

## Special Issue, Museum & Society

Deadline: Dec 19, 2016

Bethany Rex

Call for Papers:

Special Issue of Museum & Society

Museum Methods: Researching the Museum as Institution

Editors:

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Research in museums takes many forms; however, there has been significantly less work investigating the museum through institutional or organisational lenses. Overall, museum studies as a disciplinary field has tended to favour textual readings of museums, focused on the poetics of exhibitions or audience meaning-making through single gallery case studies. Some notable exceptions have increased our understanding of the internal workings of museums (Macdonald, 2001; Bouquet 2002; Zolberg, 1984), but there has been less work that has engaged with the museum in its entirety, attending to the complexity and multiplicity of its functions: as public institution, as corporate organisation, as space of representation, as educational establishment, as archive and collection store, and as legal entity with different governance arrangements. This is important to consider at a time where museum functions are arguably further expanding, notably as the funding structures of museums are changing.

Critically, there has been little offered in terms of methodological starting points to these concerns: the question of how to research the museum is rarely addressed, and on the whole, methodology is a subject that has mostly been absent from museum studies. As a distinctly interdisciplinary field, museum studies has embraced a range of diverse methods but without really addressing what 'museum methodologies' might usefully (and critically) encompass. Thinking about the multiple functions of museums briefly highlighted above, there has been a particular lack of engagement with institutional and organisational methods for researching museums.

This special issue aims to address this important gap, by focusing on methods for researching the museum as both institution and as organisation. The editorial will address the implications of these distinct concerns. The understanding of institutional and organisational methods advanced here takes inspiration from moves in geography, STS and cognate disciplines where a focus on processes, situated practices and organisational dispositions (Pallett and Chilvers 2014) has been coupled with a rich expansion in methodological sensibilities. In a turn away from strictly self-reflexive narratives of methodologies chosen and employed, this expansion has also

advanced a heightened recognition of the consequences of our research practices and their politics. The special issue wishes to push a similar expansion in studies of the museum.

We are interested in methodological approaches that take the museum as an object of organisational and/or institutional concern. The unifying concern of the special issue is to investigate the bureaucratic features of museums: the rules, norms and codes of conduct through which museums are organised, as well as the mundane administrative dimensions and working practices of museums and their effects. We are looking for papers that address museum bureaucracies through a variety of museum activities such as management, development, education, community engagement, leadership, and exhibitions.

We therefore welcome papers focused on the topics below:

- The institutional life of museum, including how the everyday practices of professionals make up museum-work worlds
- The museum and understandings of bureaucracy
- Particular features of museums as organisations, for example, professional amnesia
- Organisational/Institutional rules in museums and how they affect practice
- The social life of methods in museums
- How institutional/organisational methods can be used as a site of critique
- How can researching museums speak to other ways of understanding other institutions.

We are particularly interested in papers that draw upon methods developed in other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and organisational studies and explore how they can be applied with the museum as object of research. This might include embedded approaches, including organisational/institutional ethnography (Ybema, et al., 2009; Cefkin, 2010), Participatory Action Research (Cameron, 2007), systems theory approaches (Bateson, 2001), and socio-material approaches, including Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005; Fenwick et al, 2015).

#### Potential Authors:

The focus on the Special Issue is on methods: each paper must provide a clear contribution to developing methodologies for researching museums and their institutional, organisational and bureaucratic work, and may also debate the practicalities, promise and politics of such approaches across different international contexts. Papers will provide either theoretically informed pieces that outline methodological 'road maps' for exploring how museums function, or empirical methods papers that open up alternative ways of thinking about museums. Potential authors are encouraged to submit an abstract that will be reviewed by the editors. Authors will then be invited to submit a full manuscript and all submissions will be subject to a peer review process.

#### Submission Guidelines:

Manuscripts length will be between 5,000 and 8,000 words, following the journal guidelines, available at:

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumssociety/notes-for-contributors>

#### Deadlines:

December 19th 2016: authors to send abstracts to editors

January 16th 2017: editors notify authors whether the abstract has been accepted

30th June 2017: authors to send first drafts of full manuscript to editors.

Manuscripts will then be sent to peer review, and papers invited for a 'revise and resubmit' will be due in early 2018. The special issue will be published in 2018.

Please send your abstract or any queries to Nuala Morse, [nuala.morse@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:nuala.morse@manchester.ac.uk)

Reference:

CFP: Special Issue, Museum & Society. In: Arthist.net, Oct 23, 2016 (accessed Sep 15, 2025),  
<<https://arthist.net/archive/14030>>.