Uncharted Territory: A Review of the Literature on Professional Competencies for Socially Engaged Practice in Museums

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ABSTRACT

Although both the literature and expectations of social engagement in the museum field have grown significantly over the past two decades, there appears to be relatively little attention to the development of new competencies and work environments to support this emerging area of practice. By examining the ways in which the museum literature addresses competencies and conditions and by considering the observations regarding methods used to undertake new and more inclusive activities, this review highlights the state of current scholarship on this topic, along with the complex tensions that influence professional transitions to what may be regarded as challenging or controversial practices, the obstacles that professionals face in introducing new approaches to work, and resulting lines of future enquiry.

INTRODUCTION

This literature review explores the extent to which the "uncharted territory" (Tlili, 2008, p.130) of skills, knowledge and workplace conditions needed by museum professionals to support more socially engaged practice[1] has been considered in the museum studies literature, with particular attention to the capacity of museum professionals to animate positive social change. Since the 1980s, considerable attention has been focused on an evolving understanding of the museum's multi-faceted social roles. Initially, interest in social engagement related to ways in which museums could more appropriately represent diverse, previously invisible or oppressed peoples and perspectives in their collections, epistemology, and exhibitions. Over time, discomfort with the museum's authoritative position over other peoples' heritage added a further layer of attention to more democratic exhibition and programming practices aimed at making the museum a more equitable and collaborative space for diverse communities. At the same time, demands for greater accountability and growing interest across society in civic engagement raised awareness of the museum's capacity – and obligation – to play more socially responsible roles. The theme of social responsibility has more recently expanded to consider the museum's role as an agent of social change. As the influential scholar Richard Sandell (2002) suggests, "museums can impact positively on the lives of disadvantaged or marginalized individuals, act as a catalyst of social regeneration and as a vehicle for empowerment with specific communities and also contribute towards the creation of more equitable societies" (p. 4).

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[1] While museums are inherently social in all aspects of their work, 'socially engaged practice' is used throughout this review to describe those activities that are intentionally undertaken to actively involve communities in the work of the museum. 'Social agency' is a closely related concept that goes beyond social engagement to actively effect some form of positive change.

This emerging role is one that does not sit comfortably with all museums since it involves a significant shift from more "discretely cultural" (Sandell, 2002, p.3) expository, celebratory, reflective or scholarly relationships with communities. The notion of the museum as a neutral space in which universal or even relative truths could be explored has been questioned by many (for example Macdonald & Fyfe, 1996; Tlili, 2008) but fewer authors have considered the implications of a role as an advocate for social change (Sandell, 1998, 2002, 2005). And even fewer have reflected, and not at great length, on the specialized skills, knowledge and work conditions that museum professionals need to support social engagement and agency in a positive and sustained manner.

As the conception of the museum as a socially engaged institution evolves in response to both internal and external expectations, the skills, knowledge, attitudes and work of staff, including those involved in management and governance, must also change to embrace competencies that are, at times, at odds with traditional approaches to museum work. However, although both the theoretical and practical literatures have grown significantly over the past two decades, at this point there appears to be relatively little attention, beyond passing references, to the development of new competencies and work environments to support this emerging area of practice. By examining the ways in which the museum literature addresses competencies and conditions and by considering the observations regarding methods used to undertake new and more inclusive activities, this review highlights the state of current scholarship on this topic, along with the complex tensions that influence professional transitions to what may be regarded as challenging or controversial practices, the obstacles that professionals face in introducing new approaches to work, and some resulting lines for future enquiry.

It is important to note that, while there is general recognition across the sector that museums are social institutions that exist for the benefit of society[2] and that they must be inclusive in the ways they serve diverse communities, there is less consensus on the ways in which museums can and should fulfill that role. And given the diversity of museum types, purposes, epistemologies, resources, and community affiliations, a common definition of nature of social engagement – and the professional practices that support it – may be unlikely and perhaps undesirable. It is useful to envision socially engaged museums as positioned somewhere along a continuum of increasingly complex social purposes. Such a continuum begins with the notion of museums dedicated to physical and intellectual accessibility and moves on to increasingly engaged and inclusive relationships that actively involve communities, share authority, and provide creative spaces for meaningful learning and interaction. At the far end of the continuum is the evolving concept of museums as active agents of social change, dedicated to interventions that make a positive difference in the quality of peoples' lives. As on any continuum, the boundaries between groupings are permeable and it is certainly

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[2] The Canadian Museums Association's definition of museums states that "museums are institutions created in the public interest" (http://www.museums.ca/en/info_resources/reports_guidelines/museum_definition//index.php); the International Council of Museums stresses that "A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society" (http://icom.museum/definition.html); and the "Summary of Guiding Principles and National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries" (June 2008) states that "the museum is used, supported and valued by diverse communities as a worthwhile place to express, discover and share significant stories, ideas and objects. (http://www.mavic.asn.au/assets/National_Stds_Summary_June_2008.pdf)

conceivable that the position of a museum on the continuum would be changeable, depending upon both the aspects of institutional activity that are being measured and the nature of current and future exhibitions, programs and relationships.

Keeping such a continuum in mind is helpful in a review of literature, as it brings some order to the diverse language and ways in which various forms of socially engaged practice are discussed. For the purposes of this review, literatures that explore the knowledge, skills and work conditions involved in *intentional* actions to support inclusion and social change will be the primary focus, although it is often difficult to differentiate these from the broader discussion of community engagement that positions the museum as welcoming but relatively passive. While this literature review has important implications for professional education curriculum and programming, a complementary discussion of how current academic and professional programs are responding to this emerging area of practice is outside the scope of this study.

This study begins with a discussion of literatures of socially engaged museum practice, along with notes on research methods and limitations. With this as context, a more detailed analysis of the references in the literature to the skills, knowledge, attitude and work associated with such initiatives is provided. In the synthesis section, reflections on patterns in the current discourse, gaps in the field's articulation of competencies, and future directions and lines of enquiry are considered.

RESEARCH METHODS AND SOURCES

The literature of the museum field has expanded and matured significantly in the past twenty years, helping to legitimize museum studies as a scholarly and professional discipline. A growing number of graduate academic programs generate theoretical and scholarly writing and also produce young professionals who apply their disciplinary knowledge in workplace settings. A range of publishing houses including Routledge, Blackwells, Leftcoast Press, and AltaMira Press specialize in museum titles that are widely available to the museum profession. The American Association of Museums Bookstore, for example, offers 443[3] titles relating to specialized areas of museum practice. Several long-standing peer-reviewed journals such as *CURATOR, Museum Management and Curatorship, Museum Anthropology* and *Museum International*, have been joined by a range new titles that demonstrate the increasing specialization of museum practice, for example: *Museum and Society, Museum History Journal, Heritage Management, Journal of Museum Education, Museums and Social Issues*. These complement an extensive range of professional print and online journals and reports that represent the perspectives of diverse professional associations and government agencies that support cultural heritage. While many of these are from the developed world, a growing number of titles, particularly in journals and anthologies, are written by museum professionals and members of source

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[3] Based on a count of titles for sale in 21 specialized categories relating to areas of professional practice or interest, undertaken on June 21, 2008. The largest single list of titles appeared under Education (49), followed by Collections Stewardship (39). Some books in the governance, marketing and legal areas are drawn from the more generic literature of the not-for-profit world.

communities[4] in developing nations. These contribute new voices and perspectives to a largely western discourse. Literatures from other disciplines also include reflections on related aspects of museum practice, including such fields as sociology, education, anthropology, visitor and audience studies, tourism, cultural studies, citizenship studies and native studies.

As the changing social roles of the museum impact many aspects of professional practice, reflections on social engagement crosscut contemporary museum discourse. Literature that explores the history, philosophy and theory of museums traces post-modern critiques of the museum's long standing modernist ideals (Bennett, 2004; Genoways, 2006; Genoways & Andrei, 2008; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). Governance literature focuses on the fit of mission and institutional structure with the needs of society (Skramstad, 1999; Weil, 2002). Management literature is concerned with accountability and social responsibility (Sandell & Janes, 2007). Marketing literature is concerned with creating and promoting relevant museum 'products' (McLean, 1997). The complex literature of collections development and stewardship focuses on such issues as approaches to ownership, access, care and handling, and information acquisition and management that respect diverse source communities (Clavir, 2002; Pearce, 1999). Curatorial literature is preoccupied with representation, oppression, shared authority, the decentering of curatorial practice, and co-generation of knowledge (Ames, 1992; Becker; Dufour, 2002; Heumann Gurian, 1999; Korom, 1999; Kreps, 2003). Exhibition literature considers voice, perspective and appropriate display (Dubin, 1999; McLean, 1999). And the relatively large literature on museum education and experience design focuses on meaning-making, inclusion, and access (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). Even the literature of museum architecture concerns itself with the creation of welcoming, appropriate spaces for intercultural communications (Heumann Gurian, 2006).

With such a diverse literature at hand, a review of current thinking about the knowledge and skills associated with social engagement and agency presents a challenge. To narrow and focus on relevant sources that address intentional social engagement and agency, a series of searches were undertaken that has been helpful in isolating several useful segments of the literature. Searches of online databases, including WorldCat, JStor, Sage (Education), and Google Scholar, using the following search terms, revealed hundreds of references that required assessment to determine if their content was relevant, current, accessible and authoritative: *Museum purpose; Museum + 'social agency'; + 'social change'; + 'social responsibility'; + 'social engagement'; + 'civic responsibility'; + 'professional' 'training' 'education'; + 'social capital.'* As well, reviews of bibliographies of publications along with surveys of the indices of professional journals revealed additional relevant publications. The latter searches complemented the online searches and had the additional benefit of being situated within an already evaluated literature.

Coverage in this study was defined through a process of review and selection to identify references in English that related directly to the museum sector, were published in the academic or professional literature, dealt with theoretical and/or practical approaches to socially-engaged practice, and had been written since 1990. Using these criteria, 274 journal articles, monographs, anthologies, and theses were identified as

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[4] The term 'source communities' is used with increasing frequency to denote those minority communities whose artifacts and stories have been presented in museums, with or without their collaboration.

broadly relevant. Omitted in this selection were book and exhibition reviews, promotional pieces from museums, and other pieces that were highly technical or collections oriented. A more detailed review of these materials, undertaken through reviews of the abstract or the text and sorted by keywords within an Endnote program, provided a useful typology of contemporary museum-focused writing that deals with social engagement and, in some cases, with associated knowledge and skill requirements. Since many works deal with multiple topics, the total numbers in the categories listed below exceed 274:

Category	Number of references	Comments
Theory and/or philosophical reflections on the museum's social role and purpose	80	This literature deals with the roles of the museum, addressing history, accountability, epistemologies, power relations
Theory and/or philosophical reflections on the specific obligation of museums to engage with communities to build better, more inclusive and active relationships with community	91	This literature looks at the ways in which museums serve, engage with, attract, represent and are increasingly welcoming to and inclusive of diverse communities. It can include calls for social agency although not as a primary theme.
Theory and/or philosophical reflections on the specific obligation of museums to act as an agent of social change	52	This literature makes an explicit call for museum principles and practices that are of intentional benefit to communities, ranging from therapeutic purposes, political advocacy, social justice, and heightened public acceptance of oppressed groups
Empirical investigations, focussed on the museum's social purpose and/or community relationships	34	This literature presents research findings that deal with evidence of a beneficial relationship between museums and communities; program evaluations and qualitative surveys tend to be the primary research methods.
Empirical investigations primarily focussed on social agency in museums	18	This literature presents research findings that deal with evidence of impact on intentional interventions to effect social change.
Project-focussed studies of museums that engage with communities to for expository or celebratory purposes	48	Many authors use a case study method to describe innovative initiatives that engage their museum in a wide range of new relationships with community. While these resources are project focused, they do not necessarily utilize a case style of presentation.
Project-focused studies of museums that actively engage with communities to achieve social change	23	Many authors use a case study method to describe innovative initiative that are intended to effect social change
References that provide a substantial focus on professional competencies for social engagement, although with the exception of Tlili's study of the reception of social inclusion policy by museum staff, non of these are exclusively devoted to professional competencies (Anderson, 2004; Kelly *et al.*, 2006; C. F. Kreps, 2008; Peers & Brown, 2003b; Sandell, 2002; Tlili, 2008)	6	The literature of museum professional education is not well developed and only this small selection was located. Observations and recommendations relating to museum professional education are also noted in a range of the other literatures.

This typology was useful in narrowing and focussing this literature review to look specifically at materials that reference the ways in which social inclusion and social agency competencies are addressed. At the same time it illustrated that, in the absence of a well-developed literature that specifically addresses professional competencies and work conditions for social engagement, it was necessary to also scan more broadly for perspectives on the ways in which themes of agency and inclusion might be facilitated through practice. And while it is recognized that museums can exercise social agency in isolation from communities by, for example, unilaterally mounting an exhibition that takes an advocacy position on a social issue (ie. racism, climate change, AIDS, poverty) the contemporary norm is always to work in partnership with community-based experts.

ANALYSIS

No single authoritative and comprehensive publication that addresses the skills, knowledge and work conditions necessary for successful social engaged practice emerged from a survey of the literature. Instead, these topics are most commonly encountered as sidebars in the theoretical literature, as reflections threaded throughout anecdotal or evaluative descriptions of socially engaged projects, as very general recommendations in literature emerging from empirical studies of the impact of inclusive practice, or from specialized professional studies and reflections. As such, comments on skills, knowledge and work conditions are fragmented according to the specialized area of interest, and the task remains to create a detailed synthesis of best practices and a detailed curriculum that describes how desired competencies and work conditions can be acquired, implemented and evaluated.

This gap is the literature has been noted by a number of authors (Macleod, 2001; Peers & Brown, 2003; Scott & Luby, 2007). This review suggests that the conditions vital to successful practice tend to be discussed in terms of three general categories: (1) institutional conditions for effective practice; (2) the skills, knowledge and attitudes that individual staff need to add to their existing skills sets; and (3) the concerns and difficulties that they encounter in taking on more socially engaged roles. Keeping in mind the range of roles encountered along the continuum of socially engaged practice noted earlier, these three categories serve as an organizing structure for this analysis of skills, knowledge and work conditions referred to in the literature.

The Working Environment

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000a) captures the importance of institutional context when she suggests that while the modernist conception of the museum has been as a building, "the museum in the future may be imagined as a process or an experience ... it moves as a set of processes into the spaces, the concerns and the ambitions of communities" (p. 152-3). While a distinction between the institution and the individual can be

an artificial one in situations when the behaviour of the museum is largely shaped by the actions of its staff, much of the literature tends to refer to the museum as a corporate body that has an institutional purpose, an organizational culture, and policies and procedures that transcend the individual.

It is this corporate concept of the museum and the controls it exercises over the actions of its staff that are discussed here. As Anwar Tlili (2008) notes, " social inclusion – as organizational practice – is mediated by the contingent dynamics of the workplace – the resources available, conflicts, alliances, and perceived sanctions and rewards that can result from acting in one way or another in response to policy-driven programmatic organizational change"(p. 124). Further on in his useful analysis of the ways in which British policies on inclusion position museums as instruments of social change, Tlili observes that in addition to eliminating barriers to access and attracting groups who have been underrepresented among visitors and users, museums are expected to make themselves "socially relevant and responsible" by forming partnerships with communities in such varied areas as "lifelong learning, community development and empowerment, urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, rehabilitation, health promotion and health care, all of which are by and large uncharted territories for the conventional museum profession" (p.130).

As the literature of socially engaged practice explores the obligations and opportunities inherent in this 'uncharted territory', it makes a range of general and conceptual observations about key institutional 'processes' that should be in place. A common theme is the need for the museum to understand its role within a larger national and global context in order to appreciate the ways in which its particular strengths align with other social agencies to achieve common goals (Kelly *et al.*, 2006). The Smithsonian Institution's Emeritus Scholar, Stephen Weil (2000) calls for leadership along with "persuasive zeal and passionate commitment" for collaboration, noting that, " if museums are to realize their full potential, it can only be by ending their isolation and by linking themselves to a larger constellation of service providers whose mission-in-common is to enrich the quality of individual and communal lives" (p. xv).

Critical to the creation of supportive and externally connected work environments are governance, leadership and management processes that are committed to socially responsible and engaged practice (Sandell & Janes, 2007; Scott & Luby, 2007; Weil, 2002). However, scholar and educator Lois Silverman (2002) observes that practice often lags behind theory, noting that although many museums have successful programs, "institution-wide commitment to museums as agents of social change is not yet the norm. Indeed, enthusiasm and impassioned calls for change outweigh the concrete examples and the availability of skills to actually fulfill these expanded roles" (p. 70). Part of the reason that practice seems to lag behind theory is the apparent reluctance to adapt structural systems to be more accommodating of the need for sustained external partnerships, as observed by Elizabeth Scott and Edward Luby in a survey of 150 museums regarding their approaches to partnerships with Native American communities (Scott & Luby, 2007, p. 276).

Of particular importance are structural systems and processes that support the museum's capacity to develop and sustain meaningful relationships with external communities. These include communications systems to ensure regular and respectful interchanges (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994:42); information management systems that allow for and capture the co-creation of knowledge (Ames, 2006; Peers & Brown, 2003); clarity

on the agreements that underlie partnerships (Scott & Luby, 2007); financial systems that accommodate the real costs of collaborative initiatives over the long-term (Scott & Luby, 2007); and success measures that go beyond increased visitation to enable the museum and its partners to gauge both the long-term accomplishments and issues associated with the partnership (Silverman, 2002; Tlili, 2008; Weil, 2002).

Even when appropriate structural systems are in place to sustain full and equal partnerships, several writers note that goals for each partner will inevitably be different (Ames, 2006; Peers & Brown, 2003). As Laura Peers and Alison Brown note in their insightful book, *Museums and Source Communities* (2003), partners "bring very different goals and needs to a working relationship. They almost certainly have different expectations about how matters will proceed, about the appropriate division of labour and credit, and about the nature of authorship or control" (p. 8).

Among other factors that are seen to be crucial to socially-responsible practice is an institution-wide commitment to social engagement across the diverse professional areas that comprise the work of the museum. In a recent research study on the ways in which Britain's government-mandated social inclusion policies are embraced by staff in selected British museums, Anwar Tlili (2008) observed that "the uneven presence of social inclusion across the various professional roles in the museum settings has further differentiated the professional sub-cultures inside the museum." (p. 144). He goes on to comment that this differentiation tends to privilege some units while marginalizing others, thereby impacting organizational culture and peoples' capacity to work collectively. Other authors note the degree to which the curatorial and educational roles dominate the discourse of social engagement (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Scott & Luby, 2007). In his exploration of evolving epistemologies in the museum world, Mark O'Neill (2006) comments that "other kinds of expertise which are essential to running museums—people and project management, finance, marketing, visitor service staff, security, catering—rarely figure in the intellectual account of museums; they do not really count as knowledge at all" (p. 99). Working toward a common and democratic understanding and shared vision of social purpose is seen as important to sustained internal commitment to challenging new roles.

Workforce composition is another factor that is seen as influential in a museum's commitment to and success with institution-wide social engagement. Richard Sandell (2000) emphasizes the importance of a diverse workforce in building community relationships, noting that without diversity, museums may be perceived by members of minority communities as "white space" (p. 229). He goes on to offer a conceptual model for diversity management in the museum that integrates the linkages among workforce, audience and programming/ collections diversities and the importance of organizational, marketing and participatory community practices in sustaining a healthy and diverse institution. As David Fleming (2002) notes "even with the best will in the world, it is hard for people from a privileged background to understand the pressures, anxieties and aspirations of those less fortunate" (p. 216).

An institutional climate that anticipates and is comfortable with the kinds of controversies and power struggles that can arise in working with diverse communities on difficult and contentious topics is also seen as crucial to socially engaged practice. This is seen as a difficult balancing act, particularly when affiliation

with one community leads to exclusion of and alienation from another (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Watson, 2007). As museums can be "the public face of power struggles and can validate claims to resources, re-enforce or ignore community identities , (they) have to negotiate carefully between competing groups" (Watson, 2007, p. 18). It is here that a strong sense of social mission and purpose is vital, along with clearly defined boundaries, and the capacity to keep the museum's role in perspective (Dubin, 1999). To ensure that museums can step up to emergent opportunities and position themselves to remain relevant, they "…will need flexible management structures that are able to change in response to the demands of the many communities they serve" (Kelly & Gordon, 2002, p.170).

Knowledge and Skills

Staff, of course, both shape and are shaped by the museums in which they work, as noted by Tlili (2008) who reflects that "staff's negotiated values, norms and ideations are not automatic derivatives or reflexes of an objective organizational culture or structure..." (p. 124). They bring their own expertise, perspectives, values and agency to their work within the museum, while also being controlled to a significant degree by organizational culture, policies and processes.

If workplace conditions for socially engaged practice are only dealt with in a marginal way in the literature under review, the expertise, perspectives, values and agency expected of individual staff receive even less discussion. Attention to the knowledge and skill requirements of museum professionals tends to be the purview of professional associations that articulate curricula and best practices to shape academic and professional programs and performance expectations for museum workers. These curricula and standards have evolved to acknowledge more socially engaged practice in the past decade, both as a new area of content within the curriculum and as a theme that must be threaded throughout existing areas of practice. Unesco's International Council of Museums (ICOM), for example, added the expectation that all museum staff should be able to demonstrate skills in and knowledge of collaboration and networking, disability awareness, accountability, issues of identity and discrimination, and ethnic, racial, cultural and intellectual diversity to its curriculum in 2001, along with a range of more specialized competencies such as cross-cultural skills and awareness of dominant voice/power in interpretation, for selected areas of practice (International Council of Museums, 2001). This listing of areas of competence does not go into detail on how such emergent skills might be undertaken or measured.

At the same time, the Committee on Museum Professional Training (COMPT) of the American Association of Museums articulated *Standards and Best Practices Guidelines* that emphasized that programs should "integrate respect and appreciation for cultural diversity and diverse opinions into the fabric of curriculum content and structure" and "stress the importance of advocacy within the profession, with the public, and with policy makers"(COMPT, 2005). With reference to program content, the COMPT Guidelines call for "recognition and understanding of multiple perspectives and the benefits of collaboration and critical

thinking " and "opportunities for civic engagement and a commitment to serving the public." Like the ICOM curriculum, this one-page document highlights the importance of socially engaged knowledge and skills but provides little in the way of detailed direction on how these are developed or measured.

The most commonly discussed Individual competency themes that emerge from the literature relate to the knowledge and philosophical perspectives that professionals must bring to their work, the need to recognize and manage shifting power relations, the importance of collaboration with communities, the resulting shifts in traditional areas of practice, and to a small degree, the notion of personal agency. The value of knowledge and understanding of the theoretical and philosophical foundations of social engagement is, not surprisingly, seen by some authors as essential to credible and innovative practice (Ames, 2006; Storr, 1992) particularly as it enables initiatives to be undertaken with confidence and commitment (Casey, 2001; Sandell, 2002). Several authors emphasized the importance of understanding ways in which diverse peoples, including colleagues in the museum world, construct knowledge in order to facilitate both greater understanding and respect for diverse perspectives and stronger working relationships (Kelly et al., 2006; O'Neill, 2006).

Understanding of and commitment to the museum's capacity for social agency, while important, is not sufficient in the eyes of noted museum anthropologist Michael Ames (2006), who takes a cautionary view of museum professionals' knowledge base. He acknowledges that museum workers possess important expertise in and commitment to the functional areas of museum practice and to social justice issues. However, he suggests that professionals need to question the assumption "that the Idea of the Museum necessarily contains within it all the solutions to a community's interest in its heritage…. The museological initiative is only one alternative, and could in fact unintentionally limit local initiative and thus be counterproductive" (p. 179). He goes on to recommend that "before we become too enamoured by our own expertise we pause to listen to those we wish to assist." Ames suggests that an added benefit of such openness is that other approaches to socially engaged practice might be recognized as useful additions to "the traditional western Idea of the Museum" (179). The kinds of expertise that museum workers might integrate with their more traditional competencies include such 'non-museological' alternatives as community development (C. F. Kreps, 2008, p. 27) or therapeutic interventions (Silverman, 2002, p. 69).

Museum workers are also encouraged to gain a deep and nuanced knowledge of the communities they serve in order to be effective and sensitive partners who can instil trust, respect and reciprocity in their relationships (Peers & Brown, 2003). Given the mobility of the contemporary workforce, the development and maintenance of such knowledge is seen as a constant challenge (Watson, 2007, p. 482).

Closely linked to a deeper understanding of rationales for and approaches to socially engaged practice is an understanding of the shifting and complex dynamics of power relations. Not only is the museum worker expected to recognize and respectfully integrate community voices, perspectives, and ways of knowing in all aspects of museum practice, they must also carefully negotiate complex power relations within and among competing communities (Karp, 1992; Kelly et al., 2006; Phillips, 2003; Watson, 2007). Power relations within

the institution are also shifting as educators play a more facilitative and dominant role, thereby decentering the traditional dominance of curators (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992).

As Korom (1999) notes in his discussion of community empowerment in the exhibition process, "the issue of who controls representation in museum environments is becoming one of the most prominent questions that … museum specialists must answer to clarify the role museums will play in the twenty-first century." (p. 60). Carol Mayer (2003) also reflects on the complex negotiations and collaborations that museum workers must undertake as they bring more democratic approaches to the use and presentation of community objects and narratives, observing that the shift from consultative models that position the museum as the decision-maker to more equitable collaborative models is being grounded on a 'true sharing of power" (p. 101).

The co-generation of knowledge encompassing others' ways of knowing creates an expectation that museum workers will value and accommodate multi-vocality while also challenging them to attend to traditional scholarly standards. While Michael Ames (2005) notes a shift in power relations in this process, he emphasizes that "this does not necessarily entail a reduction in the quality of scholarship thereby produced." (p. 48-49). He goes on to reinforce the ongoing importance of the rational–empirical pursuit of information and the need for critical examination, noting that these are "essential components of any knowledge system" and suggests that the crucial questions that must frame collaborative scholarship include "how is scholarship to be applied, for whose benefit, and which different perspectives may be shared and balanced in support of political equality?" (p. 48-49).

Implicit in collaborative models are a range of management, leadership, facilitation, negotiation, conflict resolution and teamwork skills that are increasingly seen as essential additions to the museum workers' toolbox. (for example Edwards *et al.,* 2007; Karp, 1992; Kelly et al., 2006; Mayer, 2003; Peers & Brown, 2003; Sandell, 2002). In his exploration of museum epistemologies, O'Neill (2006) observes that the skills of teamwork go beyond 'faddish' management techniques that facilitate cooperative activities to become an essential process in the co-generation of knowledge:

> It is the only way interdisciplinary working can be carried out, and the only way in-depth expertise of museum content can be integrated with expertise about museum visitors. Working across specialisms and subjects threatens the individualistic assumption that knowledge is the reified possession of individuals. To work in teams, museum experts need to develop a capacity to view their own specialist knowledge with enough detachment to enable it to be drawn on selectively by colleagues to produce new knowledge. Only by becoming aware of our assumptions and thought styles will museum staff be really be able to overcome our excessively individualistic view of knowledge-production and see the process as a collaborative one between colleagues of different types of expertise and museum audiences (p. 109).

Another key skill in collaborative practice is the capacity to recognize and bring attention to the mutual benefits that can be achieved through sustained relationships. Stephen Weil (2000) notes that effective partnering involves insight and creativity along with "the ability to analyze the nature, needs, and strengths of potential collaborators and the imagination to envision what possible 'fits' with those collaborators might truly be mutually beneficial" (p. 13). He goes on to emphasize that tact, patience and empathy are also crucial qualities, particularly in sustaining partnerships. The notion of skills and methods to sustain partnerships is one that other writers stress in their explorations of successful collaborations in order to get

away from what Carol Mayer (2003) describes as "cycles of seduction and abandonment" (p. 101) and Korom (1999) describes the "hit-and-run" approach. (p. 264).

Other important skills to sustain relationships include the capacity for extended negotiations prompted by a wide range of unresolved conflicts in oppressed communities (Phillips, 2003), the capacity to manage two-way processes bridging museums and source communities (Peers & Brown, 2003), and the ability to develop and manage formal agreements that shift the relationship from personal-personal to institutional-institutional (Scott & Luby, 2007), thereby removing a common reliance on individual commitment that can fade away when the players on both sides of the partnership change.

Also key to sustained and meaningful relationships are shifts to what Christina Kreps (2008) terms 'appropriate museology' (p. 28; Peers & Brown, 2003). Kreps builds her call for an adaptation of western museological standards and practices on the recognition that other cultures have their own culturally-appropriate stewardship practices that should be respected, and cites Alpha Konare's 1983 comments to the International Council of Museums that ''the traditional museum is no longer in tune with our concerns; it has ossified our culture, deadened many of our cultural objects, and allowed the essence, imbued with the spirit of the people, to be lost'' (p. 42).

Other desirable knowledge and skills that emerged from the literature include the capacity to work with intangible heritage (C. F. Kreps, 2008), the ability to utilize social networking technologies to enhance communications (Kelly et al., 2006), and the ability to undertake participatory and community-based research (Kelly et al., 2006; Scott & Luby, 2007). This latter skill is seen as crucial to thoughtful and reflexive practice, and involves both a commitment to letting the community define the questions (Ames, 2006) and the ability to conduct evaluation to measure the achievement of common goals over the short and long term (Hein, 1994:307). While not widely undertaken, empirical research is seen as essential in "analyzing outcomes in a systematic and theoretical way" (Kelly et al., 2006, p. 217).

For some, the integration of new practices to support social engagement profoundly changes the ways in which people work. Reflecting on a collaborative exhibition design process, Bradburne (2001) comments that "our task was to support action (or better, interaction), rather than broadcast facts" (p. 77). He also observes that "we had to see our *visitors* as *users*, which is to say that our success could no longer be measured in terms of numbers of visits, but in terms of repeated, and thus sustained, action." Finding the appropriate balance in socially engaged practice is challenging. Korom (1999) cautions that "it would be unwise to think that we, as professional interlocutors, are the harbingers of change or the saviors of oppressed people, for our intervention in cultural matters often reifies the concept of unequal power relations…," and goes on to emphasize that "we must be aware reflexively of our precarious role as negotiators in the field" (p. 259). Sensitivity, self-reflection, and commitment seem key to socially engaged practice. As Dawn Casey (2001), Director of the National Museum of Australia remarked in the midst of controversy over the prominent role of Aboriginal narratives in the newly opened museum, "let me assure you that I'm only human. I don't enjoy being attacked. But its a whole lot better than being irrelevant" (p. 235).

Concerns and Obstacles

While many writers are thoughtful about the importance of socially engaged practice and of the museum's capacity for social agency, Richard Sandell (2002) observes " a marked reluctance to acknowledge the obligations that accompany it and to explore the possibilities and limitations in practice" (p. 20). For some, this may be linked to philosophical discomfort with a radical reshaping of the museum's traditional core curatorial purpose (Appleton, 2001). For others, resistance to the notion of museums as instruments of external social policies impacts staffs' inclination to engage in such practice. For example, Tlili (2008) describes the concerns among staff in response to British policies of social inclusion that seek to "transform the museum sector, redefine its role in society, restructure the mode of governance, and recast its organizational mode in such a way as to incorporate into its mission a social policy function aimed at tackling social inclusion" (p. 129).

The inherent conservatism of the museum and its political and funding milieu are also seen as significant impediments. Steven Dubin (1999) comments that even radical curators in innovative museums are limited by traditional museum structures and notes that "legacy, finances and endurance operate like sturdy lines that tether a hot air balloon to guarantee that it not break loose and destroy itself" (p. 215).

Uncertainty on how to proceed also hampers implementation of inclusive practices. In some cases this is based on a fear of causing offence and making mistakes (Sandell *et al.*, 2005, p. 16) when working with people whose concerns are outside the museum worker's comfort zone. In other cases the lack of prior experience to guide museum workers through sensitive and controversial topics and relationships makes museum workers tentative in embracing new approaches. For example, in describing her involvement in an exhibition on AIDS, Roberta Cooks (1998) noted that although she and her colleagues were committed to the project, "no single exhibit developer in the consortium was sure how to frame (an) … exhibit on AIDS. By working together we felt we could support each other, figure out how to approach the subject, and still be true to our science museums' missions" (p. 105). While the many project studies noted in the literature are evidence of numerous innovative initiatives, Richard Sandell (2005) observes a strong need for "an authoritative voice to identify best practices" (p. 16). He goes on to describe the unevenness of training that might enhance professionals' capacity for museum/ community partnerships and social agency. Patience and persistence are seen as the most effective approaches to create appropriate the skills, knowledge and working conditions for socially engaged practice (Peers & Brown, 2003, 2003; Sandell et al., 2005).

SYNTHESIS

The metaphor of 'uncharted territory' in the title of this review that has been coined by Tlili (2008) seems an apt description of the current state of attention to the skills, knowledge and work conditions in the literature. Like uncharted landforms, competencies for socially engaged practice exist and are 'inhabited', but the chart that brings them together in a coherent whole has not been prepared. And in the absence of a chart, it is difficult for the people who occupy particular positions to understand the topography, or to recognize opportunities to move elsewhere with confidence that they are on the right track.

This brief analysis suggests that the attention of the field at this point in time is most focussed on theorizing the museum's response to calls for greater inclusion, social responsibility and social agency across its many areas of specialization, as well as on experimentation with and reflection on innovative projects. While the notion of social agency can encompass broad concerns, there is a noticeable preoccupation in the literature with the museum's obligation and capacity to address inequalities and oppressions. As well, while Eileen Hooper Greenhill observed that much of the literature and research on social engagement as it relates to museum education in the '90s was coming from the North America (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b:11), the theoretical literature of the past decade has been dominated by British scholars (Corsane, 2005; Fleming, 2002; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a, 2006; Hooper-Greenhill *et al.*, 2002; Macdonald & Fyfe, 1996; Mason, 2004; Newman *et al.*, 2005; Pearce, 1999; Sandell, 2002; Sandell & Janes, 2007; Tlili, 2008). Many of these authors are observing the significant impacts on museums that British government policy on inclusive practice has created over the past decade.

Less attention is paid in the literature to the capacity of the museum to impact society's attitudes toward such other pressing social issues as civic responsibility, environmental conservation, climate change, health promotion, globalization, or urban renewal. A review of the titles of the 63 project-focussed articles and chapters identified in the literature reveals the following breakdown according to focus:

Exploration of historic oppressions	20
Promotion of cultural diversity	18
Social inclusion initiatives	14
Social action initiatives	4
Heritage conservation	2
Environmental advocacy	3
Community development	1
Urban and civic renewal	1

These accounts of innovative projects present a particular challenge to investigators seeking to mine the literature for its reflections on congenial work conditions, best practices, and obstacles and concerns. With more than sixty articles identified and the likelihood of many more to come as museums tackle and reflect on socially engaged practice, these provide a wealth of practical observations on the motivations, strategies and outcomes of diverse initiatives, often grounded in and contributing to theory. Many are based on the personal observations of the museum professional/author, while others draw on more systematic qualitative and evaluative research methods to frame their reflections. A few are from the perspective of community partners and bring valuable new voices to the discourse. Few dwell on difficulty or failure (Peers & Brown, 2003:10; Scott & Luby, 2007), and very few are positioned to reflect on the long-term impact of the program, exhibition or partnership under study (Scott & Luby, 2007). A meta-analysis of this body of case studies is needed to identify common themes, critical success factors, and a synopsis of the key knowledge and skills that emerge from practical experience. Such an analysis would also help museums to have a more realistic sense of implications of community involvement and to make decisions on the extent to which they choose to engage in such practices (Watson, 2007).

Gaps in the listings of appropriate knowledge and skills also suggest further lines of enquiry. At the institutional level it would be interesting to explore the kinds of human resource education and development needs, systems, and performance measures that support people involved in socially engaged practice. A realistic analysis of the resources – time, funding, collegial support – that new approaches to practice require would also be of value in setting realistic expectations of staff and projects.

At the individual level, it would be interesting to explore the skills and knowledge that people working in other sectors including community development, health promotion, and social justice bring to their work, and to consider the relevance of these to new forms of museum practice. Yet another fascinating study would be the factors that motivate and deter professionals in their work in this area.

Multiple lines of enquiry also emerge for professional preparation and continuing professional education. Studies of the ways in which new skills, knowledge and attitudes can be integrated within curricula are a key priority. It would also be of great interest to trace the dynamics of knowledge transfer to the workplace as students seek to apply their learning in practical settings, since this might reveal both the obstacles and synergies that occur in different kinds of museums.

In undertaking further studies to develop a more coherent understanding of the knowledge, skills and work conditions that support socially engaged practice, it is useful to keep in mind Stephen Weil's (1995) observation that "There is nothing inherently virtuous about museum work. It is simply a technology, a body of knowledge about how to accomplish certain things. Like any technology, judgements on its value must depend on the ends for which ... it is used" (p. xv).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

A review of the literature of social engagement and agency across the museum world highlights many insightful observations and suggestions relating to professional practice and to appropriate work environments. However, it also suggests that the sector has much work to do in order to define and build the competencies needed to enable museums and their staff to approach socially engaged practice with both confidence and positive outcomes. It is interesting to note that, while the focus in the literature is primarily centred on actions that can be taken within the museum itself, museums do not bear the weight of socially engaged practice in isolation. "The reality, much less threatening and radical than many traditionalists assume, is … that museums, alongside many other institutional and individual agents, must consider their impact on society and seek to shape that impact through practice that is based on contemporary values and a commitment to social equality" (Sandell, 2002, p.21).

While comforting, the notion of participation in a larger collaborative enterprise also highlights the skills, knowledge and capacity that other partners contribute to the process and suggests a need to undertake a review of related knowledge, skill and competency requirements well beyond the boundaries of the museum literature. Professional associations, for example, are positioned to help museums keep pace with society's

needs by serving as advocates for museums' emerging roles and by animating professional discourse on ethics, principles and practice in the context of contemporary values. Universities and colleges have a capacity to ground relevant professional education on theoretical foundations and to contribute to the scholarship of engaged research and practice. Government agencies, as has been clearly demonstrated by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in Britain, have significant power to shape the museum's agenda through policy and funding. Other social service agencies have the potential to work in reciprocally beneficial ways to bring new skills, perspectives and partnership dynamics to the mix. And communities themselves can come to better understand the museum and its capacity – as well as its limitations – in animating social change. Clearly there is much to be learned, coordinated, codified and shared in developing capacity for more socially engaged practice.

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