



Paul Hamlyn Foundation *Our Museum* Special Initiative

The *OUR MUSEUM* organisations
A summary of the journeys

Glasgow Museums

Introduction

Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners was a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Special Initiative, established in 2012 and finishing in early 2016. The overall aim was to influence the museum and gallery sector to:

- Place community needs, values and active collaboration at the core of museum and gallery work
- Involve communities and individuals in decision-making processes
- Ensure that museums and galleries play an effective role in developing community skills and the skills of staff in working with communities

This was to be done through facilitation of organisational change in specific museums and galleries already committed to active partnership with communities. *Our Museum* offered a collaborative learning process through which institutions and communities shared experiences and learned from each other as critical friends.

In early 2012 nine museums and galleries were selected to join *Our Museum* from participants in an earlier consultation and research period.¹ The organisations reflected key differences in the wider sector in scale, character and location. Their different starting-points, different challenges and priorities and the different kinds of resources at their disposal, were recognised by the Foundation. The organisations selected were: Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales; Belfast Exposed; Bristol Culture; Glasgow Museums; Hackney Museum; Museum of East Anglian Life; The Lightbox; Ryedale Folk Museum; Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.²

Each organisation responded to the *Our Museum* Outcomes and Indicators of Success framework and identified 'strategic change objectives' it anticipated would be the focus of its work during the programme. They also identified the members of their *Our Museum* 'engagement team': five people from the museum/gallery, ideally including the chief officer, and five people from community partners to work together collaboratively. The museums and galleries participating in *Our Museum* experimented with a wide range of approaches to achieving their strategic change objectives and create organisational change.

This document assesses the progress of Glasgow Museums and the challenges it faced in creating organisational change. It is a supplement to the main evaluation report by Gerri Moriarty and Sally Medlyn:

Museums Galleries Communities-Active Partners-Mutual Benefit: An evaluation of the Our Museum Special Initiative. Paul Hamlyn Foundation. June 2016.

¹ The research was published as: Lynch, B. 2011. *Whose Cake Is It Anyway? A collaborative investigation into engagement and participation in 12 museums and galleries in the UK*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation

² The Museum of East Anglian Life and Ryedale Folk Museum were funded for two of the three years of the programme. After they left the *Our Museum* programme the Foundation supported them with organisational review and business planning.

The four *Our Museum* Outcomes and Indicators of Success

Outcome 1 Rooted in Local Needs

Museums and galleries understand their role within their localities; they are effectively informed of and respond to, the range of their communities' needs and values and are aware of and initiate opportunities for partnerships with communities and other sectors to meet local needs

Outcome 2 Community agency

Communities are sustainably at the core of all the values, strategies, structures and work of museums and galleries: actively and regularly participating and collaborating in dialogue and decision-making about the work of the museum/gallery

Outcome 3 Capability building

Museums and galleries play an effective role in developing community skills, capabilities and creativity: preparing and helping people to be engaged in their communities, to articulate their voices, to find employment or volunteering opportunities in the heritage sector and elsewhere; and supporting staff to learn how to work with communities

Outcome 4 Reflection

Museums and galleries embed reflective practice into their work: internally, with community partners and across the sector, to ensure on-going reflection, dialogue and openness to challenge, alternative values and working methods

Indicators of Success for each outcome set out key assumptions about organisations committed to active partnership with communities: core values; kinds of leadership; ways of working; the nature and purpose of partnerships which might help inform policy and support delivery; how community and staff capacity building might help to deliver all outcomes; what good practice in this area might look like; and the critical role of reflection and dialogue in the work.³

³ The Outcomes and Indicators of Success are set out in full on page 28 of the main report

Glasgow Museums

This summary assesses the progress of Glasgow Museums and the challenges it faced in creating organisational change against the four *Our Museum* outcomes; Rooted in Local Needs, Community Agency, Capability and Reflection. It has been written by the *Our Museum* evaluators Sally Medlyn and Gerri Moriarty and is a supplement to the main evaluation report which contains further details of the outcomes framework: *Museums Galleries Communities-Active Partners-Mutual Benefit: An evaluation of the Our Museum Special Initiative*. Paul Hamlyn Foundation. June 2016.



Glasgow Museums is part of Glasgow Life, a company (Culture and Sport Glasgow) set up by Glasgow City Council to run services formerly delivered by its Culture and Leisure Services department. The service operates ten venues across the City. Its outreach service is called the Open Museum and this specialises in taking museum collections beyond the museum walls and out into the community. Scotland - unlike England, Wales, or Northern Ireland - has National Standards for Community Engagement (published in 2005) and a National Community Empowerment Action Plan (published in 2009). These set an overall national policy context for the outcomes envisaged by the *Our Museum* programme.

Outcome 1 Rooted in Local Needs: Action Learning, Cultural Hubs

Glasgow Museums is able to draw on a range of quantitative data, collected on a regular basis, to help inform its understanding of local needs. In addition, it draws on an extensive range of qualitative data, particularly that gathered by Open Museum staff who are: '*constantly developing our knowledge of the city, its spaces and resources, actors, activists; its aspirations and challenges, its opportunities for social and cultural interaction; its platforms for sharing ideas, its festivals of celebration*'. Its proposal was to work more closely with Glasgow Life's three Area Teams, which provided services and facilities for communities across the city, as a way to find out more about local needs and develop more integrated working across Glasgow Life.

It initially proposed four action research projects through which it hoped to explore integrated working across different museum departments and with local community partners. These were:

- Lambhill Stables, which was a long-standing Glasgow Museums community partner through its work with the Open Museum. A key aim was to include a wider range of the museum specialist staff in working closely with a community partner

- A temporary exhibition, displayed in the People's Palace, as part of the Red Road Cultural Project collaboration between Glasgow Museums, Glasgow Communities (another part of Glasgow Life), Glasgow Housing Association and a range of arts organisations
- The Kelvin Hall re-development, a partnership between Glasgow Life and the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum to create a cultural hub in a much-loved landmark building opposite Kelvingrove Museum. The aim was to involve the public and community partners in decision-making about existing collections, acquisition and disposal and in developing displays for the orientation space
- The Burrell Collection re-development, a major initiative for Glasgow Museums. The aim here was to focus on how communities could be involved in the decisions being taken around themes and content

Each of these individual projects had or is likely to have valuable outcomes. For example, work with Lambhill involved the research manager for natural history and the entomology curator in helping the local community learn more about a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in their neighbourhood and a community exhibition about the SSSI's wildlife drew on both local and museum knowledge. The design for the Red Road exhibition incorporated a community consultation space, with the feel of a domestic living room; this won a prestigious Scottish Design award. Glasgow Museums' staff note that Kelvin Hall and the Burrell re-development are: *'ongoing large-scale projects that enable Glasgow Museums to apply the learning gained from mechanisms created by the Our Museum initiative as well as other good practice engagement activity happening in other parts of our service and broader networks.'* This is evidenced in Audience Development Plans for these capital projects.

The action learning projects had certain limitations in helping Glasgow Museums achieve its *Our Museum* strategic objectives. Smaller-scale projects were relatively discreet, limited to one site or to a small number of staff, although they offered good illustrations of the mutual benefits of more equitable participation in service delivery. Museum staff noted difficulties in the large-scale projects in making suggestions for risk-taking methods of community participation and in documenting learning in projects which, by their nature, involved complex, pressurised project management.

As the *Our Museum* programme ends, Glasgow Life has established a number of 'cultural hubs' in the city. Based in neighbourhoods, these provide a base for staff from museums, arts and community services to work alongside each other and will give Glasgow Museums increased insight into local needs. Glasgow Museums is currently in the process of reviewing the Open Museum, with the aim of integrating its work more effectively across the museum service. The review will identify how it will continue to build on the Open Museum's considerable experience of local needs.

Outcome 2 Community Agency: Creative Café, planning documentation

In Years 1 and 2, Glasgow Museums attempted different ways of working towards this outcome, which was linked to achieving several of its strategic objectives. It involved two members of the Glasgow Life Area Teams in its *Our Museum* Steering Group; their expertise and input was invaluable, but sporadic. The Steering Group did not include external community partners. In Year 2, after internal debate and discussion, it decided to set up a Community Advisory Panel (later called a Community Forum). Initial progress with the Community Forum appeared promising, but then faltered; there were concerns about identifying shared objectives and whether the design of the Forum was appropriate to represent the diversity of the city and to enable a broad range of people to influence the service.

In Year 3, Glasgow Museums re-considered the design of the Forum and proposed a new mechanism, a Creative Café, directly linked to its planning cycles. Museum staff described the Café as: *'a regular discussion forum hosted several times a year by Glasgow Museums. It is an opportunity to bring people together from across Glasgow Life and external partners across the city, to share ideas about Glasgow Museums' work, collections and forward plans. It is also a chance for everyone who comes along to make new connections and meet new people.'* The latest Café (the third so far) considered three topics – diversity and equality, contemporary museum collecting, and built heritage – and received feedback on how ideas proposed through the first two events were progressing. Conversations, which are facilitated and informal, focus on what is working well, where there are problems or challenges and where a start might be made to move forward.

The Creative Café model is still in its infancy. Much will depend on whether those who attend can see that good ideas are being translated into action and whether the process leads to communities and the public being involved in shaping the strategic thinking of Glasgow Museums and Glasgow Life, as well as programme development, as participants are already suggesting. In a self-assessment report, museum staff noted that: *'We have continued to be challenged by the question of what scope of influence community partners can have within a local authority funded organisation such as ours. While the Creative Café is proving to be a more effective mechanism to involve community partners at a generative point in our working processes, the mechanism is still relatively experimental and we are still discovering how, by inserting greater agency at the outset of initiatives, this in turn may lead to greater agency in later parts of our planning cycle.'* It may be several years before the value and impact of this model can be fully assessed

In a less visible, but nevertheless important, development the organisation reviewed the MORPHE procedure documentation it uses as part of the planning process for all

its activities. This now includes quality criteria that emphasise Glasgow Museums is a user-focussed service and asks, as a key question, whether there are opportunities for audience/stakeholder involvement in what is being proposed.

Towards the end of Glasgow Museums' programme, it hosted a four-month secondment for a 'Wikimedian in Residence'. This person established a Wiki Working Group (a group of curators and other staff who were trained to edit) and who are interested in realising the benefits of open knowledge in a museums context. Although this initiative is at a very early stage and is currently internal to Glasgow Museums, it highlights how digital technologies are beginning to open up new avenues for community agency, which may be important to explore in future.

Outcome 3 Capability Building: Staff Ambassadors Programme

Glasgow Museums wanted to encourage a stronger commitment to active partnership with communities across its multiple sites and diverse work force. This took time to establish, but became a major element of its programme. The Staff Ambassadors Programme was designed and delivered using a range of expertise: from Glasgow Museums, community partners and Glasgow Life. The programme initially recruited a Glasgow Museums staff cohort - primarily managers, curators and learning staff - giving them opportunities for placements and mentoring in community contexts.

In Year 3, this expanded to include, for example, Finance and Front of House staff, and staff from Glasgow Communities. It comprised a range of learning opportunities: workshops, field visits, coaching training, action learning sets and group project work. It built a growing network of Glasgow Life staff and community partners who were developing shared understanding; experiencing different approaches; reflecting together; and able to give each other support when returning to their own areas of work and putting their learning into practice. The actions taken by staff after the Staff Ambassadors Programme were tracked; this was considered vital to ensure long-term support for this kind of time-intensive initiative.

The Staff Ambassadors Programme met Glasgow Museums' corporate agenda of making links across Glasgow Life services; fostering staff empowerment; and providing alternatives to actions based on 'silo' thinking. It also met its *Our Museum* agenda of helping more staff to understand the value of working with communities as active partners and building their capacity to do so; increasing staff understanding of what constitutes local need; encouraging higher level reflection; and giving staff access to tools to support reflection. Glasgow Museums think that this programme has reached a tipping point with the potential to influence the way in which all its staff work and hopes to be able to continue with it.

Outcome 4 Reflection: Insight Cafes, Artist in Residence

Glasgow Museums wanted to use reflection to help develop a culture that encouraged people to be creative and take risks. It developed a series of 'Insight Cafés', short informal discussion events bringing a range of staff and community partners together to talk about a theme or hear a speaker. This proved a good and relatively low cost method of developing relationships and connections across sites and staff disciplines, exploring new ideas and forming communities of interest. An Insight Café on historic and modern slavery led to a network of individuals across the city working on this subject with the museum service.

It experimented with appointing an artist, Emma Drye *'to contribute to and help facilitate the dialogues the Our Museum process is encouraging around creating mechanisms for meaningful engagement within our organisation'*. Staff reported that working with the artist had enabled reflection and re-alignment of personal and professional vision. The artist created an installation described as: *'a lovely and very subtle way of representing the Glasgow Museums team and how each person intersects and connects as part of a complex staff team. This can sometimes be hard to conceive of with so much going on and people working across so many venues and priorities. It was a welcome reminder of our interconnectedness.'*

Glasgow Museums identified 'everyday' structures for reflective practice during the programme, with senior managers encouraging staff to think about *'closing projects down'* and *'lessons learned'*. It also used specialist external facilitators to lead reflective processes. It offered facilitation training to a range of its staff and community partners in order to support a transition from external to internal facilitation. Twelve members of staff and three community partners began training as facilitators as the *Our Museum* programme ended.

