

Flow evaluation of Happy Museum 2017: Short executive summary

ABOUT OUR RESEARCH

HM aims to conclude in 2020, having created conditions for its principles to continue and spread. We at Flow Associates were commissioned to build on previous evaluations by Mandy Barnett Associates to carry out a status review of HM, to suggest how to continue evaluation, and ways to build capacity in the network and grow awareness so that HM can distribute ownership. We carried out desk research and consulted with 47 people in May-July 2017 to 'take the temperature' of HM at this moment. This is a short summary of key themes and recommendations. Read the longer summary or full report for more depth and detail.

THE CHANGE HAPPY MUSEUM WANTS TO SEE

HM, launched in 2011, aimed to begin a conversation about how the UK museum sector can help create a more sustainable future. The 6 HM principles are the foundation of all shared learning in the community of practice. The Story of Change includes aims for the project and its community of practice. HM places these principles and aims in a context of current global challenges, an economic growth obsession causing environmental crisis. It has been successful in starting this conversation and demonstrating many ways that museums can rethink what matters, support and engage staff and volunteers, and work with communities to increase wellbeing.

OVERVIEW OF HAPPY MUSEUM ACHIEVEMENTS

By the end of 2014, HM had funded 25 creative interventions in 22 museums leading to individual development and organisational change. It has carried out a wide range of outreach and communications activity within the network, and more widely with the museum sector. In June 2015, a 5-year plan was launched at Manchester Museum, and the Study Group was formed. In early 2017, the first round of 15 museums joining the new Affiliate scheme was announced. There are a number of successful funding bids for partners to carry out their own offshoot projects, contributing to HM outcomes.

WHAT CHANGE HAS HAPPY MUSEUM CREATED IN RELATION TO ITS AIMS?

- **Rethinking what matters:** The aims and principles of HM's Story of Change have worked very well, helping museums to rethink what matters. More museums are using the language of well-being, and some of this will have been due to involvement in and awareness of HM. Over time, more museums have applied to work with HM on environmental themes, suggesting that HM has had an impact in challenging the sector to consider how 'wellbeing doesn't cost the earth'.
- **Happy, resilient people:** Several commissions deliberately sought to engage emotions to promote wellbeing in audiences and staff, and build resilience in organisations. Fujiwara's 2013 report, 'Museums and Happiness' provides evidence about the value of more participatory approaches driven by local or social needs. The LIFE survey project aims to measure the impact of programmes on wellbeing. Piloted by 7 museums, all results showed some association between the experiences and good outcomes. Reports from events show that many innovative ideas have been generated.
- **Happy, resilient teams:** Thematic case studies describe how some HM museums have developed their own Story of Change to refocus their mission, to report on sustainable wellbeing, and to gain new perspectives on the resources available to them. The Study Group and Affiliate Scheme feedback shows that networking and facilitated support has brought many teams more common purpose and motivation. There is more awareness of how mutual relationships with communities can build support for the museum, bring in fresh ideas and capacity.

- **Happier, sustainable communities:** Thematic case studies explore how museums worked to be better hosts, or to act as a hub or a broker for well-being. Some museums sought to lead by example, for example promoting sustainability through participatory exhibitions. Developing community relationships has a knock-on effect, creating a virtuous circle, attracting new and different audiences, and resources to invest.

CONSULTING THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AND WIDER NETWORK

- Some commissioned or Study Group museums can identify strong impact on their organisations and communities, especially when they have sustained aspects of practice from commissioned projects or benefited from the reputation raised. There are issues around capacity, and with funding cuts this is becoming more problematic. However, there is continuing belief in the potential to achieve organisational resilience through HM practice.
- All members of the Affiliate Scheme have now benefited from their initial briefing workshop. Stand-out elements have been using The Story of Change tool, and using HM Principles to consider how to plan and evaluate change. Members tend to start with working towards wellbeing within the organisation, or to focus on applying just one of the HM Principles. However, a small number are already embracing a more radical 'transition' approach in their work.
- Funders, trustees or key stakeholders sense that HM has had a slow but significant impact on museums involved, by supporting them to plan in an integrated way, and drawing together staff with different values or agendas. Key challenges are around evidencing impact for the final phase of HM. They have seen the holistic philosophy of HM have real application, and want this to be demonstrated so that it can spread.
- Those looking in from outside most often express questions of what HM is about. They recognised that its holistic approach is positive, but some felt that its complexity of aims does not translate well beyond close circles. Those most interested in environmental well-being are the most enthusiastic that HM exists at all, and clearest about how it can achieve change. It is seen from an international perspective to be a very innovative project that would do well to disseminate its approach globally.

IMPACTS IN TERMS OF ITS CIRCLE OF REACH

- For **individuals**, involvement has brought a sense of empowerment and has helped some to re-engage with their work with new energy. The facilitation approach is seen to be warm, creative and generous.
- **Organisations** have found that governance and planning have been enhanced by HM. The principles have helped them engage better with audiences. HM has helped many to create a framework that allows for focus on personal well-being. For some, it provides impetus to consider wider environmental aspects of well-being. HM provides a well-facilitated space to explore issues around these expansions of mission.
- **Communities** have benefitted, especially those directly involved through commissions. Many positive results were reported, and people feel more valued by museums as a result of their participation. The more involved they are and for longer, the more this is likely. More work is needed (e.g. the LIFE Survey) to identify the network effects on wellbeing beyond those immediate participants. There is evidence of 'ripple effects' where HM practice influences partners and spreads out of the museum.
- For the **wider cultural sector**, case studies, published reports and DIY resources are available online. Several events have been open to interested public. HM have presented at a significant number of national and international conferences. Wellbeing and environmental justice agendas seem to be dovetailing, e.g. with Wales' Future Generations Act. Some respondents feel more evidence is needed to gauge the full impact, or that more work needs to clarify and advocate the HM approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rethinking what matters

- The global context is worsening faster than predicted so HM & its Community of Practice needs to shift from ‘conversations’ to demonstrating how culture can help tackle massive systemic challenges.
- Focus on communications, drawing golden threads through all the action research projects, and other comparative practice, in order to reinforce the narrative of museums for change.
- Encourage ‘rethink what matters’ as an essential principle in Stories of Change.

Lack of clarity in HM principles

- Make some adjustments to the Story of Change (working with Affiliates)
- Present the Principles more as Objectives for change, with lines of example to link them to the HM vision for change.

Influencing change within organisations

- Address governance-level barriers in museums to missions of sustainable well-being through culture by, for example, strategic meetings with NMDC and funders.
- Create more focused and evidenced case studies from this next stage of the programme.
- Be more directive about how HM-inspired projects could seek to demonstrate resilience outcomes.
- Don’t lose sight of the ethical vision in which museums are in process of transformation: scaling up, reaching out, inviting participation and having impact to affect the greatest number of people.

Disseminating and extending reach

- Identify patterns in Stories of Change from the CoP to tell an overarching UK-wide story.
- Aim to define a common language to describe civic/participatory models towards community & environmental resilience and wellbeing.
- Work strategically with Culture24 on how digital can contribute to sustainable well-being.
- Take all opportunities to present at relevant conferences/events. When invited to present, put forward members of the HM community. Increase range of contributors of blogposts

Influencing policy on cultural well-being

- Continue to support LIFE Survey and ambition around Key Performance Aspirations.
- Position HM for the next 3 years as advocate on how well-being work can be more effective if informed by systemic and environmental thinking.

The environment and well-being

- Promote the idea of Active Stewardship as an integrative idea fitting the ethos of museums.
- Be bold in stating the goal of HM is re-imagining museums as places for change towards a regenerated planet and sustainable future.
- Make clear that ‘Value the Environment’ means embracing non-human species.
- Use the Wales project (Future Generations act) to show how museums provide linking frame between wellbeing and environmental challenges.
- Continue to build alliances with others beyond the cultural sector who are working on this ‘linking frame’, including Julie’s Bicycle and the Natural Environment Research Council.

Ongoing evaluation

Happy museum programme overall

Ongoing evaluation of HM until it formally disbands in 2020 will need to provide critical friendship so that HM can achieve and demonstrate its current aims:

- A community of practice with agency and excitement for change
 - By capturing and synthesising feedback from gatherings and ‘taking the temperature’ of motivation in relation to HM within their organisations
- In the museum sector and beyond, a vision for re-imagined museums
 - By reviewing how action research projects amongst the network are enabling wellbeing impacts and effective radical approaches to museum working,
- Amongst the Third sector and public, greater awareness of the potential of museums
 - By reviewing how Third sector representatives perceive the cultural well-being role of museums, and correlating this to any awareness of HM
 - By reviewing how the general public perceive the role of museums e.g. with a survey in partnership with interested bodies
- Contributing overall, to a more sustainable museum sector – both more environmentally sustainable and economically resilient.
 - By reviewing how HM network members and the wider museums sector implement sustainable practices e.g. inviting them to report on the Museums Environmental Framework.

Suite of Evaluation tools

- The tools are well established and used so should be continued as they are.
- The HM Story of Change is crucial so we suggest making some adjustments to the way the principles, aims and ‘agents for change’ are articulated. (Plans to involve Affiliates in this process.)

Affiliate Scheme

- The evaluation will need to gather stories about:
 - how Affiliates have gained from HM gatherings and support
 - how they have implemented their Story of Change and principles, and evidence of impacts
 - how they have shared learning and gained from the network
 - any other outcomes, such as related projects, events, or successful funding bids
- There are plans to support Affiliates to hold peer discussions, and/or peer-led Story of Change workshops which can generate material for formative and summative evaluation.
- We have drafted a discussion template that is being trialled through conversations between each museum and HM facilitators.
- The evaluation process should also offer a chance for individuals to share views with an independent evaluator, and for evidence to be gathered directly by observation at events.

Study Group

- A more detailed plan will aim to pull together ‘golden threads’ to tell an overarching Story of Change for museums (happy resilient teams), communities (happy, resilient people) and the wider cultural sector (‘rethink what matters’).
- The key question is: What have you found most helpful in describing your journey towards becoming Happy Museums? What more do you want or need from peers in the Study Group and from HM to ‘own’, model and share your journey of transformation into Happy Museums? (support, skills, resources, other?)