



Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion

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Overview

Recent years have seen the emergence of the term ‘social exclusion’ within United Kingdom and European political rhetoric and discourse, increasingly used to refer to the process by which groups in society become disenfranchised and marginalised. Since the election of New Labour in 1997, the United Kingdom has witnessed widespread acceptance of the concept which now appears central to many areas of government policy making. This growing importance is reflected in the government’s creation, in December 1997, of the Social Exclusion Unit which adopts a multi-agency approach to tackle the causes and symptoms of exclusion.¹ The debate around social exclusion has flourished in recent years amongst academics and policy makers, particularly within the fields of social policy and economic development, but this level of analysis has not been reflected within the cultural arena. Museums are being asked to assume new roles and develop new ways of working—in general, to clarify and demonstrate their social purpose and more specifically to reinvent themselves as agents of social inclusion. Despite these new demands being placed on museums, there has been little supporting analysis or questioning of the concept of social inclusion and its relevance to the museum sector. What place, if any, should the museum occupy in the rapidly changing landscape of social inclusion policies? To what extent should the concept of social inclusion require a new approach by museums and in what ways can they begin to contribute towards inclusion policies? Fundamentally, in the combating of social exclusion, what, if anything, can be achieved through the agency of museums?

This paper seeks to stimulate debate around this subject and begin to suggest a possible framework within which museums and their relationship to social inclusion can be considered. Drawing on the current academic debate, consideration is given to the origin of the concept and the emergence of the term within political and social policy discourse. The paper then seeks to position the museum in relation to contemporary understandings of social inclusion and explores the relevance and implications for the museum sector, drawing on examples of ways in which museums have begun to respond to this new agenda.

The Changing Socio-Economic and Political Framework

In *Britain Divided; The growth of social exclusion in the 1980s and 1990s*, Walker *et al.* (1997) examine the impact of four successive Conservative govern-

ments on social inequality. Central to their argument is the notion that, over their 18 years in power, the Conservative administration pursued a “strategy of inequality” which widened rather than narrowed divisions in society, in particular between the rich and the poor. Prior to this, during the post-war period up to 1979, Walker states that there was a “broad political consensus that one important function of government was to try to combat poverty and to reduce, rather than increase, social and economic inequalities” and offers evidence that, during this time, inequalities in wealth had been slowly narrowing. The election of a new government in 1979, one with a wholly different view of poverty, represented a watershed in political thought. Inequality was no longer viewed as a potential threat to social fabric but was viewed as an “engine of enterprise, providing incentives for those at the bottom as well as those at the top.” The election of the Conservative government saw the removal of the combating of poverty from the political agenda and replacement with a proactive “strategy of inequality”. As a result, poverty and inequality increased; according to the government’s own definition of low incomes, the numbers of people living in poverty in the United Kingdom grew from 5 million to just under 14 million, an increase of 16% (Walker, 1997, 2–9).

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, the ideology of the New Right and the dominant ethos of economic rationalism signalled tremendous changes for museums achieved largely by successive reductions in public funding. During this period, museums faced increasing pressure to become accountable for their spending and their actions and, in response to the rapidly changing political and economic environment, focused greater attention on business managerialism and the quantity, rather than diversity, of audiences. Demands for accountability were combined with an imperative to secure new sources of funding. Museums found themselves obliged to embrace plural funding systems, to develop partnerships with the private sector and to become more financially adept and efficient in their management of increasingly scarce resources. Similarly, the new language of performance measurement was more likely to focus on the quantitative—visitor numbers, spend per head and cost per visitor—rather than the composition of visitors and the museum’s benefit to the wider public (McLean, 1997). Similarly, research within the sector was focused more on the economic, rather than the social, impact of organisations. In fact the 1980s saw a wealth of research into the economic value and impact of the arts and cultural sector.² Within this environment, museums were viewed as having a part to play in urban regeneration strategies, for example the establishment of the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester which played a key role in the re-development of that city’s Castlefield area. In many ways, the processes of exclusion traditionally operated by museums were exacerbated. The process of cultural democratisation which had been developing was faltering “in the face of a regime that [believed] that its responsible citizens should be avid consumers of culture, but not necessarily active participants in the creation and transformation of culture.” (Jenkinson, 1994, 51) Some national and independent museums responded to this increasingly commercial environment with the introduction of admission charges which tended to exclude some audiences through financial barriers to access. Despite this dominant trend, the emergence of contrary approaches to access can be discerned during this period with some museums, particularly those run by local authorities, remaining committed to free admis-

sion and actively seeking to develop their role within the community. This latter trend was particularly evident amongst those museums under the control of Labour local authorities (Davies, 1994).

During the last decade, within a climate of accountability and competition for scarce public resources, museums have faced even greater pressure to present a convincing case for their role and value to society. Lobbying from minority groups has brought about increasing social, and to some extent political, acceptance of issues of equality of opportunity, and pressure, at least for those organisations within the public sector, to ensure equal access to their services (Dodd and Sandell, 1998). Within this context, many museums have found that their preservation and conservation roles curry little political and public favour but that their potential as a vehicle for learning is more likely to win support.

At the present time, in many areas where decisions are made about the funding and maintenance of museums, hard questions are now being asked about the justification of museums, about their role in the community, and their functions and potentials. Where the answers are not forthcoming, or where perceptions of the value of museums are low in relation to other priorities, collections are sold, staff dismissed, and buildings closed. In most cases, the answers that are given are that museums are educational institutions. (Hooper-Greenhill, 1997, 1)

The election which brought New Labour to power has seen a radical restructuring of policy in all areas and a shift in the expectations and demands made of the cultural sector. Issues of inequality and poverty (now couched in terms of social exclusion) have returned to the political agenda and have assumed a prominent place within political rhetoric. Cultural, as well as social and economic welfare agencies, are increasingly exhorted to tackle these issues. So, alongside its value as an educational institution, the museum must now present its justification in terms which demonstrate its ability to promote social inclusion, tackle issues of deprivation and disadvantage, and reach the widest possible audience.

Most recently, the government has made its requirements of museums explicit. In 1998, its promise of additional resources aimed at widening access to United Kingdom museums and galleries was pledged in recognition of "their potential for education, combating social exclusion and promoting urban regeneration" (quoted in Thomas, 1998, 5). Of course, under New Labour, the ethos of accountability remains with the promise of the establishment of a watchdog to monitor quality and financial management.

Defining Social Exclusion

Since first coined in France in 1974, the term 'social exclusion' has secured increasing popularity and usage in different countries and in a range of academic, political and professional arenas. As its popularity has increased, so its meaning and public understanding of it has shifted and still varies from context to context within both political rhetoric and in academic and professional discourse. Although considerable attention has been paid to defining social exclusion in relation to existing, linked terms such as 'poverty' and 'deprivation' this has remained confined largely within the context of social and economic policy and international development studies. For the cultural sector, the term remains fluid and ambiguous. Although museums and other cultural organis-

ations face increasing pressure to respond to issues of social exclusion, an analysis of its relevance to them is hindered because the terms, concepts and associated language in relation to arts, heritage and the wider cultural sector, remain undeveloped. Within this context, how can museums begin to demonstrate their actual and potential impact on social exclusion?

Consequently, before turning attention to the responses museums have made, or could potentially make, to this new political agenda, it is necessary to consider the origin and contemporary understandings of the term and concept of 'social exclusion'. The term first emerged in France in the 1970s to describe an underclass which fell outside of the protection of the State's social insurance. These groups were labelled, ". . . mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance users, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal asocial persons, and other social 'misfits'" (Silver, 1995, 63). Over the last two decades, the term 'social exclusion' has gained popularity and is replacing the term 'poverty' due largely to the influence of the European Union (Walker, 1997). Its replacement has been fuelled by the views of some member states of the Union who were unhappy with the term 'poverty' and its connotations and also because, for policy analysts, poverty has been seen as too narrow and limiting a concept for consideration of the social problems needing to be addressed (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997).

Poverty and Social Exclusion

The academic debate around comparison of the terms 'poverty' and 'social exclusion' has been considerable.³ For Graham Room (1995) poverty is primarily concerned with *distributional* issues whereas social exclusion is concerned with *relational* issues (the links between an individual and various potential support networks). Hence, many definitions of poverty emphasise the identification of a particular level of income below which an individual will be defined as living in poverty. Others have adopted a broader definition. For example, Townsend (quoted in Walker, 1997, 8) states that people can be said to be in poverty, "when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong." In this context 'resources' are considered in broad terms to encompass more than merely income, presenting a definition of poverty more closely aligned to contemporary understandings of social exclusion (although the emphasis still lies in considering *distributional* issues).

Social exclusion, on the other hand, in focusing on relational issues, is concerned with the breakdown of the links between an individual and their family, friends, community and state services and institutions. For many, the term 'social exclusion' is more useful than 'poverty' since it is more comprehensive, can be used to encompass a wider range of socially disadvantaged individuals and groups and focuses on a dynamic process not merely a static description of a situation. So, whereas definitions of 'poverty' have tended to focus on the material means required to participate in society, 'social exclusion' is a broader term which includes those people who, whether living in poverty or not, are prevented from fully participating in the different systems of society. However Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997) argue that the terms cannot be so clearly differentiated since many of the negative outcomes of social exclusion are determined,

at least in part, by levels of income. Hence the distributional, as well as relational issues remain relevant in any analysis of social exclusion. Similarly, Walker (1997, 8) retains a distinction between 'poverty' and 'social exclusion' defining the former as "a lack of material resources, especially income, necessary to participate in British society" and the latter as "a more comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society". This definition, which incorporates the cultural, as well as the social, economic and political systems of society, begins to suggest a relevance of the concept for the museum which will be explored later in this paper.

The poverty/social exclusion debate is of more than academic interest since it reflects the fundamental differences in the ways in which different societies view inequality and disadvantage. Silver (cited in Gore *et al.*, 1995) and Room (1995) have compared the conceptual and philosophical roots of the terms 'social exclusion' and 'poverty' and exposed fundamental differences as well as commonalities between them. They find that 'poverty' has stemmed from an Anglo-Saxon, liberal individualist tradition, focusing on distributional issues, whereby the role of social policy was to ensure individuals received adequate resources to enable them to function within society. In contrast, 'social exclusion' has grown from an altogether more conservative vision which was concerned with the negative impact on society arising from the exclusion of certain groups.

Understandings of Social Exclusion

With the adoption of the term 'social exclusion' outside of France, the intellectual and philosophical traditions of each country have influenced their understanding and use of the concept.⁴ Within France, where the term originated, the process of social disintegration which it has come to describe has been regarded with particular concern since it represented a breakdown in the social bond between the individual and society and the state, a notion at the heart of French Republican ideology. In contrast, within the liberal individualist tradition, the concept is understood differently since social integration is viewed "in terms of freely-chosen relationships between individuals rather than a relationship between the individual and society [Silver, 1995, p.18]" (Gore *et al.*, 1995, 2). However, as Gore points out, such ideological differences in the roots and understanding of 'social exclusion' have not prevented the term from becoming central to political discourse outside of France. Furthermore, despite the differences, there are important commonalities in all understandings of the concept. In exploring its relevance as a concept for studying deprivation within developing countries, de Haan (1998) identifies three important common elements in any understanding of social exclusion. Firstly, it represents the opposite of social integration. Secondly, it refers to both a state and a process and thirdly the concept is multi-dimensional, extending beyond traditional definitions of poverty and deprivation.

The Dimensions of Social Exclusion

It is the multi-dimensional nature of social exclusion which has contributed to the interest it has received within a diverse range of professional spheres. When the debate was dominated by definitions of poverty, those agencies assigned responsibility for tackling its root causes and alleviating its symptoms were more likely to be confined to the domains of employment and welfare. Now, within a framework of social exclusion, responsibility is more widely shared—a broader range of institutions are considered as having a role to play as part of a multi-agency approach to tackling the symptoms and causes of exclusion. However, within academic debate, despite widespread agreement over its multi-dimensional nature, attention has been focused on the economic, social and political dimensions of social exclusion. Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997) identify and explore these three dimensions. The economic dimension is concerned with issues relating to income and production as well as access to goods and services. Hence, individuals or groups might be excluded from “income and livelihood, and from the satisfaction of such basic needs as housing/shelter, health and education” (*ibid.*, 418). Taking the example of unemployment, Bhalla and Lapeyre use Sen’s analysis (1975) to illustrate both the multidimensionality of social exclusion and the interrelationships between the economic, social and political dimensions. Sen considered employment in terms of three aspects; income, production and recognition. Whilst the first two may be considered under the economic dimension of exclusion, the idea of recognition (the status that is conferred on an individual in employment as a useful member of society) introduces a social aspect to the issue of employment (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997).

Within the social dimension, one might consider the importance of self-worth, dignity and the importance of community identity which, if damaged, can lead to social disintegration. Bhalla and Lapeyre identify three main categories for considering the social dimension of exclusion:

- (i) access to social services (e.g. health and education);
- (ii) access to the labour market; and
- (iii) the opportunity for social participation and its effects on the social fabric (this involves relational ties between individuals and society and individuals and the state).

Other issues to be considered within the social dimension include the opportunity to participate in decision-making and the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups (*ibid.*). The political dimension of exclusion encompasses access to human and political rights. Following Marshall (1964), Bhalla and Lapeyre group these rights within three main categories of citizenship rights; civil (e.g. the right to justice, freedom of expression), political (“the right to participate in the exercise of political power”) and socio-economic (equality of opportunity, right to minimum welfare benefits etc.). Social exclusion can occur when all or some of these citizenship rights are denied or cannot be claimed by an individual or group (*ibid.*, 420). The dimensions clearly overlap and could be further subdivided. For example, Commins (cited in Evans, 1998) identifies four dimensions to social exclusion. Individuals can be excluded from:

- (i) Civic integration;
- (ii) The labour market;

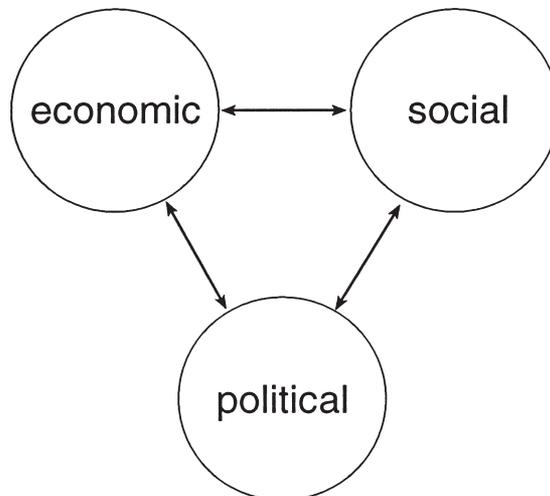
- (iii) Welfare state provision; and
- (iv) Family and community.

However the dimensions are expressed, it is recognised that the causes and outcomes of social exclusion cannot neatly be placed within discrete categories. Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997, 430) call for the inter-related nature of the economic, social and political dimensions to be recognised stating, by way of example, that “. . . it is useful to demonstrate that political freedom and civil rights and liberties can draw the best out of people and raise their productivity, thereby contributing to growth and overcoming economic exclusion”. The inter-connected dimensions of social exclusion, as identified by Bhalla and Lapeyre, are illustrated in Figure 1.

The Museum as Representation of Social Exclusion

Given the three dimensions outlined above, what role does the museum play in the dynamic process of social exclusion? It is useful here to refer to de Haan's views on the role of institutions in the process of exclusion. For de Haan, the concept of social exclusion provides a use which extends beyond traditional concepts of deprivation since it “focuses on processes, and on the mechanisms and institutions that exclude people. It may take us beyond static descriptions of situations of deprivation, and focus on the causes and mechanisms that lead to these situations . . . In this, it also has policy relevance, since it identifies problems in existing institutions and options for improvements” (de Haan, 1998, 10–11).

In many ways, museums can be seen to represent institutionalised exclusion. They operate a host of mechanisms which may serve to hinder or prevent access to their services by a range of groups. They might also be viewed as institutions which reinforce exclusionary practices within the economic, political and social dimensions described above. For Ames (quoted in McLean, 1997, 30), “Museums are products of the establishment and authenticate the established or official

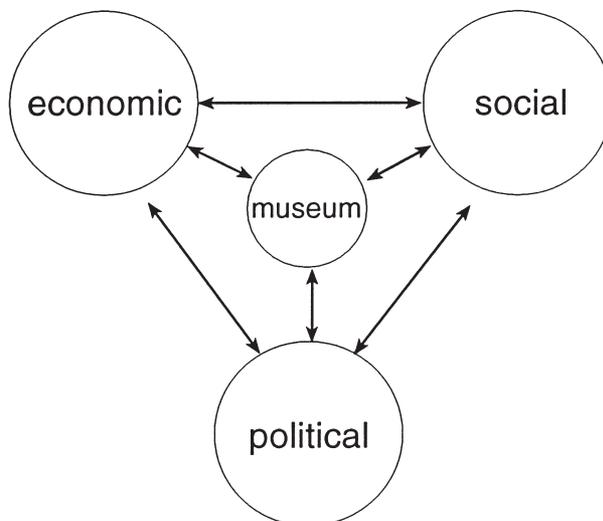


1. The inter-connected dimensions of social exclusion (after Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997).

values and image of a society in several ways, directly, by promoting and affirming the dominant values, and indirectly, by subordinating or rejecting alternate values". In this way the political, social and economic dimensions of social exclusion are manifest within the museum. So, it might be argued, for example, that the exclusion of minority groups from the political, economic and social dimensions of society is reflected in the museum which fails to tell the stories of those groups and denies them access to its services through mechanisms of exclusion (non-representation within collections and displays, selective promotional targeting, admission charges, etc.). Furthermore, it might be argued that the museum not only reflects the exclusion of groups from social systems but also reinforces and perpetuates the processes by which they are excluded. The museum might be seen as validating, endorsing and thereby encouraging exclusionary practices and processes within the political, social and economic dimensions. Hence the museum that fails to tell the stories of minority groups, not only denies access to its services for that group but also exacerbates their position of exclusion by broadcasting an exclusive image reinforcing the prejudices and discriminatory practices of museum users and the wider society. This dialogic process is illustrated in Figure 2.

The Museum as Agent of Social Inclusion

So, if museums contribute towards the exclusion of groups and individuals from society, might they also possess the capability to help retrieve and re-integrate those excluded? If so, in what ways might this be achieved? If one considers the history of museums, and the nature of their audiences over the last two centuries, they might seem unlikely vehicles for the promotion of social inclusion. Yet, the contemporary demands placed on museums to contribute towards social inclusion might, in many ways, be seen to echo nineteenth century notions of the museum as an instrument for positive social change. It is not within the scope of this paper to consider this area in great detail although



2. The museum as representation of social exclusion.

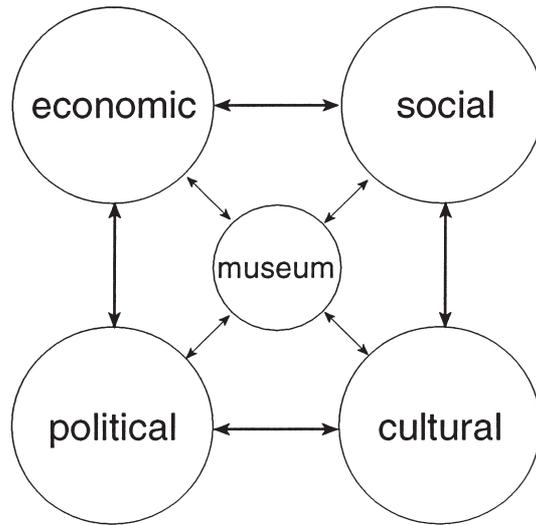
it is useful to acknowledge that the idea that culture might possess the potential to bring about social cohesion or to narrow social inequalities is not new.

In the mid-eighteenth century, access to museums was preserved for a privileged elite where, “the rules and proscriptions governing attendance . . . had served to distinguish the bourgeois public from the rough and raucous manners of the general populace by excluding the latter” (Bennett, 1995, 28). However, by the 1830s there was increasing acceptance of the idea that making museums accessible to a wider public could deliver social benefits. Minihan cites a parliamentary debate around the establishment of the National Gallery in which Sir Robert Peel stated that he “trusted that the erection of the edifice would not only contribute to the cultivation of the arts, but also to the cementing of those bonds of union between the richer and the poorer orders of the State, which no man was more anxious to see joined in mutual intercourse and good understanding than he was” (Parliamentary Debate, 1832, quoted in Minihan, 1977). Furthermore, by the mid-nineteenth century there was increasing interest in the role which museums had to play in delivering positive social change through education. Museum advocates argued that “Adequate provision for the arts, in which museums held a central place, was a credential of a civilized society: they were instruments and evidence of national honour and glory. Arts and museums would be an antidote to the brutalizing effects of mechanization, industrialization and urbanization. People could be led to a higher social order through them” (Kavanagh, 1994, 11). Such ideals inspired a number of access-related initiatives, particularly from the national museums, including evening openings and free admission and, although there is no statistical evidence with which to evaluate the impact of such initiatives on audience composition, it seems likely that many museums attracted visitors from more than one social group (Kavanagh, 1994; Minihan, 1977).

However, despite such benevolent intentions, museums have largely continued to exclude many groups. For Bennett (1995, 28), “museums, and especially art galleries, have often been effectively appropriated by social elites so that, rather than functioning as institutions of homogenization, as reforming thought had envisaged, they have continued to play a significant role in differentiating elite from popular social classes”. The legacy of exclusion has remained and today those prevented from participating fully in the economic, social and political systems of society are those most likely to remain excluded from museums and the wider cultural arena. In what ways then have museums begun to respond to social exclusion?

The Cultural Dimension

Given the comprehensive definition of social exclusion presented by Walker (1997), it would appear inadequate to confine considerations of the concept to the political, social and economic dimensions. Since the dimensions of exclusion can be seen to represent systems from which people are prevented from fully or partially participating, it is useful to consider a fourth category: the cultural dimension (see Figure 3). In addition to exclusion from economic, social and political systems, individuals can also be excluded from cultural systems. Within the cultural dimension, one might consider three main elements:



3. The cultural, social, economic and political dimensions of exclusion.

- (i) Representation—the extent to which an individual’s cultural heritage is represented within the mainstream cultural arena;
- (ii) Participation—the opportunities an individual has to participate in the process of cultural production; and
- (iii) Access—the opportunities to enjoy and appreciate cultural services (which can incorporate both (i) and (ii) above).

The cultural dimension is also interconnected with the other dimensions of exclusion. For example, it might be argued that access to, and participation in, cultural activity can increase an individual’s confidence, self-esteem and self-determination, enabling them to re-establish social relationships and even to increase their chances of securing employment. For the most part, museums have considered their role in combating social exclusion in terms of the cultural dimension through seeking to become inclusive organisations.

The Inclusive Museum

In recent years museums have paid increasing attention to issues of representation, participation and access, often denoted by the term “audience development”, especially in respect of those groups traditionally under-represented in their visitor profiles. A growing body of research has sought to identify the barriers which exclude different audiences and, in response, museums have initiated projects which seek to enable access and broaden audiences.⁵ In this way, museums are seeking to become more inclusive, to tackle their legacy of institutionalised exclusion and, through addressing issues of representation, participation and access, to promote cultural equality and democratisation. The inclusive museum then, tackles social exclusion within the cultural dimension, although the inter-related nature of the process of social exclusion, outlined above, suggests that this might lead to positive outcomes in relation to the other dimensions. For example, the inclusive museum, in representing the histories

and culture of a minority group, will seek to increase its relevance to that audience and, in doing so, help to create access to its services. Although the goal is centred around cultural inclusion and increased access to the museum the initiatives might, in turn, have a positive impact on the wider causes and symptoms of social exclusion. So, the representation of that community's culture within the museum might affirm community identity, generate increased self-esteem amongst individuals and help to promote tolerance and understanding within the wider society. These are possible impacts or consequences of the museum's action but rarely are such intentions explicitly expressed by the museum as its goal or mission. Indeed, little empirical research has been conducted into the impact of initiatives centred around cultural inclusion, their effects on the wider process of social exclusion and the lives of those who are excluded. However, comparative studies within the arts, such as that recently undertaken by Matarasso for Comedia (1997), might present a useful starting point for exploring this area.⁶ Further research is required to establish the social impact of the inclusive museum and to identify the causal links between the activity of the museum and its effects on the socially excluded audience for which it seeks to create access.

Beyond Access and the Cultural Dimension

To what extent might the museum consider its role in tackling exclusion beyond the cultural dimension? Can museums play some part in directly tackling the symptoms of social exclusion which are manifest in contemporary social problems such as unemployment, crime, homelessness, poverty, racism and poor health? Are such goals appropriate for museums? To what extent might this approach require the reinvention, or at least the repositioning, of museums in relation to their role in society?

Such suggestions are not new and, for example, in nineteenth century Britain, many were convinced of the potential for art museums to act as a deterrent to crime (Minihan, 1977). Similarly, Alexander (1979, 34), in discussing the social purpose of American art museums states that, "In the 1870s the contemplation of art was sometimes considered a means of fighting vice and crime by providing 'attractive entertainment of an innocent and improving character'". Today, for the majority of museum professionals, as well as social policy analysts, such claims are more likely to be considered quaint, naïve and inappropriate. There are, however, increasing pressures on museums to respond to contemporary social challenges and to position themselves to deliver benefits in response to social change. In *A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom*, Anderson (1997, 2) places cultural exclusion within the broader context of social change, increasing inequality and its associated problems and, in doing so, makes a powerful case for the museum's potential to respond to these issues through education and cultural inclusion:

The last two decades have seen the emergence of a 'second nation', a substantial minority which includes a disproportionate number of young people and adults whose lives are blighted by recurrent unemployment, poor housing, poor health and drug-related crime. One in three children now lives in poverty and in consequence suffers significant educational disadvantage from birth. These divisions are reflected in museum audiences . . . Cultural exclusion has become an increasingly

urgent issue for museums, and education one of the most powerful weapons against it.

Despite a growing acceptance of the imperative to become more accessible, there is little evidence to suggest that many museums have embraced their potential to act directly as agents of social inclusion and to tackle contemporary social problems. Although little empirical research has been conducted into the views held by those within the museum profession about the social role of the museum, that which does exist suggests that this is not perceived as a core function or goal. Ginsburgh and Mairesse (1997, 21) in their survey of Belgian museums, asked curators to rank possible missions for their organisations and found that, "education and permanence (i.e. ensuring that collections are preserved for future generations) are the highest rated missions by the majority of museums . . . Missions which are at the root of the New Museology current, such as quality of life (enriching the intellectual life of the community) and social role are not ignored, but they are assigned fairly low priority".

However, in response to the current political agenda, some museums are redefining their role in relation to society and reinventing themselves as agents of social inclusion through articulating new goals and developing new ways of working, often in partnership with those agencies at the front line of social policy implementation. In such instances, access and cultural inclusion become the means by which the goal of wider social inclusion and the combating of contemporary social problems is achieved (although such goals are not always couched in the language of social exclusion depending on the political environment in which the museum operates). In the United Kingdom, interest in the museum's potential in this area is increasing and the language of social inclusion is becoming increasingly commonplace as the expectations of government are more explicitly expressed through bodies such as the Museums Association and the Museums and Galleries Commission. Museums operating in this way do not confine their goals to cultural inclusion but position themselves to tackle the causes or symptoms of exclusion within the social, political or economic, as well as cultural, dimensions.

Although little empirical data exists it is possible to discern two main ways in which museums are seeking to reposition themselves so as to act directly to address the social problems associated with exclusion. This section draws on examples from the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States of America to illustrate the two different approaches. On the one hand, museums are working as agents of social regeneration to deliver positive social outcomes to defined audiences, often through direct contact and ongoing project work with small groups of people who are considered to be disadvantaged, socially excluded, or living in poverty. Secondly, it is possible to identify museums acting as vehicles for broad social change by exploiting their potential to communicate, educate and influence public opinion. This might involve adopting a campaigning or advocacy role seeking to highlight social inequality and injustice. Such initiatives are often high profile and sometimes controversial. Although the two approaches involve different methodologies, both share a common thread: the goal is not simply to create access to the museum and develop a particular audience but rather the museum is viewed as having the potential and the capability to contribute directly towards the combating of the causes and symptoms

of social exclusion. Depending on their goals and the resources made available to them, some museums may utilise both approaches in their efforts to promote social inclusion.

Museums as Agents of Social Regeneration

Here the museum seeks to deliver positive social outcomes to an identified audience of known individuals: for example to improve their quality of life, empower, encourage self-determination and develop self-esteem, aspirations or skills. Such initiatives are most often undertaken by outreach and education staff, often separate and distinct from the museum's public programmes, and employ an approach more closely aligned to those working within social services, community and health agencies. Indeed, such initiatives are often undertaken in collaboration with these organisations.

Examples which can be considered within this category include the initiatives developed by the Galleries of Justice, Nottingham. The museum works in partnership with a range of agencies including Probation, Youth and Social Services as part of a multi-agency approach to 'diversionary work' which seeks to deter young people from offending or criminal behaviour. The museum's role is to provide an environment and a process through which young people can re-examine their own behaviour and the potential consequences of continuing to offend. Such initiatives have usefully earned the museum a reputation for innovation, provided a means to demonstrate its social value within the city of Nottingham, and helped to secure political and financial support. However, central to their work is the belief that the museum has both an obligation and the capability to work in this way (Hague, 1998).⁷

A further example can be found in training projects developed by the Living Museum of the West, Melbourne, Australia, which was established in 1984 under a Labour state government specifically to tell the stories of working class people who were not being acknowledged within mainstream cultural institutions. The Museum is firmly rooted in the community of Melbourne's western suburbs and located in Pipemakers' Park, the setting for various projects which have sought to provide training for local, long-term unemployed people. Various government job creation schemes have provided the resources to enable the Museum to undertake skills development work with local people. In Australia, such job creation schemes have frequently been criticised as merely providing cheap labour pools, and for failing to deliver meaningful long-term benefit to the participants. However, for the Living Museum of the West, such schemes offer an opportunity to provide valuable training and skills development for local people, in particular those from disadvantaged groups with few opportunities to gain employment. To this end, the Museum seeks to find appropriate projects which match the needs of the participants. For example, the Koorie Garden Project, established several years ago, aims to provide culturally relevant employment for indigenous people within the locality combined with horticultural training. The project enables the participants to learn about their own culture, but also to develop skills to help them gain employment after the lifetime of the project. The original members of the Koorie Garden Project have now moved on to form a separate company in which all participants are shareholders and run a gardening business within the region. According to the Museum, this has been

one of the most successful aboriginal training projects in Australia (Haffenden, 1998).

A further example of the museum as agent of social regeneration is the work with mental health service users carried out by Nottingham Museums. Working in partnership with Nottingham Rehabilitation and Community Care Services, they have set out not only to achieve cultural inclusion through developing services tailored to the needs of people with long-term mental health problems but also help them to develop skills which would enable them to access other (non-cultural) services independently. Over time the project developed to build self-esteem, social skills and confidence amongst the participants.

Museums as Vehicles of Broad Social Change

Within this approach museums seek to exploit their potential to influence society with a view to promoting social inclusion (or alleviating the symptoms of exclusion) on a macro level. In contrast to the approach outlined above, initiatives in this category take place within the public arena, through a range of public programmes generally characterised through the use of high profile, and sometimes controversial, exhibitions and events. The following examples might be considered within this category.

Established in the late 1970s, The Migration Museum, Adelaide, Australia, was based, in part, on the recognition of the fact that “one in five people in the area were born overseas and that no-one was documenting their history” (Szekeres, 1998). The Museum’s displays and public programmes clearly reflect a political outlook which is openly pro-immigrant, critical of government in relation to immigration policies, and committed to promoting greater inter-community tolerance of immigrant minorities. The Museum aims to change people’s views about their fears of the ‘other’ (ibid.). Indeed, the Museum believes that the support for the One Nation Party demonstrated within the Federal election campaigning which dominated the national and international media debate prior to and during the 1998 Election “had led to a noticeable rise in racism amongst visitors and school children in particular and that the museum had a role to play in addressing this” (ibid.). In response to this, the Museum has initiated temporary exhibitions such as *A Twist of Fate: an experience of war, pain, torture and survival, the stories of refugees who have settled in Australia*. The exhibition seeks not only to inform the visitor of the plight of refugees internationally but to challenge their misconceptions and encourage tolerance and understanding by following the highly personal stories of three individuals on their journeys to Australia. Importantly, the exhibition will travel to Queensland, an area which demonstrated strong support for the One Nation Party. The creation of such exhibitions are motivated, in part at least, by the perceived rise in racism in the community (ibid.).

A further example is offered through the exhibition *Brenda and other Stories; Art and HIV and You*, first shown at Walsall Art Gallery during 1996. On deciding to produce an exhibition around the potentially controversial topic of contemporary artists’ responses to HIV and AIDS the Gallery faced a choice. It could either simply produce an exhibition and encourage the widest possible audience to visit it, or it could directly seek to contribute towards health promotion policies aimed at combating the spread of the virus. The Gallery chose to work in

partnership with the Local Health Authority to help deliver a safer sex message to a wide audience. One measure of its impact was the significant increase in the number of people undertaking HIV testing within Walsall during the period of the exhibition.

In some instances, those museums with aspirations to act as vehicles for broad social change might express them within their mission statements. For example, The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York, was created with the expressed aim of promoting tolerance, a notion enshrined in its mission statement, quoted below, and which informs all aspects of the institution's work:

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum seeks to promote tolerance and historic perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, gateway to America (Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 1996, 1).

Similarly, the Australian Museum, Sydney, which has adopted a proactive role in response to national debates around the process of reconciliation with indigenous people states: "Our mission is to increase understanding of, and influence public debate on, the natural environment, human societies and human interaction with the environment" (Australian Museum, 1998). Such explicit social purpose is rarely expressed within the goals of a museum and yet it might be argued that adopting this stance serves to strengthen the position of a museum and establish its social utility.

These examples described above illustrate some of the different responses museums have made to social exclusion and the methodologies employed to impact directly upon the root causes or symptoms of exclusion, either as agents of social regeneration at a local level or as vehicles of broader social change. Whilst more examples can, of course, be cited, those museums which clearly articulate their purpose in relation to society and which purposefully seek to position themselves as organisations with a part to play in multi-agency solutions for tackling social exclusion, are nevertheless still rare. Museums' responses to issues around social exclusion are varied and often multi-faceted. However, it might be useful to consider these potential responses schematically as summarised in Table 1.

Although Table 1 presents generalisations it provides a starting point for considering the museum's possible roles in relation to social exclusion. In reality, the boundaries between the three approaches presented are rarely so distinct. For example, the inclusive museum might also initiate a project which seeks to tackle directly social exclusion at both the local and broader societal levels. The examples provided and the typology suggested merely serve to illustrate a change in museums—an increasing desire to make clear the museum's social purpose and the value it provides in relation to addressing contemporary social issues. Further research is required to clarify and measure the museum's actual impact on the causes and symptoms of social exclusion and to identify the means by which this impact might be achieved.

In exploring the value of museums, further analysis is required to identify the particular, and even unique, contributions which museums can make towards the process of social inclusion. The impact an individual museum may have is likely to depend on a whole range of factors internal and external to the organisation. Some museum professionals, as well as those working in the field of social

Table 1. Museums as agents of social inclusion—a typology

	The Inclusive Museum	The Museum as Agent of Social Regeneration	The Museum as Vehicle for Broad Social Change
Goal	To achieve cultural inclusion	To improve individuals' quality of life (e.g. increase self-esteem)	To influence society/instigate positive social change (e.g. promote greater tolerance towards minorities)
Achieved through—	Representation of, and participation and access for, those excluded	Initiatives which seek to alleviate disadvantage/ encourage personal development (with individuals and small groups)	Providing a forum for public debate, education and persuasion
Exclusion is tackled within—	The cultural dimension	The economic, social, political and cultural dimensions	
Social problems associated with exclusion—	Might be addressed indirectly	—provide the rationale behind initiatives —might be directly expressed within the museum's goals	

and economic policy, will undoubtedly have reservations about this debate. Indeed, such concerns are understandable, as Alexander (1979, 229) states, “. . . there are limits to what collections of objects and museum techniques can accomplish for social uplift” and museums have other responsibilities which might conflict with their social purpose. It would be prudent to recognise the many limitations of the museum and accept that their role in directly tackling the social problems associated with exclusion is likely to be marginal. However, just as the causes and outcomes of social exclusion cannot be neatly compartmentalised within a particular dimension, it might also be argued that the potential solutions for inclusion cannot necessarily be provided by organisations working in a single, discrete field.

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Footnotes

1. According to the Government Information Service: “The Social Exclusion Unit will focus on some of the most difficult problems, where several Departments need to work together and where

- solutions have been very hard to find. Its aim is to: improve understanding of these problems; promote co-operation between departments; and make recommendations to tackle social exclusion more effectively, in particular to shift the focus of policies towards preventing social exclusion rather than merely dealing with its consequences" (Government Information Service, 1999, <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/faqs.html>).
2. See for example Myerscough, J. (1988) *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, Policy Studies Institute, London.
 3. See for example: Room, G. (ed.), (1995) *Beyond the Threshold: The Measurement and Analysis of Social Exclusion*, Policy Press, Bristol; Heikkila, M. and Sihvo, T. (1997) Concepts of poverty and exclusion in Europe, *Scandinavian Journal of Social Welfare*, 6, pp. 119–226; Bhalla, A. and Lapeyre, F. (1997) Social Exclusion: Towards an Analytical and Operational Framework, *Development and Change*, 28, pp. 413–433.
 4. Considerable debate has taken place within the social policy arena exploring the variance in understanding of social exclusion historically and within different contexts. Notably Silver's analysis has received particular attention—a threefold typology which identifies three paradigms of social exclusion rooted in and reflecting different theoretical and ideological perspectives. See Silver, H. (1994) Social exclusion and social solidarity: three paradigms, *International Labour Review*, 133 (5/6), 531–578.
 5. A comprehensive list of barriers to access is presented in Dodd, J. and Sandell, R. (1998) *Building Bridges: Guidance for museums and galleries on developing new audiences*, Museums and Galleries Commission.
 6. Recent research by Comedia (Matarasso (1997) *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*) sought to identify the social impact of participation in the arts through a range of case studies in different arts organisations, including museums. The report identified positive social outcomes in 6 main areas: personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment and self-determination, local image and identity, imagination and vision, health and well being.
 7. "As a museum of law we can't afford to not work in this field—we have a social responsibility to do so." (Sally Hague, Education Manager, Galleries of Justice, personal communication, 1998).

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