museums in the 21st Century

A typical civic museum has a large and eclectic collection, often including natural history, geology, art, social history, and archaeology. Care for the collection, and for the venerable buildings in which the museum is housed, can seem like the core task. This is consistent with the standard definition, that a museum is "a building in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are stored and exhibited".[1]

But this wider museum model is under threat. Contemporary UK audiences have easy access to information on almost any subject, households are awash with material possessions, and people expect to be stimulated by continual improvement in the products/experiences they encounter. A static, passive museum cannot compete. While people do experience a particular charge from contact with the genuine article – there is a thirst for the authentic – the contact does have to be meaningful and involving, not mediated by traditional, dated, interpretation mechanisms.

We do not always know why we do things. A conscious reason will often mask a much stronger subconscious drive. People go to a place of religion for community, not just for worship. People go to football matches to connect with their friends, not just for the love of the game. People cook Sunday roasts to be with their family, not just for the sustenance. They may well not do these things, and get these wider benefits, if they did not believe in God, or in their team, or that they need a meal.

Generally, we do not like doing what is good for us or what makes us happy in the long term. Two thirds of people who pay for gym membership do not go to the gym. Church (or mosque, temple, gurdwara) is for god and community, but only works as a community experience because it provides the opportunity for collective worship. The match is for football and friendship, but only helps us connect because we are watching the match. Sunday lunch is for food and family, but would not work if there was no meal.

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1.   https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/museum

Museums are places where interesting things can happen. The best museums have moved beyond a collections focus. To say that collections are the Unique Selling Point of museums is akin to saying that the internal combustion engine is the USP of a car. It is not wrong, but it is not sufficient – and it is a perspective that may become obstructively dated.

Museums and the Cultural Offer

Cultural consumers are increasingly driven by the need for authenticity, for an immersive experience, for connection. Good museums have a crucial role to play in the visitor and cultural economy of a place.

Inward investment, whether foreign or domestic, is driven by the quality of physical, communications and human infrastructure.[2] The human infrastructure element principally concerns the availability of a skilled workforce but, all other things being equal, an investor's decision will be swayed by the quality of educational and cultural institutions on offer for the incoming managers and their families. All these human infrastructure factors (skills, schools, and the arts) are themselves driven by the strength of relationships within and across local communities, and the overall sense of identity and belonging. Museums are therefore directly relevant to inward investment, as part of the cultural offer, and indirectly relevant, as supporters of community and identity.

The Civic Museum Role

This brief background leads to some clear perspectives on positioning. Civic museums occupy a distinctive space in the life of the UK. Typically, they are deeply embedded in a place, whilst bringing a global perspective to the way that place's story is told. By revealing the past, they can help make sense of the present, and shape the future. They are part of the civic infrastructure, where "civic" means *relating to a town, especially its administration*; but they are also specifically civil in nature, where "civil" means r*elating to ordinary citizens and their concerns.* They have the ability, or at least the potential, to bridge the gap between the state and the community, between government and the governed.

We can think of a civic museum as being

> *a museum with an emphasis on belonging: connecting a place, its people, and the world – their past, present and future*

To be a member of the civic museum family is to have this focus.

Civic museums are not a homogenous group. None the less, many within this informal category also share common challenges, including:

- **Expensive infrastructure**
  Impressive buildings that are no longer wholly fit for purpose and are expensive to maintain and adapt;
- **Diverse collections**
  A wide range of collections, giving an eclectic but patchy coverage of issues of local relevance;
- **Council relationship**
  Decision making processes determined by Council ownership, or by Council contract interfaces, inhibiting experiment and customer responsiveness;
- **Council terms and conditions**
  Job specifications, employment processes, and salaries determined now, or in the past, by local authority standard conditions;
- **Funder dependence**
  A heavy reliance on public funding.

2.   http://www.investmentmap.org/docs/FDI-2547.pdf

2   State of the Nation

Twenty First Century Life

In the UK we are wealthier and longer lived than we have ever been. Yet we are more unhappy. There are increasing levels of self-inflicted disease, loneliness, poor mental health, suicide, and disaffection. National debates appear increasingly abrasive and polarised; extremism is growing; and the principle of compromise on which democracy is founded has itself become compromised. We worship at the altar of economic growth, while wringing our hands at its consequences, the environmental destruction and the sclerosis in our lives and bodies caused by over-consumption. We are astonished and resentful when others do not agree with our world view (Brexit, Trump). We are simultaneously more secular and more superstitious; more informed and more sceptical about what we read, and less wise; less deferential, less trusting, and more in thrall to celebrity. We are less moral and yet more judgemental and more prurient. We get more support from the state than any previous generation, yet we are more dissatisfied with the services it proves. We are older and more dependent on others, but don't want the immigration that this drives. We experience drawn out and undignified deaths, because we won't talk about meaning, and the end of life. We don't know who we are any more.

We have a sense that the old certainties of a slower world no longer apply; that the pace and complexity of the modern era is undermining what it is to be a family, to be male or female, to manage, to lead, to aspire, to protect our children. We have done away with deference, and we are struggling to respect. Everything we do harms the planet, so we do it anyway.

And it is as if our means of making sense of all this – our management, political or spiritual orthodoxies – are falling short. They don't seem to have the leverage they used to. What is going on?

The Wrong Vision

The problem is that our shared purpose - greater wealth - has poisoned the air and made us unhappy.

What happened? It has become clear that the shared purpose is too simplistic: greater wealth is not a sustainable nor compelling vision; nor is GDP growth the most effective metric. We achieved greater wealth – only to discover that it was not what we wanted.

The Millennial generation have shown us what the vision ought to have been, or now should be.[3] The right vision for our time is not wealth, but fulfilment. The evidence is clear that, above a fairly low level, there is no relationship between income and happiness. Money does not make us happy.

The problem is that the system continues to be shaped by the characteristics of a wealth-oriented machinery: the metrics, the notions of learning, the approach to value, and the enablers are all about economic growth. The news tells us about the economy in growth terms, not in well-being terms. Universities advertise courses on the basis of lifetime earnings, not lifetime satisfaction. Roads are built to facilitate business growth, not access to beauty. This orthodoxy is so ingrained, even to discuss it seems risible.

The way forward requires differing thinking: we need a new approach, to challenge the orthodoxies that unhelpfully trammel our logic. As a number of observers are now saying, we need a new *Enlightenment*. We know that we can live in a healthier, happier era if we focus on participation, belonging, innovation, and networks.

Prevention of Public Ills

During the two major twentieth century wars, UK government spending rose dramatically, as the situation required. When war was done, government spending as a proportion of the economy fell – but not to anything like pre-war levels. Once a government starts to provide a service, it finds it very hard to stop. The public sector is now circa 40% of the economy. A significant proportion of this is "failure demand": services that address preventable ill-health, unemployment, poverty, crime. These are issues that could be prevented, not just ameliorated. A sizeable proportion of our national Gross Domestic Product therefore comprises activities aimed at solving issues that need never have been there in the first place.

When governments try to reduce spending, for obvious and necessary reasons they tend to protect the acute elements of the system: violent crime detection, acute hospitals, the high demand types of social care. As a

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3.   Wikipedia notes that "the majority of research concludes Millennials differ from both their generational cohort predecessors, and can be characterized by a preference for a flat corporate culture, an emphasis on work-life balance and social consciousness."

consequence, services such as neighbourhood policing, community health services, and community centres experience significant cuts. The effect of this is that demand increases. Done well, these "softer" services encourage personal and communal resilience: they stop the crime, the illness, the loneliness from happening in the first place. Their removal allows the bad back in. Failure demand grows. This is not only financially problematic, since acute services are many more times expensive than are preventative activities; it is also a moral issue, as many people suffer who need not do so; and an effectiveness issue, as the net effect on happiness and well-being is significantly less than it could be.

There is a growing understanding of what is required. Take the cost of dealing with an individual's illness, or with crime in a community, or with loneliness amongst old people. If something is done early – even before the person becomes ill, before crime is a problem, before there is any loneliness – then the costs are typically very low. It doesn't cost much to encourage people to exercise a little more, to set up youth activities, or to get neighbours to help with the shopping. If something is done a little later on, when the problem has first fully emerged – a GP addressing a person's growing obesity head on for instance – the cost will be greater. If the problem is allowed to develop without check, the costs can be enormous. This can be depicted as a graph showing costs rising steeply over time. A prevention philosophy focuses on moving the point of intervention earlier in time, leftwards on the graph, where the costs are lower and the resultant intervention more effective.

Though this concept is widely accepted in government and other public policy arenas, there are three key problems. The first is delay. Though early intervention can be hugely cost effective in the long term, it will not solve the problem experienced now by people who did not benefit from the prevention philosophy in the past. Ill health, crime, the consequences of social isolation must continue to be contained whilst additional money is spent on the new preventative work. In short, prevention activities impose an additional cost, in the short term, on the public purse, despite the savings they make in the long term. And governments are at best in the short-medium term game.

The second, related, problem concerns evidence. There has been limited evidence for what works in prevention and to what degree. A whole host of players will claim that their club, community centre, youth activity, or arts programme builds personal or community resilience (and therefore should be funded). Sometimes the evidence of progress appears good, for instance where

a community centre in a deprived area delivers joined up services with and through its community, resulting in improved outcomes. But these examples have proven difficult to replicate. It has not been clear what the essential characteristics are that need to be rolled out.

The third problem concerns the nature of government. National government operates in specialist silos from the Cabinet down; it has to do so, given the scale and complexity of what it does. But prevention is necessarily a joined up business: a more active elderly person, for instance, is a less frequent user of A&E and more likely to volunteer at the library or the school. Each public service silo will think investing in prevention is some other silo's business.

Inclusion and Participation

Inequality matters to the human psyche. Once we have achieved a fairly low level of income, wealth has little impact on our happiness: it is our position relative to others that matters to us. The more unequal a society, the more unhappy it is – even for the wealthy, who find themselves fearful for their wealth. What this means is that social and economic progress must go hand in hand, if they are to result in a happier population.

It does not work to argue that meritocracy relies on inequality, and that meritocracy drives progress. In practice, meritocratic systems tend to reinforce mechanisms that perpetuate unearned privilege (such as exclusive cultural networks and expensive schools). The greatest happiness levels in the developed world are found in the countries with the flattest class systems.

Equality depends on inclusion. What matters most, in achieving inclusion, is *agency*. Individuals and groups need to have a sense that they can do, that they can change things, that they can make decisions and see them through. Inclusion works, not because it is a liberal pipe dream of anointing the unfortunate, but because it is the close cousin of enterprise. Inclusion allows people to try, to experiment, to be involved.

For a well-informed, self-actualising, questioning population, the need is to increase an individual's and a community's involvement in the way their needs are met: a move from the traditional *doing to*, through *doing for*, to *doing with*. At this highly participative end of the spectrum, there is recognition that *who is doing it* is as important as *what is done*.

The challenge for inclusive growth is *making it happen*, because delivering inclusion is not like delivering groceries, or even welfare payments, or a breast screening service. To achieve inclusion, the machinery of public service itself has to change. This is not just an imperative to do things to beneficiaries earlier, it is the need for them to do it themselves, or hand in hand with the professional. Individuals must be involved in the choices made about their healthcare, housing, welfare. Communities must be involved in the choices made about their schools, land, economy. The public service delivery system, the delivery culture, must change.

The best professionals already know how to work with the people they serve. But often they find themselves doing this despite, rather than because of, the system. The system is as it is because the structures of national government, the silos of public service, are large in scale with considerable inertia. Successive governments have had limited success in breaking this down.

Belonging

In Western cultures, we have been telling ourselves for a generation that the individual is all important. This is an orthodoxy that has become so ingrained it feels like truth – that the individual is the building block, the lego brick, the fundamental piece in society. But the alternative narrative – that it is the community that has primacy, and that the individual only makes sense when part of a group – has just as much explanatory value.

It seems likely that this move towards individualism has run its course; that there is a growing (albeit subconscious) acceptance that a community perspective is also important to our lives. But this rebalancing is still taking place, and taking place at a different pace across generations.

Community is about belonging. To belong is an artifice, a narrative, a story we tell ourselves. But it is a very powerful story we tell ourselves. Some tell themselves a belonging story that is based on place. Some tell themselves that story based on networks. Neither story is right or wrong: each simply satisfies a biological need for a sense of belonging.

There is a very good collective reason to prefer one narrative over the other. The reason is the environment. Though the liberal, well-educated, metropolitan networkers may be the most well-informed and actively concerned about global warming, they are also the biggest users of the planet's resources. The environment is directly impacted by what each of us do in the place that we exist, in that square foot of planet that we stand on, sit above, or fly over at any one point in time. If the "inconvenient truth" of manmade global warming is to be faced, the networkers have to adjust their narrative to accept their responsibility to the specific places they are personally affecting. It is the *think global, act local* imperative.

If those with a connection to a specific geography fulfil their need for belonging by telling themselves a story of belonging to a place, they will steward that place better – and all those better stewarded places add up to a better environment.

The narrative that places the individual in prime place over community allows people to feel that they can choose their relationships. This has been a positive for many people, and has allowed oppressive norms to be challenged or escaped. But, taken too far, it results in people only connecting with others who share very similar world views to themselves. It results in new and newly inflexible orthodoxies[4], increased levels of polarisation in debate, and a lack of empathy outside of very narrow social strata. There is no better way to balance the need to see ourselves as individual with the need to be a part of a group than for at least part of our group identity to be tied to the muddled and diverse places in which we live. It is better for society and better for the individual.

Information and Meaning

It is hard making sense of an overwhelming, secular, chaotic world. We are deluged by often contradictory information about how we should behave, what we should wear, how we should think. It is not surprising when there are so many facts to choose from, so much pressure to align with this perspective or that, so many calls on our time, that public debates become crude, sentimentalised, polarised, extreme, or even violent.

Stories reveal truths, often more powerfully than facts. And different stories can suggest different solutions, world views, or interpretations without antagonising the other party.

4.   As George Monbiot says, the political history of the second half of the 20th Century could be summarised as the conflict between its two great narratives: the stories told by Keynesian social democracy and neoliberalism (see http://www.monbiot.com/2017/09/11/how-do-we-get-out-of-this-mess/)

If we are to allow nuance back into our lives, if we are to learn how to balance the tensions that characterise our complex era, rather than to flip between the extremes, then we would do well to learn how to tell, and listen to, stories. We need people who can draw out our stories; who can help us tell them; who can help us empathise.

(Local) Democracy

There is a pattern in the ways that humans work together. It is the same cycle, whether the organisational form is a town, religious group, trade associations or whatever, and it goes something like this:

1. miserable independence (no cooperation);
2. enlightened cooperation;
3. institutionalised cooperation;
4. institutional efficiency and effectiveness;
5. institutional power;
6. institutional alienation;
7. institutional collapse.

Government ought to be "of the people, by the people, for the people"[5]. In describing a gap between the people and the institutions of government set up to serve them, for instance when we talk about "the hard to reach", we are implicitly demonstrating that our understanding of government is heading towards stage 6 in the above cycle. The best place to be is cycling through stages 2 to 4.

We live in a democratic system that was hard won by our forebears. As that system has become institutionalised, in the various agencies and services of national and local government, the heart of democracy has become strangely bloodless; the forms of democracy have been hollowed out. We point at the institutions as if they were the manifestation of democracy, rather than the processes (representation and/or participation), which are what really count.

The symptoms of this phenomenon are every day in the news. We talk of "government money" as if it were not our money. We blame the government for its failure to act, as if it were something removed from ourselves, like an omnipotent parent. We expect the government to be omniscient, to know the unknowable post-Brexit future.

For democracy to survive and flourish, the citizen must regain a sense of ownership and involvement in the systems that bring it to life. This realisation has led to the localism agenda that parties of all colours have supported. But it is a policy that has, again, been strikingly bloodless in its implementation, receiving often apathetic responses from the population, who appear to find local politics petty and irrelevant.

The Local Government Challenge

As the population gets older, the demand for local services, particularly in health and social care, is growing fast. Local authorities face the "graph of doom": a chart showing the point in the near future at which the rising cost of demand for adult social care services is greater than the revenue available to fund it. And this is before any spending on non-statutory services (discretionary activity, such as museums) is taken into account. In addition, the population increasingly expects these local services to be personalised: the old models of "doing to" people, or "doing for" them, no longer suit.

The Local Government Information Unit (LGiU) noted in 2016:

> Local government is in the eye of a perfect storm: financial cuts deeper than any other sector with more to come; indifference from large parts of Whitehall; relatively low turnout at elections; disconnection from many local people; economic stagnation outside London in a decade of low economic growth; unprecedented environmental challenges to reduce carbon and waste; social polarisation between local communities; fast changing policy context in areas like education and health; and rising demand for services all combine to signal an apparently bleak future for local councils.

> Successive UK governments have often seen local government as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Even the all-party consensus that localism is the antidote to the over-centralised UK state often leads to policies designed to bypass local democracy. The national media's coverage of councils too often promotes a cynical, negative or indifferent attitude that the sector needs to recognise and confront. We live in an unforgiving age when every missed bin, unreturned phone call and impersonal letter chips away at taxpayers' confidence in public services and trust in democracy.

> *Citizen mistrust*
> *Future Local, LGiU 2016*

5.   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gettysburg_Address

Innovation

For human society to progress, innovation must continue. Innovation need not be the servant of economic growth: it is not just about products. We need to be innovative about how we build a happier society, about how we respond to the environmental crisis – even, possibly, about how we do this whilst actively shrinking the economy.

The causes of innovation have been notoriously hard to pin down. This may be because we have framed the question in the wrong way. An overly individualistic view of society leads to the view that innovation is a quality possessed by the individual, akin to the Great Man theory of history, where events happen because of extraordinary people. If innovation was a characteristic of some specific individuals, you might, for example, expect to find it in entrepreneurs. In practice, entrepreneurs have few attributes in common.

Entrepreneurial success in practice correlates with the characteristics of the founding team. Where there is successful enterprise, there is usually a small team containing the right balance of affinity and conflict, with complementary competences. There is good evidence[6] that a high level of regional innovation (as measured through patent applications) correlates with the high numbers of creative workers. It is not that creative people generate patent applications, it is that they create a social environment in which creative innovation is more supported.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Happiness is not, as we have been led to believe, subjective. In general terms, what happens in your brain when you are happy is the same as what happens in mine; the conditions that make one person experience a sustained sense of well-being are the same as those that make another.

The evidence[7] shows that there are a small number of crucial determinants of individual happiness levels, the most powerful of which concern relationships (family,

friends and community). Sustainable happiness comes from what we do and who we know, not what we have: we need to be able to generate our own well-being and to help others to do so.

Most people are not aware of what makes them happy. They will tend to think it is something (e.g. wealth, a particular possession, a change in appearance, or a specific stimulus) that, in practice, gives only a short term buzz. Unhappiness will continue to be a problem in society unless we help people understand what happiness is, and how to achieve it.

Network Thinking

A number of the themes discussed above come together in the concept of *social capital*. Social capital is the network of relationships between people. In simple terms it comprises three types of relationships:

- Bonding (the links between people within a community);
- Bridging (the links between communities);
- Linking (the links between communities and the institutions that serve them).

A particular area, population or community can have more or less of each type of social capital.

There is now considerable evidence to show that high levels of social capital are linked to a range of positive socio-economic outcomes. The three different categories of social capital have differing socio-economic effects. In broad terms the following appears to be the case. Strong bonding capital (that is, links within communities) correlates with that community's ability to contain excesses and maintain social order, but not with economic success[8]. Strong bridging capital (links between communities) correlates with increased social mobility, economic success and educational performance[9]. Strong linking capital (links between people and the institutions that serve them) correlates with a greater sense of agency and well-being[10].

6.   Creativity and regional innovation: Evidence from EU regions, Leo Sleuwaegen, Priscilla Boiardia, Elsevier 2014
7.   See e.g. Happiness: Lessons from a New Science, Richard Layard, Penguin 2011
8.   Briefing Paper 113 Patterns of social capital, voluntary activity and area deprivation in England. TSRC
      https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/briefing-paper-113.pdf
9.   Why Inequality Matters: The Lessons of Brexit, Savage & Cunningham, Sep 2016 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308417838
10.   Community engagement to reduce inequalities in health: a systematic review, meta-analysis and economic analysis PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH Nov 2013

Social capital is a powerful concept with considerable utility. If social capital levels (particularly bridging social capital) in disadvantaged areas can be increased, relative disadvantage will be eliminated. Such an approach would deliver more sustainable change than traditional experiments in regeneration, because it is founded on a self-perpetuating asset, that of the network.

There are, or were, two problems. The first was the lack of evidence about the power of social capital. Originally not much more than a concept, social capital struggled to demonstrate it could be measured and consistently analysed. This gap has now broadly been closed, with a wide range of studies across the spectrum of Public Goods (health, economy, education etc.) demonstrating a correlation. There are clear metrics, and governmental bodies such as the Office for National Statistics are using them. But the social capital message has not yet made its way fully into national or local policy.

The second problem is more current. It is the problem of replication: how do we identify what works and do more of it? It is all very well to show that high levels of social capital correlate or cause increased socio-economic performance and well-being, but what use is that if we don't know how to increase it in areas where it is low? An investment in social capital – particularly of the bridging and linking variety - has the potential to achieve significant "prevention" benefits, to increase happiness, and to save money. But, ironically, an increasingly atomised population and a siloed public service infrastructure are – for those defining reasons – unable to progress what they know is good for them. And the situation is not helped by a plethora of small scale anecdotal case studies about what works, but no real evidence of any scale.

Culture and Change

What do we know about what activities might work in building social capital? The leading candidates are **localism** (as this creates the space in which connections can be made); improved public service **engagement** practice, e.g. helping people feel that the local hospital is theirs (as this is what *linking* social capital is all about); and **arts & culture**.

All three are about "culture", meaning: (1) the way we do things; and (2) *cultural disciplines* (i.e. TV, film, music, art, theatre, literature, dance, heritage etc.).

To make progress, we need a change in the prevailing management, power, service and participation culture. This is why localism and revitalising participative democracy is so important. We also need to recognise that cultural disciplines are the most powerful means known to man of changing individual perceptions and connections.

It is not clear that our approach to cultural policy has been effective.

The picture of cultural creativity emerging through our research strongly challenges the underlying logic of the prevailing approach to UK cultural policy – what its critics call the 'deficit model'. Within this paradigm… the leading ambition has been to widen access to a particular cultural offering that is publically funded and thereby identified as the good stuff. This report argues that promoting cultural capabilities for everyone offers a new overall approach. In doing so, we are not suggesting that 'great' art or profitable creative industries shouldn't continue to be the focus of cultural policy attention. Putting cultural democracy at the heart of national cultural policy does not mean abandoning, diluting or somehow dumbing down the arts. On the contrary, we believe it holds significant potential for building bigger, more diverse, and more committed audiences – as well as enabling a more widely-engaged and diverse community of artists – and a UK cultural ecology that is not only more equitable but also more creative.

Towards Cultural Democracy: promoting cultural capabilities for everyone, King's College London, 2017

The health sector internationally is showing significant interest in the use of cultural interventions to support social capital growth and prevention.

{This report} suggests a standard framework for reporting of project activities that will strengthen understanding of what works in specific contexts and enable realistic assessment and appropriate comparisons to be made between programmes…

A theory of change should describe the desired change that a project seeks to make and identify the steps involved in making that change happen. Creating a theory of change involves identifying a clear goal or primary outcome, tracing intermediate outcomes that might contribute towards the primary outcome, and using evidence to understand the link between outcomes by working out causes and

effects. Consider the example of a singing project for older people. Here, the primary goal (based on a local needs assessment) may be to reduce loneliness and social isolation in this group, which may in turn be linked with other benefits such as reduced risk of mental health problems, improved mobility and improved management of physical and mental health conditions. The intermediate outcomes, or the things that need to happen in order for the primary outcome to be achieved, might include the provision of an enjoyable and accessible activity where people can increase their confidence and connect with others. Establishing cause and effect can be challenging, but it is important to draw on available evidence to support the assumptions made at each stage.

Arts for health and wellbeing
An evaluation framework. Public Health England
Jan 2016

Parliament itself has identified the opportunity and some of the issues.

Proponents of the arts in health have too often not made their case as well as they should. Too many evaluations of arts projects have been less than rigorous, and the return on investment in the arts has been unclear. Nor, as Professor Dame Sally Davies put it to us, has wellbeing been rigorously conceptualised. Whereas many cultural organisations have been superbly capable and committed, they have not everywhere put themselves forward sufficiently confidently, insistently and convincingly. While most cultural organisations have now embraced education with conviction as a part of their mission, far fewer are seriously interested in the contribution they can make to improving health or in extending their audiences through such work. It is also fair to say that discontinuities of funding, and, in some parts of the country, large-scale withdrawal of funding, have genuinely prevented arts organisations from remaining available to support health and social services.

Local authorities, even before they were under the present draconian pressure to reduce expenditure, have not given high priority to spending on the arts. Other discretionary items – well-maintained public spaces, cleaner streets, leisure opportunities – appear to be more popular and also enhance quality of life. There is relatively little protest if the arts are casualties of economy.

We make the case here that the arts are a vital part of the public health landscape and therefore an essential responsibility of local authorities.

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts,
Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report
Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing,
July 2017

We therefore need: (1) fundamentally to change the culture of public service, moving towards a real co-production model; (2) to encourage innovation by using culture to create linkages across specialisms/disciplines; and (3) to use arts and culture as a key tool for increasing individual and community agency, participation, connection and, as a consequence, both happiness and well-being. Those parts of the UK that have seen significant renewal in spirit and in socio-economic progress, such as Liverpool, Glasgow – indeed the whole of Scotland – do not need convincing about the power of culture. Scotland as a whole has the evidence[11].

A New Enlightenment

There is growing recognition that twentieth century ways of thinking have run into the sand; and that we are at the beginning of a new Enlightenment concerning, individual happiness, community and public life. To flourish, this emerging movement needs reform catalysts with the following core characteristics:

- **Trusted**
  able to link the civic with the civil, to strengthen a place-based sense of belonging and a revitalisation of democracy;

- **Bridging**
  supporting the development of networks between communities, specialisms and social classes;

- **Participative**
  encouraging inclusivity, engagement and involvement;

- **Innovative**
  experimental, cross-fertilising creativity across disciplines;

- **Development enabling**
  encouraging economic progress and balanced, respectful, and evidenced research/development/debate;

- **Storytelling**
  able to turn facts into meaning, the provision of unconditional spaces in which anyone's story can be told.

11.   http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0043/00430649.pdf

Such reform catalysts also need the following enabling characteristics:

- **Scale**
  sufficient geographic breadth and the variety of activity to allow for the development of real evidence of what works;
- **Complex adaptive**
  a varied group of autonomous players working on a simultaneously tight-loose basis towards the same clear vision.

Who can play the part of a reform catalyst? Local democracy is crucial, and a strengthening of local authorities must be high on the list of priorities. But this is simply restating the problem: Councils are themselves in a challenged position and in various states of change. They are crucial to a successful future state, but they have very limited bandwidth to make the case set out here and to enable significant collective progress towards it.

Trusted civic services, such as leisure facilities, libraries, and museums, have a unique position. They are simultaneously part of the civic and civil infrastructure. They are already a manifestation of linking social capital. At the same time, particularly in the case of libraries and of "civic" museums, they are each part of their own wider national (even international) movement. When cross-referenced to the reform catalyst specification, museums are particularly interesting. They are well used by the middle class, which is a crucial element of the second "bridging" characteristic.[12]

State of the Nation: Civic Museums

The civic museum movement had its roots in social reform. Civic museums have the potential to play a similarly powerful role in the contemporary era.

Capability as Reform Catalysts

Within the loose category of civic museums, there is wide variety of practice and effectiveness. A general assessment of civic museums against the required reform catalyst characteristics set out earlier looks like this.

- **Trusted**
  able to link the civic with the civil, to strengthen a place-based sense of belonging and a revitalisation of democracy

  Broadly speaking, civic museums are trusted. They focus on place. But they rarely engage with contentious debates and participative democracy challenges.
- **Bridging**
  supporting the development of networks between communities and social classes

  Civic museums are well used by those with higher qualifications. They are underused by disadvantaged and newer communities. Few other public services are better positioned to facilitate connections between social strata or classes.
- **Participative**
  encouraging inclusivity, engagement and involvement

  Many civic museums are actively working to make their processes more permeable, to move towards a more co-produced model. But they are not doing this consistently, nor helping other parts of public service get it right.
- **Innovative**
  experimental, cross-fertilising creativity across disciplines

  Most civic museums have varied and eclectic collections, spanning arts, science and humanities. But few see their role as ideas engines, or as creativity hubs.

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12. See e.g. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/610767/Museums_and_galleries_focus_report.pdf

- **Development**
  enabling encouraging economic progress and balanced, respectful, and evidenced research/development/debate

  Many civic museums have good research and development competences. Many also have good connections with Universities. Collectively (and in some cases individually) the civic museum R&D effort lacks focus.

- **Storytelling**
  the ability to turn facts into meaning, the provision of unconditional spaces in which anyone's story can be told

  Museums interpret their collections, and interpretation is storytelling. But the stories told may be more shaped by the transmission needs of the specialist than the interests of the target audience.

- **Scale**
  sufficient geographic breadth and the variety of activity to allow for the development of real evidence of what works

  There are civic museums across the country, the senior players know each other well, and there is a wide variety of really interesting social capital building work happening. But there is little in the way of benchmarking nor of shared development of research into civic museum impact, and the projects that do happen are piecemeal and under-analysed.

- **Complex adaptive**
  a varied group of autonomous players working on a simultaneously tight-loose basis towards the same clear vision

  Civic museums have a collective sense of themselves, but there is no shared vision, no simple metric to determine progress, no process by which the weakest are improved or eliminated, no mechanism for providing a consistent set of enablers.

Some civic museums are exemplary reform catalysts. They are responding to the big issues of the day. The majority are doing useful and progressive work in this direction but in a relatively small and unsung way. A number are not contributing. Collectively, they are not demonstrating the coherence needed to prove or to make their case nationally. The exemplary players could be given a stronger leadership role.

Financial Crisis

The National Museum Directors Council made the following stark observation in 2016:

> *The marked and rapid reduction in the investment in museums made by some local authorities represents the most serious and immediate challenge to the future vitality of the sector.*[13]

The LGA's Museum Survey[14] of heads of cultural services (Sep 2016) notes the following:

> *Respondents were asked to list the two main opportunities for museum(s) and cultural provision in their local authority between now and 2020. The largest number of comments focussed around accessing, increasing and generating further funding or income and developing creative ways in which to do so.*

For respondents to our survey of English Civic Museums Network members, the average proportion of income from grants was 80%, with three quarters of this coming from local authority funds. In the last five years, the average reduction in funding was nearly 30%. Funding was respondents' greatest concern about the future.

Civic museums therefore appear harder hit than the sector as a whole as presented in the Mendoza Review[15], which identifies a 13% reduction in sector funds over 10 years in real terms. The threat to civic museums' financial model is immediate and existential: more short term problematic than simply a case of "adapting to today's funding environment". For many, there will be an issue of survival while those freedoms and that adaptability are developed.

Other Key Blockers

In addition to the immediate funding pressure, civic museums are held back from playing their full role by a number of significant issues. They are held back by two types of blocker: those that operate at an individual organisation level, and those that undermine their collective effectiveness.

13. https://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/media/documents/responses_position_statements/museums_review_call_for_evidence.pdf
14. https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/museum-survey-heads-cultu-696.pdf
15. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-mendoza-review-an-independent-review-of-museums-in-england

The typical civic museum is held back from achieving its local potential for the following reasons:

- **Financial model**
  With high costs (in particular buildings maintenance and staff) and reducing income (in particular Council contributions), the typical civic museum struggles to stay out of deficit;

- **Collections defensiveness**
  It is not unusual for museum professionals and other stakeholders to have strong and inflexible views about exploiting collections;

- **Governance inflexibility**
  Many civic museums – whether stand-alone trusts or Council-owned – are unable to be as agile and enterprising as they need to be because of the governance structures they operate under, or because of the limited commercial experience of the senior team.

The group of civic museums is collectively held back from being the reform catalyst, or change movement, that is needed for the following reasons:

- **Shared vision**
  The collective has greater power and potential to achieve significant impact than it recognises;

- **Measures**
  The group has not agreed a simple metric by which impact can be measured, nor a framework to allow robust evaluation of the widespread social capital work undertaken, to discover what works best;

- **Failure tolerance**
  The civic museum world is simultaneously wary of experiment (because experiment requires failure, and failure might undermine funder support), and tolerant of failure (in allowing poor practice to continue in many museums, which therefore reputationally undermine the collective). What would in other sectors be considered necessary conditions for identifying and addressing/removing underperformance (e.g. benchmarking) are largely absent.

These six issues are further explored below.

Financial Model

The fundamental business model for a museum is not strong. A museum is required to do something expensive (looking after collections) and to pay for it by showing that collection to people (visitors) who make the conservation task even more tricky. The people who would most benefit from accessing the collection are precisely those who cannot afford, or do not want to afford, to do so.

Where museums are strongest, it is in parts of the world where their impact is evidenced and/or understood – either by governments (e.g. parts of EU, Australia) or by philanthropists (the USA). As a rule, commercial revenue (including admission fees, secondary spend, room hire) is a necessary part of the story, but cannot cover the running costs. The model requires direct or indirect subsidy.

There is no museum in the world that does not have to grapple with this fundamental weakness in the financial model. American museums[16] receive around a quarter of their funding from government, and a slightly larger amount from commercial income. They differ considerably from British museums in that private giving constitutes nearly a third of their income, with the balancing 11% coming from investments (i.e. their endowments). It should be noted that US citizens give almost three times as much per head than British[17]. In Britain, arts/culture/heritage do not feature in the list[18] of top five causes to which people give: the top cause being medical research (25%) with arts being just 2%. In America, the biggest recipient is religion (32%) with arts/culture/humanities at 5%[19]. Despite this considerably more favourable national environment for museums, the typical American museum director would still say that his/her institution was funded "precariously".[20]

In other countries, the balance of funding between national, state and local government varies, as does the balance between government and private giving. Few countries are able to compete with America in terms of private giving, through private sponsorship of museums is a feature of Russian, Middle Eastern and Chinese museum growth. The international comparators are interesting but do not provide easy answers.

16. https://photos.state.gov/libraries/amgov/133183/english/P_You_Asked_How_Are_Museums_Supported_Financially.pdf
17. https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf-gdp-report-v89c47ac334cae616587efff3200698116.pdf?sfvrsn=2fe9cd40_2
18. https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf-uk-giving-web.pdf
19. https://cffk.org/gusa-2017-highlights-download/
20. https://photos.state.gov/libraries/amgov/133183/english/P_You_Asked_How_Are_Museums_Supported_Financially.pdf

The archetypal British civic museum carries costs greater than the British norm and has commercial revenues lower than others in the wider sector. Its position is therefore weaker than an already weak sector financial model. The greater costs typically arise from: (1) the consequence of being housed in expensive to maintain and unsuitable (for modern day requirements) buildings; (2) the storage requirements of an eclectic and disparate collection; and (3) its inherited inflexible employment conditions. The lower commercial revenues result from the archetypal civic museum's inherited governance inflexibility, and from an aversion to admission costs. For most civic museums, taking on the new Enlightenment reform catalyst role would impose additional costs and therefore add a further challenge to the financial model.

Collections Defensiveness

For some in the museum sector, typically not those at the most senior levels, collections have an almost mystical status: they are seen as a unique selling point of museums (true); as the entire point of museums (not true); and more important than the visitors (a false dichotomy). This perspective ignores the subtle truth of the civic museum proposition: that the collection may give the museum its authenticity and legitimacy, but the community gives it its purpose.

Another perspective on protecting collections, more often seen amongst museum leaders, is more tactical. It worries that any diminution in the status of the collection would allow part or all of the collection to be cashed in to serve the wider (possibly short term) purposes of the Council. This is the slippery slope argument: that, when once the principle of asset selling is accepted, it will never stop.

The Museums Association's MA's code of ethics says

> All those who work in and with museums should... balance the museum's role in safeguarding items for the benefit of future audiences with its obligation to optimise access for present audiences...

> Recognise the principle that collections should not normally be regarded as financially negotiable assets and that financially motivated disposal risks damaging public confidence in museums...

> Refuse to undertake disposal principally for financial reasons, except where it will significantly improve the long-term public benefit derived from the remaining collection. This will include demonstrating that:

- *the item under consideration lies outside the museum's established core collection as defined in the collections development policy*
- *extensive prior consultation with sector bodies and the public has been undertaken and considered*
- *it is not to generate short term revenue (for example to meet a budget deficit)*
- *it is as a last resort after other sources of funding have been thoroughly explored.*

This is sensible guidance in recognising the need for balance between current and future impact. But it supposes that that there could never be items that were only ever collected for short term "show and sell" reasons. The fine art market does very well as a consequence of the authority given to an artist by his or her presence in a museum gallery. Why should the museum itself not similarly benefit? The Museums Association's guidance also supposes that the museum's collections development policy is fit for purpose. But what should the collections policy be for a civic museum, when in our product-heavy, short-cycle-time world, there are so many things that could be collected?

Governance Inflexibility

Many civic museums are owned and run by the local Council. The management culture for a local authority may not be the right management culture for a reform catalyst civic museum. There is typically a mismatch in risk orientation, performance management approach, management information systems, decision making processes, employment practices, and customer orientation. However enterprising and flexible the Council may be, its scale and statutory responsibilities make certain requirements upon the way it runs. A civic museum run on the same basis will be relatively inflexible, traditional, and disengaged; and unable to fulfil the reform catalyst role. This has been widely recognised across local authorities and in the Mendoza report.

Not all civic museums are Council owned. Of those that are independent trusts, many will once have been part of the Council and will have contractual obligations to it. The Council management culture may still be present.

Even those civic museums whose roots are not in the Council can experience governance inflexibility issues. The museum financial model is not a highly profitable one. Success requires a blend of public service orientation, commercial agility, arts/culture/heritage

competence, and technical subject matter expertise. This is not easy to achieve. One or other perspective can too easily dominate.

The Shared Vision Problem

Civic museums have an important local role. To act as effective reform catalysts in the new era, they also need to work collectively to evidence and demonstrate the effectiveness of social capital solutions. There is no prospect of civic museums coming together across the country into one organisation: the cost of change would be considerable, and the resultant arrangement would almost inevitably lose its essential local distinctiveness.

The Mendoza Review suggests that local authority museums (a category that significantly overlaps with our definition of civic museums) should look at pooling resources, perhaps across a region; be granted greater management freedoms; and be given clarity regarding levels of future funding. These are sensible themes which support the thrust of the analysis here. It is possible that there should be some consolidation or resources pooling at a regional level (see Cornwall, Tyne & Wear, Hampshire – or, on a more broadly based model, Glasgow Life): but their impact overall depends on continued local impact and ownership.

The ideal is a movement that combines local independence with national clarity of purpose: this is the complex adaptive model. The challenge is to achieve sufficient agreement about what that collective purpose should be.

The Measures Problem

A shared vision is not enough. For the complex adaptive approach to work well, it needs to be accompanied by a simple *metric* by which progress can be measured, and according to which all the players in the system (in this case, civic museums) can assess their value. The existing national metric (GDP) leads to perverse outcomes. The existing museum metric (visitor numbers) is a poor proxy for performance even in the old orthodoxy we are seeking to replace.

Civic museums across the country are doing extraordinary work on themes that would support a new Enlightenment agenda. But the work is accompanied by little more than anecdotal evidence and proselytism to support the assertion that this work is either effective or efficient. Each civic museum is too small to be able to develop an effective *evidence* base for what works. Arts Council England is working positively in this area.

Failure Tolerance

If civic museums are to be reform catalysts for a new Enlightenment, they will need to reach the majority of people who do not use them. For this uninitiated group, all civic museums will be judged by the quality of any civic museum. And that means that the civic museum movement as a whole is in danger of being judged by the quality of the poorest member. In simple terms, the civic museum brand may only be as good as the weakest civic museum. This applies to how members of the public see the museum "brand". It also applies to influential policy makers who may well have little interest in museums, but who need to be convinced about the value of investing in the prevention and the social capital agenda.

The sector's tolerance of underperformance, combined with the prevalence of a deficit model in public service, also leads to poor museum players being propped up. Substantial Arts Council, HLF and other funder monies go to those players whose needs are greatest, rather than to those players that can demonstrate hard-edged impact on, and strong relationships with, low social capital populations. This means that the strongest players, those who could generate considerably more bangs per buck, do not have the opportunity to do so.

Internally, the fear of failure issue inhibits enterprise and agility.

3   Recommendations

If a wide range of Public Ills are to be prevented rather than just cured, society needs civic museums to find themselves again in their role as reform catalysts for a new enlightenment. It needs them to up their performance individually, and to develop their capabilities as a movement.

For civic museums to deliver on their potential, three themes need to be pursued. Firstly, there are a set of actions required for civic museums to rediscover their strength as reform catalysts. Secondly, there are actions required to deal with the immediate funding crisis. And thirdly, there are actions required to remove the long standing blockers to progress.

Reform Catalysts

Civic museums originated as agents of reform, and have the ability to be reform catalysts or reform catalysts for a new enlightenment. We have five recommendations for how this could be done.

R1: Agree a Collective Purpose

In our work with civic museums, we see enormous ambition and imagination at work. It seems likely that they would have little difficulty in collectively becoming enthusiastic advocates of a variation on the following (vision):

> *a healthier, happier era focused on participation, belonging, and innovation.*

It seems likely that civic museums would be happy to see themselves as (mission) reform catalysts for a new Enlightenment:

> *museums with an emphasis on belonging: connecting a place, its people, and the world – their past, present and future*

As more than one respondent told us, the very fact that the English Civic Museums Network commissioned this piece, funded by the National Museum Directors Council, is a positive sign.

The central argument of this piece is that contemporary society needs a new way of seeing itself and its purpose, and that civic museums are uniquely positioned to make this happen. The characteristics and activities required, principally to build social capital, are currently present in civic museums, but not to the extent needed, individually and collectively. A growth in that capacity will require investment. The socio-economic and happiness payback of increased social capital is significant, but the civic museum is unlikely to see much in the way of commercial revenue increases as a result: the financial benefit will be to health, education, social services, policing, and the private sector. The civic museum model will continue to be dependent on enlightened funders (public sector and philanthropic). This is part of the reason that a collective research framework and advocacy position is so important – using evidence on what works to help shift policy and opinion.

There is good evidence[21] that the higher the governmental funding of the museum sector, the more the population will use them.

The clearer the collective civic museum proposition – and the better able the average civic museum is able to demonstrate its impact in line with that proposition – the more that funds will be made available. These will be of four kinds: local political (in support of socio-economic progress and happiness); local commissioner support (in support of the prevention agenda, particularly in health); national support (to achieve a wider prevention/prevention, with a particular focus on areas with low social capital); philanthropic giving (where a wealthy individual can more clearly see what he/she is helping to achieve in the long term[22]).

R2: Agree a Simple Performance Metric

Increased social capital and an increase in personal agency are at the heart of the new agenda. Both of these correlate with high levels of local participation, where participation means active, personal, real time involvement in multi-person activities. A reform catalyst civic museum should be a catalyst for significant increases in local population's participation rates. (There is no need to limit this participation to too narrow a cultural definition, since it is evident that museum assets and stories can effectively be

21.   http://www.egmus.eu/fileadmin/intern/Museum_statistics_and_cultural_policy_Jos_de_Haan_v3_incl_CV.pdf
22.   See for instance Tony Butler's article http://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/news/what-is-the-best-model-for-museum-funding-is-more-philanthropy-the-answer/

deployed in catalysing other forms of participation – sports, for instance.)

What is therefore needed is a participation metric. This might be, for instance, the percentage of a local population connecting with the civic museum at least twelve times per year. Amongst other things, this metric would require the civic museum to make its offer more fluid, responsive and interesting.

R3: Agree a Collective Research Framework

For the civic museum movement to demonstrate the power of social capital, and the effectiveness of its work in building social capital, it needs to agree an overarching research framework. This would shape and be shaped by all civic museums, over time becoming a means by which best practice can be distilled and disseminated, and a database to support the civic museums' local and national advocacy.

R4: Remodel Philanthropy

Though the philanthropic culture of the UK is substantially different (smaller) than the US, we are still one of the biggest givers per head in the world. A disproportionate percentage of giving goes to London-based institutions: London accounts for 90% of all individual giving in England and 67.8% of all business investment[23]. And the UK population prioritises giving to health and animals causes over culture. The opportunity then is not so much to grow this market as to redirect it – outside of London and to cultural activity.

As civic museums develop a solid evidence base for the impact their work has on social capital/prevention – and therefore on health/well-being – they should be developing their philanthropic messaging in line with this. The message is straightforward: the good person supports the unfortunate, but the good & smart person supports activities that keep people from being unfortunate in the first place.

Many successful UK residents no longer live in the area they were raised. As discussed, civic museums should be positioned as essentially the champions of the past and future success of place. For wealthy potential civic

museum donors, there is a powerful sales line about supporting the identity of the place where your heart still lies – or reshaping the identity of the place you hated, according to choice.

The long term approach to donations is likely to rest on a substantial increase in the number of smaller contributions from the middle classes. The opportunity is to shift a middle class individual from a one-off visitor, to a regular visitor, to a member, to a proactive ambassador. The middle classes now constitute around 55% of the population. If 10% of the middle class families in a medium-sized city gave £35 per year to their civic museum, this would generate circa £150,000.

This would only happen through a long term relationship development approach, digitally enabled, that eases people into a deeper relationship with the museum over time. It requires all staff to see visitor relations as being core to their job.

The whole subject of increased philanthropic giving requires that the civic museum director becomes networker in chief, and is given the freedom to do so.

R5: Move to More Flexible Governance

In recent years, a good number of Council owned civic museums were set up as independent trusts. Amongst other things, this move was heralded as a way of giving museum leaders greater flexibility.

The move into trust is just a legal device. In and of itself, it does not deliver cultural change, process redesign, more suitable commercial systems, a change in management style, better commercial trading performance, or more effective staffing rotas. It can lead to a greater distance between the civic museum and the Council, making the decision to reduce funding easier (to the detriment of both parties). It can introduce an additional accountability burden, the trust board, for the already hard-pressed museum director. On the other hand, with the right trustees, it can over time enable a positive change in culture and processes.

There is nothing to stop a Council continuing to own a reform catalyst civic museum. But it will have to find ways of giving the museum leadership management freedoms. There is nothing to stop an independent trust from being part of the Council family. But it will have to invest in

23. http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/Context-for-our-approach-to-our-investment_2018-22.pdf

developing strong personal relationships with key officers and politicians, and demonstrating a clear interest in supporting the Council's socio-economic ambitions. There is no single prescription by which this will be achieved: it depends on the character and chemistry of local players. The key point is for all sides to understand that the right balance (combining management freedoms with staying in the Council family) is achieved.

The focus should be on the objective. For civic museums to be effective reform catalysts, we need them to be both (1) embedded in civil society (which means enterprising and engaged), and (2) embedded in civic society (which means being part of the Council family). An independent trust may find the first more easy than the second. A Council-owned body may find the second more easy than the first. In both cases, the legal form is much less interesting than the relationships. A variety of legal forms can be made to serve these objectives including hybrid structures, some of which are already operating well. The key principle is **form follows function**. What is crucial is that the key players understand what is being created: an organisation capable of being simultaneously civic and civil, bridging the gap between the state and the community, between government and the governed.

Transition Support

There is an immediate financial crisis for many civic museums, and they will not rediscover their strength as enlightenment reform catalysts overnight. Somehow their essential capabilities must be protected while the longer term case is developed. We have six recommendations for progressing this.

T1: Make the Prevention Case

Civic museums should recognise that their local authorities are themselves facing crisis. Rather than special plead for protected budgets, they should set out the strong prevention/social capital case.

This case needs to be made locally, responding to the particular local circumstances and political imperatives. There may well also be an opportunity to make the case nationally and collectively, perhaps enlisting the support of a significant patron to lead a national movement.

T2: Develop National Partnerships

An increasing number of players are interested in progressing a new Enlightenment approach based on social capital concepts. A premier league of civic museums could work with, for instance, the RSA and the BBC to develop and deliver a range of well-evidenced, highly progressive demonstrator activities. With the right partners, a range of project funding could be sourced from endowed foundations, crowd funding, and government. This is unlikely to provide significant margin, but would generate interest in, and evidence for, the prevention/social capital argument.

T3: Cross Sell

In football, the premier league clubs give their place's diaspora (and others) a sense of belonging even when they don't live in that place. They earn money by taking their assets (a game, the players) to different locations. A premier league civic museum from city A should surely be able to broaden minds, build new affections, and make money by taking its story to city B (and vice versa).

T4: Compete

Civic museums could and should be more bullish with funders about funding excellence. What justification is there for spreading resources across a wide range of organisations if a small number are delivering most of the benefits? Funds should be allocated on a Value for Money basis – using a clear performance metric, such as participation, linked to a well-evidenced Public Good such as social capital.

An alternative approach would be to leave civic museum interests completely to one side and to make the case to government and funders for investing in a twenty first century agora (a public open space, for assemblies, markets, debate etc) in every large town and city. This would be directly aimed at supporting the proposition that Britain should be a country that works for everyone.[24] Civic museums would be in a prime position to compete for such a commission.

Ideally, civic museums would establish a state of coopetition (cooperation/competition) between themselves. They would compete with each other to be

24.   https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may

ideas engines for communities and for business, to be R&D hubs for a place. It may even make sense to support a short term reduction in the size of the museums sector as a whole, to shake out some of the underperformance and allow for resources to be directed at building the impact evidence.

T5: Change LEP Funding Policy

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in England are successors to a series of regional mechanisms introduced by government to invest in economic growth. They are often a first port of call when looking for sub-national public funds to support socio-economic improvement. Some museums have been successful in getting their agenda, as part of a wider cultural and/or tourism theme, on the LEP spending list.

Most LEPs have a tight focus on infrastructure and business growth. They are small, with strong business leadership, and see their role as leveraging the key points in the local economy. In some areas (e.g. Cornwall) this works from a museum perspective. In most, it does not.

There is a very good case for saying that hard infrastructure (transport, services, housing) depends on soft infrastructure (social capital, a sense of belonging, the attractiveness of an area) to keep its value. There is clear evidence that the cultural life of an area is a key factor in attracting middle class business people and their businesses. These arguments are strong but difficult to make in a network of 38 LEPs with the range of different decision makers involved in each.

These relationships, and this nuanced case, are worth developing but will take time, LEP by LEP. A change in government policy towards LEPs, shifting from a narrow economic growth agenda to a more enlightened purpose, would be helpful. Again, a significant patron leading a national movement (see recommendation T1 above) may be helpful in progressing this.

T6: Build Endowment Funds

Ideally, a civic museum would have a governance arrangement that allowed it to be both civic and civil, with guaranteed income to cover the costs of tightly managed collection and building maintenance,

allowing it to focus on activities that build participation and belonging.

An endowment would be a powerful way of providing the guaranteed income required. An endowment could be built as follows:

- Funders such as HLF might prioritise endowment development in places of low social capital;
- Collections assets that were not critical to the story of place could be liquidated, with the cash transferred to the endowment;
- Museums would be required to live within their means when it came to collections storage, with the cost of collection management determining the scale of collections held;
- Expensive and obstructive museum buildings would be disposed of, with the capital receipt going to the endowment;
- The museums sector could adjust its policy position on collections disposal, developing guidelines to encourage such balance sheet strengthening.

Progress Enablers

This section looks at how the capability and capacity issues set out earlier can be addressed. We make nine recommendations.

E1: Strengthen the Civic Museum Business/Financial Model

Civic museums need individually to ask and answer the question, *what business are we in?* There are currently a number of answers, which add up to a problematic financial model for the museum itself:

- Building maintenance (cost);
- Objects preservation (cost);
- Idea preservation (cost);
- New idea collection (cost);
- Telling the official story (break even at best – waning demand);
- Entertainment story telling (profitable);
- Participative story telling (cost);
- Social capital building (cost);
- Asset value building (potentially profitable – e.g. contemporary art – but long payback period);

- Unconditional space (cost);
- Digital enabling of all the above (cost);
- Commissioned service delivery (small net contribution).

There is no new saviour revenue stream to be had. We know from comparators across the world that the museum business model is not strong. For civic museums to have as strong a model as possible they need to do the following:

- Invest in strengthening engagement and participation – this makes operational, financial and political sense and also achieves the social capital vision;
- Buildings – disaggregate from other parts of the model, require local/national funders to support properly as part of the cityscape;
- Collections – clarify the costs of collection care from other activities and require funders to support properly; rationalise in line with purpose and across region;
- Disaggregate the visitor attraction financial model from the social capital model - make the first profitable and the second evidenced;
- Clarify financial model and funding for social capital activity;
- Use impact and commercial performance measures internally to drive a return on investment approach to decision making;
- Invest in relationship development with partners potentially supportive of impact (public health, universities, local hospital, social services);
- In all activities, establish how middle class/ disadvantaged connections can be built;
- Develop co-production storytelling capabilities;
- Disrupt any obstructive internal culture through non-traditional delivery partnerships.

This is essentially a mixed economy model and will remain so. Higher levels of participation will support visitor numbers and secondary spend, but public money will be required to open the doors and maintain the assets. Councils should know the base budget required for this, then have a greater ability to select a management regime to achieve performance on the well-being as well as visitor attraction and innovation agendas.

The financial model of a specific museum will reflect local conditions. Places with high visitor numbers should expect to have higher levels of commercial income. Places with low levels of social capital should expect greater levels of central government attention and funding.

Universities can be good civic museum partners but will not be saviours. Civic museums can help universities build their impact case and their local engagement, and may in return generate commercial revenues.

E2: Rethink the Employment Model

Most civic museums have had to grapple with inflexible staff terms and conditions, that hold back progress and even potential job growth. Many are still experiencing difficulties with Council processes and concerns. The issue of volunteers taking on what were previously paid positions is particularly politically thorny.

For the civic museum to take on the reform catalyst role, a step forward in engagement, inclusion and permeability to the public is required. Everything the civic museum does should be done with the public.

The challenge going forward is three-fold:

- *How to recruit a more diverse workforce (both paid and volunteer) into the sector in general, including people with more of the kinds of 'personal qualities' that are identified as assets in an environment that will likely increasingly emphasise adaptability, entrepreneurialism and fewer deep specialisms?*
- *How to develop the existing workforce, not just in terms of skills, but also in terms of developing their 'personal qualities', particularly given that some 'personal qualities' are difficult to change?*
- *How to get organisations themselves to be more flexible, agile and entrepreneurial and supportive of their workforce?[25]*

Character Matters: Attitudes, behaviours and skills in the UK Museum Workforce Full Report by BOP Consulting with The Museum Consultancy Commissioned by: Arts Council England, Museums Galleries Scotland, Museums Association, Association of Independent Museums
September 2016

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25. http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_Museums_Workforce_ABS_BOP_Final_Report.pdf

The solution to what amounts to an obstructive quasi-academic management culture in some parts of civic museums is not to dumb down. Nor is it to continue the hollowing out of subject specific expertise from the museum world. The answer is to do what the best museums do well. They see themselves, in this sense, as R&D functions: they practice research and development; they continually extend their expertise through their engagement practice.

At an individual museum level, that engagement expertise will not always be accompanied by a formal social sciences qualification. It may well be found in connectors[26] within communities; people who are well networked and well known. Getting such folk to be advocates of the museum, as volunteers, or employees, is a crucial step. It is not unusual for the bulk of low paid, front line museum staff to be drawn from the communities they serve. Recognising, legitimising, and working with the grain of their community insight is not a bad place to start.

There is a need for a shift in working culture towards greater agility, enterprise, engagement and advocacy.

E3: Drive up Commercial Performance

Museum commercial revenue (retail, catering, room hire, admissions) per visitor varies considerably, and in a way not explained by the socio-economic profile of the catchment area. Those agencies with an oversight of the wider museums sector (e.g. the Arts Council) should support the on-going publication of a simple set of commercial performance benchmarks[27], to enable each civic museum, and each civic museum funder, to examine and improve its performance. For civic museums, the benchmarks should also include a simple impact metric for the crucial new Enlightenment reform catalyst role.

In our work we have seen considerable variation in civic museum attitudes to and competences in commercial revenue generation. EU data[28] shows that UK households are relatively high spenders on cultural services. Civic museums must compete more robustly for this spend.

By bringing spend per visitor up to an acceptable level, an underperforming civic museum in an average UK city could perhaps increase the net contribution made by commercial activities by around £40,000. The introduction of admissions charges might double this figure. A more ambitious approach could see substantially greater success. This would be useful money, no doubt, and is certainly worth working towards.

It should be noted that:

- The increases involved will not make the difference between success and failure for an organisation that might currently have public funding to the tune of £1m to run per annum;
- An increase in some forms of commercial revenue (e.g. admissions) could jeopardise the social capital building objective, and the funding that goes with it;
- To achieve this improvement, there must typically be a significant change in management style and in governance;
- The results, even if they are achieved, will not happen quickly and may not pay off within the required timescales.

None the less, this agenda of increased customer responsiveness – which requires civic museums radically to shorten their cycle times (i.e. change their content much more frequently, in order to drive up repeat visits); drive up decision making pace; build a clear understanding of, and relationship with customers; and improve the use of evidence – is a necessary part of the longer term reform catalyst approach.

E4: Be Ready to Change the Stewards

A disaggregated financial model, a clarified collections policy, and strengthened benchmarking would enable a local (and indeed a national or philanthropic) funder to take a hard look at cost and performance of the incumbent museum team, and to form a view on whether an alternative management approach would be better value/impact for money. In these circumstances, such a view could be established without it being seen as a threat to the building or the collections – the question would simply be whether a change in their stewardship could achieve greater impact, lower cost, or both.

26.   See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tipping_Point
27.   The agricultural sector has a wide range of benchmarks to allow farmers to compare their performance at a granular level (e.g. yield of an organic dairy cow). The hotel sector tracks, for instance, revenue per available room. The supermarket sector tracks sales per square foot.
28.   http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/7551543/KS-04-15-737-EN-N.pdf/648072f3-63c4-47d8-905a-6fdc742b8605

E5: Take on the Collections Myth

In too many museums, the collections development policy is seen as a technical, quasi-mystical document, shaped by the experts, and to be protected from the utilitarian or populist concerns of other uninformed stakeholders. As a consequence, it can be simultaneously too narrowly and too broadly based, giving objects primacy over stories, perpetuating the existing areas of specialisation, and missing out on the defining contemporary issues of the place. In adopting a reform catalyst positioning, the civic museum would recognise that it does not have a monopoly on knowledge and current themes of interest to future generations, would trust the population's aggregated view[29] to make such a determination, and would therefore use engagement as the key mechanism to determine what is collected.

What if, for instance, the civic museum sent each member of the local population an 18th birthday card, inviting them to record a video message setting out the top three most important things that had happened in their lifetimes, and the top three funniest? Not only would the substance of the responses form a fascinating and valuable resource over time, such an on-going project would also: (1) directly build *linking* social capital; (2) give the ability to create fluid displays that attracted the very people who submitted the material; and (3) generate a range of possible commercial revenue opportunities.

Were a collections policy to prioritise place-based issues, it would be unethical not to realise the value of those artefacts that did not align with this theme. The resultant additional resources would be brought into the service of that that agenda.

E6: Embrace Failure

Failure is an important quality control. It should be seen as good news when a poor quality (or over-constrained) management regime is replaced by a different, or less constrained, version – as it will allow the civic museum brand overall to be strengthened. The civic museum movement may want to consider developing an exclusive kite mark precisely to ensure a consistency of quality. What would be wrong with a very effective management team from an independent civic museum in the North taking on the running of an underperforming local

authority museum in the Midlands? This need not be a takeover or a merger: just a straightforward exploitation of a proven team over a wider set of organisations.

The following measures would help to demonstrate the quality of a civic museum service:
* the participation metric set out above;
* the evidenced quality of its local social capital building work;
* strong performance against sector benchmarks, including commercial revenue.

Civic museums collectively should avoid shroud waving when a museum is under threat of closure, as long as the local Council is fulfilling its responsibility to the collection. Such an approach is too obviously special pleading or protectionist. The Council's chief responsibility to the collection is to ensure that it achieves a balance between present and future impact, and to maintain an on-going record of the main themes of relevance to that location. A change in the collections stewardship and impact management regime should be a local decision. That said, the civic museum movement might well want to equip local players to make that decision well, by establishing a simple set of indicators (as above) for what constitutes good performance.

Alongside accepting failure as a necessary marker of a vibrant sector, the civic museum movement would need to have a wider perspective on cold spots for social capital levels and civic museum coverage; and would need to ensure that national government is intervening where necessary.

E7: Be Careful about Structural Change

For any sector experiencing pressure, consolidation can be a useful mechanism to achieve economies of scale and protect scarce expertise. There are already a number of examples of museum/cultural organisation chains.

The Mendoza Review[30] encourages museums to look at this, in particular at pooled resources. It says:

> We would encourage museums and LAs to consider how such a model might work for them in terms of sharing resources, for example, procurement, storage, and roles such as marketing, digital, curators, and senior leaders.

29. E.g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wisdom_of_Crowds
30. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-mendoza-review-an-independent-review-of-museums-in-england

There are already examples of shared storage, and a nationally backed investment in regional stores might help unlock the potential of this idea, whilst simultaneously addressing the collections de-accessioning problem. Such is the hollowing out of curatorial expertise across the country, that the savings from shared specialists are likely to be very small: many specialists are already freelance, which amounts to the same thing. Many local authorities have learned to their cost that consolidating marketing budgets across services (or across museums) is just eating the seed corn: it results in a less authentic message, a reduction in visitors, and a reduction in revenue.

A sharing of senior leaders could work, much like the "super heads" idea that has been applied to chains of schools. Though, just like the super heads approach, this can be easier to describe than to effect in practice. The absolute imperative for a civic museum to be deeply rooted locally requires a level of engagement of the senior team which is in significant conflict with the need to achieve commonality and performance across multiple locations.

None the less, some level of consolidation does have significant merit, principally because it would allow strong players to increase the impact of what they do. It is one of the symptoms of a healthy and competitive sector. It is possible that a civic museum's closure may make it easier for a Council to relaunch the service in a different form, from a more suitable building, managed by a proven museum chain.

In general, structural change takes time to achieve, and is unlikely to deliver significant results in the short term required by many civic museums. It is also, in itself, distractingly resource intensive.

E8: Approach Commissioners with Evidence

As discussed throughout this piece, civic museums should be in the social capital game, and social capital has a positive impact on virtually all public services. Local commissioners of services could and should significantly improve their effectiveness and efficiency by investing in civic museums. Health commissioners, in particular, have substantial budgets and much to gain by this approach.

Museums are not alone in pressing their case. The issue is evidence, particularly for public health commissioners,

who have a preference for data. In the short term, the evidence is just not good enough. Small scale work with local commissioners will continue to be a feature of civic museums activity, but it will not quickly grow in scale; not until a comprehensive research approach is established.

E9: Toughen the Policy Environment

The Mendoza Review makes a number of recommendations for Local Authority museums that can broadly be taken as having relevance to the civic museums category. These include recommending that a Council sets out a cultural strategy; helps museums partner with education, health, and culture providers and with business; builds museums into the LEP-led economic growth agenda; strengthens museum leadership and management freedoms; takes off the commercial shackles.

These are sensible recommendations, consistent with the analysis here. Experience is that it is not easily done.

The Review calls also for "a more strategic approach to museums across government". It asks the government to be "more joined up". Both aspirations are sensible and logical, though hard to achieve: there is no magic joining up bullet. Joining up is achieved by a myriad of relationships being stronger. A strategic approach all too easily becomes an action plan and an organisational tidy-up, which distracts the existing players from taking progressive action.
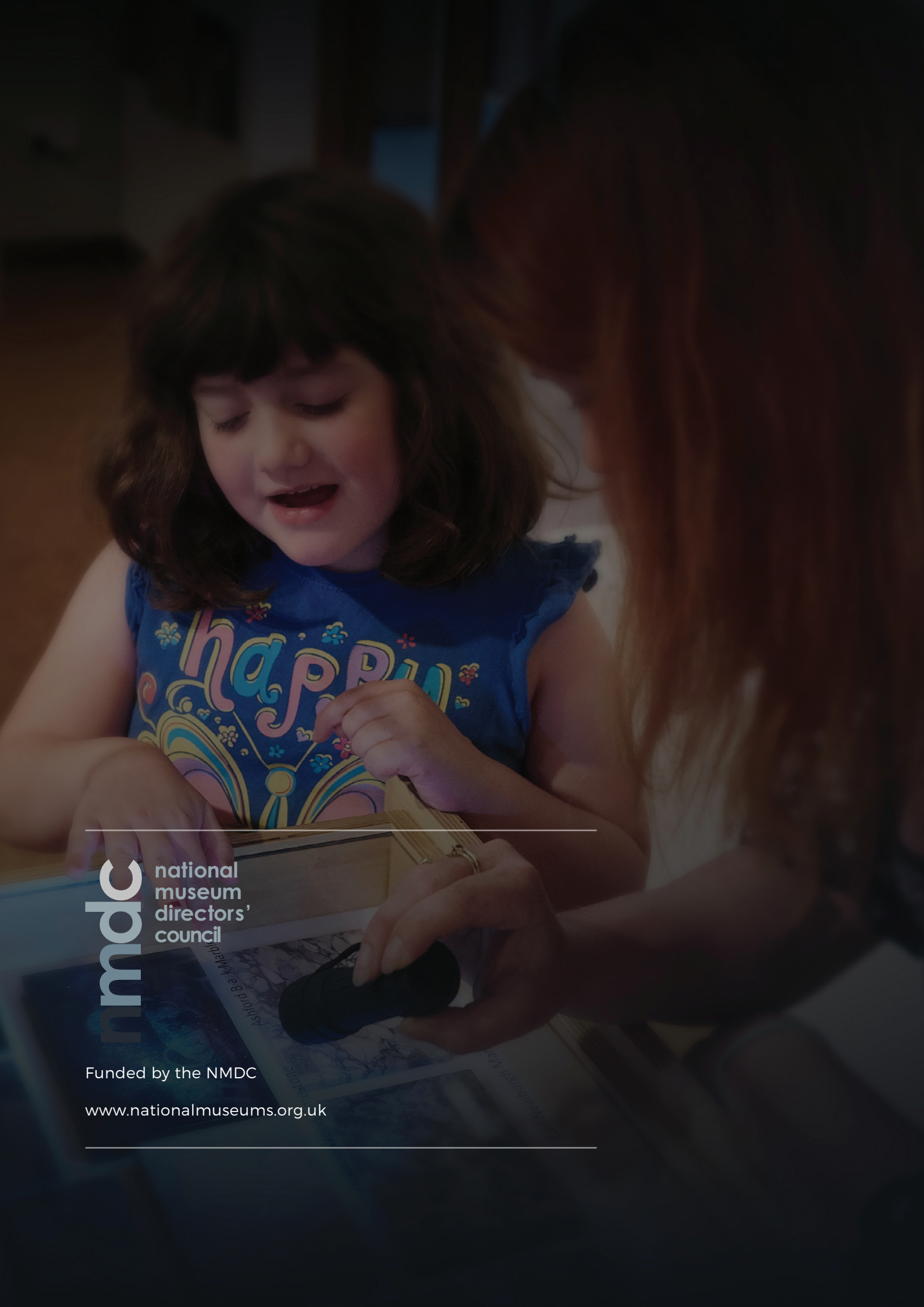
A powerful "strategic approach" by government would be to recognise that it has a key role in creating the conditions for success in this diverse sector, rather than to try to direct success. And that means:

- Encouraging competition (for instance, by investing in benchmarks);
- Addressing cold spots (areas of low social capital and/or poor/poor quality museum coverage);
- Taking a capabilities approach (by channelling support to the best players, rather than propping up the poorest);
- Disaggregating funding for building maintenance, collections stewardship, impact and participation activities, and rebalancing in favour of the latter;
- Recognising that capital monies can usefully be expended on creating endowments and on building social capital assets through museums, not just bricks and mortar: indeed, that such use of e.g. HLF funding would add considerably greater short and long term value, both well-being and socio-economic.

It might also mean that civic museums should be prioritised over other heritage buildings for HLF money – precisely because of the wider positive civic impact that they could (if they perform to their potential) achieve. A more robust (e.g. Treasury Green Book) approach to such capital funding would ensure a wider benefits perspective drove the priorities.

Government (DCMS and the Arts Council) should be encouraging coopetition in the sector and seeing the right kinds of failure as evidence of both experiment and an active quality assurance mechanism (the market) at work. They should be focused on building social capital. They should put more resource into developing those success conditions (benchmarking, access to external talent, identification of social capital cold spots). The Arts Council should be helping Councils to understand the disaggregated business model set out earlier: the difference between buildings maintenance, collections care, and the guts of civic museum activity – and the distinct nature of the financial model required to support each.

This will not be possible if the Arts Council, HLF and other funders are over-reliant on business plans. They should use hard evidence of impact and of social capital cold spots as their prime determinant of funding, not imaginary wish lists which may encourage inflexibility and the wrong kinds of competence.

Back cover image:
The 'Notice Nature Feel Joy' gallery at Derby Museum and Art Gallery
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