

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: McCall, V., and Rummery, K. (2017) The Theory and Practice of Welfare Partnerships: The Case of the Cultural Sector. *Social Policy & Administration*, 51: 56–75, which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12162>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance With Wiley Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

The theory and practice of welfare partnerships: the case of the cultural sector

Abstract

Partnership working in the welfare state has moved from the margins to the mainstream in terms of achieving policy objectives. Drawing on interdisciplinary theoretical and empirical developments in the field, this paper presents a framework for analysing welfare partnerships that give precedence to the issues of trust and interdependence. This paper presents findings from a study of local authority museum services in Scotland, England and Wales to test this framework. A series of case studies revealed that partnerships have been driven by a number of factors including policy, power, funding and people. Partnerships could gain services credibility but trust and interdependence was compromised by conflictual and unequal relationships. Partnerships were often short-term, lacked ongoing maintenance plans and were funding based. The paper proposes that further analysis of the level of individual agency at ground-level be considered when thinking about partnerships in the cultural sector.

Key words: partnerships; culture; trust; interdependence; agency

Introduction

‘Partnership’ has become a key discourse and driver within all sectors of UK policy. This has also included the cultural sector, where there is a real emphasis to work with a diverse amount of organisations. The UK central, devolved and local governments have been fundamental to pushing the social role of cultural services, such as museums, by linking the cultural sector to goals and objectives that are not traditionally ‘cultural’ in nature (Gray 2007, 2008). This has led to an increased ‘attachment’ of culture to other policy concerns throughout the UK (Gray 2002, 2007). Indeed, politicians and civil servants have found it easier to justify cultural spending by linking it with other areas such as health, social justice and social inclusion (McCall 2009, 2010). One of the ways to do this has been to encourage partnership working. These partnerships, however, have been varied and include elements of power, trust and interdependence. This paper presents some empirical thoughts on theory and partnership that are linked with research data generated from three local authority museums services in Scotland, England and Wales. Museum workers’ perspectives have been explored to give insight to their experiences and motivations behind partnership working.

Towards a theory of welfare partnerships

Both academic and political actors have long been debating how to achieve a ‘Third Way’ (Giddens 1998) of delivering welfare: between centralised, bureaucratic planning on the one hand and liberalised free markets on the other, whilst the growth of neo-liberalism in welfare planning and delivery in developed welfare states has placed great emphasis on rolling back the

responsibilities of the state and the widening of a governance narrative in welfare delivery to include state and non-state actors. The current challenge facing welfare is how to deal with a rising demand for services against a backdrop of increasing globalisation and changes in economic and social developments, not the least the current ongoing financial crisis and resulting welfare reform, which have led to traditional patterns of service delivery being criticised as being inefficient, insufficiently responsive to user demand and being delivered in organisational 'silos' which have led to the failure of collaborative or 'joined-up' governance (Ranade and Hudson 2003; Papadopoulos 2003). It has moreover long been recognised that even highly developed welfare states cannot deal with 'wicked issues' of social policy (those that are highly complex and multi-faceted in nature) in isolation and there is a need to involve a wide range of state and non-state institutions and actors in coming up with solutions to these 'wicked issues'. There has therefore been a sustained policy focus on ways of facilitating partnership working between different areas of public sector provision and increasingly between the state and other sectors. Partnership working, both between public and other sectors, and between different areas of the public sector, is held up as being a way of achieving improved services for users where there is a commonality of interest between the partners, and a history of failing to co-ordinate services effectively by other means (Audit Commission 1998). This has resulted in the need for a more 'holistic, multi-faceted' partnership approach that has been viewed as '*imposed*' on local agencies (Ranade & Hudson 2008, original emphasis).

Concerns have been voiced about partnership working in the context of welfare delivery. The first set of concerns, from political scientists, has centered on the perceived legitimacy problems raised by issues of democratic accountability and the responsiveness of governance arrangements (Papadopoulos 2003; Rhodes 2000; Pierre 1998; Newman *et al.* 2004). The second set of concerns, voiced mainly by policy commentators and researchers attempting to evaluate or measure the success of partnership working, centers on the definitional problems (what constitutes a 'partnership'?) and on the difficulties in evaluating how successful partnership working is compared to other governance arrangements (Glendinning 2002; Ling 2002; Hudson 1999, Dowling *et al.* 2004). The final set of concerns revolves around the efficacy of partnership working and the lack of evidence that it produces any improvements in user outcomes (Rummary 2002; Ling 2002; Cameron and Lart 2003; Ranade and Hudson 2003).

At the same time evidence from developed welfare states suggests that a common response to these pressures appears to be a focus on what might be called 'new managerialist' developments in welfare. Newman has characterized these as a tendency towards focusing on organizational and structural reorganization, attempting to improve the efficiency of service delivery as opposed to investing in the direct provision of services, relying on the involvement of the private and other sectors to meet welfare needs (Newman 2005). Concurrently with the developments towards partnership working and collaborative governance has been an interest in the development of alternatives to representative democracy as an instrument for developing and implementing welfare. Whilst some commentators have been sceptical about such

developments, characterizing them as disempowering to users and professionals and supporting the commodification of welfare provision (Cowden and Singh 2007), others have argued that the decline of traditional participatory democracy has highlighted the effectiveness and emancipatory effects of community action and user involvement (Postle and Beresford 2007). Moreover, arguably as one of the new managerialist developments aimed at improving the efficiency of services, more public sector areas are coming under pressure to deliver 'evidence-based practice', although some commentators have argued that this marks a move away from the market-based ideology that has characterized the new public management and towards a discourse and ideology in public services of 'community' and 'partnership' (Barnes 1999). The cultural sector and museums in particular, are not immune from these developments.

Although definitional and epistemological challenges concerning 'partnerships' are somewhat entrenched, with Powell and Glendinning arguing that it is a 'Humpty Dumpty term' (i.e. it means whatever the author wants it to) (Powell and Glendinning 2002), a consensus is emerging about what the overarching and unifying dimensions of partnerships in social policy are, and what differentiates them. Rummery (2002) has developed a framework of partnership working that distinguishes partnership working from other forms of collaborative working and has been applied to diverse social policy fields such as childcare, migration, activation and disability policies (McLaughlin 2004; Lindsay and McQuaid 2008; Dwyer 2005). Based on an analysis of partnerships across different sectors involving a range of statutory and non-statutory partners, she has developed a conceptual framework of partnerships that argues they have two distinctive features that set them apart from collaboration, cooperation, contractual relationships and other forms of joint working. . Firstly, what distinguishes partnerships is that the partners involve demonstrate a significant degree of *interdependence* - they *need* to work with the other partners to achieve their *own* core objectives, not simply to work in 'partnership' for its own sake. The second feature that distinguishes partnership working is that of *trust* -the partners involved are engaged in trusting the others to deliver on *jointly* held objectives that are developed by the partners and that they are *jointly* committed to achieving. Partnerships that are instrumental (ie developed out of a real need) and given time and resources to develop (so they develop trust incrementally based on previously successful joint working) are therefore likely to be more enduring and robust than those that are mandated (ie artificially constructed to meet top-down objectives or targets). She also argues that partnerships do differ from each other in significant ways: according to the distribution of power and benefits and the setting and achievement of goals.

'Where partners enjoy a degree of freedom in adjusting the way they work (their values and objectives) this facilitates both the operation of the partnership and its enhanced success [but] Partnership working...benefits powerful partners, [they] reinforce power inequalities that are already in existence...they divert resources away from the core business of welfare service delivery' (Rummery 2002: 241-243).

However, the evidence for that framework was drawn primarily from English sources and key social policy sectors, and is now over a decade old. This paper therefore aims to apply this framework to evidence from a recent study of the way in which workers in the cultural sector in Scotland, England and Wales understand, implement and develop policy to see whether this framework of trust and interdependence can be said to make sense in the context of that sector and in a broader context, and whether the distribution of power and benefits, and the setting and achievement of goals between the different partners involves suggests that the cultural sector is enjoying the benefits of partnership working, or experiencing threats to its autonomy and ability to deliver cultural services.

Partnerships in the cultural sector

Partnerships have of course been developed throughout the cultural sector for many years. Early writers regarding museum partnerships include Hudson (1977) and Middleton (1990) who point out their development from the 1930's. Despite this, it is only more recently that partnerships have become central to policy discourses in the cultural sector. Since 2000 the Arts and Museums Councils throughout the UK have adopted policies that have public, private and voluntary partnerships. A new "duty to cooperate" was introduced to various councils (who previously had no statutory obligations) in the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (Doustaly and Gray 2010: 6). Little is known, however, to what extent this has affected the understanding of partnerships and activities around them at the ground-level.

Partnerships have been an integral part of cultural delivery throughout the UK (see SEEDA 2005; Arts Council Wales 2010 for some examples). One of the most interesting examples of partnership practice has been Creative Partnerships (CP) in England involving 36 of the most disadvantaged areas of England and the evaluation of nearly 2,500 schools (BOP 2006; OFSTED 2006; Creative Partnerships 2011). The multitudes of cultural sector partnerships have been instigated by a high policy interest in this area. Since devolution in 1999, Scottish policy has encouraged partnerships or 'positive relationships' between museums and other bodies (Scottish Executive 2000: 2, 7, Scottish Executive 2003; Scottish Government 2008, 2009a/b, 2010; EKOS 2009; Creative Scotland 2011). For Wales, the Assembly states partnership as a core objective in Welsh policy (WAG 2003; Arts Council Wales 2011). Partnership Councils have provided effective structures for key partners such as local government to work with the Assembly (Loughlin and Sykes 2004: 1). This is a similar case for England, where community

focus and partnership ideas were emphasised in 2000 (DCMS 2000), gaining increasing emphasis through the Renaissance in the Regions funding initiatives, which held a major emphasis on increased partnership working inside and outside the sector (MLA 2004)¹. Partnership has been both a key policy theme and activity in the cultural sector.

Since the election in May 2010 the Coalition government between the Conservative and Liberal Democrats have diverged cultural policy even further from Scottish and Welsh priorities. Coalition priorities for culture now include 'philanthropic giving' and stimulating private sector investment (DCMS 2011: 2). Crucially, the DCMS (2011: 4) "*will no longer sponsor museums that should be the responsibility of local communities*". A wider delivery programme with external partners is now a key DCMS action for delivery (DCMS 2011: 6). This shows that not only have partnerships been an overarching policy priority since 1999, but indicates a new focus and priority on partnerships in the future. The exploration of partnerships, how they work, and what we can learn is thus vitally important.

Methods

Due to the diverse contexts found throughout cultural organisations, qualitative data is the most relevant as it is embedded in its context. This paper offers qualitative observations and interview data from three case studies in Scotland, England and Wales. The case studies included three local authority museum services, which involved 17 different museums and 74 museum service staff (museums here also includes museums, galleries and historic houses). This entailed observation within eight museums in Scotland, five in England and four in Wales. Forty-one museum workers were formally interviewed, and an additional thirty-three informal interviews were conducted throughout the observation period. Field-work was conducted between July 2009 and April 2010, resulting in thirty-two days of observation. Participants included managers, retail staff, curators, security guards, customer assistants, volunteers, project workers, outreach, administration and educational officers. This research was approached from a bottom-up method that focused on workers within each museums service. This approach has allowed a focus on social actors at ground level, which has helped investigate gaps in knowledge about partnership in the cultural sector.

Types of partnerships

Partnership has often been used to describe a range of relationships in arts organisations from very close to independent working (Jermyn 2004). In the three case studies, there were a multitude of different partnerships mentioned by participants. These included individual, local,

¹ Renaissance in the Regions worked by giving funding to 47 'hub' museums throughout England who were to form partnerships with local museums and distribute funding more closely aligned with local needs. According to the MLA (2011) this approach has increased visitors from deprived groups and communities significantly and established 900,000 instances of partnership through outreach activities. However, the level of these partnerships and how they are defined is unspecified.

community, national and international partnerships. They were also internal (between local authority departments such as child care) and external (NHS to local GPs to individual foster families for example). Local societies were also partnered with (such as geographical societies) and the museums were involved in many national society days. Also other heritage bodies, tourist boards, wildlife groups, mental health groups (such as MIND), local cafes and children and young people's agencies, local business's, dementia groups, health and social care were given as examples of partnerships. A detailed example for Scotland, England and Wales is given in Table 1 as these are considered in more detail later in the paper.

Exploring partnerships from the ground-level

The examples highlighted above already give an indication of varied types of relationships and the underlying tensions that partnerships often have. What makes the ground-level view so important is that local partnerships have been encouraged in particular (Gray 2004; 2006). This begins to show the importance of exploring museum workers views and perspectives as they can give unique insight to issues of trust and interdependence.

Museum workers had mixed understandings of policy expectations around the idea of partnerships. One of the difficulties of arts partnerships is the ambiguous discourse surrounding partnership in UK policy (Blaxter *et al.* 2002). Key terms such as 'partnership' 'collaboration' 'empowerment', are used widely and are set as positive ideals to aspire to and implement (Lankshear *et al.* 1997). As with many policy initiatives, the understanding and expectations around it were communicated and understood differently within the case studies. However, nearly all museum workers saw it as an important and even essential part of working their sector.

"The big word for all government nowadays is partnership. In, you know, big total capital letters in neon (putting hands up). It really is that important so working with these groups, is almost policy led, council policy, and possibly the most important work we do" (Museum Worker VII, Wales).

The importance placed on partnerships and its clear integration into the day-to-day activities of museum workers, gave partnership high prominence in all the case study areas in Scotland, England and Wales. However, the idea of partnerships, who was involved and how they were formed varied significantly. There was an inter-relation on the use of partnership and collaboration, which links to the wider conceptual confusion around partnership and collaboration (Taylor and Le Riche 2006).

Workers expressed a diverse understanding of where guidance and policy around partnerships came from. The majority expressed it as expectations from 'the council', but there was also an emphasis on working with different groups. It was also, confusingly, placed as something that

was both driven from top-down and bottom-up. There was no set strategy in any local authority when it came to forming and maintaining partnership programmes.

“And while there is a lot of lip service and talk about partnership working, the mechanisms are not really there to do it” (Museum Worker i, Scotland).

This is unsurprising as current partnerships in this sector have been found to be built on convenience, rather than on any focused strategy (Hooper-Greenhill *et al.* 2007). Jermyn has also found that there are communication issues found within partnerships and a lack of clear roles and responsibilities (Jermyn 2004). Thus the idea of partnership involved a series of different groups at different levels of the museum service hierarchy. Partnerships could be formed informally or formally, externally and within the local councils. Powell and Glendinning’s (2002) idea of partnership being a ‘Humpty Dumpty term’ is verified here. What is clear from the data is that ‘partnership’ was not a uniform concept but varied in interpretation between actors at the ground level.

Partnerships based on mutual trust

Partnerships were a central part of the way workers delivered policy and activities at the ground-level. Workers often highlighted that partnerships were successful in building effective relationships. In regards to Rummary’s (2002) framework, trust is one of the unifying themes needed for legitimate partnership. An effective relationship would include partners trusting each other to deliver on jointly held objectives or activities. For example, the relationship between the LGBT activist (see table 1) and the museum worker in Scotland could be classed as one of mutual trust.

“[It] was really big and involved a lot of communication with minority groups who were involved through partnerships and projects. From this we now have an LGBT collection which is a very good example of an inclusive project with permanent results as the archives would not have been created otherwise” (Museum Worker J, Scotland).

Part of this trust-building relationship was the view that museum workers had a serious interest in presenting the LGBT community effectively. Part of this was to offer something that went ‘beyond tokenism’. Workers often reported that short-term funded projects resulted in “a huge danger of tokenism. Huge danger” (MW 11, England). This resulted in groups being connected and worked with so that workers could ‘tick a box’ within current policy. Effective partnerships, however, was perceived as a way to overcome this. The example highlights that activities were not completely policy driven, as the partnership work was driven by community activist. This was stated as one of the most successful projects to date but it did not start with public money, rather a single activist who saw themselves as a philanthropist. Further partnerships were built upon informal links between museum workers, the community and other associations. What this

example also shows is the positive outcomes for the museum, which included extending collections, attracting substantial funding and including a generally hard to reach group in museum activities in a substantial way. Taking this further, partnership itself was seen as a 'tool' to fulfil general policy aims and objectives.

"For a long time there was a lot of social inclusion officers, and dedicated community cohesion officers, I think you can only do it through partnership working and through outreach working" (Museum Worker 1, Wales).

"Well you need to be able to show that you are working within the broader agendas. And I think that is useful for partnership working. So you're more likely to have areas of joint aims... if we are working in family learning we should have some core aims and we will have something specific for them and we will have something specific to us but there should be, it should be easy to find some core aims" (Museum Worker 10, England).

Building partnerships on respect and trust could be a legitimate way to instigate museum delivery. It was seen as a way to engage hard to reach groups at a more substantial level, gaining wider benefits for the museum and the groups involved. Working with the community was very much linked to ideas of mutual trust. Indeed, Thelen (2004) claims that museums are unique in that they generate high-levels of public trust. These partnerships successfully employed and sustained elements of mutual trust with the people involved. The complicated local authority structures involved, however, had an undermining effect on trust.

Conflicting structures and undermining trust

Museum workers were clearly affected by the structures that they worked within. Museum workers reported a clear distance between themselves, managers and the local authority. These had an undermining effect on trust from museum workers' perspectives. 'Management' was a catch-all terminology used to describe 'them above us' and could refer to managers and/or the local authority.

"They [management] can be misuse a section from time to time and get away with it. Some of the rules on restructuring for instance I think that the lines have been blurred a few times, but they are plain always but sometimes I think the management can act like they are running a small business. That's you know, but we are not we are council and they have to be reminded" (Museum Worker 14, England).

"And our political masters in particular think very short term" (MW 11, England).

The evidence suggests that management could 'misuse' the museum and workers viewed this as interference in building trusting relationships. Managers were also seen as part of a continued power struggle with curators within each service. At the time of the research, the Scottish case study curators had been changed to 'buildings managers', there was no formal curator in Wales and those in England had felt their roles were being devalued in the museum. This was very much linked to the ongoing debate about museum function. This argument is based on the idea that there are a set of natural, and historically based, museum activities compared to those activities 'imposed' by central and local government. This creates a false dichotomy between the "instrumental" and the "intrinsic" activities of cultural services (Gibson 2008: 248). Gray (2008: 211) highlighted these intrinsic, or 'core' functions, in the museums sector as "*curatorship, education, entertainment and the infra-structural management of resources*", although these are not universally agreed. Within the museum services studied, many staff felt that these 'core' functions were under attack. These are part of the wider professional, managerial, hierarchical challenges facing museums at the ground-level (McCall and Gray 2014).

These conflicts were reinforced by the perceived distance between workers and the local authority that they worked in. This is important as 40% of museums are funded and ran as local authority museums (Lawley 2003) and partnership has become a central element within local authority delivery (Wilkinson and Craig 2002). Local authority museums have particular challenges when it comes to partnership working in the cultural sector. Most importantly, museums are generally at the "*bottom of the pecking order*" (MW 13, England). Even with this low priority, partnership was seen as a key driver and activity within each local authority museums service. This shows the ability to work together to fulfil mutual goals based on trust (Rummery 2002) would be very difficult as mutual goals are already debated internally within the museum services studied. Furthermore, the low priority of services relegated the importance of museum goals within local authorities.

The above examples also show that the tensions over core functions are linked to power struggles. Managerial activities could be classed as the ongoing drive to decrease the power of professionals (in this case professional curators). Cowden and Singh (2007) would also link the disempowering of professionals to the commodification of services. Gray (2000) also highlights the ongoing commodification of culture, where services are driven more by their 'exchange-value' over their 'use-value'. An example of this included the increasing competition within the museum sector. Within the 'People's Panel' programme (see table 1), partnerships between other cultural institutions were seen as a hindrance rather than a helpful element of the programme.

"I don't think being a partner made it a success no. I mean it wasn't a negative thing but I think from my perspective there seemed to be an element of competition. But that maybe just be my perspective but I didn't feel it was a very open and supportive relationship with [the other museum]. And we, I felt, we had to sort of each of us had to kind of prove what we had done was successful... So if you have no relationship with another organisation to start with I think that's quite difficult really... So I felt more put on the spot more than anything else" (Museum Worker 10, England).

The partnership between the museums was founded on need for funding rather than mutual trust or interdependence. The partnership was driven by competition rather than already established relationships. These ideas completely undermine the suggestion that mutual trust was an element of partnership working. Issues of funding, competition and even survival are key elements that could focus partnership work in the museum services. What the evidence also shows, however, is that these partnerships had an integrated element of interdependence in the local authority setting. For example, the two museums above needed each other to attain funding. Interdependence within partnerships is now explored in more detail below.

Interdependence and cultural partnerships

As already shown, partnerships in the cultural sector are complicated by the very high number of projects and collaborations that the arts can be attached too. The 'attached' or 'instrumental' elements of activities within the services were very much linked to the idea of joint needs and interdependence. These partnerships often have a varying number of priorities that do not coincide with cultural ones (Gray 2010). Partnerships have included a wide range of policy interests including improving health, reducing crime, rehabilitation, regeneration, accessing social justice and social care. Social policy aims such as generating senses of identity and belonging, engagement, improving quality of life and wellbeing and decreasing social exclusion are also policy expectations now linked to cultural services (see Matarasso 1997; Jermyn 2001; Reeves 2002; Evans and Shaw 2004; Staricoff 2004; Daykin and Byrne 2005; Galloway 2008; CASE 2010 for various literature reviews and evidence around the social impact of the arts). It should be noted, however, that the evidence provided for the social impacts of the arts is contested (Merli 2002; Selwood 2002; 2006; West and Smith 2005). To deliver social aims, interdependence could become important as a foundation for successful partnership.

"I really think we bring our own value to the table but it's most successful when we work in partnerships with people. Especially the youths it's very hard to work with a group of, for example NEETS, if you don't have access. Because they have been referred to different agencies and they are obliged to turn up" (MW 2, England).

Interdependence is a clear theme here in regards to partnership. Museum workers discuss wide examples of cooperation. The above examples show that other services were integral for delivery as it brought key audiences to the museum. The same applied to other examples of partnership such as work with foster families, secondary and primary schools and artists. The idea of interdependence was integrated as a key part of museum delivery within a partnership framework. However, within this framework often the museums service would find itself an unequal partner.

Unequal power relationships

Rummery (2002) has shown that partnerships usually benefit the more powerful partner. There has also been doubt to whether partnerships in the cultural sector have equal power relationships (Gray 2010). Sinclair (2008) highlights a risk that some organisations are left out of this partnership process and may feel their influence is compromised. This has been particularly important to cultural services in local contexts as they are seen as 'below the water-line'. This is particularly important at the local level. Blaxter *et al.* (2002: 133) notes that partnership discourse often does not address issues of conflict between government and community organisations. Issues of conflict are prevalent through the partnerships seen at the ground-level.

An example of a conflictual partnership was given in Wales (see table 1). One community group had formed itself into an official 'Friends of the Museum' group. Museum workers reported certain tensions with the friends group, which seemed to be ongoing. They mentioned that there is a lot of "*power plays*", with members of the group using the museum to "*score points*" against other members against whom they held personal grudges. Participants mentioned they are all mayors, ex-mayors, Welsh speakers, who think they are the "*bee's knees*". There were many examples where these prominent members of the community had "*crossed boundaries*" by cutting down trees, violating health and safety rules and attending children's events without permission or disclosure passes from the local council (field notes, Wales, 23.04.10). Museum workers' negotiated these tensions by seeking allies within the friends group rather than the local council. This emphasises the powerful position of the group within the community within that particular museum service. To develop the point from the previous section, there are not only tensions between different expectations from local and central government, but also from community groups who can hold a powerful position in relation to museums.

On the other hand, workers at the ground-level were integral in 'attaching' their own activities to policy. Previous literature has placed these activities at central and local government level (Gray 2004, 2007, 2008). Therefore, 'attaching' activities was also something done by workers at the service level. This actively placed museum activities within other agendas:

“And we are working in conjunction with sort of look after children service to give us more credibility if you like” (MW 10)

“I would say our partnerships with the university are growing. There is currently a dinosaur project they are doing there, which we have some early examples of and so on. The museum tends to... well we have in this case put our name to being a small partner with this project and helped them get money – HLF money” (MW 14).

“So we have been working with a school which offers creative diploma and we have managed to link that up with the students making something for the museum. We are acting as a client for them. Supporting that through funding and advice” (Museum Worker 3, England).

All the partnerships listed in table one and also the examples above can be shown to have unequal power relationships. Museum worker 3 notes that the museum ‘acts like a client’ in a support role, which is a clearly subject position within that partnership relationship. Power relationships do not only exist within government departments, but also between public stakeholders. The LGBT exhibition in Scotland already provided an example of an individual activist’s power (and money) in driving local authority direction and activities.

What is also interesting, however, is that museum workers acknowledged this subjective position. Power relationships and activity ‘attachment’ could be unequal, but not always in a negative way. The evidence also shows that partnerships were a key strategy often instigated by workers to gain more funding and credibility for their services. They used it to get funding and policy attention (such as HLF money in the example above). What is also clear, however, is that the museums services were the ‘small partner’ in these kinds of relationships. Although there were benefits to the museum service they did not generally have much control over relationships with organisations such as Universities or children’s groups.

Power was mentioned as a central element to partnerships, but ultimately power was linked to funding. Local government budgets had been cut substantially over the last five years; project funding was the ongoing resource for all projects within the museums studied. In Scotland, there were examples of using project funding to try and keep core elements of the museums going such as collections care. In Wales the budget for the area was £800, which was asked to be cut the next financial year. Although partnerships may be positioned in policy discourse around ideas of community and participation, the funding foundations of these activities was the most challenging part of the process. So in the examples of the LGBT and “People’s Panel” partnerships, funding was key to making partnerships work:

“So.... for example 1996 again with the WEA, we do a lot (emphasis) of partnership work because that’s a how we bring in external money or council money given to an external body but then given back to the council and the expertise that they have got, the skills, and the resources” (Museum Worker F, Scotland).

The dependence on short-term project funding also linked museums to a complex set of policy targets. Furthermore, different organisations and departments were competing for the same funding. Funding applications had to be ‘partnership driven’ and this led to cross-cutting policy expectations. In Scotland there was also a good example of the expectations around funding:

“About 6, 10 years ago there was the strategic change fund and then regional development challenge fund that just finished now. Now there is the national something scheme which has money attached to it. How long that will last for who knows. So then it’s the next thing and they all have certain agendas attached to them. The development challenge fund was about partnership working. You only get the money if you show authorities working together. The strategic change fund was about doing things in a different way with other agencies. So you’re adapting those programmes to try and support your core function” (Museum Worker C, Scotland).

One important perspective here is that partnership is a means to an end in supporting the ‘core function’ of museums. The picture given, therefore, is one of interdependence on others for delivery. Within this interdependence museums often found themselves to be the vulnerable partner. This is augmented by the general weakness of policy and management in the cultural and museum sectors (Gray 2006, 2007, 2008). They often had to rely on short-term, sporadic partnership programmes to uphold their core functions.

Discussion

The evidence has shown clear elements of trust and interdependence within partnerships. However, understandings of partnership were fragmented and it was applied to different variations of work at multiple levels. What Rummery’s (2002) framework helps show is that often work perceived as ‘partnership’ included multiple forms of collaborative working. Unifying themes such as trust and interdependence have brought up questions around the formation and running of partnerships within these museums services. ‘Partnership’ was used as a ‘catch-all term’ by workers to describe a series of dynamic relationships. For example, the ‘friends of the museum’ group in Wales had no element of mutual trust. Indeed, the museum worker in the research completely distrusted those in the group as they actively undermined local government initiatives and policy. Instead of an interdependent relationship built on trust, the group offered the museum worker barriers to overcome within her role rather than positive help.

The 'bottom-up' approach allowed an exploration between policy as written and the discretion utilised at the ground level (Lipsky 1980). It showed that 'real' partnership working was compromised by unresolved understandings of what the museum service should deliver and conflictual internal structures. There was an ongoing debate and tensions between 'old' museum activities (such as collections care) and 'new' policy-focused activities (such as social inclusion or outreach). Partnerships often limited the ability of workers to achieve their 'core' values and objectives as they focused on short-term, instrumental policy goals.

There is evidence that arts partnerships are weak and unsustainable in the long-term due to lack of commitment and funding (Jermyn 2004: 76). This is in opposition to the UK and devolved governments belief that attaching higher priorities to the arts would secure sustainability for the sector. Elements of trust and interdependence could not be integrated successfully in such partnerships, as shown in the 'People's Panel' example, where multiple policy expectations had led to competition between the museums involved. Furthermore, the 'core' roles within the museums around collections care were seen as being devalued by managerial developments. This often led workers to feel that partnerships were forced upon them to fulfil policy expectations rather than their own goals and objectives.

On the other hand, partnership could also be an opportunity to fulfil workers' goals. They often enabled museums to adapt their activity (or the language around their activity) for funding to help run core activities. Partnerships could be classed as being 'strategically ambiguous' to allow different understandings and perspectives to exist (Leitch and Davenport 2007). Partnership in this way can be used as a discourse tool to allow the widespread application of its policy practice. It also allowed museums to access funding from diverse sources (such as the NHS). Although the museum services were shown to be the subjective partner in the relationship, workers did not always see the results as negative. Any activity that led to museums having more political importance or funding was seen as a success. What could be concluded, therefore, is that elements of interdependence were more applicable within the partnerships discussed. Mutual trust was a more challenging aspect to attain within museum service partnerships.

Therefore interdependence and trust have been shown to be instrumental to effective partnership working. However, we also put forward that for the cultural sector the important role of individual agency be placed into the theoretical analysis. Research into this area in the future should take into consideration the dynamic make-up of partnerships and the role of motivational leadership. Individual actors are able to begin, drive or subvert partnerships in the cultural sector. The individual scope and values behind the formation and direction of partnerships were often instrumental to their success. The workers and local community partners that are involved held a substantial amount of power over the effectiveness and impact of the partnerships outlined above. Funding is very important, but as a sole basis and foundation of partnerships it was not always successful. All those partnerships that were reported as successful had a key

element in common: a motivational agent who began and drove the partnership. Those individuals, however, could also be too motivated in their enthusiasm (such as the 'friends of the museum' group). This furthers the argument for a thorough analysis of key players within cultural partnerships. The level of individual agency and discretion is therefore a key and central element of understanding cultural partnerships for the future.

Conclusion

The mutual trust and interdependence framework (Rummery 2002) was extremely useful in assessing the types of partnerships that museum workers discussed, and can therefore be applied robustly across different policy contexts and timeframes. The idea that partnerships are built and driven on mutual trust is challenged by conflicting structures, competition for funding and difficulties linked with being a low priority service within a local authority. This leads us to question whether activities classed as partnerships by workers were effective. Despite the importance placed on rhetoric and partnership activities, there is confusion over what level partnerships are formed and this has led to tensions between 'management', local government and workers' expectations of museum function. These tensions had an undermining affect on the creation and endurance of trust between workers and the local authority.

Partnerships offered both a barrier and an opportunity for workers to fulfil what they saw as museum core functions and activities. Partnership working was very much linked to the 'instrumental' activities involved in 'policy attachment' (Gray 2007) within the museum services studied. Partnerships were often inconvenient for workers, imposed by the community or the local authority. They were also linked to multiple policy expectations that could conflict with museum workers' understandings of their work. Partnership working was also linked to short-term project with multiple policy goals that were often impossible to achieve. On the other hand, partnership was also used as a tool by workers to bring in more funding to the museum to fulfil core functions. Policy 'attachment' was also seen as a route to gaining more political importance and advocacy within their local authorities. The ambiguity of policy goals and inability to prove impact allowed room for workers to adapt their current activities into multiple partnership projects. Although museums were often the unequal partner within these relationships, they could still help core delivery. Those that were deemed more successful had integrated elements of trust and interdependence. Partnerships that were imposed and linked to multiple policy expectations were deemed less successful. Overall, this gives insight to the very complicated partnership process in the museums services studied. Successful partnerships have been shown to be a particular challenge for cultural services due to its multiple forms and links to policy expectations.

What we want to add to this debate is the importance and dominance of individual agency on the success and effectiveness of cultural partnerships. Often those partnerships that were viewed and reported as successful were linked to individuals driving that success. The success

of partnerships was very much linked to the buy-in and motivation of the museum workers and the members of the public that were involved. As Gray (2008) has pointed out, the cultural sector in particular can be subject to directional change from one motivated individual. What we show here is that partnerships are subject to the same individual influence.

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Table 1. Examples of some types of partnerships discussed by museum workers

<p>LGTB Exhibition (Scotland)</p> <p>Perceived as one of the most successful exhibitions in the Scottish case study. Inspired by one member of the public and driven by a museum worker. The exhibition created many different partnerships throughout area and many of the volunteers who joined are still working the museum today.</p> <p><i>'And she said look what you should be doing is going out and interviewing the ancient dykes. Which is lesbians over 50 (laughs). And I said well yeah but it would just be tokenism if I went out and did some interviews... And I said right, you've got money, I've got willpower (laughs) so... We had a pilot, well first of all we had a meeting which em, we asked the activist to invite people to the meeting' (MW F, Scotland).</i></p>
<p>"Friends of the Museum" (Wales)</p> <p>Created by the community. The friends group was formed voluntarily, when one of the museums in the area was being renovated. They bring in funding and general support. There were some tensions reported as the friends group wished for more power over governance from the local authority.</p> <p><i>"It's a tough role being piggy in the middle and sometimes I could do without it really" (MW, Wales).</i></p>
<p>"The People's Panel" (England)</p> <p>The "People's Panel" was formed to provide more voice to diverse members of the community. Around 12 people were invited from 'hard-to-reach' groups and helped guide exhibitions and marketing material for the museum.</p> <p><i>Created through "building on existing partnerships... Centrally government driven [and] heritage lottery funding. And I don't know how that partnership I don't know why it was the other museum. I actually think they had the idea and invited us to be a partner I think" (MW 10).</i></p>