Innovation Study:

Challenges and Opportunities for Australia's Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

September 2014

Art is the 'thoughtful reflection of our human experience'.
Prime Minister Tony Abbott
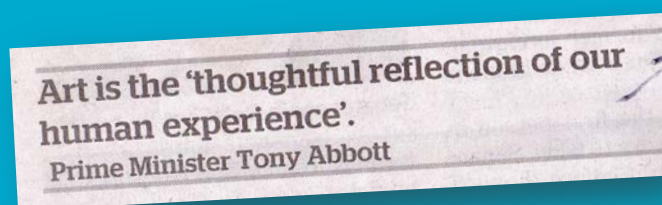
The Sydney Morning Herald, Thu 19 June 2014

Citation

Copyright and disclaimer

Important disclaimer

Full Report

The full report, of which this is a summary, is available from CSIRO at www.acbi.net.au or from the study website:

To ensure accessibility and enable this study to continue, Museums Australia will take on the role of custodian for the GLAM Innovation Study and its reports. The reports can be downloaded from:

https://sites.google.com/site/glaminnovationstudy

For any questions, discussion or to add to this resource site please contact manager@museumsaustralia.org.au.

Executive Summary

The GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) sector in Australia is a diverse group of public interest organisations collecting and exhibiting cultural and environmental material. The GLAM sector currently spends approximately $2.4 billion, around 80% of which is provided by government (local, state and federal). The combined collections contain over 100 million objects (e.g. natural and human-crafted objects, records, books, artworks, recordings etc. but excluding archive material). Around 5% of this is on-display at any one time and 25% of it is digitised. The organisations that constitute the sector are charged with preserving this material as well as facilitating public access to it for research, education and inspiration.

The sector is undergoing profound shifts driven by a number of trends, chiefly those arising from the dramatic changes in how people access, share and engage in digital services and social media enabled by broadband and mobile networks. This is creating new forms of competition for the GLAM sector, challenging the sector's traditional positions of authority and expertise and driving fundamental changes in people's interactions with GLAM organisations and their collections.

While the study identified many examples of innovative practice from Australian organisations, Australian initiatives tend to be isolated, episodic and difficult to sustain in the long term. There were also areas where Australia is trailing international best practice, specifically concerning the digitisation and access to artworks, books and audio-visual collections, most of which require new approaches to managing copyright and other clearances.

The study identified that only a few Australian GLAM organisations have made fundamental changes to their planning, structures and operations to place innovation and digital services at the core rather than as add-on activities. While nearly all GLAM organisations in Australia have started to make this sometimes-difficult transformation, most are yet to complete this process.

The innovation study team consulted with the people from state, national and local galleries, libraries, archives and museums, researchers and international experts – people actively involved in either sponsoring or managing innovation projects – to ask what are the key transformations this sector needs to make to thrive in the emerging digital environment of the next two decades?

RECOMMENDATION 1: FOUR STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Making the public part of what we do

This initiative aims for a deep transformation, both in the professional disciplines in the GLAM sector and in the organizations' relationship to the public. While participants acknowledged a profound rhetorical shift in GLAMs to address the needs of an active, informed public, especially through the use of social media, many felt a deep reluctance within the sector to let go of the traditional position of authority among curators, librarians and archivists and a simultaneous reluctance for organisations to become genuinely more porous to outside contributors and collaborators. This initiative, involving a fundamental shift to open access, open sharing and greater collaboration with the public aims to effect this shift.

Becoming Central to Community Wellbeing

Take the acknowledged role that GLAM institutions play in the wellbeing of individuals and communities and make it a deliberate and central part of each organisation's purpose and vision. The focus is on both the value of the physical spaces as community centres, but also on the role the collections can play in fostering community memory, sense of self and pride, to the economy, and to community health and resilience as our population both ages and becomes more diverse.

Beyond Digitisation – Creative Reuse

Shift the conversation from the difficulties of digitisation to possibilities of creative reuse. Much of the sector is caught between the massive scale of the collections and the expense of digitisation, on the one hand, and the varied difficulties around copyright, moral rights, cultural rights and orphan works on the other. Many participants perceived the need to transition from a "push" to a "pull" model where publics are engaged from the beginning and help pull through digitised content based on specific needs, which shapes the form of digitisation and allows for creative reuse. Digitisation is about preservation, use and reuse to build cycles of creativity in which new or reshaped digital objects join the 'collection'.

Developing funding for strategic initiatives

With the expected constraints in support from government, there is a need to transform the basis of funding towards philanthropy, partnerships with the corporate sector and direct support from the wider community. While government must continue to play its part and fund basic infrastructure, the sector critically needs to find ways to fund big, strategic initiatives that reposition organisations for the digital era. Corporate support is likely to be tied to short-term projects with specific outcomes, but there are also opportunities for greater use of philanthropic foundations to support longer-term strategic and collaborative initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 2: A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATION

The growing expectation from the public for easy and seamless access to Australia's distributed national collection, the pressures of the operating environment and similarities in the digital practice of GLAM organizations make cross-sector collaboration more obviously crucial for innovation, resource and knowledge sharing. Specifically in the areas of:

Digitisation and access

Sharing skills, standards and approaches for digitisation and collaborating on linking and aggregation initiatives like Trove, the Atlas of Living Australia and Linked Open Data.

Digital preservation

Preservation of "born digital" material urgently requires a coordinated, national, cross-sector, standards-based approach to avoid losing access to digital heritage.

National approaches to rights

A more unified approach to the digital environment in which copyright enables preservation, which handles "orphan works" (the owners of which are unknown), which more effectively maintains the rights of the traditional owners of Indigenous material and which both stimulates creativity and supports creators.

Skills and organisational change

Closing the gap between leading practice and the national mainstream in digital skills and organisational transformation.

Shared infrastructure

Sharing capability, storage and networks between organizations in the sector, exploiting the potential of AARNet and the NBN for connection and collaboration.

Trans-disciplinary collaboration and research partnerships

Learning how to communicate and collaborate between professional disciplines within the sector, with academics and researchers and with different communities of identity and culture.

RECOMMENDATION 3: NATIONAL LEADERSHIP & COLLABORATION FORUM

To move any of these ideas forward requires a common forum for conversation and in which to express leadership. Some minimal, cross-sector governance arrangements beyond the existing professional and industry associations would provide direction without the constraints of discipline or history.

Grounding such a national digital forum in practical projects and concrete initiatives is essential as is approaching funding for these new initiatives in a more integrated way.

The sector should also consider creating a charitable foundation to support cross-sector strategic initiatives along the lines of Europeana, the Public Catalogue Foundation of the UK and the Digital Public Library of America.

Conclusion

The GLAM sector faces enormous challenges in the next decade arising from the massive pace of change in its operating environment; challenges it can only face effectively by collaborating across the sector, beyond organisational and disciplinary boundaries.

This innovation study outlines some of the innovative work already underway in the sector, but draws out an emerging consensus on four specific strategic initiatives and a broader collaborative framework to enable the sector to step decisively into the future.

Photographs from Innovation Study Futures Workshop, May 2014

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It's about interrogating our past, understanding our present and imagining our future. That means the stuff that we deal in provokes that interrogation, that understanding and that imagination. That's really what we're about. [...] It's not just us projecting stories out in the broadcast model, but it's actually having a conversation, being receptive to stories in new ways.

Alex Byrne, State Library of NSW

The great conversation in the digital age is about participating, about the community participating in the creation of knowledge and new work. For a thousand years, libraries have, in a much more traditional way, harnessed that community participation because we have collected the books and articles and paintings and manuscripts that arose from people doing research in libraries - so those circles of continuity and of the efflorescence of intellectual and cultural inquiry are circles that continue. The digital world allows us to do it in so many different ways, but I'd say that to-date the digital world hasn't supplanted the physical and so the effort for us is that we're running at least two libraries - others are running two museums or two archives - because it's both the digital and physical that has to keep going.

Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, National Library of Australia

Photographs from Innovation Study Futures Workshop, May 2014

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I'm not here to tell you what your story is. You're going to share the stories that you have, to create the museum that's appropriate to that place. You're facilitators of that story, creating something that people are proud of and they feel part of and then they'll visit, they'll own it, they'll want to change it, they'll want to make decisions about it and I think that's where we have to go. We have to position the public more in the decision-making arena. It's not about being spoon-fed a culture but deciding what your language is and how you want to describe those experiences.

Julie Finch, WA Museum

The point of archives is that that we collect the intellectual property of the nation and the cultural heritage of its people. There is enormous economic benefit to Australia's economy and to the global economy by exploiting the full value of the intellectual property held in the archives and, as cultural heritage, it provides such a rich resource for people to understand their own personal identity within the context of their community identity, their ethnic identity and the national identity. Those two things are the core fundamentals of any civilized society and can only be delivered through the work of archives and the GLAM sector more generally.

David Fricker, National Archives of Australia

I think the purpose is to publicly hold and provide access to important parts of our history and objects of art and culture that the state protects and owns and gives people access to. Those things are hugely important to our identity.

Katrina Sedgwick, TV Arts, Australian Broadcasting Corporation