UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

Managing the New Museology: The changing role, purpose and management of Australian museums since 1980

Claire Baddeley

April 2013

Abstract

Significant shifts have occurred in the management of Australian state museums since the 1980s. This is due to the confluence of new public sector management trends within the organisations and the impact of new museology. Museums in Australia in the 21st century are at a cross-roads, subject to a number of external and internal pressures that are impacting upon their provision and type of services, changing purpose, new social and economic roles and management style and focus. Within the evolving social, cultural and economic context in which Australian museums have operated during the last few decades, state museums provide key insights into the nature and impact of these organisational and management changes.

This thesis investigates and analyses shifts in the management of Australian state museums since the 1980s. How have museums, as public sector organisations, adapted and changed their management practices since the 1980s? How and why are museums responding to these challenges through the introduction of new strategies and a redefinition of their roles and purposes? At management level, how are museums responding to organisational issues such as greater access and information provision, attracting diverse audiences, increased emphasis on education and learning, evolving business models, the transition to professional bureaucracies and a greater social and economic role within communities? These issues are investigated within the thesis. Similarly, how museums operate as hybrids within the public sector, combining commercial and public roles, and the ramifications of this, is explored.

The thesis uses a number of lenses from the disciplines of public sector management, organisational studies and museum studies to cast a fresh eye over the management of Australian state museums from a multi-disciplinary perspective. The research presented in the thesis has implications for museums, organisational studies and public sector management theory and practice. There are similarly few studies of museums which focus on institutions from the perspective of them as qualitative case studies, particularly in Australia. Overall the study provides insights into the factors influencing the changing management, institutional role and purpose of Australian museums today.

Acknowledgments

Throughout the research, preparation and writing of this thesis a number of people have assisted, advised, supported and guided me in a variety of ways. I would like to thank and gratefully acknowledge the roles of my supervisors in this, at times, ungainly undertaking. To my initial supervisor, Dr. Jenny Stewart, for her good sense, useful words regarding forming the shape and contents of the thesis, encouraging initial forays into essay and thesis writing and for providing advice on many public sector management sources and theories. Professor John Halligan stepped in at a time when the thesis was evolving and the initial draft writing had begun, providing constructive criticism to strengthen arguments, theories and ideas. At the same time as Dr. Halligan, Associate Professor Monica Kennedy provided another supervisory role, as primary supervisor, one in which she was keen, both about the PhD process itself as well as the topic of my thesis, and did so in a way that has been patient, encouraging, supportive and constantly helpful, providing guidance and clarity, even while dealing with my sometimes frustration towards the end. All of the support from my supervisors was greatly valued.

My Advisors for the thesis, initially Dr. James Warden from the University of Canberra and subsequently Dr. Kirsten Wehner, Senior Curator at the National Museum of Australia, were helpful in providing feedback and advice regarding the historic development of museums in Australia and museum studies generally. Kirsten's intelligent, thoughtful and wide-ranging knowledge of the development of museums and of the many institutional, staffing and philosophical quandaries now facing museums in Australia was particularly appreciated.

I would also like to extend thanks to the University of Canberra Librarian, Pat Tandy, for her good will, advice and ability to find even the most obscure (but highly useful) references in a field of studies, public sector management, that was not my undergraduate

discipline nor forte. The many senior executive staff and Board members at the three case study museums, the Melbourne Museum, Australian Museum in Sydney and South Australian Museum in Adelaide, are thanked for willingly and enthusiastically giving their

time and thoughtful reflections on the changing management of their cultural institutions during fieldwork undertaken in 2008 and 2009.

Former museum directors interviewed at the South Australian Museum (Dr. Tim Flannery) and Australian Museum (Dr. Mike Archer) also offered information and insights into the changing role of museums in the current century.

To my ‘new’ Uni friends, work colleagues at Old Parliament House and long-term ‘old’ friends, I’d also like to thank them for the respite they provided from the often nebulous path that is undertaking a PhD and for their humour, support, much needed diversions and shared experience.

My greatest thanks go to my family; my brother S and dedicated, supportive and proud parents, V and P who have learned a thing or two having a daughter undertake something as monumental (or so it seems) as a PhD, and to my ‘special friend’ CK, whose constant encouragement, compassion and emotional strength helped me remain sane while undertaking the PhD.

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