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Ma15: Communicating Culture – National Museums Aotearoa Conference Dunedin, New Zealand 2015

Museologica Brunensia. 2016, vol. 5, iss. 1, pp. 83-85

ISSN 1805-4722 (print); ISSN 2464-5362 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2016-1-13>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/135588>

Access Date: 21. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

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ZPRÁVY/NEWS

MA15: COMMUNICATING CULTURE – NATIONAL MUSEUMS AOTEAROA CONFERENCE, DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND 2015

DOI: 10.5817/MuB2016-1-13

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Museums in New Zealand

Museums in New Zealand are all very different but they all have a similar purpose. The highest percentage of NZ museums are museums of social history. New Zealand, as a very young country, is very proud of its short history. I have to agree that the life of early settlers who came from Europe around 200 years ago wasn't easy. Amongst the social history museums the second most common museums will be those holding Māori Taonga – Māori treasures and history of the indigenous Māori settlements.¹

Structure of the industry in NZ (GLAM Sector)

New Zealand museums are part of the GLAM sector: an acronym for galleries, libraries, archives and museums. There are no standard rules for establishing a museum in NZ. Large institutions in main cities (Wellington, Auckland) are run by the NZ government; smaller museums are under the local district councils; and a huge amount of small museums are run totally by enthusiastic volunteers. There are numbers of private collections as well.

Central Hawkes Bay Settlers Museum² is an example of a very

¹ *NZMuseums* [online]. National Services Te Paerangi [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://www.nzmuseums.co.nz/>](http://www.nzmuseums.co.nz/).

² *Central Hawkes Bay Settlers Museum* [online]. Waipawa: CHB Settlers Museum, 2014 [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://www.chbsettlersmuseum.co.nz/>](http://www.chbsettlersmuseum.co.nz/).

small rural museum, run as an incorporated society, with a board of trustees as a governance of the museum, and partly funded by local district council. The role of curating and managing such a rural museum is very isolated, so the opportunity to meet and network with colleagues from other museums around the country is very valuable.

Museums Aotearoa MA15: Communicating Cultures

One opportunity for this is the annual Museums Aotearoa Conference (Aotearoa is Māori word for New Zealand and means “long white cloud”) organised by Museums Aotearoa (MA), Te Tari o Ngā Whare Taonga o Te Motu. MA is New Zealand's independent peak professional organisation for museums and those who work in or have an interest in museums. Museums Aotearoa strives to be the strong, objective, fully representative voice for the evolving museum community, and to promote a shared sense of professionalism, solidarity and identity. Its mission is to nurture excellence in museums and galleries through advocacy and service, and to extend manaakitanga (hospitality) and community value. Members include museums; public art galleries; historical societies; science centres; people who work within these institutions; and individuals connected or associated with arts, culture and heritage in New Zealand.³

³ *Museums Aotearoa* [online]. Museums Aotearoa, Te Tari o Ngā Whare Taonga o Te



Figure 1: Dr. Phil Manning being welcomed at Otakou Marae at the MA15 (Facebook: MuseumsAotearoa)

The structure of the conference and why it is important for museums (Museums award)

The subject for MA15 Conference, that happened in April 2015 in Dunedin, South Island, was “Communicating Culture”. The aim of the Conference was to showcase the many innovative approaches museums and galleries in Aotearoa and beyond are using to share their collections onsite, offsite and online. In an age when new communication technologies and methods appear almost daily, there are ever more ways to reach out to and engage the communities with the stories hidden in museums' collections.⁴

The rich programme⁵ of the conference was packed into

Motu/The Museums of New Zealand [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/>](http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/).

⁴ MA Conference. In *Museums Aotearoa* [online]. Museums Aotearoa, Te Tari o Ngā Whare Taonga o Te Motu/The Museums of New Zealand [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/ma-conference/>](http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/ma-conference/).

⁵ Museums Aotearoa, Dunedin 2015: Programme. In *Museums Aotearoa* [online]. Museums Aotearoa, Te Tari o Ngā Whare Taonga o Te Motu/The Museums of New Zealand [cit. 2016-02-28].



Figure 2: Maori Powhiri (welcome) at Otakou Marae, MA15 (Facebook: MuseumsAotearoa)

three days full of inspiring talks, interesting presentations, provocative discussions and tours around cultural sites in the area. It was opened by a very emotional Powhiri – Māori traditional welcome, in te Reo Māori (Māori language), to represent the strong connection between two cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand. The New Zealand museum sector is very supportive of bringing the Māori culture back to the main stage. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington was the first NZ museum using bilingual labeling and text displays (in te Reo Māori and English).

The keynote speaker of the conference was Phil Manning, Professor of Natural History and Director of the cross-faculty Interdisciplinary Centre for Ancient Life, University of Manchester, United Kingdom. His talk was about breaking the barriers of access to the collections and research that museums house. His point was that it is our job (museums) to create opportunities for the public to have meaningful and impactful experience with that content. He believes if someone doesn't understand the message being delivered, the fault is not with the person receiving the message but with the person, or institution, trying to communicate it.

Online communication became one of the topics as digitisation is taking a huge part in museum practice. With some institutions

Available from [www: <http://www.museum-aotearoa.org.nz/ma15-communicating-culture/programme>](http://www.museum-aotearoa.org.nz/ma15-communicating-culture/programme).



Figure 3: Welcome from the Otago museum who hosted the MA15 conference (Facebook: MuseumsAotearoa)

getting 100 online visitors for every pair of feet that march through the door, the importance of digital cannot be understated.⁶ The access of museums' collections online has suddenly opened the door of museums' storages that usually are not accessible to the visitors. Museum of NZ Te Papa Tongarewa has more than 30,000 objects digitised and available to download. *"We hope that by making these images available for reuse, we are empowering people to use images of the collection in teaching and learning, research, innovation and new forms of creativity."*⁷

The Conference's presentations are done largely by museum professionals speaking from practical experience.

Part of the Conference was a dinner with a presentation of NZ Museums Awards. The awards began to be part of the conference several years ago and since then it has been growing in the quantity and quality of the entries from across the sector. To receive these awards shows a significant achievement for any museum entered. The museum industry tests and measures each entrant through peer and individual review in several categories: *"Best exhibition over \$20,000; Best exhibition under \$20,000; Best*

6 NDF review. *Museums Aotearoa Quarterly*, November 2015, p. 15.

7 *Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa* [online]. Wellington: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2014/06/03/free-downloadable-images-from-te-papas-collections/>](http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2014/06/03/free-downloadable-images-from-te-papas-collections/).

*Museum Project; Most Innovative Public Programme; Most Innovative use of Te Reo Māori; and Best Museum Visitor Experience."*⁸

The Museum Awards Dinner is a real celebration of the success of the NZ Museum Industry.

Different groups in the museum sectors

Between the main presentations on the topic of 'communicating culture' there is a space for groups with specific material.

- **Kāhui Kaitiaki:** he taonga ora, he tangata ora, (a rich life, a good life) is a network of Māori working in museums and galleries throughout Aotearoa. The outcomes of this group include contemporary collecting Māori Taonga, increasing the use of Te Reo Māori, and succession planning.⁹

- **Emerging Museum Professionals NZ (EMP NZ)** is a forum for young and/or emerging professionals working in New Zealand museums and galleries to connect, share and network with each other and others in the heritage sector. The group is based on a principle of peer support and collegiality with a view towards career development and professional growth within the sector. It operates with support from Museums Aotearoa (MA).¹⁰

8 NZ Museum Awards 2008–2014: Service IQ 2015 New Zealand Museum Awards. In *Museums Aotearoa* [online]. Museums Aotearoa, Te Tari o Ngā Whare Taonga o Te Motu/The Museums of New Zealand [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/nz-museum-awards-2008-2014>](http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/nz-museum-awards-2008-2014).

9 Kāhui Kaitiaki Hui. In *Museums Aotearoa* [online]. Museums Aotearoa, Te Tari o Ngā Whare Taonga o Te Motu/The Museums of New Zealand [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/kahui-kaitiaki-hui>](http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/kahui-kaitiaki-hui).

10 Emerging Museum Professionals New Zealand. In *Museums Aotearoa* [online]. Museums Aotearoa, Te Tari o Ngā Whare Taonga o Te Motu/The Museums of New Zealand [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/empnz>](http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/empnz).

- **Museum Education Association of NZ (MEANZ)** facilitates professional relationships between museum educators who are in need of information and assistance and those who can offer knowledge and support. The Association aims to build the capacity of the museum education sector by capturing and sharing the exchange of knowledge and expertise that occurs between mentors and mentees.¹¹
- **Directors of Small Museum Group (DSM)** exists to offer support and networking for professional leaders in small to medium-sized museums and galleries in New Zealand. Generally these institutions have fewer than eight fulltime staff, and leaders usually carry out several distinct roles that would be held by separate individuals in larger institutions.¹²

CONCLUSION

There is a real willingness to share and help each other at the Museums Aotearoa Conferences. The sessions are always good at reviewing what's 'right' and what's 'wrong' with the profession in the sector. The network and sharing of ideas and information is essential for isolated New Zealand within its own population as well as with the rest of the world. The MA 15: Communicating Culture had a record number of museum and gallery professionals, consultants, academics, service providers, supporters and friends gather in Dunedin. With around 240 people

attending the conference on any given day, MA15 was nearly 30% 'bigger' than MA14.¹³

The MA16 happening in Auckland, 16–18 May 2016, is going to be the first joint conference of Museums Australia and Museums Aotearoa. The sessions of this conference will share and contrast experiences between Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific, bringing together perspectives from Indigenous cultures of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. It is a key event on the calendar of Museums Aotearoa.¹⁴

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¹¹ *Museum Education Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (MEANZ)*. *Te Rōpū Mātauranga mā ngā Whare Taonga o Aotearoa* [online]. Dunedin: Museum Education Association of New Zealand, 2011 [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://meanz.org.nz/>](http://meanz.org.nz/).

¹² *Directors of Small Museums*. In *Museums Aotearoa* [online]. Museums Aotearoa, Te Tari o Ngā Whare Taonga o Te Motu/The Museums of New Zealand [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/ma13-leading-museums-10-12-april-2013/day-1-wednesday-10-april-directors-small-museums>](http://www.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/ma13-leading-museums-10-12-april-2013/day-1-wednesday-10-april-directors-small-museums).

¹³ MA15: Communicating Culture. *Museums Aotearoa Quarterly*, June 2015, p. 18.

¹⁴ *Museums Australasia 2016* [online]. [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from [www: <http://ma16.org.nz/>](http://ma16.org.nz/).