Does the Empire have new clothes? Exploring the international strategies and work of UK national museums

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Does the Empire have new clothes?
Exploring the international strategies and work of UK national museums.

Brad Irwin

Thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Ed.D.

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To my grandmother Elizabeth (Betty) Erceg. Thank you for being an incredible role model and for showing me that you must always move forward no matter what.
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Abstract

Museums are complex institutions driven by a variety of logics. Not only are they guided by the objects within them and the working practices that care for them, but by myriad social, political, national, and increasingly international, motivations. Recently there have been signs to suggest that the roles museums play in society are once again shifting. In the UK several national museums have developed international strategies to refocus their work putting significant energy into global endeavours. This has resulted in stakeholders suggesting museums are expanding their remit - becoming transnational actors and a key contributor to a nation’s influence and soft power overseas. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews with practitioners from four UK national museums, this study is concerned with museums’ conceptualisations of, and motivations for, international work and the logics behind them. Adopting an institutional theory perspective, the analysis suggests there is an emergent set of field-wide norms around such work; and that market, state, and community logics are dominant modes of influence on such strategies. As such, museums are hybrid institutions juggling various logics. These findings suggest that national museums are evolving from a hard power past to a soft power future. This has implications for practice as museums must begin to understand the underlying power dynamics this brings and develop more inclusive practices. Moreover, as museums are increasingly called upon to evidence their impact, international activities are becoming a powerful addition to this debate. This study contributes important new knowledge to an under-explored area of museology, whilst providing a novel theoretical framework for future studies.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Museums are complex institutions driven by a variety of institutional logics. They are storehouses for a diverse collection of objects: from natural history collections to cultural artefacts, they contain a plethora of items that require careful conservation, management, and curation. But they also play a key role that, at first glance, may seem worlds apart from their custodial remits. For example, they play a seminal role in the formation of nation states. Museums, it is argued, help citizens to gain a sense of nationhood, identity and purpose through the stories they tell and the objects they display (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2011; Kaplan, 2006; Watson & Sawyer, 2011). As Morse et al. (2018) note “...[museums] collect and house past and present material culture, promise to safeguard it in perpetuity and continue to play a central role in processes of national identity building and other political projects through their presentation and interpretation of culture/s to their publics.” (p. 112). Museums are driven not only by the objects within them and the working practices that care for them, but by myriad social, political, national, and increasingly international, motivations.

In this thesis, I highlight the emerging practice of international activity that is being undertaken by national museums in the United Kingdom (UK). In many ways, this activity is not a new phenomenon. Bennett (2006) argues that museums have a long history in developing global networks that support “the flows of things, people, and expertise....” (p. 48). Moreover, many national museums, particularly in the UK, were borne out of Empire wherein the colonisation of territories and cultures was the starting point for cultural and historical collections. But in recent years, the global activity within these museums has started to shift. As exemplified by the development of new teams and new strategies, it seems that museums are asserting a fresh role within international relations. This study explores this activity and examines the logics that underpin this new trend. I begin by exploring how museums have played, and continue to play, a critical role in the development of nation states. From their inception in the 18th century to today, museums are powerful symbols of nationhood.

1.1 Symbols of nationhood

Many academics have noted the critical role museums, particularly national museums, play in nation building. Akin to anthems, flags, coins and mascots, they are powerful symbols depicting nationhood and are often a means of instilling a sense national pride in their publics and a sense of citizenship (Aronsson et al., 2012; Aronsson, 2011). Indeed, it has been argued that the history of national museums converges with the history of nation or state-making (Wright, 1996). Aronsson (2011)
outlines three phases that help to understand the birth and spread of national museums. These include the Age of the Enlightenment; the sense of nationalism derived after the Napoleonic Wars; and the need to transform subjects into citizens.

Firstly, the Age of Enlightenment precipitated a desire to investigate, understand, conquer, and order the world. Two national museums that were conceived during this period – and are often cited as the archetypal state museums – are The British Museum (BM) in 1753 and Musée du Louvre in 1793. These institutions reflected a new sense of modernity. They were powerful symbols that embodied the advancement of human knowledge and demonstrated a new-found understanding of different global cultures and discoveries within the natural world. They were also symbols of power and leadership, showcasing the advancement of the UK and France as leading cultural superpowers. Upon the Louvre’s establishment, painter Jacques-Louis David described it as “demonstrating the nation’s great riches...France must extend its glory through the ages and to all peoples: the national museum...will be the admiration of the universe” (as cited in Hunt, 2018, p. 118).

Secondly, in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars there was an unparalleled demand for national museums alongside the creation of new nation states across Europe. Here national museums become a powerful tool in showcasing a state’s autonomy and uniqueness. These institutions, however, were founded on the same model as their forerunners. Aronsson (2011) notes “the basis for these institutions came from polite society, royal collections, systematic mapping and enquiry, looting and territorial expansion” (p. 87).

Thirdly, Aronsson (2011) argued that the need to transform subjects into citizens played a key role, particularly in the spread of national museums around the globe. Here the role of museum shifts to that of civilising agent within and across the colonies. As such Aronsson, Knell, Amundsen, and Axelsson (2012) argue that national museums are a European concept – exported to the world through colonisation. This has resulted in such institutions having a complex relationship with imperialism and Empire.

The above stages characterise the manner in which national museums were initially formed and spread. Kaplan (2006) adds to this characterisation by arguing that significant growth spurts in the development of museums can be more generally correlated with upswings in nationalism. Focusing on the UK, they cite two key periods – the 19th century whereby major organisations such as the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), The National Gallery and the NHM were created to celebrate the
country’s dominance in industry, education, and exploration; and the late 20th century whereby political devolution strengthened Scottish identity and led to a surge in nationalism and the creation of cultural institutions in Scotland.

In recent years, it seems that another wave is emerging as many contemporary museum developments are once again reasserting the role they have in nation-building, identity and nationhood (Hunt, 2018). Over the last twenty years there has been a proliferation of major new national museums, particularly in the Global South and MENA1 regions – with one critic referring to developments in the Persian Gulf as “the golden age of museums” (Nayeri, 2017, para. 1). The role of museums here has become a rich area of investigation with many scholars interested in the relationship these institutions have to nation-building and identity considering the infancy of some states and that citizens are often drawn from vast diasporas (Akinci, 2020; Al-Ragam, 2014; Bouchenaki, 2011; Exell & Rico, 2013). As such, it has been argued that museums in the region are supporting and essentially buttressing newly invented national narratives, whilst also downplaying social and racial inequalities in order to support officially-sanctioned views of nationhood (Erskine-Loftus et al., 2016).

In China, the current growth of new state sponsored museums is unparalleled. With approximately 1500 museums at the turn of the century, China now has over 5000 cultural institutions with a further aspiration to open one museum per 250,000 inhabitants (Dexter Lord et al., 2019). These sites – primarily celebrating culture for Chinese citizens – play a different role to those European counterparts that came before. Instead of reflecting the spoils of colonisation and the power garnered by global dominance, they are status symbols of a developing country (Lorch, 2015). Arguably, they also represent China’s aspirations to assert global influence through cultural attraction whilst supporting cultural nationalism (Zhang & Courty, 2021). These new developments remind us that whilst many old Western national museums have a complex history, contemporary practice is equally complicated and beset by underlying issues of nationhood, politics, and power.

1.1.1 Forming and reforming national identity

Several academics have located museums at the heart of debates on national identity. Kaplan (1994) argues that by containing items of national heritage they play a key role in fulfilling state ambitions by forming a sense of collective consciousness and belonging. McLean (1998; 2005) echoes this, noting that through the collections they hold, the exhibitions they display and the ways in which

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1 MENA is an acronym for Middle East and North Africa
they interpret objects, national museums play a significant role in promoting national agendas and forming, and reforming, national identity.

These concepts, however, are not static. With globalisation resulting in an increasingly connected world – and political and social movements recasting established narratives on nationhood – notions around “nationality” and “identity” are becoming more contested and consequently more fluid. In addition, with public trust in many institutions remaining low, museums seem to be bucking the trend as they are still viewed as places for credible, factual, and unbiased information (Dilenschneider, 2019). This means they play a key role in authenticating identities and narratives through their presentation of heritage. Watson (2021) illustrates the role museums play in casting narratives on nationhood, whilst highlighting some of the issues this can raise, as she describes her experiences of encountering the newly opened National Museum of Scotland. She notes:

I was fascinated by the museum’s projection of current political concerns into the past to create narrative origins, progress and development that supported the nationalist view of some Scots. Here, England was not the longstanding partner in a peaceful and prosperous alliance over the centuries but a dastardly bully who had attacked the innocent Scots in the past, stolen their ideas during the Enlightenment and their resources over several centuries, ignored their achievements and subsumed their identity beneath a British one that was mainly England in disguise. The periods of mutual co-operation, during which time Scots and England traded, married, moved around freely and benefitted from a productive exchange of ideas and ideals, were often ignored. (p. 1)

Over time, national museums have been framed as “memory institutions” (Bound et al., 2007, p. 16) for retaining historical national heritage; and as “identity machines” (McClellan, 2012, p. 278) as they play a role in the construction and ongoing communication of narratives that perpetuate established national values and beliefs. For the purposes of this research project I have adopted the following definition of national museums by Aronsson et al. (2012) who refer to them as “those institutions, collections, and displays claiming, articulating and representing dominant national values, myths and realities” (p. 10). For me, this frames the national museum as an organisation caught between truth and perception. On one hand they represent known facts and information on the historical, the social and the natural worlds; yet on the other they reflect how a nation portrays itself – which can be presented and perceived in many ways.

1.1.2 Place making

More recently, there is also evidence to suggest that museums are becoming an important locus for regenerative place making (Hunt, 2018; McClellan, 2008). That is, they are often designed as iconic
landmarks that helps to define or redefine a town and become a vital part of the cityscape (Lindsay, 2020). The Guggenheim in Bilbao has become a popular example of how a major cultural institution (albeit from overseas) can transform a once derelict Spanish industrial city, with rising unemployment and high crime rates, into a thriving tourist destination. Commonly referred to as the “Bilbao Effect”, the phenomenon illustrates how a museum can become a catalyst for city-wide change rejuvenating public perceptions, reactivating economies and providing a better quality of life for its citizens (Plaza, 2007). Across the UK this model has been adopted with several well-known organisations creating satellites throughout the country to enable greater access to culture whilst also generating significant tourism for towns and cities (for example Tate Liverpool, Turner Gallery in Margate and the recently opened V&A Dundee). But Franklin (2016) warns that urban regeneration is more complicated and nuanced than unveiling a new museum. Drawing on Guggenheim’s Bilbao, she notes that the Basque region played a far bigger role than commonly perceived in establishing key infrastructure and additional tourist sites that contributed to the transformation of the city.

1.1.3 National museums as symbols of power

National museums – particularly those built during the time of rampant colonisation and nation building – have a history of glorifying Empire. In the 18th and 19th centuries, they were used to spotlight the realms conquered by Western powers as they took control of other countries. Here museums displayed not only the cultures found in these distant and exotic locations, but also the abundance of natural resources that were ripe for economic exploitation. For Davis (2019) this is evident in the many natural history museums across Europe. He notes: “This can be seen in every nook and cranny of natural history collections, from the origin countries of specimens to the economically valuable plants that often formed some of the first key collections.” (para. 6). Whilst McLean (2005) argues that museums have come a long way from their days of supporting nationalistic and self-improving goals evident throughout the 19th century, national museums remain potent symbols of hard power. They were built on the back of a nation’s strength in colonising vast territories all around the globe. Objects collected in this guise were prized symbols and trophies of far-flung places – some received as gifts, others taken by force or coercion. And they were often housed in architectural statements that were an expression of strength and dominance (Vale, 2008). When museums are viewed through this lens, they are imbued with power: the power to reflect Empire; the power to form and reform national identity; the power to conquer the world; and the power to oppress others. Bennett (1995) notes the sole function of national museums at this time was to “broadcast their messages of power throughout society” (p. 61).
1.2 The emergence of international strategies within museums

Recently there have been signs to suggest that the work museums engage in and the role they play in society is once again shifting. For example, several UK national museums have started to create new, or redevelop, international strategies (NHM, 2014; SMG, 2018). This direction has seen cultural institutions create new teams and direct significant energy into global activities such as touring exhibitions, training events, brand partnerships and consulting (Grincheva, 2013, 2020b; Weeks, 2013).

Moreover, there is growing evidence to suggest that museums are becoming more involved in cultural diplomacy. For example, the recently opened V&A Gallery in Shenzhen, China – born from a combination of its namesake’s collection and staff’s expertise – has been cited as a means of “connecting people when politics cannot” (Hunt, 2018, p. 120). In addition, the Science Museum’s collaboration with the Russian Space Agency in order to develop an exhibition on the latter’s role in the space race provides a useful case study for how museums can play the unexpected role of mediator between countries at a time when bilateral politics are unable to do so (Blatchford et al., 2018). These are interesting examples of the changing nature of national museums’ international work and are discussed in greater depth in subsequent chapters.

Activities such as those listed above have led to the UK’s National Museum Directors’ Conference (NMDC) declaring that museums now have roles in “economic growth and investment, cultural exchange, the preservation of memory and exploration of identity, and diplomacy” (n.d. para. 6). Several academics and cultural commentators have gone further, noting that museums now operate as transnational actors (Goff, 2017; Hoogwaerts, 2012) and are being seen as a key contributor to a nation’s influence and soft power overseas (Blond, Noyes, & Sim, 2017; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016; Grincheva, 2013, 2018, 2020; Hoogwaerts, 2016; Hunt, 2018; Lord & Blankemberg, 2015; Nisbett, 2015).

The emergence of international strategies and activity is not a British phenomenon as other cultural institutions around the world are also exploring similar paths. Whilst the Guggenheim is often cited as the trailblazer in the arena of museum expansionism – with its inaugural site in New York and

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2 The National Museum Directors’ Conference (NMDC) represents the leaders of the UK’s national collections and major regional museums. Members include the national and major regional museums in England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland such as Tate, Science Museum Group, British Library, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and the National Archives. Whilst members are partly funded by the UK government, the NMDC is an independent, non-governmental organisation.
subsequent locations in Venice, Bilbao and Abu Dhabi (currently under construction), it seems that others are now beginning to emulate its actions (Grincheva, 2020b). From the Hermitage to the Louvre, there is a sense that major cultural institutions are using their assets to expand their global reach, brand, and influence.

But is this a new trend in the UK or a reversion to activities of old with national museums once again becoming signifiers of their country? The notion of UK national museums being connected to the world is not new. For example, the BM’s founding mission was to “allow visitors to address through the filter of history, both ancient and more recent, key questions of contemporary politics and international relations...” (MacGregor, 2004, p. 7). As such it was a site for cross-cultural conversation and cultural diplomacy. With these thoughts in mind, I question if this outward facing internationalism is a new form of colonisation whereby old ideas are simply being recast in a new guise. I query: “Does the Empire have new clothes?”

1.2.1 A developing research area

As UK national museums begin to shape their international strategies and take on significant global activities, I argue there is a clear and present need to understand what is driving such developments. Over the last twenty years, museums have been the locus of a significant amount of scholarly activity. Research has explored everything from the architecture that frames such sites (Patterson, 2012) to how people learn within them (Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, 2007; Seakins, 2013); through to the professions enacted by museum staff (Irwin, 2017; Tran & King, 2007). More recently, studies have also looked at how such museums exclude people from their work through the activities they run and practices they adhere to (Dawson, 2019). Although these studies look at different aspects of museum practice, the one thing they do have in common is by and large they all focus in on activity that happens within the four walls of the institution. Research here is bounded by a sense of place.

In contrast, the one facet of their work that receives little attention is their international activities. Whilst some research exists that highlights the need to generate income and reach new audiences (Anheier & Toepfer, 1998; Grosvenor, 2020; Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2014), and other studies critique the influence of government agendas on a museum’s operational activity (Nisbett, 2013), few studies have explored why these institutions are embarking on an international focus. What are the motivations and interests of UK national museums in participating in focused international
work? How do UK national museums balance international interests and commitments alongside other mission-related priorities and ever-developing commercial pressures?

Furthermore, little is known as to how museums are structured to deliver such activity. Are new roles being created and, if so, what function do they serve within an institution? What is clear is that national museums are already complex working environments. Not only do they house and care for collections, they also undertake research and scholarly activity, deliver exhibitions, run learning programmes, generate digital content and operate commercial enterprises (NMDC, 2004). This mix requires equally complex organisational structures that rely upon an assortment of professional roles from scientists, curators, educators, designers, business developers, marketeers, fundraisers, and digital specialists. This combination is continually shifting, especially as museums embrace new ways of working and in particular engage with digital technologies (Silvaggi & Pesce, 2018). The widening of roles and expectations within museums has been challenging for practitioners, especially as museums shift from an old to a new museology (McCall & Gray, 2014). The complexity across the museological field is further deepened by individual museums creating their own organisational structures. In other words – whilst museums and galleries might have a similar remit – the staffing structures and job roles within them are unique to each institution. Schlatter (2012) notes “a curator in one museum may also wear the hat of exhibit designer and educator in another” (p. 7). Zamora-Kapoor et al. (2019) note that the changing context of an organisation’s remit and the professional roles within it “requires a balanced solution that allows for the long-term co-existence of multiple logics” (p. 3).

This lack of understanding had resulted in some academics noting that the international work of museums is a fertile area for research and theorisation (Hoogwaerts, 2016; Nisbett, 2016). Moreover, there is a growing movement within museum studies to reorient research towards what people do in such cultural organisations; and how this work is affected by social, political, economic and professional contexts (Morse et al., 2018). As such, this study aims to contribute to the field by filling an important gap within the study of museology by exploring the rationales behind, and experiences of, museum professionals engaging in international work in order to fully understand this new direction and the implications this has on individual institutions as well as the wider museum sector. This contribution is further enhanced by adopting a theoretical framework rarely used within museum studies – that of institutional logics (for a detailed analysis see Chapter 2).
In sum, national museums are more than just a collection of objects, stories, curators, and visitors. They are potent symbols of cities, regions and indeed nations – representing societal culture, value, and aspirations (Hoogwaerts, 2016). These roles however are a result of complicated and conflicting logics at play. For Aronsson and Elgenius (2011) national museums are the result of “the negotiated logics between science and politics, universalism and particularism, difference and unity, change and continuity, materiality and imagination.” (p. 5)

1.2.2 Personal and professional significance

The role of international work within and across museums has personal and professional significance. I currently work at the NHM where I have recently been promoted to Head of Global Engagement. This is a reimagined role within the organisation, and I have been tasked with developing a new strategy for our work in the world which is a departure from previous thinking within the institution.

Prior to my promotion, I was the International Partnerships Manager – part of a division brought together to primarily generate income for the institution. Internal documentation at the time states our purpose was to “realise our full potential on the world stage... By using our ability to engage diverse audiences and our reputation for scientific excellence as leverage, we can unlock significant opportunities for commercial income generation” (NHM, 2014, p. 3). This meant that much of my time was put into partnership building with the view of selling internal expertise as consulting services to other organisations around the world. In addition, other teams within the division such as touring exhibitions, licensing and publishing were also tasked with similar commercial objectives. This direction coalesced around the Museum’s strategy whereby the scope for international working had widened and become one of four key strategic objectives. Here the NHM (2015) aimed to act on a global level “to tackle the most important scientific and societal challenges faced by the natural world and humanity. We will play a more visible leadership role to forge international partnerships and pursue large-scale scientific, public and commercial initiatives.” (p. 18)

In many ways the timing of this research project is apt. Whilst the NHM’s previous international work and thinking is explored as a case study throughout this report – it has granted me the opportunity to reflect upon where the institution has been and more importantly where it can go. As a “practitioner-academic” this reframing of the Museum’s international ambition not only consumes my working daily life – but also gnaws at the researcher within as I would like to develop a fuller and
more nuanced understanding of this type of work (see Chapter Four for methodological reflections on the emic-etic dimension of this study).

Moreover, exploring the international work of national museums seems timely and appropriate. With the UK government commissioning various reports exploring the impacts of national museums (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016; Mendoza, 2017) as well as a review of its security, defence, development and foreign policy to help shape a vision for how the country can operate in the world (Cabinet Office, 2021), this study has the potential to influence high level decision making and in turn the future funding of such work.

1.3 Research focus and questions

It is important to note the aims of this study. Firstly, this empirical investigation explores the international work and practices of several UK national museums. Here I define international work as the physically bounded cultural activities, partnerships and programmes that happen outside the UK. As such it is therefore concerned with museums’ conceptualisations of, and motivations for, international work and the logics behind such global endeavours. The research questions driving this study are thus:

1) Are there field-wide norms around the international work of museums?
2) Is it possible to identify particular patterns or themes that run through the international work conducted by the museum sector?
3) Which institutional logics can be identified as contributing to the current direction of international work of museums?

This study is not concerned with international visitors to the respective museums, nor does it consider the role of the internet and digital engagement via social media or the web. In addition, whilst I touch on the academic subject matter that underpins several of the organisations in the study, I do not explore the work or logic of the professionals who conduct these activities. Without a doubt, the duties of scientists, curators, archaeologists, and conservators is inherently global as they work with counterparts across the globe to further knowledge and understanding of collections. For many of these museums, however, this is considered “business as unusual” and does not constitute their contemporary framing of international activity.
1.4 Upcoming chapter overview

This thesis is comprised of eight chapters, each exploring a different aspect of the study. In Chapter Two I set out the theoretical framing for this investigation. In doing so I discuss sociological institutionalism – a theoretical perspective that allows me to explore how individuals operate within an organisation and how this impacts the field in which it belongs. This then draws attention to institutional logics – the frameworks that guide organisations and individuals in a particular field of practice.

In Chapter Three I explore the literature around the types of activities museums conduct internationally. I draw on both grey literature and academic studies and outline seven broad areas of activity – preserving global heritage; research and scholarship; touring exhibitions and object loans; skills sharing and capacity building; consulting; museum franchising; and global corporatisation. I then explore how this work can be framed as cultural diplomacy and soft power.

In Chapter Four I outline the methodology adopted for this study and draw attention to the interpretive framework underpinning it, that of phenomenology. I discuss sampling strategy and recruitment methods and subsequently introduce the four institutions and individuals that make up this study. Next, I describe the data collection method adopted for this study, followed by the approach I used to examine transcripts – thematic analysis. I outline the various validation measures taken to embed methodological rigour into this thesis. Ethical considerations are paramount to this chapter, and as such I discuss them throughout – highlighting issues within each stage of the methodological process.

Chapter Five builds on the methodology as I give a brief overview of the development of UK national museums before providing contextual detail on the four organisations within this study. I also outline some of the current cultural policy delates within the UK, highlighting those that relate to international working.

In Chapter Six I present the findings from my semi-structured interviews. Firstly, I unpick how individuals conceptualised their institution’s international strategy. I pull out key ideas and group these into overarching themes and frame these as an emerging set of field-wide norms around the international strategy and work of UK national museums. Next, I explore the institutional logics that underpin such work. I outline three logics – market, state, and community – as dominant modes of
influence on such strategies. Finally, I discuss the notion that UK national museums are hybrid organisations wherein various contrasting and conflicting logics operate.

In Chapter Seven I explore what my findings mean for the wider museological field. Firstly, I argue that through their global activities, national museums are transitioning from a hard power past to a soft power future. I discuss the challenges, tensions, and opportunities this brings. I then examine how such work is becoming another means to understand the impact of museums writ large. Next, I discuss how this body of work can be used to shape future museum practice. As such explore its usage study for the sector, for practitioners, and for my own practice.

Finally, in Chapter Eight I summarise my thesis noting why this investigation matters. I also point to future studies that would complement and extend this examination and add to the literature on the international work of museums.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I explore the theoretical framing that underpins this investigation. I begin by introducing the notion of new institutionalism. Emerging from the world of politics, new institutionalism provides a basis to explore institutions, especially the way they interact and influence society. I briefly look at the three dominant strands within this discipline – historical, rational choice and sociological institutionalism – before locating this study in the latter. A core facet of sociological institutionalism is that it enables one to explore how individuals operate both within, and are constrained by, an organisation and how this impacts the field in which it belongs. As such, sociological institutionalism provides a mechanism to look at individuals who work within cultural settings, which are in turn located in the wider field of museology. Moreover, this lens enables one to explore the patterns that not only span an organisation, but which also characterise a particular field. I discuss some key research in this area and examine the process of isomorphism.

In the latter half of the chapter, I turn my attention to institutional logics – the intangible frameworks that guide organisations and individuals in a particular field. Notably used in the examination of two seemingly similar but fundamentally different art museums (DiMaggio, 1991), institutional logics has now become a popular theoretical framework within organisational studies that has been used to explore a multitude of settings. Here I draw on the work of Friedland and Alford (1991, 2013) and Thornton and Ocasio (1999, 2008) and outline the key principles of such theory. Next, I look at a variety of empirical studies to illustrate how competing logics within an organisation can lead to tension, disagreement, and change; and how a shift in prevalence of one logic to another can create change within a field. Finally, I end this chapter by summarising my theoretical approach, providing the basis for forthcoming chapters and analysis.

2.1 New institutionalism

The approach I have adopted to explore and understand the international work of UK national museums is grounded in the concept of new institutionalism. This focuses on the study of institutions – in particular the way they restrict and enable the behaviour of actors through formal and informal structures (DiMaggio & Powel, 1991; March & Olsen, 1984). Coming to prominence in the 1970’s and 1980’s, new institutionalism was a way for academics to advance their understanding of politics within the United States. Much early thinking around new institutionalism originated from March and Olsen (1984). They argued for a reframing of how we viewed political institutions to better understand the role individuals played within them. As such, new institutionalism combined
the interests of more traditionalist scholars, who focused on understanding institutional rules and structures, with behaviouralists, who sought to understand the actions of individuals.

2.1.1 A reframing of institutions

With this expanded view, there has been much discussion around what constitutes an institution. For North (1991) institutions are constraints that have been devised to structure social, political and economic life. Through formal rules such as laws and constitutions, and informal constraints such as traditions, customs, and taboos, they help to create order and in turn minimise doubt and insecurity. In contrast, March and Olsen (1984) see institutions as comparatively long-standing assemblages of rules and organised practices, entrenched in structures and resources that are relatively unchanged in the face of different actors and the shifting external environment. Institutions are multifaceted and durable, whilst providing stability and meaning to social life.

Connecting these definitions is what Scott (2001) refers to as the three pillars of institutions. The regulative pillar comprises the formal or informal rules, laws, policies, and associated sanctions that shape and monitor action and activity which in turn create stability and structure. The normative pillar addresses the values, ethics and norms that run through an institution which both constrain but also empower social action. These help institutions develop a sense of individuality and personality and provide important cues around how to act and perform. Finally, the cognitive-cultural pillar shapes how individuals view reality and interpret the world.

For the purposes of this study, I adopt Friedland and Alford’s (1991) longstanding and widely recognised view of institutions. For these scholars institutions are the “supra-organisational patterns of human activity by which individuals and organisations produce and reproduce their material subsistence and organise time and space. They are also symbolic systems, ways of ordering reality, and thereby rendering experience of time and space meaningful.” (p. 248). I adopt this view as here institutions are framed as the product of human action. People are paramount, and their actions are not fixed but ever changing as they respond to myriad internal and external circumstances. For me, this approach moves institutions from being a somewhat restrictive construct to more fluid and recursive one.

New institutionalism has three key strands. These strands assign differing degrees of importance to individuals, organisations, and the field they are located within. For example, historical institutionalism heralds the notion of history and presupposes that a direction of travel articulated
early on within an institution tends to be followed throughout its development. This is referred to as path dependency – whereby a reliance on an historical track record presupposes successful outcomes. In this scenario institutional change is possible but only through critical junctions and significant crisis (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992). Rational choice institutionalism has its origins in economics and examines institutions as a system of interconnected rules and incentives. Here individuals’ rational choices are constrained by rules and as such actions are made in the interest of the self (March & Olsen, 1984). I, however, draw on sociological institutionalism which provides a lens on how individuals operate both within, and are constrained by, an organisation and how this impacts the field in which it belongs (Hall & Taylor, 1996). The selection of sociological institutionalism for this study and its relevance for museums are explained in the forthcoming sections.

Sociological institutionalism has three key features that renders it different to the other strands of new institutionalism. Firstly, institutions are defined more broadly and consider symbols, cognitive scripts, and moral templates that guide human action. Here institutional cultures are paramount as rules: structures and norms are not formed by rational choice or for efficiency, instead they are culturally constructed by the individuals operating within them (Powell & Bromley, 2015). Secondly, there is a clear understanding of the relationship between institutions and individual action. Emphasis is given to the cognitive dimension of institutional impact. This means an importance is placed on how institutions influence behaviour by providing event schemes, categories, routines, and models that are vital for action. As such, institutions influence behaviour not only by stipulating what one should do but also by specifying what one can envisage oneself doing in any given setting (Hall & Taylor, 1996). The relationship between institution and individual action is organic, highly interactive, and mutually beneficial. Finally, there is a distinctive methodology of explaining how institutional practices originate and change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Skelcher & Smith, 2015). Here organisations assume a new institutional practice, not because it improves efficiency, but because it enriches the social acceptability of the organisation or its participants. Put simply, organisations adopt new ways of working and thinking because it is widely prized and celebrated within a broader cultural context. These practices, however, may be incongruous with an organisation’s former goals.

According to Rowland, Nicholas and Rojas (2006) adopting a sociological institutionalist perspective for the study of museums is apt, as these cultural bodies carefully illustrate how institutional environments affect organisational behaviour and internal social structures. In other words, museum staff pay close attention to norms and industry practices within the wider field of
museology which in turn influences working practices such as strategy development, exhibitions, learning activities and other actions delivered by and through the museum. Moreover, whilst much consideration is often given to the objects within these places, they are in fact complex “peopled organisations” (Morse et al., 2018, p. 116). Here the individuals that work within them are constantly negotiating between the structures that enable different types of activity to be generated with the ever-changing knowledge generation that such learning environments bring.

2.1.2 The importance of organisational fields within institutional theory

A key advancement in institutional theory here is that organisations exist within what DiMaggio and Powell (1991) framed as an organisational field. They defined this as “...those institutions that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (p. 64-65). Much research in this area looks at the role organisational fields play as both a rich source of action for individuals as they come together to share practices and experiences; through to the regulative and normative systems they provide which in turn generates meaning for organisations (Scott, 2001). This reminds us that individual action is not “a choice among unlimited possibilities but rather among a narrowly defined set of legitimate options” (Wooten & Hoffman, 2017, p. 55).

For the purposes of this study, I examine individuals who work within cultural organisations such as a museum, art gallery or science centre which are situated within the wider organisational field of museology. Museology comprises the study of museums and explores a wide range of topics from the history of such organisations and their role in society, to the varied activities that occur within them. In the UK, the museological field is well developed and globally respected (Blatchford et al., 2018; NMDC, 2015). For example, The Museums Association was the first membership body in the world and has become a model for other countries to follow.

The museological field covers a wide variety of museums – from small community-led organisations through to large nationals, as well as a wide range of subject matter from art, science, ethnography, music, history etc. In this study I focus specifically on national museums. I argue that these institutions have a different remit to others across the UK as they not only house national collections but are largely funded via government. As such they encounter different pressures and expectations about their role and remit to society. Adopting an institutional lens across national museums has enabled me to move beyond “the adjectival” (Gray & McCall, 2018, p. 124) – the labels that are often given to them to differentiate them from one another based on the work they do. For
example: natural history museums, science museums, community outreach, digital activity etc. Instead, an organisational focus enables the examination of bureaucratic features which can show commonalities in the understandings and challenges linked to museum function.

One of the key implications of adopting sociological institutionalism as a theoretical framing is that certain things become visible. For example, it enables us to look at the patterns that not only span an organisation but also characterise a particular field. Early research in this area has explored why institutions look the same despite having different goals and aspirations. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) note: “Organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful.” (p. 70)

A key assumption that underpins this notion is that organisations confirm to rationalised myths – societal constructions of what makes a good and proper organisation. In doing so, organisations are able to achieve sought-after legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Organisational theory defines legitimacy as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Legitimacy is a key concern for many national museums as they have developed and leveraged a significant amount of public trust through the work they do (Dilenschneider, 2019). With cultural organisations often facing conflicting and competing demands from their key stakeholders (such as funders, the public or its staff), Patterson (2012) argues that they must pay attention to legitimacy management by making “a set of ‘front stage’ practices that need to be balanced carefully with the ‘back stage’ practices involved in managing any complex organisation” (p. 3294). The implication is that strategic thinking must align with the expectations and experiences of the public within the four walls of the museum. If not, this may compromise institutional legitimacy. Institutional theorists have acknowledged that legitimacy can largely be achieved via isomorphism (DiMaggio, 1991; Friedland & Alford, 1991).

2.1.3 Isomorphism

One approach to obtain legitimacy is to adopt the various practices and structures of other organisations within the same field of practice. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that a “highly structured organizational field provides a context to deal rationally with uncertainty and constraint often lead, in the aggregate, to homogeneity in structure, culture, and input” (p. 64). DiMaggio and Powell referred to this convergence of procedures and approaches as isomorphism. They define isomorphism as a “constraining process” that “forces one unit in a population to resemble other
units that face the same set of environmental conditions.” (p. 66) In other words, organisations such as those explored in this study – from natural history museums and science centres, through to design and anthropological museums – might start off with different collections, policies, missions, goals, and internal staffing structures. However, over time they begin to look more and more alike as they emulate and adopt each other’s processes to become more efficient and successful.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) outlined three processes or mechanisms of isomorphism – coercive, normative, and mimetic. Coercive isomorphism stems from the pressures of compliance and is often associated with political influence. These can be visible - enacted through laws, procedures, and regulation; or invisible such as societal pressure to conform. Hanson (2001) warns that the latter of these can be subtle but no less powerful. Normative isomorphism is rooted in the values of professionalism and is seen through the establishment of professional bodies, networking, training, education, and certification. These bodies can also act as gatekeepers to the profession, further strengthening normative expectations. This is echoed by Hall and Taylor (1996) who note:

Common institutional practices are said to emerge from a more interactive process of discussion among the actors in a given network – about shared problems, how to interpret them, and how to solve them – taking place in a variety of forums that range from business schools to international conclaves. Out of such interchanges, the actors are said to develop shared cognitive maps, often embodying a sense of appropriate institutional practices, which are then widely deployed. In these instances, the interactive and creative dimensions of the process whereby institutions are socially constructed is most apparent. (p. 17)

Finally, mimetic isomorphism is derived from mimicry or copying – whereby pressures to conform or succeed particularly within an uncertain environment result in emulation. Whilst these three processes are derived from different and specific conditions, they can still overlap and intermingle.

In many ways the notion of isomorphism is also evident in the concept of communities of practice. A popular frame to support professional learning within museums (Allen & Crowley, 2014), communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This bringing together of professionals within a field, can also explain the convergence of practice both in terms of innovation and institutional conservatism.

Research around isomorphism has found that government organisations are more vulnerable to all three types of isomorphic forces than other organisations such as private companies and not-for-profits (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004). In the context of university practice, for example, isomorphic
pressures have resulted in increased homogenisation amongst European universities, although there is still a sense of individuality (Hüther & Krücken, 2016). To explain the simultaneity of homogenisation and differentiation, the researchers adopted the concept of nested organisational fields. In their research, they located activity within a global field, a European field, and multiple national, state and regional fields.

The intermingling of isomorphic forces and how they homogenise a field is evident in the work of Chang (2021) who argues this is deeply evident within museology – in particular with museums across East Asia. She notes that cultural organisations in China and Japan have been studying those in the West for many years to emulate the perceived successful role they play in society. This has resulted in the “appropriation of Western formats, deeply influenced by traditional attitudes to cultural preservation and display” (Chang, 2021, p. 15). With more and more new museums emerging in Asia and the Middle East – and with many of these partnering with Western cultural institutions – it seems that a global museology may be becoming rooted in a Western-centric ideology. This raises significant challenges for the future evolution of the field, but equally for the diversity of international relations in a post-globalised world. Chang’s (2021) study also has significant implications for this investigation. As I am exploring the international work of UK national museums – key symbols of colonial power – one must question the role, or evolution, they play in shaping a homogenic world of museology.

### 2.2 Institutional logics

A key critique of sociological institutionalism is its relationship to change. For Farrell (2018) this approach largely presupposes continuity over change and that when the latter is discussed it is through the lens of “propagation via isomorphism rather than transformation” (p. 35). This is echoed by Fligstein and McAdam (2012) who recognise this approach shines a light on conformity amongst existing fields. This results in individuals following rules either “consciously by imitation or coercion or unconsciously by tacit agreement” (p. 28). These challenges have been recognised by the academic community, and some have responded with an elaborated approach to institutional theorisation and analysis that can spotlight tension, change and complexity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Johansen & Waldorff, 2015; Lounsbury, 2007; Thornton et al., 2012; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Referred to as institutional logics, they are the intangible frameworks that guide individuals and organisations in a particular field.
Thornton and Ocasio (1999) described institutional logics as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality” (p. 804). Put simply, they are myriad practices, actions and principles that frame how individuals make sense of the world around them, and consequently know how to act. Whilst this approach is nestled within sociological institutionalism – the focus moves from isomorphism and homogeneity to examining heterogeneity and difference through the values, beliefs and practices employed by organisations and individuals. The role of the individual is key as they attempt to make sense of one logic over another, defend a preferred logic, or juggle multiple logics within an organisation or a field of practice (Pache & Santos, 2013b). The framework of Institutional logics has five core elements (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). These are:

1) Society is understood as an inter-institutional system comprising different orders each with their own distinct logic
2) A flexible theoretical lens that can be used to examine multiple levels from institutions, organisations, networks, communities, and fields
3) Through the existence of different and competing logics individuals are provided with a sense of agency
4) Institutional logics have both material and cultural components
5) Historical contingency is emphasised

2.2.1 Society as an interinstitutional system

A key theorisation of Friedland and Alford (1991) was to conceptualise societal sectors as an interinstitutional system. Here each sector represents a different and unique set of expectations for social relations and behaviour. Whilst there has been some debate around the various sectors in society, I adopt Thornton and Ocasio’s (1999, 2008) view which includes the market, corporation, profession, state, family, religion, and community. For Thornton et al. (2012) each institutional sector has a “governance system that provides a frame of reference that preconditions actors’ sensemaking choices.” (p. 54). From the sources of autonomy and legitimacy through to their norms and strategy – each sector shapes individual and organisational actions, behaviours, preferences, interests, and vocabulary in different ways. For example, the market sector promotes self-interest and profitability; whereas the community sector encourages unity and the honour of members (for more information see Table 1).
For Thornton et al. (2012) future empirical research should qualify and advance this framing and in turn strengthen theorisation. As such, Reay and Jones (2015) purport that the role of institutional sectors is that they “… do not represent social reality but instead are tool(s) to interpret cultural meaning and help the researcher avoid getting bogged down in merely reproducing the often-confusing empirical situation.” (p. 7)

Institutional sectors and institutional logics are strongly interlinked. Johansen and Waldorff (2015) argue that institutional logics are quietly influential insomuch as they guide institutional sectors. For example, the institutional sector of the family is guided by a logic that promotes unity and loyalty; whilst the institutional sector of the state is guided by a logic of democratic participation. For Gumusay et al. (2020) this enables the development of institutional theory writ large – as it provides a window to understanding how overarching societal sectors are created, maintained and contested through logics. For Thornton and Ocasio (2008) viewing society as an inter-institutional system allows “sources of heterogeneity and agency to be theorised and to be observed from the contradictions between the logics of different institutional orders” (p. 104). In other words, there is not a single source of reason; instead, action, behaviour and agency are driven by multiple and at times conflicting causes. This non-deterministic approach means that the focus here is placed on the relationship between three different and autonomous levels. Here the interplay between institutional sectors, the organisations within them and individuals within those organisations is paramount.

2.2.2 A flexible theoretical lens that can be used to examine multiple levels of analysis
A key facet of the theory around institutional logics is that multiple levels of analysis can be undertaken. For example, the meta-theory can be adopted to explore institutions, organisations, networks, communities, and fields. As such it is a useful tool to explore both individual museums and the wider field of museology. For Thornton and Ocasio (2008) this flexibility may be a key reason for its popularity amongst scholars; but for others it weakens its impact. For example Willmott (2015) argues that it is overly used in organisational studies and lacks a sense of criticality, whilst Alvesson et al. (2019) have noted that its popularity has resulted in a theory that is too broad, too dispersed and too confusing. Thornton and Ocasio (2008) reject this characterisation arguing that institutional logics are key sources of legitimacy, providing “a sense of order and ontological security” (p. 108).

For Skelcher and Smith (2015), organisations are powerful sites of analysis as they are fundamentally social entities that interact with the actions of individuals. For them, they provide the ideal platform
for institutional logics to be expressed though the “identity, discourse, and normative framing of its members or stakeholders” (p. 439). As such, institutional logics has been referred as a “bridge” between the macro view of sociological institutionalism and the micro view of activity on the ground (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

2.2.3 Competing logics provide individuals with a sense of agency
As Friedland and Alford (1991) proposed, there is no institutional change without actors. Actors in a field – whether they be individuals, organisations, customers, or other key stakeholders – place internal and external pressure on companies to change. According to Schneiberg and Clemens (2006) an actor’s actions are shaped by the organisation in which they work; and that organisation is shaped by the field in which they are situated within.

Institutional logics give identity and meaning to individuals. But as they co-exist and contradict one another, individuals who cannot readily reconcile these differences must find creative solutions to such challenges. For many academics this is where logics become observable, particularly in the social activity of individuals, as they utilise, re-engineer and re-explain them (Skelcher & Smith, 2015). With this in mind, a key component of institutional logic theory is the role of the individual and how they respond to different logics. Through the existence of different and competing logics, individuals are placed in a system of friction whereby significant agency is developed. In the forthcoming section, I discuss several studies that highlight the role of individuals in navigating such complexity.

2.2.4 Institutional logics are both material and symbolic
A key principle of institutional logics is that they comprise both material and symbolic elements. By material this refers to structures and processes within an institution. These could include, but are not limited to, formal and informal practices, social obligations, and behavioural expectations. A symbolic dimension is connected to ideation and personal sense making – covering an individual’s assumptions, beliefs, values, and interpretations. It is how people see the world and make sense of what is around them. Whilst they are described separately, they are very much interlinked and intertwined. For example, Zilber (2008) acknowledged that symbols are embedded in structures and practices and such structures and practices affect the meanings of symbols. Together they provide the rules – both formal and informal – that shape action, interaction and interpretation. These in turn direct and restrain decision makers in achieving organisational tasks and in obtaining status, penalties, and rewards in the process (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).
More recently, Friedland (2013) has advocated the inclusion of tangible objects as an example of material dimensionality. He argues that “unobservable substances must be transmuted into observable objects – nested and interlocked—which are the means by which practices are anchored, affected and oriented” (p. 37). Jones et al. (2013) also recognise that most empirical research explores materiality as practices and structures, rather than as physical objects, but some studies are beginning to buck the trend. For example, Zamora-Kapoor et al.’s. (2019) exploration of working practices within three art museums found that the selection and placement of contemporary artworks within an exhibition provided traces of institutional dynamics.

2.2.5 Historical contingency

Finally, the theory of institutional logics emphasises the notion of historical contingency. Here time and space are key as institutional logics are historically variant and are shaped by economic, political, structural and normative forces (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). For example, whilst the institutional sectors underpinning society remain influential, the potency of individual facets has peaked and waned over time. Whilst earlier societies may have placed a greater focus on family and religious influences with contemporary culture tends to emphasise corporate, market or state influences (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

Gumusay et al. (2020) in their development of institutional logic theory make two relevant and connected points. Here they note the importance of contextual and temporal factors. Firstly, contextuality considers that logics are complex and not the same everywhere. Recognising that logics are highly situated and contextualised means that a certain world view in the Global North may be considerably different to that in the Global South. As such, complexity exists not only between logics, but also within each logic. And secondly, they note that much research around logics is time bound and static. Studies often explore a moment in time within an organisation. But as society is constantly in flux more attention needs to be paid to the temporal nature of logics. For Gumusay et al. (2020) logics are not static, rather they are “firm but malleable, [which means] we can use them to analyse large-scale institutional transformations.” (para. 25). Although this study aims to uncover the logics underpinning the international work of museums today, it seems these may well shift and change over time. In many ways this resonates with my own personal experiences. Whilst this study explores the logics underpinning the NHM’s previous international strategy and work I suspect the results may differ if I was to examine our current and future practices.
2.3 Empirical studies exploring institutional logics

Over time institutional logics has become incredibly popular within organisational studies and as such has been deployed to explore several contexts. Empirical studies have focused on a diverse array of fields from health and social care (Dunn, Mary & Jones, 2010; Sanders & McClellan, 2014), schools and universities (Lee et al., 2021; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020; Weiner et al., 2021), gastronomy (Rao et al., 2005), through to banking (Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007) and breweries (Christiansen & Lounsbury, 2013). Moreover it is becoming a popular frame to explore the organisational work of art museums and science centres (DiMaggio, 1991; Feinstein & Meshoulam, 2014; van Koeverden, 2018; Zamora-Kapoor et al., 2019). In the forthcoming sections I draw on the breadth of research exploring institutional logics whilst discussing how they have been adopted within a museum context. I begin somewhat chronologically and explore a key piece of research that gave rise to institutional logics. I then explore how different logics can cause conflict and tension between an organisation and field. Next, I examine the notion of hybridity – which spotlights the co-existence of multiple logics within an organisation – before discussing the notion of institutional bricolage. Finally, I draw on the literature within this chapter and summarise my theoretical approach.

2.3.1 Logic co-existence and conflict within a field of practice

A seminal study that gave rise to institutional logics is DiMaggio’s (1991) examination of art museums across the United States. Here the researcher described two very different examples of museum practice operating within society. Firstly, the Gilman model (named after the former director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston) highlighted an aesthetic logic whereby the object was paramount, and the mission of the organisation was to collect and preserve works of art; and secondly the Dana model (named after John Cotton Dana, a former director of the Museum of the Newark Library Association) which emphasised a public logic focusing on the visitor and the educational role of the museum. For DiMaggio (1991), these different logics led to organisations in the field of museology to act in vastly different ways despite the fact they looked the same from an outsider’s perspective.

Since then, many empirical studies have focused on how different and competing logics can co-exist leading to tension, disagreement, change and innovation. Several studies that adopt an institutional logics approach tend to focus on understanding field-level change, often over a significant period. For example, Thornton and Ocasio’s (1999) examination of the higher education publishing industry
is a key study that highlights how a change of institutional logic can have a significant impact on the field in which it is embedded. Through interview data and historical analysis, they found that the publishing industry moved from an editorial logic to a market logic. Here the focus on academic rigour, professional networks, and credibility gave way to income generation, market share and competition. In addition, these different logics required differing leadership styles which introduced new executive succession practices. More recently, academics have shown how the field of medical education is shaped by the enduring and competing logics of care and science. These differing logics can fluctuate over time and in doing so they create tension around how to educate future workers in the field (Dunn & Jones, 2010). Whilst these studies explore change in very different contexts, together they are useful in highlighting how a shift from a dominant institutional logic to another, over time, influences key organisational structures and practices.

Significant change in a field, however, may not necessarily be permanent. van Gestel and Hillebrand’s (2011) in-depth, longitudinal case study of public employment services across the Netherlands revealed that multiple logics remained prevalent within a field, even after a dominant logic had taken control. Here they outlined three periods – each characterised by a different dominant logic. For example, up to until the early 1990s activity was shaped by a state logic – which was characterised by a traditional, hierarchical governance structure. Between 1991-2002 they described a corporatist logic – whereby the traditional approach was replaced by a network of stakeholders with equal say and authority over decision making. And finally, from 2002 onwards they observed a dominant capitalist market logic which was characterised by a governance model based on competition.

For the researchers, the “old” or subservient logic within each period did not lay dormant, in fact it played a key role in future change processes. Two factors are key to understanding the relationship between subservient and dominant logics. Firstly, they found that actors adopted the concept of “negative choice” (p. 236) when making a preference for one logic over others. This meant that individuals resolved a stalemate by selecting one logic that would block another. The authors referred to this as selecting the “lesser of two evils” (p. 245). They also found that actors employed “deliberate ambiguity” (p. 236). Here individuals provided little information over their choices and decisions and often chose to leave things open. Whilst these factors helped to solve the struggle between logics – resulting in a dominant form ultimately succeeding – they simultaneously sowed the seeds for future change as matters were not properly dealt with, instead moved aside for the time being. Whilst there is some evidence to suggest that a field may shift back and forth between
settled and unsettled times (Swidler, 1986), the study reveals that a significant change in logic does not imply long term stability. Taken together these studies once again remind us about the temporal and contextual nature of institutional logics (Gumusay et al., 2020).

A key criticism with some studies – particularly those that focus on changing dynamics over time – is a preference to focus on archival materials (see Fowler and Gillett’s (2021) recent examination of the development of the London Transport system or Thornton and Ocasio’s (1999) earlier study on executive succession within the higher education publishing sector). Whilst the use of archival data is a powerful tool in spotlighting changing logics over time, it downplays the lived experiences of individuals within these organisations. For Zilber (2013) this “discounts the first-hand experiences of actors in the field while favoring theory-based interpretations of the researchers” (para. 8). For the author, this means we lose vital clues as to how logics are negotiated, voiced, questioned and censored. But more importantly, we lose a sense of how they are integrated into the fabric of daily life. As such they advocate the use of participant interviews to enrich investigations in this field.

Several studies have highlighted the linkages between logics and the materiality of institutional practices. These studies illustrate the lived reality of individuals dealing with conflicting institutional logics within an organisation, as they navigate and handle them to make sense of their working world. For example, studies have explored how two vastly different competing logics can guide a management investment fund to achieve different outputs (Lounsbury, 2007); and how opposing approaches to informal and formal learning within a community education space can help educators create more sustainable, integrated and authentic programming (Weiner et al., 2021). Marquis and Lounsbury’s (2007) investigation into the world of banking highlighted how the convergence of different logics resulted in creative entrepreneurialism and innovation. Here they observed that when large national banks acquired smaller community-orientated firms, a difference in logic facilitated a resistance to institutional change. This sparked a new sense of professional entrepreneurialism, particularly for those embedded within the smaller firms, aimed at preserving the community logic of banking.

Several scholars have explored organisational fields where multiple logics exist. Shields and Watermeyer’s (2020) analysis of the higher education sector in the UK found the existence of three competing logics – autonomous, utilitarian, and managerial. An autonomous logic saw universities uphold academic rigour and critique, a utilitarian logic saw universities work alongside the economy to generate innovation and growth, whilst a managerial logic pitted these organisations against one
another, justifying hierarchy and bureaucracy to survive. These different logics produced competing models of universities within the wider field of higher education. Returning to museum practice, Feinstein and Meshoulam (2014) found that science museums across the United States adopted both cooperative and client logics when defining and delivering equity-based programmes. For these authors, the former framed equity challenges as a shared endeavour between staff and the community, whereas the latter created a *them* and *us* divide. As such, the challenge of equity was seen as ways of serving the community. Whilst these logics can facilitate valuable work, Feinstein and Meshoulam (2014) questioned how institutions can use both to better serve their audiences.

Several studies have begun to tease out key factors that may play a part in allowing multiple logics to co-exist within a field of practice. Fairclough and Micelotta’s (2013) examination of law firms provides an interesting example of how different geographic locations can give rise to variation. Using Italy as a case study, they found that although the global legal field by-and-large was dominated by capitalist and professional logics, the emergence of a specific family logic within the country had resulted in a sector characterised by small firms, resistant to cooperate takeovers and foreign legal practices. Another key factor is the role of individual agency. McPherson and Sauder’s (2013) 15-month ethnographic investigation of a drug court explored how different actors (in this case lawyers) employed different logics in their day-to-day work. For example, although their study examined professionals with four distinct orientations — the logics of criminal punishment, rehabilitation, community accountability, and efficiency — they would often stray from their *home* logic and *hijack* the logics of others to achieve their own goals. Here McPherson and Sauder’s adopted the analogy of a “tool kit” (p. 186) whereby individuals would pick and choose the appropriate logic for the situation to achieve overarching goals. Despite research showing that professionals generally adhered to the overarching institutional logics of their profession (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008), McPherson and Sauder found that actors used a significant amount of agency in their work.

For Johansen and Waldorff (2015) studies such as those above represent an impressive portfolio of different logics that are “out there” (p. 62), but convey little coherence in what makes up a logic. Whilst they note that these studies are useful in understanding how individuals and organisations manage complex logics, wider societal consequences are by-in-large left unexplored. To address this gap, I am adopting Thornton et al’s (2012) Interinstitutional System Types (as outlined in Table 1 below) to ensure the logics evident in museum practice connect to wider societal sectors. By doing
this I hope to demonstrate how overarching societal sectors are shaped, upheld, and challenged though logics.

Table 1: Interinstitutional System Types by Thornton et al. (2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Institutional Sectors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Root Metaphor</td>
<td>Family as firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Legitimacy</td>
<td>Unconditional loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Authority</td>
<td>Patriarchal domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Identity</td>
<td>Family reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis of Norms</td>
<td>Membership in household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis of Attention</td>
<td>Status in household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis of Strategy</td>
<td>Increase family honour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic System</td>
<td>Family capitalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 A modified version of this table has been developed to structure and support my own research findings. For more information see p. 118.
2.3.2 Hybrid organisations

When more than one conflicting logic is present within an institution this is referred to as hybridity. Most studies on hybridity take place at the organisational level as two (or more) seemingly conflicting and competing logics co-exist in order to support organisational goals (Johansen & Waldorff, 2015). This uneasy plurality has resulted in hybrid organisations being referred to as a “collection of weirdos” (Ménard, 2004, p. 347). Whilst the combination of logics can sometimes sit comfortably within an organisation (see upcoming examples) this characterisation implies that hybrids are strange and unusual. Recognising that organisations need to survive in an ever changing social, political, and economic environment I argue that hybrid organisations are far from weird and, in fact, increasingly normal.

Hybrid organisations often combine the functions and features of public, private and charitable bodies (Fowler & Gillett, 2021). As such, there is much evidence to suggest that the public and charitable sector are mainly comprised of hybrid organisations. These are complex workplaces that balance even more complex societal, political, and commercial demands. For example, much research has been connected in the field of social entrepreneurship which has had to adopt various logics in order to serve its community (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Mair et al., 2015; Pache & Santos, 2013a). Emerging research suggests that museums are also becoming hybrid institutions as they embrace different identities in order to serve its multiple stakeholders (Anheier & Toepler, 1998; van Koeverden, 2018; Zamora-Kapoor et al., 2019). For example, with government support in the UK diminishing for its national museums, many have had to complement their public mission with more commercial ventures. This has led to many creating private companies to generate revenue and support the overarching parent institution (for example in the UK, Tate Enterprises is the separate commercial arm of Tate museums). The search for new revenue schemes to offset funding gaps has led to Brandsen, et al. (2005) noting that “hybridity [is] an inevitable and permanent characteristic” (p. 758) of the sector.

Skelcher and Smith (2015) proposed five forms of hybridisation. When organisations accommodate multiple and conflicting logics these authors describe different hybridisation approaches as segmentation, segregation, assimilation, or blending. Where an organisation was unable to resolve the contradictions between different logics, they referred to this as blocking. For example, when a single organisation has different functions reflecting different logics, they referred to this as segmentation; however, when functions with different logics are broken into separate but
associated organisations, they referred to this as segregation. This latter approach is evident in the example above whereby Tate has segregated its commercial arm with a different logic from its charitable arm that serves more broader, societal goals. Billis (2010) acknowledged that segmentation is likely to move to segregation when commercialisation within an institution increases. He referred to this as “organic hybridization” (p. 61).

When it comes to assimilation, Skelcher and Smith (2015) recognise that whilst the foundational logic within an organisation remains, some new practices and symbols from a new logic are also incorporated. The authors warn that this can come with a level of deception. This is evident in the work of Pache and Santos (2013b) who recognised that the assimilation of different logics can sometimes be akin to a Trojan Horse. Their study of social enterprises found that organisations adopted new logics, alongside existing ones, to gain legitimacy and acceptance within a field of practice. For example, some organisations from a market logic strategically took on elements from a social welfare logic to gain acceptability within the field. This is echoed by Mair et al. (2015) who speculated that some organisations assume hybridity for symbolic reasons whilst others do so for more substantive reasons.

Blended hybridisation is where multiple logics evolve within an organisation to create a new, contextually specific form. This enables organisations to create durable, long lasting identities (Skelcher & Smith, 2015). In order to create successful blended hybrid organisations hiring practices and socialisation are key (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). Finally, a blocked hybrid refers to a situation where competing logics within an organisation cannot be resolved, leading to dysfunction and, ultimately, failure.

Several studies have explored how individuals experience and cope with hybridisation. Dahlmann & Grosvold (2017) recognised that actors within hybrid institutions must draw on different behaviours and actions to bridge different and competing logics when engaging in their work. As logics provide individuals with a sense of identity, the instruction to integrate into other schemas can have a disruptive effect (Sanders & McClellan, 2014). Pache and Santos (2013a) argue that in a world of increasing institutional pluralism many organisations are becoming embedded in competing institutional logics which in turn are causing conflict and distress in individuals. They found that individuals resorted to five approaches when having to engage in competing logics – ignorance, compliance, resistance, combination or compartmentalisation. This thinking supports the work of Fligstein and McAdam (2012) who defined two roles that staff can play within an organisation. They
referred to staff as *incumbents* – individuals who are fundamentally focused with maintaining the status quo within a field, or *challengers* – disruptors who want to replace old ways of working with a new set of initiatives and processes.

One example of how actors negotiate logics within an organisation is Zamora-Kapoor et al. (2019) examination of art museums. Here they identified state, market and aesthetic logics underpinning the development of exhibitions. For them, state logic saw a preference to highlight political and national narratives in exhibition making; market logic heralded the importance of income generation and redrew visitors as consumers; and aesthetic logic promoted the art itself and centered around the power of display, conservation and collections. They concluded that individuals across the organisation acknowledged the necessity to integrate various complementary and competing logics into their work without complex negotiations or power struggles.

Moreover, van Koeverden’s (2018) examination of Dutch museums provides a window into the processes that shape hybridity within a cultural context. Their model – conceived from observing the rise of market and professional logics within Dutch museums at the expense of a hobby logic – identified three stages. Firstly a (dis)confirmation of existing logics occurs, followed by a change of logics, and then finally an acknowledgment of such change. This process, created when institutions or sectors go through some form of organisational change, has both positive and negative outcomes for individuals within the organisation. Whilst many staff can accept such changes and adopt their working practices; others struggle to do so and often become disillusioned with their organisation.

For Johansen and Waldorff (2015), when hybrid organisations succeed it is due to creativity and innovation derived from the friction that is created between two seemingly incompatible logics. Again, here the role of individual agency and action is key in navigating such a complex and fraught path. The authors note that hybrids “offer a notion of how even the most calloused institutionalized praxis can change over time, through the creative re-conceptualization of traditionally competing logics” (p. 66). But as recognised above, not all hybrids flourish and there is some evidence to suggest that new hybrid organisations have a harder time at succeeding than older, more well-established ones. Battilana and Dorado (2010) argue that mature organisations have the much-needed frameworks in place to deal with competing logics, tension and conflict, whereas newer hybrids do not have these “ready to wear” (p. 1419) models. For them this means that new types of hybrid originations are unstable and are unlikely to retain their hybrid nature over time. This observation is useful, as this study is concerned with well established, long running national
museums. Whilst the Dutch example above indicates hybridity can be a complex process, it seems that museums are able to juggle such challenges.

### 2.3.3 Institutional bricolage

A third, and much smaller, cohort of studies on institutional logics centres around the notion of *institutional bricolage*. Here studies tend to cover how multiple logics provide rich and diverse materials for individuals to combine into new products (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Christiansen & Lounsbury, 2013; Rao et al., 2005). Here bricolage is often described as an integrative process. For example, Baker and Nelson (2005) described it as “making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities” (p. 333). Schneiberg (2007), meanwhile, referred to it as “flotsam and jetsam” (p. 48), seemingly old bits from abandoned projects that an actor can combine in order to create something new. As such, the notion of bricolage refers to the way in which a “bricoleur” creates an artifact by using whatever is available to them. Christiansen and Lounsbury’s (2013) study of Carlsberg – a global brewery group – provides a clear example of bricolage in action. Due to growing pressures to be more responsible, individuals within the organisation creatively combined elements of social responsibility and market logics to create a Responsible Drinking Guidebook. As such, the guidebook can be seen as a boundary object (Star & Griesemer, 1989). These are objects that are both “plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites.” (p. 393). In this instance, the guidebook plays a key role in straddling multiple logics and in turn renegotiating the organisation’s identity.

A key factor present in studies around institutional bricolage is once again the notion of agency. Here individuals have the autonomy to choose, shape and transform available institutional logics into their daily practices, projects and work. As such logics are not accepted writ large, they are negotiated and moulded. Moreover, the performance of a “bricoleur” is largely predicated on two key factors. This includes their relationship to the institution and their availability of materials (old and new) than can be reconstructed. For Campbell (2004) this results in more “expansive repertoires to work with... with a wider repertoire, they are more likely to have a bricolage process that is very creative and revolutionary, rather than the opposite.” (p. 75)

### 2.4 Summarising my theoretical approach

In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical framework that underpins this investigation - sociological institutionalism and as such, in the forthcoming chapters I examine the international
work of UK national museums through this lens. Working with this lens, I firstly recognise international work of UK national museums as a field-wide challenge. This is a relatively new museological direction that could be defined and delivered in different ways according to different institutional logics. I posit that a museum’s international strategy and activities provide a unique window into said institutional logics. These strategies and practices will be analysed to provide a deeper understanding into the interests and motivations of museums and, in turn, reveal the underlying institutional logics driving such work. In this way, I hypothesise that individual museums will rely on an institutional logic — or more than one — to help them balance these demands and guide their approach to international working. In addition, I expect that other UK national museums will be influenced by emerging field-wide norms about what international working means in today’s environment and furthermore how it could (or should) be addressed. For the purposes of this investigation, I adopt the the interinstitutional work by Thornton et al. (2012). This framing will be used to guide my understanding and analysis of data. Moreover, it enables me to make a wider contribution to the field of museology by building much needed theory around the international work of UK national museums.
Chapter 3: The International Activity of Museums

In this chapter I begin by exploring the literature around the international work of museums. Whilst these cultural organisations have become the site for a range of empirical research studies addressing topics such as education (Hein, 1998; Russell, et al., 2013), through to visitor studies (Everett & Barrett, 2009; Seakins, 2013), the practices of international work have received limited research attention. I thus outline the variety of global activities undertaken by museums and throughout, I note some of the associated challenges and tensions. This includes examining issues connected to colonialism which have led to calls from both the sector and the public to decolonize cultural institutions. Next, I discuss how many of these activities have been seen as a form of cultural diplomacy and soft power. I examine definitions from outside and within the museum field and explore some of the emergent debates around the adaptation of such framings.

3.1 Exploring how museums work internationally

As noted above, there has been a dearth of literature on the international work of museums within the academic arena. Recently, however, a small number of studies have been published and these are explored in this chapter. Many of these studies focus on touring exhibitions as a popular mode of cross-cultural activity; by contrast, licensing and consulting has received scant attention. To structure my discussion, I modify the NMDC’s (2002) framework on the global activities of museums. That is, whilst the framework is a useful contribution to understand how museums work internationally, particularly those in the UK, its conceptualisation is arguably somewhat dated. Thus, I draw heavily on the work of Grincheva (2013, 2020b, 2020a), and Davidson and Perez-Castellanos (2019) who offer more contemporary perspectives. With this in mind, in the following section I describe six areas of global activity on the part of museums – preserving global heritage; touring exhibitions and object loans; skills sharing and capacity building; consulting; museum franchising; and global corporatisation.

3.1.1 Preserving global heritage

From natural history specimens to cultural artifacts, objects are at the core of most museums. Telling the stories of these objects is a fundamental part of any museum’s work, and so too is the need to preserve and care for these collections for future generations to come. Whilst many museums place an emphasis on creating world class storage facilities with high tech collection care and security measures, many also work beyond their physical walls to preserve objects and specimens in their original context or natural habitat (NMDC, 2002).
Many museums have been active in preserving global heritage both at home and abroad for many years. This includes playing a key role in the development of conservation standards, techniques and technologies, as well as strategies and actions to preserve natural and cultural heritage. Examples include the V&A’s Culture in Crisis programme whereby the institution acts as a global convenor for those interested in protecting cultural heritage by providing a forum to share information, to inspire and support action and to raise public awareness. Similarly, since 2015 the BM has run the Iraq Emergency Heritage Management Training Scheme. This is a collaboration with the Iraq State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), providing Iraqi archaeologists with training so they can document and stabilise heritage sites under threat in their country. According to Jonathan Tubb, BM Iraqi Scheme Director, the motivation behind such a programme is “to do something positive and constructive in the face of the most appalling destruction that had been going on” (BM & Shore, 2017, para. 3).

The ownership and protection of cultural heritage is becoming an important topic for many museums, with these issues becoming increasingly entangled with notions of global justice (Joy, 2020). Indeed, some museums with colonial collections are increasingly being viewed as out of touch and elitist as they continue to resist repatriation claims (Jenkins, 2018). For Berkowitz (2022) such contested cultural artifacts are the visible and tangible manifestations of another country’s history and culture. She notes “For them to exist outside of their place of origin works to further perpetuate the cultural genocide of which western countries are guilty” (para. 12). Whilst repatriation calls are increasing for UK national museums, there is little evidence to suggest that objects are returning permanently to their original home (Wilding, 2019). This has led to growing unrest, with some museums becoming the site for public protest over their governance structures and policies (Løgstrup, 2021).

In addition, with ongoing violence threatening cultural heritage in places such as Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan there is a sense that this destruction may result in museums taking an even more conservative approach with future requests. Gary Vikan, former Director of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, stated in the New York Times “I think this will put an end to the excess piety in favour of the repatriation model” (Mashberg & Bowley, 2015, para. 5). Critics of this approach argue that contemporary wartime destruction should not be used to vindicate outdated Western practices and that this approach once again exemplifies Western privilege (Berkowitz, 2022; Tharoor, 2015). It has been argued that past “wrongs” can be remedied through contemporary actions such as
recognition, economic repatriation and return (Joy, 2020). For the author this debate reshapes the role of cultural heritage workers – centering them as key players in the arbitration of global justice.

When examining one’s relationship with their colonial past, Pratt’s (1992) notion of contact zones is paramount here. Here she argued that a “contact zone becomes the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (p. 6). In relation to museums, Clifford (1993) argues that these cultural sites can be seen as a place where different peoples can meet and engage particularly around their historical, political and emotional relationship with objects and artefacts. This concept however is not uncontested. For example, Boast (2011) points towards an inherent power imbalance, whilst Løgstrup (2021) notes that these sites are already “sanctifiers of the cultural value of imperialism” (p. 130) which inhibit them from becoming safe and egalitarian spaces. She notes that “sometimes, the meeting place is not right from the beginning” (p.130).

Many of these issues and debates around colonialism have led to researchers and practitioners calling for institutions to change. For example, in a recent opinion piece for the Museums Association, Francis (2018) declared “it’s time all museums were postcolonial” (para. 1). Here he argues that museums need to decolonise their organisations by developing registers of contested objects to facilitate long term loans or returns; and establishing diversity targets both in terms of staffing and public programming. Taken together he notes that “museums can become postcolonial rather than colonial” (para. 11).

There is some evidence to suggest this shift is happening. For example, Aldrich’s (2009) research exploring colonial museums in a postcolonial Europe indicates that changes are happening pointing to innovations in displaying objects and working with local communities in an open, consultative, and meaningful way. Moreover Giblin, Ramos and Grout (2019) argue that decolonisation is now recognised as an important part of contemporary museum activity. Here they draw on two exhibitions from the BM that represent the experience of Empire, from multiple perspectives. For the researchers, they see this as a “movement toward more critically reflective representations of Empire within the master’s house” (p. 471). Whilst these examples are powerful indicators of change, for some it is too slow and out of step with current public and sector discourse (Kendall Adams, 2019; Løgstrup, 2021; Sleigh, 2020; Wilding, 2019).
3.1.2 Touring exhibitions and object loans

One way in which museums engage with other museums around the world is through the sharing of collections via touring exhibitions and object loans. With an unprecedented rise in global cultural consumption, museums have been developing blockbuster exhibitions both for their local audiences and for those abroad. The development of touring exhibitions generally follows one of three strategies. In the first case, co-production is a partnership model where two or more organisations take responsibility for the development and financial costs of a touring exhibition. Alternatively, co-organisation occurs which can also embody a collaborative model between several museums, but there is an identified technical producer and only one institution is financially responsible. In the final instance, an exhibition is solely produced by a single institution and is subsequently sold or rented (exported) to other institutions (Amsellem, 2013).

Touring exhibitions are often centred around iconic objects, with Young (1999) noting the “magical power of famous objects to mobilise huge admission-paying audiences to special exhibitions, oils the wheels of a global roadshow” (p. 12). When touring exhibitions go to another site, they have a concentration effect and a distribution effect (Skinner, 2006). A concentration effect brings together a wide variety of artworks, cultural artefacts and specimens which allows the museum visitor to see a far greater number and diversity of objects in one place. The distribution effect, on the other hand, brings such a collection to multiple locations, whether that be within one country or across borders.

A useful model to understand the drivers behind touring exhibitions has been devised by Davidson and Perez-Castellanos (2019). They noted that the production of such programmes and consumption by venues around the world are influenced by a combination of three key drivers – diplomatic, mission-related and market. Whilst in certain circumstances one driver may dominate, they acknowledged that most exhibitions were underpinned by a combination of drivers. As such they concluded that international exhibitions are a means for museums to present and advance a cosmopolitan agenda. This framing draws our attention to the institutional logics underpinning touring exhibitions, and the international work of museums more widely. Moreover, it indicates that conflicting and contrasting logics may be at play within the international work of museums. With this in mind, I now describe each driver in more detail.

For many museums, touring exhibitions are driven by a market domain as they are a method to generate income or off-set costs (Davidson & Perez-Castellanos, 2019; O’Reilly & Lawrenson, 2014). To boost their appeal to other organisations and to ensure profitability, many museums attempt to
create exhibitions that have broad public appeal. This has been referred to as the “blockbuster exhibition” (Berryman, 2013; Bradburne, 2001). Whilst there is limited financial data available on the commercial success of touring exhibitions, significant claims have been made. For example, Goff (2017) asserts that loans from the Louvre to a museum in Atlanta generated $6.4 million (USD), whilst Tromp (2009) notes that the Hermitage generally charges between one to one and a half million dollars for a host venue to stage one of its touring exhibitions. These figures are in direct contrast to research conducted by the Touring Exhibitions Group (2007) who found that touring was rarely profit-making and that “even large organisations with dedicated touring teams at best break even” (p. 9).

International exhibitions can also be driven by a museum’s mission. Here museums are able to share their collections more widely and foster cross-cultural dialogue and discussion (Cai, 2013). As such they become a vehicle to enhance the global reputation of an organisation, reach new audiences, share expertise, and strengthen international relationships. Several studies show the benefit of presenting a touring exhibition for audience increases on the part of host institutions (Macdonald, 2006; Skinner, 2006). For example, O’Reilly and Lawrenson’s (2014) examination of *The First Emperor: China’s Entombed Warriors* hosted at The Art Gallery of New South Wales in Australia found that it fostered meaningful connections with previously non-visiting local Asian communities. This potential change in perception from simply being a donator or a recipient of an exhibition to one that generates cross-cultural dialogues has been little studied. Questions such as “Do touring exhibitions enrich the brand and audience development of lending institutions?” still need to be explored.

There is evidence to suggest that early touring exhibitions have their roots in diplomatic intentions. For Wallis (1994) they have a key role in the “promotion of tourism, the populist expansion of the role of the museum, and the development of international business and political connections” (p. 264). In addition, Wallis also suggests that such exhibitions are also “politically safe” vehicles for nation building as they have “presented easily digestible vignettes of a foreign nation’s culture” (p. 267).

Some studies have highlighted the challenges and limitations of touring exhibitions. For example Barker (1999) argues that the costs and internal resources associated with staging such programmes

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4 Founded in 1985, the Touring Exhibitions Group is a non-profit professional development organisation devoted to supporting the exchange of exhibitions to extend public knowledge and enjoyment of historical and contemporary culture. They work across the UK and internationally with organisations of all sizes and types.
limits those who can take them. Indeed, Lambert and Henderson’s (2011) study on the carbon footprint of museum loans reminds us of the ecological footprint these can have particularly when travelling the globe. As many museums begin to declare a planetary emergency and make changes to their daily working practices to reduce the impact they have (Kennedy, 2019; NHM 2020b), I posit this could have a significant impact on the future of the touring exhibition market. Despite these challenges Amsellem (2013) argues that touring exhibitions have a “label effect” (p. 48). This means that through creating exhibitions that travel the globe, museums are seen by their peers as a major cultural institution. For Amsellem, this perception prompts other institutions to consider internationalisation.

Object loans are another method in which museums engage with one another. Here an institution sends certain objects to another for a predetermined period. These objects can be used in permanent display, or as part of a temporary exhibition that the host organisation is staging. The loaning of objects can have a positive contribution to global relations as they can foster relations and dialogue that political institutions may not be able to do. For example, Hoogwaerts’ (2016) exploration into the cultural exchanges of objects between various countries found that these activities made positive contributions to diplomatic relations. Her study explored the loan of objects from The National Museum of Iran to the BM at a time when political relations were fraught between the two countries: and the loan of Picasso’s (1943) *Buste de Femme* painting from the Van Abbermuseum in the Netherlands to the International Academy of Art in Palestine. According to Hoogwaerts, the former example helped to “keep doors open for political negotiations” (p. 313) whilst the latter was used by Palestine to cultivate a positive view of the country on the international stage. Although the initial benefits are clear, the causality and long-term impacts of such activity remain unexamined.

Once again, a key tension here is the notion of ownership. For example, UK national museums are widely recognised as holding some of the most unique and important objects and collections in the world. Although they have a significant reputation for the sharing of such collections (DCMS, 2019) this activity is an interesting reminder of power and control. For example, the mere notion of lending “represents a natural response to what can be described as a constrained marketplace” (NMDC, 2002, p. 29). With a limited number of cultural and scientific objects in society, *loaning* and *borrowing* asserts a power dynamic of who owns these objects and who might be able to have them, albeit temporarily. Interestingly for UK government, touring exhibitions and object loans provide an avenue for British institutions to build and maintain their reputation as world-leading museums,
generate income and support cultural diplomacy (DCMS, 2019). Cai (2013) suggests that these forms of cross-cultural collaboration essentially reassert historical power dynamics resulting in a 21st century form of cultural imperialism.

3.1.3 Skills sharing and capacity building

Museums also work globally through skills sharing and capacity building. This is a long-standing, well established practice of museums and can happen both informally and formally (Nevins, 2019; Reynolds, 2012; Robinson, 2019). Skills sharing and capacity building can be activated by leveraging the knowledge, skills and expertise held by staff within an institution and manifests itself in peer-to-peer sharing, conferences, training schemes and staff exchanges to other institutions. For example, organisations such as the BM and Tate both run international training programmes supporting museum practice globally. Delivered in their respective institutions, they are an opportunity to educate museum professionals in a variety of topics from collections care to exhibition development.

Sector bodies such as Ecsite, NAMES and AAM also run training and development programmes for museum practitioners. Whilst they are developed centrally, they are often delivered using practitioners who work in museums and science centres around the world. For example, the annual NAMES Euro-Mediterranean and Middle East Summer School sees practitioners drawn from across European museums working with professionals in the Middle East to help develop their knowledge and understating of contemporary science communication (NAMES, 2015).

3.1.4 Consulting

Museums are also engaging more and more in consulting activities: helping governments, local authorities, and corporations develop new museums; or working with peer institutions to redevelop existing offers. Examples of this include the Exploratorium in San Francisco which established the Exploratorium Global Collaborations in 2012 as an R&D wing to help other museums further their own goals, reach, and impact. Recent projects include designing two new galleries for The Scientific Center of Kuwait; and create a new learning lab for Serviço Social da Indústria in Brazil (Exploratorium, n.d.). Moreover, the SMG consulted on the redevelopment of the Queensland

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5 Ecsite is the European network of science centres and museums. Ecsite gathers more than 350 organisations committed to inspiring people with science and technology and enabling dialogue between science and society.

6 NAMES is the North Africa and Middle East Science centre network. It aims to popularise science throughout the region by enhancing the public understanding and involvement in science and scientific culture.

7 AAM is the American Alliance of Museums. It is the only organisation representing the entire museum field, from art and history museums to science centres and zoos.
Museum’s interactive science gallery. Here they used their own Wonderlab\(^8\) galleries as a template to provide content and learning resources for the new space (SMG, n.d.).

The motivation for much of this activity seems to be purely commercial, and for some museum workers it feels at odds with their institution’s mission and vision. For example, a staffer at the Exploratorium commented that the science centre is "moving from visionary, internally developed work to work-for-hire for other museums around the world" (Chang, 2013, para. 5). For them this aspiration was not about building partnerships or investing in cross-cultural collaborations, it was purely about generating much needed income and offsetting the losses from diminishing ticket sales at home.

More recently museums seem to be striking wide-reaching consultancy deals that see them providing advice and guidance alongside long term loans and multi-year exhibition programmes. This model is gaining traction with many national museums in the UK. For example, Tate have partnered with Shanghai Lujiazui Group to create the Pudong Museum of Art in China. Here the UK based organisation will provide training and expertise in a number of fields, an inaugural exhibition followed by an additional two - all drawn from its collection (Tate, 2019). Meanwhile, the BM have partnered with Abu Dhabi’s Zayed National Museum to train Emirati staff, advise on the development and operation of the museum and provide around 500 object loans (Harris, 2019). It has been suggested that these wide reaching partnerships are primarily happening with organisations in the Global South as they do not have the museological workforce to support such initiatives (Grincheva, 2020b; NMDC, 2012). Moreover, the cache attached to working with well-known museums are seen as a driving force behind such partnerships (Ajana, 2015; McClellan, 2012; Wainwright, 2017). Either way, these developments provide an opportunity for museums to once again generate income and build their brands (McAuley, 2017).

3.1.5 Global franchising

Grincheva (2020) defines museum franchising as “a hybrid form of museum management... [as it combines] non-profit organisational management and a new behaviour that sees museums as more autonomous actors in the creative economy” (p. 2). Global franchising has also been referred to as creating satellite branches. For Goff (2017) this is a new form of transnational activity whereby “actors, interactions and flows that cross conventional borders, go beyond established patterns, and

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\(^8\) Wonderlab is the Science Museum in London’s flagship interactive gallery. Spread across seven different zones it is an opportunity for younger audiences to interact with real scientific phenomena. The Wonderlab concept has now been replicated across other SMG sites.
can be seen as an alternative to state-centric perspectives” (Jönsson, 2010, p. 40). Examples of such activity include the Guggenheim with satellites in Venice, Bilbao, and Berlin; the Louvre with its newly opened branch in Abu Dhabi; the V&A with a gallery in Shenzhen; the Pompidou with additional sites in Shanghai and Malaga; and the Hermitage with a branch in Amsterdam. There are also many more in development, including further Guggenheims in Helsinki, Guadalajara and Abu Dhabi and the Pompidou with potential sites in Brussels and New Jersey. It seems there is a proliferation of museum franchising – a trend that I suspect will only grow over time.

Creating satellites is unlike other forms of international activity as it has different motivations and involves different stakeholders. For example, touring exhibitions are normally a museum-to-museum activity; whereas international satellite branches tend to implicate and involve governments. For Goff (2017) “satellite branches can exercise distinct forms of political, cultural, and commercial power” (para. 1). This expanding role is further addressed below.

One project that exemplifies many of the issues and tensions with this type of activity is the latest museum franchise – the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Opened in 2017, it is the most recent in a series of well publicised cultural and educational projects earmarked to transform the Emirati capital (Ouroussoff, 2010). The collaboration is between the iconic French art institution and the Abu Dhabi government and involves Abu Dhabi temporarily leasing the Louvre brand for 25 years at a cost of USD1.3 billion (Zaretsky, 2017). The deal includes the more expected benefits from naming rights, exhibitions, and access to staff knowledge and expertise. But it also includes access to collections from other French state museums including Musée d’Orsay, the Centre Pompidou, and the Bibliothèque Nationale. Intangible benefits also accrue including reputation, cache and artistic kudos which come hand in hand with the Louvre name. The relationship ensures that the new museum can quickly become established, whilst the 25-year contract provides enough time for the museum to develop its own collection, brand and eventually name.

For Ajana (2015) the value of this contract is a clear sign as to the power and reach of mega-museum brands, as well as how they are beginning to reap financial reward from their reputation. Vivant, (2011) has argued that for some new cities “it is easier to pay for a brand than to create a new museum and build-up its legitimacy and reputation from the ground up” (p. 112).

The Louvre-Abu Dhabi collaboration has garnered much attention with many debating the motivations behind the Louvre pursuing such a project. For some, this has been interpreted as an
escalation of the Louvre’s global aspirations (Grincheva, 2020a; Hunt, 2017); whilst others have been more prosaic, recognising the need for a cash strapped institution to generate more income, especially in light of falling visitor numbers, expensive restoration projects and diminishing funding from the state (Lorch, 2015; Zaretsky, 2017). Within France, the project has also received much criticism. McAuley (2017) declared that French museum professionals decried the decision to use the Louvre’s name and collection for the project, as it was seen as a “beloved museum selling out to the highest bidder” (para. 3).

International collaborations such as this are much more than just the exchange of objects and expertise. In many ways they are the coming together of two countries, two cultures or two ways of being. There is a sense that the UAE does not share a similar value system as the French, which in turn could tarnish the brand and ethos of the Louvre (Cashen, 2017). For example, the regime’s track record around limiting press freedom has caused concern (Rea, 2017), whilst the construction phase has come under fire for its treatment of migrant workers as evidence emerged of their wages being withheld, passports being confiscated and their substandard living conditions. Staff who had protested against low pay were also found to be deported for speaking out (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Whilst the Louvre Abu Dhabi aspires to be a beacon of humanity (Guéraiche, 2018), such grim human rights violations starkly call this into question. They also pose a significant challenge to the Louvre and its vaunted brand. Whilst one can only assume a contract of this magnitude had various clauses in place to ensure the safety of its brand and reputation, these issues highlight the perils of global outposts and working with regimes with different value systems than your own.

Yet others have also suggested the project is tantamount to cultural imperialism, albeit in a new guise (McClellan, 2008). A key criticism has been around the curatorial practises and acquisitions strategy for the organisation which has been seen to prioritise Western artists (McAuley, 2017). For local Emirati there is a sense that the Louvre Abu Dhabi is importing culture and placing an emphasis on Western art rather than those from the region. This has led to accusations that the museum is prioritising tourists over locals (Ajana, 2015; Cashen, 2017). For some this project is a reproduction of Western ideology and thinking with McClellan (2012) noting, “It is a testament to how universal Western values have become, to how difficult it is to ‘un-think’ Western taxonomies, that the Louvre is essentially reproducing itself in the Persian Gulf whilst claiming to do something new and different” (p. 284).
As noted by Goff (2017) above, the motivations of such projects can also veer into the political. For the French government the partnership was an opportunity to strengthen its soft power aspirations, foreign policy and geopolitical presence in the region (Chrisafis, 2017). For McAuley (2017) the new museum was a key step in a broader strategic expansion into the Middle East. Soon after the agreement was struck the French government installed several military bases in Abu Dhabi, the first of their kind since the mid 1960’s. This has led to critics of the project arguing that such agreements are exploiting France’s cultural assets for economic and political gain (Cashen, 2017) with French art historian Didier Rykner, noting "The objective was never aesthetic — it was political," (in McAuley, 2017, para. 9).

One researcher that provides a detailed and layered perspective is Wakefield (2021). Her research explored both franchised and autochthonous9 heritage initiatives across the UAE. Recognising heritage development as a hybrid process, she argues that the combination of such projects plays a key role in creating a transnational identity for the region. Moreover, she argues that projects such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi, allows the French institution to reframe its relationship with the past. By engaging in such an initiative, they are able to shift the discourse from an imperialist and colonial past – to a more inclusive and universal present.

3.1.6 Global corporatisation

Global corporatisation (Grincheva, 2020b) is when museums engage with large corporations to extend their brand and reach, whether at home or abroad. This activity further emphasises the commercialisation of museum practices and spans creative money-making ventures that enable a museum to become financially sustainable. Grincheva (2020b) further frames corporatisation as “partnerships with transnational corporations that usually seek to draw on a museum brand to win new markets” (p. 2).

Global corporatisation practices primarily stem from a core group of mega museums – old, well-known organisations that house significant collections (Grincheva, 2020b). Such practices are largely occurring in Asian markets, primarily China. For example, a recent study found that the BM had 34 licensing deals with Chinese companies racking up annual sales worth approximately £20m. These include a deal with the Sunmei Group10 to lend its name to a hotel chain in the city of Qingdao; and a

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9 Here the author uses the term ‘autochthonous’ as a way of describing the development of cultural heritage in the place where it occurs.

10 The Sunmei Group is one of the largest hospitality chains in China integrating hotels, home furnishings, retail, catering, and entertainment. The group owns over 5,000 hotels with plans to open another 30000 in 10 years.
branding collaboration with Hello Kitty for an Egyptian themed pop-up store currently touring Chinese shopping malls (Milmo, 2021). New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art has similar licensing deals resulting in a range of products that leverage the museum’s collections. For example, in collaboration with beauty brand Max Factor they created an eyeshadow palette echoing Mondrian’s (1921) seminal work Composition; whilst a partnership with tea brand Twinings allowed Van Gogh portraits to be placed onto packaging (Whiddington, 2021).

3.2 International activity as a form of cultural diplomacy and soft power

In the next section, I explore how the international activity of museums has been framed as a form of cultural diplomacy and soft power. Here I explore the definitions of such terms and briefly outline emerging critical discourse around these areas. Whilst this is a developing area of research and associated with this study, I have chosen not to undertake detailed analysis in order to maintain the focus on institutional logics.

Firstly, several scholars have argued that at times the international activity of museums can be seen as a form of cultural diplomacy (Cai, 2013; Grincheva, 2013; Hoogwaerts, 2012, 2016; Nisbett, 2013, 2016). In such instances, international activities are providing the basis for a different type of museum work and impact. Cultural diplomacy has been defined as:

A course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond; Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society. (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, 2019., para. 4).

Grincheva (2018) acknowledges that museums have been active on the international stage in terms of cultural diplomacy for some time. This is evidenced especially around the loaning of objects for exhibitions (e.g., in 2014 the BM loaned one of the Parthenon Sculptures to St Petersburg’s Hermitage Museum). In addition, Grincheva (2000) notes that museums can operate within the diplomatic space as they have expertise, credibility and resources. But as already discussed, cultural diplomacy can be controversial, especially when it reveals itself as a new form of cultural imperialism – once again promoting an unequal power dynamic between Western and post-colonial nations (Cai, 2013; Nisbett & Doeser, 2017; Wakefield, 2021). As museums work more and more
transnationally, they are able to engage in quasi forms of political activity: sending messages, building relationships and engendering trust between nations that trade wars and military forces are not able to do (Hoogwaerts, 2016).

One area where museum practice and cultural diplomacy are heavily intertwined is in China. Kong’s (2021) research into Chinese museums and their international exhibitions presents a view where such exhibitions were, and still very much are, developed and delivered through a clear governmental agenda to shape global perceptions. Using the UK as a case study, the author explores how the Chinese government deployed the terracotta warriors of the Qin First Emperor of China to multiple British venues as means of contemporary image building. Interestingly, Kong argues that whilst this demonstrates the pivotal role the Chinese government plays in delivering initiatives, it is a role that is more bureaucratic and facilitative, than propagandistic.

The use of the phrase cultural diplomacy as a way to frame the international work of museums is becoming less popular. Nisbett (2016) notes that whilst cultural diplomacy was the go-to-phase to describe such cultural interventions for many years, there is a sense this term is losing popularity politically within governmental circles as they begin to describe such activities as symbols and generators of soft power.

Taken together, global activities such as touring exhibitions, international training programmes, cultural heritage programmes and museum franchising have resulted in practitioners, politicians, and academics recognising that the role of museum has significantly widened and changed. No longer is activity stuck within the four walls of a building; the museum is now a “transnational actor” (Goff, 2017, para. 2) with an escalating “diplomatic function” (Hunt, 2017, para. 11). This has led to several noting that museums are a key contributor to a nation’s soft power and influence overseas (Blond et al., 2017; DCMS, 2017; Holden & Tryhorn, 2013; Hunt, 2017, 2018; Lord & Blankenberg, 2015; Mendoza, 2017; Nisbett, 2015). Molho (2016) has claimed that soft power has been used as “an attractive slogan to promote the enthusiastic discourse on how museums can change the world” (p. 302), whilst Hoogwaerts (2016) suggests that museums’ role in the development of soft power “should not be underplayed” (p. 320).

Coined by American Joseph Nye in the 1990s, soft power refers to the use of positive attraction and persuasion to achieve foreign policy objectives. In the words of Nye (2002), soft power is “the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants” (p. 4). The notion – conceived
as the antithesis to hard power whereby countries use more traditional tools of dominance such as the military, weapons, and sanctions to coerce others into submission – was seen as a more sophisticated, and less deadly, mode of achieving foreign policy objectives. As noted by Nye (2011), when soft power is possible, policy makers “…can save on carrots and sticks” (p. 16).

Nye’s conceptualisation grew from his experiences during the Cold War. With Nye having held various US government political appointments during this period – from Deputy to the Undersecretary of State for Security Assistance, Science, and Technology (1977-1979), to Chairman of the National Intelligence Council (1993-1994) – one must question the political motivations behind its conception. Indeed, Nisbett (2016) argues that the term was developed in response to claims that the United States had weakened its global position during the Cold War. With many countries seeing their traditional leadership (via hard power) diminishing, soft power quickly became a new way to counter such perceptions and remain on top. Nye (2004) outlined three sources of soft power – foreign policy, political values and culture. Furthermore, he noted that art, literature, design and fashion are key assets in generating soft power. For Nye, culture is a fundamental pillar in exerting international influence and allowing a country to reign once again supreme through art, popular culture and renewed foreign policy.

In a recent report by King’s College London, exploring soft power and cultural diplomacy at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Nisbett and Doeser (2017) note that there seems to be little consensus between the use of both terms. They state: “On the whole, Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy are poorly understood, often confused, thought to be good things, lack empirical justification and are a replication of geopolitical power” (2017, p. 32). McPherson et al. (2017) agree, noting that soft power is still very much a contested term and that it is often discussed interchangeably as both an initiative into a cultural process, or as an outcome of a cultural intervention.

In response, new ways of thinking about these terms are beginning to emerge. Nisbett and Doeser (2017) offered “standing out” and “reaching out” (p. 13) as a way of differentiating soft power and cultural diplomacy respectively. For them, standing out relates to countries wanting to set themselves apart from others. This is often displayed through acts of power, asserting leadership and status, competing for business, promoting national interest, or influencing decision-making. In contrast, reaching out is about unity with others, finding common ground, developing better relationships, creating a sense of community, and developing cultural awareness. Further, it has
been argued that it is best to see these concepts on a continuum in order to give flexibility to their meaning and use (Ang et al., 2015).

In addition, academics have criticised Nye for the lack of detail when explaining the term, with many noting there is no coherent theoretical framework to back up his assertions. Nisbett (2016) puts it plainly, stating “it fails to offer any serious scholarly rigour or analytic depth” (p. 3). This also raises questions around how to understand and evidence impact. McPherson, Mcgillivray, Mamattah, Cox, and Norrman (2017) outlined several challenges when examining soft power. These include: the absence of clear objectives for such activities; complexities around measuring intangible concepts such as image, trust, relationship building and influence; the challenges of examining the long-term nature of evidencing impacts; and the issue of instrumentalism and causality. Consequently, they note the challenges of identifying the “object of study” (p. 15), developing meaningful indicators of success, and agreeing sector-wide routes to evaluation. With this in mind, it’s no surprise that Deborah Bull declared “the holy grail of a credible measurement framework remains elusive...” (cited by Nisbett & Doeser, 2017, p. 3).

Despite the critiques around the term, it is becoming a popular phrase adopted by various governments and practitioners to encapsulate and measure efforts to influence others via global activity (Blatchford et al., 2018; Culligan et al., 2014; Guildford, 2014; McClory, 2018). Moreover, some academics are beginning to modify its meaning to give it more relevance to museums. For example, Grincheva's (2018) defines soft power as “a [museums] ability to mobilize and attract large audiences, generate significant economic activity, and develop stronger relationships with a wide range of constituency at home and abroad” (p. 2). Blankenberg and Lord (2015) move away from a state centered view, depoliticising the notion by linking it to the role museums play in cities and communities. Whilst these definitions differ greatly from one another, what does connect them with Nye’s (2004) view is the notion of influence. Thus, I have chosen to use the term soft power in this thesis.

According to Hill and Beadle (2014) soft power relies on two key factors. Firstly, countries must be able to develop an image of themselves that the rest of the world wants to follow. In order to generate soft power, governments have attempted to frame agendas, build networks, communicate narratives, establish international rules and rely on the resources that make their country appealing to the world (McClory, 2019). Secondly, that image must be communicated in a way that others know about it. Communication thus becomes an important part of opinion forming: a task
previously controlled more easily by governments via formal diplomacy, marketing campaigns and large-scale global events (e.g., Olympics); but now more complicated through the democratisation of the internet and the rise of social media. Significantly, opinion forming has shifted from largely being in the control of a central government to the contemporary situation of being in the hands of public citizens. Beloff (1965) reminds us that we all play a part in generating soft power, noting “whether they like it or not, the universities, the orchestras, the novelists, the sportsmen and women, the archaeologists…. are all part of the projection of Britain abroad” (as cited in Hill & Beadle, 2014, p. 48).

Throughout this chapter I have explored the international work of museums, and as such it provides important context for my upcoming findings and discussion. It seems that not only are museums engaging in various international activities around the world; but this work is becoming more and more complex as it becomes entangled with politics, perception, and notions of prestige. Whilst the Louvre Abu Dhabi provides a powerful example of what museums can achieve globally, it also highlights the challenges and pitfalls of such work. In the forthcoming chapter, I turn away from the French and begin to explore the UK context in which this study is situated.
Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter examines the methodological framework adopted for this study. I begin by acknowledging positionality, noting the importance this plays within the research process. I then revisit the research questions that drive this investigation, as well as the research framework underpinning it. Next, I discuss the participants for this study, outlining the sampling strategy and recruitment methods adopted. Finally, I describe the data collection methods and data analysis strategies that I employed, before outlining the various validation measures taken to embed methodological rigour into this investigation.

Throughout this chapter I discuss ethical issues – particularly through the notion of positionality. Positionality is fundamental to research and has been defined as the stance or position of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study (Fleming, 2018; Merriam et al., 2001). Positionality can affect every aspect of the research project from developing questions, gathering data to the presentation of findings (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). There is much debate exploring the boundaries of positionality. For example, Hall (1990) acknowledged the need to assert a fixed position in order to catalyse findings. The researcher noted “There’s no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all” (p. 18). This however is in contrast to Chavez (2008), who argued the position of the researcher is not static; instead, it can be fluid. Chavez’ view is echoed by Merriam et al. (2001) who argued that the binary approach of insider/outsider is unrealistic as “in the real world of data collection, there is a good bit of slippage and fluidity between these two states” (p. 405).

For this study I hold the dual position of insider/outsider. Insider research has been defined as the study of one’s own social group, society or organisation (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Fleming, 2018; Naples, 2003) or where the researcher shares the same cultural, biological or occupational characteristics as the researched (Loxley & Seery, 2008). For this study, it is particularly pertinent as I straddle both considerations. Not only am I examining my own workplace, but the other participants in the study are my peer group. As such I am familiar with the subject matter being discussed and the activity that they deliver around the world.

In order to recognise this duality, throughout this chapter I engage in the process of intersectional reflexivity. Jones (2010) defined this as “acknowledging one’s intersecting identities, both marginalized and privileged, and then employing self-reflexivity, which moves one beyond self-
reflection to the often uncomfortable level of self-implication” (p. 122). As such, I regularly examine how the multiple identities I hold throughout this process, from colleague to researcher, and from insider to outsider – as well as the status they each hold – in shaping, influencing and interpreting my data. Whilst this has resulted in a chapter which at times feels as if it has multiple personalities, I am guided by Van den Hoonaard (2002) who writes “If we are to take self-reflexivity seriously, we must recognise that we are always producing two works - a research biography and an autobiography” (p. 123). Being an insider/outsider not only enables a rich insight into the research process but also brings with it many ethical considerations. To aid my examination, I adopt Brinkmann and Kvale’s (2015) approach and highlight ethical considerations at every step of the research process, whilst also leaning into Greene’s (2014) insights on the issues and challenges of conducting insider research

4.1 Research questions

As previously discussed, this study is theoretically grounded in sociological institutionalism. With a focus on the role of organisations, sociological institutionalism provides a lens on how individuals operate both within an institution and how this impacts the field in which it belongs (Hall & Taylor, 1996). For the purposes of this study, I examine individuals who work within cultural organisations such as an art gallery, museum, or science centre – which are in turn embedded in the wider field of museology. A core concept within sociological institutionalism is institutional logic. I use this concept to examine the ways in which international work, as a new field-wide initiative, is (or is not) defined and delivered.

This project also addresses an imbalance often seen within museum research. As Morse et al. (2018) have noted, there is a tendency for researchers to focus their examinations on the front stage of the museum. That is, the focus is placed on exhibitions, marketing and learning programmes – the public facing, and arguably more polished spheres of the organisation. Morse and colleagues argue that more attention needs to be placed on the “more mundane museum spaces and their associated practices, from back offices and corridors to the cleaning cupboards, meeting rooms and the other routine domains of bureaucracy” (p. 114). Moreover, they remind us that museums are “peopled organisations” (p. 116). This approach centres the role of individuals within these institutions and platforms the work they do, rather than highlighting the role of objects and storytelling – concepts which are well-explored elsewhere within the literature.
With these factors in mind, this study attempts to shine a light on the work that happens within the realms of the museum office, focusing on the people who generate international strategy and work. It is therefore concerned with conceptualisations of, and motivations for, museums’ international work, and the experiences of key staff in delivering such programmes. As introduced in Chapter 1, the research questions driving this empirical study are:

1) Are there field-wide norms around the international work of museums?
2) Is it possible to identify particular patterns or themes that run through the international work conducted by the museum sector?
3) Which institutional logics can be identified as contributing to the current direction of international work of museums?

4.2 Research framework

To explore the questions above and support my theoretical lens, I have adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is the study of lived, human experience. Put plainly, it describes “the common meaning of several individuals and their lived experiences of a concept or phenomena” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Adopting this approach therefore allows me to delve into the perspectives, thoughts and opinions of museum professionals and develop an understanding of their experiences in working internationally both within their own institution and the wider museological field. As such, the phenomena being examined are those of international working. Moreover, the aim of phenomenology is to develop an “essence” of what has been experienced by all. Moustakas (1994) outlined that this should include what participants have experienced as well as how they have experienced it.

A phenomenological approach marries well with the theoretical frame of institutional logics. Here many scholars agree that one of the most effective ways to see and understand logics in action is through the individuals who carry them out (Friedland & Alford, 1999; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, 2008). For example, Skelcher and Smith (2015) advocate for the examination of “texts and expressions of individual identity generated by actors” (p. 439) to uncover logics at play. When exploring empirical studies around institutional logics some have adopted a phenomenological approach to better examine the personal experiences of individuals. This counters criticisms outlined earlier whereby many studies only used archival material to reveal changing logics over time (Zilber, 2013). For example, Lee et al’s (2021) research project adopted a similar theoretical framework to understand the motivations and behaviours of Kazakhstani universities when engaging with China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. In their study, interviews with organisational actors played a key role in revealing a strong utilitarian logic behind their actions, found to be at odds with the cultural
A key consideration throughout this experience was my ability to “bracket out” my personal experiences. Bracketing has been defined as a process whereby the researcher sets aside their experiences, assumptions, understanding, beliefs and biases of a phenomena (Fischer, 2008). For some this process is a fundamental part of a phenomenological study as it allows the participants’ understanding of the world to come to the fore (Gray, 2004); for others bracketing is paramount in mitigating the impact personal preconceptions have on the research process. Tufford and Newman (2010) note that bracketing plays a key role in cementing rigour into phenomenological research projects. As I work in the field of international partnerships within the museum sector and work with the participants who were interviewed for this study, I was very aware that I have my own pre-conceived notions of why museums engage in such activity. Moreover, I was incredibly mindful that assumptions and emergent findings should not be based on my own prior knowledge and experiences, but rather built on data collected from participants. To navigate what seemed to be a complicated process, I drew from Psathas (1973) who stated:

...[bracketing] does not involve denying the existence of the world or even doubting it.... Bracketing changes my attitude towards the world, allowing me to see with a clearer vision. I set aside my preconceptions and presuppositions, what I already “know” about the social world, in order to discover it with clarity and vision. (p. 14-15)

As such, to “bracket out” my own ideas, I began by keeping a journal where I wrote down my own thoughts and opinions around international work, as well as my personal reflections around the research process. I adopted the systematic bracketing framework by Tufford and Newman (2010) and started this process at the beginning of the research. This enabled me to keep in check my pre-conceptions during project conceptualisation, the development of research questions, data collection, data analysis and writing. The process seemed odd at first: it conflicted with my notion of what a “real” academic was supposed to feel like as the first few entries felt overly personal and somewhat forced. However, over time, these concerns disappeared, and my reflections become more focused. The process also provided a checkpoint throughout the analysis phase as I was able to compare my thoughts with those emerging from participants.
4.3 Participants

4.3.1 Sampling

Due to my knowledge of the field, I adopted a purposive sampling strategy. Purposive sampling is where individuals are deliberately chosen from the population as they have the experience or knowledge required to fulfil the logic of the research being conducted (Punch, 2005). As such, I selected five museum professionals who occupied senior leadership or international roles within major cultural institutions across London. Moreover, these museums were chosen due to the large volume, scope, and breadth of the international activities that they conduct. By focusing on a small sample, I am aiming to generate information-rich case studies which will result in new and layered understanding of international work.

4.3.2 Recruitment

In adopting a purposive sampling strategy and interviewing participants that I knew, much thought was placed into how I would recruit them for this study. Although I had existing and positive relationships with key colleagues from the identified institutions, I was cognisant that our relationships sat on a continuum spanning “peers” to “competitors” especially when it comes to winning international commercial work. Moreover, I also planned to interview my line manager with whom I had worked for several years. Therefore, a key challenge was to balance the personal and professional position I had with most of the interviewees with the new role of researcher that I was adopting for this project.

For this project I was aware that my role as insider/outsider would shift throughout the process. At times I would be examining peers from the wider field of international working; at others, I would be collecting data from a close colleague – my line manager. Moreover, whilst Aguiler (1981) acknowledged that insider research can be more natural – as the researcher and the participants know one another and the context in which they work – for me, this relationship felt very unnatural. At the time, it caused personal internal conflict as I was worried that the familiarity I had with most participants might detract from being seen as an academic researcher. Furthermore, I was aware that my personal relationships could affect the decision to participate in the study.

I began the recruitment process by sending individuals an introductory email from my personal account outlining the purpose of the study and what their participation would involve. I kept this email relatively short and focused. Throughout this process I was aware of the importance of impression management (Greene, 2014). That is, in creating and communicating information in
order to control one's own image as perceived by others (Kim, 2008) – I wanted to craft and present a persona that was somewhat different to how they knew me. As such, as each participant responded, I immediately followed up with a detailed communication about the project which included participant information and consent forms (see Appendix I and II respectively). At this point I made it clear that I would be conducting this work as a researcher, not as a peer or colleague. The recruitment process took a few months as one individual proved harder to contact than others. Although I persisted and sent various communications, it became increasingly clear that they were not able to commit to the project. As a result, the number of organisations involved in the study was reduced from five to four.

Throughout this process I wanted to ensure participants gave informed consent, so in addition to participant information and consent forms I also held individual meetings to outline the research project and talk through ethical considerations. In these meetings I stressed that due to targeting large national museums in London institutional anonymity would not be possible. As I wanted to understand the lived experiences of participants, which would include providing clear examples of international practice, I felt that it would be impossible to anonymise the very focused and specific work of each of these museums. I did however note that individual anonymity for participants would be possible and provided the options to be fully identified or to remain anonymous. Consequently, every participant in the study agreed to be fully identified.

Once individuals had agreed to participate, I then scheduled interviews. Although I was proactive in arranging these, a key challenge that hindered my ability to conduct them in a timely fashion was that each participant, including myself, had roles that involved significant travel. This not only made it hard to align diaries, but on several occasions, appointments had to be moved as last-minute work travel scuppered plans.

An overview of participants can be seen in Table 2 overleaf. For a general overview of UK national museums as well as an introduction to each institution in this study, see Chapter Five.
4.4 Data collection

4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

The data collection method adopted for this research project was semi-structured interviews. This approach enabled me to ask a similar set of questions to each participant but provided the freedom and flexibility to react and respond to individual answers. This often resulted in me changing the order and structure of questions in each interview, as well as asking follow-up questions to probe deeper into what was being said. Arksey and Knight (1999) recognise that semi-structured interviewing is “a powerful way of helping people to make explicit things that have hitherto been implicit – to articulate their tacit perceptions, feelings and understandings” (p. 32). Furthermore, Merriam et al., (2001), note that this interviewing technique is a useful approach, particularly when conducting insider research, as it enables the ability to ask meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues.

4.4.2 Aide memoire development

To guide interviews, I created an aide memoire. I began by writing a disclaimer – outlining that whilst I knew participants I wanted them to “pretend” they were talking to me for the first time. Chavez (2008) promotes this approach to avoid implied knowledge and deferred responses such as

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**Table 2: Overview of participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s name</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Broughton</td>
<td>Head of International Engagement</td>
<td>Natural History Museum (NHM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Reeve</td>
<td>COO and Deputy Director</td>
<td>Victoria and Albert Museum (V&amp;A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadja Race</td>
<td>Director of International Engagement</td>
<td>The British Museum (BM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Jones</td>
<td>Director of Strategy and International</td>
<td>Science Museum Group (SMG)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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11 I have changed this participant’s name from Jim Broughton (by which he is professionally known) to James Broughton. Firstly, James is his legal name, and secondly it makes for easier reading as I often compare his thoughts and experiences with another participant, Tim Reeve.
“you know what I mean”. Next, I noted down a series of questions that would allow me to explore participants’ work experience and background. I then took the research purpose and broke this down into several broad questions exploring participants’ experiences of international working (see Appendix III). Broad questions were used so that “the participants can construct the meaning of a situation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25).

Once the aide memoire was completed, I piloted it with a colleague who works in an international role at a European museum and moreover had previously completed a doctorate so understood the interviewing skills required to generate appropriate data. Whilst it felt odd to ask my colleague questions and treat them like a make-believe participant, the process did result in some very specific and honest feedback as to what worked and what didn’t work. For example, she felt that I spent too much time asking personal questions and not enough time “getting to the root of what was needed”. She stressed that I was being too polite, that I knew these people and they only had dedicated an hour to the process. Through the conversation it became clear that the questions were not fully meeting my research aims and thus I re-examined and refined my approach.

To generate robust and reliable data from my interviews I adopted strategies outlined by Thomsen and Brinkmann (2009). This included sharing the aide memoire with the participants beforehand to provide an outline of what would be discussed, whilst also giving them the time to think through answers and examples. I also thought through various prompts and cues to make sure I generated examples prompting participants to contextualise their personal accounts. To hone my skills in this area I explored the work of Bernard and Ryan (2010) and adopted their techniques around probing. As such I kept in mind the “tell-me-more” probe, the “echo” probe, and the “uh-huh” probe. According to Gray (2004) probing is “vital when a phenomenological approach is being taken where the objective is to explore subjective meanings that respondents ascribe to concepts or events” (p. 373).

4.4.3 Conducting the interviews

All interviews were held in private and quiet offices within each museum and were audio recorded using a dictaphone. I asked to conduct interviews in the participants’ respective institutions to further emphasise my role as researcher as opposed to a peer. Each interview was approximately one hour long. Across all the interviews I asked the same set of questions in a very similar manner, however one of the challenges in conducting the interviews was that some of the participants were more guarded than others. For example, during the interview process it felt as if certain respondents
were being reserved, often taking more time to think through their answer, selecting precise words and examples. This felt odd, as outside of my role as a researcher, we had a very casual professional relationship and often talked openly about the challenges of conducting international work. Notably, once the interview had finished and I had stopped the recording, the participant opened up and became more candid with their responses. Another challenge that I faced was the use of prompts. Whilst I had thought through various strategies, reality proved harder than the theory. For example, to generate more detail around a specific project one interviewee noted that I repeatedly asked: “So, can you tell me more?” to which they did not know how to respond. With hindsight, I see that I should have been more direct and pushed for specific, clear examples.

4.5 Data analysis

4.5.1 Transcribing

Once interviews were completed, each audio file was sent to a professional transcriber. As data was collected over a period of five months this meant that audio files were sent and returned in batches. As each transcription was returned, I checked it alongside its corresponding audio file to ensure accuracy and spent some time cleaning up data that was misinterpreted by the transcriber. Moreover, as each transcript included pauses, fillers, and small utterances, the resulting document was initially difficult to read as the flow of ideas was repeatedly broken up. Although my first inclination was to remove all of these pauses to aid my reading and comprehension of each interview, I kept them in case they highlighted uncertainty, contention or nervousness when it came to data analysis. To ensure data was always protected, I used secure web applications when working with the transcriber, and then placed each file in a password protected folder on my personal computer.

4.5.2 Analysis

To break down, code and examine transcripts, I merged phenomenological data analysis methods outlined by Moustakas (1994) with a thematic analysis approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Whilst Moustakas (1994) described a three-step process (outlined below) I was also drawn to the somewhat clearer and more flexible approach provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). For example, they advocated for six steps including data familiarity, coding the data set, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up. In the forthcoming sections I note how I merged both processes in order to analyse data.
Firstly, I began data familiarisation by reading transcripts and field notes several times. This was an important step in reconnecting with my data sets as interviews had spanned several months. Throughout this process I regularly noted down personal reflections, to “bracket out” preconceived ideas.

Next, I began to code the data set. I started this process by adopting an “old-fashioned approach” of using pen and paper, highlighters and post-it notes to record my ideas but quickly found the sheer amount of data resulted in this process quickly becoming unwieldy and chaotic. Although reading and re-reading each transcript helped to move beyond what was being said and develop some initial coding, I needed a better system to categorise relevant quotes and to capture my developing analysis. As such, all interviews were imported into NVivo, and this software became the bedrock for my analysis.

Once initial codes were developed, I then entered into a significant phase of developing themes. During this phase I initially relied heavily on the approaches described by Moustakas (1994). For example, individual interview transcriptions were re-examined, and 85 significant statements were highlighted. This helped to facilitate an understanding of how participants experienced international work. Moustakas (1994) refers to this phase of data analysis as horizontalisation. This step also helped to reduce the significant amount of data I was dealing with. Next, significant statements were grouped into 12 themes or clusters of meaning. Smith and Osborn (2003) noted that these themes are “concise phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text” (p. 68). Once these had been devised, a description was then written for each to outline what and how participants experienced. Finally, descriptions were then used to develop an overview of the essence of the phenomena studied. This focuses on depicting the common experience of all participants, to provide the reader with an understanding of “what it is like to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). Whilst this is described in a linear fashion, in reality it was an iterative process. Here the data analysis steps defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) of searching, reviewing and defining themes became useful as I was able to go back and forth throughout my data to generate and check codes.

Throughout this process the theoretical framework that guides this study was paramount. I constantly reflected upon how institutional logics seemingly underpinned activity. This not only helped to highlight existing ideas as they were already in the literature, but also bring to the fore new ways to think about the participants’ work. Managing the volume of data and keeping on top of
the clusters was not easy. This was compounded when I took time away from analysing interviews for work reasons. To mitigate these issues, I took several weeks off work to focus on data analysis and engaged in an in-depth iterative process of reviewing my data, checking codes and groupings. In the forthcoming chapter, I present five overarching field-wide norms as identified in the data and discuss the emergence and effect of three institutional logics. For more information on clusters of meaning, significant statements and descriptions see Appendix IV.

Throughout the data analysis phase I constantly considered positionality. I drew heavily on the work of Bourke (2014) who considered the notion of positionality as he examined his own practices as a White researcher investigating the experiences of non-White students in a predominantly White university. His summation that it would be “naïve … to suggest that codes and themes emerged from the sources of data absent of any other influences” (p. 4) very much resonated with my own thinking. My voice, my point of view and my positionality are fused and entangled in this project. But, I argue, this need not be a limitation. Once again, as Bourke (2014) succinctly notes “The research in which I engage is shaped by who I am, and as long as I remain reflective throughout the process, I will be shaped by it, and by those with whom I interact” (p. 7).

4.6 Validation measures and transferability

A key part of any empirical study is embedding validation measures into the research process. Moreover, as I am studying my own field, it was essential I embed validation measures into the data analysis process. According to Creswell (2013) “validation in qualitative research is an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (p. 249-250). In order to do so, I adopted three approaches.

Firstly, I clarified researcher bias by bracketing out my own personal experiences. As this study closely aligned to my own working history, clearing my own preconceptions became an important ritual when analysing data. I also drew on Greene's (2014) advice for mitigating bias, particularly when conducting insider research. Here she advocates speaking openly about the process with another researcher to “create distance and deconstruct the familiar world” (p. 9). Throughout this process I regularly spoke to a colleague, who is also undertaking their doctoral studies, about the execution of my methodological process as well as my emergent findings. Secondly, I engaged with the notion of peer review by working with my supervisors and taking on board their critical feedback. Finally, I conducted an external audit as I asked another researcher to independently code one transcript and devise significant statements and initial themes. Once completed, I compared
their findings with my own to develop a sense of interrater reliability to the study. Here I found that in certain parts of the transcript our coding was similar, whilst in others it was not. Although I was initially concerned at the variation of our findings, once we had discussed the reasons behind such difference it became clear we were using different words to describe the same thing.

Transferability is an important part of empirical research – as we ask ourselves: “Are findings transferable to other settings and contexts?” This draws our attention to two key areas – sampling, and context. Firstly, as previously noted, I have adopted a purposive sampling technique and have focused in on four very specific national museums. Spanning natural history, art and design; science; and world cultures – the organisations represent a diverse array of national museums within the UK and further afield. As such the findings have applicability to other national museums. Next, Punch (2005) highlights the importance of context, whereby “thickly described” (p. 256) cases enable readers to judge transferability to other contexts for themselves. Here I have used in-depth, rich case studies to provide as much context and detail as possible. Moreover, throughout my findings I have heralded the participants’ voice and use quotes of varying size to encapsulate key points.

Throughout this chapter I have outlined the methodological framework that support this investigation. This includes adopting a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994), whilst using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to make sense of my data. To provide more context for this study, in the following chapter I explore the notion of national museums within the UK. In addition, I provide background information on the four organisations within this study.
Chapter 5: Institutional Overview

This short chapter builds upon my methodology and provides background information to the institutions that are a part of this study. I begin by briefly outlining the birth and role of national museums in the UK. I then address some key issues that are impacting their work today. From dwindling government funding which has resulted in divergent commercial practices; through to political resistance around repatriation and decolonialisation agendas, this provides useful context for current international working. Next, I introduce the four institutions within this study. In doing so, I describe the foundation of each museum and touch on the types of collections they hold, before outlining each institution’s mission and vision. As interviews for this research project were held in 2018, it is important to note that I am sharing the institutional strategies guiding museums at this specific time. To situate my upcoming findings and discussion chapters, I also acknowledge how each museum frames their international work. Where applicable, I outline their international strategy. Where it does not exist, I draw on institutional documents to give the reader a flavour of their work.

5.1 National museums in the United Kingdom

In the UK national museums were largely formed between the mid-18th and early 20th centuries. Many early museums were founded from collections donated to the state or purchased from wealthy individuals. For example, the BM and NHM owe their origins to the physician Sir Hans Sloane who left his vast collection of cultural objects and natural history specimens to the nation. The National Gallery’s collection, meanwhile, is derived from John Julius Angerstein, a wealthy financier and philanthropist whose assemblage of Old Masters formed the cornerstone of the gallery’s collection upon his death.

Although the role of the state was limited in the initial development of some UK national museums, many were, and still are, seen as the products of nationalism formed when the country evolved through the Age of Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution and expansion of Empire (Aronsson, 2011; Aronsson & Elgenius, 2011; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Watson & Sawyer, 2011). As such, it can be argued that the establishment of UK national museums and their collections not only tells a story of the human and natural worlds, but also the story of individual wealth, empire, and economic, political, and military power (Abdullah & Khadaroo, 2021; Duthie, 2011; NMDC, 2002; Watson & Sawyer, 2011).
Today there are 14 national museums in the UK, all established by Acts of Parliament\textsuperscript{12}. This means their existence is governed by legislation and the objects they hold are of such significance that they belong to the people as a national collection in perpetuity. Whilst these national museums differ in size and purpose, DCMS (2017) recognise that they share the following seven characteristics:

1) Collections are of national importance  
2) Possess a high public profile and reputation both nationally and internationally  
3) Play an important role in shaping and reflecting the nation’s cultural identity and world heritage  
4) Follow a culture of independence fostered by their longevity and identity outside of any government function; with a Board of Trustees appointed by government  
5) Present high fixed costs incurred by managing and protecting collections of international historical and cultural significance and maintaining listed buildings  
6) Are funded by government but also successful in generating income from non-government sources; and  
7) Have specific statutory responsibilities e.g., the British Library is a legal deposit library, and the BM is responsible for the protection, assessment, and display of treasure under the Treasure Act 1996 (p. 14).

5.1.1 Current cultural policy debates

Part-funded by the DCMS, national museums are categorised as Arm’s Length Bodies (ALBs), meaning they can pursue their own agendas with minimal interference from government. However, recent activity suggests this independence is under threat. For example, some museums are currently exploring their colonial roots with some re-contextualising historical statues and objects to ensure multiple perspectives are told for their audiences (Davis, 2019). For the BM, this has resulted in a statue of their founder Sir Hans Sloane being moved from its prominent location in the Enlightenment Gallery, to a case that addresses his slave trading past and explains how his collection was built on imperialism (Bakare, 2020). In response, then UK Secretary of State for DCMS Oliver Dowden (2020) outlined the government’s position on contested heritage, stating: “The Government does not support the removal of statues or other similar objects” (para. 3). He further added that museums must notify government of any activity in this area, and that

\textsuperscript{12} National museums in the UK include the British Museum, Imperial War Museum, National Gallery, National Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool, Science Museum Group, National Portrait Gallery, National Army Museum, Natural History Museum, Royal Armouries, Sir John Sloane’s Museum, Tate Group, Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Wallace Collection.
...issues of contested heritage [should] be consistent with the Government’s position. Further, as publicly funded bodies, you should not be taking actions motivated by activism or politics. The significant support that you receive from the taxpayer is an acknowledgement of the important cultural role you play for the entire country. It is imperative that you continue to act impartially, in line with your publicly funded status, and not in a way that brings this into question. This is especially important as we enter a challenging Comprehensive spending review, in which all government spending will rightly be scrutinised (Dowden, 2020, para. 4).

This has led to fears that the government is threatening the independence of national museums by interfering and attempting to control their public activities (Clare, 2020; Hewison, 2020; Kendall Adams, 2020). The Museums Association articulated this concern, stating “We feel that this contravenes the long-established principle that national museums and other bodies operate at arm’s length from government and are responsible primarily to their trustees” (2020, para 5). The notion of political interference however is not new. Governments have historically shown interest in museums when they can serve as a tool for their agenda. For example, in the late 19th century they were used as a means to educate the general public and as a means of “tempting the working man and woman from the public house” (Watson & Sawyer, 2011, p. 99). There is, however, a sense that governmental interference is more prevalent today with Abdullah and Khadaroo (2021) claiming that UK government “insidiously influence their [museums’] objectives” (p. 2) through political trustee appointments, accounting approaches and through direct interventions.

As noted above, UK national museums are part-funded by government, although financial support has diminished over the last decade (Newman & Tourle, 2011). Sir Ian Blatchford, Director of the SMG, used the Museums Association Conference in Belfast to decry the current state of affairs, stating that whilst “British museums are adored abroad [they are] diminished at home” (2018). Whilst reduced funding has resulted in the significant reduction of services for some, it has also led to museums having to find new and innovative ways to generate income. More recently the need to do so has become acutely more prominent. With the impact of Covid-19 severely affecting the finances of almost every cultural institution across the UK (McGivern & Kenney, 2020), the Secretary of State for DCMS, Oliver Dowden, has warned that future financial bailouts will be dependent on institutions exploring alternative sources of income. He warns if museums do not explore profit driven opportunities such as monetising digital offerings and licensing he “will not be in a position to make the case for any further financial support for the sector.” (Grosvenor, 2020, para. 1).

One way many national museums generate funding is through sponsorship. This activity however has resulted in much public debate as some organisations have partnered with companies that seem
to be at odds with their public mission. For example, the SMG have received significant scrutiny for its ongoing relationships with fossil fuel companies BP and Adani who have sponsored exhibitions and educational projects related to climate change (Mills, 2021). This has resulted in large-scale protests — many of which comprised school children — and boycotts from the scientific community (Holland, 2021). Their relationship with these organisations has led to some stating that the SMG is facing a “crisis of credibility” (Carrington, 2021, para. 7) and that it risks “losing its remaining legitimacy as a scientific institution.” (Climate Activists ‘Occupy’ Science Museum over Fossil Fuel Sponsorship, 2021, para. 16). Hannah Fry — who recently departed the SMG as a Trustee over these relationships — highlighted the importance of maintaining public trust. She notes “being a credible, trusted voice is a fragile prize that should be preserved above all else” (Kendall Adams, 2021, para. 8). This departure is perhaps the outcome of an individual who is unable to reconcile two competing logics within an institution. Whilst little is known as to what other staff within this organisation feel about such activity, it seems from a public perspective legitimacy and trust can be easily diminished.

Most national museums in the UK are located within London. With their formation largely occurring at a time when the city was the focal point for Empire, they were a showcase of the country’s power and dominance of the world, and in turn a significant generator of a very “British” national identity. However, these institutions now sit within a metropolis that is highly globalised and multicultural. This contextual change has led to some academics questioning whether these institutions are now able to foster national identity as they largely serve a heterogenous community. In fact Watson & Sawyer (2011) argue that these national museums in the UK now “assume a distant Britishness” (p. 115) as they position themselves within an international space, using their collections and displays to speak to largely a global, tourist audience rather than a local British population.

Over time, these institutions have become both globally revered for the breadth and depth of their international collections, but also, and as noted above, challenged for their complicated colonial history and the implications thereof (Aldrich, 2009; Frost, 2019; Giblin et al., 2019; Wilding, 2019). A key issue here is the notion of ownership as collections have been developed from archaeological excavations, colonial government and missionary activity, personal gifts, and bequests through to more contested means such as military action and its consequences. This has resulted in critics referring to acquisitions as “highly contentious” (Duthie, 2011, p. 12) or even akin to “displaying loot” (Lunden, 2016, p. 1). As such, many UK national museums have been called upon from various governments around the world to return items within their collections to their original homeland (Wilding, 2019). For example, countries including Greece, Egypt, Chile and Nigeria maintain that
several objects within UK national collections belong to the nations in which they were found and have demanded the return of artifacts to the respective national authorities (Sleigh, 2020; Vardas, 2021). Most recently this has seen the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, engage in bilateral talks with British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, regarding the possible return of the Parthenon Marbles (Winchmann, 2021). The BM has rejected most demands for repatriation, maintaining that it is a global institution with the right to exhibit artifacts from diverse cultures (Duthie, 2011).

Moreover the NHM argues that by maintaining control and ownership over their collection they can be a hub that fosters “collaborative international research” on such items (Wilding, 2019, para. 13).

As noted in this chapter, there is evidence to suggest that museums are beginning to reframe narratives to include diverse voices and perspectives in the interpretation of objects in order to tell a more balanced view of history (Kendall Adams, 2019). More recently the NHM has begun to recognise its relationship with colonialism and to the slave trade as early specimens collected from across the Empire were often transported on slave ships and via trading missions. Recognising that museums often portray a romanticised notion of Empire, Davis (2019) notes that “cultural institutions have a history of denying and ignoring the violence, trauma and exploitation that this desire to collect inflicted upon others” (para. 7). He noted that museums must engage with this history and find ways to make collections more accessible.

5.2 Overview of participating organisations
5.2.1 The British Museum
The BM is often referred to as the first national (and public) museum in the world (Lunden, 2016; MacGregor, 2004; McLean, 2005). Born out of the Age of Enlightenment, it covers all fields of human knowledge and celebrates ideals and values including open debate, scientific research, progress, and tolerance. The BM’s founding collection was originally brought together by Sir Hans Sloane. Over his lifetime he amassed approximately 70,000 natural history and cultural objects drawn from developing global networks, enabled by the expansion of the British Empire. Upon his death in 1753, his collection was sold to Parliament and used as the starting point for the BM.

In 1759 the BM opened its doors as an organisation for “the world and to be open to all free of charge, ensuring the right of all citizens to information about the world” (MacGregor, 2004, p. 7). The original museum was located in Montagu House, however as collections grew the need for a new building quickly arose. In 1852 the Sir Robert Smirke building, within which the museum is
located today, opened to the public. Over the next 150 years several additions have been completed including the World Conservation and Exhibition Centre in 2013.

The BM today is considered to house the largest and most comprehensive collection of art and culture in the world. The collection currently comprises eight million objects covering two million years of human history, art and culture. It is thus reasonable to state that “No other museum is responsible for collections of the same depth and breadth, beauty and significance” (BM, n.d., para. 2).

The BM’s public purpose has not changed since its inception – it is a place of scholarly inquiry. *Towards 2020: The British Museum’s strategy* (2013) sets out the priorities for the organisation. It covers three broad areas: collections and research; audiences and engagement; and investing in our people. The BM does not have a publicly available international strategy; however, its overarching strategy outlines several aspirations. These include:

1) To become a museum for the whole world, achieved through partnerships and exchanges with sister organisations
2) Nurture long standing relationships with museums in Europe and the US; and build new connections in Asia, Africa, and Australia
3) Develop and expand training and skill-sharing programmes and build a global community of curators, conservators, scientists, and museum professionals
4) Leverage this global community for the shared study and display of the BM’s collections, allowing joint research programmes, the circulation of exhibitions, and the exchange of people and skills
5) Find people and resources to realise the potential of international activity (p. 8)

Today the BM is one of the most visited cultural attractions in the UK. In 2019 it welcomed over 6.2 million visitors, with the majority comprising international tourists (Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, 2019). Moreover, it has become a large organisation with over 1000 employees working in a diverse array of departments (BM, 2017).

5.2.2 The Natural History Museum

The origins of the NHM very much begin with the BM. For example, the specimens that underpin the NHM’s collection today originated in the private collection of Sir Hans Sloane which became the foundation of the BM. In 1856 Sir Richard Owen – then keeper of the BM’s natural history collection – foresaw a lack of physical space and lobbied to construct a new site to specifically house the
institution’s natural history collections. He proposed a cathedral to nature to celebrate the awe, wonder and diversity of the natural world (Fortey, 2010). In 1881, the Alfred Waterhouse designed building in South Kensington was opened, with this outpost remaining a part of the BM until 1963. Like the BM, the NHM was founded in a time that revolutionised humanity’s perception of its place in nature. This precipitated an extraordinary desire to collect, understand and debate the natural world (Girouard, 1999).

Throughout its history, like many other museums within this study, the NHM acquired new sites and has significantly grown ever since. For example, in 1937, it obtained a second site – the private museum of Lionel Walter, 2nd Baron Rothschild in Tring. In 1986, it expanded its London footprint by absorbing the adjoining Geology Museum of the British Geological Survey, and in 2009 it added the Darwin Centre to house collections and showcase the inner working of its scientists (Brown, 2010).

Today the NHM is recognised for its dual role as a centre of excellence in scientific research as well as a public visitor attraction. It has over 900 staff – spanning scientific, public facing, fundraising and operational roles. It comprises approximately 80 million specimens, covering all aspects of the natural world including botany, entomology, palaeontology, mineralogy and zoology (NHM, n.d.). The collection also includes a significant number of artworks, primarily works on paper, documenting key voyages. As such, the collection contains some of the most scientifically and culturally important treasures including specimens from expeditions by Charles Darwin, Alfred Russell Wallace, Mary Anning and Dorothea Bate; the first-discovered Neanderthal skulls; and moonrocks from the lunar landings (NHM, 2017). Like the BM, the provenance of the NHM’s collection and in particular its connection to colonisation has resulted in significant repatriation requests (Wilding, 2019).

The NHM’s vision and mission at the time of conducting interviews for this study was “To challenge the way people think about the natural world – its past, present and future. We aim to stimulate public debate about humanity’s future and equip our audiences at every level with an understanding of science” (NHM, 2015b, p. 5). Its stated objectives were to extend its impact digitally, nationally, internationally, and in London and included the following:

1) Digital: We will use technology to deepen engagement with the collection, including mass digitisation of specimens and creating innovative digital platforms
2) National: We will create national networks to support science in schools, engage society with UK biodiversity through citizen science, and open up the UK’s natural history collections by sharing skills and facilities

3) International: We will develop our global relationships to create new commercial opportunities, build capacity among our partners, and tackle major scientific challenges, such as biodiversity loss, the spread of diseases and the supply of scarce minerals

4) London: We will build on our position as one of the world’s great public museums in a truly global city to enhance the experience of our visitors through a series of major capital developments to improve the grounds, the Hintze Hall, galleries and learning centre. (p. 7)

Since its foundation, the NHM has worked globally to study and present a natural world that transcends political boundaries. The NHM’s international strategy (2014) primarily addresses the themes of collaboration and leadership through the development of new commercial partnerships to “engage a global audience on the museum’s core intellectual narratives” (p. 2). There are three key objectives:

1) Generate £2.7 million per annum from international activities

2) Organise the business for international working

3) Grow international visibility

It is important to note that the international strategy here does not include the NHM’s scientific work. Instead, fieldwork, collecting, collaborations and scientific projects are framed as “business as usual” (NHM, 2014, p. 4). This activity, however, is nonetheless key to realising commercial ambitions. That is, the strategy states “To realise our full potential we must adopt a more integrated approach. This will enable us to capitalise on income generation opportunities and clearly position NHM as a world museum.” (NHM, 2014, p. 4)

5.2.3 The Victoria and Albert Museum

The V&A’s origins are connected to The Great Exhibition of 1851 – the world’s first global display of design and manufacturing. Following the success of the event, the Museum of Manufactures was founded in 1852. Located in St James’s it explored applied arts and science and included several exhibits from The Great Exhibition. In 1854 these objects were transferred to the South Kensington Museum (Bryant, 2019).
Over the next 40 years, plans for a grander building were developed and much of the collection was separated out and rehoused in other subject specific institutions. In 1899 Queen Victoria lay the foundation stone of the Aston Webb building and officially renamed the institution the Victoria and Albert Museum, with its founding mission to “Educate designers, manufacturers and the public in art and design” (V&A, n.d.). Today the V&A comprises 2.2 million objects spanning ceramics, glass, textiles, costumes, silver, ironwork jewellery, furniture, sculpture, prints, drawings and photographs.

The V&A has also expanded to include several other sites and today it is considered the largest museum in the world of applied and decorative arts. Additional sites include the V&A Museum of Childhood (recently renamed Young V&A), V&A Dundee and two new sites in east London are currently being planned under the umbrella heading of V&A East. Additionally, in 2014 the organisation opened its first international outpost – the V&A Gallery at Design Society in Shenzhen, China (for more information see Chapter 6: Findings). Across its different sites, the V&A employs approximately 1000 staff members (V&A, 2018).

The V&A has a public mission to: “Be recognised as the world’s leading museum of art, design and performance, and to enrich people’s lives by promoting research, knowledge and enjoyment of the designed world to the widest possible audience.” (V&A, 2018, p. 2). This aim is currently coalesced around 6 key strategic objectives. These include:

1) To create a world class visitor and learning experience across all V&A sites and collections
2) Focus and deepen the relevance of our collections to the UK creative and knowledge economy
3) Expand the V&A’s international reach, reputation and impact
4) To operate with financial and organisational initiative and efficiency
5) Showcase the best of digital design and deliver an outstanding digital experience
6) Diversify and increase private and commercial funding sources (p. 2)

Although the V&A did not have an international strategy at the time of conducting this research, the international aspirations of the organisation are evident in its strategic objectives. Moreover, the V&A is framed as a “global organisation” as it engages with the international community through cultural partnerships, trading, touring exhibitions, loans, research, advice and skills sharing. For the V&A, such areas of work bring “benefits to the museum and its visitors by enriching our knowledge and expertise – allowing us to make sense of our collections, attracting new audiences, and building our reputation and brand” (V&A, n.d., para. 7).
5.2.4  The Science Museum Group

The Science Museum’s establishment and collection stem from The Great Exhibition of 1851, which due to its popularity enabled the foundation of the South Kensington Museum. Opened in 1857, it held a mix of industrial and decorative arts as well as various collections spanning the natural and physical sciences. The premises also contained the Patent Office Museum, which included a collection of then contemporary and historical machinery from locomotives to steam engines. With collections growing alongside a public appetite to see such material, it was decided to move the scientific collections within the museum to a separate building. In 1862 the collections were moved across Exhibition Road into a building originally constructed for the International Exhibition. Some twenty years later objects from the Patent Office Museum were then subsumed into the South Kensington Museum into one core scientific collection. Towards the end of the 19th century momentum from the scientific community was growing to provide a separate building to house what was becoming a nationally significant collection (Science. Museum, n.d.). In 1909 the South Kensington Museum was renamed after its patrons as The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Science Collections were officially separated out and located within the independent entity known as the Science Museum (Bud, 2010).

Whilst approval for a new physical museum was granted in 1910, it wasn’t until 1928 that the Sir Richard Allison-designed building opened to the public in South Kensington. Then Director, Colonel Sir Henry Lyons, played a key role in how the museum connected with its audiences advocating for the needs of “the ordinary visitor” ahead of technical specialists (Science Museum, n.d.). This approach gave rise to a Children’s Gallery which opened in 1931. A key figure in the development of the collection and museum was Norman Lockyer. Then editor of scientific journal Nature, Lockyer was a powerful figure in advocating for a public organisation dedicated to the pursuit and enjoyment of science. Lockyer’s 35-year campaign for such an institution came to fruition at a time when UK government was focused on scientific and technological advancement (Morris, 2010).

Since its inception the museum has grown significantly. In 2000 the Science Museum opened the Wellcome Wing, exploring contemporary science; and in 2012 it subsumed the Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester, and became known as the SMG. It has since grown to include several other sites across the UK including National Railway Museum, York and Shildon; National Science and Media Museum, Bradford; and Science Museum Wroughton, Wiltshire. The SMG comprises 7 million objects covering science, technology, engineering, mathematics, media and medicine.
The SMG shares one unifying vision across all its sites. Their vision is “A society that celebrates science, technology and engineering and their impact on our lives, now and in the future.” (SMG, 2017, p. 9). The SMG has seven key priorities

1) Grow science capital in individuals and society
2) Grow our audiences and exceed their expectations
3) Sustain and grow our world-class collection
4) Extend our international reach
5) Transform our estate
6) Harness the potential of digital
7) Increase income (p. 9)

In organisational documents there is a strong sense that the museum wants to build on its national presence and become an international organisation (SMG, 2017). For the SMG this is important as it enhances their public offering “through international cooperation on research and lending; building capacity and improving standards in the sector globally; growing and strengthening our spheres of influence at home and abroad; developing our own people and organisation; and generating income” (p. 30). This is further evidenced through their separate international strategy entitled *International strategy 2018-2022. Extending reach, growing reputation, and building resource* (SMG, 2018). Here the title strongly signposts its international aspirations to reach more people, build the brand of the organisation and to generate income. Moreover, a key goal of its international work is to be recognised as a vital part of brand Britain. For example, one of the SMG’s objectives through its international work is to be “recognised as a vital means of promoting the UK, both directly and through soft power” (SMG, 2017, p. 30).

This chapter outlines the birth and history of national museums in the UK as well as exploring the four cultural sites examined in this study. As noted in this chapter, these four museums all have long histories. Born out of Empire, they played and continue to play a pivotal role in connecting the British public with the wider world around them. They are also potent reminders of Britain’s hard power – with collections drawn from vast colonies all around the world. Today it seems that these museums are now complex and large organisations that operate within an ever changing political, social and economic context. With this in mind, in the upcoming chapter I present the findings of my study and explore the field-wide norms and logics that underpin their international activity.
Chapter 6: Findings

In this chapter I present and discuss my research findings. I begin by exploring my first two questions: Are there field-wide norms around the international work of museums? And is it possible to identify patterns or themes that run through the international work conducted by the museum sector? I then move on to my third question: Which institutional logics can be identified as contributing to the current direction of international work of museums? Here I include short case studies of specific international activity described in the interviews. These case studies not only show the breadth of international work being undertaken by these national museums but also provide a way to contextualise the various logics that I describe throughout the chapter. When examining all three questions I also draw on quotes from participant interviews. In doing so, I place a focus on the lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Skelcher & Smith, 2015; Zilber, 2013) of participants which in turn provides a contemporary view on the situation for museums in the first quarter of the 21st century.

6.1 The field-wide norms and common themes of international work

Across my sample, participants largely framed their international strategy and work in similar ways. That is, although the museums have different origin stories, different collections and different policies, they all strive for international success and efficiency. As a result, it appears that their strategies and work are broadly aligned. This similarity is explained by DiMaggio and Powell (1991) who argue that “Organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful.” (p. 70). Indeed, as museums deal with external and internal pressures such as uncertainty over future government funding (Grosvenor, 2020), the changing nature of museums (Freedman, 2010; Gainon-Court & Vuillaume, 2016) and the instability of global politics through a shifting world order (Milmo, 2021; Ruiz, 2021; Spence, 2022) we arguably see isomorphism in the homogeneity of strategy, structure and activity.

As discussed in Chapter 2, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) identified three forms of isomorphism – coercive, normative, and mimetic. I argue that, when examining the international strategy and work of UK national museums, two of these forms are at play. Firstly, my results indicate that mimetic isomorphism is occurring as museums begin to copy or mimic the work of each other. This is primarily evident through the set of activities each museum undertakes as part of their international work. And secondly, I posit that normative isomorphism is occurring as individuals who lead this work within each organisation have begun to build a community of practice among one another.
Whilst this may not be explicit in the participant interviews, being an insider to this world, I have had the personal experience of sharing collective problems and devising agreed solutions with these individuals. This collegiality results in “common institutional practices …[emerging] from a more interactive process of discussion among the actors in a given network – about shared problems, how to interpret them, and how to solve them” (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 17). Moreover, through this process of meeting and discussing, the individuals who lead international activity for their museum are “developing shared cognitive maps, often embodying a sense of appropriate institutional practices, which are then widely deployed” (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 17).

This similarity is arguably evidence of an emerging set of field-wide norms and practices around the international activity of UK national museums. This finding resonates with existing research that identifies how museums in the US are similar to one another (DiMaggio, 1991), and more recently how the intermingling of isomorphic forces are resulting in museums across East Asia resembling those in the West (Chang, 2021).

Before I explore the themes that run through the international strategy and work of UK national museums, it is important to note two key points. Firstly, three out of the four participants said they had written specific international strategies for their museum. The NHM, BM and SMG all noted that they had developed strategies over the last five years to steer their international work. For the NHM, their first strategy was implemented in 2014 and then updated in 2017. Similarly, the SMG was in the process of rewriting and updating their strategy at the time of the interview. Of all the participants the V&A was the only institution yet to develop a focused strategy and Tim was unsure whether one was necessary. He described their international work as “loose and elastic” and that he was “quite open minded to the extent to which the V&A needs, or not, to have a very defined structured strategy and approach to its international work...”. Whilst Tim was uncertain at the time of this interview, the V&A has since developed an international strategy to guide its work (N. Marchand, personal communication, March 18, 2020). Secondly, most museums framed their strategy or work as being international. As such, interviewees described it as “doing work” between the UK and another entity overseas, whether that be a nation, museum or community of practice. For example, the V&A’s activity in China was framed as “working in and with” the country. Here it is important to note differences in framing between the descriptors global and international, with the former referring to issues, concerns, and activities within the entire world, and the latter referring to issues and concerns between two or more countries. James, for example, said: “We [the NHM] talk about the world as a system, not as a group of nations or group of people or cultures.” Significantly,
although James framed the NHM’s strategy as being global, my analysis suggests that the work was, in fact, more akin to being international.

Using a phenomenological approach alongside thematic analysis (see Chapter 4: Methodology) five overarching themes emerged from the iterative analyses of the interview data sets. Themes included: affirming credibility; international activity as something new or different; a similar suite of activities; reframing impact; and wider societal and political implications. Within each theme I have further identified subcategories, providing more nuance and detail. Table 3 below provides an overview of the emergent field-wide norms of international work.

Table 3: Emerging field-wide norms around the international strategy and work of UK national museums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affirming credibility</td>
<td>By connecting to their history</td>
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<td></td>
<td>By connecting to their strategy and mission</td>
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<td></td>
<td>By connecting to their collection and subject matter</td>
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<tr>
<td>International activity as something new or different</td>
<td>The emergence of new teams</td>
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<tr>
<td>A similar suite of activities</td>
<td>Cultural activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Touring exhibitions and object loans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Training and skills sharing</td>
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<td>Consulting</td>
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<td>Repositioning international work as partnership building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reframing impact</td>
<td>Generating income</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extending reach and reputation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Building reputation with key stakeholders</td>
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6.1.1  Affirming credibility

Most participants began by connecting their international strategy and work to the historical nature of their institutions, its overarching mission, as well as the collection and academic activity that underpinned it. These connections provided a sense of integrity to international work, which in turn helped to legitimise activity with internal and external stakeholders. By referencing history, mission and collections, the interviewees were engaging in a process of organisational “labelling” which, according to Chia (2000), is a strategy of “differentiation and simple-location, identification and classification, regularizing and routinization [that is, to translate] the intractable or obdurate into a form that is more amenable to functional deployment” (p. 517). In other words, by connecting to well-known facets of their museum, or institutional common ground, participants were finding ways for others (peers, internal and external stakeholders) to understand and engage with their work.

6.1.1.1  Connecting to their history

All participants came from large national museums with long histories, and thus there was a clear nod to the past and how international working was a fundamental part of their inception. Nadja noted, “International [work] has been at the core of what the BM does from the start simply because of the nature of the collections we have”, whilst Tim recognised that the V&A has always been a museum with an internationalist outlook because of the way it was founded. Referencing The Great Exhibition of 1851, he noted that the V&A “was founded out of a Trade Fair ... the bringing together of a kind of global creative and artistic practice into one place.... So, it has always been international because it was conceived out of an international event.” For James, the colonial beginnings of the NHM provided the basis for contemporary international working. He noted:

If you go back to the foundation, the [NHM] has engaged in international work through the business of Imperial Britain...from the acquisition of cultural property and scientific specimens from the Age of Enlightenment onwards when British aristocracy and military were going out into the world gathering, collecting, and documenting things. This was a means of gaining knowledge, documenting human and natural life and ... exerting control as a kind of tool of the British state.
Here James not only recognises that the NHM was founded in the context of Empire but that its international work was very much aligned with the goals and aspirations of Imperial Britain. He also frames the NHM as a “tool” of state – one which exerts influence over others. Whilst contemporary museum work is structurally separated from UK government (as ALBs) the implication here is that these boundaries have been blurred in the past.

Whilst participants adopted history as a starting point to rationalise the contemporary international aspirations of their organisation, they also chose to adopt a somewhat positive picture of such history. Today the very notion of Empire is both celebrated and contested; however, the latter was not overtly raised in discussions. With the public becoming more and more interested in how museums address issues such as decolonisation and the interpretation of collections (Giblin et al., 2019) and with repatriation requests growing significantly (Kendall Adams, 2019; Sleigh, 2020; Wilding, 2019) this doesn’t seem to affect the ways in which museums structure their international strategy and work.

6.1.1.2 Connecting to their strategy and mission

All participants noted that international working was directly written into their overarching museum strategies. This ranged from the explicit through to the implicit. For the SMG, V&A and the NHM, international working was noted as a clear objective to their future working. For the SMG, extending international reach was one of seven strategic priorities. Helen noted, “We aim to have a very strong international profile and reputation for excellence that enhances our offer, promotes the UK and generates income”. For Tim, international working was one of five strategic objectives for the organisation. He noted that the museum’s ambition was to “expand the V&A’s international reach and be a global catalyst for the UK creative industries”. For James international work was integrated throughout the NHM’s strategy, as there was a drive to see impact digitally, locally, nationally and internationally. He noted that the NHM was focused on “developing global relationships to create new commercial opportunities, building capacity and tackling major scientific challenges...”. For Helen, Tim and James there was a sense that having international work recognised within their museum’s overarching strategy not only gave their work credibility but it was also a signal to the rest of the institution that this form of activity was central to the institution’s future (Chia, 2000; Weick et al., 2005). For Nadja however the connection to the BM’s overall strategy didn’t seem as important as it did for the others. As already noted, international working was a core function of the BM, due to the very nature of the institution. Consequently, it didn’t need to be overtly stated in
their strategy. She noted that international working was implicitly woven into the organisation as it framed itself as “the museum for the global citizen”.

For each participant the thinking around international work was also tightly married to their museum’s overarching mission. Nadja reiterated that the BM was a “museum of the world, for the world” which meant international working was “part of everything that we do”. Whilst Tim noted that the mission of the V&A – to be recognised as the world’s leading museum of art, design, and performance, and to enrich people’s lives by promoting research, knowledge and enjoyment of the designed world to the widest possible audience – meant that they should be working in the world. For James, the NHM’s overall mission - to challenge the way people think about the natural world - also provided a clear path for activity as this mission was “not limited by territory”. He explained that since the science conducted within the museum “dealt with interlinked global ecological systems … we need to think about how we relate to people regardless of where they live.” Finally, Helen noted that the “mission driven motivation [for international working] is strong” particularly as the SMG aims to “build a scientifically literate society…and grow science capital”. This mission, although conceived for museums in the UK was, according to Helen, globally relevant. She noted: “Lots of countries both developed, and developing, predicate their future success on [being] a scientifically literate population. And so, nearly everybody wants science education. So, there is a mission angle to it.”

6.1.1.3 Connecting to their museum’s collection or subject matter

For most participants, there was also a strong desire to weave their international strategy and work to their respective museum’s collection or subject matter. Whilst these connections were stronger for some than others, there was a sense this overarching narrative added another layer of legitimacy to their work. At the BM the connection was clear, as their collection and research were the starting point and rationale for all international working. Nadja noted, “Our collections span the whole world. We do have partnerships and relationships with every country in the world and that’s mostly really stemming from curatorial collection, research, exchanges… the starting point [for international work] is always the collection...”. Having such an international collection not only gave the BM a logical reason to work in the world, it also helped them to structure what they did in the world. Throughout discussions, Nadja reflected that their international activity was a way of “plugging gaps” with their collection. This meant that they were able to use their international work as a mechanism to add new objects to the collection as well as develop new knowledge about the collection. Tim also made this connection, stating that the V&A’s international work “started with its
collections.” He recognised that they had long standing and natural partnerships around collections and curatorial work with European and North American peers and were wanting to “supplement that work by reaching out to particularly populous areas of the world where our collections can tell a particularly resonant and powerful story”.

For Helen and James, although their museums held collections drawn from across the world the connection to international aspirations was not as straightforward. Helen noted, “Our collections are not so inherently international. Even if they were, we don’t classify them as being international. So, we were often starting [international activity] from cold…. This sense of ‘starting from scratch’ was also raised by James who made the comparison to other national museums and their ability to tap into global curatorial networks and opportunities more easily. He noted:

We’re less inherently international in the way that we are organised as an organisation. Take for example, the BM, V&A or Tate. They are structured as a series of geographic curatorial departments, the NHM does not have an Asia department in the same way those museums do. If you’ve got an Asia department, you tend to employ a dozen or more people who are all Asia specialists who will have different connections, will know the place well, who speak the language…. We don’t do that because we look at the world taxonomically. For example, somebody who studies flies, will study flies [from] all over the world...

Here James recognises that the ways in which collections are organised plays a key role in how these organisations can reach out and connect with the wider world. As such, there was a sense that for the SMG and NHM they had to find other mechanisms to develop global relationships outside of curatorial structures. Whilst the organisation of the collection proved a limiting factor for the NHM’s international work, its subject matter did not. Here the NHM’s intellectual territory – science and nature – was perceived as “borderless” which created a platform to work in the wider world. Of all the participants, the SMG made the least connections, only referencing their subject matter – science – as their entrée to work in the world. Helen stated, “Our subject demands it in a way. The science and the issues that we face are transnational…”{.} Whilst some international activity resulted in their collection being developed (see Case study of state logics: The SMG and Russia p. 106-107), there was a sense that this wasn’t as important as for other participants.

Overall, when participants discussed their museum’s international strategy it was clear that activity was expected, or a given. Participants implied that international working was very much tied to their status as a national museum with historical roots. Participants described international working as “expected” and “natural for a world leading national museum”; whilst others found that working in the world was beholden on them largely due to their “stature” or “reputation”. Nadja exemplified
this best when discussing their relationship with the Zayed National Museum stating, “I think reputationally to have refused, declined to help, that would be a complete clash with how the BM behaves.”

6.1.2 International work as something new or different

Whilst all participants talked about how their museum had engaged in international activities for many years, there was a sense that the work they were referring to now was something different, something new. For Helen and James, it was about the organisation being “more strategic” about where and why they worked in the world. For Tim, international activity was “something new, a new type of partner in a new country doing something over and above the bog-standard museum stuff like conference papers and exhibitions.” In order to develop such work, new teams were emerging within each organisation.

6.1.2.1 The emergence of new teams

A key norm across all institutions was the establishment or growth of teams and specific roles to deliver international work. This ranged from large stand-alone units with set staff through to smaller teams who worked across the institution to influence global activity. For the BM and NHM large teams were responsible for international working. At the BM there was a core team of 15, who primarily focused on touring exhibitions, partnership working and training programmes. Whereas for James, he had created a new division – International Engagement – to knit together the various global business, advocacy, and diplomacy functions. This comprised approximately 40 people divided into four teams – consulting and partnerships, touring exhibitions, intellectual property, and the Wildlife Photographer of the Year13 competition office.

For the SMG and V&A the teams were smaller and more focused on creating and implementing internationally strategic activity. Helen stated, “we have a small team of four people... and only two of them have International pretty much exclusively in their jobs.” Whilst the team was small, Helen noted that over the last few years they were growing. For her, the team were focused on establishing and maintaining collaborations, brokering relationships, documenting partnerships and reporting but she was careful to point out that they were not necessarily about delivering activity. She noted “informally we often just refer to it as oiling the wheels of collaboration” but that delivery of all international work came from “different teams across the museum such as the learning,

13 Wildlife Photographer of the Year is an annual international wildlife photography competition staged by the Natural History Museum. It is the largest wildlife photography competition in the world
touring exhibitions or consultancy department”. Similarly for Tim, there was a three-person team consisting of a Head of International Strategy (currently a vacant role), an International Coordinator, and an International Manager. Whilst recognising that many other people had international working in their job description across the organisation, he wanted a specific team who were: “Highly coordinated, highly organised, able to tap into what is going on in the outside world and then through the power of influence draw on the expertise and profile of the rest of the Museum to make things happen.”

Regardless of the size of team, the leader of each played a key role in their respective museum’s senior leadership or executive function. For the participants this meant that international working was a clear focus for their museum and as such they were able to influence decision making at the very top of the institution. This was also a sign to the rest of the organisation that international working was central to their museum’s future which once again aided internal legitimacy and status.

The emergence of these new teams reflects the changing nature of a museum’s work (Schlatter 2012; Silvaggi & Pesce, 2018). No longer are they just a site for curation, conservation, learning or exhibition roles, instead they are evolving to address the needs of contemporary work practices. Moreover, this development marries with Gainon-Court and Vuillaume’s (2016) view that a number of professional profiles – defined not in terms of occupation but rather of activities or tasks — are emerging within the sector.

6.1.3 A similar suite of activities

Whilst most participants were careful to talk about the breadth of international activity their museums undertook as both cultural and academic institutions, when it came to the suite of activities that fell within their international strategy and remit it was very much about the former, rather than the latter. Here participants talked about touring exhibitions and object loans, training, skills sharing and wide-ranging consulting deals. Across all four museums these activities were by and large the same, again providing evidence of isomorphism in action. Moreover, throughout interviews participants also framed international activity as partnership working. For some this was part of their mission: helping other museums to develop and grow with a view this was supporting the wider museological field. This activity was often funded and was based on trust and mutual endeavour. However, for others, partnership working was a commercial enterprise based on the exchange of money for goods and services. With all this in mind, it felt that the international activities described by participants was full of nuance and at times complex contradictions.
6.1.3.1 Cultural activities

Whilst most participants used their academic underpinning and/or collections as a key reason to engage in the world, the endeavours that constituted international working were very much akin to cultural activities. This was most evident at the NHM. Here James described international activity as “how we work as an institution rather than through our scientific activity”. In doing so, he makes an interesting distinction between the international scientific work of the NHM which was framed as “business as usual” and the international engagement work which was more about having a “role in soft power, public engagement and business”. Whilst James recognised that the NHM worked around the world for many reasons, international activity that fell within his remit was more focused. He noted:

> It can be ... a completely commercial transaction to providing long term training for small museums overseas who need specific support that you can only find in large specialist museums such as ours... Then of course there’s the stuff which is ... about the supply of our content and our brand to a world market... [it’s about getting] our message and our values to people who would never necessarily visit the NHM or participate in our cultural programmes.

Whilst James connected the NHM’s international strategy to its collection and science, the actual work in this area focuses on business, public engagement, and reach. It does not focus on scientific collaborations. Herein lies an interesting contradiction as the museum leveraged its science and collections to add legitimacy to its international strategy but did not conduct this type of activity around the world.

For Tim, there was a much stronger connection between their international strategy and the broader work of the V&A. That is, Tim perceived their global activity as a whole, where curatorial work, commercial activity and brand building all worked together to promote the museum. He noted that global curatorial work led to commercial opportunities such as sponsorship and fundraising which enabled the museum to do more curatorial work and collecting. He noted, “It is a genuinely inter-related pitch; it is a virtuous circle of international activity that feeds off each other.” For Tim, this interrelatedness was fundamental in providing a sense of integrity and authenticity to their global work.
6.1.3.2 Touring exhibitions and object loans

A key feature present in all participant interviews was the importance of touring exhibitions and loans. It was clear that this was the primary mode of engaging globally, with many of the institutions in the study having conducted such activities for many years. For Nadja, it seemed this was the cornerstone of her international strategy. She noted that over the last ten years they had “92 exhibition openings in 21 countries and had reached more than 10 million people”. Sharing the collection for her was paramount as she wanted to “take our [the BM’s] collection to our partners and to their audiences”. For James, the NHM had been touring exhibitions for over twenty years and was their main way of reaching large, diverse audiences around the world. It also provided a way of generating relationships with museums globally who would then regularly “take their shows”. For the SMG this was a newer form of activity but one they hoped would enable them to reach new audiences and generate income.

6.1.3.3 Training and skills sharing

Training and skills sharing was another popular mode of engaging internationally. However, here the rationale behind such work differed between institutions. For Nadja, through global training programmes (see Case study of community logics: The BM’s International Training Programme p. 109-111) the BM was able to provide a platform to connect with colleagues from across the world to share skills and experiences as well as generate new knowledge about objects within the collection. This felt very much connected to their mission as an institution and helped to develop a wider community of practice.

For James, the NHM was always keen to connect with its “established peer group” (museums in Europe and North America) to share knowledge and expertise. For him, the staff within these museums had a collective expertise that was useful to share to help solve each other’s problems. He noted:

There’s also stuff we can do within places like Europe and North America where our established peer group can give knowledge to us or help us solve challenges. For example, some of the work we’ve been doing with the natural history museum in Denmark over the last couple of years as they prepare a master plan for a whole new physical home for their buildings and collection where we’ve been participating in a community of the twelve largest natural history museums in North America and Europe and coming together to share ideas to help them benchmark their ideas against what they might do with their master plan. And that not only benefits them, it benefits every single institution that’s in the room who’s wrestling with some of these common problems for old collections such as ours.
When it came to more formal training programmes however, the internal knowledge and expertise of museum staff could be commercialised and sold to particular institutions. Here James and Tim talked about their respective training programmes which were available to the wider museum market – but for a price. For these two interviewees, there was a sense that knowledge sharing was at times a one-way affair, disseminated from their institutions to whomever wanted to procure it. Activities such as this however were at times part of wider consulting deals.

6.1.3.4 Consulting

Expertise and knowledge were also packaged up as part of larger consulting deals. All four museums were engaging in various agreements with different organisations around the world. For example, James talked about work they were doing with a museum in Asia around developing a permanent exhibition; Nadja raised their work with the Zayed National Museum; Tim talked about their work in China with the Design Society; and Helen discussed their project with the Queensland Museum in Australia. Whilst participants were able to talk about these projects generally, no one spoke in detail around the specific nature of each contract. As such there was a sense that these projects were largely driven by private commercial agreements that were not for public dissemination.

A key facet of these partnerships is that they included myriad activities. As Nadja explained, the relationship with the Zayed National Museum was to provide a mix of training, skills sharing, content and collection loans. Helen discussed how they were providing content from an existing gallery in London to their partner in Australia, whilst James indicated that the NHM had significant internal knowledge and skills, as well as content and programming that could all be of value to other institutions. For example, he discussed a programme of work with The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Saudi Arabia, which involved “using internal staff to develop a masterplan for a gallery around natural history as well as training staff to embed a culture of volunteering in the organisation”.

The selling of expertise from one museum to another, particularly in places such as Asia and the Middle East, seems to be a developing practice (Harris, 2019; McAuley, 2017; Tate, 2019). Again, this has wider implications for the museum field as it seems Western ideologies are dominating global museum practices (Chang, 2013). Moreover, James’ comment about their relationship with museums across Europe and North America implies a clear differentiation between older more established museums and new organisations in emerging economies. Here it seems the one is
framed as peer-to-peer learning and collaborative, whilst the other is very much commercial. This disparity is examined in the discussion chapter.

6.1.3.5 Repositioning international activity as partnership working

Across all interviews, there was a preference to frame activities as a way of generating and supporting partnerships. This all-encompassing term allowed museums to “reach out”, “connect” and “learn” from other institutions. James created a new post within his team entitled International Partnerships Manager, and he renamed the Touring Exhibition Sales Managers as Exhibition Partnership Managers. For him, these changes shifted the emphasis away from commerciality towards a sense of cooperation and community building, despite these being income generating positions (J. Broughton, personal communication, June 15, 2021). Here it seems individuals are tasked with integrating complex activity spanning different logics, perhaps an indication that through their international activity museums are becoming hybrid institutions (Skelcher & Smith, 2015).

For Tim, partnership working was paramount, and an important facet of their international strategy. He stated: “A step beyond [academic collaborations, touring exhibitions etc] are opportunities that arise from our creative and diverse approach to partnership working. This moves us on from exhibitions to something different and interesting … new ways of doing work internationally.” Here Tim describes international work as fundamentally about creative collaborations. No longer does he want it to be about individual or one-off transactions or activities, instead he wants it to be a vehicle for boundless exploration with another organisation. Tim noted the need to be open-minded when it came to international work. He said “[sometimes it is] a bit less about the collection and the geography and more about trying to broaden our horizon about what a museum partner in the 21st century could be and what the type of partnership should be”. This sense of newness and innovation is evident in their work with China. Tim noted “we wanted the emphasis of the Gallery opening [in China] to be the V&A doing something interesting, innovative and quite bold overseas.” Moreover, throughout discussions he repeatedly framed their work in China (see Case study of hybrid logics: The V&A Gallery in China p. 114-116) as a partnership and collaboration. For example, he noted:

For us it wasn’t transactional…yes, it is using V&A objects, and yes it was using V&A know-how around exhibition making, design and display. But the narrative here is we have created something together with a Chinese audience in mind. This is important as we move away from [the idea that partnership working is a] transaction where we export an exhibition …
Whilst all participants talked about a similar suite of international activities, the absence of what they did not talk about is also noteworthy. The notion of *global corporatisation* (Grincheva, 2020b) was strikingly missing from all discussions despite some of these institutions engaging in such activities. For example, Nadja made no reference to the BM’s licensing and brand partnership work in China. Whilst much has been written about the commercial nature of this work (Milmo, 2021; Spence, 2022) it did not seem to form part of her international strategy. This once again draws our attention to the complex nature of museums as working environments (McCall & Gray, 2014; Schlatter, 2012; Zamora-Kapoor et al., 2019) as it seems that although Nadja was responsible for the BMs international strategy and work, other departments were also pursuing global activity but perhaps with a different remit and logic underpinning it.

### 6.1.4 Reframing impact

All participants framed their international strategy and work as a way of generating and broadening impact for their institution. Whilst all could easily show revenue as a means of commercial impact, there was a sense that their work was also contributing to something much more than this. As such, impact was largely encapsulated in three ways – income, reach and reputation. There was also a clear sense that this work was important for UK government. As such they became an important stakeholder when discussing the impact of global activities.

#### 6.1.4.1 Generating income

For some, international work was very much tied to generating income and increased funding. James stated that he had developed an international business strategy to generate significant income for the NHM, and that there was little appetite to engage in global work unless it “washed its face financially”. For Helen, a clear driver within her strategy was to tell other museums and stakeholders that they were very much “open for business”. For the SMG, generating income had “risen up the priority scale” and they were “not at all coy about making income from international activity”. For Helen, working internationally was also a way to increase both direct and indirect income. She noted:

> Direct being things like fees from consulting etc... and grants. And indirectly: the way my team and international activity generally supports other fundraising. Some funders are interested in international working. Sometimes even if they’re not directly supporting an international project, they like the outlook of the museum.
For the V&A, international working was an opportunity to be commercial. Tim noted that he was keen to explore “different types of partnerships and to be quite entrepreneurial in what we consider to be an acceptable or appropriate museum partnership internationally”. This meant that some of their work was “less about geography and more about the partners that we are engaging with wherever they happen to be in the world”. For example, Tim noted that whilst Italy was not a target country, working with the Venice Biennale had a prestige and cachet that not only supported the brand and mission of the museum but was of interest to future funders and donors.

Of all the participants, Nadja seemed the least focused on generating income through international activities. She noted that touring exhibitions “are income generating, but not all the time” and that the main driver was once again, around “sharing the collection”. She further explained that although the BM has been involved in large scale commercial opportunities through international consulting work (for example their consulting deal with the Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi) these financial partnerships were not the driving force behind the relationships they sought around the world.

Although each institution was keen to use their international strategy and work to generate income, it seemed that each had their own approach to doing so. For example, some participants talked about charging other museums for goods or services; whereas others would seek funding to make collaborations happen. Regardless of the approach, for most participants international activity had to cover its costs. But this was not always the case. Adding to the complexity, Nadja stated “It is always a mixture. We provide a lot of advice to our partners free of charge. But again, our resource is finite so in most cases, things need to be funded.” Here the BM once again seems to operate slightly differently, as they see their work in the world as akin to other mission-led activities their museum might deliver such as conversation, education, or curation.

6.1.4.2 Extending institutional reach

For many, international working was also about extending institutional reach and reputation. Here participants talked broadly about reaching more people around the world through touring exhibitions as well as extending their brand in key locations. As such, there was a sense that international work was about expansionism. No longer were these institutions just about reaching national audiences and stakeholders, they were escalating their remit to the world. Most participants were explicit when talking about this aspect of their work. For example, Helen noted
that the SMG’s international strategy was about “extending reach, growing reputation and building resource” whilst Tim was clear that for the V&A this was also about “reach, reputation, and impact”.

When it came to discussing impact, all participants drew on their touring exhibitions programme as a way of articulating the number of people who had seen their exhibitions in certain museums around the world, as well as how many places they had been to. For example, James talked about how their annual exhibition *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* goes to “40 venues in about 20 counties each year”; and how their exhibition *Treasures of the Natural World* in Japan was seen by “340,000 people” but reached “80% of the Japanese population ... due to the news and TV coverage”. Nadja and Tim noted similar numbers for their touring programmes.

The idea of “brand building” was used repeatedly by participants as one of the factors underpinning their international strategies. Although this was rarely defined by participants, there was a strong link to geographic expansion. For the V&A their activities in China were partly “a big brand building campaign with lots of different tentacles.” Furthermore, Tim thought about touring exhibitions in the same way. He noted, “exhibitions are important because they are the-calling card of the V&A internationally and the thing that helps us to extend the brand of the V&A.”

Most participants talked about where they wanted to build global activity and enhance their brand. For the NHM there was a desire to “to increase the visibility and footprint... in a key target market” whilst the SMG wanted to build their brand in places where it had little visibility. This often resulted in the museum thinking about opportunities as cost neutral with the view that it bought different benefits. Helen noted:

> Touring exhibitions have never been seen as a massive income source. You’re offsetting some of the costs of your own exhibitions by building brand and reputation. And we realised that we had to put quite a lot into that because although the brand of the Science Museum is known in some areas of the world, it’s not universal or nearly as extensive as we might like to think.

For Helen, there wasn’t a formula that dictated where to work in the world, instead there was a tendency to adopt an approach that made use of important moments. She noted: “We’re working with the BRIC\textsuperscript{14} countries. But we never did a massive analysis that said we ought to focus there... So Brazil arose, we’d had some conversations already but then they were very much catalysed by the

\textsuperscript{14} BRIC countries refer to Brazil, Russia, India, and China. It is a widely used acronym to group these four countries primarily reflecting their newly advanced economic development. In 2010, the acronym was modified to BRICS, to include South Africa.
cultural Olympiad”. Here it seems that Helen is leveraging major global moments such as the Olympics to help ascertain where they should work in the world. Although not stated there is a sense that this form of connection may well help with visibility and funding as it aligns with overarching UK governmental moments.

For the NHM there was a focused system to ascertain where they should work in the world and for what reason. Here James described multiple indicators to help him guide his work. Firstly, he wanted to work in locations that fulfilled a set number of criteria including:

Where the natural world is most interesting to study; where there are great conglomerations of people; where there is a lack of institutions like ours occupying the same place in public life; where there is excellence in research networks; where there are great education systems; where there’s stable government and economies.

Secondly, he had developed a matrix of five different filters to help him (and the wider museum) understand the benefits of certain international activity. These included “… advocacy and reputation, scientific discovery, public engagement, knowledge transfer and profitable income.” In many ways these indicators are at odds with the work he was undertaking within the international engagement department. As previously noted, he made a clear distinction between the scientific activity and the cultural activity that this strategy was focused on; however natural world locations, research networks and scientific discovery seemed to play an important part in selecting where and what to do. This disconnection further emphasises that international activity was being decoupled from the museum’s overall mission and vision. Because of these levers, James developed a strategy that was built around “10 to 12 alpha level\(^{15}\) global mega-cities all located in major nations in Asia and Latin America”. The selection of alpha level cities provided an avenue to reach significant populations and potentially tap into commercial opportunities via their growing economies; the selection of cities within Asia and Latin America also indicates a desire to engage with emerging museological markets.

In terms of location, for Nadja, the BM’s global collection meant she couldn’t “neglect any part of the world…. But for the NHM, SMG and V&A there was a clear sense they wanted to grow activity in key locations, with all of them referencing China. The reasons behind working in China varied between participants: for the V&A there was strong connection to their collection; whereas for the SMG and NHM there was a sense that they could increase reach and positioning from working in this

\(^{15}\) Alpha level cities are defined as important global locations that link major economic regions and states into the world economy.
part of the world. Helen noted, “Our major region is China. We just decided that we ought to be in a country and so set about doing that.” Whilst no one was explicit about the commercial benefits of working in this region, many of them talked about their developing their touring exhibition footprint in this country. However, for Nadja there was limited mention of China being a key country for the BM; despite the fact they have significant commercial businesses operating there (Milmo, 2021). The selection of China as a key location for international work is noteworthy – especially as political relations sour due to humanitarian crises (Spence, 2022). Whilst the brand of UK national museums might be increasing in China, Milmo (2021) argues that museums connecting within such regimes may well be tarnishing their reputations at home.

All participants talked about their connections to museums in Europe and North America. There was a sense that these partnerships were something different as institutions in these regions had long established histories that had often connected throughout time. Nadja commented that the BM’s connections here have been established for “...a long, long time” whilst Tim noted “...we have quite good mature connections with Europe, and with North America because of historic ties.” Furthermore, Tim referred to museums in Europe and North America as “easy natural partners internationally”, whilst James positioned them as an “established peer group.”

6.1.4.3 Building reputation with key stakeholders

For some participants, international working was explicitly tied to building reputation. Whether it was with UK government, internal trustees, donors or funders, working internationally helped institutions to get noticed and position themselves in a favourable light. According to Helen, the SMG used international working to “…get noticed... increasing our profile and reputation with our own government and funders: the stakeholders.”

Some made the link between international work and government funding. There was a sense that international working was “beneficial” for future funding settlements as it showed the value and impact these institutions were having, not just in London and the UK but also around the world. Helen stated that the SMG “shall be making a great deal of international working in our Comprehensive spending review submission.” James recognised that museums needed to “demonstrate value for money” and international working was one way of doing so. He went on to state “demonstrating that you are delivering high returns across all of their [DCMS’s] metrics is a

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16 The Comprehensive Spending Review or CSR is a governmental process in the United Kingdom carried out by HM Treasury. It sets expenditure limits and, through public service agreements, defines the key improvements that can be expected.
tactically advantageous thing to do. So, I think there’s a very real funding imperative [around international working].”

Whilst all participants were quick to note they were not directed by government; many were keen to connect with and support the UK government’s global interests. This ranged from Tim who recognised the need to be “mindful of but not dictated” by their agendas through to Helen who stated, “we get a lot of the benefit domestically … with government departments [when we are] seen to support those agendas.” For example, across all interviews there was a sense that museums were finding opportunities to connect activity, whether in London or around the world, with UK government. This not only highlighted their work to key politicians but often showed partners their pulling power, reach and influence. Helen recounted how SMG delivered a set of activities in London during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). She noted:

Our India Season had been announced by Theresa May when she was in India alongside Modi. So, we always had in mind that we would quite like some sort of closing event for it. We kept the exhibition open for an additional three weeks [so that it aligned with CHOGM] … Modi came in the end with Prince Charles, and we hosted the reception. And he [Prince Charles] mentioned it on his TV programme the other night… you can’t quantify or monetise it but it’s great that it happened.

Moreover, participants were quick to use UK government or diplomats to strengthen their presence overseas. For example, Nadja talked about inviting British diplomats or visiting ministers to see their exhibitions abroad. Furthermore, Tim explained how the V&A connected with the then Prime Minister David Cameron’s trade mission to China, using his presence in the region to connect and promote their travelling exhibition *Masterpieces of Chinese Paintings* as well as garner political support for the partnership they were about to embark on with the Chinese Merchants Group17 (CMG). This enabled the V&A to get “a huge number of brownie points” with their Chinese partner who were able to see just how influential the museum was in being able to obtain high-level political support for their activities.

6.1.5 Wider societal and political implications

Throughout interviews participants conceptualised their international strategy and work as contributing to more than just institutional goals. For them this work was important in generating

17 The China Merchants Group Limited is a state-owned corporation of the People’s Republic of China. The company operating under the Chinese Ministry of Transport.
cross-cultural relationships. Moreover, there was a general awareness that this activity was being framed as part of a wider governmental agenda.

### 6.1.5.1 Generating cultural diplomacy

For all participants, international working was about developing cross-cultural relations which in turn supported cultural diplomacy. Nadja was proud that her work was fundamentally about building “people to people” or “museum to museum” relationships that stood outside of political interference or rhetoric. Because of this, she was able to work almost anywhere in the world. James also talked about how his work was very much about “diplomacy” and that he had “relationships with many people in many places”. All participants talked about how their work often facilitated important relationships between two countries when this was unable to happen at a political level. For example, Helen talked about the work they conducted with Russian museums and diplomats at a time when the UK government had imposed sanctions on the country (for more information see Case study of state logic: The SMG and Russia p. 106-107).

### 6.1.5.2 Brand Britain and soft power

Throughout interviews, all participants recognised that their work was related to the government’s global positioning of Britain. Tim noted, “there will continue to be ... this idea that Government wants to encourage what museums and cultural organisations could do internationally as part of Brand Britain”. Moreover, all participants also mentioned “soft power” (Nye, 2004) as a way of articulating their work, further referencing governmental interests in boosting perceptions abroad. Of all participants, Helen referred to soft power the most. Throughout her interview, she used it to describe the SMG’s aspirations and activities. She noted that soft power was key to their international work and as such was woven into their overarching strategy documents. For example, in *Inspiring Futures Strategic Priorities 2017-2030*, (2017) the SMG states a desire to “be recognised as a vital means of promoting the UK, both directly and through soft power” (p. 26) and that they want to “work closely with UK public sector agencies to add value to each other’s work and help maintain the UK's soft power ranking” (p. 28). For the SMG, connecting to governmental soft power agendas was seemingly beneficial, particularly with Brexit on the horizon. Helen noted “As we know [soft power] has been given a slightly perverse boost through Brexit.... And that’s really helped us. So, we were kind of on the front foot in some ways.” Here Helen acknowledges that as Brexit tarnishes the global reputation of the UK, opportunities will arise to showcase the positive and influential aspects of SMG’s international activities.
For some, soft power became a tool that could be used or traded for influence, power or positioning. James noted, “I think the NHM’s stock is rising in terms of its kind of visibility to government as a kind of soft power engine or a cultural diplomacy channel”. Helen was more explicit, noting that their work with Russia meant they had developed relationships with diplomats on both sides that could come in handy one day. She noted:

I think we built up a lot of soft power capital in that project. Which you kind of hold in reserve and then you might want to bank it when you want it. Or sort of cash it in...
Somebody had a really good phrase at something I went to. That said soft power is and can only be sort of cultural capital. And it only becomes power when you expend it.

For Nadja and Tim, there was a reluctance to define their work as such and at times a sense of hesitation was felt throughout the interview process. For Tim, it was a term that was used by others to define their activities, particularly around their work in China. When questioned on it, he noted, “The soft power thing wasn’t so much part of our narrative... It was part of it, but it wasn’t the bit that we were necessarily amplifying.” Moreover, for Nadja she was the least interested in using such jargon to define her working practices. She stated:

These words in terms of advocacy, soft power, culture diplomacy, they’re not totally new but we’re talking the last decade. Nobody uses those words. Maybe some people thought it, but I don’t think we were thinking it necessarily or doing it for those reasons. Because I think this exchange of ideas was, as I mentioned it, it was always really at the core of it because we’re constantly wanting to find out more because I think we’re totally aware that we don’t know everything about the collection.

Adding to the complexity, whilst there was a sense that museums had a role in generating soft power through their activities which they could then use to influence key stakeholders like government, it was clear that they didn’t want government dictating their activities. Helen noted “[soft power] it has to stem from the integrity of the organisation and the activity. You know it just wouldn’t work if it was undertaken too cynically or too overtly government”. Tim agreed with this sentiment stating:

I think that feels like the right relationship is for us to have an eye on each other in what we are doing internationally, to spot the opportunities to slip stream with each other. But not to have a situation where Government is in any way trying to dictate international strategy over and above a broad heading of cultural diplomacy.

Whilst there was a clear spectrum of international activities that all the museums engaged in – from partnership working to touring exhibitions, through to consulting and diplomatic activities – there
was a clear consensus that they were all pursuing the same types of activity. Moreover, there were clear parallels in the reasoning for doing such work. This included supporting the overall mission of the museum through to income generation, positioning and building reach. Whilst some museums emphasised mission-related reasons behind their global activities, others placed an emphasis on the need to generate income and make profit through such work. Moreover, these new modes of impact were further signals that the value of a museum is evolving. No longer is it good enough to just reach the public within their local vicinity, now there is an expectation that these national museums spread their work and influence internationally. Moreover, museums are no longer just about impacting the lives of their visitors through changing their perceptions or behaviour, or increasing their knowledge in a topic; they are now being seen as a way of extending their countries values and brand overseas (Grincheva, 2020b; Hoogwaerts, 2016; Nisbett, 2013). Finally, the creation and evolution of new roles and tasks within the museum field heralds an interesting movement in the purpose and function of these institutions in the 21st century. Not only is there a clear need to generate income from international activities – with many having set up large touring exhibition and consulting teams to bring in revenue – there is also an overt repositioning of museums as global entities who work in partnership to generate new content, new relationships, and new opportunities (Freedman, 2010; Goff, 2017; Grincheva, 2020b).

6.2 Which institutional logics can be identified as contributing to the current direction of international work of museums?

Through adopting a phenomenological approach, the analysis of data has allowed me to identify commonalities and differences between the actions of the four museums, and thus distinguish between instances that might be described as applying different logics. As discussed in Chapter 3 several academics have explored how institutional logics can affect the work of museums. Zamora-Kapo, Godart and Zhao's (2019) exploration of elite art museums – such as MoMA in New York, Tate Modern in London, and the Pompidou in Paris – found that state, market, and aesthetic logics influenced both their selection and display of artworks. In addition Feinstein and Meshoulam (2014) have discussed the ways in which science centres and science museums adopted client and cooperative logics when thinking about their publics, resulting in differing implementations of equity-based work. From analysing the various transcripts, I identify three logics that are driving the international work of individual institutions. These can be framed as market, state and community logics. Whilst these logics are presented individually and somewhat “neatly” it is important to note that there is much overlap and interdependency amongst them. The walls between these logics are by no means solid as individual institutions appear to slide between them with ease. As such, I
acknowledge that UK national museums are hybrid institutions that are able to negotiate these seemingly conflicting logics in order to deliver international activity.

In the following sections I draw on the work of Thornton et al. (2012) and note how museum practices, structures and symbols provide the rules that shape action, language, interpretartion and interaction. As such, I explore how these different logics provide a diverse “governance system[s] that provide a frame of reference that preconditions actors’ sensemaking choices.” (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 54). Moreover, throughout this chapter I recognise that museum collections – important symbols of institutional logics – act as boundary objects. Here museum collections seem “plastic enough” to bridge multiple logics, yet “robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites.” (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393).

6.2.1 Market logic

With external pressures such as state funding cuts, museums moved to become more financially independent, focussing attention on global money-making ventures such as franchising, consulting and touring exhibitions. As such, for most participants in this study there was a clear focus on generating income from some international activities. For example, internal documents show that the NHM wanted to “generate £2.7 million net contribution per annum from international activities” and in order to do so they would “organise [their] business for international working” (NHM, 2014, p. 2). Helen couldn’t be clearer stating that the SMG was “not at all coy about making income from international activity”. The emphasis placed on commercial activity arguably indicates a strong market logic in international work: activity was framed as way to generate revenue, as well as “dominate the market” through expansionism.

6.2.1.1 Structures, symbols, and practices of a market logic

Throughout interviews, participants talked about various structures, symbols and practices that indicated a market logic. Firstly, all organisations had at least one trading company operating within the museum that dealt with commercially driven activity. According to DCMS (2017) national museums secured 15.7% of income from commercial activity in 2016-2017 via trading companies. The government body notes that whilst London-based nationals have become incredibly successful at generating income to offset funding gaps (via a mix of retail, hospitality, licensing, hiring venues, touring exhibitions etc), many “have subcontracted sections of their commercial operations to diversify the risk and ensure that they can focus museum activity on what they are best at, i.e. running a museum” (p. 32). As such this becomes an important structure within each organisation.
that allowed individuals to act in a different, more entrepreneurial way. For example, participants also talked about generating business plans to support new activity, drawing up commercial contracts, “pitching” ideas and partnerships to other organisations, and the development of sales brochures to promote touring exhibitions. As such these are important symbols of market logic within an institution. For Friedland (2013), these are the tangible objects of institutional logics, whilst Zamora-Kapoor et al. (2019) noted that these are examples of “the imprints of the institutional logics that have guided stakeholders’ choices” (p. 5).

A market logic was also largely evident in the language adopted by all participants when discussing some of their activities. For example, participants talked about “target markets”, “non-disclosure agreements”, “contract negotiations” and “business planning”. This was further emphasised by Tim who noted their relationship with CMG to develop a gallery in Shenzhen was “B2B... it feels very reciprocal... it is not B2C ... it is fundamentally a B2B endeavour [that] has other great spin-off benefits”. By adopting such language, he frames the relationship very specifically in the realm of business: “B2B” refers to “business-to-business” activity where one entity makes a commercial transaction with another; whilst “B2C” or “business-to-consumer” refers to selling products directly to customers, bypassing any form of middlemen. By using this term there is an implication that both parties are businesses with comparable negotiating power. Information on the CMG’s (2021) website states that in 2020 the group achieved record-breaking profit with revenue noted as RMB18 814.8 billion, up 14.1% year-on-year, and total profit at RMB 175.4 billion, up 7.6% year-on-year. Whilst the income here outstrips that of the V&A, the notion is that the Museum’s collection, name, brand and expertise have significant economic, social and cultural value.

In negotiating such an economic transaction, the V&A also transitions from being a public museum with a focus on collections and education to a business seeking profitability. Moreover, and as noted previously, the relationship with CMG includes the V&A providing content, collections, naming rights and expertise for their new gallery. These museum assets now become products or services that can be sold: not between one museum to another, but from one business to another.

Alongside this example, the role of museum collections within a market logic perspective is noteworthy. Here a focus is placed on the value of collections as economic assets. As such they are exploited for financial gain and reward. Exploitation comes in the form of “hiring exhibitions” to other institutions, and there is a sense that some objects are more valuable than others. For

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18 RNB or renminbi is the official currency of the People’s Republic of China.
example, the forthcoming discussion around the NHM’s exhibition – *Treasures of the Natural World* (see p. 99-101) – indicates that the value of some items is much higher due to their rarity.

### 6.2.1.2 Source of legitimacy

Under a market logic, status in the market becomes a key concern as organisations vie for dominance and leadership (Thornton et al., 2012). For many participants, this notion of status within the marketplace underpinned their international working as they wanted their institutions to “stand out” and be seen as “global brands” and a “leader” in their field. Throughout interviews participants often used a language of dominance to describe their collections and activities. For example, Nadja referred to the BM as “the biggest lender in the world” whereas James talked about an exhibition as “the most prestigious global set of photography awards related to commentary about the state of the natural world”. Similarly, Tim described the V&A as “pre-eminent in exhibition making and particularly in touring exhibitions”. This helped to reaffirm their institutions as market leaders – the best of the best. Many also referred to their travelling exhibitions as “blockbusters” and noted the “record breaking” visitor numbers they had obtained in other museums. Nadja clearly expressed pride when she said, “We showed it [an exhibition] at Hong Kong Science Museum and they said it broke the record for their highest visitor numbers ever.” Similarly, James was keen to discuss visitor numbers, media reach and various other notions of impact when talking about their work in Tokyo. There was also a desire to grow international work to improve one’s position or status. James noted “by joining things up or by looking at bigger partnerships and opportunities, we can increase our standing which is always the aim”. Across the interviews there was a sense of friendly rivalry or competition between some institutions. This was most evident between James and Helen who conceived an imaginary league table and ranked their museum’s work in relation to others. For example, James stated “We’re still, kind of I would say, in the middle of the pack in terms of our peer institutions in London” whereas Helen noted “[we are] still many steps behind the organisations that have been doing it for years like [the NHM] … and the V&A.”

To tease out some of the complexity and nuance around activities underpinned by a market logic, in the following section I explore a particular case study of museum practice.

### 6.2.1.3 Case study of market logic: The NHM and Treasures of the Natural World

Market logic can be seen as the driving force behind the conception, development, and delivery of the NHM’s touring exhibition *Treasures of the Natural World*. Planning for the exhibition began in
2015 with the view that it was only going to be an international touring show. This was a different approach for the Museum as most of their touring portfolio came from exhibitions that were initially designed for their South Kensington site. James talked about developing a robust “business case” to get investment from the NHM to make this happen. As the touring exhibition work sat within the museum’s trading company James talked about how the tour – which would run over five years and many venues – “would be able to cover its costs and generate significant profit after a few years”. The approach for developing the show was also different. Whilst the museum would normally tour turnkey exhibitions19 this was created as a collection of specimens with an intellectual property package. This meant that the receiving institution would get digital media assets (a selection of films and interactives) and full text of the exhibition, including section and sub-section panels, labels for objects and supporting images (NHM, 2017). This approach reduced the development costs for the NHM (as there were no setworks with the exhibition) and enabled host institutions to display it in a way that resonated with local audiences.

Launched in 2017 this exhibition brought together the very best items from the NHM’s scientific and cultural collections. Specimens included the birds Charles Darwin studied to test his theory of evolution by natural selection, items belonging to Sir Hans Sloane, the physician and scientist whose private collection formed the basis for the museum, and the fossil Iguanodon bone described by Richard Owen in the paper where he coined the term dinosaur. For the NHM, the exhibition captured, “both physically and intellectually, the essence not only of our collection and our scientific work but of exploring the museum as a visitor” (NHM, 2017, p.8). For James, the exhibition was pitched towards “key target markets” such as “Asian mega-cities”. By creating something that had flexibility in design, and which heavily traded on the NHM’s name, heritage and iconic collection he felt he was able to reach different venues with interesting partners. Moreover, due to the nature of material in the exhibition, the NHM was also able to ask for “a pretty good monthly hire fee”. In many ways this exhibition can be viewed as a highly desirable product that had strong market appeal. By including star objects, or the museum’s treasures, the organisation was leveraging specimens that no other museum had in their collection as a key sales feature. Moreover, many of these items had never left the museum before, increasing the rare nature of the product. These features were emphasised heavily in the exhibition’s sales brochure which unlike others within the touring portfolio had a different look and feel: its gold cover, bound spine and use of heavy stock paper promoted a luxury, high-end feel.

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19 A turnkey exhibition is fully designed, built, and installed - completely ready to operate in another museum. The term implies that the receiving museum can just “turn a key” and start running the exhibition as a public programme.
To supplement the exhibition, the museum’s commercial teams (retail and publishing) developed a bespoke suite of products: keyrings, magnets, books, soft toys, pencils, tea towels and more. These were offered to host venues to supplement the exhibition offer.

The NHM debuted the exhibition with a three-month run at the National Museum of Nature and Science, Tokyo, in partnership with media group The Yomiuri Shimbun. Over its run the exhibition was seen by 340,000 people. For James, this form of large-scale exhibition provided an opportunity to boost the NHM’s brand overseas and “increase the visibility and footprint of [the NHM] ...” The exhibition also enabled the museum to work with various governmental bodies, both in the UK and abroad, to extend their influence in the region. This included “working with the British Council, UK diplomatic mission, Japanese mission to the UK, with chambers of commerce, with science innovation networks...”. For James, these groups were useful in brokering relationships in Japan as well as “demonstrating the visibility and impact of the NHM overseas”.

The exhibition brought significant commercial benefit to the museum, with James noting it had “made us a substantial kind of cash contribution that offset a hole in our budget elsewhere.” Moreover, since launching the exhibition in Tokyo, it has travelled on to Singapore, Taiwan, Quebec and Melbourne; and it has been seen by over 750,000 people (P. Roberts, personal communication, January 15, 2022).

6.2.1.4 Shifting external pressures

Thornton and Ocasio (1999) recognise that institutional logics are historically variant and are shaped by economic, political, structural and normative forces. In the context of this study, a strong market logic is perhaps not surprising considering the financial state of many UK national museums. With government funding to museums diminishing (Anheier & Toepler, 1998; Frey & Meier, 2006; Newman & Tourle, 2011), there is need to generate income to not only cover shortfalls in operating budgets but to compete with entertainment businesses that are also vying for the public’s attention and leisure time (Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2014). This is echoed by Macdonald, (2006b) who acknowledged that whilst “most museums are rich in terms of their collections, they are usually rather short of cash for operational activities” (p. 379). In other words, the need for museums to generate income has become a matter of “simple self-preservation” (Fleming, 2005, p. 1). Moreover, with the Covid-19 pandemic affecting the financial sustainability of many museums (McGivern & Kenney, 2020), there is also a sense that the need to generate income is gathering pace.
With this in mind, it seems UK national museums have little choice but to become “cultural enterprises” (Mendoza, 2017, p. 18). As such they must learn to operate within complex commercial environments whilst recognising that they are fundamentally value driven organisations rather than profit driven (Fleming, 2013). The commercialisation of museums is a growing trend. McClellan (2008) has recognised that “perhaps, no development in the museum of the last half century has been more dramatic or controversial than the increase in commercialism” (p. 221). This need to generate funds has spawned the term “museopreneur” (Ciecko, 2019, para. 3). Roles like this are clearly different to more traditional positions in a museum such as delivering learning sessions to students or conserving objects. By contrast, museoprenuers have the autonomy to chase opportunities, make deals and negotiate contracts. Whilst for some, commercial activity brings new ways of thinking, new partnerships and an entrepreneurial spirit into museums (Camarero & Garrido, 2012), others argue that without careful consideration for a cultural institution’s mission and vision, this drive for generating income can cause tension and conflict amongst staff (Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2014). Moreover, Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) argue that when non-profit organisations, such as museums, adopt approaches and values from the commercial world, this can call into question their ability to shape and maintain civil society.

6.2.2 State logic

When exploring research studies that have identified state logic within an organisation there is a sense that it is connected to democratic participation and bureaucratic domination (Thornton et al., 2012; van Gestel & Hillebrand, 2011). Within a museum context however Zamora-Kapoor et al. (2019) note that a state logic is often reflected in a museum’s mission statement, especially when it is focused on valuing national heritage and telling the nation’s story. I however, seek to broaden the definition as my findings indicate that state logic is more nuanced when it comes to international activity.

When referring to state logic I am recognising how museums represent the state, or the nation. That is, state logic captures the way in which museums reaffirm the role they play in defining, supporting and spreading nationhood, national identity and national values (Aronsson et al., 2012; McLean, 2005; Watson & Sawyer, 2011). The key distinction is that they are portraying these facets not at home, but abroad. When state logic is enacted on the international stage, museums become potent symbols of modern Britain around the world.
This is evidenced in two similar yet different ways. Firstly, it sees museums working on a nation-state-to-nation-state level. As such museum activity is reframed as the UK “working with and in” countries such as China, Brazil, or India. From blockbuster touring exhibitions that showcase the very best of UK national collections, through to mega-partnerships with new museums in the Global South, activity becomes more about “Brand Britain” than the individual museum itself. Secondly, it sees museums working in a more subtle way, developing important cross-cultural relationships with other institutions around the world. This is where cultural activity can sometimes happen even at a time when political activity cannot. The nuance around such activities are best described by Aronsson et al. (2012) who note:

> While national museums are established to present the nation, professionals working in them may not consider their institutions as national in a political sense but rather as being a national service. Indeed, the professional desire, largely successful, to speak in a language of neutrality, objectivity and reasonableness gives these museums unique status as trusted authorities.... (p. 14)

But within this study, that sense of neutrality and objectivity was at times blurred. Here a key complication when state logic is evidenced in museum activity is how it relates to government. In many ways this should be seen on a continuum. For example, at times international activity is highly connected to UK government. At others, museums dissociate themselves from government to keep activities apolitical. This nuance is described in more depth below.

### 6.2.2.1 Structures, symbols, and practices of state logic

Throughout interviews there were various symbols and practices that indicated an underlying state logic. For example, state logic was evident in the way individuals were taking on new practices as they travelled around the world, showcasing the work of their institutions. Museums have become a form of “cosmopolitan ambassador” (Davidson & Perez-Castellanos, 2019). James described his participation in several DCMS sponsored “missions” to emerging markets. He stated:

> On the one level we might look at something that we at the museum would do to support UK soft power and cultural diplomacy. And I’ve personally been involved in three different Secretary of State for Culture led missions to parts of the world that DCMS has put together for groups of people to go and explore opportunities for soft power collaboration, cultural collaboration in places that are of interest to UK government for various other reasons. And the territories are not particularly surprising. It’s places like Saudi Arabia, places like China, places like India where us being representative of the British cultural economy is something that is beneficial to the UK and to UK government as much as it is to our institutional standing with government and in the world.
Similarly, Tim outlined how he “was on a plane as part of a trade delegation to China meeting the Chinese Premier”. For him this was an “important part of the political dynamic” in building relationships with China. At times museum staff also played the role of cultural diplomat. For example, when Helen discussed their work with Russia there was a sense that museum professionals were very much involved in negotiating complicated cross-cultural relationships. Moreover, Nadja talked about the work of curators, educators and conservators whose relationships with other colleagues around the world “continued irrespective of what’s happening on the political scene between our country and particularly another country”.

At times, state logic was characterised by the manner in which museums placed an emphasis on representing the UK. For Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A, international working was a means of showcasing contemporary British culture to the world. Hunt noted that the V&A wanted to “provide an innovative, and often revolutionary, sense of what contemporary British culture and identity can offer.” (2018, p. 120). Moreover, for Tim, the V&A’s outpost in Shenzhen was a powerful way to showcase what the UK was good at overseas. He noted: “We were…creating a lot of kind of noise and interest around the idea of a national UK museum doing more overseas and doing interesting partnerships overseas and taking their collections overseas”. What is noteworthy here is that Tim refers to the work in China as specifically British. It is the UK on show, not just the V&A. This distinction is important as the work of museums moves from showcasing the work, talent and expertise of their professional staff to representing British values and expertise on a global stage. Moreover, James noted that the NHM was “a UK public institution acting on behalf of UK government... such as participating in World Expos20”. Here he discussed how the Museum had participated in various Expos placing exhibitions within the UK pavilion to showcase British expertise. For James, the NHM was becoming an important “soft power engine” for the government.

On a similar note, participants talked about the importance of tapping into the UK diplomatic scene around the world. In such instances, the British Council and UK Embassies become important figures in developing new relationships as well as adding a cachet to global events. For example, Nadja would always “invite them” to exhibition openings around the world.

Under a state logic the role of collections once again shifts. No longer is there an emphasis on the value of collections as economic assets; instead, a focus is placed on the role they have in celebrating nationhood. And whilst objects in their original form represent the stories of far-flung

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20 World Expo is a regular international exhibition designed to showcase the achievements of nations.
cultures or different geographic locations, here that narrative is somewhat diminished as they become, instead, a symbol of Britain.

Throughout interviews, a state logic was also largely evident in the language adopted by all participants when discussing some of their work. For example, they used phrases such as “promotes the UK”, “tool of state”, “world leading national museum”, and “global catalyst for UK creative industry”. The implication is that UK national museums are a key part of “Brand Britain”. Moreover, participants also used terms such as “cultural diplomacy”, “diplomats”, “soft power” when describing the impact of their work.

6.2.2.2 Source of legitimacy

When the international work described by participants connected with UK government this added a form of legitimacy to their work. For example, Tim talked about how the V&A managed to secure then Prime Minister David Cameron to cement a deal with Chinese partners. It seemed these connections, especially leveraging heads of government, were important moments to celebrate the success of UK institutions on the world stage. Moreover, it provided an opportunity to show current and prospective partners the leveraging power of such institutions.

For James, it seemed that activities that supported a state logic were advantageous from a funding point of view. When supporting UK government agendas around the world, such activities “demonstrated value for money as part of our grant-in-aid from government” and as a consequence made “government sit up and notice” them.

When a state logic was the driving force behind the international work of UK national museums, legitimacy was also achieved when activities and actions generated soft power or fostered cultural diplomacy. This was most successful when it occurred outside of government interference. For example, Grincheva (2020) notes “a museum’s international activities must meaningfully contribute to, or complement, the foreign policy objectives of their nation states, while being self-initiated rather than facilitated by state incentives”. (p. 28)

To highlight some of the complexity around activities underpinned by a state logic, in the following section I explore a particular case study of museum practice.
6.2.2.3 Case study of state logic: The SMG and Russia

In 2015 the Science Museum in London launched *Cosmonauts: The Birth of the Space Age* – a large scale exhibition examining how Russia became the first nation to explore space. The exhibition showcased a significant collection of Russian spacecraft, artefacts and memorabilia, many of which had never been seen in the UK or Western world (Cookson, 2015).

The exhibition took many years to develop, and much work was devoted to forging partnerships with key Russian arts, science and political organisations. A key challenge was working with Russian commercial and governmental space bodies – who had no experience of lending objects – and had to be persuaded to engage with and authorise loan requests. The SMG’s Director Sir Ian Blatchford played a key role in negotiating these relationships and spent much time in Russia to continue conversations and arrange loans. In many ways his role here shifts from that of cultural leader to cultural diplomat. This was noted by Sparks (2015) who described his actions as akin to “Indiana-Jones-style curation and serious top-level diplomacy to get these items to London” (para. 8).

The exhibition development phase coincided with a time of significant political turmoil as the relationship between the UK and Russian government was strained over unrest in the region. The museum however kept communication channels open and continued to use their allies in both the Russian Embassy in the UK and the UK Embassy in Russia to move the project forward. Helen noted:

> It was at a time of the unrest in the Ukraine…. The shooting down of the aircraft over Ukraine. I mean it was pretty much as bad as it could get. But we kept open communications between us and the British governments and directly between us and the Russian government. Both Embassies and Foreign Offices were very closely involved, and both wanted to go ahead. So, this was some cultural diplomacy in action.

Whilst governmental relations continued to break down, Helen noted that the exhibition was seen by political stakeholders as the only positive activity between the two countries. She noted “somebody in an Embassy … who had been in Russia at this time, said to us you know that was the only light in a very dark time.” Moreover, because of the exhibition and their work with Russian organisations, Blatchford received the Pushkin Medal – the nation’s highest cultural honour from Russian President Vladimir Putin – for his services to Russian arts and culture. One reporter at the ceremony noted, “We understand that [the exhibition] has provided him [Vladimir Putin] and David Cameron with something positive to talk about at otherwise awkward discussions about Ukraine and ISIS.” (Sparks, 2015, para. 22).
The work between SMG and Russia has been cited as an example of soft power and cultural diplomacy in action (Blatchford et al., 2018; Blond et al., 2017; Cookson, 2015). Helen echoed this, stating “[it is] often held up as an exemplar [of soft power]” whilst an SMG curator noted it is “an example of the importance of soft power and cultural relations in maintaining dialogue between peoples at times of heightened political tensions” (SMG, 2016, p. 2).

This relationship between SMG and Russia is an interesting case study as it highlights the changing nature of museums. Here they are playing the role of a cultural diplomat: a trans-national actor carefully connecting countries, institutions and peoples at a time when politicians could not. But it also highlights the geo-political challenges when engaging in complex global relations. With Blatchford being awarded the Pushkin Medal one must ask: Is the Museum being rewarded for its services to Russian culture; or is it being used as a political tool to shift perceptions of a state with a complex relationship with the West?

6.2.3 Community logic

Across this study, museums used international working to support communities of practice and develop the wider museological field. Participants talked about sharing their museum’s institutional knowledge, skills, and collections through activities such as training events, staff exchanges and object loans. This indicates a strong community logic in the international work of UK national museums as activity is less about financial stability, or the role they play in supporting the nation state, instead it draws attention to the role these organisations play in supporting the wider ecosystem of cultural organisations. As Thornton et al (2012) explain, institutional logics drive the action, behaviour, and identity of individuals within an organisation. Under a community logic, museum staff were seen to be focusing on collaboration and mutual endeavour. As such, the identity of individuals becomes that of community member and practitioner.

6.2.3.1 Structures, symbols, and practices of a community logic

Throughout interviews, participants talked about various activities, symbols and practices that indicated a community logic. Firstly, all participants talked about training programmes, skills sharing, staff exchanges and object loans. Whilst some of these activities were charged for and as such characterised by a market logic, they were also conducted under the auspices of the museum’s wider civilising or values-led mission. This was a commitment to the museological community and as such, activities were provided for free. For the BM, this was a significant part of their international strategy, with Nadja noting “it’s just who we are” and “what we do”. To provide context, she talked
about the museum’s Iraq Scheme. Launched in 2015 as a response to the destruction of heritage sites in Iraq and Syria by Islamic State, the programme aimed to provide the expertise and skills to document and stabilise damaged heritage sites in preparation for potential reconstruction. For Nadja this programme drew heavily on the knowledge and skills of BM staff. She noted:

When they’re looking [to learn] how to do conservation... colleagues from the conservation department join in.... If they need to learn about audiences, then the learning and audiences team join in. So that input from other departments is then brought into that whole group.

Here Nadja frames the BM as an organisation with an abundance of expertise spanning various aspects of museology. But more importantly, and in this context, the expertise is not monetised but provided to support international colleagues in their pursuit to protect the very thing the BM celebrates – cultural heritage. Similarly, as James recounts, the NHM regularly engaged in peer-to-peer discussions. For him, it was “the kind of mutual support that we might give to like-minded institutions who are facing challenges similar to our own”. In this case, “like-minded” institutions were primarily peer museums located in North America and Europe, and include the example discussed earlier regarding the contribution to the Danish Museum of Natural History’s master plan.

Throughout interviews, participants talked about various practices that supported a community logic. These included forming collegial relationships, developing training manuals to support peer workshops, writing funding applications to support collaborations, through to Memorandums of Understanding or MOUs. For example, Helen talked about the “two MOUs [they have] with institutions in Rio de Janeiro...” For the SMG this was the starting point to lay the ground for staff exchanges that supported institutional learning “working in both directions”.

The very notion of lending objects also became a key practice of community logic. Objects are often sent to other museums to supplement their exhibitions or to support curators/scientists in their pursuit of knowledge. Again, this seemed to be the major aspect of the BMs work. Nadja noted: “we lend whenever possible... [approx.] 5,000 objects per year. It is because we really want to share our collection [because it is all about] knowledge generation... it’s something we’re absolutely committed to”. The role of museum collections here is again noteworthy. No longer are they commercial assets or political symbols, instead they become important tools in facilitating cross cultural learning and collegiality. From a community logic perspective, a focus is placed on the value of collections as knowledge and relationship brokers. As such they are used for training, creating shared narratives, and building trust amongst practitioners.
A community logic was also evident in the language adopted by participants when discussing their work. Terms such as “partner”, “peer group”, “community” or “collaborator” help to frame the relationship between all parties in more equal terms; whilst the use of phrases like “developing knowledge”, “supporting their ambitions” and “fostering capacity” arguably imply notions of community or sector building.

### 6.2.3.2 Source of legitimacy

Under a community logic, personal investment in the wider museological sector becomes a key concern as organisations focus on increasing the status and practices of others (Thornton et al., 2012). A key feature of community logic is thus the commitment to help, shape and develop communities of practice by transmitting knowledge as a public good rather than a commodity. As noted in Chapter 2, communities of practice is a popular frame to support professional learning with museums (Allen & Crowley, 2014). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Thus, the focus moves away from the public facing activities of the museum to support the profession and professionals that underpin it. For some this commitment was also an obligation, as Nadja notes: “the obligation lies because we have the knowledge, and that idea of sharing knowledge is why we do feel that we should actually help colleagues and share knowledge”. She emphasises the role that large, old, national institutions have in supporting more than their own goals, but also that of the wider sector.

Once again, I now turn to a case study of museum practice. Here I explore the BM’s annual International Training Programme (ITP) and tease out some of the nuance of community logic.

### 6.2.3.3 Case study of community logic: The BM’s International Training Programme

Initially conceived as a bespoke training programme for museum colleagues at the Supreme Council for Antiquities of Egypt, the ITP has since expanded as a professional development scheme for museum practitioners around the world. The programme’s mission is to develop “a sustainable global network of inspired museum and heritage professionals, through sharing knowledge, skills and experiences.” (BM, 2018, p. 4).

The programme, which spans six weeks in the UK, has three core components. A training programme at the BM with various presentations, workshops and visits; a placement in a BM
department based on participants’ specific areas of interest; and a ten-day placement at a partner museum somewhere in the UK. This latter activity enables participants to work on a specific project and gain hands-on experience with collections as well as develop closer relationships with staff. The topics taught across the programme cover contemporary issues and challenges within the museum world through to more classical topics. In 2019, areas included cultural heritage and peacebuilding, equality and diversity, museum future planning through to conservation, education and fundraising.

Whilst participation in the programme is free (ITP is externally funded through donations and sponsorship), there is a selection process that enables the BM to prioritise individuals based on their professional, economic and social situation. Nadja noted “we select people who are the best candidate... Rather than have somebody sent here because they might be in a particular position [in their museum] or come here [because] they might be able to afford to do it.” Whilst the programme aims to generate a global network of practitioners, it seems most participants come from the Global South. Jack (2018) noted that a recent cohort included participants from Myanmar, Azerbaijan, Sudan, Rwanda, Nepal, Oman, China, India, Turkey and Mexico. The BM notes that “fellows come from countries that have identified themselves as needing support to develop their museum services.” (2018, p. 2).

A key consideration for the BM is the care and welfare of participants when they are in the UK. As such participants are provided with full travel and medical insurance, accommodation, travel tickets, a UK SIM card so they can contact family members and their home institutions easily, and a weekly subsistence grant. For Messenger (n.d.), a staff member who works on the programme, providing these enables participants to focus “on sessions and projects, fostering collegiality, skills sharing, and worthwhile experiences” (para. 9) rather than on logistics.

For the BM the programme sits at the core of its international strategy. It not only provides a tangible way for museum professionals from around the world to connect with the BM but most importantly it helps to generate new knowledge around the collection. As such, over the programme’s 14-year history, it has reached more than 300 museum professionals from across 48 countries. Moreover, this has resulted in collaborative projects, exhibitions and academic papers which further the understanding of cultural heritage (BM, 2018). Neal Spencer, Keeper in the Ancient Egypt, and Sudan Department, recognises that the benefits of the programme are multifaceted and multi-directional. Not only do participants provide BM staff with new insights on collections and museological practices, but long-lasting professional connections are formed. He also
notes: “I’ve seen Egyptian curators meeting their Sudanese counterparts for the first time, and
Iranians and Iraqis who say they grew up thinking of each other as the enemy” (as cited in Jack,
2018). Here the role of the BM moves from trainer partner to cross-cultural mediator.

For the BM’s Director Hartwig Fischer, the programme not only provides a way to support those
responsible for global cultural heritage but equally it helps to reposition the museum as a
collaborative and connected institution. He notes: “Throughout the programme, friendships are
formed, ideas exchanged, and collaborations conceived. Preconceptions are dispelled and
connections revealed. The BM thus truly becomes a museum of the world.” (BM, 2018, p. 2).

6.2.3.4 The temporal and contextual nature of community logics

Of all the logics evident through the international work of UK national museums, community logic
seems to be the least potent. Whilst objects loans, training and knowledge sharing was evident
across all museums, it arguably carried the least weight. This finding seems to be at odds with some
earlier research around the global work of museums more generally. For example, several
commentators have noted that training and community building was a key aspect of how these
organisations work around the world (Nevins, 2019; NMDC, 2002). In contrast, it seems that
priorities today are shaped more by market and state logics. This shift in emphasis resonates with
the analyses of Gumusay et al (2020) who highlight the temporal and contextual nature of logics. As
the work of museums changes, institutional priorities – and underpinning organising logics – shift.

Across interviews there was a sense that for some institutions certain logics prevailed over others.
For example, Nadja talked about the importance of knowledge sharing, noting that it was “crucial”
to their work and activity thus indicating the centrality of a community logic. By contrast, for Helen,
soft power was front and centre of the SMGs strategy indicating the key role that state logic played
in filtering the opportunities that the museum pursued. For James, his international strategy was
arguably defined by key commercial metrics, indicating a preference for activities that supported a
market logic. However, despite his attention to finance, James also noted that each opportunity was
always examined on its own merit:

I think there has to be a net win…. the worst that’s acceptable for us to participate in a
project is no change. If a project isn’t doing any new science, that’s fine. If a project is doing
bad science, then we’d write the project off. Likewise, if the project is actively losing us
money rather than recovering its costs, we must look very hard at whether the other
benefits outweigh that. If a project is damaging our reputation, then again, we wouldn’t do
it. It might not be giving us great reputational gains but if it’s enhancing knowledge of the sector or enriching the audience then of course they are reasons to do it.

In this quote, James gives the impression that there isn’t necessarily a hierarchy or preference of logics. Instead, their weighting changes depending on the circumstances. In other words, the institutional logics governing international museum practice are fluid and ever changing.

In Table 4 below, I summarise the three forms of logic, and provide examples of how they manifest in institutional structures and practice, vocabularies and strategies.

Table 4: The influence of market, community and state logic

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<td><strong>Root metaphor</strong></td>
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<td>Museum as quasi-diplomat</td>
<td>Museum as community member</td>
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<td>Status in marketplace</td>
<td>Role supporting perception of nation</td>
<td>Status with wider museological community</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Basis of strategy</strong></td>
<td>Increase income and profitability</td>
<td>Generate soft power and foster cultural diplomacy</td>
<td>Develop wider community of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional structures, symbols and practices</strong></td>
<td>Trading company; consulting; franchising; touring exhibitions; business plans, sales brochures; trade fairs</td>
<td>Diplomatic missions; large partnerships with new museums; connecting to national agendas or important global moments</td>
<td>Staff exchanges; conferences; training programmes; object loans; MOUs; training documents; funding applications</td>
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<td><strong>The role of museum collections</strong></td>
<td>Commercial assets for hire</td>
<td>Symbols of nationhood, Britain, and British culture</td>
<td>Brokers of cross-cultural knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabularies of practice</strong></td>
<td>Target markets; non-disclosure agreements; contract negotiations; and business planning</td>
<td>Promotes the UK; tool of state; world leading national museum; Brand Britain; global catalyst for UK</td>
<td>Partnership working; collaboration; knowledge sharing; peer learning</td>
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Table 4: The influence of market, community and state logic

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6.2.4 UK national museums as hybrid organisations

Contemporary organisations face multiple and often conflicting institutional pressures (Pache & Santos, 2013a; Thornton et al., 2012). From market forces to balancing societal demands, the pressures they face are complex and unrelenting. The application of institutional logics can help us to understand these multifaceted practices. When more than one logic is present in an institution they can be described as hybrid organisations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Pache & Santos, 2013b; Skelcher & Smith, 2015).

For example, in this study all the museums have developed trading companies within the organisation to facilitate commercial activity. In this instance they are driven by market logic. However, and simultaneously, they are also engaging in other tasks that are underpinned a community or state logic such as supporting the wider museological community through training programmes or to working with UK government on trade fairs. This complexity mirrors previous research that has shown museums are complex environments driven by multiple logics (Feinstein & Meshoulam, 2014; van Koeverden, 2018; Zamora-Kapoor et al., 2019) Significantly, whilst Pache and Santos (2013b) have warned that logic compatibility and integration can sometimes be deceptive, in this context there was a clear sense that across all four museums the different logics kept in balance.

This balance of logics was particularly evident when Helen discussed the SMG’s aspirations and activities in Brazil. On one hand these were driven by a state logic: Helen noted that there was a lot of “encouragement from government” to show their expertise around science engagement and science capital to a country that seemed to lack it. Here the notion of British expertise was at the fore. However, there was also evidence to suggest that a community logic was at work. For example, Helen noted that all institutions had signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cement their desire to work together, and that they had undertaken staff exchanges and knowledge sharing that was “funded and working in both directions”. This approach seemed to support a partnership work and a wider museological community of practice.

A fundamental principle of institutional logics is how they provide a frame for individual behaviour and action (Thornton et al., 2012). Within a hybrid organisation this becomes challenging as individuals must balance multiple logics and make sense of what this means for their working practices and professional identity. For Skelcher and Smith (2015) this increases the risk of a blocked hybrid due to the difficulties individuals have in accommodating such variation. The value commitment of organisational members may also help to determine the form of hybridity an
organisation experiences as well as mitigate some of the issues above. When an actor is committed to the success of the organisation, Skelcher and Smith (2015) hypothesise that assimilation is more likely to occur as individuals seek to sustain core practices and identity by accepting conflicting logics – albeit sometimes at a surface level – to maintain legitimacy with stakeholders. From the analysis of my data, I argue that the various actors responsible for the international strategy and work within UK national museums show a high level of value commitment to their organisation. For example, they are also museum people with long, well established careers within the field of museology. Between them James, Tim, Nadja and Helen had accumulated over 70 years of experience in the sector whilst holding roles in various museums and attractions. As such they have developed a detailed understanding of the role museums play in contemporary society and the multiple functions they must perform. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest many museum staff are highly committed to their workplace as they share the same values and beliefs of the organisation (Bennett, 2019). As such, I posit that the participants in this study play a seminal role in balancing the various logics within their workplace to see their museum succeed whether it be in the marketplace or wider field of museological practice. Furthermore, I suggest that balance was supported because the individual museums were able to build and maintain a sense of credibility though their international activities.

One project that reflects the hybrid nature of the international work of UK national museums is the V&A’s Gallery in China. I present this example of hybrid logics resulting in institutional bricolage as the final case study below. The multiple logics underpinning the museum’s work provide rich and diverse material for individuals to combine into a new product (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Christiansen & Lounsbury, 2013; Rao et al., 2005), albeit a multifaceted partnership agreement with CMG.

6.2.4.1 Case study of hybrid logics: The V&A Gallery in China
In 2017, the museum opened its first global outpost: the V&A Gallery located within the Design Society in Shenzhen. As part of a five-year agreement with the CMG, the V&A became the lead museological partner for a major new gallery project that was part of a wider regeneration initiative for downtown Shenzhen. The opportunity was more serendipitous than planned. The confluence of a popular V&A touring exhibition in the country, an approach by CMG to form a new partnership and a burgeoning UK governmental interest in the region resulted in the V&A embarking on what Tim referred to as “a leap of faith”.
For the V&A, China and Shenzhen was the “perfect location” for its first international outpost. Firstly, the museum holds one of the most comprehensive collections of Chinese art outside East Asia. Acquiring its first Chinese artefacts in 1852, the V&A’s now holds approximately 18,000 objects, covering all aspects of Chinese art and craftmanship. This was important for Tim, who noted that the partnership “starts [from a] curatorial point of view”. Secondly, the location – a recently designated UNESCO City of Design – provided a complementary narrative to the V&A’s own mission and growth ambitions. Located in the heart of the Pearl River Delta, Shenzhen epitomises contemporary China. Once central to their manufacturing ecosystem it is now home to a “revived” city of 12 million people and an economy driven by creative and tech companies that is now larger than Hong Kong (Huifeng, 2019). Tim echoed this stating, “China, [Shenzhen] and the V&A’s stories are really intertwined particularly around the creative economy... The V&A therefore should have a very assertive, confident, and creative presence in China.” With this in mind, Tim was adamant that the project was “not [about a] commercial imperative. There is commercial opportunity but there is a curatorial imperative for us to be working in China. It wouldn’t make sense for us not to be [doing this].”

As part of the contract the V&A agreed to provide advice and guidance throughout the development process, assist the Design Society (the museum within the wider development) in creating its own collection and deliver training to its senior management team. The V&A also obtained naming rights and the use of a gallery within the building where it has since showcased several exhibitions. Tim explained this further noting:

The contract [has multiple] parts .... There is advice and consultancy to do with the establishment of a new institution. So, everything that goes into it from environmental conditions, security, visitor experience, collecting. And then there is content provision .... For us [it was important to have] a V&A presence, a V&A Gallery of V&A objects in front of a Chinese audience. So content is in two parts – firstly the V&A Gallery, which is a [space] of V&A objects mainly from our holdings but supplemented by fifteen new acquisitions from in and around Shenzhen; and then [a place for our] touring exhibitions.

In this case study, Tim is solving the challenge of how to work with a new experimental partner, but also utilising his agency to create a new product that incorporates different institutional activities and resources (Baker & Nelson, 2005). The product ranges from selling institutional knowledge and skills, hiring out touring exhibitions as well as the development of collections and curatorial practice. As such this partnership agreement plays a seminal role in straddling multiple logics which, according to Christiansen and Lounsbury’s (2013), can have a powerful effect on reshaping and
reframing the organisation’s identity.

Although commercial details surrounding the project are not public, and were not shared during the participant’s interview, there is a sense that revenue generation played a key role in decision making. Tim noted that the V&A had been remunerated for their services but did not state how much. Moreover, the V&A spent much time assessing the viability of the project and subsequently implemented various principles to ensure it carried little financial risk. Tim noted “this is a really well-structured partnership. It is adventurous but there is quite a lot of good, clever de-risking components to it: for example, we are always getting paid ahead of each phase of work.”

The museum's activity in Shenzhen is the first collaboration of its kind between an international museum and a Chinese partner. As such, the V&A is keen to capitalise on this and build further links. For example, the museum’s website has a dedicated page outlining its varied relationship with the country. Here the V&A outlines the various activities it has conducted with and in China. This includes lists of Chinese collections, galleries, exhibitions – both in London and those that have toured to Chinese venues – educational activities, publications, special projects, institutional collaborations and diplomatic relations. Irrespective of an international strategy, China is and will remain a central focus for the organisation.

Throughout this chapter I have presented my research findings. Firstly, I recognise an emerging set of field-wide norms and practices around the international activity of UK national museums. In doing so I point to existing research that identifies how and why museums across the globe are becoming similar to one another (Chang, 2021; DiMaggio, 1991). I have also outlined three institutional logics that underpin the international work of UK national museums. I frame these as market, state and community logics. In addition, I acknowledge that UK national museums are hybrid institutions that can negotiate these seemingly conflicting logics in order to deliver international activity. In the upcoming chapter I explore what these findings mean for various players within the field of museology.
Chapter 7: Discussion

In this chapter I take the findings from this study – the field-wide norms around international work and the logics underpinning them – and explore what this means for various stakeholders. First, I discuss what this means for the museological field. Here I highlight four key points: museums are transitioning from a hard power past to a soft power future; international work may yet reflect contemporary colonial practice; international work is increasingly recognised as a key contributor to a museum’s impact; and through international activity a new museology is beginning to emerge. In addition to discussing the implications for wider practice, I focus on the consequences for my own, and immediate peers' practice.

7.1 Key insights

7.1.1 Museums are transitioning from a hard power past to a soft power future

As UK national museums continue to deliver a wide range of international activities with various partners around the world, and as these field-wide norms continue to be adopted as codified practices, I posit that these institutions are evolving from a hard power past to a soft power future. The national museums in this study were conceived at the height of Empire – a time when the UK deployed its hard power assets to dominate and control its colonies all around the world. As such, these museums were symbols of strength, power, knowledge and nation building (Levitt, 2015). However, these institutions now operate in a very different global context. With hard power approaches at odds with a dominant neo-liberal worldview, the notion of soft power becomes a powerful vehicle in which foreign policy objectives can still be achieved. The notion is echoed by Boris Johnson who, at the 2016 Conservative Party Conference, noted, “... our hard power... is dwarfed by a phenomenon that the pessimists never predicted when we unbundled the British Empire and that is soft power” (para. 25). He went on to add that: “I believe that Global Britain is a soft power superpower...” (para. 32).

Although some participants in this study were unwilling to use the term soft power to describe their activities, others were very keen to do so. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the notion of soft power is beginning to gain traction within the museum community. Not only is it being discussed at professional conferences (see the Museums’ Association Conference 2018; and Ecsite Annual Conference, 2019) but some academics have noted that practitioners have adopted it as a way to describe the impact of their global work (Hoogwaerts, 2016; Nisbett, 2013). In 2017, the UK’s Museums Association conducted an online survey asking its readership “Is the concept of soft power
useful for museums?” With 86% of respondents responding positively, this is an indication that the term is gathering interest with the museum field. Grincheva (2018) notes that soft power is the “buzz term [for museums] that is frequently applied in relation to contemporary museums and their internal cultural engagements” (p. 1).

Significantly, the NMDC (2002) have long called for museums to be more explicit in their international work and to make it a part of their institutional agendas. They argued this would help to raise their profile to UK government and highlight their significant contribution to the UK’s presence in the world. Such positioning would also support important global agendas, such as the protection of the world’s cultural and natural heritage, and the dialogue between cultures. In addition, the report Britain’s global future: Harnessing the soft power capital of UK institutions (Blond et al., 2017) made a strong case for the role of museums in promoting the nation’s values as well as contributing to its economy. They argued that the values and ideas inherent to the UK cultural sector provide a significant platform for the generation of soft power especially when combined with the sector’s international appeal and reach. As UK national museums are ALB’s this enables them to work outside of politics, building trust with their counterparts around the world.

But any separation from politics, however, may not be as clear as some think. There is mounting evidence to suggest that the UK government is exploiting their national museums as soft power assets (Grincheva, 2020a; Nisbett, 2016). For example, the DCMS’s Culture white paper (2016) heralded the value of arts and culture in generating soft power to “…enhance our global reputation further.” (p. 43) A key asset in achieving these ambitions are UKs national museums. It states: “Museums are jewels in our national crown, and we want to ensure that they remain so and are as best-placed as they can be to continue supporting our aspirations for access, place-making and soft power.”(p. 57) In addition, other government reviews have noted a similar ambition (see The Mendoza review, 2017; and The strategic review of DCMS sponsored museums, 2017).

Acknowledging the rise of international work in major national museums and the impact this has in contributing to UK soft power, Mendoza (2017) articulated a desire to grow this work, especially at a time when perceptions of the UK have been tarnished due to Brexit. The author states:

...national museums appear well-placed to continue thriving internationally, using their valuable experience, expertise and skills at generating strong international relationships to contribute to stronger bilateral relationships worldwide. It will be important for museums to face this challenge [cf Brexit] and use their unique role in public life.... (p. 70)

In the recent governmental Comprehensive spending review (HM Treasury, 2020) – the mechanism
by which UK national museums bid for future funding – the expectations of the way museums are to work in the world could not be more clear. Listed as a key priority for future funding, the UK government want to see how museums “strengthen the UK’s place in the world” (para. 8). Whilst not explicitly stating soft power, the implication here is museums are powerful actors in improving perceptions around the world. However, focusing on international activity for museums as a driver for political capital raises several important questions. Firstly, if museums are agents of soft power, then whose interests are being served through such activity? And secondly, how independent are museums from political narratives?

For Blankenberg, museum governance structures and operating models are vulnerable to government intervention and interference. She notes “it would be naïve to say that [governments] have no bearing on the way museums operate” (in Dunne, 2016, p. 2). Nisbett and Doeser (2017), meanwhile, acknowledge that cultural activity can sometimes be used as a “trojan horse” (p. 19) for political messaging. This study has highlighted recent events wherein government ministers have applied pressure on museums regarding how they represent colonial collections and the ways in which they should focus on their finances. Clare (2020), Hewison (2020) and Kendall Adams (2020) have similarly noted fears in the sector regarding the government’s overstepping and trying to play a bigger role in the direction and running of the nation’s cultural assets.

Others have argued that by connecting to such narratives, soft power is just another way of reaffirming cultural imperialism, propaganda and dominance over others (Dunne, 2016; Nisbett, 2015). Under a soft power lens museums remain potent symbols of strength, power, knowledge and nationhood that were symbols of a country’s hard power past. As such it seems that national museums have become significant players in the “negotiation and consolidation of new answers to questions ultimately related to nationhood, citizenship and the role of nations within a system of other nations” (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2011, p. 5). In relation to museum practice, and to respond to the question asked in the title of this thesis, it would seem that the Empire does not have new clothes. Whilst the processes through which contemporary UK national museums operate may be starkly different, the imperialist outcomes are the same as ever they were.

7.1.2 International work as a new form of cultural colonisation

When Dolan (1999) questioned the Guggenheim’s motives in expanding to other sites around the world, he wondered whether the approach was simply “old wine in a new bottle” (p. 58). My findings in this thesis prompt a similar concern. That is, are large Western institutions using their
international work as a way to assert global dominance afresh? More specifically, does the international activity of UK museums, with their market and state logics operating alongside community logics, constitute a new form of cultural colonisation?

For Nisbett (2016), culture is an important lever in which old Western powers can still remain dominant within a shifting global context. She notes that, “.... [culture] remains one of the last enduring weapons through which traditionally powerful states attempt to resist or slow down the changing world order.” (p. 1). This is echoed by Falkmann (2018) who acknowledged that whilst the expansion of major museum brands around the world enables the spreading of culture, it also serves another purpose: showcasing and reasserting “Western supremacy” (p. 45).

In this study, whilst all the museums had a large global footprint, there was a clear preference for some to work in very specific parts of the world, such as China, India, Brazil, and Russia. It can therefore be argued that a focus is being placed on developing relations with emerging economies. This interchange between museums in the Global North with those in the Global South has been referred to as an exchange between nations of prestige with nations of wealth (Taylor, 2007, para. 5). This depiction recognises the cultural riches (from collections all the way to expertise) that has been built up in places such as Europe and North America, but equally acknowledges the economic powerhouses that are emerging across Middle East and Asia.

In the 19th century, cultural imperialism could be evidenced through museum architecture as the notion of the archetypal national museum was replicated all around the world. Dolan (1999) writes “many colonial museums are reflections of those in Europe. All around the world, 19th century art museums are as similar looking as McDonalds restaurants... there are stylistic echoes of the V&A, in Bombay, Sydney and sundry other colonial capitals.” (p. 61) Nowadays, something different is being exported. Instead of architectural design, it would appear that expertise, collections, and brand are the new exports of choice. In this way, international activities such as large museum partnerships – primarily underpinned by market and state logics – are effectively shoring up the established practices from the West in order to maintain a power differential over the rest of the world.

Other studies corroborate this claim of cultural colonisation. Cai’s (2013) exploration of cultural cooperation between Singaporean and French museums found that whilst exhibition exchanges served as gestures of political goodwill, it also exposed deep-seated inequalities between the two nations, once again echoing historical power dynamics. For example, Singaporean museums had significantly less bargaining power in obtaining collections from their French counterparts due to the...
varying quality of objects that were part of the exchange programme. Consequently, Cai noted that whilst the partnership was apolitical in its inception it none the less became so “due to inherent unequal power relations between the collaborating parties” (p. 127). Duthie (2011), meanwhile, cites repatriation battles to argue that the BM remains a “trope of Empire” (p. 13) and that it is still fundamentally an “imperialist institution resistant to attempts to dismantle a dominant British culture of the past” (p. 13).

As noted earlier in this study, there are many calls from both the academic and practitioner communities for museums, particularly those born from Empire, to decolonise their practices (Berkowitz, 2022; Kendall Adams, 2019; Løgstrup, 2021; Sleigh, 2020; Wilding, 2019). Whilst some work has begun within the walls of such institutions to do so (see Aldrich, 2009; Giblin, Ramos & Grout, 2019) it seems that similar attention should be paid to the activities beyond their physical bricks and mortar.

7.1.3 The contribution of international activity to the wider impact of museums

A key insight that has emerged from this research concerns the growth of international work within and across UK national museums and the value this activity brings. For some of my respondents, there is a clear indication that this activity generates income and makes a substantial contribution to the bottom line of their institution. This comes from activities underpinned by a market logic such as touring exhibitions or consulting projects. For others, global work has helped to increase their museum’s reach and influence. More and more museums are using touring exhibitions as a way of engaging audiences around the globe, and thus numerical metrics relating to visitor numbers help prove the worth of engaging in international activities. But the findings from this study indicate that the impact of international work is more complicated and nuanced than that. From supporting the wider museological community through training schemes and object loans, to showcasing British values and expertise, it would seem the value of national museums has expanded to create and support positive perceptions of the UK around the globe.

Understanding the impact of museums is challenging; the topic has been an ongoing discussion within the sector for many years. For example, practitioners and academics have noted the sector lacks a robust understanding and articulation of the impact of its work with no agreed measures to do so (Dillon et al., 2016; Falk et al., 2012). Despite this, many have tried to examine particular aspects of practice and the value this brings. This includes understanding the impact museum visits have on student and family learning (Andre et al., 2017), through to examining the role they play in
generating wider societal benefits around health and wellbeing (Dodd & Jones, 2014). More recently Falk (2021) has attempted to put a monetary figure on the value created by cultural experiences. For this scholar, museums have long understood the need to demonstrate the contribution they make to their local community, but “have not been able to agree on what the nature of that contribution is, let alone what it is worth” (para. 4).

Understanding the value and impact of museums has never been more pressing. With Covid-19 decimating budgets and with external funding streams drying up, more and more museums are beginning to close (Hope, 2021; McGivern & Kenney, 2020). Scott (2011) reminds us that “museums are vulnerable in hard economic times and can too easily be perceived as a luxury rather than an essential” (p. 7). As such there is a growing need for museums to be able to articulate their value and impact on society. Whilst working internationally adds value to what national museums can do, understanding it, and evidencing it is more problematic. There is consensus that measuring the outputs of international activity are more easily achievable than the outcomes of such activities (Mcpherson et al., 2017). Take, for example, the exhibition Landscapes of the mind: Masterpieces from Tate Britain (1700-1980) displayed at the Shanghai Museum in 2015 and supported by a one-off £1.3m grant from the UK government as part of a funding package for UK cultural projects in China (Bailey, 2018). Here the output is relatively straightforward – 615,000 people viewed the exhibition across 14 weeks, making it Tate’s most successful exhibition ever – but the overall outcome of the initiative is less clear. Moreover, as discussed above, the Comprehensive spending review (HM Treasury, 2020) states that national museums should “strengthen the UK’s place in the world” (para. 8). There is, however, no guidance on how organisations should evidence this.

7.1.4 International work as an indicator of a new museology.

This study indicates that the work and practices of UK national museums is shifting. With new teams and working practices emerging to deliver international work, a new language developing to describe such activities, and wide-ranging impacts on the back of such endeavours, there is a sense that the role museums play in society is once again evolving. Although more traditional roles around education and conservation remain important, museums are now beginning to have a significant hand in cross-cultural relations, diplomacy and complicated transnational commercial activity. And whilst these activities might not be as well-known as the public offer museums provide visitors primarily in their buildings, there is a sense that it is becoming an important part of their future. As such I posit that through the international activity of museums a new form of museology is beginning to emerge within the sector.
First, it is important to note that museums are not static. They are always evolving (Decker, 2016). Museums of the 18th and 19th centuries were largely focused around collecting, conserving and documenting. Here the object was paramount. Over time, these institutions have evolved from being collection depositories primarily for the elite, to accessible and socially relevant spaces (Black, 2011; Gray & McCall, 2018; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999). Furthermore, McLean (2005) argues that museums have come a long way from their days of supporting nationalistic and self-improving goals evident throughout the 19th century to one where they are embedded in the social and political agendas of the 21st century. This latter movement is often referred to as “new museology” and recognises the changed relationship between “museums and their societies and communities” (McCall & Gray, 2014, p. 19). Significantly, and with respect to the third research question driving this study, Zamora-Kapoor et al. (2019) note that these changes in practice “requires a balanced solution that allows for the long-term co-existence of multiple logics” (p. 3).

This study has revealed that museums now have new roles in nation building, not just at home and within their local or national communities, but also abroad. Through their international work, museums are generating important cross-cultural relations and partnerships at times when politics cannot. Moreover, they are using their collections and expertise to also generate income for their ongoing operations at home. As Freedman (2010) has discussed, museums now operate under a new set of contexts that shifts the attention away from museums solely focusing on objects and knowledge to one where they are exploring complex socially relevant programming, market-sensitive commercial endeavours, and complex political negotiations around repatriation claims.

The epitome of the new museology may be museum franchising: that is “a hybrid form of museum management... [as it combines] non-profit organisational management and a new behaviour that sees museums as more autonomous actors in the creative economy” (Grincheva, 2020, p. 2). For some, franchising one’s brand is an example of the way that, through their international work, museums contribute to global relations and nation-building. Hunt (2017) recognised that this is a “dramatic escalation of our diplomatic function” citing the French-UAE collaboration (discussed in Chapter 3) as an example of the Louvre “leveraging their cultural capital to support forward-looking administrations.” (para. 11). This view is shared by McClellan (in Maher, 2017) who argued that the partnership between the two entities rewrites the contribution of museums in terms of purpose and cultural relations. He noted:
The idea that museums can have a global impact, an impact on global relations, is a remarkable one, the rhetoric you hear consistently around the openings of these [new] museums is that they will foster dialogue between east and west. And that’s a very important justification for museums I think all over the world. And they’re putting that into operation, in effect, by bridging the east and the west through this partnership. (para. 23)

Such activity is also resulting in organisational shifts. Through such endeavours Grincheva (2013) noted changes in working practices and internal structures as museums becoming sites for transcultural encounter. Moreover, this study has found similar happenings, as museums invest in new staff and new processes in order to realise such opportunities. As such, it seems that museums are now transnational actors (Goff, 2017) with complex roles in global relations, cultural diplomacy, and soft power. The definitions of old and even new museology no longer apply. No more is the national museum predominately about collections or conservation, or even education and public engagement. Instead, they have become transnational actors or quasi diplomats, brokering dialogues and discussions between regions.

7.2 Contributions to practice
The findings from this investigation have several practical uses. These range from the macro, with the findings informing the wider field of museology, through to the micro, with results impacting individuals such as myself and my team at the NHM. As such, in this section I note the various contributions that this thesis makes for different audiences, including the field, for policy makers, and practitioners working internationally.

7.2.1 For the museological field
Firstly, it is important to note that UK national museums are operating in a similar way to other large museums in the Global North as exemplified in the earlier discussions about the Louvre and the Guggenheim (see Chapter 3). I thus argue that the museological field accepts internationalism as a codified practice.

However, whilst international practice is largely accepted, it is not uncontested. As noted in this chapter, museums are transitioning from a hard power past to a soft power future, and this brings with it tensions around power, politics and positioning. As discussed throughout this thesis, when museums begin to expand their work globally, much consideration must be given to the history and legacy these organisations bring and consequently what these new partnerships might look like. Moreover, this study has also highlighted the language we use to discuss our work and practices. For example, at the moment the phrase soft power seems to be the “buzz term” (Grincheva, 2018, p. 1)
used by museum practitioners, policy makers and academics to describe both the activities and impact of a museum’s work overseas (Blatchford et al., 2018; Guildford, 2014; Hoogwaerts, 2016; Hunt, 2018; Nisbett, 2016). Throughout this study I have also used this language to frame possible futures for UK national museums working in this space. Moreover, other phrases such as “global leader” and “superpower” have also come up as ways to frame and describe aspiration, activity, and impact. But throughout, key questions have continued to bother me. For example, does this language encourage a colonial mindset? By adopting such language are we using imperial phraseology which undermines our work and remit? And as museums evolve to be more inclusive, collaborative, and progressive spaces for dialogue and debate, should we not endeavour to adapt our words to reflect the spirit that underpins such an important movement?

Outside the museum sector, alternatives are being devised to counteract many of the issues raised above. For example, Nisbett and Doeser (2017) have offered “standing out” and “reaching out” as a way of differentiating soft power and cultural diplomacy respectively. In many ways these terms offer a depoliticised, decolonised and practitioner-friendly alternative. Bond (2021), a UK charity focused on international development, also offers alternatives to some of the words discussed above. For example, instead of using phrases to describe the UK such as “global leader” or “superpower”, they suggest simply saying the “UK playing its part in the world”. I agree with the spirit of these suggestions and would assert that the museum sector needs to develop a new vocabulary to frame not just its international activities, partnerships and impact, but also its work more generally.

With international work growing in scale and importance, another implication for the museological field is to understand how to evidence such work. Some frameworks are beginning to emerge as a means of evidencing a country’s soft power (McClory, 2019). Indeed, Grincheva (2018) has developed a new geo-visualisation tool to map museum soft power. Here she worked with the Australian Centre of the Moving Image to understand their collection, partnerships and global reach to create a digital tool to showcase the museum’s soft power capabilities. The tool incorporates resources (collections), outputs (travelling exhibitions, online and onsite visitors, exchanges), networks (collaborations, partnerships) and perception change. Moreover, it deconstructs soft power into measurable indicators that demonstrate the ‘capacity’ to create the notion of attraction, rather than evaluating the impacts of such. For Grincheva “…the process of generating ‘soft power’ starts with activating available resources through employing certain strategies that lead to certain outputs, eventually shaping complex relationships between agents and subjects and forming public
perceptions” (p. 5).

However, as noted in Chapter 3 soft power lacks a coherent theoretical framework (Mcperson et al., 2017; Nisbett & Doeser, 2017). Moreover, Nisbett (2016) noted that the outcomes of such activity that are seen as building soft power or cultural diplomacy are often “grand and overblown narratives that may bear little resemblance to the reality on the ground” (Nisbett, 2016, para. 26). As such, focusing on this measure seems problematic at best. When thinking about the context of this study, museums must find a way to better understand and evidence the value of what they are doing globally. The field-wide norms of this study suggest that this work is becoming increasingly similar across the sector. As more and more museums see the benefits of international working and begin to embark on this type of activity, the need to be able to successfully evidence the impact of such will only grow.

To develop such measures and create a useful framework of impact, I assert that museum practitioners must be at the heart of these discussions. Whilst other perspectives are needed – such as policy makers, funders, local communities – the sector itself needs to come together to develop a framework to fully understand the impacts of their international activities. By collectively developing meaningful indicators of success and agreed routes to evaluation, I posit this will leave the sector in a stronger position to advocate for its work and use it as a means to secure future funding.

7.2.2 For policy makers

For UK national museums to continue to pursue international work, it will be necessary to ensure more government investment, particularly given that many of UK’s cultural assets may be in financial trouble. For example, Adnan (2014) proclaimed that the UK is losing its grip on its soft power assets, and recognised that the government’s lack of a co-ordinated strategy is weakening, rather than bolstering what it has to offer the world. Moreover, political discourse around funding does not seem to match the reality for many practitioners within the cultural sector. As noted throughout this study, many museums have decried the impact significant and long-standing funding cuts have had not only on the type of services their organisations can offer. Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A noted:

As public funding for the arts continues to fall – and with the budgets of the BBC, British Council, and Arts Council England all under pressure – it is going to prove a real challenge to retain our global influence. What is more, continued investment in the cultural vehicles that generate British soft power and foster cultural diplomacy will only become more vital as the
Brexit process continues. Culture, debate, and art are the keys to keeping Britain open to the world. (2018, p. 121)

To retain its influence and partnerships throughout the world, the UK government will need to significantly reinvest in its cultural assets and not leave these entities to rely on private funding or philanthropy. Moreover, with counties such as China, France, Japan, Russia and Germany pledging significantly more investment into culture than the UK (British Council, 2021), it is arguably nonsensical for the UK to reduce its own spending on culture yet rely on it to help improve its global reputation. However, whilst more funding is welcomed, interference is not. Museums work best when they are able to operate independently of government. And I posit that their work is most impactful overseas when it is not political or politicised.

7.2.3 For practitioners such as myself

When reflecting on the contributions of this study I am drawn to the notion that “Research is a process, not just a product” (England, 1994, p. 82). By adopting this lens, I note that this study is an ongoing journey and, in many ways, will not end once I have submitted this thesis. For example, this piece of research has come at a time when I have also been asked to develop a new global engagement strategy for the NHM. The timing is apt. The examination has not only provided the perfect platform to critique our previous strategy but it has also enabled me to look at other institutions and assess what they are doing. Whilst it has facilitated a deep analysis of the field and the theory underpinning such work, most importantly it has enabled me to reflect: reflect on my work; reflect on what the museum stands for; and reflect on how I want to shape our international activity moving forward. As such, this professional doctorate has real world application as the findings, discussion and implications are currently informing and influencing the thinking for the NHM’s future global engagement strategy.

In direct response to the findings in this thesis, one of the shifts I want to implement at the museum is to move from an organisation that is inherently international to one that is truly global. As evident in this investigation many national museums have strong, vibrant, and sustainable international programmes. This activity comprises the same set of activities largely trying to achieve the same set of goals. Moreover, ideas or products are often developed in London and then relocated to another country. This form of activity has been conducted for many years and is evident in the three logics of market, state and community underpinning institutions resulting in the generation of income, influence, a sense of community and prestige.
But the world that we live in has changed. Humans have become the most dominant species on the planet and many scholars now agree that we have reached a tipping point, where anthropogenic pressures on Earth’s systems have caused irreversible damage (Rockström et al., 2009). Moreover, in recent years we have seen increasing global awareness about the causes and consequences of the planetary emergency (Taylor et al., 2019). In response to this, the NHM has recently rewritten its overarching strategy. The museum’s vision now is for a world where people and planet thrive, with a mission is to create advocates for the planet (NHM, 2020a). This new approach is strongly centred by the global planetary crisis and a need to mobilise all facets of society in order to find scientific and social solutions. This new thinking moves the museum away from some of the logics described in this investigation towards a new one – that of a green or environmental logic. Gumusay et al., (2020) defined an environmental logic as “caring for the common and future generations, connecting humans with the natural environment, a human–ecosphere symbiosis as a socio-ecological ecosystem, as well as renewability and sustainability” (para. 18). This logic is gaining traction within the academic world as several scholars recognise the value it has in tackling grand challenges (Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017; Grinevich et al., 2019).

In this context, there is an opportunity to leverage the NHM’s science, collections and public reach to become a truly global organisation addressing global challenges. To create advocates for the planet we can’t just communicate to people, we need to tailor experiences to reflect individuals’ lived experiences. What might work in London is unlikely to work in Shenzhen, Auckland or Rio. This means we will focus on making activity, where possible, locally relevant to people anywhere in the world. With much international work centred around market logic we cannot abandon activities such as touring exhibitions, licensing and consulting. This will remain an important facet of our future international activity but we will begin to focus more on mission-driven global public engagement initiatives where we can connect with diverse publics with nature-based issues. Importantly, this activity needs to be locally rooted, so new partnership-working with other institutions is paramount to this thinking.

A new global engagement strategy for the NHM still comes, however, with connotations of dominance and whilst writing it I have been mindful of the museum’s long history and what this means for our work today. Much of our cultural partnership work has occurred in the Global North, with museums and organisations that have a similar history to ours. Moreover, when we have worked in other regions – namely the Global South – this is often via commercial means. As such I am introducing key principles around broadening our relationships, focusing on geographies and
organisations that we have not worked with before. With an emphasis on an environmental logic, these should be based on mutual interest and trust, not commerciality.

Across this chapter I have explored what my research findings mean for the museological field through to my own and others’ practice. As this study forms part of a professional doctorate, I have paid particular attention to my own practice and how this research project is shaping the future of my own work at the NHM. In the final chapter I summarise my thesis whilst signposting future studies that could emerge from this investigation.
Chapter 8: Conclusions

In this final chapter, I once again go back to my initial research questions and use them to briefly summarise the findings from my investigation. I then make a case for why this research is an important part of contemporary museology. Next, I point to future studies that could enhance this body of work before ending this thesis by noting some personal and professional reflections.

8.1 A summary of research findings

This study aimed to examine the international work of four UK national museums and was underpinned by three research questions. The first two questions were: Are there field-wide norms around the international work of museums? And: Is it possible to identify particular patterns or themes that run through the international work conducted by the museum sector? This study found an emerging set of field-wide norms that characterised the international work of UK national museums. Norms included developing international strategies that connected to their organisation’s mission and vision to enhance internal and external credibility whilst framing international activity as something new or different. This led to most museums delivering the same suite of activities across the world. Moreover, all participants discussed their international strategy and work as a way of generating and broadening impact for their institution. Consequently, impact was defined in three ways – income, reach and reputation. As such, this study found that isomorphic forces were at play as organisations begin to mimic one another in order to achieve legitimacy and success.

The third question was: Which institutional logics can be identified as contributing to the current direction of international work of museums? This study revealed that market, state and community logics were key driving forces behind their work. These logics were evident across all sites – though some logics were more powerful in some museums than others. As such, this study found that UK national museums are hybrid organisations.

I began this thesis by noting that there were signs suggesting that the roles museums play in society were beginning to shift. With many UK national museums developing international strategies, delivering bold new global projects and creating new teams to deliver such work, several academics and commentators had claimed that museums now operate as transnational actors (Goff, 2017; Hoogwaerts, 2012) and are being seen as a key contributor to a nation’s influence and soft power overseas (Blond, Noyes, & Sim, 2017; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016; Grincheva, 2013, 2018, 2020; Hoogwaerts, 2016; Hunt, 2018; Lord & Blankenberg, 2015; Nisbett, 2015). But
whilst museum studies as a field has flourished over the last twenty years, few studies have explored why some UK national museums are embarking on such an endeavour. As such this study fills an important gap in the academic literature, adding much needed new knowledge and understanding to a developing area of museum practice.

This study is also important as it gives us a window into the changing world of museology. This field is by no means static and it is important to note that the logics underpinning the international work of UK national museums represent a moment in time and that logics themselves are both temporal and contextual (Gumusay et al., 2020). One factor that has not been taken into consideration with this study is the Covid-19 pandemic. For museums, the pandemic has been devastating: many have had to close their doors for considerable periods of time, significantly affecting their financial wellbeing (McGivern & Kenney, 2020). The pandemic also dramatically changed the way in which museums engaged with their audiences. Unable to connect with visitors in their buildings, many turned to online activity to deliver public programming. Understandably, international activity between museums at this time has suffered. Whilst some activity such as training and international conferences moved online, others such as touring exhibitions have stalled. Although some museums have manged to cross borders to instal objects at a time when global movement has been restricted (for example, my own team at the NHM was granted permission from the Australian government to install Treasures of the Natural World at the Melbourne Museum) these are few and far between. Some global activity however has flourished. Global corporatisation activities such as licensing enabled some museums to maintain key income streams whilst remaining active with new audiences. This is evident with New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art and their licensed product ranges in China. Whiddington (2021) notes “The museum may have been closed for much of 2020, but throughout the year, it remained extremely active in China and partnered with an increasingly diverse range of brands” (para. 3). As museums rethink their business models for a post-covid world, perhaps decentring commercial activities away from their buildings (and physical visitors) may become a more popular practice. As such, I ponder: Will a market logic begin to take precedence over others.

8.2 Signposting ideas for further research

Although this research adds important new knowledge to our understanding of how national museums, particularly those in the UK, work internationally, there are some limitations to the study that should be acknowledged. In the following section I frame these limitations not as shortcomings, but as important opportunities for future research.
Firstly, this investigation focuses on individuals who hold significant leadership roles around international activity in four UK national museums. Whilst these participants are the key spokespeople for this activity and are responsible for developing and delivering their international strategy and work, it does not include other voices from each museum who work in this area. For example, at the V&A international activity was delivered across exhibitions, licensing, touring, learning and curatorial teams. Whilst I suspect interviewing a mix of practitioners within each institution would still highlight similar logics, the conceptualisations of the logics might be more nuanced. Moreover, as new global corporatisation initiatives begin to generate more and more income for UK national museums, I wonder how the views of the individuals running those business ventures might differ from the more traditional touring exhibition teams. Whilst the option to focus on four individuals may have limited the scope of this study, it also paves the way for future empirical research to explore individual institutions in more depth. One study that would make an interesting companion piece to this investigation might be an in-depth case study of one institution.

Similarly, as outlined at the beginning of this investigation I have chosen to focus on the “physical” activities that museums take part in within another country. As such I do not focus on how museums engage globally via digital means. This is a fast-developing and constantly evolving practice that needs more investigation, and in many ways including this activity might have enriched my findings. Certainly, there is some evidence to suggest that digital engagement is a successful route to fostering cross-cultural collaboration, leading to some seeing it as a contemporary mode of cultural diplomacy (Grincheva, 2013). Again, this provides rich material for future studies.

A core challenge in adopting an institutional logics approach is its connection to a Western-centric ideology. Derived from the view of Friedland and Alford (1991) on the central institutional orders within contemporary Western society, its very conception takes a one-sided perspective on civilisation and as such disregards the Global South. Although several academics have explored more diverse settings outside of the West, Gumusay et al. (2020) argue there is a tendency to depict and privilege a Western-centric institutional scaffold in academia. As such, this limits the ability to fully contextualise findings and characterise a global field. As this study explores UK national museums – arguably some of the longest-standing and entrenched museums in Western society – adopting an institutional logics approach seemed apt. However, to fully understand the wider field of museology, future studies should take a more global approach to how museums work and include examples from all parts of the world. Moreover, coupling this by exploring non-democratic societies such as
China or Russia may also provide a different view into new organisational paradigms. For example, in the next few years, we will see the arrival of Hong Kong Palace Museum, a satellite of the Palace Museum in Beijing. Understanding the logics behind such a venture would make for an interesting and complementary addition to my own research. Recalling Watson’s (2021) observations around the National Museum of Scotland, I do wonder what role a Chinese museum will play in authenticating identities and narratives on nationhood within Hong Kong. With this in mind, I argue that the international work of museums, not just those in the UK, is an area ripe for continued exploration.

Finally, a more explicit consideration of colonisation within international teams is worthy of support and indeed further research. These teams are working in an increasingly complex political and social context. As narratives around decolonising collections and repatriation grow (Giblin et al., 2019a; Kendall Adams, 2019; Mashberg & Bowley, 2015; Tharoor, 2015), the work they do around the world with other museums will only become more relevant.

8.3 Personal reflections

This research project has formed a significant part of my personal and professional life for many years. When I began this journey, I wanted to develop a better and more critical understanding of my own and others’ work. By exploring the academic literature across museology, institutional logics, phenomenology and many more subjects I have developed a layered understanding of the field within which I work. Moreover, by engaging with research methodologies I have developed new skills in collecting and analysing data. As noted in the previous chapter this study has also enabled me to build an international strategy and approach for the NHM that takes the findings of this investigation and pushes my own thinking in new and exciting ways. As this is a professional doctorate designed to explore one’s workplace that seems a highly relevant and useful outcome.

This process has also made me think about my own identity. Having worked in museums for over twenty years I have always thought of myself as a practitioner – constantly busy developing, delivering, and evaluating projects with specific outcomes. But this thesis has helped me to step out of my comfort zone and develop an additional professional persona as a reflective researcher. Although the title of this research project seemed to be a clever play on words, it is somewhat ironic that as I reflect on my own path, the question that now seems equally apt is: Does this practitioner have new clothes?
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Appendix

I. Participant information form

INFORMATION SHEET FOR MUSEUM PARTICIPANTS

REC Reference Number: LRS-17/18-6629

Title of study: Exploring the international work of UK national museums

Dear Participant

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project which forms part of my doctoral studies. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in anyway. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being conducted and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information and if you have any further questions then please ask.

What is the purpose of the study?
This study seeks to explore the rationales behind, and experiences of, museums engaging in international work in order to fully understand the implications for this on individual institutions as well as the museum sector. Having a detailed understanding of the international work of museums will be useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, although this is a growing area of museological practice - particularly for large national organisations - very little has been written about it within the academic arena. Therefore, conducting a study on the experiences of museums undertaking such work will be a useful starting point for future academic work. Secondly, this research will be a useful resource for those museums and cultural organisations that wish to engage in international work. Exploring the experiences of museums will become a key starting point for those institutions that wish to rethink their own strategies and operations. Moreover, it has the potential to be useful for governments and funding bodies that wish to understand and support this work.

Why have I been invited to take part?
I am inviting various senior museum professionals who spearhead international initiatives for their organisation in order to ascertain their perceptions and thoughts on the research topic.

Do I have to take part?
Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part.

What will happen to me if I take part?
If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. At a time convenient for you, I will discuss the interview procedure and provide an interview topic guide. With your consent, I will interview you at your workplace. To have a focused conversation I will need you to find a suitable room that is quiet and private. The interview will take approximately 1 hour and will be based on the interview topic guide, but it is designed to be flexible. The interview will be recorded, subject to your
permission. Once your interview has been transcribed you will be asked to review it and make any additions that you feel are necessary. Even if you have decided to take part, you are still free to cease your participation until one month after you have reviewed your transcription.

What are the risks of taking part?
In terms of risks, they are minimal. It is possible that you may find answering some of the questions challenging. This is unlikely but if it were to occur the interview could be terminated at any time.

Will my taking part be kept confidential?
The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews. What is said in the interview is regarded as strictly confidential and will be held securely until the research is finished. Interview data will only be accessed by myself, my supervisor, and a professional transcriber. All recordings of data on audio-equipment will be deleted after transcription. If you ask me to withdraw your interview data up to one month after you have reviewed your transcription, then I will remove all traces of it from the records. Due to the small number of UK national museums who engage in international work as well as the unique nature of their work – providing anonymity for these organisations within this study will prove challenging. Therefore, if you choose to participate your organisation will be named throughout. Individuals however will be given the option of remaining anonymous. I will create pseudonyms for respondents and take great care in the selection of any quotes in the final thesis to ensure that such comments do not compromise the professional position of individuals. Finally, all data will be held on password-locked computer files and locked cabinets within the Natural History Museum.

How is the project being funded?
My studies are being funded by the Human Resources department at the Natural History Museum, London.

What will happen to the results of the study?
I will produce a final report summarising the main findings, which will be sent to you. I also plan to disseminate the research findings through publications and conferences.

Who should I contact for further information?
If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me using the following details:
Brad Irwin (Researcher)
School of Education, Communication and Society
King’s College London
Tel: +44 (0)20 7942 5870
Email: b.irwin@nhm.ac.uk

What if I have further questions, or if something goes wrong?
If this study has harmed, you in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study you can contact King’s College London using the details below for further advice and information:
Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.
II. Interview consent form

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDY

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Exploring the international work of UK national museums

King’s College Research Ethics Committee Ref: LRS-17/18-6629

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

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<th>Questions</th>
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<td>I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 20 April 2018 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and asked questions which have been answered satisfactorily.</td>
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<td>1 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my interview data one month after I have reviewed and edited my transcription.</td>
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<td>2 I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998.</td>
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<td>3 I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the College for monitoring and audit purposes.</td>
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<td>4 Due to the nature of the research, institutional anonymity will not be possible. However individual anonymity is optional for this research. Please select one option from the following:</td>
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<td>OPTION A: I agree to be fully identified</td>
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<td>OPTION B: I wish to remain anonymous.</td>
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<td>5 I agree that the research team may use my data for future research and understand that any such use of identifiable data would be reviewed and approved by a research ethics committee.</td>
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<td>I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>I consent to my interview being audio recorded and transcribed.</td>
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| ___________________________ | ____________ | ____________________ |
| Name of Participant        | Date         | Signature           |
### III. Aide memoire

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<th>Research purpose: Exploring the international work of UK national museums</th>
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## IV. Cluster of meanings and descriptions

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<th>Cluster of Meaning</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples of Significant Statements</th>
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| **Historical international roots**        | For all participants international working was part of their museum’s inception story. They were all created out of Empire or significant global events. As such their collections are drawn from all over the world. This history provided the perfect reason to be able to do contemporary international activity | “International [work] has been at the core of what the BM does from the start simply…”
“…the [NHM] has engaged in international work through the business of Imperial Britain” |
| **Rationales for international working**  | All participants talked about why they were engaging in international work. For all of them they wanted to make connections to their museum’s overarching strategy, mission, and collection. For some there was a sense that international activity was a given, and somewhat beholden on them because of what their museum (historically) represented. | “Lots of countries both developed, and developing, predicate their future success on [being] a scientifically literate population. And so, nearly everybody wants science education. So, there is a mission angle to it”
“The starting point [for international work] is always the collection…”
“Our subject demands it in a way. The science and the issues that we face are transnational”
“[international activity is] natural for a world leading national museum” |
| **International activity is something different now** | Across all interviews international work was expressed as something *different or new* to the organisation. This was a departure from old, or more traditional, ways of working. New teams were created and some of these were growing. For all participants international work had moved from doing “stuff” to being much more strategic. | “Something new, a new type of partner in a new country doing something over and above the bog-standard Museum stuff like conference papers and exhibitions.”
“Small but nimble team” |
| **Cultural activities not academic or science activities** | A key distinction made by most participants is that international working was not about the academic side of their institution. It was more about the “cultural” side of what they did. Here the focus was not about academic collaboration or fieldwork; instead it was about activities such as touring exhibitions, training and consulting. | “How we work as an institution rather than through our scientific activity” |
| **Touring exhibitions and object loans as cornerstone of international activity** | Touring exhibitions and objects loans were a fundamental part of everyone’s international strategy and work. For many this was the cornerstone of partnership working. | “92 exhibition openings in 21 countries and had reached more than 10 million people”.

| **Training and skills sharing** | Whilst all participants engaged in delivering training and skills sharing to others; their approaches were quite different. For some it was just a part of being a member of the museological community. For others it was something that could be commercialised. As such some described it as community building; whilst others described it as money making. | “it’s just who we are” and “what we do”
“There’s also stuff we can do within places like Europe and North America where our established peer group can give knowledge to us or help us solve challenges”

| **Consulting** | One way of generating income was to act as a consultant for other organisations. Here museum staff moved out of their daily role and into the position of advisor/consultant. This was common across all museums. | “Using internal staff to develop a masterplan for a gallery around natural history as well as training staff to embed a culture of volunteering in the organisation”

| **International activity as partnership working** | Whether activity was around developing the wider community of practice; through to generating income – all of it was by in large framed as partnership working. This gave activity a sense of collaboration – even if when described it wasn’t collaborative. | “A step beyond [academic collaborations, touring exhibitions etc] are opportunities that arise from our creative and diverse approach to partnership working. This moves us on from exhibitions to something different and interesting … new ways of doing work internationally”

| **Generation of income** | A big part of international activity was to make money for the organisation. This resulted in activities such as touring, consulting and training. There was a sense that museums were commercialising their assets to offset funding gaps at home. This resulted in participants going out into the world acting as salespeople to consultants. | “Open for business”
“Not at all coy about making income from international activity”

| **Growing museum reach, brand and influence** | International activity was all about impact. For all participants this was about moving beyond the physical site of their museum into other museums and territories. All museums wanted to expand their reach and influence – whether that be with museums, cities or

"Reach, reputation, and impact”.
“80% of the Japanese population … due to the news and TV coverage”.
“A big brand building campaign with lots of different tentacles.” |
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<th>Generating cultural diplomacy</th>
<th>Governments. There was a sense that these museums were becoming global brands.</th>
<th>“…get noticed... increasing our profile and reputation with our own government and funders: the stakeholders.”</th>
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<td><strong>Brand Britain; symbols and generators of soft power</strong></td>
<td>For some participants activity was about generating cultural diplomacy. This was often evidenced when activity could happen at a time when politics could not. This was seen as an important outcome of international activity.</td>
<td>“Somebody in an Embassy ... who had been in Russia at this time, said to us you know that was the only light in a very dark time.”</td>
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<td>Throughout interviews all participants recognised that their work was related to the government’s global positioning of Britain. Here the term soft power was used liberally. For some participants they wanted to generate soft power and use this as a way of showing impact to government. Others were less interested in that connection.</td>
<td>“There will continue to be ... this idea that Government wants to encourage what museums and cultural organisations could do internationally as part of Brand Britain”.</td>
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<td>All participants recognised that their museum was more than just a series of objects though – they were symbols of British skills, expertise, history.</td>
<td>“I think we built up a lot of soft power capital in that project. Which you kind of hold in reserve and then you might want to bank it when you want it. Or sort of cash it in... Somebody had a really good phrase at something I went to. That said soft power is and can only be sort of cultural capital. And it only becomes power when you expend it.”</td>
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<td>“I think the Natural History Museum’s stock is rising in terms of its kind of visibility to government as a kind of soft power engine or a cultural diplomacy channel”.</td>
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