[Museums
Australia]

New South Wales

Museums Australia (NSW)

Chapter Representatives Conference 2010

REGIONAL MUSEUMS IN AN ONLINE FUTURE

Summary of Presentations

July 2010

Contents

1   INTRODUCTION

This year's chapter representatives' conference was devoted to the theme *regional museums in an online future*. As well as getting updates on the work of chapters and related organisations, we wanted to develop strategies to assist regional and community museums move with greater impact into the online environment.

Draft information sheets were distributed to delegates on the following topics.

- *Developing websites with little money* with suggestions, links and sources on internet service providers, web tools, content management systems and social media software. Presenter Ingrid Mason encouraged delegates consider a number of key questions when creating a website. What's its purpose and value? Do you need to do it yourself? How much do you need to know? Who has the skills and knowledge to develop and support particular kinds of websites? Where can you find further information and acquire more skill? What are other museums doing? What free social media tools will help you test the wind?

- *Using social media* highlighted services such as Wikis, Ning, blogs, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube. Presenter Joy Suliman drew attention to workshops presented in the past year by the Powerhouse Museum ThinkSpace in collaboration with the NSW Branch and some chapters on aspects of using social media. She encouraged chapters to check the ThinkSpace site and to contact her directly if they would like to present future workshops.

- *Implementing systems for cataloguing* provided suggestions on system requirements and selection, systems used in Australia, low cost and open source systems, and issues relating to the maintenance and development of systems.

- *Using standards for cataloguing* gave information on standards and related issues.

The Branch will be finalising the sheets through Museums Australia's Publications Committee, which is reviewing the association's online printed and online information resources.

2 CONTEXTS

2.1 Government policy and funding

NSW Executive officer **Paul Bentley** explored the current state of government funding and policy and posed the questions: do we need to change anything and, if so, why and how?

The funding quagmire is a well-used phrase to describe the difficulties of supporting museums in Australia's federated system.

According toe Australian Bureau of Statistics' estimates we have more than 1,184 museums, which earn nearly $1 billion, employ 7,856 people who are paid, attract over 30 million visitors to their buildings, and attract over 63 million to their websites. Most of the money to sustain their operations (65%) is provided by governments. Museums receive more than 10% of total cultural funding from the three tiers of government. Out of a pot of $660 million from governments, the Federal Government provides 31%, the state and territory governments 62% and local government 7%. There are variations to contributions by state and local governments. Summary data exists for government subsidies for museum

operational and capital expenditure. But the extent of investment in digitisation and online delivery, a priority, is less clear.

In this muddy picture, unpaid effort is an important factor. The 23,426 people who are not paid to work in museums, generated a lot of the value. In general terms, volunteers contribute 623 million hours to non-profit Australian institutions (including museums and museum support agencies). This equates to 317,200 full-time equivalent jobs. The economic value of these hours is estimated to be $14.6 billion. The Productivity Commission's recent report, seeking to capitalise on these efforts, makes general recommendations for consideration by the Federal Government.

A study of government funding in the United States by the Institute of Museum and Library Services in 2008 (*Exhibiting Public Value: Government Funding for Museums in the United States)* made several conclusions which may be applicable to Australia. The diversity of museums (in disciplines, attendances, resource needs, and geographic reach) encourages an inconsistent pattern of public support. Different ways of codifying museum grants makes it difficult to track and analyse data. There is no federal-state partnership program aimed at increasing the capacity to the museum sector as a whole. Government support flows through a variety of different agencies and funding mechanisms. There are different perceptions about museums and different fiscal conditions in different jurisdictions. There are uncertainties on the best way of coordinating future options.

Australian and NSW government policies and funding have an impact on museums in NSW. Although most of the money is distributed by arts departments, other funds flow from a wide range of other portfolios relating to social inclusion, regional development, broadband, innovation, research, education, and the economy.

Museums Australia has been working with others nationally to present the needs of the sector to governments. Last year, it organised the meeting *Advancing Common Ground* with kindred organisations. This culminated in the association's submission on national cultural policy. In February this year, with funding from the Australian National Data Service (ANDS), it organised a meeting in Canberra to consider how the museum sector could assist ANDS in making collections more accessible to researchers. The NSW Branch has made contributions and submissions to a number of Federal and State government inquiries over the past few years.

Making things happen is not just dependent on Government funds. As reported in the companion document *Chapter News & Issues,* many NSW museums pursue their goals without the benefit of significant funding. Andrew Mawson's book *The Social Entrepreneur: Making Communities Work* offers inspiration on this front.

2.2 Museums and Galleries NSW

Maisy Stapleton sketched out the achievements of Museums and Galleries NSW (MGNSW) over the past decade. The standards program, which has involved 73 museums in 45 local government areas, has been complemented by a range of other programs supporting touring exhibitions, professional development, research, advocacy, volunteer initiated museum grants, mentorships and fellowships. The regional museum adviser program encourages councils to match MGNSW funding, strengthens communication with local governments and the sector, complement cultural planning objectives, and addresses practical needs.

The review of MGNSW by Peter Watts provides an opportunity to evaluate these programs and set a course for the future. Maisy said among issues for consideration are continued development of a strategy for the sector, closer ties with local government, development of facilities, regional cooperation, sustainability, Aboriginal participation, audience development, care of collections, and strengthening links to the creative industries, communities, and tourism.

2.3 Local government in NSW

Christopher Hudson, Cultural Development Policy Officer at the Local Government Association of NSW and Shires Association of NSW, spoke briefly on the work of the two local council associations and stimulated discussion on ways for museums to become more involved in cultural planning. Although the associations and their staff of 60 operate as one, there is a currently a move for more formal integration.

Christopher urged museums, including paid and volunteer staff, to become more involved in local government planning. New opportunities are flagged in the guidelines *Planning A Sustainable Future,* which is available the Department of Local Government site at http://dlg.nsw.gov.au. The new regulation will be implemented in three groups of councils over the next three years.

> Reforms replace the former Management Plan and Social Plan with an integrated framework. It also includes a new requirement to prepare a long-term Community Strategic Plan and Resourcing Strategy…The framework recognises that communities do not exist in isolation – they are part of a larger natural, social, economic and political environment that influences and, to a large extent, shapes their future direction.

> Neither do council plans exist in isolation – land use and infrastructure planning produces social, environmental and economic outcomes, and vice-versa – they are connected.

> [The] framework encourages councils to draw their various plans together, to understand how they interact and to get the maximum leverage from their efforts by planning holistically for the future.

> It recognises that most communities share similar aspirations: a safe, healthy and pleasant place to live, a sustainable environment, opportunities for social interaction, opportunities for employment, reliable infrastructure, etc. The difference lies in how each community responds to these needs. That is what shapes the character of individual towns and cities.

> The new framework opens the way for councils and their communities to have important discussions about funding priorities, service levels and preserving local identity and to plan in partnership for a more sustainable future.

Discussion, led by Chris, touched on the following issues. Local historical societies find it hard in the past because of a perceived adversarial position in putting forward their needs. They tend to be fearful of rocking the boat. Some want to become more professional, some don't. Training and practical support were needed. Cultural and social policy is not always a cost recovery proposition.

Chris's final message: "Knock on a door and have something to give."

2.4 Royal Australian Historical Society

Mari Metzke, Manager of the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS), acknowledged the close relationship that exists between historical societies and many museums, particularly in the regions. The work of RAHS has not only brought about general improvements in the way research is conducted and the range and quality of history publications, it has strengthened the work of museums.

Mari said there several issues that need closer attention by the two associations. There is a lack of 'shovel-readiness' by many members in taking advantage of government programs. Local government red tape frequently needs to be unravelled to get results: there must be a better way. She detects that volunteer hours are declining, possible due to the ageing of volunteers and the competing needs from farms, businesses and families. Concerted action is needed to support historical societies who experience natural disasters and concerted action is needed to assist local communities to take advantage of the internet and online developments.

2.5 State Records NSW

Christine Yeats, Manager Public Access at State Records NSW, spoke about the relationship of the State's principal records management and archival agency to regional collections.

State Records NSW has overall responsibility for State archives created by government agencies, regardless of format or custody arrangements. This includes managing the transfer process, and ensuring the long-term preservation, management and accessibility of all State archives. For the vast majority of agencies, transfer to State Records' custody will be the most appropriate strategy, but a small number of agencies (such as universities, large cultural institutions and some local councils) may opt for a 'distributed management' model. By agreement with State Records, some agencies with the capacity to operate an archival program that meets State Records' requirements may seek to retain some or all of their archives 'in-house'.

State archives are the small proportion of State records that have been authorised for retention as part of the State archives collection. They document the rights and entitlements of citizens. They record the actions of government. And they form an essential part of the State's cultural heritage, as covered by the provisions of the *State Records Act 1998.*

Government departments and agencies, through their records management staff, are generally responsible for ensuring the preservation and proper management in compliance with the Act. The aim is to ensure that by the time that the records cease to be in regular official use, they are still in a reasonable state of preservation, and able to be transferred to the control of State Records to be managed as State archives.

State Records can provide advice and guidance on all major aspects of records and archives management, including management of current and active records, appraisal and disposal, digital recordkeeping, documentation, and preservation and copying. It can also provide information to assist communities and groups to care for their own archival collections. For more information, see http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping/recordkeeping and the Archives Outside Blog http://archivesoutside.records.nsw.gov.au/. Museums Australia NSW

Branch has an RSS feed from Archives Outside on its group page at maNexus (http://manexus.ning.com).

State Records is keen for further collaboration with the libraries, archives and museums in order to'breathe new life into documents and provide additional contexts for objects. It has been collaborating with the Collections Australia Network on making records available on the network and promoting its services through CAN blogs and YouTube.

2.6 Regional and Public Galleries Association NSW

Michael Rolfe, President of Regional and Public Galleries Association of NSW, traced the link between regional galleries and local governments over the past one hundred years and offered his thoughts on future directions.

In 2010, local government galleries are a significant component of the overall level of community focused, and locally delivered, cultural activity. They represent a total annual operating expenditure in excess of $20 million. They employ over 100 full time staff and are responsible for approximately 43,000 artworks in their collections. They attract 1.5 million visits a year.

For a number of years, in a previous guise as Regional Galleries Association NSW in partnership with Museums Australia (NSW), it provided a range of support services and professional development activities for members from throughout the state. The associations continue to work together.

In 1996, Justin MacDonnell was commissioned to review regional arts development in New South Wales for the NSW Ministry for the Arts (now Arts NSW). His review led to changes to the then Arts Council of NSW which became Regional Arts NSW with a structure of RADO positions and regional arts boards. The MacDonnell report was also one of the factors leading to the creation of MGNSW through an allocation of funding withdrawn from Museums Australia (NSW) and RPGNSW.

Michael recalled the united, if not unequivocal, level of support among members of both associations for this change at the time, as we looked forward to efficiencies and gains that would provide a higher level of professional support and more effective advocacy than had been the case.

The recent review of Museums and Galleries NSW by Peter Watts provides an opportunity reassess and shape future directions. RPGNSW members believe that changes are necessary to improve service and support, particularly in the regions. The differences between museums and galleries, he said, require different kinds of strategies and support. We need to remain "joined at the heart but not at the head."

2.7 Collections Australia Network

CAN National Project Manager, **Ingrid Mason**, gave an update on the Collections Australia Network.

CAN is a social and technical platform supporting Australian collecting organisations in collection management and the provision of public access to collections onsite and online. It offers information resources to support museum practice, online access to collecting organisations and collections, free web pages to describe and promote collecting

organisations, and tools for promoting museum news, events, and jobs. The CAN e-lists also facilitate discussion and debate on professional issues. Scial media tolls such the CAN Outreach blog, YouTube, Twitter and Slideshare are used to complement onsite training programs.

CAN has a broad community of collecting organisations, practitioners and volunteers to support and has designed its services to marry with the need and capacity of those organisations and individuals it works with.

Museums with well developed collection management practices use CAN services to augment their operations. They can attend a training session. They can put some collection information online via the CAN database. They can provide a link to a collection online for search via CAN. They can use one of the CAN e-lists. They can use new technologies and interact online via social media.

Volunteer run and/or small one-person museums with fledgling collection management practices use CAN services to help build their operations. They can get a better understanding of description practices, learn more about collection systems, test the processes of putting collection information online and experiment with new technologies and social media. They can use CAN e-lists and find peers and expertise in their locality.

CAN has been working with the National Library of Australia to contribute CAN partner data to People Australia, one of the components of Trove (htt://trove.nla.gov.au). For example if you put 'riverina' the results now include the Museum of the Riverina in the People and Organisations section of the Trove page.

CAN looks for opportunities to assist all practitioners in their work. Ingrid sees merit in progressing the online agenda in small steps, whether these are basic steps (such as help to describe five objects and put them up online) or technically sophisticated solutions (such as liaison to develop an OpenSearch API and provide link to enable another collection to be searched via CAN).

Ingrid said future collaboration between CAN and Museums Australia could include sharing and leveraging development and outreach activities, maintaining low barriers to getting experience in describing museum collection items and putting collections online, enabling connections to be made into the wider collecting sector for collaboration and peer support, and establishing local communities of practice.

Post-conference note: The Cultural Ministers' Council is currently deliberating on the review of CAN, undertaken in 2009. Museums Australia has been advocating its continuation at federal and state levels. The NSW Minister for the Arts has assured the branch that a decision will be made by the Cultural Ministers Council later in the year. The Powerhouse Museum is in dialogue with the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts about arrangements for maintaining the service.

3 THE WORK OF NSW MUSEUMS

Moving into an online future involves managing and presenting information resources within museums, connecting systems to other museums and collaborating with other types of organisations. At the chapter representatives' meeting, we invited a few colleagues to speak to us about their experiences in making their collections available to a wider public.

3.1 Sydney University museums

Maree Clutterbuck gave an overview of the work by Sydney University to develop a more integrated approach to managing cataloguing records in its 3 public museums and 50 smaller department museums (http://www.usyd.edu.au/museums/. The museums, until recently, used a range of databases including MS Access and dBase1V. In 2006, KE Emu was purchased. In the lead up to this the museums began consolidating data and unifying associated practices. This preparation involved looking at minimum level database records, and either splitting or combining fields to match new standard fields in EMu. The online catalogue will be launched on the museum website in July 2010.

In developing cataloguing policies, there has been a need to address concerns within the university about putting the catalogue online. The essential purpose of many of the collections is to serve University staff and students rather than the general public.

Maree's advice in undertaking projects of this kind? Be clear about what you want to achieve. Define your audience. Allow sufficient time. And do it in small steps.

In a discussion on this session, Andrew Simpson highlighted the value, in university settings, of using academic staff to building narratives around records and objects

3.2 Powerhouse Museum

The Powerhouse Museum (http://www.powerhousemuseum.com) is a State museum with an international reputation for innovative use of technology. Its catalogue is a richly layered presentation of catalogue records and images of museum objects, complemented with links to user tags, related subjects, similar objects, auto-generated tags and sources such as Wikipedia, Worldcat records and the Library of Congress Authority File.

Geoff Barker, who has been working on a total asset management project experimenting with options for improving the quality of data and enhancing the online experience, provided an outline of recent work.

TAM is an externally funded project which works with the Museum's collections and objects whose current storage, age, and state of documentation is deemed to expose them to risk. From its inception this project has recognised that significance and digitisation were as important for the ongoing management of these objects as the cataloguing and rehousing collections.

As upgraded documentation in the form of significance, themes and images is generated it is harvested automatically from the Museum's KE EMu data into its online database. This along with improved object description and part numbering has vastly increased the scope for its online search ability and the automatic generation of tags and links

In addition the themes generated have allowed objects to be managed in a multitude of themes http://www.tinyurl.com.au/aoh or collections http://www.tinyurl.com.au/aoi as well as ensuring end users can browse through high quality data. The project based nature of the TAM project has also highlighted the different management systems currently at work within the museum (archives, image services, curatorial and registration all use their own models to manage objects) and how the TAM model could perhaps lead to the breaking down of some of the existing walls with the institution.

Other notable online strategies by the museum include use of Flickr to publish images and uploading content to other government projects—such as About New South Wales (about. nsw.gov.au/). Its Australian Dress Register (www.powerhousemuseum.com/dressregister/) is expected to be launched as a public site this year. The museum's partnerships on the Sydney Sidetracks website (www.abc.net.au/innovation/sidetracks/) and the Dictionary of Sydney (www.dictionaryofsydney. org/) are indications of wider collaboration.

3.3 Historic Houses Trust

Matthew Stephens, the Reference Librarian at the Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection described developments in managing information at the Historic Houses Trust (http://www.hht.net.au/), which has museum, library and archival resources.

The Trust is one of the largest state museums in Australia and is entrusted with the care of key historic buildings and sites in New South Wales. It manages 14 diverse sites and properties, including the Museum of Sydney, Government House, Justice & Police Museum and Sydney Mint, Vaucluse House, Elizabeth Farm, Rouse Hill House & Farm, Rose Seidler House, to name but a few. It has extensive collections in each of its properties as well as at the Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection at the Mint. Not only are each of the buildings part of the collection, the bricks, pieces of stone, windows, doors, nails, flecks of paint, archaeological deposits which form the buildings, are part of the collection. And the knowledge and expertise of the Trust's staff form part of our system.

The Trust is playing catch-up in putting collections online. Funding is tight and getting tighter. Collaboration with other organisations is an important element of our strategy. Setting priorities is another. One of the priorities is putting its putting its collections online using the Vernon content management system.

Matthew focussed his presentation on collections that have already been made available by the Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, currently the only online access available.

The library specialises in the history of house and garden design and interior furnishing in New South Wales. It can be described as a hybrid of museum and library. Its staff of curators and librarians reflect this mix. It uses the library OptimusPrime FIRST integrated library system to catalogue its holdings and maker it available on the Trust's website. The library has added many of these holdings to the national bibliography database managed as part of Libraries Australia, particularly unique trade catalogue material. The inclusion of these cataloguing records in WorldCat has generated enquiries nationally and internationally because WorldCat records are now picked up in Google and Google Books searches.

The library has also developed two additional add-on databases with the Optimus system.

The Colonial Plants Database lists over 11,000 plants compiled from Botanic Gardens records, nursery catalogues and manuscript plant lists created by early colonists. At a workshop hosted by Museums Australia and the Australian National Data Service (or ANDS) in February, it was suggested that HHT's Colonial Plants Database was a prime candidate to be added to the ANDS portal. Sometimes you can be taken by surprise by unexpected offers of collaboration and this is certainly something we will pursue in the future.

The Pictures Collection Database currently has over 1,000 images of paintings, watercolours and photographs relating to the Trust's properties, as well as other images of houses,

interiors and gardens in the library's collection. It also contains a growing number of images from the forensic photography archive at the Justice and Police Museum, which has an estimated 130,000 images created by the New South Wales Police between 1910 and 1960. This work has generated some interesting work on thesaurus terms. By tagging crime scene photos with the term 'domestic interiors' we now have access to a resource for a previously unimagined purpose. The Pictures Collection is regularly harvested by Pictures Australia (now available through Trove) and we have found a surprising number of people accessing what is a relatively small number of images. Another benefit of making material available through Trove is that our images are now appearing alongside related publications, including early newspapers and, no doubt, other formats as they come online.

To complement work on full online access to HHT's collections database, the library has also developed the Museums Collections Catalogue, a database of photographs and descriptions of domestic furnishings from the 19th century to the present day.

For a relatively small, complicated and decentralised organisation, the library has made a good start in getting some of the Trust's collections online but clearly have some way to go. It is salient to observe that it has managed to get its published material out to the world via Libraries Australia, its images likewise through Picture Australia. It has aspirations to provide similar access to its archival material through Trove. How people will engage with this federated access and how useful they find it is yet to be determined. But meanwhile, our object collections remain a challenge and continue to be the least accessible of our collections online.

The National Library's collective approach to getting content online has certainly given a visibility to the HHT library and image collections that has benefited HHT immensely.

In finishing off, Matthew stressed that online collaboration for the Caroline Simpson Library is not just about creating and managing databases and then allowing them to be harvested and distributed by the big players such as the National Library. Collaboration can also be a relatively simple affair where information you have managed to get online can be linked to by other organisations in meaningful ways. For example, the NSW Architects Registration Board has recently launched a new website architectureinsights.com.au. HHT has been asked to contribute content and is currently discussing how best do this in the most meaningful and resource-efficient way.

Never underestimate the current hunger for content. Package it in the right way and it is very likely that someone out there will value it. They may well want to collaborate with you in making it more accessible.

3.4 Hurstville Library, Museum and Gallery

Rebekah Schulz, Manager of Hurstville City Library Museum and Gallery, talked about the work of integrating services in a local council setting. Until recently, the library and museum functioned as separate services. They now have one service working in three locations.

Organisational changes have led to a new structure of four units: Technology and Online Services; Collection Services, Historical & Cultural Services and Customer Service & Outreach. The Technology and Online unit consists of a coordinator, an online services facilitator, professional development facilitator, IT and Intranet facilitator, a technology trainee and system librarian.

The website has been redeveloped. This involved looking at the marketplace and the habits of online visitors to ensure the site and related services were designed to meet defined needs. What topics were searched? How long did they stay on the site? How did they navigate the site to reach their goal? Where did they come from? What were the popular services? How many people visited? Google Analytics was used to monitor and evaluate website usage.

The integrated library and museum is now promoted at http://www.hurstville.nsw.gov.au/lmg. The catalogues are a prominent feature of the site. Visits to the site are increasing. Social media tools are employed to engage the people and solicit feedback. See, for example, http://hurstvillelmg.blogspot.com.

The success of these changes and the new dynamic operating is reflected in the following comment in a student's blog at http://cisforcecil.blogspot.com/2010/01/looking-back-on-good-timesand-looking.html:

> "Hurstville Library, where i used to go to study alone because I couldnt concentrate at home.but it soon turned out to be the place where I got to know people whom i wouldnt have got to otherwise, nd a place where we could relax, hang out nd study with friends at the same time. And I'll always remember the library as the place that made studyin for the HSC a lot more bearable, nd as a place where everybody helped each other through the biggest thing in our lives so far.nd a place where we had so much fun."

3.5 Newcastle City Council

Museums Australian National Secretary and champion of Newcastle museums, Bill Storer, talked about the Newcastle Cultural Collections database, a collaboration of Newcastle Regional Library, Newcastle Region Gallery and Newcastle Museum at http://collections.ncc.nsw.gov.au/keemu/pages/nrm/index.htm.

At the turn of the century, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle Regional Library and Newcastle Regional Museum had six different systems for managing their various collections. The Library had a local studies photo database to complement its integrated library system, plus two other systems for different collections. The Museum used RBase. The difficulties of supporting different databases within Newcastle City Council led to a proposal in 2002 for an integrated system.

Initial reluctance by some of the stakeholders eventually led to an agreement in 2004 to use KE-Emu as an integrated system for local history, gallery and museum material under the project leadership of Newcastle Regional Museum.

When the catalogue went live in 2005, the enthusiasm of the previous year gave way to concerns about copyright, the loss of income from image reproduction, and the design of the website discovery interface.

These concerns have now been resolved. Support by the library, gallery, museum and IT departments of the Newcastle City Council are strong. There is better awareness of each collection. Website interest, loans and copying have increased. Other areas of Newcastle City Council are looking at the system for a tree database. The library is leading a joint narratives project and other development. All stakeholders have a sense of ownership as they work through future development issues.

4 FUTURE STRATEGIES

To simulate thinking on future work, **Paul Bentley** began by posing questions. What's the nature of the universe that museums now occupy? What immediate and future steps does Museums Australia need to take with others to equip the sector for the online future? How do we transform corner stores into food chains? What special help is needed for small museums?

4.1 Issues

Strategic considerations include the following issues:

- The changing digital universe including the increased amount of digital information being created and used, the widespread use of Google and other search engines as a first-step search tool, proliferation of social media channels, development of mobile technology and steps towards the Semantic Web.

- Responses by museums in managing real objects and digital objects, developing systems and practices to support online searching, using cloud computing and social media tools to improve access and to aggregate data.

- Cross-sectoral drivers for online aggregation of cataloguing metadata in museum, library and archive repositories, the relative importance of structured and unstructured data, controlled and uncontrolled vocabularies to describe subjects and topics, utilise the work on exhibitions when developing online experiences and managing data, Widespread interest about people and events in the past, perennial interest in ancestors is an important driver for stronger collaboration by historical societies, museums, archives and libraries, professional education and training.

- Financial questions. How much money and unpaid effort do we have? What do we spend our money and time on now? How do pay for what we do? Who's responsible for what and why?

In his recent research, Paul said he had ringed the words of five commentators for further consideration. If they are valid in a local context what do we do to address the issues they raise?

Kenneth Hamma (formerly Executive Director, Digital Policy and Initiatives, Getty Trust), in *Museums, Cataloguing & Content Infrastructure* (Academic Commons, 16 December 2007) http://www.academiccommons.org/commons/interview/ken-hamma:

 "Convergence happens at the network level. Metadata is the largest issue to be addressed, but there are levels of complexity within the metadata debate."

 "What the community needs is a more systematic approach. One of the problems is that there isn't a lot of good museum data out there to be aggregated. So talking about what it would be like to have aggregated repositories other than those that are hugely expensive and highly managed...it's unlikely to happen anytime soon. There's not enough there to be aggregate with good results."

 "You have to be standards compliant, you have to have thesauri…

 "Dublin Core, as we've learned, is a bit too generic…"

"Museums could have the benefits of good cataloguing and collection management at a level greater than most currently enjoy and at a cost less than probably any individual currently supports."

"it is really a question of attitude in institutions and a willingness to see opportunities. Almost never believe, 'we haven't got the money to do it'. In scholarly communication there are millions of dollars going into print publications that have a print run of several hundred, for heaven's sake. You just need to take money out of that system and put it into a much more efficient online publication or collection access system."

"It would really be helpful if there were, for example, a museum association in [the United States] that had been thoughtfully bringing these issues to the attention of the museum community, but that hasn't happened for the last twenty years."

David Bearman and Jennifer Trant, in *Issues in Structuring Knowledge and Services for Universal Access to Online Science and Culture* (Paper presented at Virtual Museums and Public Understanding of Science and Culture, Stockholm, Sweden, 2002):

Museums and libraries, they said, still needed to develop methods for constructing knowledge models that "are sufficiently forgiving to permit useful aggregation of content, structured by a number of disciplines, yet sufficiently architecturally sound to enable useful computing across resource domains….

"In addition to numerous discipline-based knowledge structures (biological taxonomies, thesauri of artistic terminology, etc.), museums have created semantic models of the information they manage, such as the Categories for Description of Works of Art (CDWA) which focus on the relations in the life-cycle of collected objects from a scholarly perspective, SPECTRUM which focuses on the museum object and museum business processes, and the CIDOC-CRM which emphasises the historical contextualization of objects. In a networked environment, the value of these knowledge models will be determined more by their ability to connect to other knowledge representations by other groups, than by their ability to represent all subtle aspects of terms used for indexing aspects of cultural heritage."

The basic principles of information engineering, they said, must be respected from the outset in the construction of cultural information utilities, not the least because cultural knowledge bases will be built up over many years or decades.

"The promise of the web is to virtually unite and re-unite digital objects in contextual information spaces. However, our current web practices stand squarely in the way of achieving those goals. Flash-built, exhibition-focused web features that present the equivalent of a closed CD-ROM on the web, may have a sound pedagogical and communications goals. But as they are now implemented, the digital objects in these expensive and labour-intensive resources are rarely reusable, and rarely locatable outside their local navigation. They stand in the face of the developing perspectives of museums as sources of information for society…What is critical is that we begin to work together to surface the true impediments local practice has on collective knowledge construction."

Martha Anderson, in *Evolving a Network of Networks: The Experience of Partnerships in the National Digital Information Infrastructure Program*, (International Journal of Digital Curation. v3, no 10, 2008), commented on the difficulties of collaboration experienced in the US Digital Preservation Program. Relationship between public and private enterprises are not always

interoperable. Even within the same domain, there are barriers to collaboration. Although partners share a common interest, their work in diverse communities is not necessarily conducive to thinking and working as a larger network. Interoperability challenges become greater as user communities broaden their interest. Metadata in standardised formats very often represent an institutional context that is not easily transferable to a larger context. At the moment, the greatest common ground for preservation processes, tools and standards lies at the bit level. Long term preservation is data-centric not system-centric. A single tool may not provide complete coverage and extraction of useful information.

Thomson Reuters' OpenCalais leader, Tom Tague, at the 2010 VALA Conference in Melbourne, drew attention to the challenges of moving from a Web 2.0 environment to a Web 3.0 environment. The web is now a big mess. We need to overhaul the human knowledge system. The new form of democracy brings cacophony, many voices, many truths, noise in an echo chamber. This makes it harder to find what we are looking for. Web 3.0 will arrive when we've cleaned up Web 2.0. The web may be a disaster but structure is emerging. Mega-scale interoperability is on the horizon. We're getting close to the "iPod moment." There will be a Semantic Web and it will be fantastic. But, in its current state, it is struggling to catalogue new content types, to reconcile consistently tagged content, to offer federated search against diverse content. It needs to address ambiguity, automate tagged content in a consistent way, detect connections, provide contexts, deliver insights, and chunk content so it can be mashed-up in new ways. In this universe, the aggregated metadata of libraries and other types of collections will be extremely valuable.

4.2 Research and development

What research and development activities should we note?

- *National cultural policy*. How do museums get a piece of the pie from broader government cultural policy funding? In 2009, the Federal Minister for the Arts Peter Garrett called for comment on the elements of a proposed national cultural policy. Submissions by museums Australia and others are available at http://nationalculturalpolicy.com.au/

- *Australian National Data Service* (http://ands.org.au). How do museums link up with research and higher education agendas? In 2010, Museums Australia in partnership with other museum bodies, has made submission for major funding to complete a metadata project relating to the museum sector.

- *Australian national curriculum (*http://www.acara.edu.au/). How do museums at national and local levels package themselves to become vital resources in the K-12 marketplace?

- National and State Libraries Australasia's Community Created Content Project (http://www.nsla.org.au/projects/rls/community-created-content) is developing a distributed set of tools and operational frameworks and spaces where people and communities can create, tag and protect digital content and share it.

- Museums Australia formed a digital strategies committee in 2009. After focusing on the submission to the Australia National Data Service in the first half of 2010, the committee will begin work on developing strategies to advance other aspects of working online.

- Free and open source web content management and cataloguing systems create a new dynamic in the landscape.

- OCLC Online Computer Library Center (http://www.oclc.org) is undertaking a number of research activities, including Museum Collection Sharing Program, Museum Data Exchange Project's tools to support data sharing in the art museum community; and

Sharing and Aggregating Social Metadata. Networking Names Advisory Group, Virtual International Authority File (VIAF), and Worldcat.

DISCUSSION AND FURTHER ACTION

Advancing the interests of regional and community museums in an online future, Paul said, may be akin to dealing with climate change. It we hadn't polluted the planet in the first place, there would be no need to clean it up. If museums were to take more concerted steps to create clean or consistent metadata, it will make it easier to aggregate and easier to search the data in the future. Wider adoption of standards and cleaning up inconsistent data will need to take into account the diverse nature of the museum sector, its heavy reliance on volunteer institutions and workers, its dependence on what other sectors are doing and the diverse nature of people who use museum

Following discussion at the conference, the NSW Branch is planning the following action:

(1) clarifying with Arts NSW its plans for publication of the MGNSW report and future museum strategies;
(2) undertaking a survey of information and communications technology needs in NSW regional and community museums;
(3) consulting kindred bodies about possible involvement in the survey;
(4) developing printed and online information sheets.

Summary prepared by Paul Bentley
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