INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS

ICOM-SA

THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS

ICOM SA CONFERENCE REPORT
DURBAN, 26 and 27 August 2014
Museum Research in South Africa – Relevance and Future
12 December 2014

Sponsored by the Department of Arts and Culture and the Ethekwini Municipality.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The conference was undertaken as part of ICOM-SA's programme for International Museum Day 2014 with the theme 'Collections make connections". The conference focused on specialist research across all disciplines within museums.

Presenters and delegates commented on the lack of "connection" in terms of research undertaken by museums. The management of museums is fragmented according to political boundaries (national, provincial and locally owned museums) as well as funding sources (government, corporate, university or independent), creating challenges in developing a collective approach to museum research. Though some museums are connected to the NRF research framework, others find it difficult to access NRF programmes or are in need of mentorship and support to develop research capacity. The draft Policy Framework on National Museums recognises the need for a coordinating body that liaises with research entities and government departments on behalf of museums, but does not provide details on how this challenge will be addressed. It is also not clear how this proposed unit will address the needs of museums that are not nationally funded. The NRF's Centre of Excellence and Pilot Project to award grants to five museums to coordinate research amongst a number of museums can be used as possible models.

To improve access to research support, it is recommended that:
- DAC work with professional associations and museum services to promote access to NRF programmes through support and training;
- Investigate utilisation of NRF funding for contract projects as part of a broader mentoring, succession planning and equity strategy;
- Distribute funding not only towards projects, but create sustainable human resource structures to implement projects;
- Create mentoring and succession plans across institutions in a way that benefit both the mentor and the person being mentored.

Existing models for research collaboration should be supported and further extended to create formal relations between museums and other research entities. It is recommended that:
- Museums councils, or alternative structures, should facilitate formal stakeholder relations with research institutions;
- Cross-institutional platforms for collaboration that transcend institutional boundaries should be explored. The platforms will not necessarily replace current institutional formations or lead to the physical centralisation of collections. Such platforms should:
  a) Feed into the DST system of innovation and NRF strategic programmes;
  b) Acknowledge and feed into existing collaborative platforms such as the Centre of Excellence for Palaeosciences and the national reporting system for IKS;
  c) Promote cooperative research programmes;
  d) Promote collection mobility, i.e. provide access to collections across institutions in a way that defines museum collections as a national asset and not as an institutional asset.

In order for museums to unlock their research potential, research should be acknowledged as a core function of museums that provides the foundation for its other core functions of collection and communication. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- A dynamic, ever-changing museum practice should be explored through museological research to keep South African museums abreast on new trends and museum specific opportunities. This will entail either creating museological research capacity within government agencies or the development of partnerships with research institutions such as universities or the HSRC;
- Governance and management structures of museums should create a supportive environment for museum researchers, and museum leadership should be familiar with the research environment and infrastructure and how it relates to other museum functions. Museum professional associations can play a leading role together with government agencies to promote this environment;
- Research excellence should be a significant institutional performance indicator and therefore be linked to the performance indicators of senior managers;
- Museum research strategies and objectives should acknowledge the multi-disciplinary nature of museum research and explore alternative forms of research output suited to humanity research such as art collections;
- Incentive funding for research outputs similar to the Department of Education should be given to museums for all research publications.

The ICOM definition of museums emphasises that museums are in service of society. It is therefore necessary that museums articulate their objectives and projects in terms of value to society. In order to create a value chain for museum research, it is recommended that:

- Toolkits to assist museums to create value chain for museum research should be developed that
  - outline museums value to society,
  - align research in museums with international and national academic trends,
  - align research in museum with government imperatives,
  - outline partnerships with NGOs and civil society;
- Research portfolios in museum be aligned with new academic trends, interdisciplinary research and the growing significance of IKS;
- Museum collections (natural science, palaeosciences and humanities) should be evaluated in terms of their potential contribution to research programmes. This evaluation can include the potential contribution to the national value chain for research; scope of collections; condition of collections; human resources available to unlock potential of the collections; and development of capacity to achieve this.

Museum research is a professional activity and should be managed as such. Management models should be explored that acknowledge that:

- Museums are dynamic organisations, but are managed according to a mechanistic model;
- Museum research programmes are partially influenced by international and national peers through professional associations;

- Performance standards are set by international and national peers through professional associations and should be adopted and supported by government departments and agencies;
- Performance measurement is partially dependent on peer opinion and indicators may differ between different disciplines. Performance recognition of peers should be incorporated into institutional performance management systems;
- Planning and performance management processes should accommodate the non-routine and responsive nature of museum programmes.

In addition it is proposed to:
- Create a fund to reward research outputs similar to the DHET fund for tertiary education institutions;
- Support retention of skills and knowledge assets;
- Address equity;
- Contribute to job creation of museum specific work;
- Address competitive remuneration of staff with scarce skills so as to retain their knowledge and experience, with greater uniformity of salaries, career paths and performance assessment across the sector;
- Provide funding to acquire the full range of research infrastructure that supports research enterprises in the 21st Century;
- Support SAMAB, the journal of the SAMA, as a vehicle for museum research.

Lastly it is recommended that a task team consisting of museum professionals be created in cooperation with ICOM-SA and SAMA to:
- Identify gaps in ICOM Code of Ethics;
- Align ICOM Code of Ethics with South African legislation, e.g. confidentiality of medical records;
- Review and incorporate, where appropriate, existing programmes to strengthen ethical conduct in South African museums.

1. Introduction

The conference was undertaken as part of ICOM-SA's programme for International Museum Day 2014 and the theme was therefore explored within the broader ICOM International Museum Day theme for 2014: "Collections makes connections".. Research is considered to be one of the core functions of museums together with preservation (acquisition, conservation, collection management) and communication (community relationships, exhibition, education, publications) – the so-called PRC system. Research informs preservation as well as communication and is crucial for sustaining museums as creative spaces and for unlocking the potential of museum collections to expand knowledge that is of cultural, economic and environmental importance. In addition, research informs best practices in conservation and collection management.

The conference set out to explore the concerns raised regarding the state of specialist research in museums as well as the potential of museum research to benefit society as defined by government imperatives as well as determined by international and national research priorities.

This conference was a vital beginning of constructive engagement between researchers in museums and the key players in government that influence the legislation, policies and funding for researchers. The title clearly indicated that the relevance of research by museums needed illumination and that the relevance of museum research outputs for current national and global priorities, was on trial.

2. Scope and limitations

Included in the scope of the report was research across all museums in South Africa, i.e. nationally, provincially and locally funded or owned museums as well as independent museums. Issues raised were, therefore, not limited to a specific department, but addressed general trends in South Africa.

The discussions at the conference focused on specialist research only and we acknowledge here that this excludes other types of research conducted in many museums. This does not mean that research in these museums is not considered to be important. It should be noted that valuable original research is conducted in many museums that are not integrated with formal research infrastructure due to the formal qualifications of staff (Ph.D or D.Phil staff are in the minority in humanities based museums). Formal qualifications do not necessarily reflect the experience and skills of research staff in that many staff members with Honours and Masters degrees have excellent research records. In addition, smaller museums do not have the capacity to employ specialist researchers, but can be very important contributors to research due to the resources they hold in terms of collections and community relations.

A further restriction on the findings of this report is that it is based on presentations and discussions at the conference followed by a consultative process where a draft report was circulated for comment. No representative survey has been conducted and the report therefore cannot be considered to be entirely based on a scientific study. In fact, the lack of collated data on museum

research is a major constraint in reviewing performance of museums. Without such a study, one can only speculate on the causes of the perceived decline in research output by some museums while research has never been fully developed in others.

Though there are pockets of research excellence within the South African museum sector, there is a feeling that research outputs by museums are in decline, that research is not prioritised to the same extent as, for example, the communications function of museums and that museum research is receiving less support from management authorities than in the past. That something is amiss, is acknowledged in the draft Policy Framework for National Museums that notes that the lack of adequate funding "threatens the future viability of museums-based research, resulting in a loss of expertise and deteriorating collections." The draft policy framework also refers to the NRF audit report on natural science collections that depicts a bleak future for museum collections and collection based research.

3. Research in museums – a regulative framework

A significant challenge for museum researchers is the lack of a specific supportive policy and regulative framework. The current regulative framework can be discussed as follows:
- Fragmentation of museum sector;
- Institutional arrangements relating to research;
- The status of research as a core museum function.

After 1994 the new political dispensation reconfigured the South African museum sector in terms of funding authorities. This new configuration imposed an arrangement of national and provincial competencies on the pre-existing pattern of museums that were aided/funded by government, provinces, municipalities, universities and corporate and independent individuals, leaving museums with a fragmented voice that discouraged cooperative programmes. Yet, these museums work within the same professional and ethical frameworks and conduct research on collections that cut across political and institutional boundaries. In addition, most museums do not have large research teams that create challenges in terms of knowledge management, mentoring and succession planning. The solution to this problem could be partially facilitated through collegial support structures and access to collections in different institutions.

Museums are multi-disciplinary institutions that overlap with the heritage, art and performance, civil society, education and natural studies sectors. Yet, most government museums are managed as part of heritage promotion units and therefore report to management structures with a narrow mandate that excludes those important core functions.

In order to address these challenges cross-institutional platforms are required that promote cooperation across museums from different funding bodies; encourage cooperative programmes and knowledge sharing; integrate museum research with that of universities and with Department of Science and Technology programmes; provide professional support; and provide mentorship.

Before 1998, this aspect was partially facilitated through arms-length management structures that allowed museums to develop relations beneficial to their full mandates through museum councils.

Councils of nationally funded museums included representatives of stakeholders, such as universities and research institutions, thereby creating formal relationships between the museum and other relevant organisations. A similar system is used in Zimbabwe. Since the promulgation of the Cultural Institutions Act (Act 119 of 1998), museum council members have been appointed by the Minister of Arts and Culture following a public nomination process and the only requirements are that the Council should be geographically representative and should include members with financial and legal skills. A similar process is now proposed in the draft Policy Framework for National Museums, with the difference that there should be one Council for all nationally funded museums. This means that there will be even more distance between governance and programme development (specialist levels) within museums. We recommend here that the composition of Councils of nationally and provincially funded museums should members who will create formal relationships that will benefit relevant research (and other mandates).

Although the draft Policy Framework for National Museums acknowledges that research is a core museum function and states the promotion of scientific activities within the national system of innovation as a policy objective, it does not provide details on how this will be accomplished. It recommends the formation of a Research and Innovation Directorate within the Department of Arts and Culture that would closely liaise with other relevant departments like Science and Technology and Environmental Affairs to promote and improve funding for museums' research. The draft policy framework also recommends the establishment of a centralised coordination structure to, amongst other matters, "coordinate and liaise with government departments regarding research and education" and "promote scientific activities in the national system of innovation". No framework for the further development of these recommendations is provided, however, and we are left with the assumption that the "framework" document will be followed up with more detailed policy documents.

The National Research Foundation (NRF) is the lead governmental agency to promote research and work across the institutional boundaries that fragment the museum sector, but focuses only on specialist research. In addition the NRF system is difficult to understand and access by researchers who are not supported by established institutional research offices, as is the case in most museums. It is proposed that the Research and Innovation Directorate should work together with the NRF and museum professional associations, such as ICOM-SA and SAMA, to provide support and training for researchers from smaller museums to access the NRF system. For example, information workshops can be presented at museum conferences. A model that includes provincial, local and independent museums should be developed.

The NRF's Centre of Excellence and pilot project to fund research in five museums can be explored as models for future collaborative projects. This would also be in line with the proposal in the draft Policy Framework for National Museums to extend the responsibilities of clusters of national museums to include assistance to museums in a specific region, and for provincially and locally owned collections of significance to be declared national museum collections.

It is recommended that:
- *The DAC establish a Research and Innovation Directorate to address issues of research in museums and liaise with the NRF on funding for research in museums;*

- *The NRF work with professional associations and museum services to promote access to NRF programmes through support and training;*
- *Museums councils, or alternative structures, should facilitate formal stakeholder relations with research institutions;*
- *Funding be given not only for specific projects, but for the creation of sustainable human resource structures to implement projects. Mentoring and succession plans be created across institutions in a way that benefit both the mentor and the person being mentored;*
- *The NRF investigate the utilisation of funding for contract projects as part of a broader mentoring, succession planning and equity strategy;*
- *Cross-institutional platforms for collaboration that transcend institutional boundaries be explored. The platforms will not necessarily replace current institutional formations or lead to the physical centralisation of collections. Such platforms should:*
  - e) *Feed into the DST system of innovation and NRF strategic programmes;*
  - f) *Acknowledge and feed into existing collaborative platforms such as the Centre of Excellence for palaeosciences and the national reporting system for IKS;*
  - g) *Promote cooperative research programmes;*
  - h) *Promote collection mobility, i.e. provide access to collections across institutions in a way that defines museum collections as a national asset and not as an institutional asset.*
- *That SAMAB, the journal of the SAMA, should be supported as a vehicle for museum research.*

4. Leading museums with vision and passion

Though there are many definitions of museums, they differ in emphasis rather than in content. Most definitions focus on functions of museums that are consistent over time and between cultures while museum practice tends to be more dynamic and is expressed within local social and cultural contexts.[1]

A defining characteristic of museums is the interrelatedness between the core functions of research, conservation and communication as well as the interactive, creative processes used by museums. Research, therefore, is located as central to broader museum practice. The notion of museums as multidisciplinary knowledge centres requires further exploration, especially into the creation and promotion of interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research. Functioning in the interface between the academic world and the general public, museums are uniquely positioned to educate the public on new innovations and to obtain public feedback on academic work.

In order for museums to fulfil their potential:
- *Dynamic, ever-changing museum practice should be explored through museological research to keep South African museums abreast on new trends and museum specific opportunities. Thisl entails either creating museological research capacity within government agencies or the development of partnerships with research institutions such as universities or the HSRC;*

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[1] Refer to Davis, A. Mairesse, F. & Desvallées, A. (eds). 2010. *What is a museum?* ICOM ICOFOM: Munich, for an extensive discussion on museum definitions.

- *The governance and management structures of museums should create a supportive environment for museum researchers, in other words museum leadership should be au fait with a research environment and infrastructure and how it relates to other museum functions. Museum professional associations can play a leading role together with government agencies to promote this environment;*
- *Research excellence should be a significant institutional performance indicator and therefore be linked to the performance indicators of senior managers;*
- *Museum research strategies and objectives should acknowledge the multi-disciplinary nature of museum research and explore alternative forms of research output suited to other human sciences such as art collections.*

5. Creation of a value chain for museum research

Museums provide services to society. They have the potential to be multidisciplinary knowledge centres that feed into the national system of innovation and to conduct specialist research in various fields such as palaeo-sciences, biosystematics/taxonomy and humanities. Through their research, museums can contribute to:

- Public Health Management;
- Agriculture and Forestry Management;
- Marine resource management;
- Wildlife management;
- Management of ecosystems;
- Water Resource Management;
- Climate Change Studies;
- Heritage management;
- Building a sustainability society (informed, caring and responsible citizens);
- Social development (people confident and able to engage in public affairs);
- Social Cohesion and National Building;
- Building a democratic society (providing safe spaces to engage on current and cultural issues);
- Tourism development;
- Acknowledge and promote local knowledge nationally and internationally.

It is recommended that:
- *Toolkits to assist museums to create value chain for museum research should be developed that*
    - *outline museums' value to society,*
    - *align research in museums with international and national academic trends,*
    - *align research in museum with government imperatives,*
    - *outline partnerships with NGOs and civil society;*
- *Research portfolios in museums must be aligned with new academic trends, interdisciplinary research and growing significance of IKS;*
- *Museum collections (natural science, palaeosciences and humanities) should be evaluated in terms of their potential contribution to research programmes. This evaluation can include the*

potential contribution to the national value chain for research, scope of collections; condition of collections; human resources available to unlock potential of the collections and development of capacity to achieve this.

6. Creating a nurturing and supportive environment for museum researchers

It was generally agreed by conference participants that even though there may be enough funding for research projects, museums cannot access these funds due to infrastructural and human resources shortcomings. This includes the lack of human resources (absence of leadership, co-ordination, research competence and qualified support staff; number of research staff) and institutional infrastructure (laboratories, storage space, vehicles, field equipment).

The government's Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD) framework is a matter of concern here as it recognises only natural scientists and not researchers in humanities as specialists. Furthermore OSD is only implemented in certain museums (e.g. provincial museums). In addition and of significant importance, museums do not qualify to receive financial support for research undertaken as they do not fall under the Department of Higher Education; this represents a significant source of income for universities and an important incentive for university researchers.

An article by Adv Paul Hoffman and Daan Groeneveldt titled *The Management of Professionally Qualified Persons in the Public Service[2]* provides an interesting perspective on the human resource issues raised at the conference. According to Hoffman and Groeneveldt, government departments and agencies are managed according to a mechanistic or administrative model that is characterised by centralized decision-making and control and is well suited to routine standardised work. However, this approach is ill-suited to professional or dynamic organisations characterised by decentralised decision making and control. The attributes of professional or dynamic organisations are:
- Problem solving oriented;
- Complex/Dynamic operating environment;
- Standards of professional performance originate in independent, self-governing professional associations;
- Professionals are registered with professional organisations along with their colleagues across all operating organizations;
- Professional associations rely on the standardization of skills (scope of practice) for coordination and control;
- Coordination and control also occurs between the operating professionals through the standardization of skills and knowledge i.e. by what they know to expect from their colleagues;
- Core operations are staffed with registered professionals who are in control of their outputs i.e. the freedom to act within their registered scope of practice;
- Professionals work independently of their colleagues, but closely with the clients they serve;

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[2] Hoffman, P. & Groeneveldt, D. 2009. The Management of Professionally Qualified persons in the Public Service, The nstitute for Accountability in Southern Africa, http://www.ifaisa.org/Professionally_Qualified_Person, accessed 13 November 2014.

- Professional organisations emphasize the power of expertise (or sapiential authority);
- Strategies of the professional organisations are largely those of the individual professionals within the organization, but with reference to those of the professional associations on the outside;
- Professional organisation strategies represent the cumulative effect over time of the projects, or strategic 'initiatives' that their members are able to undertake;
- Supporting technical infrastructure systems cannot be used to regulate work practices or facilitate automation of work;
- Professional organizations are driven by professional rules, standards and client needs;
- Change in the professional organisation is not caused by new administrators taking office and introducing reforms;
- Change occurs through the evolutionary process of changing the rules of entry to the profession, the creation of new knowledge, skills, norms and thereafter the willingness of all previously qualified professionals to continuously upgrade their skills.

Museums are dynamic organisations, but are managed according to a mechanistic model. A nurturing environment would require:
- *Museum research programmes that are partially influenced by international and national peers through professional associations;*
- *Performance standards set by international and national peers through professional associations and should be adopted and supported by government departments and agencies;*
- *Performance measurement is partially dependent on peer opinion and indicators may differ between different disciplines. Performance recognition of peers should be incorporated into institutional performance management systems;*
- *Planning and performance management processes should accommodate the non-routine and responsive nature of museum programmes.*

In addition, a nurturing and enabling environment for research must be created to:
- *Create a fund to reward research outputs similar to the DHET fund for tertiary education institutions;*
- *Support retention of skills and knowledge assets;*
- *Address equity;*
- *Contribute to job creation of museum specific work;*
- *Address competitive remuneration of staff with scarce skills so as to retain their knowledge and experience, with greater uniformity of salaries, career paths and performance assessment across the sector;*
- *Provision of funding to acquire the full range of research infrastructure that supports research enterprises in the 21st Century.*

7. Exploration of a South African specific ethical and social responsibility framework

The ICOM Code of Ethics is supported by SAMA and all members of ICOM and SAMA are required to commit to upholding these standards. In addition, ICOM adopted a Code of Ethics for Natural History

Collections that augment the general Code of Ethics at the Rio de Janeiro General Assembly in 2013. However, it is acknowledged that the ICOM Code of Ethics provides minimum standards that are applicable across nations and it is therefore necessary to augment the Code of Ethics to address local social, political and ethical issues.

It is recommended that a task team, consisting of museum professionals, should be created in cooperation with ICOM-SA and SAMA to:

- *Identify gaps in ICOM Code of Ethics;*
- *Align ICOM Code of Ethics with South African legislation, e.g. confidentiality of medical records;*
- *Review and incorporate, where appropriate, existing programmes to strengthen ethical conduct in South African museums;*
- *Align professional conduct in museums with social responsibility imperatives such as*
  a) *Protecting the dignity of all people,*
  b) *Providing access to information,*
  c) *Contributing to education,*
  d) *Promoting and protecting community intellectual property,*
  e) *Providing guidelines and support for ethical conduct in museums,*
  f) *Providing guidelines for ethical research in museums.*

Conclusion:

In concluding, the Research Conference was a resounding success in that not only did it address the role of research in museums, but it also emphasized that research is one of the core functions of museums, and that the mere presence of collections in museums does not serve any national purpose unless their values are unlocked through research. Despite the many challenges that were identified, there is scope for a bright future for museums research. Unlocking the high potential value of research in museums will improve South Africa's national system of innovation and significantly contribute to national growth priorities.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS AND SPEAKERS

The conference was attended by 93 delegates from across the country representing the national Department of Arts and Culture, the national Department of Science and Technology, National Research Foundation, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provincial governments as well as eThekwini and Nelson Mandela Bay metropolitan authorities. Tertiary and research institutions represented included the University of the Witwatersrand, University of KwaZulu-Natal and SANBI. Museums from across the spectrum were represented, i.e. nationally aided museums, provincial museums, local museums, university museums and community museums.

The speakers of the conference were invited to highlight challenges as well as opportunities facing museum researchers. A short overview of the discussions will be provided followed by recommendations.

Hamish Robertson, Director Natural History Collections, Iziko Museums of SA	The status of research in South African museums
Vusithemba Ndima, Deputy Director General: Heritage Preservation & Promotion, Department of Arts and Culture	The contribution of museums to research and innovation – a government perspective
Andrew Kaniki, Executive Director: Knowledge Fields Development, National Research Foundation (NRF)	Funding opportunities to enhance knowledge generation through museum research
Yonah Seleti, Chief Director Science Missions, Department of Science and Technology	The role of museums in the development of science collections in the national system of innovation
Wayne Florence, Curator Marine Invertebrates, Iziko Museums of SA	Un-natural museums: the unnatural governance structures for natural history collections and research – action is needed
Helene Vollgraaff, Helene Vollgraaff Projects and Chair ICOM-SA	Thinking about museums, museological research and trends
Michelle Hamer, Director - Zoological Systematics, SANBI	National needs for biological systematics in South African museums
Leigh Richards, Curator of Mammals, Durban Natural Science Museum	Making biosystematics relevant: the application of museum-based research in studies of emerging infectious diseases and public health
Bruce Rubidge, Director of Evolutionary Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand	Palaeontological research in South African museums: challenges and opportunities
Gavin Whitelaw, Archaeologist, KwaZulu Natal Museum	Pre-colonial archaeological research in South African museums – challenges and opportunities
David Allan, Curator of Ornithology and Editor of Durban Natural Science Museum Novitates, Durban Natural Science Museum	The past, present and future 'niche' of museum research journals with a focus on the natural sciences

Pearl Sithole, Research School of Built Environment and Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal Howard College Campus, Durban	The role of museums in oral history research
Jaco Boshoff, Curator of Maritime Archaeology, Iziko Museums of SA	Historical archaeological research in South African museums: challenges and opportunities
Melanie Hillebrand, Director Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum	Art museums: Making research a priority.
Juliette Leeb-Du Toit, Senior Research Associate University of the Witwatersrand and University of Johannesburg	Art's mediation of history: thoughts on curation and research in South African museums.
Rochelle Keene, Adler Museum of Medicine, University of the Witwatersrand & Julie Parle, Honorary Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal	Museums and collections of medical material: Seeking an ethical framework
Dolly Khumalo, Senior Manager: Museum Services, Arts and Culture, KwaZulu Natal Province	Museum research and its implications for a democratic South Africa.
Wendy Black, Curator of Pre-colonial Archaeology, Iziko Museums of SA	The legacy of unethical research: dealing with human remains
Carol van Wyk, Director Knowledge Systems, Department of Science and Technology	Indigenous knowledge research – how should museums be getting involved?
Johann Tempelhoff, School of Basic Sciences, North West University	Disciplines, archives and artefacts in the changing landscape of research on water in South Africa

## APPENDIX B: OVERVIEW OF PAPERS AND DISCUSSIONS[3]

There is a perception that there has been a decline in museum outputs; lack of visionary leadership regarding museum research and a lack of support for museum researchers. These aspects were explored by the conference speakers.

1. **Status of research in museums.**

Helene Vollgraaff, Chairperson of ICOM-SA indicated in her introduction that the status of research in museums has been a concern for a long time. Concerns have been raised at SAMA conferences as far back as 1997. The perception that research in museums is in dire straits is supported by the data presented by Hamish Robertson, Wayne Florence and David Allan. Hamish Robertson provided an overview of the journal output by museums. Although he did not have access to a complete set of statistics for all museums reviewed, he was able to identify important trends, and argued, that the absence of information regarding publications from museums is a symptom of a loss of institutional memory.

It is also noteworthy that natural sciences have a much higher research article output than humanities.

The following chart compiled by Robertson demonstrates the decline in research outputs.
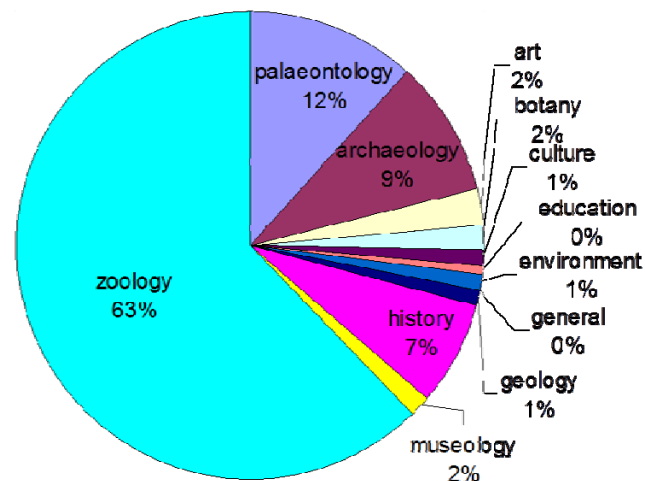
David Allan analysed output of in-house museum journals for the period 1964-2013. Though there are mixed journals that include natural history and humanities, the humanities articles have been excluded by Allan for the purposes of this analysis. In findings that mirror those of Robertson, Allan's

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[3] The appendix is based on the papers presented at the conference as well as notes on the discussions and does not necessarily represent the view of ICOM-SA.

analysis show that the biggest stakeholders in natural science museum journals are invertebrate biologists and to a lesser extent palaeontologists. "Other invertebrates", originally separated into marine and terrestrial forms, were lumped together here due to time constraints and because they are not always easy to differentiate based on article titles (esp. molluscs!). Ichthyology and especially earth sciences, botany and the miscellaneous category are poorly represented. According to Allan, the overall decrease, or at least stagnation, in the number and length of articles in in-house natural science museum journals cannot simply be interpreted as a decrease in museum research publication generally as researchers may prefer to publish in other journals. However, this is not borne out in the statistics provided by Robertson whose analysis focussed on research outputs whether in published in in-house journals or not.

Melanie Hillebrand and Juliette Leeb-du Toit argued that there is little scope for art historians to publish in accredited journals. There is only one accredited journal for art historians in the country. However, Leeb-du Toit recommended that alternative methods of measuring research output should be considered, for example adapting models developed by musicologists in order to acknowledge research outputs in formats different from journal articles. This is already done in the academic sector.

Vollgraaff explored the status of museological research in South Africa. Museology as distinguished from museography. Museology is theory of museums while museography refers to museum practice. Museology is by nature interdisciplinary. It is the theoretical study of the relationship between museums and reality, in other words, how museums perceive reality and how they respond to this perceived reality and include:
- power relations between museums and their funders, including the government; the way in which these power relations are maintained and utilised;
- power relations between communities and the museums, the social and economic environment in which museums work;
- knowledge production and dissemination as an expression of power.

Museology borrows from a large spectrum of social, linguistic and philosophical theory with an aim to apply them to museums such as epistemology, social science (politics, sociology, anthropology, education, communication, linguistics). Museums are also used as case studies to contribute to the expansion of social science theory and philosophy. Vollgraaff found that museology is under-developed as a discipline within museums. However, Leeb-du Toit's paper indicates that the art historian community is picking up on museological trends.

Establishing museology as a discipline will require a coordinated effort as many of the museological issues can only be studied across institutions rather than within institutions. As no research or government entity deals with museums specifically or at least as a focus area, this coordination is lacking. Possible focus areas for museological research within the South African context include:
- Impact and responses to the changing environment of museums, e.g. ICTs and social media replacing museums as main source of scientific information;
- Academic trends, e.g. new museum disciplines and emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches;

- Social and cultural changes, e.g. increased literacy and access to information leading to developments such as citizen science, community heritage practice, social activism;
- Changing political landscape, e.g. emphasis on economic and social development, cultural justice and reconciliation;
- New trends in learning and communication theory, including visitor studies;
- Organisational and sectorial change with an emphasis on the impact of government policies, including transformation related policies, on the functioning and programming of museums.

Wayne Florence argued that research is the foundation of the value chain of museum work. It informs collection and preservation, but translates collections into assets for society. However, with the focus on the communication function of museums, this is often overlooked and the value of research, i.e. original information, is undervalued. Florence ascribed the weakening research performance of museums to:
- Lack of strategic, legislative and policy resulting in a neglect of research priorities. For example, the Cultural Institutions Act does not speak to research in museums and the value of natural history collections is not well articulated within the strategic priorities of the national Department of Arts and Culture;
- Collections and research budgets are perceived to be inadequate to fulfil purpose;
- Understaffing in terms of essential skills, e.g. inadequate expert (taxonomic) capacities required by museums to fulfil their full purpose;
- Decline in curatorial posts or failure to fill those that have become vacant;
- Lack of parity in salary scales between researchers working in different funding frameworks, e.g. researchers in national museums in comparison with researchers in provincial museums. John Midgley noted from the floor that though natural history scientists in provincial museums benefit from the Occupation Specific Dispensation, humanities and art researchers in provincial museums are worse off than both natural history researchers and humanities researchers in national museums.

As a case study, Michelle Hamer focused on the contribution of biosystematics or taxonomy. She showed that despite a healthy policy and strategy environment as well as scope and need for research, the potential for museum's contribution to taxonomic research is not being realised.

According to Hamer, biosystematics is well-placed on a policy level in South Africa. The country is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that recognizes the need for taxonomy, and established the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI), which aims to "address the lack of taxonomic information and expertise in order to improve decision-making and management in conservation, sustainable use and relevant economic sectors". South Africa has a national strategy for biosystematics and SANBI has been mandated to coordinate and promote taxonomy in the country. In addition, the scope of biosystematics research is vast. As an example, 65,500 species of animals are known of which 43,555 are insects, at least half of which are endemic to South Africa. Estimates of the number of species still to be discovered range between 20,000 and 200,000 with the general consensus being around 80,000. This means that at the current rate of description, it will take another 335 years to describe all of SA's animal species.

Despite the potential for biosystematics research, there are only 92 animal taxonomists in South Africa, including 32 at 9 museums. This is a decrease from an estimated 62 taxonomists at museums in 1991 and 41 in 2001. Of the estimated R80 million distributed to taxonomic research over a period of 8 years, only R2 million found its way to museums and NRF funding for taxonomy was allocated to only 4 museum scientists. Of the 20 grants totalling R3.5 million made available by the new Foundational Biodiversity Information Programme (FBIP), only 2 grants totalling R200,000.00 were awarded to museums. This can be ascribed to a lack of applications as well as the poor quality of applications submitted. Only 2 museum animal taxonomic researchers exceeded the median number of publications per researcher per year over the past 11 years confirming the low research output. Of the animal taxonomists in museums, 14 have PhDs and 6 are NRF rated. Demographic transformation has been slow with 8 of the 32 being Black of whom 4 are classified as African.

According to Hamer, though enough funding is available for research, museums cannot utilise these funds due to lack of capacity, a lack of collaborative projects across institutions and lack of mentoring and post-graduate training.

Bruce Rubidge painted a similar picture regarding palaeo-sciences. Despite the importance of the palaeo-heritage and the official mandate of SAHRA and museums as custodians of palaeoscience heritage, museums face a number of problems, namely:
- Lack of capacity to prepare and interpret fossils;
- Collection facilities at some museums need upgrading;
- Most Museums do not champion research - only 9 palaeontologists (for all fields) at SA Museums;
- Many aspects of the SA fossil record are neglected , for example, there are no positions for the study of invertebrate fossils, paleobotany and micropalaeontology;
- Inadequate numbers of curatorial/preparation staff (NRF positions are short term);
- Inadequate provision for mentoring of young staff;
- Cumbersome provincialised heritage legislation.

2. New models and structures

Despite its importance, there is no coherent approach or strategy towards museum research. In arguing for a national strategy that is integrated with that of research institutes and universities, Vollgraaff refers to the Research Strategy developed by the European Cultural Heritage Committee as an example. The four focus areas are:
- Developing a reflective society;
- Connecting people with heritage leading to
  - protection through use,
  - sustainability,
  - security,
  - heritage information;
- Creating knowledge;
- Safeguarding our cultural heritage in order to
  - create an enabling framework,
  - develop capability and capacity,

- o foster management strategies,
- o share knowledge,
- o support research infrastructure,
- o influence policy, laws and regulations.

Andrew Kaniki presented the National Research Foundation's structure and strategy. He emphasised that museum researchers can benefit from existing structures to promote high level research. These include funding grants for established and emerging researchers, as well as the NRF's existing programme to preserve and manage effectively natural history collections countrywide through regional hubs. In addition these grants aim to develop an absorptive capacity and assist smaller collections from the region. In the pilot phase of this programme, the NRF awarded a total of R4 million (R1 million to each region) intended for the preservation and maintenance of science collections in six museums:

- Ditsong Museums of South Africa in Pretoria – Gauteng region;
- Iziko Museums of South Africa in Cape Town – Western Cape region;
- Consortium comprising of the National Museum in Bloemfontein and the McGregor Museum in Kimberly – Central region; and
- Durban Natural Science Museum and KwaZulu Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg who submitted a joint proposal as part of their regional collaboration – KwaZulu-Natal region.

Rubidge described one of the programmes of the NRF that involved museum research. The palaeosciences is one of a number of knowledge fields identified in the National Research and Development Strategy in which South Africa should aim at achieving international research excellence because of our geographical position and natural or cultural heritage. The palaeosciences (collectively including palaeontology, palaeo-anthropology, archaeology and related disciplines) are areas in which South Africa has a geographical advantage, owing to the quantity and diversity of finds within our national borders. The strategy links the private and public sectors, through the work of different government departments, their agencies and institutions such as universities, science councils, and museums that play a significant role in research in the palaeosciences to work in concert toward realising the goals of the strategy. The strategy regarding palaeosciences is achieved through the NRF Centre of Excellence and includes existing programmes such as the African Origins Platform. The Centre of Excellence is hosted at the University of the Witwatersrand and includes the following partners:

- Iziko Museums
- Albany Museum;
- National Museum;
- Ditsong Museum;
- Univ. Cape Town;
- Rhodes University;
- Council for Geoscience;
- McGregor Museum;
- KwaZulu-Natal Museum;
- Durban Natural Science Museum.

The partners bring large collections, expertise (23 palaeontologists of whom 9 work at museums), equipment and outreach opportunities. The objective of the programme is to:
- Promote world class research;
- Train students & technicians;
- Ensure sustainable & excellent curation;
- Increase public awareness and national pride;
- Develop a sustainable heritage- and paleo-tourism industry for South Africa.

Carol van Wyk explained the national reporting system on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and articulated the vision of an information and research for an Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) platform that will serve as a conduit for collaboration between various actors:- museums and their collections, historians, researchers and most importantly indigenous and local communities.

VanWyk noted that Indigenous Knowledge Systems in South Africa are:
- Oral in nature;
- Linked to a strong spiritual base;
- Originate from ancestors and are passed on to new owners and practitioners by parents and grandparents;
- Practised in social structures that differ from one community to another;
- Used in an environment of respect, recognising the influence of beliefs of the community and the natural environment;
- Managed in a way that is driven by the specific culture and customs of the people; Transferred in metaphor or rituals within strong tradition;
- Source of pride to people who hold it.

IKS Policy (2004) is committed to the recognition, promotion, development, protection and affirmation of indigenous knowledge systems through;
- Bringing together key drivers that are catalysts for the development and economic viability of holders and practitioners of IKS;
- Providing for the creation of an infrastructure to sustain this knowledge;
- Embedding IKS in the National Research and Development Strategy and 10 Yr Innovation Plan as one of SA geographical advantage areas.

Museums can play an important part in promoting and documenting IKS. IKS are an important component to history and represent traces of the past (e.g. oral memories, traditional knowledge). IKS don't have separate categories for science, art, religion, philosophy, nature, and culture. They are holistic, with all elements viewed as interconnected and not able to be understood in isolation They are also bound to the land or ecosystem in which the people live. Museums play a dynamic role in representing history, memory, identity of a people through discourse. However, museums have to address the perception of museums by communities as no-go areas as they are located in urban areas and reflect a western approach to knowledge.

It is proposed that an IKS information research infrastructure is created that serve as a conduit for research and collaboration between museums and their collections and Indigenous and local communities, as well as relevant academics.

Museums can contribute to IK research in many ways:

- IKS taxonomic development in partnership with indigenous, rural and local communities;
- Providing access to and actively promoting IK through appropriate displays, exhibitions;
- Having a welcoming presence for indigenous cultures and material by and about indigenous and local peoples;
- Providing essential services that promote an understanding of indigenous issues;
- Involve indigenous communities as research partners, co-investigators even co-authors.

Museums are an entry point and collection area for most indigenous and local communities' cultural history. However, it should be remembered that every indigenous community has different needs and these must be accommodated in order to ensure that collections can be used and accessed by the communities. Museums should include indigenous and local communities in research, interpretation and display of material. Museums should consider principles of prior rights, honesty, traditional guardianship, full participation, full disclosure, confidentiality, respect, active protection of their knowledge, and equitable sharing of resources. Museums should understand the community they are serving and at the same time have roots in the local community or, at least, identifiable links with it.

The holistic approach of IKS also provides a model for western or universal research in museums by breaking down barriers between natural science and humanities. Yonah Seleti emphasised that the definition of scientific collections in museums should be reconsidered to encompass all collection-related scientific activities in an interdisciplinary and holistic way.

Johann Tempelhoff presented a paper on water research to illustrate a new approach to heritage related research that emphasises interdisciplinary research. In SA, as democracy now matures, we need to contemplate heritage in the context of the demand for relevant knowledge systems to persist and contribute to the ideals of the developmental state. There is also a need for adding on and enhancing new systems and a new heritage for the 21st century. He uses the CuDyWat project as an example. The CuDyWat at NWU(Vaal) since 2007 active focusses on water governance and specifically local water supply and sanitation service delivery issues in rural urban areas. It focuses on participatory interactive research among all stakeholders, and looks at the problem from an ontological perspective before integrating emergent epistemological perspectives in research output. There is a deeply felt need for traces of former cultural and natural heritage resources to unlock the understanding of the present. There is a need for greater integration of natural and human cultural heritage to understand changing contemporary conditions.

3. **Building the value chain**

Seleti, Kaniki and Luthando Maphasa (from the floor) stressed the importance of museums' responses to broader research strategies and to government imperatives. Beverley Thomas and Seleti stated from the floor that a value chain for research must be stated. Though the museum

might not be responsible for the end of the value chain, the value chain starts with stating the purpose of the research.

Leigh Richards showed how a value chain can be developed for research in museums. She concluded that biosystematics plays an integral role in multi-disciplinary/hierarchical approach to the understanding and management of zoonotic infectious diseases. Museum researchers can provide crucial assistance in the monitoring and surveillance of animal/insect vectors and infectious diseases of local and global public health importance. For example, the use of analytical techniques such as GIS ecological niche modelling that utilises museum specimen occurrence records can assist in identifying potential epidemiology 'hotspots', towards which surveillance efforts can be directed.

Gavin Whitelaw argued that museums lie at the interface between scientific research and wider society. Nowhere else can the two achieve such close proximity. According to Whitelaw, displays and education programmes should significantly reflect the research undertaken within the museum. Archaeologists at museums contribute to education by publishing in:
- School textbooks (*History alive* series);
- Children's programmes run in and outside the museum;
- Newspaper articles;
- Museum open days and holiday programmes;
- Displays – Story of People in Southeast Africa (1979);
- Museum in a box – travelling displays;
- Public lecture programmes.

According to Whitelaw, displays and educational programmes should:
- Present the known;
- Point towards the unknown;
- Challenge;
- Excite.

Pearl Sithole emphasised that research and exhibitions should be rooted in local environment to have value for local communities. She argued strongly against overly generalised and generic exhibitions and public programmes. In addition to including local stories and perspectives, Sithole argued that research objectives should be located within an African knowledge production framework. She listed the following considerations regarding research programmes.
- Do they capture the African variety of what science has discovered?
- Are they deep and affirming or are they merely instrumentalist? That is:
    - Do they capture an African variety of what science has discovered?
    - Do they present African science/achievement?
    - Do they commercialise the aesthetics of local social life?
    - Do they capture social life and humanities in the local context?
- To ensure connection with the local community:
    - Struggle is good to portray; but locally owned history is easily marketable;
    - Classifications (Zulu, Nguni, Voortrekker, etc.) appeal to the mind; but real heroes and heroines are good vehicles for a brand;

- Financial sustainability makes sense; but intangible dividends are worth an investment;
- Intensive audit of value is good; but M&E beyond quantities is also good (i.e. linkages with youth and schools; skills; innovation) – worth the effort.

4. Addressing institutional infrastructure

We have discussed above how the museum sector in South Africa has become fragmented and how this provides a challenge to establish coordination and strategic focus in museums. Although none of the speakers focused on either governance issues or human resources specifically, these issues formed part of the presentations and were raised from the floor. Both Kaniki and Hamer indicated that enough funds are available for research but there was general agreement from the floor that it is the lack of human and institutional infrastructure in museums that prevents researchers from accessing these resources. Seleti, Robertson and Vollgraaff emphasised the need for vision and leadership and an integrated strategy.

Robertson, Hamer, Rubidge, Florence, Allan and Jaco Boshoff, supported by Midgley from the floor, referred to the decrease in curator positions, the lack of, or inadequate, mentoring programmes for young researchers, the lack of priority placed on research and the resulting lack of capacity within museums to conduct research. Inconsistent and uncompetitive remuneration frameworks also play a role. The NRF do fund mentoring programmes that include the sponsoring of young scientists in contract positions for 5 years, but this is problematic within government human resources systems as people may not be appointed on contract for more than 3 years. Some museums cannot utilize the mentorship programmes as the principle research posts are vacant. The objective of the NRF programme is to assist with mentoring and succession planning. Furthermore, it is unclear whether a person on contract may be appointed in a permanent post without a competitive process.

The lack of knowledge management systems and loss of institutional memory was also noted in discussion from the floor. This is partly due to a lack of succession planning and mentoring.

The current performance management and reporting systems used by government was a heated discussion point. The system is seen as time-consuming and inflexible that makes innovation very difficult and responding to unexpected opportunities virtually impossible. It is also felt that the system measures outputs that do not contribute to delivery in research projects and therefore contribute to the marginalisation of research. Hillebrand in her explanation of object oriented research as practiced in art museums, indicated the importance of flexibility and innovation that is undermined by performance management systems intended to control rather than deliver. She made the important point of serendipity – all cannot be predicted. And one should not lose the moment because it is not in the strategic plan. There is a general feeling that the reporting system should be replaced by project related reporting that provides information about progress, challenges and opportunities. The NRF reporting system has been noted as adding value to project monitoring and evaluation.

5. Ethics and social responsibility

Rochelle Keene and Wendy Black highlighted the need for a review of ethical procedures in order to be aligned with the South African constitution and recent legislation. The ICOM Code of Ethics is generally supported in South Africa as it is a precondition for ICOM and SAMA membership. However, the ICOM Code of Ethics provides the minimum standards and does not deal with issues of a more specific nature. ICOM promotes the further development of their Code of Ethics for local circumstances – the only condition is that the local Code of Ethics is not in conflict with the ICOM Code of Ethics.

Keene and Black focused on the particular ethical concerns in working with human remains and medical records. The role of museums in making information available is in conflict with confidentiality of medical records. Black emphasised that many museums are already in the process to review ethical conduct, for example in addressing the legacy of human remains in museums that provides a platform for future review of a local Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. Keene proposed a separate process led by ICOM and SAMA to develop a more detailed Code of Ethics for South African museums.

Van Wyk, in her paper on IKS research, emphasised the social responsibility of museums. Museums have a responsibility towards communities and have to act to the benefit of communities.