**Mapping Museums: Application for Impact Funding**

This application is for funding for 21 hours buy-out time for Dr Andrea Ballatore, Lecturer in Big Data Analytics, to enable him to contribute to the Mapping Museums project, specifically, to a report for the professional museum sector.

**Context:**

There is a general consensus that the UK museums sector has been poor at keeping records of its own profile and history, and at data management more generally. The Museums Association and numerous regional and national funding bodies collect data on museums, but only within their specific institutional remit. Historical data is rarely archived, and current data is not cross-referenced, is only minimally searchable, routinely omits smaller venues, and is not always accessible to the public. Closure is rarely documented. Although the number of museums has quadrupled over the past six decades, there are no longitudinal studies that document change. In consequence, museum consultants and the bodies responsible for maintaining and developing the sector have had to proceed with little solid information as to geographies and patterns of development and change.

In 2016 the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport commissioned a review of the English museum sector and the issues it faced. The ensuing report, known as the Mendoza Review, was published in 2017. It explicitly noted the problems with data management and strongly recommended that museum services develop a better grasp of the health of the sector over time. Since then, there has been a will to engage with data collection and to better understand the history of the sector.

**Research**

Mapping Museums is a four year project funded by the AHRC. It aims at documenting and analysing expansion and change within the UK museum sector from 1960 to the present day. The team is currently half way through the project and has successfully developed an extensive dataset on all the museums open during that time period. It is now the most comprehensive collection of data on UK museums. At the same time, we have designed and implemented a Knowledge Base and Web application that allows that information to be browsed, searched, and visualised in precise and nuanced ways. Using the Knowledge Base will allow us to identify patterns and trends within the museum sector, which will be subject of further analyses.

**Potential for impact**

The Mapping Museums research has been well supported by the museum sector. For instance, all nine branches of the Museum Development Network (MDN) assisted in the process of validating data; The Arts Council England (ACE) Accreditation team worked with us on devising museum definitions; while museum consultants, museum curators, and staff from MDN, ACE, the Association of Independent Museums (AIM), have all assisted in our user evaluation trials. After seeing our work at a recent Advisory Board, Isabel Wilson, the Senior Manager for Museum Development at ACE commented:

I’m convinced of the importance and potential impact of the data and evidence that you are bringing to light – it is really valuable in terms of the long-term view and the breadth of view. The trends and thematic information will be able to help … inform our strategic role for museum development in England.

Thus, there is a strong potential for the Mapping Museums research to have an impact on the museum sector. The research is useful to the sector, has been validated by the sector, and is supported by key individuals and organisations within the sector. However, there are a number of stumbling blocks to that potential being fulfilled. These are:

* The research is all due to be published in academic journals, which are rarely read within the museum sector.
* The planned publications are academic and will focus on specific aspects of the data, that are not directly relevant to people working in the sector
* Museum professionals are accustomed to getting data driven reports with executive summaries, bullet points, and plots and graphs that show what has happened, rather than articles that present narrative arguments about what has happened.

Moreover, the research is not due to be completed until September 2020, which is too late for impact deadlines. We do not anticipate the knowledge base and web application being made publicly accessible much before this date.

**Proposal**

In order to improve the impact potential of the Mapping Museums research we intend to write an extensive report in a form that is recognisable to and usable by the sector. The report will present a comprehensive overview of trends and patterns within the sector over past 60 years. Importantly the report is not simply the further dissemination of academic work, but a distinct mode of writing and publication that will greatly improve the possibility of the research having impact.

We have consulted both Isabel Wilson (ACE) and Emma Chaplin, director of AIM, about the merits of such a report. Isabel replied:

We are really interested in the idea of a report about the last 60 years of UK museums. It would be fascinating and there would be interest from museum policy makers. We could potentially commit to organising a seminar or similar to help disseminate and advise on other routes.

Similarly Emma wrote:

Yes, this is definitely of interest to us, and our members too. You are now on my list to speak to about a session at next year’s AIM conference (20-22 June) to present your findings. It may also work as article (s) for the AIM Bulletin. As Isabel says, happy to work with you on this…

Since then we have begun further discussions about the report being more tailored for their needs, and potentially published under the umbrella of ACE or AIM.

**Practicalities and costs**

In order to undertake this work and complete it in time for the AIM conference, we need to create research time for Andrea Ballatore, who is currently programme director for BSc Geography, BA Human Geography, and BSc Environmental Management. Andrea was not included in the original bid for grant funding but has since joined the Mapping Museums team and has been conducting major work on the project in the area of data analytics, particularly from a geographical quantitative perspective. He would lead on the statistical analysis of the data and take responsibility for generating plots and tables for the report. No other member of the research team has these skills, and unfortunately we are prohibited under the terms of the grant from using our funding to buy out a full time academic. Releasing some of Andrea’s time is particularly pressing given his teaching workload and academic management responsibilities in the coming year.

This funding would allow the department to hire a sessional lecturer to cover one module.

COSTS:

On the basis of an ‘Associate Lecturer A’ being appointed to work 21 hours and with an hourly multiplier rate of 2.5 costs would be:

 £1,392 (if appointed on the first pay spine point of the grade)

£1,430 (if appointed on the second pay spine point of the grade)

Prof Fiona Candlin, Principal Investigator of the Mapping Museums project