'Exhibition Development In Auckland Libraries'

by

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Exhibition development in Auckland Libraries.

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1.0   Problem Statement

1.1   Rationale for the Study

Throughout New Zealand's public library sector, librarians, particularly those responsible for special collections, maintain and create exhibitions. They aim to reflect the depth and richness of our history, cultural heritage and society. Due to the immeasurable value of cultural heritage, it needs to be presented effectively, not only for aesthetic and preservation purposes, but also for the betterment of society. Therefore the objective of this study is to explore how exhibition principles are being applied to exhibition development and presentation in Auckland Libraries. This study will not only focus on the principles behind physical layout of the exhibitions, and selection of objects on display, it will also attempt to place exhibition design into a wider context. It will do this by exploring how library exhibitions reflect public policy, and how exhibition designers perceive their social and cultural responsibilities as representatives of public libraries. Herein lies the value of the proposed study; it will allow better informed practices by exploring the use of exhibition design principles, and the application of public policy in public.

1.2   Research Questions

1.2.1   Topic Question:

How are exhibitions developed and presented in Auckland Libraries?

1.2.2   Sub Questions:

➢ Are the exhibits designed through democratic processes; what is the driving force, community or librarian?

➢ How does public policy affect exhibition practices in libraries?

➢ How is the layout and content decided upon?

➢ Are exhibits being designed by staff with a professional knowledge in the field?

1.3   Theoretical Framework

This will be a deductive study undertaken from a constructivist ontological position. A constructivist approach to learning is often employed in the development of interpretive exhibitions because it allows visitors to actively participate in the narrative of the exhibition on their own terms. Freeing them to actively participate on their own terms is important because it does not encroach on their cultural background, it does not tell them what to do or think, which allows them to freely perceive and understand the world around them. By bringing this to bare, it allows the visitor to filter information and internalise it in a way they can understand; constructivism holds that this is how people learn(Jeffery-Clay, 1998). In museums this filters down to exhibition designers being aware that they are catering for myriad individuals with unique learning paths. One way to do this is by providing a guiding interpretation. This is not to suggest the use of an arbitrary dissemination model, but rather to present narratives with characters, plots and themes; to which the visitor can relate to in any way and still come out with something new (Jeffery-Clay, 1998; Serrell, 1996). Essentially by relating to an exhibit, visitors are applying their cultural background and learning— or not; this study does not assume that learning is in the forefront of every visitors mind. This study will observe how, or if, library exhibition designers implement the above, and the role public policy plays in this implementation.

1.4   Delimitations/Limitations

1.4.1   Delimitations

➢ The study will only involve interviewees who are associated with Auckland Libraries as exhibitions.

1.4.2   Limitations

➢ The course specified timeframe, finance and research experience limit the depth and scope of the project.

2.0   Literature Review

This literature review discusses view points on the role of interpretation in exhibitions, the effective use of labels and exhibition space, the impact of government policy on exhibition and cultural programmes, the role which multi-sensory exhibitions can play and the

development and application of online exhibitions. These topics are organised into distinct sections titled *context and interpretation*, *public policy*, *multi-sensory exhibitions*, and *online exhibitions*. Overall, this literature review draws from practical and theoretical material written to reflect the state of the art of exhibition curation in multiple fields.

2.1   Context and interpretation

The point of entry for this literature review is a report that came from Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) about the practice of library curation(AHRC, 2011). The report discusses several issues and ideas of relevance. It covers the role of interpretation and the importance of context; the use of space, as well as visitor and community collaboration. The authors discuss the relationship between exhibit design and interpretation of books and manuscripts on display. They challenge the idea of representing a book by displaying a tiny fraction of the entire work, and introduce the value of interpretation by arguing that "When a book is strapped open in an exhibition, visitors are often seeing only a tiny fraction of the content. An exhibited page is a frozen part of a sequence. Unless extra interpretive materials are provided, visitors are unable to read more than the text on the pages displayed." The authors acknowledge that displaying a book or manuscript without displaying its text, for the purpose of displaying the objects provenance, is an understandable. However, once objects are displayed as "talismans or art an object, any text that is displayed as such is at risk of looking second-class." They go on to say that "such displays might misrepresent the nature of the books on display and the collections of which they are instances," suggesting that the reliance on visual aesthetics of the object limits display possibilities(AHRC, 2011).

The authors state that "in an exhibition of the written word the interpretation provided – whether labels, panel text, catalogue information or audio clips - is particularly important," but point out that "It is not generally possible to tell the whole story of any particular text, or to interpret it in ways that might appeal to every conceivable exhibition visitor." They argue that providing the viewer with an interpretation—as long as it is designed to limit cultural conflict which could detract from the true meaning of the text—can allow the

objects to "exercise some of their normal functions"; that of the written word rather than an art object(AHRC, 2011).

This echoes Serrell who defines interpretive exhibits as "displays that tell stories, contrast points of view, present challenging issues, or strive to change people's attitudes."(Serrell, 1996) She argues that they provide the environment necessary to ensure "the communication objectives selected by the exhibit designers". She stresses the importance of having an overarching story, or 'A Big Idea', that defines the interpretive exhibit. She points out "similarities between interpretation, narratives, storytelling, and exhibit texts" arguing that "good interpretation, like good storytelling, carries the listener along with the sound of the words and the images they create, and lets the visitor participate by anticipating where the story is going". She describes labels as short stories which give visitors a "'minds-on' moment". In essence, labels should be meaningful stories that provide viewers with subjects, or characters, and clear actions to which they can relate personally.

This is solidified in a study done by Serrell in which she found further value of accessible interpretive information, stating that "unless visitors quickly get some enjoyable, provocative, or personally meaningful feedback from an exhibition, their attention will turn elsewhere" and that "if the exhibit challenges are not matched to their skills, visitors will not pay attention"(Serrell, 1997). Along a similar vein Serrell also found in the study of interpretive exhibitions, that "The places where visitors stop most often are also among those frequently mentioned as most memorable"; suggesting a connection between effectively engaging interpretation and learning.

Tangentially, it is important to point out that exhibitions in libraries do not necessarily have their own dedicated space, away from the collection. A case study in the AHRC report written by Julie Johnstone of the Scottish Poetry Library, raises this point(AHRC, 2011). The case study brings two important ideas to the floor, libraries do not necessarily have floor space dedicated to exhibitions, and that exhibitions need to fit in with the space available. Similarly museums, library exhibition staff need to think about how the layout of exhibitions will affect the visitors experience(Bitgood, 2006; Hanner, 2011).

2.2 Multi-Sensory Exhibitions

A case study in the AHRC report written by Jeff Cowton of the Wordsworth Trust, touches on the idea of multi-modal display, suggesting that contextual pictures surrounding an object can effectively deliver good interpretation(AHRC, 2011). This is an idea often discussed and employed in the field of museum curation. The rough consensus is that multi-modal displays do enhance the learning environment, but only to a certain extent (Allen & Gutwill, 2004; Davidson, Heald, & Hein, 1991; Harvey, Loomis, Bell, & Marino, 1998). Allen & Gutwill articulate this limitation with five pitfalls "of designing exhibits with high levels of interactivity or multiple interactive features: (1) multiple options with equal salience can overwhelm visitors, (2) interactivity by multiple simultaneous users can lead to disruption, (3) interactivity, even by a single visitor, can disrupt the phenomenon being displayed, (4) interactive features can make a critical phenomenon difficult to find, and (5) secondary features can displace visitors' attention from the primary one". This indicates that, like Serrell's labels, multi-media exhibitions need to be concise and enhance the interpretive experience rather than dilute it with extraneous stimuli.

One way museums determine the effectiveness of the interpretive experience is by studying learning outcomes of visitors (while learning outcomes are not within the scope of this study, the ways in which exhibition designers think about them is). The AHRC report suggests that thinking about learning outcomes should follow the more open Generic Learning Outcomes framework developed by the UK Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. The GLO framework espouses that exhibit designers should be "thinking in terms not only of Knowledge and Understanding" but also in terms of "Skills; Attitudes and Values; Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity; Activity, Behaviour and Progression"(AHRC, 2011). While that particular framework may be flawed(Brown, 2007), it highlights the importance of constructivist thought regarding exhibit design. The idea that exhibits should allow for multiple learning paths and visitor interpretation, a tenet of constructivist thought, is echoed in the GLO framework(AHRC, 2011; Jeffery-Clay, 1998).

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2.3 Public Policy

The authors of the AHRC report also explore the effects that public policy, specifically those aiming to create cultural inclusion, can have on exhibition design. The process of implementing 'state' policy into exhibit design is referred to as instrumentalism. The immediate impact of instrumentalism is that it creates a situation in which exhibit designers need to design and define their exhibitions with public policy in mind; this does essentially give cultural institutions an awareness of their social responsibility, but reflects the nature of the state, democratic or not. The report, referring to institutions in the UK, exemplifies the impact of public policy by pointing out that "Policy agendas entail a shift in thinking about exhibitions. Their rhetoric moves away from the sense of a display as addressing an 'audience', a relatively passive body to whom cultural 'experts' speak, and towards a sense of dialogic engagement and responsibility for empowering 'communities', active bodies whose own voices are of equal importance to that of the 'expert'."(AHRC, 2011).

While the report is not discarding the value of instrumentalism, it is pointing out the potential confusion it can cause for cultural institutions. This confusion is exemplified by O'Neill's critique of three positions in the instrumentalism debate(O'Neill, 2008). With some thinking of instrumentalism as a new addition to cultural institutions (NMDC, 2004)and others finding it outright hostile(Gibson, 2008). Gibson further articulates this confusion, and the instrumentalism debate in the same article (Gibson, 2008). Both O'Neill—and Gibson less explicitly—posit that cultural institutions were originally founded with the goals of instrumentalism and have since been subject to the development of elitism. He concludes saying that "All publicly funded institutions have a dual task – to deliver their particular service, and to do so in ways which contribute to the development of a democratic society." (O'Neill, 2008)

2.4 Online exhibitions

In an article analysing online cultural heritage exhibitions, Liew explores the types of online exhibitions are being made available by various cultural heritage organisations(Liew, 2006). The author makes various observations of value to this research project. A lot of emphasis is

placed on access. The first point of relevance the author makes is that "There will be an issue of the growing number of users who will access the exhibition sites"(Liew, 2006). This raises the issue of the physical viability of online exhibitions, and the question of how libraries are coping with the increasing numbers of online patrons.

Another relevant point raised in the article focuses on the retrieval of content by patrons. The author observes that none of the exhibitions supported natural language search expressions, pointing out that the "sites expect users to combine search terms and phrases, with appropriate Boolean or other search operators. This poses constraint on novice and inexperienced users who form a large part of the user population of online exhibition sites."(Liew, 2006). The study also found that retrieval mostly relied on searching for text within labels, and recommended that metadata about the objects themselves should be indexed(Liew, 2006). It also found that most exhibitions lacked support for multilingual searching.

The author also points out those browsing functions are often just as limited; being largely based on themes, topics or titles, loses their effect with large collections. The article suggest that, like in the British Museum, curators should create diagrams visualising the exhibition space, in unison with hyperlinks, to represent the exhibition space and allow for virtual browsing in a manner roughly analogous to a physical exhibition (Liew, 2006).

Bernier also emphasises the need for retrieval methods that can meet the needs of various user groups, emphasising the use of relevant search associations(Bernier, 2002). The article, based on the analysis of ten online exhibitions, also argues that one of four learning styles should be used in the creation of online exhibitions(Bernier, 2002). She articulates them as follows: "1) giving facts and details (e.g., index on artists), 2) supporting pragmatism and skill-oriented exploration (e.g., higher-end technologies), 3) sharing ideas (e.g., newsgroups), and 4) bringing about self-discoveries (e.g., quizzes)(Bernier, 2002)".

Roberto compares 39 online exhibitions, analysing them from a user perspective in order to compile a list of positive and negatives features being utilised. Summarised below are points of relevance. The author emphasises the importance of online exhibitions having a

'unified look', stating that this can be done with motif, colour scheme or metaphor(Roberto, 2008). Along with standardised buttons and menu bars, a unified look lends a degree on congruity to site navigation, removing confusion as a barrier for users(Roberto, 2008).

Similar to the AHRC report focusing on the problem of representing a written text with random pages, Roberto stresses that merely displaying anything from a collection does not guarantee a good online exhibition(AHRC, 2011; Roberto, 2008). Roberto develops this idea further by arguing that "displaying material from a specific time period repeats and intensifies the beliefs from that time period", stressing the importance of creating a complete representation of events to facilitate a complete discussion(Roberto, 2008). This also raises the importance of determining the motivations behind the exhibitions.

Like Liew, Roberto presses the importance of assigning separate web space to online exhibitions, as this allows cultural institutions to have several exhibitions without restricting them to a single style(Liew, 2006; Roberto, 2008). Influencing the Roberto article was a book written Kalfatovic about online exhibition, in which Kalfatovic posits that it is essential for online exhibitions to have a "tight connection between a central idea, a selection of objects or documents to make this point, and a script."(Kalfatovic, 2002; Roberto, 2008). Similarly to Bernier's four learning styles, Kalfatovic observes that there are five forms of exhibition which evoke reactions, these are aesthetic, emotive, evocative, didactic or entertaining. Aesthetic exhibitions focus on the beauty of object, an emotive exhibit attempts to illicit emotional responses, evocative exhibitions evoke specific atmospheres, didactic exhibitions focus on teaching and entertaining exhibitions focus on amusing viewers(Kalfatovic, 2002).

Foo adds to the discussion of the relationships between digital exhibitions the end user, In an article about concepts and design considerations for online exhibitions (Foo, 2008). The author places the variety of end users into context by pointing out that they can be anyone, including "children and adults, students and teachers, academics and researchers, novice and expert users, tourists and casual Internet surfers, the general public and professional users (such as archivists, librarians and information professionals)", concluding that no single approach will fit all visitors(Foo, 2008). Foo also points out online exhibitions should be seen as extensions rather that copies of physical exhibitions(Foo, 2008).

The time and resources necessary to create an online exhibition are important to take note of. In an article about the Powys Digital History Project, Reid describes the process of digitising and preparing material for online exhibitions(Reid, 2001). The article stresses the large expense in staff time to digitise and provide interpretations for objects, it illustrates this by stating that the "project is averaging between 200 and 250 words per page and an average of one webpage per person per day…or approximately 250 pages per person in a calendar year." Reid acknowledges that it is relatively easy to attach brief captions and metadata to objects, but points out that this approach has no value to the general user(Reid, 2001). Echoing Serrell's interpretive approach to labelling(Serrell, 1996).

3.0   Methodology

3.1   Data collection procedures:

To collect appropriate data it was be necessary to interview people closely or directly involved with Auckland Libraries exhibition creation processes and collections. Due to the two pronged nature of the research questions—public policy and social responsibilities, as well as design and creation—the research interviews ended up producing a wide variety of data. The variable nature of the interviewees' roles in creating exhibitions did not render quantifiable data; rather each interviewee contributed unique data. Due to the varied roles filled by Interviewees interviews were semi-structure. Filter questions were applied and the sequence of questions altered according to the interviewee's experience. The interviews were conducted face-to-face. Due to the limited nature of the study, and the small scale nature of exhibitions development in Auckland Libraries, the study will involved eight interviewees.

3.2   Population and sample:

This study set out to find a public library, or collection of public libraries, that curate a special collections exhibition(s). Interviewees had to be involved with the planning and creation of exhibitions for the organisation at the time of the interview. Initially three case studies were considered, in order to sample the state of exhibition development in New Zealand Libraries, however due to the limited nature of the project, Auckland Libraries was selected as the single case study for the project. The intention of this study was to understand both high and low level functions of exhibition development in Auckland Libraries. And so Interviews were conducted with interviewees associated with creating and managing the implementing public policy, from a higher level of the process, and those involved in the planning and curation the exhibitions, from the lower level and end product stage of the process. Approaching interviewees with these affiliations was ideal as they were directly involved with the processes this study set out to explore. The study focused on the Auckland Libraries exhibition programme.

The final group of interviewees was made up of eight Auckland Libraries staff; most of whom work regularly on exhibitions. Seven of the eight interviewees are employed within the Auckland Libraries Heritage and Research Department, which runs exhibitions through Research Centres, including Sir George Grey Special Collections, in Auckland Central Library, as well as the North and West Auckland Research Centres which are based in the Takapuna and Waitakere Central library's respectively. Six of the eight interviewees work directly on exhibitions, in their respective Research Centres, throughout the year. They fulfil their exhibition roles on top of a regular work load consisting of Research Centre duties; such as reference enquiries, collection development, preservation work and research into the collections. Of the two remaining interviewees, one was involved in a single exhibition and the other fulfils a management role within the Heritage and Research Department.

 The exhibition teams operate semi-autonomously; they do not share material or exhibition themes. Each team has a unique exhibition programme, outlined below.

Sir George Grey Special Collections is the only team with a preservation standard exhibition space and their exhibitions are often considered more 'professional' or world class; housed in a room with approximately a dozen cases and wall mounts. It is the only space in

Auckland Libraries that can safely exhibit rare, unique, and fragile material. The exhibition team is supported by the Auckland Libraries conservation team, located in the same building, who provide cradles, adjust lighting and prepare material for display. The conservation team work on exhibitions as an aside to other tasks. Most of the exhibitions held in Sir George Grey Special collections have been internal; hosting external exhibitions is an infrequent occurrence. They produce three physical and corresponding online exhibitions per year. The group of interviewees included three people from this arrangement, including a web team liaison, team leader and a conservation librarian.

The West Auckland Research Centre team run one or two internal exhibitions and host several external exhibitions, usually created by community groups or individuals, per year. The exhibition space is a lot smaller than that in Sir George Grey Special Collections; being large enough for mostly wall based exhibitions. The space cannot be maintained to preservation standards, which restricts the content exhibited. The staff, one of which I interviewed, are involved in community based exhibition projects and the creation of contemporary historical records. The West Auckland exhibition team have experience with multi-sensory oral history exhibitions, and are responsible for a lot of the work done on the Dominion Road Stories, an expansive online exhibition. Renovations have been planned to allow for an expansion of their exhibition space.

The North Shore Research Centre exhibitions are a yet smaller affair, and appear to be more ad hoc than the other exhibition spaces. The exhibitions are primarily displayed on vertical wall screens and a television monitor; they are located in a thoroughfare used to access the Research Centre. Exhibitions here are often designed to be largely visually stimulating, based on local history photographs, and put together by one or two staff members. They also reflect popular reference enquiries. Like the West Auckland Research Centre, renovations have been planned to create more exhibition space in the Takapuna Library.

The Auckland Libraries exhibition programme is considered to be lively and growing, participants were selected from these three Research Centres, and the various roles which make up the Heritage and Research team, to create an accurate impression of this programme.

3.3   Ethical Issues:

The interviews were conducted with the express permission of the interviewees, whose input is collated with those of the other interviewees in the following pages. Interviewees will not be mentioned by name, nor will any opinions be associated to their name. They will remain anonymous. The interviewees were free to terminate the interview at any time. The study was approved by and met the conduct requirements set out by the Victoria University of Wellington's School of Information Management Human Ethics Committee.

3.4   Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis. Verbatim interview data was be analysed to identify a framework of themes and sub-themes. This framework was used to extract core themes from the data. Each core theme was represented by a matrix of subthemes (x-axis) and interviewees (y-axis). The frequency of recurring subthemes was used to uncover emergent trends. The initial framework of themes and sub-themes was derived from a search of the data for recurring topics, similarities and differences between interviewees' responses; as well as linguistic connectors, missing-data and theory related material. The data analysis was done using NVivo.

4. 0 Findings

4.1   Introduction

The discussion of findings below is roughly organised into sections and themes which tie them in with the research questions.

The first section, titled *exhibition design*, focuses on answering the research question "How is the layout and content decided upon?" This includes a discussion of the following topics: how content is decided upon, how patrons interests are determined, the effect of exhibition spaces on design decisions, the benefits and use of multi-sensory content, determining how visitor comfort and accessibility effect design decisions, hosting external exhibitions, the use of online exhibitions and finally how the design process is effected by funding and resourcing.

The second section, titled *background, knowledge and necessary skills of exhibition staff*, is a product of pursuing the research question "Are exhibits being designed by staff with professional knowledge in the field?" It explores the following topics: how exhibition staff are, and came to be, involved in exhibition creation, the skills required for creating exhibitions and the ways in which staff approach professional development.

The third section, titled *public policy and societal impact on exhibition practices*, derived from the research question "How does public policy affect exhibition practices in libraries?" It discusses censorship, the relationship between exhibition development and Auckland Council values and it briefly discusses how exhibitions interact with and reflect political events.

The final section, titled *driving forces behind exhibition development*, resulted from exploring the research question "Are the exhibits designed through democratic processes; what is the driving force, community or librarian?" and explores the following: exhibition team dynamics, regional interactions between exhibition teams, the relationship exhibitions have with society and what motivates staff to create exhibitions; and the role they play in society.

4.2 Exhibition design

4.1.1   Deciding on content

From interviewees discussing the processes behind deciding upon the content of exhibitions, the following themes began to emerge: the importance of historical accuracy; that exhibitions need to be visually stimulating and easy to take in; that staff engagement and dialogue is crucial; the importance of reflecting societal norms, and that funding and resourcing have an impact.

Interviewees tended to emphasise the importance of historical accuracy when choosing content. Some interviewees felt that exhibitions should reflect what society was like for people living within the time periods being covered by the narrative. They felt that visitors were interested in discovering how their predecessors, or familial ancestors, may have lived. As well as what their land, neighbourhood and city was like; how it functioned, and indirectly, how it may have changed in the intervening years. Interviewees felt that In order for material to be considered historically accurate, it requires the ability to convey at least part of the narrative the exhibition team are trying to encapsulate and portray.

Many interviewees felt that an object's ability to accurately contribute to a narrative must come paired with the ability to be visually stimulating, as well as contextually relevant; fitting in alongside other material in the exhibition. Interviewees were vague on the meaning of 'visual stimulation', presumably because it is a subjective function, but the general impression given was that an object needs to be in viewable condition and have an appearance of interesting for visitors. It also needs to contribute to making the exhibition self explanatory and enjoyable to visitors in a visual sense, or as one participant poignantly said "if you can't produce a visually appealing thing for people to look at, then it doesn't matter how clever your idea is or how socially responsible you're being, it's not going to work."

 This criteriais considered necessary because it makes for an exhibition which is accessible to people with English as a second language, or who have difficulty reading labels and captions; it is a practical application of Serrell's argument that "if the exhibit challenges are not matched to their skills, visitors will not pay attention"(Serrell, 1996). This also applies to

visitors who want to view the exhibition and not necessarily garner anything specific from it. Interviewees felt that visitors should be catered to by utilise a variety of forms in exhibitions; i.e. combining a collection of manuscripts, photographs or images, as well as books. Some interviewees felt that a good rule of thumb is to ensure that exhibitions can be viewed effectively in one visit.

An object also needs to be contextually relevant. The process of choosing how to represent a book is illustrative of deciding an objects contextual relevance. When deciding how to represent a book, interviewees reported that it is necessary to have a sense of balance of what to show in the case; meaning that one image, or object, needs to complement the other object(s) in the case. The primary way of doing this is to make sure that books are looked through over a period of time, a long enough period to allow multiple viewings and time away from the object to come at it afresh; also multiple staff members look over the same objects and discuss their opinions. Time away from the material being decided over is important as interviewees reported that books had a tendency to become a blurred sequence of impressions, which they find difficult to articulate or represent accurately or effectively. Second opinions function as another layer of the selection process. Multiple perspectives make reasonably objective decisions possible; at least in relation to the narrative being put together.

 This leads into the next theme of open dialogue, staff engagement and resources. Staff engagement also has a role to play in deciding what content to display. Interviewees reported working in a team for most exhibitions. They stressed the importance of frequent and open dialogue within the exhibition team; this was reported to be the primary way in which content is decided upon. To ensure this, in most cases, the interest of the staff needs to be engaged before exhibitions pursued, as one interviewee put it "you actually have to believe in it."

 That is to say, exhibitions are often based on ideas of personal interest to the staff; interviewees did acknowledge the importance creating exhibitions that are relevant, or potentially of interest to visitors and society. Interviewees reported that this process of creating staff engagement is utilised even when external events, such as a Centennial

remembrance, or the donation of a collection, effect exhibitions. This usually results in exhibitions which explore the external event with a personalised twist, or from an angle which the staff find interesting. Interviewees largely treat external events opportunities and reported instances of an exhibition topic being arbitrarily imposed upon them. However, while interviewees felt that society had minimal impact on exhibition content decisions, stressing the importance of sharing the collections and being engaged in the exhibition concept, others placed emphasis on the impact which societal norms have on exhibition content (refer to censorship section).

That being said, interviewees did not see themselves and their exhibitions as autonomous from society, stressing that the exhibitions were created purely for the visitors' benefit. This relationship can be seen in the fact that exhibitions often reflect popular research centre enquires. It can also be seen in the yearly exhibition schedules of some branches, which aim to be roughly in synch with seasons, commemoration and other cultural events. For example: 'light' exhibitions of general interest are prepared for summer when people, often tourists from overseas and out of town visit. Later in the year, exhibitions tend to be more dense, academic and intellectual to match with the opening of universities after their break period.

4.1.2   Determining Patrons' Interests

Popular research enquires

Some interviewees reported that they use popular research centre enquires to roughly determine what exhibition themes would interest visitors.

Maintaining specialist collections

Buying books for specialised collections gives some interviewees an understanding of what is going on in the field, and what themes are popular.

Encouraging visitor feedback and input

Customer surveys are regularly sent out to patrons of the library. Similarly with exhibitions, people's suggestions and feedback are encouraged and listened to; however interviewees felt that this information needs to be taken with a grain of salt, pointing out that "with the feed back you need to be a little bit careful because there will always be one or two people who will say 'you've got that wrong' but for every one that says that, there will probably be thousands who quite enjoyed it, but are not going to tell you because they're just busy doing their own thing." Input is also sought from people have are related to the topic involved, people are welcomed to provide comments and additional information on material.

Statistics of exhibition use

Statistic for door count and online visitations are recorded to keep track of visitor numbers created by each exhibition.

4.1.3   Exhibition Spaces

Overall Auckland Libraries has exhibition spaces which limited to walls or small to medium sized rooms. Exhibition media ranges from TV screens and board screens, to glass wall cases, to rooms with projectors and stand alone glass cases. Some cases are considered unsuitable (too heavy to move) but cannot be replaced due to funding limitations. Preservation standard conditions are used only in one exhibition space.

4.1.4   Multi-sensory Exhibitions

When talking about multi-sensory exhibitions, interviewees were generally positive about the idea, but most felt, similarly to Allen and Gutwill(Allen & Gutwill, 2004), that there ought to be a limit to multi-media exhibitions preventing them from becoming too overbearing.

One interviewee preferred quiet exhibition spaces over "bells, and whistles and beeps." In addition to that sentiment, interviewees reported that multi-sensory exhibitions often cannot be supported by their budget, that they can be one layer too many on an already limited team. One interviewee illustrated this by pointing out that "You've got to have the experts, you've got to have people, either you or somebody who is really good at doing video, really good at sound and really good at putting it all together."

However, there have been instances of audio being used to create exhibitions based around oral history; and some exhibitions use projectors. After running an exhibition based on oral history and audio, one interviewee described the effect of audio positively, praising it as new layer of detail and enjoyment for visitors, saying that "hearing the voice and the nuance that sits in voice, and the way that people use accents, the surprise, irony, you just don't get that on a flat page."

4.1.5   Visitor Comfort and Accessibility

Exhibition spaces in Auckland Libraries are limited to single rooms or open areas, so requirements for providing visitor comfort are not large. Each exhibition space is accessible via elevator, with stairs being avoidable. One challenge to visitor comfort is that in some instances lighting caters to the material rather than visitors; the Sir George Grey exhibition space can be seen as too dim. There is a sign which explains the need for preservation standard lighting. Visitors adjust to this dimness, and it is also partly mitigated now by using a larger font for labels, as darkness makes text seem smaller. A challenge for accessibility is that some cases are too tall for children to see into. Exhibition staff are reluctant to leave stools for children as they cause hindrance, but they can be brought out when requested. There are seats, which are often used for data shows and when reading material is provided. The blind can come to exhibition tours, which have a spoken aspect. The West Auckland Research Centre exhibition space is small enough to not usually require chairs; chairs have been provided for oral history exhibitions with listening posts.

4.1.6   External Exhibitions:

Some research centres support and cater to external exhibitions more than others.

Sir George Grey Special Collections rarely host external exhibitions. Individually run external exhibitions are generally avoided due to lack of staff time for liaising and setting up exhibitions; as a lot of staff time is needed due to individuals not being familiar with exhibition processes, or not understanding what visitors like. External exhibitions from other institutions involve liaising as well, requiring visits the exhibition to take photos and select which items could fit in. While interviewees said the external exhibitions always turned out well, they prefer their exhibition space to primarily reflect the collections held by Auckland Libraries.

Similarly Auckland Central Library hosted an external exhibition project called White Night, put on by Elam School of Fine Arts students, which involved hosting art work and activities library in their general areas. This involved a lot of liaison and planning but may be done again.

The West Auckland Research Centre host several external exhibitions per year. They are done by groups within the community (school children, adults with mental health problems), with advertising, labels and space provided by the library. The exhibitions and content is entirely decided upon by the creators; there have been some instances of staff assisting to promote exhibitions and record creation. The Auckland Festival of Photography sees a local photographer invited to create an exhibition every June. This fits in with making the records of tomorrow and also draws more people from the community into the library (teachers, parents, and friends). While the Research Centre staff would prefer to have exhibition space more frequently filled with their own material, they do not have the staff time or preservation standard exhibition space. Regardless of this, they see it as an opportunity to assisting creativity and present library space as belonging to the community.

4.1.7   Online Exhibitions

Online exhibitions began in 2005, on an ad hoc basis, but have gradually become almost mandatory. This gradual process was partly due to technical limitations, and limitations of the Council computer information policy.

Digitising collections and putting them online is now seen as a way to reach people in the wider (national and global) community. Interviewees report that they are almost compulsory, with online versions being created for all new exhibitions. They are also maintained perpetually after the physical exhibition closes. Some exhibitions are not hosted in physical spaces at all. The Dominion Road stories, a collection of 42 oral histories, 1000 photographs and 200 written manuscripts, is an example of that.

As well as replicating the physical exhibition, online versions of exhibitions have additional content, an example being the Manatunga online exhibition, which has video and a panoramic image of the exhibition. Further expansions are being considered such as including television footage of the exhibition openings and video recordings of closing speeches. In theory, physical constraints of an exhibition space become irrelevant. However financial resourcing does impose limitations, they need people to do it, and copyright issues also create restrictions.

Another affect of the online exhibition program, is the need to create online versions of exhibitions has reduced the yearly output of exhibitions, in SGG, four exhibitions per year have dropped to three. This is because of the additional work load created by digitising an exhibition, which involves selecting material, photographing all of the selected material and writing labels with enough time to spare for the web team to prepare the online version to coincide with the physical opening of the exhibition.

4.1.8   Funding and Resourcing

As with any department, there are funding and resource limitations within which Heritage and Research have work. Interviewees reported that anything done within those limitations has been encouraged. That being said, exhibitions are active and growing; there exhibitions

being run in Auckland Libraries most of the year, and there are plans to expand the exhibition space in the North and West Research Centres. Also, exhibitions are always supported by the Auckland Libraries marketing team, who oversee the production of collateral and assist in building public awareness.

However, funding limitations mean that there is no allocation to have teams dedicated to curation. They also mean that Research Centres find it difficult to upgrade items or purchase new technology and equipment for multi-sensory exhibitions—or have the staff time to create them. They also mean that, overall the exhibition space in Auckland Libraries is minimal, with one Research Center being able to provide fully functional preservation standard exhibition conditions. This latter point affects the exhibition programme by preventing exhibition teams from displaying some items; often requiring them to create copies of material to put on display, while the originals, which are felt to be better for display, are locked away. However, participants were realistic and work within their means, with one viewing it as simply the inability for "the capacity of the organization to provide the ideal."

4.2 Background, knowledge, and necessary skills of exhibition staff

4.2.1 Path to, and involvement in, exhibition creation

Interviewees came to their position of involvement in exhibitions through various routes.

Some interviewees started librarians and learned exhibitions practically. Others had a background involving a visual sense, one started out in television. Others started in library school, before learning to create exhibitions as part of their first library roles. This last fact was generally how interviewees learned about the exhibition process; by needing to fulfil their respective library roles.

 Some interviewees started off with a passion for some aspects of creative arts and industries, became skilled elsewhere, practically and through tertiary study; ending up in library roles which involved contributing to exhibitions.

Like in any department, interviewees have varying types of involvement in creating exhibitions. Some interviewees have been working on exhibitions since their respective Research Centre began producing exhibitions, allowing them to have had experience in all aspects of the process; putting them in the position to oversee a project and fill any role they need to in the team. Other interviewees are not directly involved in exhibitions, and take on a sponsorship role to make sure exhibitions get all the support they need from above. Most interviewees actively assist in the creation exhibitions. Interviewees described a system in which roles vary from the practicalities of exhibitions, such as putting frames up and setting books in cradles, the creation of the exhibitions themselves on a thematic and research level; from liaising with IT to create online exhibitions, to recording and working with oral history exhibitions.

4.2.2 Skills required

When asked about the skills required for creating an exhibition, each interviewee was able to provide a wide plethora of necessary skills. Below is an outline collating their responses:

Team work

Most interviewees acknowledged that while one team member may be able to fulfil all functions necessary to create an exhibition, it is important to share the load; that each team member has different skills at which they excel, and a unique outlook, allowing the team to have input from multiple angles and contexts relevant to the decision making progress.

Knowledge of the collections

This is another point that most interviewees made, as most exhibitions are created with material from their own collections, staff need to have a skill set that enables them to familiarise themselves with the collections they maintain.

Writing skills

A functional exhibition team needs skilled writers to compose labels, catalogues and other collateral. This involves the ability to write clear, succinct and effective compositions that accurately reflect the material, and add to the narrative being presented.

The ability to think about your audience

An exhibition team needs to be able to think about their intended audience. They need to be able to understand the knowledge which visitors may or may not bring with them. It is important to be aware of how much and what information is needed; knowing how to avoiding putting out too much information, while effectively encapsulating the intended narrative within the exhibition.

Research skills

The ability to conduct effective research into the topic of the exhibition is an essential intellectual skill for exhibition staff to have; it is needed to create a coherent and accurate exhibition.

A sense of conceptual integrity

Knowing and being able envisage what the exhibition will look like as a whole. This requires an aesthetic eye, the ability to visualise the exhibition, how to edit it down and how to put it together. This also involves being aware of how visitors are going to move around the exhibition.

Preservation staff

Preservation staff are to maintain preservation standards. They also decide if something can be prepared, or prepared in time, for exhibition.

The ability to make decisions and facilitate exhibitions

An enabler who can facilitate the creation of an exhibition in a collaborative way; be receptive to ideas and familiar with the organisation structure, knowing how to manoeuvre within it. This also includes social skills for exhibition openings, and the ability to build relationships in the community.

The ability to make decisions

Exhibition staff need to be able to make and commit to decisions.

4.2.3 Professional Development

Each interviewee had a slightly different approach to professional development, depending on their pre-existing skill set, knowledge and role in their exhibition team. Two things that most of the interviewees reported were to generally maintain an understanding of the gallery, library and museum sector; and that professional development includes the use of

open dialogue with colleagues to build and share understanding and skills. Some of the other methods mentioned by interviewees are listed below:

> ➢ The practical application of acquired skills and knowledge was an effective approach for some interviewees.
> ➢ Most interviewees made use of library run training and development workshops.
> ➢ Some interviewees promote and attend National Digital Forum Bar Camps
> ➢ Some attend seminars and conferences, such as the ones put on by LIANZA and ARANZ, also rare book summer schools, bibliographic society meeting conferences for rare book librarians.
> ➢ Others write and present papers at seminars; they view this as a way of reflecting and exploring knowledge gained through practical activities.
> ➢ Most interviewees read; more specifically journals, such as archives and photographic history journals, as well as keeping up with relevant e-mail lists.
> ➢ Tertiary study was also a common form of professional development.
> ➢ Attaining and maintaining LIANZA registration was also frequently mentioned.

4.3 Public Policy and society's impact on exhibition practices

4.3.1 Censorship

One aspect of public policy explored below is censorship, how content is affected by standards external or internal to exhibition teams. Interviewees reported no cases of censorship being imposed from outside of the library, or exhibition teams. However, there is a degree of self-censorship involved in the exhibition creation process. Due to Auckland Libraries being a cultural and cultural organisation, exhibition staff cannot control who comes through their doors. Interviewees reported that this led them to avoid being too openly polemic or controversial. Some interviewees reported that the portrayal of potentially controversial concepts such as death, racism and sexuality needs to be done in a way that accommodates 'decent human values'. That is to say, items deemed by the team to be 'visually controversial' are passed over for display selection. One interviewee encapsulated this stance by saying "[we] don't court controversy for the sake of it" going on to say that this is because "potential bad press would...set back the library's mission".

That being said, interviewees felt that exhibitions were created with historicity and cultural accuracy in mind. Meaning that core aspects, controversial or not, are always represented and worked into the exhibition. This is reportedly done in subtle ways. One way interviewees reported doing this was by altering the context in which potentially controversial objects are presented; explaining that controversial material can be displayed when a barrier of time separating current cultural norms, from those of the past, is clearly established.

Conversely, other interviewees reported no instance in which content was deemed inappropriate or excluded. Pointing out the variety of exhibitions, stating that inevitably "what one person may think is acceptable, somebody else may not"; questioning the idea of censorship on the grounds that each person forms different interpretations.

4.3.2 Council Values

In places Auckland Council values over lapped with those of exhibition staff. This over lapping appears is more of a coincidence, or convenience, than a conscious act of exhibition staff trying to fall in with Auckland Council values. To illustrate this point, one value of Auckland Council posits that Auckland should be the most liveable city. Having a vibrant

exhibition program is part of that. This overlaps with what most interviewees want, but does not mean it is a causal relationship.

This relationship of overlapping values has, some interviewees reported, led to Auckland Council seeing Auckland Libraries as a success story, a success to attach itself to. Interviewees felt that Auckland Council is supportive of anything Auckland Libraries does. This support can be seen in the Council brand being attached to all library, and exhibition collateral. This is not to suggest that exhibition staff see Auckland Council as a benefactor that must be appeased. Exhibition staff view this relationship as an opportunity to play an important role in society; a role which they would strive towards regardless. This can be seen in exhibitions reflecting commemorative events of importance to government and society at large.

However, there have been instances of exhibitions being designed to reflect certain council values; such as giving people a sense of connection to their origins. Some interviewees reported that there have been projects which have been chosen for funding due to their nature fitting in with the strategic direction for an Auckland Plan. However Auckland Council values, in most cases, do not directly affect exhibition themes or content.

4.3.3 Reflecting Political Events

While some controversial content has appeared in exhibitions, interviewees reported that they generally do not seek to reflect current political events. However, there have been occasions when exhibitions have reflected current political events, the Chinese Poll Tax exhibition being an example of this. It was an exhibition that had a live video feed to display the Government's public apology for the Poll Tax. Interviewees pointed out that this was only done because Auckland Libraries had valuable material on the subject; that ultimately any exhibition idea must have a means of expression within the collection, in a visually appealing fashion. Exhibition such as the Chinese Poll Tax one are seen as opportunities to reflect their collection, and are not representative of a political agenda held by Auckland Libraries or exhibition staff.

4.4 Driving forces behind exhibition development

4.4.1 Exhibition Team Dynamics

There are two points of interest regarding team dynamics; firstly interviewees work on exhibitions as a small part of their job. Secondly, interviewees gave the impression that the process of creating an exhibition is, to a greater or lesser extent, reliant on working as a team.

None of the interviewees' job descriptions solely consist of working on exhibitions; everything they do on exhibitions is a smaller part or additional part of their role as research centre staff. While this does imply that exhibition output is reduced, interviewees reported that working on exhibitions as an aside adds strength to research centres. They felt that exhibitions give staff a creative output, a way to apply their skills, and the knowledge they gain from research enquiries. However some interviewees find that exhibitions can take over from the rest of their work at times—which is another factor in the pacing of the exhibition programme; staff need time to fulfil their regular roles.

Every exhibition is done cooperatively, between some or all of the team. Each member has specific skills, and some have all of the skills necessary to create an exhibition on their own—however, roles in exhibition development are shared around, to allow knowledge to be shared amongst the team. Each team member provides opinions that come from their own unique perspective. Everyone in the team checks labels, provides feedback on selection choices and contributes to the creation of the initial theme—some exhibition themes are in gestation for a few years. Exhibition ideas are generally agreed upon by everyone involved, because it is felt that they need to be committed to it with an authentic interest.

4.4.2 Regional Interactions

Interviewees reported that regional interactions, although they are all under the Auckland Libraries Heritage and Research department, were minimal. Aside from an advisory role, the Research Centre teams do not work together, although they do consider each other to be colleagues. Exhibition themes generally do not overlap, and never intentionally. However, there are some loose interactions; for instance some exhibitions reflect other programmes being run by Auckland Libraries, such as Dare to Explore. Some interviewees feel that there is the potential for region wide themes, stating that collection content does overlap between Research Centres; that collections are not necessarily separated between branches by theme or subject, meaning that there is the potential to synchronously share exhibition themes without sending rare items out of their respective libraries.

4.4.3 Relationship to Society

The relationship which exhibitions, and exhibition staff, have with society has two components: first, they fulfil a public service role by creating and presenting something of benefit to society. Second, they provide society with a means to reflect itself. They do this by involving the community in the creation of content.

Interviewees felt that part of the service they provide is to allow visitors to build their sense of identity, and of their origins; giving them a sense of how the society they live in, or are visiting, came about, and how they are a part of that. Interviewees felt that in general the exhibition programme enhanced the cultural wealth and well being of people, as well as positively impacting the future.

Another aspect of the service is providing an insight into the collections of Auckland Libraries, which are not necessarily accessible to the public. While exhibitions are intended to share with and represent culture, it is important to note that interviewees stressed the term 'insight' rather than 'educate'; they do not actively pursue the goal of 'educating' visitors, or telling them what to take away from exhibitions.

That being said some interviewees pointed out that exhibition spaces are not necessarily seen as a welcoming service; that exhibition spaces are viewed as 'closeted away' facilities take effort to come and adjust to. Interviewees report that this is being addressed by using exhibitions as a means to leave the physical boundaries of the library, and reach out to the wider community. This is being done through the production and dissemination of collateral, and by taking exhibitions out of the library with things like the Dominion Road Stories—a project which had a caravan, a story collecting program, as well as a blown up image of a Dominion Road store owner on the side of the Albert-Eden board office—and and an increasing internet presence.

Exhibitions are also being opened up to a limited extent, to allow the community to participate in the creation of content. One way this is being done—aside from external exhibitions—is by encouraging, or asking people in the wider community to add information about exhibition material. Some exhibition spaces act as gateways for creative members of the public to have their material shown, with staff sometimes working with community development groups to assist creativity.

Some interviewees also promote this idea by supporting largely volunteer run community exhibition programmes, without financial support, in order to promote grass roots exhibitions.

 There are instances where the reverse occurs, with Local Boards and heritage groups getting involved and supporting exhibitions, financially or as valued connections to the community, by providing television screens, records (as well as other material) and having a presence at exhibition openings. Some interviewees felt the library should be a neutral space that brings representatives of the community together and build bonds and creative relationships with the community.

4.4.4   Perceived Motivations and role in Society

Interviewees' opinions on what motivates exhibition staff to create exhibitions, and the role which exhibitions play in society, vary. Some felt that they were motivated, amongst other things, by the enjoyment of creating exhibitions, as well as a pride in the collections with which they worked. Others felt that they worked on exhibitions as part of their role.

All interviewees felt that exhibitions help people understand what type of material is contained within Auckland Library collections. That exhibitions provide a glimpse at material which otherwise would be kept isolated in controlled storage environments; offering insights that the visitor may not have had. It is also seen as a safe way to exhibit that material, not only physically, but socially. People do not need to come in and ask to see specific material, which some interviewees considered a very daunting thing for a visitor to have to do; with exhibitions they do not need to have a research topic in mind or even want to see something in particular. They can serendipitously experience something which they may find interesting.

Several interviewees also felt that the material, often of historical importance, helps build a sense of identity for visitors and society.

There was a split between interviewees as to how far that constructive relationship with society should reach. Both sides see exhibitions as a way to build ties with local history groups, schools and other community development groups. But there were two differing opinions between interviewees regarding community involvement. One was that exhibitions should showcase only material from library collections, to maintain ownership, and the other was to open up to community produced exhibitions to promote the library as part the community; a place where the community could create and add contemporary documentation to the historical process. Exhibitions can be controversial in content and create a dialogue with visitors who liked something, or felt that something was left out.

4.5   Conclusions

The goal of this research project was to discover how exhibitions are developed and presented in Auckland Libraries. It began with a literature review exploring the value of

interpretive exhibitions, the effect of public policy on cultural institutions, the value of multi-sensory exhibitions and the revolutionary world of online exhibitions. After interviewing eight staff from the Auckland Libraries Heritage and Research Team, findings started to immerge, which are outlined above.

Some of the findings can be linked to the ideas explored in the literature review, such as the importance of providing interpretation in a way that allows visitors to make their own journey through the exhibition. The value of having concise and well balanced exhibitions, which are visually engaging to visitors with all levels of ability, is also recognised by exhibition staff; exhibitions in Auckland Libraries do not aim overwhelm or underwhelm visitors. They also place less emphasis on education, or information dissemination, and more on providing a good experience; trying to include society, rather than educate it.

The importance of online exhibitions and their effect on the volume of exhibition output reflects the ideas explored in the *online exhibitions* section of the literature review.

Other findings clashed with ideas explored in the literature review, for instance Auckland Council does not impose, or promote an instrumental social policy within Auckland Libraries. They are allowed to be largely autonomous, free to make their own decisions, to develop exhibition programmes and relationship with the community as they please. This has allowed them to reflect the heritage collections of Auckland Libraries in an effective, well informed fashion, free of political agendas. The study found that freedom from political agendas has allowed exhibitions to become more encompassing, more democratic and inclusive. This can be seen in exhibition content decisions being informed by people outside of the library. It can also be seen in the support they offer community created exhibitions. Over all, the study found that exhibitions are developed and presented in Auckland Libraries in a democratic, unbiased, although financially limited, way; there are potential avenues yet to be explored. This project has provided an insight into exhibitions produced by Auckland Libraries. It is an insight which benefits to the library sector, exhibition staff or anyone hoping to get a glimpse at what goes on behind those backroom doors.

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