

Why Happy Museum?

Since 2011 Happy Museum (HM) has stimulated and supported museum practice that places wellbeing within an environmental and future-facing frame, rethinking the role that museums can play in creating more resilient people, places and planet. Through action research, academic research, peer networking and training, HM has worked directly with over 50 museums in the UK and connected with many more through events and an online presence which stretches globally.



Core to our work is the principle that human wellbeing now depends on tackling pressing global challenges: resource depletion, climate change, biodiversity loss, inequality and social injustice. In this challenging context, museums and cultural organisations are responding rapidly by increasing their work on social wellbeing,¹ with HM providing peer-led support for the challenges this brings. HM promotes a proactive path of ethical entrepreneurship where museums thrive through values-based and participatory work with communities. There is a vital need for museums to develop capacities of resilience alongside values of future stewardship, and to develop these in local communities and wider society.

¹ Work that aims to make a positive social impact is a strong and increasing focus for museums – see *Museums in the UK 2018* report from the Museums Association

Our first phase

From 2011 to 2015, with investment from PHF, ACE and CyMAL we:

- funded creative interventions in 22 museums² contributing to individual development and organisational change
- drew learning from creative interventions and research to develop a Story of Change and a set of common Principles
- created a suite of case studies, tools and resources for wider use
- commissioned ground-breaking econometric research with Daniel Fujiwara of the LSE measuring the value of museums to people's happiness

- developed a major research programme, the Cultural LIFE survey, on how museums create wellbeing, with integrated environmental measures
- shared learning beyond the museum sector through three annual symposia and other events bringing the HM community of practice alongside leading UK cultural practitioners and policy makers.

"The skills and knowledge which we have developed as an organisation as a result of this project is phenomenal, and we are beginning to use these to work on other projects in more resourceful way."

Derby Silk Mill



² Including: London Transport Museum, Derby Silk Mill, The Lightbox, Beaney House, Reading Museums, Chiltern Outdoor Museum, the Cinema Museum, Imperial War Museum North and Manchester Museum.

What now? And what next?

Our focus from 2015 to 2020 is to stimulate, support and amplify peer learning and participation around the Happy Museum Principles and the Story of Change. With funding from ACE and the Wales Federation we are expanding and deepening the Happy Museum Community of Practice:

- Six museums³ are investigating the impact of HM Principles on their practice through an in-depth five-year study, underpinned by the LIFE survey methodology, and currently funded by the ACE Museum Resilience Fund.
- 15 affiliate organisations⁴ form a peer learning network and a shared platform for wider conversation. We will expand the Affiliate network in and beyond 2018 – including an international dimension.
- A group of six museums in Wales are working to align HM Principles with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act funded by the Welsh Government through the Wales Museum Federation.

By 2020 we aim to have:

- built a self-sustaining community of practice with agency and excitement for change
- promoted a vision for re-imagined museums, showing how action research among the HM network has enabled wellbeing and created radical changes in museums (UK and worldwide)
- amongst third sector organisations and the wider public, increased awareness of the potential of museums
- contributed to a more sustainable museum sector – both more environmentally sustainable and economically resilient
- developed our online platform and resource centre to build and share learning for the future.



³ Manchester Museum, Derby Museums, Beaney House in Canterbury, The Lightbox in Woking, Woodhorn Museum and Northumberland Archives, and Ceredigion Museum, Aberystwyth.

⁴ Oxford University Museums, Design Museum, People's History Museum, Heritage Team at Toynbee Hall, Seven Stories, The Atkinson, Monmouthshire Museum Service, Mental Health Museum, Chester Zoo, Museum of Homelessness, Culture24, National Trust Midlands, Encounters Arts, Reading Museum, and Leeds Museums and Galleries.

We are seeking further investment now to achieve the outcomes listed on the previous page and to explore options and implement this evolved and distributed structure. We will investigate options for funding (including commercial options), governance, distribution, formal partnership and terms of reference.

“Museums tend to assume that objects are at the core of their being. But cultural wellbeing should be at the core. They are about the relationship of humanity to the biosphere and everything else that is in it.”

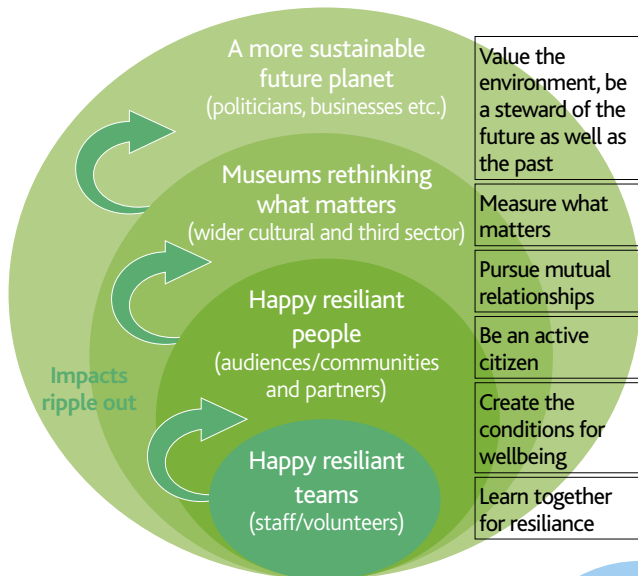
Douglas Worts,
Culture and Sustainability
Consultant, Canada

Becoming a Happy Museum

HM places the need to create a more sustainable future at the heart of a museum’s work with its communities. Its positive, aspirational approach explores the virtuous circle in which societal wellbeing contributes to a regenerated environment and in turn how that wellbeing is dependent on a healthy planet.

This diagram shows how the aims and principles of Happy Museum relate to each other to generate change and impact.

Happy Museum aims and principles



For more information see www.happymuseumproject.org
or on Twitter at [@happymuseum](https://twitter.com/happymuseum)