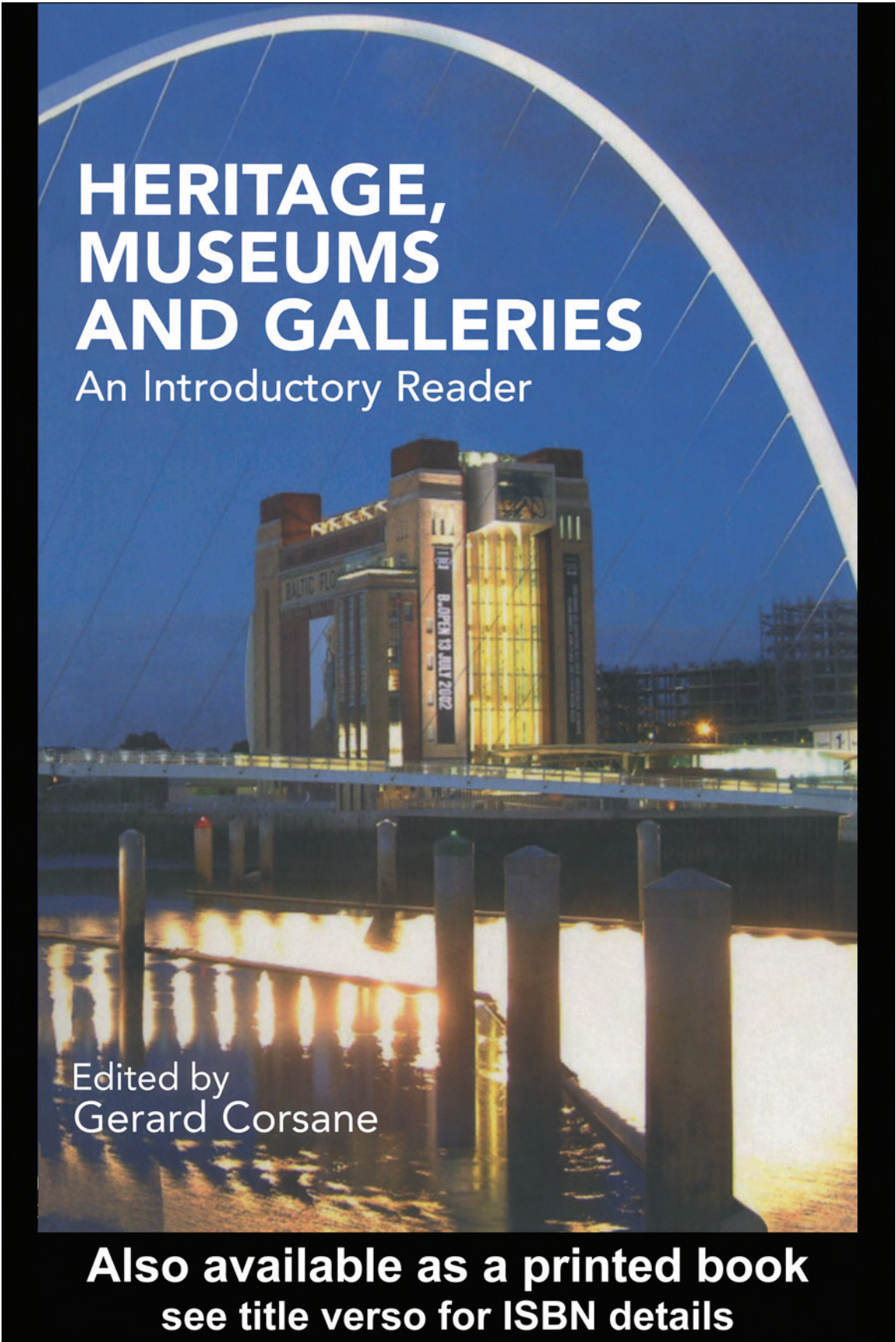




HERITAGE, MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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Understanding the social impact of museums, galleries and heritage through the concept of capital

Andrew Newman

Drawing from the work of Bourdieu, literature in museum and heritage studies often makes reference to the notion of 'cultural capital': a form of capital that people are perceived to need to fully benefit from museum and gallery visiting. This form of capital can be acquired and accumulated, although it is always more easily done by those from culturally dominant groups. However, when considering the social impacts and benefits that people can acquire through visiting museums, galleries and heritage sites, it may be useful to consider other forms of capital.

In this chapter the notions of 'human', 'social' and 'identity' capital are considered and used to describe a wider range of benefits that may be accrued when people visit and engage with museums, galleries and heritage. The acquisition of these other forms of capital, in addition to cultural capital, can benefit individuals and society as new skills, abilities and values are acquired and accumulated. These forms of capital are important for determining the value and impact of museums, galleries and heritage.

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present an analysis of the social impact of museums, galleries and heritage. This will be viewed in terms of the acquisition of various forms of capital. It will attempt to determine the ability of such an analysis to effectively describe the museum, gallery and heritage experience.

Published research into the social impact of museums, galleries or heritage is wide ranging. For example, material culture (Pearce, 2000) and learning theory (Hein, 1998; Falk and Dierking, 1992, 2000) seek to explain this process. Authors such as Dicks (2000) have presented a range of sociological perspectives, such as a return to the past, nostalgia, reminiscence, identity in terms of place, nationalism, memorialism and politics, heritage as a communication medium including the encoding and decoding of messages and imagined communities.¹ Consideration of the physical processes influencing social impact includes the study of memory (Kavanagh, 2000; Crane, 2000) and emotion, physicality and performativity² (Bagnall, 1996). However, despite the above, there is still much uncertainty about the ways that people interact with museums, galleries or heritage.

Apart from academic interest, understanding this process has considerable importance to museum, gallery and heritage policy construction and practice. For example, the UK Labour Party Administration, elected in 1997, attempted to use all aspects of government, including museums, galleries and heritage, as agents of social policy to resolve problems of social exclusion³ (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, 2001). This resulted in a series of policy guidance publications which presented strategies that were designed to assist museums, galleries and heritage organizations in this objective (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000, 2002). Organizations such as English Heritage⁴ and the National Trust⁵ were being expected to have a clear social benefit and to see their role as going beyond the preservation of the built environment to become more focused upon the needs of users. However, the success of such an approach was dependent upon having a clear understanding of the impact of museums, galleries and heritage. Without this, it is extremely difficult for policy, which aims to achieve certain defined outputs, to be successful. An understanding of the processes involved is also important for practitioners who view their ability to effectively communicate with audiences as extremely important. For example, if an organization sees its aim as primarily educational, it is essential to know how people interact with the museum gallery or heritage site and so how learning occurs if that aim is to be achieved.

This chapter uses the concept of capital, as in its various forms it has been used to describe the benefits that might be accrued by an individual by developing certain knowledge, skills and abilities. This makes it useful in an attempt to understand what the public gains from engagement with museums, galleries and heritage. This has already been used in a cultural context by Bourdieu (1984) in terms of 'cultural capital' but will, here, be extended to include 'human', 'social' and 'identity' capital, as described by Cote (1996). Human and 'social capital' are seen as resources that can support sustainable economic and social development (Healy *et al.*, 2001). 'Cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984) helps to explain the accessibility of museums and galleries and 'identity capital' (Cote, 1996) was proposed to replace 'human', 'social' and 'cultural capital' as more relevant in modern society.

This chapter will define 'human', 'social', 'cultural' and 'identity capital' and then make links with the perceived functions of museums, galleries and heritage. It will then draw conclusions as to the ways that capital can provide a way of understanding the impact of museums, galleries and heritage.

Human capital

Cote (2001) stated that the term 'human capital' was first used in the early 1960s by economists such as Schultz (1961), who considered the idea of viewing human beings as a form of capital who are invested in and invest in themselves. He stated that 'human capital' was increasing at a much greater rate than non 'human capital' and this was responsible for a significant proportion of post-war economic progress. 'Human capital' has been defined as: 'the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well being' (Healy *et al.*, 2001:18).

Becker (1993) used the economic returns of educational attainment as a way of measuring 'human capital'. He identified that the average income of those with a college education was higher than those who do not have one. However, Cote (2001) criticized such an approach, as it ignores the complex nature of human learning which will occur over a lifetime. Much research has focused on the economic benefits of the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but other research has demonstrated its wider social benefits (Behrman and Stacey, 1997). The acquisition of 'human capital' appears to have a beneficial impact upon health, reduces crime and increases civic participation.

Although museum, gallery and heritage literature does not refer to 'human capital', the acquisition of knowledge and skills is fundamental to the ways that they are perceived to function. This is demonstrated by the definition of museums and galleries adopted by the International Council of Museums⁶ (ICOM) in 1989 (amended in 2001, based on a definition adopted in 1974).

A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.⁷

The purposes of museums and galleries, according to this definition, of study, education and enjoyment, are in close agreement to the personal and social well-being elements of the definition of 'human capital' given above.

Hooper-Greenhill (1991) traced the development of museum and gallery education and stated that museums and galleries started out at the beginning of the nineteenth century primarily as educational establishments and in recent years have refocused upon that objective. The importance of the educational function is illustrated in a report to the Department of National Heritage⁸ (Anderson, 1997), where museums were encouraged to develop as learning organizations with education central to their purpose. The care and display of collections was no longer seen as sufficient justification for their existence.

The most significant educational contribution of museums, galleries and heritage is in informal learning. This has been described by Falk and Dierking (2000) as free-choice learning that is context driven. This does not focus upon what things have been learnt from a particular experience, but in the ways that those things contribute to or interact with what the learner already knows. Learning then is influenced by the context that the learner exists within. The contexts given are personal, physical and sociocultural; these are considered to be interrelated and of fundamental importance to the ways that people learn. While this model was written from the point of view of museums and galleries, the principles are equally applicable to all free-choice learning environments, including heritage sites and the wider historic and natural environment.

There is also a tradition of community development projects based in museums, galleries and heritage organizations which aim to provide participants with useful skills. These mainly focus upon social and personal development, but also might provide participants with skills that may facilitate individuals obtaining employment. An example is the Living Museum of the West in Melbourne, Australia (Sandell, 1998:143), that provided training for the local community with the aim of enabling people to gain

employment after the lifetime of the project. Further accounts of the impact of learning in terms of skills are given in *Renaissance in the Regions—a New Vision for England's Museums* (Resource, 2001:36–42) and *People and Places Social Inclusion Policy for the Built and Historic Environment* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2002:14).

There are limited examples in the literature of 'human capital' being developed by cultural activities being used consciously to encourage large-scale economic development. While a number of studies have considered the economic impact of museums or the arts (Brand *et al.*, 2000; Myerscough, 1988), they do not separately consider the impact of 'human capital'. However, in a report, by the *Economic Review Subcommittee on Enhancing Human Capital* of the Government of Singapore (2002), it was argued that there was a direct relationship between the creativity of the workforce and economic development. The involvement of people in the arts, culture, sports and recreation would facilitate the change from an economy based upon manufacturing to one based upon knowledge and innovation.

The above demonstrates that members of the public use heritage, museum and gallery resources to aid the development of 'human capital'. The term itself is not in common usage, but the concept is firmly established.

Social capital

'Social capital' is based upon the relationships between people and the concept has called attention to the importance of civic traditions (Cote, 2001). Trust is considered an important outcome of investment in this sort of capital and it is seen as essential to many aspects of society. Three types are identified: 'bonding' that relates to links with members of families or ethnic groups; 'bridging' that refers to links with distant friends, associates and colleagues and, finally, 'linking' that refers to relations between different social strata, or between the powerful and less powerful. It is viewed (Healy *et al.*, 2001:39) as relational, not being the property of a single individual and produced by investments that are not as direct as investment in physical capital. A further source of 'social capital' is seen as civil society, the development of associations and voluntary organizations. The greater the investment in 'social capital' amongst a group, the greater the social cohesion of that group will be. The definition of bonding social capital might also include links with imagined communities (Anderson, 1983; Calhoun, 1991; Phillips, 2002), which are tied together by facets of perceived identity rather than interpersonal contact.

An influential study on 'social capital' has been written by Putnam (2001), who charts the decline in political and community participation seen in American society. Using considerable supporting evidence the author presents possible reasons for this, such as pressures of time and money, mobility and sprawl, technology and the mass media. Evidence is presented linking 'social capital' with health and happiness, democracy, and safe and productive neighbourhoods. Finally, a series of recommendations are made to reinvigorate American communities. Further research linking 'social capital' with health was given by Veenstra (2001), who suggested that societies with excessive income inequality are those with low social cohesion and so low 'social capital', and this results in poor health. Glaeser (2001) provided an overview of the formation of 'social capital',

proposing that the process starts with individual decisions. It is postulated that a greater investment in 'social capital' is made if an individual has decided to live in a particular community for a length of time.

The view that museums and galleries have a part to play in their communities has a long history, but the form it takes now dates to what has been described as the 'second museum revolution' in the mid-1960s (Van Mench, 1995). This saw museums and galleries as social institutions with political agendas becoming much more concerned with people than they had been previously. An important element of this social responsibility was the fact that museums and galleries were seen as civic organizations and part of the community that they served. An example of this is the American Association of Museum's *Museums and Community Initiative*, which was established in 1998 to 'explore the potential for renewed, dynamic engagement between museums and communities'.⁹ The research phase included six community dialogues, one of which took place at Bellingham, Washington in 2001.¹⁰ The sessions focused upon 'finding creative solutions that build 'social capital' and support healthy communities'. The emphasis was on exploring museums' civic role in a way that facilitated social cohesion. It was suggested that museums can assist in the development of 'social capital' because they are comfortable, accessible, enjoyable and trusted places. Support for the view that museums have a role to play is given in the results of a report of an initiative that was designed to measure the social impact of museums, libraries and archives (Bryson and Usherwood, 2002:7). It was stated that, 'respondents clearly perceived the cultural organisations examined in this study as providing resources for building 'social capital'. Possible mechanisms for the development of 'social capital' are involvement through volunteering, and community development projects.

The importance of heritage in terms of the built and historic environment, in providing the setting through which communities can be strengthened and so 'social capital' may be developed, is emphasized in *People and Places, Social Inclusion Policy for the Built and Historic Environment* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2002:3). Tessa Jowell¹¹ stated in the foreword that:

physical structures are vital in defining a community, with a high quality well managed built environment essential for community cohesion. But in many of our poorest neighbourhoods, poor quality buildings and public space have contributed to decline.

The report goes on to say that:

getting involved with improving the local built environment can lead to positive social and educational outcomes including raising skills, raising aspirations for a neighbourhood, and building a sense of community.

The built environment provides the potential to facilitate 'social capital' through allowing people to feel connected with their culture, so contributing to active citizenship.¹² The report encourages the development of strategies that involve communities in the planning process.

From the above, it can be demonstrated that while the roles and functions of museums, galleries and heritage sites can be mapped onto the definitions of 'human' and 'social capital' there is much overlap. A museum, gallery or heritage site might provide evidence of both elements. The literature provides support for this view; for example, Coleman (1988), quoted in Healy *et al.* (2001:13) stated that 'the role of strong communities and trust among parents, educators and pupils in fostering learning' and 'education and learning can support habits, skills and values conducive to social participation'.

'Cultural capital' and 'identity capital' have grown out of research on the nature of society. They are distinct from 'human' and 'social capital' in that they are more abstract and have fewer direct links to social policy.

Cultural capital

Bourdieu (1997) described 'cultural capital' as existing in three forms: in an embodied state; an objectified state in the form of cultural goods; and in an institutionalized state that confers original properties on 'cultural capital' that it is presumed to guarantee, for example, educational qualifications. Gershuny (2002:8–9) defines it as, 'knowledge related to the participation in, and enjoyment of the various forms of consumption in society. Specific knowledge about consumption contributes to an individual's satisfaction with their consumption'. 'Cultural capital' is used by Bourdieu and Darbel (1997:37) to explain the ways that visitors behave in museums and galleries. They stated that, 'it is indisputable that our society offers to all the pure possibility of taking advantage of works (of art) on display in museums, it remains the case that only some have the real possibility of doing so'. They go on to say that the time a visitor takes to view a work of art is directly in proportion to the ability of the viewer to decipher the range of meanings that are available to them. Works of art, when considered as symbolic goods, only can be fully understood by those who have sufficient 'cultural capital' to interpret the coded meanings held within them and this may be correlated with educational attainment. The greater the educational attainment, the longer a visitor spends viewing the work of art. This process is further explored by Bourdieu (1993:215).

It is possible to suggest that this situation can be equally applied to the museum or gallery itself as an institution and that different collection types such as social history, or for example a heritage site, might be decodeable (Hall, 1980) by people with a different sort of 'cultural capital' to that needed to help the decoding of works of art. Bourdieu's work has been criticized for its overemphasis on class, for example in Bourdieu (1984), where a hierarchy of taste is constructed, and for not recognizing the role of viewer or participant sufficiently in constructing meanings (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997:98).

While the principles described above have been established within an art gallery, they are equally applicable to heritage sites and the built environment. In order to understand the messages being conveyed at, for example, a country house, interpreted archaeological site or preserved townscape, the viewer needs to be able to decode the messages that have been encoded. In order to do this, they will need sufficient 'cultural capital'; if this is not the case, the individual will not be able to make sense out of what they encounter.

The idea of 'cultural capital' has been adopted by museums, galleries and heritage sites through the emphasis given to access in current policies guiding their management,

but in an inverse manner. The approach followed is that exhibitions and activities should be designed so that those without specialized forms of capital can access the messages that are available. This means that as far as possible, technical or specialist terms, for example, are not used in interpretation and links are made to the lives of visitors. Judgements are being made about the forms of 'cultural capital' held by visitors and interpretation is being designed accordingly. Such an approach has been criticized for not sufficiently challenging visitors and not enabling them to widen the scope of their 'cultural capital' (Appleton, 1997:21).

Identity capital

Cote (1996) developed the concept of 'identity capital' as a replacement for 'human' and 'cultural capital' as being the most appropriate to modern life. He suggested that in different types of society the acquisition of particular forms of capital would become the basis of strategies that would allow an individual to effectively negotiate the difficulties that they encounter. Three forms of society are described: pre-modern, where identity is ascribed; early modern, where identity is achieved; and late modern, where identity is image orientated and managed. It is proposed that in pre-modern society 'human capital' might be the most appropriate form to invest in, in early-modern society, 'cultural capital' and in late-modern society, 'identity capital'. An individual invests in a certain identity or identities and then engages in a series of exchanges with others. The process of construction is described, 'to do this in a complex, shifting social milieu requires certain cognitive skills and personality attributes that are not imparted by 'human' or 'cultural capital', and are certainly not imparted by mass/public education systems'. 'Identity capital' is described as being tangible, elements that are socially visible, such as memberships, speech patterns and dress and also intangible, such as critical thinking abilities that give individuals the capacity to understand and negotiate various life obstacles.

The possible role played by museums, galleries and heritage in the construction of 'identity capital' might be described as being both tangible and intangible. An example of the tangible variety might be provided by visiting museums, galleries and heritage sites. This generates a visible exclusive membership, particularly seen in some galleries of modern art. In this instance, particular forms of dress, speech and behaviour are often adopted, representing investments in a particular identity that will hopefully assist in achieving desired social outcomes. Museum, gallery and heritage site visiting may provide tangible 'identity capital' through an association with cultural property that has been imbued with value. It might be seen as an investment in the self in a similar way that, for example, the collection of paintings is an investment in an individual's identity as much as a financial investment. An example of the intangible variety might be seen in community development programmes. These are often designed to develop social skills amongst participants so they are more able to successfully manage their lives. Silverman (2002) described the *Museums as Therapeutic Agents* group that was established in Bloomington, Indiana, USA in 1997. This consisted of representatives from museums, the local university and local social service programmes. One of the aims was to provide people with the skills to lead independent lives. Those who benefited from this initiative

may have not decided, in a conscious strategic way, to invest in themselves, but will have benefited from investment in 'identity capital' made on their behalf.

The descriptions of the four different types of capital given above and the attempt to map them onto the functions of museums, galleries and heritage has resulted in an analysis that represents a series of different ways of understanding their impact upon individuals and society. It is clear that it is difficult to draw boundaries around each of these approaches and in some cases overlap occurs. However, it is believed that the concepts are sufficiently different to make them useful analytical tools.

Conclusion

The four different forms of capital described above assist in understanding the impact of museums, galleries and heritage upon the public. Together they present a complex picture that illustrates and to some extent explains that impact and adds to an understanding of their consumption. They also help to provide a basis for an understanding of their contribution to social policy by presenting possible ways through which museums and galleries can contribute to society.

'Human capital' as a concept is a useful way of understanding aspects of social impact, but needs to be seen in terms of free choice constructivist learning (Falk and Dierking, 2000). Museums, galleries and heritage sites have long claimed that this was central to their function (Anderson, 1997; Hooper-Greenhill, 1991) and it remains important to practitioners.

'Social capital' appears to be an important way of describing a significant form of impact of museums, galleries and heritage sites upon visitors. It is suggested that they might be used as part of a strategy to address some of the decline in political and civic participation identified by Putnam (2001). Of the three sorts of 'social capital' identified, 'bonding', that is links between family or social groups as well as links to imagined communities, would probably dominate in museums, galleries and heritage sites, although research is needed to confirm or refute this.

The presence or absence of different forms of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1997) is a useful way of explaining the accessibility or otherwise of museums, galleries and heritage sites. It determines the ability of people to decode the messages that have been encoded and so fundamentally influences their ability to make meaning out of the resources that are available to them.

'Identity capital' is also a useful concept to analyse the impact of museums, galleries and heritage upon members of the public. The resources that they provide might be used as part of a strategy that enables people to negotiate difficulties that they encounter (Cote, 1996). Apart from this, it might be suggested that the acquisition of 'identity capital' would provide individuals with a better understanding of the world.

It could be argued that 'human' and 'social capital' are the product of many civic organizations or where groups of people come together for various purposes, but when they are blended with 'cultural' and 'identity capital', they combine to produce a much more complex picture. Conceptualizing social impact in terms of capital embeds that impact within broader theories of society and so provides a clearer vision of the consumption of museums, galleries or heritage. The concept of capital needs to be used

as the basis for the analysis of empirical research into the social impact of museums, galleries and heritage to provide evidence to support or refute the arguments presented above.

Notes

- 1 Imagined communities are defined as 'large collectives linked mainly by common identities but minimally by networks of directly interpersonal relationships' (Calhoun, 1991:95–6 quoted in Phillips, 2002:597).
- 2 Performativity is the process through which individual consumers stimulate memories using resources provided by museums and galleries.
- 3 The term was first used in France in the 1960s where the poorest sections of society had begun to be referred to as 'the excluded' (Silver, 1995). Rene Lenoir was the first to use the term 'social exclusion' itself in 1974, when describing different categories of people who were not covered by social insurance. The understanding of 'social exclusion' broadened in the 1980s to include the consequences of technological change and economic restructuring, known as the 'new poverty' (Gore, 1995).
- 4 English Heritage aims to make sure that the historic environment of England is properly maintained and cared for. The organization's social inclusion goals may be found online at <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/> (accessed 1 July 2003).
- 5 The National Trust, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/ (accessed 1 July 2003), was founded in 1895 by three Victorian philanthropists—Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley. Concerned about the impact of uncontrolled development and industrialization in England, they set up the Trust to act as a guardian for the nation in the acquisition and protection of threatened coastline, countryside and buildings. A report by Hunt (2001) showed the challenges that faced that National Trust by social inclusion.
- 6 www.icom.museum/ (accessed 1 July 2003).
- 7 www.icom.museum/definition.html (accessed 1 July 2003).
- 8 This became the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 1997 with the election of the Labour Party administration.
- 9 www.aam-us.org/initiatives/m&c/index.cfm (accessed 1 July 2003).
- 10 www.aam-us.org/initiatives/m&c/dialogues/bellingham.cfm (accessed 1 July 2003).
- 11 At the time this chapter was written, Tessa Jowell was Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, a post she had held since 1998.
- 12 Burchell (1995:540) provided an overview of the active and passive traditions of citizenship. These are viewed as being organized as a series of oppositions, 'between a citizenship focused upon the public sphere and one focused upon the private, between liberal-individualist and communitarian impulses, between an emphasis on duties and one on rights'. The active citizen is viewed as being essentially self-created and the passive citizen the product of the social discipline associated with the activities of government.

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