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Chief Editor and Reviewer: Nick Higgett, De Montfort University

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Email: Nick Higgett at nick.higgett@hotmail

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A Whole Life of a Bicycle: The Design, History and Narrative in Visa Dzīve Vienā Divritenī Exhibition

Dr. Zhiyu Zhao
Beihang University, China
Email: zhaozhiyu@buaa.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

A whole life in a bicycle exhibition was opened in Riga Latvia. All exhibits were collected by an Italian man Mauricio Urbinati which were created and customised between 100 and 150 years ago and value 1.5 million euro approximately. This bicycle exhibition demonstrated people's initiative and ingenuity in situations where artisans, who failed to find works in their hometown and went to make a profit in neighbouring villages as well as in distant lands to return and feed their families. Based on the author's observation, the story-telling method has been used in the exhibition to present the history and narrative of each of the customised bicycle. This exhibition had both information posters and guide interpreters to tell each story of the bicycle which made possible to allow visitors obtain knowledge in detail. Moreover, visitors were able to physically engage with the installations of the bicycles. In this research, the author as a complete observer will not only introduce the history of the customised bicycles, discuses the narrative method on exhibition arrangement, but also evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the exhibition such as employing multimedia technology.

KEYWORDS: Narrative, Exhibition Design, Bicycle

1. INTRODUCTION OF THE EXHIBITION

"Visa dzīve vienā divritenī" (A Whole Life in a Bicycle), a beautiful and interactive pop-up exhibition staged at a Riga Plaza (a shopping mall in Riga, Latvia), displayed dozens of original artisanal bicycles manufactured around the world between the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. The unique of the exhibition was that these displayed bicycles were not run-of-the-mill bikes. Each was both a tool of mobility and a wheeled cabinet. For example, a specially adapted scooter bicycle was also a theatre of marionettes bicycle, a clown's bicycle or a sweet vendor's bicycle. These bikes were made by people who failed to find works in their hometown and sought a profit in neighbouring villages so that they could return and feed their families. "A Whole Life in a Bicycle" demonstrated the initiative and ingenuity of these artisans.

All of the bicycles on view belong to Mauricio Urbinati, who has assembled the collection over a 40 year period, beginning with a cobbler's bike purchased at a flea market in Italy. The bike reminded him of his childhood in a small village visited every month by a cobbler on a bike. For Urbinati, it was an event; the shoe man showed him the world. He has said that he views each customised bicycle as an anthem for craft, and a tribute to the spirit of strong and determined people who found a way to survive in even the most difficult situations (Glumane,2020).

Figure 1. Poster of the exhibition

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The research employed complete participation observation as the main research method, a particular type of participant observation. The researcher Gold (1958) differentiates four degrees of researcher participation in social settings: complete participation, participant as observer, observer as participant and complete observer (Symon and Cassell, 2012). The first of these was selected in order to fully understand visitors' behaviour in a natured. Furthermore, it helped the author to easily observe and deeply analyses this exhibition as an actual visitor. The author analysed the narrative design of this exhibition by what she saw, heard, felt and touched during the observation. The additional research method in this paper was using literature review to discuss in what ways the narratives were employed in the exhibition design and to further explain how important the educational elements was used in this exhibition.

3. NARRATIVE DESIGN IN THE EXHIBITION

Narratives or story-telling is a tool of describing an event or a thing. It constructs stories to convey what has already happened. The value of stories has been also acknowledged in giving people the most valuable information in the shortest time. Narratives consists of three roles which are narrator, medium and receiver. Narrative thinking can be used to establish emotional connection in terms of combination of five senses and space design. Narrative can influence the way visitors have perceived history. As a consequence, it is crucial to explore how narrative and empathy can be irreplaceable in tours within exhibitions (Burkhardt, 2019). In this exhibition, there were communications between people and environment, people and exhibits as well as people and people. There were three mediums of narratives employed in this exhibition, which were narratives of space design, content of graphic design, story-telling of guide interpreters.

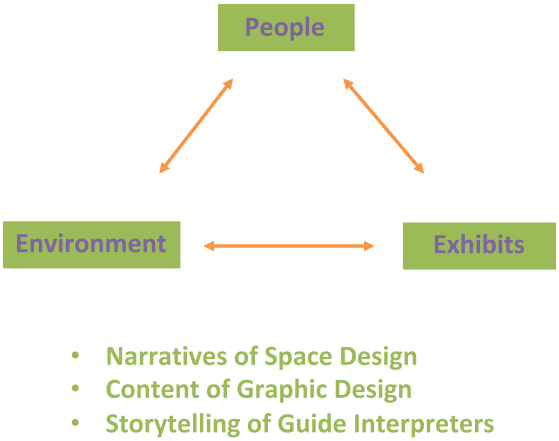

Figure 2. Narrative design diagram in the exhibition

3.1 NARRATIVES OF SPACE DESIGN

People perceive information based on vision, hearing, touch, smell and even taste. The five senses enables people to recognise exhibits. In order to pursue the best way of display in space, the advantage of visual language has been employed in this exhibition. Good visual communication will make people understand the information of exhibits more clearly. The exhibition was divided into three sections that included a video hall showing a documentary about the history of bicycles, a display area to show the new Leitner bicycles (the Riga neighbourhood where the first factory in the Russian Empire was established), moreover, in the main exhibition area, the display of the old customised bicycles. Showing traditional, customised bicycles and modern bicycles enabled visitors to compare their different appearance.

Figure 3. Display of the exhibition

The customised bicycles were organised according to their purpose, such as entertainment, food manufacture, beauty, religion, and art. Signs stuck in the ground identified each bicycle's year of manufacture. When being people-oriented, the design goal is to create a sequential spatial experience based on narration plot (Hidayat, 2018). The understandings of visitors were built by experiencing narration of space, while not by merely reading the text. Narration shapes and simplifies events into a sequence can stimulate the imagination and with visitors' understanding which comes the possibilities of the story being retold (Coates, 2012). Besides of the bicycles, the exhibition designer also decorated the display area for visitors to take the story with imagining the history. Visitors could watch, listen, touch and feel the bicycles in this environment. And the dim light helped to create atmosphere and bring visitors into historical sense and even give people a feel of immersive experience.

Figure 4. Doctor's bicycle

3.2 CONTENT OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

Visual language has been using in space design from early on. The information need to be reorganised and arranged by using graphs, symbols and texts to create new visual image in the process of communication. Graphic design plays a crucial role in an entire exhibition design in terms of interaction between visitors and exhibits. This exhibition showed posters to offer visitors detailed information of each bicycle. For example, a clown's bicycle was accompanied by an old picture of its owner standing alongside his creation so offering visitors a window onto the past. A small text showing the background story of the clown were presented on the poster. The content were translated in English, Russian and Italian.

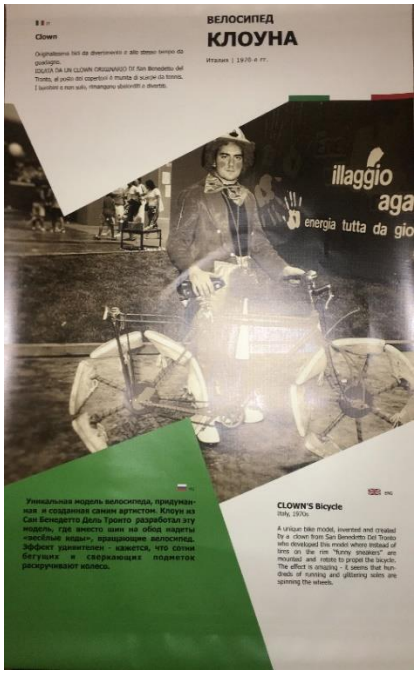

Figure 5. Poster of clown's bicycle

3.3 STORY-TELLING OF GUIDE INTERPRETERS

This exhibition had both information posters and guide interpreters to tell each story of the bicycle which made possible to allow visitors obtain knowledge in detail. Moreover, the guide interpreters were the contractor who provided guided tour under a strict and constraint time duration (Bourlakos, 2018). They were responsible for controlling the tempo and atmosphere in order to sustain the visitors understanding the background stories and the bicycles properly. The impact of exhibition also owed to the fact that all the customised bicycles were still operational and the guides activated them for the visitor. For example, when introducing the clown's bicycle, the guide would wind the trumpet. As a process of co-construction, guide interpreters and listeners create meaning collaboratively when they conducting a story-telling (Herman and Vervaeck, 2019). By touching the exhibits with the guide, the visitors were directly connecting themselves to that history and were instantly able to place themselves in that moment. As a result, the lively activities not merely attracted visitors but also offered a rich memorable interactive experience.

They particularly helped young visitors to understand the history and cultural knowledge of the origin of customised bicycles. They provided the group tour for school children. In the tour, the interpreter guides have taken the young visitors' needs and psychology characteristics into full consideration through the interesting explanations. They offered paper work and quiz for young visitors to learn the history and bicycles in deeper memory. Narrative and multi-sensory design bring visitors to have better understanding and involvement.

The exhibition was not only a small museum, but also a place of edutainment. The advantage was teaching through lively activities which was hardly realised by other means of knowledge dissemination. The aim of many exhibitions is not merely to attract visitors but also to offer a rich memorable interactive experience and engagement with the objects (Haesler, 2016). Narrative strategies aimed at evoking the emotion of visitors when perceiving exhibits. However, it not merely focuses on stimulating their rational thinking in gaining formal information provided through texts. The story-telling exhibition made the interaction between people and exhibits as the core of the display. It encourages visitors to accept, process and remember the narratives through the process of observation, listening, touch and interactive reaction. Consequently, they could complete the entire cognition on the history of the customised bicycles. The way of narrative was characterised by expressing connotation and conveying information which became a fundamental feature that distinguished it from other educational methods. It was more direct, iconic, comparable and convincible. Visitors were given a chance by the exhibition to acquire emotional impact while earning the history.

4. EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE AND THE WEAKNESSES OF THE EXHIBITION

Exhibitions and museums are non-formal learning area where provided opportunities for people to obtain knowledge by out-of-school courses. Although the primary aim is not learning and it belongs to a kind of side effect, exhibitions and museums ought to pay more attention to public educational part. However, most of museums and exhibitions are material-oriented which are attaching importance to the function of scientific research and the protection of cultural relics. As a consequence, some of them failed to take improving the cultural quality of people and promoting the development of society as the purpose and significance of their existence. A few exhibitions even unilaterally pursue the function of their brand image and corporate culture while neglect and weaken their function of public education. As has been discussed in the beginning of the article, *A whole life in a bicycle* exhibition was not only a small museum, but also a place of edutainment. In the author's opinion, narratives has been employed through the entire planning of the exhibition display in terms of guide interpreters, exhibits arrangement, text board and video section. As a consequence, it contributed to visitors to accept information and absorb knowledge imperceptibly and thoroughly.

Although this bicycle exhibition used video and audio media to attract visitors to being immersive in the situation and atmosphere, it would be better if more multimedia methods had been involved. Compared with the traditional display and exhibits, multimedia technology provides occasions for visitors to present the information of the exhibits in dynamic ways which are not merely including

animations and sound effects but also offer a combination of them (Yang, 2021). It helps to achieve a more hierarchical presentation and to provide a more interactive activity. Interactive activities is a bridge connecting spiritual culture and physical exhibits, through which the visitors are willing to improve their tour experience (Shan, 2011). In the author's opinion, the planning of *A whole life in a bicycle* exhibition, multimedia technology should have integrated to truly display complicated processes of designing and customising bicycles as well as to allow visitors exploring history by using sound and light effects. It could provide a new visual experience for the visitors that could attract a larger number of audiences to immerse in the strong visual auditory impact. For example, using virtual reality (VR) technology to make visitors obtain better visual effect experience with vision, touch, smelling, listening and taste. Based on the existing animation of history context on bicycles, this exhibition can add and develop virtual reality immersive animation for visitors. This design only needs small space in the exhibition area. Audiences can use touchpad of VR helmet or rotate their head to navigate and look around to complete the immersive animation, thereby understand the history with subjective initiative. Compared with the liner animation narrative, VR animation makes it possible for audiences to manage the knowledge proactively and flexibly.

Exhibitions should aim to serve all members of the society with the educational mission of enhancing the scientific and cultural literacy. Additionally, the education of exhibitions should be equal which allow all members of the society freely enter and leave every single region and space of exhibitions. Both children and adults in the world should be benefit from museums and exhibitions in terms of searching the history, present state and future of mankind and the natural world human-beings are living in (Ann, 2004). Visitors with different personalities and ages who have distinctive requirements of information and knowledge for exhibitions. Besides, there are a certain number of differences in their capacity of understanding and analysis in terms of using their brains. As a result, exhibitions should design and develop alternative extension activities during the exhibition tour according to visitors' aptitude.

In the tour of *A whole life in a bicycle* exhibition for young people, however, it was lack of a unique learning area for children visitors specially. It is requisite to employ any art form to the centre in young individuals' introduce of product. Children learn best when they actively participate into the studies which help them to seek opportunities and have ability to obtain directly the objects (Howards, 1992). Especially in the field of exhibitions and museums, making art has positive effects on children (Robyn, 2003). It is paramount fundamental to provide education of visual arts for formation of well-balanced societies with positive, critical, creative and inquiring individuals. Moreover, the practice of well-qualified visual art education is an inevitable requirement for the individual to become mature through the attainment of visual art (Levent, 2008). As has been mentioned above, *A whole life in a bicycle* exhibition had video watching area showing the documentary and animation of bicycles. It not only has been employed the way of narrative to be the exhibits arrangement by expressing connotation and conveying information to distinguished it from other educational methods, but also used the expression technique of visual animation and documentary for disseminating the history and background. The primary objective of art education is to bring up generations in accordance with contemporary human being apprehension and generating the human being within its own values . With regards to *A whole life in a bicycle* exhibition, nevertheless, drawing corner should have been designed for children visitors. Due to the limitation of the exhibition space, it was challenging to design a large-scale interactive activity such as setting up a bicycle building area. In order to strengthen memory of the interesting customised bicycles and to develop children's imagination, drawing corner would be an effective solution for them to make a worthy ending of the exhibition tour. Through the children's participate activities; they could harvest knowledge with happiness. This kind of extended form of exhibitions can essentially mobilise the young visitors' enthusiasm and shorten the distance between the children and the exhibitions. Another beneficial interactive activity for young visitors that can be added is VR technology which has been mentioned above. As children are now increasingly exposed to digital technology at a much younger age, exhibitions should offer opportunity to engage children with history and culture through new technology that they feel familiar with. A case study could be learnt from is the activity *Every Drawing Tells a Story* which launched by the Digital Discovery Centre at the British Museum in 2015. There were workshops aimed at children of all ages, including family events on weekends. Visitors to this session were invited to develop their drawing skills using a range of creative software on tablets and phones. Family participants were provided the chance to discover a variety of objects from the Museum's handling collection and create drawings to bring home or add to a collaborative collage. VR content on tablets was available for families to explore. The intention was that families would learn about the exhibits and its context using the tablets and then use the provided digital tools to draw the replica object (Rae and Edwards, 2016). With regards to *A whole life in a bicycle*

exhibition, combined with the activities in the drawing corner, young visitors can either draw either the displayed bicycles or new creations digitally or paint on papers.

5. CONCLUSION

There are a great number of factors which can influence the attraction of an exhibition. With regards to these factors, the most important ones are the contents, exhibits, display design, explanation and interaction. In order to enhance the charm of exhibitions, it should be ensured that the exhibition content can meet the requirements of the visitors in terms of a new and unique design form, exhibits with highlights. Employing story-telling method in exhibitions has the ability to engage more visitors and allow them to experience the exhibition tour and immerse in the background straightforwardly. Moreover, an additional factor is the use of new media technology effectively to contribute to complete the narrative of the context, history and information. To sum up, *A whole life in a bicycle* exhibition employed narrative method to make the interaction between people and exhibits as the core of the display. It encourages visitors to accept, process and remember the narratives through the process of observation, listening, touch and interactive reaction. It would attract more visitors who are in different personalities and ages by involving multimedia technology in the future.

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‘Engagement and Impact’: The Challenges Of Translating Fiji’s Cultural Hritage

Karen Jacobs, Katrina Talei Igglesden, Sipiriano Nemani, Apolonia Tamata,

Mereia Luvunakoro, Jotame Naqeletia, Prakashni Sharma and Mikaele Sela

ABSTRACT

Following the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded *Fijian Art* research project and its culmination in the exhibition *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* (Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, 2016-17[1]), the project team received further funding to translate the results of that project into substantial impacts in Fiji. Under the banner of ‘International Development’ the project engaged with non-academic communities in the hope to bring lasting benefit to Fiji in the cultural heritage sector. The aim of this paper is to reflect on some of the activities that were organised during the project *Fiji’s Artistic Heritage: Impact and Engagement in Fiji* (AHRC Follow-on-Funding Scheme) and to focus on challenges of translating research into impact and engagement. The most tangible outcome of this project was the exhibition *Kamunaga: the story of tabua* at the Fiji Museum (2017), curated by staff of the Fiji Museum and iTaukei Trust Fund Board, which is the main case study of this paper.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the challenges of translating the outcomes of an academic research project into the buzz words ‘impact’ and ‘engagement’, which means making academic research relevant to wider communities. The Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded research project *Fijian Art: Political Power, Sacred Value, Social Transformation and Collecting Since the 18th Century* (2011-14; AH/I003622/1) was a collaboration between colleagues at the Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia, and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, and a wide range of project partners in Europe, the USA and Fiji.[2] Project staff, led by Principal Investigator Professor Steven Hooper, and partnering museums aimed to revalue Indigenous Fijian (also referred to as iTaukei) collections held globally in ethnographic museums.

In 2016, the UEA project team received further funding to translate the results of the initial research project into substantial impacts in Fiji, an upper-middle income ODA recipient country (Official Development Assistance; this was a requirement when applying for funding). The Follow-on Funding Highlight Notice for International Development provided an exciting opportunity to extend the impacts and engagement to Fiji itself, building on connections made and opportunities that had arisen since the original research project began in 2011. The project welcomed the opportunity to engage more with non-academic communities in Fiji and hoped to bring lasting benefit to Fiji’s cultural heritage sector. The aim of this paper is to reflect on some of the activities that were organised during the project *Fiji’s Artistic Heritage: Impact and Engagement in Fiji* (2016-17; AHRC Follow-on-Funding Scheme, AH/P006116/1) and to focus on challenges of translating research into impact and engagement as well as on the project’s legacy. The most tangible outcome of this project was the exhibition *Kamunaga: the story of tabua* at the Fiji Museum (2017-2020), curated by staff of the Fiji Museum and iTaukei Trust Fund Board, which will be the focus of analysis.

This paper was written collectively by the core team members involved in the *Kamunaga* exhibition. The authors were based in various institutions and various geographic locations (UK and Fiji) which impacted the way we worked and the trials and benefits that we encountered. We therefore wrote a collective overview of the project but decided to highlight institutional and personal voices in order to convey how an institutional base and location affects the challenges involved in translating Fiji’s heritage across communities and audiences.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Fijian museum collections were the core research tool during the original AHRC project (2011-14). These collections were linked with related material, textual and pictorial sources – historical and contemporary – to achieve more profound and multifaceted interpretations that aimed to include Indigenous voices. The largest iTaukei collections, outside of those held by Fiji Museum, are stored in UK museums, a result of Fiji being a British colony between 1874 and 1970. Among other research strands, the team examined the impact of colonial relations on collecting processes, the distribution of collections and looked for Indigenous Fijian voices and agency in the collections. Project outputs included publications and a range of exhibitions in the UK and Fiji.[3] The *Fiji’s Artistic Heritage* Follow-on-

[1] The exhibition was later shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles, CA, USA; 15 December 2019 – 2 May 2021).
[2] A full list of project members and partners can be found on the project’s website (see: http://www.fijianart.sru.uea.ac.uk).
[3] Among the outputs were publications such as Herle and Carreau (2013) *Chiefs & Governors*; Hooper (2016) *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific*; Jacobs (2019) *This is Not a Grass Skirt*. Exhibitions such as ‘Chiefs & Governors: Art and power in Fiji (2013-14, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge), ‘Art and the Body: Exploring the role of clothing in Fiji’ (2014, Fiji Museum), ‘Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific’ (2016–17, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich; 2019–21, Los Angeles County Museum

Funding project focused on disseminating the research outputs in and with Fiji. This was done via participant observation, knowledge sharing and collaborative and interactive activities. The Kamunaga exhibition was built on a series of collaborative workshops during which everyone was invited to contribute and by keeping in touch through social media.

The term 'translating' in this paper's title was chosen carefully to resonate with Silverman's argument that collaboration between communities and cultural heritage institutions necessarily involves a process of translation of knowledges (plural to reflect the potential existence of different epistemologies) (Silverman 2015: 2). Collaboration provides an opportunity for a dialogic translation of knowledges, which was important for our project. What this project made clear is that what was needed was the forging of an 'appropriate museology' (Kreps 2008). For our collaboration, this was important to recognise because it would assist us in strengthening our collaboration and creating lasting impact, both between our respective institutions but also within Fiji's cultural heritage sector and amongst the nation's larger population. Defined as 'an approach to museum development and training that adapts museum practices and strategies for cultural heritage preservation to local cultural contexts and socioeconomic conditions' (Kreps 2008: 26), appropriate museology draws on participatory approaches to development and represents a community-based or grassroots framework. As will be discussed further in this paper, we looked towards creating equity, confidence and trust within our own team in order to prioritise how we could collectively better meet the professional requirements and needs of Fiji Museum and the iTaukei Trust Fund Board as well as engage local knowledge and interests.

3 FOLLOW-ON-FUNDING PROJECT: OVERVIEW

The *Fiji's Artistic Heritage* Follow-on-Funding project wished to both convert opportunities that arose during the course of the *Fijian Art* research project and nurture new relationships that developed during and after the research period (2011-14) to optimise the impact of this research in Fiji, and not just in the UK (the focus of the original project's impact plans). Apart from the Sainsbury Research Unit (SRU) as the grant holder, two UK-based partners were the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), University of Cambridge, and the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM), University of Oxford.

The two Fiji-based partners were Fiji Museum (FM), which was also a partner in the original research project, and the iTaukei Trust Fund Board (TTFB). FM is Fiji's national museum, serving its diverse and multi-ethnic communities. It exists to collect, care for and share its 10,000+ object, textile, flatwork, archaeology, natural history and archival/photographic collections, and through them, tell a story about Fiji's history. FM was established in 1904 with the specific purpose of creating a national cultural facility to both protect and preserve Fiji's cultural heritage as well as create a space for the public to engage with and appreciate the nation's rich and diverse heritage. TTFB was a new project collaborator. Established in 2004 by the Fijian Government, its mission is to foster advancement of Indigenous Fijians (iTaukei) and Rotumans to assist in their long-term, economic, social, and cultural, community and political development.[4] As an organisation, they do not hold any permanent collections but work with Fiji's vanua to safeguard tangible and intangible heritage in their own possession.[5] TTFB is currently in the process of engaging with stakeholders to build a cultural centre in Fiji's Western Division focused on Indigenous Fijian and Rotuman cultural heritage; this does not encroach on Fiji Museum's role within the community as it serves the nation's wider multi-ethnic community. FM has long had a (inaccurate) public perception of being a storehouse for object collections only, and TTFB lacks objects but actively organises community workshops to help vanua identify their own unique cultural and heritage features. Further project supporters were the Fiji High Commission London, British High Commission Suva, NatureFiji-MareqetiViti and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, which was hosting the *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* (15 October 2016 – 12 February 2017) exhibition that was used for professional development and capacity building.

Activities were organised during two phases in the UK and Fiji respectively. During the first phase, activities centred around the *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* exhibition and it was considered a time when knowledge exchange of mutual benefit could take place. The second phase took place in Fiji and focused on activities that would directly benefit Fiji communities.

In February 2017, Fiji Museum staff members Mereia Luvunakoro (conservation officer), Jotame Naqeletia (conservation assistant) and Prakashni Sharma (marketing & media liaison), and iTaukei Trust Fund Board staff members, Dr Apolonia Tamata (senior culture and heritage officer) and Mikaele Sela (archaeology/linguistics project officer) travelled to the UK where they were based at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (SCVA), hosted by project members at the Sainsbury Research Unit: Professor Steven Hooper (Project's Principal Investigator), Dr Karen Jacobs (Co-Investigator) and Dr Katrina Talei Igglesden (at the time PhD student on the project). During their stay they had several sessions with SRU and SCVA staff (including the conservation and curatorial team, education and marketing team). They also visited other museums, including project partners MAA and PRM, as well as the Horniman Museum & Gardens in London.

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of Art, Los Angeles) and a range of exhibition packages in the UK, which involved working with local curators to enhance documentation and co-curate Fiji-focused exhibitions (see: http://www.fijianart.sru.uea.ac.uk/exhibitions.php).

[4] Rotuma, a Fijian dependency since 1881, is an island group north of Fiji. Rotuman people are a unique Indigenous ethnic group and constitute a recognisable minority within the population of Fiji. Like iTaukei, Rotuman language and culture is safeguarded in Fiji.

[5] Throughout this paper Indigenous Fijian terms will not be italicised because of their frequency of use, but also to reflect the normalcy of using Fijian words in everyday contexts. This point is highlighted here as the term vanua (lit: land, region, place, spot) is the first Indigenous Fijian word used in the paper.

Figure 1: *Fiji's Artistic Heritage* project members Mereia Luvunakoro and Katrina Talei Igglesden unpack Adi Litia Mara Dugdale's wedding dress with conservators in the SCVA conservation lab. The dress was part of Fiji Museum's loan of 23 objects to the *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* exhibition. Photo courtesy of Fiji Museum; photographed by Jotame Naqeletia.

At MAA, Fijian colleagues participated in talks about museum displays by Dr Anita Herle, collections research by Dr Lucie Carreau, collection management and storage by Rachel Hand, conservation by Kirstie Williams and photo archives and storage by Dr Jocelyne Dudding. At PRM they were hosted by Faye Belsey and went through object and photo collections. In both museums, the different display style compared to the *Fiji* exhibition in Norwich was remarked upon. The wealth of material on display at MAA and PRM contrasts with SCVA's display ethos, which aims to highlight the artistic character of objects by exhibiting them in separate display cases allowing the objects to be viewed from all sides, and appealed to the Fijian group as less material on display was viewed as singular and lonely looking – a concept that is not natural to Indigenous Fijian practices of communalism and collectivity. While the Horniman Museum was not an official project partner, they offered to host the Fiji-based team for a visit. During their time with Dr Sarah Byrne, the group toured the museum's conservation lab, visited the live Fijian coral reef in the museum's aquarium and provided collaborative input into the redisplay of the museum's Fijian material. This community museum provided a point of difference to the three university museums visited and appealed to the Fijian team members who related well to the various forms of community collaboration prioritised by the Horniman.

During the final capacity building session of the Fijian colleagues' visit we began discussing the idea of a co-curated exhibition by FM and TTFB. This would enable the Fiji team to translate their existing and acquired skills and would be an ideal starting point of collaboration. So far the group had mainly learned about loan lists, exhibition design, marketing and educations programmes related to the *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* exhibition. They had also learned about museological practices such as conservation, collections management and photographic collections during their fieldtrips to other museums, all of which gave the team ideas on how to curate their joint exhibition as well as effectively collaborate with their audiences.

The next project phase took place in Fiji, with Jacobs and Igglesden meeting the team there the following month for a three-day workshop.[6] The SRU team and the FM and TTFB teams worked together on the joint exhibition by talking through each of the events and stages that need to be completed when organising an exhibition. We covered timetables, division of labour, budget, exhibition themes, object selection, marketing, education, activities, sponsors, and open days associated with the exhibition. A second one-day workshop session occurred the following month in which text writing was a focus, as were general updates on the progress being made by the team. During this workshop, the timetable and budget were revised based on ongoing lessons being learned about collaborative practices and co-curating.

Figure 2: The *Fiji's Artistic Heritage* project team working on the Kamunaga exhibition's content during the three-day workshop held at the iTaukei Trust Fund Board. From left to right: Prakashni Sharma, Karen Jacobs, Sipiriano Nemani, Mikaele Sela, Jotame Naqeletia, Vika Musumoto and Mereia Luvunakoro. In addition to the core project team, Vika Musumoto and Master Vereniki Nalio also contributed to the exhibition planning and programming. Photo courtesy of Katrina Talei Igglesden.

[6] Jacobs stayed for the March workshop only, while Igglesden participated in the March and April workshops.

The team chose to focus on the significance of the ceremonial gift known as kamunaga, particularly the tabua. Tabua are presentation sperm whale's teeth, and their offering is carried out during important Indigenous Fijian ceremonial occasions. As kamunaga, tabua are presented by men with specific mannerisms and language styles depending on the region or vanua they are in/from. Specifically, the team wanted to convey the 'value' of tabua; not only in a monetary sense but looking at what constitutes value in an Indigenous context such as size, colour, shape and more. They decided to include newspaper articles on the different ways tabua had been presented as kamunaga such as during Fiji's coup d'états and when coach Ben Ryan led Fiji's men's national sevens rugby team to an Olympic gold medal, on fake tabua and the news of the large number of seized tabua by the New Zealand Customs Service.[7] The team also hoped to conduct street interviews asking what tabua meant to people in Suva. These interviews would not only be targeted towards Indigenous Fijians, including both male and female, but all ethnicities represented in the city. There was a clear aim to include a broader audience than either FM or TTFB normally engage with.

Figure 3: A tabua (presentation whale's tooth; *Physeter macrocephalus*) with a rich oiled red patina suspended on a magimagi (coconut coir) cord. Photo courtesy of Steven Hooper; photographed by Pete Huggins.

Although physically distanced, the UK and Fiji teams remained connected during the exhibition planning and installation phases via a private Facebook group. The private membership meant that the group was unsearchable both on Facebook and online which allowed the project team to communicate openly and freely. The use of social media rather than official emails also made for easier conversations and dialogue. It also strengthened the connection between the institutions, creating trust between all members.

KAMUNAGA: THE STORY OF TABUA

Figure 4: The poster created for the Kamunaga exhibition, designed by staff from the iTaukei Trust Fund Board. Image courtesy of the *Fiji's Artistic Heritage* project.

[7] Tabua are seized by customs services around the world when they leave/arrive in a country without proper documentation. Permits are required to both export and import whale ivory as part of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES; for more information, see https://cites.org/eng/disc/what.php).

The exhibition *Kamunaga: the story of tabua* was opened on 15 June 2017 by His Excellency the President of Fiji, Major-General (ret'd) Joji Konousi Konrote.[8] Praising the exhibition as being relevant to Fiji's collective communities, just as kamunaga is a collective valuable item, he highlighted this celebration of iTaukei cultural heritage only weeks after the New Zealand government repatriated seized tabua to the Honourable Prime Minister J. Voreqe Bainimarama - tabua that would have once been destroyed instead of recognised for their cultural value. He continued, commenting on the importance of both the exhibition and tabua:

'The tabua, which has profound ceremonial and aesthetic value to the iTaukei, embodies many things in many facets and in many ways to all of us. This special exhibition on the kamunaga is sure to provide numerous benefits to the Fijian public and visitors from abroad. The objects on display and the associated stories on the tabua will evoke self-realisation for the young iTaukei to appreciate and recognise the significance, value and importance of the kamunaga' (HE President Konrote, opening speech, 15 June 2017).

Figure 5: Opening of the Kamunaga exhibition, 15 June 2017. From left to right: His Excellency the President of Fiji, Major-General (ret'd) Joji Konousi Konrote, Kate Vusoniwailla, Chairperson Fiji Museum Board of Trustees and *Fiji's Artistic Heritage* project member Apolonia Tamata. Photo courtesy of Fiji Museum.

The exhibition's straightforward display ethos showcased the whale ivory material on a black background in black painted cases. The language of the text panels (which were written in both English and Vosavakaviti)[9] was aimed towards the overall demographic of Fiji with particular emphasis on high school students. The exhibition, the first fully in-house exhibition curated in more than 30 years, was well received in the media and museum attendance has gone up since. Particularly for Fiji Museum, the exhibition brought new interest and excitement in their collections as many of the tabua and other objects included in the show had either never been displayed or had not been displayed in recent memory. Both staff and visitors showed great enthusiasm for the exhibition and how it was presented, even though some would have liked to have seen more objects in the cases.

The exhibition itself became a classroom. The first exercise of visitor participation involved the exhibition team themselves. During a debrief session in July 2017, Igglesden and the Fiji team walked through the exhibition to discuss the challenges and difficulties associated with planning and executing the exhibition which prompted the team to look towards the future and how to actively engage Fiji's communities in the subject matter. Public programming and staff development workshops were a result of this session. In addition to regular visits by schools to the display, the emphasis on community continued via a dedicated education programme held in September 2017. As kamunaga are iyau (valuables) representing masculinity and are presented by males during ceremonial occasions, during the programme the exhibition team partnered with male staff from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs to hold hands-on sessions for groups of high school boys (years 10-13: 15-17 years old) to learn proper presentation protocols for different life cycle events. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs created a generic template on traditional presentation protocol that was used to facilitate the programme and the males mentoring the students added in the detailed information that make each vanua different from one another, especially in terms of the openings and closings of the kamunaga presentations. To do this, the students were split into groups according to their matanitu vanua (confederacy; Kubuna, Tovata and Burebasaga) as were the facilitators.

[8] President Konrote has since become Fiji museum's official patron. An avid supporter of Fiji's arts and culture sector, Konrote is of Rotuman heritage and is the first non-iTaukei President in Fiji's history.

[9] The vernacular Standard (Bauan) Fijian language. In Fiji, there are three official languages: English, Fijian (or Vosavakaviti) and Hindi.

Figure 6: Mikaele Sela leading a session during the Kamunaga education programme in September 2017. Participating schools included Saint Vincent College, Nasikawa College and Nasinu Secondary School. Photo courtesy of Prakashni Sharma.

It was a successful education, as well as cultural, programme that was over-subscribed in terms of registration. This is significant because it showed the need for such as programme, as well as the level of intergenerational interest in the exhibition's subject matter. Also significant from a delivery standpoint was that the multiple facilitators were of different ages, some close to those of the students. In a culture that focuses on hierarchy, being able to connect with males close to one's own age appeared to be beneficial for the youth and created open and comfortable dialogue. Two of the younger facilitators of the programme were TTFB archaeology/linguistics project officer Mikaele Sela and FM conservation assistant Jotame Naqeletia, the former of whom describes how they engaged the youth:

'For the Tovata group, Jotame and I spent some time just talking to students on what they knew or heard about presentations from their own vanua. We also talked about words or phrases from their vanua that were unique and only used during presentations [as a marker and showcase of identity]. This way, those that knew some information were actually helping those that knew nothing. We didn't let the presentations [practiced during the programme] run from beginning to end and interrupted when and where we needed to for questions, corrections and clarifications, so we were critiquing and commending them as they presented, and the others were learning as well. We closed off talking about the importance of mental preparation…and just being totally immersed in that moment so that they speak from the heart and speak to the heart. [Our discussion] was done in very informal/round table talanoa.[10] We also shared stories and jokes [of] grown men running away or hiding because they didn't know how to do the presentations and … [other] funny things that happened, but all emphasizing the huge need to know, for them as young iTaukei men.'

While only a one-day event, the Kamunaga education programme provided a tangible means of not just preserving old things, but also encouraging and promoting the contemporary significance and relevance of culture through practice. The programme was also supposed to mark the end of the exhibition, as most displays in FM's Temporary Exhibition Gallery are only open for 3-4 months. However, the exhibition ran until early 2020 (the original closing date was 16 September 2017) because of its popularity and role as a place of learning for Fiji's diverse audiences. This exemplified the exhibition's resonance as a classroom and a site of knowledge sharing and exchange; it also spoke to the forging of an appropriate museology methodology when conceptualising the project and the exhibition. Working from the ground up in a community-driven and focused approach encouraged the privileging of local knowledge, skill and practice, creating an engaging experience for the programme participants, while at the same time encompassing and catering to the needs of FM and TTFB. In the same vein, and when thinking about possible future education programmes, it was noted that while the objects displayed were important to the exhibition and its reception, the connection to and with audiences and between cultural heritage sector communities was a significant aspect of the exhibition and its longevity.

4 ENGAGEMENT: DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

While the exhibition was successful and for all authors one of the most beneficial aspects of the *Fiji's Artistic Heritage* project, it is important to reflect on the challenges in translating research and heritage across communities and to different audiences as well.

For the UK-based team members, Karen Jacobs and Katrina Talei Igglesden, these challenges are ones that are faced by many teams but were more prominent during our project because of the multiple organisations involved and the physical limitations present. During the initial three-day planning workshop, hindsight revealed that it is hard to propose an exhibition budget in a funding proposal without realising some of the on-the-ground problems that can occur, especially when considering currency exchange rates and availability of materials in a different country. For example, we realised that buying a drill in Fiji, which was an essential tool for the exhibition installation, would eat up most of the budget, so that is something that was purchased in the UK and taken over. Conservation materials were a higher cost than anticipated due to lack of accessibility in Fiji. While an exhibition budget was included in the application, it did not take considerations into account needed for an exhibition of historical objects in which conservation, case refurbishments and security were key budget categories. Other areas of the exhibition had to be scaled back to account for these extra costs, such as interactive components that would have featured a greater community connection. Tabua are valuable objects and there is a general lack of supply

[10] Storytelling; a common practice across the Pacific in which storytelling and/or conversation is had in an inclusive, facilitative and receptive manner.

across Fiji and a continuing demand. They are available in some pawn shops but are otherwise hard to acquire if your family does not already own one. Thus, security issues were prioritised and additional funding was sought to accommodate for refitting the display cases with proper locks. When discussing the division of labour for the exhibition at the end of the workshop period, we noticed that local hierarchies and ways of thinking prevailed regardless of the emphasis placed on the exhibition being a team endeavour. In Fiji, local hierarchies are both male dominated, but also status (or, in this instance, profession/qualification level) driven. This is an unavoidable situation and we quickly recognised that there remained a need to understand cultural contexts and curtail project activities and expectations to accommodate them.

Distance was both a challenge and a disguised advantage. It was a challenge because we could not physically be present to help during stressful times such as installation and the opening reception. Although we had agreed to be 'silent' facilitators during the project, our inability to be there if needed made it easy to feel like we were not following through with the promise to see the exhibition project to its fruition. Distance was not only felt physically, but in terms of time differences as well. The 12-hour time difference impeded our ability to contribute to discussions or reply to requests and questions by the Fiji-based team. In contrast, we feel that the physical distance of the UK team encouraged the TTFB and FM team members to become more confident in their decision making and on-the-ground choices for the exhibition – a feeling that is endorsed by the Fiji team. Although the UK team members remained available as 'silent' facilitators, it was up to the Fiji team to plan and curate the exhibition in a way that best suited their audience and institutions.

Another difficulty to consider in hindsight is that the text panels were more accurate when written in Vosavakaviti than English. Certain terms could not appropriately be translated to English, which meant that visitors who could read Vosavakaviti gained more from them than those that could not. The planned video interviews showing diverse perspectives on tabua were not edited due to a lack of time, which resulted in a lack of diversity in interpretation.

At Fiji Museum, the host institution for the exhibition, stakes were high. Hence why FM staff felt not just a high sense of responsibility but also of stress. All FM team members reported that better teamwork, better communication and overall staff training were crucial for future projects. For Prakashni Sharma the lack of proper planning and the resulting lack of time was a challenge. As a Marketing and Media Liaison this implied a delay in sending out the media release and the exhibition opening invitations. For Mereia Luvunakoro and Jotame Naqeletia, there were many challenges faced while setting up this display such as the lack of communication among team members. At times, designated roles were not followed and dates to submit tasks were not timely meaning that deadlines had to be extended because of slow implementation. This included making last-minute decisions on which objects to include in the exhibition and installing these the night before the opening. They felt that the lack of knowledge and skills in the museum's exhibition department worked against them and that training for staff should be extended.

Fiji Museum's Director, Sipiriano Nemani, was only four months in post when the project took place, which meant that his contribution was overshadowed by many other commitments. Exhibition work and the various processes encompassed herein were new to him and learning how to choose objects, condition reporting, exhibition installation, educational programming, marketing were a steep learning curve. The pressure of time to prepare and deliver the exhibition was considered a challenge: "A lot was riding on the Fiji Museum as the exhibition was to be hosted in our temporary gallery and most were contemplating on its failure and/or success". It was also the Director's responsibility to invite Fiji's President to open the exhibition, which was a first for the museum.

Apolonia Tamata at TTFB felt that she had to sharpen her research skills as well as her writing and translation skills but she was motivated by the fact that she found the accounts on tabua very stimulating. While having never written exhibition texts before, she had to produce text quickly from her office while the other team members focused on putting up the actual exhibition cases. She was aware that she, a woman, was researching an object that is closely associated with the male realm in Fiji. In daily life she would have not paid that much attention to the topic as "it's a men's thing, not for us women" but she is now more attentive to the details in kamunaga presentations as the oratorical details speak volumes of Fijian ideology, values and epistemology.

Despite these challenges, the success of the Kamunaga exhibition project is evidence of the positive collaborative effort by three partner institutions. Increased professional skill in presenting collections to audiences, the use of the exhibition as an education tool for schools, wider community engagement and interaction and greater exposure of the work done in Fiji's cultural heritage sector are all impacts of the project. Collectively, impact was felt in the empowerment of working as a group to achieve an end goal.

5 LEGACY AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES

The exercise of co-organising an exhibition between the two institutions paved the way for more collaborative undertaking and social gathering between TTFB and FM. This culminated in an MOU signed between the two institutions to foster greater understanding and sharing of resources. TTFB is supporting the Fiji Museum financially in the revamping of its maritime gallery, including the provision of much needed cultural and technical advice.

For the Fiji Museum, the Kamunaga exhibition project helped to bring local communities and audiences back into the museum – something that they endeavour to develop further. All Fiji Museum staff reflected on the fact that they enjoyed receiving feedback from local visitors who, as shared by Mereia Luvunakoro, 'were able to treasure our ancestors used as a wealth to them and also that kamunaga signifies a lot to the iTaukei people…. This kamunaga is still in use in all our customary occasions'. Prior to the exhibition, iTaukei visitors did not necessarily constitute the usual museum audience, but the exhibition enabled the public to see things that they know and use in a cultural heritage setting. Rather than only seeing displays of objects that are no longer part of their living memory, being able to interact with things that have meaning within the lives of Fiji's people, including our team members and staff from the partner

institutions, created interesting responses and engagement with visitors. FM's Prakashni Sharma has since reflected on her experience with the Kamunaga exhibition, noting that objects are 'the touchstones that bring memories and meanings to life and they make history real.'

For TTFB, they decided that their future work with communities would be supplemented by using the exhibition format to display and disseminate the intangible cultural heritage they actively engage with when working with Fiji's vanua. Mikaele Sela felt that the TTFB would be propelled forward in their fieldworkers initiative by using 'exhibition[s] as outlet[s] for their research about their respective vanua but also work with them during the planning to the prepping stages of the exhibition. We are using the same exact approach with the fieldworkers [as done with the FAHT project] where they decide what to exhibit and how best to do it with our guidance and funding.'

Relationships between the SRU, FM and TTFB continued after the Fiji's Artistic Heritage project ended, with some team members working together on smaller initiatives such as the Commonwealth Association of Museums conference and exhibiting at the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, both taking place in February 2018, as well as in the conceptualising of a language and culture programme for UK-based Fijian communities (2018-19). Additionally, from late 2020, some team members are collaborating on a British Academy project which is focused on Fiji's urban youth.

(Re)Defining Culture: Engaging urban Fijian youth in sustainable employment opportunities in the cultural heritage sector (YF\190087) is sponsored by British Academy's Youth Futures Programme, supported under the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund.[11] Consisting of a range of project partners including the SRU and Fiji Museum, the project aims to bring urban youth communities in Fiji into cultural heritage institutions, while documenting what culture and cultural heritage constitutes for Fiji's youth. The lessons learned from the Follow-on-Funding project have been incorporated into this project where the relationships between project partners in themselves and project partners and communities have been at the core from the beginning of the project.

6 CONCLUSION

While forging an appropriate museology to benefit our Fiji-based teams and the public they serve, we also acknowledged that finding a collective voice to do so would be a challenge. No individual can solely represent their institution, let alone their community, audience, culture or country as a whole. While the project brought together a range of institutions with a certain mission in preserving cultural heritage, ultimately, we ended up with a collective of individual voices. It was this collective voice, this creation of a community, that proved the most beneficial to all involved. This creation of a community is something that we will take forward, and recommend, in similar collaborative heritage activities.

Our collective appropriate museology approach allowed the project to actively create a pathway for meaningful community collaborations to be a central feature of future work. In their book *Museums and Communities*, Golding and Modest emphasise that museums have a social role which 'can be realized by working with discerning museum communities that are increasingly demanding fuller collaborative and polyvocal practices from their museums'. This work, they state, must 'involve radical turns—more than mere consultation and inclusion of diverse perspectives. One such radical turn is already echoed in shifting terminology from education to learning in UK museums' (Golding and Modest 2013: 1). It is the latter remark that was most important to us. Collaboration is about connection, which might involve a degree of translation, but mostly involves learning on various levels and in multiple directions. What we learned most is that appropriate museology should in fact also be 'slow museology', a term put forward by Silverman (2015: 12-14) to coin the secret to successful community collaboration with cultural heritage institutions. Slow museology is not only based on developing but on sustaining relationships. In other words, translating cultural heritage to communities mostly requires time.

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[11] For more information on the project and an overview of project partners, see: https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/

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Preserving, Presenting and Prolonging the Life of Living Heritage: the Multiple Operating Approaches of the Puzhen Bai Tie-Dye Museum in Dali

Shuye Zhang
School of Arts & Humanities
Royal College of Art, London, UK
shuye.zhang@network.rca.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss the contemporary intangible cultural heritage of textile crafts in the context of China, and how the 'inheritors' – craftspeople – are involved in craft practice and make a living from it. Taking the Puzhen Bai Tie-Dye Museum as a case study, the Museum's operation is positively enabled by several different communities – craftspeople, who themselves can be divided into two classes (lead entrepreneurs and employed workers), academic professionals, the general audience of Museum visitors participating in hands-on tie-dye making activities, collaborating students from art and design schools, women's organisations and local government, etc. The discussion of crafts, communities, culture and heritage focuses entirely on one specific ethnic group – the Bai people.

The last part of this paper will reflect on the Chinese system of assessing intangible cultural heritage and the commercial activity of inheritors, discuss the meaning of the Museum's hands-on elements in relation to craft and heritage, and examine the role of the Museum as an academic and educational institution.

KEYWORDS

Chinese intangible cultural heritage; textile crafts; craftspeople; community engagement; Bai ethnic group

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the contemporary intangible cultural heritage of textile crafts in the context of China, and how its 'inheritors' – craftspeople – are involved in craft practice and make a living from it. 'Inheritors' is a typical Chinese expression, referring to identified craftspeople on different levels within the Chinese intangible cultural heritage system. The dynamic aspect of this living heritage prompts the consideration not only of how it can be preserved and presented, but also of how to prolong its life, which requires the involvement of, and active interaction between, various communities.

The Puzhen Bai Tie-Dye Museum, established in 2015, is located in Zhoucheng village, Xizhou town, in the city of Dali, in Yunnan province in south-western China. It has the functions of display, hands-on experience, and training. The Museum building is in the distinctive Bai residential architectural form, 'Sanfang Yizhaobi', a quadrangle with two-storey buildings on three sides and a screen wall facing the main building (Shang, 2019) (Fig 1). The Museum building, together with the craft, the people and their lives and stories, displays a fresh, vivid image of Bai culture.

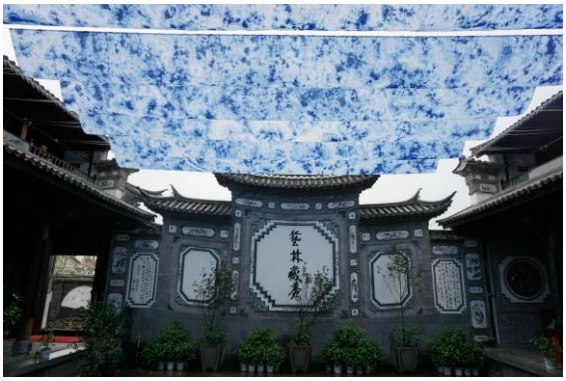

Fig 1. 'Sanfang Yizhaobi', the building of the museum

The research methods used in this study are participant observation and interviews. The main interviewees are the Duan couple and Mr. Zhang, core members of the Museum – two craftspeople and an academic professional respectively, as introduced below. The study outcome comprises part of my PhD research on contemporary textile craft practice by Chinese craftspeople.

It is also worth mentioning here my own position as a PhD researcher and interviewer. In this case study, I prefer to see myself as an observer, an outsider and a describer, someone who is not directly involved in the Museum's operation; this is important, as it aligns with the self-supporting, self-perpetuating and living nature of intangible cultural heritage.

2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The operation of the Museum is positively enabled by six different communities — the 'inheritors'/craftspeople, academic professionals and institutions, the Museum's audience and tourist consumers, students, women's organisations and local government. All of these contribute to the success of the multiple operating approaches of the Museum.

'Inheritors'/Craftspeople

The 'inheritors', or craftspeople, all belonging to the Bai ethnic group, can be divided into two classes – lead entrepreneurs and employed workers. The lead entrepreneurs in this case are the Duan couple, who manage the Museum, and the Puzhen Bai People's Tie-dye Corporation, which owns the Museum. The Duan couple have been identified as representative inheritors on a national and provincial level respectively.

The employed workers are mostly middle-aged and elderly women. The craft of tie-dye in Dali is facing a severe problem: an ageing population. Since the wages for tie-dyeing are lower than those for work in urban areas, young people choose to migrate to cities for employment, meaning that children and the elderly are left behind. To tackle this issue and encourage young people to stay in the village, since 2007 the Duans have trained and employed the local Bai women, including elderly women, to produce high-quality craft work, reviving and developing their craft skills.

Now the employed workers are of two kinds – one group of more than thirty who work in the workshop, and another group of around 2500 who tie the fabric with string and cut the threads after the dyeing process as commissioned work at home (Fig 2). The advantage for those working at home is that they work on a freelance basis, and can take care of agricultural work, childcare and other household chores as well as doing craft work.

Fig 2. Tying the fabrics with string, 2017

Academic Professionals and Institutions

The institutions involved are mainly museums and offices who obtain artworks from the craft artists – i.e., artworks created by the Duans. What is particularly interesting in this case is the museum expertise involved, represented by Mr. Zhang, a professional who has worked in the field of cultural heritage for more than thirty years. After retirement, he was invited by the Duans to help construct the Museum, including the work of museum registration, positioning and branding, collection documentation and exhibition content development. Apart from this, he takes on some of the responsibility for communicating with visitors and interviewers and introducing craft techniques, as he appears to be more eloquent than the craftspeople themselves, whose mother tongue is Bai, rather than standard Chinese.

The role played by professionals in relation to intangible cultural heritage is different from the one they play in tangible cultural heritage. In the context of the power relationship in the former between the researcher and craftspeople, craftspeople, as the practitioners and owners of particular crafts, maintain dominant control over their craft, while professionals play the role of consultant for support and aid. In some cases, craftspeople or their children even take on the role of knowledgeable academics, teaching both theory and practice in universities.

The Museum's Audience and Tourist Consumers

The Duans' target customers are the Museum's audience and tourist consumers. Visitors to the Museum can participate in hands-on tie-dyeing activities (Fig 3). Participation by audiences of all ages contributes to the dynamic display in the Museum. Imitating the manual operation of craftspeople with their hands enables the audience to understand the core and essence of tie-dyeing and empathise with the craftspeople, thus embodying the Museum's educational function. Another important group of customers are the consumers and retailers who buy the tie-dyed products in wholesale and retail markets in Yunnan Province and beyond. They play a vital, even fundamental, role in creating revenue for the Museum and the corporation.

Fig 3. The Museum's hands-on section

Photograph: Shuye Zhang, 2020

Students

Educational involvement is represented both by art college students and by primary and secondary school students. Art college students contribute in terms of collaboration and innovation (Fig 4). They come with a clear aim of creating a tie-dyed artwork. The whole collaboration lasts no more than two months, and the students normally leave when the work is finished.

Fig 4. The Museum has been established as a training base for Yunnan Arts University. The picture shows a tie-dyed artwork by students.

Photograph: Shuye Zhang, 2020

Local primary and secondary school students are being educated specifically to resolve the problem of an ageing population of craftspeople. They come to the Museum at weekends and during the school holidays, learning the skills of drawing and tying. The craft of tie-dye is a part of the community heritage of Zhoucheng village, and approximately half the women, mainly elderly, can produce tie-dye work. By encouraging the younger generation to learn the tie-dye craft, the traditional way of one-to-one training of crafts within a household is revived to some extent when children consult their grandmothers about tying techniques.

Women's Organisations

The participation of women's organisations can be seen in the establishment of 'Mom's Handworks Cooperative' in Zhoucheng village in 2017. 'Mom's Handworks' is a public welfare project initiated by the China Women's Development Foundation; it aims to provide poverty-stricken mothers with craft skills and create jobs for them, as well as encouraging them to stay and contribute to their home villages. This aligns with the aspiration espoused by the Duans. The project invites accomplished designers to design crafted products, refines the production process, and helps to sell the products on its sales platform – the online one in particular. It reveals how a social organisation can help intangible cultural heritage to survive in a rural village.

Local Government

In terms of the part government plays, there are statements such as 'with the support of the local authority, the Duan couple established the tie-dye museum' (Zuo, 2019), but in one-to-one interviews, when they were asked how they were supported by the government, their reply was 'there's some financial support, which can't solve the problem radically'. It is apparent that prioritising the meeting of basic living needs in China is more fundamental than funding heritage, but it is also worth mentioning that the couple who answered my questions have another identity as entrepreneurs, for whom the brand value brought by their definition as officially identified inheritors is far more important than funding, as this enhances their reputation in the tie-dye market. In other words, being officially identified as representative inheritors within the intangible cultural heritage system is the support that the government can offer.

3 INSIGHTS

Reflection on the Commercial Activity of Inheritors

The argument above may give rise to questions about the commercial activity of inheritors. Concern arises about whether using the brand value to make a profit violates the ethics of inheritance (Wang, 2019). However, tie-dye products are no longer everyday necessities, and the craft skills involved are not fundamental and necessary for girls to learn. This is why the craftswomen who are employed should be trained. In many cases, inheritors who fully integrate themselves into the market economy can better support themselves and have spare capacity to fulfil their duty as identified inheritors (Yang, 2018).

'Mom's Handworks', the project described above, is the best evidence of this argument. Another proof is the combined use of natural dyes and synthetic dyes by the Puzhen Museum and the corporation. Although there is a revival of natural dyeing and a fashion for naturally dyed products, especially in relation to handicrafts, the use of synthetic dyes can ensure that costs are under control and products better accepted by part of the market.

This raises another question concerning the assessment system: is it reasonable to support inheritors at a national level with the highest amount of funding while other lower-ranked craftspeople receive little, sometimes even nothing, and struggle to survive? The inadequate assessment system needs to be further modified.

The Meaning of the Hands-on Section

As argued above, the Museum's hands-on section enables the audience to understand the essence of the tie-dye technique. This understanding, in turn, creates a demand from consumers for hand-made products in the market. To meet this demand the Duans are not even expected to use a textile printing technique to print the dots on fabrics before tying them by hand. This is an example of the way in which the Museum, consumers and the subjects of heritage, crafts and handwork mutually impact on each other. No doubt the mutual impact has been weakened during the Covid pandemic, but when I revisited the museum in early November in 2020 it was still open to the public, and the tourist markets elsewhere in Dali were as busy as before.

Why is the Museum Important?

Last but not least, why is the Museum, as an academic and educational institution, indispensable in preserving the heritage of tie-dyed textiles? The answer to this, discussed above – is that it helps to preserve, present and prolong the life of living heritage. The museum records the history of the living heritage and heralds its future. Also, since tie-dyeing by the Bai people in Dali has become highly commercialised and viable in the future, the Museum can better record and preserve its traditional appearance and essence by collecting and displaying it, as well as offering new sources of creativity that challenge the homogeneous products which fill the market.

4 CONCLUSION

Other similar organisations exist, such as Blue Calico Museum in Nantong, Jiangsu province, and Caicheng Clamp Dyeing Museum in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province. Recently I have been learning and practising manual dyeing techniques in the studio of a Chinese dyer. From this personal experience I finally understand how labour-intensive it is to practise craftwork. It is not easy to consistently maintain production and keep the business running smoothly. This study demonstrates how the Puzhen Museum and Corporation can effectively

work as a home base for craftspeople to carry out collection displays, craft skills training, innovative collaboration and other commercial activity, enabling them to fulfil their duty of prolonging the life of intangible cultural heritage.

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Puzzling through the Pandemic : A Community Heritage Experience

Judith Green St James' Heritage and Environment Group Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, UK Email: stjamesbenwell@gmail.com

KEYWORDS Digital divide Heritage learning Pandemic

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the experience of adapting the work of a community-based heritage organisation to the situation of the Covid Pandemic. The organisation's knowledge of its local community and its pre-existing relationships with a vibrant network of other local organisations enabled it to adapt swiftly by creating and disseminating appropriate materials and activity resources. Extensive user feedback has shown that the work carried out during the pandemic has not only engaged people in heritage learning and helped to entertain and occupy them, but has also given them a continuing sense of belonging to a community. A particular focus of the paper is the significance of the digital divide and the need to develop ways of communicating with those with differential levels of access to digital resources.

1 INTRODUCTION

St James' Heritage and Environment Group is a volunteer-run organisation based in the west end of Newcastle upon Tyne. This is one of the most deprived areas of the UK, as evidenced by the fact that it is the location of the country's largest food bank. However it has a fascinating history as, among other things, the location of a major fort along Hadrian's Wall, a decisive battle in the English Civil War, significant innovations in the development of the railways, and one of the world's leading armaments manufacturers. Our work is targeted primarily at the local community, including some of the most vulnerable groups of people with underlying health conditions and disabilities and poor experiences of formal education. This is a community in the main rooted in a particular place, which means that there is a real passion for local history, not just as an interesting topic in the abstract but as a way of understanding and connecting to people's own lives. This is especially important in an area which had acquired an unwelcome reputation as a place of crime and poverty – particularly following the "riots" in 1991. A focus on heritage helps to create an alternative narrative of which local people can be proud and which outsiders can admire. The area has experienced massive change over the past decades in terms of large-scale clearance and regeneration programmes, wholesale de-industrialisation, and increasing ethnic diversity. Counter-intuitively, this experience of change seems to mean that many people have a particularly strong sense of place and their identity appears to be bound up with the ability to locate themselves and their families in specific geographical terms – a finding reflected in a number of heritage studies. (Watson, 2007; Wedgwood, 2009).

As we have written elsewhere, we take a community development approach to our work which distinguishes us from many other heritage organisations. (Green, 2016). This means that we try to understand how the local community operates, what people's lives are like and what motivates them, and how we can actively involve them in our work, rather than seeing ourselves as "producers" of heritage and our audience as individual consumers. We use multiple methods to encourage active participation and try to build long-term relationships with local people and organisations. We seek to be part of the infrastructure of everyday life by relating to people in a holistic way, as individuals with a range of motivations, needs and interests – social, creative and learning, and by being part of a local eco-system of community groups and organisations

In normal times most of our work involves face-to-face activities. During the 12 months leading up to the start of the pandemic we ran a variety of activities including events, guided walks, site and study visits, heritage outings, talks, graveyard maintenance sessions, film showings and other activities – including a cross-community "Potted History" project whereby groups of local people of all ages created scenes from the history of the area using clay modelling. Footfall during that year was over 3,500. We also mounted exhibitions in different local venues and produced a new book on the history of the area in the early 20th century which, like our previous publications, was available free of charge and distributed at our events and activities and through local organisations and venues. Our digital presence was limited to a basic wordpress website from which all our publications, films and oral history material can be viewed, and an email list used to publicise forthcoming activities. The arrival of lockdown in late March meant the immediate cancellation of all activities, and a major change in our work, although not in the principles underlying it.

Fig 1: More than 200 people took part in our Potted History project in 2019/20.

The following sections describe the main ways in which we have continued to promote heritage learning and to maintain a sense of connection and community during the period from the start of the first lockdown in 2020 to mid-May 2021. We did not carry out formal evaluation or request feedback on the value of this work, as our priority was to provide comfort and diversion to people struggling with the impact of the pandemic, and it would have been inappropriate to add extra burdens at this time. However we have received extensive feedback throughout the period from which it is possible to assess the value of our efforts. This reflects the fact that our practice is interactive and involves communication with a variety of individuals and groups. Feedback has come through many different routes including direct messages from individuals via email, conversations by phone or at outdoor events, letters and cards. For us, such unsolicited messages are more powerful than any tick box evaluation exercise. Throughout the period, we have also been in communication with other organisations working with the local community, and their feedback on the value of our work has helped us to shape our activities in light of changing needs.

2 PUZZLING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

The response of many heritage organisations to the pandemic has been to develop new ways of delivering heritage content digitally. This built on innovative work that was already underway. The Heritage Network conference in February 2021 included many impressive examples of this. Our organisation's initial response was to move online, using our existing emailing contact list. At first, as the situation was changing day by day, we focused on keeping people up to date about what was happening in the area, how they could contact agencies and what support was available. We also linked with other local organisations to contact people by phone to find out how they were managing and what they needed.

Realising that many people were feeling isolated and bored, we soon began to include in our emailings things to keep people entertained. We created original puzzles of different kinds - crosswords, wordsearches and quizzes – all with local history themes. We also produced short illustrated features about different aspects of local history. We did this twiceweekly at first, later weekly, and were still continuing with this at the time of writing in late May 2021. It would have been easier, of course, to use ready-made crosswords and other puzzles from the internet, but we have created our own material based on our store of knowledge and images of the local area, as well as contributions from other helpful people. An important factor has been our earlier experience of working with this audience. Considerable thought goes into judging the appropriate content and level of difficulty for different readers - aiming to enable some people to solve clues on the basis of their personal experience and knowledge while others may have a more detailed knowledge of topics in local history. We know that many people love the detailed information about aspects of local history and appreciate learning new facts. It is probably the case that we have done more in the way of delivering what the Heritage Lottery Fund calls "heritage learning" during the pandemic than we have done in the past decade of our work. However, we aim not only to entertain and inform but also to encourage people to dip into their own memories and knowledge, and to interact with us. We receive many responses from people giving us further information about the places and people we feature, and sharing their own memories of living and working in the west end. The process is often more akin to a conversation than simply the provision of entertainment and learning material. People email us with anecdotes and information about places and events we have featured, telling us, for example, that they attended the now-demolished school in that photograph or that their grandmother used to work in that grand house as a cleaner.

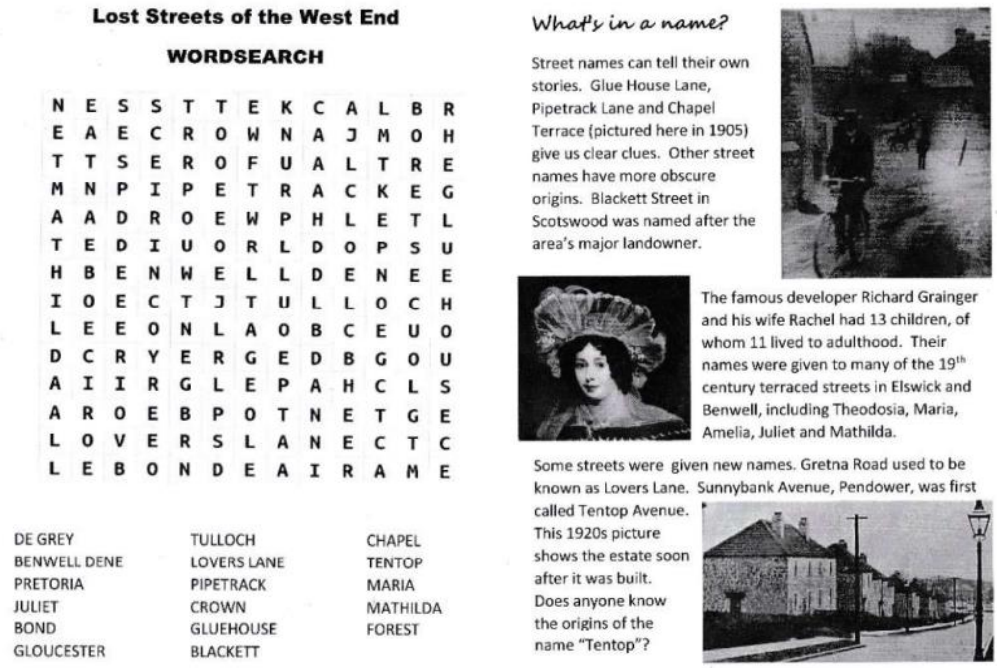

Fig 2: Local history wordsearch, with accompanying information sheet

This has proved a really effective way of keeping in touch with people. From the extensive feedback received, we know that it has made people feel involved and connected. We get a lot of messages from people saying how much it means to them that someone cares enough to keep in contact with them in this way. The phrase "keeping in touch" is frequently used by people describing the benefits of the regular emails. Several people actually described our communications as "a lifeline" in a situation where they struggled with loss and isolation, reminding us that apparently small acts of kindness can really make a difference. A typical response is: "Thank you for your work. It gives us encouragement and a sense of belonging in spite of the distance and the isolation."

We make a point of replying to every email, answering questions, providing information and thanking people for their interest.

In addition, our reach has extended well beyond our existing email contacts. Our own contact list has continued to grow, and a number of other Tyneside organisations have disseminated our material through websites and email lists.

We have found out that many of our email recipients forward the emails to friends and family, and others regularly print them off and deliver them to neighbours and others who do not have access to email. This brings us to a key issue that has concerned us throughout the pandemic – how to reach those on the other side of the digital divide.

3 THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

From the outset of the pandemic, we were very much aware that most of the people with whom we have worked over the past decade or so do not have access to the internet and do not use email. As an illustration, St James' Heritage and Environment Group is a membership organisation (although the members are supporters rather than users, as our activities are open to anyone to attend) and only a few of the 200+ members use email, so that we have to keep in touch by the traditional methods of printing, packing envelopes, and posting. While the emailings we developed were successful and appreciated, we had to develop ways of communicating with those who could not benefit from our digital offerings.

At a time when so many people are benefiting from the ready availability of theatre, music, films, exercise classes, "zoom" talks and events, and all the rest, it seems hard for a lot of people to believe that many of their fellow citizens are excluded from these opportunities. That is the reality of that phrase the "digital divide". There is ample evidence that it is related to wider economic and social divisions.

"Digital exclusion is another facet of the deep inequalities which run through the social fabric of the U.K., and is more widespread than many people are aware of". (Holmes and Burgess, 2021). And this divide has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Understandably the emphasis during the pandemic has been on the digital divide in relation to children because of the impact on their education, but our concern has been with adults - especially those who are older, less mobile and isolated. The Office for National Statistics states that the digital divide leads to "inequalities in access to opportunities, knowledge, services and goods." (ONS, 2019). According to their definition of "internet non-users", there were still, by 2018, 5.3 million adults in the UK who had never used the internet or had not used it in the last three months. That represents 10% of the adult population. Internet usage varies across the country with the North East of England having the highest level of non-use (at 12%) after Northern Ireland. Older people consistently make up

the largest proportion of internet non-users, with more than half of all adult non-users being over 75 years of age in 2018. The ONS also found that those on low incomes and those living alone were less likely to have an internet connection. We do not have any statistical evidence to support this, but we know from our own experience that the ONS definition of an internet non-user would under-estimate the actual incidence of non-use during the pandemic, since many local people rely on libraries to provide them with internet access. This is only one way in which the pandemic would exacerbate the digital divide. (Holmes and Burgess, 2021). AgeUK have suggested that lacking access to the internet may not be a problem for many older people, as long as they have a supportive network, and they highlight the benefits of offline activity such as face-toface interaction and physical activity. (AgeUK, 2018). However, the pandemic has meant that these counterbalancing factors may not apply.

When lockdown began, we were able to develop creative methods of continuing our heritage work using email and our website, but we had to think quickly about how we could reach those people without email and internet access. This was not a new issue for us. Our main route for publicising our activities and events had always been through leaflets, posters and – most importantly - word of mouth and local networking.

We have tried to maintain some sort of direct but safe social contact whenever possible, although this has been very limited because of the numerous and ever-changing sets of restrictions. Compared with many other organisations, we had the advantage of having available to us a safe and attractive outdoor space in the form of the Benwell parish graveyard which we have maintained for several years. In addition, through the generosity of partner organisations with whom we maintained contact throughout the period, we were able to make use of other suitable outdoor spaces for specific events in other parts of West Newcastle.

We made a point of arranging special events in order to give people a sense that there are new things happening and occasions to celebrate in the midst of the gloom and boredom. Celebration events have always been an important part of our programme, and we attempted to continue this as best we could in the given circumstances. For example, we were one of only six organisations in Newcastle who participated in the Heritage Open Days programme in September 2021. As well as a digital local history event, we invited people to book a time to come to the graveyard which we maintain as part of our work, and to choose one of three heritage trail leaflets we produced for self-guided circular walks in the area – the best we could offer at a time when guided walks were no longer possible.

Fig 3: Participants returning from a self-guided walk around Roman Benwell, as part of our 2020 Heritage Open Days event.

Fig 4: Participant in a creative crafts activity in the graveyard as part of an outdoor event in December 2020.

In December we offered a very limited version of our usual big Winter Event where dozens of people would crowd into a church hall for various heritage and environment activities followed by mulled wine and mince pies. In 2020 about 20 masked people took part in a socially distanced outdoor event, making Christmas decorations out of natural materials from the graveyard while being force-fed cold mince pies. Despite the cold and rain, the participants enjoyed themselves and said how good it was to be with other people. Our strategy was to try to keep going and doing things in whatever way was possible at any particular time, rather than to continually postpone and cancel activities – and this paid off. One of the strangest events was the great shrinking book launch in the autumn of 2020. We planned this at a point when outdoor events with a maximum of 30 people were allowed, only to find the rules changing twice over the next three weeks. In the end, all we could offer was for a strictly limited number of people to come singly and masked, by prior booking, to a field behind a local library where they were able to approach a table where masked volunteers handed out copies of the new book. Despite the circumstances, the invitations were greeted with great enthusiasm. On the day, there were many shouted conversations across the windswept field as old friends and colleagues seized the opportunity to talk in person after six months' absence, and a good proportion of the books were taken away to be distributed across the area by willing volunteers. These examples showed how desperate people were to get out and do something with other people, no matter how limited and uncomfortable.

We endeavoured to maintain some level of consistency of contact with people who do not have internet access and who were unable to benefit from the weekly emailings or communicate with us digitally. For this, we made use of the more old-fashioned methods of printed material and DVDs. The first step was to send these out by post to our 200+ members, most of whom live in West Newcastle. This list has subsequently grown over the period as more people have joined us, attracted by our publications. Before long, with the help of other local organisations and individuals, we extended our reach to several hundred more people by means of targeted postal and hand deliveries. In addition there has been considerable demand from a wider range of people (including many exiled Geordies) for copies of booklets and DVDs as a result of word of mouth and reports in the local Newcastle newspaper. Consequently we have had to devote considerable effort to handling postal deliveries for the first time.

Our main printed output has been the puzzle books – hence the title of this article. These contain similar material to the weekly emailings - crosswords, word searches, quizzes and other puzzles, as well as features on local history. A local history theme runs throughout. All the puzzles are original and seek to be informative as well as entertaining. Several of the features are aimed at obtaining feedback from local people about their own experiences. For example, we have sought stories about people's experiences of health services prior to the establishment of the NHS as part of a project we are undertaking. As well as helping to amuse and occupy people, these books encourage them to explore the history of their own areas and to appreciate that their own memories are part of a wider shared experience and are of value and interest to others. We also try to keep people updated about changes in the local heritage environment of which they may be unaware while living in isolation. For example, we included photographs and information about the demolition of a Victorian workhouse building on a local hospital site during the first lockdown.

In addition, we began a series of more substantial local history booklets, self-designed and produced in a format that kept postage costs to a minimum. "West End Stories" was a collection of bite-size features on different aspects of the area's local history, informed by consultation about what topics people found most interesting from the earlier puzzle books. " West End at War: Stories from the Home Front" contained first-hand verbatim accounts of the experiences of both adults and children of living through the Second World War. We avoided the usual brave soldiers narrative, and focused on stories of everyday life, including factory work, nursing, evacuation and schooling. Personal stories were supplied by people identified through our networks of partner organisations, and telephone interviews were carried out using an unwieldy set-up of speakerphones and smartphone recordings. Interviews lasted well over an hour each and, despite the lack of face-to-face interaction, people commented that they enjoyed the opportunity to have a lengthy and detailed conversation after months of virtual isolation.

During the pandemic, we also managed to produce and launch two high quality new books telling the history of particular neighbourhoods through old maps and archive photographs. As well as benefiting from our existing working relationships with local heritage organisations and individual experts who generously provided images, information and advice, we also, through a "snowball" process of email and phone conversations, made several new contacts who gave us invaluable help.

Fig 5: Newcastle's Lord Mayor launches a new book at a socially distanced, outdoor book launch event for Local History Month in May 2021, as restrictions began to ease. Venue and refreshments were provided by a church in the neighbourhood which was the subject of this new book, researched and published by the Group during the pandemic. The traditional spread of home-made cakes reminded everyone what normal life could be like.

The other format we used to communicate local history information and ideas was DVDs. Those who do not have access to the internet cannot, of course, take advantage of the many opportunities available online to watch films and listen to talks. In recognition of the digital divide, we produced DVD versions of the digital outputs we created during the pandemic. The first comprised the programme of talks and exhibitions which we produced for Heritage Open Days in 2020. The second was a DVD containing three films we had made on the theme of the lost industries of West Newcastle riverside. This subject is of particular significance to this area as it was the site of a number of industries of global importance. It is also of great significance to residents as these industries were the major local employers, occupied a huge area of land along the riverside – and have now disappeared almost without trace, We sent this DVD out to everyone on our postal mailing list as a surprise Christmas present – which turned out to be especially timely in light of what happened to the Christmas arrangements .

4 PARTNERSHIP

An important factor underlying the effectiveness of our work during the pandemic has been our strong relationships with the excellent community groups and organisations who have worked incredibly hard over the past months to give practical and emotional support to local residents and continued, despite the difficulties, to be well networked with their local communities. In the past, most of our publications were distributed at events and through local venues such as libraries. During the pandemic we have relied on the help of other local organisations. They have played a big role in distributing our material directly to hundreds of isolated people. Individuals have also helped by delivering material to neighbours, friends and family. For example, one of the local councillors has delivered copies to sheltered housing schemes. Our regular print runs have increased over the period from the 250 copies initially produced for our members to about 1,500. In this way, our material has gone directly to those in need.

This has been a two-way relationship. We have supported the work of these local organisations by providing tailor-made materials for use in their work, such as local history resources, booklets and leaflets with a focus on a specific area. Just as an example, one neighbourhood-based community project included a specially produced heritage walk trail in an activity pack distributed to local families for the Easter holiday period. In this way, local history activities and information were distributed alongside food and craft materials as part of a combined effort to keep people active and engaged, and with this comes social contact and support for the most vulnerable and needy people.

One of the few joys of the past year or so has been the generosity and commitment of so many organisations. Several local voluntary and community organisations have supported our work by providing financial and other practical help during the pandemic. They have also contributed in other important ways – such as by identifying people willing to be interviewed for projects such as "West End at War" and to lend us precious photographs for use in publications. The fact that they have relationships of trust with people has been an important factor in encouraging participation in such projects. We have also benefited from the excellent service received throughout from the small firms who have done our printing and DVD copying. Working under challenging conditions themselves, they have adapted to meet our needs – arranging direct deliveries during lockdown, meeting us on street corners to throw master copies of DVDs in through car windows for us to take home and check, working late to meet unexpected deadlines, refusing to charge for additional design work – and last but not least sharing our satisfaction in a job well done and the positive responses we have received.

5 WALKING THROUGH HISTORY

A major part of our work from the autumn of 2020 onwards has been the creation of heritage walking trails. Guided walks have always been part of our work, both directly as part of our programme and in partnership with other organisations. The pandemic restrictions put an end to this, so we turned instead to developing printed trails for self-guided walks.

While we already had extensive knowledge of the history of the different neighbourhoods that comprise the west end, designing walking trails involves a considerable amount of extra work. There were many hours spent prowling around derelict sites, braving mud and nettles and investigating footpaths, to try to put together accessible and interesting walks. We roped in a number of people to help scope and pilot the routes - luckily not losing any in the process. The initial plan was to print A4 versions of individual walks but, in light of the response to these, we had the idea of packaging them into booklets, each containing one or more walk routes around historic sites in each area, illustrated with old photographs and map excerpts. Five such heritage guides have been published to date, covering Benwell, Elswick, Denton Dene and old Scotswood, and two focusing on the outer west communities of Newburn, Lemington, Sugley and Bell's Close. The outer west guides were an achievement of which we are especially proud, as this was an area we had not explored in any detail previously. In the process of creating these walk booklets, we made several new contacts with knowledge and expertise in the history of these places, and have been able to build on these relationships with further joint work.

The heritage walk trails were created during a period when very limiting restrictions were in place in the North East. One of the key aims was to use local history as a prompt to encourage people to take exercise. Conversely, they encourage people to learn more about their heritage at a time when they are restricted to walking around their local areas anyway. And even if people don't do the walks - for example, because they are shielding or have mobility problems - they can still enjoy the guides as reading matter that is directly relevant to their own lives and encourages them to appreciate their own area better. The high demand we have had for copies of the guides, as well as the feedback from people, indicates that we have been successful in meeting these aims.

6 NEW SKILLS

The Heritage and Environment Group is wholly run by volunteers. Among us we have a variety of valuable skills – in research, writing, community development, gardening, fundraising, and other areas. The pandemic has certainly tested our skills and abilities, but it has also been a source of satisfaction to have been able to be able to put to good use the resources of knowledge, information, images and contacts we have gathered over to the previous 12 years.

We have learned many new skills over the pandemic period. Most of our publications have been designed by us, for example, and, while not exactly of a professional standard, they have been well received. Our earlier efforts at filmmaking have been extended by the discovery that it is possible to make short films using a smartphone. Other types of expertise have been generously contributed by helpful people who have been willing to support our work.

7 IMPACT

Whilst we have not undertaken a formal evaluation of our work during the pandemic so far, we have kept a record of the almost 200 unsolicited responses received by email or post. A selection of these comments are reproduced here. They illustrate the benefits of feeling involved, cared about, valued and in contact with others, as well as being entertained and informed. They also show how the material we produced has been shared widely across the area and beyond.

"During this depressing time of lockdown and isolation, St James' Group has been a lifeline for many people. I am grateful to all concerned for their efforts, giving varied and interesting weekly contact (which was kindly forwarded to me by my friend)."

"Thank you so much. I continue to look forward to receiving and enjoying the weekly - keeping in touch, getting to know your community, being part of something good and how to survive a pandemic; crosswords, Benwell history and other goodies. Thanks to all involved. Means a lot."

"Thank you to you and everyone else involved for all the work you have done for us all over the last months. The puzzles have tested us, the photographs have given a great insight to what went on in days gone by, and the stories have been both entertaining and informative. All you have provided has been an immense help in getting us through the unsettling and difficult days."

"I have enjoyed all of these having been house-bound since March."

"I loved these local history snippets and have been forwarding them to others."

"Just dropping you a note to say thank you for the newsletters/quizzes you are sending out. I share them with my parents who are 91 and 90, my Mam in particular really enjoys them. The information and quizzes bring back many happy memories and get her talking about all sorts of everyday experiences she'd forgotten about. The whole family are interested in the photographs and local history facts."

"I have enjoyed reading all the articles and studying the photos which you have sent. I have an elderly friend who is house-bound and lives alone so I have sent copies of these to her in the post."

"Thank you for the weekly local history lessons which I share with half a dozen neighbours – they are excellent and lift the spirits."

"A big thank you from all the friends you've made through the publications, newsletters, DVDs etc I'm passing on."

"Thanks for the local history mailing . A triumph of lockdown communication!"

"Well done for making something worthwhile and long lasting from the lockdown situation."

8 CONCLUSION

Our experience is just one example of the creative responses developed by heritage organisations during the pandemic. Although our contribution has been very small in the overall context of the pandemic, the evidence shows that we have succeeded in making a difference to people's lives during this difficult period. We were fortunate in that our work over the previous decade had equipped us to respond to the specific needs of the local community we serve. This was not necessarily an obvious route to take, and it was certainly not easy. Many other heritage organisations simply stopped their work at the start of the first lockdown, and some have not yet restarted. When institutions such as archives and museums closed, some developed creative ways of delivering alternative services using digital technologies; others, including some of the best-funded institutions in the region, simply closed their doors, furloughed their staff, and stopped working. Our decision to keep on working by whatever means we could may seem in retrospect to have been rash, but it just seemed the right thing to do at the time.

The process of carrying out this work has been very timeconsuming and fraught with challenges. Like most other organisations we have faced numerous crises such as problems with IT, and found everything that previously was straightforward took five times as long to do, especially during periods of lockdown. Money was also an issue. The printing and postage costs associated with our output were significantly higher than in the past, but we took a decision to proceed with what we judged was needed and trust that we could find the means of paying for it. Thankfully our optimism proved justified. Individuals and organisations have been generous with donations and financial support.

We have been asked to include recommendations for other similar organisations. Unfortunately there is no simple answer to this question, primarily because it is difficult to think of any similar organisations. Our work is focused on a specific geographical area and is a composite of several interconnected strands of work – carrying out research, producing publications and exhibitions, running guided walks, looking after a historic graveyard, running programmes of talks and events, and organizing cross-community projects – all focusing on the heritage of a specific locality. Many organisations do one or more of these things, but we know of none who do all of them or whose work is embedded in a particular community and local networks, and underpinned by a community development practice as we are. It was these characteristics, plus our specialist knowledge of the history of our area, that enabled us respond promptly to the pandemic, informed by our understanding of local needs and interests. We would not claim that ours was the only appropriate response – or even the best one – but the evidence shows that it did help a significant number of people to cope with the difficult situation of the past year, and, for us, that outcome is sufficient justification for our efforts.

The key point we would want to identify on the basis of our experience is the continuing importance of the digital divide. For us this is much more than a phrase: it is the reality within which we work. It is exemplified by the food bank queue that stretches around the graveyard we maintain once a week, by the fact that only half of our trustees use email, the way that most of our members pay their subscriptions in cash and participants book for events by letter or phone, and by the bags of food and activity packs hand-delivered by our partner organisations. The efforts made by so many heritage organisations to run events and activities using technologies such as Zoom have made a huge contribution to keeping people occupied and maintaining the exchange of ideas and information – but they could not reach many of those most in need whose exclusion from mainstream social and economic life was exacerbated during the pandemic, but whose enthusiasm for heritage is central to their identity and sense of place.

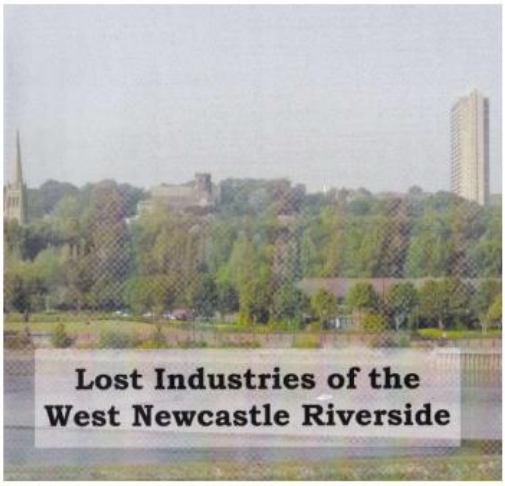

Fig 6: A DVD of films made by the Group during the pandemic was posted out to more than 200 people in December 2020.

All our publications, films and recorded talks can be accessed on our website – https://stjamesheritage.com

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