The Cultures, Experiences & Practices of Local Authority Museum Professionals in Contemporary Institutional Life

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Declaration

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Abstract

As they are employed in local government-owned, managed and funded institutions, local authority museum professionals experience their working lives within an organisational framework that is based on high levels of politics and administration (Lawley, 2003). Inherent to this governance model are pressures, constraints and structuring forces that affect the agency and practices of local authority museum professionals, and the makeup of their institutions. However, the literature does not sufficiently attend to the experiences of local authority museum professionals, in terms of their working lives and the distinctive environmental conditions that they operate within. This is especially the case in the contemporary context. Of the museum types, local authority museums have been the hardest hit by austerity (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2015), and my research finds out about the experiences of their professionals based on the findings generated from the data of 30 semi-structured qualitative interviews. My research comprehends the interplays between structure and agency, following a trajectory from the micro to the macro, through the perceptions of the participants. It consists of the following investigative format.

The first focus was on finding out about the cultures of the participants to learn about their backgrounds, which was achieved by using Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital. Learning about their cultures helps to identify whether there was a lack of ethnic and cultural diversity in the profession, and assists in understanding more about the characteristics that underpinned and shaped the practices of the participants. Then, using DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism, the second focus was on finding out about the structuring forces that homogenised the practices of the participants and their museums, albeit in different areas and to different degrees. Deviating away from structuration, the third focus was on the
agency of the participants and their manipulation of pressures and constraints in diverse ways, which were potential areas of innovation. Moreover, the experiences of the participants are at the heart of the findings and discussions that are presented throughout my thesis.

My research evidences that pressures, constraints and structuring forces, in the form of isomorphic processes (normative, mimetic and coercive), homogeneously affected the practices of the participants and their museums. These processes were caused by other professionals, institutions and organisations, along with policies and communities. On evaluation of the findings, it is concluded that isomorphism was a presence among the museums, and more broadly, local authority museums in the sector, although the findings show that homogenisation had its advantages and disadvantages, which centred on legitimacy and efficiency. Furthermore, the findings show that while the participants were highly restricted in exercising their agency, there were small signs of its presence in their construction of displays and building of community and councillor support. As they would be enduring austerity for the foreseeable future, the participants perceived that building support would help to foster the resilience and sustainability of their museums. On reflection of the findings and discussions that are presented in my thesis, suggestions about where future research and policy need to be directed are made.
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1. Introduction

Outline

This introduction is divided into four sections. The first section outlines research question one, which pertains to the cultures of local authority museum professionals to find out about their backgrounds, along with their perceptions, understandings and experiences of their working lives. The second section outlines research question two, which is about normative, mimetic and coercive isomorphic processes, and their potentially homogenising effects on the practices of local authority museum professionals and their institutions. Then putting structuring forces aside, the third section outlines research question three, which pertains to the agency of local authority museum professionals, and the possibilities that they encourage diversity to emerge in their practices and institutions through their manipulation of pressures and constraints. Lastly, the fourth section situates my research against the backdrop of austerity, as it had the potential to influence all three of my research questions. Where my research fits in and what it contributes to the literature are stated throughout.

Cultures, Backgrounds & Experiences

Bourdieu (1984) claims that individuals with tastes and habitus for distinctive cultural forms and activities pursue them in their lives, in their acquisition of cultural capital, which exists in the embodied, institutionalised, economic and social states (Bourdieu, 1986). In certain situations, with the correct type(s) of cultural capital present, individuals are provided with the legitimacy (a representation of power) to
access particular social groups (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986), or in the context of my research, the museum profession. There are also mechanisms for its generational and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973), that is, the transmission of cultural capital and its accompanying social properties from one generation to the next. Cultural capital is a strong concept, because, when used to examine the forms of capital that are present in the backgrounds of individuals, it reveals the hierarchies, inequalities, similarities and differences, among them (Cuff et al., 2006; Goldthorpe, 2007; Ritzer, 2008).

Museum professionals can be conceived of as individuals with specific tastes and habitus for high cultural forms and activities, like museums, and their pursuit of them, meaning that they are likely to have certain forms of cultural capital present in their backgrounds. Spock (2000), for example, states that museum professionals visit museums often when they are children, which inspire their desires to work in them later in their adult lives. Due to their interests in museum culture, museum professionals are therefore likely to have similar embodied capital, and because they are highly educated individuals (Chen, 2001; Tatsi, 2011), similar institutionalised capital, too.

Yet, in the literature, little is known about the cultures and backgrounds of museum professionals, despite there being a well-documented absence of ethnic and cultural diversity in the profession (Bloomfield, 2013; Ivy, 2016; McCambridge, 2017), which is accompanied by a skills gap (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2015). This raises concerns about the extent to which individuals from some ethnic-minority and cultural backgrounds can access the profession, and whether museum professionals are affected by gaps in their know-how, which is an issue that could be influenced by a lack of continuing professional development training in the profession (Jewson et al., 2015; Tuck et al., 2015). Identifying such barriers
could be essential against the backdrop of austerity considering that museum professionals have had to adapt their responses and practices in response to the current environment (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a), but due to gaps in their know-how, they may not have been efficiently able to do so.

In reference to their cultures and backgrounds, local authority museum professionals are especially elusive in the literature. Finding out about the forms of capital that are present in their backgrounds is therefore beneficial for producing greater understandings about their personal and professional biographies, lives and identities, their journeys into the profession, along with the demographic composition of the profession. In addition, the perceptions and experiences of museum professionals are elusive in the literature. There is the need, then, to learn more about them in general, and particularly in the contemporary sense, to discover how they are coping with the changes, challenges and obstacles that have been imposed by austerity, which have affected museums and the profession considerably (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a). The cultures and experiences of local authority museum professionals are themes that are encompassed in the first research question:

1. What are the cultural backgrounds of local authority museum professionals and how do they understand, perceive and experience their professional lives?

Museum professionals have their own subjectivities, rationales and practices that are shaped by their trajectories and the discourses that are present in their backgrounds, along with the specific conditions and territorial dynamics that are inherent to their working environments (Gray, 2011). To fully comprehend the cultures, backgrounds and experiences of local authority museum professionals, my research goes on to look at the pressures, constraints and structuring forces that have
the potential to define, shape and homogeneously affect their practices and institutions. This is achieved by adopting DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism, which is now discussed.

Isomorphism

Local authority museums are owned, managed and funded by ‘town, parish, borough, city, or county councils and other local authority bodies’ (Museums Association, 2017b). Of the 1,316 museums in England, 397 of them (around 30%) are local authority museums that belong to 123 authorities, which is an average of three museums per authority (Tuck et al., 2015). As these museums are publicly-funded institutions, they have strong public-service identities (Lawley, 2003) and take on the identities of their towns and communities, which means that they usually ‘house collections that reflect local history and heritage’ (Museums Association, 2017b).

Local authority museum professionals experience their working lives within an organisational framework that is based on high levels of politics and administration (Lawley, 2003). With it, come pressures, constraints and structuring forces that constrain the agency of local authority museum professionals in ways that have the potential to homogenise their practices and institutions. While structure and agency at work in museums are not necessarily new areas of the literature (Gray, 2014, 2016), they are a significant presence in museums. It is well argued that museums, and the practices of their professionals, are continually invested, contested and negotiated phenomena (Cavendish, 1987; Karp and Lavine, 1991; Macdonald, 1998, 2002, 2003; Rothfield, 2001). However, rather than producing contemporary research that rehearses existing structure and agency debates that have commonly been made in the literature, my research takes a less explored route to examine their interplays in the local authority museum context by looking at the ways in
which they homogenise (structure) and diversify (agency) the practices of local authority museum professionals and their institutions, in a multitude of areas and extremes. While agency and diversity are discussed in the next section, the remainder of this discussion centres on the relevance and application of DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism to study the practices and institutions of local authority museum professionals.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) are interested in the sources of influence that cause institutions and organisations that belong to the same fields to homogenise. They use the concept of isomorphism to denote the process that forces ‘one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 66). For isomorphism to take place among institutions and organisations, then, similar pressures and constraints need to be present, and the professionals within these institutions and organisations need to similarly conform to them. Combined, in different areas and to different degrees, structuring forces affect and operate through the practices of professionals. They are processes that lead to the homogenisation of their institutions, organisations and more broadly, the collectively shared field that they belong to.

Isomorphism exists in the normative, mimetic and coercive states. Each of them cause the practices of professionals and their institutions to homogenise in their own ways. Normative processes are caused by pressures that shape and encourage professionals to have similar rationales and practices, and emerge from education, employment and networking. Mimetic processes stem from uncertainty, and are caused by the pressures that encourage professionals to engage in modelling (i.e. copying) the ideas and practices of other professionals. Coercive processes stem from the pressures exercised by authoritative institutions and organisations, like the state (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). It is possible for these isomorphic processes
to be present in the local authority museum context, especially that of the coercive
variety due to managerial and policy pressures. To determine, then, if isomorphism
is present among local authority museums, normative, mimetic and coercive pro-
cesses, and their homogenising consequences, need to be uncovered. Contained
in the second research question are these themes:

2. What evidence is there for normative, mimetic and coercive isomorphic
processes in the local authority museum context and do they homoge-
nise the practices of local authority museum professionals and their in-
istitutions?

Isomorphism is a ‘useful tool for understanding the politics and ceremony that per-
vade much modern organizational life’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 66), and was
therefore selected for my research as it is a powerful tool to understand the effects
of structuring forces on the practices of local authority museum professionals and
their institutions in homogenising ways. It also provides comprehension into the
ways that the practices of local authority museum professionals are based on their
decisions to enhance the legitimacy and efficiency of their institutions (discussed
in more detail in the literature review). In addition, finding out whether the practices
and institutions of local authority museums are similar (in specific areas, for specific
reasons, and with specific effects) adds nuance to what is known about them in the
literature. Although DiMaggio and Powell (1991) are explicit that their focus is not
on attending to diversification, they minimise the agency of professionals (from
which diversification, as opposed to homogenisation, could develop). These
themes are incorporated into the third research question, and are now discussed.
Agency & Diversity

Theoretically speaking, as local authorities govern local authority museums, they operate under the same governance model, policies and procedures, meaning that their professionals experience similar pressures, constraints and structuring forces, evidencing that their practices and museums are likely to be similar in corresponding areas, and therefore, places for isomorphism. However, in reality this might not be the case, especially because austerity is causing the governance of these museums to change, with moves towards privatisation and trust status (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2015) that could present them with new possibilities. It is also not plausible to assume that local authority museums are similar based on their shared characteristics, without accounting for other external influences. After all, museums play to their individualities (Simon, 2010) and local authority museums exist in an environment that is full of diverse external factors (Lawley, 2003).

And so, alongside finding out about whether isomorphic processes are present in the local authority museum context, my research accounts for the ways that local authority museum professionals use their agency and are motivated to act independently, based on their own goals (Luck and D’Inverno, 1995), and manipulate structuring forces in diverse ways (albeit in different areas and to different degrees). Research question three, therefore, frames agency as the potential mechanism for the diversification of the practices and institutions of local authority museum professionals, via their prerogatives, resisting directives, and acting outside of established norms and expected patterns of behaviour:

3. What evidence is there for the agency of local authority museum professionals and the diversification of their practices and institutions?
My research bridges micro and macro orientations, and, alongside them, structure and agency. There is room to explore structure and agency in local authority museums as not enough is known about the connections between the cultures, backgrounds, practices and institutions of local authority museum professionals, especially in the contemporary sense, alongside the processes that homogenise and diversify them. These professionals, through their perceptions, understandings, experiences and portrayals of their practices and working lives, are also positioned at the heart of structural and agentic processes, and subsequently, at the heart of the findings and discussions that are presented in my research. Additionally, throughout my thesis, the awareness of local authority museum professionals, and their recognition of similarity and diversity, are accounted for.

UK Austerity

My research also arises at an essential time. Central government funding to local authorities has been under strain (Harvey 2016; Museums Association, 2015a, 2017b; Tuck et al., 2015) stemming from the 2010 Coalition government’s agenda, and currently, a Conservative one, founded on austerity policy and funding cuts to local authority budgets. Taking hold after the 2010 Spending Review, these austerity measures are cost saving efforts to recover the economy from the 2008 recession (Harvey, 2016). However, because local authorities fund local public services, the cutbacks have caused knock-on reductions in their provisions to them (Harvey, 2016). Local authorities fund the museums that are owned by them, but also independent museums and external organisations (such as non-departmental public bodies, like Arts Council England) that they provide grants to (Lawley, 2003). Therefore, local authorities fund museums directly and indirectly, as well as other cultural forms and institutions, like the arts and libraries (Alexander, 2005; Harvey, 2016;
Lawley, 2003). But, this support has changed in response to shifts in central government administration, and in this following quotation, Harvey (2016) sets the scene:

Local government has long been one of the country’s strongest supporters of arts and culture. [...] Councils have been active in our cultural life, long before Whitehall had a department for culture. Even now, collectively, local government is one of the primary funders of arts and cultural activities. [...] However, that support is in jeopardy. (p.7).

The 2010 Spending review states that local government budgets were to decrease by 25.6 percent by 2015, which comes to a figure of £6.68 billion. In consistency with these numbers, Harvey (2016) finds that between 2009/2010 and 2014/2015, local government budgets had reduced by an average of 20 percent, and that taking into account population growth, spending per person had dropped by 23 percent. While non-statutory public services have been affected by austerity, it has been those of the non-statutory variety, such as the museums sector, that have fared among the worst. This is because local government funding of them is optional (Rex, 2015). Local authorities have tried to maintain adequate spending on these services, and the adequate supporting of them, but it has been difficult for them to do so because of the cutbacks and their focus on core, life and death services (Harvey, 2016). As they are at the ‘frontline’ (Museums Association, 2015a: 3) and therefore, among the first affected, museums are in an especially vulnerable position when it comes to cutbacks (Rex, 2015).

Of the museum types, local authority museums have been the hardest hit by austerity (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017b) and Tuck et al. (2015) find that these professionals are ‘feeling that they have already reached a “tipping point” in their
ability to provide a satisfactory service’ (p. 4). An overreliance on quantitative surveys to provide up-to-date awareness into the effects of austerity prevails in the literature (e.g. Harvey, 2016; Museums Association, 2011-2015a, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2015). My research takes place on the backdrop of austerity, and set out to produce subjective, qualitative and valuable insights into its effects on the experiences and practices of local authority museum professionals. Some conclusions, then, into what resilience and sustainability in the local authority museum context look like are made in my thesis. The intention is to direct where research and policy need to be aimed, so that museums and their professionals can be better supported and equipped as they move into the future.
2. Literature Review

Introduction

Museums are interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary phenomena (Macdonald, 2011). The literature on them is in great supply, and stems from the UK and overseas. This chapter describes, discusses and critiques the literature (theoretical and empirical) that shaped my research questions. The discussions presented enable perceiving my research topic in various senses (e.g. socially, culturally, historically, politically, economically, and professionally, institutionally and organisationally), in turn, highlighting its multifaceted and complex nature. In addition, and as already mentioned in the previous introductory chapter, my research capitalised on two theories to interpret the findings. The first was Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital and the second was DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) theory of isomorphism. Discussions of them are provided in this chapter, with attention on how they helped to understand on the cultures, backgrounds and practices of the participants, along with their institutions and the organisational framework within which they operated. Explanation of where my research fits in, and what it contributes to, the literature, are provided throughout this chapter.

UK Museum Austerity

Financially troubled museums are not recent phenomena (Alexander, 2005; Lawley, 2003; Thompson, 1987). For example, Freedman (1987) says that non-profit arts organisations, while ‘dedicated by charter to the public interest’, ‘labor under severe financial constraints’ (p.199). Thompson (1987) states that the finances of
these institutions are never adequate, and that because of this, there are widespread fears that emerge from their professionals, especially at times of economic crisis. Along with the 1979-1997 Conservative government came museum austerity and shifts towards privatisation, commercialism and enterprise culture (Alexander, 2005; Lawley, 2003), and similar scenes have been echoed since the 2010 Coalition government, for, due to cutbacks in funding, ‘local authorities in England have cut spending on museums and galleries by 31 percent in real terms between 2010 and 2016’ (Museums Association, 2017a: 5).

Museum income decreased by 58 percent in 2010/2011 (Museums Association, 2011) and 47 percent in 2014/2015 (Museums Association, 2015a). Although, museum austerity goes beyond finances. Staffing had decreased by 24 percent, but volunteers had increased by 45 percent in 2014/2015 (Museums Association, 2014), a rise of 12 percent from 2013/2014 (Museums Association, 2014). A relationship between reduced professional staffing and higher volunteer outsourcing therefore exists. While cultural institutions would not be viable without volunteers (Groninger, 2011), there is a growing concern that volunteers have the potential to undermine the quality and efficiency of museum work, and the legitimacy of museum professionals (Groninger, 2011). For instance, an article written anonymously for the Guardian (2016) by a museum professional, contextualises these issues against the unstable nature of museum employment, which is another concern related to the profession:

I’m worried this government will extinguish the passion of museums staff. When I first started we’d only call in external staff as an extraordinary measure. Now half my colleagues are on zero-hours contracts.

Museum professionals face uncertain futures (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017b,
Tuck et al., 2015) and, in addition to losses in professional staff, the Museums Association (2015a) finds that museum professionals are concerned about ‘the loss of skilled staff and many say they are unable to offer the level of pay they need to attract the talent required to tackle the challenges ahead’ (p.16). In addition, increased workload pressures and an absence of continuing professional development training in the profession are areas of concern in the literature, and the focus is now on retaining and protecting specialist knowledge and heritage-specific skills (BOP Consulting and the Museum Consultancy, 2016: 1). These issues have also had a social impact, for displays, outreaching and, essentially, how museum professionals interact with their communities, have decreased as museums focus their resources on fundraising and income generation’ (Museums Association, 2015a, 3). Therefore, museum-centred tasks no-longer take precedence in the ways that they were previously in museums. Consequently, ‘museums that serve local communities deliver real public benefit and there is a danger that whole areas of the country will have these services wiped-out if the cuts continue’ (Museums Association, 2015a: 17).

The outsourcing of jobs and services to maintain the operations of museums has become increasingly common in the sector, but partial and full closures remain possibilities for many (Museums Association, 2015a). ‘At least 64 museums in the UK have closed since 2010, with 15 museum closures in 2016 alone’, and the majority of closures ‘are the result of reduced public funding’ (Museums Association, 2017a: 5). Perhaps to avoid closures, the Museums Association (2015a) finds that 12 percent of its survey respondents had changed their governance model since 2010 (three percent to trust status, one percent to a social enterprise, and eight percent to a community-interest group or mixed model). Local authority museums have tended to move to trust status in order to ‘cut cost, achieve greater autonomy, and make the procurement of services more efficient’, however, they ‘run the risk
of being cut adrift from local authority funding entirely’ (Museums Association, 2015a: 15). In addition, local authority museums that have transferred to independent status have struggled to make the transition (Museums Association, 2017a), in part, due to the skills gap in the profession. The situation is made more complicated, as there was a reported 47 percent increase in visitor numbers in 2015/2016 (Museums Association, 2017a), and a 61 percent increase in 2014/2015 (Museums Association, 2015a). Although these figures reflect positive visitor attendance, they also represent increased consumer demand, which is likely to be problematic under such restricted resource constraints.

Of the museum types, local authority museums have been the hardest hit by austerity (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a). For example, in 2014/2015 local authority museum budgets had been reduced two percent more compared to other museum types, which breaks-down to a further one percent decline in public funding and three percent decline in self-generated income (Museums Association, 2015a). This account from a respondent from the Museums Association’s (2015a) survey portrays the difficulties inherent to the situation:

Planning for a 52% further cut in budget by 2017, meaning that total cuts since 2010-2017 are 69%. We are highly likely to lose museum buildings by 2017 and rationalise collections significantly so that storage costs are reduced. [Local authority museum, Yorkshire] (p.5).

And another local authority museum professional reported that they were planning for ‘closure and redundancy’ in 2014/2015 (Museums Association, 2015a: 16). On reflection of these circumstances, my research focuses on local authority museums because they are more restricted and have less agency to respond to the effects of austerity in comparison to other museum types, and:
Are particularly at risk and have experienced a greater decrease in total income from 2013-14 to 2014-15 than other types of museum. And the funding position of local authority museums is likely to worsen following the substantial cuts to the local government grant announced in the 2015 spending review. (Museums Association, 2015a: 3).

An overreliance on quantitative surveys to provide up-to-date awareness into the effects of austerity prevails in the literature (e.g. Harvey, 2016; Museums Association, 2011-2015a, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2015). My research set out to produce subjective, qualitative and valuable insights into the effects of austerity on the experiences and practices of local authority museum professionals. As austerity was such a pervasive presence in the sector, it had the potential to influence all three of my research questions. On reflection of my findings, some conclusions into what resilience and sustainability in the local authority museum context look like are made in my thesis. These suggestions are made with the intention to direct where research and policy need to be aimed, so that local authority museums and their professionals can be better supported and equipped as they move into the future.

Museum Professionals

Museums are physical and public institutions that represent society, culture and history, and it is the task of their professionals to acquire, store, care for and communicate objects and hold them in trust for society (International Council of Museums, 2017; Museums Association, 2017b; Vergo, 1989a). Drawing his inspiration from Harley’s 1953 novel *The Go Between*, Sorenson (1989) suggests that it is the task of museum professionals to call-up ghosts, which he explains in this quotation:

I think that a go-between – between the living and the dead – is not a bad definition of an essential part of the job. [...] We usually call them up in order that they should
help us to understand the artefacts – to show us how the ‘things’ work. (p.71).

In addition, by drawing inspiration from de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Boon (2011a) argues that it is the task of museum professionals to produce enough rabbits for textual poachers, that is, audiences, to catch. In addition, Saumarez Smith (2007) describes the politics of display that are inherent to curatorial sensibilities and processes:

> Within galleries, there is an under-articulated language to museum display. It is a language based on modest differences of curatorial approach, on how pictures are hung, on the use of fabric and wall surface, and the relationship of pictures to one another. These are issues of sensibility and aesthetics, as much as of politics and culture. (p. 626).

These practices do not necessarily apply strictly to curators either, for calling-up ghosts, producing rabbits and display construction can be interpreted as team efforts (Edson, 2004). This is because museum professionals from different roles (e.g. curation, education, outreach, marketing and management) work with and alongside one another, using methods of communication, organisation and operation to meet institutional visions and goals (Edson, 2004) and, in turn, bring museum content alive and to public attention. Perceiving museums in this way positions the centrality of professionals to them, and, aptly, the centrality of them in my research.

My research is based on the data of 30 qualitative semi-structured interviews with local authority museum professionals, from a selection of public-facing roles (discussed in the following ‘Research Methods’ chapter, 3). The need for my research to centre on these professionals arose in response to insufficient focus on their experiences in the literature – generally, but with particular reference to the contemporary context. With the focus on the latter, it is necessary to find out about
how local authority museum professionals are experiencing their professional lives and environment (and its conditions), as austerity has caused financial, service and staff-based losses, and resulting strain and uncertainty have manifested in the profession (Museums Association, 2011-2015a, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2015). The Museums Association (2011-2015a; 2017a) has produced findings on the experiences of museum professionals, however, they lack the description, detail and depth that are needed to comprehend the underexplored topic of museum austerity, which is because they are based on quantitative survey data. Similarly, for their study, Tuck et al. (2015) used quantitative surveys, but also carried out 20 interviews with local authority museum professionals, local authority staff and stakeholders. While useful, the scope of this research is limited as it lacks the necessary description, detail and depth that are needed to grasp the experiences of local authority museum professionals. In response to these gaps in the literature, my research qualitatively studies, at length and in detail, the experiences of local authority museum professionals in the ways that they perceive and understand them.

The literature on museum professionals exists in abundance, but rests heavily on their practices, although a selection of citations that informed my research and shaped the research questions, are provided here. For example, the practices of museum professionals and displays (e.g. Macdonald, 1998, 2002; Rothfield, 2001; Simon, 2010); their practices and outreach (e.g. Rocetti et al., 2013; Simon, 2010; Smithsonian Institution, 2001; Strohecker, 1997); their practices and codes of ethics (e.g. Bounia, 2014; International Council of Museums, 2013; Museums Association, 2008, 2015b; Thomson, 2002); their practices and continuing professional development training (e.g. Bevan & Xanthoudaki, 2015) or lack thereof (e.g. Jewson et al., 2015); their practices and online resources (e.g. Bernier & Bowen, 2004; Clough, 2013; Deuschel, 2014; Marty, 1999, 2005, 2006, 2008); their practices and understanding and/or working with audiences (e.g. Housen, 1987; Jones, 2015; Miles,
1986), visitors (e.g. Doering, 1999; Falk, 2017; Sheng and Chen, 2012; Smithsonian Institution, 2001), communities (e.g. Bienkowski, 2014; Karp et al., 1992; Turakhia, 2010), and tourists (e.g. Harrison, 1997). With attention on these areas comes attention on museums, as institutions (which is discussed in the following section, ‘Museums’).

Attention on these areas of enquiry, while important, do not help to understand the backgrounds and cultures of museum professionals. And so, in addition to their experiences, my research finds out about the cultures and backgrounds of local authority museum professionals because more needs to be known about them in the literature. There is a well-documented absence of ethnic and cultural diversity in the profession (Bloomfield, 2013; Ivy, 2016; McCambridge, 2017), which is accompanied by a skills gap (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2015). Concerns are raised about the extent to which individuals from some ethnic-minority and cultural backgrounds can access the profession, and whether museum professionals are affected by gaps in their know-how, which is an issue that could be influenced by a lack of continuing professional development training in the profession (Tuck et al., 2015; Jewson et al., 2015). Findings into these areas mean that inferences about the current situation can be made, in turn contributing important insights into the nature of the profession and the trajectories and discourses that surround accessing it. Identifying such processes and barriers could be essential against the backdrop of austerity, considering that museum professionals have had to adapt their practices (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a), but, due to gaps in their know-how, may not have been efficiently able to do so.

The literature that does exist on the backgrounds of museum professionals stems from research that has centred on their recollections of visiting museums as children (e.g. Falk and Dierking, 1995; Leichter & Spock, 1999; Spock, 1999, 2000).
These studies agree that memories are telling and salient to the lives of individuals, which is a claim that is supported by Haight and Hendrix (1995), Meacham (1995) and Wong (1995), and that visiting museums as children firmly influenced the desires of museum professionals to want to work in the profession in their adult lives. For example, through his analysis of 75 in-depth qualitative interviews to explore the motivations of individuals that wanted, and went on to become, museum professionals, Spock (2000) concludes that their visiting museums as children was the source of their inspiration. On reflection of his study, he says that:

Each of us carry the seeds of our own museum careers. [...] The sincerity of themes, the richness of detail, the emotional depth. [...] Clearly, something important was going on. It seems reasonable to take these self-reported stories as suggestive evidence that museums can actually change people’s lives in profound and lasting ways. (Spock, 2000: 28).

Anderson et al. (2002, 2008) and Jensen (1994) have studied children’s memories and experiences of visiting museums. Anderson et al. (2002) argue that their experiences of museums are embedded into children’s ‘familiar culture’ (e.g. their customs, beliefs and values) ‘and contexts’, which ‘are powerful mediators of memory, enjoyment, and learning in these settings’ (p.229). Furthermore, by studying children’s field trips to museums, Anderson et al. (2008) find that visitors have agendas, and that children’s museum visiting experiences are controlled (instead of negotiated) by teachers, for they affect the empowerment of their experiences. These studies suggest that children’s familiar cultures and contexts, and teachers, mediate the museum experiences of children. Complimentarily, Spock (2000) indicates that museum visitation, and its abilities to spark children’s enthusiasm for museums (and their desires to one day work in them) is not a straightforward, instantaneous or value-free process.
Although those studies are insightful, they make no attempt to connect the childhood experiences of museum professionals to their subsequent pursuit of museum careers, and the trajectories and discourses that are involved (e.g. whether they volunteer and train in museum-centred disciplines to pursue employment in the profession, whether they have work experience gained from other sectors, etc.). Therefore, in those studies, the leap from children to professionals is too large to fully comprehend the different paradigms that are inherent to the backgrounds, biographies and, subsequently, the identities of museum professionals and their journeys into the profession. Insights into these areas could be beneficial for interpreting how the practices of museum professionals are shaped by such trajectories and discourses, and how they shape their practices. Through the use of a mixed methods approach, Chen (2001) focuses on the beliefs and training of museum professionals, and makes the connection between the educational backgrounds of museum professionals and their effects on their practices. Positioning museum professionals at the centre of authorship and content, Chen (2001) provides comments on how their training and beliefs inform their curatorial rationales and practices, which renders them as particularly agentic:

What is actually reflected underneath the power of a museum's display is the philosophy of the museum staff. It is their belief, spoken or unspoken, that decides whether a museum should be a curiosity box, a history book, an adventure, or an unforgettable aesthetic experience. Becoming aware of the human element in museum settings has broadened my idea of the function of the art museum. (p.1).

However, Chen’s (2001) study fails to account for the connections between the education and the broader cultural backgrounds of museum professionals, to the ways that structuring forces pressure and constrain them in their practices and institutional lives. Therefore, there is an imbalance between structure and agency.
present in Chen’s (2001) study. While museum professionals have their own subjectivities, their rationales and practices are shaped by their histories but also the specific politics, conditions and territorial dynamics that are inherent to their working environments (Gray, 2011). To fully comprehend the cultures, backgrounds and experiences of local authority museum professionals, then, my research goes on to look at the pressures, constraints and structuring forces that have the potential to homogeneously affect their practices and institutions, which is achieved by adopting DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism (which discussed in this chapter’s later sections). My research centres on exploring these micro and macro processes in the local authority museum context, but it began by uncovering the cultures of local authority museum professionals to learn about their backgrounds, using Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital to do so.

**Cultural Capital**

Following Bourdieu, we view “cultural capital” as comprising types of tastes, knowledge, and modes of appreciation that are institutionally supported and very broadly acknowledged to be high-status and worthy of respect (as distinguished both from passing enthusiasms that are not institutionalized and from cultural forms whose prestige is limited to particular groups). (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004: 189).

While cultural capital has been used in museum studies to research visitors by Bourdieu himself in the 1960’s (Fyfe, 2004) and others since that time (e.g. DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004), its use on museum professionals is yet to come to fruition (due to the identified lack of research attention on their cultures and backgrounds). My research used Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital as the conceptual lens to understand the cultures and backgrounds of local authority museum professionals. The following forms of capital, which have been adapted from Bourdieu’s (1984)
work, are used to conceptualise the findings pertaining to the biographies of the participants to produce knowledge about their cultures and backgrounds:

- Embodied state: long lasting dispositions of the mind and body (e.g. interests, tastes and dispositions).
- Institutionalised state (e.g. education) and the objectification of it (e.g. academic qualifications, which Bourdieu refers to as symbols of cultural competence and legitimacy).
- Economic capital: institutionalised capital can be exchanged for economic capital (e.g. via employment). Bourdieu refers to this as a conversion.
- Social capital (e.g. relationships with individuals, groups and networks).

The forms of cultural capital are embedded in individuals’ habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). Habitus is ‘the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them’ (Wacquant, 2005: 316). Cultural capital was chosen because it is a powerful theory that is able to comprehend the tastes, dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986) of local authority museum professionals, and the forms of capital that are present in their backgrounds. Therefore, when applied to the empirical context, cultural capital can conceptually draw out the similarities and differences, and, if data allows, the potential to identify the forces for its generational and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973), which is the transmission of cultural capital and its accompanying social properties from one generation to the next. Although cultural capital – its acquisition, use and reproduction, are complicated, interrelated and often blurred processes (Goldthorpe, 2007), the following text attempts to outline the forms of capital that are likely to be present in the backgrounds of museum professionals, and
the ways in which it can be reproduced, based on the findings of various studies.

As well as being interested in museums (e.g. Spock, 2000), museum professionals are educated individuals (e.g. Chen, 2001; Tatsi, 2011). Tatsi (2011) describes that the identity of a museum professional is that of a ‘traditional, modernist cultural expert, deploying hegemonic power stemming from institutionalized legitimate knowledge’ (p.65). Indeed, Dumais (2002) finds that students with high educational attainment ‘are more likely to participate in cultural activities’, and ‘may be more encouraged to make use of their cultural capital to succeed in school’, which highlights that individuals are able to access their cultural capital in specific scenarios (also see Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999). Therefore, there are relationships between education and the pursuit of – and inclinations towards – certain cultural forms and activities. But more specifically, though, there are relationships between high educational attainment, high social classes and the pursuit of – and interests in, ‘highbrow’ cultural forms and activities, such as museums (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004: 169) (also see Bourdieu, 1973, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu et al., 1997; DiMaggio, 1987, 1991; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Vincent & Ball, 2007).

Therefore, based on the evidence, museum professionals are likely to possess the embodied and institutionalised forms of capital, and be of a higher social class (middle-class) orientation. As museum professionals are educated individuals and are likely to have volunteered in museums prior to employment (Carrington, 2001; Holmes, 2006), they are likely to have had the sufficient economic capital growing up, which is linked to ethnicity and social class. For example, Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) find that there are cultural capital and resource differences between the black and white races, which reflects a disparity in their educational attainment and social class status. Black students, for instance, have lower cultural
capital, resources and educational attainment, and white students have higher cultural capital, resources and attainment (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). White students are likely to be from a high social class orientation, and black students from a low social class orientation (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). It is these kinds of issues that could be contributing to lacking ethnic and cultural diversity (see Bloomfield, 2013; Ivy, 2016; McCambridge, 2017) in the profession.

Museum professionals are also likely to come from families that share similar tastes for museums to them, and could be a cause for the generational and social reproduction of cultural capital. For instance, De Graaf et al. (2000) find that the cultural capital of parents affects the educational attainment of their children: the higher the cultural capital (in terms of ability), the higher the attainment. This shows how cultural capital can be generationally and socially reproduced, and the findings of that study are similar to those of Sullivan (2001), who suggests that ‘cultural capital is transmitted within the home’ (p.893). Although, she goes on to conclude that the reproduction of cultural capital is only a partial explanation for the relationship between educational attainment and class (Sullivan, 2001).

Museum professionals, then, are likely to have cultural backgrounds and identities that are centred on museum culture, in terms of their interests, volunteering, and training, and, demographically speaking, they are likely to be white and middle-class. But, critics of cultural capital suggest that the theory and its accompanying concepts are distorted and ambiguous, making it difficult to decipher what culture means, and what the consequences of its acquisition, use and reproduction are, along with its relationship to privilege and mobility (e.g. Goldthorpe, 2007; Kingston, 2001). Commercialism, deinstitutionalisation (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004) and the development of heterogeneous tastes (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; Peterson & Kern, 1996) have eroded the distinctions among the forms of capital. Despite
these criticisms, for reasons that have been outlined in this discussion, cultural capital is a strong concept for it is able to unearth the forms of capital that are present in the backgrounds of local authority museum professionals, and, in turn, provide deeper understandings of them, and of the similarities and differences that exist among them. Using this concept, it is also possible to identify the forms of capital that provide local authority museum professionals with the legitimacy (as a representation of power) to access the profession.

Museums

Museums are physical institutions that tangibly represent objects, and their professionals communicate their facts and narratives to audiences (e.g. Jordanova, 1989; Saumarez Smith, 1989). There is also a temporal dimension to museums, meaning that their missions and the practices of their professionals are always adapting and evolving in response to internal and external influences. For instance, museums in the past are conceived of as material and symbolic forms of hegemonic power, and their purpose was to ‘show and tell’ and ‘incorporate the people into the processes of the state’ (Bennett, 1988: 88). However, the shift from the old to the new museology, which took place in the 1970’s, marked a new era for museums (Vergo, 1989b). The former was ‘too much about museum methods, and too little about the purposes of museums’ (Vergo, 1989b: 3). Consequently, such re-examination into the purposes of museums meant that their missions and the practices of their professionals shifted from education, object-centred approaches, to those of the more social, visitor-centred varieties (Ross, 2004; Vergo, 1989a). And so, in addition to education and learning-based functions, contemporary museums became places for entertainment and enjoyment (Hyson, 2004). Although Packer and Ballantyne (2002) question the connection and compatibility of the two, they conclude
by suggesting that, together, they have the potential to provide visitors with transcendent, ‘synergistic’ experiences (p.54). Over time, museums have also taken on greater digital and virtual components (Clough, 2013; Simon, 2010). Clough (2013) says that:

Today’s digital revolution is providing a dizzying array of tools that offer opportunities for learning institutions all over the world to become more vibrant and accessible. [...] Suddenly, everybody can have access to information that previously was only available to the experts. Everybody can take part in the creative processes of institutions that once were not even in public view. However, this unprecedented and continuous shift has left many institutions struggling to adapt and is forcing them to rethink how to maintain their unique qualities while at the same time adding value. (p.2).

Museums are also represented online (Simon, 2010), and professionals are increasingly making use of the internet to target and engage with audiences. Websites and putting museum content online (e.g. Marstine & McTavish, 2008; Schweibenz, 1998; Styliani et al., 2009), the adoption of social media platforms (e.g. Russo et al., 2007; Spiliopoulou et al., 2014; Zafiropoulos, 2015), and the concerns surrounding museum transitions from the physical to the virtual (e.g. Tonta, 2008), are well covered in the literature.

Museums evolve in response to the social and cultural contexts in which they exist (see Harrison, 1997; Simon, 2010; Turakhia, 2010). Advances in the modern world have meant that museum professionals must continually adapt their practices to keep up-to-date with the expectations of audiences, but this is difficult in contemporary life. Individuals’ personal, social and cultural lives are being continually transformed with frequent global technological developments (see Swingewood, 2000) that have spurred the information age and (social) network society (Prösler,
These developments have changed individuals’ lives to such an extent that Macdonald (2003) argues modern living has become de-based and de-cultured, and that individuals belong to multiple social groups, and have fragmented identities and senses of belonging. Moreover, Einsiedel (2000) argues that ‘every individual will, at any given time, be a member of many other publics’ (p.145), which highlights the difficulties of pinning-down a clear and coherent conception of society, or more specifically, audience(s), at all. Therefore, because the expectations of audiences frequently change and evolve, they are difficult for museum professionals to capture and anticipate. These factors contribute to dilemmas in museum missions.

Museums have different meanings for museum professionals, stakeholders and audiences, meaning that their missions, operations and contents (such as the displays and outreach agendas that emerge from them) are subject to the attitudes, activities, interactions and relationships of the individuals that are invested in them. For example, Macdonald (2002) researched the conception, construction and reception of the Science Museum’s 1988 *Food for Thought exhibition*, and the negotiations that took place between the museum’s professionals, the state and the exhibition’s funders. Her findings are that this exhibition was shaped by stakeholders, for they influenced the practices of the museum’s professionals, and, in turn, the production, content and distribution of the exhibition itself (Macdonald, 2002) (also see Macdonald & Silverstone, 1987, 1992). In addition, the controversial 1999 *Sensation* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art offended the city’s mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, to such an extent that he tried to close the museum by withholding city funds, but a legal ruling prevented this from happening (e.g. Alexander, 2003; Arthur & Wallach, 2001; Rothfield, 2001). In addition, Silverstone (1988) argues that the ‘work of creation and production involves a whole series of decisions, both
compromised and compromising' which bear on the resolution of internal and external dilemmas, where ‘the final products [...] will carry the scars of the collective decision-making process, though every effort will have been made to mask them' (p.232). And so, displays – especially when they are controversial, ‘always involve the culturally, socially and politically saturated business of negotiation and value-judgement, and they always have cultural, social and political implications’ (Macdonald, 1998: 1).

Museums are therefore political institutions with many embedded and often competing interests (Lawley, 2003). Museums, then, are invested, contested and negotiated sites and there are politics and power relationships embedded in them (e.g. Cavendish, 1987; Gray, 2011; Karp and Lavine, 1991; Macdonald, 1998, 2002; Rothfield, 2001). For example, Zolberg (1981, 1987) discusses the internal and external tensions and conflicts that take place in the art museum context, with attention on policies and the roles of stakeholders. She argues that art museums ‘are usually pictured as suffering from contradictions in purpose [...] they reflect conflicts among actors who want to mold them in one image or the other’ (1981: 103), and with reference to educational policies, states that:

The ambiguities inherent in art museum educational policies are embedded in the character of the institution, the diverse motives of the groups that created and maintained museums, and the demands of outsiders who have a stake in the institution’s policies [...] and are characterized by the ongoing interplay of forces, both internal and external. [...] The dilemmas by their competing goals are built into their very structure. (Zolberg, 1987: 195).

All museums have their own specific political structures, ‘whether public, private, voluntary or community – there are power relationships embedded within not only what they do, but also within how they do it, the purposes that lie behind what they
do, and the relationships between them and the wider public’ (Gray, 2011: 45). The focus of my research is on the local authority museum context, for they embody a distinctive organisational form as local government-owned, managed, funded institutions. Indeed, Lawley (2003) says that the environmental conditions that local authority museum professionals operate within are ‘complex and uncertain’ (p.75), and there are competing priorities from central and local government institutions that require local authority museum professionals to reconcile them. These professionals are required to meet the internal needs of their institutions, while at the same time meeting the expectations and policies of authorities, and those exercised by external stakeholders (Lawley, 2003). In turn, these influences are ones that have ‘a significant impact on the way in which museums operate and interact with their local communities’ (Lawley, 2003: 75). Local authority museums, likewise to other institutions that are owned and managed by the state, reflect ‘the struggles of individual leaders’ to create and establish a legitimate institution under a range of administrative restraints’ (Cavendish, 1987: 154).

There is scope for closer examination into the balance between structure and agency at work in museums, and in the practices of their professionals. Since life is more than individual random acts, yet is not determined by social forces (Gauntlett, 2002), my research looks at the interplays between structure and agency in the local authority museum context. To fully comprehend the cultures, backgrounds and experiences of local authority museum professionals, my research looks at the pressures, constraints and structuring forces that have the potential to homogeneously affect their practices and institutions. Taking on the view that the acts of individuals reproduce social structure (Giddens, 1991), DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism is used.
Uncovering information about the backgrounds, cultures and experiences of local authority museum professionals were among the aims and objectives of my research. The further aims and objectives of my research were centred on making the connections to their practices and their institutions. To achieve this, DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism was used, which is inherent to their work on the new institutionalism or neoinstitutional theory, presented in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). Isomorphism is a concept that was able to grasp the connections between the participants’ practices and their institutions, with specific reference to the structuring forces that affected them and caused them to homogenise. Isomorphism is a distinctive manifestation of structuration, which, to contextualise isomorphism, is now discussed.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) are interested in the processes that cause professions, practices, institutions and organisations in the same fields to homogenise, and they use Weber’s 1968 and 1952 work to build their theory on, as he looks at rationality and bureaucracy and their roles in the structuration of institutions into organisational fields. According to Weber 1952, rationality and bureaucracy are two essential features of structuration. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) say that, in the rise to modernity, Weber perceives that ‘the rationalist spirit […] had achieved a momentum of its own and that, under capitalism, the rationalist order had become an iron cage in which humanity was […] imprisoned’ (p.63). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) go on to interpret that, for Weber (1968), bureaucracy was ‘the rational spirit’s organizational manifestation’, and was ‘so efficient and powerful a means of controlling men and women that, once established, the momentum of bureaucratization was irreversible’ (p.63).
Weber (1968) explains that structuration had three related causes in the rise to capitalism. They were competition among firms in the marketplace, competition among states that increased rulers’ control of staff and citizens, and bourgeois demands for equal protection under the law. He considers that the first, competition among firms in the marketplace, was the most important for structuration, for it was an economy that demanded that the ‘official business of administration be discharged precisely, unambiguously, continuously and with as much speed as possible’ (Weber, 1968: 974). It was in this economy that large modern capitalist enterprises were ‘unequalled models of strict bureaucratic organization’ (Weber, 1968: 974).

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that although bureaucracy remains to be the dominant cause of structuration, other forces have emerged since the period that Weber (1952, 1968) spoke about. They argue that while structuration still stems from the competitive marketplace and the need for efficiency, which are ones that Weber (1968) describes, structuration also stems from the state, corporations and professions. Similarly to the way that Weber (1968) focuses on the structuration of the early-modern political capitalist economy, DiMaggio (1992) and DiMaggio and Powell (1991) say that institutions and organisations need to be arranged into the same line of business, and the same fields, before isomorphism and homogenisation can take place. The structuration of fields is a four-stage process (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 65), and professionals are at its heart, for it is through their practices that it takes place:

1. An increase in interactions among organizations in the field.
2. The emergence of sharply defined interorganizational structures, which have boundaries that are defined by domination and patterns of coalition.
3 An increase in the information load among organizations in the field.
4 The development of mutual awareness among organizational professionals. These professionals are involved in a common enterprise.

Fields consist of the institutions and organizations that are ‘key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services and products’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 64-65). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) explain that this conceptualisation of fields accounts for competition and the networks of interacting professionals, institutions and organisations, while also giving attention to connectivity (the transactions that tie organisations to one another) and structural equivalence (the similarity of position in a network structure). Drawing on Schelling’s (1978) work, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) claim that institutions and organisations in the same fields ‘respond to an external environment that consists of other organizations responding to their environment of organizations’ responses’ (p.65). The structuration of fields, then, is a tightly knit, highly ordered and constraining process that gives formation, maintenance and meaning to institutional and organisational life. Structuration, therefore, is about structural forces that shape fields and those within them. A manifestation of structuration, isomorphism is about the structuring forces that cause fields, and those within them, to homogenise, and it is now discussed.

Isomorphism

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) discovered that despite their diversity in the initial stages of their cycles, when organisational fields form, ‘there is an inexorable push towards homogenization’ (p.64) (also see DiMaggio, 1991). ‘Powerful forces emerge that lead them to become more similar to one another’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 64). This homogenisation applies to the establishments that are already
positioned in fields, and new entrants to them as well (the latter also undergo field socialisation, which causes them to homogenise). Like structuration, isomorphism is the process of structuring, but with homogenising consequences.

By examining the differences between institutional (e.g. Kanter, 1972) and competitive (e.g. Hannan & Freeman, 1977) isomorphism, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) say that external influences that are exercised by the outside world (such as the effects of institutions and organisations on one another), needed to be incorporated into the concept. Looking at the work of Aldrich (1979), they say that there was the need to consider this component because ‘organizations compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 66).

Like structuration, professionals are positioned at the heart of isomorphism, for it is through their practices that their institutions become homogeneous. Three isomorphic processes cause the practices of professionals to become homogeneous (normative, mimetic and coercive processes) and they homogenise the practices of professionals from different angles (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Normative processes stem from professionalisation, mimetic processes stem from uncertainty and modelling, and coercive processes stem from forms of authority (each of them are discussed in the following three sections). These processes are not distinct for they mingle in empirical settings (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), but they are structuring forces that cause the practices of professionals to become homogeneous. Professionals, therefore, ‘construct around themselves an environment that constrains their ability to change further in later years’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 65). However, for their institutions to homogenise, professionals need to be exposed to similar isomorphic processes that spring from similar sources, in order for them to
similarly affect their practices. Local authority museum professionals, and the organisational framework in which they operate, are exemplars of the conditions that are needed for isomorphism to ensue.

The rate and extent at which homogenisation happens varies depending on the conditions in which isomorphism takes place (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). As isomorphism emerges from different conditions and leads to different outcomes, some establishments respond quickly, but others change after long periods of resistance (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Moreover, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) and Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that professionals’ practices are based on their rational decision-making that is based on providing them, and their institutions, with enhanced efficiency and legitimacy. While their decisions are likely to provide legitimacy (because they are decisions that are normatively sanctioned in their fields, evidencing that their chances of adoption are increased), they might not provide efficiency. ‘Strategies that are rational for individual organizations may not be rational if adopted by large numbers’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 65). Instead, efficiency can be measured by how homogeneous their institutions become.

Isomorphism was selected for my research as it is a powerful theory to understand the effects of structuring forces on the practices of local authority museum professionals and their institutions in homogenising ways. It also provides understanding into the ways that the responses of local authority museum professionals are based on their decisions to enhance the legitimacy and efficiency of their practices and institutions. Finding out whether the practices and institutions of local authority museums are similar (in specific areas, for specific reasons, and with specific effects) adds nuance to what is known about them in the literature. The combination of cultural capital and isomorphism make important contributions to the museum field.
Normative Processes

Normative pressures stem from professionalisation, and are therefore concerned with education and employment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), but also from the cultures, backgrounds and the identities of professionals, along with their socialisation. Institutions of education, such as universities, teach aspiring (and perhaps, retraining) individuals to learn, and conform to, the dominant norms, rationales and practices that are inherent to particular disciplines. They equip them with particular institutional and disciplinary logics (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Museum professionals are highly qualified individuals (Chen, 2001) and are highly likely to be trained in museum-centred disciplines. Based on what DiMaggio and Powell (1991) say about normative pressures, this means that they will have similarly museum-centred rationales and practices, which will cause their museums to become homogeneous. However, normative pressures can also stem from the informal resources that professionals use (industry journals, magazines) and their networking with other similar professionals (where ideas and practices can be talked about and exchanged, which are protagonists for mimetic processes and modelling, and are addressed in the next section) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Normative pressures are forces for the practices of museum professionals to become homogeneous and, in turn, their institutions. They are therefore forces for isomorphism.

Employers also exercise normative pressures and are involved in the homogenisation of professions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Employers have expectations about the qualities that applicants should have, and recruit the applicants that have them into professions. These qualities include having the necessary educational backgrounds and qualifications that provide applicants with the symbolic power and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) to access their chosen pro-
fessions. Employers therefore engage in filtering (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) to discriminate against applicants in deciding which ones fit their norms and are suitable for employment. Education and employment, considered as normative pressures, therefore cause professions to become filled with homogeneous individuals. Bourdieu’s (1986) forms of capital helped to identify whether the participants’ backgrounds were homogeneous. From these findings, discoveries about their education and employment, and them being normative pressures, were made, with reference to the homogenising effects that they seemed to have on the participants’ practices and thus, their museums.

Mimetic Processes

Professionals adopt the ideas and practices of others to enhance the legitimacy of their organisations, and to demonstrate that they are trying to improve current working conditions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). In addition, ‘the wider the population of personnel employed by, or customers served by, an organization, the stronger the pressure felt by the organization to provide the programs and services offered by other organizations. Thus, either a skilled labor force or a broad customer base may encourage mimetic isomorphism’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 151).

When they are uncertain, professionals model the ideas and practices of other professionals (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). This modelling causes their practices, and then their institutions, to become homogeneous. Therefore, if professionals have similar backgrounds and cultures (which are caused by having similar educational backgrounds, using similar resources, and networking with similar professionals, which were discussed in the previous section, ‘Normative Pressures’), it is especially likely that modelling will cause homogenisation. Professionals, though, may not be aware that they are modelling, or being modelled from (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).
Museum professionals operate in an environment that is full of uncertainties, and therefore, in the face of them, they might engage in modelling. For example, museums have many missions. In the 1970’s, with the New Museology movement, the democratisation of museums and increased professional reflexivity (Ross, 2004; Vergo, 1989a) caused museum missions to become centred on audiences as opposed to collections. Silverstone (1988; 1994), however, suggests that audience-centred approaches have made museum missions even more ambiguous and uncertain. This is because museums have to ‘educate, inform and entertain’ audiences, while also being ‘dependent on the visitor’s willingness and ability to pay’, while being ‘enmeshed in a competition for attention, enmeshed in the mass-mediated culture’ (Silverstone, 1988: 231). These are dilemmas between:

- Information and entertainment (a dilemma about function),
- between orality and literacy (a dilemma about mediation),
- between fact and fantasy (a dilemma about content),
- between a perception of the audience as active or passive (a dilemma about potential effectiveness),
- between myth and mimesis (a dilemma about narrative),
- between objectivity and ideology (a dilemma about the act of representation),
- between commerce and public service (a dilemma about responsibility and role). (Silverstone, 1988: 231-2).

The expectations of audiences also need consideration (e.g. Housen, 1987; Jones, 2015; Miles, 1986), since they are forces for coercive processes. As already discussed in this chapter, audiences themselves are highly ambiguous (Einsiedel, 2000; Macdonald, 2003). However, despite this ambiguity, professionals will try to meet the expectations of their audiences, which comes with added benefits. Alexander (1996a), for example, suggests that museum professionals modify their activities, such as arranging blockbuster shows and expanding their gift shops, to increase support and profits, although uncertainty about what audiences want and expect
from museums, and their professionals, could lead to modelling. This could certainly be the case in the context of austerity. Increased uncertainty, fewer resources to work with, yet higher audience demand (Museums Association, 2015a) could mean that museum professionals are finding it more efficient to use already proven strategies, modelled from other professionals, instead of taking less explored paths. With modelling, comes less risk, greater economic savings and the assurance of using methods that have already proven to be successful (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). However, because professionals take ideas it does not necessarily mean that they stay in the same forms. Professionals could take them, change them and then use them. This provides the advantages of modelling but with the potential to avoid homogeneity. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) do not explore this relationship between modelling and adaption, but my research does consider it.

Coercive Processes

Coercive processes stem from dominant authority, such as when dominant organisations exercise pressures, and impose constraints, on dependent organisations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). These processes can be formal, and exercised through policies, for example, or more informal, and exercised through expectations (such as those of audiences, as discussed in the previous section). Museum professionals are subject to policy pressures (Gray, 2008) of different types. Museum-based policies, professional policies, political, economic, cultural and social policies generated from the state affect museums of all types, meaning that coercive processes are built into them and form their fabrics. Local authority museums, due to their ownership, are directly affected by high amounts of central and local government legislation. This means that coercive processes are likely to be particularly evident in them, perhaps in comparison to other museum types. Consequently, the agency of their professionals is likely to be much more restricted, because their practices
are regulated and, thus, controlled. In response to austerity, policy changes could mean that local authority museum professionals are now operating under narrower directives, which could indicate that their museums are homogeneous.

Scholars have been attracted to the study of nonprofits because of a growing recognition of their many unique organizational attributes. Moreover, these features – often analytically fascinating in their own right – cast in sharp relief the different roles played by government and the private sector. (Powell, 1987: xi).

Non-profit organisations have more distinctive make-ups in comparison to for-profit organisations, which are primarily concerned with funding. Non-profits are charitable organisations, meaning that they are exempt from state and local taxes, and depend on ‘donations, grants and mission-related earned income to fund its socially oriented activities’ (Fritz, 2017). The main sources of non-profit funding are private contributions, government funding and commercial activities (Froelich, 1999). Froelich (1999) terms non-profit reliance on these funding sources ‘resource dependence’, but also acknowledges that non-profits are attempting to diversify funding sources to combat resource dependence. While each funding source ‘has its appeal and current niches of opportunity but also carries constraints and pressures that may impinge on the agency of the organization’ (Froelich, 1999: 263). Therefore, non-profits ‘have moved away from concentrated dependence on single revenue’, to ‘reduce their vulnerability to income uncertainties and the influence of resource providers’ (Froelich, 1999: 263).

The decentralisation of local government funding has meant that local authority museum professionals have transitioned from relying on one dominant stakeholder, to a reliance on multiple income streams (Tuck et al., 2015), and, in turn, multiple funders. This is encouraged by them being encouraged by their local authorities to pursue greater commercialism for the purpose of income generation,
which accompanies privatisation due to shifts to trust status (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017b; Tuck et al., 2015). ‘Privatization refers to the growing need for arts organizations to rely on private sources of funds (chiefly, individual philanthropy and corporate sponsorship), a need that arises as a direct result of cutbacks in public funding of the arts’, which in the UK is ‘accompanied by the pervading influence of enterprise culture’ (Alexander, 2005: 58).

These changes could mean that local authority professionals are now subject to coercive processes, that is, policies, stemming from a greater number of sources. If funders have different expectations, this could mean that the practices of local authority museum professionals, and their institutions, diversify. Homogeneity could appear in places, but be more fragmented in comparison to a situation where these professionals had chief reliance on their local authorities for funds, although some may remain reliant. Local authority museum professionals, according to the Museums Association (2015a, 2017b) have struggled to adapt, and respond to, the austere climate. Therefore, how professionals are responding also needs to be taken into consideration, although the assumption is that these professionals will have to conform to their funders’ expectations, in exchange for funding, which, similarly to local authority funding, restricts their agency. Local authority museum professionals are therefore subject to strong, structuring and homogenising forces, which stem from their governance and funding. This means that they are likely to be homogeneous and places for isomorphism.

Structure could have been more of a presence in the local authority museum context due to legislative controls, austerity policy and the funding cuts. These changes may have heightened the levels of homogenisation present in these institutions, or lessened existing pressures via the breakdown of institutional structures (e.g. with transitions to different governance models). Austerity could have also caused the
participants to become more resourceful and therefore, agentic in the ways that they approached and managed particular situations and decision-making.

The Areas of Homogenisation

Homogenisation that happens in response to normative, mimetic and coercive processes stems from different sources and homogenises to varying degrees. Normative processes result in similarly like-minded professionals being employed in professions (particularly those that are well ordered, hierarchal and with clearly defined entry and filtering criteria). Homogenisation in this context, then, is specific to the similarities that exist among individuals in the workforce of the local authority museum profession, which is in terms of their ethnicities, cultures and backgrounds. If local authority museum professionals are similar in those areas, there is the potential for their museums to become similar, which is in terms of their content, mainly, as these professionals supposedly have similar rationales and practices that result in homogenisation to manifest inside their institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), which are similarities that are communicated and represented externally to their audiences and the outside world.

Alongside normative isomorphism, mimetic and coercive processes play their parts, too. Mimetic processes mean that professionals model their rationales, ideas and practices of others (which according to DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) conception, are those that are taken from similarly like-minded professionals, and those that might belong in the same sector). Mimetic processes therefore, enhance normative processes and institutional content to homogenise. Together, then, normative and mimetic processes are a dual force for the homogenisation of displays and outreach agendas. While coercive processes sit more independently of normative and
mimetic processes (as they tend to come from the top-down and imprint themselves on the practices of professionals as opposed to emerging from them), they are nonetheless pervasive. Coercive processes follow a much broader structuring and homogenising function, and are likely to affect the operation of local authority museums (i.e. the ways in which their professionals run them according to policy directives and the routines that they follow), along with their structure (the governance models that they adhere to, which dictate the form and identity that they take, along with how they function and are institutionally organised).

Agency & Diversity

DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism is a powerful one for reasons that have been outlined in this chapter, but it has underdeveloped and underexplored aspects. DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) work is largely theoretical. Of the 16 chapters in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, there are six empirical studies, and one of them is relevant to the study of structuration and isomorphism of cultural institutions in the American art museum field in 1920-1940 (DiMaggio, 1991a). However, the time context of this study is dated and its insights are limited to informing my research topic. More recent studies look at structuration and isomorphism in the non-profit sector (e.g. Cairns et al., 2005; Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004; Leiter, 2005, 2008, 2013; Verbruggen et al., 2010), although their presence in local authority museums (or museums generally) still needs investigation, especially if the contemporary effects of austerity on the process of homogenisation are yet to be considered.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that ‘the best indicator of isomorphic change is the decrease in variation and diversity, which could be measured by lower standard
deviations of the values of selected indicators in a set of organizations’ (p.76). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) criticise institutional theory for overemphasising structure and seek to strike a balance between structure and agency in their theory on the new institutionalism. Despite their efforts, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) downplay the agency of professionals, which is exemplified in their suggestion that professionals ‘construct around themselves an environment that constrains their ability to change further in later years’ (p.65). According to this conception, professionals use their agency to implement structure and act on the behalf of the agendas of others, but to have agency (and autonomy) means to act independently of coercive, structuring forces, and instead, be motivated by their own goals (Luck and D’Inverno, 1995). In addition, and along similar lines, Oliver (1991) constructs agency as ‘active organizational resistance from passive conformity to proactive manipulation’ (p.145). The absence of professional agency in the new institutionalism is a well supported criticism in the literature (e.g. Battilana, 2006; Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009; Olsson, 2016; Scott, 2008 2014). Indeed, Battilana et al. (2008, 2009) and Garud et al. (2007) further argue that there needs to be a comprehensive theory of institutional entrepreneurship.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) render professionals as subject to the forces of structuration and are seen only as recipients of such forces rather than actors who actively engage with the external environment and manipulate constraints in diverse ways. As it is possible that structuring forces may not be as intense as DiMaggio and Powell (1991) suggest they are, my research looks at the factors that encourage diversity or dilute the influence of structuring forces in the direction of diversity, which are likely to stem from the agency of local authority museum professionals, via their prerogatives, resisting directives, and acting outside of established norms and expected patterns of behaviour. In addition to agency and diversity, my research considers the awareness of local authority museum professionals, in terms
of similarity and diversity, to make sense of the ways that they ‘stand back from belief and value systems, habitual ways of thinking and relating to others, structures of understanding themselves and their relationship to the world, and their assumptions about the way that the world impinges upon them’ (Bolton, 2010: 14).

**Myth**

While my research seeks to capture the realities of local authority museum professionals through their perceptions of their working lives and the internal and external environment that they operate within, my study’s insights are highly contingent on the participants’ perceptions of their professional lives and how they construct and communicate them to me in the interviews (which are discussed in the following ‘Research Methods’ chapter, 3). With austerity being a pervasive and volatile presence in the sector, and with the longevity of its effects uncertain, it is important to acknowledge that the participants’ accounts may be coloured with their hopes and fears for the future of their professional positions, and more broadly, the profession and their museums. While these accounts are always respected and treated as connected to their realities and identities, it is beneficial to have a closer look at their predictions about what might happen in the future using the concept of myth.

While the participants’ views, hopes and predictions about the future are insightful (and analysed with due care and attention), some degree of caution is exercised in these scenarios for there is the need to look closely at the concepts that emerge in them, to envision what the future of local authority museums might look like. There is the potential for qualitative interview participants to have grass is greener on the other side perspectives (Lichtman, 2011; Tschirhart et al., 2008), hindsight, and may see the future through rose-tinted glasses (Bryman, 2008; Day, 2016; Hanley et al., 2013; Hayes & Hefferton, 2015; Plummer, 2001), which could render it as consisting
of more positive and promising possibilities. However, these possibilities may be mythical (DiMaggio, 1987; Hallett, 2010), as myths can be symbolic of institutional, cultural ideals, but they are not necessarily given ‘tangible flesh’ (Hallett, 2010: 53).

In my thesis, the focus is not on how myths manifest inside institutions, but on whether the participants’ predictions for the future could be based on myth in the sense that their predictions may not be as ideal, beneficial, achievable or practical as what they seem, particularly when viewed from an outside researcher’s perspective. With the areas of focus on building resilience and sustainability in their environments (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a), commercialism and moves to trust status may be among those that the participants mention will be beneficial to their work and institutions in the future. Focus and action in these areas could be beneficial, however, they could also challenge the identities of arts and culture institutions (Alexander, 2007; Froelich, 1999), like local authority museums. Myth could be applicable in these areas, and its use could enhance our understandings about the possibilities and constraints that surround the perceived advantages and disadvantages of future institutional predictions and goals. It is a tool, then, that provides an analytical and questioning lens to interrogate the findings in these areas.

Summary

My research is an attempt to contribute to the museological and sociological literature, using Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital to study the cultures and backgrounds of local authority museum professionals, and then making connections to their practices, applying DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism to the museums sector to draw-out information on potentially overlooked aspects regarding the ways that local authority museum professionals operate their institutions in the context of austerity (and how it has affected their abilities to
innovate and diversify their museums in various respects). These areas of focus are enhanced further, by looking closely at the forces for structuration and isomorphism that suppress diversity and instead, homogenise local authority museums in different dimensions and to varying degrees.

Structure and agency are embedded in museums and they have the potential to cause similarities or differences in their operation, content and structure. But, these themes of structure, agency, awareness and reflexivity were of course dependent on the participants’ accounts and their portrayals of those themes. My research capitalised on the use of qualitative interviews as the method of data collection in order to capture the subjective experiences of local authority museum professionals, and the complicated processes that are invested in their practices and institutions – those that have been outlined in this chapter. In the next chapter, the research methods that I chose to study my research topic are discussed in detail, along with how my research meets the identified gaps in the literature and contributes to the academic field.
3. Research Methods

Introduction

I interviewed 30 local authority museum professionals for my research. In the literature review chapter, it was identified that there is insufficient literature on the experiences, cultures and backgrounds of local authority museum professionals, and on connecting their cultures and practices to the effects that they have on their institutions, along with how their experiences and practices are shaped by the organisational framework that they operate within and the external environment. This is particularly the case in terms of contemporary contributions to the field. There is the need to qualitatively study the effects that austerity has on the experiences and practices of museum professionals in the sector, and its effects on their institutions. While the findings produced by the Museums Association (2011-2015a, 2017b) and Tuck et al. (2015) provide valuable insights about the impact of austerity on the sector, they are based on quantitative survey data. Since they are chiefly statistical in nature, they have limited inferential abilities, which is because of the closed-ended answer format that is inherent to survey research methods (Bryman, 2008). The findings of these studies therefore lack the required depth, detail and nuance that are needed to fully comprehend the topic of museum austerity.

My chosen methods enabled my research to achieve its aims and objectives and were therefore the most suitable and effective ones to study my research topic. They generated the type of data that I needed to produce valuable findings and answer my research questions, and, in turn, my research is able to make important contributions to the literature and academic field. The research methods that I chose and how I used them are described, discussed and evaluated in this chapter.
Sampling the Participants

I sent the recruitment email (see ‘Appendix A’) to the email addresses of the participants when they were available. The email addresses were listed on their museums’ websites. When this information was not available, I sent the recruitment email to the museums’ generic email addresses, and it was circulated to local authority museum employees on my behalf by the members of staff that received my email. Once the participants showed an interest in volunteering to take part by contacting me, I emailed them the information sheet (see ‘Appendix B’) and we arranged times and places for the interviews to take place. The types of local authority museum professionals that I recruited are discussed shortly, but first, I describe the museums that they belonged to.

As there were 18 museums in the sample and 30 participants, more than one participant was sampled from the museums in some cases. This coincidentally happened because some of the participants from the same museum wanted to take part in my study, but also because of snowball sampling, which is when participants recruit other participants from their professional network (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Brewerton & Millward, 2001; Vogt, 1999), or, more specifically in this case, their museums. An effective method, snowball sampling provides researchers with the chance to make new contacts to recruit participants (Berg, 1988; Thomson, 1987), which means that it is time effective, can help researchers to gain access into potentially difficult contexts, and because existing participants do the recruiting, the snowballed participants are given assurances about participation from those they know have already taken part (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). This helps to generate trust between researchers and the snowballed participants (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Bonevski et al., 2014).
Most participants were recruited using purposive sampling (see Brewerton & Millward, 2001; Bryman, 2008; Mason, 2002). This means that I sought and selected them because they met the criteria that I set for my sample, which were used to recruit the types of participants that I needed for my research (i.e. those that had the most suitable and fertile knowledge (see Sousa (2014)). The criteria were that each of the participants had to be employed in a local authority museum and therefore belong to the profession, although on the recruitment email (see ‘Appendix A’) and information sheet (see ‘Appendix B’), I listed a preference for the participants to be employed in curation/exhibition, publicity/marketing or education/outreach – public-facing roles that are central to the content, communication and running of museums. The development of these categories was informed by Boylan (2004), Desvallées and Mairesse (2010), and Geneways and Ireland (2003), who outline the dominant employment structures and hierarchies prevalent in museums in recent years. Upon recruitment, however, it became obvious that the roles of local authority museum professionals were particularly complex and fluid, and it was common for them to be fit into more than one role category (which entailed various responsibilities and forms of authority, that were also contingent on the staff numbers and structures that were present in the museums).

**Participant Characteristics**

I recruited fifteen male and fifteen female participants, although I did not actively seek an even distribution of gender. Twenty-nine of the participants were white, twenty-seven of them were British and the remaining three participants were Asian, Canadian and Irish. The ages of the participants ranged from those in their twenties (those born in the 1990’s) to those in their sixties (those born in the 1940’s) and I directly asked them for the decade that they were born in. The participants birth decade (as opposed to their birth year) and role descriptors were used to protect
their identities, while still providing the necessary contextual information that was needed to understand their accounts. The participants had been employed in the profession (at various museum types, in various professional roles and with various responsibilities and forms of authority) for numerous lengths of time, ranging from a few years to decades, which was mixed among the age ranges of the participants. All of the participants, bearing in mind their generational differences, had thorough knowledge of the areas pertaining to my research topic (but also in some respects, had differing knowledge. The older participants, for instance, were often curators and were therefore more specialised. The younger participants occupied more generic roles. These themes are discussed in the findings of chapter 4). They therefore were able to provide me with deep, meaningful and quality data in the interviews. Detailed in the following figure are the participants’ characteristics that I am able to disclose in this chapter without compromising their identities.

*Figure 1. Participant Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Decade Born</th>
<th>Role Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WB</td>
<td>1950’s</td>
<td>curation management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WB</td>
<td>1950’s</td>
<td>curation management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>WB</td>
<td>1960’s</td>
<td>management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AO</td>
<td>1980’s</td>
<td>curation outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WB</td>
<td>1990’s</td>
<td>outreach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

50
| P6 | F | WB | 1980's | education outreach |
| P7 | M | WB | 1950's | curation management |
| P8 | M | WB | 1960's | curation management |
| P9 | F | WB | 1980's | curation |
| P10 | F | WB | 1950's | collections management |
| P11 | M | WB | 1950's | curation management |
| P12 | M | WB | 1950's | education outreach |
| P13 | F | WB | 1980's | curation |
| P14 | F | WB | 1980's | education outreach |
| P15 | F | WB | 1940's | collections human resources |
| P16 | M | WI | 1980's | education outreach |
| P17 | F | WB | 1970's | management |
| P18 | M | WB | 1950's | curation |
| P19 | F | WB | 1950's | funding human resources |
| P20 | F | WB | 1940's | human resources |
The participants’ specific information was anonymised to protect their identities. Each of the participants’ names were replaced with a number (corresponding to the order that they were interviewed). Alongside their participant number was their sex and ethnicity (in abbreviated form). For example, [PX, m/f, ethnicity (e.g. WB stands for ‘white British’), 19XX’s]. This is how the participants’ accounts (which are extracted from the transcripts) are referenced throughout the findings chapters. Where necessary, the participants’ roles are described if they help to contextualise what is being discussed in the accounts.
I did not ask the participants about their social class for various reasons. Social class is highly difficult to measure (Chalabi & Sedghi, 2013), which is especially due to the fluidity of professional status, individual/household income, residential status, social mobility and the emergence of new class categories (e.g. the underclass). Asking the participants about how they define their social class position is equally as problematic for those identified reasons, along with how they may differently perceive, define and experience the concept of class. I chose to tentatively make inferences about the participants’ class positions based on my analysis of the information that they provided me with about their cultural backgrounds. As most of the participants were white, British and highly educated individuals that were able to volunteer and work for free when volunteering in museums for often long periods of time, and visit museums as children (signs of their economic capital), in my thesis, the suggestion that I make is that the participants were likely to have been middle-class individuals (which is reinforced by the literature. See the section ‘Cultural Capital’ in chapter 2, and the discussions presented in the findings of chapter 4, ‘Museum People’).

While insightful, the suggestions that I make about the participants’ class positions are inferential, tentative and not absolute. With more research being undertaken on the ethnicities, cultures and backgrounds of museum professionals, perhaps the class concept could be validated more thoroughly than what I have been able to achieve in my research, which is very specific to explaining predominantly white, British local authority museum professionals based on the data that they provided me with, which are factors that set the contextual, representative and generalisable limitations of my study. (For more information, see my study’s evaluation in this chapter’s later section, ‘Which or Whose Reality?’).

Thirty or so participants are generally suitable for small scale, independent studies
(Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), such as mine. While sampling saturation is usually driven by the rate at which theoretical saturation occurs, this number is likely to provide researchers with sufficient data (see Lincoln & Guba, 1995) so that they do not reach theoretical saturation too quickly when they come to analyse their data (see Morse & Field, 1995; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). It was my experience that the interview data of 30 participants, based on their length and the quality of the information that was generated in them, provided me with more than sufficient data to produce findings that were able to answer my research questions. I decided that I had reached sampling saturation when I was transcribing and analysing my data, which was an iterative process, when new information ceased emerging in the interviews with the latter participants, which I interpreted as a sign that I had reached theoretical saturation and that I could then stop interviewing.

Museum Characteristics

The 30 participants were sampled from 18 local authority museums that were situated in the South East of England, in the Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire counties. These museums were largely comparable, for the following reasons.

In addition to being similar in size, the museums that were sampled were rural local authority museums that centred on the local history theme via their topics of display/outreach agendas, which means that they told the stories of their counties and communities, which means that the museums were consistent in terms of their type and specialism. Moreover, the counties in which they were positioned were similar in terms of the demographic composition of their populations. Corke and Wood (2009) produced a portrait of the East of England as it appeared in 2007, and found that the counties (including the South East region) consisted of 97 percent white and British residents, which was three percent higher than the national average.
This similarity across the counties means that the museums could have been catering to similar audiences and operating within similar geographical contexts.

While the museums were similar on the surface in terms of their characteristics and their internal and external makeup, pressures and conditions, it is important to bear in mind that the museums differed in resources and staffing (these variations are discussed along with the findings). Moreover, the museums were local authority-owned museums, but some of them had begun transitioning to trust status and there was some ambiguity present between their legal and actual governance models (which, again, is discussed along with the findings).

Furthermore, the participants’ perceptions, understandings and experiences of their professional lives may have differed as their versions of their realities were deeply personal to them, which is particularly applicable for the participants that were sampled from the same institution. Indeed, the information obtained from one participant may have differed to that of another participant from the same museum. For this reason, it was key that when analysing the data, I approached the participants’ accounts from the stance that the information was specific to the perceptions, understandings and experiences of the participant in question, and were not necessarily going to be comparable in the ways that their museums were, even though there may have been shared themes and similarities present among them. The data obtained in my research, then, is very specific to the context from which it arose, which limits the explainable capability of my study’s findings (which is discussed in this chapter’s later section, ‘Which or Whose Reality?’).
Mason (2002) argues that to produce theoretically and methodologically ‘integrated and complimentary’ research (p.35), the researcher’s values should be linked to the methods that they chose to carry out their fieldwork. I chose qualitative interviews as the method of data collection for my research, and I chose them because I valued them as a research method because of the ways that they positioned the participants at the heart of the research process. The ontology and epistemology of qualitative research is that human subjectivity is the central source of information for understanding individuals’ lives and the social world (Bryman, 2008; Mason, 2002). The methodologies that stem from the qualitative research tradition are therefore tailored to provide researchers with deep comprehension into the ways that individuals make sense of themselves, others, and the world around them (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2002). Interviews, then, enable seeing through the eyes of participants, which provides researchers with a ‘strong handle on real life’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 10) and representation of their perceptions, understandings and experiences based on the information that they share, which is likely to be founded on the themes that are the most salient to their lives (Mason, 2002).

Participants, then, are at the heart of qualitative research, in terms of orientation, process and the data produced from it, and my choice to use interviews was driven by my desire to study and represent the participants and their realities in ‘legitimate’ ways (Mason, 2002: 63).

In addition, the data produced from qualitative research methods is descriptive, detailed and nuanced (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2002), which means that it can explain a great deal about the participants in a variety of different aspects (such as their understandings and experiences of their professional lives, and the ways in which they recollect on past memories, like when visiting museums,
which is discussed in the findings of chapter 4, ‘Museum People’). Therefore, this was the type of data that I needed for my research (to also contribute to the quantitative literature on austerity, outlined at the opening of this chapter). Furthermore, Bryman (2008) and Mason (2002) suggest that in comparison to other agent-centred techniques, such as quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews have an open-ended format, and lend themselves to an interpretative and highly exploratory approach. As there is much background information about my research topic (discussed in the introduction and literature review chapters), this is the kind of approach that I needed to go about studying it. While they are temporally and contextually specific to the time that participants are interviewed, the information generated in interviews is not conceptually narrow, which means that themes can be freely explored and uncovered through their use.

As the interviews that I chose were of the semi-structured variety, they were conversations with a purpose (Burgess, 1984). With this strand of interviewing, I was able to break down my research questions into much smaller interview questions that made them more accessible for me to study and for the participants to answer. I listed these questions on the interview guide (see ‘Appendix D’), which enhanced the efficiency of the interviews, because it acted as my visual aid and point of reference (e.g. Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2007). I took the guide into the interviews with me, and, by doing this, I was able to keep track of the questions that I had asked the participants, which gave me an awareness of question coverage and served as an indicator of whether follow-up interviews were required (although this was also dependent on the quality of the interactions and the information that emerged from them). In addition, with semi-structured interviews, I was able to ask pre-defined questions which gave me some mild control over their direction and content, but I was also able to reword, rephrase and ask follow-up questions, which pro-
vided me with flexibility and responsiveness to the dynamics of each of the interactions (e.g. Mason, 2002). In this process, the interview guide facilitated as opposed to prohibited the fluidity and conduciveness of the interviews (e.g. Creswell, 2007), because I ensured that I was not over-reliant on its use. Moreover, the participants were able to interpret my questions and communicate their responses in whichever ways they chose to. Therefore, I and the participants had agency in the production of co-constructed knowledge (Plummer, 2001). My construction and application of the interview questions and guide are discussed in the following text.

The Interview Questions & Guide

As already mentioned, I broke down the main research questions into much smaller interview questions that I listed on the interview guide (see ‘Appendix D’). I divided them into sections of topics that I needed to cover in order to find answers to my main research questions. I constructed the interview questions carefully so that they could retrieve the information that I needed from the participants, so that I could obtain relevant data that was able to answer my research questions. For example, ‘Section A’ on the interview guide lists the questions that were aimed at finding out about the cultures and backgrounds of the participants. I used different openings to these questions to encourage varied responses from the participants, and to identify which opening style they were the most responsive to. For example, Q.1 in that section begins with ‘please tell me about your professional role’, whereas Q.3 begins with ‘how did you become involved in/access the profession?’ Most of the participants were more responsive to the former, although this also depended on what they were being asked and how interested they were in the topic that we were discussing. ‘Section C’ for example, contained the questions that were targeted to finding out about income and funding, but with specific reference to austerity policy. Indeed, the participants were particularly vocal in this area, and
expressed their concerns, which shows just how salient the issues were to them.

Therefore, I mainly used open-ended questions because they allow participants ‘to contribute as much detailed information as they desire’ subsequently providing them with the ability to ‘fully express their viewpoints’ (Turner, 2010: 756). I also worded the interview questions with as much clarity as possible so that the participants could fully understand and interpret them in the ways that I anticipated them to, and so that they were not leading, for I did not want to influence and manipulate their responses by imparting my own assumptions on them, which would have removed their responses from the truth. I also used hypothetical questions that are based on scenarios, to encourage more innovative and revealing answers (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995). This can be seen in ‘Section D’ (see ‘Appendix D’) where Q.54 asks them if they would change anything about their museums and the reasons why/why not.

The participants were asked the same questions to begin with in the order that they appeared on the interview guide (see ‘Appendix D’), but then I asked them follow-up questions, which provided me with the ability to explore particular themes in greater detail. Follow-up questions were particularly useful in the instances when the participants did not directly answer the question I had asked them and, instead, went off topic (see Arksey & Knight, 1999; Cresswell, 2007; Mason, 2002; McNamara, 2009; Turner, 2010). Questions, then, were not asked in a linear fashion, for they took many twists and turns. Although, sometimes my follow-up questions were excessively wordy. This is a natural occurrence in qualitative research, as these questions are created in a spontaneous manner, they are more susceptible to expressive errors (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Arksey and Knight (1999) argue that wording affects how well participants understand questions. The questions were under my constant evaluation to gauge their effectiveness, and if they were flawed and not
efficiently retrieving the information that I needed for my research, I reworded and rephrased them. In doing so, my line of questioning was highly flexibly and able to respond to the participants depending on their responses, which enabled me to be sensitive to them and their needs (Fielding & Thomas, 2001), and sensitive to the dynamics of each of the interactions (see Mason, 2002).

Interviews, then, provide fairly holistic and non-intrusive questioning techniques (Mason, 2002), whereby question order, wording and structure took diverse formations. My questioning also needed to work as a whole to encourage flow so that questions complemented one another as opposed to abruptly jumping between topics. In turn, questioning can be perceived as akin to a process of layering, as my questioning started with simpler questions and became deeper and more complicated through the use of follow-up questions and question modification to delve deeper into certain occurring themes. Such a finding is common in the literature (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2002; Turner, 2010).

Conducting the Interviews & Rapport

The first three interviews that I conducted were pilot interviews (which are included in the sample). I conducted pilot interviews because I wanted to ensure that, firstly, my sampling criteria were attracting the correct participants (correct as in the participants had the necessary knowledge to find out about my research topic), and, secondly, because I wanted to ensure that my interview questioning (touched on in the previous section) was effective for retrieving the information that I needed from the participants. I found it important to be considerate of the fact that the participants were each different individuals and would respond in their own ways to my questioning. The benefits to interviews were that, as May (1993) argues, questions can be tailored to suit participants and, moreover, Mason (2002) argues
that this provides both flexibility and sensitivity to the dynamics that they take. The interview questions were prone to continual adaptation, but because I fluently asked and devised questions depending on the participants’ responses, the data generated in them was well-rounded (see Mason, 2002: 65) due to their responsiveness to the dynamics of each interaction, and the quality of the data that they were subsequently able to elicit.

As the interviews were one-to-one, this was a particularly non-invasive way to interact with the participants as they could take their time to talk to me and contemplate their answers. I was mindful of the significance for the participants to be able to respond openly to my interview questions, so that they could express themselves by their own definitions of accuracy and clarity. Indeed, the participants decided which parts of themselves they wanted to voice, without any intrusive influence from me. This was enhanced by conducting the interviews in settings that were private, and ones that minimised external noise and unnecessary interruptions. In addition, I let the participants choose where they wanted to be interviewed, because the settings that they chose were going to be where they felt the most comfortable, which may have helped to elicit naturally occurring responses from them (Mason, 2002). In most cases, the participants chose quiet spaces in their museums to be interviewed. Although, in other cases, the participants chose to be interviewed away from their workplaces. In these cases, I conducted the interviews in public venues, such as cafés. While the latter were noisier and slightly more distracting, I ensured that the settings were, to the greatest extent possible, spaces for the participants to openly and freely express their views, so that the productivity in them could be enhanced (McNamara, 2009). Overall, the quality of the recordings was high, which was important for minimising errors when I came to transcribe the interviews.
The interviews lasted for around one to two hours. Some of the interviews were conducted on two separate occasions, as these participants were follow-up interviewed, and the reason for this was because I needed more information from them. This was due to a few reasons, such as not covering all of the questions in the first interview, or needing to expand on some of the themes that were uncovered. In addition, if the first interview left-off unfinished, a second interview provided me and the participants with the knowledge and understanding that we had explained ourselves fully and had asked the questions that we wanted to ask, which meant that we were able to essentially sign-off in the second interview, although the participants were made aware that they could contact me at any time if they had any subsequent queries or concerns.

Rapport is based on the comfort and trust that exists between researchers and participants, and academics argue that it increases the quality of the data that is collected in research, but interviews especially (Bryman, 2008; Gilbert, 2008; Mason, 2002). While rapport is not always easy to establish or measure, I tried to develop some familiarity with the participants to encourage them to feel comfortable in the interviews, and, in turn, comfortable with sharing information with me, so that they could communicate with me easily and effectively. This was with the intention to enhance their naturally occurring responses to my interview questions, which were likely to be less censored, and therefore more accurate portrayals of their perceptions (Bryman, 2008; Mason, 2002; Simmons, 2008). The benefits of one-to-one interviews is that it is easier to establish rapport because the interactions are more personal (May, 1993; Patai, 1991). Bryman (2008) argues that rapport can be developed through researchers’ aesthetic display and behaviour, such as ‘smiling or maintaining good eye contact’ (p.202), to exhibit receptive body language, without influencing their responses by inadvertently signalling my approval or disapproval (e.g. nodding or sitting with my arms crossed). These might be taken for granted
assumptions, although I was reflexive about my body language and the effects of my cultural position on the research process (which is discussed later, in the section ‘Which or Whose Reality?’).

Recording & Transcribing

I used two recording devices that had quality recording abilities. Two devices were used as a precaution to safeguard against losing data by running out of storage space, battery life or from experiencing technical malfunctions (see Bryman, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Although, I thoroughly checked the devices to detect for any problems prior to using them. I let the participants know that I was using two recording devices and explained why, and it was at this point prior to interview that I gained and collected their informed consent (see ‘Appendix C’). After each of the interviews had taken place, I uploaded the recordings to a password-protected PC (and anonymised their identities, which was mentioned earlier in the section ‘Sampling the Participants’) and then removed them from both recording devices.

Transforming the interview recordings into written form was a straightforward process, although there were techniques that I used to ensure that they were, to the greatest extent possible, accurate representations of the data. For example, I used headphones with high sound and playback quality, so that I could listen well to the recordings, which helped to reduce me making any interpretive or listening errors when transcribing. When and where necessary, I re-listened to the recordings to ensure precision (see Bell, 1993; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Transcribing the data involved me going back and forth between the recordings and the transcripts – between listening and writing. This technique was useful because the participants occasionally used terminology that was specific to the profession, such as names
of particular objects and individuals (often historical figures), which I was not necessarily familiar with. In addition, they also often used quotations, which means that I had to differentiate between the speakers in their responses (see DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Their sentence structures also took diverse formations, and were at times difficult to follow because they were lengthy. Re-listening to the recordings helped in these areas. Transcription was a time intensive process, but it helped me to familiarise myself with my data, and gave me a comprehensive pre-awareness of the themes that I was likely to find when I came to analyse it.

Ethics

Researchers are short but influential presences in participants’ lives (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Lee, 1993), and participants’ needs and wellbeing should always be central to researchers’ agendas (Orb et al., 2001). Indeed, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) and Orb et al. (2001) assert how crucial it is for researchers to be conscious of ethics, in terms of practice and evaluation, when doing social research. In keeping with those ideas, prior to fieldwork, I consulted The University of Surrey’s Ethical Review Checklist and its Ethics Department and Committee about whether my research needed formal ethical approval. While I was informed that it did not require it, my study did, of course, need to be ethical, which was a central focus of attention throughout its design and process. For references, I consulted were the University of Surrey’s (2004) Code on Good Research Practice and the British Sociological Association’s (2002) Statement of Ethical Practice, and those listed in this discussion.

There were steps that I took from first contact with the participants to ensure that they were well informed and confident about participating in my research. I explicitly informed them about each aspect of the research process from the start. First contact was initiated by me via the recruitment email (see ‘Appendix A’), and after
the participants had shown an interest in participating in my research, I emailed them the information sheet (see ‘Appendix B’). In these texts, the essential information that the participants needed to be informed about my research was listed. I sent the recruitment email one to three times (depending on the museum) over around a three-month period to ensure that the participants received my information frequently (in case they had overlooked it or were still deciding on their participation), but without being overbearing or forceful in my approach. The participants were therefore able to take their time to reflect on their decisions before contacting me about taking part. When they did, I sent them the information sheet (see ‘Appendix B’) and answered any questions that they had, from which time, we arranged times and locations to meet to conduct the interviews.

The informed consent form (see ‘Appendix C’) was significant as it was a document proving that each of the participants had agreed to participate in my research. It disclosed their awareness of what participation entailed and safeguarded my role as the researcher by obtaining it. Orb et al. (2001) state that agency is based on respect, and the ‘recognition of the participants’ rights, including the right to be informed about the study, a right to freely decide whether to participate in a study, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty’ (p.95). I assured the participants that participation was optional and that, if they did participate, they could withdraw their participation at any time without any repercussions. This gave them the agency to decide their participation (see Orb et al., 2001). On the information sheet (see ‘Appendix B’) I listed my contact details, and that of my supervisors, for the participants to get in touch if they had any questions, wanted to express any concerns or complaints, or, if they took part, to withdraw their information at a later date (although none of the participants did). The participants were made aware that the findings generated from their provided information would form part of my PhD thesis, and be disseminated in published formats in the future.
There are risks that data can bring harm to participants (Bryman, 2008). The participants’ data had the potential to cause them reputational damage, although in accordance with ethical procedures, I removed their identifiable information and replaced them with descriptors (e.g. their names, date of birth and professional role titles, in conjunction with in-text information appearing in their transcripts, e.g. names of specific projects, institutions and organisations. In addition, the names of individuals were removed and replaced with descriptors, e.g. ‘colleague’, and without decontextualising the data, their genders were changed, e.g. from ‘she’ to ‘he’).

The data that I collected for my research is strictly held under The Data Protection Act (1998), and is currently stored in a password-protected PC, and will continue to be held there for 10 years in keeping with the University of Surrey’s policy on data of this nature, after which time, it will be permanently destroyed.

**Thematic Analysis**

Striving to interpret and make sense of the phenomena that I was investigating (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), I used thematic analysis to analyse the data. ‘Themes are groups of codes that recur through being similar or connected to each other in a patterned way’ (Buetow, 2010:123), and Joffe (2012) perceives that ‘themata’ are a ‘genesis of social representations’ (p.222). Buetow (2010) deems that thematic analysis is closely aligned to what he terms ‘saliency analysis’ (p.123), which is further supported by Joffe (2012). There were specific reasons why I chose thematic analysis instead of other methods to analyse the data. Firstly, this form of analysis allowed me to discover themes in the data, and I needed such an open approach to freely and flexibly uncover broad themes, and work them into smaller and more discrete subthemes. Thematic analysis allowed me to foster such thoroughness and coverage of the data. Therefore, through the discovery process, I was able to refine themes and draw patterns, relationships and hierarchies between broad themes.
and subthemes (Buetow, 2010; Joffe, 2012; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Schutt, 2011).

Using thematic analysis, my procedure was based on an inductive approach, where ‘themes come from the data’, which is a form of open or latent coding (Ryan & Bernard, 2003: 88). However, my data analysis procedure was also abductive (Mason, 2002), and therefore can be understood as encompassing a priori approach, which is where themes were developed from my prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (Ryan & Bernard, 2003: 88). Both approaches mean that I was able to be theoretically sensitive to my data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), which occurs when ‘theory, data generation and data analysis are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process’ (Mason, 2002: 180). Analysing data, and developing theory in this way, means ‘moving back and forth between data analysis and the process of explanation or theory construction’ (Mason, 2002: 180). Undeniably, ‘hybrid approaches’ to data analysis that make the inductive-deductive distinctions more fluid have gained increasing use throughout the research field in recent years (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Thematic analysis, then, as well as being an iterative approach to coding (Becker, 1958, Mason, 2002: Tuckett, 2005), provided me with a flexible, yet thorough, methodological framework and the ability to explore the data, while allowing themes to naturally occur from it.

Schutt (2011) states that qualitative data analysis is a way to pull data apart, ‘and then put it back together more meaningfully’ (p.328). I annotated and highlighted the transcripts, also known as ‘cutting and sorting’ (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) when discovering themes, and this became more extensive as the coding procedure developed, and as themes became more refined. Therefore, I started my procedure by manually looking for themes by hand, but then started to electronically copy the relevant themes and quotations that I had identified in the transcripts and grouped them into separate files. Each file was named after the theme that they
represented, which made it easy for me to find my evidence when writing-up the findings of my research. Each quotation was referenced with abbreviations of the participants’ details, and, to avoid decontextualisation, each quotation was referenced with the page number of the original transcript that it was extracted from. To prevent replication, the quotation from the original transcript was marked to signal that it had already been extracted and appeared at where it was referenced.

As with any method of data analysis, the systematic organisation of data is central to analytical thoroughness (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tuckett, 2005) to avoid ‘messy and empirically shallow’ research (Gobo, 2004: 406). To the greatest degree possible, the procedure I used to perform thematic analysis on my data was deliberately constructed to be systematic, organised and thorough, but one that promoted ‘interpretive consistency’ (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), and prioritised the saliency and depth of themes discovered. While I followed the procedure of letting themes ‘speak’ from the data (Joffe, 2012: 217), this process was informed by an element of my own prior theorising to assist in its scrutinisation. Prior theorising is a useful quality to have, as although themes might be repetitive in and across transcripts of data, this does not necessarily mean they are the most important themes that do justice to the findings of a study (Joffe, 2012; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

To elaborate on my adopted procedure, I first explored each of the transcripts in detail, and I loosely discovered some potential themes based on ‘repetition’ (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and the topics that occurred, reoccurred and were common (see Taylor & Bogdan, 1975; Guba, 1978). This process became increasingly elaborate as the process progressed, for themes became increasingly more refined and specific to what they were portraying. From this point, I then started to compare the themes that I had discovered by looking across the transcripts. Glaser and Strauss (1967) term this the ‘constant comparison method’ (p.101), as it involves making
comparisons and contrasts by searching systematically across data to clarify or falsify any patterns that may or may not be present. I repeated this process until my themes became more refined between themes and subthemes, and until I reached the point of saturation (Mason 2002), which is where no new themes were emerging from my data. The saturation point often signals the ending of the data analysis process (Bryman, 2008; Pyett, 2003). An important consideration throughout this constant comparison procedure was to ensure that I was striking a ‘fine balance between obtaining thick description from each case and obtaining comparative description from each comparison’ (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007: 250).

I was looking for signs that the participants’ backgrounds, practices and their museums were similar or different from one another (and I used Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital to make sense of the participants’ cultures, backgrounds and practices, which are presented in chapter 4, the next to follow). In addition, I was looking for potential isomorphic pressures, and therefore, signs of normative, mimetic and coercive pressures and processes. Using these basic starting points allowed me to delve deeper into my data and explore these themes further, to assess where isomorphism and diversity were present, and if they did constitute findings, how they answered the main research questions, addressed the topic and linked to the literature.

I was mindful not to decontextualise the themes that I discovered in my data, since themes must always come from, and be supported by, the data (Bryman, 2008). For example, in the findings chapters to come, the themes discovered are supported with extracts from my data that support the claims that I make. Based on my analysis, generalisations about my data are what Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) term analytic generalisations, and is where qualitative researchers ‘generalize words and
observations to the population of words/observations (i.e., the “truth space”) representing the underlying context’ (Onwuegbuzie, 2003: 400). Joffe (2012) argues that competent thematic analysis should be able to describe the bulk of the data and produce balanced views of the data, ‘rather than attaching too much importance to the frequency of codes abstracted from their context’ (p.215). Thus, the findings generated from thematic analysis must — firstly, always be performed through a comprehensive analytical procedure, secondly — must always be supported by the data, and thirdly — must always accept the boundaries of the data, and, consequently, the generalisations that can be made about the data (Joffe, 2012; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The findings generated from my research adhere to these listed principles, and in so doing, attempt to represent the participants’ perceptions, understanding and experiences in the most authentic ways possible, to add valuable knowledge to the literature and academic field.

Which or Whose Reality?

The research methods that I chose were ones that I deemed to the most suitable and efficient for studying my research topic (which has been explained throughout this chapter). These methods were also a good fit for PhD research. However, all research methods (and the findings that result from them) have their limitations, for they are not value-free (Lacey & Luff, 2001; McNeill, 1985) and, when studying human subjects, neither should they claim to be (Snape & Spencer, 2003). While in this chapter I have explained and justified the research methods that I chose for my research, and the ways in which I used them, in this section I declare the limitations of my research findings, with reference to method and practice, to provide transparency about the contributions that they make to the literature and field.

It can be difficult to assess the limitations of qualitative research due to its highly
subjective nature, and, for this reason, the concepts’ validity, reliability and representativeness that are widely used in the quantitative tradition to measure facts (Sousa, 2015) do not transfer well to the qualitative research context. I use a more suitable approach that stems from Pyett’s (2003) suggestion that qualitative researchers should ask themselves the question, ‘which or whose reality did I represent?’ (p.1178).

The findings of my research represent the working lives and realities of local authority museum professionals at the time that I interviewed them (see Connolly, 1998; Mason, 2002), which, for the most part, are the working lives and realities of white, British (and as chapter 4’s findings suggest, middle-class) local authority museum professionals located in the South East of England (although an Asian, Canadian and an Irish participant: three in total, are included in my sample). In addition, while the museums sampled were comparable, the subjective insights provided by the participants, based on their own, unique experiences (especially those few participants that belonged to the same institutions, which was discussed in the earlier section, ‘Museum Characteristics’) may not have been. I sensitively approached the data analysis process in light of these factors to ensure that due care and attention was taken when working with the data, but these factors combined mean that the findings of my research are specific to, and can only explain, these contexts and paradigms from which they arose. Not being able to discuss the participants’ social class with definitive proof and confidence means that my study is also limited in some of its claims and generalisations (which was discussed in the earlier section, ‘Participant Characteristics’). Further research is needed to aid this deficiency and strengthen contributions into this area of investigation in the future.

Furthermore, the sample consists of the local authority museum professionals that were willing to take part in my research, and were those that saw the recruitment
email (see ‘Appendix A’) (with some exceptions in relation to those that were recruited via snowball sampling). Some local authority museum professionals may have had more opportunities to see the recruitment email and contemplate whether to take part. This is because, on occasion, when the email addresses of local authority museum professionals were not available, I sent the recruitment email to the email addresses of their museums, and then whoever received the email (which was usually an administrator) circulated it to the employees in their museums on my behalf. Who the email was circulated to (other than the participants that volunteered), along with how many times it was circulated and received, is unknown. In addition, it was up to local authority museum professionals to decide whether they deemed themselves eligible to take part in my research based on their interpretation of the sampling criteria (which were the categories of the professional roles that I was interested in) that were listed on the participant information sheet (see ‘Appendix B’). The findings of my research, then, are shaped by these processes.

Qualitative research is considerably criticised in the literature for its claimed lack of analytical structure and bias that stems from researchers and participants (Bryman, 2008, Gobo, 2004, Mason, 2002). In terms of the participants’ bias, the findings of my research are founded on the information that the participants deemed appropriate to share with me in the interviews (see Buller et al., 1991; Mason, 2002). Although this information was likely to have been salient to them, it could have also been tainted by grass is greener on the other side views (Lichtman, 2011; Tschirhart et al., 2008), hindsight, and been rose-tinted (Bryman, 2008; Day, 2016; Hanley et al., 2013; Hayes & Hefferton, 2015; Plummer, 2001). At times, the participants might also have over and under exaggerated the information contained in their responses (Archimowicz et al., 2015; Becker, 1958), which could have been subject to frequent change, ‘depending on the circumstances’ (Golafshani, 2003: 603). These factors
were likely to have affected the accuracy and authenticity of the information that was collected from the participants.

In terms of my own bias, I constructed my research, from its initial conception, to the research behind it, to its design, execution and evaluation. I recognise that my bias has affected my research in the ideological and practical senses, which is why it is important for researchers to be actively reflexive at every stage of the research process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Mason, 2002; Pyett, 2003). I was ‘active and reflexive’ (Mason, 2002: 66) throughout the research process, and, to the greatest extent possible, I tried to minimise my effects on it. For example, I was reflexive that I and my research questions were not influencing the participants’ responses in the interviews, and that, when transcribing them, I was attentively and repeatedly listened to the recordings so that I transcribed with accuracy and made minimal errors. I was also reflexive that when analysing the data, I followed a systematic, organised and consistent procedure that provided me with complete coverage, thorough interrogation and cross-comparison of the data. Resulting from this process, themes occurred from, and were well supported by, the data. Each of those areas has been discussed in this chapter.

**Summary**

In summary, the research methods that were chosen to produce findings about my research topic have been described, discussed and critically evaluated in this chapter. All research methods have their strengths and weaknesses, and on reflection of the discussions presented in this chapter, those that were chosen to study my research topic can be deemed to have been the most suitable and efficient for the task at hand. This is because they were ethical, met the aims and objectives of my research, and were able to produce accurate, quality findings that are sufficiently
able to directly answer my research questions. These strengths mean that my re-
search makes meaningful contributions to the existing literature that pertains to
my research topic. Now moving away from research methods, the next three chap-
ters present the findings of my research. The following chapter presents the find-
ings that are concerned with uncovering new and detailed knowledge about the
participants’ professional backgrounds and the local authority museum profession
in the contemporary context.
4. Museum People

Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter are about the cultures and backgrounds of the participants. The findings were conceptualised using Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital to uncover the forms of capital that were present in the participants’ backgrounds, which was a powerful tool to learn more about them as individuals, as well as uncovering the similarities and differences that existed among them. The concept also helped to identify the areas where normative isomorphic pressures were present, based on the analytical framework adopted from DiMaggio and Powell (1991). The findings presented in this chapter are insightful because they show that the participants followed similar trajectories into the profession, and had similar interests in museums, volunteering experience in museums, and training in museum-centred disciplines. All in all, the evidence shows that the participants had deep identity-based connections with these cultural institutions and the work that they did in them, which was accompanied by their strong senses of dedication and loyalty to the profession. These are valuable qualities to have in a profession that is fuelled by uncertainty and volatility.

Long Lived Interests in Museums

Twenty-nine of the participants had similar interests in the museum culture. These participants’ interests in museums can be understood using embodied capital (Bourdieu, 1986) based on the ways in which their interests were embedded in their habitus, and were deeply connected to them personally and to their identities. These themes are exhibited in the accounts presented in this section, which are
based on the participants’ memories of their childhoods. In these accounts, the participants reminisced. ‘Reminiscing is concerned with the remembrance, often in a casual way, of something that is long past’ (Meacham, 1995: 37). The process is deeply personal and can be social, that is – collective (Meacham, 1995). Qualitative research methods, which are based on similar acts of meaning making, bring forth information that is the most meaningful and salient to the lives of individuals (Haight & Hendrix, 1995; Mason, 2002). This is because they comprehend the functions and forms of reminiscence (Haight & Hendrix, 1995). In addition, Wong (1995) states that:

The past affects us more than we generally realize. Our perceptions are coloured by past experiences. Even our values, life styles, and the choices we make spring from our unique past history. Whether we are resilient or vulnerable to stress, whether we are resourceful or inadequate in coping, often has its roots in early childhood experiences. (p.23).

The participants’ interests in museum culture originated in their childhoods, but were interests that lasted into their adult, professional lives. With the focus for now on their childhoods, these interests were the motivating forces for their wanting to one day work in museums when they grew up. For example, in this following account, P17 recalled her visit to a national museum in her childhood. This account conveys that it was through this visit that her interests in museums were sparked, and were the motivating forces behind her wanting to one day work in museums:

I went to the British Museum in 1979 to see their Viking exhibition and thought it was the most amazing place in the world and then somebody told me that people actually worked there and got paid to work there and I just thought: ‘wow! That’s what I want to do’. I’m 44 and I’ve wanted to work in museums since I was eight or nine years old. I knew this was always what I wanted to do. I always said I wanted
to work in a museum before I started working in museums and I pretty much have my ideal job now. [P17, F, WB, 1960’s].

That account shows that for P17, museums were deeply connected to her personally and to her identity, which are signs of embodied cultural capital, and that her interests for museums were embedded in her habitus. In addition, that account indicates that visiting museums is influential for sparking children’s interests in them, and their motivations for wanting to work in them later in their adult lives. Indeed, these themes were ones that consistently ran through the accounts. For instance, in the following, P22 recollected a memory of visiting a museum with his parents in his childhood, and said that he had wanted to work in museums since he was a child, and said that he was interested in the museum world in his adult life via his enthusiasm for particular subjects:

I wanted to work in a museum from the age of eight. [...] My parents took us to the coast on holiday and for some reason there was a small, dusty museum with an alligator on the floor, maybe even a crocodile. The cases were dusty, but on the inside, were objects and I was just fascinated by them. I knew I was going to work in museums or work in archives. I have a very strong interest in archaeology [and] I love history. [P22, M, WB, 1950’s].

Therefore, in a similar way to the previous account, that account exhibits that P22’s interests in museums were sparked through a visit to one, and that he had a firm sense of knowing that he was going to one day work in museums when he grew up. Again, these are signs that this participant’s interests in museums were embedded in his habitus, and that museum culture formed part of his identity. Moreover, similarly to before, that account demonstrates how impressionable museum visitation is on children for igniting their interests in them, and their making future
career choices to work in them. To provide another example, in this following account, P1 spoke about his interests in history and archaeology, and recalled the memories of when he used to visit museums in his childhood, which, he explains, stayed with him because they appealed to his interests:

I have a very strong interest in local history and archaeology. Other people will get into railways or old buses or whatever it is, and this is my equivalent. Certainly, in my case, when I was taken around to museums and things on summer holidays and visits, I remember those were the highlights of the holidays for me. I remember them because I found them interesting. [P1, M, WB, 1950’s].

In similar ways to what the previous accounts have shown, that account denotes that P1’s interests in museum culture were deeply connected to him personally and to his identity, which are evidence that his interests were embedded onto his habitus and therefore, signs of embodied capital. Therefore, overall, these accounts show that the participants’ interests in museums – and the museum world, were sparked when they were young, but more specifically, by visiting museums as children. However, being able to visit them as children also implies that the participants were individuals that came from backgrounds with the financial resources, that is – the economic capital, and the parentage (social capital) (Bourdieu, 1986) that enabled them to undertake regular visits in order to deepen their interests in museums.

These findings also suggest that the participants were of some ethnic and social class dispositions. Further evidence from the sample is that 27 of the participants were white and British. The participants’ definitions of the class group that they belonged to were not recorded as part of the data collection process as class is a difficult concept to measure due to the discrepancies to do with occupation, economic income and social mobility (Chalabi & Sedgh, 2013). (The ramifications of these issues on my study’s findings, and how claims about class are made in my
thesis, were stated in the section ‘Participant Characteristics’ in the previous chapter). Although, based on these findings, the tentative inference that can be made is that the participants were likely to have been middle-class individuals, for there are relationships between social origin (e.g. upbringing), economic and social capital, the pursuit of distinctive cultural activities, and class – but, in particular, the notion that high cultural activities appeal to higher classes (DiMaggio, 1991b; DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Vincent & Ball, 2007). On the topic of cultural capital, Cuff et al. (2006) make the connection between culture and class in this following extract:

In each of the fields of education, art and literature, there are some dominant sets of ideas that define what is culturally valued and desirable. [...] Each set of ideas is associated with specific social groups or classes and particular historical periods, but they transcend these origins and stand as societally legitimate definitions of what is educationally or artistically worthwhile. (p. 329).

In addition, for the majority of the participants it was their parents that took them to visit museums when they were children, and it is likely that they were forces for the generational, social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973) of cultural and class dispositions. This is because their parents were likely to have had the same interests in museums that they did, hence the reason why they took them to visit museums when they were young. Therefore, in addition to having the upbringings – with the necessary economic and social capital that enabled them to develop their interests in museums by visiting them – the participants were likely to have had parents that shared the same class and cultural dispositions, and tastes for museums that they did. The longer-term assumption of this is that the participants would have the same effects on their children, and the cycle would continue.
However, in addition to parents, this following account from P9 evidences that extended family played roles in the development of tastes for museum culture, too. P9 describes the ways that an uncle sparked her enthusiasm for the museum world through history, which was through the objects that he acquired from his travels—objects that he shared with her. The similarity of interest for history between this participant and her uncle reinforces the point that family members are involved in the generational reproduction of class and cultural capital:

I’ve always loved history. My uncle was an archaeologist and he used to bring back treasures, perfectly permitted treasures of course, from sites across the world. That enthused me in that way. I’ve always had a passion for history and was a bit of a bookworm, and I always read a lot. Museums were always something that I was going to go in to. [P9, F WB, 1980’s].

That account shows that exposure to objects, in the same way as visiting museums, initiated this participant’s enthusiasm for museum culture. Consistent with the accounts presented previously in this discussion, that account shows that P9’s interests in museums stemmed from her childhood, and that she had a sense of knowing that she was going to one day work in museums when she grew up. This further evidences that the participants’ childhood interests in museums were motivators for their subsequent pursuit of careers in the museum profession, and that their interests are embedded in their habitus, and are therefore signs of embodied cultural capital. Therefore, the participants’ childhood interests in museums were formed by visiting museums, and by the influences exerted by parents and extended family members, which provided them with access and exposure to museum culture. The evidence presented in this discussion have shown that these influences encouraged the participants to develop particular identities for museums.

Jensen (1994) argues that children prefer visiting museums with family and friends,
and consistent with the findings presented in this discussion, suggests that personal interests, family and cultural backgrounds were important factors that influenced the museum going experiences of children. In addition to family members though, there were connections between the participants’ interests in museum culture and their schooling present in the accounts. For instance, similarly to the previous one, this account from P12 shows that his interests in history were sparked by his school’s history teacher, which shows that interests in museum culture (and more specifically, history) can be ignited outside of the museum context:

I used to have a very good history teacher. And, I remember to my horror, that the headmaster built an Iron Age hut on the school field, and then burnt it down to see how it burnt down. [...] I think that’s what fired my imagination. [P12, M, WB, 1950’s].

Therefore, the participants’ childhoods were impressionable periods in their lives, as their interests in museum culture were sparked and shaped in them, and it was these interests that were the motivations for them wanting to one day work in museums later in their lives. A study that is consistent with these findings is provided by Spock (2000), which was discussed in the literature review, although to provide a brief reminder here, through his analysis of 75 qualitative narratives – an impressive data set for such an underexplored topic in the literature, Spock (2000) finds that museum professionals have profoundly personal interests for museums, and that visiting museums as children made a difference to the way they turned out, and ‘why they ended up working in museums’ (p.28).

On reflection of the findings, the participants’ interests in museums were deeply personal to them and deeply connected to their identities, which are signs that their interests are embedded in their habitus. However, Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital does not become embodied or embed itself onto individuals’ habi-
itus in the same, uniform ways. For example, P4 was the only ethnic-minority individual in the sample – which reflects a lack of cultural diversity in the profession more broadly (and is a theme that is discussed later in this chapter). Unlike the other participants, this participant’s interests in his current museum, specifically, stemmed from his ethnic background:

I really like to talk about historical material - archives, artefacts, cultural artefacts, because they are based on my background. I am an ethnic-minority. Here at the museum, a lot of the materials are from [my country of origin], and a lot comes from an ethnic group core. So basically, as a curator working at the museum, I enjoy it and I am personally attached. [P4, M, AO, 1980’s].

Therefore, the connection that P4 had for the museum world was due to the objects contained in his museum’s collection, which originated from his country of origin. This means that this participant’s interests in museums was specific to his institution, and his interests were embedded onto his habitus due to the deeply personal connection that he has for the objects in its collection, which represented the deeply personal connection that he had for his ethnic and cultural background and identity. Although in slightly different ways to the previous accounts, that account from P4 still evidences that his interests in museum culture formed part of his identity.

Perhaps the participants’ interests in the profession are not particularly surprising, as it could have been expected that they were interested in, and enjoyed, the work that they did in their professional roles, lives and museums as it is such an interest-driven line of work. It is far more revealing to have uncovered the forms of influence that directed their paths to museum employment. The accounts presented in this section are insightful, for they encompass the roles that parents and extended family, schooling and ethnicity play in the participants developing their interests in the
museum world during their youth, mainly, but with reference to their adult, professional lives – a signifier that their interests were long lived.

Furthermore, the participants’ interests in museums seemed to have infused them with strong senses of dedication and loyalty to the profession, which were accompanied by their equally as strong senses of gratitude for being employed in it and therefore being able to do the work that they enjoyed. This theme of gratitude was one that ran through the accounts, but was particularly vivid when discussed alongside the profession being an apparent source of strain, which was not necessarily austerity specific. For instance, in this following account, P6 expressed that she was able do the work that she enjoyed, wherein gratitude was a form of justification for dealing with the less enjoyable aspects to her work, which she rendered as the norm:

You’re actually really lucky that you’re able to do something that you really love doing. So, working more hours than you’re contracted to, or trying to work out how to do something really cheaply, is just part of the job. [P6, F, WB, 1980’s].

As the participants had such deeply personal, identity-based connections to museums – as previously discussed, they appeared to have close and meaningful attachments to their professional roles. In this following account, P28 expressed his enthusiasm for his professional role against the context of low pay and a general sense of deflation that – similarly to the previous account, were sources of strain that seemed to accompany working in the profession. These sources of strain were ones that were also normalised by this participant, but instead of being grateful, P28 framed being passionate as justification for coping with the downsides to working in the profession:

You’re doing it because you love it, because you want to, because you’re passionate
about it. It’s the symptom of being in a career that you like, rather than a job that you do. When you enjoy something it’s your priority. This isn’t the best paid sector in the world. It is a little bit crushing a lot of the time. If you love it, you take it home with you. There’s a lot of downsides to loving what you do. [...] You carry it with you all the time. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

Additionally, that account portrays that P28’s interests in museums were connected to him personally, and to his identity, which are signs of his embodied cultural capital, and is consistent with the other accounts that have been presented in this discussion. Furthermore, this following account from P17 illustrates that her dedication and loyalty to the profession stemmed from her interests in her museum, and, in turn, its embeddedness in her habitus. Moreover, as this participant makes a comparison between her own feelings to that of her colleagues, this is evidence that suggests local authority museum professionals’ interests in the museum world might be collectively shared within and across museums:

I love my work and I never want to do anything else. You have people like me, who have been here for thirteen years and show absolutely no sign of going and they’ll probably have to carry me out in a pine box, and leave me by the curb-side because I don’t know where else I’d want to go. [My colleague] is the same. Why would she want to go anywhere else? We love our jobs, we all love our jobs. We spend a lot of time here. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

In summary, these 29 participants had been interested in museums since they were children, and had similar childhood upbringings and in turn, developed similar tastes for them. In addition, it was their childhood interests in museums that were the driving forces behind them wanting to become employed in the profession later in their lives. It is valuable to discover that the participants’ interests in museums were sparked fairly instantaneously at specific points in their childhoods. In
addition, the findings have uncovered when and how the participants’ interests in museum culture emerged, and what exposed them to, and influenced them towards, these cultural institutions in the first place. It is also meaningful to discover that the participants were deeply dedicated and loyal to the profession, although their interests were not what was going to necessarily keep them employed in it – due to the ongoing effects of austerity causing losses in professional staff (which is discussed later). For now, it is posed that the participants’ dedication and loyalty to the profession meant that there was some continuity present, due to their commitment to the profession.

These findings fill gaps in the literature in more ways than one. Firstly, not enough is known about the backgrounds of local authority museum professionals, such as their childhoods and their motivations and journeys into museum employment. Secondly, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) neglect professionals’ interests and motivations for being drawn to particular professions, due to their macro theory orientation, which means that they largely ignore the experiences of professionals. Shedding light on this topic, the findings presented this far assert that children’s early interests are influential forces that encourage their wanting to pursue particular careers later in their lives.

While 30 of the participants went on to become employed in museums, the latest of which was the local authority kind, it needs to be acknowledged that seven of the participants had careers in other professions prior to their current employment. While one of them was not interested in museums, and has been accounted for in this analysis, six of them were interested in museums, but in these cases, their interests did not motivate them to become employed in the profession as their first choice of professional career. The reasons for this are not known. But, this means
that some of the participants followed different trajectories into museum employment. While 29 of the participants volunteered in museums, seven of them did so much later in their lives. These different pathways are considered in the following two sections’ analyses. The first, looks at the 29 participants that volunteered in museums. The second, looks at the 25 participants that underwent formal, academic training that made them suitable to work in them.

Volunteering

In the literature, not much is known about volunteers in the non-profit and museums sector, despite them having high presences in these arenas (Groninger, 2011; Holmes & Edwards, 2008; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010). Consistent with this, the accounts convey that there were high volunteer numbers present in the museums – frequently, these numbers were in the hundreds. In addition to volunteer outsourcing though, 29 of the participants were volunteers themselves prior to local authority museum employment. Based on the previous section’s discussion, it is likely that these participants’ interests in museums were the motivating forces that encouraged them to volunteer in museums, although the other side to this is that volunteering experience was required for securing museum employment. With these in mind, the participants’ initial motives for volunteering were divided between the older and younger participants. These are now discussed.

Of the 30 participants, for seven of them the museum profession was their second choice of career, and these participants were the older participants (those born 1940’s – 1960’s). The accounts from six of them (the remaining participant did not volunteer but had the intention to – this is discussed later) denote that their motivations for volunteering were centred on them wanting to be active in the sector and fulfil their lifelong interests in museums. The accounts from the remaining 23
participants – for whom the museum profession was their first choice of career, denote that they volunteered for the purpose of securing museum employment, which suggests that they had awareness of the expectations of museum employers. Although, as per the previous section’s discussion, these participants were also interested in museums. But, had they not needed volunteering experience, these participants may not have volunteered. These generational differences in the motivations of volunteers are consistent with the literature (e.g. Groninger, 2011; Holmes & Edwards, 2008; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010). As these participants followed different trajectories into museum employment, their ages when they volunteered, and the lengths of time that they volunteered for, varied, which means that they have different timelines and experiences when it comes to volunteering and training. For instance, the 23 participants whose first careers were in the museum profession started volunteering in their teenage years, alongside training at secondary school, college or university. These participants volunteered for years – often lasting into their adult lives, and for some of them, at multiple museums. For instance, P17 said that she volunteered for eight years, in two museums, alongside training:

I went there every school holiday from the age of fourteen to the age of twenty-two, twenty-three. I carried on volunteering even when I was working in museums. The two days a week I wasn’t working for them, I carried on going to [museum-1], and I volunteered at [museum-2], just because I happened to know somebody that worked there, and they let me go and volunteer for them. This is all I’ve ever done. I got my first paid job in a museum just before I graduated from [university] with a [Master’s] and I’ve been in paid employment in museums ever since. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

That account also shows that P17 had a connection that worked in the museum that she went on to volunteer in, which was a source of social capital, and an indication that having connections serves a useful purpose for securing volunteering
(and later, employment) opportunities in museums. This following account from the one participant that did not volunteer – for whom the museum profession was his second choice of career, conveys that he had the intention to. P2’s situation was a fairly unique one. He described the casual nature in which he enquired about volunteering in his current museum, but was offered paid employment instantaneously. Earlier in the interview this participant said that he was not actively seeking paid employment at the time, although as this account shows, came out of retirement to take up the opportunity:

It was a chance event that I came here just to have a look around the museum with my wife, and I’d just sort of let the curator at that time who was present know that I was interested in volunteering. They asked me if I wanted to be curator, because the curator that was then doing the job, her term in office was going to come to an end. I’m paid fifteen hundred a year for running the place now, which is fine. I can afford not to have a full-up salary. [P2, M, WB, 1950’s].

P2 was not paid a professional salary, which in conjunction with the previous curator leaving, are indications that local authority museum employment might be contingent on circumstances. Given the situation that is depicted in that account, it can be inferred that there was an urgency to fill the position, and due to a shortage of resources, there was not enough funding available to pay P2 the same salary as the previous curator (which P2 described at an annual twenty-thousand pounds) which was possibly the reason behind the previous curator leaving (the unstable nature of local authority museum employment, and the effects of austerity on the profession, are discussed later).

Of the seven participants that had previous careers in other professions, this participant was one of two that formally retrained in subjects that were relevant to
working as curators. Two participants from the seven held specialist, curatorial, positions. P2 had a previous career in finance but retrained and got a Master’s degree in archaeology, and P8 had a previous career in engineering and retrained as a curator through a scheme at a national museum. The next section’s discussion evidences that training in disciplines and subjects relevant to working in museums, and relevant to working in specific positions, are essential for securing local authority museum employment. In light of this, because these participants retrained, and were therefore suitably equipped for working as curators, they secured those specialist positions. Without retraining, their employment would have been highly unlikely, because, as now discussed, volunteers do not always have the forms of legitimacy, and the skills, that are needed to secure this kind of employment.

For instance, some of the participants that were managers, talked about the incidences where volunteers in their museums had applied for paid, professional positions. These volunteers, however, seem to have lacked the qualifications and training that were needed to secure the positions that they had applied for. These themes are portrayed in this following account from P6, which denotes that specialist roles required specialist skills, and that qualifications were important for providing applicants with legitimacy, despite them having existing work experience in the relevant area:

The only job that was going was the curator job that was filled. […] That obviously requires quite a specialist set of skills. Although, that might have been the area that some of them were volunteering in, they might not have had the qualifications to back it up. [P6, F, WB, 1980’s].

Moreover, P3 – a museum manager, explained the incident when a volunteer in her museum applied for a paid, professional position, which was one that the volunteer
in question had already temporarily occupied. Unlike the volunteers that were portrayed in the previous account, however, this volunteer was training on a postgraduate course at the time and, therefore, on the path to qualifying. This account is demonstrative that it was the criteria inherent to the application process that hindered this volunteer’s successful journey into paid, professional employment:

She wanted to get into museum work and was doing one of the museum postgraduates in her own time, and came here doing work experience and was doing it somewhere else as well. And then a member of curatorial staff left, so we asked her if she would cover in the short term. And she did, and it was fine. And then we advertised to recruit that post, and we didn’t interview her. And it was absolutely objectively on the criteria, and although sadly we knew she could do the job. [P3, F, WB, 1960’s].

The importance of formal qualifications and training are essential for providing volunteers, and aspiring museum professionals with legitimacy. Volunteering and training are qualities that are essential for local authority museum employment, and they are expectations of employers that are built into the recruitment process. For example, P3, who was also the manager of her museum, was directly involved in the recruitment process there. This following account from her conveys that volunteering and training were essential criteria that she actively sought when scouting for new, entry level employees:

It’s essential for them to have some experience working in a museum or paid post that they’ve got a postgraduate in museum and gallery studies. So, we set the bar reasonably high for what is the starting post. [P3, F, WB, 1960’s].

These findings presented are consistent with Carrington (2001), who argues that new, entry-level applicants need to show ‘commitment to the museum cause by putting in some voluntary work’ (p.22). However, the financial restrictions of unpaid
work may deter certain individuals from volunteering, which demographically influences the types of individuals that volunteer (Holmes, 2003; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010), and, subsequently, become professionals. For instance, in the UK, it is common for volunteers to be white and middle-class (Holmes, 2003; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010). Based on the sample and the discussion presented in the previous section, 27 of the participants were white, British and middle-class, which means that they were likely to have had the economic capital to volunteer. This raises questions about under-represented working-class and ethnic-minority groups in the profession, and questions about the lack of cultural diversity in its current and future workforce, based on the reproduction of class and culture that takes place through the local authority museum recruitment process.

Volunteering can also be perceived as a form of institutionalised and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), because it socialises volunteers in the culture of museums and the organisational norms that are present in them. Linking back to DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) theory of isomorphism, these authors argue that, in addition to formal training, informal socialisation acts as a homogenising force among professionals, because it encourages them to conform to similar institutionalised logics and methods of working that are inherent to professions. On this basis, training and volunteering can be viewed as normative pressures that encouraged the participants to think and work in similar ways. This following account from P19 is an illustrative example of these processes in operation. This participant explained that when she applied for her current position, her local authority wanted a candidate with volunteering experience. P19 went on to explain how volunteering tempered her (and thus, socialised her to conform), in ways that suppressed what she learned from her previous legal career:

They wanted someone that had been in a volunteering role themselves so they
could appreciate what a volunteer feels like. My experience of volunteering undoubtedly tempered the way I had been brought up professionally. It was a totally different environment from the environment I’d worked in professionally. This job requires more of the stuff I learnt as a volunteer, than it does my skills [in law]. That’s a more valuable area regarding my past experience for this role. [P19, F, WB, 1960’s].

In addition, that account suggests that P19’s volunteering experience was more important than that gained from her previous career, which emphasises that volunteering was an important criterion for local authority museum employment, and, in this case, provided this participant with greater legitimacy for the post in question. Volunteering, therefore, was important for getting employed in the museum profession, and more centrally the local authority museum profession, which is discussed shortly. The participants, then, in addition to having similar interests in museums which stemmed from their childhoods, went on to volunteer in them. They therefore possessed similar embodied and institutionalised capital. Next, their educational backgrounds are the focus, which is a discussion that encompasses talk of normative processes.

**Training**

Twenty-four of the participants had university educations – and possessed undergraduate (bachelor’s) or postgraduate (master’s) degrees (or in some cases, both), and were therefore trained at similar levels of education. Hence, the participants had the economic capital to obtain university educations, as well as the cultural capital that they learned on their courses. There was evidence in the data for the generational and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973) of cultural capital, as the participants came from educated families. Bourdieu (1984) argues that ‘all cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading etc.), and preferences in literature,
painting or music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin’ (p. 1). There were links between the participants’ interests in museums, their educational backgrounds, upbringings and familial connections. For example, P24 talked about the circumstances that led to his attending university, which was influenced by the fact that his family came from a teaching background:

When I was at school, I was quite good at history, art, and my family have quite a lot of teaching in their background, and so I was predestined, I think, to go on and study at a university. I began and set out on my university career. [...] Following some of the museum studies courses I found that very applicable to my interests, and, when I got to university, I was more focused when it came to practical things around museums. [P24, M, WB, 1970’s].

The 24 participants also trained in similar disciplines that were typical to working in museums. They included archaeology, anthropology, art history, history, heritage and museum studies. Therefore, the participants possessed similar institutionalised capital (Bourdieu, 1986). While these disciplines have their differences, training can be perceived to have taught and encouraged them to adopt similar rationales and practices in their professional lives, which is because training causes normative pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). ‘The resting of formal education and of legitimation in a cognitive base produced by university specialists’ mean that ‘universities and professional training institutions are important for the development of organizational norms among professional managers and their staff’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 70). This means that individuals conform to the institutional and disciplinary norms that are inherent to their training, which in turn renders training as a protagonist for institutional homogenisation (and thus, a normative pressure), as it takes place through, and results from, the similar practices of professionals.
These discussions assert that the participants were likely to have had similar rationales and practices. The most revealing accounts are those that stemmed from the curators – who tended to be among the older participants, because they were specifically trained in specialist object-centred disciplines, but mainly archaeology. These participants were attached to objects, which shows that they were invested in their training backgrounds. For instance, this following account from P11 conveys the tastes (and distastes) that curators have for particular objects:

You definitely will get curatorial obsessions. [...] The first curator rather liked cameras and the second curator rather liked costume. My predecessors will grind their teeth at this museum's gypsy collection. [P11, M, WB, 1950's].

While they had different conceptions about the purposes of museums – whether communications should have centred on education or entertainment (e.g. Hyson, 2004), the common perspective that they shared was that objects were central to curatorial practice at all times, irrespective of which engagement strategy was adopted. Therefore, these participants had particular ways of conceiving the relationship between objects, their communication, and audiences. For example, in this account, P22 explained that objects were always the focus of attention, and had a particularly object-centred approach to allowing children to handle them. This approach differed to the one taken by the other museums on the grounds of conservation. It was a more innovative aspect to this museum's engagement strategy:

Objects are key. I always bring objects along and say: 'right, you can read all the history books, and you can read all these documents, but now let's actually look at what the objects are'. We allow kids to handle the dinosaur bones. Other museums are like: 'no, you can't allow children to handle them, they might damage them'. Well, they've been stuffed in the ground for 60 million years. What damage are you really going to do? [P22, M, WB, 1950’s].
In addition, and on a similar note, P26 trained in archaeology and again positioned objects at the forefront of curatorial practice and audience engagement, from which he posed that a social history of objects could be developed thereafter. However, this participant also described that fewer resources had changed curatorial practice, which came in the form of dumbing-down, a concept that is discussed by Bucchi (2008) and Macdonald (2002), which had caused less audience engagement with objects in favour of greater commodification:

I think if you engage someone with the object itself, I don’t think it matters what series of questions you ask, or whether you ask social questions. [...] I think with all reductions in finance comes a dumbing-down of engagement with the artefacts themselves. I think what a lot of museums try to do is package it up and give it to you, and you don’t have to do anything. The personal interaction with the artefact has been taken away. You’ve almost been desensitised and that, I think, is a shame. [P26, M, WB, 1950’s].

That account exemplifies the tensions between traditional and commercial values. Similar themes are exemplified in this following account from P11, which situates the differences in perspective between curators and marketeers. For the former – the focus was on objects in the traditional, tangible sense. For the latter – the focus was on the more controversial yet popular topics. Here, this participant described the give and take dynamics that occur between these types of professionals:

Historically [the museum] is meant to be haunted by different ghosts and people are really interested in that. Traditionally and curatorially, the curators just think it’s a load of rubbish. Sometimes they say to us: ‘why are you marketing ghosts when you should be concentrating on the wonderful paintings and the beautiful ceramics there are there?’ [...] People are also really interested in coming to ghostly vigils. They’d rather pay to come to ghost vigils and that money will ensure that ceramics can continue to be conserved. So, there’s a pay-off between what we want to do
as a marketing department and sometimes what the general thinking is of other people. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

Indeed, some of the accounts depicted that curators, while specialists, were not necessarily efficient. That was because they were so heavily invested in their disciplines and specialisms, which prevented them from being able to pursue other, more diverse activities. These themes are showcased in this account from P9:

We’re such different animals. For example, he hates volunteers. He won’t have them touch his collections, he thinks they make a mess of everything. He doesn’t have that engagement with the community, he doesn’t really talk to the public. He does a great job, and he’s an absolute collections guru, knowledge-wise he’s fantastic, but we are worlds apart. [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

Together, those accounts are indications that the participants had similar rationales and practices, which were rooted in the disciplines that they had trained in, which they used in the professional roles that they were trained for. These findings are consistent with the hypotheses of DiMaggio and Powell (1991), for they say that professionals with similar training occupy similar professional roles, and are indistinguishable across their organisational field. Indeed, as this above evidence shows, the participants were invested in their training and the professional roles that they occupied. Later, it is shown that the participants that had previous careers in other professions trained in disciplines that were not specific to working in museums, but deemed themselves to be more efficient in comparison to their colleagues for that reason.

In addition to formal academic training that the participants received from universities, they described that they were required to undergo compulsory local authority training as part of the terms of their employment. This training was concerned
with local authority policies, which are discussed in detail in chapter 6. Similarly to the training that the participants received from universities, local authority training was also a normative pressure that encouraged the participants to think and work in similar ways and according to similar organisational norms. Local authority training was organisation wide, and therefore affected all local authority employees, and not just local authority museum professionals. Hence, when it came to local authority training, the participants were not treated as being distinctive or special in any way:

We’ll get something saying we require all [local authority] employees to do this course, which is compulsory. Fire, evacuation, health and safety, fire extinguisher training and some online computer course to do with equal opportunities, diversity and non-discrimination. They’re things [the local authority] decided that everyone ought to do, to achieve a certain standard regarding how they should behave in situations, to be sure that everyone is up to a certain level or on a particular topic. That is one of the things that comes with being employed by the local government. [P19, F, WB, 1960’s].

Therefore, the participants were like other local authority employees more generally, and because they were required to undergo training in the same local authority policies and conform to the protocols that they embodied, which were policies that informed their responses to situations and decision-making, it was likely that they had similar rationales and practices. Some of the participants were also required to issue local authority policy training to other members of staff and volunteers, hence enforcing, as well as conforming to, normative pressures themselves, which means that they were involved in the production of professional homogenisation. These findings show that the participants were likely to ‘view problems in a similar fashion, see the same policies, procedures, and structures as normatively sanctioned and legitimated, and approach decisions in much the same way’ (DiMaggio & Powell,
The main sources of training that the participants received were from higher education and local authorities. Most of the participants said that they frequently attended events provided by other museums, and networked with other professionals at them, which was because they were part of county-wide museum groups. These groups are thoroughly discussed in the next chapter. A couple of the participants expressed that they were also enrolled on training courses, such as those provided by the Museums Association, among others. While these courses and spaces on them seemed to be rare, they can be perceived – in ways akin to higher education and local authority training, as encouraging professionals to develop similar rationales and practices in their working lives.

For now, some of the participants said that they occasionally attended workshops or conferences that were provided by external organisations, such as Arts Council England, the Museums Association and the South East Museum Development Programme, among others. However, these events did not seem to happen often for these participants – perhaps once or twice a year, which was due to these courses not being more regularly available, these participants not having the availability, and, when these events were not free, not having the funds to attend. The events provided by the Museums Association, in particular, were commonly described as out of reach due to steep pricing, even though they were likely to be the events that were the most useful. For instance, this account from P9 portrays these issues at work in her museum:

The Museums Association’s national conference – I find it appalling at the cost to attend that conference when they are discussing really salient, relevant issues for all museums. I know they do discounted rates, but they are astronomical and completely beyond most people’s budgets. [...] It’s really hard to justify to my employer,
it’s £500 for the weekend, that’s half of my collections’ acquisitions budget and I can’t justify that. [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

These events could therefore be important for local authority museum professionals keeping up-to-date with current issues and events in the industry, although accessing them seems to be difficult because they are not affordable. In terms of more informal resources, some of the participants said that they used the Museums Journal and newsletters to keep up-to-date with industry developments, and others said that they used online resources. Of these, the Museums Journal could potentially be a normative pressure, because, as an academic resource, it could reinforce particular institutional logics. Although, with local authority museum professionals lacking the abilities to attend training events, it is perhaps more useful at this point to see it as a valuable resource that these participants used to keep-up-to-date with the industry, and as a resource that offers tried and tested solutions that have been discovered by others, which could help to ensure that the museums run more smoothly.

More research is needed into an area that my research touched upon. There was a stark absence of continuing professional training in the profession. This means that aside from the training that the participants received in their education, and the policy training that they received during their employment, the participants were not trained to cope with situations that were new and unfamiliar to them, which means that they may have found it difficult to adapt to the effects of austerity. Austerity policy and funding cuts can be perceived as related to areas of economic and commercial activity that the participants simply may not have been accustomed to, or trained for. The evidence shows that they were trained in specific museum-centred disciplines, and that employment depended of this kind of professional background, meaning that a skills gap is being reproduced in the profession.
Indeed, Tuck et al. (2015) finds that the skills of local authority museum professionals ‘remain a barrier to change’ (p.3), and that traditional approaches to working are incompatible with the changes to local government governance, management structures and business-models. It was the case that the participants and their local authorities were conflicted in terms of their ideologies and approaches to working. The break down of these relationships are present in the findings, and manifested in the areas concerned with commercialism and independence (which are examined in chapter 6, ‘Governance, Income and Support’). Austerity has been the protagonist for these tensions to proliferate, and so there needs to be a viable link between local authority museum and local authority agendas made, to promote the ‘effective leadership of the museum’ going ‘hand in hand with effective leadership and support from the local authority’ (Tuck et al., 2015: 3). Unfortunately, this currently seems unlikely, but nevertheless, remains to be seen.

In summary, 29 of the participants volunteered in museums, and trained in subjects that were relevant to working in them, and, on these grounds, based on what DiMaggio and Powell (1991) claim about training as a normative pressure, the participants were likely to have had similar rationales and practices. Formal education – training and qualifications, as well as volunteering experience, were essential for museum employment, which is because they provided applicants with the necessary legitimacy (e.g. DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, Bourdieu, 1986, 1984) that was needed to access the profession. This highlights how certain forms of cultural capital have the power to grant individuals the power to access certain social groups (e.g. Bourdieu, 1986), or, more specifically, the ability to grant the participants access into the profession. These themes are now discussed.
Accessing the Profession

In this chapter, it has been identified that volunteering and training produced normative pressures, but that volunteering and training were two essential qualities that local authority museum employers expected from applicants in the recruitment process. Indeed, Holmes (2006) argues that new, ‘entry-level applicants need to be both highly qualified’ and ‘demonstrate strong commitment to the sector’ by volunteering, coupled with ‘having a good first degree and a postgraduate degree’ (p. 241). This implies that, to be both experienced and qualified, aspiring professionals need to ‘volunteer outside of formal study programmes in order to gain paid work in the UK museums sector’ (Holmes, 2006: 240-1). This following participant is a shining example of what a museum professional – at the start of their career, should perhaps embody:

I was a fresh graduate coming along with a history degree and quite a lot of volunteer experience. [...] Volunteering is vital for people trying to get their first foot on the museum profession ladder. [P5, M, WB, 1990’s].

Some of the participants recalled how difficult these standards were to meet. For example, P14’s account portrays having to get the experience, education, but also, having to be competitive, in order to secure employment in the profession:

I think the sector expects you to have everything. So, it’s really difficult to have the experience as well as the education. And so, you have to end up doing the education and experience at the same time. Unpaid, even, before you can get anywhere. And, it’s really competitive, and that’s a big problem. Lots of people want to do these jobs and they’re nice jobs, they’re things that people will enjoy doing. So, you have to compete with a lot of people. You have to have something over them to get that job. [P14, F, WB, 1980’s].
Many of the accounts depicted that the recruitment process was based on filtering, a concept used by DiMaggio and Powell (1991), which they define as the process where professionals ‘are drawn from the same universities and filtered on a common set of attributes’, which results in ‘the hiring of firms within the same industry, through the recruitment of fast-track staff from a narrow range of training institutions, through common promotion practices, such as always hiring top executives from financial or legal departments, and from skill-level requirements for particular jobs’ (p.72). This means that, in terms of professionalisation, it is likely that applicants are recruited because they have the desired characteristics that employers expect them to have. In the local authority museum profession recruitment process, volunteering and training (for the most part, in museum-specific subjects, although this was dependent on professional roles), were the two main characteristics that local authority museum employers sought. The expectations of museum employers seemed to be well known by the participants, but also by other professionals that they mentioned in their accounts. For instance, this account from P14 shows that she was advised by a museum professional to train for a Master’s degree in museum studies at university to get employed in the profession:

I then got advised to do an MA in museum studies. The only reason I did my second Master’s was to get a job, really, because my curator advised me that I would be competing against people that already had an MA in museum studies. [...] I did it to have it on the piece of paper, unfortunately, so that I could compete with people in interviews, because that’s what people, especially councils as well, it’s a big part of their system when they interview. [P14, F, WB, 1980’s].

The professional in question that solicited the advice to P14 can be perceived to have reproduced museum employers’ expectations by making them common knowledge. This can be therefore seen as a reproductory force for P14’s acquisition of institutionalised capital, so that she could compete with other applicants and
secure museum employment. In addition, this participant’s description that she did her Master’s degree to have it on the piece of paper links to Bourdieu’s (1986) argument that the academic qualification is a ‘certificate of cultural competence’ (p.21) and marker of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), for it gave this participant the legitimacy and ability to compete, and, in this way, set herself apart from other potential candidates. Furthermore, these findings can be positioned alongside Bourdieu’s (1986) suggestion that the academic qualification ‘is legally sanctioned’, having ‘the performative magic of the power of instituting, the power to show forth and secure belief, or […] impose [institutional] recognition’ (p.21). Essentially, the accounts presented thus far evidence the ways in which applicants, in response to normative pressures and to secure local authority museum employment, change themselves in ways that are desirable and fit for such a purpose.

Recruitment is the process through which training and qualifications are exchanged for employment and along with it, economic capital. This is known as a convergence (Bourdieu, 1986). In keeping with this theme, Bourdieu (1986) argues that institutionalised capital can be converted for economic capital by ‘guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital’, which ‘establishes the value […] of the holder of a given qualification relative to other qualification holders and […] the monetary value for which it can be exchanged on the labour market’ (p.21). However, in the recruitment process, in order for museum professionals to be successful, they need to have the right training, qualifications, and sufficient amounts of volunteering experience that employers want. These themes have been identified throughout this chapter. Bearing in mind that training was contingent on the professional roles that were being applied for, this account from P16 highlights how this participant shaped his expertise and skills in ways that employers wanted, as a response to their criticisms and turning him down for a position:
They said: 'oh, sorry, you’re not quite qualified in museums' and I thought: 'I’ve got two degrees, what else do you need?'. Then, I found this museum studies degree. I retrained [and] decided to do the Master’s because I felt that it wouldn’t waste my other two degrees. [...] I had to spend six months [on the coast] volunteering in a museum down there. So, it was mainly about getting work experience stuff so I could get more confident. [P16, M, WI, 1980’s].

Some of the accounts conveyed that there was an abundance of competition among applicants, particularly for entry level officer positions, coinciding with a proliferation of museum-based training courses, yet fewer vacancies. This evidence indicates there was likely to have been a vast number of highly qualified applicants that were applying, especially for starting positions, which shows how guarded the profession was to get in to. In this account, these themes are illustrated by P3 – a manager who was directly involved in the recruitment process, who remarked on the extraordinary number of applications that she received for a single vacancy, which seemed to have made the selection process difficult:

We had over two-hundred applications for that one post. And, for a majority of them, it’s not as though a high proportion of them were not qualified. A majority of them had all the essentials, and quite a lot of them had all the desirables as well. So, you can see that it is incredibly difficult, and from the point of view of recruiting, [...] it gets that hard when everybody has everything that you’re asking for. [...] Over the last ten years, there have been so many courses and now when so many of the jobs are disappearing, it just means that people don’t have a chance of getting into it. [P3, F, WB, 1960’s].

Some of the accounts portrayed that the application process was divided in two – between written applications and then, if successful, interviews. P24 outlined the interplay of these processes, and this account also depicts that the selection process was distributed among different stages, an evidence that filtering was at work
in this context:

You’ve got to fill in this application form which takes hours to do, then you’ve got to write an essay to get in to the interview. And then you’ve got forty minutes to persuade complete strangers that they should spend forty thousand pounds on you per year. [P24, M, WB, 1970’s].

In addition, some of the participants described a point system that scored applicants against pre-defined assessment criteria, based on volunteering and training, which is further evidence of filtering. For example, P14 expressed that, based on the filtering, certain qualifications provided a given number of points, showing how there were values placed on types and levels of educational attainment. However, this account also shows that for this participant, colleagues were sources for learning the correct knowledge and harnessing the skills needed to make successful written applications, which were positioned against local authorities’ recruitment process and expectations:

You have to get certain points, and if you haven’t written that in your application, you don’t get the highest points. And then they only interview the people with the highest points. So, having a degree, or having a Master’s would give you more points than just having the degree. Even though you might be the best person to do the job in the world, if you don’t have the qualifications in the first place, you might not get the interview. [...] It’s only councils that really do it. [...] Luckily, my colleagues from my first museum job taught me how to apply successfully for job applications. [P14, F, WB, 1980’s].

Indeed, the accounts depicted that connections were highly valuable, as they informed the participants about vacancies that they perhaps would have not otherwise known about. In addition, as the previous account showed, they were also highly valuable for the participants acquiring the relevant knowledge and skills to
construct successful written applications. For example, this account from P28 portrayed that inside knowledge was important for applying to work in museums:

Maybe in the first instance you’ll get somewhere, just out of luck or knowing someone. I’ve got a friend, he’s doing a bit of a career change. He wants to get into museums. He worked for us for a little, but, because he worked for the council, he was in a job here for a while doing admin and stuff with us, and that’s when he realised he wanted to work in a museum. Fortunately, he had the inside scoop on how you do that. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

And so, based on the evidence, entry into the profession was closely guarded, as the local authority recruitment process was difficult to navigate without the forms of legitimacy (i.e. the volunteering and training) that museum employers expected in potential exchange for employment. However, having connections (i.e. existing local authority museum professionals), a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), helped some of the participants to navigate the recruitment process and secure employment, because they helped them to become more efficient at writing job applications in the ways that local authority employers wanted, providing them with legitimacy, a factor that was likely to have enhanced their chances of successful employment.

The local authority museum recruitment process was one that attracted only highly qualified and experienced individuals, suggesting that particular types of individuals were drawn to the profession and became employed in it. The participants were individuals with distinctive interests, training and volunteering (and the economic capital that accompanied them). Hence, in terms of their backgrounds and cultural capital, the participants were very similar. This theme of professional homogeneity among the profession’s workforce, as the result of the recruitment process, was reflected in some of the accounts. For instance, P14’s account conveyed that local
authorities recruited applicants because they fitted into the existing professional structure. The revealing element to this account is that applicants that fit may not be the best individuals for the roles, which raises questions about efficiency. This participant’s awareness of these processes is also a striking feature of this account:

I think councils look for people who fit in. I think they are the best people, but the best people in their opinion. I think you have to be a certain type of person to work for the council. So, I think it’s better to find that type of person who’s going to fit in, rather than employ somebody who is the best in the world but can’t work in the way a council works. [P14, F, WB, 1980’s].

Some of the participants were aware and reflexive that the profession consisted of similar individuals, something that was connected to the recruitment process. For instance, P24 expressed this, and went on to outline the issues that this posed for diversity in the profession, such as missing out on the best individuals, a theme that echoes back to the previous account. Again, this poses problems for efficiency in the profession, and in terms of professionals’ working practices:

There are lots of other people with the same ambition, similar background and similar experience. There is a danger to the museums sector, there’s lots of questions about diversity and all the rest of it. [...] There’s no: ‘let’s take a punt on this guy’. It’s: ‘we’ve got someone there and they’ve been to the right university’. Do you know what I mean? It’s just there’s, this subconscious playing it safe. Within recruitment, you could potentially be missing out on excellence because of the artificial way in which recruitment processes are devised. [...] I just think there is a tendency in the museums sector, to consciously recruit like for like. [P24, M, WB, 1970’s].

In addition, this account from 28 addresses the lack of cultural diversity in the profession, which, from what is posed in this account, was due to the employment
process and the nature of the work favouring individuals with particular ethnic, economic and class-based characteristics:

You’ve got to be white and middle-class to come into this sector, as it’s the only way you’ll not work for a year and have a crappy salary until you’re in your thirties, basically. That’s why nobody is coming into the sector outside of that demographic group. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

This account shows that the local authority museum recruitment process was one that suppressed diversity and hindered the recruitment of applicants that were quite possibly the best individuals for the positions they applied for. This discussion has also posed problems for accessing the profession. In consistency with this, Davies (2007) argues that ‘many potential applicants are deterred by the current approach to entry which favours people with voluntary experience who are often over qualified’ (p.5). In addition, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that service based industries place higher values on anticipatory socialisation – that is, modes of behaviour based around professional norms, where a focus on credentials is the strongest. Certainly, the analyses presented in this chapter has shown that the participants were highly qualified and highly experienced individuals, who experienced normative pressures as forms of institutional socialisation, that were likely to have caused them to think and work in similar ways, which had the potential to encourage isomorphism to develop among their museums. This is discussed in chapter 5.

Non-Traditional Routes & Efficiency

Seven of the participants had careers in other professions before becoming employed in museums. These professions were related to business, engineering, finance and law. These seven participants seemed to have perceived that they brought a unique contribution to the profession, in the form of increased efficiency.
While two of them retrained in subjects that were relevant for working in museums, and secured employment on the basis of that training, the focus of this discussion is also on the five participants who did not retrain, but became employed anyway, despite them having distinctively different forms of cultural capital present in their backgrounds.

For these five participants, museum-specific training was not needed for the professional roles that they occupied in their museums, showing that training is contingent on specific professional roles. For example, P19 stated that museum-specific knowledge may not have been needed for the position that she occupied – a human resources based role. Instead, this account denotes that this participant’s training from her previous career may have actually been more valuable for the professional role in question. Therefore, this participant’s skills (stemming from her previous career in law) seemed to have aligned well to the values of the local authority, evidencing that it was likely to have been particularly beneficial to securing this employment, because it provided her with legitimacy:

I don’t know if they saw having museum knowledge as officially part of the role. I stressed to them that I didn’t have any heritage background, but being [in law] by background I take mine and the museum’s responsibilities about things like health and safety and complying with regulations, making sure they’re safe on the job and making sure the people that come in are safe. And, the local authority, as an organisation, takes those things very seriously. [P19, F, WB, 1960’s].

Further to this, the accounts portrayed that training in subjects that were relevant to working in museums were not always the most suitable, or even desirable for that matter. For instance, P28 explained that while professionals with specialist training were suited to corresponding specialist positions, professionals from efficiency based backgrounds, on the other hand, may have been more useful for other
There are roles in the museum that are great for museum people. You know, people that have come through museum studies programs and that, you know, curators and that kind of things, because there are some hard museum-y type things. But at the same time, to assume that someone with a museum studies background is going to be great at marketing a museum, that’s a bit foolish. Some of the best museums I’ve seen had people from business [because] it’s efficiencies, it’s an environment encouraging people to try something and if it didn’t work well that’s ok, fine, move on. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

For 23 of the participants, their knowledge and skills were specific to working in museums, because they were informed by museum-specific, specialist training. Although all 30 of the participants underwent local authority policy training, for these seven participants, their perspectives on certain situations were based on increasing efficiency (despite two of them retraining in museum-specific subjects), which was a quality that was different to the other 23 participants. Therefore, for these seven participants – despite five of them not retraining in museum-specific subjects – efficiency was a useful trait that they perceived they contributed to the profession, one that stemmed from their previous professional careers in other sectors and industries:

For example, P20 and P15 had careers in finance and held professional roles that were related to administration, policy and human resources. P19 had a career in law and was responsible for policies, human resources and training. P12 had a career in business and was responsible for constructing applications for external funding, health and safety and education policies. And, P1 had a previous career in engineering, and was responsible for management, funding and policy. The other
two participants were discussed earlier: they were the two participants that re-trained in subjects that were relevant for working as curators in their museums, but P2 had a previous career in finance, and P8 had a previous career in engineering. While P2 and P8 did not comment on this next topic because they were curators, the other five participants stated that they had different perspectives on how to work in comparison to their curator colleagues. These perspectives were based on differences to do with efficiency. For example, in this following account, P12 made a comparison between his own style of working to that of his curator colleague, and this account shows that he perceived himself as more efficient in a practical sense, a skill that he was likely to have acquired from his previous career in business:

She is an expert, but perhaps she doesn’t have a grip on reality. […] She doesn’t always have her feet on the ground. She will complicate it. She loves indexing stuff. That’s where she’s different from me. I’m always much more practical. An easier system is always the best. We have a different kind of knowledge. I look down at a hole in the ground and I don’t know what’s going on, it looks like dirt. And we have different branches of things that we know about and find interesting. [P12, M, WB, 1950’s].

In a similar kind of way, P15 made a comparison between her style of working to that of her curator colleague. In the same way as the previous account, this participant talked about how she was more efficient, in terms of tasking, time and money, which were traits that seemed to differ to that possessed by her colleague. This participant also expressed her concern about wasting money, and in the same way as before, was a perspective that was likely to have been linked to the culture of her previous career in finance:

She prefers me to do it in this way of working, which I don’t find as efficient as the way that I think I would do it, so we have a different way of looking at how to attack
a job. [...] I don’t like wasting time. [...] The only thing that concerns me, is they
don’t worry about wasting money. They’ve got a budget, and if something isn’t
quite right they go out and buy another one, and that’s something that you
wouldn’t find in the private sector. You would be made to account for how you’ve
spent your money more. I think their attitude to money is different to my attitude
to money. [P15, F, WB, 1940’s].

Furthermore, P19 explained that, due to her lack of knowledge about the museum
world, she might have been more efficient compared to professionals that did, in
terms of an efficiency that centred on being able to delegate tasks to others, but
also to think critically and in more business oriented ways:

There is no tendency for me to dabble in areas that I know nothing about. There
are areas where I have no input to, because I don’t have the expertise, because I
would be guilty of the ‘it’s easier to do it myself than get someone else to do it’.
Certainly, I think that creeps in to some people’s professional lives. You lose the
power of delegation. [...] I think the biggest impact of me having a different back-
ground is that I have brought the mind-set of that sounds fine but what if? [...] I
just think in a more practical, business-like things needed to run a museum. [P19,
F, WB, 1960’s].

And so, it was certainly the case that these seven participants were likely to have
made some important contributions to working practices, and the profession more
broadly, in the form of increased efficiency. Such efficiency was likely to have been
quite beneficial simply because it promoted increased performance, something dif-
ficult for the participants that had museum-specific backgrounds, because their in-
terests in museums may have meant that they did not work efficiently at times. For
instance, in chapter 5, it is presented that some of the participants had a hard time
being disciplined when it came to accessioning objects, because their judgements
were based on how much they liked the objects instead of the contributions they
made to collections. While six of these seven participants had interests in museums too, because they came from remotely different professional backgrounds, they seemed to have had more methodical ways of thinking and working, which was also to do with the roles that they occupied in them. For five of the participants, they were not specialist, museum roles. This means that perhaps specialist roles, such as those curatorial (the ones this discussion has mainly centred on), may have been the biggest risks in terms of decreased efficiency because the professionals that do them are so invested in them. This is an indication that professional roles are informed by professionals’ interests, an aspect that connects back to the analysis presented at the outset to this chapter.

In addition, in chapter 6 it is discussed that local authorities were pressuring the participants to behave in more commercial ways to generate income. In the discussion presented there, it is shown that the participants lacked the know-how to do this, and, instead, were reliant on their existing knowledge and skills. This skill set proved often not beneficial to enhancing the efficiency of their working practices in that context. With the startling absence of continuing professional development training to guide them – meaning that the participants were not being taught or learning about how to modify their working practices (which is especially important for resilience and sustainability, too), these seven participants with efficiency based cultural capital backgrounds could have certainly been highly useful for operating in effective and practical ways to generate income, given their enhanced understanding about business, financial and legal issues.

The Nature of the Profession

There are downsides to careers in the museum profession (Groninger, 2011; Holmes, 2006), including poor pay, short and temporary employment contracts,
lacking opportunities for promotion and training (the latter of which was discussed earlier). Most of the participants talked about these downsides. In addition to these, many of the participants discussed the problems that the unstable nature of local authority museum employment posed for their personal lives, such as taking leave, or making long term commitments, such as settling in a location, purchasing homes and starting families. On reflection of these issues, P10 said that:

If I was starting again now, I would definitely have my doubts. Especially when I have people coming to me asking me about jobs in museums. I do try to make them aware of how difficult it is, and that jobs tend to be short-term, temporary contracts. It’s very difficult. I wouldn’t say don’t go into it because there are still people that are passionate. And we need passionate people and enthusiastic people to try and keep museums going. [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].

Coupled with the above identified downsides, in this account from P9, it seems that instability in the profession had stunted risk taking and professional mobility within staff structures:

It’s the same faces at higher level and mid-level. They don’t change, it’s absolute stagnancy. […] I considered the next move up, at this level, the mid-career level, no-one’s budging. It’s too risky, everyone’s got mortgages and bills to pay. If they’re going to move it’s going to be for that big job, you know. The job. They’re not going to move because they fancy this or that. They’re waiting for the one museum job that they’ve been waiting for. I’ve seen the market absolutely stop. [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

Yet, despite these downsides, these participants maintained strong senses of dedication and loyalty to the profession, accompanied by their senses of gratitude for being employed and able to work in it (discussed in an earlier section). Although, their commitment to the profession was not necessarily what was going to keep
them in it, as it seemed to have undergone significant changes in response to austerity in the form of restructuring, which had affected staff structures and caused threats of and losses in professional staff, in response to redundancies, for example. Davies and Shaw (2013) argue that ‘a quarter to a third of professionals who gained work in museums will have left the sector within a decade’ (p.172). Based on these issues, it was the theme of job insecurity that was prominent in the accounts on restructures. For example, P10 spoke about restructuring and redundancies and what she had experienced, and how she was involved in these processes, in addition to the emotional uncertainty that they had caused her, which reflected the serious changes and problems that are currently endured by professionals in the local authority museum context:

My previous job has been deleted and [I've] had to apply for newly created posts and gone through a selection process and interviews to get the new job, which is very unsettling. You’re being interviewed by people you know and are going into competition with your colleagues. It’s very difficult. And, I’ve also been in the position of having to make people redundant as well. To be on the interviewing side, to choose between colleagues and there’s only one post. That’s very difficult. So, you feel uncertain about your own job while also having the feeling of worry about other people. [P10, F, WB, 1960’s].

In addition, that account shows the local authority’s pressure for its professionals to occupy more diverse and multifaceted roles. It was common for the participants to occupy several different roles under their primary position, and a result of this, many of them explained that although they had much variety in their daily working lives and routines, they were too thinly spread across various activities to give any one task sufficient attention. This had worsened because of restructures, redundancies and losses in professional staff as there were fewer individuals to share
workloads, and this theme was described in more detail by P29. This following account highlights the array of different responsibilities this participant and his colleagues were confronted with in response to there being fewer professionals available in his museum to share in the workload:

There’s a lot of hearsay about all the changing roles [and] there’s talks of your contract changing. [...] The jobs have been depleted, so we’re taking on those extra things. We are working with the public, so we’re promoting the collections, assisting with events, and dealing with buildings maintenance, and things that perhaps other departments once did. We’re dealing with security, and shop orders, attending more meetings and just having more of a hands-on general role, everyday goings on in the museum, and cataloguing. [P29, M, WB, 1970's].

Therefore, threats of redundancy were present, and, in addition to causing a sense of uncertainty in the profession, had caused higher workloads for the professionals that remained. These themes are exemplified in this next account from P17, who – similarly to the previous participant’s experience, had experienced losses in professional staff in her department, and with it, higher workloads among her team. In this account, the convergence of professional roles can be seen to have taken place:

We saw the cuts in the fact the marketing department is now much smaller to what it was when I first started. We’re now down by two posts. We now have a marketing manager job role that’s split between me and somebody else. [...] So, we’re down almost two roles, and people’s roles have been amalgamated into other roles. [...] Her role was basically lost due to redundancy and that meant that her role was basically deleted, so that was involved into everyone else’s work. [...] So, everyone’s roles have increased I think massively, but not necessarily in monetary terms, and time terms, there’s a lot more squashed into a lot less time. [P17, F, WB, 1970's].

For other participants, job insecurity did not always stem from restructures and
redundancies. For example, P18 described that it was through his museum’s potential move to trust status that his professional position was threatened. The move posed problems for its legitimacy, and his employment, because restructuring to incorporate his museum’s professional structure into the structure of the trust was one that was likely to question his position in the future:

> How my job will change in the future I’m not too sure at the moment. But certainly, like a lot of peoples’ have, the job changes, you get additional jobs, different tasks, you get more added to it, so I’m not too sure about the future in that sense, but it would certainly be a bit different to [the museum] being run by the local council. [P18, M, WB, 1950’s].

These findings show that due to restructures and redundancies, there were risks and actual losses in professional staff, which had caused professional convergence: fewer professionals taking on higher and more numerous workloads that were not necessarily completed with any great deal of efficiency. Not only does this threaten the legitimacy of professionals, as experts and authorisers of cultural knowledge, it affects the efficiency of their working practices, and, more broadly, the content and structure of their museums.

The convergence of professional roles means that the boundary lines that separate roles from one another were being lost. While this blurring means that there were breakdowns of professional hierarchies, this also seemed to mean a breakdown of clear and well-defined management structures. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that management plays a role in the structuration and homogenisation of organisational fields, as ‘the exchange of information among professionals helps contribute to a commonly recognised hierarchy of status, of centre and periphery that becomes a matrix for information flows and personnel movement across organisations’ (p.72). While the absence of well-defined management signals less influence
for homogenisation and in turn, isomorphism, it might at the same time signal a lack of efficiency in museum work. These issues are reflected in the fact that most of the participants were managers as well as curators, and this appeared to have worsened since austerity. For instance, as this account from P9 evidences, management was carried by various professionals at various levels:

Officers and curators and managers are doing just that, they’re managing and running services at various levels. And, you don’t have a specialist anymore. [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

Greater workloads, fewer professionals, and the absence of robust leadership and direction could cause problems for these institutions, and the profession more generally, if the problem continues to worsen. This poses problems for professionals’ abilities to research and develop their knowledge of the area in which they worked. For instance, there was not the time, or even the resources, to dedicate to object based, collections research that curator participants needed. P30 said that such research was rare in the early nineties, but rarer currently, evidencing that curatorial knowledge, and the practices that encourage the acquisition of it, had changed:

The people I met when I started working in museums in ‘91-’92, there were some real old-style curators who would know everything. I remember one archaeologist and he was the national expert [on a] particular type of Anglo-Saxon coin. Even then, that was unusual. I think now you don’t have the capacity for that level of research. [P30, F, WB, 1960’s].

These themes are further illustrated by this following account from P11. As a curator himself, P11 expressed how the nature of professional roles had changed and the implications that this had on the construction of knowledge, where he also positions himself, as a curator in the traditional object-centred sense, as a rarity,
which, similarly to the previous account, evidences that this specialism had changed over the years:

We realised the horror that nobody else knew what these bloody things were, because you’ll talk to people and they will say, I was brought in to do the [funding], I was brought in to upgrade the building. Whether we’re training up a future generation of people who are catalogue centred I don’t know. [...] I’m now unusual being a collections - rather than outreach-based curator. [P11, M, WB, 1950’s].

Such changes to traditional specialist knowledge were complicated further, because it seemed that older professionals that had it in abundance, who were those that had developed it over the course of their professional lives, were leaving the profession through retirement. This was detrimental, since their knowledge was being lost, as there were no handover procedures in place for succession planning. Many of the participants stated their concerns about these issues. For example, P10’s museum was going through a crucial period of upheaval and potential structural change, that was potentially detrimental to her own role, and its body of professional staff, for it was in negotiations to move to trust status. In this account, P10 expressed her concerns for the nearing loss of a particularly highly experienced curator in her museum, who was soon to leave to retirement, on the basis of which this participant asserts the underlying ramifications for losses in such knowledge:

Our curator of art is hugely knowledgeable. In the past, there has always been another person with the curators or conservators, who have also developed that knowledge and have built up knowledge and experience from the curator. But we’re so reduced now. [There’s] nobody to pass on that skill and expertise and knowledge. [...] I think about all the experience that’s going to go with him. I think this applies to all the curatorial and collections staff. [...] I do worry about succession planning in the profession. [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].
This participant went on to speculate how succession planning might have been achieved, but the problem with her suggestion is that it was an unlikely possibility because there were fewer members of staff available to handover to, which makes it difficult to implement handover procedures:

The person coming up for retirement can record things and write things down, and there’s clear incentive as to who is going to take over. I mean, if someone is going to retire, then perhaps recruit somebody early, so there is a much longer handover period before that person actually retires. I think with succession planning, you’d have to have some overlap regarding the person coming in and the person who’s leaving. [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].

Furthermore, this participant perceived that professional resilience was related to the sharing, capture and preservation of knowledge. This suggests that, firstly, resilience exceeds the roles of professionals, for it is the information that is important to protect. And, secondly, in order to become resilient, professionals must adapt to the needs of their institutions:

Unless you’ve got those softer skills, of translating that information and knowledge, or at the very least, documenting it for future generations rather than keeping it in your own head, then I think your individual resilience as a museum professional is challenged. [P24, M, WB, 1970’s].

Arts Local Authority England, the Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland and the Northern Ireland Museums Local Authority have a collaborative Accreditation Scheme that the participants’ museums were accredited under. ‘The Accreditation Scheme sets nationally agreed standards for museums in the UK. It defines good practice and identifies agreed standards, thereby encouraging development’ (Arts Council England, 2016), however the Accreditation Scheme was ultimately a beneficial one. For example, this next account from P9 highlights that the scheme
is one that helps professionals to work by:

In terms of accreditation, such as with ACE, that’s the usual box-ticking exercise that we need to be doing in order to maintain high standards. That’s different. I think that’s credible, useful, valuable and a good tool to work by. [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

In this following account, being an accredited museum seemed to have some advantages in that these kinds of procedures were inherent to the process of becoming accredited. While this does not ensure their survival any more than non-accredited museums (although many of the museums were accredited):

We are a fully accredited museum, so we have jumped through the hoops and everything that you need to do to become an accredited museum. [...] It’s reviewed every five years under the Arts Local Authority. [...] If you tick all the boxes you still remain an accredited museum. It does open-up channels of funding. [P8, M, WB, 1950’s].

That account shows that the Accreditation Scheme may have opened-up greater funding opportunities, but there were a few themes that emerged in the data to indicate that the participants had to adhere to the criteria inherent to the scheme, which can be perceived to have encouraged them into working in similar ways, and in accordance to the same organisational norms, and it can be perceived as a source of isomorphism, potentially causing the participants’ practices, as well as the content and structure of their museums, to homogenise and become similar:

You just have to make everything predictable and as safely recorded as possible. If the museum closed I would like to think the collection went somewhere with their records and that would be what an accredited museum meant to do, but you don’t know. If it closes and I’m not here anymore, then they’ve got no control. So, there’s no certainties in life really are there. [P30, F, WB, 1960’s].
Resilience and sustainability are two key words that are buzzing around the museums sector at this time (e.g. Harvey, 2016; Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2015). The participants, and their institutions had survived, an indication, perhaps, that there were – to some extent, at least, resilient and sustainable. These themes are yet to be discussed in the findings chapters, although to briefly mention here, building community and councillor support were methods through which the participants used their agency to build resilience and sustainability for their museums. All of the participants, however, expressed their concerns for the future of their museums, and the accounts are firmly positioned against the notion that austerity was likely to continue for them. The accounts, however, did not convey that the participants had clear ideas about what resilience and sustainability looked like. While generating income and fostering support were the dominant ways in which they sought longevity for their museums, there with little else in the way of direction, planning and progress. Perhaps this absence of findings is exemplar of the current situation, and them simply now knowing how to go about securing the future of their museums in other ways.

In summary, professionals being lost to the profession posed serious problems for knowledge, an aspect highlighted in the discussion on curators. This was significantly detrimental at a context where there were existing constraints on time and resources to devote to training, and, combined with a lack of continuing professional development training opportunities in general, posed considerable problems for the efficiency, legitimacy and identity of professionals as experts (Tatsi, 2011), and caused ambiguity in the roles of professional staff, such as curators managing museums, taking on more hybrid, yet demanding roles, moving into the future. With fewer professionals likely to have been present in the profession, the implications this had for succession planning were posed. These factors combined
perhaps indicate that there will be an even greater reliance on volunteer outsourcing.

Volunteers

Volunteers are a large presence in museums in the UK, and commonly outnumber paid, professional staff (Groninger, 2011; Holmes, 2006, 2007). For instance, Groninger (2011) argues that ‘by the 2000’s, volunteers assisted in 92% of museums, and tripled the size of the museum workforce. And, at the time, there were 12,500 paid employees’ (p.23). Therefore, volunteers are highly valuable to the operation of museums (Groninger, 2011; Holmes, 2006, 2007) and this was reflected in the data. All the participants said that they used volunteers in their museums, and, in most cases, they were used extensively (commonly in the hundreds). Additionally, in the accounts it was depicted that dependence on volunteers had increased since austerity, in response to losses in professional staff and to the temporal, fluctuating nature of local authority museum employment. However, increases in volunteer numbers seemed to affect the internal efficiency of the work carried out in museums.

There is the argument that the prevalence of volunteers in the sector means that the profession is becoming increasingly ‘unreliable and unprofessional’ (Groninger, 2011) and this was a theme discovered from the analysis. For example, this account from P5 depicted that volunteers, although valuable in terms of manpower, had the potential to threaten the status and legitimacy of professionals, and the nature of the work that they carried out. As this participant expressed, and as chapter 6 examines in depth, sometimes volunteers were highly knowledgeable and effective in certain working contexts:

You couldn’t do the work without volunteers, because of the nature of how the
employment works, and because people are trying to save money here, there and everywhere, there’s less of an inclination to offer employment, where you could get away with a group of volunteers doing the job. Volunteers are critical to modern museums. [...] In some organisations, a volunteer can do just as good a job as a professional. And, it does dilute museum work, because it makes professionals seem less vital to any role. [P5, M, WB, 1990’s].

In addition, and in a similar kind of way, P29 stated that volunteers had the potential to threaten paid, professional employment and question the status, legitimacy and identity of professionals, a concern that had caused this participant some emotional turmoil in terms of the ramifications that this had for his own role. It shows that volunteers, in addition to restructures and redundancies, were a source of job insecurity:

It could be that there’s none of us with these talks about volunteers. It’s a case of which ones are keepers and which ones are ready for redundancy? These things do go through my head a bit, but I am a bit paranoid. [P29, M, WB, 1970’s].

And lastly, P12 expressed his concerns about the future of museums. While one of them was closures, which are discussed in chapter 6, the other was volunteers. This account posits the irrelevance of professional staff against the context of volunteer outsourcing. In this account, the relevance of professionals is only asserted on the basis of their symbolic legitimacy and legal representativeness for the purpose of an insurance policy:

Staying open and professional staff, because it’s all done by volunteers. If the council decide we’re going to close you and get rid of you lot, they could leave the displays exactly as they are. [...] So, they could actually have an exhibition up here but nobody working. They could actually get volunteers to run it. But, they actually have to have paid people here for the insurance. It would be a great shame if the
Most of the participants described the downsides to volunteer outsourcing. These descriptions ranged from a lack of time and resources to devote to them, which caused the inability to train and supervise them, or the space to have them. These issues posed problems for efficiency and maximising the use of volunteers and the knowledge and skills that they had to offer. For example, the participants described that volunteers were not able to do certain tasks, or did those tasks poorly, because they were not properly trained. While volunteers received local authority training, mainly in the form of those based on health and safety, they lacked museum-specific training, and, therefore, legitimacy. Because of this, for the most part, their activities in the museums were restricted to generic tasks, however, not in all cases. The volunteers portrayed tended to be highly educated individuals, and, in terms of their backgrounds, they had different forms of cultural capital. Although, chapter 5 evidences that, sometimes, volunteers were able to inform the construction of museum content (displays and outreach) and made performance enhancing contributions on the basis of the knowledge and skills that were likely to have been acquired in their previous, professional careers (in chapter 5, it is shown that an ex head teacher was particularly useful and efficient at helping alignment to the national curriculum).

These findings are insightful. However, more up-to-date academic research on the subject is needed, as there is little known about the roles and influences of volunteers’ in institutions, or even their motivations for volunteering (and their volunteering in particular sectors), or even the structure and organisation of this unpaid vocation (Groninger, 2011; Holmes, 2006, 2007). In the literature that does exist on the subject, the focus of attention is that volunteer outsourcing should not become a cover-up for labour exploitation (Feinstein & Cavanaugh, 2009; Holmes, 2006,
While this issue is important, the impact of volunteer outsourcing on working practices, and its potential to detrimentally affect the efficiency of them and the legitimacy and identity of paid professional staff, need to be explored. These findings on volunteers also add a new dimension to DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) theory – that unpaid vocations and the volunteers that do them, can also affect the profession, working practices and, thus, the content that emerges from institutions (as chapter 5 shows) in small scale, but influential ways.

Summary

The participants had remarkably similar backgrounds, in terms of their interests, volunteering and training. Off the back of these findings, the discussions have suggested that while they varied slightly on the grounds of their trajectories and efficiency, they were likely to have similar rationales and practices, which are findings that indicate that homogenisation and, thus, isomorphism, were likely to be present among their institutions. This is explored in the next chapter. This chapter, though, ends by drawing some important conclusions about the current state and status of the profession.

Local authority museum professionals are individuals who had certain capital, resources and life chances that enabled them to become employed in these institutions. These have been discussed in-depth in this chapter. There is a correlation between these forms of cultural capital and the demographics. Based on the evidence presented, local authority museum professionals tend to be white, British and middle-class. This raises concerns about cultural diversity in the profession. For example, Davies (2007) argues that there needs to be more individuals from ethnic-minority backgrounds, poorer backgrounds, more disabled people and more men, present in the museum profession. While there was an even distribution of male
and female participants, an indication that gender may be less of a concern, qualitative research is needed on why individuals from marginalised backgrounds are not currently represented in the museum profession. The reasons could be related to individual interests or problems accessing the profession (see Davies, 2007; Davies & Shaw, 2013; Sandell, 2000).

As local authority museum professionals are trained so specifically and the stark absence of professional training present, there is a knowledge and skill gap about how to respond to the current political and economic climate. In this sense, then, lacking know-how is a barrier to effective change (Tuck et al., 2015). If such training is provided, one important consideration needs to be made to avoid a standard one-size-fits all approach to the funding environment: institutions have specific needs and training must be specific to meeting them. Only then can resilience and sustainability for local authority museums be found. These themes are explored in the proceeding chapters.

The findings reveal much about the working lives and realities of local authority museum professionals in the context of austerity policy and the funding cuts, insights that are much needed in the literature. For example, the local authority museum profession had been affected by restructuring and losses in staff, which had threatened succession planning and expertise in the profession and spurred an up-and-coming generation of overworked generalists. With fewer posts available due to lacking funds, austerity has pushed-up the levels of success required from applicants, resulting in high levels of competition for them. This had helped to cause homogeneity in the profession. The profession, though, was generally unstable, asides from austerity. The nature of its employment is based on short-term, temporary contracts and low pay, something the participants considered an obstacle for long-term future planning. Combined with the stark absence of succession
planning, a generational disparity between older, more experienced professionals and their younger counterparts, with more hybridised and generic professional roles, has been left. In addition, with higher levels of volunteer outsourcing, which was high, but now is even higher in response to austerity due to fewer professional staff, there was the potential that the quality and efficiency of the work emerging from the museums, and the legitimacy of paid local authority museum professionals, were at risk.
5. Influences on Museum Work

Introduction

The findings from the previous chapter suggested that the participants had strong museum identities that stemmed from the cultures, trajectories, discourses and experiences that were present in their portrayals of their backgrounds. And so, based on the evidence presented from the analysis, normative pressures were likely to have shaped the rationales and practices of the participants in homogenising ways, and caused them, and perhaps, the content of their museums, to become similar (but this also depends on the other isomorphic pressures that were present, along with the participants’ practices conforming to them). Consequently, this would mean that the content of their museums was an area in which isomorphism took place. This chapter explores these possibilities, and it starts with collections policies.

Collections Policies

The museums were quite similar in terms of the content of collections. This is because they were local authority museums that thematically capitalised on local history (which was a sampling criteria that was discussed in chapter 3, ‘Research Methods’). This focus on local history meant that the museums told the stories of their towns and communities through the objects contained in their collections. These kinds of local history objects ranged from textiles to tools and machinery, which were relevant to, and often used, in the towns and communities in the past. Therefore, the stories that these museums, and their collections, told, deviated away from grand narratives (grand discoveries and achievements) in favour of local living. While this did not mean that they were less captivating for doing so, it did mean
that they were largely similar in terms of the content of their collections, and sub-
sequently, their displays and outreach (which are discussed in later sections) by
capitalising on the local history theme.

Although, this is not to suggest that towns and communities are homogeneous (for
instance, it was identified in the literature review that local audiences have diverse
expectations). However, it is to suggest that the museums represented their towns
and communities in similar ways, which rendered these towns and communities
similar to one another. For example, the museums took on and represented the
identities of their towns and communities because they were publicly-funded, pub-
lic-service institutions (see Lawley, 2003; Museums Association, 2017b), and, thus,
were obliged to do so. With specific focus on the collections of the museums, they
strongly centred on objects pertaining to the local history theme, which was be-
cause they were built on, and added to, via public donations, and this was a process
of acquisition that was written into their collections policies.

There was little evidence to suggest that the participants could actively acquire and
select objects (which means that their collections were formed on the basis of what
was given to them as opposed to what was sought. Although, there were also not
the resources to acquire either). However, the findings showed that donors (local
community members) gifted similar kinds of local history themed objects to the
museums, causing their collections to become quite similar to one another. Indeed,
the accounts portrayed that the problem with public donations was that high num-
bers of local history objects were received in the museums’ collections, leading
them to become full of duplicate objects. P14 spoke about how her collections’
policy had been reworked to control the number of objects in her museum’s col-
lection. The interesting aspect to this account is that P14 exhibits her awareness
that her museum’s collection was similar to those of surrounding museums:
We’ve got a lot of replicas, a lot of forged iron, around forty-five times. So, definitely, now, if people bring things in, our policy now is if they have any connections to the local community. And, if they don’t have any connections, then we can’t take them. And, we have to fill out forms. We need the name of the donor, and they need to be catalogued as soon as they go in to the collection. So, it’s really important to do that because you end up with a collection like ours at the moment, and you don’t even know what you’ve got a lot of the time. And, some of it’s amazing and some of it’s no good, or everybody’s got one. [P14, F, WB, 1980’s].

Although, that account also conveys that only accepting objects that were connected to the local history theme was likely to have caused that museum’s collection to contain even higher amounts of duplicate objects, and, resultanty, to a much stronger degree, centre on the local history theme. This means that collections policies were a source of pressure and constraint that homogenised the museums’ collections to the local history theme. Collections policies, therefore, can be perceived as barriers to diversity flourishing in the collecting practices of the participants, and, subsequently, the collections of their museums. P23 recognised that it was difficult to diversify beyond the local history prerogative, an issue that, according to this account, appears to be embedded into the identity of his museum:

Because of the nature of our collections are focused on [the town’s local] history, we couldn’t really diversify beyond that without radically re-shifting the entire focus of the museum. [P23, M, WB, 1990’s].

Public donations may have also not been relevant to the specific local contexts in which the museums were situated, and, in turn, not relevant to the museums that they were given to. This issue is exhibited in this following account from P21. It conveys that not being able to actively acquire and select objects meant that there was a reliance on objects that were donated, which do not necessary make valuable
contributions to collections and the stories that they were able to coherently tell:

We are aware that we have got collections that are not particularly enhancing our offer. Why would we have an offer of Normandy bee-keeping equipment? Maybe there’s somewhere in Normandy that would be better or could use it better. We have to rely on donations which obviously fall in, you do tend to get some nice things sometimes, though you can’t necessarily pick what you’re offered. [P21, F, WB, 1960’s].

That account suggests that donations might not have been an efficient or diversifying form of acquisition. The participants’ agency and collecting practices to actively seek and acquire objects were prevented by collections policies. Their collecting practices also lacked the ability to exercise control, which is contrary to the way that Elsner and Cardinal (1994) suggest that collecting practices should be. They argue that collecting ‘is not simply to own or to control the items one finds, it is to exercise control over existence itself through possessing every sample, every specimen, every instance of an unrepeateable and nowhere duplicated series’ (p.3). In addition to donations, controlled acquisition may have also been hindered by the participants’ own interests in objects, along with storage constraints, two features that can be identified in this account from P11:

You need to have a structured way of looking at things because you’re trying to build up a collection, [...] on account of what they are as opposed to how much you like them. [...] In terms of scale and size, and the constraints on what you’ve currently got, and the feeling of overfull shelves, people are not adventuring on unusual. [P11, M, WB, 1950’s].

That account suggests that the cultural backgrounds of museum professionals colour their collecting practices, indicating that their similar rationales and practices could be forces for the homogenisation of their collections. Although, ‘the more
interesting dream is to resist the criteria inculcated by one’s generation and class, and to collect against the grain – to wriggle out of belonging to an established set. Sometimes one collects so as not to submit to social expectation or to “belong” [...] Collecting can also be an attempt to challenge the norm’ (p.3). In the local authority museum context, though, it certainly did not seem that the participants had much agency or choice to collect (irrespective of whether they liked them or not) and be driven by the curiosities of the collector (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994). Collections policies outlined the procedure of acquisition, constraining their practices in ways that caused the collections of their museums to similarly centre on the broad and generic local history prerogative.

It can be considered that the participants were limited by the public-facing identities of their museums, and their obligation to accept the donations gifted by members of their communities, the latter of which was embedded into their collections policies. Therefore, with the focus on the local history theme, there was little diversity to be had in the collections of the museums. (Although, there was the potential to diversify within the local history narrative. For example, greater inclusion of ethnic and minority group histories and portrayals. This is discussed later in the section on partnering, collaborating and co-curating). Although, Harrison (1997) states that, above all else, visitors want museums with strong local identities. She states, ‘their greatest potential ‘attractivity’ is rooted in strongly expressing their sense of distinctive “localness”, in all of its dimensions [...] that is what tourists want to see’ (Harrison, 1997: 36-37). However, the evidence has shown that, while the museums did have strong local identities, it was the cause and reason why they were so similar, which renders them as not particularly distinctive at all (and therefore, perhaps not an effective tool for boosting their attractivity). The similarity of the museums is further illustrated in the following discussions.
Deaccessioning

There were benefits to being owned and managed by the local authorities, and two of them were that they provided the housing, funding and support of local services (but these findings are discussed in the next chapter, 6). However, in a time of austerity, such provisions were changing. Some of the participants described that their local authorities were reclaiming the buildings that they housed their collections in. Austerity, combined with lacking storage space, appeared to be the two main protagonists for the local authorities reclaiming their outlying stores. Due to the need to empty these stores, the participants were deaccessioning objects from their collections to downsize and create space. Accompanying a sense of unsettlement, there was uncertainty about whether new stores were being issued in replacement of those lost.

While accessioning is the formal acceptance of objects into collections, which accompanies provenance, deaccessioning is the reverse. Deaccessioning was a coercive pressure that stemmed from the local authorities’ requirements for the participants to undertake the process, although it was one that the accounts portrayed they were not particularly comfortable with doing (as it conflicted with their professional values and integrity). The participants spoke about how they were uncomfortable with deaccessioning in general, and, while the pressures to deaccession were firmly exercised by the local authorities, their professional ethics and codes of practice were founded on the simple premise that it was the responsibility of museum professionals to acquire, safeguard, conserve and display objects (Vergo, 1989a). Therefore, their professional identities and historical, cultural and social responsibilities were founded on the assumption that museum professionals are safe-keepers of objects (Burcaw, 1997). Consistent with these findings, the Mu-
seums Association (2015a) finds that in response to austerity, museum professionals ‘are being forced to make decisions that threaten the quality of their work and ultimately their public value’ (p.17). For instance, P18 expressed the dangers associated with deaccessioning, especially in terms of public perception:

I think it’s dangerous, actually, because people like to donate things for a purpose and for them to be kept forever. And I think it’s a dangerous thing you can do, because it reduces peoples’ confidence in you. [P18, M, WB, 1950’s].

Therefore, deaccessioning posed problems for the identities, missions and public perception of the museums, and the roles of their professionals. Indeed, in a similar way to the previous account, P10 explained that her focus of concern was the perception of her local community on the issue, and her museum’s social and cultural obligation to keep objects in a permanent and fixed state:

You have to take into account how the museum is perceived by the local community. Objects mean a different thing to museums than in the past, such as keeping them in perpetuity. So, there’s this whole social publicity thing you’ve got to think about. [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].

While ‘financially motivated disposal involves selling objects from collections to raise funds’ (Museums Association, 2015a: 17), the deaccessioning that the participants were undertaking was not of the financially motivated variety. This is because there were strict deaccessioning procedures inherent to the collections policies that governed their practices, which meant that the provenance of objects had to be traced, and the objects given back to the original donors that gifted them. Alternatively, the other option was to gift objects (on temporary or permanent loan) to surrounding local museums. However, these were not straightforward (or necessarily efficient or diversifying) processes. For example, object provenance was not
always available, and it was a fragmented and elusive activity to locate and trace the information that was needed to contact original donors. On explaining how to obtain object ownership, P10 for example, suggested that documentation did not always exist, which made the process of deaccessioning rather difficult (especially as it would have needed to be continually repeated for each individual object). This account further shows that there was another layer to collections policies and the process of deaccessioning, which was having to acclimatise objects in other museums if they were to be given away:

You have to check the documentation and check the ownership. Our collections go back to 1912, and some of the documentation over the years has been non-existent. We have items in our collections that we don’t know if they were loaned to the museum, and there might be objects that don’t fit into our collections policy, so we don’t know if we’re in a state of abolition to dispose of it because it might not be ours. We’d need to find the original owner and that’s difficult. But, once you have got a standard of ownership, it’s a case of trying to find another museum to take the object and acclimatise it. [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].

Collections policies were also inefficient because they hindered the process of deaccessioning, and the two processes together were counterproductive. For example, P14 outlined the arduous process of having to retrace each individual object to the individuals who donated them, which was a research laden task, and one that seemed to make object disposal particularly slow. In addition, this account portrays that collections policies were coercive pressures that firmly influenced how this participant (and her colleagues) were required to follow specific procedures when deaccessioning objects from their museum’s collection:

We can’t get rid of things unless we re-contact the people who donated it, if that’s possible. We should have the records for that, so then they decide what they would
like to do. You can’t just get rid of things. You have to make sure that they’re dis-
posed of properly and that the donor is contacted. We’re going through matching
the objects to the information that we’ve got at the moment. [P14, F, WB, 1980’s].

In addition, as that account depicts, it was the decision of donors to decide if they
wanted objects back, for, if they did not, there was a chance that they would have
remained in the collection that they were in (unless gifted to surrounding muse-
ums). These factors highlight the highly complicated process of deaccessioning
that supressed the agency and deaccessioning practices of the participants. Con-
sequently, the participants lacked decision-making and control in the process of
deaccessioning (similarly to the process of collecting). For example, P10’s local au-
thority was reclaiming the building that part of her museum’s collection was
housed in, and this account highlights the difficulties and highly procedural process
that entailed emptying her museum’s store. The local authority’s pressure for this
participant to do this was a coercive one:

[The store] is where we store all of our large industrial equipment, such as machines
and things to do with the ship building industries and local industries in the city.
That’s a worry. To empty a store, you have to go through a collections rationalisa-
tion process. You can’t just dispose of things willy-nilly. You have to follow the dis-
posals tool kit and do things properly. I think there’s a lack of understanding with
senior management because we can’t just dispose of a lot of items very quickly. It
[takes] time and resources. [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].

The accounts conveyed that the participants were giving objects to surrounding
museums as a way to navigate rigid collections policies and the process of deac-
cessioning. This giving of objects was described as temporary or permanent in na-
ture (via loaning objects to other museums), but the giving itself was contingent
on whether objects were received by professionals and into the collections of other
museums. For example, P8 described the act of attempting to give an object in this following account. Accredited museums were offered objects first, suggesting that accredited museums and local authority museums with accredited status were likely to have been especially similar and particular sites of isomorphism due to the higher administrative restraints at work in them:

Where these objects are offered first to accredited museums. So, if you are an accredited museum, you get first pick on these objects, if you want them. And these objects are given away. There’s no charge for them, you tend to give these objects away to anybody that wants them. [...] We might try to dispose of some of those larger objects to other museums because we’re never going to be able to do anything with them ourselves, but they may be of use to some other museum, and that would be just transferred into their ownership. They were given to us and we will pass them on to another museum in the hope that they could do something with it that we can’t. [P8, M, WB, 1950’s].

In addition, while that account denotes that the giving process may have meant that other museums could have made greater use of objects, it may not have necessarily helped in terms of assisting in their diversification if the museums were accredited, and if local authority museum objects were being given to other local authority museums (because the collections of the museums were largely homogeneous. If diversity was to be had, other museum types with more diverse collections would need to be involved, and be the ones doing the giving to local authority museums). This giving would have meant that similar types of local history themed, local authority museum objects were being passed around local authority museums, helping to homogenise their collections, and could have also homogenised the collections of other local museum types (by encouraging their collections to focus on the local history prerogative). In either case, this giving was likely to have been a firm source for isomorphism to take place among local museums. More
specifically, this isomorphism could have been of the mimetic variety, but the kind where the participants were not aware of the effects that their practices were having on their collections and broader content of their museums, but instead, perceived giving objects away as other museum professionals wanting objects and being able to do more with them.

The participants more generally were aware that their collections were similar to those of surrounding museums. In this following account, for instance, P1’s awareness that his museum’s collection was similar to those of other surrounding museums is present. This account is further evidence that, due to collection policies, similar types of local history themed objects were being passed around local museums, which shows that the act of giving was a protagonist for isomorphism to take place:

I realised that I’ve got loads of tools, and then the penny dropped, that so had everybody else. I gave it to [a museum] […] They’re not advertising it because anyone else wants it, they’re advertising it because they’ve got to, as part of their terms of deaccessioning. [P11, M, WB, 1950’s].

Therefore, through the act of giving, that account shows that collections policies were contributing to local museum collections (but those of the local authority kind particularly) becoming similar to one another, and were sources of coercive isomorphism. But, collections policies were also constraining pressures in terms of the ways that the participants were able to acquire and deaccession objects from the collections of their museums. In addition, deaccessioning and the act of giving objects to other local museums were protagonists for mimetic isomorphism. On the other hand, however, collections policies (akin to local authority policies, discussed in the following chapter, 6) can be perceived more positively. This is since they ensure that objects are safely and procedurally acquired, handled and disposed of
(and that professionals uniformly conform to and enforce such standards), albeit in not necessarily the most efficient ways. Uncertainty was present, though, with the emptying of stores and deaccessioning, disrupting the care and sustainability of collections. This raises questions about how collections should be looked after and maintained in the long-term, at times of crisis and volatility.

**Online Collections**

With donated (local history themed) objects being given to the museums (and passed around local museums), combined with the inability to effectively deaccession objects due to the procedures entailed in collections policies, the process of deaccessioning did not seem to effectively save space, and the museums’ collections were also likely to have remained in the same form. In addition, and more broadly, collections policies were counterproductive to working – the practices entailed in acquiring, deaccessioning and gifting objects were not particularly efficient, for they were highly regulated and constraining, time consuming, and collections may not have subsequently met the individual needs of the museums (e.g. they were similar, and the donated objects that were acquired may have possessed displaced object context and narratives that, while based on the local history theme, were not specific to the communal and geographical location of the museums. Due to lacking controlled acquisition, objects were also produced in duplicate quantities). There was the added problem of lacking storage space (and the added problem that some of the local authorities were reclaiming outlying stores), which seemed to amplify the pressures to dispose of objects and give them to other museums as a way around collections policy constraints. These processes convey a circle of homogenising forces that caused the collections of the museums to become similar, and are evidence for isomorphism among the museums.
Those above-mentioned issues pose problems for the sustainability of the museums’ collections (discussed in the previous section), and also their accessibility. Appearing to exhibit some awareness and concern about the future of their museums’ collections, many of the participants spoke about how they were putting their collections online. For example, this account from P9 exemplifies this mission:

I mean the forward plan that the museum has outlines the collections targets that we really want to hit. We’re working on getting our entire collection on a digital database the most complete. That’s the big target for us from the collections side of things. [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

While putting their collections online was not their solution to making them more sustainable, it was a way that these participants expressed that they were attempting to reach larger audiences to raise greater public awareness about their museums’ collections to give them, and their institutions, a greater social presence and generate public support. This is similar to them building local community and councillor support (discussed in the next chapter, 6). It was when they were building sources of support that the participants’ agency seemed to appear. But, the portrayed limits to online agendas were based on the participants’ perceptions that their museums were fundamentally physical institutions. For instance, P17 expressed some hesitation about her museum becoming a virtual one, but also said that technologies could also serve useful functions as they enhanced, rather than prevented, strategies of communication:

We are a museum, so we’re about 3D dimensional objects, and we’re about looking at the thing and going – ‘wow! That is an amazing thing’. [...] New technologies take away from that, I find. I don’t mind technologies that supplement that, like the app where you can stand in front of an object and go: ‘that’s amazing’ and pull-up additional information. I don’t want to go down the route where you just have a
Furthermore, P27 said that there were limits to wanting to become an online presence, although she was in a unique situation with her museum, for it had been forced to close (because the local authority reclaimed the museum’s space and did not, for whichever reason, provide another). The interesting aspect to this participant’s situation is that she and the professionals from her museum were outreaching their museum’s collection in their local community by doing temporary, mobile exhibitions at various public venues and events. (This museum – and its closure, are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, 6). As this participant’s museum did not have a physical presence, an online one was likely to have been particularly significant, and cost-effective, for establishing its profile:

Museums, in my experience, tend to be very long-term institutions. [...] In the last day, we’ve managed to get a lot of our collection up online. [...] People were talking about us becoming a virtual museum. And I’m really wary of that, because, to me, that sounds like just a website, and that’s not a museum. It’s just a case of constantly reiterating what we are and talking about projects that we do and places that our collections are. [P27, F, WB, 1960’s].

That account also positions the centrality of museums as physical institutions. While putting collections online was a way that the participants were building the profile of their museums, with the potential to serve a wider advocacy-based function, closures and moves to trust status (discussed in the following chapter, 6), similarly to deaccessioning, had the potential to threaten the museums’ collections in ways that raises concerns about their sustainability (with reference to what happens to the meaning of objects when they are decontextualised from their museums’ original governance and mission and potentially given new meanings in new organisational and institutional contexts).
Physical Barriers

To provide a brief description, the museums were generally fairly small museums that contained quite high numbers of large wooden cabinets filled with objects pertaining to the local history theme (which was discussed earlier). Most of the participants, in their own ways, described the physical constraints of the buildings that their museums were housed in, which, in most cases, were buildings that housed their local authorities. These descriptions ranged from poor external sign-posting and venue location, to restricted operating hours, and the inability to make physical modifications to their buildings, which was an issue that posed problems for accommodating physically disabled visitors. The latter point conflicted with the participants’ abilities to accommodate those with physical disabilities, by not being able to modify or make more user friendly the physical barriers that prevented disabled visitors from experiencing museums (Hetherington, 2000, Reichel and Brandt, 2008).

Furthermore, many of the participants said that their museums were old fashioned (with particular reference to display conventions) because they had not changed in many years. Change also seemed to be an unlikely possibility in the future in terms of their collections – for policy-oriented reasons that have been outlined in this chapter, but also because there were evident physical constraints that thwarted the participants’ agency and abilities to innovate and diversify the content of their museums, such as displays (in terms of how they were curatorially constructed and manipulated). For instance, this account from P8 provides a revealing glimpse into these constraints, and how they were barriers to change:

[The museum] is really rather an old-fashioned museum in the way that objects are displayed. [...] It’s a part of how it’s always been done. [...] The problem with a
small museum is that you haven’t got scope to change things around, anyway. You’ve got very limited room. You’ve got cases everywhere, full of objects. So, we’re stuck with that, really. We have to follow that and what’s happened in the past, really. We’ve made as much use as possible from the room that we’ve got. We haven’t got sufficient storage facilities to take things out of the museum and put them in store. So, with the museum displays, quite a lot of the objects are on permanent display in the museum, so that acts as another store as well. And the old display cases were taken from when the museum first opened. [P8, M, WB, 1950’s].

The participants were similarly physically constrained by the buildings and display conventions in which their museums were housed, then. In other areas, the museums were similar, too. The text panels and labels that accompanied the display of objects followed similar conventions to one another, for they were short, printed descriptions of the objects that were positioned adjacent to them, and were the most consistent stylistic convention that the museums unanimously followed. While this means that the museums were similar in terms of their content, text panels and labels are, in practical and communicative senses, important, as they impose some kind of social order, but an order that enhances how museum content is received by visitors, which means that they can be perceived as essential. Indeed, museums operate on such an order, for, as Elsner and Cardinal (1994) argue, the practices of museum professionals, their collections and their institutions are ‘inherently collective’ (p.2). Each of them ‘thrives on classification, on rule, on labels, sets and systems’ (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994: 2). In addition to physical display constraints, another consideration that seemed to have influenced the construction of the museums’ displays was whether they were economical and sustainable, which were considerations that were present in this following account from P1, who talked about display maintenance over time:

It requires a lot of thought, in terms of what we can display, how it’s displayed,
whether it needs a lot of serious maintenance or not, and so on and so forth. That’s really where most of their work goes. [P1, M, WB, 1950’s].

Austerity played its part and seemed to have thwarted innovation and diversity, too. While there were fewer resources available for the participants to work with, many of the accounts depicted that they were particularly resourceful and able to work according to a budget. However, while these are practical skills, fewer resources appeared to have (to a greater degree) hindered innovation and diversity from emerging in the practices of the participants and subsequently, from manifesting in the content of their museums. This was because they were recycling existing content, instead of creating new and, perhaps, more innovative content, as this following account from P14 shows:

I’m quite apt for working in museums, anyway, and we try and do a lot of stuff on a budget. At the moment, I’m just redeveloping what we’ve got here rather than creating something new, if that makes sense. [P14, F, WB, 1980’s].

Not being able to create new content was likely to have kept the museums in similar forms due to the inability of their professionals to innovate and diversify them. Therefore, while the participants were resourceful, the effects of austerity can be interpreted to have contributed to maintaining similarity among the museums and subsequently, isomorphism proliferating among them. Austerity can be perceived to have therefore imposed its own kinds of homogenising pressures and outcomes. Moreover, the museums differed on the basis of their size (but were generally fairly small museums) and resources, yet, their professionals were physically and curatorially constrained in similar ways by the display conventions of their museums, which impinged on their agency and practices in ways that required them to conform in similar ways to the display context. This limited what they were able to do in them. However, in addition to collections policies and these here mentioned
physical barriers, most of the participants pursued similar topics of display (one of them being local history) and outreach agendas, in response to various isomorphic processes. These findings are explained in more detail in the discussions to follow.

**Topics of Display**

It’s also just doing things that are creative with your collections, and finding different ways of using them. And, again, that’s just about your people. If you’ve got talented, outward looking, creative people from different types of backgrounds or different points of view, it’s not homogeneous. [P24, M, WB, 1970’s].

Unlike what that account from P24 suggests, the evidence has shown that the participants (in terms of their cultures and backgrounds) were not diverse and neither were their collecting practices, the content of their collections, or the physical composition of their displays. In addition to these findings, the displays and the outreach that the participants were undertaking were largely similar too. The local history theme was the primary topic of display in the museums, and they told the stories of their towns and communities (which, based on the sample, were the stories of rural, local history, in the South East of England). Therefore, not to assume that all local museums (or their towns and communities) are homogeneous, the findings are specific to explaining this context. As well as being embedded in the identity of the museums’ collections, the local history theme was embedded in the museums’ topics of display. For example, this account from P5 showcases that his museum was centred on local history and telling the story of his town and community – comprising a large part of the practices of the professionals at his museum, which was a theme that was embedded in the identity of his museum:

It tells the story of [town] going back through time. [...] We have a variety of materials that focus on the history of the [local area]. We’re the only organisation telling
the story of [the local area], and we’re focused on fulfilling historical demands of the local community through exercises like answering public enquiries, developing peoples’ research and understanding and knowledge of the town. [P5, M, WB, 1990’s].

While the museums similarly capitalised on the local history topic of display, there were mixed accounts exhibiting the participants’ awareness of this. Some of the participants perceived that their museums’ displays were different from those of surrounding museums because they centred on the local history theme. This following participant, for instance, stated that his museum’s uniqueness stemmed from its ability to tell the story of his town and community:

I think it makes the museum unique, not in the special super sense; it makes it unique, simply by definition, because we reflect the local community. [...] A museum like ours and any other around here tend to be unique because they’re reflecting their own environment, which is unique. [P2, M, WB, 1950’s].

On the contrary, other participants perceived that their museums were similar to those in surrounding areas. For instance, this account from P16 showcases the lack of originality that this participant perceived his museum to have, precisely because it centred on the local history topic, which, he went on to describe, was standardised and old-fashioned (the latter a theme that was also mentioned in the previous section on physical barriers):

There’s nothing unique about my museum, I don’t think. It just deals with the local authority. It deals with the borough, and I think it’s a museum by numbers. I think if I were to visit the museum without knowing anything about it and not having worked there, then I would have turned around and thought that it’s a pleasant enough museum, but it’s a bit dated. [P16, M, WB, 1980’s].
In conjunction with the museums centering on the local history topic, many of them were focused on telling the stories of World War I or II (which, they told through the local history topic and stories of their towns and communities). For example, this account from P18 showcases that World War I and II were topics that were represented in his museum through the local history filter:

*It’s local history: The First World War, the Second World War, the home front. We’ve got displays on the royal observer core. A lot of it is local related because, with the air raids, a lot of the soldiers went from here. A lot of it is locally based and a lot of it is relevant to the [museum]. [P18, M, WB, 1960’s].*

Similarly to before, some of the participants seemed to be aware that the content of their museums, in terms of their centering on the World War I or II topics of display, were similar to those adopted by other surrounding museums. This account from P1, for example, conveys that his museum was not original:

*I don’t think there’s anything else particularly unique, because you can go to any industrial museum in the country and find bits of old tram line and [World War I and II] experiences and that sort of thing. You can find them everywhere. [P1, M, WB, 1950’s].*

There were various reasons why the museums were centred on the World War I or II topics of display. For example, in 2014, it was the centenary of The First World War (the participants were interviewed in 2015). This was a reason why some of the participants selected the topic of the world wars (first or second, depending on which objects that were the most relevant were available to represent them), because of the socio-cultural and historical significance of this anniversary. Due to this, the participants also perceived it as important to cover it. For example, this account from P2 is evidence of it being covered, in this and other museums, in
response to the centenary:

I mean, World War I. Obviously, everyone was doing it. And I felt, personally, that we should do it, and we just did it. I don’t feel any pressure from any other museum to do anything, really. We just do what we consider to be appropriate. If we all lived as hermits and came up with displays, intellectually you might be able to argue that they may be ok. [...] We would reflect in our displays what we feel would be appropriate to the local community. [P2, M, WB, 1950’s].

In addition, this following participant explained doing the World War II theme because it had been 60 years since its end. As the Second World War ended in 1945, this display was constructed in 2005 (or thereabouts). As it remained, for the most part display in the museum (albeit subject to minor modification), questions need to be raised about the contemporary relevance of the museum and its ability to keep up with current issues, debates and events. Again, similarly to the previous account, the connections between local history and the World War II theme are portrayed in this following account from P17 (but also, the role of the national curriculum, which may have been an influencing force to cover this display theme):

I’ve tried to do a national curriculum subject, but on a local level. So, we did an exhibition on sixty years since the Second World War. [...] It was great at the time for the schools, because it related to the national curriculum, but it was about how the Second World War was fought out in the borough, so it was about the local war industry and the local frontier. So, that was a school children, but everyone can enjoy, exhibition. [P17, F, WB, 1960’s].

Generally, though, it can be suggested that, because exhibitions last for differing periods of time, the similarity of display themes would lessen when the participants uninstalled them and changed their display topics. This means that the similarity of content among the museums would have appeared in the most coherent and
dense form around the time of the anniversary occasion, for instance, because the museums would have displayed their exhibitions at similar times. This means that, when it came to displays, their timing was important for similarity (and isomorphism) to take place among them. Although, there was evidence to suggest that the display topic of the world wars would need to soon change. The accounts conveyed that the knowledge of audiences was changing, suggesting that learning about these topics would cease to be close to their interests and, subsequently, cease to be relevant to their lives. These issues are consistent with Urry’s (1998) claim that how audiences remember the past changes in response to time, tradition, memory and travelling cultures. Similar sentiments are also echoed by Macdonald (2003), who recognises that the ‘identities of the past are becoming increasingly irrelevant in which new identities, and new identity formations, are being created’ (p.1). These themes are depicted in this account from P1:

It’s, if you like, a presentation of the past, because you’re not reminding people because they don’t remember. The number of people that can remember steam trains rumbling up and down is dwindling by the year. And most visitors are probably people that won’t remember them rumbling around. [...] I’d say we are in the same boat, you know, especially in terms of the Second World War stuff. There will be a time, not that far on now, when there won’t be anyone around to remember any of it at all. [...] I say this because I doubt there are people nostalgic about the Napoleonic wars now. If you have an interest in it, and if you put together a good museum site to cover it. But, if it’s not popular, it’s a case of how dreadful the Napoleonic wars were and that’s an academic enquiry. [P1, M, WB, 1950’s].

There were various reasons why the museums centred on telling the story of World War I or II, in addition to anniversary occasions. The museums focusing on the World War I or II topics of display could have been connected to their collections being able to represent these narratives (telling the stories of the world wars and
their effects on towns and communities were those that were able to be told via the strong local history focus of their collections). In addition, the participants’ decisions to capitalise on these topics could have been because of its connections to the national curriculum (and were therefore topics of display that appealed to, and was expected by, education professionals, such as teachers, for when they brought their students on field trips to museums), because councillors had particular tastes for some display themes, or because networking encouraged them to adopt similar ideas and practices, and engage in modelling (which are discussed in the sections to follow). The first of them to be discussed is the national curriculum.

**The National Curriculum**

As already discussed, the museums’ collections were limited in terms of the stories that they were able to tell due to their strong local history prerogative. The national curriculum can be perceived as a coercive influence that encouraged the participants to become even more specific, by covering certain topics of display and outreach in their museums that linked to the subjects that were covered under the national curriculum agenda. For instance, this account from P1 shows that the World War II theme was a subject that was covered in the national curriculum, and it also exhibits the participant’s perception that his museum was unique in its approach, when, in reality (as the evidence has shown), the museums were actually similar. In this account, teachers can also be perceived as a coercive pressure:

> From a school’s perspective, obviously, they cover The Second World War. So, you’ve got air raid shelters and pictures of buildings that were destroyed, and rescue equipment and this sort of thing. [...] This is what it was like in [the town] and what it was like to live in the [the town] in the 1940’s. So, it’s more [the town] at war and not The Second World War. It’s a very different approach. [...] I mean, the teachers who come ‘round, say: ‘yes, this is exactly what we need to see’. [P1, M,
Interestingly, some of the accounts depicted that volunteers, depending on their forms of expertise, assisted in certain areas of museum work that were relevant to their professional backgrounds. For example, this account from P5 shows that the volunteer in question, who was an ex-school head teacher, was a source of knowledge and information that assisted in tailoring museum content to the national curriculum. This volunteer, then, could have enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of engaging with the national curriculum:

I think they are important. They do bring things to an organisation. For example, we’ve got someone who was a head teacher. So, when it comes to talking about the curriculum and the things we can do here with the schools, she’s invaluable. [...] She brings a particular use and skill to us. [...] People come here to volunteer and it’s very often they have a skill or something they know about and come out about. [...] I think sometimes volunteers do bring a lot of things in that you might not get otherwise. [...] I think they have other experiences, like with the head teacher, and comes in with the national curriculum. [P5, M, WB, 1980’s].

Away from the display context, with outreach there was greater variety in relation to the ways that objects were used by the participants. Not confined to the display context, outreach enables museum content to play more fluid, dynamic and diverse roles (Simon, 2010). The participants tailored their outreach to children and school groups, in particular (as well as elderly and dementia groups, which are discussed in a later section), by providing them with talks, activities, workshops and clubs, containing various arts, craft activities and role playing. Similarly to the topics of display, outreach was often depicted in alignment to the national curriculum and meeting the educational needs of school children. In addition, the findings indicated that the outreach that was aimed at school groups was also commonly based
on the World War I or II topics. For example, this following account denotes the high numbers of school children that those at P12’s museum outreached to in reference to the World War I topic, which he seemed to perceive was a particularly original strategy (although based on the evidence presented in this chapter, it was not particularly):

I think, when it comes to the crunch of how important it is what we do, we’re the only ones that go in to schools. I mean World War I – we actually spoke to over 3,000 school children. [P12, M, WB, 1950’s].

Although, there seemed to be increased innovation (but not necessarily diversity) to be had in the ways that the World War I or II topics were engaged with, the further removed the projects and activities were from the display context (perceivably due to reduced physical barriers and display conventions). This account from P17, for instance, shows that with increased space came increased scale and perhaps more vibrant and entertaining ways of engaging audiences:

We have events and, once a year, we have a big community event, which is free. This year we did a big World War I re-enactment with a life size spy plane on the field opposite the museum, which was completely free to the community, but paid for by the friends. So, we’re very lucky. And, it’s amazing that the council is very supportive of us too. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

While a coercive pressure, the national curriculum was not a mandatory policy pressure, for museum professionals do not necessary have to cover it, although because the participants said that they wanted to cover it, it can therefore be perceived as a self-directed policy pressure. It is also likely that the local authorities encouraged the participants to cover the subjects that were part of the national curriculum, due to its connection to the education system, and its ability to attract and appeal to
educational groups and increase participation and visitation. However, the national curriculum was changing, and many of the participants raised their concerns about this issue, because they may not have been able to address the subjects covered under it, due to the strict local history emphasis of their collections (which, as already discussed, posed problems for being able to diversify beyond it). For instance, these issues were mentioned by P6, which is an account that also shows that the curriculum change did not seem to discourage her from wanting to cover it:

> With the way that it will be, it shouldn’t be that tricky, because the subjects covered in our collections will match-up with many of the areas of the curriculum. But, obviously, we’ll be a bit stuck when we come to ancient Greeks and Egyptians. [...] Where we can do, we will match up with what is in the curriculum, because it seems ridiculous not to. [P6, F, WB. 1980's].

In addition, P18 also spoke about the problems that were associated with the curriculum change. This account exhibits this participant’s inability to address the new topics that were covered under the curriculum, because of the institutional identity of his museum and the content of his museum’s collection:

> There’s a lot of people in the same position that say: ‘well we can’t cover the areas they’ve changed it to, especially the Romans and the ancient Britons, and things’. [...] We can’t do all of the curriculum offer that it does now, because it’s changed so much. I think they’ve got to understand that you can’t suddenly go and do the Romans, or something, because, if you haven’t got anything in that period, you can’t really get schools to do it. [P18, M, WB, 1960’s].

Therefore, the museums’ collections were, for the most part, confined to the local history theme, and as a result, could not diversify far beyond it, for these collections were centred on telling local history stories via their displays and outreach. Not
being able to cover the topics of the new curriculum could have negatively affected
the educational offering that the participants were able to provide educational pro-
fessionals, school groups and children. As a result, the World War I or II topics may
cease to be relevant, which poses problems for the relevance of the museums and
along with it, visitation to them. The problem was that there was little potential to
diversify (and with it, cover the new curriculum). Without the ability to actively col-
lect and acquire more diversifying kinds of objects, the risk is that the museums
were going to remain capitalised on the local history and World War I or II topics
and remain in similar forms. However, while the participants were significantly lim-
ited in their abilities to diversify, the curriculum change could have encouraged
them to become more reflexive about their practices, collections and the ways that
they were communicated, in response to finding ways to meet and accommodate
the new national curriculum agenda.

Therefore, it could have the potential to encourage them to represent more diverse
versions of history (in the most effective ways that they could, with the resources
that were available to them and enabled them to do this). As a consequence,
greater diversity could have been achieved (but at the same time, conformity to
the national curriculum, and with it, similarity and isomorphism, too). This is be-
cause the museums that aligned to the national curriculum were likely to have been
particularly similar to one another, because they operated under even narrower
directives that caused the content of their museums to become even more specific
to the World War I or II themes, as these were national curriculum subjects, and the
ones that were described by the participants, and the ones that their collections
were relevant to covering. This indicates that isomorphism was present among the
museums, due to the ways in which they similarly worked with their collections and
designed displays and outreach to cater to the national curriculum agenda.
Thwarted Innovation & Diversity

In addition to collections policies and the national curriculum, there were further coercive pressures present that had caused the displays and outreach of the museums to become similar to one another. These processes stemmed from local authority staff and councillors and the ways in which they shaped the participants’ practices so that innovation and diversity were suppressed, but also, the ways in which the participants tailored their practices to meet the agendas of their local authorities. To begin with the former, P28 explained being visited by his local authority when in the construction phase of an exhibition. In this account, it is evident that such regulating procedures impinged on the agency of this museum’s professionals, also highlighting the tensions in mission between them and their local authority:

We had regular visits from a lot of people on the local authority and working for the local authority visiting us during the creation of our [exhibition] to make sure that we weren’t doing this and we weren’t doing that. And, I know our curatorial staff felt like we were bordering on censorship and that kind of thing, but I knew that was going to happen before we even started. […] What you’re allowed to say, what you’re allowed to do. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

While regulating procedures were generally portrayed as a common occurrence in the accounts, the reason why the local authority was present in P28’s case was because they were constructing a potentially controversial World War II exhibition, that, depending on the curatorial stance taken, have offended the local community. However, what the accounts depicted in other cases was a clear sense of stifled innovation. Following on from the previous account, this theme is exhibited in this account from P28:
We did put on a show about wounded soldiers. [...] You wouldn’t think of it as a particularly contentious issue, but it is. And it’s the interpretation of it. [...] You’ve got a lot of people that want to view it as loss, the loss of life, but then you’ve got a few powerful people that say, no guts and glory and empire and all that kind of thing. [...] I don’t want to sell out, because it would have been really easy to do [a more obvious take on the] exhibition, and loads of people did, and I didn’t want to do it in a fluff in either direction. The more constraints, the harder it gets, the cleverer you become. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

This participant, though, developed a way to retain his agency in the exhibition, by the World War II topic of display through the local history of the town. While not an original concept, as the evidence presented in this chapter has shown, it was one that was strategic and provided this participant with the means to navigate (but not prevent) the regulating influences of his local authority:

I actually got to weigh in quite heavily on this exhibition because of my military history background. I chose that [this exhibition] was going to be about the local area. [...] About surgery and medicine, and that kind of stuff. And about the hospitals, because this was a hospital town. I think we found a way through it that actually put on a really interesting show, that didn’t aggravate either side. [...] Everyone enjoyed it, the councillors liked it, the public liked it. It went over very well. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

Therefore, from this, it seemed as though there was a way to maintain some, very small, level of agency when operating within a much broader, constraining framework. Indeed, Alexander (1996b) found that in response to external stakeholder pressures, museum managers use various strategies to retain their agency and legitimacy. However, this agency was limited, as this following account evidences. In other cases, the participants expressed that their ideas and practices were regulated by their local authorities in favour of more conventional approaches, which
were evidence that innovation and diversity was thwarted and suppressed. P22 explained the interaction that happened with his local authority when he came up with a particularly innovative, albeit controversial, name for an exhibition:

We developed this exhibition, and I wanted to call it ‘food porn’. Of course, the local council kicked-off about it. I submitted the paperwork for what we were doing that year, and they got straight back to us and said: ‘No, you can’t call it that’. I thought, well, why not, it’s current and it will get peoples’ attention. [...] They kicked off about it and I couldn’t call it that. So that was that, we named it something fairly generic in the end and they were fine with it. [P22, M, WB, 1950’s].

Furthermore, in other instances, it was the case of having to adopt political correctness. Although, as this account shows, political correctness interfered with this participant’s professional values and integrity, but also, its requirement that professionals manipulate museum content in ways that deviate from accurate portrayals of the truth. By the same token, sometimes, it is the case of having to negotiate the two (authenticity and political correctness. For, while truthful portrayals are authentic, they can still be derogatory and simply unethical for public facing, cultural institutions to advocate, especially when children are involved). This account from P18 makes the case that accurate portrayals are important, but that the appropriateness of the portrayal, when it is derogatory in its meaning and past usage, is also important:

I think sometimes you have to be a bit politically correct. [But], I think sometimes you have to portray things as they were. In the navy they give you a certificate for crossing the equator, and one of the words they used was pollywogs. And, I thought: ‘oh, that’s not going to go down well’. So, I didn’t use it, partly because I knew we’d get lots of complaints, but that was the language of the time, you know. [...] This is the thing with language, I think sometimes we just manipulate things and change things. It’s something I have a problem with, to be honest, personally.
In addition, while the participants can be perceived to have used their agency when constructing displays, they did so in ways that encouraged their practices and museums to conform to the expectations of local authority staff and councillors. Therefore, agency may not necessarily mean that individuals have autonomy (Luck and D’Inverno, 1995). While the expectations of local authority staff and councillors may not, in themselves, be similar (as they have their own biases), conforming to them can be perceived as another constraint that the participants accommodated, leading to more conventional approaches to work being undertaken. The expectations of local authority staff can be perceived as coercive pressures, and are portrayed in this account from P5:

The local authority make the final decisions. So, the subjects have to be ones where they understand the appeal, or they themselves find appealing. [...] The local authority is more demanding. I’d never be able to do anything that isn’t reasonably expected to be done. [P5, M, WB, 1990’s].

But, similarly to covering the national curriculum, appealing to the interests of councillors, specifically, seemed to have also been a self-imposed constraint that the participants had imparted on themselves. In various ways, most of the participants described the ways in which they deliberately appealed to the interests of councillors. This account from P27 evidences that, doing so, could build better relationships with them and, in return, generate advocacy for her museum:

There are councillors that have particular areas of interest. So, we did this project last year with the local Brownie pack. [...] And there’s one councillor who’s very involved with the Brownies and was a great advocate for us for that project, but also, as a consequence, has become a really good advocate for the museum. [P27, F, WB, 1960’s].
In addition, on a similar theme, this account from P3 conveys that projects could fit into the agendas of councillors, indicating that it could be a way to change and colour their perceptions of museums in ways that were more beneficial:

There are local councillors that have evolved in the decision-making. There are local councillors that may not see us as their greatest priority; and there are a lot of local councillors who like heritage or arts. It’s an attractive sort of thing, and some of the projects as well might fit quite nicely with the things that they’re interested in. [P3, F, WB, 1960’s].

Local authority staff and councillors can, therefore, be perceived to have been coercive pressures that suppressed innovation and diversity from emerging in the practices of the participants, and consequently, their museums. However, in addition to local authority staff and councillors, restructures and redundancies also had the potential to thwart innovation and diversity. For example, this account from P24 denotes that there was a great deal of uncertainty regarding his working practices, with looming fears that he was going to lose his job, which seemed to have been a common occurrence for him:

How on earth are you expecting me to work towards an exhibition in May, when you’re going to cut my job out in April, potentially? And, all of the things that I’ve been working on and all of the things that I’ve been developing were under a great deal of uncertainty. I think when your job is under threat, it does become very, very hard to be motivated, and it’s just a nightmare. And I have been threatened with redundancy three times in the last five years. That uncertainty and that black cloud that’s hanging over your shoulders all of the time, thinking: ‘when am I going to get a letter saying that I’m going to have to enter redundancy negotiations?’. [P24, M, WB, 1970’s].

Based on that account, austerity seemed to have thwarted innovation and diversity
in favour of high levels of uncertainty and frustration. Under these circumstances, lacking innovation and diversity might have been small prices to pay in exchange for the support and potential survival of their institutions in exchange for keeping local authority staff and councillors satisfied (whether that be by conforming to their biases or actively fitting into local authority agendas). Reminiscence was also a topic that was being undertaken by many of the participants via outreach, and likewise to parts of the discussion presented here, the evidence suggested that this was because it fitted in with local authority agendas. This is now discussed.

**Reminiscence**

Handling museum objects has healing potential (Chatterjee et al., 2009). It improves wellbeing, life satisfaction and health status, and reminiscence in particular, has the ‘potential to assist with counselling on issues of illness, death, loss and mourning and to help restore dignity, respect and a sense of identity [...] by providing a springboard for reminiscing and the telling of life stories in a highly institutionalized setting’ (Chatterjee et al., 2009: 164). Rhodes (2009) also argues that reminiscence programs provide people with dementia and caregivers with ‘positive and meaningful experiences in museum settings’ (p.229).

The outreach of many of the museums was based on reminiscence. In the previous section, it was shown that local authority staff and councillors played roles in influencing the direction of the participants’ practices in conventional ways, and the ways in which the participants also tailored their agendas to meeting their interests due to their perceived benefits that this could bring. The latter theme – that the participants were fitting their activities within the agenda of their local authorities, appeared in the accounts that portrayed reminiscence outreach. This account from
P17, for example, evidences that the local authority was the reason why reminis-
cence was pursued (as a workshop), as it was a topic that fitted in with its agenda:

The reason why we do the reminiscent things is because it seems like a natural
progression. And the reason why we do the dementia [workshop] is because of the
local authority. [The local authority] are developing their services for elderly people
with dementia, in particular. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

In addition, and similarly to the previous account, this following one from P27 in-
dicates that capitalising on reminiscence resulted from fitting in with the agenda
of her local authority:

We started doing reminiscence sessions with elderly people and pe-
pople with de-
mentia, which proved really popular with the local authority, really, as well as any-
body else. So, just trying to change that narrative, really, of slow inevitable decline,
into one that can be more expansive and contemporary and exciting. It fits into the
local authority’s broader agenda of health and wellbeing. [P27, F, WB, 1960’s].

It did not seem to be the case that the local authorities were pressuring the partic-
ipants to do reminiscence work, which means that it was not necessarily a coercive
pressure. (However, while not explicit, the participants may have felt obliged to
cover it, some way or another, perhaps, because it was part of the agenda of their
local authorities). Reminiscence outreach took a very specific form that was com-
mon among the museums. This was in the form of loan boxes. Many of the partic-
ipants also said that they used loan boxes for schools, although the schools out-
reach was more diverse to that offered by the community groups catered for
through reminiscence schemes (school groups were discussed earlier, in the sec-
tion pertaining to the national curriculum). This account from P17 portrays the use
of loan boxes for both groups, and how the idea for one emerged from the idea
for the other, but, also, from a request made by a local group:
We also have some of our reminiscent boxes out, because, as well as doing a dementia [workshop], we go into elderly centres to deliver reminiscent sessions. We started off doing reminiscent sessions because we do loan boxes for schools. A local elderly centre asked us if they could borrow one of the boxes for something to do with their clients. And, then, we thought: ‘wow! Yes, you can do’. But they’re not that suitable because they’re set up for the national curriculum. We have a PhD student - he’ll go out and do a talk for us. He’ll come to the museum, collect the resource boxes and the notes and things, and he’ll go off to the school and deliver it on our behalf. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

That account positions that the content of loan boxes needed to be appropriate for the needs of elderly groups (similarly to the way that loan boxes needed to be appropriate for school groups, hence, why they were tailored to the national curriculum). Therefore, when it came to reminiscence, there were ethical and moral considerations that needed to be made when working with vulnerable groups. This account from P22 provides important recognition of how there was the potential to affect the memories of the individuals, and the memories that objects could elicit from them, in undesirable ways. In this account, this participant observed that not all memories were good memories, and highlighted the importance of training for the individuals delivering reminiscence sessions. As this example shows, this outreach was delivered by professionals, as opposed to being self-led sessions:

We turn around to them and say: ‘look, if you take a loan box out, you must be trained, you can’t take it out and use it without training. We can’t deliver it because we don’t have staffing resources, but we can train you’. […] We need to train people to say: ‘you could get bad memories, as well as good memories. This is what you need to do’. They could cope with that. […] We keep getting asked by the retirement homes: ‘please, can we have World War II objects’, and I say: ‘no’, because your memories might be bad. You’ve got to train how to deal with bad memories. [P22, M, WB, 1950’s].
In consistency with previous discussions, that account shows, again, that the participants were covering the World War II topic of display, showing that they were similar. The changes imposed by austerity, though, had played its part in scaling back the outreach that the participants did in their museums, despite them serving important social functions for school and disadvantaged groups. These themes are encompassed in this account from P10, who explains how her museum’s outreach service had been reduced:

When I came into the museums service, it was very much a public service. We did a lot of work and outreach, you know, taking museums out to disadvantaged groups. We would take exhibitions out to hospitals, and reach out to distant communities, such as those who didn’t have the funds to get the bus and come into town to the museum, so we took the museum out to them and did road shows and things [...] All our outreach teams have been cut and we don’t really do outreach anymore. The educations team just do work in the museums, so all school groups have to come to us. And we had a history unit that used to go out and interview people and study local history and recording it, producing publications about local history properties. That’s all gone. [P10, F, WB, 1960’s].

Outreach seemed to be a promising way in which the participants were able to diversify slightly, as they were able to escape the physical curatorial confines of the display context. But, austerity was likely to have played its part in restricting the agency of the participants in ways that would have, perhaps, suppressed the small presences of diversity among the museums by scaling back these outreach services, meaning that their museums were likely to have become more restricted and consequently, more similar to one another. Therefore, austerity seemed to have brought its own kind of pressure for homogenisation. Although, the participants were partnering, collaborating and co-curating with external institutions, organisa-
tions and communities. These were influences for homogenisation, but also potential sources of diversity. They are now discussed.

Partner, Collaborate & Co-Curate

Many of the participants expressed that they were hoping to – or were, partnering and collaborating with external institutions and organisations, for they perceived that working with others enabled them to deliver more than they were able to on their own. Therefore, partnering with others was quite a practical strategy to build resources, support and also enhance effectiveness compared to what otherwise might have been the case. These themes are exemplified in this account from P21, who suggested that partnering had the potential to build resources and support:

We all jump on to any project that comes along that might help us to deliver more than we can deliver on our own. So, getting involved in externally funded partnership projects, for example, which are very valuable and enable us to either have curatorial support or to do displays or to do engagement work. I mean, my activity budget is very small. [P21, F, WB, 1960's].

But, while working with external partners was beneficial from a building resources and support perspective, which were valuable resources in the context of austerity, partnering with others may have encouraged innovation, but on the other hand, was not necessarily diversifying. For example, similarly to the Accreditation Scheme (which was discussed in chapter 4), the Happy Museum Scheme was one that encouraged museums with similar missions to innovate and partner with one another, and can be perceived as forces for coercive and mimetic isomorphism. Coercive – because the museums were required to conform to the organisational norms and criteria inherent to the scheme. Mimetic – because similar museums were partnered with, and collaborated (and innovated) with similar museums. These structuring
forces result in similarity in form and thus, isomorphism among the museums that were registered under the Happy Museum scheme. For instance, P30, whose museum was registered under the scheme, explained the similarities between her museum and another that she was partnered with, although nuance is needed. While this participant perceived the similarities in terms of ideology and practice, she did not perceive that the museums were institutionally similar:

There are some basic principles that were common across for museums to adhere, or would help museums to become happy museums. [...] We were partnered with [a museum]. We definitely had similarities, in that we definitely had similar aspirations. We had an interest in environmental issues and we were attracted to the project and the idea of the project. And they paired us because we were trying to make stronger links with the community, and that was the point with our projects, really. We definitely had things in common. [...] I think we were perhaps similar in our approach and discussions, but, on the other hand, the actual museums were quite different. [P30, F, WB. 1960’s].

However, contrary to the above participant’s suggestion, the museums registered under the Happy Museum Scheme were very likely to be similar in terms of ideology and practice, but also institutionally. For example, they would have adhered to the policies, procedures and criteria of the scheme, which would have affected them on operational and institutional levels. This is similar to the scheme and process that was entailed in becoming accredited. As a result, these Happy museums were, therefore, likely to have been similar and places where isomorphism was present. In addition, if the museums adhered to more than one scheme (Accreditation and Happy Museum, for example), there would be larger levels of structuration present in them (due to higher pressures, constraints and structuring forces), and consequently, higher levels of similarity among them. These schemes, then, en-
courage like-minded museum professionals to work with other like-minded professionals (and their similarly-oriented prerogatives, missions and institutions), and, as they have similar rationales and approaches to working, encourage their institutions to homogenise further. (And so normative isomorphism could have played its part in the process of homogenisation, too. In the following section it is shown that partnering and networking situations were where the cultures and backgrounds of the participants played their roles in contributing to normative processes).

Yet, such schemes set out with the intention to help museum professionals build resilience and sustainability for their institutions, and while they are sources of isomorphism, there are needs and benefits involved in their pursuit and adoption (needs and benefits which could have become more heightened in the climate of austerity, which could mean that museums are now progressively becoming more similar in response to it). This is especially the case if they contribute to ensuring that museums survive as they move into the future. Although, the other side that comes with homogenisation and isomorphism is that partnering and collaborating with other institutions and organisations under partnership schemes is that they were not sources of diversification. Although, in this account, P5 explained that his museum had partnered with another, but that the aim was to keep the local history emphasis (and therefore, the perceived independence, of his museum). Therefore, retaining agency and the institutional identity of his museum in the process of partnership working is present in this account:

We’re hoping through the work that we are doing in the coming months that it’s going to bring us closer together, and, hopefully, build a brilliant working relationship out of it. We’re hoping to still keep the focus of the museum, because it’s the town’s history, so we’re still trying to keep that focus in the exhibition, so it’s still
uniquely ours, so we’re hoping not to lose that aim through the partnership working. [P5, M, WB, 1990’s].

Therefore, there was the potential that the participants did not succumb to the forces of structuration and instead, retained their independence, although in reality caution needs to be exercised regarding the extent to which this was achieved, and more broadly speaking, the content of the museums were similar and lacked diversity. Partnering with other institutions and organisations could have brought diversity, but only if the participants were willing (and the possibilities were there) to adventure beyond the local history emphasis of their museums, or at least diversify beyond the local history theme and the stories that were being told in accordance with it. This following account from P9 highlights that partnering and collaborating could be sources of innovation and diversity. While the museums’ collections were largely similar in theme (and topics of display), this example shows that partnering with others offered the ability to diversify beyond this prerogative, which in this case was by centering on dinosaurs as the topic of display (a display topic that was contrastingly different to other museums in the surrounding area of this museum and those in the sample):

We’ve reaped the benefits. There’s a display coming here in January from [a national museum], to do with their next major exhibition. We’ve recently worked with the big museums on a big summer exhibition [about dinosaurs] this year. We want to do more partnership work. We want to do more touring exhibitions that seems to bring in visitor figures. So, like many local museums, it is focusing on working with partners more, diversifying the offer in that way, and, obviously, attracting more visitors, and building profile. [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

Highlighting the differences between national and local museum collections, that
account conveys that working with museums that are different (in specialism, collection and scale) could be sources of diversification beyond the local history theme. However, in reality there are limitations to partnership working. Freedman (1987) argues that ‘the barriers to effective cooperation among nonprofits seem quite low, and the potential payoffs high’, but ‘despite such attractiveness in theory, few successful instances of cooperation by performing-arts organizations can be found’ (p.199). The problems are due to the difficulties entailed with centralising management and resources, along with resistance to them (due to competition for attention and income), and developing effective strategies, which are accompanied by the ‘survival instincts’ of the organisations that are in partnership (Freedman, 1987: 207), and their needs for agency and efficiency. In turn, while the mission might be shared, these factors make collaborative efforts difficult, and hinder the ‘essential promise’ that the organisations originally set-out to fulfil (Freedman, 1987: 207).

Partnerships and collaborations, though, were not just of the organisational variety. Consistent with the 61 percent of respondents to the Museums Association’s (2015a) survey, many of the participants were encouraging participation (or said that they were going to) from their communities, by involving them in the work that they carried-out in their museums in co-curative projects. In these instances, working with communities had strong potential to bring greater innovation and diversity, because the community groups that were targeted were more ethnically and culturally diverse. For example, in this account from P3, it is exemplified that museums could be places for social change, by colouring public perception, which, in this case, was the negative ways in which local gypsy and roman traveller groups were received:

We just started a project working with local gypsy roman traveller groups [...].
where they represent their own history and culture. It's co-curative project and this is in an area where there are lots and lots of daily legal incursions by travellers. It's a big political issue and you might say they'd be like: 'don't do anything like this, at all'. But, in fact, I've done more advocacy and it's a really good thing for the council to do, so it shows a positive side, considering the subject as well, so it's not all negative, and, so, actually, I think it's surprising things, if you go about them the right way. [...] There really is quite a lot of bad feeling in the area because of travellers, people turning up and worried about crime, and there's all sorts of litter, so it is a very live issue, locally. It's quite positive that we can do some sort of intervention, if you like, to slightly disrupt that narrative. [P27, F, WB, 1960's].

Co-curative participatory projects are becoming increasingly popular in contemporary museum practice (Simon, 2010). It is a curatorial practice that encourages audiences to inform and construct museum content, and in turn, become more involved in museum work. It helps to increase the relevance of museums and their connectedness to their communities, and it also encourages innovation in ways that force museum professionals to become more embracing and attentive to the needs of co-curative partners (Simon, 2010). Similarly to the previous account, far more bespoke ways of curating exhibitions were being adopted and achieved through the use of co-curative methods, which evidences that it was a tool and means of diversification (and one that appeared to have encouraged the participants to think more collaboratively and reflexively about which community groups to aim and engage with). Curatorial approaches via co-curation encouraged far greater attention on ethnic-minority and culturally diverse groups. However, this account from P28 is exemplar of the short-lived nature of community-led projects and the unlikeliness that permanent change will come about:

We've got a huge Bangladeshi community, but they don't use the museum. [...] When we asked them, we found out why. They said: 'well it's not really our history'.
So, when we do a project and it involves them and their families, they come in for the project and that all works. We do a big celebration and all this other stuff. Then, six to eight months after the project’s done, it’s right back to how it was. And it’s not for lack of continued communication, I think there’s bigger issues at play, and I don’t think tiny targeted engagements here and there are going to create this tidal wave. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

Co-curative projects might have been an area in which the participants were able to exercise greater agency in the construction of exhibitions (as they were more self-led and directed in comparison to partnership schemes), but it is important to bear in mind that, firstly, the participants were subject to many other pressures and constraints that stemmed from various sources (which have been outlined in this chapter and are outlined further in the next), and that, secondly, their communities had expectations about their museums (and their professionals), which means that they were also coercive pressures. This, along with the significance placed on the participants’ connections to, and support issued, by their communities, are discussed in the next chapter (6).

In addition, co-curative partnership projects had the potential to encourage ethnic and cultural diversity, but with reservations. On a permanent basis, the museums largely capitalised on white, western narratives of display (such as World War I or II). Engagement and participation with ethnic and culturally diverse groups was far less common and, as the above account shows, fleeting. While museums have always been participatory (Boon, 2011b; Simon, 2010), in the sense that audiences interpret and make sense of museums in their own unique ways, ‘this participatory culture provides enormous opportunities as well as challenges to museums’ (Boon, 2011b: 3). In the local authority museum context, these challenges centre on the influences that prevent and impinge on the agentic abilities for local authority museum professionals to diversify their practices and, subsequently, the content of
their museums, in ways that could encourage greater cultural and social inclusion from those that currently might feel excluded from their institutions.

Museum Groups & Networking

Nearly all of the participants said that they belonged to county-wide museum groups, and, while there seemed to be elected museum professionals that took charge of the running of them, members organised and put on events for other members that took place at various museums and at various points throughout the year. The participants claimed that museum groups provided guidance, which is exhibited in this account from P9:

In this district, we’ve got a very healthy environment, where we actually do have these subgroups and people know where to go for guidance. [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

In addition, the participants said that it was at these museum groups that they got to train and network with other local authority museum professionals, and those from other museum types in the sector. Chapter 4 identified that there was a lack of continuing professional development training present in the local authority museum profession, and museum groups were valuable for filling this function. For example, this account from P27 conveys that training provided perspective and awareness of the profession and sector:

I think it’s crucial refresher training, but also engagement with the wider sector and not just getting bogged-down in your own issues. […] Our team do training of various kinds, but also networking with similar museums, because we don’t want people getting bogged down and that’s the risk if you don’t continually engage with your profession. [P27, F, WB, 1960’s].
In the accounts, there was a strong sense of cohesion and cooperation among museum professionals in the sector, and along with this, far weaker senses of competition, which were likely to have been the reasons why there was such openness among their exchanges at museum group, networking events (openness that encouraged them to share their ideas and practices – discussed shortly). Nonetheless, this account from P28 does convey that competition may have been a presence to some extent, but at the same time, a lack of concern regarding its presence:

> When I started in museum education, I spent three weeks at another museum, just working with them every other day to learn how to do it. And they were training the competition, but that was fine. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

In essence, museum group events were those where museum professionals could interact and network with others in the sector. The accounts portrayed that the professionals that mingled at museum group events were very similar to one another, which was not specific to local authority museum professionals. For example, this account from P5 depicts the similarities that exist among museum professionals, and the interactions and nature of the relationships that take place between them:

> We are part of a wider community of museums, and that, ultimately, we do work together. It wouldn’t work if we didn’t have this closely run, organisational joined up thinking, where we’re working together to try and achieve a similar aim. […] We have similar outlooks on life, and hobbies and that kind of thing. We’re in similar roles, facing similar kinds of problems. […] We mostly tend to agree. It’s quite a harmonious relationship. [P5, M, WB, 1990’s].

Moreover, this account from P4 indicates that museum professionals mingled with one another on the grounds that they were similar, and consistent with the previous account, highlights the network-based exchanges that took place at these events.
They were forums for similar ideas and practices to be shared, and in turn, can therefore be perceived as pressures for normative isomorphism:

We have the chance, especially when it comes to a subject that they are interested in, and are similar to me, then that’s really helpful. We talk about how we work with communities, and how we interpret things, even in terms of the audience. So, I have the chance to exchange and share ideas with others. [P4, M, AO, 1980’s].

And so, the events put on by museum groups facilitated large scale networking opportunities that were forums for guidance and training, but they were also forums for normative processes to take place in. Earlier, it was identified that the museums represented similar display topics that pertained to World War I or II. This following account evidences that the professionals that networked at these events were exchanging similar information, and actively modelling ideas and practices but, also, networking with professionals from other museum types. Based on this evidence, the World War I project depicted in this account could have stemmed from, or encouraged, other museum professionals (but specifically, as they were so similar, local authority museum professionals) to also pursue the display topic (in conjunction with the other isomorphic processes that were discussed earlier in this chapter). This account from P6 situates this possibility and indicates that local authority museums were particularly similar:

Some of them will be doing similar things to what we’re doing. Especially through that [World War I] project. We’ll all be doing similar things at the same time. And, also, not all of the museums are local authority. [...] It’s interesting to see how those other museums operate. It’s also interesting to talk to those that are local authority museums, to see how they are dealing with issues relating to being a local authority museum. [P6, F, WB, 1980’s].

These museum groups and networks caused normative pressures. McPherson et al.
(2001) for instance, argue that ‘familiarity breeds connection’, and that ‘people’s personal networks are homogeneous regarding many sociodemographic, behavioural, and intrapersonal characteristics. Homophily limits people’s social worlds in a way that has powerful implications for the information they receive, the attitudes they form, and the interactions they experience’ (p.415). In addition, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that networking encourages the rationales and practices of professionals to become based on industry sanctioned norms, and, therefore, for normative processes to occur. This is because these networking events are forums where professional vocabularies are used, encouraging practitioners to organise, coordinate and work on ‘common ground’, whereby they engage in rituals of conformity that guide their thinking and behaviour (Loewenstein, 2014: 65). Loewenstein (2014) argues that ‘professional vocabularies are not only barriers (for non-professionals) but also largely unnoticed facilitators of organizing’ (Loewenstein, 2014: 65).

Furthermore, in addition to normative processes, this following account indicates that the process of modelling took place at museum group events, which is evidence for mimetic processes and that the participants looked at what other museum professionals, and museums, were doing, and modelled their own practices after them (in turn, causing their museums to become similar in their content). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that it is professionals’ responses to uncertainty which is the force for mimetic isomorphism. But, while the museums were sites for uncertainty, especially in response to austerity, there was also evidence that the participants modelled the ideas and practices of others as it was common practice for professionals in the sector to do so. For example, in this following account, P7 said that he and his colleagues took ideas from other museums. Yet, this account indicates that these ideas and practices were taken, but may not have necessarily remained in the same form, for this participant explained that they were enhanced:
We would take somebody else’s ideas, because we are now. We are currently. We look at what other galleries are doing and what other professionals are doing. [...] I think there’s always room for the modification of somebody else’s ideas. I think that’s what professionals are very good at doing. [...] I think we’re very good at taking somebody else’s design and then making it better. [P7, M, WB, 1950’s].

The act of modelling and the changes to the model that is portrayed in that account adds some nuance to DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) work on the subject. This is because it depicts that while modelling was present, the model may not necessarily have caused similarity among the museums in terms of their content, but have been sources of inspiration (and sources of efficiency, particularly that of the financial kind, as professionals tend to borrow from already established, successful models – DiMaggio and Powell, 1991), although that account depicts making a model better, but this does not necessarily mean making a model different, which means that modelling was not strictly a source of diversity either. In addition to the last, this following account strongly depicts the process of modelling, but that modelled ideas or practices taken from various sources may not have necessarily remained in the same form, and while innovation is present in this account, may not have been sources of diversity. Therefore, there is contingency present in the process of modelling:

I would use things, like ideas that I’ve collected throughout my years from different museums. I would also speak to my old colleagues in different museums and get some ideas, and even kind of look online. Research other museums and see what other museums have got. Other museums have got session plans online, so that you can look at and get ideas on what they’re doing. [...] It’s also a case of Googling something. There’s two specific sites that I use for an idea and, then, I’ll develop it from that idea. [...] Once I’ve got the basis of an idea, I can roll with it, I can take it on and make it specifically for us, instead of copying exactly what they’re doing.
There are limits to the extent that models can be changed, though. For example, the ideas and practices that P14 selected would have been coloured by her cultural background and based on the discussions presented in chapter 4, would have been modified and shaped on the basis of her cultural background (and her rationales and practices that were cultivated in it). In addition, the degree to which that change to models could occur will have varied. For example, each model had a source and therefore, was not entirely original. In addition, there would have been less flexibility to modify session plans, compared to what there would have been in developing ideas. These suggestions indicate that there was going to be similarity among the museums, albeit in different areas and to different degrees, where modelling and mimetic processes were concerned.

Some of the participants exhibited their knowledge and awareness that there were risks to sharing their ideas with other professionals, which were based on them being taken and used. Although, despite this awareness, there were mixed reviews about the activity. For example, P5 said that he did not perceive the sharing and taking of ideas as problematic, which similarly to an earlier account, conveys the strong sense of cohesion and lack of competition among museum professionals in the sector:

The risk of sharing ideas with anybody is that they’re going to take them and use them for themselves. I think that’s just the kind of risks you take in discussions. [...] Normally, most things are advertised anyway. I personally have no problem with sharing information about things and making them readily available through other sources. [P5, M, WB, 1990’s].
While competition is a force for isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991), its absence could indicate that there was less structuration present in the sector. However, it seems that a strong sense of cohesion, networking and the sharing of information were the protagonists for greater structuration, homogenisation and thus, isomorphism. Contrasting with the previous account, this following account from P17 conveys the process of modelling in full fruition, which happened in response to this participant (along with her colleagues) sharing information about an approach, which, being one that was admired by other museum professionals, was then used in another museum, causing the two museums to become similar in this area and therefore, sources of isomorphism that happened in response to a mimetic process:

In the early days, we were keen and enthusiastic, and we naively told all the museums in the area and further afield how we did it. Even someone from [a national museum's] education department came down to ask us why they'd heard such good things about our education department. At the time there was only one person running the education department and we had been telling people, so now I know that [museum] have gone down the same route as us. [P17, F, WB, 1970's].

And so, although the participants openly expressed that they shared and took each other’s ideas and practices at museum group events, they might not have necessarily been aware that their museums were becoming similar in response to them. In addition to their motives to fit into the agendas of their local authorities, there was evidence to suggest the participants’ widespread focus on reminiscence could have happened in response to mimetic processes that caused the practice of modelling to take place among them, in turn causing their museums to become similar in this area. For example, in this account, P28 details his quite innovative and resourceful development of a dementia toolkit that was designed for smaller museums on a budget to adopt and use, which can be conceived of as a protagonist for
mimetic isomorphism:

They said: ‘let’s write-up something at the end of this project that’s of benefit to other people’. And the initial ideas that were thrown round were kind of high-minded and expensive. And I thought: ‘well, no’. [...] What is the point in me writing a toolkit for five places, when I can write something that can be used by 80 places? [...] What we wound up producing was a toolkit, on a budget, meant to be for places on a budget. I wrote it for a place even smaller than us, and in the end that’s what’s been winning us the awards, because it’s more practical than other projects [...] We came runner-up to [national museum] and its half million-pound project. We spent basically nothing on ours. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

The integral aspect to this account is that the toolkit was designed to share with other museums, meaning that it was likely to be the case that other professionals, and not just those that were local authority specific, adopted, used and modelled the approaches that were outlined in this toolkit, which, can be implied, would have caused isomorphism to take place among the museums in the area in which the approaches were applied. The success of this participants’ toolkit adds support to DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) claim that ‘organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful’ (p.70). Upon evaluation of the evidence that has been presented in this section, the practices of the participants, and their museums, were likely to have been similar to one another and places where isomorphism was present. Modelling can be economically and practically efficient (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991), but, in the local authority museum context, it was likely to have homogenised since there was little diversity to model from, and the process of modelling itself diminishes diversity for it is based on replication and distribution of existing ideas and practices.
Summary

It is fairly easy to make the presumption that museums are diverse, based on the multifaceted nature of their collections, communications and audiences. Indeed, museums possess the potential to be diverse cultural institutions. Local authority museum professionals, though, are confronted with various pressures, constraints and structuring forces that suppress innovation and diversity in their practices, and, subsequently, diversity from manifesting in the content of their museums. That is why they end up becoming similar. These influences emerged from collections policies (preventing variation in collections and effective deaccessioning – which came with the circulation of similarly themed objects around local museums), the national curriculum, physical display constraints, local authority staff and councillors, networking and different forms of collaborative work with other institutions and organisations. This is not to mention the other isomorphic processes that are mentioned in the other two findings chapters. Moreover, the operational environment seemed to have become more intense due to austerity, and it had increased the likelihood that the museums were homogeneous by suppressing innovation and diversity to greater degrees compared to what previously might have been the case.

Although working with external partners had the potential to encourage diversification, the level of which depending on whether partners were similar (and shared an organisational policy through partnership schemes) or diverse to the museums concerned. National museums, for example, were a source of diversity, due to the diverse nature of their collections (such as dinosaurs, which was discussed), in comparison to local authority museums. Working with minority community groups was also a source of diversity because they had the potential to open-up new narratives (albeit within the local history theme of telling the stories of towns and communities). The museums were predominantly focused on westernised display topics
(World War I or II) and this was to the exclusion of the representation of ethnic and cultural diversity. This could be achieved, though, if the museums’ collections contained objects that were able to represent these narratives and histories, but this would need to feed into collections policies (and the physical constraints associated with accessioning objects and making the space – deaccessioning, to store them, would also need to be worked out). It could also be possible that the museums’ collections contain objects that are needed to represent ethnic and culturally diverse community groups, but that they are simply not used, or need to be cultivated further. Either way, greater reflexivity in approach, and diversity in practice, and in representation, need to be adopted in this area. Local history and public knowledge has and continues to change, and local authority museum professionals need to grasp these narratives in order to tackle cultural and social exclusion and become relevant to the lives of (all) community members, in order to develop the originality and public advocacy of their institutions.

It was posed in the last chapter that the participants were likely to have had similar rationales and practices that caused the content of their museums to homogenise. Indeed, normative pressures were present in the discussion on networking, and there was evidence of modelling. However, more research (content-based, ethnographic and longitudinal) into the ways in which ideas and practices are taken, adapted and used, as well as the forms that they take in museum content and communications, could be beneficial to subsequent contributions to the literature. Such insights into these areas reach beyond the scope of my research, although it has identified the presence and activity of modelling and the likelihood of its ability to homogenise, adjacent to other competing isomorphic processes that are similar in their effects.

While museum professionals, in general, are like-minded individuals (such as in
their interests for museum culture), greater ethnic and cultural diversity among them could mean that they are different in their rationales and approaches to museum work, which could encourage ethnic and cultural diversity in museum content. It is the case of needing to look closely and examine the profession – its entry, in particular, such as the processes of recruitment and employment, and the barriers experienced by ethnic and working-class individuals in particular (based on the previous chapter’s discussion), which prevent them from pursuing (and accessing) museum employment.
6. Governance, Income & Support

Introduction

The findings that were presented in the previous chapter showed that the practices of the participants and the content of their museums were similar. This was because normative, mimetic and coercive pressures and processes (stemming from a variety of sources) similarly shaped their practices and the content of their museums. Based on the evidence, it was concluded that isomorphism was present among the museums. There were signs that the participants were aware that their practices and museums were similar to those of other professionals and institutions, but there was little in the way of reflexivity. In addition, there were signs of the participants’ agency, but they were highly restricted from acting independently of structuring forces, meaning that they tended to enforce rather than manipulate them. This chapter’s findings pertain to governance, income and support, and begins by looking at the effects of local authority policies on the operation of the museums.

Local Authority Policies

As the museums were owned and managed by local authorities, local authorities were the dominant stakeholders in the museums, and, because of this involvement, their policies were a strong, overarching presence in them. However, these policies were not specific to the museum context, but, instead, generic to the operation of government-owned, public-service institutions. The museums were therefore not special regarding their internal operation, for they were like the other institutions that belonged as their kind. This serves as evidence for DiMaggio and Powell’s
(1991) suggestion that organisations become organised around ‘rituals of conformity to wider institutions’.

Local authority policies were similar across the museums, and many of the participants similarly conformed to, and enforced them, via their practices. For example, with health and safety policies, the participants expressed that they were required to conduct regular assessments of equipment and facilities. For example, this account from P17 denotes her adherence to health and safety procedures, a highly standardised activity, but one that she deemed professionals were responsible for:

Making sure that nobody damages anything, making sure that nobody films anything that they shouldn’t, and making sure that everybody’s in and out the building safely, and the fire assessment, and the risk assessment, and all that stuff is done properly, is the job of the people who look after that building and who look after the precious things in that building. [P17, F, WB, 1970's].

Many of the accounts portrayed that local authority policy pressures had increased in response to austerity, as there were fewer employees present in the museums to distribute workloads among, an aspect that was becoming an apparent source of strain. For instance, this account from P10 conveys the issues that she personally confronted when working in accordance with health and safety policy procedures, usually a highly standardised set of activities. Strain is present in this account:

I have to do more management of things like the stores and the equipment, the heating systems and the water systems, and I've actually got to fill in the spreadsheet to say all these things are happening. And this is something that used to be done by other people. But now that there’s fewer and fewer of us. It’s now fallen on to my shoulders to do all this extra management work. And I wouldn’t call it collections work at all, but it has to be done. Legally, we have to make sure that we’re getting the safety checks done regularly, such as the alarm systems and the
While policies restrict the agency of professionals, they also ensure that professionals and their establishments are safe, and also legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Unanimously agreed and enforced professional standards are important for those in the public-service sector. For example, many of the participants said that Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks were compulsory for all local authority employees, and, even though they are a source of filtering (something discussed in the findings of chapter 4), they safeguard against unethical behaviour. For this reason, these checks are likely to be desired by professional managers and their staff. Indeed, many of the participants said that they, their colleagues and volunteers were subject to CRB checking, and their accounts conveyed that these checks provided them with protection and legitimacy. For instance, P12 stated that he wanted a CRB check done, because it seemed to contribute to and protect his professional status:

I always remember our chief executive and I were talking about criminal record checks. [...] I wanted it because it's professional to have it, just in case anyone asks. [P12, M, WB, 1950's].

Additionally, and similarly to the last account, this account from P30 denotes that CRB checking was a source of legal protection for volunteers:

Things we do now, like having all our volunteers CRB checked, because they're on their own in an enclosed space and they work regular days every week and there's always a danger and always the potential that someone will start to build an inappropriate relationship and it's really for volunteers' protection. [P30, F, WB, 1960's].

Therefore, under these circumstances, local authority policies (and the homogeni-
sation that they imposed) were beneficial to the widespread and healthy functioning of the museums (and of other local authority-owned institutions). Indeed, policies take away the extraneous decision-making. Dependent organisations use the power of the dominant organisation to eliminate difficulties and provide for needs (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, Pfeiffer & Salancik, 1978). For this reason, some of the participants expressed that they liked being governed by their local authorities because they had access to council services, such as building maintenance and IT, and access to expertise and advice from council employees. For instance, P19 explained that she used her local authority’s expertise about child protection, among other policies, to inform her practices and that of the staff at her museum, which suggests that the local authority is a valuable resource for her to use when such expertise is needed, like when she was enforcing policy procedures herself:

We have access to expertise there and I do raise queries and there are certain things that are so important you wouldn’t begin to second guess them yourself. Take child protection. I have taken advice and had people in from [the local authority] to train on child protection because that is their full-time job. At the moment, we’re dealing with things related to the fire risk assessment and changes the evacuation procedures, and again I would always use the expertise of the emergency planning officer at [the local authority]. [P19, F, WB, 1960’s].

Local authority assistance is likely to enhance the efficiency of their professionals’ practices in policy-related areas, and having this thinking done on their behalf means that they need not carry it themselves. However, some local authority policies were barriers to efficiency. This account from P24 portrays that his practices may have been affected by limited computer access, accompanied by a corporate aesthetic displayed on his museum’s website (affecting the public’s perception of his museum):
The challenges that we've got are to do with the juggernauts that exist around IT and all the rest of it, where you've got separate IT systems and that limits what you can do on websites and things like that, where they've made us have a corporate look, all of this sort of stuff can impinge slightly. [P24, M, WB, 1970.s].

Additionally, many of the participants said that they had to tender quotes prior to purchasing goods and services. Quote tendering was a method that the local authorities used to ensure that the spending of the participants was economical and that reliable suppliers were used. Quotes were regulated by council employees as they approved them. Quote tendering was a highly constraining activity, in particular for this participant, who, when on the topic of quote tendering, described having to tender quotes from a pre-defined list of suppliers:

You can’t just go and buy something. You have to go and buy something from the recommended list of suppliers and if something isn’t on the recommended list of suppliers, you have to put a case in as to why they should be, which is all very time consuming. It’s things like that that tie your hands in a local authority. [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].

The problem with policies and procedures is that they operate on the assumption that professionals and their institutions have similar needs. Purchasing amenities from such a list could be practical. However, the participants being limited by what they were permitted to purchase and from whom, restricted their agency and abilities to be efficient. This is because the participants and their museums were likely to have had bespoke needs, in which case they would have needed suppliers that provided them with bespoke services. This account from P11 is particularly original compared to the other accounts on this subject, for he describes his employment of an independent supplier that he used to build a bespoke piece of furniture for his museum. This participant knew the supplier in question, probably the reason as
to why he had the independence to hire this person:

We were enormously lucky that a lot of what’s built out in the gallery now was built by [independent supplier]. He can build anything you like, which he did. [...] He’d go out the back, saw some bits up, he’ll use some original bits of wood, but turn them around completely, put a lick of paint on it, put a new fixture on it and it does look rather better. [...] What you don’t want to do is farm out your thinking. The worst thing is when people get substantial and revolutionary funding for a museum refit, got in a firm to do their thinking for them, got in another firm to contract-out building it. [...] There’s only so many firms going around. [P11, M, WB, 1950’s].

This account is indicative that professionals with the independence to do their own outsourcing could encourage diversity regarding the content of their museums, but that caution needs to be exercised, and originality retained, when firms are used. The assumption here, though, is that firms come-up with similar ideas, but as specialist architectural firms are invited to tender, this may not be the case.

‘The direct imposition of standard operating procedures and legitimated rules and structures’ and ‘the existence of a common legal environment homogeneously affects many aspects of an organization’s behaviour and structure’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 63). The evidence has shown that local authority policies were a strong presence in the museums, and they encouraged the participants to similarly conform to the organisational norms of their governing bodies, and they similarly operated their museums according to these norms. As professionals are required to honour legal commitments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) they conform to the policies of their governing bodies and implement them via their behaviour (Ritti & Goldner, 1969). Local authority policies were therefore sources of coercive isomorphism. Policies, as a form of bureaucratic organisation, are powerful forces for institutional and organisational homogenisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, Weber,
Cuts & Commercialism

In the first findings chapter (4) it was identified that the profession had been affected by austerity, in the form of staff losses, and had caused it to be surrounded by high levels of competition for posts, but, at the same time, uncertainty. On a broader level, all of the museums had been particularly affected by the funding cuts, in terms of their finances, but also their services. Indeed, the participants expressed the ways in which they, and their museums, had been affected by austerity, albeit in different areas and to different degrees. For example, P24 said that his museum had been affected by the cuts, and sets the scene of the sector in this account:

We’ve already cut ourselves down to the bone, and I think if other museums are in the position where they haven’t made forty or fifty percent cuts over the last five or six years, and they’ve been on a static budget, it may be that they’re having to make some very difficult changes imminently. [P24, M, WB, 1970’s].

In addition, P9 also spoke about the effects of the funding cuts in her museum, but in this following account, spoke about the stance of her local authority on the issue. This participant seemed to be particularly used to the behaviour of her local authority when it came to them making savings. Evidently, though, this participant’s concern was on the protection and health of her museum:

I wish there was less pressure on the sector in terms of cuts and having to streamline, put savings where we can. With this staffing situation, I’m sure the council, as they should be, as public sector workers, will be keen to make savings. Of course they will, and they will assess whether that’s appropriate to that level. And that's
the thing I know is going to happen because I've worked in the council for ten years, of course they’re going to make savings. I've just got to make sure the museum is protected – is the museum’s service going to be delivered to a standard that is appropriate? [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

Consistent with that account, many of the accounts depicted the participants’ concerns about the resilience and sustainability of their museums against the backdrop of austerity. As already discussed in the previous chapter, they had found ways to foster greater resilience and sustainability for their museums by partnering with others and collaborating with their communities, but also by appealing to councillors’ interests (later, it is further shown that building community and councillor support was an essential method of protecting their museums at times of crisis, and, in turn, ensuring their future survival). Additionally to staff, financial and service-based losses, which had imposed their own pressures, constraints and sources of strain, many of the participants discussed that they were restricted by time. This account from P30 exemplifies that time restraints had affected her ability to be reflexive about her own practices, an issue that appears to have worsened since austerity’s effects had taken hold:

I feel like we’re firefighting, and I think that’s a real issue for me, personally. […] I am aware that can be a bit of an issue for museums feeling under pressure because you haven’t got quite enough staff and you haven’t quite got the time to reflect on practice or to really evaluate it, unless there’s external funding where you have to evaluate it. You know, it’s very easy to rush on to the next thing without really taking the time to see and do that robust assessment of what has worked and what hasn’t. [P30, F, WB, 1960’s].

That account also shows that external funding was a process that required her to
reflect on her practices and the projects that were supported by this source of income. This can perhaps be perceived as a coercive pressure, but one that encouraged that participant to be reflexive and was therefore beneficial. As already evidenced throughout the findings, while the theme of awareness was present in the accounts (that the participants were aware that their museums were similar, or not, as the case may be), reflexivity was a quality that was missing (the above account suggests this could have been due to time restraints). There was not reflexivity in practice (and not conscious, actively sought attempts for greater efficiency or diversification). As the museums were so largely homogeneous, this issue of reflexivity is returned to in the concluding chapter of my thesis.

Many of the accounts portrayed that the work that the participants did in their museums had changed, because it had become more centred on administration and commercialism, and less centred on museum work. On this issue, many of the participants expressed that they were no longer able to do the work that they enjoyed in their professional roles and museums. More central to this discussion is the finding that the majority of the participants were under pressure from their local authorities to become more commercially inclined in their prerogatives and pursuit of income, something that emerged as a coercive pressure. As a result, these accounts portrayed that the participants were required to focus on results and operate their museums like businesses. For example, P10 expressed the way in which the attention of her local authority was on income and visitor numbers, two areas that this participant and her colleagues were being encouraged to capitalise on via exhibitions:

I think that the whole local authority [...] think that museums as a whole are income generation for getting people through the doors of the museums, and that’s really where the emphasis lies. We have been told in the collections team that we should concentrate on working towards exhibitions, because the changing exhibitions are
what encourages visitors and increases income. [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].

While there seemed to be tension present between the participants’ perspectives on commercialism to that of their local authorities, the accounts conveyed that many of the participants may not have had the expertise to pursue more commercial activities to generate income, which posed problems for them efficiently being able to pursue commercialism. The participants possessed a distinctive professional identity that was, for the most part, specific to museums and museum culture (as discussed in chapter 4). Because of this, they were likely not to have had the necessary know-how that was needed to operate in more commercially-oriented ways.

In drawing these themes together, P17 expressed the differences in perspective regarding income generation between her and a senior committee member. Unlike the latter, who had a clear focus on income generation, the participant had a clear focus on providing a museum service. In this account, it is evident that this participant was not commercially-oriented on the basis of her background:

Where we can make money, although it’s never a huge amount, we do. But that’s not our primary aim, and I do get annoyed sometimes. There was a spell with the chairman of the committee who was a money person and wanted to know figures and money, and I think look at all these smiling children and look at these wonderful objects we’ve got, and he’s like: ‘yes, but how are you paying for it?’ […] Money is not the forefront of my mind. I’m not a money person and I’m not trained to run a business, I’m trained to look after objects and manage a museum. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

On a similar theme, this account from P11 conveys the shift to commercialism, but also the difference in prerogative between this participant’s local authority and his own focus of attention: not on commercialism, but on his museum’s focus and ability to serve:
We’ve seen the sector turn into a commercial body of people. [...] It’s a case of do more, do it now, and it’s far more results driven. [...] If you can say that you did delivered 500 happy children, it’s an unanswerable argument. [P11, M, WB, 1950’s].

While the local authorities were pressuring the participants to become more commercially inclined, the participants expressed that they did not necessarily want to be more commercial – a theme present in this following account from P1. This account highlights the difference between this participant’s local authority agenda to his own:

They want us to run it more commercially. We’re busy enough as it is. We don’t want to be running a business which would effectively be what we would be doing. [P1, M, WB, 1950’s].

Therefore, these accounts suggest that the participants may not have had the know-how, or the desire, to operate in more commercial, business-like ways, although there were professionals from commercial backgrounds employed in the museums. An example of this was provided by P3, who described that she went through a learning process from an employee that came from a commercial background, from which, it can be suggested, she acquired the skills to become more commercially inclined. While this could have filled the gap in knowledge that was identified earlier, when coupled with local authorities’ pressures for more commercial activities, it could have been a force for normative and mimetic processes in the direction of greater commercialism:

He’s the hospitality officer and he deals with lets and hires, so more of a commercial line. He’s easy to manage, but he’s come from a commercial background and he’s had his own business, and I’ve always been in local authority museums, most of the time anyway. So, it has been a lot of learning because people work in different ways
and the culture is different, and now it is quite interesting. At the moment, the current administration is very keen on the leisure and commercial side for obvious reasons. [P3, F, WB, 1960's].

The employment of this type of commercial professional could have possibly come hand-in-hand with the local authority’s attention on commercialism. But, in addition to lacking know-how, the participants described not being able incorporate commercialism effectively into their practices and routines, as there were limits to its facilitation in the museum context. For instance, P30 described already being as commercial to the extent that she could be, and identified the limitations associated with commercial strategies of income generation, and there not being that sort of commercial value attached to museums. These limitations were combined with her reluctance to exploit the public by charging them for services:

We’re already as commercial as we know how to be and we’re not a very commercial thing. There isn’t the potential for making a lot of money here because no-one’s going to pay us very much for what we do. It’s local history, it’s ordinary people, it’s real life, and so we do try and make as much money as we can. We try to set that so that everyone gets good value for money. We don’t want to exploit anyone. So, I can’t see it getting any more commercial because I just don’t think there’s scope. [P30, F, WB, 1960's].

Coercive pressures for commercialism are inherent to conservative agendas, for they are based on market ideologies, and concerned with increased efficiency, self-sufficiency and privatisation (Alexander, 2005; Lawley, 2003). Under such agendas, museum professionals are directed to ‘adopt business like management techniques, and strategic planning and performance management’ – ‘tools of the museum director’s trade’ (Lawler, 2003: 75). Resilience and sustainability are focuses of attention in the recent literature on museums (e.g. Museums Association, 2015a,
Indeed, many of the participants perceived that generating income was a way to become resilient. This account from P9 denotes that income generation, which was accompanied by commercialism, was central to her museum’s sustainability:

[Our sustainability policy] outlines all we’re actively in our working lives, ways to be sustainable. So, diversifying income streams, thinking more business-like. I can certainly see the benefit in promoting sustainability in the museum, but I’d like to think that like us, most local authority museums, and local museums, have a strong commitment to working towards a sustainable future, in terms of the environment, as well as becoming more economically viable and really providing value for money in the community really. [P9, F, WB, 1980’s].

Alexander (2007) talks about art and the state, and the challenges between commercial and aesthetic values that ensue. To exemplify her argument, Alexander (2007) draws on Bourdieu’s 1993 work on the field of the arts to highlight the distinction between commercial and aesthetic art forms and their values. In the field of the arts, there are two poles: the autonomous pole is independent of other fields and the producer of ‘pure’ art: ‘rich in cultural capital, but poor in economic capital’ (Alexander, 2007: 197). And the heteronomous pole: producer of bourgeois, industrial art, and, thus, the arts penetrated by the commercial sector, which is ‘lowbrow and produced only because it sells’ (Alexander, 2007: 197). Alexander (2007) argues that, in the UK, the commercial sector and the state are pervading the autonomous pole of pure art, and that ‘all social issues can be solved through neoliberal economic processes’ (Alexander, 2007:197).

It is possible that commercial funding will affect the values of local authority museums (and museums more generally, as institutions), the services that they provide, and their status as ‘rich’ cultural institutions. However, Zolberg (2000) argues
that privatisation of the arts offers threats, but also opportunities. Her work highlights the give-and-take nature that is embedded in the exchange relationships that take place in museums for funding, and the external influences imposed by stakeholders in regulating and censoring museum content (such as those exercised by local authority staff in the process of exhibition construction that can result in thwarted innovation – a theme discussed in the previous account).

Although funding sources present possibilities, there are three areas for concern. Firstly, adjacent to growths in funding sources are growths in the constraints and pressures imposed by funders, meaning that ‘a delicate balance of often conflicting demands’ is required (Froelich, 1999). The second area of concern, linking back to the first, is that growths in management tasks detract from more mission-oriented efforts. Thirdly, fear of the unknown of the effects of funding diversification and increasing commercial activity ‘focuses attention on the darker possibilities while ignoring limitations of the more familiar revenue strategies’ (Froelich, 1999: 263).

Therefore, there are concerns about commercialism in cultural institutions, such as museums. In exploring these themes further, the following discussions are about the income that the participants described that they were in receipt of, and seeking to generate. They stemmed from philanthropy and gift shops, charging for services, sponsorship and those issued by key funding organisations.

**Philanthropy & Gift Shops**

Museum professionals piece funding together from a variety of sources (Lindqvist, 2012). As already discussed, the participants were financially challenged because of the funding cuts, and, due to this, many of them expressed how important income generation was to them and their museums. For example, this account from P2 situates his experience of economic hardship against the backdrop of austerity, and
asserts how important the income that he received was for the running and operation of his museum:

We are very poor as a museum, financially. Very poor. We get funding from the council, who we are obviously extremely grateful to. [...] But every institution and everybody in my situation throughout the land I expect is saying that, and we’re lucky they don’t just cut the funding altogether. Other sources of funding are incredibly important to us, because that’s literally nowhere near enough to run the museum. [P2, M, WB, 1950’s].

The participants were reliant on philanthropy, via the donations that they received into their museums from visitors (collected via donations boxes). These contributions, while small, were nevertheless valuable. There was little evidence to suggest that the participants actively sought philanthropy from external institutions and organisations, which may have been more lucrative sources of charitable giving. Many of the participants were in discussions about moving to trust status (discussed in more detail later in this chapter). Moves to trust status presented the possibility for the participants to pursue philanthropy in greater ways. For instance, P10’s museum was potentially one that was moving to trust status by joining with an existing umbrella organisation, and her account shows that philanthropy was being encouraged by the trust organisation, and was one that P10 was also willing to pursue:

And we are just starting to look, in conjunction with the cultural trust, into philanthropy and charitable giving by individuals and businesses. And I think that’s something we’re keen to pursue. And we don’t seem to get those sorts of funding, but quite a lot of work’s being done to set up the system. [P10, F, WB, 1960’s].

Philanthropy was a fairly non-intrusive way to generate income (especially when received directly into the museums from visitors), although larger efforts to seek
The shop is really important for us. The profit from the shop used to be about ten thousand a year. Last year it was seven and a half thousand. Donations have gone down a bit, and I think our visitor numbers have gone down slightly. I think because the numbers have gone from about sixteen thousand a year to fifteen and a half. I think the spend of each visitor has gone down a bit. [P30, F, WB, 1960's].

The gift shops of the museums were strikingly similar. They each stocked small and cheap items (suitable for children), such as stationary and books. For example, P23 explained these items in more detail:

Museums do have the bog-standard pencils, sharpeners and rubbers, which I understand because, when school groups come in, a lot of schools give a budget to their kids that they can bring, £2.50 say. That’s the sort of things you need in the shop for the kids to buy. [P23, M, WB, 1990’s].

This participant continued in his description by outlining that, in addition to these more generic items, the gift shops of museums tend to stock more specialist items.
too:

I’d say each shop has an amount of specialist literature and DVD’s for people that are real fanatics. In [railway museum] it’s everything they used on the trains, like china sets and vintage mugs, they’re all sold, which I think that you can’t get anywhere else, which is definitely quirky. But I’d say they both want a mix or quirky and generic stuff in the shops. [P23, M, WB, 1990’s].

Participants were aware that their gift shops were similar to those of other museums. Similarly to the more generic items, there was an overarching similarity in specialist items, especially if museums bought in similar objects pertaining to similar themes. These similarities, though, were not caused by the participants coincidentally selecting similar items to sell in their shops, for there was evidence to suggest that they bought in objects from similar suppliers that sold similar items. P2, for instance, used the brochures of suppliers to select the items to sell in his museum’s gift shop:

We get all sorts of brochures through the post and they are generically known as pocket money toys. Just a few pounds. It could be marbles, it could be pick-up sticks, and they have thousands of these in a catalogue. We just mix and match and decide on what we’re going to do. We tend to go for things like fossils, gemstones. All the museums have got the same stuff. If you go up to the Natural History Museum, you’ll find that same generic stuff that we’ve got because obviously, they’re catering for thousands of kids like we do. [P2, M, WB, 1950’s].

This could be evidence of mimetic processes, although one where the participants were not consciously or actively aware of modelling. This is because the participants seemed to unknowingly copy one another by selecting the similar items from similar suppliers, which means that their decisions (regarding what to buy) were pre-defined (and a subtle coercive presence). This process of acquiring the items limited
diversity and caused their gift shops to become very similar. The museums, in terms of their gift shops, were affected by isomorphism.

**Charging for Services**

Charging for talks and loan-boxes (discussed in the previous chapter) had the potential to generate very small amounts of income, as illustrated in this account from P17:

Care homes sign up for a year for thirty pounds, and they can borrow as many of the boxes as they want. We've got fifteen boxes, so as many as they like throughout that year. Or they can pay three pounds per box and do it on a box by box basis. With our school loan boxes, depending on how many children there are, somewhere between thirty and forty-five pound for the year, and they get to borrow as many loan boxes as they want throughout the year, and they also get a discount on the sessions we deliver for the school kids. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

In addition, this following account from P1 demonstrates the coercive pressures that were exercised by school teachers, who were not always willing to pay for particular services. This pressure was persuasive enough for this participant to revert to donations (showing how particular influential individuals can be at influencing the decision-making and practices of professionals), perhaps due to the social obligation attached to museums to meet the expectations of the public, and the individuals that are invested, and have a say, in what goes on in them:

We get a lot of interest from schools. We used to charge a fixed-rate regardless, but last year we were getting feedback from one or two of our members that run various groups, and they were not willing to pay that much per head for a forty-minute look around the museum because for them it wasn’t worth it. [...] We don’t want to put people off from wanting to come and see the place, so the most we’ll
do now for local groups with an educational purpose is to ask for a donation. [P1, M, WB, 1950’s].

Therefore, that account shows that charging school groups for services was dependent on their willingness to pay. In addition to this, the participants described potential avenues for income generation that stemmed from hiring their museums’ venue out for corporate events and ceremonies, although the participants that had attempted to pursue these avenues said that the ceremonies, particularly those of the religious variety, were potentially resisted by local authorities as they were sources of controversy, as this account from P3 highlights:

We had somebody wanting to hire it for a religious service on a regular basis, and I did ask the local authority how they felt about that and I didn’t actually get an answer. [...] I can see that if we did an exhibition that had a strong religious element, or that we had a local group that was strongly religious, or had particular beliefs, that could be difficult. [P3, F, WB, 1960’s].

While local authorities were encouraging the participants into pursuing more commercial activities to generate income, based on that account, there appeared to be constraints on, perhaps, one of the most lucrative ways to generate income. While local authorities exerted pressures on the participants for more commercial activities, this was not likely to have been a cause for isomorphism, because isomorphism was contingent on the participants being able to respond to demands, and implement them, in similar ways.

The accounts conveyed that the participants had strong senses of opposition to charging admission fees, but the local authorities seemed to identify this as an area of income generation (which again, akin to deaccessioning and commercialism,
highlights the tensions between the values of the participants and their local authorities. The pressures on the participants to charge admission fees were coercive in nature, and had the potential to cause other sources of pressure – pressure for redundancies, too. For instance, evident in this account from P25 is that coercive local authority pressures intermingle in the empirical setting, emerge from different areas and have different effects:

We had to bring in charging at [the museum] fairly recently, because the local authority said it’s either charge or redundancies. [...] I think what UK people see is that they pay their local authority tax, so why should they then have to pay to get in to their museum when they’re paying their local authority tax at an enormous rate anyway. There is resistance to it but also a resigned acceptance, with a very underlying political opinion. The visitor numbers have dropped, as we predicted. [P25, F, WB, 1960's].

The participants were in a difficult situation when it came to charging admission fees. They were at a crossroads between representing their museums as publicly-funded, public-service institutions, while at the same time being subject to pressures from their local authorities to charge. The accounts portrayed the clear and direct links that charging admission fees had on declining visitation, which posed greater problems for the participants, as they were also being pressured to focus on visitor figures (discussed in the previous section). These conflicting demands are causes for concern, because they were visibly putting the participants in difficult positions, further affecting their museums in ways that might be irreversible in the future, for they could lead to a downward spiral. Such themes are portrayed in this following account from P16:

If you stick an admission charge on a museum, you know you’re wiping out half of the potential people that would go there. It would almost be unfair if museums
then become for the elite or for the people that can afford them. [...] Putting an admission charge on the door [...] I think that should be a last resort. It’s a tough one because if museums can’t generate enough money and can’t receive any funding, then they’re going to end up cutting back on staff and cutting back on services. And then you have the case of a museum that is a museum that really can’t provide a good service for the visitors that do go there. [P16, M, WI, 1980’s].

In addition, and similarly to the discussions that were presented earlier, generating income from admission fees was contingent on public spending:

If they were to charge for entry, I don’t think you’d have very many coming in at all. Whereas people that come in to [location], are so fixed on seeing what they want to see, that they’re willing to pay the prices. [P23, M, WB, 1990’s].

This account also demonstrates the problems associated with local authority museums, as publicly funded organisations, charging admission fees. There is a great deal of controversy surrounding admission fees in museums in general (Vandersypen, 2012), and there are studies that suggest that admission fees deter and reduce visitation (Laskey, 2015). In addition, charging admission fees is part of a much broader access debate, as there is the potential problem of excluding individuals and social groups without the economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to pay to visit museums. This poses problems for cultural diversity, as it might help to enforce the status of museums as being white and middle-class institutions. Charging admission fees, then, could contribute to normative processes and encourage visitation from individuals from particular cultural backgrounds, to the exclusion of others.

Charging admission fees was also a contentious issue, and this following participant seemed to be keen not to make such discussions public:

If there is something negative going on, we have to be careful about what we say,
especially around charging you know, the story had to be really carefully looked at by a lot of people that knew about press releases. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

These discussions on income have shown that philanthropy, gift shop sales and charging for services were highly dependent on the willingness and giving of individuals. They have also highlighted the often conflicting directives inherent to local authority agendas (their pressures for the participants to become more commercially inclined, while constraining their hiring of venues for religious services, and exercising other pressures in the form of redundancy threats). These issues put local authority museum professionals in ambiguous situations when it comes to income generation, which are tied into the publicly-funded, public-service identities of their museums. While isomorphism would have been present among the museums that were charging admission fees in response to local authority pressures, for example, as many of the participants were resistant to doing so, coercive processes were not likely to have caused isomorphism among the museums to a significant degree because they were not uniformly or unanimously pursued by the participants.

**Sponsorship**

You don’t want to be charging the public because not enough people come upstairs anyway I think, so you certainly don’t want to be charging admission. We do now have sponsorship. [...] And, it’s the only other way you’d raise money. So, there are things happening. Whereas 10 years ago the council paid for everything. [P14, F, WB, 1980’s].

Many of the participants said that they were seeking, or were, partnering with external institutions and organisations for the purpose of sponsorship, a move that marked a shift towards commercialism. However, while the participants were being encouraged by their local authorities to pursue commercial activities to generate
income, while at the same time placing restraints on hiring venues for ceremonies (discussed in the previous section), local authorities placed restrictions on the types of sponsors that the participants were permitted to approach for sponsorship. These were coercive pressures that constrained the practices of the participants. For example, this following account from P10 portrays these themes:

We’re certainly looking for corporate sponsors, and there were certain types of sponsor that we weren’t allowed to approach. British American Tobacco has got a big presence in [the local area]. But, because it was a tobacco firm, we weren’t allowed to seek funding from them. The local authority procedures are a bit restricting and can be difficult to work around sometimes, which can be frustrating. [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].

Why that participant would have wanted to be sponsored by a tobacco manufacturer is another question, due to the public-facing identity of the museum. The appropriateness of sponsors is a consideration that P10 would have had to have made. That account is, perhaps, an example that the participants were not selective about who they approached for funding, because it was the need for funds that took priority. For example, this account from P20 illustrates that with sponsorship came branding, but that the funding was the greater concern over being fussy about the branding that came with it:

We hoped to be sponsored by Sainsbury’s this year, but sadly we weren’t picked for their charity of the year. We are fairly blatant about going for income, and I don’t mind if I have the Sainsbury’s logo all over my educational loan boxes, because we can’t really afford to be careful about that. [P30, F, WB, 1960’s].

Therefore, it seems that the participants were sacrificing their own needs and expectations in favour of accommodating those of sponsors, which, to some extent, indicates that they might have lost some of their agency in the process. Sponsors
have their own terms and conditions for funding, and Davidsson & Sørenson (2010) make the distinctions between the explicit and implicit roles of sponsors in museum contexts. ‘Direct impact refers to sponsors’ explicit demands of being visible in the exhibition, or demands concerning content. Sponsors’ indirect impact refers to implicit demands, where the staff members need to take into account what they believe are views of the sponsors through self-censorship’ (Davidsson & Sørenson, 2010: 345). With reference to some of these themes, there was evidence to suggest that the demands of sponsors were mainly of the direct variety, that is – being visible in terms of content, but also that of the implicit variety – the participants sacrificing their agency. In this following account, addressing an explicit form of sponsorship, P6 describes how the branding of a sponsor manifested in the content of the equipment that they provided, showing how the content of museums are affected.

For an exhibition collection I’m hoping to get sponsorship funds from some AV equipment, from a local company and then we can have their sticker on the side, and then it won’t be distracting within the exhibition. But, that’s the only sponsorship that we do, the sponsorship of equipment rather than anything else. [P6, F, WB, 1980’s].

In addition, this following example from P7 posits that sponsors themselves could also be similar, in this case, in the form of estate agents. This participant expressed not having been subject to explicit demands from these sponsors, but the effect of these sponsor relationships – similarly to the previous account, was branding, but with differences in terms of scale, for the branding of equipment was less intrusive than the branding of museum content that manifested in several areas, as opposed to the one:
There are two or three estate agents and we choose one to sponsor us, or to sponsor an event, it may start to show a bit of favouritism which might just be an uncomfortable thing to do. So far, no one’s kind of restricted us, but they’ve used it as a form of advertising, because their logos go on to our display boards, and posters, and various things like that. None of them have kind of suggested: ‘oh you should be doing this or this kind of exhibition or that kind of exhibition’. I think at the moment they’re just being very supportive, because they’re local people and they want to support a local institution. [P7, M, WB, 1950’s].

That account also shows that sponsors could be sources of support. However, if similar sponsorship models were replicated across many museums, this could be evidence of isomorphism. While the above accounts depict the participants’ perceptions that sponsors directed them to what they could and could not do, they were sources of coercive pressure because they expected branding in exchange for sponsorship. However, on a broader note, branding may have been a small sacrifice to make in a climate where funding is scarce, yet essential. Sponsorship, then, may have provided greater, long-term possibilities for the participants, and their museums, than it confronted them with limitations, although some of them recognised the importance of retaining their agency when in relationships with sponsors, and the importance of sponsor transparency, as conveyed in this account from P16:

There is a fine line when selling out, if someone approaches you with money and you were to say ‘no thanks’, then that’s ridiculous. I think that if the firm comes to you with money has an ulterior motive, then that’s different to when they’re being transparent about it, in which case is fine. [P16, M, WI, 1980’s].

This participant went on to discuss how sponsors could be a source of controversy, and conflict with the missions of museums (and of communities). This account from him also situates the relationships that take place between them:
There was a water company that we were in talks with. [...] It didn’t go any further, but if it had it would have been awful for the museum because it turns out that the [water company] had run into a bit of trouble recently because they weren’t looking after their water disposal properly and they’d been polluting a couple of beaches. And on the one side, the museum is organising all these beach cleanings, and really pushing and you know, trying to clean up natural habitats of water. [It] was completely contradictory because on the one side we’re championing the organisation, and then we’re taking money from the people that essentially are fighting it. It’s a difficult position to be in because you have to take the money off these people to keep your doors open. [P16, M, WI, 1980’s].

Indeed, sponsor relations have the potential to be highly controversial, affecting museum missions, the practices of their professionals, which feed into public image and perception. In the case of the British Museum and the National Portrait Gallery, when they broke their code of ethics to meet the needs of their sponsor, BP was able to influence ‘curatorial decision-making, shaped cultural institutions’ security strategies and used museums to further its political interests in the UK and abroad’ (Macalister, 2016). It was BP that decided to include a piece of aboriginal artwork when trying to promote the controversial offshore Great Australian Bight project, but also to send museum staff on its self-organised terrorism training program, requesting information about trade unions at the museums, amid worry that their members might be opponents of fossil fuel arts sponsorship, and insisting that BP logos appear on the front of an NPG book about commissioning. (Macalister, 2016). This example shows the pervasive influence and controversy of sponsorship on the activities of professionals and the content of museums, but one that was not akin to the portrayed experience of the participants interviewed for this thesis.

Some of the participants stated that there were some advantages to becoming independent from their local authorities. For example, this following account from
P25 portrays that independent status has the potential to provide her and her colleagues with greater agency in terms of seeking sponsorship:

Some benefits may be in the fact that we’d become more agentic, and we’d be able to approach different people for sponsorship, for more money, and unfortunately, we can’t at the moment because we’re run by [the local authority], and commercial stuff, it’s quite difficult sometimes. [P25, F, WB, 1960’s].

While that participant perceived that independence from her local authority presented the possibility of greater agency and financial growth, these themes can be understood through the concept of myth. For example, DiMaggio (1987) says that ‘independent foundations are, in many respects, uniquely organized to act independently’ because they have greater agency, flexibility and diversity (p.136). However, in reality, private foundations are in themselves constrained. ‘Relatively few of them live up to their potential to be different and to take risks that others refuse’ (DiMaggio, 1987: 136). Therefore, greater agency and financial growth are possibilities with moves to independent status, but they are not necessarily likely or feasible, which positions the imbalance between idealised ways of thinking (or theoretical possibilities), and myths (the ways in which the authenticity of theoretical possibilities can be questioned as true when positioned in reality).

Therefore, the participants had various income streams in addition to that which they received from their local authorities. While the participants had not convincingly become self-sufficient at income generation (which was highly affected by the agendas of the public and funders), which may make it difficult for their museums’ future security, posing problems for them being able to legitimate themselves separately from their local authorities.

**Key Funding Organisations**
There are a few large external organisations in the museums sector that offer local museums funding in the form of grants. Many of the accounts depicted that the funding offered by these organisations was highly valuable and was the dominant source of funding that the participants were actively pursuing, although applying for funding from these organisations meant that the participants had to construct applications (and the content of their projects to be funded) in quite specific ways (and ways that would get them funded). The criteria were consistent across a limited number of organisations, which means they had similar expectations about what they wanted from projects. Reminiscence projects (that the previous chapter showed resulted from coercive pressure and were a source of similarity) were supported by this source of funding, which indicates that it could have been a desirable topic, and one that manifested in funding applications. For example, P21 said that Arts Council England urged this participant to apply for its funding for a reminiscence project:

We can’t do our [reminiscence] project badly because that’s going to potentially unlock more investment from ACE, and they wanted us to apply. There’s quite a lot of delivery, even though we’ve got consultants doing it, we still have to be involved in the consultation, in the community based events, etc. [P21, F, WB, 1960’s].

In the following account, P23 talked about how a project did not get funded, despite being similar to other museums that had been funded. This account shows that projects funded through this source were similar:

There are other museums that have got it and they were no different to us at the time. It’s just our applications weren’t as strong, which might imply that the people putting the applications together haven’t been trained in how to do it. [P23, M, WB, 1990’s].
The participants expressed the ways that they constructed applications (and the content of their projects to meet funding criteria. Lowenstein (2014) argues that professional vocabularies foster organizing, as they are tools that enable ‘members of a social collective to form conventions and so generate meaningful systems of categories representing specialised knowledge, identities and valuations’ (p.79). For example, P12 also described the key words he used on applications to make them more attractive to funders. While a strategic response, it was one that shaped this participant’s project towards particular organisational norms:

We know exactly what we’re going to do so that it ticks the right boxes. […] You have to spell it all out. You can’t assume that they’re going to grasp what you mean. You put phrases in. Such as hands-on, children, engagement. The ongoing things are going to be sustainable. The ongoing learning and development that we’re adding towards. So, it doesn’t just stop there, it’s about making sure that it goes on. It’s going to have a future. They like that a lot. You have to devise things, be very careful. Get the most out of it really. […] Sometimes they get you to have a second go. You submit it and then they tell you why they’ve turned it down. [P12, M, WB, 1950’s].

Instead of the participants freely driving the application process, the accounts depicted that criteria stated what funding organisations expected from applications. This involved the participants sacrificing their agency (which was similarly the case with sponsorship). For example, P21 explained the process of constructing projects to fit funding criteria in applications. Further to this, this account demonstrates the content of projects may have been compromised in the same way. On this basis, it was through the application process that projects were shaped, but in ways that suppressed the relevance of, and the participant’s interest in, projects, in favour of securing funding:
You can end up writing in activities to fit the funding criteria. You might need funding for X, but, actually, what the funder is really interested in is Y. In order to get the money for X you’ve got to do a load of Y as well, which might be an activity that you don’t have time, interest or resources to do, but you end up doing it because that helps you get the funding. [...] I think that’s the issue with external funding: to fulfil the criteria, you apply for things you wouldn’t necessarily have done. You end up doing things that aren’t totally in your interest really. [P21, F, WB, 1960’s].

That account conveys the participant’s willingness to meet the needs and expectations of the funder, which illustrates how significant this source of funding must have been for the participant. However, some of the participants perceived they were able to navigate the application process. For instance, P30 described her attempt to find a balance between meeting her own needs to that of the funder, between being clear about the destination for a project, but, ultimately, having to conform to the criteria:

It’s not the thing that you would have done first, because your priorities aren’t their priorities. It’s a question of, if you had all the money in the world and you’ve got a powerboat and you can go straight to that, but you haven’t and you’ve got a sailing boat and you’ve got to go where the grants take you. So, you should always be heading towards that destination and you should always be honest and enthusiastic about that destination, but sometimes you do have to alter your projects a bit, to fit the grant-giving body’s criteria. [P30, F, WB, 1960’S].

Some of the participants also explained approaching the organisation that was most likely to fund their project. In the following account from P10, for example, she described approaching particular organisations for particular needs, but the account shows her mindful consideration of becoming vulnerable to organisational agendas:
It’s a case of finding the one that most closely meets whatever the project is that you want to work on. There’s always the risk because if you’re relying too much on project funding you get buffeted from one funder’s agenda to another and you need to be a little bit careful about that. [P27, F, WB, 1960’s].

However, similarly to before, the agendas of organisations take precedence, and, therefore, this participant’s perception that she was able to navigate the funding process can be interpreted as optimistic, and at the same time, a mistake or misapprehension. Funding criteria and applications, then, can be perceived as coercive pressures that caused museum projects that were funded through this source, to become similar (but only on the basis that they were funded). If funded, it is likely that these processes caused isomorphism to take place among the museums (especially as the museums were similar in their content). A wider point can be made, because funding from these organisations was not specific to local authority museums, isomorphism could possibly broadly exist across different types of museums in the sector, although criteria were also useful. For example, P12 explains that:

It focuses your mind more. For example, World War One. You can’t just represent white people, you have to represent Indians and Asians. So, in that respect, it does broaden your mind more, because you also have to cater for the different types of people in the local community. So, you have to open it up worldwide. [P12, M, WB, 1950’s].

Useem and Kutner (1987) argue that as corporations grow, ‘the convergence of corporate practices may lead companies to give more and to give in similar ways’, but, ‘it may at the same time make it more difficult for organizations unfamiliar to business to become the recipients’ (p.110). Therefore, the issue with funding organisations is that they do not typically ‘support activities that are either experimental
or in other aspects comparatively unattractive to most agencies that assist arts organizations’ (DiMaggio, 1987: 114). Hence, this source of funding homogenised the practices of the participants and the content of their museums, and it was a barrier to diversity. In addition, P8 described the assistance that Museum Development Officers (MDO’s) provided local museums in his area:

There’s two museum development officers in the South East. [...] It’s a local source of support for all local museums, and they’re very valuable. They give a lot of support, especially to the smaller museums like us. [...] I think they may possibly have some input, and I think the MDO’s might have a little say in it to help you along. [...] They deal with a range of things, the MDO’s, it’s not all about funding. They did deliver training courses, training in all aspects of museum work, which was free training really to anybody in the area, so they did a lot of that sort of work. [P8, M, WB, 1950’s].

Museum Development Officers (MDO’s) that were commissioned by Arts Council England, while useful sources of support and guidance for local museum professionals, could have contributed to the participants constructing similar projects, and according to the criteria of the key funding organisations. Thus, they were likely to have been coercive pressures, but also normative pressures, especially as they delivered training.

Friends Groups

The final source of income to be discussed is that provided by friends groups. Friends groups are informal groups that operate akin to a ‘social club model’ (Hayes & Slater, 2003). They are non-professional, self-governing groups with independent charitable status (Serventy, 2002). This model is the same for friends groups supporting ‘specialist library and small or independent museums’, raising income
in similar ways consistently over time (The National Archives, 2012: 4-6). Friends groups generate their income through donations, fundraising and the sale of memberships, although in addition to financial assistance, they volunteer, provide expertise and foster public support on behalf of the hosts that they represent (Prestwich, 1983; Serventy, 2002; Swerdlow, 2016). All of the participants spoke about the ways that they received income and support from their friends groups. For example, P17 described the myriad of ways that her museum’s friends group provided support, and, in this account, she exhibits a sense of gratitude for having their assistance:

We have a fantastic friends organisation that do the fundraising for us. All of the exciting add-on things that we do that isn’t lighting or heating the building, paying for staff or putting on exhibitions [...] is all funded by the friends. [...] Our [project] has been funded by the friends, we had a website with new online resources for an online catalogue which was funded by the friends, and they developed a museum app for us. We have events and once a year we have a big community event which is free. This year we did a big World War One re-enactment with a life size spy plane on the field opposite the museum, which was completely free to the community but paid for by the friends. So, we’re very lucky. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

While the accounts portrayed that the contributions from friends groups were relatively small in comparison to that received from other sources of funding, they were consistent (other sources were not, necessarily). In this following account from P12, for instance, he expressed how much his museum’s friends group contributed to the running of his museum, and, similarly to the previous account, conveys a sense of gratitude for having them and their support:

We’re lucky at the moment because we have friends of the museum. [...] They raise about £6,000 extra money. So, if we need a new laptop, they will pay for it. It won’t come out of our money. Wherever we can, the friends will pay for it. Otherwise, you
just tick over. [P12, M, WB, 1950’s].

Consistent with the amount depicted in that account, a study into the income of 23 museum and archives friend’s groups from 2008-2012 finds that the average income generated for host organisations is £6,402 (The National Archives, 2012). Interestingly, this following account from P17 depicts that friends groups could also be valuable for enhancing income by working to the advantages of their organisational status:

   The friends worked out that if donations went directly to the friends they can now claim gift aid back on them, so that’s what we do. We have a donations box and instead of saying donations to the museum it says donations to the friends. The friend’s treasurer then gets gift aid from that and then gives the gift aid to the council. So that’s a twenty-five percent increase in our donations. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

But, as already highlighted in this chapter, funding arrangements encompass give-and-take dynamics, and the relationships between the participants and their friends groups are no different. This is because the accounts portrayed that in exchange for the financial assistance that they provided their museums, the participants provided their friends groups with small benefits. For instance, P7 explained that his museum’s friends group received invitations to special museum events:

   Another strand of income we have as well is from our friends group, which are local people that just simply put a fiver in a year, and they become part of the friends. They have advantages in that they are invited to private views and special evenings and special events that we put on. [P7, M, WB, 1950’s].

Although friends groups tend to operate separately to the host that they represent, they do often work with the host organisation to maximise the mutual benefits of
the relationship (Slater, 2003). If friends groups expect such benefits in exchange for their support, they can be perceived as coercing the participants to do so. This is because, as DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue, coercive pressures can stem from the cultural expectations in the society that institutions function. In addition, the participants might have had to frequently liaise with friends group members, and perhaps manipulate the content of projects to appeal to their friends groups (and communities, which is addressed in the next section). If this is the case, coercive pressures, and perhaps, isomorphism, could be present in these areas. However, caution needs to be exercised with claims like these, because there is little known about friends groups in terms of their organisation and the relationships between them and the hosts that they represent (Serventy, 2002, Slater, 2003). More research is, therefore, needed into these areas for more assertive claims to be made.

However, there are problems with this source of support. As friends groups mainly consist of elderly and retired individuals (Serventy, 2002), a selection of the accounts conveyed that their members were ageing or that their support was in decline. For instance, in this following account, P2 talked about how his museum’s friends group was made up of the same individuals that started it over 30 years ago, and that their presence was in decline:

We have money contributed by the friends of the museum, but that is now increasingly getting very small. Unfortunately, the friends are made up on people that started the museum in 1980, and they were sort of late fifties, sixties at that date. You can imagine their ages now, they’re starting to drop off their perches so they’re becoming far fewer. [P2, M, WB, 1950’s].

Friends groups, and the income that they provided, were valuable to the participants and the running of their museums. The funding from local authorities and friends groups may be the only consistent sources of income that the participants
received, albeit if the amounts had been in decline. These sources of financial support and assistance, because of their consistency, can be perceived to have contributed to the sustainability of the museums (but there were much larger issues at play in them which threatened it too, deaccessioning for example, along with moves to privatisation, trust status and potential museum closures, which are discussed in the following sections).

Funding organisations have effects on those that they fund (Useem & Kutner, 1987). This has been the message of the past few discussions on funding. Therefore, the participants had multiple sources of income (see Griffin, 2008; Lindqvist, 2012; Tufts & Milne, 1999) and each of them was valuable. Some avenues, though, they did not pursue. Sponsorship and funding from the key funding organisations entailed coercive processes and led the participants’ practices and their museums to homogenise, causing them to become similar. However, this homogenisation was only applicable to those that were successfully funded, and by the funders that had similar expectations. These findings show, nonetheless, that isomorphism was present among the museums that had the necessary conditions at play. These sources of financial assistance benefit museums in immediate and, often, short-term ways, meaning that professionals will only be able to plan short-term into the future, if anything, and this poses problems for their resilience and sustainability (see Museums Association, 2009). Non-financial, moral support, on the other hand, contributes to them in the long-term. Later, it is discussed how the participants were actively trying to build much stronger links with their communities and councillors, for they perceived these two groups to be deterrents to the potential future closure of their museums, and therefore, valuable to the purposes of resilience and sustainability. This means that the participants were taking on more direct relationships with their communities, as opposed to relying on their friends groups to generate community support by proxy.
Privatisation & Trust Status

The local authorities did not have the provisions to suitably fund their museums. They were seeking to outsource their museums’ services, so that they were delivered by external organisations to cut maintenance costs, and were, therefore, encouraging the museums to operate more independently from them, which marked shifts in organisational responsibility. For instance, P30 expressed that her local authority was acting as more of a mediator of services as opposed to a provider of them, and that she had to outsource her museum’s rubbish collection, detrimentally affecting her museum’s resources in terms of cost, and efficiency:

[The local authority] have a vision of the local authority that doesn’t deliver services directly, so it’s a broker for independent organisations to deliver services. They would like to follow that model for museums. [...] The money [the museum] used to raise that could have been spent on the collections will now be spent on the rubbish collection. As an individual customer, we don’t get the same deal that the local authority got when we were part of a massive local authority deal. So, a lot of things that the local authority used to cover, they no longer cover, which is sad. It has a big effect on the museum’s service that we’re delivering. [...] I think the idea of not delivering services and contracting out services, which is a Conservative idea, I think, and one that they’re very committed to. [P30, F, WB, 1960’s].

In that example, the local authority’s reduced involvement imposed greater pressure on P30 to outsource her museum’s services. Thus, while the participants may have experienced less organisational pressure exercised by local authorities via shifts to privatisation, they may have actually experienced greater institutionally driven pressure. This pressure would have also shifted from local authorities to new maintenance providers. The shifts towards privatisation are also present in this account from P7:
This was one of their properties which was key to actually filter out to the private sector or another group that could take it on and run it. A lack of funds and [the local authority] had to pick and choose and they’ve had to decide what’s going to be best in the interests of the town really and that’s really what the angle is. [P7, M, WB, 1950’s].

While all of the museums were local authority-owned museums, for some of them, their governance models were more hybridised, because management was shared between local authorities and external institutions or organisations. For example, while most of the museums were housed in the same buildings as their local authority, in the remaining cases, the museums were housed in the buildings of external organisations to whom local authorities paid rent. These external partners also played a role in the co-management of the museums. Although, P30 expressed her concerns with such arrangements, for there were obvious concerns posed in terms of their resilience, sustainability and the position of museums that follow this governance model in the future. Similarly to what is discussed in the following section, this account constructs the position of these museums as fragile:

What worries me about contracting them out is that you lose that permanence. The [arts organisation] in [another town] has taken a three-year contract with the [local authority] to run the museum and has a grant from the local authority for three years, and, at the end of that, they’ll have to reapply. So, that museum is only really running for three years. [...] I don’t think that’s a very healthy model for museums. [P30, F, WB, 1960’s].

Therefore, the ownership and management of some of the museums had started to take on different, hybridised forms. While they would have also been subject to the coercive pressures exercised by the partnering institution or organisation (and
those exercised by local authorities may have been lessened, although local authority policies were a strong presence in the museums (as discussed earlier in this chapter). This indicates that the museums with this hybridised governance model were likely to have been similar to local authority museums, and, therefore, places where isomorphism took place. It could have meant, however, that local authorities were less hands-on and involved in the museums (with could have been the case with such shifts towards privatisation), but this is not to suggest that their forms of influence were weaker (only their presence).

Moves to trust status is fast becoming a common encounter for museums across the sector (Harvey, 2016; Museums Association, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2016). ‘They are not usually funded directly by the state, but may receive support through government programmes. Some may have agreements with local authorities (Museums Association, 2017a: 3). Moves to trust status are practical, but political (Rex, 2015), for, in addition to ownership, management and administration, trust status threatens the identity of local authority museums as fundamentally public service institutions that exist to serve them (Rex, 2015). For some of the participants, potential moves to trust status was one of many considerations in an environment filled with uncertainty. For example, this account from P25 embodies the theme of uncertainty, and the strong sense of unknowing and lack of direction about what was going to happen in this museum in the future – professionally and institutionally:

There’s been a lot of restructuring over the entire service, there’s a lot of job roles created that weren’t previously. We’re still don’t know if we’re going to go to trust status. There’s been a plan for a while now that we will go to a self-governing trust and we will be ejected from the council, go out and be this little ship on our own, so now there’s a bit of a change is what it seems. So, I suppose people are unsure about the bigger picture regarding what’s happened in the local council essentially and where we’re heading. As a general feeling across the department, people are
really busy and they're stressed and don't really know what's going to happen in the future. [P25, F, WB, 1960].

Some of the participants said that becoming independent from their local authorities would be difficult without its provisions, which, while it had declined, was consistent and sufficient enough to cover basic operating costs. There were benefits to being governed by local authorities (discussed earlier in this chapter) and security was one of them. In this following account, P2 poses what it would be like if it was taken away:

It’s that famous invisible security. You don’t think about it on a day-to-day basis, but, if it was taken away from us, we’d probably be overwrought, we’d probably have a big problem. [P2, M, WB, 1950’s].

In addition, P17 posed the financial difficulties and the problem of self-sufficiency associated with converting to trust status, and that her museum’s sustainability was contingent on its connection to her local authority:

We’re never going to be able to pay to run the museum, so, if they ever decided to set us up as a trust, it would be very difficult for us. [...] We’re only sustainable to the extent that the local authority is able to fund us. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

Some of the participants did not have a choice in deciding whether to become independent from their local authorities, because some of the local authorities were explicit in their (coercive) pressures, but some of the participants also wanted the change. This account from P7 is demonstrative of the two – and situates the role that the absence of know-how in becoming independent (similarly to the absence of know-how in pursuing commercialism), combined with lacking resources, has on making the transition:
When we feel that we've got enough income coming in, and had that sort of security, that would have been the key for when we ask for independence. But the intention was that we become entirely independent and self-financing. It would appear the new town local authority that have been elected are keen for us to go sooner rather than later. The problem we've found, and what we're concerned with going independent, is that there isn't the know-how and we don’t have the manpower as well. There’s insufficient people with insufficient knowledge and insufficient time to be able to see every angle. [P7, M, WB, 1950’s].

Because the participants had such distinctive professional identities, this is likely to make moving to trust status particularly troublesome for them, because survival as an independent organisation accompanies privatisation and the need for extensive income generation, commercialism and self-sufficiency (Wu, 2003). Therefore, with these concerns present, joining with an existing trust organisation had the potential to avert the issues to do with the participants’ lack of know-how to become independent, and subvert the risks associated with making the change, by joining with an established organisation. For instance, P10 spoke about these themes, and this account from her argues that trust status had the promise of sustainability, even if that did appear to mean that the institutional identity of this museum would be dissolved into the organisational structure of the trust:

We’ve got different local councillors now and they are quite keen that we should join in with the trust. We should hear by the end of the year if we’ll join up with the county. And in some ways, that’s encouraging, because I think we stand a better chance of survival as part of this broader independent trust than we do staying within the city local authority. So, I think we are just hoping that we’ll join up with the trust. Even if there has to be changes and reductions in the services of our own team, the museum will probably stand a better chance of survival in the long term [P10, F, WB, 1950’s].
Joining with an existing trust organisation meant that the museum would have been moving from one form of administration to another, for trusts have their own governmental and administrative conditions (and with them, pressures, constraints and structuring forces), which means that they could also be isomorphic environments. However, Tuck et al. (2015) find that, aside from legal and technical status, local authority museum professionals need to select the right business-models and strategies that support the development of their institutions. For some, to avoid closure (discussed in the next section), that business-model could imply shifting to a trust form. The self-governance model (not joining with an existing trust organisation) provides the promise of greater agency and opportunity. It was identified earlier that the participants were constrained in their pursuit of commercialism and charging for services, but these kinds of restraints did not seem to be as prevalent for trusts. This means that the participants, in theory, could explore more avenues of income generation in trust form, (but in practice, are constrained by their lack of know-how to do so). Nevertheless, the possibilities (as opposed to the restraints) are conveyed in this account from P27:

I think independent museums can possibly sense the best opportunities at the moment to avoid those pitfalls, because they have the opportunities to act as businesses and make money, with resource opportunities and charging for different services. [...] It’s definitely a concern. [P27, F, WB, 1960’s].

In addition, with reference to grants, this account from P30 echoes similar themes:

It gives us a degree of flexibility for grants, because we can go for grants as a trust that we couldn’t go for as a local authority museum. So, to a degree, it gives us the best of both worlds. And I think it’s a good combination. [P30, F, WB, 1960’s].

Indeed, while independent trust status could mean that local authority museum
professionals could become more autonomous regarding the ways in which they pursue income and potentially, foster greater sustainability for their museums, these possibilities could also be myths (see DiMaggio, 1987). Independence offers the promise of increased opportunities and possibilities, but also, the reality of the situation is that it also offers increased risks (Wu, 2003). The findings of the Museums Association’s (2017a) survey, for instance, finds that local authority museums that have recently transferred to independent status have not fared particularly well in making the transition, and based on these findings, a contributing factor is likely to be the absence in their know-how regarding how to operate commercially and independently from their local authorities.

Fragility, Closure & Resilience

Lindqvist (2012) argues that due to their status as non-statutory services, museums are exposed and vulnerable to fluctuations in state income and funding. Indeed, in relation to this topic, most of the accounts portrayed the participants’ perceptions that their museums were fragile because their museums were not statutory. For instance, in this account from P17, her museum is constructed as particularly fragile when positioned against statutory services, with its potential closure looming as a result:

I knew that when I was going into the job. That the local authority could, in theory, and at any point: ‘well, we want our £120,000 a year to go into something else’. If it came down to keeping the streets swept and the drains and all the other things that a local authority has to do, then maybe a museum isn’t high on their list. We are mindful that the local authority could close us at any moment. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

With the focus of local authorities on the funding and support of core, life or death
services (Harvey, 2016), many of the accounts also conveyed the participants’ perceptions that their museums were not valued by the government, local authority staff or councillors. Similarly to before, these accounts feed into the non-statutory status of museums, constructing them as exposed and vulnerable to the agendas of their governing local authority bodies. For example, P12 said that he felt like his museum was not valued by local government officials and his own local authority, which seemed to have been particularly present at election time:

In the local elections, there’s not one of them that mentions local history and local heritage from any of the councillors in the local elections. It’s all welfare, it’s all roads, it’s all saving the common or whatever, but heritage, when it comes to it, it’s very low profile. Even within the council, and, sometimes, I feel that we’re a forgotten service. [P12, M, WB, 1950’s].

This theme of not being valued is also present in this account from P23, but with particular reference to museums not being able to generate returns (which connects to the difficulties between museums and commercialism). Again, similarly to the two previous accounts, museums are constructed as fragile due to their non-statutory status:

I don’t think they’re given enough importance. Because [the museum is] not economically profitable, it doesn’t particularly produce much that you can put on a spreadsheet. It doesn’t seem valued and not something that’s given priority. If there’s going to be cuts, the first place they’re going to look are museums and the arts. I think these are the easily cuttable things in terms of what councils see. [P23, M, WB, 1990’s].

McDonald and Cicáková (2015) report that local authority professionals have doubts as to whether culture, arts and library services would be provided within the next 10 years (but, unlike arts and culture services, libraries are statutory services
and so, as it currently stands, would have to be provided, although at what level of provision is a another matter entirely). A similar sentiment was echoed by P30, and this account from her sets the scene regarding the potentially non-existent future of non-statutory services:

They can make that decision at any time, because a museum is not a statutory service. [...] Now museums and heritage aren’t statutory, and you can certainly envisage a time when the council will only be delivering statutory services. [P30, F, WB, 1960’s].

As museums are not required by law, this could mean that coercive, policy pressures are less prevalent in this area. However, it also means that museums are also at risk of cutbacks in finances and support, at times of economic hardship. This does put them in a precarious position (Rex, 2015), and it is due to their non-statutory status. Therefore, the lack of statutory policy in this area is detrimental to their survival, especially because it is difficult for local authority museum professionals to pursue commercialism and become self-sufficient (discussed in an earlier section).

Some of the participants talked about how the opening hours of their museums had been reduced, or that their museums had partly closed, which, in this period of austerity, are common experiences for museum professionals across the sector (Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a). Moreover, many of the participants spoke about the threat of their museums’ potential future closure. For example, P23 discussed the possibility of his museum’s closure, which he initially found out about through an indirect, public source, indicating that there was an ongoing lack of transparency from his local authority on the issue:

There’s going to be a review about whether the museum stays open, and that’s
coming in the next couple of months. I actually only got the news through the local paper, and that was the first time that I’d heard of it, so that was a bit of a shock. There’s a bit of worry about what might happen. Even then if they decide to close it, we’ve worked out that we’ve got another six months before it can be closed. But, we’re being very kept in the dark. [P23, M, WB, 1990’s].

On a similar note, this account from P17 demonstrates that her museum’s closure had been on the cards for two consecutive decades, which can be conceived of as a period of prolonged uncertainty and fragility:

There was a time back in the eighties and again in the nineties when the council were considering closing the museum or downsizing it or changing it. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

Although, on the other hand, while the exact causes are not known, perhaps that example conveys that P17’s museum was in some way resilient to have remained open after that time. Indeed, resilience was a theme that was discussed by P28. His account conveys that, while museums in the sector were being challenged, it may have encouraged greater long-term resilience and sustainability for those that survive:

It does encourage a sink or swim environment, which has its benefits, but also has its drawbacks as well. The museums you see survive are probably going to be very good and very resilient, but you are going to lose some along the way, [...] But, you are going to get some that come out the other side and will be stronger. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

However, the reality is that not all museums will be able to endure the climate and build resilience. Approximately 44 UK museums have closed since 2010 and further closures are inevitable (Brown, 2016). P17, who was a supporting advisor to two
surrounding museums, explained that the individuals from one of the museums in question had a particularly negative outlook, which seemed to have been related to a gap in their funding know-how – factors that affected their resilience:

It’s always: ‘oh I don’t know how to fill out a grant application […] When we get the money, what do we do with it?’ […] Now, I don’t know whether negative feeling came first or the threat of closure came first. I think it was the more negative outlook, because, when they were threatened of closure, I think they’d have crumbled a bit more. I think if that was to happen to the other museum that I’m advisor for, I think they would say: ‘right, ok. Well, what can we do? Let’s fight’. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

The individuals from the second museum seem to have had a better chance of survival which was due to their resilience. Resilience is a theme that was prominent in P27’s situation. P27’s museum was the only one in the sample to have closed around 12 months prior to interview, which was because her local authority had reclaimed the space in which her museum was housed, and did not have another building to replace it. This participant referred to her museum as one without walls, because, despite not having a physical presence in the traditional sense, its displays were housed in multiple local authority centres that were scattered throughout the borough. The museum had a website that displayed the museum’s collection (discussed in the previous chapter), which was in storage. The professionals from this mobile museum were, therefore, quite resourceful and resilient at keeping their museum alive, in its revived form, in the face of such adversity:

The team are now based at our local civic centre, and, then, objects are on display at the civic centre and at various points around the borough. So, they’re not mobile, they’re static, but they are just in different places. And we also have mobile elements, such as pop-up displays and putting temporary exhibitions in art galleries and the like, as well. We’re calling ourselves a museum without walls, because we’re
That museum is an example that, when museums close, they are not necessarily lost, and that reviving them could lead to more innovative and diverse approaches to curating and communicating objects. Although, by the same token, that is a rare example, for the local authority continued to own and manage the museum (and under usual circumstances museums tend to be dissolved). It is, therefore, an example that may not be easily followed by others (or even one that others would want to follow in). In addition, while resilient, that museum may not have been necessarily sustainable, but fragile, for the housing of its displays (and collection) was dependent on the goodwill and consent of the local authority to outsource its buildings, which had proved to be volatile in the past.

Threats of closure were looming for many of the museums, and with pushes towards privatisation, trust status may be the only viable option for local authority museum professionals to foster resilience and sustainability for their museums. While many of the participants expressed that they were (by choice or coercion) contemplating or transitioning to trust status, many of the participants also spoke about how they were building community and councillor support to safeguard against the potential future closure of their museums, and, in turn, build resilience and sustainability. This is discussed next.

Building Community & Councillor Support

The Museums Association (2015s, 2017a) states that museum professionals are responding to austerity by focusing their attention and efforts on income generation (which has been evidenced in this chapter), and by building stronger links with their communities, by incorporating them into the work that they did in their museums.
(which was evidenced in the previous chapter). The findings have evidenced that friends groups, too, played roles in building community support. In addition to these, most of the participants explained that they were trying to build community and councillor support (the latter of which was attempted by appealing to their interests, discussed in the previous chapter), as they perceived them to be defences against the potential closure of their museums. They were seen as mechanisms for building resilience and sustainability. This discussion starts with community support.

P12, for instance, recollected a time when his local authority attempted to close his museum. The move was resisted by his community, forcing the reversal of the decision of the local authority. This shows that this community was politically motivated and influential in their effects:

We’re very lucky, because they did at one point try to close the museum down. Fortunately, the whole village rose up and said ‘no, and the schools, no, no, it’s too good an asset’. We became a political hot potato. They’d have to be fairly desperate before closing us down. [P12, M, WB, 1950’s].

Indeed, the participants exhibited their awareness that their communities were such forces of support. Similarly to the previous account, this account from P17 shows that communities were sources of counter-pressure, and had the potential to reverse local authority decision-making. This account also conveys the give-and-take dynamics that took place between the participants and their communities, in exchange for advocacy:

I thought that was an obvious counterbalance to forty local councillors who sit in a committee room. It’s the eighty thousand residents that will hopefully speak out for you. Even if only a quarter of them did, it’s still a voice that the local authority
have to listen to. [...] We do things for the local community, but I expect the local community to stand up for us, if we were to ever be threatened. [P17, F, WB, 1970’s].

Communities have expectations of their museums and of their professionals (Bienkowski, 2014; Karp et al., 1992; Turakhia, 2010). Meeting the expectations of their communities, in exchange for their support, was what the participants described that they were doing. For example, this account from P6 conveys responsiveness to the expectations of her community. Based on the way that this participant expressed the obligation to respond to these expectations that stemmed from her community, they can be perceived as coercive pressures:

We’ve done a lot of consultations with residents, and the public at large, and the need for a local history offer is greater than the military one. So, we have to respond to public demand. [P6, F, WB, 1980’s].

Furthermore, this account from P3, similarly to the previous accounts, renders communities as particularly active in their pursuit of their chosen cause:

There’s a very affluent and articulate community who want what they want. And, so, I think, in many cases, they’re lobbying. And if they don’t like something and they want something, they’re inclined to go to a local councillor and say: ‘why can’t we do this?’ [P3, F, WB, 1960’s].

P30 also described having a strong community behind her museum. Yet, this account from her exhibits that, what her community wanted, may have occasionally stood at odds with the needs of her museum, suggesting that communities may be a source of coercion and obstruction at times:

We want tourists, but, on the whole, the residents that vote for the local councillors don’t want tourists. And, I remember briefly, there was a tourism officer at [the local
authority], and she said to me her job was to manage the tourists so the residents never saw them, basically. That was her brief. [P30, F, WB, 1960’s].

The following is a vivid example from P28. He explained the situation where complaints from his community interfered with the construction of a Halloween exhibition, highlighting the politically invested nature of his museum at the time, by taking on the tensions and expectations of the community and local authority. These were coercive pressures. Although P28’s curating practices were highly constrained in this example, he was particularly agentic, as he managed to think of ways around and negotiate these constraints so that they allowed him to strategically install the exhibition:

A lot of museums in the next month are going to start capitalising on Halloween, because that’s a very popular thing. We’re not allowed to use the word Halloween or reference it, because the council gets complaints, [...] and we don’t want to be seen to be encouraging. [...] Now we are doing a Halloween thing, but we’re not calling it Halloween, we’re keeping it more to the original tradition that inspired it. So, we are making [...] costumes and masks [...] but we’re not using the term Halloween. You have to do that. If your councillor comes in and says: ‘look, we’re getting a lot of flak about this or that’, you just can’t do it, you’re done. You just go with it. So we did an entire [...] show, never referencing [the term Halloween], other than it was an event that was happening, never having to express an opinion about it. [P28, M, WC, 1980’s].

Local authorities and communities were forces for coercion. While local authority influences were those that homogeneously affected the practices of the participants and their institutions (discussed in the previous chapter), it was unlikely that communities, while causing coercive pressures, were forces for isomorphism, because they have such diverse expectations, they are not similar or predictable. To
some extent, communities could be a source of diversification, but only if local authority museum professionals seek to diversify beyond the dominant western narratives of display (and diversify their collections, which is unlikely). These themes were discussed in the previous chapter, whereby co-curation with ethnic-minority and marginalised groups had the potential to elicit new and more original lines of storytelling. But, as it was discussed there, these narratives of display need to be long lasting and not fleeting attempts to improve outreach and minority-group visitation.

In addition to communities, many of the participants described fostering support from local councillors. The main way that they achieved this was by actively raising awareness. In these instances, the participants can be perceived as more agentic individuals who influenced councillors in their own, subtle ways. Similarly to before, the participants perceived that councillors were defences against the potential future closure of their museums. As councillors are directly involved in the decision-making that takes place regarding museums, gaining their support has obvious advantages. Indeed, the participants were well aware of this. This account from P27, for instance, conveys the importance of being particularly active and agentic in the building of community and councillor support,

It’s absolutely crucial, because that’s who makes the decisions ultimately. [...] I think a really important thing to remember is to think about advocacy, and that quite a big part of advocacy is doing good work and demonstrating the benefit of having done good work. [...] So, there was a lot of advocacy about: we have a great collection and here are some lovely things from it, this is what we can do with it and this is what we’re here for, and this is how we can fit into broader council agendas, in terms of wellbeing. [...] Building relationships with people and selling your ideas and telling them what you can do and all of that kind of stuff is good too. [P27, F, WB, 1960’s].
In addition, P19 expressed her conscious and deliberate approach to raising awareness of her museum, which, again, could indicate that local councillors, in positions of influence, serve a vital function when it came to influencing potentially detrimental decisions in a more positive direction, from within the local authority:

We would like them as people of influence to support the museum in whatever way they can. [...] It's a very tight knit community, generally, and those who are local councillors we would know by sight and would make an effort to obviously make sure that they have nothing but a high impression of the museum. [P19, F, WB, 1960's].

For example, in the following account, P17 explains that, in response to her local authority's attempts to close her museum, she actively raised their awareness of the museum, which indicates that awareness was this participant's response to safeguarding against her museum's potential closure:

There were a few local councillors that thought they should just cut their losses and close it, instead of spending all this money refurbishing, so from the very first day I was here, I spent hard time winning them over. [...] The local councillors are very supportive of us and they come to all of our events and the rest of it. But there's something in the press every week about what we do. Every month the local councillors get an update from the museum and what we're doing. So why would they know unless we tell them? [P17, F, WB, 1970's].

The accounts, however, convey that it might have been difficult for the participants to foster local councillor support when they had the potential to change, because of the election every four-year period. This means that it may have been necessary for the participants to re-establish relationships with councillors, which would have taken time, effort and could have also been quite unsettling. This illustrates the temporal nature of this source of support, and it is fair to suggest that, due to the
unpredictable nature of local councillors’ personal attitudes towards their museum, it was probably difficult for the participants to have anticipated how they approached or won favour with local councillors who were entering the local authority structure. Therefore, there was a whole getting-to-know process the participants had to actively pursue, which is depicted in the following account from P12:

If you’ve got a lot of new local councillors, they’re not going to know what the museum did. [...] You just have to kind of win them over. We have a lot of newer ones this time. We actually looked up a picture of all the local councillors, and I didn’t recognise half of them when I saw them. [P12, M, WB, 1950’s].

The evidence has shown that communities and councillors are valuable sources of support that the participants were engaging with. Lindqvist (2012) states ‘the management of long-term stakeholder relationships is a more reliable way of achieving financial stability than the implementation of short-term strategies to counter the effects of a recession and financial crisis’ (p.1). These sources of support exercised their own coercive pressures, though, as well as interplaying with one another. In the circumstances, however, the exchange that take place in these relationships is, perhaps, small prices to pay when closures can be avoided by accommodating the needs of supporting individuals. These sources of support seem to have become more crucial in the context of austerity, for they can alleviate some of the pressures for closures and, subsequently, provide local authority museum professionals, and their institutions, with resilience and sustainability.

Summary

The discussions presented in this chapter have shown that local authority museum professionals are reliant on various stakeholders for funding, which is consistent
with the literature (e.g. Froelich, 1999; Lindqvist, 2012). In this chapter, the possibilities – as well as the pressures, constraints and structuring forces that were imposed by stakeholders, are framed as coercive processes that encouraged the participants to work in specific and, yet, similar ways, which is achieved through their conformity to the organisational norms of local authorities and external funders alike. While all stakeholders have their own terms and conditions in exchange for funding and support, meaning that there might be slight variation among these expectations, this does not prevent the museums from becoming similar, in terms of their content, operation and structure. Yet, tensions existed. Moves towards commerce meant that the participants had to adopt different values and pursue greater commercial activities for the purpose of income generation, but there were constraints present (again exercised by local authorities) that prevented the participants from pursuing it effectively or to any real benefit. While this suggests that the museums were not exposed to the marketplace to any significant degree, it did mean that income generation was limited. Public spending also had a large effect on the participants being able to pursue certain income strategies. These processes seem to put them in poor positions as they move into the future, although as that final discussion showed, building community and councillor support could serve important functions for resilience and sustainability.
7. Conclusion

My research has produced new, contemporary and valuable findings about the experiences, cultures, backgrounds and practices of local authority museum professionals. Then making the connection to the operation of their museums, my research has also produced meaningful findings about the effects that the practices of local authority museum professionals have on their institutions, accounting for the roles that structuring forces and their agency play in homogenising or diversifying their museums. In doing so, my research has explored the interplays between structure and agency – the micro and the macro, through the perceptions of local authority museum professionals. The findings of my research are now recapped in detail.

Recap of the Findings

Using Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital as the analytical tool to interrogate the findings pertaining to the backgrounds of the participants, the first findings chapter (4) evidenced that the participants had remarkably similar backgrounds, culturally and demographically, and they had similar museum-centred professional identities. For example, nearly all of the participants were of a similar ethnicity (white, British) and (middle) class. Based on their similar cultures (upon examination of the forms of capital that were present in their portrayals of their backgrounds), nearly all of the participants had similar interests in museum culture (which accompanied their strong senses of dedication and loyalty to their professional roles and the profession), and most of them volunteered in museums and trained in similar disciplines at higher education. While some of the participants had slightly different biographies and followed different trajectories into the pro-
fession, overall the findings evidenced that the participants were essentially mu-
seum people. On evaluation of the findings, it was discussed that lacking ethnic
and cultural diversity in the profession raises serious questions about ethnic-mi-
nority and working-class individuals being able to access it, and the role that mu-
seum employment (and that of the local authority kind, specifically) plays in the
filtering of applicants and the production of professional homogeneity in the work-
force.

Chapter 4 also evidenced that, because the participants had such similar cultural
backgrounds, they were likely to have had similar rationales and practices resulting
from normative pressures, and, therefore, had potentially caused their institutions
to homogenise, indicating the presence of isomorphism, although this was ex-
plored in greater detail in findings chapter 5. Indeed, chapter 5 used DiMaggio and
Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism to understand the operation of the muse-
ums, and its findings showed that the museums were largely similar in terms of
their contents (collections, displays and outreach), which suggested that isomor-
phism was present among them. Tracing the isomorphic pressures that had caused
the contents of the museums to become that way, the findings evidenced that col-
lections policies, the national curriculum, community groups, local authorities (staff
and councillors), networking and working under partnership schemes had caused
the contents of the museums to become similar (but partnership schemes also had
the potential to assist in diversification). There were discrete signs of the partici-
pants’ awareness and agency, however, it was concluded that the environment in
which they were operating was highly constraining and one where structuring
forces flourished and affected their practices and institutions in ways that su-
pressed innovation (although innovation and diversity do not necessarily go hand-
in-hand).
Findings chapter 6 evidenced that the museums were quite similar in the ways that they were operated, which resulted from the policies and procedures imposed by their local authorities. Yet, accompanying these similarities, were discrepancies. While most of the participants were being pressured by their local authorities to operate commercially for the purpose of income generation, they were also constrained by them, by their status as publicly funded and public service institutions (highlighting the conflicting agendas and missions that were embedded in the museums) and by their know-how. While branding from sponsors and successful funding from external organisations similarly affected the practices of the participants and the content of their museums (indicating the presence of isomorphism), other sources of income did not (but the museums were strikingly homogeneous regarding the content of their gift shops).

The findings, then, went on to evidence that the museums were changing at different rates, in terms of their governance. While a museum had closed and was operating without walls, many of the museums were transitioning to trust status (by choice or coercion). With trust status came the promise and hope (and perhaps even, misguided hope) of greater agency (which can be understood through the concept of myth), but also, increased risk. Problems were raised as the participants did not necessarily have the know-how that was needed to operate commercially or in the ways required to move and sustain their museums in trust form. There was some evidence of the participants’ agency, which was through their building of community and councillor support, although akin to the previous chapter, the local authority museum environment was a highly constraining one that was filled with uncertainty and volatility that had been imposed by austerity. It was these forces that impinged on the practices of the participants (and affected how they experienced their professional lives).
Throughout all three findings chapters, the participants’ perceptions, understandings and experiences of their professional lives, along with the conditions that they worked in, were evidenced. They experienced their professional lives in personal and professional ways, for, due to their deep connections to museums, they were dedicated, loyal and thankful for being able to be employed in the profession and to be able to do the work that they enjoyed. They had also experienced austerity in quite significant ways, in terms of staff losses, increased workloads, losses in finances and services, each of which affected the work that they did in their museums. However, such difficulties did not deter their commitment to the profession. It should be suggested that they are the kind of museum people that the profession needs, given its current instability.

Key Messages

Local authority museum professionals are deeply committed to the work that they do in their museums, and to the profession, more generally. This commitment stems from their long lived interests in museums, which originate from their experiences of visiting museums when they were children, and from the experiences that they shared with their families. These lasting dispositions mean that local authority museum professionals have identities that are museum-centred. The current and future status of the profession is unsteady and uncertain, for losses in professional staff have caused losses in expertise and problems for succession planning. The professionals that remain face concerns about restructuring, may feel threatened by volunteers, and, in turn, are likely to be hesitant in their daily working lives and practices. Accompanying these issues, is a lack of continuing professional development training in the profession that is suited to meeting the individual needs of professionals and their institutions. Against this context, due to their commitment, local authority museum professionals can be perceived to be quite resilient.
individuals, and, perhaps, the kind of individuals that the profession needs for its continuity. However, these professionals are ill equipped at being able to safeguard against losses in expertise, at being able to adapt effectively to environmental conditions and, in turn, respond to the changes, challenges and obstacles that have been imposed by austerity.

Lawley (2003) argues that ‘museums are not homogeneous. They serve a large number of different constituencies and their internal cultures remain diverse, however strong the rhetoric of competing values remain between managers, curators, educators and front-of-house staff’ (p.75). My research has made a contrasting case. Local authority museums are largely similar – professionally, institutionally and organisationally, and the pressures, constraints and structuring forces that they face, while stemming from various sources, have a tendency to be fairly uniform in their nature and pervasive in their effects. These sources of influence homogenise the practices of local authority museums and their institutions, and, because of this, isomorphism is a firm presence in these institutions, albeit in different areas and to different degrees. These conclusions give much credit to DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of isomorphism and the overall body of theory developed around it. Similarity among the practices of professionals and their institutions could be symbolic of much more detailed and complicated (isomorphic) processes being present. Due to structuration, the agency of local authority museum professionals is highly restricted, but they manage to find openings to use it. When they can, it does seem to manifest in the areas pertaining to them building the resilience and sustainability of their museums. Therefore, at times when it is vital for them, practitioners could be able protect their institutions in small, but, perhaps, significant, ways.

While local authority museum professionals may be aware that their practices and
institutions are similar to those throughout the sector, they may not necessarily be reflexive (which, as identified, could be for various reasons, such as not having the time and resources to devote to such a practice). My research has the potential to encourage awareness and reflexivity of local authority museum professionals in the sector (and perhaps, those invested in them, along with professionals from other museum types). While local authority museums (and museums in general) do not have to be different from one another, it is for local authority museum professionals to decide if they should seek to diversify their institutions. It is up to these professionals to evaluate the benefits that it can bring their institutions in the future.

Future Research & Policy

My research has provided a snapshot of the world of local authority museums and the working lives, realities and biographies of their professionals. In order to delve deeper into the effects of isomorphic processes on the practices and institutions of local authority museum professionals, subsequent research could employ mixed-methods, longitudinal approaches (i.e. content analyses, ethnographies and qualitative interviews) to case study the conception, construction and implementation of projects from beginning to end, in order to fully comprehend the processes, interactions and negotiations that take place between structure and agency – the macro and the micro, in contemporary museum life. While my research has filled its research capacity, subsequent research, then, could be much larger in mission and size.

While there are various museum contexts in which subsequent research could be applied, it would be advantageous to study isomorphic processes at work in museums with trust status, or local authority museums that have made the transition
to trust status. Regarding the latter, identifying the ways in which their professionals are adapting and overcoming obstacles would be valuable, considering local authority museum professionals are likely to be making the conversion, since austerity is set to continue to 2020 at the least, according to the 2015 Spending Review. As my research has shown, local authority museum professionals perceive it as the most viable option to secure the future survival of their institutions, and so, enhanced understandings into the area would be beneficial for their professionals and academics alike.

There is a profound lack of ethnic and cultural diversity in the local authority museum profession, which is accompanied by an evident skills gap (Tuck et al., 2015 also find the latter). Research attention is needed on these areas, with three points of focus. The first focus needs to be on access, to find out the reasons why ethnic-minority and working-class individuals are so severely under-represented in the local authority museum profession. The second focus needs to be on finding out about the skills gap in the local authority museum profession, and whether it is caused by a lack of continuing professional development training. The third focus needs to be on the effects that local authority museum employment has on lacking cultural and ethnic diversity, and the skills gap in the profession. Current findings into these areas are needed before policy can be directed to the necessary areas. But, future policy does have the potential to be aimed at broadening education for children (of different ethnicities and cultures) in museums, in order to improve accessibility and potentially broaden the range of museum professionals once children grow up.

Combined with losses in specialist expertise (and problems concerning succession planning), is a lack of continuing professional development training in the local authority museum profession, and policy needs be directed towards these areas.
Regarding the latter, local authority museum professionals need to be equipped with the know-how to ensure the survival of their institutions. However, training causes normative pressures which could be counterproductive, for these professionals need not a one-size-fits-all approach, but the knowledge and skills to respond to the individual needs of their institutions. With such know-how, local authority museum professionals are going to be able to make well-informed decisions concerning their practices and institutions in ways that will be more efficient and self-sufficient, helping to build an ‘entrepreneurial culture’ (Tuck et al., 2015: 3). Discussions about how individual museum training can be fostered need to take place.

Chapter 6 showed that the agendas of the local authorities regarding commercialism conflicted with what the participants were able to achieve in practice, for they were constrained by their local authorities and the publicly-funded, public-service identity of their museums. Similar themes were also echoed in the discussion on collections policies, and the tensions and constraints that they imposed on the participants’ abilities to effectively deaccession, which meant that the activity was counterproductive and futile. With potentially more ambiguities and challenges like these present, in the future, it would be beneficial for local authority museum professionals to know where they stand within the organisational framework of their governing bodies, and clarity between the expectations, directives and policies of local authorities, and the how they correspond to the practices of their professionals, although whether commercialism is the best hand for local authority museum professionals and their public-facing and funded institutions (and the problem that commercialism poses for culture) requires serious discussion, along with how commercialism and deaccessioning conflict with the values and integrity of local authority museum professionals, and their apprehension and abilities to undertake and execute them.
In 2015, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport stated that the recession had caused long-term damage in the sector. Local museums may only survive in reduced form, if at all (Anderson, 2011) and there is a great deal of uncertainty in the sector (Harvey, 2016; Museums Association, 2015a, 2017a; Tuck et al., 2015). The abolition of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Authority in 2010 has left a strategic and operational gap (Anderson, 2011) that multi-sector bridge organisations (e.g. non-departmental public bodies) cannot easily fill, and the absence of national cultural and funding strategies (Anderson, 2011) are reminders that a cross-sector collaboration between sector bodies and central funding organisations have been unsuccessful to date, and it remains unclear whether survival should be driven by local contexts (which continue to change) or proactive leadership and support provided by sector bodies or leaders (at local and national levels) (Tuck et al., 2015).

It might be too simplistic to suggest that there needs to be an effective strategy in place to protect museums, particularly at times of crisis, but a strategy is needed. The future of the UK’s museums is an area of immediate concern in the literature (e.g. Anderson, 2011; Madge, 2016; Steel, 2015) for austerity is set to continue. By 2020, it is expected that the key Revenue Support Grant for local government will fall from £11.5 billion to £5.4 billion, and to recoup the funds lost, council tax rises and business rate initiatives will fund local government institutions (Harvey, 2016). The position of local authority museums, as non-statutory, non-commercial institutions (based on the findings of my research), in this political economy under Conservative administration, is unclear. Attention needs to be on them, for they are not faring well in the current climate.
8. Appendices

Appendix A: The Recruitment Email

Miss Tara Knights  
PhD Candidate  
Department of Sociology  
University of Surrey  
Guildford  
GU2 7XH  
[Email address]  
[Telephone number]  
[Date]

R.e. This is an invitation for local authority museum professionals to participate in my study

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Surrey, in Guildford. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in my study about the working lives and realities of local authority museum professionals.

My study seeks to explore how local authority museum professionals perceive, understand and experience their working lives and realities. The purpose of this is to uncover new knowledge about what it is like to be a local authority museum
professional in the context of austerity, which is a politically and economically volatile context. These insights are important for comprehending the current operation of contemporary local authority museums, and to get to the heart of what is occurring and felt in these institutions from a ‘behind the scenes’ perspective of the professionals that work in them.

This is a rare opportunity for local authority museum professionals to have their voices heard. Indeed, I, on behalf of the University of Surrey, have great interest in finding out what you have to say.

The attached information sheet provides more detailed information about my study. Please contact me by email or by telephone if you are interested in participating in my study, and taking-part in a one-hour interview with me. I am happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Tara Knights
Taking part in my study about the working lives and realities of museum professionals

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Surrey, in Guildford. I have written to you to invite you to participate in my study about the working lives and realities of local authority museum professionals.

What is the purpose of the study?

My study seeks to explore how local authority museum professionals perceive, understand and experience their working lives and realities. The purpose of this is to uncover new knowledge about what it is like to be a local authority museum professional in the context of austerity, which is a politically and economically volatile context. These insights are important for comprehending the current operation of contemporary local authority museums, to get to the heart of what is occurring and felt in these institutions from a ‘behind the scenes’ perspective of the professionals that work in them.

This is a rare opportunity for local authority museum professionals to have their voices heard. I, on behalf of the University of Surrey, have great interest in finding out what you have to say.

Why have I been invited to participate?
You have been invited to participate because you are a professional that is employed in a local authority museum in the South East of England, and are 18 or over. You might perform a variety of different professional roles, but it would be especially helpful if you had any experience in the following areas:

- curation/exhibition
- publicity/marketing
- education/outreach

Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to participate, as deciding whether to participate is a voluntary decision. There will be no adverse effects on your wellbeing or employment if you participate or do not participate. If you do decide to participate, you can always withdraw fully from my research at any time and without providing a reason. Any contributions you have made to my research can be withdrawn up until my research is submitted to the University of Surrey. This is expected to be in July 2017.

What will happen to me if I take part?

When you have expressed an interest in participating in my study, I will ask you for some details about you to arrange with you a convenient time and place for a one-to-one interview. The interview will last for around one hour. You will be asked to talk about your views, understandings and experiences of your profession, work and museum environment.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
Yes, I will maintain confidentiality at all times. Your contributions will be anonymised so that names and other identifiable features are removed, so that those reading reports from my study will not know who has contributed to it. All data will be held as password protected files and stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) for 10 years in accordance with the University of Surrey policy. After this time, all data will be permanently destroyed.

There are limits to confidentiality. If you choose to disclose to others that you are participating in my study, then your contributions may be identifiable to those individuals. Also, if you disclose to me that you or someone else is at risk then I may need to report this to an appropriate authority. This would usually be discussed with you first. I am further bound by law to disclosures of criminal activity.

What are the benefits of taking part?

It is unlikely that participating in my study will bring any direct benefits to you, but many people have enjoyed using the opportunity to voice their views, understandings and experiences. In addition, your contributions will help to explore, discover new knowledge, and make valuable insights into the working lives and realities of museum professionals and local authority museums. The findings will be published and people will be able to read about the research.

Are there any disadvantages?

My study will ask you to arrange a convenient time and place to meet for a one-to-one interview. The interview will last for around one hour.

What happens when the interview is over?
When the interview is over, I am still available to you should you have any questions or concerns. I will contact you to ask you about your feelings about my study and to ask if you would like to receive a summary of the research findings when the study ends.

What if there is a problem?

Any concern or complaint about any aspect of the way you have been dealt with during the course of the study will be addressed, please contact Dr. Victoria Alexander by email at [email address] or Dr. Paul Hodkinson at [email address].

Who is reviewing the research?

My study has been developed alongside the University of Surrey Ethics Committee’s (2014) Code on Good Research Practice (2014) and the British Sociological Association’s (2002) Statement of Ethical Practice.

How can I contact the researcher?

If you would like to take part or have questions about any aspect of participating in my study, please contact me on [telephone number] or by email at [email address].

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.
Appendix C: The Informed Consent Form

I, the undersigned, voluntarily agree to participate in the study about the working lives and realities of local authority museum professionals.

I have read and understood the information sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation by the researcher of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study and what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.

I consent to my anonymised personal data, as outlined in the accompanying information sheet, being used for this study and other research. I understand that all personal data relating to participants is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice.

I confirm that I have read and understood the above, and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS): .............................................
Appendix D: The Interview Guide

Section A. Personal and professional backgrounds/the profession

1. Please tell me about your professional role (practices, routines, responsibilities).
2. Please tell me about your academic background and training (specific qualifications).
3. How did you become involved in/access the profession? (I.e. training, volunteering, having connections, etc.).
4. Are there any possibilities to train or research?
5. In what ways do you try to keep up-to-date with current issues and debates in museums/the sector?
6. Please tell me about your interests, enthusiasm and motivations for getting involved in museums/the sector (growing-up, parents, schooling, etc.).
7. Please tell me about your experiences of what the most enjoyable/unenjoyable, likeable/unlikeable parts of being in your professional role/the profession.
8. Please can you describe what it is like being a professional in a local authority museum?
9. How might this differ from other types of museums?

Section B. Austerity/local authority status and working practices

10. Please tell me about the impact that the funding cuts have had on your working practices/your museum/the sector/the profession.
11. What have been the most obvious changes?
12. What are the current challenges/challenges moving forwards?
13. Please describe the relationships that you have with local councillors/local authority employees.

14. Is there much involvement from them/co-operation/collaboration that happens?

15. How have these relationships been affected with your local authority changing? I.e. Conservative agenda and local councillors/local authority employees potentially changing after each election result.

16. Do you try/not try with these relationships?

17. What benefits/disadvantages might they bring?

18. In terms of your working practices, what kinds of policies do you have to follow?

19. Are they helpful/not helpful? Are they effective/do they restrict your working practices in any way?

20. Are there any kinds of ideas/activities that you are encouraged/are not allowed to pursue? (Consider controversial subjects).

21. Where do you get your ideas for projects, e.g. exhibitions/outreach?

22. Is your local authority supportive of new innovative/diverse ideas?

23. Are there any restrictions with pursuing them?

24. Who makes the decisions in your museum? I.e. in terms of ideas for projects/constructing projects and allocating resources, etc.

Section C. Income streams/resilience and sustainability

25. Please tell me about the main funding streams that currently support your museum.

26. How crucial are these sources of funding to support your working practices/your museum?

27. Are there any terms and conditions involved in receipt for funding?
28. In what ways might you need to accommodate these expectations/proce-
dures into your working practices?
29. Is the funding enough to make your museum resilient/sustainable/long
lived?
30. Are you required to think of new ways to generate funding?
31. How do/would you?
32. How competitive might this be when competing with other museums in
the area?
33. Has this got better/worse (easier/more difficult) with austerity? How?
34. Please describe the areas in your museum where resources might be
needed the most.
35. Why/what are the consequences if resources are not in supply?

Section D. Working practices/other professionals and the external environment

36. Please tell me about the kinds of relationships do you have with your col-
leagues.
37. Are you from a similar background to that of your colleagues/do you ex-
change ideas with them?
38. Do you agree/disagree?
39. What kinds of subjects do you talk about/what kinds of ideas do you
share?
40. How effectively do you think you work together?
41. Please tell me about the relationships that you have with professionals in
other museums.
42. Is it important to be connected to other professionals? Why/why not?
43. Please tell me about the volunteers at your museum.
44. Who is responsible for training them/what kinds of training?
45. What do they contribute? Are there any difficulties working with them?
46. What are the effects of unpaid work on the profession?
47. Please tell me about the kinds of activities do you do to keep informed about your profession (e.g. read books or magazines, attend conferences, etc.)?
48. In your museum, where do you get your ideas from? (E.g. brainstorming, meetings etc.).
49. Please describe your museum. What might be unique/not unique about it?
50. Do you ever compare your museum and activities to other museums/attractions in the area?
51. Do you or the professionals in your museum have ideas that are particularly innovative/diverse?
52. What are the limits on coming-up with new ideas/innovation as far as resources go?
53. Do you or the professionals you know ever run-out of ideas?
54. Would you change anything about your museum? Why/why not?
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