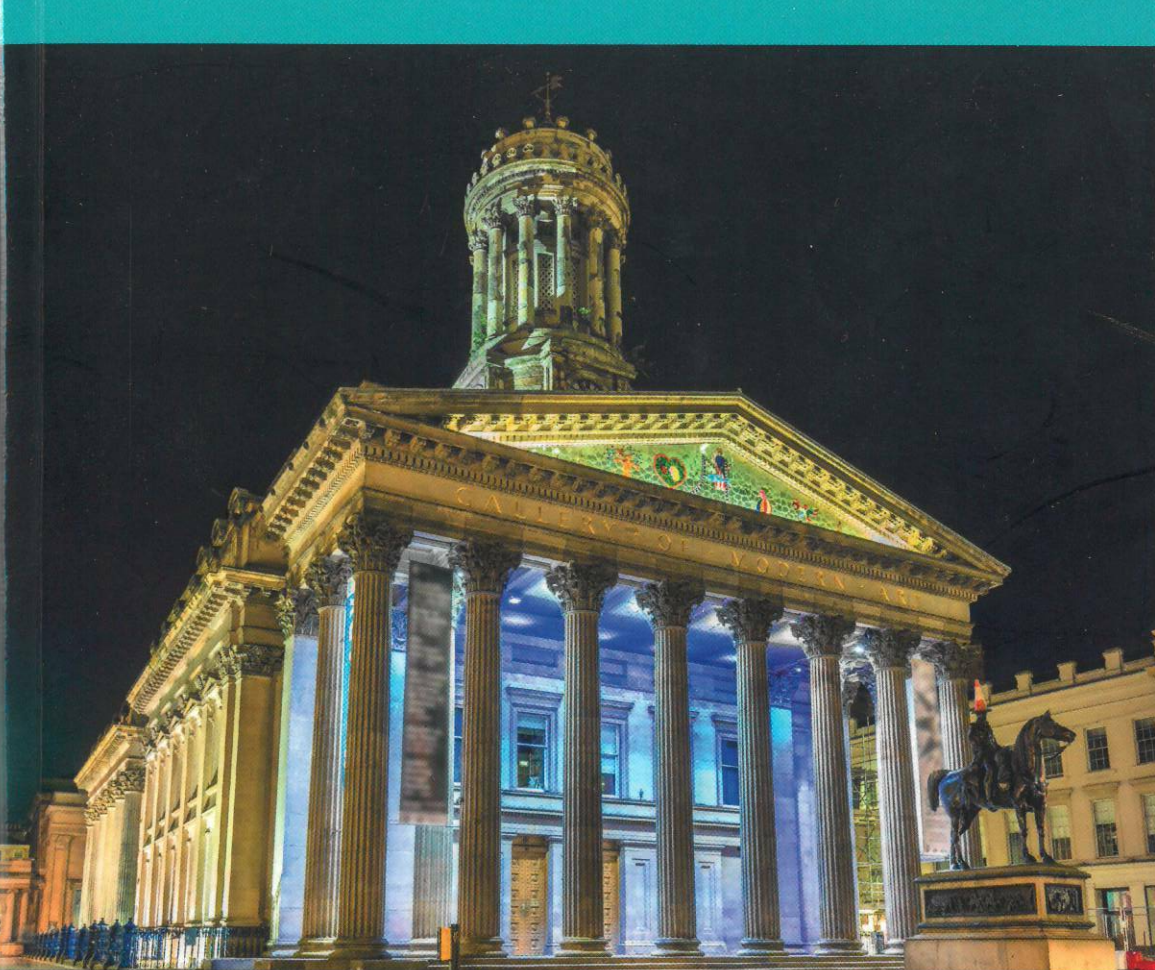




The Role of Today's Museum

Clive Gray and Vikki McCall

THE ROLE OF TODAY'S MUSEUM

The Role of Today's Museum provides a thorough investigation of what museums do and why. Arguing that museums are multifunctional institutions, the book examines the consequences of this for the services that museums provide, the publics to whom they are provided and the providers themselves.

Adopting a wide perspective on understandings of the roles of museums and considering the different environments within which museums operate, Gray and McCall provide a new perspective on how transformations, as well as the gaps between intended policies and the actual work that is undertaken within museums, can be both identified and understood. By differentiating between social, economic and political visions and expectations of museums, the analysis in this book allows for a fuller understanding of what these organisations do and provide for their societies and the struggles and negotiations that surround their existence.

The Role of Today's Museum takes a critical, interdisciplinary approach to studying museums and museum policy. As a result, the book will be of interest to academics and students engaged in the study of museums, cultural policy, social policy, cultural sociology, public policy and cultural and political economy. Highlighting the gaps that exist between policy ideals and museum practices, the book also provides valuable insights to policy-makers and practitioners.

Clive Gray is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Cultural and Media Policy Studies at the University of Warwick. He has previously published three books. He has published widely in public policy and administration, the politics of the arts and cultural policy, and on politics, management and policy-making in museums.

Vikki McCall is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Stirling with work focusing on bridging the gap between policy and practice. Dr McCall is Board Director for the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Parkhead Housing Association, alongside being a member of the Social Policy Association Executive Committee and Editorial Board member of *Social Policy & Society*.

To our children

Connor and Emma, and Caitlin and Laurie

First published 2020

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2020 Clive Gray and Vikki McCall

The right of Clive Gray and Vikki McCall to be identified as authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gray, Clive, author. | McCall, Vikki, author.

Title: The role of today's museum / Clive Gray and Vikki McCall.

Description: New York : Routledge, 2020. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019058343 (print) | LCCN 2019058344 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Museums—Textbooks.

Classification: LCC AM6 .G73 2020 (print) |

LCC AM6 (ebook) | DDC 069—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019058343>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019058344>

ISBN: 978-0-367-26504-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-26509-0 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-29356-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo

by codeMantra

CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xi</i>
1 Introduction	1
<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Understanding museums</i>	2
<i>But what are museums for?</i>	6
<i>The structure of the book</i>	9
2 What do museums do? What are museums for?	14
<i>Introduction</i>	14
<i>Which functions? Universal description</i>	16
<i>Which functions? Sources</i>	21
<i>Which functions? Policy</i>	25
<i>Functions and questions</i>	27
<i>Conclusions</i>	32
3 The multifunctional museum	37
<i>Introduction</i>	37
<i>Museums and complexity</i>	37
<i>Whose functions?</i>	40
<i>Institutions, practices, arenas</i>	44
<i>Time, organisation, location: the contextualisation of museum functions</i>	49
<i>Which contexts?</i>	53
<i>Conclusion</i>	55

4	Museums, policy, practice and the 'struggle over space'	59
	<i>Introduction</i>	59
	<i>The struggle over 'space' in the museum</i>	59
	<i>Symbolic violence</i>	62
	<i>Policy, the policy process and museums</i>	64
	<i>'Top-down' versus 'bottom-up' policy</i>	68
	<i>Governance of museums</i>	70
	<i>Museums and social inclusion</i>	72
	<i>Museums, place, regeneration and urban development</i>	73
	<i>Conclusions</i>	77
5	Museums and societies	83
	<i>Introduction</i>	83
	<i>The evolving social role of museums in society</i>	84
	<i>The social role of the museum in society</i>	85
	<i>Museums in the field of cultural production</i>	88
	<i>Building a social role for museums within the 'game of culture'</i>	90
	<i>The impact of the social role of the museum</i>	91
	<i>Community</i>	92
	<i>Social inclusion</i>	94
	<i>Quality of life and wellbeing</i>	96
	<i>Difficulties with social expectations in museums</i>	97
	<i>Conclusion</i>	100
6	Museums and economies	107
	<i>Introduction</i>	107
	<i>Economics and museums</i>	109
	<i>Economics and museum functions</i>	111
	<i>Museums as the source of economic value</i>	115
	<i>Whose value?</i>	121
	<i>The instrumental museum?</i>	128
7	Museums and politics	134
	<i>Introduction</i>	134
	<i>Political functions and museums</i>	135
	<i>Political functions in the museum</i>	140
	<i>Political functions of museums</i>	145
	<i>Political functions about the museum</i>	150
	<i>Conclusion</i>	156

8	Conclusion	161
	<i>Introduction</i>	161
	<i>Functions: the museum as a social construction</i>	162
	<i>Value: societal, social and economic</i>	165
	<i>Legitimacy</i>	168
	<i>Conclusion</i>	169
	 <i>Bibliography</i>	 171
	<i>Index</i>	189

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

4.1	Locating the museum in the field of cultural production	61
8.1	The structure of the argument	163

Tables

2.1	Potential museum functions	17
2.2	Sources of functional activity in museums	22

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the first place we would like to thank all of the staff, managers, volunteers and visitors to museums who we have corresponded with, interviewed, discussed with and chatted to. Without you, we would not have been able to write this, and even if you disagree with us we are grateful to you for sparing the time to talk to us.

Vikki would particularly like to thank her art teachers – Miss Hood and Mrs Murray – from Hawick High School for inspiring a lifelong interest in art and museums, as well as all the museums and galleries in the Scottish Borders for letting her volunteer and do research. Without that early support, this book would never have been written.

Second, we would like to thank our families for tolerating our fascinations with museums and galleries even if they would often have preferred being on the beach rather than visiting yet another collection of artefacts and art-works. Vikki would particularly like to thank Lee for all his support and belief in her work and dedicates her part of the book to Connor and Emma, the next generation of enthusiastic museum visitors. Clive's dedication is to Caitlin and Laurie, currently working in Malaysia and Australia, and still visiting museums.

Third, we would like to thank all of our students both for their questions and comments and for their essays and dissertations, all of which have helped us to clarify our thoughts and arguments.

Fourth, we would like to thank the librarians at Warwick, Stirling and Leicester universities for their sterling efforts on our behalves.

Fifth, Clive would like to thank the cats for being themselves, providing endless pleasure and eating a great deal of cat-food.

Sixth, Clive would also like to thank Laurence Sterne for *Tristram Shandy*, which has provided continual delight for more years than he cares to remember.

Lastly, Vikki would like to especially mention Dr Sharon Wright for her supervision, support, motivation and simply being an inspiring and awesome person.

1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Museums can be described in many different ways, with museums being labelled as engaging, relevant, professional, adaptive, community, people's, children's, scientific, natural history, labour, virtual, symbolic, connected, trust, charitable, engaging, local, national, universal, independent, private, company, digital and public, amongst many other labels, depending upon which one is being looked at, by whom, and for what purposes. One consequence of what we have previously described as the growth of the adjectival museum (Gray & McCall, 2018) is that there has equally been a proliferation of understandings of what it is that people expect museums to provide, how they are expected to provide it, the intentions that they expect museums to fulfil, and what sets of outputs, outcomes, consequences and results they expect museums to produce. The recent developments in how museums are understood and what it is that they are expected to do, continue, however, to co-exist alongside much older ideas about museums that conceive of them as being places of contemplation and ritual (Duncan, 1995) that provide an alternative to the pressures and demands of the present through the consideration of the past, and which provide a neutral public arena (Barrett, 2011) that will produce better human beings through their simple existence.

In the present case we use 'museums' in a general sense to cover all of the versions of the term that are covered by our label of the 'adjectival museum' (Gray & McCall, 2018). We include in this usage all material and immaterial collections of 'things' that have been gathered together to fulfil some purpose for the individuals, communities, groups and societies who have undertaken the process of collecting, whatever that purpose may be. Thus we do not distinguish between art galleries that were created to establish some essentialist nature of what 'beauty' is

(Sheehan, 2000, 13); heritage collections of physical material that was unearthed at an individual site; archives of written material that were intended to establish property rights; or those organisations labelled as 'museums' that store, conserve, curate, exhibit and display particular sets of material artefacts.

The tensions that are generated by these seemingly irreconcilable visions of the roles of museums – between those that view them as instruments for the attainment of a variety of social, cultural, political, technological and policy goals, and those that view them simply as institutions that provide spaces for reflection and learning – have existed throughout the history of museums (as can be seen in Alexander & Alexander, 2008, for example). These tensions have created a situation where museums are, on the one hand, seen as being sites for the pursuit of a wide variety of communal objectives, and, on the other hand, as sites for the development of the individual citizen, untrammelled by externally set objectives, including those of the communities within which they reside. While this is a major generalisation of the perceptions of museums that can be found in most societies, such a dichotomous division between the societal and the individual roles of museums is frequently found in the host of normative advocacy claims and counter-claims about them that are commonly to be found in public debate.

While none of these claims are essentially wrong they are more frequently simply partial or misleading as to the real effects that museums can, and do, actually have – that is, when they are not simply self-contradictory. The purpose of this book is to examine the host of arguments that have been put forward about what the point of museums actually is. The way in which this is approached is through an examination of the justifications that are used to identify what objectives, both social and individual, museums could, and should, be expected to reach through undertaking their functional roles within communities. As a result of this museums are not considered in terms of the precise ways in which they do things but, instead, are examined in terms of their status as a particular set of social, economic and political institutions alongside their museal status in terms of their collections. Such an approach that emphasises the contexts within which museums operate rather than the detail of their daily activities requires some justification and it is this that this first chapter in the book provides. Later chapters will investigate in depth the changing expectations and understandings of museums within societies but here we are concerned with explaining our own contexts that have led us to this point.

Understanding museums

It is not our intention in this book to provide yet another version of an absolute and definitive statement about exactly *how* museums *should*, and *must*, be thought about. Instead, we are concerned with contextualising the sorts of claims about these that are frequently made by their supporters, through linking them to the underlying sets of assumptions, beliefs and ideological predispositions that they rest upon. As a consequence of the fact that we both agree and disagree with

parts of all of the claims that have previously been made about the importance and significance of museums for individuals, groups, nations and the entirety of humanity it would be presumptuous of us to think that our own positions are absolutely the right ones to adopt when thinking about museums as either individual establishments or as an institutional category. Indeed, given the sheer mutability of the claims that have been made about museums it would be unrealistic to expect that a claim made in 2019 would remain in force as the best, or only, way to think about museums in 2029, let alone in 3019 (provided that humanity has not succeeded in wiping itself out in the fallout from climate change by then). Indeed one of the motivations for writing this book was our recognition that the validity of the arguments that are put forward to explain, justify, account for, or understand social phenomena never stay either valid or remain in the same form for very long. Thus, while the arguments of Aristotle about democracy still carry an argumentative weight, they simply do not mean the same today as they did when they were first promulgated, and the effect of the arguments of later writers on the same subject from Mill and Marx in the nineteenth century to writers on direct and discursive democracy in the twenty-first century (let alone much earlier writers on the subject) have necessitated a continuing reappraisal of the Aristotelian arguments, with this changing their meaning altogether in terms of current concerns, problems and issues. The consequence of this is that there is something of a partial nature to present interests and concerns that will not necessarily remain the same into the future. This may be a truism but, unfortunately, this is not something that particularly seems to bother polemicists or advocates, both of whom tend to assume that there is something not only inherently sensible about what they are saying but also that it is inescapably correct in the present, and will continue to be both sensible and correct into the future, if not for all time.

A key thread throughout this book includes a constructivist approach to thinking about museums. This follows an ongoing tradition in the cultural and arts sectors around the social construction of reality, questioning how things are framed and reframed, and the narratives surrounding that. This book will highlight that the museum is a social construction on many levels. We investigate the social, political and economic roles that have been and are connected to museums from the lens that 'truth' and 'reality' are constructed depending on the 'norms', understandings and discourses that are employed by certain social groups (Heylighen, 1993). That the museum as an organisation, and museum functions as sets of activities, have been seen to change over time and place thus allows social constructionism to be adopted as a key approach as it allows us to challenge of the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions and realities (Andrews, 2012) that are commonly made use of when the nature of museums is discussed. Berger and Luckmann (1991, 15) ultimately contended that this approach is about the 'analysis of the social construction of reality' and this book throughout the different chapters analyses the construction of the reality around the concepts, roles, functions and policies that are applied to 'the museum'.

As will be seen in later chapters there is a strong tendency amongst writers about museums to implicitly assume that their own position may be questioned, but rarely that it can be entirely discounted. It is not our intention to undertake a wholesale assault on the ideas and claims that we investigate – each of them can be supported to a certain extent (usually as long as their underlying premises are accepted as being valid). Recognising that, however, does not mean that the conclusions that are derived from such claims must be accepted at face value. There are many reasons to support museums, individually and *en masse*, but these reasons require adequate, and appropriate, forms of support – both argumentative and evidential – to make them both acceptable and valid. At the very least this requires an explicit justification to be given for each reason to support museums that may be put forward. Alongside such justification from argument, however, it is also necessary to establish some form of justification from evidence: as was reportedly said by Thomas Huxley, ‘a beautiful theory destroyed by a nasty, ugly little fact’,¹ apart from being a tragedy of science, is an important element in establishing the validity of claims. For such generally well-accepted institutions as museums this becomes even more important: if the arguments that are put forward in support of claims that museums are important for societies are demonstrably untrue then why should societies continue to make use of them? And, in the present context, why do societies continue to open them in such large numbers? The explosion in museum numbers around the world in recent years – most noticeably in China (Lu, 2014; Varutti, 2014) – is predicated on a large number of assumptions about the growth in local employment, the attraction of tourists and the expression of local identities (amongst many others), each of which is, at the very least, open to question in theoretical and argumentative terms, and can be either misleading or simply wrong in empirical terms. For museums there are also increasing sets of expectations, requests and demands that they provide ‘evidence’ to demonstrate their value for their societies and funders. In this context, if there is either an absence or simply a lack of adequate empirical support to justify their activities then the case for museums becomes at least weakened, if not terminally damaged.

The stress on empirical evidence that we give in the following chapters derives from our own perspectives as empirical social scientists (one with a background in sociology and social policy, and one with a background in political science, public administration and policy). We have applied ourselves to the investigation of museums over a number of years and have published widely on how policy-making, social inclusion, the ‘new museology’ and citizenship are embodied in museums, and on the political and social nature of museums as institutions. In our research, rather than impose our own views on what museums are doing, we have, instead, let museum staff tell us what they are doing, why they are doing it, how they evaluate it, and what the consequences of doing it have been for their own organisations and for the communities that they serve. The largely qualitative nature of our research has allowed us to identify the importance of professional values and ideologies, organisational power distributions

and hierarchies, and the meanings that museum staff give to their activities as being of great importance for understanding the ways in which museums function, and this extends far beyond unsubstantiated, non-empirical, claims about what museums are and do.

The dominance of normative advocacy arguments about museums, and the relative lack of detailed empirical analysis about them, can be simply explained as an academic disciplinary effect, where the tendency within much of the literature about museums rests upon disciplines such as art history and cultural studies. While there is some international divergence in this disciplinary basis – museum studies in the United States, for example, has a tendency to be more closely aligned with archaeology and anthropology than art history – there is little doubt that the dominant ways of thinking and talking about museums within academia have a great reliance upon the types of qualitative argumentation and logic that are based in the humanities in general, and which have become increasingly concerned with ‘reading the text’ of the museum rather than with detailed empirical contextualisation in many cases. There are clearly developed examples of more empirically orientated and some quantitative forms of research within the humanities, such as the example of cliometric economic history (Diebolt & Hauptert, 2016), but as will be seen throughout this book such approaches are far more noticeable by their absence than their presence in developing arguments about the value of museums for societies. Even in the case of the large number of visitor surveys and analyses that rely upon quantification (as in Falk & Dierking, 2013) there is no certainty that the statistical evidence that is made use of is actually valid in methodological terms, being dependent more on the assumptions that are made about models and evidential validity than anything else. The assertive certainties that exist in many of these arguments is thus as much a case of how disciplines organise what are seen to be valid ways of thinking and writing about subjects as it is to do with anything else. Alternative disciplinary approaches establish other criteria as being appropriate for the formulation of valid arguments and claims about museums, and it is the difference between these approaches that have a significant effect on the whole topic of what museums are for.

The recognition of differences in how arguments and claims are constructed and validated within disciplinary settings makes no judgement whatsoever about whether these approaches are in some sense ‘superior’ or ‘inferior’ to one another: they are simply different. As noted above there is something of value in all of the arguments and claims that have been put forward about the place of museums in societies: our intention is to examine them, not as arguments and claims, but as justificatory mechanisms. If museums create employment then how could that actually be demonstrated? What causal mechanisms would need to exist for the presence of a museum, or the building of a new museum, to demonstrate its effectiveness in this role? Museums may well be a source of valuable employment opportunities (although who the beneficiaries of these opportunities are is another matter altogether), but if that is a major justification for their existence

then it must be expected that questions about their success in doing the job of job creation will be asked. At the very least the question of whether the jobs that are created could have been created more effectively through other means (as Frey & Meier, 2006, argue) can become an important concern in times of economic constraint – and museums are not exempt from such constraints, however much many of their defenders might wish them to be. In other words, it is not the arguments themselves that require examination (although the normal standards of logical thought might discount some arguments at the outset), rather it is the ways in which these arguments are employed for policy purposes that becomes central to our concerns. In this context viewing museums as service-providing social, economic and political institutions rather than as simply repositories of collections (either tangible or intangible) widens the nature of the debate between alternate visions of what museums are for, what they might provide, and how and why they might undertake this provision, as the following section argues.

But what are museums for?

The simple answer to this question is ‘whatever you want them to be for’, although, as academics, we must always add the proviso that things are rather more complicated than that. Certainly museums have been used for multiple purposes at different times (as the argument in the rest of this chapter will explain), leading to a position where a single view of the museum enterprise is likely to incorporate only a small part of the entirety of what museums *could* be used for. It is possible to draw a number of distinctions between the views of museums that are held by museum insiders (particularly their service-providing employees, but also their funders and senior managers), regular museum visitors and users (including museum members and volunteers), and those members of societies who never visit museums, do not care about, and never think about, them. Each of these groups will contain within them a range of views about what the purposes of museums might be and what societies might expect museums to provide for them.

Depending upon who is being asked, museums could be seen to have something of a mystical status, acting in some fashion as a source of enlightenment, openness, sensual delight and excitement, or as a collection of dead ‘stuff’ that is boring, irrelevant to today, utterly pointless and a waste of space. The reasons why such extreme positions can be held are tied up with matters of education, cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2010), social class and status, political ideologies (Gray, 2015a), economic advantage and disadvantage, access to museums, social geography, and social and personal psychology. Given this sheer variation in relevant factors it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify any single cause to account for why museums are seen to be either central to the life of societies or an irrelevance to them. As might be expected, we are strong supporters of museums and can see their value as being embodied in the multiple activities that they might undertake, the multiple services that they might provide, and the contents of the collections that they have. We do not, however, think that our opinions are the only valid ones

that exist: our preferences for what would make for an interesting presentation of museum material in the form of exhibitions and displays are not even necessarily shared between us, let alone with everybody else in society.

This does not mean, however, that we view every opinion as being equally as valid as another. As we stress in our argument, the validity of claims about museums depends upon a combination of logically consistent argument, the use of acceptable assumptions about the world, and the existence of accurate empirical evidence based on demonstrable causal linkages between variables. Much of this has already been implicitly referred to in the preceding argument, and forms a major part of our later analysis of the claims, justifications and assumptions that have been made use of to support the continued existence of museums within societies. As will be seen there have been many claims made about the benefits that accrue to societies from museums undertaking particular functional roles, whether social, economic or political. These claims are not the only ones that could be made about museums but we have concentrated on them as they have become the dominant ones for justifying the continued support of states, trusts, individuals, community groups, charities and societies for museums. In light of what we have already said, however, we do not think that they will necessarily always continue to have a similar status at a later date as new concerns will certainly arise to replace the seeming centrality that current concerns have.

Museums have always been multifunctional organisations, undertaking a large number of roles within societies, for a large number of groups and individuals, and for a large number of reasons. The emphasis on which of these functions is, or are, perceived to be the most important for the museum enterprise has undergone important changes over time. These changes have had considerable consequences for the ways in which museums are understood, what it is that they are expected and intended to do, why these things are deemed to be worthwhile and appropriate for museums to undertake, as well as for the ways in which they are expected to do them. Our argument investigates what museums do, why they are expected to be doing it, and the consequences of these expectations and activities for how they serve the multiple, competing, demands to which they are subject. This investigation involves an examination of the economic, social and political environments within which museums operate so that explanations can be provided for how and why the expectations of museums have changed, and what the consequences of these changes have been, and will continue to be, for museums, both as individual organisations and as an institutional category. The perceived increasing instrumentalisation of museums, where they have become expected to be concerned with far more than the simple accumulation, conservation and display of their collections (a claim which itself makes a large number of assumptions about what museums are for), means that the social, political and economic roles and functions of museums have tended to be perceived by policy-makers at least – if not by museum professionals, visitors and funders – as increasingly important justifications for their existence. By examining these justifications, and explaining their validity – or lack of it – for the multiple constituencies that

museums serve we will demonstrate the multitude of answers that exist to the seemingly straightforward question of 'what are museums for?'

In this context the recent debate within the International Council of Museums (ICOM) about the definition of a 'museum' is rather enlightening. While we discuss this further in later chapters it is worth noting that the proposed new definition that has been advanced (ICOM, 2019) has been seen as being far more about what it is intended that museums should do than it is about what they are in themselves (Fraser, 2019). This does not mean that either the existing or the proposed new definitions are right or wrong in themselves, only that there is no unanimity about the subject. The consequence of accepting this is that there is also an acceptance of the fact that there are a plurality of views about museums in existence, each of which depends upon its own argumentation and appeals to evidence. Rather, however, than falling into a simplistic post-modernist claim of relativism about these differences of view we will argue that some views make more sense, both in their own terms and absolutely, than do others about what the meaning, point and purpose of museums can be. Thus, we view the ongoing argument about whether museums should be classified by whether they are not-for-profit or for-profit organisations as being extremely important in some contexts and circumstances but as entirely fatuous in others. Indeed, the fact that museums can be understood and made use of in so many different ways forms an important part of our argument: understanding today's museum depends upon understanding the claims that have been made about them both as individual organisations and as an institutional form.

By adopting a long-term perspective on these matters it will also demonstrate that the seemingly new instrumentalising pressures that museums are facing have actually been around for as long as museums themselves, and that what has changed is the context within which arguments about the roles of museums are played out rather than anything else. Museums have always been multifunctional institutions but what the consequences of this multifunctionality are for the services that museums provide and the publics to whom they are provided has equally varied considerably over time. This makes the museum, its functions and its roles and surrounding reality constructed in a variety of ways. By examining the range of arguments and explanations that have been used to make sense of the changing world of museums in an international context, we also intend to show how the gaps that exist between policy ideals and museum practices, and how the effects of economic, political and social choices within the museums sector play out, can be found in different forms in different museum contexts. This is an important element of our argument as the pressures that are faced by large, national, 'universal' and general museums are very different to those that are faced by small, specific, private museums that are catering for particular, and not necessarily general, sets of visitors. Thus a lawn-mower museum (as in the case of the British Lawn Mower Museum in Southport in the United Kingdom) or a museum dedicated to the cartoon art of a single person (as with the Musée Peynet et des Dessin Humoristique in Antibes in France) are rather different kettles of fish

in comparison with the Smithsonian Science Museum or the Louvre. Likewise a Trustee museum (as with the various branches of the Guggenheim Foundation that are to be found around the world) will operate under different pressures than those affecting local authority museums which have different management and funding arrangements, amongst many other differences – and the pressures that the latter confront will be very different depending upon which country is actually looked at.

The structure of the book

Having identified the simple fact that museums are not all the same thing as each other, and that their meanings have changed over time, the question arises of how, in that case, can anything be said about them that extends beyond individual sets of stories and examples of differences between what museums do and how they do it? Our answer to this has been to establish a generalised framework to use for thinking about the nature of the differences that exist between museums rather than to look at the specific details of each museum in turn. While reference must be made to individual examples of museums and how these have been made sense of, these cases do not exist in isolation from each other. Making generalisations has its disadvantages in that individual cases can be forced into a Procrustean bed that loses the fine detail that is important to them, and they depend upon the assumptions and values that underlie them in the first place. On the other hand, however, they do allow for the identification of common characteristics that are prevalent within the museum sector. We do not claim that the choices that we have made about how to think about museums are the only ones that could have been made, or that the characteristics that we identify have a definitive nature: other choices and other characteristics are available to organise thinking about museums. In what follows we will justify the choices that we have made about how to examine museums and will show how their application can be used to make sense of the complexity of the museum landscape and the individual museums that form it.

We begin by setting the context for the examination of individual museums by identifying the range of functional activities that museums are expected to undertake, or have been expected to undertake. This leads into a distinction between the perceived intrinsic functions of museums and their extrinsically claimed functions: those that depend upon the museum form of organisation, and those that are imposed upon them. Chapter 2 will also begin to explain the dynamic nature of the policy process in relation to museums and the gap between policy and practice that is an endemic feature of the sector. The difference between internally governed museum practice and externally determined expectations of the economic, social and political contributions that museums can have for societies are clarified and the consequences of these differences are explained. The relationship between the multiple pressures that affect the activities that museums undertake is stressed, demonstrating that the internal/external dichotomy

is only a part of a more complex set of factors that affect museum practice and the expectations that are held of museums. Other approaches to understanding the roles of museums within societies will also be considered to emphasise the particular nature of the approach that we are adopting. The themes that are introduced here are then explored in greater depth in the following chapters.

We then move on in Chapter 3 to differentiate between the types of function that museums undertake in terms of how these functions are tied in with questions of policy purpose, policy effect, policy output and policy outcome. Policy in this sense is concerned with intended means–end relationships that are created by undertaking particular forms of action by both individuals and groups of actors in particular structural settings. In effect it deals with the practical dimension of turning intentions into forms of social behaviour that are meant to fulfil these intentions. Distinctions are drawn between functions that are held to define what a museum is (intrinsic functions), such as conservation and curation; those which are imposed on organisations as expectations or obligations of their existence, such as accountability or community engagement; and those derived from ‘reading the text’ of the museum, such as their perceived ritual (Duncan, 1995) or disciplinary (Bennett, 1995) roles within society. How these distinctions have been made use of by a range of academic, economic, social and political actors will be explained through the use of multiple examples of museum practice from around the world. We will also present an analysis of policy narratives around the UK and internationally that try to explain the particular nature of museums as organisations. The differences that these imply for the relationship of museums to the societies that they are located within are then identified and explained.

Chapter 4 introduces the background to the gap between museum policy and practice in the context of the struggles and negotiations over space and place that are endemic within the museums sector. Chapter 4 goes into more detail about how the host of functions that have been attached to museums have important consequences for how museums are to be understood and distinguishes between: museums as institutional forms, defined by what they do; museums as sets of occupations, defined by the roles that are fulfilled by the people within them; and museums as arenas for action, defined by non-traditional museums criteria, such as social inclusion, place and urban development. These three versions of how museums are to be understood establish different links between museums and their economic, political and social contexts; they equally imply different understandings of how museums are expected to operate. The work of Bourdieu is employed here as a critical lens to develop insights into museum practice leading to an identification of distinct models of museum practice that emphasise the relationships – and distances – between ideologies of museums, the claims that are made about them by a variety of actors, and the work that is actually undertaken within them. Bourdieu’s argument that museums are not just sites of practice but are also mechanisms for the exercise of ‘symbolic violence’, where the choices and decisions that are made by those who run museums have major effects on the legitimisation of museums as institutions and the collections that

they contain, is made use of to underline the complex social roles that museums play within societies.

The relationships between museums and the societies and communities within which they are located have important implications for the expectations that will be placed on museums and their staff and Chapter 5 examines the difference between intrinsic, expected and imposed functions in terms of how the social role of museums is located within them. This is then connected to the interaction of local communities, groups and stakeholders in museum functioning. The expected and actual contributions of museums to community identity formation and community engagement are examined, and the consequences of changing perceptions of the social dimension of museum activity for museum practice are identified. This discussion employs a critical view, drawing on Bourdieu to explore the social role of museums and culture in that context. This examination leads into a further discussion of the governance of museums and their perceived and actual instrumental roles in governing and controlling 'culture'.

Developing from the museum–community relationships discussed in the previous chapter the anticipated economic roles of museums form the basis of Chapter 6, with an emphasis on the asserted role of museums as the creators of economic value as opposed to other forms of value (such as social and cultural value). Treating museums as simply economic actors has considerable implications for the range of functions that museums undertake and leads to the development of various claims and counter-claims about the ultimate purpose (and purposes) of museums. The role of different funding bodies – such as national and local governments, quangos and independent and charitable Trusts – and their role in pushing the agenda of economic impact are outlined, and the issues surrounding the provision of evidence of museum impact are identified and explored. The misuse (or non-use) of the evidence that museums provide, or which has been identified as inhering in museums, highlights issues concerning the nature of the accountability that museums owe to different groups of social and political actors. The drive to link museums with economic impact highlights and reflects the increasing relationship between the cultural sector and the conservative political agenda to which it is often attached (see, for example, Janes, 2007). The economic arguments and evidence about the valorising role of museums are examined, and their consequences for museum practices and functions are identified.

Chapter 7 is concerned with the political dynamics of museum practices. The roles of power, ideology and legitimacy in determining how museums are understood and the roles that they are expected to play within societies are examined, and the consequences of political choices for museum practice are identified. The relationships between political, economic and societal demands and how these affect museums are considered and the implications of these relationships are explained. The ways in which policy narratives are developed to justify the choices that are made by societal actors on the basis of the underlying distribution of power, ideological and legitimisation resources is also examined and explained.

While the inherently political nature of museums has previously been made clear (Gray, 2015a) this was at a level of generality that sometimes missed out on the particular ways in which politics affects individual museum practices and processes and the current discussion considers this in detail.

After having considered the sheer variety of visions, arguments and ideas that exist about what museums can do, should do, and what directions they could take, within societies, and how an understanding of the political, societal, and economic assumptions and implications of these changes affects their meaning and appropriateness for museums and their activities, the focus of Chapter 8 is not so much to simply provide a summary of what has already been said as to raise questions about why thinking about the political and economic implications of museums within their societal framework is essential for understanding how museums actually function within their specific environments. This, in turn, has a wider applicability for exploring museums as social, political and economic organisations and opens doors for future research and analysis as well as for understanding the museum enterprise as a whole.

What is evident from this summary of the themes, issues and approaches that we *do* cover in this book is that we have *not* considered a number of other themes, issues and approaches that we might have. Thus, questions concerning the relationship of museums to colonialism and post-colonialism and moves towards the decolonisation of the museum are not directly touched upon. Equally the indigenisation of museum practices (Kreps, 2003; 2008) and the representation of indigenous peoples within museums (McCarthy, 2007; 2011) are mentioned only in passing. (In each case more detailed discussion can be found in Gray, 2015a.) These omissions are not because we do not see the relevance, significance and importance of these issues but, rather, that we effectively deal with them by reference to other ways of thinking about museums. Both of these issues have direct social, economic and political dimensions to them, and rather than treating them in the rather patronising manner of seeing them as special cases of these, we have chosen to concentrate on the underlying arguments, claims, logics and rationalities that these dimensions rest upon. Applying the arguments that we develop will thus provide the opportunity to develop new approaches to the understanding of these issues in the museums context.

Note

- 1 Which derives from the context within which Huxley reportedly said it: see Galton (1908, 258).

References

- Alexander, E. & M. Alexander (2008), *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (2nd Ed., Lanham, AltaMira Press).
- Andrews, T. (2012), 'What is Social Constructionism?', *Grounded Theory Review*, 1, 11.

- Barrett, J. (2011), *Museums and the Public Sphere* (Chichester, Wiley/Blackwell).
- Bennett, T. (1995), *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London, Routledge).
- Berger, P. & T. Luckmann (1991). *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth, Penguin).
- Bourdieu, P. (2010), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Abingdon, Routledge Classics).
- Diebolt, C. & M. Haupert (Eds) (2016), *Handbook of Cliometrics* (Springer, Heidelberg).
- Duncan, C. (1995), *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London, Routledge).
- Falk, J. & L. Dierking (2013), *The Museum Experience Revisited* (Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press).
- Fraser, J. (2019), 'A Discomforting Definition of Museum', *Curator*, 62, 501–4.
- Frey, B. & S. Meier (2006), 'The Economics of Museums', in V. Ginsburgh & D. Throsby (Eds), *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture* (Amsterdam, North-Holland), pp. 1017–47.
- Galton, F. (1908), *Memories of My Life* (London, Methuen).
- Gray, C. (2015a), *The Politics of Museums* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan).
- Gray, C. & V. McCall (2018), 'Analysing the Adjectival Museum: Exploring the Bureaucratic Nature of Museums and the Implications for Researchers and the Research Process', *Museum and Society*, 16(2), 124–37 (DOI: 10.29311/mas.v16i2.2809).
- Heylighen, F. (1993), *Epistemology: Introduction* (Principia Cybernetica).
- ICOM. (2019), *Museum Definition*, <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/> (accessed 30 September 2019).
- Janes, R. (2007), 'Museums, Corporatism and the Civil Society', *Curator*, 50, 219–37 (DOI: 10.1111/j.2151-6952.2007.tb00267.x).
- Kreps, C. (2003), 'Curatorship as Social Practice', *Curator*, 46, 311–23.
- Kreps, C. (2008), 'Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 23, 23–41 (DOI: 10.1080/0964777070186345).
- Lu, T. (2014), *Museums in China: Power, Politics and Identities* (Abingdon, Routledge).
- McCarthy, C. (2007), *Exhibiting Maori: A History of Colonial Cultures of Display* (Oxford, Berg).
- McCarthy, C. (2011), *Museums and Maori: Heritage Professionals Indigenous Collections Current Practice* (Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press).
- Sheehan, J. (2000), *Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism* (New York, Oxford University Press).
- Varutti, M. (2014), *Museums in China: The Politics of Representation after Mao* (Woodbridge, Boydell).

2

WHAT DO MUSEUMS DO? WHAT ARE MUSEUMS FOR?

Introduction

It is something of a truism that museums are multifunctional organisations. Greenwood (1996 [1888], 4) saw these functions as covering 'rational amusement of an elevating character', education, the storage of 'local objects of interest' and 'specimens of manufactures resembling those produced in the immediate locality', with the museum being one of a 'series' of local institutions focusing, in the main, on education. More recently ICOM, the leading pressure group representing the interests of museums, museum services and museum professionals around the world, has claimed that a museum 'acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment' (ICOM, 2013). The continuity between these views, separated by 125 years, could be taken to imply one of two things: either that museums are beacons of functional stability within a changing world, as there is an underlying core of activities that are accepted as being what museums do regardless of time, place, or context; or, that these claims about museums are largely superficial generalisations that hide a much more varied, and contentious, world of practice and activity. The second view allows museums to avoid having to explain to the world how they deal with the continuous processes of change that they are confronted with on a daily basis as it assumes that change does not particularly matter in a museums context. The former statement goes further than this by assuming that the continuities in museum practice outweigh the significance of broader changes within societies that might be expected to affect what these organisations could be asked to do in the light of new social, economic and political circumstances.

This chapter outlines some of the debate about the definitions and understandings of 'the museum' that has previously been described as a 'crisis' of role

and function (Harrison, 1994). The questioning of museums, their purpose, role and functions has been of key concern since the development of the new arguments and ideas from the 1920s onwards about the relationship of museums to the societies of which they are a part that have since been labelled as forming the 'new museology' (McCall & Gray, 2014). The arguments of Bourdieu (1999) suggesting that museums are a space for symbolic violence in the continual legitimisation of the cultural classes have also had an effect on how museums are understood and, if classed as an institution of symbolic violence, then the museum must have a role in reproducing the conditions of its own existence whilst also reproducing itself as a distinct field of social action, separate from all others (Jenkins, 1992). This chapter begins to outline and categorise some of the domains of struggle over this space of social action – where power is both subtly and not so subtly exerted and exercised (Bourdieu, 1999, 126). The debate that has developed has been one that has overtones of defensiveness on the behalf of museums when the purposes and activities of museums have been consistently linked to wider existential, social, economic and cultural changes, with a perceived instrumentalisation of museums often being seen as damaging to what are held to be the 'real' and intrinsic roles of museums. This argument can also be seen as being simply the latest example of a continuing tussle between alternative visions of how museums are to be understood within societies. This chapter examines these alternatives to show how museums have been understood by practitioners, politicians, the general public – whether visitors or not – and academics as being much more than simple repositories of different sorts of collection and, instead, actively respond to a host of social, economic and political pressures, contexts and demands to create the complicated sets of roles and functions that the modern museum undertakes. This examination involves the investigation of central questions concerned with the entire museum enterprise:

- Which functions do they undertake?
- Why these functions rather than any others?
- Who controls these functions?
- What effects does the undertaking of these functions give rise to?
- Where are these functions to be undertaken?
- How are these functions to be carried out?

As will become apparent the answers to these questions are affected by time: different functions assume greater or lesser significance depending upon the particular context that is being examined – the expectations of a sixteenth-century *wunderkammer* or cabinet of curiosities are not the same as those that are associated with museums today – and the ways in which museums have changed in response to their environments, and have changed their environments in turn – are an important part of what follows. This is explored along with examples of museum practice that give insight into these questions and the differing political, economic and social circumstances that affect museum functions.

It is possible to identify an extremely large number of functions that museums undertake, have undertaken, and are expected to undertake. Rather than trawl through these as a set of individual activities the starting point lies, instead, with organising them into coherent categories of analysis. By doing this it is possible to establish a robust mechanism that will allow for the development of explanations to account for changes in both the expectations of what museums are doing and why these expectations have changed in the ways that they have. It is then possible to identify different sets of categorisation for museum functions that point attention in different directions ranging from the descriptive to the theoretical as the means by which to make sense of what museums are doing. All of these approaches have particular strengths and weaknesses as ways of organising the material that is being dealt with. Simply to illustrate what this can lead to, a comparison of three approaches is given here: one towards the descriptive end of the spectrum; one dealing with the source of the functions concerned, which derives directly from description and theory; and one based on policy purposes, intentions and effects, and which is more explicitly theoretically informed.

Which functions? Universal description

The descriptive approach is based upon a broad view of museums as multifunctional organisations, with these functions being associated with particular dimensions of the overall work that museums undertake (Gray, 2015a, 3–8). It assumes that these functions will be found in all museums, of whichever sort, at any time and in any place and is thus based on a universalist view of museums. In this case museum functions can be divided into four categories:

1. Core – those functions that must be undertaken if an institution is to fit into the ICOM (2013) definition of what a museum is.
2. Intrinsic – those functions that are inherent in museums as an organisational form.
3. Use – those functions which are associated with both the physical and metaphysical forms of the museum idea.
4. Community/social – those functions that directly relate museums to particular sets of social and community interests.

By themselves these are simply labels which require filling-in before sense can really be made of them. However, the categories are useful in that they give an indication of the museum's *purpose* not just its activities, with this being, as Weil (1990) noted, central to how museums should be identified. Table 2.1 summarises examples of exactly which sets of activities have been included within each of these categories, even if, as the discussion will demonstrate, their location is open to a great deal of disagreement and debate.

TABLE 2.1 Potential museum functions

CORE	Acquisition, Conservation, Research, Communication, Exhibition (ICOM, 2013)
	Interpretation, Collecting, Managing and Caring for the Collection (Ambrose & Paine, 2012)
	Amusement, Culture, Scientific Study and Research, Technical Instruction (Murray, 1996 [1904])
	Education, Labelling, Classification (Greenwood, 1996 [1888])
INTRINSIC	Mediation, Management (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010)
	Buildings Management (Ambrose & Paine, 2012)
	Instruction and Self-Enlightenment of an Audience (National Museums of Canada, 1981)
	Trading, Managing Visitors (Greenwood, 1996 [1888])
	Bestowing Value and Meaning, Controlling Information, Processing Knowledge (Stam, 1993)
	Accountability (Gray, 2011)
USE	Education, Study, Enjoyment (ICOM, 2013)
	Health Improvement (Chatterjee & Noble, 2013)
	Being a Time Machine (Lumley, 1988)
	Ritual Activities (Duncan, 1995)
	Social Control (Bennett, 1995)
	Being an Institution of the Public Sphere (Barrett, 2011)
	Creating Economic Value (Plaza, 2008)
	Social Amelioration, Lounging, Cultivating Powers of Observation, Conquering the Craving for Strong Intoxicants (Murray, 1996 [1904])
	Being a Catalyst for Social Change (Dodd <i>et al.</i> , 2002)
SOCIAL/ COMMUNITY	Contributing to Human Dignity (ICOM, 2019)
	The Representation of Local/National Identity (Knell, 2011)
	Being a Guardian of Place (McCall, 2009)
	Being a Contributor to Social Identity (Dewdney <i>et al.</i> , 2013)
	Being a Contributor to Social Inclusion (West & Smith, 2005)
	Audience Development (Black, 2005)
	Cultivation of Local Patriotism, Elevation of the Masses, Conveying High Moral, Intellectual and Physical Lessons (Greenwood, 1996 [1888])

In the case of the *core* functions of museums slightly different versions of the ICOM definition exist which both serve to demonstrate that the idea of a 'core' to museum activities is by no means an uncontested one, and also to show how a descriptive definition of what the museum core is can start to bleed into the other categories. Thus Desvallées and Mairesse (2010, 20) add mediation and management (as intrinsic functions) and architecture (as a use function) to the ICOM listing of core functions, and make no mention of the provision of 'enjoyment' at all. The ICOM-inspired standard training manual for museum staff

around the world (Ambrose & Paine, 2012, v–xi) is organised around the central functions of interpretation, collecting, managing and caring for collections, museum buildings (which can take the form of both intrinsic and use functions), and museum management (an intrinsic function), for the purposes of providing for the museum visitor. While these act as extensions to the basic ICOM listing, the extent to which they are accepted as being centrally concerned with what it takes an organisation to be if it is to be considered a museum is open to some debate. Certainly the inclusion of architecture and buildings is generally of much less, if, in some cases, of any, importance for dealing with intangible heritage (Alivizatou, 2012; Smith & Akagawa, 2008) however significant they may be for more traditional, and distinctly tangible, forms of museum collections (MacLeod, 2013).

This questioning of the centrality of particular functions is increased when the other types of function are taken into account. In terms of *use* functions, for example, apart from fairly obvious examples where the museum space is simply one that can be utilised for particular purposes – such as being used for the staging of musical events (with some museums and galleries having this as a long-standing activity, such as with the New Walk Museum and Gallery in Leicester, England, for example, which has acted as a location for concerts since the nineteenth century) – this function can also include a range of symbolic roles that museums and galleries can play for particular, and specific, groups and nations as well as for individual visitors. Thus, the role of museums in establishing particular representations of national and local identity (Knell *et al.*, 2011; Gonzalez, 2015; Knell, 2016) has been long recognised as an important function that museums can fulfil. Whether it is important enough to be considered a ‘core’ activity of all museums becomes, however, a matter of interpretation rather than anything else: it is more the case that museums *may* be seen to be providing this function, but there is nothing to say that they *must* be providing it. It has, however, been a key part of wider national policies and strategies within Scotland and Wales (see for example MGS, 2012) since these nations received new devolved powers in the late 1990s, but how it is actually delivered or evaluated remains rather complex, if not obscure. In this case it is perfectly possible for some visitors to see this symbolic function as being at the heart of the museum enterprise, and thus a core function, whilst for other visitors it is an utter irrelevance, if not completely alienating.

A similar problem arises with the idea of *intrinsic* functions. These activities can range from legal requirements concerned with the state of the museum’s accounts, to questions of accountability (to whom and for what, with both being a part of this), to matters of community engagement (whoever these communities may consist of), amongst many others. In effect, these functions are concerned with the expectations and obligations that go with being a museum. These may be developed from both internal sources – such as the maintenance of professional standards in the undertaking of job roles in the museum – and external ones – such as the law of the land (as in the case of dealing with human remains and tissue samples in many countries), and the general social standards

that museums are expected to live up to and abide by. In the case of accountability, for example, operational managers have both a legal and social duty to ensure that organisational rules and procedures are followed, and an operational and political responsibility to their line managers and funders (Gray, 2015a, 114–15) and this division between forms of accountability causes complications for managers in undertaking their role. In a general sense, intrinsic functions must be undertaken by museums if they are to be seen as legitimate social organisations undertaking social roles, but their status is not the same as that accruing to the museum's core functions in terms of delivering services. McCall and Gray (2014) for example highlighted a clear divide in some local authority museums between people labelled as 'old school' (core function focused) and those labelled as 'new school' (concentrating on outreach and learning focused roles). Other potentially intrinsic functions form an accretion around the service-providing role of museums which is just as important but which, simply put, works in a different way. Where the dividing line between core and intrinsic falls is utterly unclear in this but, intuitively at least, it does exist.

While the *community and social* functions of museums are given a discrete categorisation in this descriptive listing exercise it is already clear that they could be seen as being simply an element in the intrinsic functions of museums, or even a core function in their own right. Each of ICOM (2013), Desvallées and Mairesse (2010) and Ambrose and Paine's (2012) views of these core functions, either implicitly or explicitly, assumes that there are sets of people with an interest in what museums are, what they do and how they do it. Indeed the 'new museology' as a philosophy of museum operation had a clear and explicit focus on drawing museums and the communities that they serve closer together – even if this has not always been as successful as it might have been (McCall & Gray, 2014). McCall (2013) notes that museum workers link ideas around citizenship, user involvement, place and belonging to community involvement and the role of the museum as a 'guardian of place' was seen as being central to local communities and to the social functions of museums. However, the evidence also noted that the museum was often seen as a 'conduit' or 'neutral forum' (therefore the 'guardian of place' role was a descriptive category rather than a central or core function) and often discussed as something that *should* be seen within museums even if it is 'not necessarily the case in all museum sites' (McCall, 2013, 81). The perceived need that this entails to improve the museum/community linkage might imply that this relationship has not necessarily been seen to be a core function that museums have – after all, if it was accepted as being central to what museums are doing then there would be no need to give it a new significance and importance. This is supported by the short-term nature and failure to maintain successful community projects in the museum context: McCall and Rummery (2015), for example, note this as a limitation on the ability of museum partnerships to engage diverse community members. Despite a large appetite for the continuation of community involvement, resource limitations dictated the end of one engagement project that had been evaluated as successful, indicating that other factors were seen as being relevant for such forms of engagement and these could be

turned on and off at will, meaning that they were seen as being neither 'core' nor intrinsic functions in their own right. On the other hand it might equally be the case that this is an example of Downs' (1972) issue attention cycle argument – that not every issue is equally as important at all times and in all places but goes through a cyclical process of interest and neglect, usually depending on matters that are entirely external to the museum itself. Whichever is the case though, it is clear that the community functions that museums undertake have not always been given the centrality that would be expected if they were actually a core part of museum activities making them a distinct category in a descriptive sense.

The complexities that arise from these multiple versions of what museums are intended to be doing (and achieving), and the fact that these versions have changed over time, have been recognised by ICOM, which proposed in September 2019 that a new definition of what a museum is should be introduced. While this proposal was shelved for further discussion and consideration, it forms an important component of recent developments in thinking about the roles and functions of museums in societies. In brief, the new definition (ICOM, 2019) sees museums as participating in processes of democratisation and inclusion, providing opportunities for dialogue and addressing present-day 'conflicts and challenges'. They do these things through their material/immaterial (or tangible/intangible) collections, and should seek to make them accessible to everyone and promote equal rights to heritage. The idea from the previous ICOM definition (ICOM, 2013) that museums are 'not for profit' remains in the new version, as do the functions of collection, preservation, research, interpretation, exhibition and the enhancement of understanding, even if 'enjoyment' seems to have fallen off the definitional map. In addition, museums are expected to be 'participatory and transparent' and to develop close links with all of their communities, and to contribute to 'human dignity ... social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing'.

The shifts in emphasis that are marked by the proposed new definition suggest that the precepts of the 'new museology' have firmly taken root at the ICOM level – even if the shelving of its adoption indicates that these have not been entirely accepted by the international museum community as a whole. It is appropriate to note that the new definition assumes that museums can actually do all of the things that it is suggested they do, although later chapters will demonstrate that problems of causality and attribution are rife in the museum sector and that the evidence base to support most of these claims is extremely thin, if not actually non-existent. It is also fair to point out that there is a great deal of rhetorical noise associated with the new definition and whether this noise can be translated into something of practical significance is entirely unclear – and, again, later chapters will demonstrate that the implementation gap between desires and practices is an ever-present reality in museums. The fact that the proposed definition is full of deeply ambiguous terms means that while museums and their critics will be able to make claims and counter-claims about the success, or otherwise, of museums in fulfilling the demands that are being made of them it will be difficult

to demonstrate the accuracy of any these claims (Gray, 2015b). Thus, while the new definition is full of worthy ambition on the surface, it is quite likely that underneath this the water will be full of both sharks and Snarks (in the original Lewis Carroll (1971, 213–30), sense of the word, rather than the social media one) leading to a great deal of frustration and pointless debate rather than anything more fruitful.

The simply descriptive view of museum functions clearly has some problems attached to it, not least in terms of determining which sort of function each activity falls under. For example, the idea of the museum expressed in functional terms has been a way of avoiding questions regarding political and moral issues (Weil, 1990), something that debates about the restitution, repatriation and simple return of items that museums have in their collections have recently brought to the fore (Greenfield, 2007). More positively, however, it does provide a basic check-list of the range of activities that museums can and do undertake, allowing for distinctions to be drawn as to whether a particular activity is being carried out as a core, intrinsic, use or community function in any specific case. This, in turn, allows for a clarification of the purposes which particular functions fulfil and serves to indicate that multifunctionalism takes place not only at the simple level of there being a lot of functions that museums undertake, but also at the level that these functions are being carried out for a variety of purposes, with each of them potentially serving multiple ends. Thus, the development of outposts of galleries, as with the expansion of the Guggenheim, the Louvre and the Tate, could be seen to be concerned with everything from allowing more items in the collections of these organisations to be put on display; to contributing to local economic development through job creation and increased tourism numbers; to acting as a mechanism for the exercise of cultural diplomacy; to forming a demonstration of the cultural power and importance of the host gallery; to providing an educational resource to influence artistic ideas and practices. At the very least this demonstrates that museums are not concerned with any single, particular, function at any given time but, instead, that there are a plurality of uses to which museums can be put, allowing a great deal of flexibility for museum staff to make use of in organising what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what they are doing it for. It is not necessarily the case that all of the functions that are available are being undertaken at any particular time but their availability provides multiple opportunities for museum staff to arrange and rearrange what it is that they are providing. It also allows them the opportunity to direct whatever functions they are providing towards multiple groups of recipients, thus extending their ambit away from the 'traditional' core of museum visitors (as seen in Cuno, 2004; 2011) to many more potential audience members.

Which functions? Sources

What is not of particular concern in the descriptive approach is where the functions concerned are derived from. In this sense the sources underpinning