

Public Policy and Administration

<http://ppa.sagepub.com/>

Museums, Galleries, Politics and Management

Clive Gray

Public Policy and Administration 2011 26: 45 originally published online 15 November 2010

DOI: 10.1177/0952076710365436

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://ppa.sagepub.com/content/26/1/45>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



Public Administration Committee

Additional services and information for *Public Policy and Administration* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ppa.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ppa.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://ppa.sagepub.com/content/26/1/45.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Dec 30, 2010

[OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Nov 15, 2010

[What is This?](#)

Museums, Galleries, Politics and Management

Clive Gray

De Montfort University, Leicester

Abstract

Politics takes diverse forms within the museums sector, from the effect of national government policies and funding decisions to the manner in which the contents of museums are presented to the public. This diversity of political forms leads to the creation of a range of administrative and managerial contexts within which museums operate. This paper explores the relationship of political practices and administrative and managerial regimes for the manner in which museums and galleries in the United Kingdom undertake the functions that they are responsible for, and indicates the possibilities and problems for museum and gallery practice that are associated with different political forms.

Keyword

analysis, management, museums and galleries, politics

To say that there is a political dimension to museums and galleries is to state the obvious, even if there can be unexpected forms of this political dynamic. As with all organisations – whether public, private, voluntary or community – there are power relationships embedded within not only what they do, but also within how they do it, the purposes that lie behind what they do, and the relationships between them and the wider public. These power relationships take multiple forms and lead to the creation of distinct strategies for the management and administration of the museums and galleries sector as well as having a clear territorial dynamic to them. By identifying the variations that exist in these political relationships and how they affect matters of both internal and external managerial practices and structures, it is intended to demonstrate that the politics of museums are a complex set of phenomena that require detailed examination to

distinguish between the effects of structure and agency in explaining, precisely, how politics affect the sector and how, in turn, they can lead to the sector becoming a series of sites for political action.

What do Museums and Galleries do? Functions and Intentions

The manner in which politics can, and does, have an effect upon the museums and galleries sector is partly tied up with what it is felt that such institutions exist for. Attempts to provide some brief statement of the functions of the sector do exist but can all be criticised for a number of reasons. The Museums Association¹ (2008) (the MA), for example, defines museums as ‘institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens which they hold in trust for society’, enabling ‘people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment’. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council² (in its previous incarnation as Re:source, 2001) (the MLA) on the other hand argues that museums should contribute to ‘collections for inspiration and creativity’, provide ‘excellence and high quality in delivering core services’, be a site for education and learning, be concerned with access, inclusion and economic regeneration, and be involved with modernisation and rationalisation. More recently the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS, 2006) has identified the core priorities of the MLA itself as being concerned with children and young people, communities, economy and delivery, and (DCMS, 2000: 9) for museums, galleries and archives, ‘their goal should be to act as vehicles for positive social change’. At the very least these indicate that there are a number of functions that can be associated with museums and galleries; it is difficult to define these functions with precision (Beer, 1994); and what the balance between these functions could or should be is not easily decided (O’Neill, 2006).

In effect there are two sets of functional views at play: an internal set deriving from the practice of running museums and galleries and an external set that develops from the location of museum and gallery sectoral policies within the wider policy concerns of government. Whether attempts to provide neat packages of what these functions appear to be are useful, and whether such attempts simply produce a binary division that is untenable in practice when functions interact and overlap with each other (see Gibson, 2008) are both continuing issues within the museums and galleries sector and are themselves an element of political debate (Davies, 2008). This debate, even if it can appear to outsiders to be the museums and galleries equivalent of attempting to count the number of angels dancing on the head of a pin through its sheer aridity, has a point to it in so far as it serves to identify sets of views about how the museums and galleries sector is perceived, what it is expected to do, and who it is that these activities are aimed at. Indeed the museological literature treats this debate with a great deal of passion (as can be seen, for example, in the readings in Greenberg et al. (1996), or in the museum

‘skepticism’ of Carrier (2006)), and its continuing significance for the museums and galleries sector should not be lightly dismissed.

A first view on this develops from the question of who decides what museums and galleries will do. The policy choices of political actors serve to identify which functions are seen to be important, and why they are seen as being important. In this respect the internal/external division of functions can be significant. For political actors outside of the sector itself an emphasis on outputs and impacts in terms of larger questions of policy may be seen as being significant, and the role of museums and galleries would be seen in a potentially instrumental fashion in terms of how far these institutions contribute to goals that are sometimes seen as being peripheral, or utterly irrelevant, to the sector by some of those within the sector (Vestheim, 1994; Gray, 2007, 2008). Apart from potentially leading to conflict between endogenous and exogenous sets of actors this can also lead to the normal forms of political activity associated with goal displacement, the use of implementation as a tool for policy-making or for the subversion of external policies, organisational structural change and ideological change. A more internally derived view of museum practice is by no means free of political conflicts as there is no clearly accepted set of functions that is agreed upon: directors and curators of the national museums and galleries often have very different views of what museums exist for than do the directors and curators of local museums, and the developing network of community and neighbourhood museums differ again.

The consequences of this for museums in the context of changing historical views of the role of museums in society are discussed in O’Neill (2008) where the emphasis on professional perceptions affects how material is presented to the public and, implicitly, how it is understood by the public, indicating that differences between museums and galleries in different geographical locations, with different professionals or lay actors in charge in each case, will lead to a multiplicity of forms of presentation and understanding. This can be extended with an acceptance that national, local and community and neighbourhood museums³ are themselves internally divided about what they should be doing, and how this should be done: a study of the Science Museum in London found that ‘one curator told me that I would end up with a model of factional warfare’ in attempting to account for how the museum worked (Macdonald, 2002: 5). In effect the lack of unanimity within the museums and galleries sector leaves it open to the development of complex patterns of political engagement that have real effects upon how the sector, and its component parts, function.

Representation and Display

This fragmentation of viewpoint is more complex than the traditional political concerns with matters of ideological or party political difference, where the

locations of political actors amongst a range of possibilities are relatively clear-cut. Within the museum and galleries sector there are complex matters of ontology and epistemology involved as well. The museological literature has developed an extremely strong relationship with both social constructivist and interpretive approaches to analysing how museums and galleries function and the effects that they have on their visitors. The range of questions that are asked within these, and the conclusions that are drawn from them, make a number of theoretical assumptions about human behaviour which in turn lead to assumptions about how society is perceived and understood, and how museum displays and contents either can be, or are, constructed and presented for particular social, ideological and political ends, and how visitors make use of the material that is presented to them (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 148; O'Neill, 2002). There is a growing amount of research on visitor perception and reception and while some of this still appears to be based on certain ontological assumptions that are something of an article of faith rather than being based on effective empirical support and evidence (one museum director bemoaned the 'lack of good research on what visitors get out of displays'), and the literature is full of assertion and claims rather than with the provision of such evidence (see Falk and Dierking, 2000), there is an increasing development of other approaches to visitor studies based upon, for example, psychological and sociological approaches (see Packer, 2008; Newman, 2009), that seeks to develop complex causal relationships between a range of variables to investigate, from the bottom up, precisely how visitors understand and make use of the museum and gallery experience. Alongside such approaches there have also been developments within the more traditional social constructivist/interpretive methods of analysis. While these may have the usual difficulties associated with forms of qualitative research (Denscombe, 2010: ch. 10; Henn et al., 2006: 207–11) they do provide a range of indicative evidence that illustrates the variety of ways in which the museum and gallery experience can affect, for example, education and learning (Hooper-Greenhill et al., 2007; Watson et al., 2007).

The derivation from literary models of analysis and interpretation of the dominant approaches to be found in museum and gallery studies, notwithstanding the more recent developments noted above, has led to the development of certain other assumptions about both how museum and gallery representational displays work; and how they have an effect. These assumptions are based on ideas about 'the signifying power of culture' (Sandell, 2002: 3) and imply a rather straightforward impact of the representational strategies of museum and gallery displays on people.⁴ The transmission of the content of displays appears to work through a form of problem-free osmosis where the explicit and implicit (and, sometimes, the subconscious) intentions of those who control what is displayed, and how it is displayed, are transferred directly to the visitors. Thus the growth of museums in the 19th century (Bennett, 1995) and the Millennium Dome (McGuigan and Gilmore, 2002) at the start of the 21st century have both been

seen as unproblematically reflecting certain social, cultural, economic and political preferences that are then simply imposed upon visitors to reinforce the status of the displays as some preferred form of social ideal. The top-down nature of this process, and the assumption of an undifferentiated visiting public that has no role in the act of interpretation, have both been criticised by a range of post-modernist and modernist approaches which see reception and perception, instead, as much more complex phenomena (see Alexander, 2003: 41–54, 181–96, 205–21). The significance of this debate then becomes entwined with questions of structure and agency that are not capable of simple solution or dictat (Hay, 2002: ch. 3 discusses some of the issues here in the context of politics).

While this may appear to be simply a methodological issue that is being argued about in academic circles – which would, of course, make the issue political in its own right – it is also the case that it has a real effect in practical terms. Political actors external to the museums and galleries sector appear to have equally as unproblematic an approach to museums and galleries through the emphasis that is attached to them as instruments of social, cultural and political change. The Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry (Audit Commission, 2005: 8–12) for cultural services (which include museums and galleries) contains a key statement that these services need to demonstrate their success in ‘meeting local, regional and national objectives’ in terms of ‘healthier communities’, ‘safer and stronger communities’, ‘economic vitality’, ‘learning’ and ‘quality of life for local people’. While this may simply be saying that cultural services are seen as having a likely impact beyond more than their own sectoral concerns, it could also be seen as indicating that operational effectiveness should be assessed in these terms rather than any others that may be seen to be more endogenous to the sector (such as, for example, developing new conservation techniques). At the very least it assumes that museums and galleries actually contribute to such broader social, economic, educational and emotional activities – even if the causal mechanisms that may be involved are not specified by the Audit Commission and, again, are rather taken as an article of faith. Such a view of museums and galleries could be seen as, at the very least, undervaluing – at the worst, ignoring – the other functions that museums and galleries undertake with regard to their collections. The nature of these functions is such that any simplification to their component elements is likely, if not certain, to miss the overlapping nature of what is involved in managing and providing museum and gallery services and could lead governments to focus on those concerns that are central to their own interests with a relative neglect of those concerns that staff within museums and galleries see as being more central to their own activities.

Interpretations of the impact of this linking of museums and galleries to wider matters of government policy can vary: one view would be that there is a simple instrumentalisation of museum and gallery practice to live up to the top-down demands of state actors, a second could be that these external demands have

unintended consequences for the sector that appear to be instrumentalising (for example, an emphasis from governments on museums and galleries as places for learning may serve to make museums more explicit about the educational activities that they have always undertaken, rather than making them simply a different sort of classroom pursuing educational goals at the expense of other functions), and a third would be that museums and galleries ‘attach’ themselves to these broader policy concerns for a variety of reasons – from access to economic or political resources that would otherwise be difficult to obtain, to attempts to show that not only do they already do these things but also that they are very good at doing them, thus securing their safety from external political intrusion (Gray, 2002, 2007, 2008; in the case of social inclusion where all of these reasons can be seen to operate see Newman and McLean, 1998, 2004; Tlili, 2008; West and Smith, 2005). A result of this is that the pressure to demonstrate such policy relevance becomes important for the sector and an organisational focus on such evaluative material is given a new significance (see, for example, DCMS, 1999; MLA, 2008).⁵ Such developments, however, should not be seen as being simply a modern phenomenon as many of the current pressures on museums have a long-standing history – ‘museums began evaluating their practice in the 1920s, when many were under pressure to justify funding’⁶ (Lawrence, 1993). But the context in which the current developments are taking place provides a new motor to such changes indicating a more complex picture of underlying factors and points to the need to develop a wider picture of causality in organisational change than is perhaps often considered (see the criticisms of the division of much of the administrative reform literature between planned change and emerging strategy approaches in Toonen, 2007).

At this level the museological concerns about the inherently political nature of forms of representation and display becomes transmuted into a different form of political analysis, concerned with outputs and outcomes, that derives from the methodological, epistemological and ontological underpinnings of these concerns, and from the practical consequences that develop from them. While the understandings of politics that inform each of these bases differ from each other, they can both be used to raise questions about how museums and galleries have an effect upon, and are affected by, the societies that they exist within. This concern then raises questions about the underlying causal processes that lead to these outcomes, as well as raising questions about structure and agency within the sector. Whether actors are constrained within rigid structures of discourse and governmentality (Foucault, 1991) or are more free to choose the paths that they pursue (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003: 32) will be partly decided by the analytical approach that is adopted, and partly by the evidence used and how that is interpreted.⁷ Such concerns give rise to considerable differences in the understandings that are developed within cultural policy analysis and these, in turn, have political implications in analytical terms (Gray, 2010).

Decisions, Decisions

Discussions of the functions of museums and galleries, and of representation and display within these settings, are both predicated upon the assumption that there are decision-makers, both endogenous and exogenous to these institutions, who determine what takes place within them at both the strategic and operational levels. Who these decision- (or policy-) makers are, the basis upon which they make their choices, and the consequences of their choices are clearly political matters, concerned with the exercise of power in different ways and for different purposes: Macdonald (1998), for example, differentiates between different forms of politics as being present within the museum setting: politics as control, politics as ideological manipulation and dominance, politics as legitimacy, politics as a policy process, the politics of content and display, and the political consequences of the choices, decisions and policies that are made, all of which depend upon human agency for their translation into action.

If nothing else, this opens a great deal of territory for an investigation of these political forms as individual processes, let alone as interlinked components of a broader politics of museums and galleries. Indeed, these sites for analysis can be extended to a consideration of the specific contents of museum and gallery practices in their own right. Given that museums 'impact also on the development of culture and cultural policy issues, including multiculturalism, postcolonialism and sustainability in relation to heritage sites and the preservation of material culture' (Message, 2006: 26–7) it can be seen that this widens the arena of political analysis away from the more directly obvious examples of decision and policy-making to a consideration of the uses to which these policies and decisions can be put. The court cases concerning the preservation of 'Seahenge' (Pryor, 2002), and the debates about returning the Elgin Marbles to Greece (Beard, 2004; Sylvester, 2009: 33–53) both demonstrate that the past can still serve to generate a great deal of political heat in the context of the museums and galleries sector (see the debates in Gibson and Pendlebury, 2009, on heritage, for example).

Alongside the political symbolism that collections can generate there are also wider political dimensions to these collections in terms of the operational activities undertaken within the museums and galleries sector as a whole. At the financial level the care, management and display of collections consumes a considerable part of the resources of the sector: amongst the national museums, for example, care, conservation and research associated with their collections consumed 49% of the budget of the British Museum in 2009, 50% of that of the Natural History Museum in 2007, 65% of the Horniman Museum's in 2009, and 61% of that of the National Maritime Museum in 2006.⁸ How this money is spent, what it is spent on, and which messages are contained within this expenditure are all important political considerations for analysing the sector, even before considering the questions of who is making the decisions about

these matters, the basis upon which they are acting, and the purposes that underlie these decisions. The nature of the political analysis that may be appropriate for analysing these questions of policy and management within the museums and galleries sectors is potentially different to that which has often been utilised for examining matters of representation and display – the former being normally more positivist, or at least empirically evidence-based in approach, and the latter being more interpretive or social constructivist in approach.

The range of decisions being made is necessarily large within the context of the museums and galleries sector as a whole, cutting across all of the functional areas that they cover. Notwithstanding the difficulties of defining such functions it is evident that component elements of the sector – conservation, display, education, entertainment and amusement, for example – all depend upon the making of choices that have a number of political implications behind them. More than this, however, simply viewing museums and galleries as institutions in their own right raises questions about such classic administrative and managerial arrangements as the allocation of resources to different functional areas within each institution, through to more recent, and seemingly mundane, concerns such as how much to charge for a cup of tea in the museums' and galleries' restaurants and cafeterias.⁹ This range of decision-making activity would normally be taken to include the idea that there are different forms of policy- and decision-making activity being used in each case, implying a fragmentation of the system. Such fragmentation would be expected to incorporate different sets of actors in differing arenas of decision and policy making and the creation of an image of museums and galleries as being the sites of multiple forms of political activity that have implications for the types of decision and policy being made. MacLeod (2006), for example, identifies art galleries as potential sites for political protest that have both politically symbolic and practical administrative dimensions to them, with each having their own individual effects upon their organisational structures and practices, this being a rather different set of policy debates than those associated with, for example, the price of postcards in museum shops, or the share of the organisational budget that is to be allocated to conservation as opposed to display or education.

The question of who is actually making the decisions that affect the museums and galleries sector is, in the first instance, determined by what the decisions are. Elected politicians at the national and local level, for example, are formally responsible for major funding decisions while museum and gallery professionals normally have the responsibility for what are seen as the technical decisions over matters such as conservation techniques (even if there are questions as to whether conservation is a profession or not: see Pye, 2001: 166–9). The fragmented nature of the museums and galleries sector – institutionally (there were over 2,500 museums in the United Kingdom in 2009; see MLA, 2009), organisationally, geographically and functionally – has led to the creation of a densely populated field of political actors with a wide range of demarcated arenas within which

they operate. This fragmentation can be multiplied by a recognition that the visitors to these institutions, and the communities that they are located within, can also be significant contributors to the decisions and policies that are made both directly and indirectly (Wilkinson, 2008). Attempting to separate the precise roles and impacts that each set of actors contributes to is by no means a straightforward task, although there is no reason why it should prove to be impossible. The fact that there is a limited literature concerning the precise detail of the decision- and policy-making process within the sector indicates that this is an area of museums and galleries that would benefit from new empirical research.

In the same vein, the absence of detailed empirical work on the processes and mechanisms by which decisions and policies are made within the museums and galleries sector is matched by the absence of specific knowledge about the basis on which such choices are made. While the already available literature and evidence from other policy sectors – including the cultural policy sector – may indicate the role that is played by such variables as ideology, resources, party politics, pressure groups, dominant sectoral oligarchies, management practices, policy orthodoxies and many other variables, there is no real picture of how these interact to affect the particular case of museums and galleries. Some limited evidence can be found that demonstrates, on a case-by-case basis, how individual variables have affected particular examples of decision- and policy-making (for example, Falconer and Blair, 2003; Lawley, 2003; Sandell, 2003), but there is little that could provide a general account of policy dynamics within the sector. Indeed, it could be expected that the sectoral fragmentation that exists between individual museums and galleries will lead to the creation of an equally fragmented set of policy pressures in any given case. The desire to identify what the impacts of political influences are on the operations of museums and galleries requires further study.

At this level an absence of knowledge is easy to identify; the consequences of this lack are more difficult to clarify, although some indication of the terrain that could be explored can be gathered by examining how accountability can be seen to operate within the museums and galleries sector. In effect there are multiple forms of accountability within the sector, just as there are in every other public policy sector,¹⁰ although it could be argued that the museums and galleries sector contains some forms of accountability that are only rarely, if ever, discussed in the context of other policy sectors. At the most basic level accountability within the sector is split between endogenous and exogenous forms. The latter can be seen by reference to, in the case of the national museums and galleries in Britain, the financial accountability that is owed to Parliament (at both Westminster and Holyrood) or Assemblies (in Belfast and Cardiff), to relevant government departments (in particular the DCMS in England) and, sometimes to the MLA, in local authority museums and galleries this accountability rests with local councillors, and in private, charitable and/or voluntary or community museums and galleries it

rests with the managing boards. At the local authority level there is also direct political accountability to local councillors. In the case of all museums there is also a general, public, accountability to the people that the museum exists for – whether this be the general public at large, local communities, or simply those who visit particular institutions. In the endogenous form accountability can be extended to incorporate the technocratic and/or professional values that are held to inhere within the sector (Museums Association, 2008), and the day-to-day managerial forms of accountability for job performance that exist in all organisations. Alongside these, however, the sector also contains a temporal form of accountability that is rarely recognised in other organisational settings. This form of accountability concerns the responsibility of museums and galleries towards the past (through the maintenance of the exhibits/collections that they have acquired over the years), the present (in terms of how these exhibits/collections are displayed), and the future (in terms of the inheritance that they will bequeath to future generations). How each of these distinct forms of accountability operate at the level of the sector as a whole, and at the level of individual institutions, will have considerable effects upon how the sector will function, who it will be functioning for, and what it will be doing in the pursuit of these functions. Without some detailed empirical understanding of the underlying politics of accountability within the sector these questions of emphasis will remain either unanswerable or discussed at such levels of generalisation as to be more rhetorical rather than practical matters of concern.

Given that some concern with the idea of accountability is contained within the decision and policy making process of public organisations the necessity to identify which form of accountability actually underpins particular examples of these processes can be informative for understanding and explaining not only these activities but their consequences as well. The complexity of the concept of accountability demonstrates that a simple investigation of the standard questions concerning policy making¹¹ can lead into much more complex examinations of organisational structures and processes than may otherwise be considered. At the very least the particular specificities of individual organisational forms and sectoral peculiarities are required to make sense of the patterns of behaviour that are being explored. If this is accepted then the certainties that are often to be found in general models and theories of the policy process (see, for example, Sabatier, 2007) and public administration and management may need to be re-appraised to take into account not simply the variations around common patterns of activity that can be seen in all policy sectors, but quite distinct policy and administrative practices that are driven by internal sectoral characteristics in the first place. The importance of this specificity for how museums function has been recognised for some time (see, for example, McLean (1993), on how the specificity of the museum context affects the development of the marketing function within the sector; Kawashima (1999), on how it affected the introduction of strategic management initiatives; or Senie (2003), on how site specificity can affect the

reception of public art), and maintaining this awareness for discussions of the politics of a highly fragmented organisational universe is likely to be of some utility for analysing how it functions.

Who are Museums and Galleries for?

This point feeds in to a final area of concern for understanding the politics of the museums and galleries sector, which is concerned with who is being served by the existence of such institutions. While it is possible to discuss museums and galleries as being, in themselves, 'a total work of art... (that) create(s) the envelopes in which art arrives' (Carrier, 2006: 6–7), giving rise to particular interpretive arguments about the natures, forms and functions that they embody, it is also possible to examine who is intended to be the focus of museum and gallery practice and decisions. This raises different questions about not only how to understand museums and galleries but also about what is taking place in terms of who it is that decisions, policies and internal practices are aimed at.

The answer to this concern is necessarily complicated as it rather depends upon who is being examined: the view of national politicians may not be the same as that of museum curators, and neither of these may resemble the view of local community groups running an independent museum trust.¹² Whether those who go to museums are seen as 'audiences', 'visitors', or 'customers', and whether they are understood as being 'citizens', 'consumers' or 'learners' can have a considerable impact upon what roles museums and galleries are expected to undertake in terms of meeting their requirements, and this, in turn, can affect the forms of representation and display that are provided. It can also have an impact upon the relative weighting that is placed upon specific functional roles that are undertaken by staff within museums and galleries: marketing, education, shops, catering, the development of interactive displays, the provision of websites, dealing with the media, and the attraction of sponsorship or volunteers (other roles can also be included: these have been developed from a much longer listing; see Ambrose and Paine, 2006: 18–132) can all be seen to be affected by the relationship that museums and galleries have with the multiple users that they are concerned with, and have a direct relationship with such questions of internal museum and gallery management as levels of staffing, functional specialisms, income and expenditure. This also has an impact on what museums and galleries may feel needs to be done to make attendance at these institutions a worthwhile experience in the face of multiple demands upon the time of visitors and potential attendees (see Hooper-Greenhill, 1994: ch. 9).

In addition to the complexities that derive from the multiple attitudes that can be adopted towards attendees and non-attendees at museums and galleries it

should be noted that there has never been a static vision of what is entailed here. Ross (2004), for example, has argued that while the 'new museology' of the 1980s onwards has led to an increased focus within museums and galleries on their visitors and the visitor experience, this shift has been contested within both the sector as a whole and within individual museums and galleries. Again, the values and underlying ideologies that are associated with these debates have a clear political (and sociological and economic) component to them that could be usefully clarified to identify the mechanisms through which they are decided upon. Equally, the extent to which these debates are influenced by the fragmentation of the museums and galleries sector between forms of institution (national, local, voluntary, community, trust, private, et cetera) and geographical location may indicate the effective, practical significance for museum and gallery practice that they have. In either case the underlying practice of politics within the organisational setting of the museums and galleries sector is likely to have direct relevance for understanding how these institutions function.

Conclusion

This paper has not been intended to provide a detailed framework for understanding the political dimension of the museums and galleries sector. Instead it has attempted to demonstrate that the application of ideas and arguments from mainstream political science and public administration can identify a number of arenas that deserve further investigation and analysis. While this may seem to be rather limited it is worth noting that in the combined total of 413 years of publication of nine leading politics and public administration journals in Britain¹³ there have only ever been five articles published on museums and galleries. It is possible that this is a reflection of the generally low levels of interest in the politics of culture, in general, amongst political scientists, and the relative lack of centrality of the museums and galleries sector, in particular, in the field of public policy and administration: while there has been an increasing use of ideas from politics in the museums, galleries and heritage literatures (see, for recent examples, Smith, 2006; Ashworth et al., 2007) it would appear that there has been little traffic in the other direction (with the recent exception of Sylvester, 2009, who examines museums and galleries from an international relations perspective). It is possible that a closer connection between the discipline of politics and the subject matter of museums and galleries may have benefits for both in developing the sophistication of the analysis that is undertaken, and in broadening the scope of political analysis per se. If this paper sparks a greater interest in the further political exploration of an area of public life that has implications for all members of society, in terms of how we understand and explain ourselves and the world around us, then it will have served a purpose.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to the museums staff who have discussed, and corresponded with me about, some of the subject matter that is contained in this paper. The one direct quote given is from a confidential source. My thanks also to Andrew Newman, Lisanne Gibson, and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments and corrections to an earlier version of this paper.

Notes

1. The Museums Association is an organisation intended to care for the interests of museums and galleries. It is funded by its membership and is formally separate from governments.
2. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) with a strategic role for promoting best practice in the museums, libraries and archives sector.
3. This is not the sum total of museum and gallery forms: in Britain, for example, there are a range of military/regimental museums as well as private and trust museums and galleries that operate in a rather different fashion.
4. This is not a criticism of the work of Sandell who is consistently much more nuanced and informative on these processes.
5. In this respect it is significant that the DCMS has recently launched a programme to identify the basis for evidence-based policy in the field of culture: see DCMS (2009). Given the major methodological difficulties that exist in evaluating cultural policy (Gray, 2009) the utility of this exercise remains to be seen.
6. An example of 'plus ca change, plus c'est la même chose'. Many of the arguments in Murray (1904 [1996]), ranging from the art and craft of display to the disposal of items from museum collections can still be seen to have direct relevance to current concerns within the museums and galleries sector. This demonstrates either his pre-science or the continuity of debate within the sector.
7. This straddles the post-modernist solipsism of the 'interpretation is all' approach and the positivist reliance on 'facts'. These approaches lead in very different directions and cannot be simply dismissed as both are capable of producing interesting findings.
8. Information is taken from the relevant Annual Reports and Accounts of the organisations concerned: for the British Museum this can be found on p. 42, the Natural History, p. 32, the Horniman, p. 61, and the National Maritime, p. 44.
9. With the commodification of the cultural sector (Gray, 2000) such questions have a real significance in terms of developing alternate sources of funds to maintain and develop the institutions within the sector. This became particularly important when entry charges to the British national museums and galleries were introduced by the Conservative governments of the 1970s, left in disuse by the Labour government of 1974–79, implemented by the Conservatives in the 1980s and effectively abolished by the Labour government from 1999 onwards.
10. See Koppell (2005), who differentiates between transparency, liability, controllability, responsibility and responsiveness demands for accountability leading to different forms of accountability mechanism to deal with these.
11. Summed up in Kipling's 'I keep six honest serving men/(They taught me all I knew)/ Their names are What and Why and When/and How and Where and Who' from 'The Elephant's Child' in *Just So Stories*.

12. It should be noted that the trust model is the predominant one in Scotland where 162 out of 210 members (77%) of Museums Galleries Scotland take this form: see Orr, 2008: 310.
13. *Political Studies, Politics, British Journal of Politics and International Relations, Parliamentary Affairs, Public Administration, Policy and Politics, Public Policy and Administration, Local Government Studies and Political Quarterly.*

References

- Alexander V (2003) *Sociology of the Arts*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ambrose T and Paine C (2006) *Museum Basics*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
- Ashworth G, Graham B and Tunbridge J (2007) *Pluralising Pasts: Heritage, Identity and Place in Multicultural Societies*. London: Pluto Press.
- Audit Commission (2005) *Key Lines of Enquiry: Culture and Leisure*. London: Audit Commission. Available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Downloads/KLOECulture.pdf (accessed 8 June 2009).
- Beard M (2004) *The Parthenon: Temple, Cathedral, Mosque, Ruin, Icon*. London: Profile Books.
- Beer V (1994) The Problem and Promise of Museum Goals. in Moore K (ed) *Museum Management*. London: Routledge, 31–40.
- Bennett T (1995) *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory and Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Bevir M and Rhodes R (2003) *Interpreting British Governance*. London: Routledge.
- Carrier D (2006) *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Davies S (2008) Intellectual and Political Landscape: The Instrumentalism Debate. *Cultural Trends* 17(4): 259–65.
- Denscombe M (2010) *Ground Rules for Social Research: Guidelines for Good Practice*. London: Sage/McGraw Hill.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (1999) *Efficiency and Effectiveness of Government-Sponsored Museums and Galleries: Measurement and Improvement: Visitor Information Excellence Study*. London: DCMS. Available at www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/visit.pdf (accessed 8 June 2009).
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2000) *Centres for Social Change. Museums, Galleries and Archives for All: Policy Guidance on Social Inclusion for DCMS Funded and Local Authority Museums, Galleries and Archives in England*. London: DCMS. Available at www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/centers_social_change.pdf (accessed 5 June 2009).
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2006) *Funding Agreement between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) 2006/07–2007/08*. London: DCMS. Available at: www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/FA_MLA0608.pdf (accessed 5 June 2009).
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2009) *CASE: The Culture and Sport Evidence Programme*. London: DCMS. Available at www.culture.gov.uk/case/ (accessed 8 June 2009).
- Falconer P and Blair S (2003) The Governance of Museums: A Study of Admission Charges Policy in the UK. *Public Policy and Administration* 18(2): 71–88.

- Falk J and Dierking L (2000) *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Foucault M (1991) Governmentality. in Burchell G, Gordon C and Miller P (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 87–104.
- Gibson L (2008) In Defence of Instrumentality. *Cultural Trends* 17(4): 247–57.
- Gibson L and Pendlebury J (2009) *Valuing Historic Environments*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Gray C (2000) *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Gray C (2002) Local Government and the Arts. *Local Government Studies* 28(1): 77–90.
- Gray C (2007) Commodification and Instrumentality in Cultural Policy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13: 201–15.
- Gray C (2008) Instrumental Policies: Causes, Consequences, Museums and Galleries. *Cultural Trends* 17(4): 209–22.
- Gray C (2009) Managing Culture: Pitfalls and Prospects. *Public Administration* 87: 574–85.
- Gray C (2010) Analysing Cultural Policy: Incurably Plural or Ontologically Incompatible? *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 16: 215–30.
- Greenberg R, Ferguson B and Nairne S (1996) *Thinking about Exhibitions*. London: Routledge.
- Hay C (2002) *Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Henn M, Weinstein M and Foard N (2006) *A Critical Introduction to Social Research*. London: SAGE.
- Hooper-Greenhill E (1994) *Museums and Their Visitors*. London: Routledge.
- Hooper-Greenhill E (2000) *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Hooper-Greenhill E, Dodd J, Creaser C, Sandell R, Jones C and Woodham A (2007) *Inspiration, Identity, Learning: The Value of Museums Second Study. An Evaluation of the DCMS/DCSF National/Regional Museum Partnership Programme in 2006–2007*. Leicester: Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, University of Leicester. Available at www.le.ac.uk/ms/research/Reports/DCMS2.pdf (accessed 17 December, 2009).
- Kawashima N (1999) The Introduction of Strategic Management to Local Authority Museums in Britain: A Missing Link Between Policy and Organisation Theory. *Policy and Politics* 27: 359–73.
- Koppell J (2005) Pathologies of Accountability: ICANN and the Challenge of “Multiple Accountabilities Disorder”. *Public Administration Review* 65(1): 94–108.
- Lawley I (2003) Local Authority Museums and the Modernizing Government Agenda in England. *Museum and Society* 1(2): 75–86.
- Lawrence G (1993) Remembering Rats, Considering Culture: Perspectives on Museum Evaluation. in Bicknell S and Farmelo G (eds) *Museum Visitor Studies in the 90s*. London: Science Museum, 117–24.
- Macdonald S (1998) Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition: An Introduction to the Politics of Display. in Macdonald S (ed) *The Politics of Display*. London: Routledge, 1–24.
- Macdonald S (2002) *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum*. Oxford: Berg.
- MacLeod S (2006) Civil Disobedience and Political Agitation: The Art Museum as a Site of Protest in the Early Twentieth Century. *Museum and Society* 5(1): 44–57.

- McGuigan J and Gilmore A (2002) The Millennium Dome: Sponsoring, Meaning and Value. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 8: 1–20.
- McLean F (1993) Marketing in Museums: A Contextual Analysis. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 12: 11–27.
- Message K (2006) *New Museums and the Making of Culture*. Oxford: Berg.
- Murray D (1904 [1996]) *Museums: Their History and Their Use, Volume I*. London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press.
- Museums Association (2008) *Code of Ethics*. London: Museums Association. Available at www.museumsassociation.org/asset_arena/text/07codeofethics_2007.pdf (accessed 6 July 2009).
- Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2008) *Economic Impact Methodologies for the Museum, Libraries and Archives Sector: What Works and What Doesn't*. London: Jura Consultants. Available at <http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Economic%20Impact%20Methodologies%20June%202008%20Final%20Version.pdf> (accessed 8 June 2009).
- Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2009) *About Museums*. London: MLA. Available at www.mla.gov.uk/about/work_with/mla/museums (accessed 8 July 2009).
- Newman A (2009) *Theorising the Social Role of Museums and Galleries: Consequences for Policy* (paper presented at De Montfort University, Leicester).
- Newman A and McLean F (1998) Heritage Builds Communities: The Application of Heritage Resources to the Problem of Social Exclusion. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 4(3–4): 143–53.
- Newman A and McLean F (2004) Presumption, Policy and Practice: The Use of Museums and Galleries as Agents of Social Inclusion in Great Britain. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10: 167–81.
- O'Neill M (2002) The Good Enough Visitor. in Sandell R (ed) *Museums, Society and Inequality: Roles, Responsibilities, Resistance*. London: Routledge, 24–40.
- O'Neill M (2006) Essentialism, Adaptation and Justice: Towards a New Epistemology of Museums. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21(2): 95–116.
- O'Neill M (2008) Museums, Professionalism and Democracy. *Cultural Trends* 17(4): 289–307.
- Orr J (2008) Instrumental or Intrinsic? Cultural Policy in Scotland Since Devolution. *Cultural Trends* 17(4): 309–16.
- Packer J (2008) Beyond Learning: Explaining Visitors' Perceptions of the Value and Benefits of Museum Experiences. *Curator* 51(1): 33–54.
- Pryor F (2002) *Seahenge: A Quest for Life and Death in Bronze Age Britain*. London: HarperCollins.
- Pye E (2001) *Caring for the Past: Issues in Conservation for Archaeology and Museums*. London: James & James.
- Re:source (2001) *Renaissance in the Regions: A New Vision for England's Museums*. London: Re:source.
- Ross M (2004) Interpreting the New Museology. *Museum and Society* 2(2): 84–103.
- Sabatier P (2007) *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2nd edn. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Sandell R (2002) Museums, and the Combatting of Social Inequality: Roles, Responsibilities and Resistance. in Sandell R (ed) *Museums, Society, Inequality*. London: Routledge, 3–23.

- Sandell R (2003) Social Inclusion, the Museum and the Dynamics of Sectoral Change. *Museum and Society* 1(1): 45–62.
- Senie H (2003) Reframing Public Art: Audience Use, Interpretation, and Appreciation. in McClellan A (ed) *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*. Oxford: Blackwell, 185–200.
- Smith L (2006) *The Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Sylvester C (2009) *Art Museums: International Relations Where We Least Expect It*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Tlili A (2008) Beyond the Policy Mantra of the Inclusive Museum: Reception of Social Exclusion and Inclusion in Museums and Science Centres. *Cultural Sociology* 2: 123–47.
- Toonen T (2007) Administrative Reform: Analytics. in Peters B and Pierre J (eds) *The Handbook of Public Administration*. London: SAGE, 301–10.
- Vestheim G (1994) Instrumental Cultural Policy in Scandinavian Countries: A Critical Historical Perspective. *European Journal of Cultural Policy* 1: 57–71.
- Watson S, Dodd J, Jones C (2007) *Engage, Learn, Achieve: The Impact of Museum Visits on the Attainment of Secondary Pupils in the East of England 2006–2007*. Leicester: Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, Leicester University. Available at www.le.ac.uk/ms/research/Reports/EOE.pdf (accessed 17 December 2009).
- West C and Smith C (2005) “We are not a Government Poodle”: Museums and Social Inclusion Under New Labour. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 11: 275–88.
- Wilkinson H (2008) Commentary: Conceptualizing Impact: Museums, Government and Value – Irreconcilable Differences? *Cultural Trends* 17(4): 335–9.
-

Clive Gray is Reader in Cultural Policy in the Faculty of Humanities, De Montfort University, Leicester. He is the author of a number of books, chapters and articles on cultural and arts policy, including recent articles in *Public Administration*, *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*, and *Cultural Trends*. He is currently analysing structure and agency in the British museums and galleries sector.