



Collective Conversations: New Audiences and Museums

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The Manchester Museum

“As a university museum, the Manchester Museum uses its international collection of human and natural history for enjoyment and inspiration, working with people from all backgrounds to provoke debate and reflection about the past, present and future of the earth and its inhabitants”

Facts and Figures

- 4,420,000 objects and specimens
- 4,235,00 - World Environments
 - (Botany, Entomology, Geology, Zoology)
- 185,000 - Human Cultures
 - (Archery, Archaeology, Anthropology, Egyptology, Numismatics)



Facts and Figures

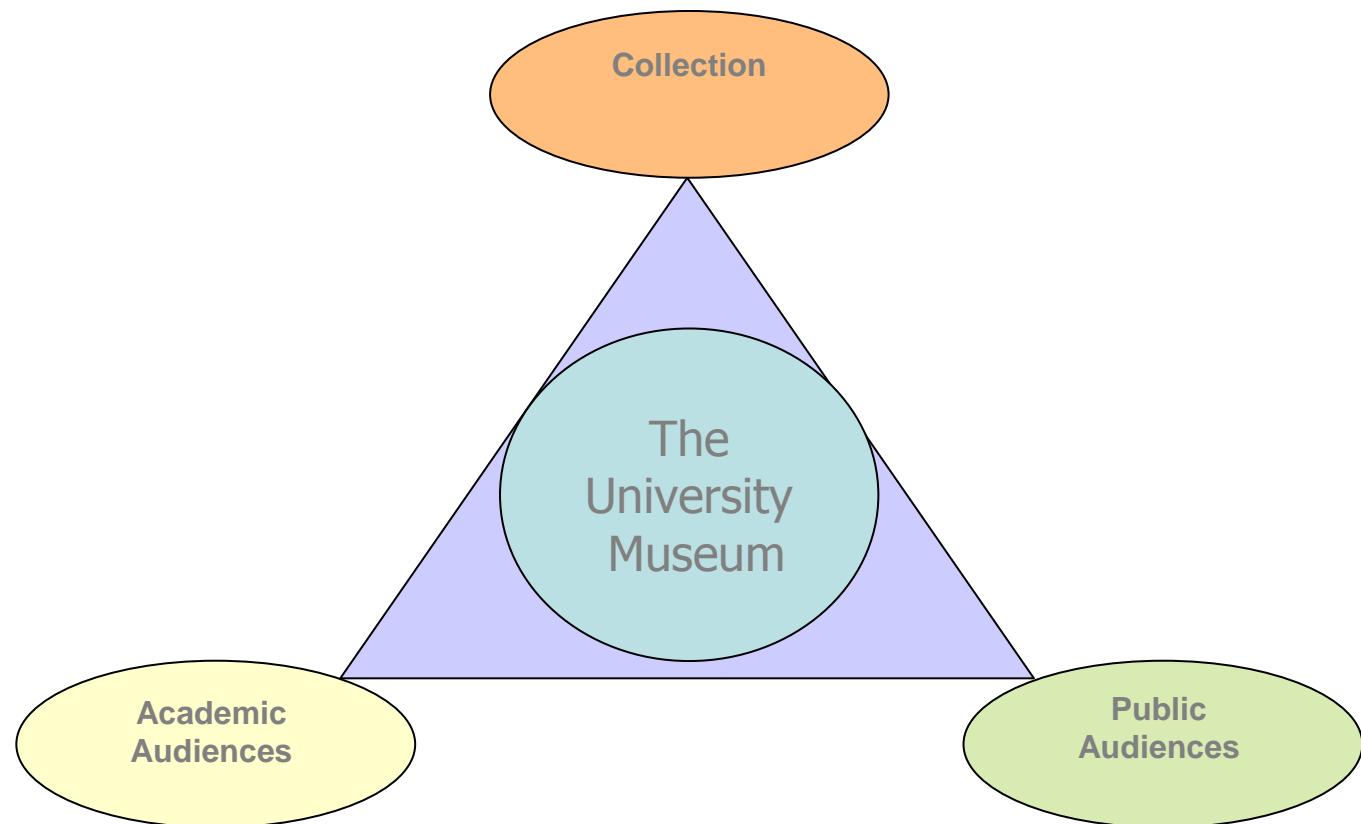


- On display
 - 5,520
 - 0.12%



- In store
 - 4,414,480
 - 99.88%

Distinctiveness of University Museums



Museum philosophy

- Past
 - Display collection – general visitor
 - Handling collection – school children
 - Reserve/research collection – *bona fide* researcher (i.e. academic)
- Present
 - Single collection
 - All users engage with real objects
 - Object store is simply a location not a category
 - Range of programmes and opportunities
 - Physical and virtual
 - Communities around the Museum

Collective Conversations: Project Aims

Aims

- Increase access to Museum collections
- ‘Communities’ involved in the processes of identification, documentation and interpretation
- Use innovative consultation techniques
- Display conversations on the museum website

Tasks

- Documentation and image creation for database
- Re-storage to improve physical access
- Facilitated ‘round table conversation’ sessions with relevant interest groups

Funding

- NW Hub (Renaissance in the regions)

Phase 1: Trial Approaches

- Trial conversations – Somali and Sudanese group
- Pensioners group from East Manchester
- Greater Manchester Coalition for Disabled People
- Mohawk Nation of North America
- Wai Yin Chinese Society parenting group
- Local Archaeologists
- International conversation between 2 school groups here and in Australia



Phase 2: Thematic Approach

- Revealing Histories
- Managed by Greater Manchester-wide steering group of eleven institutions
- Researching history of collections and relationship to legacy of Slave Trade and Empire in NW
- Engaging community in broad consultation and co-authorship
- Developing new directions in interpretation



Phase 3: Exhibition Approach

- *Lindow Man: a bog body mystery*
 - Cheshire Police
 - 13-15 year old students
- *Our City: collections and connections*
 - Local history group
 - 8-10 year old school children
 - WAST
- Engaging community in broad aspects of exhibition content development and interpretation



Museum as Contact Zone

- Creating new ways of working
- Public access to collections usually hidden in museum stores
- Located in heart of museum
- Non obtrusive space



Meetings



Subject Matter and Objects

- topic and objects selected by group
- provide information on 'themes' and objects that relate to their areas of interest within context of Museum's ongoing work



Narratives (2) - Display

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1462
Elliot and Nadim 01 - Introduction

Narrative

Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People (GMCDP) is a campaigning organisation that promotes the independence and integration of disabled people in society. It identifies and challenges the discrimination that disabled people face and encourages and supports the self-organisation of disabled people. It is staffed and run entirely by disabled people like Elliot Thomson and Nadim Khawaja, who took part in this conversation in 2005. The objects that Elliot and Nadim selected and discussed from the Manchester Museum's collections all have symbolic and personal meanings relating to their lives as disabled people and to wider issues about disability in general. In this fascinating conversation they talk about anthropological objects ranging from Ibeji figures and a ceremonial club to a contemporary shopping trolley and a beer can. Over the course of the discussion, they relate the objects to pertinent issues of equality, civil rights, social barriers, changing attitudes and the medical and social models of disability.

Nadim introduces himself and tells us about the work of the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People.

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Collective Conversations: Measure of success

- Inclusion of community voices in interpretation and documentation
- Increased levels of use and awareness of the anthropology, botany and natural history collection
- Exhibition around which new learning programmes can be developed
- Establishing the Contact Zone as of a model for inclusive ways of working for further collections access through
 - gallery displays
 - learning programmes
 - collections development
- YouTube
 - 251 videos currently available
 - 98,500 Video views
 - 3091 Channel views
 - 68 subscribers

Participant response

“Collective conversations evoked inner feelings about our identity that concern our traditions and culture.”

“To me, seeing Somali objects from the Museum’s archives aroused feelings of belonging to something. We all felt happy to see, feel and talk about objects that represent our culture and heritage, illustrating the ways we lived.”

Participant response

“We contributed a lot of history and knowledge which we hope will be passed on to children as well as adults from a lot of different nations...”

“It was also good hearing the others [in the group] speak, telling what they know, and their memories. If I had the time, or if I did it again, I would say something more controversial! But I know that this was an important thing to do because when people listen to us it will get them thinking.”

Audience response

“Thank you very much for this we are Yoruba custodians also and we feel many of our people are seeking western knowledge instead of there traditional rituals and culture.Wow!!”

“it is craet that you make the video becorse my children have a father from Benin City, I stay in Benin to and I speek EDO I com from Berlin but I miss benin soooo mush”

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ManchesterMuseum>