

## **INSTRUMENTAL VALUES: PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN COLLABORATIVE CULTURAL WORK**

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The *Instrumental Values* study will examine ethical dimensions of collaborative practice between museum and library sectors and partner agencies working in two priority public policy areas, including public health and wellbeing and prison education reform. The research has been designed to explore the transitional efficacy of museum and library sectors' ethical codes of practice when working in collaborative public policy contexts. Using a communities of practice (CoP) conceptual framework, the research will develop two sector-specific case studies focusing on museums working in health care settings and prison library services. The research aims to provide evidence-based guidance on shared codes of ethics in cross-sector cultural work, emphasising the relationship between professional values and the capacity of museum and library sectors to respond and contribute to cross-government public policy agendas in England.

**Key words:** museums; libraries; public policy; professional ethics; instrumentalism; cultural value.

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### **Research context**

Ethical dimensions of cultural policy and practice have come into focus recently, in relation to the civic and social responsibility of publicly-funded arts and cultural organisations. In the museums sector, debates have arisen for example over the ethics of accepting [commercial sponsorship](#) from international oil companies whose own business practices have been morally scrutinised; and on the ethical responsibility of the sector to respond and contribute to geopolitical issues arising from policy interventions including the EU referendum and devolution agendas. Dominant political narratives more broadly are encouraging a greater degree of synthesis and integration between arts and cultural sectors and public services (Wilson, 2016). As cultural and public policy and practice become more strategically and operationally aligned, it is important to consider the efficacy and legitimacy of codes of ethical practice designed to uphold the principles and values of cultural sectors as independent professional domains.

The *Instrumental Values* study aims to fill a gap in the cultural value research field by exploring the extent to which professional ethics and values stimulate and support museums and libraries in responding and contributing to public policy agendas.

There are a number of policy drivers pertinent to the *Instrumental Values* research programme. Within the context of health and wellbeing, a renewed focus on the social determinants of health following the Marmot review of health inequalities in England (2010) has encouraged localised, asset-based, integrated approaches to preventive health care. In response to this paradigm shift, the Royal Society for Public Health has begun to 'rethink' the wider public health workforce (RSPH, 2015), including 'librarians and related occupations'. Undeniably, a 'strategic space' has been created for arts, health and wellbeing, illustrated by developments in cultural commissioning by statutory health and social services (NEF, 2016).

Within the criminal justice reform agenda, the Coates review of education in prison (2016) recommends a systemic approach to educational rehabilitation, including reading, literacy and peer support through prison library services. The role of arts and culture as integrated public assets is also advocated in national cultural policy documents, including the Culture White Paper (DCMS, 2016), which includes objectives to improve relationships between cultural sectors, public commissioners and local partners via ‘better collaboration’ with agencies including Local Enterprise Partnerships, health and care services, police and community safety organisations.

In considering the cross-sector values *and value* of museums and libraries in the context of such contemporary public policy drivers, *Instrumental Values* works to the hypothesis that cultural work has another socio-economic purpose beyond ‘being cultural’. The overt political ‘instrumentalisation’ of arts and culture gained considerable traction under New Labour governments in the UK (1997-2010) – a policy which in turn has faced considerable criticism from researchers in the field. Gray (2008) describes a process of museums being used as a tool for the attainment of policy objectives that were traditionally ‘a peripheral concern of the sector’, leading to a practice of ‘policy attachment’ whereby cultural sectors aligned themselves with other policy areas to garner ‘scarce resources and political credibility’. This has been interpreted as a response to an imposed, top down instrumental agenda, causing a dramatic shift in the government’s responsibilities towards supporting the arts and expectations of the sector to evidence its impact, creating a form of rhetorically weak ‘defensive instrumentalism’ (Belfiore, 2012).

Targets became an emblem of New Labour’s instrumentalism, ‘forcing artists to jump through hoops that were not of their own choosing’ (Hewison, 2014). The main intellectual concerns with instrumentalism therefore, are about protecting the autonomy of the arts from direct policy imposition, especially given the nervousness about proving that instrumental objectives had been met. The

range of objectives seemingly assigned to the sector under New Labour’s umbrella social inclusion remit – neighbourhood renewal, community cohesion, cultural diversity, health and regeneration - added an extra layer of complexity and confusion (Hesmondalgh et al, 2015).

Research led by the Leadership Fellow to date has explored different dimensions of the cultural sector’s relationship with public policy and instrumental cultural policy, including both problematic and mutually beneficial outcomes. An AHRC-funded study on public library staff attitudes towards and engagement with social inclusion policy in England (Wilson and Birdi, 2008) revealed examples of responsive and committed socially engaged librarianship alongside systematic experiences of role dissonance and strain in more challenging social environments. Members of the [Art of Social Prescribing](#) research network – funded by the AHRC under a Public Policy highlight notice 2014-15 – expressed concerns that arts and culture may be devalued as adjunct activities of ‘other’ public services further to public policy agendas described above. Alternatively, [research on the impact of House of Memories](#), a dementia awareness training programme led by National Museums Liverpool (NML) since 2012, is unequivocally demonstrating the unique value of museums to health and social care sectors (Wilson, 2015).

Much of the academic literature on instrumental cultural policy arguably overlooks the extent to which this overt political movement has been positively *embraced* by some parts of the sector, as in the case of NML and *House of Memories*. Research undertaken with [cultural leaders in Australia and the UK](#) illustrates that instrumental agendas encouraged a sense of empowerment through enhanced political visibility for arts and culture and ‘renewed social relevance’. Instrumentalism inspired new forms of multi-agency working and collaborative leadership that enabled a ‘united front’ in campaigning for the sector and its social value. This was dependent however on the social and political orientations and predispositions of leaders and their relative sectors and organisations, including organisational mission and values, track records

in socially responsive programming and demographic reach.

The professional identities, values and ethics of cultural workers can be positioned therefore as an under-researched missing link in the contemporary study of cultural value, although this is beginning to be addressed: see for example Newsinger and Green (2016) on discrepancies between ‘official’ discourses of cultural value and the views held by cultural practitioners themselves.

Similarly the ways in which cultural work is organised and practised in response to policy objectives, including professional structures, organisational and sector leadership and collaborative relationships with other relevant sectors and services, are key conditions in any consideration of instrumental cultural value. The established professional identities of museum and library sectors therefore add a particular dynamic to their engagement with public policy agendas. Both are defined by membership professional associations the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and the Museums Association, with prescribed entry levels, qualification frameworks and continuing professional development structures, including routes to chartered status for library professionals.

Literature on the sociology of the professions adds a valuable perspective in this context, including ideas on the claim of professional jurisdiction (Abbott, 1998) and professions as social actors (Friedson, 1994; MacDonald, 1995). Paquette (2012) for example explicitly associates professional identity with positive engagement with instrumental agendas in arts and culture, explaining that ‘occupational areas such as learning programmes... and others have thrived under the New Labour era, and professionals have come to identify with the values of the policy...therefore providing a form of policy coordination through the professionals’.

Ethics and codes of practice furthermore provide a unique lens through which to examine the values of museum and library sectors and how these translate across professional boundaries. Both sectors have a published Code of Ethics and/or a Code of Professional Practice

via CILIP and the Museums Association. The former’s Code of Professional Practice applies agreed ethical principles ‘to the different groups and interests to which CILIP members must relate’, including personal responsibilities; responsibilities to information and its users; to colleagues and the information community; and responsibilities to society. The Museums Association has recently published a revised [Code of Ethics](#), following a substantial public consultation with members. The code is structured around public engagement and public benefit; stewardship of collections; and individual and institutional integrity. During a consultation workshop with members in June 2015, the code was described as the sector’s “social contract” with the public by the Museums Association’s President, Dr David Fleming.

Responsiveness to *new* audiences, collaborators and working patterns also create opportunities for museums to ‘stay relevant’, sustainable and demonstrate their value to ‘communities and society at large’ (Ocello, 2011: 199). Collaborative professional practice including relative ethics and values must be integral to ongoing debates on the extent to which culture effects change, and therefore generates cultural value (instrumental or otherwise) and how this is measured and understood. Research to date has placed too much emphasis on arts and culture as single units of social and economic enterprise (Karpusheff, 2013).

### **Research questions**

The *Instrumental Values* research programme has been designed to interrogate the transitional efficacy of conventional professional ethics and codes of practice for museum and library sectors when working in collaborative public policy contexts, focusing upon museum professionals working in health and social care settings and prison library services. Using a ‘communities of practice’ (CoP) conceptual framework, the research will develop two sector-specific case studies, working across multiple research sites, on the relationship between defined Codes of Ethics and those serendipitously developed between collaborating professionals and organisations as cross-sector communities of practice mature.

CoPs are defined as vehicles for situated learning, generating knowledge and sharing practices within and across a range of work-based and organisational spatial settings (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Gherardi et al, 1998; Amin and Roberts, 2008). A review of the literature on communities of practice (Wilson, 2014) presents the concept as a valid multi-dimensional framework in which to investigate collaborative cultural work. Applying this to situated forms of cultural work in health and social service sector and prison settings will create original insights on the reciprocal benefits and ethical implications of collaborative practice to museum and library professionals and key public services, especially in relation to the articulation of cultural value in public policy agendas.

Specific research questions and issues to be addressed throughout are as follows:

- The extent of work assimilation across professional boundaries;
- Identification of shared repertoires, artefacts and symbols of collaborative professional learning;
- The social construction of embodied professional knowledge and skills;
- The articulation and representation of unique professional identities in creating collaborative 'added value';
- The reciprocal value of defined codes of ethics to collaborating professional communities;
- Each set within the context of public policy agendas and their influence upon developing cross-sector professional communities.

## Research methods

Using an ethnographic approach that capitalises on the Fellow's existing professional networks, up to six fieldwork sites (three per sector) involving prison libraries and health-sector based museums practice in England will be selected in consultation with organisations including CILIP's prison libraries special interest group; Museums Association; and the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing. Case study sites will be chosen according to geographical location; institutional profile (for example category of

prison; type of health service); and service user demographics. A sample of key stakeholders per research site, including library and museum personnel and practitioners from collaborating services, will be interviewed on a longitudinal basis at quarterly intervals throughout the first 12 months of the project.

An ethnographic, qualitative approach is considered essential in order to capture the complexities of the relationship between policy, ethical codes of practice and the lived experience of collaborative cultural work, and to add authority and authenticity to the research via the collection of detailed, autobiographical professional narratives (Riessman, 1993; Robson, 2002). An ethnographic methodology will furthermore enable an in-depth, observational consideration of the *situatedness* of collaborative practice and its ethical implications, inspired by situated learning theory as a central principle of communities of practice research, which is described as learning through goal-directed activity in the situation where the learnt or acquired knowledge is to be deployed (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Billet, 1996).

Rigorous discourse analysis of professionals' social construction of their worlds enables a greater exploration of the 'pragmatic function of language' and how talking translates into doing (Wood and Kroger, 2000). The interview method therefore is appropriate for research in professional environments, which seeks to determine relationships and patterns in vocational behaviours and actions. Each field visit will last one-two days to enable enough time and space to develop interpersonal, trusting connections between the Fellow and research participants including an observational appreciation of their physical, social and cultural work environments. Ethnographic interviewing is defined by on-going relationships with interviewees, establishing enough rapport to facilitate a genuine exchange of views (Sherman Heyl, 2007).

Complementary research methods will include an ongoing review of the literature on relevant concepts including professional ethics and public policy developments. Supplementary secondary data from case study research sites (for example evaluation papers; annual reports) will also be incorporated into the study where

possible. This data will be used to contextualise practitioner narratives on their own professional practices with organisational mission and values, performance indicators and outcomes and associated strategic and operational developments. The research programme will be punctuated by two scheduled workshops (mid and endpoint) with an invited, extended cross-disciplinary community of interest in order to facilitate an iterative, holistic approach to data analysis and research dissemination.

### **Knowledge exchange and engagement**

The *Instrumental Values* research programme is at the vanguard of scholarly debates and professional sector development on professional ethics in policy-responsive collaborative cultural practice. Central to this ambition is a close working relationship with relevant professional bodies and cross-disciplinary national and international academic communities.

As such knowledge exchange events and activities are planned with the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies, Australian National University (ANU) and the University of Hull's Institute of Applied Ethics in 2018.

The Fellow will also work in collaboration with Museums Association and CILIP Ethics Committee(s). The purpose of committee participation and engagement is to enable an ethnographic appreciation of the committees' work in developing and implementing respective codes of ethics and to create a regular opportunity to feed research findings directly into this process.

The main scholarly output for the research will be a self-titled monograph – *Instrumental Values: Professional ethics in collaborative cultural work*. The book will bring together relevant elements from the Fellow's full research portfolio, including most notably AHRC-funded research on public libraries and social inclusion policy and on-going research on the value of museums in dementia care; findings from the *Instrumental Values* programme; and recommendations on the future direction of the field.

Regular updates and research materials will be shared as the *Instrumental Values* study progresses via the [Institute of Cultural Capital](#) website and social media.

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