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Knowledge Utopias

An epistemological perspective on the convergence of museums, libraries and archives

By

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Originality Statement

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at The University of Sydney or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and all references to the research of other authors is duly acknowledged.

Signed

Date

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Stuart, and our children, Adam, Joel and Jacob. The process of conducting and writing up this research has impacted their lives as much as it has mine. With the submission of this thesis I look forward to spending a little more time with each of you!

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Preface

In 2008 I was employed as a lecturer with the Museum Studies program at the University of Sydney, teaching a unit of study that focussed on different disciplinary and theoretical approaches to the interpretation of museum objects. At the same time, working as a social history curator and sharing an office with an archivist, I experienced first hand the problem of 'demarcating' the borders between different types of collections for the purposes of cataloguing, documentation and eventual use in exhibitions and educational programs. Undoubtedly these circumstances heightened my interest in the growing prevalence of 'convergence' – a broad term denoting various kinds of mergers of museum information, organisational structures and services with those of libraries, archives and galleries.

I had observed the formation of the Collections Council of Australia (CCA) in 2004 – a body created to facilitate interaction and collaboration between the different collecting domains - in tandem with the activities of similar organisations internationally such as the United Kingdom's MLA[1] and the IMLS[2] in the United States. I noted increasing international momentum toward digital convergence of collection databases. Meanwhile, in Australia, convergence became synonymous with an emerging movement to physically integrate different types of collecting institutions, especially at the local government level. A number of prominent examples of 'convergence' in the region, among them Albury's LibraryMuseum and New Zealand's Puke Ariki, were applauded as innovative re-conceptualisations of the cultural collection institution model.

Through my curatorial experience and work at the University, I had become familiar with methodologies for interpreting the meaning of museum artefacts, such as those anthologised by Schlereth (1999) and Pearce (1994b). The contrasts between the epistemological grounding and disciplinary slant integral to each of these models made the subjectivity of museum interpretation explicit. That is, the perceived

[1] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

[2] Institute of Museum and Library Services.

significance of any museum object is intrinsically tied to its existence within a particular museum paradigm: its position within a particular collection and relationship to other artefacts; the collection practices governing its treatment; and the disciplinary conventions according to which it is researched, documented and presented. So, what would happen if we were to reconfigure the collections context according to the convergence model, creating new spatial and symbolic relationships between objects previously housed in different kinds of repositories? Moreover, from the perspective of my own museum background, I wondered how new 'integrated' collection and institutional contexts might influence the traditional ways in which museum artefacts are acquired, documented, researched, managed and presented. What consequences did convergence have for processes of understanding museum objects?

From these reflections, a research question emerged:

> *Does the convergence of museums with other types of collecting institutions - namely libraries, archives and galleries - have the potential to reshape the interpretive context for museum collections and, therefore, the extent and ways in which their meanings and significances can be expressed?*

The bipartite nature of the question suggested a two-pronged research approach: the first based on a theoretical, comparative analysis of the literature to identify fundamental conceptual issues around convergence; and second, an investigation of actual cases, where the experiences of collection professionals could be examined to gain better understanding of how collection practices are affected by convergence as an institutional model.

This thesis presents the results of this research process. By exploring the concept of convergence from an intellectual perspective (the 'theory') as well as its implications in the field (the 'practice'), the research foregrounds issues affecting the interpretive capacity of museum collections, and evaluates their knowledge potential, in converged organisation environments. As such, it tests, for the first time, the validity of some of the conventional wisdoms surrounding the benefits of convergence, as well as providing the first in-depth study of staff experiences of collection work and collaboration within converged institutions to be undertaken in both the Australian

and international collections sector. By synthesising the results of theoretical and case study analysis, the thesis provides valuable insights into the conceptual and practical ways in which converged institutions operate, with immediate relevance to policy, management and professional practice.

Importantly, presenting the fieldwork component of this research gives the voices of 'converged' collection workers a platform among scholars and professional bodies concerned with convergence. I hope that further consideration of the theoretical issues, together with the contributions to this research provided by collection professionals from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and expertise, will engender a more conceptually rigorous discourse around convergence; one that recognises and integrates scholarship in the ongoing development of convergence, and builds understanding of the role of museum practice, and the museum context, in interpreting the significance of cultural objects.

Abstract

Since 2005, convergence of museums, libraries and archives has emerged as a prominent trend in both the international and Australia collection sectors, made manifest through the development of digital platforms that allow integrated access to diverse collection databases and resources, as well as collaborations and mergers of cultural institutions to incorporate various types of collections and professional disciplines.

The convergence phenomenon has led to significant investments in technology and infrastructure, and provoked considerable scholarly and professional discourse across the library, archives and museum sectors. Yet, the available literature is largely characterised by speculations and assumptions about the advantages and possible limitations of convergence, and its impact on cultural experience and knowledge. Only a handful of empirical studies exist to inform this debate, reflecting a nascent field of study where the majority of research is characterised by inventory-style attempts to quantify and classify types of collaborative or convergence projects. To-date, studies have identified the aims of selected examples of convergence, processes of implementation, project outcomes and perceived benefits and barriers, often concluding with practical recommendations for planning and project management for cross-domain collaboration and convergence restructuring. None have so far examined the phenomenon within the conceptual and epistemological frameworks of the very disciplines – museum studies, library and information science, archival studies - from which the professional base for converged institutions is drawn.

This thesis responds to and extends current research by examining convergence of museums, libraries and archives within the context of museology. The derivation of meaning and knowledge from collections through the application of interpretive processes has, and continues to be, a central concern of museological scholarship. Accordingly, this research explores ways in which the integration of collecting institutions influences understandings of objects, through its impact on museum practices.

A focus on the interpretation of museum collections within converged institutions demands a dual commitment to both theory and fieldwork. Correspondingly, this thesis combines inter-disciplinary conceptual analysis of the epistemological implications of convergence with five detailed case studies of bricks-and-mortar converged organisations. The case study institutions – one located in New Zealand and four in the state of New South Wales, Australia (where several high-profile integrations of previously autonomous cultural organisations in urban and regional municipalities have taken place in the last 10 years) - provide a nexus between the international movement towards convergence and local government and cultural policy contexts.

The research findings suggest that convergence not only produces a new institutional framework for museum practices and, therefore, the interpretation of museum collections, but also that the integration of collecting institutions has the ability to reshape fundamental understandings of identity, place, heritage and culture.

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1 Introduction

> *Convergence as a whole model - there are two kinds of aspects of it. One is that convergence is seen by the managerial side of things as the best model, because you can pool all of your resources, put them all in one place, make all these 'savings' by making all these people operate in one group rather than three or four groups… But other than the managerial side of things, there's the conceptual side of things. What does convergence actually mean to the product that you're producing?*
> Collections and Exhibitions Officer, *LONEHILL*.[3]

In his influential essay of 1999, the eminent American museologist and museum administrator Stephen Weil wrote that museums had shifted from 'being about something to being for somebody' (Weil, 1999). Around the same time as contemporary convergences of museums with other types of collecting institutions began to take place, Weil was identifying a significant reorientation of museums from inward-facing collection focussed institutions toward a social outcomes model of museum provision; one that prioritised their educational and social role. Along with this transition came the imperative for museums to demonstrate their public value, which, according to Weil, could be measured according to two fundamental criteria: financial transparency and accountability; and positive impacts on quality of life. As Weil wrote in his introduction, the museum was becoming:

> *…a transformed and redirected institution that can, through its public-service orientation, use its very special competencies in dealing with objects to contribute positively to the quality of individual human lives and to enhance the well-being of human communities.* (Weil, 1999, 231)

From this perspective, museums were vital to the conservation of material representations of culture, as well as facilitating community participation and affiliation with cultural programs (1999, 237). According to Weil, museum collections

[3] Interview conducted August 2011.

- and the specialist skills and knowledge that enable museum professionals to render collections meaningful - circumscribe a unique area of practice that has the capacity to invigorate and deepen cultural engagement to produce significant social benefits. Implicit in this vision was an emphasis on access to collections and associated collection information – the foundations upon which museum education, the museum experience, and the cultural knowledge through engagement with objects, are constructed.

As this research will show, convergence has certainly been driven by the notion of expanding the community benefit of collections by providing geographically convenient, cross-domain, cross-disciplinary access to diverse collections, coupled with the promise of efficiency and return on tax- and rate-payer investment in cultural facilities. But does convergence deliver on the promise of extending and deepening intellectual access to collections? Does it facilitate or impede the ability to identify the significance of objects? Is the convergence model conducive to exploring the cultural value of museum collections and their relevance to the communities from which they originate, and purportedly serve?

The establishment of the Institute for Museums and Library Services (IMLS) in the United States in 1996, the United Kingdom's Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in 2000, and the Collections Council of Australia (CCA) in 2004 signalled accelerating momentum towards collaboration and convergence between collecting institutions worldwide at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2007, *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* (USA) devoted an entire issue to increasing collaboration and convergence across the collecting domains, while the coordinated publication in 2009 of special issues on digital convergence in *Library Quarterly, Archival Science* and *Museum Management and Curatorship* – all prominent international titles - reinforced the significance of convergence within professional and academic discourse. Rapid advancements in digital technologies served as the catalyst for new initiatives to provide integrated access to disparate collection databases and propelled discussions forward about bricks-and mortar convergence.

As governments in Europe and beyond have moved towards greater decentralisation and privatisation of cultural institutions, with the associated adoption of self-financing models (Boylan, 2006, 201-204), convergence of 'similar' organisations, such as libraries, archives and museums, has come to the fore as a solution to the financial rationalisation of cultural services. Likewise in Australia, excitement around convergence has focused on the promise of practical and financial benefits; economies of scale, shared staffing and organisational structures, urban revitalisation and new audiences.

At the time of writing of this thesis, the issue of convergence assumed national prominence in Australia. In its 2014 budget, the Australian Federal Government announced a forecast saving of $2.4M in its intention to consolidate some of the administrative functions of several Canberra-based national collecting institutions: the National Portrait Gallery, National Gallery of Australia, National Library of Australia, Old Parliament House, National Film and Sound Archive, National Museum of Australia and the National Archives of Australia. The anticipated cost savings to be gained through this integration mirror the adoption of convergence at state level from the early 2000s, as a method for both achieving financial efficiency and activating the combined potential of diverse cultural collections.

In the state of NSW, the adoption of convergence into government policy was formalised with the signing of the Third Cultural Accord (2006) by the NSW Minister for the Arts, The Local Government Association of NSW, and The Shires Association of NSW. The Accord strongly promoted the integration of museums, libraries, archives and galleries through funding incentives for programs and capital works.[4] Kevin Wilson, writing as the Cultural Services Group Leader at Albury City Council, stated in the introduction to a 2007 article about Albury's new converged LibraryMuseum [sic], that: "as we build a whole new generation of cultural facilities around Australia, the buzz word – and de facto government policy – seems to be

[4] The wording of the Accord stated: *"In recognition of the important cultural collections held by local governments, [the aim is] to jointly encourage greater integration of the operation of Local Government cultural facilities including libraries, museums and art galleries*" (Debus et al., 2006).

'convergence'" (Wilson, 2007, 24). The Powerful Places conference, convened in 2008 by Museums & Galleries NSW (M&G NSW)[5] brought together representatives from converged organisations around Australia, providing strong endorsement for existing projects and consolidating the official profile of convergence as the organisational model of the future. As further evidence of enthusiasm for the trend, in 2009 Museums Australia (MA) advertised an upcoming cross-sector discussion around convergence. The text of the advertisement stated: "the field is abuzz with the term convergence – traditional boundaries are being questioned as libraries, archives, museums and galleries consider closer collaboration and a convergence of facilities."[6]

Within this environment of rapid change, convergence emerged as a solution promising more effective transmission of cultural memory and knowledge, enabling greater access to collections, and in promoting cross-pollination of skills between collection professionals from across domain boundaries (for a selected chronology of convergence in the Australian and international cultural sectors 1996-2014, refer to Appendix 2). However, despite significant investments in converged digital and physical infrastructure, marked by the development of joint database portals and the construction of new institutions, discussions about convergence appear to have been made on the basis of a series of assumptions around the benefits of the model.

Only a handful of scholarly studies examine the impact of convergence on museum, library, archive and gallery work, throwing into sharp relief the absence of staff consultation in evaluating the effectiveness of converged organisations. Furthermore, as I elaborate in forthcoming chapters, no existing research examines the impact of convergence on the museum - as an epistemological staging ground for production of cultural narrative and meaning - through its influence on museum practices, the interpretation of museum collections, and the delivery of museum services. There is a marked lack of research investigating convergence as a model that supports

[5] M&G NSW is a not-for-profit organisation supporting museums and galleries in the state of NSW, and their visitors. It receives funding primarily from the NSW Government, with additional funding from the Commonwealth Government.

[6] Museums Australia website, advertising a *Critical Engagement Event: Your Place or Mine: the implications of co-location and convergence of facilities on the collecting sector.* Advertised for 7 August, 2009, Western Australia.

intellectual, as opposed to merely geographic, access to collections, and one that achieves the cultural benefits to local communities to which government rhetoric alludes.

In response, this thesis confronts the phenomenon of convergence, in its current forms, as an under-theorised bureaucratic model for structural change with unknown consequences for museum provision in the early twenty-first century. It recognises the disconnectedness between scholarship, empirical study, and the institutional rationales, structures and professional priorities at work in converged organisations. It draws together complementary strands of conceptual analysis and case study research to expose new ways of understanding museum collections within converged facilities. In doing so, this research contributes to the creation of a robust intellectual discourse around convergence, builds a bridge between the theory and practice in this field, and brings to light fundamental questions regarding engagement with museum collections within the converged institutional context.

1.1 Defining convergence

Reflecting the fluidity of the convergence model and the variety of converged institutions that have come into being, a strong and binding definition of convergence is difficult to pinpoint. The blanket usage of the term 'convergence' conceals the diversity of institutional mergers and structures it is used to describe; institutions that differ considerably in the level of sharing and collaboration between the constituent organisations. There appears to be no consensus surrounding the exact meaning of the term 'convergence', and what exactly it entails for the staff roles, institutional missions, and programs of converged organisations.

In the international scene, there has been an attempt to define the meaning of convergence with greater precision. In an article from 2001, Archivist Christopher Marsden of the V&A Museum Archives referred to the concept as 'integration', describing it as "one of the chief concerns of the moment for the archive profession" (Marsden, 2001, 17). Marsden distinguished different forms of convergence in terms of 'institutional integration', where organisations are physically combined, and 'macro-integration', where organisations remain autonomous but co-operate to jointly

develop products and services. Similarly, writing in 2007, the British librarian and scholar Gerald Beasley observed the emergence of two main trends or modes of convergence between libraries, archives and museums. The first involved greater collaboration between the domains, especially in the digital and online spheres, where collections become "more open to being shared, transferred, sliced and diced." The second trend involved the actual organisational amalgamation of institutions (Beasley, 2007, 21).

In 2008, the authors of a now oft-cited report undertaken by OCLC Research titled *Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration Among Libraries, Archives and Museums (*based on research of university collections in the USA and UK), also described various levels or stages of 'convergence' among different collecting organisations and devised a 'collaboration continuum' in an effort to illustrate these differences (Zorich et al., 2008, 10-12). Within this framework, the report defined convergence as an end-point where collaboration has "matured to the level of infrastructure and becomes, like our water transportation networks, a critical system that we rely upon without considering the collaborative efforts and compromises that made it possible" (Zorich et al., 2008, 12). To put it another way, these authors identified convergence as a situation where organisations become integrated and mutually reliant to a point where they no longer function as entirely autonomous units.

Interestingly, in the context of Zorich, Waibel and Erway's report, convergence is seen to be most useful in support areas such as venue security, collection storage or the development of a shared Web interface, rather than involving the combination of libraries, archives and museums into a new organisational entity. Here, the benefit of convergence is realised in freeing the participant organisations from the obligation to individually provide certain non-core services, allowing them to "focus their energies more productively on tasks only they are qualified to do… to reinforce that which is most distinctive, valued and unique about each of the benefitting libraries, archives and museums" (Zorich et al., 2008, 12). In contrast to some local as well as international examples (e.g. Puke Ariki in New Zealand, Library and Archives Canada, Albury LibraryMuseum in regional NSW), this view of convergence does not necessarily penetrate to the level of domain-specific approaches to organisational structure, management, programs and collections.

More recently, Jennifer Bastian and Ross Harvey published research on digital convergence projects undertaken by cultural institutions in the USA. They offer the following definition of the distinguishing characteristics of converged institutions, one that could be applied equally well to digital or physical cases:

> *…a converging cultural heritage institution is one that combines library, archival and museum material, and is working towards a set of standards and best practices that unites traditional theory and operations from each.* (Bastian and Harvey, 2012, 2-3)

Within Bastian and Harvey's description, three key facets identify convergence: the co-existence and integration of different kinds of collections and supporting documentation; the formulation of common information frameworks and practices; and the leveraging of traditional, domain-based processes towards the development of innovative cultural programs and services.

In Australia, the prevalence of physically converged collecting institutions has become most pronounced with organisations under local government administration, in both urban and regional areas. And yet, a variety of converged organisational models prevail. The Powerful Places conference on convergence, held by M&G NSW in Tamworth, 2008, clearly demonstrated the breadth of the term. Speakers from around Australia and New Zealand described a range of approaches to convergence within their own organisations, ranging from simply co-locating facilities (e.g. the Tamworth Regional Gallery and Library), to sharing of basic front-of-house services, through to full integration and amalgamation of previously disparate collections and functions (e.g. Puke Ariki in New Zealand, Wanneroo Library and Cultural Centre in Western Australia, Albury City LibraryMuseum in New South Wales). In the same year, the Collections Council of Australia's Veronica Bullock and Margaret Birtley (2008, 28) took a national overview approach, confirming the development of a range of so-called 'converged' organisations across Australia.

While these authors and forums illustrate the heterogeneity evident across so-called 'converged' organisations and the ambiguity surrounding the precise implications of

the term, they also raise other questions. In particular, questions relating to the motivations behind the popularity of convergence as a solution for the restructuring of local government-funded collecting organisations, the circumstances of its realisation at individual facilities, and the experiences of professional collection staff working within the model are yet to be examined within a scholarly research framework.

1.2 Physical versus digital convergence

In addition to the variety of iterations of physical convergence among collecting institutions, the usage of the term in describing the integration of the digital information resources of museums, archives and libraries has added further complexity to understanding of a term that is already loosely employed.

The USA's Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the federal funding body for libraries and museums in the USA, has recognised that:

> [the] *increased use of, and reliance on, digital resources has blurred traditional distinctions between organizations* [sic], *prompting an increased focus on the shared information needs and challenges facing libraries, archives and museums in the information age.*[7]

In this sense, *digital* convergence, which hinges on information sharing via the standardisation of meta-data across digital collection records and interoperable database technology, is quite a separate issue from *physical* convergence, where the cohabitation and potential cross-pollination of previously distinct collections has the potential to bring about a profound and permanent alteration to their very fabric. In other words, while the *digital* convergence debate centres on how we tag the information that already exists in various collections in order to make searching across databases more efficient, *physical* convergence has the capacity to influence the fundamental nature of that collection information, the integrity of tangible collections, the configuration of collection spaces, and user engagements with collection objects.

[7] Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) & Florida State University, 2008,1.

1.3 Factors driving the convergence trend

1.3.1 Historical precedents and 'artificial distinctions' between the domains

Contemporary notions of convergence of the collecting domains are often predicated on the common history of libraries, archives and museums. From this perspective, contemporary collaboration and convergence of collecting institutions represents the reunification of domains that traditionally belong together, seemingly righting an accident of history that saw museums, libraries and archive develop and pursue individual trajectories. For example, Robert Martin (Martin, 2007, 81), writing in his capacity as Director of the IMLS (Institute of Museums and Library Services, United States) has pointed to the common ancestry of libraries, archives and museums, referencing the ancient library of Alexandria, destroyed in 48 B.C.E. (also called the Museon, or Temple to the Muses), as the archetypal 'converged' collecting institution.[8]

Other authors (Weil, 1999, Waibel and Erway, 2009, Given and McTavish, 2010, Madsen, 2010, Bickersteth, 2010) also contend that convergence of libraries, archives and museums is not really an innovation, but rather a return to an earlier mode of collecting developed in sixteenth to nineteenth century Europe. During this period, wealthy 'gentlemen scholars' assembled collections of books, documents, specimens and artefacts according to thematic groupings and without differentiating between object types.

The crystallisation of Enlightenment epistemologies during the same period contributed further to the perception that collecting institutions – libraries and museums – had a joint purpose in facilitating access to knowledge. The rise of empiricism, in which the gathering and transfer of knowledge was understood as a transparent, impartial process (Stehr and Ufer, 2009) and where global understanding could be drawn from observable evidence (Hedstrom and King, 2004, 4), was a key development of the time. Museologist Eileen Hooper-Greenhill has noted that the birth

[8] Much like modern-day universities, the Museon was a repository of books, documents and objects, as well as a centre of scholarship.

of the Modern period in the nineteenth century was marked by the desire to reinvent knowledge as a purely rational pursuit, correspondingly attempting to "cut away those aspects of knowledge that were seen as superstitious, subjective, emotive, and ultimately, unreasonable" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, 105). The meaning of artefacts in collections came to be seen as concrete, fixed and unambiguous, allowing objects to be "read" like books (Given and McTavish, 2010, 11) and thereby also supporting the common goal of museums, libraries and archives in facilitating public education and development (Gibson et al., 2007a, 56). Within this paradigm, library, documentary and artefact collections could be seen as inherently compatible. Every kind of object was seen as a source of objective information and, when organised together according to a subject area such as natural or local history, collections could create a reservoir of tangible 'knowledge' on a particular theme.

Some of the contemporary scholarship focussing on the idea of convergence persists with the view that there is a purely typological difference between the published material collected by libraries, the government and institutional records collected by archives, and the individual objects or artefacts collected by museums. For example, Tanackovic and Badurina refer to typological differentiation as an 'artificial distinction' that creates an impediment for users, who are obliged to search across institutions in order to gather together diverse materials required for their research, educational needs and other purposes (Tanackovic and Badurina, 2009, 299). From this point of view, it is easy to envisage the benefits of convergence, in either digital or physical forms, in streamlining access to collection resources and making the use of collections less cumbersome.

However, while library, museum and archival collections gradually grew apart into distinct professional domains, it is difficult to generalise about the periods of time, circumstances and processes by which this occurred. Contrary to the 'accident of history' argument put forward by some proponents of convergence,[9] rather than being arbitrary, this separation seems to have occurred for a range of conceptual and practical reasons.

[9] See, for example, Clifford Lynch's comments recorded on Holly Witchey's weblog, (Witchey, 2007, 6)

Offering a chronological perspective on the separation of the collection sectors, Robert Martin cites the development of typographic printing technology in fifteenth century Europe, which caused a rapid escalation in the sheer volume of available texts, as one catalyst for the separation of written works from objects in organised collections (Martin, 2007, 81), leading to greater demarcation between libraries and museums. He also points out that the growing formalisation of governments around the same period necessitated a more systematised approach to the storage of government records, resulting in the development of national archives (idem.). Like Martin, Hedstrom and King (2004, 12)[10] connect the institutionalisation of libraries, archives and museums as separate collecting entities with the maturation of modern statehood in Europe and the United States (ibid., 14). These observations attribute the separation of library, archival and museum collections to two simultaneous developments; the growth in the number of publications in collections, as well as the increasing importance of documentation in government bureaucracy.

It should be acknowledge that different kinds of repositories continued to coexist within certain collecting organisations. For example, most State and National museums in Australia, and indeed around the world, retain their own archival and library collections. However, it is important to distinguish between these examples – where the archives and library play a supporting role serving the identity and activities of the museum as the dominant partner – to recent examples of supposedly non-hierarchical 'convergence' of previously autonomous collecting institutions.

These explanations of the historical divergence of libraries, archives and museums as a response to philosophical, technological and political developments during the early modern period have become a justification for the reconciliation of the domains in the light of the information storage capacity and development of digital technologies (Hedstrom and King, 2004, Martin, 2007). Indeed, in an article titled *Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines*, Marlene Manoff (2004) writes that many contemporary scholars exploring the concept of the 'archive' interpret this term as

[10] Article commissioned by the OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004.

encompassing museums, libraries and archives together, with an understanding that the term ‘document’ refers to any historic object. In this regard, the typological differences between collections seem to become irrelevant, rendering both physical and intellectual obstacles to the joint management and provision of collections obsolete, and correcting the accident of history that saw the domains separated in the first place.

1.3.2 Financial imperatives

The quest for greater cost efficiency and long-term economic viability of cultural organisations has emerged as a powerful influence on convergence trends both in Australia and internationally. Research carried out between 2001 and 2003 found that governments in Europe and around the world are rapidly moving away from tax-payer funding towards greater decentralisation and privatisation of cultural institutions, with the associated adoption of self-financing models (Boylan, 2006) - an observation echoed by other authors (Genoways, 2006, Hedstrom and King, 2004). In the USA, the availability of funding to heritage organisations is also being restricted, with a variety of factors including rising energy costs, diminishing local philanthropic support, and the pervading threat of economic downturn projected to continue downward funding pressure on museums well into the twenty-first century (Chung et al., 2008).

As early as 2001, UK archivist Christopher Marsden identified government policies and funding models, biased towards integration of products and services by collecting institutions, as the primary cause of the rapid expansion of convergence projects (Marsden, 2001, 21). Significantly, for better or worse, he also noted that the coercive tendency of these directives had encouraged institutions to embark on collaborative ventures that might not otherwise have eventuated. In a similar policy context, US heritage consultant David Curry has predicted that forms of convergence will increasingly provide a solution to the financial sustainability of cultural organisations in the face of economic stress (Curry, 2010a). Michelle Doucet, writing on the amalgamation of the National Library and National Archives in Canada in 2004, also cited shrinking resources, and the resulting need for greater scale and efficiency, as the rationale behind the merger of the two organisations (Doucet, 2007, 61).

Gibson, Morris and Cleeve, in their own summary of literature dealing with museum and library collaboration in England and the USA, identify the sharing of physical and funding resources, as well as the possibility of rationalising costs, as some of the most pervasive grounds for convergence being articulated by a variety of authors (Gibson et al., 2007a, 58). Furthermore, their research into collaborations between libraries and museums suggests that some organisations believe financial aid from funding agencies would be easier to obtain if they were seen to be working together (Gibson et al., 2007a, 61). In the digital environment, De Laurentis proposes that libraries, archives and museums should see their collections as financial assets and exploit them to create products and obtain revenue, even though this would require a shift away from the mindset that cultural organisations exist outside the economic realm, purely for public benefit (De Laurentis, 2006, 81, 87). Seen together, these views point to a changing perception of cultural collections, away from a government-funded resource available to all, to a commodity in the financial marketplace able to attract commercial income.

In Australia, several authors have indicated that restricted access to funding for cultural facilities has been a key driver in the proposal and development of converged collecting institutions in regional areas (for example, Clement, 2007, 11, Boaden and Clement, 2009, 9). This has occurred against the backdrop of diminishing federal and state budget allocations for cultural organisations; a situation that can, at least partially, be attributed to the rise of neoliberal regional development policies in Australia since the 1970s, as I discuss further in Chapter 5. *The Bookends Scenarios*, a comprehensive report commissioned by the Library Council of NSW and State Library of NSW to explore the future of the public library system in NSW, found that continuing decreases in library funding, despite increases in public usage, threatens the sustainability of the state's library sector (Freeman and Watson, 2009, 12-13, 54).

Fluctuations in government expenditure for collecting institutions also indicate a downward trend, along with a greater expectation that cultural facilities and programs be funded out of state and local (rather than national) government budgets. For example, figures compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2014a) show that expenditure by the Australian Government in the 2012-2013 period was $63.9m for art museums (compared to $191.8m from state and territory governments) and a further $285.9m for other museums and cultural heritage (versus $550.6m from state

and territory governments). This compares to a considerably higher spend of $90.1m allocated to art museums by the Australian Government five years earlier in 2007-2008 (with $187.1m from state and territory governments) and $295.7m (versus $371.8m from state and territory governments) on other museums and cultural heritage. Likewise, during the 2012-13 period, Australian Government spending on Archives fell 6% compared to 2011-12 period (ABS, 2014b).

In NSW, the museum and gallery sector continues to lobby state and federal governments for funding support. *Adding Value!* (Huxley, 2014),[11] the most recent research conducted by Museums & Galleries NSW and commissioned on behalf of seven prominent regional local governments, attests to the sector's continued need to justify the value of cultural facilities in economic terms. The report prioritises financial returns on investment and positive impacts on local economies as indicators of the public benefit of cultural facilities.[12]

In terms of museum sustainability, the swing towards financial benchmarks has also skewed the traditional functions of museums and may be contributing to the trend for museums to converge with other collecting institutions. In the USA, prominent museologist Hugh Genoways has warned that museums, which have historically apportioned relatively equal resources to their four core areas - collections, documentation, preservation and interpretation - are now under pressure from funding bodies (and non-museum administrators) to deliver marketable programs and increase their public interface, sometimes at the expense of care, maintenance and scholarly research of collections (Genoways, 2006, 225-226). Similarly, Hedstrom and King

[11] *Adding Value!: A report on the economic impact of the cultural infrastructures of the Evocities of NSW* (2014) is the publication of research facilitated by M&G NSW and produced by Western Research Institute (WRI). The research was conducted for the *Evocities*, a partnership between Bathurst Regional Council, Dubbo City Council, Orange City Council, Albury City Council, Armidale Dumaresq Council, Tamworth regional Council and Wagga Wagga City Council.

[12] *The Adding Value!* report continues a discourse created around the concept of the 'arts industry', where the social value of cultural amenities is translated overwhelmingly into economic terms. Anderson (1991) implies that the linkage of arts and cultural funding to political goals and election cycles predisposes the sector to justifying its social contribution ('public good') in terms of financial benefit to communities.

acknowledge that financial pressures have forced many cultural institutions, but especially museums, to become increasingly market-orientated, but that this redirection in focus has elicited criticism that curators are producing "exhibitions that are popular and trendy rather than critical and thought-provoking" (Hedstrom and King, 2004, 22). In these contexts, the positioning of convergence as an efficiency model capable of delivering economies of scale, greater access to funding opportunities, as well as improved marketability for cultural organisations, also raises the question of whether the quality of programs produced by such institutions will be biased in favour of maintaining a profit, rather than engaging audiences on a deeper intellectual level.

1.3.3 New technologies: the 'virtual Wunderkammer'

Rapid innovation in the development of digital technologies and online capacity has added considerable momentum to discussion about greater collaboration among the domains and cross-institutional access to collection information (Dempsey, 2000, Doucet, 2007, Neal, 2007, Zorich et al., 2008, Waibel and Erway, 2009, Duff et al., 2013), especially in the context of supporting an increasing demand for learning resources and 'edutainment' (De Laurentis, 2006, 80-81). James Neal, as Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian at Columbia University, refers to the need to manage the "collective collection" rather than individual library, archive and museum repositories, in the light of emerging digital technologies and globalised information accessibility, as well as "renovating descriptive and organizing [sic] practices" to advance this cause (Neal, 2007, 266-267). Similarly, Manoff (2004, 10) has argued that the typological differences between the materials collected by libraries, archives and museums are eroded once collections appear in a digital environment. Robert Martin concurs, proposing that the convention of separating library, archive and museum collections is not replicated in the usage patterns of these collections online, where "new users do not care whether the original materials are in a library or a museum or an archives… They just want access to 'the stuff'" (Martin, 2007, 82).[13] Martin proposes that the particular collection management techniques and access rules imposed by the different types of institutions impede physical, cross-

[13] Martin does not, however, provide evidence, such as findings of user evaluations, to support his assumptions.

sector access to collections, especially where users are becoming accustomed to unhindered access to other kinds of information via the Internet. Under these circumstances, Martin suggests that users may legitimately lose patience with distinctions between professional identities and organisational cultures across libraries, archives and museums (Martin, 2007, 82).

Waibel and Erway are among the growing chorus to argue that users expect to be able to access diverse collection information via a single online search (Waibel and Erway, 2009), creating a strong rationale for digital convergence of collection information. These authors point out that online commercial enterprises such as Google, Amazon and Flickr are now competing with traditional cultural institutions for user's attention online, and that a more cohesive, networked presence is vital for libraries, archives and museums to maintain their profile in this environment (Waibel and Erway, 2009, 323). Under these circumstances, Waibel and Erway propose that collaboration and convergence may provide the only opportunity for cultural institutions to retain a viable digital presence: "LAMs [libraries, archives and museums] now have to find a way to work together in securing their space in this colossal virtual *Wunderkammer*" (Waibel and Erway, 2009, 325).

Hedstrom and King contend that some online businesses, such as booksellers and retailers Amazon, have an advantage over traditional repositories, in that they are able to invest more quickly in their databases, resulting in a scenario where Amazon's catalogues are now more comprehensive and up-to-date than those of some large libraries (Hedstrom and King, 2004, 23). Furthermore, the reality that private enterprises such as Amazon are self-financing, rather than dependent on government funding, has led to predictions that the need for ongoing public support of cultural institutions may fall into question (Hedstrom and King, 2004, 23). Moreover, they argue, the pervasiveness of online information, as well as social networking, threatens the ongoing viability of bricks-and-mortar collecting institutions: "once everyone and everything is on the Internet exchanging intellectual property in a universal cyber-marketplace, the quaint old LAM [library, archive, museum] will no longer be needed" (Hedstrom and King, 2004, 1-2).

At least one study, published by the IMLS in 2008, indicates that new cross-domain research habits, developed through the medium of the Internet, are leading to an increase in reciprocal visitation between museums and libraries (Griffiths and King, 2008, 10). However, the consensus seems to be that digital access to collections is eroding the 'market-share' of traditional repositories. Taking these views into account, it is possible to see how the advancement of digital technology has not only raised the bar for provision of online collections access for all kinds of collecting institutions, but also the way in which discussions about user participation in the digital realm have prompted questions about the long-term sustainability of operating separate collecting domains and physical collection spaces.

1.3.4 Collecting organisations as a Third Place

Research by the IMLS (Griffiths and King, 2008) highlights the high level of trust placed on museums and libraries by public users; a quality that enables museums and libraries to act as sites for safe and meaningful social interaction (Weil, 1999, Wright, 2010). Similar ideas have been prominent in broader museum, library and archive discourses surrounding how collecting institutions can engage and connect with communities and better respond to the needs of their constituents (Gomez, 2010). Furthermore, the notion that cultural heritage institutions share a common purpose as a 'Third Place' – a safe, welcoming environment outside of work and home - have prompted calls for greater collaboration between the collecting domains.

The term Third Place has been used to describe the social function of museums, libraries and other cultural organisations as sites for civic engagement, where people can gather and commune around relevant issues. An online forum conducted in 2010 addressing this concept describes the Third Place as "a neutral community space, where people come together voluntarily and informally in ways that level social iniquities and promote community engagement and social connection." (Hildreth et al., 2010). In Australia, the NSW Library Council's *Bookends Scenario*s report observes that the growing number of people living alone, as well as increased urbanisation, has elevated the community-building role of libraries as a secure and accessible Third Place for people to socialise (Freeman and Watson, 2009, 12, 53, 56). Similarly, Public

Libraries NSW has highlighted the beneficial role of libraries in providing welcoming and safe public meeting space (Don, 2008, 2, see also Baum, 2008).

In the UK, research conducted in 2007 focussing on collaborative projects between libraries and museums in the UK and USA revealed "the encouragement of community development through social inclusion was an important motivating force in a number of collaborative projects." (Gibson et al., 2007a, 60). The targeting of a similar range of visitor demographic groups by both libraries and museums, including children and teenagers, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, those taking part in continuing education, teachers and researchers, was seen as justification for cooperation between institutions. In this context, museums in particular have a two-fold opportunity to act as facilitators for communities to articulate and engage with significant cultural themes (Sola, 1997, Carr, 2006, Patchen, 2006, Chinn and al., 2010), as well as using museum expertise in converged settings to identify and foreground issues of emerging social importance. Furthermore, the renewed emphasis in the museums sector on education and public programs since the 1980s (Genoways, 2006) has aligned museums more closely with the social purpose of libraries.

By considering this overview of factors influencing the convergence of museums, libraries and archives both internationally and in Australia, it is evident that motivation for integration is present on a number of levels. Some research points to the common ancestry of the collecting domains and insists that the different types of repositories are inherently compatible, with current trends towards convergence merely the fulfilment of a historical precedent. At the same time, the pursuit of financial sustainability is making it imperative for collecting institutions to consider closer collaboration and convergence in response to changes to funding models and cultural policy. In addition, many authors justify convergence in reference to the potential of new digital technologies to integrate users' access to collections online, eliminating the need for 'antiquated' separation of the collecting domains and underscoring the timeliness of physical institutional convergence. Finally, the joint perception of collecting institutions as a 'Third Place' has refocused attention away from typological differences between collections. Emphasis on the wider social role of collecting institutions, their programs and the social spaces that they can offer provides further impetus to the idea of convergence.

1.4 Parameters of this research

This overview demonstrates that the term 'convergence' can be used to describe a variety of institutional collaborations and integrations, involving different combinations of collecting institutions established in response to a range of motivations. Convergence of the collecting domains can be realised in both digital and physical environments. However, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis where literature on the topic is considered, the body of commentaries and scholarship that deals directly with convergence remains largely speculative and disconnected. In terms of empirical research, only a handful of studies provide primary analysis of actual cases of convergence. Most of the existing research focuses on inventory-style quantifying and documentation of institutional objectives, change processes, benefits and challenges of convergence, rather than critically engaging with theoretical and disciplinary discourses related to professional collection practice. I suggest that the examination and evaluation of convergence in the context of ideas central to museological, library and information science, and archival scholarship, represents unrealised potential to extend current understandings of the trend and its impact on engagement with, and understanding of, cultural collections.

Recognising that no single study of legitimate depth and rigour can address every manifestation of convergence or the full range of possible research questions related to the trend, this thesis focuses on instances of institutional convergence that have come to fore in Australia and New Zealand. Set against the backdrop of the international movement towards convergence, these local cases have developed in tandem with new directions in government cultural policy, within a specific funding environment, and in response to perceived community (and broader user) demand for access to cultural facilities and resources.

While institutional convergence has the potential to involve cultural organisations of all sizes, consultant Sue Boaden and Carina Clement of the Albury LibraryMuseum observe that in Australia, convergence has generally occurred at local government level and in regional areas (Boaden and Clement, 2009, 1). In a regional context, convergence of libraries, archives, museums and galleries in Australia is often associated with the concept of cultural hubs, or precincts, where various facilities are

clustered together in order to provide a focal destination point for community and tourist visitors, as well as encouraging the sharing of audiences through the proximity of venues (Boaden and Clement, 2009, MGNSW, 2010, Khoshaba et al., 2010). Regional and local government areas have been worst affected by aging infrastructure and community demands for better cultural facilities, while simultaneously facing increasing difficulty in funding cultural initiatives. Under these circumstances, convergence has come to be seen as solution to rationalising expenditure while answering community expectations for improved cultural facilities. In some quarters, convergence is idealised as a panacea for solving these local issues. As Boaden and Clement claim:

> *Convergence at its optimum will result in a new model cultural facility which communicates and engages with diverse audiences through innovative and imaginative service delivery and programming designed by multidisciplinary teams of qualified and experienced staff.* (2009, 4)

However, recent research conducted by Museums & Galleries NSW into the development of converged organisations in the state of NSW indicates that such ideals are often not realised. New converged institutions are still affected by problems of adequate professional staffing, lack of clear organisational structures, audience development issues, inappropriate infrastructure and ongoing funding shortfalls (M&GNSW, 2010). Taking into account the significance of cultural organisations in regional and rural areas (where populations are geographically remote from major state and national cultural institutions that are most often centrally located in major cities) what are the ways in which these institutions encourage and facilitate intellectual engagement and physical interaction across multiple collection areas? How effectively do they represent heritage and contribute to cultural life?

In consideration of these questions, physically converged institutions in NSW offer a fertile and compelling opportunity for study. They are the result of rapid appropriation of a global trend into local government cultural policy, incorporating an international movement towards the integration of diverse collection resources within the specific political, community and heritage context of New South Wales. In the most part, they are new institutions, created through the amalgamation of previously existing and

autonomous collecting organisations. In many cases, they are experiments in a new kind of organisational and management structure, bringing together collection professionals with a range of disciplinary backgrounds under the expectation of collaboration and cross-fertilisation of skills. They are joint venues, built to enable more efficient expenditure of tax- and rate-payer money for the provision of cultural infrastructure. Significantly, they are a new kind of repository, where works of art, museum and local history collections, library holdings and archival records are housed side by side under the premise of improving their value to users, through joint collection access and inventive cross-disciplinary research and public programs.

To what extent, however, do these organisations fulfil the expectations that have driven their formation? In response to this question, this thesis investigates five cases of institutional convergence, including one organisation in New Zealand and four in NSW, Australia. With an emphasis on outcomes for museum collections that have become part of converged organisations, the research examines the case studies through documentary data and in-depth interviews with staff. By combining the findings with a comparative, conceptual analysis that interrogates some basic assumptions about the benefits of convergence as articulated in the international literature, the research offers new insights into the impact of the converged institutional model on the interpretive potential of museum objects.

Based on factors driving the convergence trend, the thematic review of the discourse around convergence and existing primary studies, I ask:

> *To what extent does the convergence of museums with other types of collecting institutions affect museum practice? How do changes to practice influence the interpretive context for museum collections and, therefore, the extent and ways in which their meanings and significances can be expressed?*

In particular, I examine the following:

- Does the amalgamation of museum collections with those of libraries, archives and galleries alter established methodologies for documenting, interpreting and communicating the significance of museum objects?

- Is convergence leading to productive cross-pollination of professional skills and knowledge or, conversely, the dilution, fragmentation or loss of specialist museum skills and expertise?
- Does convergence provide for higher levels of cultural engagement and amenity than that offered by independent museums, libraries and archives?
- Do changes to the interpretive context of 'converged' museum collections affect the diverse knowledge potential of those collections, and their capacity to support the development of community and cultural identities?

In examining convergence around this core research question, the thesis provides the first museological analysis of the convergence model. It is also the first research to focus solely on instances of physical, institutional convergence, rather than digital convergence of collection databases and resources, or project-based collaborations between institutions. It considers a range of convergences across all collection domains, focussing on museums that are integrated with libraries, archives, galleries, arts and tourism centres, or various combinations of these services.

The research contributes to the international discourse around convergence, but the project also has special significance in Australia, where the popularity of the convergence model has grown rapidly in the first decade of the twenty-first century and continues to gain currency with local, state and national governments.

The nature of the research question demands both theoretical and qualitative approaches to provide thorough, balanced, reliable and representative findings. In this way, the thesis provides an inter-disciplinary, systematic, empirical contribution to knowledge in this field.

1.4.1 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis follows a conventional structure, compiling a review of the literature and existing research around convergence, as well as setting out the research methodology, before describing the research findings in detail. I examine the significance of the findings in the context of the research question, incorporating an inter-disciplinary

selection of scholarship to explore the ramifications of convergence on processes of meaning-making associated with museum collections.

Chapter 2, *International and Australian research on convergence,* begins with a thematic survey of issues surrounding convergence as they appear in both scholarly and professional literature around the topic. I extract common issues and comparisons between the work of academics and practitioners in diverse yet intersecting fields, including museology, social science, epistemology, archival science, library and information science, and state and local government. I identify and describe recent international and Australian research dealing with convergence, with an emphasis on the ground covered by these studies and opportunities for further research.

Rather than including an exhaustive list of the literature surrounding convergence, the role of the chapter is to establish the contours of the debate and provide background for the questions for this research. Where relevant, further references to scholarship and empirical research are included and explored throughout the thesis, to provide context for both the theoretical discussion and fieldwork analysis components.

Chapter 3, *Research Methodology,* describes the theoretical analysis and qualitative case study methodology that forms the empirical research component of this PhD. I outline the phenomenological approach that underpins my method of inquiry, as well as explaining my choice of a multi-case study technique, including the sources of data and methods of collection, analysis and interpretation that I have employed.

Chapter 4, titled *Knowledge utopias: An epistemological perspective on the convergence of museums, libraries and archives,* provides the conceptual anchor for the thesis, positioning convergence within the context of epistemological analysis and questioning the impact of the model on the production of knowledge around collections. While knowledge creation in museum, library or archive settings has been explored in a range of scholarship within each of these individual disciplines, the fundamental concept of 'knowledge' and how it can be communicated has not been comprehensively discussed in regard to convergence of these institutions. The chapter begins by foregrounding the epistemological assumptions inherent in the labeling of museums, libraries and archives as 'knowledge institutions' within the discourse

around convergence. I examine the concepts of data, information and knowledge in the convergence context and challenge the legitimacy of the claim that convergence will deliver greater knowledge for collection users.

Chapter 5, *Case Studies: Cultural policy contexts and institution backgrounds*, begins a sequence of three chapters in which I report the findings of the five case studies of converged organisations used in this research. The chapter investigates significant national and state cultural policy frameworks, as well as developments in the role of municipal councils in provision of cultural services, as a backdrop to the advent of convergence as a popular model for the upgrading and development of new cultural facilities in local government areas. Chapter 5 concludes by outlining the background of each case study, including information about the history of each institution's formation, the type of convergence represented by each case, and some quantitative information such as organisational size, budget, etc.

While the reporting of the findings is conditional on maintaining the anonymity of the participants in the study (and therefore the institutions in which they work), I provide sufficient detail about each organisation to establish a context for accurate interpretation of the findings and to enable readers to make meaningful comparisons across cases.

Moving into a detailed account of the research findings, Chapter 6, *Case Study Findings: Museum interpretive practices in the convergence context*, describes the influence of convergence on areas of museum practice specifically related to the development, management and presentation of museum collections. Here, I group the findings around three distinct but inter-connected themes; collections, exhibitions and interpretation, through which I explore the ability of staff to perform tasks related to acquisitions and collection development, documentation and description, preservation, and development of permanent and temporary exhibitions. I consider the findings in reference to the different interpretive approaches existing within the library, archives, visual arts and museum professions, exploring how these methods interact in converged institutional settings. Throughout the chapter I explore the impact of convergence on specific aspects of museum interpretive practice and discuss the implications for knowledge creation around the museum collections.

Chapter 7, *Case Study Findings: Organisational structures and management of convergence*, examines the influence of high-level, institution-wide changes to administration and structure on the goals and leadership of an organisation, as well as the roles and responsibilities of its staff. These findings contextualise those presented in the previous chapter, demonstrating the ways in which the broad institutional frameworks of convergence produce particular conditions for museum practice. Areas of management and administration, including strategic planning, expectations on staff performance, the implementation of new cross-departmental communication mechanisms, collaboration and reporting structures, and the redesign of individual job descriptions, are considered for their impact on the interpretation of museum collections.

Having reported the findings of my case studies, Chapter 8, *Keeping the promise? The theory and practice of museum interpretation within the convergence model*, concludes the thesis with a discussion of key findings in reference to the fundamental philosophical issues introduced in Chapter 4, providing analysis of convergence in the context of epistemology.

I examine the extent to which the experiences of collection professionals working within converged institutions, as evidenced through my research, shed light on the potential for information and knowledge creation in these environments. The discussion provides new insights into significant ways in which convergence influences practices of making meaning around museum collections.

The thesis concludes with the key findings of the research and their wider implications for both academic and professional (cultural sector) discourses around convergence. I reiterate the ways in which this thesis addresses critical gaps in current research of the convergence trend by offering empirical evidence of the impact of convergence on museum practices and interpretive outcomes for museum collections. Through this research, I hope to strengthen the dialogue about the ways in which physical convergences can alter archival, library, and especially museum frameworks, and correspondingly, the interactions with collections that result in the creation of cultural knowledge.

2 International and Australian research on convergence

As museology, archives and library scholars involved in the most recent international study of convergence of cultural institutions point out, the body of literature around the topic of convergence to date remains limited in comparison to the growth of the phenomenon in both digital and physical (institutional) contexts (Duff et al., 2013, 5). The relatively small number of scholarly publications, and scattered emphases of existing case studies, contributes towards the difficulty in establishing a consistent narrative through a review of this literature.

Below I present my review in three sections, reflecting the types of scholarship relevant to the topic. First, I consider intersections between the idea of convergence and concepts within museological scholarship, identifying connections between convergence and its possible influence on museum practices. Second, I present a series of key themes that emerge from an overview of publications on the theme of convergence that take the form of professional or academic opinion pieces. These primarily discuss and speculate about convergence, the rationale behind the trend, its influence on collaborative practices, as well as considering potential impacts on visitor engagements with collections. Third, as there is little primary research of convergence, I take each of the existing empirical studies in turn, considering the approach, methods and findings reported by the researchers, as well as any limitations posed by the research.

2.1 Convergence and Museology

Any consideration of the ways in which the perceived meaning and value of collection objects is constructed – whether those objects are books, documents, artworks, images or artefacts – inevitably leads to questions relating to the discipline-based, professional collection practices that produce information, thematic connections and the intellectual 'order' of collections. These issues have been addressed within the academic literature surrounding archives, libraries and museums as individual fields of practice (see, for example, the work of Canadian theorist Terry Cook in reference to archival

historiography and Hope Olsen's critiques of library classification and cataloguing conventions). In the context of convergence, an interdisciplinary discussion of disciplinary interpretive practices is especially warranted, and I examine and contrast these approaches in Chapter 4 of this thesis. However, the ways in which museum interpretive contexts may be modified or challenged by convergence deserves some introduction here.

A core concern of museology as a scholarly discipline lies in investigating how meaning (knowledge) is derived from objects (for example, see contributors in Pearce, 1990c, Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, Pearce, 1994b, Lubar and Kingery, 1995, Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Museology studies the history of museums and the mechanisms of museum practice and management, as well as considering philosophical concerns such as the production of narrative about identity, history and culture in the museum context. In these ways, the discipline explores the museum as an intermediary between, and interface for, numerous fields of study – archaeology, social history, the visual arts, the sciences, etc. – and the visiting public.

For these reasons, changes to the ways in which museums function, both in terms of internal professional practices and processes, as well as relationships with other cultural institutions, are significant in their potential to change this interface, altering the context for the production of meaning around museum objects and, therefore, the availability of those meanings to museum users. The convergence of museums with libraries, archives and galleries represents such a contextual shift. By restructuring museum activities, spaces, programs and staff roles, convergence has the potential to impact the kinds of information produced around museum collections and the engagements available to users of those collections.

2.1.1 Convergence and the identity of collections

A number of prominent museologists and scholars in related disciplines have discussed the ways in which institutional context shapes both the overall character of collections and the interpretation of individual objects. Questions about the identity of collections are relevant to the discourse around convergence, where different groups of objects -

each with their own history and provenance, and accumulated according to specific domain-based practices - are brought together into a single institutional context.

Susan Pearce (1999b) has explored the interconnectedness of objects within museum collections and the impact of various interpretive traditions on understanding the significance of artefacts in their collection or institutional settings. Using the metaphor of an iceberg, Pearce argues that the meanings of collection objects should be seen holistically, comprising of both the 'tip of the iceberg' – the hard measureable, quantifiable properties of the individual artefact that are available to empirical analysis – and the less measureable, amorphous 'below the surface' relationships between the item and its belonging to the whole of the overall collection, that collection's history, its internal logic and even its physical location (Pearce, 1999b, 18-19). Similarly, museums scholar Eileen Hooper-Greenhill indicates that the meaning of artefacts in museum contexts is always an interaction between the materiality of the object and the interpretive framework applied to the object as a component of a larger 'collection' that has been assembled according to a particular rationale (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, 103-104). For Hooper-Greenhill and Pearce, a museum object's tangible characteristics, as well as the internal logic of the collection overall, contribute to the knowledge potential of the artefact: both its individual and referential properties are mutually contingent.

From this perspective, the internal consistency of museums collections – assembled under particular historical circumstances and visions of purpose – contributes to the interpretive capacity of collection objects. Convergence represents the potential to disrupt this collective integrity, perhaps less so by the assimilation of collections into larger multi-purpose institutions (and corresponding changes in the physical environment of the collections) than through collections becoming subject to new organisational policy, strategic and professional frameworks.

In an article exploring the concept of collecting, Couze Venn identifies museum collections (though he could just as easily be referring to library or archive collections) not simply as repositories of significant objects, but also as cultural artefacts in themselves. According to Venn, collections bear the imprint of the governing epistemologies of the period during which they were assembled and, therefore,

embody the potential to be understood as documents of prevailing culture and intellectual discourse over a particular historical period. Borrowing the words of Heidegger, Venn writes that collections bring to light the ways in which societies have approached "the ordering of the orderable" (Venn, 2006, 36), as contained in their chosen classification systems and other forms of schematic grouping, revealing the prevalence of a particular world view. The conceptual and physical fabric of a collection are both significant in "providing enough evidence to enable one to interrogate the collection from the point of view of the meta-categories operating to constitute the modern architecture of knowledge" (Venn, 2006, 37). In this way, collections become an important source for reflection on ways of knowing, supporting the development of conscious self-knowledge among communities regarding their own position and relation to the epistemological lineage represented in the form of the collection.

The work of scholars such as Pearce, Hooper-Greenhill and Venn suggest that the perceived meaning of collection objects depends not only on the physical nature and provenance of the individual items, but is also derived through the narrative relationships developed between objects within a collection, as well as the motives (implicit as well as explicit) of the collecting institution that has assembled them. In this way, collections attain a particular history and character in a holistic sense, through their provenance relationships, exhibition histories, the conventions under which they are described, and so on. In turn, the reification of these relationships through collection documentation and presentation can influence the kinds of interactions that users experience with objects, and the meanings they attribute to them.

There is no reason why the same ideas - emphasising the impact of the identity of the collection as a whole on the ways in which individual items within the collection are understood – cannot be applied equally well to libraries and archives.[14] Therefore, does

[14] See, for example, Hope Olson's (2001) critique of inherent bias in library classification schemes, which highlights the influence of overall world views and epistemologies that guide the development and documentation of library collections, as well as the positioning and understanding of individual items within those collections.

convergence between libraries, archives and museums fundamentally affect the ways in which individual objects within those collections can be interpreted? Through the merger of organisational structures, policies and objectives, what potential does convergence have to alter the perceived cultural significance of objects and collections previously held by independent institutions?

2.1.2 Cultural norms for collection engagement

Inasmuch as museums, libraries and archives are repositories and sites for the interpretation of cultural objects, it could be argued that traditional ways of visiting and interacting with collections also represent a valid and valuable form of cultural expression – the intangible cultural heritage of engaging with collections, to put it another way. As Edwina Taborsky writes in her chapter titled 'The discursive object', which appeared in Susan Pearce's influential museum studies reader *Objects of Knowledge* (1990c), the cohesiveness of societies is predicated on shared beliefs, behaviours, and modes of communication, which enable the members of a society to meaningfully engage with one another (Taborsky, 1990, 50, 55). The long history of museums in Western / European culture has seen the development of particular conventionalities of usage, including ways of interacting with exhibits, behaving in museum environments and receptiveness to museum communication. In these ways, the museum context constitutes a particular staging ground where norms for social engagement can be enacted. These conventions, based on shared behaviours and understandings, contribute to functioning society; the act of visiting a museum constitutes and represents an enactment of culture in its own right.

In a similar way, museum scholar Susan Crane describes our collective understanding of museums as a shared "museal consciousness": a common set of approaches through for understanding the way in which museums order and represent objects and information (Crane, 2000, 2). Scott Paris develops his own formulation of this concept in his description of the "communities of practice" that develop around museums (Paris, 2006, 261-264). He likens the learning of the social and intellectual processes that accompany museum attendance to a type of apprenticeship, where more experienced museum users demonstrate appropriate and meaningful participation to novices:

> *Novice visitors learn how to view objects and read signs, how to identify exhibit boundaries and themes, and how to navigate the physical spaces as part of social groups… Then, like experts in the community, they share stories and inculcate others into the community"* (ibid., 261).

In other words, both Crane and Paris highlight that an important aspect of a user's interaction with (in this case) a museum collection is their subscription to, and performance of, specific behaviours perceived as appropriate for museum visitation, and the corresponding sense of participation in a cultural practice that this engenders. Though difficult to measure, these 'affective' aspects of museum experience form an important experiential context for user engagements with collection objects.

The concept that part of the museum visitor experience is the sense of membership to a museum-literate group adds a new dimension to the idea, expressed by authors cited earlier, that museums uniquely support communities. Museums not only function to deepen individual and collective understandings of culture via the interpretation of collections, thereby creating a stronger sense of local identity. The very process of becoming acquainted with the methods museums use to communicate these interpretations, and becoming well versed in social and participative norms within museum settings, constitutes communities of 'museum-visitor practice', whose affiliates internalise their membership to the group as part of their identity.

In the light of convergence of libraries, archives and museums, we might reasonably question what aspects of the museum experience, affiliation and ritual are altered when different types of collections, services and organisational functions are integrated. If our approach to conceptualising and using libraries, archives and museums as separate entities is culturally embedded, in what ways are those conventions challenged in merging the identities and activities of collecting institutions? Are community identities attached to collecting organisations also altered? Does the combination of collections under a single entity confuse our ability to navigate the collection space, forcing visitors to oscillate between different modes of comprehension and engagement? To extend Paris' ideas on museum communities of practice, will a mass re-initiation be necessary to develop new literacy among visitors in the necessary skills

and normative behaviours for engaging with converged collection environments? And, could convergence reduce rather than enhance access to collections, if the physical proximity of collections and integrated spaces are not conducive to audiences effectively interacting with them, or comprehending their meaning? Finally, how can collection professionals working in converged organisations effectively leverage established approaches to engagement to develop meaningful participation with all kinds of collections?

This litany of questions points to the under-researched aspects of convergence: its possible effects on the production of knowledge; its impact on user engagements with different kinds of collection information and spaces; and (specifically in the case of physical / institutional convergence) its potential to influence user affiliation with collections.

2.2 Literature surrounding convergence: gathering the threads of an emerging discourse

Differences in purpose and practice between the collecting domains, and the impact of these differences on the eventual meanings and relationships created between collection objects belonging to library, museum or archival collections, has yet to emerge as a significant feature of discussions surrounding the convergence trend. While acknowledging the variety of epistemological and methodological approaches that characterise particular collecting domains (as well as highlighting the potential for the creation of 'converged' professional roles and skills), the literature stops short of exploring precisely how the new institutional structures, dynamics and professional practices brought about by convergence might alter established approaches to collections and produce new perspectives, or new kinds of knowledge, about objects.

In spite of claims highlighting the self-evident compatibility of the collecting domains based on historical precedents for integration, many scholars acknowledge that the professional distinctions between libraries, archives and museums remain intact. Discussion about the reasons for professional differentiation across the collecting domains persists in publications dealing with convergence, especially in regard to

ways in which traditional 'silos' can be broken down to enable effective cooperation and communication between collection-related disciplines.

Dempsey (2000, 12) and others recognise that the content and organisation of library, archive and museum holdings is a reflection of different institutional missions, traditions in collection management and control, and perceptions of object value. Robison observes that each domain enacts its own legal processes, visitor access rules, loan policies, conservation strategies, deaccessioning procedures and other collection management philosophies that can produce vastly different outcomes for relatively similar collection items (Robison, 2007, 43). The emergence of greater staff professionalisation in the collections sector has been cited as an important factor in the development of libraries, archives and museums as distinct collecting domains up to the present day, complicating the argument for convergence with considerations of diverse professional practices and cultural outputs of institutions.

Analysis provided by a number of authors – some of which happen to be proponents of the convergence trend – indicates that there are historical justifications for the autonomous existence of libraries, archives and museums. Given & McTavish (2010) state that, as methodologies for documenting and presenting library collections, archival records and museum collections evolved and became more specialised from the beginning of the twentieth century, the practicality and conceptual appropriateness of jointly dealing with collections diminished. In the USA and Canada for example, systematic library education became formalised around 1920,[15] with programs for museum professionals to follow during the 1930s (Given and McTavish, 2010, 16-17). Similarly, Gerald Beasley has also cited the growth of librarianship as a profession, and the accompanying need to develop more efficient systems for dealing with growing collections of books and journals, as the key contributing factor in the separation of printed collections from other forms of material culture (Beasley, 2007, 22).

[15] Hjorland notes that a Department of Library Science existed in Chicago as early as 1894 (Hjorland, 2000, 27).

In the USA during the 1950s and 1960s, standardisation across library collection documentation and management was advanced with the application of computing technology to library cataloguing, leading to the development of the machine-readable cataloguing (MARC) format, which was adopted nationally in 1971 (Hedstrom and King, 2004, 18). This development, alongside similar attempts to standardise library classification and cataloguing rules in Britain and Europe, precipitated the publication of the International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) during the early 1970s, with refinements and extensions to the standard continuing until today (Hedstrom and King, 2004, Byrum, 1997). As Hedstrom and King point out, these classification procedures imposed a particular epistemological framework - an "epistemic infrastructure" - across library collections worldwide, based on the ideals of encyclopaedism and scientific rationalism (2004, 18). Moreover, the emphasis placed on achieving ubiquitous cataloguing protocols across libraries – to achieve consistency in their philosophical framework, collection description methods, and the physical order imposed on bibliographic collections – contributed to positioning librarianship as a consolidated professional field requiring highly specialised training.

By contrast, the professionalisation of museum work is still seen by many as unfinished business (Sola, 1997, Genoways, 2006, Archibald, 2006), perhaps because of the inter-disciplinary backgrounds of museum practitioners and the dual facets of museum provision, which involve specialisation in both back-of-house functions such as collection research, management and exhibition development, as well as operational aspects with a direct public interface, including educational programs, publications and, increasingly, online presence. While it has evolved in tandem with the library field, museum practice and theory has developed along a trajectory that acknowledges non-standardised classification, heterogeneous approaches to object interpretation, a wide variety of material culture expertise, and an emphasis on overtly mediated public access to collections. A considerable body of literature exists around the contested topic of museum methodologies for artefact interpretation, and many of these papers were published during the 1980s and 1990s in a number of important edited museological publications (e.g. Schlereth, 1985, Pearce, 1994b, Lubar and Kingery, 1995). The different methodologies for artefact study anthologised in these volumes

exemplifies the influence of diverse disciplinary approaches and epistemological perspectives underpinning the functions of institutions within the museum spectrum.

The significance of fundamental differences in the ways in which libraries and museums understand the purpose of their collections, and their professional role in providing physical and intellectual access to those collections, has received some (albeit limited) attention in the discourse around convergence. Gerald Beasley has observed that libraries provide systematised access to collections, whereas museums, though also having systems, use these as a means to an end, constructing narrative around collections and providing access to these interpretations in the form of exhibitions, public programs and other pieces of communication (Beasley, 2007, 24).[16] Similarly, Deborah Wythe has noted that collections are integral to museums because they support acts of interpretation and the resulting programs, but that collecting alone does not constitute the mission of museums (Wythe, 2007, 53). Furthermore, Gibson, Morris and Cleeve (2007) remark that museum cataloguing systems have traditionally been designed for use by staff and not public users. Correspondingly, 90% of museum collections reside in secured storage, in contrast to library collections, which are generally fully accessible to outside users (Gibson et al., 2007b, 56).

In other words, libraries focus on user access to entire collection holdings via standardised cataloguing protocols that library professionals apply consistently to describe the collections. By contrast, museums envisage their objects as cultural artefacts that require active, ongoing interpretation (Gibson et al., 2007a, 56), and whose meanings are communicated through narratives in the form of exhibitions, guided tours, publications and other public programs.

[16] Marlene Manoff has highlighted the narrow epistemological framework embedded within the rigidity of library cataloguing, citing David Greetham's criticisms of Library of Congress Classification (LCC), Dewey, and Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) as systems that perpetuate an empiricist approach to knowledge. According to Manoff, these frameworks attempt to objectively categorise collections from a position apparently outside of any cultural or temporal context (Manoff, 2004, 20). The simulated neutrality of these universal schemes is at odds with the multiplicity of cataloguing regimes and nomenclatures used within the museum sector, which often reflects the particular character and needs of particular collections.

Archives present yet another model of collecting, often viewed first and foremost in their role of preserving information contained in unique records, rather than as overt interpreters of content. In a paper focussing on the concept of archives, Mike Featherstone, editor of journal *Theory, Culture & Society*, describes the archive historically as:

> *…the place for the storage of documents and records. With the emergence of the modern state, it became the storehouse for the material from which national memories were constructed* (Featherstone, 2006, 591).

The idea of the archive was, therefore, conceived around the principle of preservation of documentary materials, later evolving an official bureaucratic function. Archives fulfilled these functions by providing 'raw' content that could be mined and interpreted by scholars, governments and other external users for, among other things, the production of historical narratives.

In contrast especially to museums, interpretation of collection holdings in historical or thematic contexts by archivists is sometimes discouraged and even regarded as antithetical to good archival practice. The most recent edition of *Keeping Archives* (2008), a comprehensive manual of archival practice published by the Australian Society of Archivists, contains several references to the necessity for archives to be kept according to the principle of provenance (i.e. the original order in which they were received from the creating agency) and the priority for archivists to remain at arms length from interpretation processes (Bettington et al., 2008, 18, 356, 365, 382). The archival approach to record keeping is succinctly described in the following paragraph from *Keeping Archives*:

> *As outlined above, archives have many potential uses and an archivist cannot know exactly what these uses may be in the future. Rather than rearranging records in a way that might be 'useful' to a particular audience, archivists preserve the original order so that records can be understood in their original context, giving room for users to interpret*

> *and analyse the records in a multitude of ways.* (Bettington et al., 2008, 18)

With their primary objective to protect original order, archival practices avoid placing layers of interpretation on collections. This may preclude the use of subject or theme indexes and other finding aids common to both museum collections and libraries (even though collection guides and series summaries do represent forms of interpretive content). The primary concerns of archives lie in retaining the relationship between the documents and the institutional and personal functions and activities that gave rise to them. As such, access to the collection is organised around the source or creator of the record, the record type, and so on.[17] Similarly, due to the governing principle of provenance (also called *respect des fonds*), archival records are arranged and described in series, rather than as individual items. Ideally, each public user follows their own path through the order of the archive, making their own sense of the collection without the inference of any pre-imposed understanding.[18] As such, interpretation of the meaning of archival materials often remains personal and publically undisclosed (unless it forms part of research disseminated via a secondary outlet that is not connected with the archive itself, such as a government publication or scholarly research). Hence, while archives exist for public use, and their content is inherently relevant to the history and 'memory' of societies, the act of articulating and disseminating those histories and narratives sits outside the remit of the archive itself.[19]

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[17] It is important to acknowledge here that institutional archives work within a legislative framework in which certain collections must be preserved for a minimum period, and where records are seen as a potential source of evidence of the operations of an organisation. In this context, the administrative role of institutional archives differs from that of collecting archives, which primarily focus on the accumulation of original documentary material for posterity (although many archives serve as an amalgamation of both).

[18] Another indication that the extrapolation of meaning is not seen as one of the roles of archivists is presented in the content of the Archives of Australia website (2010) which, for example, does not cite interpretation of collections among the six core areas of theoretical and applied knowledge necessary for archival practice.

[19] It is important to acknowledge the tension that does exist between some scholars of the archival context and its practitioners. In his wide-ranging and rigorous essay that covers the historical development of archives and critiques mechanisms for archival information management, Terry Cook (2009) argues that archives are not, in fact, the neutral repositories

David Bearman, as cited in an overview of issues surrounding convergence in the Museums Australia NSW Branch newsletter (Sloper, A., 2009, p.11), sums up the role of archives as follows:

> *Archives store evidence of activities of large organisations that is needed for accountability; their function is to be able to retrieve documents so they can be the basis for factual, often legal, assertions.*

This perspective, while recognising the interpretive nature of archival work in identifying object groupings within the collection (according to provenance), underscores the bureaucratic nature of archives in records management. In a neat analogy, archives have been described as "wholesalers" which provide raw research materials for others to interpret, while museums can be seen as "retailers" with ready-made products for their users (Yakel, 2005, 16). To add to this disjuncture, archives rarely describe collections at the level of the individual item, so the notion of combining collections where archival records are documented as groups, while others items are individually accessioned, presents significant challenges to joint collection management, use and access. Finally, archives have their own set of considerations regarding appraisal, access and disposal, retaining some records only for the necessary legal period and generally filtering access in regard to other issues such as copyright, confidentiality and freedom of information requirements (see Bettington et al, 2008, Chapter 11, 351-378).

In view of these differences, the prospect of convergence of the collecting domains produces certain tensions around collection management, documentation and interpretation. For example, how do the mission statements and collection policies of converged organisations vary from those formerly belonging to their constituent collecting bodies, and what does this tell us about deeper changes to institutional motives? When collections are integrated, do staff expertise and skills within the new organisation reflect the individual needs of the component collections? And, are

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of information that they purport to be, and that archivists actively engage in historiographic processes – even if at times they may not recognise their own actions as such.

certain domain-based strategies for collection documentation and public access given preference over the others?

2.2.1 New skills and professional cross-pollination

Forming a significant thread in the literature surrounding convergence, a number of commentators suggest that collaboration and convergence in the collection sector will lead to the acquisition of cross-domain knowledge between library, archive and museum staff, the cross-fertilisation of ideas, practices and experience, and innovation and development across the sectors (Dempsey, 2000, 5, Miller, 2000, Clement, 2007, Boaden and Clement, 2009, Stapleton, 2007b, Duff et al., 2013). There is an aspiration for the creation of a new breed of collections professionals - with cross-domain knowledge and capabilities - to develop out of the convergence trend (Macnaught, 2008, Zorich et al., 2008, 28).

In the context of digital collections convergence, new roles for collection professionals that traverse domain boundaries have been posited, and new job titles coined. Curry proposes the formation of a new professional field called “knowledge stewardship” to coordinate and manage the knowledge commons created by digitally available library, archive and museum information (Curry, 2010b). Similarly, the ‘cultural heritage information professional’ or ‘CHIP’ embodies the goal of creating a new breed of converged collection specialists. The ‘CHIP’ is defined as a cross-domain information expert, who “uses or manages information technology to organize [sic] and provide access to information resources for all users of cultural heritage organizations [sic], including libraries, museums and archives.” (Marty, 2008, 1).

However, judging by recent international debates around the possibility of greater collaboration between specialists from across the collecting domains, the presupposition of professional cross-pollination occurring naturally as a result of convergence appears problematic. For example, in a 2010 online discussion on the future of museums and libraries hosted by the IMLS, one participant, whose view was echoed by others on the same weblog, commented “it is disappointing that so few librarians seem to appreciate where curators and archivists are coming from and what they actually do” (Gomez, 2010). Writing on the feasibility of convergence, Dupont

described similar sentiments in citing a museum studies student who, in response to a library, archive and museum conference in 2007, stated: "I was a bit surprised at some of the attitudes from these [library] professionals toward museum collections and accessibility, mainly that museums don't do enough or don't come across as being 'user friendly' like libraries and archives do" (Dupont, 2007, 16). Although these comments are general in nature, they do point to areas of tension between collection domain professionals.

Dupont has underscored the significance of the essential differences between collection practices across the domains, citing the comments of a library student who observed that the "library world places a high value on access and standardization [sic], but these may not be the ideals of archives and museums" (Dupont, 2007, 15). Another student was quoted as observing that there was less common ground between museums and libraries than appears on the surface, because museums prioritise producing creative content around their collections, whereas libraries and archives focus on cataloguing collections (Dupont, 2007, 17). In another IMLS discussion, one blogger commented that museums are "expressive, creative, and scholarly forces with active educational missions", rather than simply storehouses and providers of information (Gomez, 2010), highlighting the varying extent to which museums interpret collections in comparison with libraries and archives. Furthermore, a librarian participating in a parallel discussion acknowledged, especially in view of public libraries, that:

> [the] *information consultant, aka librarian, has limitations in becoming an interpreter of content, …we are educated in mapping the road and flow of information, and in synthesizing it, etc.* (Scheinfeldt, 2010).

In other words, collection professionals recognise the different emphases placed on the role and provision of collections in different domain contexts. Libraries, for example, privilege broad access to collections, while museums can be seen as more selective with the objects presented to visitors, deliberately casting them in narrative contexts.

As Dupont has noted, the recognition of some overlap in functions between librarians, archivists and museum workers has not necessarily been accompanied by a roadmap

indicating how the practical amalgamation of these roles may be achieved (Dupont, 2007, 18). This lack of resolution appears to be the source of some apprehension among professionals across the domains. For example, at a 2006 session of the USA's National Joint Committee for Archives, Libraries and Museums (CALM), Clifford Lynch commented that museums feel uneasy about the degradation of narrative and context within converged collections while, conversely, libraries are uncomfortable about having to superimpose interpretation on their collections, where they have previously simply given highest priority to public exposure and access to the collection (Witchey, 2007). Even Michelle Doucet, a strong advocate of convergence at Canada's LAC (Library and Archives Canada) warns that if "you throw librarians and archivists and museums professionals in a room and tell them to get along and play nicely, they will not" (Doucet, 2007, 66) – perhaps because the organisational structure and expectations of staff in the converged institutions remains unclear. More generally, Brown and Pollack (2000), as cited by Gibson, Morris and Cleeve (2007b) in their research of museum and library cooperation in the USA and England, point out that a potential problem of any collaboration is domination by the larger partner. This is a relevant concern considering the different levels of funding and public profiles of libraries, archives and museums.

In addition to these concerns, the prospect of effective 'cross-pollination' of skills is compounded by the lack of converged approaches to educating collection professionals of the future. Canadian museum informatics researcher and consultant Jennifer Trant has observed that current curricula for the training of museum professionals, librarians and archivists continues to promote traditional differences between the domains rather than preparing a new generation of collection workers for collaboration and cross-domain convergence (Trant, 2009, 376-377; see also similar observations by Given & McTavish, 2010, 9 & 23, and Tanackovic & Badurina, 2009, 318). It is also important to note that much of the impetus towards augmentation of professional training derives from digital convergence; there is little evidence to inform the ways in which museum, library and archives professionals should be educated to function effectively within physically converged collecting organisations.

For organisations that have already embarked on convergence, the question is whether differences in institutional goals and traditional approaches to collections have been

reconciled, whether professional cross-fertilisation is actually happening, and what tangible evidence exists for its benefits or potential negative consequences for collection practice.

In Australia, there have been some indications that the ideal of professional cross-pollination in converged institutions has been difficult to achieve. For example, in 2010, Carina Clement of Albury LibraryMuseum conceded that staff restructures had occurred a number times in her institution since its inception as a converged organisation in 2006, stating that "we learn as we go along" (Clement, 2010). Earlier in the project's history, manager Kevin Wilson had already noted that one of the greatest and ongoing challenges was the restructuring of staff roles, including the creation of more "generic" positions such as programs and operations team leaders covering all the facilities (Wilson, 2007, 24). According to Clement, staff were slotted into new roles for which they lacked the necessary skills or background (Clement, 2010). Importantly, Clement hints that a neglect of museum collection management and in-house exhibition development was a consequence of the staff restructures, and that certain library-trained staff have since been undertaking qualifications in museum studies in an attempt to rectify negative impacts on the collections.

These Australian examples indicate the potentially fractious environment that convergence can produce, raising important questions about the consequences for acquisition, documentation and interpretation of collection holdings. For example, in converged organisations where librarians, curators and archivists may be working together in newly devised roles, how are responsibilities for collection management, documentation and research allocated? What methodologies are applied to the interpretation of collections? Is there an imperative for staff trained in specific domains to multitask, expanding their roles into the care and presentation of combined collections? Are resources and institutional support available for staff to undertake additional training? And finally, what are the actual benefits, in terms of collection knowledge and interpretation, of applying library or archival expertise to museum collections, and visa versa?

2.2.2 Convergence and the visitor experience

While the approaches of libraries, archives and museums to collection documentation, description and interpretation represent so-called 'back-of-house' functions, the public interface of collecting institutions, including the kinds of interactions visitors (or, more generally, 'users') experience with collections, has also been a dominant topic of discussion with regard to the idea of convergence.

As early as 2000, Lorcan Dempsey, reporting to the European Commission's Information Society Directorate General, indicated that the patterns of user behaviour and user expectations for integrated collection services in digital and online environments were unknown and under-researched (Dempsey, 2000, 11). Since that time, as discussed below, several authors have commented on differences in user behaviours in relation to libraries, archives and museums.

Some have questioned the benefit of superficially combining collections access without adequately preparing visitors for new, integrated ways of engaging with different kinds of objects. Articulating concerns about the effectiveness of converging displays, Kevin Wilson has written:

> *Some libraries have added into their shelving display cases or pull-out museum drawers that house objects related to the books, but once the novelty value has worn off, do these display ideas merely become decorative or no different to the occasional small travelling exhibition set up in a left-over space in the library? …Are we being utopian to believe that we can easily change a person's normal way of doing things or navigating and using space?* (Wilson, 2007, 25)

Here, the implication is that a person going to a library does not have the intention, or the frame of mind, that is usually directed towards a museum visit. Hence, are museum-type displays within these spaces of any relevance or impact to that visitor?

Other authors draw attention to the difference in usage patterns between libraries, archives and museums, giving way to contemplation of how various kinds of user engagements can be resolved in converged collection contexts.
For example, Jennifer Trant has made observations regarding the positioning of museums and libraries as collections access providers, highlighting the different approaches of users to the services of each type of institution. She has written:

> *One visited the rare works in the museums; borrowed the replaceable ones in the library. A curator interpreted complex originals in an exhibition or gallery context; the librarian might have referred a user to a source, but its use was personal and individual.* (Trant, 2006)

Wythe (2007) and Martin (2007) echo Trant in their comments on users of collecting organisations, defining museum visitors predominantly as 'viewers' engaged in a social experience,[20] while characterising collection use in libraries and archives as more active but also more solitary, where users 'read' and contextualise the material for themselves. As Wythe writes:

> …*why do people go to a library or an archive? To read, to look up information, to borrow books, to do research. It is a very* individualized [sic] *experience. Why do people go to a museum? To* see *something, perhaps to learn something. Often they go* with *someone … A museum visit tends to be an* interpersonal *experience*. (Wythe, 2007, 54)

Overall however, research that documents user behaviours and access to collections in converged environments is virtually non-existent – especially in regard to audience crossover and the ability of users to develop thematic and intellectual linkages between the contents of different collection types. The co-location of collection spaces in converged institutions is experimental and its benefits are unknown. There is no research to indicate whether audiences are able to adapt usage behaviours across

[20] Gaynor Kavanagh, a prominent museum scholar from Britain, also acknowledges the central importance that visitors place on sharing their museum experience with others (Kavanagh, 1994, 6)

collection contexts, and whether this results in more flexible and enriched experiences of collections.

In the final section of this review, I summarise and evaluate extant empirical research that has been undertaken in reference to the convergence phenomenon. Through this analysis, I highlight research questions that have been addressed, as well as foregrounding opportunities for research that are taken up in this thesis.

2.3 Existing research, methodologies and findings

Despite endorsement of convergence from a variety of perspectives, authors of published empirical studies dealing with convergence - see, for example, Gibson, Morris and Cleeve (2007a), Yarrow, Clubb and Draper (2008) and Tanackovic and Badurina (2009) - acknowledge that international research investigating collaboration between libraries, museums and archives is at best fragmentary, with few surveys examining the breadth, implications and success of such projects. In other words, while much of the literature supports the notion of convergence as a worthy ideal, there is relatively little empirical evidence to indicate whether the concept lives up to expectations, or whether there are any potentially negative 'side-effects' of the trend.

In 2007, Gibson, Morris and Cleeve published the first research into contemporary library-museum collaborations in the UK and USA, focussing on identifying the types of collaborative projects initiated, project partners, funding and management, target audiences, evaluation, perceived benefits and difficulties (Gibson et al., 2007a). The researchers identified examples of collaborations between libraries and museums, and an email survey was sent to members of staff who had been involved in the projects. Their study found that joint library and museum projects mostly had a community development function, focussing on local heritage (UK) and education (USA). While this study examined collaboration rather than full scale convergence (with its associated complexities), the findings do indicate some common issues, such as the need for clear lines of responsibility in joint project teams, effective project management, increased staff training, and the development of funding models. The benefits cited for these collaborative projects included new facilities and programs, improved access to collections (including via digitisation), some sharing of staff

expertise and improvements in public relations. Difficulties included problems in allocating staff roles and priorities, incongruous staff expectations across the partner organisations, as well as the need to monitor progress "to avoid overreaching the capabilities of resources available" (Gibson et al., 2007a, 63).

However, the study presented a number of significant limitations. First, the research sample was small, with only a 50% return rate on the surveys and a total of only eleven individual respondents from England and twelve from the USA. The restricted size of the sample, in combination with the convenience sampling technique that was used,[21] means that the conclusions of the study cannot be regarded as broadly representative. Second, the subject of the study was collaboration between institutions, rather than full convergence. While the research set out to document the types of collaborations taking place between libraries and museums (i.e. projects undertaken, goals, team structures, resources, benefits and disadvantages, etc.), it did not consider collaboration with archives. Finally, as the aim of the research was investigation of collaboration mainly at the level of project management, the effect of collaborations on the interpretation of collections – a theme of interest given the high expectations on the diffusion of 'knowledge' via convergence – was not explored.

In 2008, Zorich, Waibel and Erway published a prominent study on collaboration between libraries, archives and museums commissioned by OCLC Programs and Research.[22] Using one-day workshop meetings between staff of libraries, archives and museums that were part of larger organisations in the UK and USA as the primary sources of data, the study aimed at isolating "the elements needed for successful LAM [library, archive, museum] convergence and offering a tangible method for identifying concrete ways to pursue this convergence" (Zorich et al., 2008, Appendix 1: Project Methodology, 36). The selection of workshop sites was based on the existence of cross-domain collaboration projects and a positive intention by each organisation to

[21] The authors describe their sampling technique as 'snowball sampling', where "selection of units from the population are based on easy availability and/or accessibility" (Gibson et al., 58). By implication, particularly interesting, uncharacteristic or otherwise notable candidate institutions may not have been represented simply because staff were unavailable or difficult to contact.

[22] OCLC: Online Computer Library Center.

pursue further convergence (ibid., 37). Individual participants were then chosen to represent a cross-section of management and 'grass-roots' staff. In the end, the report collated the findings of five workshops with 91 participants.[23]

The subsequent report articulated the various stages of collaboration through to convergence in the form of a 'Collaboration Continuum' (Zorich et al., 2008, 11), noting that the greater the interdependency between organisational partners, the more difficult it became to maintain a collaborative relationship.

The report then identified nine 'catalysts' (prerequisites) that form the basis of successful integration. These included: *vision* (commitment to a shared vision of the benefits of working together); *mandate* (strong leadership to promote collaboration); *incentives* (rewarding collaborative efforts through career progression, financial bonuses and recognition); *change agents* (team leaders to maintain momentum towards increased collaboration); *mooring* (provision of dedicated space or base, and administrative resources, to support collaborative projects); *resources* (access to technology, funding and staff); *flexibility* (cross-disciplinary knowledge and a willingness to embrace new practices); *external catalysts* (defining audience benefits from collaboration, competition to innovate between institutions, incentives to collaborate from funding organisations, and professional bodies in support of collaboration and convergence); and *trust* (the establishment of mutual respect and trust to minimise perception of risk) (Zorich et al., 2008, 21-32).

In other words, the research yielded a tangible product by establishing a checklist to guide the planning and sustainability of collaborations and convergence between collecting institutions.

However, while Zorich, Waibel and Erway's study was comprehensive within the parameters set out within their methodology, a number of limitations emerge when considering the broader context of the research. First, an inherent bias is implicit from the outset of the study, which departs from the assumption that collaboration and

[23] The institutions were Princeton University, the Smithsonian Institution, the University of Edinburgh, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Yale University.

convergence between collecting institutions is fundamentally a good thing. Second, the institutions that were sampled for the research were selected because they had expressed their active pursuit of a collaboration agenda. That is, they already held the belief that collaboration was worthwhile. In combination, these factors predispose the study to promoting a positive perception of convergence. Further, the institutions approached by the researchers were large organisations with both the motivation and funding capacity to initiate collaborative projects. While such institutions may experience successful outcomes from such ventures, they are not necessarily comparable to small organisations, such as those funded by local government, who attempt similar goals with comparatively restricted financial and staff resources. Finally, it appears that all of the institutions studied under this research had instigated collaboration and convergence independently, without pressure from an external funding or government body. This places them in stark contrast with organisations that have become converged as a result of local or state government objectives.

In contrast to Zorich, Waibel and Erway's study of collaboration between libraries, archives and museums that were already associated with large institutions, 2008 also saw the publication of a report by Alexandra Yarrow, Barbara Clubb and Jennifer-Lynne Draper that focused on partnerships and convergence of libraries, archives and museums with an emphasis on local municipality organisations. Titled *Public Libraries, Archives and Museums: Trends in Collaboration and Cooperation*, the project was sponsored by the IFLA Public Libraries Section with the aim of quantifying and identifying a typology of collaborative projects from around the world (though focussing on institutions in the USA and Canada). The report has been referenced in a numerous subsequent publications dealing with the topic of convergence.

Yarrow, Clubb and Draper enumerate and describe three broad kinds of collaborations: 'collaborative programming' around education and information provision, where institutions worked together on specific projects such as presenting different aspects of a community theme; developing 'collaborative electronic resources' - which could also be termed digital convergence – where goals are digitisation of collection resources and the creation of joint online collections access; and 'joint-use/integrated facilities', ranging from examples of co-location, selective integration (projects or departments),

to full integration (unification under a single mission) of museums, libraries and archives (Yarrow et al., 2008, 25). The report goes on to provide a guide to the implementation of the different types of collaborative ventures, presented as a recipe-style checklist for planning and implementation.

While Yarrow, Clubb and Draper's report provides a useful descriptive overview of a large number of cooperative or convergence initiatives between museums, libraries and archives, the overall approach for the study is hampered by a simplistic methodology and a lack of rigorous evidence gathering. In particular, while the authors describe their methodology as a "qualitative case study approach" (Yarrow et al., 2008, 7), a case study method is not actually applied according to academic standards. Instead, the information presented in the report, which includes approximately sixty examples of collaboration, has been obtained from institution websites and only about fifteen interviews "with leaders in the relevant fields" (idem.). By implication, the research is very general in nature and it is difficult to confirm the reliability of its conclusions. Moreover, the literature cited in the report only serves to reinforce the assumptions of the authors about the benefits of collaboration and convergence, while no concrete original data is provided to support or refute these claims.

In 2009, Sanjica Faletar Tanackovic and Boris Badurina published a study examining partnerships between collecting institutions within a more thorough, scholarly context. Although this research centred on Croatian organisations, it has achieved an international audience through its publication in the *Museum Management and Curatorship* journal, and has been cited by other authors interested in cross-domain collaboration and integration. With a focus on museums, the study aimed at determining the prevalence of partnerships and identifying ways in which collaborative practice could be improved. The researchers relied on an online survey (sent to all 173 museums in Croatia with almost 50% participation) as well as a small number of semi-structured interviews; five with respondents selected from the returned questionnaires and two with representatives of the Croatian government's cultural agency.

The broader conclusions drawn from the findings point to interesting areas for future inquiry. For example, the study revealed that, while many respondents articulated strong support for the idea of cross-domain collaboration and convergence – based on

the common role of libraries, archives and museums in facilitating access to cultural heritage materials – the actual incidence of such collaborations was relatively rare (Tanackovic and Badurina, 2009, 307). Furthermore, the expected benefits of collaboration always exceeded the actual perceived benefits (ibid., 314), even though expected barriers to collaboration were much greater than those experienced in reality (ibid., 315). Moreover, the research revealed that by far the most common form of collaboration undertaken by museums in Croatia was not in fact with cross-domain partners, but rather, other museums. The prospect of increased workloads, inadequate planning, lack of staff training and understanding of other collecting disciplines, as well as inadequate technical, financial and management support, were among the impediments to cross-domain collaboration reported by the study (ibid., 317-318).

Tanackovic and Badurina's research is presented in detail and offers useful insights into the movement towards collaboration and convergence between libraries, archives and museums in one European country. However, the study focussed on cases of partnership, rather than full-scale institutional convergence. In addition, the research examined the views of museum professionals involved in collaboration, not library and archive workers who would ultimately have a stake in the outcome of any cross-domain partnership. In regard to the research sample, the authors included a large number of museums, but the study seems to use only one respondent per institution. Unfortunately, neither the participants' position within their organisation, their professional background, nor the direct involvement of respondents in collaborative undertakings was revealed in the report, so that the consistency of the findings is difficult to determine. In addition, the very small sample of in-depth interviews, coupled with the lack of context given for these responses, means that this component of the data cannot necessarily be generalised.

In 2012, Professor Jeanette Bastian and Ross Harvey - two academics from the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College, Boston - presented a conference paper describing a three-year research project (commenced 2009) examining digital convergence in cultural heritage institutions. The research partnered groups of students at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science with six cultural institutions of various sizes in the vicinity of the New England (USA) region. The aims of the program were twofold: to provide practical

experience for the students in creating and implementing a digital convergence project, and informing the development of a cultural informatics curriculum at Simmons College. In the context of Bastian and Harvey's research, digital convergence was defined within a cultural heritage informatics framework to include any activity that leveraged collection data and other information resources of library, archive or museum origin to produce unified, seamless access to content, and enable that content to be developed into other digital services.

According to the authors of the report, the project provided unexpected insights into the challenges associated with processes of digital convergence, indicating that workplace culture, professional bias and organisational issues (such as the absence of a clear mission or inadequate leadership) posed greater threats to successful implementation than lack technical ability or infrastructure (Bastian and Harvey, 2012, 1-2, 5-9). This finding is significant not only within the context of discreet digital convergence projects occurring internally within organisations, but equally for cross-institutional digital convergence or 'physical' convergence of previously autonomous institutions, in that it highlights the impact of site-specific circumstances – such as organisational structures, strategic vision, staff professional backgrounds, attitudes towards communication and collaboration, and economic constraints – on final outcomes. As the authors note in their conclusion:

> *The real issues of convergence and digital continuity go beyond translating theory into practice, but also, and probably more significantly, call for the recognition and negotiation of the myriad issues and concerns of the cultural heritage institutions themselves.* (Bastian and Harvey, 2012, 11)

These findings point toward the need for greater investigation of the impact of organisational environments in the implementation of convergence – either digital or physical. Bastian and Harvey's project remained limited in its scope, examining only relatively small-scale digital convergence initiatives and focussing on single organisations that already included existing library, archive and museum functions.

Canadian researchers Wendy Duff, Jennifer Carter, Joan M. Cherry, Heather MacNeil and Lynne C. Howarth have carried out the most recent international study of

convergence. Their research was published in *Information Research* journal in 2013 under the title *From coexistence to convergence: studying partnerships and collaboration among libraries, archives and museums* (Duff et al., 2013). Examining five institutions in Canada and New Zealand undertaking cross-domain collaboration and convergence, the rationale for conducting the research and its methodological approach broadly resemble those identified as relevant for this PhD, even though the findings only appeared in the scholarly literature during the final phase of my research project. For this reason, the study is of particular interest in the context of this thesis and deserves attention.

As I do here, Duff, Carter, Cherry, MacNeil and Howarth point out the disproportionately small number of independent, empirical studies of convergence compared to the increasing incidences of digital and institutional convergence world-wide and the number of speculative papers written on the topic since 2007 (Duff et al., 2013, 5). Setting out to partially address this gap in the research, their study examines the motivations for convergence, processes for its planning and implementation, its challenges and its benefits, based on accounts given during a series of semi-structured interviews with professionals working at two Canadian and three New Zealand institutions.[24]

According to the authors, the most commonly cited motivations for convergence in the contexts of these case studies were the desire to address user needs for easier access to collection information, to capitalise on developments in digital technology, and to achieve financial efficiencies. Their findings suggest a generally inclusive and collaborative approach to planning for convergence, where staff from across departments and disciplinary backgrounds were involved in consultations to set objectives and strategies for implementation (Duff et al., 2013, 14). However, the authors also acknowledge that the anecdotal accounts of implementation given by the research participants were not verified against any independent data on these processes.

[24] The researchers state that interviews took place on-site at the selected institutions between 2010 and 2011.

Among the advantages of convergence, respondents in the study cited professional development, new ways of working collaboratively, and the benefit of collaboration as a catalyst for rethinking access to, and the role of, collections. Some of the subject organisations realised benefits in the adoption of innovative technologies, revision of the public mission of the institution, more flexible work practices and improved distribution of resources to less well-funded collections and activities (Duff et al., 2013, 18). In terms of challenges, Duff et al.'s research supports findings reported by Bastian and Harvey (2012) in concluding that institutional and professional factors, such as the persistence of organisational 'siloes', communication barriers, differences in practice and standards, and ineffective leadership, were the main impediments to successful convergence.

Despite the rigour of this study, it does present some inherent limitations. Of the five cases chosen for the research, only two (the Taylor Family Digital Library, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal) were examples of full operational convergence, where museum, library and archive collections and services were united under the umbrella of a single institution.[25] Of the other cases, two were involved in partial convergence around a defined project (i.e. collaborating with each other to achieve a particular goal but remaining essentially independent), while one represented the integration of two types of museums (i.e. without involving other collecting domains). The differences in organisational structure and levels of convergence between these cases raise questions about the researchers' ability to draw cross-case comparisons, as well as the representativeness of the findings.

In terms of the research sample, the findings are based on only 19 respondents from the five cases. According to the stated parameters of the study, the findings of the interviews were restricted to the four research questions that mapped broad motivations, implementation processes, challenges and benefits, as opposed to detailing complex and nuanced effects of convergence on professional practices. An

[25] The Taylor Family Digital Library was still under construction at the time of the research in 2010. It is likely that staff had not yet experienced the extent of integration envisaged in organisation's 2004/2005 strategic plan.

opportunity exists to interrogate convergence in greater detail, examining a more consistent group of converged institutions and using a sample of participants aligned more closely in their professional profiles and roles.

In summary, across my review of the international literature on the topic, I have identified only six published empirical studies of collaboration and convergence between libraries, archives and museums. While all acknowledge a momentum towards greater cooperation and integration, none have specifically focussed on institutional convergence in particular. Despite revealing a range of findings describing a variety of models for collaboration and convergence, the different motivations behind the trend, some details of planning and management of such initiatives (as well as offering practical suggestions for future convergence projects), none of these studies takes the research a further step to analyse the impact of convergence on the production of cultural knowledge. In other words, does convergence facilitate new or enhanced potential for engaging with museum collections, or deepen our understanding of cultural values, histories, shared experience and values through museum collections?

Gibson, Morris and Cleeve's (2007a) research considered library and museum collaborations without including archives. In addition, their study utilised a relatively small sample of organisations in the UK and USA, creating problems with the representativeness of the findings. Zorich, Waibel and Erway (2008) also addressed institutions in the UK and USA, but their study focussed on very large, well-established organisations that already encompassed library, archives and museum collections. In addition, their research was based on the assumption that collaboration and convergence of the domains was fundamentally positive and they selected like-minded institutions for study, predisposing the findings to a degree of bias. Yarrow, Clubb and Draper's report and guidelines for best practice in museum, library and archive collaboration (2008) identified numerous examples of cooperative and convergence projects, but the authors' positive inclination towards the concept, combined with an inconsistent and superficial data-gathering strategy, reduce the significance of their conclusions. Tanackovic and Badurina (2009) conducted nation-wide survey research in Croatia but consulted only single representatives of museums in their questions regarding cross-domain collaborations. While providing interesting

insights, the lack of context and very small sample of interviews for the qualitative component of the research diminished the ability to generalise the data. In any case, the capacity for these four studies to provide more than fragmentary glimpses into the development of the convergence trend internationally cannot be over-estimated.

Most recently, research by Bastian and Harvey (2012) and Duff et al. (2013) provides interesting observations of projects involving digital convergence and various kinds of institutional convergence projects respectively. Both of these studies highlight workplace culture, professional bias, and problems with management and communication as impediments to successful convergence, but neither study investigates these issues directly.

2.4 Research in Australia

In the Australian context, where there has been a significant uptake of convergence as an operational model for cultural institutions since the early 2000s, research into convergence has also been relatively limited. In 2009, Sue Boaden (a cultural planning and policy consultant) and Carina Clement (Cultural Programs Team Leader at Albury City) delivered a paper that offered some insights into the effects of convergence on cultural institutions in Australia, England and New Zealand, primarily from a public libraries viewpoint. Focussing mainly on infrastructure planning and management restructures, they position convergence as an appropriate framework in connection with broader trends for the library sector – namely an increased emphasis on marketing, responding to diverse audience needs, new approaches to education, and harnessing changes in technology. They also associate developments in the Australian cultural heritage sector, such as rationalisation of services and management and cross-disciplinary professional development, with the advent of the convergence model (Boaden and Clement, 2009, 4-6). Citing both the risks of convergence as well as the benefits, Boaden and Clement described four ‘case studies’ of convergence and concluded that the integration of cultural heritage institutions represents a host of positive outcomes for the organisations involved, their staff, and visitors, including the ability to take advantage of new funding opportunities, financial economies of scale,

innovative approaches to exhibiting collections, more effective marketing, and creating greater user access and participation in services.

Unfortunately, Boaden and Clement do not articulate their methodology and its 'case studies' read as a promotional narrative for each institution, consistently lacking references to sources of information and primary evidence to support claims of professional development, management efficiency, innovative use of collections, or measurement of audience development. An intrinsic bias exists in the focus on libraries within the convergence equation, sidelining potential insights from museum, archive or art gallery professionals.

The Museum & Galleries NSW 2009-2010 convergence study (MGNSW, 2010), though only available as an unpublished internal summary report, represents the single concerted attempt to outline emerging issues and trends in organisational structure, funding, visitation, staffing, programming, promotion and collections management in the growing number of converged and co-located organisations around Australia. Using the results of staff interviews conducted at these institutions, the study outlined a range of emerging 'hard' and 'soft' infrastructure issues. For example, some respondents cited a lack of consultation with museum professionals regarding the provision of adequate exhibition space, collection storage and staffing resources in new buildings, uneven visitation outcomes (or even outright competition for visitation) between the constituent collection types, as well as poor planning for organisational structure and staff selection. Echoing Zorich et al. (2008) and Tanakovic and Badurina (2009), the study acknowledged that negative staff attitudes towards the convergence could sabotage the delivery of programs, stating:

> *A converged facility will theoretically fare much better with staff involved who believe in convergence and the cross-fertilisation of museum/library/gallery and who are keen to promote it, to work together and to bring other staff members on board.* (MGNSW, 2010, 2)

The study observed that the combination of a lack of specialisation or professional staff, unclear role descriptions and inadequate budgets for staff allocation inhibited effective provision of services to the community (MGNSW, 2010, 2-3).

However, the M&G NSW study appears to have no consistent methodology, and for this reason it is difficult to ascertain the scope and representativeness of the findings. For example, the preliminary report did not provide any background for the cases, nor did it indicate how many institutions were sampled, what criteria were used in selecting the organisations and individual respondents, or what research questions were posed. Moreover, while M&G NSW seemed to focus on infrastructure and management issues, there were no details about how each organisation's treatment of previously separate collections had been affected by convergence, or what new synergies had been developed between these collections. Overall, this study creates an opportunity for further research to investigate converged institutions with greater consistency, depth and detail in all areas, as well as examining the provision of cultural collections within the converged context.

2.4.1 New South Wales: Inquiry into the Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure Outside the Sydney CBD

Although not directly focussed on convergence, some information about the trend can be gathered from the 81 NSW local government authorities, arts consultancies and cultural agencies that contributed submissions to the NSW State Government's Inquiry into the Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure Outside the Sydney CBD (Khoshaba et al., 2010).[26] The Inquiry provided new information about cultural infrastructure needs of mainly regional NSW communities, including museums and libraries, and the ways in which local councils were attempting to address these issues.[27] Considering the geographic scope of the Inquiry, the findings provide valuable background for this PhD research.

[26] The Arts North West Regional Arts Board submission notes that there are 103 Local Government areas in NSW (Ritchie, 2008, 6).

[27] It is noteworthy that, of the 81 submissions, only two actually cite archives among the institutions responsible for safeguarding and disseminating cultural heritage, which appears to indicate that there is not a widespread acknowledgement or consciousness of the contribution made by archives to the arts and cultural sector in NSW. See (Bentley, 2008, 2, 8, 11, 16-17, Boaden, 2008, 3).

With the overall aim of developing an arts and cultural plan for the state of NSW, the third of the seven terms of reference for the Inquiry was to study the "desirability of locating cultural facilities in close proximity to create hubs" (Khoshaba et al., 2010, vi). Although the final list of recommendations of the Inquiry did not include a specific reference to this question, the 81 submissions by local councils, cultural organisations and consultants indicated a mixed response to the appropriateness of co-locating cultural facilities and, by inference, to their potential convergence.

Judging by local government and other submissions to the Inquiry, perhaps the most prevalent issue for 'arts' infrastructure was lack of adequate funding for cultural facilities around the state of NSW.[28] According to the submissions, funding shortfalls are not restricted to museums, with the Public Libraries NSW submission indicating that a steady decrease in government support over the last 25 years (in spite of increasing demand) has resulted in poorly maintained buildings and lack of resources for innovative programs (see Baum, 2008, Attachment 1). Taken together, these problems provide the contextual backdrop that has increased the perception that convergence – by integrating services – can provide financially 'efficient' infrastructure renewal and a more sustainable model for financing and staffing cultural organisations.

The financial difficulties experienced by local government areas outside of Sydney were reinforced in the Inquiry report, which acknowledged the inequitable distribution of funding between urban and rural areas of the state. It confirmed that 84.7% of the state government's Arts New South Wales grants program was allocated to the predominantly metropolitan Sydney-Newcastle-Wollongong region (Khoshaba et al., 2010, 2). In 2007, only 10% of NSW local government cultural expenditure was covered by allocations from the state government (ibid., 2010, 3). Similarly, 92% of private sector funding was directed to metropolitan areas, compared with 8% for rural areas (ibid., 2010, 2). Councils reported being overwhelmed by the cost of maintaining aging physical infrastructure (Piggott, 2008, 2, Conroy, 2008, 2) as well as ongoing

[28] (Baum, 2008, 2, Black, 2008, Boaden, 2008, 7-8, Brown, 2008, 2, Carter, 2008, 4-5, Jones, 2008-2, Cameron, 2008, 1-2, McPherson, 2008, 2, Piggott, 2008, 1-2, Maguire, 2008, 1, Riley, 2008, 1-3, Scarlett, 2008, 3).

operational costs (Lally, 2004, 9, 24, Bourke, 2008, 2, Stapleton, 2008, 6) and felt unable to meet growing community expectations for cultural provision (Khoshaba et al., 2010, 37, Clark et al., 2009, 35, Holloway, 2008, 4, Wallace, 2008, 1). The cumulative effect of unbalanced funding distribution between urban and regional areas has meant that local councils rely heavily on collection of rates to support any cultural spending in their region (Milston, 2008, 3, Haley et al., 2009, 29-30). Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that councils have considered cost-effectiveness – or at least the promise of such efficiencies – as important criteria for planning and building cultural amenities.

Although co-location of cultural facilities was one of the areas investigated by the Inquiry, the suitability of co-location remained unresolved. Numerous submissions were enthusiastic about the potential benefits of concentrating cultural facilities in either close physical proximity or in the same building. Anticipated benefits of co-location (and, by inference, convergence) included assisting the development of creative communities and networks (Holloway, 2008, 4-5, Bourke, 2008, 8, Wallace, 2008, 9, Alderton, 2008, 1, Stapleton, 2008, 8, Pepping, 2008, 9), the possibility of sharing administration, staff, infrastructure and operational costs (Don, 2008, 3, Balind and Hordacre, 2008, 3, Clement, 2008b, 2, Stapleton, 2008, 8, McMahon, 2008, 10) and creating a 'metropolitan standard' facility (Rogers, 2008, 7). Other anticipated advantages were improved delivery of educational programs and greater accessibility to cultural services (Balind and Hordacre, 2008, 3), urban regeneration (Bourke, 2008, 8, Rowe, 2008, 6, Alderton, 2008, 2, Rogers, 2008, 8, Clark et al., 2009), community building (Don, 2008, 3), cross-over audiences (Tegart, 2008, 3, Stapleton, 2008, 8), professional development for cultural practitioners (Balind and Hordacre, 2008, 3, Gourley, 2008, 4) and increased tourism (Alderton, 2008, 3, 5, Stapleton, 2008, 9, Rogers, 2008, 7). These predicted benefits highlight the appeal of co-location and convergence for local government, as well as indicating some of the motivations driving such projects.

On the other hand, a number of the submissions are more apprehensive of co-location and convergence, arguing that the concentration of resources on a single 'hub' could drain resources from smaller communities (Jones, 2008, 1, Marshall, 2008, 1, 5) or lead to a generic region-wide cultural outlook, rather than highlighting the diversity

and individuality of smaller communities (Tyne, 2008, 9, McPherson, 2008, 3-4, Clark et al., 2009, 28).[29] As Marshall writes:

> *Hubs will create strong collective of thought around consistent and singular themes that reduce the overall marketability of the diversity and intrinsic qualities of the myriad of smaller and individually dynamic communities.* (Marshall, 2008, 2)

In other words, the geographic bundling of cultural infrastructure has the potential to reduce the ability of regional communities to express their individual histories and heritage, creating a homogenous impression of cultural identity and expression in a particular region. Logistic concerns such as the lengthy travel required by outlying towns to access regional centres were also seen as limitations to the effectiveness of the centralised model (Piggott, 2008, 2, Walker, 2008, 2, Slough, 2008, 6).

On a practical note, many submissions articulated concerns about the ability of non-metropolitan areas to attract appropriately qualified professionals to staff cultural facilities (Rowe, 2008, 4-6, Milston, 2008, 5, Ritchie, 2008, 4, Stapleton, 2008, 6, Rogers, 2008, 2). And, finally, some submissions to the Inquiry were cautiously supportive of cultural hubs or co-located facilities, provided they were allowed to evolve organically, and were not imposed on communities (Firth, 2008, 11, Boaden, 2008, 12-13, Head, 2008, 9), hinting at some underlying distrust of the ability of state and local governments to tailor cultural infrastructure planning to the needs of individual population centres. Other submissions cited the scarcity of funding for dedicated cultural development roles within councils as a factor that could lead to inadequate attention and poor planning for cultural projects (Nicholson, 2008, 1-2, see also Maguire, 2008).

[29] Ruth Tsitimbinis, Gallery Co-ordinator for Kyogle Council, commented that the centralist model for cultural facilities might often fail simply due to dispersion of rural communities and resulting access issues: "In the past, the centralist model is one which we sometimes fight against. I had to drive 1 1/2/ to 1 ¾ hours just to get here. You cannot locate facilities here and expect people in the Clarence valley to access them" (Clark et al., 2009).

The authors of the Inquiry report acknowledged the untried nature of co-location or convergence and the need for further investigation of the concept (Khoshaba et al., 2010, 3). Nevertheless, the submissions provide a useful background, both qualitatively and quantitatively (in that they represent the majority of local government areas in NSW), to significant cultural policy and provision issues facing the state. They foreground challenges such as meeting the costs of replacing aging museum, library, and other cultural infrastructure, competition for restricted state government funding for cultural buildings and programs, addressing the cultural access needs of dispersed communities, retaining individual local expressions and interpretations of heritage, and attracting suitably qualified professionals to work in cultural facilities. These concerns form a contextual backdrop for the popularity of convergence as a model for restructuring cultural institutions around NSW with the expectation of enhancing their long-term efficiency and sustainability. At the same time, the Inquiry report also foregrounds the assumed benefits of convergence and establishes an opportunity to examine whether the model is able to achieve these goals by reference to real examples.

2.5 Conclusion: an opportunity for study

An overview of the literature throws up a large number of unanswered questions about convergence of archives, libraries and museums, representing a range of possible research directions.[30] The handful of existing empirical studies of convergence are only beginning to address some of these issues, but as I have shown, the scope of these research projects is scattered and sometimes methodologically inconsistent. Very few examples of full institutional (or 'physical') convergence have been examined in comparison to instances of project-specific collaboration between independent organisations, or cases of digital convergence. In this context, there is a need for a study of convergence with a thorough, strongly articulated and academically valid research methodology.

With numerous opportunities for scholarly investigation, it is beyond the capacity of any single study to address the full scope of potential research in this area. However,

[30] For a table outlining a range of possible research questions emanating from existing research and other literature, see Appendix 3.

starting from a museological perspective, the ways in which the meaning and significance of collections (and the individual items that comprise them) can be understood and communicated within converged institutional settings seems implicit in all of these areas of inquiry. Without their collections, libraries, archives, museums and galleries would obviously not exist. Equally, the means by which domain-based practices and notions of purpose establish a context for engaging with collections is fundamentally what characterises these institutions and sets them apart. Therefore, by establishing a focus specifically on museums as part of the convergence equation, the purpose of this research is to understand how conceptual and organisational changes brought about through convergence influence the capacity of (previously independent) museum collections to be interpreted for meaning.

In the forthcoming chapter I explain my research methodology in detail, from its philosophical approach to the mechanics of both the conceptual and fieldwork aspects of this study. This method gives rise to both qualitative research findings and theoretical analysis of convergence; two strands that are intertwined throughout the body of this thesis.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction: selecting a method

As discussed in the previous chapter, only a handful of empirical studies into convergence of museums, libraries and archives have been conducted internationally, while only two studies (neither of which present methodologically rigorous, peer-reviewed content) have been identified in Australia. This places the extent of existing research at stark odds with the prevalence of cross-domain collaboration and convergence occurring worldwide, as well as the popularity of institutional convergence within the Australian (and New Zealand) collections sector.

In NSW in particular, the formation of a number of converged organisations within local government areas, including various combinations of museums, libraries, archives, galleries, and other cultural services, took place between 2000 to 2010. As recently as 2014, convergence appeared on the federal government's agenda with announcement of budget plans to integrate the back-of-house functions of seven national collecting institutions located in Canberra. As a contemporary model for the efficient provision of cultural services, the idea of convergence has informed the development of a significant number of new organisations that are now operating with various levels of disciplinary and programming integration. As one of the respondents to this study observed:

> *Councils are going to say 'you saved 3 positions because you don't have to have a separate curator, a separate education* [officer] *and a separate collections* [officer]*?' You are looking at $200,000 a year less – and that's what it's going to come down to: the dollars.*
> Manager of *WESTLANDS* (interviewed 04.07.2011)

In other words, the trend towards convergence continues to appeal to funding bodies and shows no sign of abating. But what benefits to cultural engagement and the enrichment of knowledge - the essential purpose of museums, libraries, archives and galleries – do these restructures represent?

One of the problems for evaluating libraries, archives, museums and their convergence, as noted by Robert Martin of the IMLS, appears to lie in defining and measuring public value of cultural amenities in general, for which effective metrics have yet to be developed (Martin, 2007, 87). Cultural economist David Throsby has also pointed out that, because of its multifaceted and unstable nature, the measurement of cultural value is difficult to assess using existing quantitative or qualitative methodologies (Throsby, 2003, 279). Furthermore, Burton and Griffin (2006), in the introduction to their case study of the social value of small museums, note that the assumed positive benefits of museums and other cultural amenities are rarely subjected to rigorous analysis and that no established methodological approach exists for such studies. Likewise, there appears to be no emerging concurrence among scholars contributing to the discourse around convergence in regard to which methodologies are most effective for measuring the cultural and epistemological impact of converged institutions.

Commentaries on recent collaborations and convergence between collecting organisations have identified the need for systematic field research and new approaches to measuring ways in which the merging of collection spaces and information can affect cultural organisations (Fraser and al., 2010, VanderBerg, 2012). Nevertheless, Australian research into convergence remains very limited, in spite of a significant number of cultural institutions having adopted the model. The previous chapter of this thesis makes clear the infancy of many convergence projects and a lack of published studies, making evaluation and analysis of converged cultural organisations difficult to obtain. As I discuss later, internal surveys and visitor statistics at converged institutions have thus far focussed mainly on obtaining 'headcount' visitor numbers, rather than carrying out in-depth evaluation of organisational performance.

For all of these reasons, drawing on previous studies to select an appropriate methodology for examining converged organisations is problematic. However, existing research does set a precedent for the use of qualitative case study methods, even though the studies completed to date vary in the scope, rigour and consistency of their approaches.

This investigation approaches convergence from a 'pure research' perspective, in that it is motivated by a desire to gain understanding and insight into the development of convergence as a new organisational model, interpretive context, and environment for user engagements with different types of collections. I employ a qualitative case study approach, using inductive analysis of documentary sources and in-depth interviews at five institutions to produce new knowledge of the convergence phenomenon. At the same time, by posing questions that challenge some of the popular assumptions about the benefits of convergence and the compatibility of various collecting domains around historiography and knowledge production, this research moves into an applied and evaluative mode.

In this chapter I outline the methodology for this research. First, I describe the design of the study (philosophical and disciplinary frameworks) and my selected research approach, before documenting the design of the case studies, the research sample and selection of respondents, the kinds of data that were collected, as well as details of the interview content and technique. In acknowledgment of this study's conformity to the University of Sydney's guidelines human research, I also provide information about the ethics framework that has influenced the research approach and the reporting of the findings. The chapter concludes with details of my approach to reporting and analysis and an acknowledgement of the limitations of the research.

3.2 Design of the study

3.2.1 Disciplinary framework

Building a critique of cultural policy from an epistemological analysis of the convergence trend, this research forms part of, and extends, a larger body of scholarship known as the new museology, a termed coined by author Peter Vergo in his edited book of the same title in 1989. 'Traditional' museology concentrated itself primarily with the description and dissemination of practical museum methods for administration, conservation, education and other fields of museum operation. By contrast, the 'new' museology movement sought to examine and critique the historical significance of the development of museums, the conceptual frameworks underpinning

museum practices, its representational techniques, and the social, cultural and political impact of the museum as a cultural institution. As Sharon Macdonald writes, the new museology embraced "a move toward regarding knowledge, and its pursuit, realization [sic], and deployment, as inherently political" (Macdonald, 2006, 3).

So too, this thesis examines the implications of integrating conceptually and historically distinct collecting domains, and the inherent recasting of institutional hierarchies, specialist knowledge and collecting priorities, on the interpretation of cultural themes and objects in the museum context. In particular, the research examines convergence as a new epistemological framework for museum collections and therefore questions the ways in which museum collections are understood within converged collection environments. This study of convergence extends museological inquiry by examining and comparing the interpretive strategies operating within museums, libraries and archives, where each domain's different conceptual approaches and methodologies for understanding collections are being combined and reiterated in new, mostly undocumented ways.

3.2.2 Philosophical orientation

This study proceeds from a theoretical perspective consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology, which recognises the inherent subjectivity of the researcher as integral to research inquiry, foregrounds the need for observation and engagement with the object of study, and avoids rigid and fixed methodologies in favour of more flexible and dialogic research practices. Educator and qualitative researcher Paul Sharkey, writing on hermeneutic phenomenology in research, has stated that this approach "does not seek to objectify the 'object' of the researcher's interest. On the contrary, hermeneutic phenomenology always seeks to open up a middle space of rich engagement between the research object and the researcher" (Sharkey, 2001, 16-17). In other words, research findings and meanings do not emanate automatically from evidence, nor do they derive solely from the mind of the researcher. Rather, they are 'co-constituted' through the complex interaction and fusion of both the researcher and participant's perspectives (Flood, 2010, 10).

This philosophical approach does not preclude the design and application of practical, procedural methodologies for qualitative research, as long as the subjectivity of the researcher, and the role of the researcher as co-creator of the understandings (findings) of the study, is recognised. In other words, a study can aim to establish methodological rigour as long as this is not confused with a neo-positivist 'recipe' for achieving objective findings (Burnard, 1991, 462, Qu and Dumay, 2011, 241), where meaning supposedly becomes self-evident provided that the correct processes of data collection and analysis have been followed. As Sharkey explains:

> *The researcher's understanding is not reproductive or mimetic, but productive and creative, culminating in a fusion that includes the horizons of both the interpreter and the texts* [subjects], *but is somehow more than just the sum of these constituent parts.* (Sharkey, 2001, 29)

So, from a phenomenological point of view, both the boundaries and characteristics embodied within the subject of study, as well as the researcher's unique insight, reflections and interpretations, shape the 'data' gathered, as well as the analytical conclusions of a study.[31]

There are significant similarities in approach between phenomenological and (recent) museological epistemologies - or understandings of the way meaning is constructed. Both phenomenological perspectives and the 'new museology' contend that meaning is "not discovered but constructed. Meaning does not inhere in the object, merely waiting for someone to come upon it. …Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, 42-43 as cited in Merriam, 2009). That is, the philosophical approach of basic qualitative study and museum artefact study correspond: it is only through experiencing (and there are many

[31] In an paper about interviews in qualitative research, Qu and Dumay (2011) describe a similar perspective, referring to research interviews as a form of 'localist' inquiry. Here, the attribution of the term 'localist' comes about because "the interview process is not a neutral tool to evoke rational responses and uncover truths, but rather a situated event in which the interviewer creates the reality of the interview situation" (Qu and Dumay, 2011, 247). In other words, an interview is a particular, situated form of communication that generates its own context for interpreting information and creating understanding.

ways of ‘experiencing’) a phenomenon - or an object - that we come to a conscious understanding of its meaning. The meaning of phenomena *and* objects is therefore always plural, unstable, and variable, and, therefore, perceived meaning can be altered as the experiential context changes.

In this investigation of the ways in which convergence, as a conceptual and organisational shift in ‘experiential context’, may affect the interpretation of museum collections, I too adopt a method of inquiry that is underpinned by a complementary epistemological stance.

3.2.3 Research approach and processes

The overall aim of the research is to build understanding of the effects of convergence on the operation of cultural institutions, and thus, how access to, and understanding of cultural heritage might be transformed by this change. In particular, taking a museological perspective, the research asks: in what ways does the convergence of collecting institutions have potential to alter the museum context?

The first step in the research, embodied in the forthcoming chapter of the thesis, takes the form of a conceptual analysis that builds on and extends the literature review by focussing on some of the key epistemological assumptions surrounding convergence and interrogating their legitimacy. Improved knowledge acquisition for users of collections is often cited as the goal and justification for convergence. However, while the creation of knowledge in museum, library or archive settings has been explored in a range of scholarship, the fundamental concept of ‘knowledge’ and its dissemination has not been comprehensively discussed in regard to convergence of these institutions. In response, I discuss the ideas of data, information and knowledge in the context of convergence, setting up theoretical parameters for examining the claim that convergence will deliver greater knowledge to collection users.

Having established the conceptual issues around convergence, I move into the empirical research phase of the research by exploring these issues through the examination of five case studies of the model. My data collection strategy uses a multi-case study approach, incorporating various sources of evidence (see *Data Collection*

below) including documents, observations and interviews. This approach was chosen because the case study method has been identified as most appropriate for research where questions focus on "how" and "why" a certain phenomenon occurs, where the study cannot be conducted under control circumstances, and where the subject area being investigated is contemporary (as opposed to historical) in nature (see Chapter 1, Yin, 2009).

In his book outlining the processed of case study research, Robert Yin (2009, 17) adopts the following definition of the case study method provided initially by W. Schramm in 1971:

> *The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result.*

So too, my research investigates the decision to implement convergence of collecting institutions, the rationale for the model, how convergence has been achieved (via changes to organisational structure, professional roles, collection practices, resourcing, etc.), and what impact this has had on collections of museum objects, the interpretation of those collections and both intellectual and physical access to them. In addition, because instances of convergence vary substantially - with contrasting structures, composition and scale – the examination of five institutions (as opposed to just a single case) was deemed most likely to produce findings that were externally valid, that is, broadly applicable.[32]

My analytic approach is a combination of testing ideas produced by theoretical consideration of available literature, as well as inductive analysis of evidence gathered in the field. Following a methodology developed from Glaser and Strauss' Grounded Theory approach (see Charmaz, 2006, also Merriam, 2009, Chapter 1, 6), my analytic method works by extrapolating common themes by cross-referencing the data, as I will describe in detail later in this chapter. This approach does not rely on testing preconceived ideas about convergence and therefore remains open to alternative and

[32] See also the rationale for using multiple cases in Yin (2009, 53, 60-62).

new readings of the convergence phenomenon, making it appropriate to building fresh understandings of this under-researched organisational model.

The program of research has proceeded in two stages. I began by thoroughly surveying the available scholarly, professional and other literature relating to convergence, identifying core themes and suppositions. This has been followed by a critical, cross-disciplinary examination of the validity of key ideas within the discourse around convergence. As Yin points out, case study inquiry "benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (Yin, 2009, 18). Accordingly, by exploring and challenging assumptions about the benefits of convergence, a number of significant questions emerged, creating a framework for further research to be conducted in the field.

The second phase involved five case studies of converged institutions chosen for their significance within the development of the trend in Australia and New Zealand.[33] For each case study institution, official documents, media reports and advertising materials were consulted to provide a background, history and statistical information on each facility. I visited each institution to tour the facilities and interviewed a range of staff across all areas of each organisation.[34]

Using a questionnaire developed from key themes that emerged during the literature review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 39 staff members in total, as well as three representatives of non-affiliated collections sector support bodies which have been involved with converged institutions. I assessed how workers in each institution understand the effects of convergence on their ability to manage, document, interpret and render access to different kinds of collection materials. I provide a full description of the process used to analyse the interview transcripts later in this chapter.

The interviews formed the focal point of this research phase, offering an abundance of primary data from which to analyse the impact of convergence. Collection professionals in museums, galleries, archives and libraries, having trained and worked

[33] Further details of the selection of case studies are provided later in this chapter.

[34] For position descriptions of staff interviewed at each case study, refer to Appendix 4.

in specific disciplinary contexts, are fundamental to the ways in which different types of collections are assembled, appraised, classified, documented and presented to users. At the same time, staff members are also at the frontline of organisational changes ushered in by the convergence of cultural heritage institutions. They are subject to a revision of institutional goals and priorities, the redefinition of role descriptions, and new expectations on levels of collaboration across collection areas.

For these reasons, the accounts of staff working in converged institutions emerged as a unique window into the conceptual and structural shifts involved in convergence. Collection professionals who have had first-hand experiences of the convergence process provide otherwise unobtainable information about alterations to specialist practices, workflows, staff communication and management. Combined with information obtained from documentary sources, the analysis of their accounts of convergence reveals the influence of the model on the interpretive context of collections and, in turn, the perceived meanings and potential for knowledge creation around collection materials.

3.3 Design of case studies

The absence of a standardised model for convergence has resulted in a variety of organisational structures, staffing models and types of collections brought together under the term 'convergence'. Furthermore, the specific and local circumstances in which converged organisations take shape – including particular funding arrangements, community needs, the history of collecting organisations in that area, and so on – make generalisation about the convergence trend difficult. For research purposes, it is therefore appropriate to consider each individual case within its particular context, and for the findings to be reported in acknowledgement of each specific institutional frame of reference. For these reasons, a multisite case study approach,[35] where significant examples of convergence could be explored and compared, and more general conclusions drawn from the collective findings, was selected as the way forward.

[35] For definitions and descriptions of case study research, see Merriam (2009) Chapter 3, 39-54.

After conducting an extensive review of relevant literature about convergence in both international and Australian publications, five case studies were selected in order to probe the professional implications of convergence and its effect on provision of cultural facilities. In-depth interviews with staff at each location, supplemented by an examination of institutional and government records, were undertaken during the course of 2011 in order to assess whether the forecasted benefits of convergence were actually borne out by experience. [36]

3.3.1 Sample selection

The case studies were purposefully selected on the basis of the following criteria: that each particular institution had been cited as a prominent example of convergence in the literature around the topic; that organisations of a range of sizes were represented; and that various types of convergence, combining a variety of collecting organisations, were explored. As such, the selection process employed the strategy of 'maximum variation sampling' (see Merriam, 2009, 78, 227-229) with the aim of capturing a diverse range of experiences and understandings of the ways in which convergence had impacted collection practices.

An important characteristic of contemporary institutional convergence in Australia has been its uptake in areas where cultural amenities are primarily funded by local government. This automatically excluded major national organisations as case study candidates, although cross-domain functionality has historically been a facet of some of these large institutions. Instead, the aim of the research was to examine the effect of recent integration of cultural organisations, in both metropolitan and regional areas, which had previously functioned as autonomous units – such as local libraries,

[36] Sharan Merriam (2009) has outlined some of the advantages of interviews as a research process, citing the ability of the researcher, as the 'primary instrument' for data collection, to "expand his or her understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information (data) immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses" (ibid.,15). These benefits were deemed appropriate in the case of this research project, allowing the under-research and under–theorised convergence model to be investigated in depth and from a variety of angles, and allowing interpretations and conclusions to be drawn directly from the research, rather than quantitative testing of preconceived hypotheses.

regional museums, historical society collections, local studies collections, council archives, and art galleries.

Such examples of convergence have taken place roughly between 2000-2010 and have been characterised by the expectation that staff, many of whom had already been employed in the independent institutions, assuming new, redefined roles in the newly converged facility, often encompassing cross-domain operational functions. The fact that these are recent developments provided a window of opportunity to record the responses of many workers who had first-hand experience of the restructure. Most interviewees had domain-specific (that is, either library, archive, museum or gallery) training or experience, and had been required to adapt to broader roles and responsibilities that traversed traditional domain boundaries.

Four recently converged organisations located in NSW, Australia, and one in New Zealand were selected. As I explain in Chapter 5, the inclusion of the New Zealand case was based on recurring references to this institution as a prototype for Australian examples of convergence.

As no fixed model exists as a structural template for convergence projects, the aim of the research was to include a representative sample of organisations, ranging in scale and budget as well as the type of convergence undertaken. As such, the case studies featured different combinations of museum, art gallery, library and archive amalgamations. The case studies were also selected on the basis of their prominence in the Australian convergence debate, either because they were cited as examples, or because they represented an important phase in the development of the convergence trend. Appendix 4 includes a table summarising the form of convergence at each case study, the number of respondents interviewed and their titles. Further contextual information on each case study institution is provided in Chapter 5 of the thesis.

3.3.2 Selection of respondents

The selection of interview respondents at each case study institution was based on whether their roles had direct involvement with the museum component of the converged organisation (i.e. curatorial, collection management, exhibition

development, education, public programs and general management areas), as well as identifying those whose roles had become cross-disciplinary as a result of the convergence. This meant that interviewees from across the library, museum, archive and gallery spectrum were targeted.[37] The selection process employed a 'network sampling' approach (Merriam, 2009, 79), using initial contacts at each institution (usually management staff) to suggest fellow workers with experience that met the research criteria.

Respondents with comparable role descriptions were involved across all the case studies.[38] They were asked to respond to a range of themes arising from convergence, to determine the ways in which this contextual and organisational restructure had affected their role descriptions, application of professional expertise, collaboration with other staff across professional areas and treatment of collections. Interviews were semi-structured, exploring the key themes through a single-page list of questions that was circulated to each respondent prior to their session. The interview questionnaire is included here as Appendix 1.

In the interests of collecting a manageable amount of data, mid-level and senior staff members were chosen at larger institutions for their ability to provide detailed examples as well as a more general overview of convergence at their organisation. In addition, workers who had been present before convergence took place were also targeted for their 'before and after' accounts. The average length of interviews was one hour, and the total number of case study interviews was thirty-nine.

In addition to the information gathered at case study sites, further qualitative analysis was conducted through interviews with three professionals involved with peek agencies supporting museums and collecting organisations in NSW and Australia-

[37] As participants were chosen on the basis of having some involvement with the 'museum' collection at their organisation, the sample of interviewees did have a bias for including more comprehensive representation by museum professionals (i.e. curators, collection managers, exhibition development staff, etc.)

[38] Differences in the scale of each organisation dictated the number of individuals interviewed. For example, some case studies had only a single exhibition development position, whereas others had several.

wide. Using the same questionnaire as a guide, these interviews gauged responses to convergence in the wider collections sector and provided additional information about the cultural policy contexts of the trend, as well as relationships between bodies representing the professional library, archives, museum and gallery communities.[39] Each of the thirty-nine case study and three collections sector interviews was audio recorded and transcribed in full.

3.4 Data collection

Yin has described six potential sources of evidence for case study research: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artefacts (Yin, 2009, Chapter 4, 99-126). The data collection for this study was derived from the first four of these categories, with the core of the data obtained through interviews with thirty-nine respondents at the five case study institutions, and supplemented by a range of documentary and archival sources. The purpose of using more than one data source was to enable triangulation of evidence: to test the reliability of, and substantiate the information provided by respondents during the interviews. Site observations were also carried out, with the main purpose of providing greater context for the researcher to be able to effectively carry out the interviews. The following explanation outlines how each of these data-collection methods were employed.

3.4.1 Interviews

At each case study, individual interviews of a number of staff members (varying according to the size of the institution) were undertaken. The interviews were semi-structured, using a standardised questionnaire organised around four key subjects: the rationale for convergence; collections; exhibitions; and administration. More specific questions were included under each theme.[40]

Qu and Dumay observe that "there is no one right way of interviewing, no format is appropriate for all interviews, and no single way of wording questions will always

[39] In accordance with the human research ethics guidelines for this research, I am not able to reveal the identities of the peek bodies or their representatives.

[40] For questionnaire, please refer to Appendix 1.

work" (2011, 247). I decided to use a semi-structured interviewing technique because it ensures that a consistent set of predetermined, significant topics can be addressed in each interview without forcing respondents to comment on areas outside of their experience. The semi-structured (also termed 'focussed') approach provides sufficient flexibility for the researcher to remain responsive to each individual's particular understandings of the research topic, allowing certain themes to be probed in greater detail. It also allows for a conversational flow that may be less intimidating for interviewees.[41] In addition, I remained open to new avenues of investigation as they presented themselves throughout the interviews process, allowing me to modify questions or insert new lines of inquiry as appropriate to each respondent.

The guidelines of the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics committee to a large extent dictated the way in which interviewees were approached and the amount of information given to them about the research project. Support for the research was obtained from the head of each institution before individual respondents were contacted. Prior to the day of the interview, each respondent received an email copy of the questionnaire, along with an information statement outlining the research objectives. Further correspondence was carried out with each respondent to answer any questions about the project and to arrange a suitable interview time. I then travelled to each organisation to observe the site and conduct the interviews.

With the exception of two interviews that were conducted over the telephone, all others were carried out in-person. Each respondent was interviewed individually and in private.[42] The interviews were recorded using the Smart Recorder application on a MacBook Pro laptop computer. All of the forty-two interviews were fully transcribed by the researcher.

The first three interviews I conducted were with representatives of state and national 'umbrella' organisations for the collections sector, whose roles included coordination

[41] For comparison of different types of interviews see Merriam (2009 Chapter 5); Yin (2009, 106-109).

[42] Due to constraints on staff time, four staff members from the Heritage Collections team at *MAUNGA TAPU* were interviewed together in a focus group format.

of cross-domain and inter-institutional collaborations, providing advisory services, facilitating access to expertise and resources, and strategic planning. These interviews served as 'pilot' studies, enabling me to refine my interview technique and test the relevance of my interview questions. In addition, these respondents gave their own accounts of the development of a number of converged institutions, allowing me to confirm my choice of case studies and providing valuable background context for future interviews.

3.4.2 Observations

In the context of this research, observations in the form of an informal site visit, taking into account both publicly accessible and 'back of house' areas, was undertaken for each case study before the commencement of interviews.[43] The purpose of these site visits was for the researcher to become familiar with the physical environment of the institution (the spaces devoted to each collecting area, the condition of the buildings, the work spaces, the layout and characteristics of exhibition areas, numbers of floor staff and some user interactions) to provide additional background to inform the subsequent interview process. The site observations were not systematically organised or recorded, and are not reported among the findings in this research.[44]

3.4.3 Documents

According to Yin (2009, 102), the advantages of consulting documents and archival records include the ability to determine exact details (such as dates, full names and titles, names of contractors, etc.). Additionally, documentary records can be copied and kept for ongoing reference, can cover a long time period, and provide quantitative information.

In the context of this research, documents were collected during each site visit and included memoranda, emails, meeting minutes, announcements, annual reports, building proposals and strategic plans, news clippings and press releases. Analysis of

[43] Confidentiality obligations prevent photographs taken during site visits from being published here.

[44] The potential for further research on convergence, focussing on user observation, is dealt with in section 3.7 of this chapter.

documents was based on the same lines of questioning as the interviews, as well as providing background information for each case study.

3.4.4 Ethics requirements

As a condition of the University of Sydney's guidelines on human research, an outline of the study, detailing its purpose, methodology, recruitment of participants, interview questionnaire content and processes to ensure confidentiality, was submitted and approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality were key prerequisites for obtaining Ethics approval. Respondents in the study gave their consent to take part based on the proviso that they could not be identified in the reporting of the research. For these reasons, both the names of the institutions and the individuals who were interviewed have been changed in this report. Initially I assigned an impersonal code to each case study, but I found that codes alone made it difficult to distinguish between the cases in the write-up of the findings. Instead, I have opted for alternative titles for each institution, reflecting some characteristic of each case. Likewise, I have necessarily omitted the names of individual participants but have included basic details of their role description to facilitate easier tracking of particular respondent's contributions throughout the findings.

In order to contextualise each case study in depth, I provide a description of the important characteristics of each case study in Chapter 5 of the thesis.

3.5 Method for case analysis

After considering a number of approaches to analysing qualitative data (see for example Charmaz, 2006, Merriam, 2009, Silverman, 2013) the process of thematic content analysis, as described, for example by Burnard (1991),[45] Braun and Clarke (2006) and Seidman (2006, 125-131), which is also referred to as the constant

[45] Burnard describes this approach as an adaptation of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) 'Grounded Theory' technique, where explanations – or theory - for a certain phenomenon are developed by comparing and identifying patterns in information gathered via qualitative processes (see also Cooney, 2010).

comparative method (Merriam, 2009), was chosen as appropriate for assessing the interview transcripts. This iterative approach, in which interview transcripts are progressively categorised (or 'coded') according to themes developed from the content (i.e. inductively), allows for a systematic examination of data and identification of recurring subject matter. At the same time, this method acknowledges the inherent subjectivity of respondents' views, the difficulty in correlating comments made by individuals working in different institutional settings, acknowledges the subjective role of the researcher in interview analysis, and allows for the inclusion of unexpected or surprising findings.

While thematic content analysis has been closely associated with Glaser and Strauss' (1967) Grounded Theory method, it should be noted that in essence this approach describes a common strategy for analysing and cross-referencing information from various sources – be they interviews, documents, narratives, images, or any type of communication. As it has been my own practice to aggregate, describe and analyse research in this way (though I never attributed to it a formal methodological title), I felt comfortable adopting a similar approach to these case studies.

In accordance with this method (see Burnard, 1991, 462-464, Merriam, 2009, Chapter 8), analysis of the data began in parallel with the interview process and intensified once all the interviews were complete and fully transcribed. Initial interviews provided a source of feedback on the original questionnaire, allowing me to modify and create additional questions as I learned more about convergence at each case study.

During the process of transcription, I annotated the transcripts, highlighting points of interest and recurring themes in the content. Subsequently, the transcripts were closely examined, with as much content as possible interpreted and categorised according to the themes described in the interview questionnaire, as well as other topics introduced by the respondents. I recorded these categories and interpretations in the margins of the transcripts using the 'Comment' function within MS Word. In a separate word document, I recorded each category and, as each interview was analysed, themes being reiterated by numerous respondents came to light. Sorting the content into emerging categories in this way allowed for the prevalence of certain themes both within and

across cases to be identified. This process was repeated until a number of core topics were derived, and these formed the framework for reporting the findings.

3.6 Reporting style and structure

I devote three chapters of this thesis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) to the findings of this research. The findings are presented as a richly descriptive ('thick') discussion of concepts and themes that have emerged from the data analysis, as is consistent with qualitative research reporting (see Charmaz, 2006, 14, Merriam, 2009, 16, 223-229).

It is worth acknowledging the dilemma I have faced in choosing the most appropriate form of presentation for the findings. The interviews that comprised this research, together with the documents and observations gathered at each case study, combined to produce a formidable and, at times, almost overwhelming amount of primary 'data'. Once all the documents had been collated, and interviews fully transcribed and coded, the challenge became how to present the resulting information in a coherent, compelling format. For some time I debated the most appropriate structure for reporting the findings. In particular, two approaches, each with their merits as well as potential disadvantages, presented themselves.

The first was to treat each case study in isolation, outlining of the background of the institution and moving through a detailed account of the interview research. This method would allow linkages to be made between the specific circumstances of each case – its history, particular form of convergence, etc. – and the accounts given by staff in relation to both the general functions of the organisation as well as the status and enactment of museum practices. Given that my research confirmed that there is no singular or common 'model' for convergence, this approach had the advantage of foregrounding the co-constitutional relationship between a case, with all its particularities, and the instance of 'convergence' developed there. At the same time, a clear disadvantage of this reporting approach was the necessary deferral of cross-case comparisons based on the themes that I identified in the data. Likewise, broader interpretation and discussion of the significance of the research results to the overall research question would need to be postponed. The entire process would provide a rich and detailed account. However, it seemed a roundabout way of addressing the research

question, which did not call for an in-depth exploration of every aspect of interview findings of each case. The written length of the findings section of the thesis would also have become problematic.

The alternative approach, which I have proceeded with, was to present the findings thematically, combining and comparing the responses of interviewees from all five cases simultaneously within the context of specific topics. While this strategy did not allow the full complexity of each case to be explored individually, it did provide a mechanism for filtering the interview data and maintaining a focus on thematic areas with direct relevance to the research question, while excluding those of lesser importance. For example, many of the respondents spoke about visitor evaluation methods used by their institution and speculated on the effects of convergence on visitor engagements with collections. However, this area did not contribute towards an understanding of the effects of convergence on museums practice, and hence it is not discussed in detail in the findings. Building the narrative of the findings around the research question has also allowed me to include a discussion of the wider implications of the research within each chapter, rather than delaying this until a later part of the thesis.

In order to make sense of the complexity and specificity of convergence at the case studies chosen for this research, it has been necessary to frame the convergence trend within the context of national and state cultural policies and the role of local government in the provision of cultural amenities. The first of the findings chapters (Chapter 5) provides a succinct overview of influential policy directions in Australia roughly between 1980-2010 – a period that saw local governments assume primary funding responsibility for museums, libraries and other arts facilities and programs in their communities. Second, each individual case study is introduced, combining information that has been gathered from official documents, media reports and personal accounts. Details are provided in each case about the history of the institution, what form of convergence it represents, the organisational structure, scale and operating budget.

The case study interview findings are divided between Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis to reflect the broad thematic division that shapes my response to the research question.

The information within the interviews is presented thematically and in detail. I summarise, analyse and compare the respondent's accounts of their experiences working within converged institutions. In acknowledgement of the context-specific, nuanced and complex nature of individual participant's accounts, the reporting chapters include relevant and, where necessary, extensive original excerpts from transcripts.

The findings are followed by a discussion that brings this case study research into the context of wider philosophical and practical discourses around convergence, leading to the formulation of substantive theories about convergence and its effect on museum practices and the interpretation of museum objects.[46]

3.7 Reliability and limitations

There are a number of considerations relevant to the credibility of qualitative case study research that I have attempted to address in my methodology, as detailed below.

3.7.1 Internal validity

The triangulation of data, acknowledged as an important strategy for underpinning the internal validity of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009, Chapter 9, see also Yin, 2009, Chapter 2, 42-43) was employed here, comprising multiple case study sites, information from a variety of documentary sources, and in-depth analysis of interviews.

In addition, case studies were chosen based on variation, in that each represented a different articulation of convergence and the overall sample included organisations ranging in size and budget.

While the research detailed here intentionally focuses on multiple cases of convergence, there is still potential to challenge the credibility of the findings (external validity) on grounds of the relatively small sample size (Merriam, 2009, 51, Yin, 2009,

[46] Substantive theory is understood here as "theory that applies to a specific area of practice." (Merriam, 2009, Chapter 8, 200)

43). To offset this, I have endeavoured to provide a rich description of each case and respondents' views, underscoring the circumstances behind each set of interviews, and offering the reader a variety of opportunities to extrapolate the findings across into other situations that share similar organisational issues or context.

Another potentially contentious aspect of the findings was the tendency for participants to express negative attitudes toward the restructuring, creating circumstances where, it could be argued, respondents' accounts of convergence may have been tainted by lingering resentments about change management processes that had occurred at their institutions. In order to substantiate their accounts, I have included not only general comments made by the interviewees, but also concrete examples they cited to illustrate the ongoing impact of convergence on their professional practices and the activities of their organisation.

3.7.2 Researcher bias

As the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in the case study method, there are associated issues regarding the skill of that researcher in conducting interviews, as well as the problem of the inescapable bias that the researcher brings to the process (see Seidman, 2006, 22-27, on acknowledging the subjectivity of qualitative research). There are a number of ways in which I have attempted to counteract these potential problems.

First, in the interests of compiling as much pre-existing information about each site prior to the actual site visit and interviews, I cast a wide net in collecting documentary information about each venue, including website, media, government, archival, and internal institutional records. While none of these sources can be considered free of bias in themselves, they did provide me with alternative perspectives on each site against which to measure my personal interpretations.

Second, in order to build trust, a personal rapport, and encourage open communication with my interviewees, I circulated the interview questionnaire to each individual prior to the interview day, as well as contacting each individual via email and/or telephone to arrange the meetings. During each interview, I explained the research and made

clear my own disciplinary and career background. I have maintained a feedback loop with my respondents, circulating my subsequent publications to them and inviting their comments.

No form of research can be totally impartial, nor should it pretend to be. My aim as a researcher was to remain open to the 'data' and to foreground my role in its analysis. While maintaining the readability of the thesis, I have included substantial interview excerpts throughout my presentation of the research findings to substantiate my interpretations. The interview questionnaire is also provided as Appendix 1.

3.7.3 Peer review

In order to test my evolving ideas about convergence during the course of the literature review and case study research, I have submitted part of my theoretical and interview analysis to peer review prior to the submission of this thesis.

Arising from the literature review, my examination of the labelling of converged organisations as 'memory institutions' was published in the UK journal *Museum Management and Curatorship* in 2012 (see Robinson, 2012b).

In November 2012 I presented findings of two case studies in the context of the impact of convergence on the development of new skills, practices and professional cross-pollination within the collections sector at the conference of ICOM's International Committee on Management (see Robinson, 2012a).

A second paper examining the ability of converged institutions to enhance knowledge of collections was published in November 2014 in *Museums & Society* journal (see Robinson, 2014).

3.7.4 Sample and research focus

Finally, as this research concentrates on the internal workings of converged organisations, its parameters do not extend to in-depth evaluation of visitor responses and perceptions of these institutions. It must be acknowledged, however, that a consolidated qualitative and quantitative analysis of visitor behaviour in, and

community responses to, converged organisations, including the ways in which collections information and public programs are understood and internalised, would provide useful information in the evaluation of this new model for collecting institutions. Such research would enrich intellectual as well as practical understandings of the cultural impact of converged organisations: their role in strengthening community identity, promoting social cohesion, creating a forum for community discussion, providing a space for informative social interaction around collections, etc. This 'outside-in' analysis of convergence provides abundant avenues for further research and this thesis can be considered a first step in this process.

4 Knowledge utopias: an epistemological perspective on the convergence of museums, libraries and archives

Much of the academic literature and other commentaries on the convergence of museums, libraries and archives proposes that facilitating streamlined access to collection information, either by building integrated facilities[47] or creating joint digital pathways to information, will simultaneously deliver unprecedented access to knowledge for users. Within this discourse, physical access to collections correlates with intellectual access, and there is an implied equivalence between the possession of information and that of knowledge. Yet, the mechanics of knowledge production in the context of converged collections remains to be described. Does the availability of diverse types of collection information in a converged setting necessarily bring about greater knowledge? If knowledge acquisition by users of collections is not an automatic benefit of convergence, does this fundamental justification for convergence still hold true? And, on what conceptual basis is the substantial investment in converging bricks-and-mortar institutions founded?

Here I reflect on whether the knowledge attributes characteristic to each collecting domain can – at least theoretically - be maintained and enhanced in a converged setting or, conversely, whether there is a risk of impoverishing knowledge around collections as a consequence of convergence. These issues form the reference points for a discussion of the case study findings and contribute to a greater understanding of the potential cultural impact of the convergence phenomenon.

[47] As I have discussed earlier, the concept of convergence, and what it means in practice, has, to date, evaded a singular definition, as evidenced by the variety of partnerships, collaborations, institutional models and staff structures which describe themselves, or are described, as converged. So too, it is difficult to pinpoint terms to accurately express every example of convergence. Accordingly, I also refer to convergence as the 'integration', 'joining', 'amalgamation', etc., of collecting institutions.

The first part of this chapter investigates the prevalent understanding of the term 'knowledge' within the discourse around convergence, adopting an epistemological focus to examine the sources, structure and parameters of 'knowledge' in relation to various types of collections. Transcending a merely semantic debate, it explores the definitions, creation and flow of data, information and knowledge, in and across collecting domains. It considers whether dominant understandings and deployment of the term 'knowledge' in the context of convergence take into account the full diversity of knowledge produced via experiences with different types of collections.

I begin this section by examining the use of the term 'knowledge' in the context of convergence, exposing the problematic nature of its indiscriminate usage within this area. Considering relevant literature produced by scholars across the collections sector – in museology, archives theory, and library and information science - as well related fields such as cultural studies and information technology, I adopt an epistemological approach to delineate fundamental differences between concepts of data, information and knowledge across museums, libraries and archives. Rather than extensively examining the historical scope of epistemological thought as an abstract branch of philosophy, I focus on recent cross-disciplinary and international contributions that consider the communication of meaning through collections, and their cultural impact, as part of epistemological inquiry.

Having established a framework for understanding the concept of knowledge, I go on to examine each collecting domain's engagements with data, information and knowledge. Given that particular information and 'knowledge' contexts can be seen as characteristic of museums, libraries and archives, this part of the discussion includes a general comparison of the information(s) and knowledge(s) produced through the methodologies employed by different types of collecting institutions to describe, document and present their collections. A closer examination of the museum context is used to elaborate ways in which specific epistemological frameworks can develop around collections by interpreting them through the lens of a particular kind of institution.

4.1 Converged collecting organisations as 'Knowledge Institutions'

A review of the literature in support of both the physical and digital convergence of library, archive and museum collections reveals the centrality of the concept of 'knowledge' in legitimising the trend towards integration. The novelty and appeal of contemporary models of convergence in the collections sector is often linked to the promise of improved opportunities for knowledge acquisition, and this relationship is readily apparent in the language used to describe such models. For example, in their paper considering the history of the convergence trend, Given and McTavish cited Ian Wilson, then the Librarian and Archivist of Canada, who described the 2004 integration of Libraries and Archives Canada as revolutionary because the organisation represented 'a new kind of knowledge institution' (Given and McTavish, 2010, 7).[48] Similarly, as the title of their paper suggests, Kirchoff, Schweibenz and Sieglerschmidt describe the digital convergence of library, archive and museum collections in Germany, through the development of the joint BAM Internet portal, as motivated by 'the spell of ubiquitous knowledge' (Kirchhoff et al., 2008).[49] They cite extensively from Lorcan Dempsey's influential 2000 paper that emphasised the benefit of convergence in creating 'knowledge networks' (Dempsey, 2000, 3). Likewise, Waibel and Erway outline the potential of digital convergence to revive the ideal of a 'deeply interconnected LAM [Library, Archive and Museum] knowledgebase' (Waibel and Erway, 2009, 325). Within a similar context, libraries, archives and museums have been described interchangeably as 'physical knowledge exchanges' (Dempsey, 2000, 3), the 'knowledge industry' (Enser, 2001, 428), 'knowledge centres' (Macnaught,

[48] Perhaps because it was seen as self-evident, an explanation for precisely how LAC functions as a 'knowledge institution' was not provided.

[49] It should be noted that these authors, and others, consider contemporary convergence of the collecting domains as a 're-convergence' in fulfilment of a historical unity that existed as far back as the ancient Mouseion of Alexandria - the legendary 'institution of the muses' - which included the great Library of Alexandria, functioned as a centre for scholarship, and from which the modern word 'museum' is derived. However, these authors examine neither the rapid expansion of collections since the nineteenth century nor the professionalisation of archival, museum and library workforces in the twentieth century in considering the important distinctions between these collecting domains as we know them today.

2008), and ‘knowledge domains’ (CILIP, 2009), with a shared mission of ‘knowledge transfer within society’ (Enser, 2001, 424). As these examples show, much of the discourse in support of convergence is underscored by the assumption that more knowledge – presumably for users - will automatically be generated via integrated access to cross-domain collections. Ideally, convergence purports to offer democratised and universal access to information and knowledge, fostering shared access to cultural heritage.

4.1.1 The influence of digital technologies

The realisation that digital technologies and the internet present unprecedented possibilities for integration between cultural heritage databases, along with the perception that collecting institutions now have an obligation to provide new forms of public access in online environments (see Zorich et al., 2008, 13, also Coburn et al., 2010, 17-18), have provided strong validation for the pursuit of convergence in both digital and physical contexts.

The linkage between access to collection information and the attainment of knowledge is most pronounced when considering the literature around digital convergence. Archive and museum informatics specialist Jennifer Trant has noted that the utopian idea of developing seamlessly interconnected digital heritage resources is propelled by the notion of opening up new knowledge horizons to users. She writes: ‘Drawing on the desire that all information be available to anyone, anywhere, the vision of an integrated cultural web is portrayed as a powerhouse, latent with the potential of unrealized knowledge’ (Trant, 2009, 369). The implication is that the advent of digital technology and the Internet will facilitate the release of vast reserves of knowledge around collections; knowledge that previously remained untapped by the majority of users before the arrival of the world wide web. Conversely, siloed professional practices, disciplinary distinctions and time-consuming processes that characterise ‘physical’ collecting institutions seem at odds with the fluidity, ongoing rapid development, responsiveness and accessibility of digital technology.

Much of the conversation around convergence supposes that the availability of joint online collection databases, and other forms of collection and institutional resources,

has increased the appetite of users for efficient cross-domain collection access across the board. Discussions at a 2009 meeting of CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) titled *Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Unlocking the benefits of collaboration between libraries, archives and museums* and supported by the UK Society of Archivists, Museums Association and MLA,[50] centred on the premise that users 'increasingly expect access to dispersed materials from within a single search environment' (CILIP, 2009). As early as 2000, Lorcan Dempsey, in a report for the European Commission's Information Society Directorate, emphasised that libraries, archives and museums were striving to emancipate their cultural heritage content via the new potential of digital networks, in recognition of 'their users' desire to refer to intellectual and cultural materials flexibly and transparently, without concern for institutional or national boundaries.' (Dempsey, 2000, 3). In other words, the primary impediments to what could be termed the 'free flow of knowledge' from resources held by collecting organisations are understood to originate in the limitations posed by physical dispersion, for which technological advancements are seen to provide the ultimate solution.

Such arguments present digital technologies as a panacea for the relative inefficiency of physical collection repositories in disseminating cultural knowledge, and as such, disciplinary distinctions between collecting domains appear obsolete. Furthermore, the restructuring of bricks-and-mortar collecting institutions to emulate cross-disciplinary, cross-domain access to collection resources – and 'knowledge' - in the virtual world seems a natural extension of these developments.

4.2 Introducing an epistemological perspective

It would seem that the ideal of digital convergence as a pathway toward universal access to cultural 'knowledge' is founded on the assumption that all kinds of objects in cultural collections (books, documents, images, artefacts, etc.) are equal in their potential to be interpreted for meaning. The examples I have cited imply a perceived

[50] The British Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, launched in 2000 by the UK government to provide joint strategic direction, promote standards, and allocate funding across the collecting domains, as well as providing policy advice to government. It was active until 2010, when funding was discontinued.

equivalence across the 'knowledge' content supplied by the various repositories, and correspondingly there is no questioning of the ability of users to traverse these knowledge resources seamlessly, once digital technology provides the means. From this perspective, the information surrounding various collection items – though crafted by their respective repositories – is nevertheless regarded as structurally and epistemologically compatible across institutional boundaries. Like 'objective' scientific facts within the positivist paradigm, individual collection components (objects, digitised documents, photographs, imagery, object records, catalogue entries, exhibition texts, etc.) retain their full information potential regardless of their de-contextualisation from the body of a specific collection. They can be separated, exchanged and recombined based on the needs of the user and regardless of their original institutional source or provenance, creating the so-called 'Knowledge Commons' that aligns the content of libraries, archives and museums (Curry, 2010b). Moreover, we are led to believe, access to information equals access to knowledge, and enabling one will automatically result in possession of the other.

This point of view, perhaps influenced by information science (which has traditionally emphasised resource discovery and dissemination over interpretation of content)[51] has given way to pragmatic initiatives to produce consistency in collection description across sectors (see for example Johnston and Robinson, 2001). Likewise, new emphasis has been placed on creating generic cross-domain cataloguing tools and standardised vocabularies capable of 'harmonizing cultural metadata', such as those described by Coburn et al. in their article outlining the development of shared cataloguing protocols for the museum and library communities (Coburn et al., 2010).[52]

[51] See Birger Hjorland (Professor of Knowledge Organization, Royal School of Library and Information Science, Copenhagen) in his discussion outlining the conceptual basis of Information Science and, in his view, its flawed grounding in nineteenth century positivism (Hjorland, 2000).

[52] Efforts to achieve integrated access to digital collection resources have been underway for over a decade. For example, in 2000, Judith Pearce and Warwick Cathro of the National Library of Australia, along with Tony Boston, described the challenges of creating a hybrid information environment where digital information resources from libraries, archives and museums would ideally be available via a single interface (Pearce et al., 2000).

However, while the convergence of collecting institutions promises unprecedented access to abundant 'knowledge' reserves, there is a conspicuous absence of discussion about exactly how libraries, archives and museums function as information or knowledge repositories. Precisely what kinds of 'knowledge' are produced by them? Does convergence of cultural collections, either in digital or physical form, necessarily result in greater acquisition of knowledge by users? And, what does this discussion indicate about prevalent understandings of the significance of museums, libraries and archives in shaping knowledge around cultural collections? In order to address these questions, it is first necessary to establish a clear understanding of the definition of 'information' in comparison to 'knowledge', to articulate the relationship between the two concepts, and then to consider how these distinctions apply in relation to cultural collections.

4.2.1 Differentiating data, information and knowledge in the context of the collecting domains

The essential differences between 'data', 'information' and 'knowledge' have long been the subject of epistemological inquiry, as well as forming important themes within other fields such as the social sciences and information science. And yet, distinctions between these concepts seem not to have penetrated discussions in the academic and professional library, archive and museum sectors with regard to the idea of convergence, where their loose and interchangeable use points to a superficial understanding of what these terms signify. By considering recent scholarship about the nature and creation of knowledge from across various disciplinary fields, it is possible to discuss these theories of knowledge to convergence, and outline a model of knowledge (and its creation) against which the supposed benefits of convergence can be evaluated. Ultimately, these concepts become the criteria for assessing the significance of my case study findings, in terms of identifying the degree to which the convergence model successfully facilitates the production of knowledge around museum collections.

A seminal contribution to understanding the differences between information and knowledge was provided in 1991 by Michael K. Buckland, a scholar of Library and Information Science, in his influential article titled *Information as Thing*. Buckland

examined ambiguities around common understandings of the term 'information', identifying conceptual distinctions between the process of becoming informed, information itself, and knowledge, and systematically demonstrating that 'information' is always takes tangible and physical forms – hence the title of the paper.[53] Buckland emphasised that information is not the same as knowledge, which is only created when human beings encounter and interact with (passive) information and change what they believe or understand as a result (Buckland, 1991, 353). The presence of information on its own is no guarantee that knowledge will be produced.

In an article published in 2009 in the International Social Science Journal concerning the global distribution and dissemination of knowledge, authors Nico Stehr[54] and Ulrich Ufer[55] argued a similar point, proposing that the development of digital technologies has indeed allowed for the spread of *information* around the globe at an unprecedented rate, but that global *knowledge* 'remains a highly hypothetical aim' (Stehr and Ufer, 2009, 7). Likewise, in a paper presented at the Museums and the Web conference in 2004 titled *Searching for Meaning: Not Just Records*, Darren Peacock of the National Museum of Australia, together with software developers Derek Ellis and John Doolan, made an important distinction between the superficial availability of online digital collection records and the more complex notion of making these resources meaningful as knowledge to the end user (Peacock et al., 2004, 1-3). According to these perspectives, the advent of converged collections, where large amounts of collection information from multiple repositories becomes jointly accessible, cannot on its own guarantee an automatic increase in knowledge of those collections.

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[53] Buckland views every kind of object as potentially informative. Therefore, under this broad definition, museum artefacts, written documents, audio-visual materials, images and even natural found objects all have information status (Buckland, 1991, 353-355). For further discussion of the physical form of information see Buckland, 1997.

[54] Karl Mannheim Professor of Cultural Studies at the Zeppelin University, Friedrichshafen, Germany.

[55] DAAD-Professor at the Canadian Centre for German and European Studies at the University of Montreal, Quebec.

The fields of Information Science (IS) and Personal Information Management (PIM), though normally associated with discussions about Information Technology, also intersect usefully with epistemological discussions about the differentiation of data, information and knowledge in library, archive and museum contexts. In a 2010 article intended for a PIM audience, William Jones, a researcher in information science at the University of Washington, offers interesting ideas about how differing approaches to the collection and recording of information might lead to a variety of knowledge outcomes from the same initial data sources. Like Buckland, Jones identifies information as a *"thing"*, as opposed to knowledge which has no tangible characteristics (Jones, 2010, 2), and concurs with Stehr and Ufer in proposing that there is interdependency, but not equivalence, between data, information and knowledge. Of particular interest to this paper is Jones' discussion of *information* as resulting from the synthesis of data via cognitive perception, where information comes into being as a tangible record of a perception event. In this form, information can be made physically available, manipulated, stored and exchanged in various ways.[56] However, information is not the same as facts, because its content is always already shaped by the process of perception that identified and recorded it. It follows that collection information originating in libraries, archives or museums already bears the unique imprint of the institution that authored it, being inescapably shaped by the processes and lenses of 'perception' applied through the practices of each organisation. At this point in the construction of information, the subjective role of individual collecting institutions in embedding particular concepts of significance within the documentation created around collections comes to the fore.

So, if *information* is tangibly recorded perception of data, what is knowledge? Stehr and Ufer define knowledge as "a capacity for action…Knowledge enables an actor … to set something in motion and to structure reality. Knowledge is thus knowledge about processes" (Stehr and Ufer, 2009, 8-9). In other words, having knowledge is not just about the passive consumption of information (i.e. the fact that information is available cannot be equated with access to knowledge). Rather, knowledge results from the ability to make the available information personally relevant and useful.

[56] See also Hjorland's citation of the American Association of Information Science (ASIS) definition of information, which is similar (Hjorland, 2000, 32).

Jones takes a similar view, arguing that knowledge comes about through an individual's internalisation of information into the complex world of personal meaning. In this sense, knowledge is fugitive; it exists as an individual's internal and perpetually fluctuating response to the reception of information (Jones, 2010, 2). Furthermore, because knowledge is a personal response to information, it cannot be frozen, recorded and passed on in the same physical ways as information. Knowledge, then, is created when an individual internalises information in order to alter his or her reality in some meaningful way.

Similarly, UK academic Donald Hislop, writing on knowledge management and sharing for the *Journal of Information Technology* (2002) , has persuasively argued against the idea that knowledge can be effectively transmitted via digital technologies, pointing out that knowledge cannot be reduced to one-way messages transferred via digital networks from a source to a recipient. Hislop builds his critique of the role of information technology in knowledge management by examining philosophies related to the fundamental character of knowledge. He argues that the 'optimism' surrounding information technology as a tool in 'knowledge-sharing' is based on an objectivist epistemology that artificially separates a holistic concept of knowledge into two discrete components.[57] That is, 'explicit' knowledge, which "can be codified in a tangible form, for example, "scientific theories published in documentation", and 'tacit' knowledge, which exists within the individual but cannot be expressed verbally, incorporating "both physical skills and cognitive frameworks" that are embodied and culturally or socially framed (Hislop, 2002, 166-167).[58] Because this bipartite view

[57] Birger Hjorland has also highlighted that the proposition that the interconnection of digital data files equates to the true interconnection of ideas is based on a nineteenth century positivism, which does not acknowledge the contingency of information to its source (Hjorland, 2000, 32-33). Hence, the information(s) produced by libraries, archives and museums carry their own institutional legacy and cannot necessarily be transposed into a converged collections context without either obscuring their authorship or losing informational identity. Such considerations in turn raise questions about the ability to streamline information(s) from diverse sources, or indeed the possibility of a true flow of 'knowledge', in a converged collection environment.

[58] Interestingly, the notion of 'explicit' knowledge can be paralleled with the definition of 'information' as described by Jones and Buckland. Correspondingly, 'tacit' knowledge bears a resemblance to Jones' concept of knowledge as personally embodied and embedded.

assumes that there is no subjective interference in the communication of 'explicit' knowledge, digital technologies become an ideal conduit for the unimpeded flow of this 'knowledge' between senders and recipients – a concept implicit, for example, in Lorcan Demsey's reference to the 'knowledge networks' formed through the digital convergence of libraries, archives and museums (Dempsey, 2000, 2).

What emerges from Buckland's characterisation of information as 'thing', Hislop's critique of the objectivist 'explicit' versus 'tacit' model of knowledge, Stehr and Ufer's delineation of knowledge as bound to individual context and practice, as well as Jones' model that foregrounds the intangible, personal characteristics of knowledge (as opposed to information, which is a tangible record of interpreted data), is that 'knowledge' cannot be 'transmitted' by, or between, information repositories (such as libraries, archives and museums), either in physical or digital form. If we accept this approach, it follows that libraries, archives and museums should not be understood as repositories of knowledge at all, but rather only of information – or as Buckland has written, as a 'species of information retrieval system' (Buckland, 1991, 359).

What are the implications of this conceptual approach for convergence of collecting institutions? First of all, the idea that it is only possible to transmit information, rather than knowledge, between collection repositories (and to their users) complicates the notion that, for example, digital convergence of diverse collection records will achieve a universal diffusion of cultural knowledge on the basis of simply facilitating more streamlined access to collection resources. Likewise, differentiating between information and knowledge in this way negates the ideal of the 'one stop shop' model of physical convergence, bringing into question whether this form of institutional integration can automatically deliver improved knowledge gain for the users of such facilities. Instead, the rationale for convergence needs to do more than simply invoke promises of knowledge and articulate the actual strategies, collaborations and processes that will promote meaningful engagements with collections among staff and users. The designation of converged collecting organisations as 'knowledge

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However, Jones avoids compartmentalising knowledge into two types, understanding 'information' as a prerequisite and phase in the development of knowledge, but not encapsulating it in a particular and finite form.

institutions' therefore becomes contingent on the capacity of those organisations to provide a suitable environment for users to interact with and internalise the available collection information. Furthermore, to justify convergence on epistemological grounds, these engagements with information need to be comparable with, or exceed, the possibilities already provided by distinct libraries, archives or museums.

Now I consider the ideas of these authors regarding data, information and knowledge in relation to the various processes of capturing, prioritising and recording information appropriate to different kinds of collecting institutions. By concentrating on the practical mechanisms through which collection information is produced, manipulated and presented in the museum context, the contingencies of information to its source institution - as well as the knowledge that may eventually be abstracted from it - become apparent. In particular, I investigate ways in which a variety of professional practices – such as the different classification and cataloguing conventions of libraries, archives or museums (i.e. each institution's modes of 'cognitive perception' for data) - can give rise to particular characteristics in the informational content surrounding collections. I consider the extent to which these characteristics influence the scope of users' interactions with collections to produce meaning and, conversely the knowledge outcomes at stake if museum processes for creating and shaping information are structurally altered, or perhaps prevented, from taking place.

4.2.2 Museum information frameworks

Over time, each collecting domain has developed its own language for describing collections, and techniques for collection management, preservation, and presentation, that create diverse potentials for interacting with information. Museums provide a useful case study for demonstrating how the practices of one type of collecting institution embody various 'ways of seeing' collections - their cultural significance and their utility to the end user - that, in turn, shape the content and structure of collection information and therefore the kinds of knowledge that can eventually be produced around it. This section takes a more detailed look at the ways in which museums function to contextualise their collections, not because these methodologies offer a superior model to that of libraries or archives, but rather to illustrate the complexities involved in interpreting the content of collections from the standpoint of just one

domain. Because analogous considerations exist for the contextualising processes and physical settings provided by libraries and archives - each producing their own frameworks for understanding content - it becomes possible to glimpse the constellation of engagements possible with collections by encountering them through the 'lens' of various institutional settings. The same considerations complicate the notion that the streamlining (or indeed the obsolescence) of some of these environments through convergence can lead to improved knowledge outcomes.

Every museum engages with objects in its own unique way, enacting processes for acquisition, collection documentation, research and communication that are replete with both implicit and explicit judgements about the informational value of the artefact. The understanding that the meaning that develops around collections is not objective or fixed, but rather 'situated and contextual' (Macdonald, 2006, 2) becomes clear when one considers the plethora of methodologies that exist for interpreting museum artefacts. Erwin Panofsky's systematic approach to 'decoding' the symbolic content of art works, first published in 1939 in his *Studies in Iconology* (see Chapter 1, Panofsky, 1970), is an early example of a method for interpreting the meaning of artefacts within the art historical tradition. Some decades later, Thomas Schlereth (1982) and Susan Pearce (1994b) produced edited anthologies detailing numerous models for the study of museum objects, each offering different philosophical, disciplinary, and practical approaches for interpreting the meaning of artefacts.[59] More recently, in their publication of Significance 2.0 - a methodology for interpreting the different meanings of material culture that is used widely by Australian collecting institutions - authors Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth have emphasised that Australian collections owe their diversity to the heterogeneity that characterises the nation's collecting institutions, each with its own history, policies and priorities that have helped to construct the meanings of items in their care (2009, 2).

As a case in point, one of the most basic steps that museums (and indeed libraries and archives) perform in order to create information around collections is the process of

[59] For prominent examples, see those methodologies proposed by E. McClung Fleming (1982), Jules Prown (1994 – originally published 1982), Ray Batchelor (1994), R. Elliot et al.(1994), and S. Pearce(1994).

naming objects, or classification. Yet, even this apparently straightforward act establishes parameters for interpreting the meaning of a collection item and is characterised by the institution in which the collection is housed. The variety of potential outcomes in the process of identification highlights the multiple perspectives from which objects can be understood and associated with one another. This idea is illustrated well by literary theorist Maria Esther Maciel in an article interrogating the idea of the 'unclassifiable' object (Maciel, 2006). Here she defines as 'unclassifiable' not only any concept or thing that exists outside of language, but also any object that can be arranged into several taxonomic groupings simultaneously, while not being fully contained by any single one – much as museologist Eileen Hooper Greenhill has identified the potential for a silver teaspoon to be classified as ' "Industrial Art" in Birmingham City Museum, "Decorative Art" at Stoke-on-Trent, "Silver" at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and "Industry" at Kelham Island Museum in Sheffield' (1992, 7). The capacity of objects to move between various typologies highlights the perceived meaning of objects as contingent upon the classification schemes of the institutions in which they are housed, opening up the possibility for multiple readings of their meaning.

Likewise, Sheldon Annis has highlighted the symbolic nature of museum objects in reference to the thematic relationships that are built between collection objects, and the use of artefacts in exhibitions. He notes that, like any symbol, objects in the museum context have no singular, fixed meaning and retain a capacity to be understood in a multitude of ways. He describes them as "multivocal" and "polyvalent" - that is, they speak with many meanings and in many combinations (Annis, 1994, 21).

The polysemy of objects is particularly poignant in the context of convergence, as the museum domain has traditionally eschewed universal naming standards, making it problematic to identify common holdings across institutions. The diversity in museum naming conventions also highlights that the meaning (and therefore 'knowledge') of objects is not fixed within their physical fabric, but rather, attributed to them through their position in a particular institutional context. Taken together, the diversity between standards of nomenclature across libraries, archives and museums, but also individual organisations within these broad institutional divisions, provides just one example of how a rich, multidimensional information environment for knowledge creation can be

produced via the existence of diverse collecting institutions and disciplinary approaches.

The particular techniques that museums employ for contextualising objects, including processes for accessioning, cataloguing, collection management and representation, have been recognised by a number of museology scholars as a distinct epistemological genre (Findlen, 2004, Paris, 2006). Moreover, experiences with objects and information in a museum setting have the potential to influence knowledge creation on a number of levels. Scott G. Paris argues that museum visitors develop knowledge via their interactions with collection objects, but that this knowledge transcends the objects and is internalised in novel ways by each individual - much as the meaning of any text is a transaction between the intention of the author and the ability of the reader to make the text personally meaningful (Paris, 2006, 258). The social context of the museum space allows visitors to interact with one another as well as the objects, creating an exchange of ideas and helping to form communities of understanding (Paris, 2006, 259-261). In this way, the conversion of information into knowledge in museums happens on a number of levels: first, the museum sets the stage by putting forward a selection of information, in particular formats, for visitors to interact with; second, visitors engage with exhibits and other collection-based programs to develop personal understandings of the ideas and narratives presented; and finally, visitors exchange and work through their understandings within a social context, leading to the communal generation of shared cultural knowledge and meaning.

The complex ways in which information experiences are constructed within the museum environment underscore the advantage of having a large number of diverse institutions – irrespective of whether they are libraries, archives or museums - that can each provide unique engagements with information for the creation of knowledge. From this perspective, fostering an organic, heterogeneous array of collecting institutions – rather than what might be termed ‘mega-repositories’ - could be vital to maintaining the richness and diversity of cultural knowledge.

4.2.3 Museum, archive and library information frameworks as models of 'cognitive order'

A brief comparison of the various approaches and techniques for the selection and organisation of information employed by museums, archives and libraries provides further insights onto the contexts for knowledge creation that are brought together within the convergence model.

In the museological literature, a number of influential scholars have proposed that the information structured by museums not only influences the kinds of knowledge acquired by users of collections, but also that museum processes are significant in demonstrating how a variety of apparently incongruent information sources can be rendered comprehensible. For example, museologist Gaynor Kavanagh has observed that the narrative structures that museums build around objects through collection development and documentation give tangible form to broader cultural understandings and debates within society (Kavanagh, 1994, 5).

Similarly, David Carr (2006, 13) has argued that museums impose 'cognitive order' on our view of reality via the mechanism of placing collection items and information in particular contexts. According to Carr, such museum representations provide audiences with a tool and template for understanding their world – for making sense of information. This aspect of the museum offering may be considered particularly valuable in a world where access to information (and data) is constantly increasing and where, more than ever, individuals require skills to filter, organise and meaningfully connect large quantities of information.

While museum practices of acquisition, collection management, curation and representation give rise to particular information content (as well as providing a tangible illustration of how large quantities of disparate information sources can be organised and associated with one another) libraries and archives represent alternative, equally complex systems for shaping information. In the context of archives, Canadian theorist Terry Cook (2009) has persuasively argued against the idea that archives are passive, neutral repositories of information, pointing to archival arrangement and description techniques, along with collection management and even simple

administrative activities such as the implementation of destruction schedules and the prioritisation of conservation resources, as active historiographic processes that play an important role in determining the narratives that are eventually produced by historians and others who consult archival materials. Likewise, Elizabeth Yakel has highlighted the subjective, socially constructed nature of archival arrangement practices, noting that archivists often structure archives to reflect an idealised intellectual order rather than the state in which records existed in their original context (Yakel, 2003, 1-2, 10). She argues that the organising principles employed by archivists are not only culturally formed, reflecting and supporting prevalent epistemological frameworks, but also create a feedback loop by establishing parameters for future thought and historical analysis (Yakel, 2003, 6). Hence, access and interpretation of original records in archives is pre-determined by the ways in which they are combined and stored with other documents, as well as through the indexes and other finding aids that provide pathways into the material. As museums do with objects, archival methods privilege certain encounters with records and can influence the ways in which their significance is understood.

Libraries can also be seen to promote particular understandings of collections via the selection of collection content as well as the controlled vocabularies used to classify individual items into thematic groups. For example, in her influential paper titled *The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogues*, Hope Olson (2001) has provided a rigorous analysis of the biases inherent in controlled vocabulary[60] systems such as the widely adopted Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). Such systems provide a limited scope for the interpretation of library holdings and force users to conform to rigid terminologies in order to access collections.[61] Olson argues that the quest for a universal (homogenous)

[60] Also termed 'bibliographic control'.

[61] In recognising the inflexibility of library naming systems, Sarah Anne Murphy (2005) has written about the vital role of the reference librarian in collaborating with users to facilitate successful retrieval of relevant reference materials. She identifies searching a reference collection as a narrative hermeneutic process, where the user and the librarian work together to re-interpret and re-frame the reference query until it becomes compatible with the allowable search limits, or language, of the library catalogue. Again, this underscores that libraries present information about their collections according to limited parameters, predisposing the

descriptive language for naming information in library collections comes at the expense of allowing diverse attribution of subject matter for collection items, which may superficially inhibit efficiency in search and retrieval (especially across different collections or institutions), but which highlights the plural interpretive possibilities of the materials in the collection.[62]

By contrasting the information processing strategies of archives and libraries to those of museums, it is possible to envisage not just museums, but all three domains as 'epistemological genres'. Each type of collecting institution (not to mention the variety of approaches that exist at the level of individual organisations) plays an influential formative role on how collection items and the wider groupings into which they are organised are interpreted, named, described and associated with one another, offering a rich tableau of information resources and interactions available to the end users of collections. The multiple pathways into collections available via the diversity across, and within, domains creates the interface for a constellation of encounters between users and collection objects, giving rise to a multitude of possible 'knowledge' outcomes. Is this rich and valuable informational diversity acknowledged, and can it be effectively nurtured, within the scope of converged collection environments - from cultural policy decisions down to collection practices at the institutional level?

4.3 Reframing convergence around epistemology

So far, I have explored important conceptual differences in the definitions of data, information and knowledge, as well as considering how the collection practices that

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way in which those resources are understood. Also crucial to Murphy's argument is the significance of the personal interaction between the reference librarian and the user; an aspect of the library experience that that seems largely omitted in the context of online access to library catalogues and therefore, with probably graver consequences, also to the context of joint access enabled by digital convergence of library, archival and museum collections.

[62] Historian David McKitterick (2006) approaches a similar point in his account of the development of library collections in England and continental Europe from the sixteenth century. His description of the slow and un-systematic crystallisation of formalised principles for the organisation of library collections, not to mention the gradual development of librarianship as a profession, demonstrates that there is no intrinsic 'natural' order according to which books can be classified and, therefore, assigned meaning.

characterise museums, but also archives and libraries, illustrate the close relationship between the information available around collection objects and the institution in which those records were created. By recognising that museums, libraries and archives offer different but equally subjective and domain-specific approaches to the arrangement and presentation of information, several questions about the assumed benefits of convergence of the domains become apparent.

First of all, by understanding that the availability of information, either in the digital realm or in a physically integrated setting, does not automatically translate to the acquisition of knowledge, the basic premise upon which many arguments in favour of convergence rest becomes complicated. As authors Stehr and Ufer conclude in their discussion about knowledge, it is possible that "one individual has more information than another. It is much more difficult to conclude that one individual commands more knowledge than another" (Stehr and Ufer, 2009, 9). So too, it may be inferred that while a converged collecting institution, either as a digital or physical entity, may contain a larger quantity of tangible information than a discreet library, archive or museum, it cannot be assumed that users will automatically come away with more knowledge, or better knowledge. These considerations form a compelling argument for a shift in focus for converged institutions; one that does not take the production of knowledge as a given. In other words, a vision that recognises the importance of the structure and quality of collection information, the specialist work that shapes and contextualises information resources in relation to one another, and the opportunities provided for users to make sense of the information.

Second, by considering museums, archives and libraries as individual epistemological genres, it becomes clear that these organisations are differentiated by more than just the physical, typological distinctions across their collection holdings. Each domain represents a distinct framework for the creation of knowledge, employing specific methodologies for interpreting collections and producing information that reflects subjective concepts about the identity, value and meaning of objects. The variety of engagements with information that heterogeneous collecting institutions make possible for users of collections represents a valuable and diverse interface for cultural interaction and the production of knowledge. However, the ways in which *converged* organisations can effectively create the conditions necessary for users to make

meaning around the collections - acknowledging and leveraging existing disciplinary approaches to the arrangement of collection information and the interpretation of collection objects - has not (until now) been questioned in primary research of the collections sector. The case study findings presented here represent the first such examination of museum practices - in the context of information and knowledge production – within the converged institution model.

Finally, to what extent does the value of collecting institutions lie not only in the individual objects and associated records they house, but also in the ways in which these collection items have been organised in relation to one another to reflect an institution's particular epistemological framework for understanding the world? In other words, is there a more holistic notion of the significance of collections at stake if organisations are restructured to fit a converged model?

4.4 Conclusion: possibilities for knowledge through convergence

By considering the way in which information is created and transmitted, we see that libraries, archives and museums cannot automatically be regarded as 'knowledge institutions', or described in similar terms alluding to their 'knowledge' content. They do not and cannot transmit knowledge. Rather, they offer particular opportunities and settings where users can encounter different forms of *information*, creating knowledge and personal meaning for themselves. By inference, any mechanical co-location or integration of collection resources from different domains, either in a digitally or physically 'converged' environment, will not automatically yield greater knowledge acquisition for end users.

In recognising that the domain-specific and organisational context of objects and information is integral to their potential as sources for 'knowledge', the challenge in converging museums, libraries and archives becomes the preservation or enhancement of that context, highlighting the polysemous quality of collection objects and offering a diverse menu of information choices and forms of engagement to the end user. However, based on current understandings evidenced in the use of language surrounding how convergence might advance 'knowledge', it is not clear whether

prevalent approaches to convergence take full account of these complexities. If the planning, construction and organisational structure of converged institutions develops in the absence of a strong conceptual rationale and clear strategies for realising the knowledge potential of collections, the risk is that collections will simply continue to function within pre-established modes of operation without drawing any benefit from the convergence model. Of greater concern though, is that the lack of strategic vision around the 'knowledge impact' of convergence could allow for the instigation of staffing structures and administrative processes that actually interfere with an organisation's ability to offer their users meaningful engagements with collections. The next chapters of this thesis present the findings of the case study research and consider convergence in reference to these questions.

5 Case Studies: cultural policy contexts and institution backgrounds

5.1 Introduction to the Findings

As discussed in the Methodology, the findings of this research are presented over three chapters using an approach consistent with thematic analysis. This chapter begins with a brief survey of particular developments in national, state and local government cultural policies, positioning the trend towards the convergence of collecting organisations within a broader political and funding context. It then provides background information for each case study institution, gathered from a variety of documentary sources.

The forthcoming chapters (6 and 7) use thematic organisation of the interview data to explore the variety of influences of convergence on museum practices. In Chapter 6, I focus directly on the performance of museum practices that can be considered explicitly 'interpretive' in nature, including collection management, documentation and description, curatorship, exhibition development, the creation of public programs and assessment of the significance of collections. Here, I consider respondents' views with respect to their capacity to carry out these roles within the structure of a converged organisation.

Chapter 7 addresses what might be termed the 'managerial' frameworks of convergence, examining the ways in which bureaucratic and operational processes that govern the function of an entire institution - such as strategic planning, organisational structure, management and leadership factors, the fashioning of new role descriptions, and so on – impact on museum work. I consider the institutional frameworks, policies and formal relationships between departments that describe the role of museums within converged organisations and create the institutional matrix in which museum practices are enacted. These factors are examined as the broad institutional contexts shaping museum practice, interpretation of collections, and, therefore, the production of knowledge, in converged organisations.

Together, Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present museum practice in converged institutions within both macro (e.g. cultural policy) and micro (case-specific) contexts, as well as offering insights into the shaping of museum practices in relation to particular professional relationships, organisational structures, the existing specialisations of staff, etc. The findings emphasise the complexity of staff engagement with museum collections in converged organisations through comprehensive analysis of the individual accounts of professionals working in the field.

5.1.1 Chapter 5 outline

Prior to the presentation of interview findings, each individual case study requires an introduction detailing its history, the form of convergence it represents, the organisational structure, its scale, and (where available) some financial and visitation information. These details provide a context for understanding the perspectives and experiences of individual staff members, and their responses to the research questions.[63]

For each case study, a diverse range of sources, including local government documents (strategic plans, cultural plans, business plans, media releases), state and federal government reports, promotional documents, news clippings and architectural briefs, were collected and analysed. Due to differences in the history, development and procedures of each institution, standardisation across the documentation was difficult to achieve, in spite of casting a wide net to assemble as much material as possible from each facility. Nevertheless, the case study backgrounds have been collated and written such that comparisons can be made across the institutions.

It is useful to contextualise the convergence of cultural facilities, as manifested within Australia and the region, against the backdrop of significant cultural policy changes

[63] As a condition of this research, conducted under the auspices of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney, it is necessary to protect the anonymity of respondents. Therefore, there are inherent limitations to the amount and detail of information about each case study that can be revealed.

affecting the local government sector during a period that spans roughly over three decades, from the early 1980s until 2010. This phase in the development of Australia's national, state and local government cultural policies has been considered in a range of scholarship, which I draw on here to pinpoint key influences relevant to the convergence trend. In particular, I consider the political history of the Community Arts program of the Australia Council for the Arts and the contested idea of cultural democracy (i.e. universal 'right' to cultural participation) as precursors to the assumption by municipal councils of primary responsibility for local arts and cultural amenities, and the subsequent growth in popularity of the convergence model.

Additionally, a number of research reports provide useful markers in plotting the development of cultural facilities and the growing prevalence of the convergence model within that context: namely, the Australia Council's Arts Development in Western Sydney report of 1990 and the Cultural Accords (the Third Cultural Accord 2006-2008 in particular) between the NSW State Government and the Local Government and Shires Association of NSW. Below, I discuss the significance of this research to the prevalence of convergence, followed by the individual backgrounds of the case studies used in this research.

5.2 Cultural policy, cultural development and local government

Adopting a longitudinal perspective of cultural policy changes in Australia that began in the mid to late 1970s, it is possible to place the movement towards convergence of museums, libraries, archives, galleries and other cultural facilities – especially at local government level – within a larger narrative of decreasing national and state government involvement in 'community' cultural programs and the progressive assumption of funding responsibility for local cultural facilities being taken up by councils. As a consequence of this shift, local government now contributes the vast

majority of funding for regional museums, galleries and other cultural amenities.[64] As I discuss below, the resulting dual imperative for councils to provide quality cultural facilities, while simultaneously demonstrating prudent spending of ratepayer money, has contributed towards a view of convergence as an efficient solution to local cultural provision.

A number of researchers of Australian cultural policy have drawn attention to the relatively recent entry of cultural development into the scope of local government responsibilities. Kim Dunphy points out that cultural development roles in councils have only recently emerged as a professional field of practice, and that many local governments only began to think strategically about arts and cultural planning in the early 2000s (Dunphy, 2010, 100-101).[65] Likewise, Mulligan and Smith (2010a) have attributed the increasing local government responsibility for arts and culture to recent broader policy shifts, both internationally and in Australia, that foreground the role of local cultural engagement as a counter-measure to mitigate the alienating effects of globalisation, and for aiding in the creation and sustenance of stable, inclusive communities. They observe that there is a pressing need to support the cultural development sector in Australian local government, which "hardly has a sense of being a sector, with most practitioners feeling isolated and under-valued" (ibid., 36). However, as I discuss below, the assumption of responsibility for local arts and cultural activity by councils – or, as it may be, the divestment of those responsibilities by national and state authorities to local governments – has had a longer gestation as a product of over three decades of policy and funding changes.

[64] Corroborating this trend, it is noteworthy that research published in 2014 by the Museums & Galleries NSW, in partnership with seven major NSW regional municipalities, indicates that local governments contributed $16.59 million of the combined $18.9 million of federal, state and local government spending on cultural facilities in those regions in the 2012/13 financial year (Huxley, 2014, 50).

[65] Writing in 2010, Dunphy noted that councils had not undertaken substantive evidence-based research to guide decision-making in arts and cultural portfolios (mainly due to minimal staffing of these areas and inexperience of staff in evaluation techniques), resulting in a shortage of empirical information about the outcomes of cultural projects (Dunphy, 2010, 105, 108).

An awareness of the importance of cultural activity and participation at the local level emerged in Australia during the 1970s, reflected in the formation of the Community Arts and Development Committee in the Australia Council for the Arts in 1973 (Hawkins, 1991a, 45). According to Gay Hawkins, whose research on the history of the Australia Council's Community Arts program is well known, the Committee's agenda during the 1980s focussed on improving low rates of participation in formal cultural activities at 'community' level, which it understood as a result, and symptom of, social inequity. Hawkins argues that the inferior status of community arts (at that time still understood as concerning mainly the visual arts) and the idea of cultural participation as 'art therapy' for disadvantaged groups, influenced the development of a funding model for community arts projects, where responsibility devolved from federal to state and local governments (Hawkins, 1991a, 48-51). Later, argues Hawkins, the agenda of the Australia Council became more democratic in acknowledging the significance of diverse forms of cultural expression to the vitality and renewal of national culture, although 'community arts' were still perceived as secondary to nationally funded cultural activities (Hawkins, 1991a, 50-51).

Sociologist Alan Petersen has suggested that the concept of 'cultural democracy' was central in shaping the approach of government agencies, such as the Australia Council, towards community arts and cultural programs from the mid 1970s and through the 1980s (Petersen, 1991). According to Petersen, the idea of social inequality in creative and cultural life, and the prioritisation of strategies to improve access and participation in arts among marginalised groups, was solidified through the introduction of community arts funding at federal level in 1973, administered by the Australia Council.[66] Through the 1980s, community arts work evolved as a professional field ideologically informed by social democratic principles and committed to facilitating creative expression among diverse community groups (ibid., 26). Responding to this shift, the formation of the Community Cultural development Unit with the Australia Council in the 1980s provided funding for community projects emphasising egalitarian access and participation in the arts (Mulligan and Smith, 2010b, 47-48). From a

[66] Citing Hawkins, Petersen points out that community arts programs nevertheless privilege "diversity rather than excellence", effectively accentuating the perceived difference between 'high art' and the creative products of community groups (Petersen, 1991, 28).

theoretical perspective, both Petersen and Hawkins (Hawkins, 1991b) provide poignant analysis of the conceptually problematic and politically fraught notions of 'community', 'culture' and 'democracy' to which community arts subscribed. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it is interesting to speculate about the development of community arts as an important step towards what could be termed the 'municipalisation' of arts and cultural policy in Australia. 'Community arts' addressed itself to particular social groups, seeking to embed cultural activity at community level and setting the stage for local government involvement in provision of cultural facilities and programs.

In parallel with the movement towards the 'democratisation of culture' during the 1970s and 80s, the rise of neoliberal policies in Australia, and resulting shifts in economic strategies and expectations on regional and local government, also appears to have influenced the eventual development of convergence of cultural institutions. Neoliberalism, characterised by economic models that favour market deregulation, privatisation, reduced government commitment to social welfare, and an increasing role for business and non-government organisations in decision-making to support economic and employment growth, has been an important force in regional development in Australia since the early 1980s (Beer et al., 2005, Cheshire and Lawrence, 2005, Tonts and Haslam-McKenzie, 2005).

In their historical survey of Australian regional policy from the 1970s through to the 1990s, political geographers Matthew Tonts and Fiona Haslam-McKenzie identify economic efficiency as cornerstone of neoliberal ideology (2005, 184-185), which correlates with one of the key drivers for convergence of collecting institutions in Australia (even though the funding reductions for social services and infrastructure they describe do not necessarily appear to reflect the considerable investment required to implement converged organisational structures and facilities). Both Tonts and Haslam-McKenzie (2005, 189, 195-197) and Beer et al. (2005, 52-54) point out that the austerity of the first wave of neoliberalism during the 1980s was 'softened' somewhat in the 1990s, with greater acknowledgement of the need for ongoing government involvement in providing policy guidance and some funding support for regional development programs. The NSW state government's endorsement of convergence via the Cultural Accords with the LGSA, and the limited funding

incentives provided to councils as part of this incentive, appear to fit within the 'reformed' neoliberal context. In particular, the tendency of neoliberalism to distribute responsibility and resources across all tiers of government (including local councils) while retaining authority for policy direction appears reflected in the development of convergence. Beer, Clower, Haughton and Maude (2005) write:

> *In effect the state has retained a disciplinary power over how it allocates funding and responsibilities, a process which has seen the rise of the audit culture and a proliferation of short-term experiments which can be closed, cloned or converted into different approaches at will.* (Beer et al., 2005, 51)

Is convergence the result of one of these 'experiments' by state and local governments, testing efficiency and cultural outcomes of merging collecting institutions and thus 'solving' the problem of aging cultural facilities and the imperative to facilitate community participation in culture? It is interesting to consider neoliberal economics and the concept of cultural democracy as dual, though perhaps philosophically opposed, forces that combined to create the circumstances where convergence of collecting institutions emerged as a financially attractive, and government-endorsed model for cultural provision at the local level.

Arts Development in Western Sydney, a detailed report commissioned by the Australia Council and published in 1990, provides an indicative example of the increasing role of local government in the provision of cultural amenities. The report, while focussing on a particular geographic region, is important because its approach and recommendations illustrate the move towards a de-centralised model of cultural provision, which increasingly saw municipal councils, rather than state and national government bodies, take up the burden of planning and funding local cultural facilities and programs. As the opening sentence of the preface to the report stated, the report was "an extremely important step for the Australia Council in an ongoing process of developing cultural planning and arts support for 'growth centres' such as Western Sydney" (see Preface, Chesterman and Schwager, 1990). In other words, the conclusions of the report could be used to inform planning across NSW and Australia as a whole, in areas where cultural provision was perceived as lacking.

The report summary included the recommendation that:

> *…local councils should develop strategic cultural plans, and play an active part in providing arts access centres, using their planning powers to gain contributions for more substantial developments and in providing assistance to local groups and festivals.* (Report Summary, Chesterman and Schwager, 1990)[67]

This recommendation was made despite the authors admitting that, in the 13 local government areas that were investigated, most councils had a "very marginalised" view of their responsibilities to culture and "expressed concern that both Federal and State governments were trying to press them into funding arts and culture" without providing additional financial support (Chesterman and Schwager, 1990, Chapter 3, 7).[68] To extrapolate, the recommendations effectively added to existing pressure on councils to fund cultural amenities, even though arts and culture had not historically

[67] See also Chapter 3, page 5 of the Report that states that it is the policy of the Australia Council to encourage local councils to become involved in the provision of artistic and cultural activities, based on local government being "closer to the people" (i.e. better able to identify community needs) and have greater flexibility in regard to expenditure.

[68] The Report acknowledged that while the Australia Council had no direct authority over local government spending on arts infrastructure, it could advocate for better planning by serving an advisory role. The report cites the Australia Council's awareness of innovative international projects, such as "multi-use developments in the USA", as an example of the knowledge it can share with local councils to create more "effective" facilities (Chesterman and Schwager, Chapter 6, 6). Furthermore, the report advocates increased "collaborative programming" to foster efficient development of the arts (ibid., 7). Both of these comments suggest an inclination towards the integration of museum, library, archive and gallery facilities appearing from the late 1990s.

been a core role of the local government sector, and councils did not have extensive experience in this area of administration.[69]

Chapter 5 of the *Western Sydney* report criticised shortcomings in local government cultural strategies, arguing that a lack of effective cultural planning by councils was a key problem affecting arts development in the western Sydney region. In Chapter 7, the Report culminated in recommending the formation of a Regional Cultural Planning Centre as a joint initiative of federal, state and local governments, with the role of assisting local government in producing effective cultural plans and strategies. In these ways, over the next two decades from 1990, the report formed part of a movement that saw federal as well as state governments disengage from responsibility for arts and cultural amenity in local council areas. The creation of cultural development roles within councils both in Western Sydney and across NSW,[70] the development or upgrading of council-run cultural facilities, as well as the assumption of authority by councils over previously volunteer-managed cultural collections, can be read as part of this shift.

It is worth noting that in an international context, British cultural policy scholar Clive Gray has documented a similar trend of greater local government involvement in cultural provision developing during the period of the early 1980s in the United Kingdom. Like Hawkins and Petersen, Gray connects the decentralisation of arts policy with left-wing political strategies that aimed to give voice to disadvantaged groups in society through cultural participation - a shift that resulted in the tendency to regard cultural facilities and programs at the local level as a means of achieving

[69] The authors conceded that the resources set aside for the research did not allow for existing and potential audiences for cultural programs (i.e. the residents whose rates would largely pay for the programs) to be surveyed – an important limitation considering that one of the report's central assumptions was that improved cultural provision was fundamental towards "creating a pleasurable social environment, in providing labour-intensive job creation, in encouraging economic regeneration and in developing tourism" (Chesterman and Schwager, 1990, Chapter 1, 3). As will be discussed later, the same expectations have been invoked to legitimise the development of the converged institutions that were studied for this research, with little evidence to support the claims.

[70] See also Chapter 10 of the report.

broader societal and economic benefits (Gray, 2002).[71] Not only did this trend move the emphasis of cultural programs away from the tangible outcomes of creative production but, as Gray argues, culture in its own right no longer seemed to provide a strong enough justification for spending public money (Gray, 2002, 84).

The tendency to bolt cultural policies and programs onto the aims of other, more 'critical' areas of government policy (what Gray terms "policy attachment") has been mirrored in Australia, not least in the Evocities *Adding Value!* report (Huxley, 2014), the most recent research conducted by the Museums & Galleries NSW, which explicitly sets out to demonstrate the economic (rather than intellectual or creative) impact of cultural infrastructure in seven prominent NSW local government areas.[72] In Australia and elsewhere, it appears that by the late 1980s there was an expectation that state and local governments would be the main providers of funding for community cultural programs and facilities, and that such programs would support wider political objectives around economic and social improvement.

By the early 2000s, the involvement of councils in providing cultural amenities and programs was widespread, though Mulligan and Smith note that arts and cultural functions within local government structures remained underdeveloped and were still regarded as peripheral to the traditional core concerns of LGAs (Mulligan and Smith, 2010a, 35). At the federal level, the 2004 abolition of the Australia Council's Community Cultural Development Board (with its focus on project funding) and the formation of the alternative Community Partnerships Program consolidated the federal government's expectation that development of arts and cultural activities should happen at the local level (Mulligan and Smith, 2010b, 11).

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[71] Indeed, Mulligan and Smith link the rise of community arts practice in the 1970s in Australia with international civil movements emphasising philosophies of social equality and self-empowerment (Mulligan and Smith, 2010b, 35).

[72] The Evocities report's findings focus on itemising the $61.8 million in goods and services that 26 cultural facilities in the seven participating local government areas contributed to the economies of those regions. The report found that cultural facilities provided an average 69% return on investment by local, state and federal governments, including economic benefits in job creation and tourism (Huxley, 2014, 18).

As the culmination of a shift that began with introduction of community arts programs in the 1970s and 80s, in 2014 local government is the main provider of funding and management to a variety of cultural facilities such as museums, galleries and entertainment centres, as well as libraries and archives. As the Evocities report indicates, of a total $18.9 million spent by all tiers of government on cultural facilities in the 2012/13 financial year, investments by local government were $16.59 million (Huxley, 2014).

5.3 The Cultural Accords between NSW state and local governments

A desire by the State Government of NSW to streamline its cultural policy objectives with outcomes across the state led to the initiation of Cultural Accords between the NSW state government (Arts NSW) and local government associations (LGSA, 2013). The first Cultural Accord was signed in 1997, with a new Accord ratified every three years since that time.

Reiterating the accountability of local government for planning, development and operation of cultural facilities, Accord 4 (2011 – 2013) calls for ongoing partnership between Arts NSW and local government bodies to achieve cultural vitality, local distinctiveness, increased participation and broad access to cultural amenities (Judge et al., 2010). At the same time, while the Accord describes state and local governments as "complementary partners" in local-level cultural development, neither the funding commitments of each party, nor the details of implementation strategies (which are subject to a separate implementation planning process), are specified in the document. Furthermore, it is local councils who bear primary responsibility for cultural planning, development and operation of cultural facilities. This responsibility has been mirrored in funding patterns, which, for example, show that while in 2010 Arts NSW pledged $330,000 towards outcomes over the three year period of the Fourth Cultural Accord (Hudson, 2010), local government across the state spent $409.7 million on arts and culture between 2009 to 2010 alone (Beevers, 2013). Within this context, the Cultural Accords reveal a now entrenched expectation for local government to fund and facilitate the majority of cultural activities and infrastructure development at the local

level, even though local government appears to remain answerable to state cultural policy direction through the Accords framework.

Within this funding environment, it is understandable that local government has pursued financial efficiency in the provision of cultural services and facilities. Convergence of collecting institutions, such as museums, libraries, galleries and archives, emerged as a promising solution for maintaining amenity while minimising duplication of resources. As I discuss below, the concept received further endorsement from the NSW state government in its provision of funding for projects that merged the facilities and management structures of cultural institutions.

It was the Third Cultural Accord, signed in 2006, that specifically outlined the NSW government's interest in convergence, encouraging local councils to pursue the integration of cultural facilities. Clearly articulating its endorsement of convergence, the Accord resolved that:

> *In recognition of the important cultural collections held by local governments, to jointly encourage greater integration of the operation of local government cultural facilities including libraries, museums, and art galleries.* (Barr, 2006, 5)

Justifying his support of the model, Michael Goss, then Program Manager at Arts NSW, argued that convergence would enable improved access to cultural collections, as well as promoting higher participation in culture overall. In addition, convergence was incorporated into the Arts NSW museum program guidelines, as well as its cultural planning guidelines to local government (Barr, 2006, 5).

As such, convergence of libraries, archives, museums and galleries in local government areas came about as a culmination of over three decades of national and state cultural policy changes, which saw strategic planning, funding and operation of cultural facilities and programs crystallise as a local government responsibility. At the same time, through federal and state initiatives, such as the findings and recommendations of the Australia Council's research into arts development in Western Sydney and the NSW government's Cultural Accords, local government remains

accountable to national and state government cultural policy direction. The timing of the arrival of convergence as a new operational model for collecting institutions, appearing in tandem with the formalisation of cultural development as a core function of local government, draws attention to possible difficulties for the design of such venues, their organisational structures, management and operational priorities. Could convergence, as an experimental model that necessitates the re-conceptualisation of existing museum, library, archive and gallery amenities and activities, be successfully realised by local government authorities only just coming to grips with their own cultural development role?

With these broader cultural policy issues and funding arrangements in mind, I now provide a specific introduction for each of the case studies used in this research. As mentioned previously, in providing a background to each of the cases I have attempted to strike a careful balance between the level of detail required to contextualise the interview findings in the forthcoming chapters, and the limitations of maintaining the anonymity of participating organisations and individuals, as necessitated by the ethical research requirements of the University of Sydney. As far as possible, I have included exact statistical information about areas such as the capital costs of each facility and staff numbers.[73] A variety of archival and documentary evidence, including annual reports, strategic plans, internal memos, planning documents, architectural briefs, press releases and other publicity materials were consulted in compiling these backgrounds. Rather than using codes to identify each facility, I have chosen instead to change their names to improve the readability of the text.

5.4 Case study backgrounds

5.4.1 Case Study 1: *RIVERBANK* Museum, Library, Archive and Visitor Centre

According to documents produced by the local council, *RIVERBANK* is one of a limited but growing number of 'cultural' facilities in this region of Sydney. Statistics obtained through the local council show that in 2011 the area had a population of around 180,000 people with a median age of 33. The population is multicultural, with

[73] See Appendix 4 for a tabulated comparison of the case studies.

more than half born outside of Australia. According to an Australia Council report published in 1990 (Chesterman and Schwager, 1990), this outer metropolitan region has been identified as having historically low government investment in arts and cultural infrastructure. In spite of the area's significance to the development of both indigenous, colonial and post-WWII society, much of its history was not formally recognised or explored in the form of designated cultural facilities and programs until recent times. The area also had significantly lower participation rates in cultural activities compared to Sydney averages.

During the 1990s, a number of state and local government initiatives sought to address this imbalance, resulting in the employment of a cultural planner at the council and the drafting of a regional cultural plan. *RIVERBANK* was established in 1998 as one of two council-run 'flagship' cultural attractions in the area, incorporating a permanent museum exhibition, temporary exhibition spaces, a local studies library, council archives and a visitor information centre. It employs approximately 15 staff across its services.

In 2004, the council commissioned a comprehensive cultural strategy, establishing a direction for development of facilities, programs and funding through to 2015. The first of seven key goals articulated in the report was to develop the region's diverse cultural heritage, improve engagement with this heritage, and enhance its interpretation. Interestingly, *RIVERBANK* was not broadly referenced in the report, which recommended the building of a new, larger, converged facility at a location within the commercial centre. A comprehensive visitor strategy was drafted for the region in 2011, incorporating *RIVERBANK* as a tourism experience and this time including suggestions to upgrade its facilities.

In parallel with evolving cultural policies at council level, *RIVERBANK* produced its own business plans in 1998 and 2011 respectively, positioning the institution as a point for engagement with the region's unique history and cultural heritage through a range of information sources, collections and programs. While the 1998 plan notes the co-location of the local studies library, archives, artefact collection and tourism centre, this document does not reveal the extent to which these components were expected to collaborate to achieve the goals of the organisation. Furthermore, at the time of the

1998 business plan, collection policies for the various sections had yet to be developed.

RIVERBANK's 2011 business plan was a much more comprehensive document, creating a long-term vision for the institution in the context of the council's tourism focus. Furthermore, the 2011 plan highlighted the need for the organisation to continue to develop programs of relevance across the multicultural and generational base of the local community. In order to achieve these goals, the plan identified an urgent need to redevelop its dated permanent exhibition areas, as well as improving access via digital technologies, expansion of public programs and implementing "more appropriate and meaningful evaluation and analysis" of its services (*RIVERBANK* Business Plan, 2011).[74] The plan also recognised that the organisation was an example of a "converged business model" useful for informing the development of a new Council cultural centre envisaged for the commercial district. In fact, the document identified the continuing need for cooperation across its various services as a priority towards achieving its strategic goals. At the same time, the 2011 plan acknowledged that inadequate staffing, overall funding shortages and problems with its building posed a significant impediment to realising the organisation's goals.

RIVERBANK's1998 business plan flagged the need to develop collection policies for the library, archives and museum sections of the institution, and at the time of this research, these documents existed in various stages of completion. A collection policy for the council cultural collection (i.e. the artefacts collection at *RIVERBANK*) was written but never endorsed, continuing to exist in draft form only. The document contained a number of inconsistencies, namely the parts of the collection to which the policy applied remain ambiguous. For example, the council's material culture collection is acknowledged as encompassing documents and archives (council archives, community archives and historic records), audio-visual and digital works, art works, social history and memorabilia items, as well as historic sites. However, while the policy aimed to "promote and develop an understanding of [*RIVERBANK'S*] unique identity and heritage", the content of the collection policy seems to refer

[74] The organisation had relied mainly on visitor headcount statistics up to this date.

primarily to issues concerning works of art. The extent to which this was a working document is unknown.

The archives management policy is a comprehensive document clearly defining the scope of council records and historic archives to be collected, standards and procedures to be followed. However, while the content of the community archives component of this collection expressly relates to the history of the local area - thus complementing the focus of both the museum and local history library on site - there is no mention of synergies between these collections or how staff could collaborate to develop or improve access and programs across all the collecting areas.

By contrast, the local studies library's collection policy, created around 2000, made a number of references to supporting the operation of the archives (especially in assisting research enquiries), as well as acknowledging its position within *RIVERBANK* as the larger institution. This policy delineates both the subjects and the kinds of materials that the library would or would not collect, in consideration for the special expertise and capacity of either the archives or museum areas to best manage specific object types or thematic areas. In particular, this policy made explicit statements about the potential advantages of positioning the local studies library in relation to the other collecting areas:

> *The local studies library is now part of a facility that combines the varied resources of archives, library and exhibition centre to promote the heritage of* [location name removed] *and its community…*
> *Archives, libraries and museums take very different approaches to the acquisition and organisation of their respective collections. It should be realised that the functions of each vary one to another. Separate management policies must be developed fort each of the three services. If all three operate in the one facility then the interrelationship between these distinctive agencies should be complementary.*
> (*RIVERBANK* local studies library collection policy, 2000, 10)

In other words, on the basis of the various policies, the intent towards professional cross-pollination and cooperation to pool and leverage the strengths of each collecting

area across *RIVERBANK* appeared mixed. The degree to which the institution was functioning as a converged organisation, rather than merely co-locating individual collecting areas, was not clear from the documents consulted.

5.4.2 Case Study 2: *WESTLANDS* Museum, Gallery and Arts Centre

The second case study, *WESTLANDS*, was a small organisation of 7 full-time equivalent staff,[75] located in a regional area of NSW and funded through the local city council. Council statistics show that the city's population is approximately 40,000 with a median age of 36. With a diverse community, over 10% of the city's residents identify as Indigenous. Opened in 2006, *WESTLANDS* is a convergence of a local social history museum, regional art gallery, and community arts centre.

In 1997, the city council assumed responsibility for the museum, which had been administered to that point by the local historical society since the 1950s, with a collection loosely focussed on the history and identity of the people of the region. The regional gallery collection originated through the council in the late 1980s. Around the year 2000, it became apparent that the preservation and storage conditions for the museum were inadequate. At about the same time, it became necessary to relocate the gallery, and it was at this time that the plan to develop a joint facility evolved. Recognising that the target audiences and educational objectives for the museum, gallery and proposed community arts centre overlapped, the council resolved to create an integrated facility to house all three functions.

The resulting institution produced a staff structure that was fully 'converged' from the outset, with the key roles of manager, curator, collections officer, education officer and centre coordinator each working across all three facets of the institution. At the time that the interviews for this research were conducted (2011), the facility had a busy program of events, filling six exhibition areas with a regularly changing calendar of travelling and in-house curated exhibitions,[76] as well as developing appropriate public

[75] Accurate at July 2011 when interviews were conducted.

[76] The organisation's 2009 Collection Policy outlines the expected exhibition schedule across the institution, with the main visual arts gallery turning over every 6 to 8 weeks and the

programs. The fully integrated staff structure offered a unique example of convergence for this research.

A detailed overview of the history, development and operational concerns of *WESTLANDS* are available through successive Function (i.e. Business) Plans for the institution produced between 2005 (before the opening of the new facility) through to 2011, when this research took place.

While it is not necessary to reiterate the contents of each plan, especially as each version contains significant repetition from previous documents, a brief analysis of the first Function Plan illustrates important issues that influenced the development and general operations of the institution from its inception and for the next five years, leading up to the point when the organisation became a case study for this research.

First, the executive summary of the first Function Plan, written in 2005, clearly articulated ambitious goals for the facility, namely the expectation that the opening would result in immediate benefits in cultural tourism and community pride, with a new facility providing a range of dynamic programs and services for both local residents and visitors to the area (*WESTLANDS* Function Plan, 2005, 1). As such, the imminent opening was heralded as a "milestone" for the wider geographical region. The objectives of the institution were to foster "active engagement in cultural heritage and the arts" through an innovative, inspirational and welcoming facility that would preserve and exhibit its collections, as well as providing "extensive learning opportunities" for the community (Ibid., Section 2.1).

At the same time, from the outset this Function Plan flagged the need for the newly built facility to justify its relevance to the district, stating that, through its vibrant programs, "the museum and gallery will prove the importance of the centre to the local residential and tourist communities" (Ibid., Section 1). This somewhat peculiar choice of words seems to indicate that either the new organisation was not unanimously

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temporary museum space hosting new exhibitions every 12 to 16 weeks, with displays in the smaller exhibition areas also subject to change.

supported in the local community, or that the council's decision to proceed with its development had been met with scepticism from local residents.

Third, the manager of the facility at that time (who authored the Plan), signalled early doubts about the ability of the organisation to successfully deliver on expectations, and remain sustainable in the longer term, on current staffing levels. In particular, she highlighted the increased size of the exhibition area, the large number of planned exhibitions, the lack of dedicated personnel to devise the education programs, a well as unknown building maintenance costs, as areas of potential difficulty. At the time of opening, there were only 5 staff members employed, working full-time.[77] The Function Plan identified the need to double that number. Likewise, the SWOT analysis provided in the Plan identified the "small professional team" and "insufficient resources for research and development" among the centre's weaknesses, and identified a financial threat, noting the "centre's requirements exceeds [sic] Council's operational budget" (Ibid., Section 4.1).

Together, the first Function plan set out the important issues for the institution: ambitious programs and the anticipation of numerous benefits for the local community; the need for the facility to deliver positive outcomes to validate its existence; and, simultaneously, emerging anxieties about the ongoing viability of these high expectations in view of the resources available to the institution.

Subsequent Function Plans continued to highlight the importance of these issues. On the one hand, the institution had committed staff and remained focussed on achieving its programming goals. On the other, the need to increase staff numbers was reiterated in the 2007/08 Function Plan (draft), which also cited the need to secure private sponsorship with the understanding that the city council would "not cover the full cost of the centre indefinitely" (*WESTLANDS* Function Plan, 2007/8, Executive Summary). With perceptive insight, the author of this document highlighted the danger of a

[77] By 2009, the staff number had increased to approximately 7.5 full-time equivalent, including non-collection based roles such as administration and site maintenance. At this time, the institution was also responsible for co-ordinating 115 volunteer "ambassadors" and venue hire for the community arts centre facility. The 2009/10 Function Plan still listed insufficient staffing and long-term sustainability as important issues for the organisation.

serious imbalance developing between the high standard and expectations set by the new building, as opposed to the potential for the quality of programs to diminish, stating:

> *Without support staff, services will be reduced and staff burn out will result…* [the city] *has an opportunity to be a leader in cultural programming given the capital investment in the building, but will rely on increased human resources to do so.*
> (Ibid., Executive Summary)[78]

The final version of the 2007/08 Plan reinforced the apprehension surrounding the sustainability of the institution's programs, also stating that the facility's resources requirement "exceeds Council's operational budget beyond 2010", even while the marketing strategy detailed in the same document locked the institution into a cycle of constantly changing exhibitions as a key selling point.[79] The 2009/10 Function Plan, which included budget details and ten year financial plan, listed an operational deficit of almost $2 Million for the organisation – a total that was projected to grow steadily through to 2019.

By the end of 2009, the publication of the 2010/2011 Function Plan appeared to show a stabilisation in the operations of the organisation. The outgoing Manager wrote:

> *Resources at both human and financial levels are sound, team morale is high, the facility is very well regarded within the community and Industry and* [place name removed] *City Council is committed to ensuring its sustainability.*
> (WESTLANDS Function Plan 2010/2011, Executive Summary, 3)

One year later, the 2011/12 Function Plan, authored by the new Manager, painted a slightly different picture of the institution. In his Executive Summary, he noted that

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[78] For greater detail see also Section 4, page 19-20.

[79] The institution's collection policy, included in the 2007/08 Function Plan, further highlights that the "fundamental role of [*WESTLANDS*] is to provide access to quality exhibition and cultural material".

visitation figures had increased, with venue hire and educational programs representing the strengths of the organisation. At the same time, he observed that the institution's 'aggressive' schedule of exhibitions and programs would be difficult to sustain at current staffing levels.

5.4.3 Case Study 3: *LONEHILL* Library, Museum and Gallery

The third case study, *LONEHILL*, represents convergence on a considerably larger scale than that of *RIVERBANK* or *WESTLANDS*. Also located in regional NSW, the city where *LONEHILL* is located has an immediate population of around 50,000, with a median age of 37. The city is a hub for a network of rural centres.

Funded through the local council administration, *LONEHILL* is a convergence of the city library, regional museum and regional art gallery. The library and museum, as well as a new technology and information section, share a building "with limited barriers between the zones … to encourage integration of spaces and experiences" (conference paper delivered by *LONEHILL* senior staff member, 2009, 10). According to its collections policy (2011), the organisation aims to stimulate community engagement and interest in all forms of culture, and the heritage of the region, through innovative exhibitions, programs and publications.

The foundations for the formation of this institution were laid in the late 1990s, with strategic planning at council level suggesting the development of a cultural precinct in the city centre, as well as the co-location of the existing library and museum,[80] to achieve economies of scale across the two facilities. In addition, the thematic relationships across the library, museum and local studies collections, the joint purpose of collecting organisations in providing educational opportunities, as well as emerging technological capabilities to streamline collection access, provided further justification for the integration of cultural services. In the course of their research into the integration of cultural services, council staff became interested in adopting a fully converged model for the management and staffing of a new, joint institution (conference paper delivered by *LONEHILL* senior staff member, 2009, 11-12). New funding opportunities for convergence projects from state and federal governments provided the final impetus for the decision to amalgamate facilities and services.

[80] In various forms and locations, a local museum had existed in the city since the late nineteenth century. In the early 1980s the council assumed responsibility for the museum collections from the district historical society.

LONEHILL was opened in 2007 and employs the full-time equivalent of approximately 25 staff, including two management staff at council. Multiple exhibition and research areas exist within the main building with the aim of encouraging audiences to engage in a variety of library, museum and research experiences. The management structure extends across to the regional gallery, which is located nearby. The goal of integrated collection access was addressed with the development of an online search engine that functions across the library, museum and art gallery databases. Furthermore, the institution's education team works across all facets of the organisation, devising public programs that take advantage of all the collections and spaces available.

Internal review documents from 2010 and 2011 reveal that the art gallery and museum regularly host in excess of 30 exhibitions every year – around half of which are curated in-house – with five exhibition spaces at the gallery and another five at the combined library and museum venue. In 2011 the council's intention was to further increase the total number. Interestingly, the council's cultural plan for 2011-2013 states that about 25,000 people visited the gallery, 45,000 attended museum exhibitions, and almost 200,000 used the library facilities, indicating that the library component is the most popular aspect of the convergence (although it is not clear what percentage of these library figures represent multiple return visits).

A number of positive indicators attest to the success of the new institution in attracting local visitors and becoming a popular destination within the city centre. Attendance figures have shown that the combined museum and library facility is enjoying around double the visitation of the previous library and museum (conference paper delivered by *LONEHILL* senior staff member, 2009, 10). A user survey conducted in 2010 reported widespread satisfaction with the institution, citing "the opportunity to offer an enhanced environment, more extensive exhibitions and public programs, improved public access technology and… a wider and more recent bookstock" among the key advantages.[81] In addition, a large number of visitors used more than one service provided by the institution, although library and computer/internet usage were the most popular activities.

[81] This survey did not include Art Gallery patrons.

However, the function of the institution has proved challenging from an operational perspective. In the four years since opening,[82] the organisational structure underwent four revisions, gradually breaking down from a fully converged staffing model to a more traditional, domain-based division of departments and role descriptions. In a conference paper delivered only two years after the opening of *LONEHILL*, a manager working in the institution conceded that the converged structure was experimental and had already been subject to review. This staff member referred to the administration of the institution as "making it up as we went along", suggesting that the implementation of the converged institutional model was untried and constantly evolving. Furthermore, the same manager noted that the reorganisation of staff into new roles created with the convergence was not always successful, with numerous staff being unqualified or not adequately experienced for their new responsibilities – a situation compounded by inadequate change management and poorly defined role descriptions (conference paper, 2008).

Owing to regular changes to the organisational structure, responsibility for care of the collections at *LONEHILL* and the provision of access to these collections has shifted between staff with expertise in diverse professional areas, with mixed results for collection care and interpretation. For example, in the initial converged structure the collections manager role became responsible for holdings across the museum, gallery and the library's local studies collection. One consequence of the placement of staff in roles outside of their expertise was the under-utilisation of the museum and gallery collections for exhibitions and a temporary stall in collection development (blog comments by senior staff member, 2010). Similarly, the implementation of cross-collection management strategies prompted concerns about the dilution of professionalism and specialist expertise at the institution (Ibid.,). In 2011, an audit of the visual arts collection found a significant cataloguing backlog, inconsistent documentation of the art collection, and inadequate procedures for collection management (*LONEHILL* Cultural Services Strategic Plan 2011-2013, 6). This audit did not, however, specify whether these shortcomings had occurred because of

[82] At May 2011 when interviews were conducted.

insufficient staffing, staff expertise or resources since the convergence, or whether the situation was inherited from the previously autonomous art gallery administration.

Through its wording, it appears that the 2011-2013 Cultural Services Strategic Plan moved to harmonise some of the tensions and discords within the organisation as a result of the convergence and ongoing restructuring. The document listed ideals such as mutual respect, teamwork, communication between teams, continued professional development, and a commitment to "positive incremental change" among the institution's core values.

Many of the existing staff members at *LONEHILL* have worked in the institution since before it was opened and have been subject to the various staffing structures. In this way, they provide a direct insight into the impact of convergence on staff roles, the capacity of professionals to work outside of their area of expertise, and the development of new skills for working in a converged institution.

5.4.4 Case Study 4: *SOUTHSIDE* Museum, Library and Gallery

SOUTHSIDE is a convergence of a regional library, a local studies collection and a regional museum, funded and managed by the local council in an area located outside the Sydney CBD. The council area has an approximate population of 80,000, with a median age of 37 years and almost 40% of people from non-English speaking backgrounds. At the time this research was conducted (2011), the museum and gallery were not co-located with the library. Each retained their original buildings, with the library occupying the ground floors of a multi-storey apartment building and the museum utilising a heritage building close-by, adjacent to the main shopping area in the region. However, the services were integrated at the level of management, staffing structure and certain programs.

The regional museum originated as a historical society collection that had come under the auspices of the local council a few years prior to the convergence with the library. The legacy of its beginnings as a volunteer-run organisation had continued to persist even after the management of the museum was professionalised. The museum manager noted a significant cataloguing backlog, the lack of provenance information for many

objects, an unclear collecting rationale for the content of the collection, and inadequate conditions for storage and preservation. In 2008 to 2009 the museum recorded visitation of approximately 30,000 people.

By contrast, the library was firmly established within the community. The region had a library service since 1964, and in 2008-2009, 550,000 visits were recorded. However, developments in technology and changes in the demographic of the local community prompted a review of the library's provision of services and staff structure during the early 2000s. Community consultation and customer satisfaction surveys of library and museum patrons, conducted between 2007 and 2008, revealed that users expected improved technology, website and online access, an expanded range of programs for different customer groups, as well as better promotion of services and events.

In 2008, the council contracted an external consultant to assist in strategic planning, holding workshops with staff members to set future priorities and an integrated vision for the converged organisation. The community was also given the opportunity to provide feedback in consultation workshops held with the Friends of library and museum in 2008-2009.[83] In addition, staff training in change management was conducted in early 2009.

In the 2008-2009 financial year, the combined operating budget of the library and museum was about $5 million. At the same time, the council began considering the ongoing viability of funding library and museum services in the face of the projected long-term local impact of the global financial crisis. Responding to the imperative to focus on customer service and broad access, improve website and Internet provision, as well as the opportunity to integrate services such as public programs, collection access, and joint marketing, convergence of the library (which also housed the local studies collection) and the museum was proposed as the "most effective and efficient structure possible" for the local council (proposal to converge & restructure *SOUTHSIDE* - Report to Council, 2009, 2). In particular**,** 'siloed' ways of working

[83] Based on the documents that were consulted for this research, it is not possible to know the extent of these workshops, the number of people actually involved, or the impact of their feedback on the planning process.

were identified as being contradictory to perceived synergies between the various collections. As one internal report outlining the benefits of the planned convergence stated, users of cultural services expected "one stop shopping and integrated service delivery" (Ibid., 4). Furthermore, the restructure had potential to reduce overall staff costs.

Deciding to proceed with the convergence, the council instigated the staffing restructure in mid 2009, merging the library and museum through both the modification of existing positions and the creation of new roles. The change resulted in four 'service delivery units' plus an administration department across both facilities. Overall, about 29 positions remained unchanged (with no re-application for positions required), 26 roles were significantly modified (requiring employees to re-apply) and 8 completely new roles were developed (with no internal applicants selected as suitable candidates). In other words, the new structure represented a major overhaul, with approximately 10 staff identified for redundancy (with a final outcome of 12 voluntary redundancies), 3 resignations, and 12 external appointments. The staffing changes caused some controversy within the community, with the discontent of staff opposed to the retrenchments and restructuring being covered in the local media, and the relevant union advocating on behalf of the employees who had lost their jobs.

According to media releases, the council announced that the model of integrated services had been "proven to result in greater efficiencies and higher standards"[84] and would promote improved public programs, professional cross-pollination and create opportunities to apply for an additional range of government grants, thereby underlining the financial incentive for the restructure. The council seemed to have followed through with its plan of rationalising staff numbers further, with the strategic plan drafted in 2010 identifying a total of 53 staff; 10 less than the 63 positions outlined in the original restructure.

Aspirations for the newly integrated library, museum and gallery were high. The organisation was promoted as a future 'centre of cultural excellence'.[85] The goals of

[84] It is not clear on what basis these claims were made.

[85] Details of how the attainment of 'excellence' would be measured were not provided.

the museum were also re-articulated, stating its aim of becoming a model of best practice in museological standards and management, including conservation, storage and collection development. A new library, museum and gallery logo and website was launched in conjunction with the restructure.

SOUTHSIDE was considered an appropriate case study for this research based on its integration of museum, library and gallery services at management level. The incorporation of the library's local studies collection into the remit of the museum also represented a transferral of a significant collection from administration under one disciplinary domain to another.

5.4.5 Case Study 5: *MAUNGA TAPU* Museum, Library and Visitor Centre

Opened in 2003, *MAUNGA TAPU* is a convergence of a city library, regional museum and visitor information centre, and also incorporates a research centre that combines museum, library and archive resources. The institution is located in the town centre of a regional district of New Zealand with a population of around 70,000 people. People of Maori descent comprise about 15% of the local population.

Both the public library and museum, and the co-location of these institutions, had a relatively long history in the area. Both were established (as separate entities) in the early twentieth century,[86] and around 1960 the two organisations moved into the same building. However, the inadequacy of the existing space for both the museum and library's staff and activities was recognised within a decade (documented in a council review of *MAUNGA TAPU*, 1998, 1-5). It was not until 1989, when the museum came under the auspices of the district council, that discussion about an improved facility could proceed in earnest.

[86] Both a public library and the museum collection came into being in the mid-nineteenth century. The museum collection grew through the early twentieth century with the addition of some substantial private collections, including one containing a large number of significant Maori artefacts. Meanwhile, the library also developed with the provision of new facilities in 1908 and 1918.

According to the facility's website, the concept for the converged organisation first developed in 1993 when a council working party was formed to explore solutions for the lack of space and storage at the library and the museum. At this time, only a small percentage of the museum collection could be displayed. Concluding a decade-long planning process**,** the council determined that a new building would be constructed and that the museum and library would move beyond co-location to become an integrated cultural heritage institution, providing seamless access to library, museum and archival collections. In 1995 the council decided to construct the new building on a site significant to both Maori and colonial settler histories. Council contribution to the project was NZ$12.7 Million, with fit-out to be funded through non-council contributions. Around 2002, during the construction of the building, it was decided that a visitor information (tourism) service would also be added to the facility.

The development of the institutions was not without its controversies. The proposed facility was not immediately supported by rate-payers, with many opposed to increases in council rates and unclear about the benefits of improved cultural services. A community consultation process was undertaken by the council and produced 'vigorous debate', resulting in hundreds of written and verbal submissions. The predominant concern among those who expressed negative opinions appeared to centre on the substantial project costs (council review of *MAUNGA TAPU*, 1998). Through an information campaign, the district council justified the capital cost of the project by anticipating that facilities and staff could be shared across the library and museum facilities (Ibid., 23), as well as taking advantage of economies of scale. By implementing this integrated strategy, it was thought that the overall space requirement of the new building would be reduced, as well as minimising the number of necessary employees.

At the same time, proponents of the development argued the need for an up-to-date, larger building, citing the responsibility of the museum to make its locally significant collections as accessible as possible to the community. Furthermore, an enhanced capacity to articulate historical and cultural narratives through exhibitions became central to the planning of the new museum: "There is a need to ensure that the story of [place name removed], its environment, people and events is told as a service both to residents and visitors" (council review of *MAUNGA TAPU*, 1998, 8). These aims were

to be achieved by doubling the existing space, where the museum and library would collaborate to create one "knowledge centre" offering a variety of services (wording used in a conference paper delivered by a former manager of *MAUNGA TAPU*, 2008). The emphasis of the convergence between the library and the museum was on educational offerings, information retrieval, collection storage, research and improved access. The idea was to provide "combined access to collections, combined programming and a research facility" (*MAUNGA TAPU* conference proceedings, 2006, 14) where public library, museum and visitor information services would "flow from one to another through the sharing of knowledge" (MAUNGA TAPU visitor brochure, c.2011). According to fund-raising documents (c.1998), the plan for the institution was to harness new technologies to create networked databases across various information resources, as well as using technology for interactive displays. Key points for integrated services were to be the research centre (focussing on local history resources), children's discovery area and the institution's website.

In these ways, convergence was perceived as a solution to achieving the most cost-efficient realisation of the project, as well as delivering cultural benefits in enabling improved access to collections and information resources, leading to increased knowledge of the history and identity of the region. Funding proceeded, with the council's outlay of NZ$12.7 Million for the build supplemented by funds for the fit-out and ongoing exhibition expenses from national government sectors adding NZ$4.2 Million. Corporate and other forms of private sponsorships yielded a further approximately NZ$11.5 Million. The total project cost was about NZ$26.5 Million.

The fund-raising documents produced to garner the support of the local community, as well as attract sponsorship from corporate partners, reveal the ambitious goals of the project, citing far-reaching advantages for both users of the institution to the wider community. One brochure produced for the sponsorship campaign (c.1998) highlighted the integration of museum and library visitor experiences across the facility, envisaging that visitors would adopt a holistic approach to utilising all the resources that the institution had to offer. It stated: "visitors will be able to move from exhibits and halls into research rooms - take a close-up look at artefacts, then explore interactive media throughout the facility or retrieve detailed information through from the library." Another information pamphlet (c.2000) targeting the general public

stressed the need for a cultural centre that could effectively communicate the significant narratives of the region through extensive displays and innovative access points to information. The institution was heralded as the "world's first integrated museum, library and tourist information centre" (MAUNGA TAPU website, 'History' section, 2008) offering a best practice approach to the presentation of cultural heritage (*MAUNGA TAPU* information brochure, c.1998, 1, *MAUNGA TAPU* fundraising document, 2008, 10). It was promoted as "an innovative model of knowledge centre", where services would be converged to foster "knowledge provision" (*MAUNGA TAPU* conference proceedings, 2006, 1). Furthermore, it would boost the regeneration of the town centre and assist in creating a 'heart' of the city (Ibid., 7). Finally, the institution would be instrumental in driving creativity and innovation in the community, stimulate the "knowledge economy", and promote "social well-being", "environmental wellbeing" and "economic wellbeing" (conference paper delivered by a former manager, *MAUNGA TAPU*, 2008).

The 2003 high-profile opening of the architecturally prominent institution seemed to have achieved many of these aims. The new building boasted approximately 10,000 square meters of space, with substantial exhibition areas allocated to both permanent and temporary displays, including a significant allotment for the exhibition of a large collection of Maori artefacts. However, it is unclear to what extent the institution genuinely lived up to its ideals, with both the space and the organisational structure only partly embodying the idea of convergence.

The library and museum remained as effectively separate buildings, with a research centre and gallery creating both a physical and conceptual link between the two functions. In terms of organisational structure (*MAUNGA TAPU* management report, 2008), the overall manager role for the institution oversaw both the library and museum, with the next tier of administration spread across four roles covering library, museum, business development and exhibitions respectively. Interestingly, the library service was allocated almost 50% of the staffing resources, while the heritage collections (museum) accounted for only 9% and exhibitions approximately 4%. On the surface, these statistics suggest that the library was effectively operating as the dominant partner within the institution's structure.

After the first five years of its operation, *MAUNGA TAPU's* management and the local council realised the inadequacy of the initial revenue to cover costs into the future, launching another fundraising campaign for ongoing operational, collection management and exhibition development costs. The booklet published for this campaign notes the achievements of the institution but also highlights the need for greater investment in expert curatorial staff to address a substantial cataloguing backlog. Written in 2008, it acknowledged that the full narrative potential of the heritage collections had yet to be realised, implicitly admitting that the aim of the institution to 'tell the stories of the region' had not yet been achieved. The booklet stated:

> *For every heritage item we have in public catalogues ten are waiting. They are safe and secure, but incredibly, nobody fully knows what we hold in our collections… It will only come to light as expert curatorial resources become available.*

It is not clear, however, whether this situation developed through inadequate forward planning, an inappropriate organisational structure, or an imbalance in resources allocated to various sections of the institution.

6 Case Study Findings: museum interpretive practices in the convergence context

6.1 Introduction

Following the introduction of case studies and the cultural policy and funding frameworks that have shaped their development, I now turn to the findings of the case study interviews to investigate museum practice, exploring the specific impact of this institutional model on the interpretation of museum collections. In response to the detailed content of the case study interviews, I focus on fundamental aspects of museum expertise and practice that have direct bearing on the creation of meaning and understanding around collections. This includes consideration of so-called back-of-house functions, such as acquisition procedures, collection research and documentation, conservation, as well as the use of collections in the development of 'forward-facing' projects such as permanent and temporary displays, educational and other public programs.

In Chapter 5, I positioned the growing prevalence of the convergence model for collecting institutions, as it began appearing in various permutations in the state of NSW since the early 2000s, as a manifestation of particular shifts in national and state cultural policy, as well as the evolving responsibilities and agendas of local government around the provision of cultural amenities. Having established the policy environment for convergence, Chapter 5 also provided background information about each of the case studies used in this research, compiled using a variety of sources including strategic planning documents, annual reports, internal policy documents, publicity materials, and media reports. Together, cultural policy and specific institutional contexts provide an important foundation for considering the interview findings detailed in both this, and the following, chapter.

In this chapter I examine, at a more granular level, the ways in which policy frameworks, organisational structures, professional relationships and disciplinary expertise impact upon the daily performance of staff at the frontline of interpretation of museum collections. That is, through the thematic analysis of the interview data, I consider the ability of staff to carry out museum-based interpretive activities such as identification and accessioning of objects, collections research and management, and exhibition development. The impact of convergence, as an ostensibly administrative institutional framework, on the potential for the cultural significance of museum objects to be explored and communicated, emerges as a central theme of this chapter.

The primary data presented and analysed in this chapter, and the next, are respondents' accounts of their professional experience working in converged institutions, gathered via in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted on site at each of the case study venues in 2011 (see Chapter 3: *Research methodology* for details). For clarity, both chapters follow a similar structure, presenting the results of the case study research as a discussion of key themes that are organised under hierarchical headings. However, this kind of thematic grouping can create the impression of an artificially neat compartmentalisation of the data, partially obscuring interrelationships and contingencies between various thematic threads running through the research, not to mention the complexities inherent in actual practice. To mitigate this effect and underscore the interconnectedness between themes, I have included as much primary transcript material as possible (given the constraints of allowable word limits and readability), with the intention of foregrounding different nuances in the responses of interviewees and acknowledging overlap across thematic boundaries.

6.2 Collections

The question of how convergence affects museum practice in relation to collections is an interesting one, considering the heterogeneous content, scope and histories of the museum collections that were affected by restructuring at the institutions studied for this research. As discussed in Chapter 5, most of the museum collections were initially developed by local historical societies (*WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL*, *SOUTHSIDE*,

MAUNGA TAPU).[87] By the time they were incorporated into the converged organisation, the collections consisted of an array of objects, including social history and technological artefacts, archaeological and indigenous materials, art works, archival images and photographs. At the time the converged institutions were established, it would be fair to say that all the museum collections in question were inconsistently (or very poorly) documented and conserved. They existed within very loose policy frameworks, administered by a mixture of paid, qualified staff and volunteers.

Importantly, what these collections had in common was their abundant potential for development, research and contextualisation at the time that they became part of converged institutions. They were all under-documented and under-interpreted, sometimes according to even the most basic standards of accessioning (i.e. object identification/naming, recording of provenance, numerical registration into the collection, etc.). Indeed, the accounts of many respondents in this research indicate the degree to which this potential has (or has not) been realised at their organisations, providing valuable insights into the performance and efficacy of museum practices within the convergence model.

6.2.1 *We have so many similarities and we share a really close relationship*:[88] re-connecting collections

Across all case studies except *WESTLANDS*, the primary benefit of convergence, and a form of collection expansion, was the amalgamation (or formation of formal linkages) between museum and local studies collections. Many respondents identified local studies as an area of natural cross over between museums and municipal libraries. In this way, convergence provided a mechanism for integrating thematically linked collections of objects, documents and photographs that had previously existed within separate collecting institutions, with benefits for in-house research and interpretation,

[87] According to interview respondents, the museum collection at *RIVERBANK* evolved as a result of the random accumulation of artefacts by the local council through donations by residents, objects uncovered during building works in the area, and items of memorabilia collected by the council over time.

[88] Historical and Cultural Services Coordinator, *SOUTHSIDE*, describing the working relationship between the Local Studies Officer and museum staff at her institution.

as well as enhanced research potential and convenience for visitors and other users. The important relationship between local studies and museum collections became even more pronounced when considering the consequences of the separation of these areas, as occurred at *WESTLANDS*.

At *SOUTHSIDE*, members of the museum staff described how the incorporation of the local studies section of the library into the museum management structure removed bureaucratic barriers to collaboration between museum staff and the Local Studies Officer, facilitating improvements in collection access and research. For museum staff at *SOUTHSIDE*, the benefits of regular and coordinated interaction between the two collection areas included reduced waiting time for collection and information requests, greater collaboration around user requests for information, and the ability to pool the knowledge of museum and local studies staff to develop deeper understanding of the thematic connections between diverse objects and documents. One of the institution's curatorial staff highlighted the ways in which this aspect of the convergence restructure had helped improve both interpersonal and professional relationships between the museum and local studies employees, facilitating easier access to collections and higher level research and interpretation:

> Respondent: *Having the Local Studies Officer on our team has made so much difference – because we have so many similarities and we share a really close relationship. Before, it was definitely not like that…*
> …Interviewer: *So, previously there wasn't a lot of collaboration with Local Studies?*
> Respondent: *No. We would have to request-- for instance we do a WWII program with high school and there is a particular oral history recording that we use. We would have to request it every time, and it was a bit of strained relationship. But now, it's part of our collection and our team, so it's much easier.*
>
> *Finding the value of items of in the collection has been enhanced by joining with Local Studies and Family History. We were able to find out things about objects that we may never have known. I tend to find with Local Studies librarians that they have that information in their heads – they just know so*

> *much about the area. For me, going to look for something is totally different from* [the Local Studies Officer] *going to look for something, because she just knows it back to front. We have 10-minute team meetings every morning, and we can just mention something in passing, and* [the Local Studies Officer] *will know all about it and have photos of the family, that sort of thing. That kind of collaboration has really enhanced the collection.*
> Historical and Cultural Services Coordinator, *SOUTHSIDE*

At *RIVERBANK*, participants made similar observations, noting that integration with the local studies library extended the research role of the museum:

> *I would have to say working with our local studies library - it's always my first port of call. Libraries are different containers for stories. So that the stories can be enriched, and certainly the resources that we have up there – we have other ways that we can tell our stories by being able to access that research aspect.*
> Curator, *RIVERBANK*

Here, cooperation between staff of the two collections enabled a greater diversity of historical narratives to be explored, for the purposes of both public program development and visitors' research.

MAUNGA TAPU is somewhat different in that the a local studies collection had not existed officially prior to the convergence, but had been established in the form of a regional research centre through the restructure. Serving as a research gateway, the purpose of the local studies section is to provide access to both its own study materials as well as collections (and staff expertise) across the institution. The former Manager of the organisation noted that this local studies facility was perhaps the single area of the institution that actually functioned effectively as an example of institutional convergence:

> *There wasn't really much evidence of an integrated service other than in the […] research centre. And that's where anyone who was seriously interested in the history of* [the region], *they would be able to go to one space, ask their*

> *question, and be dealt with by a range of experts and have one suite of resources – including collections of artefacts – but also the documentary heritage of* [the region]. *That made a lot of sense for that kind of enquiry.* Former Manager of *MAUNGA TAPU*

As the examples above demonstrate, convergence enabled informal thematic connections between local studies collections (mostly located and staffed through libraries) and museums (often with roots in local historical society and municipal collections) to be recognised and legitimised through structural integration. Greater collaboration between library, local studies and museum staff elevated the research capacity of each respective section, enhancing the development of programs and exhibitions, as well as extending research access for public users. The situation at *WESTLANDS* further underscores this point, illustrating how impediments to collection research can be produced through the dislocation of local studies and museum collections.

WESTLANDS was established in a regional centre where the library remained separate to the converged institution (which incorporated the local museum, art gallery and a community arts facility). During the restructuring process, the local studies collection was divided from the museum and set up in the library – a move that seems to have been justified on the basis of the typological differences between the items in the local studies versus museum collection. The Local Studies Officer, who had previously been involved with the museum collection, described how this process divorced related objects from one another physically, stating "It's like I have the left arm and they have the right arm". For her, this situation not only resulted in two closely related collections being subject to different access policies and conservation regimes, but also limited the narrative links that could have be derived from them through a unified approach:

> *There were family 'boxes' with a mix of items, and that was split, which is sad now because over at [WESTLANDS]* [the staff] *are not* [city name] *people, so if they're going to put in a display, they don't know that there's all this additional material... They are not aware of associations – we have this beautiful object here, but they're not aware of the wider relationships.*

Local Studies Officer, *WESTLANDS*

Here, not only was a thematically singular collection physically split, but the separation of the Local Studies Officer - with her considerable local knowledge and familiarity with the content of the museum collection - from the remaining museum staff, fractured the ability to employees to collaborate around the interpretation of the collection.

6.2.2 Acquisitions and collection development

While the integration of local studies and museum collections at four out of the five case studies proved advantageous for access, research, documentation and interpretation of objects, other changes to the institutions that occurred in tandem with convergence were not perceived as equally beneficial for developing and expanding collections.

As previously cited by respondents at *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, the main limitation to strategic collection development of museum collections under convergence was the lack of budget allocation for new acquisitions – a symptom of converged funding models under-catering for the ongoing operational costs of integrated institutions.

The Visual Arts Coordinator at *LONEHILL* – a primarily curatorial role - underlined the discrepancy between this area of budgetary shortfall compared to the size of her organisation, describing how collections staff were compelled to devise various unofficial mechanisms for acquiring new objects to sidestep the lack of funds set aside for this purpose:

> *Surprisingly, the gallery that I came from had a higher acquisitions budget. The* [*LONEHILL*] *museum and the art gallery don't actually have a direct acquisitions fund at all. There is a proposal that next financial year we'll get one, but we don't now.*

> *So the way that acquisitions happen is by* [the Museum and Social History Coordinator] *and I sort of 'creatively' massaging our exhibition budget, or structure a contract where you might get the exhibition for free, frame their work and then get so many prints. It's actually interesting, given our operations budget, that we don't have an acquisitions budget.*
> Visual Arts Coordinator, *LONEHILL*

Likewise, members of the Heritage Collections team at *MAUNGA TAPU* expressed frustration about the shortage of funds for acquisitions. Like their counterparts at *LONEHILL*, these staff 'creatively' manipulated their existing budgets, saving small yearly allocations in order to build up an acquisitions allowance. Even so, as the participants explained, the amount accumulated was still insufficient to cover the full scope of the collections:

> Respondent 1: *Well, we've got-- next to no money for acquisitions. It's a pretty sad sense of--*
> Respondent 2: *If anything, it's only been about $10,000 a year. It has actually increased this year to $40,000. That's what we've got. And it's through careful nurturing, so where we've got it left in the budget we can roll it over. So, it's carefully trying to accumulate--*
> Respondent 1: *So that was $10,000 for all four of the heritage collections – so that's social history, pictorial,* [indigenous] *and archives. So,$10,000 between four.*
> Heritage Collections team interview, *MAUNGA TAPU*

At *WESTLANDS*, there had been a halt to acquisitions (and an acquisitions budget) for the museum following the convergence. The local council justified the hiatus on the basis of a shortage of additional storage space and the poor documentation of the existing collection. However, while founded on legitimate concerns, the prohibition on acquisitions nevertheless proved problematic in terms of collection development around important local themes. As the Curator pointed out, the organisation had missed opportunities to make purchases (and even accept donations) of potentially significant objects on account of the inflexibility of the rule:

> Respondent: *So certainly there have been objects come our way, that have been offered for the museum to buy, but that we haven't been able to buy them.*
> Interviewer: *Even if they're significant objects?*
> Respondent: *Yes, pretty much. Not that we've had anything majorly significant, but there have been people who have come and said did we want to buy something, and we've said we can't, so they've gone elsewhere.*
> *I think that there needs to be the opportunity to purchase things if we need to, if they are significant.*
> Curator (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

In other words, budget decisions not to acquire, made by management staff or local municipal funding authorities, contributed to various degrees of stagnation in the development of the museum collections. At *WESTLANDS* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, such restrictions had been in place for several years. While it could be argued that the lack of sufficient funding for acquisitions is not a problem confined to, or necessarily cause by convergence, it would seem that implementation of such restructures as part of a program for achieving financial efficiency produced management decisions that were not necessarily in the best interests of museum collection development. Furthermore, as I discuss later, convergence had the additional effect of bringing discrepancies between relatively small funding allocations to museum collections, versus the larger budget allowance for library collections, into sharp relief.

6.2.3 Documentation and description

Following the stages of conventional curatorial and collection management workflow, consideration of collection development policies and acquisition processes brings us to the description and documentation of museum objects (i.e. cataloguing, documentation, research) in converged organisations. For the most part, participants in this research acknowledged the positive outcomes of convergence on collection documentation, although improvements in this area were attributed mainly to the official incorporation of previously volunteer-run historical society or community collections into a formal collecting institution context, rather than to the effects of integrating different collecting domains.

Starting from what was often a very low base, the implementation of basic standards and procedures for museum cataloguing, performed (sometimes for the first time) by professional staff, was a clear benefit for museum collections brought into converged institution environments. Respondents at *RIVERBANK*, *WESTLANDS*, and *SOUTHSIDE* in particular were keen to point out the paltry extent of documentation around their museum collections prior to the restructuring brought about through convergence. For example, a member of the curatorial staff at *SOUTHSIDE* described a massive backlog in the cataloguing and recording of provenance around collection items, pointing to her team's recent discovery that boxes of uncatalogued material had previously been registered under single object numbers, disguising the true percentage of the collection that remained undocumented. At this institution, the employment of a staff member with dedicated responsibilities to collection documentation was an important first step in addressing such problems. Likewise, the manager of *RIVERBANK* explained that a central benefit of convergence was the instigation of fundamental museum procedures, with appropriately qualified staff to carry them out:

> Respondent: *Probably the convergence model, in a sense, has had more effect on the cultural collection being much more managed.*
> Interviewer: *Because it didn't sound like it was managed at all previously.*
> Respondent: *Exactly, yeah. And if it was, it was fairly project based, so they'd bring an expert in to do a particular thing, rather than it being a sustained long term* [strategy]. *Convergence has meant that it is being managed now, and that there have been significance assessments done on particular items and the recording is much more within industry standards.*
> Manager of *RIVERBANK*

In these examples, the formation of the converged organisation allowed for specialist curatorial roles to be created, helping to establish an environment where consistent and professional collection documentation could begin to take place.

The professionalisation of collection practice through convergence also influenced the formation of policy frameworks for acquisitions and collection management. Respondents at *RIVERBANK*, *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU* reported that not all collection areas had fully developed collection policies at the time

that convergence took place, creating an opportunity to create parity in this area. At least one participant – the Collections Officer employed at *WESTLANDS* – claimed that a benefit of her converged role description was the ability to assess and improve the respective standards of collection management and documentation across both the museum and visual arts collections. However, her account mirrored those of most other participants in acknowledging that collection themes and development priorities remained quite separate, and often incompatible, across the different collection areas.

In fact, a clear and binding articulation of institution-wide collection aims and strategies for collaboration eluded most of the organisations studied for this research. For example, at *LONEHILL*, a consequence of lack of clarity around the rationale for the convergence, a poorly designed organisational structure and a shortage of staff and funding (as discussed in Chapter 5) was the deferred implementation of formal museum policies and procedures and insufficient resources to maintain basic collection management standards.

At *LONEHILL*, the initial convergence structure did not make provision for any staff to catalogue and research the museum collection. Furthermore, an employee from an exclusively library background was installed as the manager of the museum collection, leading to the alteration of fundamental museum procedures. As the following extract demonstrates, this staff member drew on her knowledge of library practice to make unilateral judgements about the appropriateness of museum cataloguing procedures, potentially disrupting the consistency of the museum's existing records:

> *The first thing we did was get rid of the accession register – just put it to the side. We figured out a way to do our numbers. That was just when* [the Museum and Social History Coordinator] *started, so I can't comment on whether* [the Museum and Social History Coordinator] *continued down that path or whether they've brought back the accession register. But from my point of view it just felt like it was a very labour intensive process, whereas we get a book in, catalogue it – I mean 99% of library books are catalogued, whereas with the museum collection, 90% of it wasn't catalogued.*
> Information and Library Collections Coordinator, *LONEHILL*

Using library conventions as her only available point of reference, this staff member focussed her attention on improving the 'efficiency' of the museum cataloguing process, without considering the possible value of registers as an initial documentary layer in recording the entry of objects into museums before formal accessioning takes place. What this example illustrates is the potential damage caused to collection documentation through inappropriate recruitment of staff to roles requiring specialist disciplinary expertise and experience.

Managing differences between domain-based approaches to collection documentation came to fore in a number of other respondents' accounts of their work experiences in converged settings. In particular, museum staff encountered difficulties in creating institution-wide recognition of the time-intensive nature of museum cataloguing, research and collection documentation, especially when set in sharp relief against the relative efficiency of library processes in converged settings. Staff at *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU* commented on the difficulty in obtaining adequate staff and financial resources to devote adequate attention to these tasks. As one of the Heritage Collection team members at *MAUNGA TAPU* explained:

> *What we've found is gross discrepancies between what one aspect of the business gets as opposed to the other. I think that heritage* [collection] *has been very badly impinged upon. The collections, in terms of funding-- that allows us to do core work: cataloguing, the day-to-day stuff – and that's the bread and butter of a museum's work - but with convergence-- You know, you would never have a stand-alone museum where collections weren't considered to be an important thing, whereas I think they have been really strongly sidelined here. The lack of money allows us to do less and less than would normally be done in a museum business.*
> Heritage Collections team member (Pictorial), *MAUNGA TAPU*

Another member of the same team noted that the separation of collections and exhibition development into different departments within the museum section of the organisation had marginalised the profile of documentation and research of the collection. In combination with the problems posed by what these staff perceived as an unsympathetic director (who had come from a libraries background), and lack of

appeal to potential financial donors, the status of essential museum work was further downgraded in a joint collections, multi-functional environment:

> *You know, exhibitions is kind of a sexy side of the business, so it's much easier to raise funds for exhibitions, I think, than it is for the stuff that we do. Because the exhibition staff get something like $160,000 a year to do whatever they want with. Why doesn't a little bit of that go our way, and then know that they can effectively run a museum? Because it's much easier to, say, sell an exhibition to a firm, or a business* – [you can't say] *"how would you like to sponsor some cataloguing?"*
> Manager, Heritage Collections, *MAUNGA TAPU*

This respondent expressed general frustration about lack of resources for labour-intensive but low profile activities such as registration and accessioning, as well as for researching the provenance and historical contexts of individual objects. At the same time, he signalled his ongoing professional commitment to these tasks, highlighting the acute importance of description and documentation in determining the quality of all other subsequent collection programs:

> Respondent 1: *Yes – because once you understood that ethic you would understand that you are going to get a better exhibition, you are going to get a better public program, better research--*
> Respondent 2: *Better marketing--*
> Respondent 1: *All of those things will start to cascade out of that work that you've got to put in right at the beginning.*
> Respondent 2: *And that's one of those things – I guess you can never expect anybody to know the reality of your job, but it's so hard to explain to people how long cataloguing takes!*
> Heritage Collections team interview, *MAUNGA TAPU*

Likewise, the Collections Officer at *WESTLANDS* emphasised the fundamental importance of collection documentation and management in shaping future uses of the museum's holdings:

> *It's been a long process, in terms of a lot of my work seems to be in kind of reinventing the wheel. But I am conscious of the fact that big strategic decisions about the collection can't be made until we're all fully aware of exactly what's there, and exactly how it's organised, and what we've got, and what we don't have. So, I feel as though I'm building the foundation into some kind of order.*
> Collections Officer (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

Critically, the influence of collection documentation extends to the capacity for users to eventually access and engage with collection objects both physically and intellectually. However, many of the respondents' accounts indicated insufficient recognition of the significance of basic collection work at their institutions. For example, some respondents described the tendency to defer original research and cataloguing of museum collections in order to meet short-term programming deadlines. The Collections Officer at *WESTLANDS* noted that this approach favoured use of parts of the collection that were already well-researched, and conversely, discouraged time-intensive investigation of less well-documented objects, or research of less developed themes. In these ways, the staffing and resource shortages described by the participants could combine to produce potential detrimental effects along every stage in the life-cycle of museum collections and, down the line, the extent and depth to which users can interact with the full scope of collections and the information surrounding them.

6.2.4 *It's hard to get one that will do both:*[89] converging collection databases and access

As a subset of description and documentation of collections, the promise of convergence as a catalyst for increased cross-domain collection database access was discussed by a number of respondents in this research.

[89] Collections and Exhibitions Officer (Art Gallery), *LONEHILL*, describing the use of a single collection management software system for visual arts and library collections.

At *WESTLANDS*, the collections officer spoke about reviewing the documentation of the museum and visual arts collections around joint subject keywords to eventually facilitate research across both collections, even though she acknowledged that the pursuit of cross-collection search capability was her own personal initiative, rather than a strategic goal of the organisation. Likewise, the Manager at *SOUTHSIDE* was exploring the possibility of establishing a federated search facility across the library, local studies and museum collections, in partnership with the library's information technology specialist staff. A similar project was also underway at *LONEHILL*, where the purchase of new library collection management software would enable keyword searches across the library catalogue, subscribed electronic publications, and potentially also the museum collection database. These efforts signal some recognition by converged institutions of the potential to create thematic linkages between objects and information held in separate digital databases, with the hope of streamlining and enriching research capacity for collection professionals and collection users alike.

However, other respondents identified a number of difficulties in attempts to achieve database compatibility and interoperability across collections. One criticism centred around the problem of different terminologies between the collecting domains, leading to difficulties in reconciling naming conventions in joint databases. One of the gallery staff at *LONEHILL* commented on this issue, describing how the use of library database software for the visual arts collection required staff to constantly translate gallery terms into library information fields:

> *When we use DB Text, all the terminology is set up for libraries and museums, so when we look for 'artist' we can't find it – we have to type in 'author'. Just different terminologies-- quite a few things like that, where you think eventually we will sort through it. Everything will have double terms.*
> Collections and Exhibitions Officer (Art Gallery), *LONEHILL*

Similarly, the Heritage Collections team at *MAUNGA TAPU* noted that the staff member charged with cataloguing archival materials at their institution had had to re-purpose a museum collection database system to suit archival cataloguing needs, leading to clumsy object descriptions and the inability to clearly account for record series.

Importantly, some participants highlighted broader epistemological consequences in altering domain-based cataloguing and documentation structures. The Collections and Exhibitions Officer (Art Gallery) from *LONEHILL* explained that the compromises inherent in adapting terminologies and information fields to library-based software had the potential to erase essential characteristics of museum or visual arts collection traditions, resulting in a reduction in the diversity of information recorded around those collections. He warned that all-encompassing databases were likely to be overly generalist in their nature; forcing out specifically nuanced, specialised information categories in favour of a one-size-fits-all framework:

> *It's like when you're designing a car to be either a racing car or a taxi; it's hard to get one that will do both. You're going to have a vehicle in the middle, that's not a very good taxi and not a very good racing car.*
> Collections and Exhibitions Officer (Art Gallery), *LONEHILL*

Elaborating on this further, a former senior staff member of a national collections sector body, who was also interviewed as part of this research, outlined the essential differences between collections information that shape the documentary practices of the different domains, and therefore the record-keeping and documentary approaches employed by them:

> *Librarians anchor their information management to some very clear givens. For example almost everything has a named author, or 'anon.', almost everything has a title, almost everything has a date of publication, so they've got some really strong givens and I can imagine a librarian feeling totally at sea if they didn't have those anchoring points.*
> *Whereas the museum world is completely used to things not having* [a known] *maker, not having an agreed name or multiple names – there are lists that try to provide some standardisation in that community of interest. You often don't know the date or even the century when the object was manufactured, created or its evolution. So, you are dealing with uncertainty rather than certainty in the museum world.*

> *And I think archivists are a little in between because they are dealing with unique materials, and they might be authored materials but the author might have to be deduced, rather than finding it on the title page.*
> *So I think the way in which systems have evolved to document those sorts of collections, its not just driven by the individuals involved in those professions and the way they are trained – its also that the starting point for one profession is fixed knowledge, and the starting point for the other professions is 'nothing is fixed'.*
> Senior staff member, national collections sector agency

Significantly, what this extract highlights is that the ways in which information is organised in collection databases, and the architecture of those databases, frames the information content within certain epistemological contexts, ranging from empirically defined, fixed, positivist attribution of knowledge, to more relativist ideas about the contingency of understanding the meanings of objects. The reconfiguration and renaming of collection information to achieve compatibility across databases represents more than a simple reorganisation of content; rather, it potentially constitutes a fundamental alteration in the kinds of information and, therefore, knowledge produced around collections.

Notably, however, such considerations appear to be largely academic in reference to the case studies used for this research. Participants from both *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, whose websites offered some degree of database convergence and cross-collection search capability, acknowledged that the provision of access to diverse collections had been under-utilised. A member of the Exhibitions team at *MAUNGA TAPU* described the online search function on his institution's website as "pedestrian", with little appeal to public users. Similarly, the Library Manager at *LONEHILL* acknowledged that her institution had little evidence to suggest that online users were utilising the ability to search subject themes across the organisations holdings.

In these cases, it seems that the potential for digital convergence of collection databases, and the promise of inter-connected access to thematically linked information sources, has not been realised so far. On the one hand, the cumbersome task of reconciling different documentary traditions and terminological conventions is

a time-consuming endeavour, unlikely to be completed given the other pressures on staff in converged institutions (as described in Chapter 5). On the other, the benefits of digital cross-domain collection access, while considerable for serious researchers and collections staff developing programs, remain poorly understood for other 'public' users.

6.2.5 Conservation and storage

The final area of museum work raised in the interviews was related to the conservation and storage of collections. While preservation issues may not be seen as directly linked to the interpretation of collections (and hence the research question for this thesis), approaches to identifying and prioritising conservation needs are themselves inherently interpretive, hinging on the ability of staff to identify objects of perceived significance and heritage value. For this reason, I have included respondents' comments about collections conservation in this analysis.

As previously discussed, most of the museum collections referred to in this research - with their origins in local historical society and informal community or council collections – came into converged facilities with little or inconsistent documentation. Likewise, conditions for preservation of these collections were generally basic. For the museum collection components of *RIVERBANK*, *WESTLANDS*, and *SOUTHSIDE* in particular, convergence represented an opportunity to raise collection storage and conservation standards to meet established collections-sector benchmarks.

From the perspective of the Manager of *RIVERBANK*, the formation of the converged institution made preservation of heritage material a greater priority for the local council. For the first time, heritage collections became visible to members of the local community (i.e. rate-payers), placing a duty of care on the council to care for those collections:

> *I think that's probably the biggest thing out of this particular centre - its major benefit has been the public access and the preservation and conservation that has been able to be done as part of that. There's now a rationale behind it; it's not just council trying to prioritise its money. There* is *a heritage centre, it has*

> *got public access, the reason why you have to do x, y and z is for community benefit. You can much more easily make those arguments and get the funding for it, whereas before it was just a few passionate heritage people jumping up and down about things.*
> Manager, *RIVERBANK*

In other words, this respondent acknowledged that, while the establishment of the institution had not necessarily effected a greater receptiveness on the part of the council towards the cultural significance of the museum (and archival) collections, the physical presence of the institution, and its public visibility, meant that the council was obligated to provide resources for collection care.

For members of staff at *SOUTHSIDE*, the restructuring that accompanied convergence assisted in highlighting the conservation needs of the museum collection to the local council, on account of the museum's new association with the library. The Manager of the institution expressed her optimism about improving the storage conditions for the museum and local studies collections:

> *Now I think – and we are nowhere near there yet – but we've got a little more push and drive to be able to lobby council for a better storage facility, because our storage is awful a the moment. It's in a car park, it's not a good facility, but we don't have the money to do anything about it. Now that we've incorporated the museum within the library, we're a bigger entity, which means more voice.*
> Manager of *SOUTHSIDE*

Here, the 'critical mass' established by the combination of the library and museum into one entity, and the corresponding elevation in the status of the overall Manager, improved the prospective success of lobbying the council for conservation resources. What is more, other respondents at *SOUTHSIDE* noted that the overall number of museum staff had increased as part of the convergence. That, together with the fact that the Manager of the institution had come from a museum curatorial background, also increased the attention dedicated to collection conservation.

In these ways, the formal recognition of museum collections by local governments through convergence restructures produced new emphasis on the preservation needs of those collections. One could question, however, whether convergence was the necessary or only step that would have led to this outcome. A focus on renewing the funding and facilities of the museum as an independent facility could have achieved the same benefits.

However, potential for improvement in standards of collection conservation as a result of convergence was not a universal outcome for all the case studies used for this research.

At *LONEHILL*, the Visual Arts Coordinator described a chronic lack of storage space for the visual arts collection, which not only impeded the acquisition of new works but also meant that objects were not always housed appropriately. At *WESTLANDS*, where the entire site had been refurbished and a new wing of the building constructed to house the art gallery and stores, the Manager acknowledged that the new building did not meet the required storage needs for either collection, let alone accounting for future collection growth. Furthermore, the dislocation of the local studies collection from the museum, which occurred in tandem with the establishment of the converged institution, placed the local studies collection under the local library's jurisdiction. The Local Studies Officer described this situation as a threat to preservation of the collection, citing the difference between library and museum notions of conservation:

> Respondent: *I've found it really hard here* [at the library]-- *there's no thought or consideration given for best museum practice for artefacts.*
> Interviewer: *For preservation and documentation?*
> Respondent: *Yes, and buying correct archival material. It's just 'do this and it'll do' – which upsets me, because I can see that-- one of the things I am working on now was let go for 10 years. They are actually photographs that were in those original sleeves they used to have, and the image is actually stuck to the sleeve. That's the type of thing I'm up against.*
> Local Studies Officer, *WESTLANDS*

At *WESTLANDS* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, participants also identified the problem of prolonged exhibition exposure for objects in the 'semi-permanent' displays. Members of the Heritage Collections team and the Exhibitions Manager at *MAUNGA TAPU* all observed that, given available budgets, the prohibitive cost of producing in-house collection research and exhibitions had stalled the rotation of objects on display, where some sensitive objects had been on exhibition for over 7 years.

Responding to the unresolved storage and conservation issues at her institution, the curator at *RIVERBANK* pointed out that access and conservation are intrinsically linked; without pre-existing understanding and appreciation for collections, it is difficult to justify the resources required to conserve them. Her observation alludes to the way in which local museum collections, including those in converged institutions, can become trapped in a 'Catch 22' scenario. She and other participants acknowledged that, given the necessary resources, it is the behind-the-scenes activities of professional staff that produce the research, documentation and interpretation of collections that leads to effective exhibitions and public programs. Community engagement with collections, enabled via these exhibitions, programs and other forms of access, generates the appreciation of the significance of collections that justifies ongoing council expenditure on museum staff and collection budgets. If, however, there are insufficient resources to begin with, the cycle never gets an opportunity to swing into action. Staff may find it difficult to argue for increased funding for under-documented (and therefore low profile) parts of the collections; members of the public are never offered the opportunity to engage with the collections; and objects continue to be left to languish indefinitely in sub-standard storage conditions, without adequate conservation assessment or treatment.

6.3 Exhibitions

Permanent, temporary and travelling exhibitions, as well as other interfaces through which visitors (or 'users') can interact with collections (e.g. education programs, guided tours, publications, online forms of access, etc.) are the end products of museum processes for the cataloguing, documentation and research of museum collections. Moreover, these processes are fundamentally interpretive in nature, and the narratives created around objects through these processes become reified in the

content of public programs. For this reason, a detailed analysis of the interview findings in reference to exhibitions and public programs are central to the consideration of the research question of this thesis.

A common feature of the institutions studied for this research was the demarcation of publically accessible 'museum' spaces into so-called 'permanent' (or 'semi-permanent') and 'temporary' exhibition areas, with small, adjunct displays often also located in common circulation zones, parts of the library or in research areas. Accordingly, this section of the findings focuses on respondents' accounts of the provision of these two types of exhibitions in their organisations, including museum work associated with exhibition planning and development, exhibition design, installation and maintenance.

6.3.1 *They didn't put in the little stories and they didn't put in the big stories*:[90] permanent exhibitions

Across all the case studies except for *SOUTHSIDE*, participants in the research raised significant problems associated with thematic content and narrative cohesion within the permanent exhibition areas of their institutions, where displays were expected to communicate significant information about local regions and cultural groups, and provide clear chronologies of important events. Dissatisfaction among interviewees regarding the representativeness, accuracy and narrative cohesion of 'permanent' exhibitions was compounded by a lack of resources to achieve regular rotation of objects and redevelopment of displays.

A common observation among the participants was that the permanent exhibitions, and the spaces housing them, had originally been developed and installed by "outsiders" - contracted curators and designers - who did not have the necessary pre-existing knowledge of the local area and its people to produce coherent, relevant narratives. For example, the Manager at *WESTLANDS* was critical of the selection of objects used for the permanent display, which he perceived as having failed to identify potent historical, political and cultural discourses that were constitutive to local cultural

[90] The Curator, *RIVERBANK*, speaking about the shortcomings of the institution's permanent exhibition.

identities and continued to shape the experiences of people living in this regional, rural area:

> *We all recognise that the museum has flaws in its service to the public. It is so object-based it doesn't tell a cogent narrative. You just come in and turn right. The first thing you see is a small Aboriginal display, which mixes things given by European settlers to Aborigines with stone tools and wooden hunting weapons. Then you go on to a Chinese* [object] *made from an old biscuit tin, and then you've got some old swimming costumes, and then you have a steam engine. So I pity the viewer who comes in here to learn about this town – it's hard to put it all together. We want to fix that and have a more cogent narrative, while at the same time not coming down on one side or the other. So, talking about the disputes between the original inhabitants, the settlers, and the people on the stock route, which meant that there were gunshots fired. That story needs to be told; not this person was right or this person was wrong. We need to show this conflict is still here now – this conflict is still going on about who has land and who has assets and what you can do with it. That's what we want to do. And talk about agriculture, mining, farming from both sides, industry, the various failed housing developments that went through here, crime and punishment, really give people a sense of, well, that was* [this town], *but this is also really typical of a country town, this is how they developed.*
> Manager of *WESTLANDS*

As the extract demonstrates, this participant identified the permanent exhibition as having abundant but unrealised potential in promoting active and constructive engagement with issues of local importance among the population of the town, and surrounding region. Instead, the narrative presented within the displays was disjointed and ad-hoc, providing only glimpses of significant cultural groups, industries, events and social changes, without exploring thematic connections between these individual parts or the relationships between local narratives and those of other rural communities.

At *RIVERBANK* – an institution located in an outer-metropolitan area of Sydney – the Curator raised similar problems relating to the lack of a sequential narrative to ground

the permanent displays, resulting in inconsistent communication of the regional and national historical significance of the municipality. Noting that the exhibition had been assembled hurriedly by a team of external consultants, who were accustomed to working on much larger projects, she observed:

> *More than anything else, it's a 'what is heritage?'* [display] *with some themes attached. So they didn't put in the little stories and they didn't put in the big stories. …So the big stories weren't told, the small stories weren't told, there is no chronological history. In another place that might not be so relevant perhaps, but in a place where you've got the amazing Aboriginal occupation – at least 30,000 years here* - [and] *1789 was the first colonial built structure here, and we're not doing any historical analysis!?*
> Curator, *RIVERBANK*

In her view, the methodology utilised in designing the exhibits and narrative was not locally appropriate, employing a generalist model better suited to larger institutions that were less specific geographically or in their cultural orientation. While these circumstances were not an inevitable outcome of convergence, the situation suggests that the conceptual rational for convergence - in supposedly expanding opportunities for meaningful engagement with collections - was not at the forefront in the planning phases of the project.

In addition, the same respondent noted that the content of the permanent exhibition had been developed hurriedly, before there had been a stock-take of the objects in the collection - an observation echoed by the Group Leader, Cultural Services, and the Team Leader, Art Gallery and Collections at *LONEHILL*, as well as Heritage Collections and Exhibitions staff at *MAUNGA TAPU*:

> *And what happened with the* [organisation] *was that that semi-permanent exhibition went up very very quickly, without too much thought I think, and it's not cohesive. So* [the Museum and Social History Coordinator] *and I are organising for a facilitator to come in and for us to develop a group of people, including the Historical Society and interested people from the community (historians, etc.) to talk about what could be there.*

Team Leader, Art Gallery and Collections, *LONEHILL*

The way that the building was developed, actually what's on display was actually a bit of a rush job.
Project and Technical Administrator, Exhibitions, *MAUNGA TAPU*

In this way, it was not possible for curatorial development to take full account of what objects were available for use in the exhibitions, their relative significance to one another, nor their representativeness in regard to the history and people of the area. Instead, exhibitions were established on the basis of partial knowledge of collections and their context. Where external consultants were employed, whatever expertise was gained during the exhibition development process was subsequently lost once they had completed their contracts.

Furthermore, the inflexibility of the interior design in some of these permanent spaces – including built-in showcases, integrated text panels, immovable seating, etc. – precluded the future modification of displays to accommodate changes to the exhibition narrative and contents:

There's stuff we know has been on display since we opened in 2003 that actually should have been well and truly retired by now.
So we had to take some stuff off, but a lot of it is the only example that we've got, so you take it off and it leaves a great gap. So you really need to revamp that whole section, but we just keep getting told that there's just no money.
Heritage Collections team member (Pictorial), *MAUNGA TAPU*

In the prevailing context of funding shortages for museum activities within the converged institutions (see Chapter 5), the fixed nature of pre-existing exhibition design and hardware at all the case study institutions placed constraints on the ability of museum staff to augment existing displays in response to discoveries made in the course of ongoing collections research, to tailor exhibits to correspond to changes in school education curricula, or modify exhibition content to better reflect the history, heritage and debates significant to the local population.

At *MAUNGA TAPU*, a number of respondents perceived the permanent exhibition areas as particularly static and dated. Members of the Heritage Collections team, responsible for research and documentation of the in-house collection, were critical of the disproportionate amount of funding ear-marked for hosting expensive travelling exhibitions, which did not explore the heritage of the region or promote public engagement with *MAUNGA TAPU*'s extensive in-house collection holdings. The implications of the situation were likewise recognised by the Manager, Exhibitions, who raised the broader consequences of inattention to permanent displays for the long-term sustainability of the organisation as a whole:

> *What we're tackling at the moment are funding issues to do with how we go about refreshing those* [permanent] *galleries. One way we're going to disenfranchise our public is to be seen to not really care much and not investing energy into keeping the place vibrant.*
> Manager, Exhibitions, *MAUNGA TAPU*

In other words, unchanging, poorly funded permanent exhibitions could communicate an institutional disregard for the value of local heritage and culture to visitors (and other users) of the facility. With exhibition areas functioning as the primary interface between museums and a large proportion of their audiences, any institution that neglects the development and maintenance of its displays – especially a converged organisation whose operation is paid for by council rates - risks alienating the community of stakeholders that fund its ongoing operations.

6.3.2 *Churn 'em in, churn 'em out*:[91] temporary exhibitions

In contrast to the issues raised in connection with permanent exhibitions of museum content, temporary exhibitions – comprised of a variety of content including art work, museum objects, and archival photographs and documents - were a focal point of all the case studies involved in this research. Most institutions had a very active program of changing exhibitions.

[91] Extract from comments by the Team Leader, Art Gallery and Collections, *LONEHILL*, regarding the display of touring exhibitions.

6.3.2.1 Exhibition spaces

In this regard, one benefit of convergence, often cited by participants across all the cases, was greater access and flexibility in the use of exhibition spaces, especially when new facilities were constructed to house the integrated institutions. The capacity to spread larger exhibitions across multiple zones (i.e. library, research centre or general circulation spaces) not only meant that a increased variety of travelling and in-house exhibitions could be accommodated, but also had the additional advantage of promoting the growth of new audience groups for each collecting area:

> *I'd say one of the benefits of convergence is that we can co-locate exhibitions like Great Collections... And certainly it introduces new audiences in particular to the gallery. So you get people that don't normally go there – who might go to the library, borrow a book, wander through the museum but not often go to the gallery – but if they see that 'oh, there's a motorbike over there at the gallery'-- It's a different type of clientele, so I think it does help with audience development.*
> Museum and Social History Coordinator, *LONEHILL*

In this way, convergence resulted in multi-purpose collection spaces, supporting the hosting of a diverse range of exhibitions and inviting broader access to them.

6.3.2.2 In-house versus imported exhibitions

However, the prevalence of touring exhibitions over local content again came to the fore as a perceived problem, especially at *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU* (all the regional organisations in this study). A core concern expressed by several respondents (at all case study institutions except *SOUTHSIDE)* was their institution's preoccupation in acting as a venue for travelling exhibitions. They speculated that hosting predominantly travelling displays produced an emphasis on the culture of larger metropolitan centres (for whose audiences the exhibitions were originally developed), rather than creating opportunities to investigate and validate the cultural distinctiveness and contribution of communities in regional areas through exhibitions curated in-house. As the gallery Manager of *LONEHILL* noted:

> *I think rural communities are very hard on themselves. They see themselves as the poor cousins of the major cities. And they don't have to be. They have attributes that are unique that need to be related, and they have a part in the national story and that needs to be told too.*
> Team Leader, Art Gallery and Collections, *LONEHILL*

The same respondent argued that her institution's over-reliance on touring exhibitions reduced the possibilities for showcasing objects from the organisation's own collection:

> *In this institution, when I arrived here, it revolved totally around touring product. Churn 'em in, churn 'em out. There was no major exhibition from the collection, and people in the community complained about not seeing the Drysdales, which are very much part of the community, or the Dupains, but just seeing the touring exhibitions.*
> Team Leader, Art Gallery and Collections, *LONEHILL*

In other words, the local community felt little affiliation with the content and themes presented in travelling exhibitions, while art works and objects with tangible links to the local region remained warehoused.

At *WESTLANDS*, the Manager, Collections Officer and Curator all conceded that the institution had a duty to compensate for infrequent changes to content in the permanent exhibition by delivering a greater number of temporary exhibitions dealing with local themes. However, as evident in the accounts provided below, this imperative was complicated by an imbalance in budget allocation for gallery versus museum temporary exhibitions. As a result, fewer financial and staff resources were available to conduct museum exhibition development:

> *We also felt that as this permanent exhibition wasn't changing, the temporary space had the responsibility to tell more local stories. That meant more curated shows, which meant more of our time going into them. So a bit of necessity and a bit of choice. We decided that we have an obligation to tell* [the region's]

stories, so if we're going to curate shows we need to spend the time to do it properly.
Collections Officer (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

Under our current status, the museum curator would be the poor second cousin three times removed, in terms of workload and in terms of the budget. The museum has a budget – probably about $24-25,000 a year. The gallery has a budget of $150-160,000 a year for exhibitions.
Manager of *WESTLANDS*

We had a few museum shows that were curated in-house that probably weren't the best exhibitions that we've ever done, and there was a sense that they were like that because there was no time to do anything more.
Collections Officer (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

As these extracts demonstrate, despite a stated commitment to produce an increased number of exhibitions using the organisation's own collections, insufficient funding and staffing for museum exhibition development resulted in what staff themselves perceived to be mediocre displays.

6.3.2.3 Planning for temporary exhibition development

As highlighted by members of the Exhibitions team at *MAUNGA TAPU*, development of temporary exhibitions at their institution was hampered by the fact that, from the time of the organisation's inception, there had been no plan to develop temporary exhibitions in-house. Correspondingly, responsibility for curatorial work was not clearly defined in the organisational structure, with a formal division drawn between the Heritage Collections team, responsible for cataloguing, research and collection documentation, and the Exhibitions team, which focussed on facilities management and coordinating the calendar of travelling exhibitions. The Manager, Exhibitions, described the effects of this disjuncture, noting that exhibitions utilising objects from the organisation's collection had usually only been developed when "gaps" in the travelling exhibitions roster needed to be filled, and that (although these exhibitions proved worthwhile) the Heritage Collections team was not adequately staffed to take on these additional duties:

> *On an informal level we've had a couple of people from Collections develop exhibitions. That's not part of their job description, but they've done a fabulous job just actually using what we've got in-house and filling some gaps with some really cost-efficient and really engaging exhibitions. We've got to encourage that sort of thing more. But they've got a day job as well. Putting that sort of effort into an exhibition, which isn't part of their primary role, is a really hard thing to justify and places a lot of stress on them.*
> Manager, Exhibitions, *MAUNGA TAPU*

In this case, the separation of collection research and exhibition development roles seem at odds with conventional museum staffing structures, where (at least ideally) original research of collections allows for exhibitions to evolve organically, through the identification of culturally and locally significant themes and relationships between objects. Effectively, the organisational structure at *MAUNGA TAPU* discouraged dialogue between museum professionals with rigorous knowledge of the collections, and those with authority to initiate exhibition projects.

6.3.2.4 Building knowledge around collections

Interestingly, at both *WESTLANDS* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, the propensity towards pre-packaged, travelling exhibitions rather than temporary exhibitions curated in-house demonstrates an effective disconnect between staff knowledge of collections and the eventual public programs offered by these institutions. In the case of *WESTLANDS*, the Curator was responsible for both research and exhibition development, but, as discussed in previous section of this chapter, in-depth knowledge of the museum collection remained unattainable due to his workload and the time-intensive nature of museum collection research.

Participants at *RIVERBANK* and *LONEHILL* described similar circumstances. In fact, *RIVERBANK*'s curator outlined how she had deliberately insisted on avoiding exhibition development or coordination for 12 months in order to conduct research on the collection, which she had felt she had neglected for several years. In her view, objects suffered "little deaths" when relegated to storage for indefinite periods – a situation she was at pains to reverse:

> *I said to* [the Manager]*: I'd really like to focus on the collection this year and give it the time that it needs. Because we have a really fantastic collection, a lot of really early period-- the first 50 years of Australia, and the dynamics of that, are here, locked in there* [the storeroom]. *Locked in cardboard boxes in compactus.*
> Curator, *RIVERBANK*

Here, the Curator's chronic shortage of time to explore the collection for new information frustrated the scope of potential exhibition development, subsequently limiting opportunities for visitors to interact with significant cultural artefacts and narratives.

For similar reasons, the Team Leader, Art Gallery and Collections at *LONEHILL*, deplored her organisation's reliance on travelling exhibition 'product', highlighting that its value was restricted to superficial notions of financial efficiency, rather than community benefit:

> *Well, if you are going to reduce administrative costs, then you probably will do the touring exhibitions that you just churn in and churn out every 6 weeks, because you don't have to do any research. You don't have to do any interpretation of it. You don't have to relate it to the community because it isn't part of the community. So yes, you can do that. The contribution is* [only a] *administrative saving.*
> Team Leader, Art Gallery and Collections, *LONEHILL*

In other words, pressure to maintain a rapidly changing cycle of temporary exhibitions, imported from other institutions, did little to foster engagement around issues of local interest, identity and historical importance. As the Curator at *WESTLANDS* stated:

> *…we need to do our own shows. It is crucial. We can't bring in too many things* [travelling exhibitions], *because there are too many things that this display here is not telling us. …At the end of the day, I keep saying we need to curate more. There is no point in us simply being a venue. Being a 'venue' is*

> *attractive to a lot of people, in the sense that you just show things that pass through, and we have that role to play. But we are much, much more than that.*
> Curator (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

By contrast, at *MAUNGA TAPU*, Heritage Collections staff had the opportunity to develop deep knowledge of the museum holdings through dedicated attention to cataloguing, research and other forms of documentation. However, this knowledge did not regularly translate into exhibition content because exhibition development was outside the role descriptions of collections staff.

6.4 Interpretation*: It's the mediation thing, isn't it?*[92]

Issues relating to the interpretation of museum collections – the ways in which the meanings, values and relevance of objects are constructed and communicated within the museum context - are implicit in all of the themes considered within this chapter so far. In particular, the parameters according to which institutions select objects for inclusion in their collections, the ways and extent to which those objects are researched and documented, and points of access to collections (through permanent and temporary exhibitions, databases, and other public programs) all play a role in determining how object meanings are understood by collection users. However, interpretation as a constitutive element of museum practice within converged institutions has not been explicitly considered so far. In this final analysis of the findings, I therefore focus on the implications of convergence for interpretive processes through the accounts given by participants in the study.

6.4.1 Domain-based interpretive approaches

The integrity of specific library, archive, museum and gallery approaches and collection practices is maintained in institutions that retain a singular disciplinary focus. However, in the cases of convergence studied for this research, differences in the way in which collection professionals from different disciplinary backgrounds conduct their roles come into sharp relief. In relation to museum collection research

[92] Heritage Collections team member (Pictorial), *MAUNGA TAPU*, describing fundamental differences between library and museum approaches to collection documentation.

and public program development, participants remarked on the impact of discrepancies in concepts of interpretation, and differences in the priority given to interpretive practice.

For respondents at *WESTLANDS* and *LONEHILL*, incompatibilities between museum, art gallery and library approaches to interpretation resulted in inconsistencies in the development and delivery of public programs. For example, at *LONEHILL*, where staff with a single area of professional expertise were assigned cross-domain roles following the convergence restructure, the Library Manager reflected on the period during which she had been responsible for museum, gallery and library collections. Explaining that her professional knowledge of the non-library areas increased gradually as she worked in her new position, she highlighted that a fundamental difference between museums and libraries is the relative importance placed on access versus interpretation of collections:

> *It's really interesting, we explored this over time: librarians are very much about access - and I'm library-trained but I have done up to a postgraduate certificate in museum studies, just to give me some background – and I know museum people are about access as well, but librarians are about providing access to the collection and that's their raison d'etre. People from the museum profession have that focus as well – and of course it is and that's what exhibitions are about; access and interpretation – but librarians don't-- Interpretation is not as important to a librarian. Nor is that really detailed documentation.*
> Library Manager, *LONEHILL*

Here, she underscores the library emphasis on making book stock available to the public as soon as possible, and hence the importance placed on expedient cataloguing procedure. By contrast, the primary research often required for accessioning and documentation of museum objects, together with processes of interpretation – such as building thematic relationships between objects, composing exhibition texts and other publications, devising visual strategies for the presentation of objects, etc. - necessitated much slower 'progress' in workflow. One of the members of the Heritage Collections team at *MAUNGA TAPU* made specific reference to these differences,

comparing the specific ways in which libraries and museums understand the role of interpretation in the service they provide to users:

> *Yeah, it's the mediation thing, isn't it? Like, sure, we* [the library] *facilitate the lending of books that have information that will translate to knowledge, but the person that takes that* [book / resource] *away and does all that stuff 'out there', and processes that however they may wish to – or not at all, if they don't bother reading the book or whatever. And then they come in, drop the book off, and that's all the library's required to do. Whereas the museum, and the way in which we try to facilitate from our objects and the information around it, public programming and all of that, is incredibly labour intensive by comparison.*
> Heritage Collections team member (Pictorial), *MAUNGA TAPU*

In a sense, this respondent was drawing attention to the different points along the interpretative continuum that library items, as distinct from museum objects, become available to users.

In discussing the structure of archives and the ways in which they are rendered accessible to users, the Archivist at *RIVERBANK* provided yet another disciplinary perspective on the appropriate level of interpretation of collections. In her view, the role of archivists centred on organising, describing and preserving records, with little place for evaluating their wider meaning or significance:

> Respondent: *As an archivist, my role is more custodian, not so much researcher. People do often mix those up and think that you're a historian and a researcher as well – which you do, you end up having to do for enquiries and things, but it's not… the ideal role is to get the records organised so that they can be accessible and preserved. That's kind of the main thing – you are looking after the actual archives in the repository.*
> Interviewer: *So that's what you see as your key role?*
> Respondent: *Well, that's what the archivist should be doing. …making sure they have the right kind of material there, that they are looking after it for posterity, and that it is kept in good condition. And that it can be accessible if*

> *people want to find it later on. The fundamental principles of archives are original order and provenance.*
> Archivist, *RIVERBANK*

By way of summarising the extracts above, it is worth quoting at length the former CEO of a national collections sector body, interviewed as part of this research. Speaking from her experience negotiating across the library, museum, archives and gallery domains, she offered her own synopsis of the different attitudes and practices of collection interpretation that are distinctive to each collecting area:

> *So, the objects themselves can actually be considered in any way you want, managed in a converged way or not. The difference is in the attitude of the professional to that cultural material. I'm going to give you some stereotypes, but to me they are true: the traditionally trained librarian sits at the information desk, a customer – a user - comes forward, a potential reader, a user of the material, and says "look, I'm chasing down this report, I can't find it anywhere". The librarian says "let me help you", does some searching-- The librarian hasn't opened the covers, has just read the spine to make sure it's the right volume, and their day's work is absolutely fulfilled by having been able to put the document or artefact that the user wants into the user's hands and they do not, in a sense, care what the user does with* [it]. *The librarian doesn't in any way interpret that material for the user. Whereas, the museum curator or education officer or collection manager will be similarly thrilled at being able to match up a research enquiry with a real object, but they will also read the catalogue information and add to the information about that object by fleshing out the understanding of it in an interpretive way.*
> Former Director, national collections sector agency

This respondent's ideas reflect the comments of the previously cited participants in outlining domain-based approaches to collection interpretation, and the relative importance of interpretation to their professional area. Moreover, these extracts underscore the degree to which different 'end-products' for collection work require particular professional skills and expertise in order to be delivered effectively.

6.4.2 *Process conflict:*[93] interpreting across the domains

For many of the participants in this research, competing approaches to interpretation resulted in challenges to the sustainability of converged role descriptions.

At *WESTLANDS*, respondents described the "process conflict" that developed when individual staff members, whose previous expertise and experience was limited to either museums or the visual arts sector, were required to work across the two disciplinary fields. In particular, as the following two extracts demonstrate, disagreement around the appropriate level of interpretation provided in exhibition content, as well as uncertainties about catering appropriately to perceived differences in the expectations of museum versus gallery audiences, were common sources of tension and frustration for staff:

> *Narrative revelation, rather than resolution – that's what the museum world needs to work in. But a lot of the art galleries don't have that narrative and they don't want that narrative; they view anything that gets in the road of just seeing the artwork as almost anathema to it.*
> Manager of *WESTLANDS*

> *And I know also that there's a tendency for example on* [the Manager's] *part, with gallery shows, to have lots and lots of text, because he comes from a museum and education background where interpretation and information is what people want. Whereas* [the Curator] *is reluctant to do that because he comes from an art background where the images take-- where you don't over-interpret, you let people work it out for themselves. So there is a bit of a process conflict there, coming from different perspectives at something.*
> Collections Officer (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

At *WESTLANDS* it was difficult for individual staff members to balance the contrasting demands produced by the time-intensive nature of museum collection research and exhibition development, as opposed to visual arts curatorial practices.

[93] Collections officer, *WESTLANDS*, describing the effects of different approaches to interpretation on the ability of staff to perform their roles effectively.

Extracts I have already included from the interview with *WESTLANDS*'s Curator attest to the stress and diminished sense of accomplishment that this situation engendered. As the Manager of that institution confirmed:

> Respondent: *Well, the curators that we've had have been from art backgrounds. They have all been from fine arts backgrounds. So they are far more comfortable working within the gallery sphere rather than the museum sphere. Museum shows are far more difficult to do.*
> Interviewer: *In what way?*
> Respondent: *They require a lot more research, they require a lot more time, and they require a lot more material in a sense. Whereas, within a regional arts base, you can have a couple of meetings with an artist, go to their studio and give them some advice or talk about what they're doing; get them to write an artist's statement for the floor sheet, and then the work comes in and you spend a few days arranging it. There's a lot of conceptual work in that, but it's not the sitting down and slogging through books and newspaper articles to find exactly who said what and when, and to find objects to illustrate that story.*
> Manager of *WESTLANDS*

In this case, it became very difficult for staff to reconcile different levels of significance attributed to the informational versus affective properties of the object, together with opposing concepts about the role of the visitor in experiencing the meaning of visual arts or museum displays.

Furthermore, while respondents at *WESTLANDS* were conscious of the limitations that switching between museum and gallery 'headspaces' placed on achieving efficiency and high standards across the institution's programs, there was a sense among employees that any attempts to improve the situation would be resisted by the local council funding body. According to *WESTLANDS*' Centre Coordinator, the primary concern for the council was to maintain (i.e. avoid increasing) the resource allocation to the institution, even if this resulted in a gradual decline in the quality of its services:

> *I think council's really happy that they have this great centre and there's really good feedback, and they just want it now to 'go' – so "don't do anything*

fabulous that will impact on your staff, don't have more venue hire because we don't want to hear you say you need more staff. Don't have more shows – just have the basic and don't make them fancy, because we just want to say: we have a great centre over there." But they don't understand that to keep it going with the people over there – the industry is saying we've got to do these things and these new things are happening – and of course, professionally, they want to be delivering the best. I think council just wants to have 'enough' – don't do too much, just do 'enough'.

Centre Coordinator, *WESTLANDS*

In these ways, the organisational structures created through convergence at *WESTLANDS* and *LONEHILL* contrived to bring together professionally distinct library, museum and art gallery traditions for interpreting collections, producing complex and cross-disciplinary role descriptions. The stress felt by staff whose roles necessitated straddling these approaches and achieving a professional level of collection research, documentation, exhibitions in each interpretive 'genre', has already been referenced earlier in these findings. Of greater concern perhaps, is the apparently secondary importance placed on the capacity for museum collections to be explored for meaning - and therefore made intellectually accessible to visitors and users - within this environment. To this end, it could be argued that the rich interpretive potential of the museum collections that formed part of this research has not been realised so far through the convergence model.

6.4.3 Collection interpretation and the predilections of local government

One final theme related to the interpretation of museum collections in converged institutions focuses on the role of councils in influencing direction of collection interpretation. Of course, no museum is neutral, nor can museums claim to be unbiased in the focus of their research, documentation and presentation of collections. However, the merger of collecting institutions with local government bureaucracies through the process of convergence signalled a significant shift for many of the museums involved. Moving from organisations that had been initiated by community groups such as local historical societies, many of these museums had functioned as independent entities. While convergence, in many cases, guaranteed the future sustainability of these

organisations, the changes involved in conforming to council reporting structures and local government objectives (not to mention a perceived responsibility to satisfying rate-payers) was also a significant influence on how these museums could function.

A number of participants noted that interpretation of the museum collection components of converged institutions was beholden to the intentions of local councils. For the Curator at *RIVERBANK*, both the background of the organisation's overall Manager, and its position as an arm of local government, played a significant role in determining the context in which the meaning of objects was presented:

> *Generally, how our work is informed, it is informed from a particular perspective, which, I think, is quite tourism-based. That's also been driven by other parts of council, because it's being driven by the professional experience of our Manager. And those have upsides, but I happen to think that the museum aspect is often not recognised in the same way.*
>
> *Council has never really understood, I believe, except for the council workers here, what the function of museums is. And now the drive for tourism and that engagement, and also the managerial experience in this situation is visitor information experience largely… I think that the way that interpretation occurs, or what is considered to be important, and how it happens, is more from a tourism point of view than a museum point of view.*
> Curator, *RIVERBANK*

As these extracts and other information in the interview transcripts demonstrates, this respondent felt strongly that certain aspects of museum interpretation and communication, including highlighting the national historical significance of the local region, and producing researched collection publications, was sidelined in favour of narratives perceived as favourable to, and geared towards, the needs of outside visitors to the area.

Likewise, the Local Studies Librarian at the same institution described how the emphasis on appealing to tourists was shifting the organisation's goals away from interpreting the local significance of its collections:

> Respondent: [The Manager], *coming from her background in tourism, is obviously interested in tourism, and there is a push on at the moment to change the focus of* [*RIVERSIDE*] *to be more tourism-based.*
> Interviewer: *What does that entail?*
> Respondent: *It would entail changing some of the things, like the direction of the education officer, for example. And the focus of education will be more tourism… To have exhibitions that are more globally-based than locally* – [so] *how do you get the person from the North Shore to come to [this region]? Do you put on a historical exhibition about* [this region]*? No. You put something on about other sorts of activities; things that are maybe not* [this region]-*centric, but will bring people in.*
> Local Studies Librarian, *RIVERBANK*

These, and similar observations made by participants at the other case studies, return focus to the influence of management structures on the exploration of the meanings and significance of cultural collections.

6.5 Key themes: museum interpretive practices and convergence

This chapter has examined the effects of convergence on museum practices, underpinned by the assumption that structural changes to collecting organisations (including the configuration of management structures, funding arrangements, redefinition of position descriptions, the deployment and expectations placed on professional staff with particular disciplinary expertise, etc.) have the capacity to fundamentally alter the interpretive context for museum collections. I considered the ability of staff working with museum collections in converged institutional settings to perform professional museum work related to acquisitions and collection development, cataloguing and documentation, preservation, exhibitions and other interpretative activities. It is these activities that ultimately shape the quantity and quality of the information produced around collections, facilitating intellectual access to the diverse histories, cultural practices and community groups represented through collections and determining the potential for objects to be utilised in public programs.

Based on this research, it is possible to draw the following general conclusions about the impact of convergence on activities related to the interpretation of museum collections:

Collection growth

The integration of local studies collections with museum collection through the convergence model assists in the formation of research links between related objects, images and documents, thereby improving the ability to identify thematic connections across collections. In general, however, converged budget structures often neglect allocating sufficient funding to new acquisitions, limiting opportunities for strategic development of museum collections.

Documentation and description

In some cases, convergence restructuring has precipitated improvements to basic museum collection documentation through the instigation of formal collection policies and employment of professional staff. Nevertheless, in most of the cases studied for this research, significant backlogs in cataloguing and research of museum collections remain unresolved.

Converging collection databases

The promise of creating thematic connections between diverse collections via converged collection database access has not been effectively realised. Existing joint access provided by converged institutions to their databases remains underutilised by public users, and usage patterns have not been evaluated.

Conservation and storage

Through convergence, the positioning of museum collections within the remit of local government created a perceived obligation on councils to preserve collections. However, not all case studies reported improvements to collection storage and conservation.

Permanent exhibitions

The use of external contracted curators and short lead-times for exhibition development characterised the set up of permanent museum exhibition areas at converged institutions. These conditions led to the installation of exhibitions without coherent narratives and limited relevance to the local community.
Shortages in ongoing funding for exhibition renewal have resulted in static permanent displays, and staff members are unable to modify these spaces or adequately adapt the displays to improve levels of user engagement.

Temporary exhibitions

Co-location of facilities through convergence provides greater variety and flexibility in the use of exhibition spaces. However, respondents point out that converged funding models favour regular rotation of travelling exhibitions in temporary display areas over the development of local content. For reasons outlined in this chapter and Chapter 5, limited capacity to produce in-house exhibitions reduces opportunities for converged institutions to document and carry out primary research on their own museum collections. Over-reliance on touring exhibition product therefore diminishes institutions' ability to interpret the unique heritage of local regions and their populations.

Interpretation

Differences in domain-based approaches to collections and access were confirmed in the responses of participants in this study: librarians perceived their primary role as the provision of public access to collections via efficient and swift cataloguing processes, rather than research and interpretation of collections; archivists prioritised custodianship of collections, including the preservation of records in 'original order', as their focus, with a secondary emphasis on collection research; and visual arts curators regarded large amounts of interpretive exhibition text as contrary to art gallery conventions.

Taking these differences into account, discrepancies between domain-based approaches to documentation methods and interpretation – so called "process conflict" - can potentially have detrimental impact on museum research and exhibitions (especially when staff from non-museum backgrounds become responsible for museum collections). Furthermore, where institutions are linked to local government,

the ways in which the meanings and significance of collections are explored can be influenced by the preferences and goals of councils.

With regard to the case studies used for this research, it is possible to draw a general conclusion: given the low standards of care and interpretation that typified the museum collections identified in this research, convergence certainly creates the potential for improvement across the scope of activities associated with museum professional practice and the provision of access to museum collections for visitors and users. However, in many ways, this potential remains either partially or mostly unfulfilled.

There are a number of significant challenges to museum practice that appear to be specifically related to converged collection environments. First, all case studies provide examples of museums existing in parallel with at least two other collecting areas (archives, local studies collections, art galleries, libraries, research centres), where an overall budget was split unevenly between these areas and their subsidiary functions. As a result of this situation, many respondents described chronic shortfalls in funding for basic museum activities such as accessioning, research and significance assessment. In regard to funding of the museum component, participants noted that a greater share of resources was directed towards 'outward-facing' programs such as a changing calendar of temporary displays - which comprised primarily of touring exhibition product created by other institutions – rather than promoting the development of exhibitions and public programs that utilised the institution's own collections. These circumstances compromised staff's capacity to devote adequate time for labour-intensive activities such as researching collections, perpetuating a pattern of comparatively superficial engagement with the collections and, subsequently, the range of opportunities for interacting with collections that could be made available to end-users down the line.

Second, the redesign of role descriptions around the converged model (particularly at *WESTLANDS* and *LONEHILL*) created positions with cross-disciplinary, cross-collection responsibilities that were originally filled by staff without the complementary range of expertise or experience. Several respondents confessed to their relative ignorance of collecting areas outside of their professional background, as well as the stress and insecurity – or "process conflict" - produced through the

necessity to work across diverse collecting areas simultaneously, or within collection contexts for which they were not specifically trained. For museum collections, this situation led to inconsistent attention being directed towards core activities such as primary research, building deep knowledge of collections, and thematic and narrative development for exhibitions.

In the next chapter I discuss the influence that institution-wide changes brought about through convergence – such as organisational 'vision' and goals, strategic planning, leadership, financial structures, the design of role descriptions, etc. – on museum practice.

7 Case Study Findings: organisational structures and management of convergence

7.1 Introduction

The extent to which the convergence of museums with other types of collecting institutions affects museum practice appears contingent on changes at the pan-institutional level. That is, the ways in which high-level, organisation-wide management restructures, modified role descriptions, and realignment of formal relationships between previously independent organisations and their staff, influence granular changes to professional engagement with, and interpretation of, museum collections.[94] This chapter investigates the direct and flow-on effects of convergence management and restructuring on activities related to museum collections and programs. The categories discussed include the impact of the original motivations of governing bodies in pursuing convergence, the importance of leadership, strategic direction and implementation of institutional changes in structure and role descriptions, and the facilitation of staff collaboration and professional development. Having examined the specific implications of convergence for interpretive museum practice in Chapter 6, this chapter reveals the significance of management and organisational structures to the performance those practices.

7.2 Mixed messages: articulating a concept of convergence

A logical starting point for reporting the findings in this chapter is to begin with the rationale for convergence, and outline which aspects of the model motivated local governments across NSW to pursue convergence of cultural facilities.

[94] Other legitimate lines of inquiry could investigate the effects of converged management and organisational changes on library or archival practices, but that research falls outside the scope of this thesis.

In view of accounts provided by the respondents, the most striking finding within this context was the ambiguity that surrounds the concept of convergence, and what the organisational restructuring it entails was supposed to achieve for the institutions involved. The research revealed a mixture of perceived justifications for convergence – which I detail below - ranging from the philosophical to the purely pragmatic. Together with the different iterations of convergence adopted across the case studies, the variety of rationales for the restructures positioned the priorities of converged institutions across a wide spectrum of end-goals. For museum collections in particular, uncertainty around organisational vision resulted in varying degrees of emphasis on the importance of interpretative museum practice.

7.2.1 A holistic view of culture

Agreement about the rationale for convergence was rare among participants in the study, but perhaps the only point of consensus for several respondents, across all five cases, was the idea that convergence broadly makes sense as a concept of uniting diverse forms of cultural expression. In other words, all kinds of collections, whether they comprise bibliographic material, records, artefacts or artworks, are all physical manifestations of human culture.[95] From this perspective, typological distinctions or boundaries created by the separate collecting domains produce artificial divisions between materials that are intrinsically linked. Some respondents recognised the potential to understand the significance of any collection object in numerous ways, and therefore that convergence provides an opportunity for the relationships between objects and collections to be made explicit.

As an example, one respondent highlighted the polysemous nature of collection objects, stating:

> *…people can run rings around themselves trying to define when something becomes craft and when it becomes art – but it's just a continuum. Something is conceptual, and something is not. Something is used, and something is not.*

[95] See the Introduction to this thesis for references to literature that supports the concept of integrating different forms of material culture.

> *Just as to say something is important and conceptual, but to say to the designer of the last Ford Falcon 'sorry, there's nothing conceptual there, no meaning in what you do, you're just making a car'. To me, we will eventually get over that and see that you can tell the story of humanity through all of it's objects, all presented together, complex and dynamic in narrative.*
> Manager of *WESTLANDS*

Another participant at *LONEHILL* proposed that the idea of converging collecting institutions embodied the concept of an interconnected cultural exchange in Habermas' model of the public sphere, where vibrant engagement with all forms of culture could be facilitated.

The perceived joint cultural purpose of collecting institutions was also reflected in a number of more specific comments. For example, some respondents at *RIVERBANK* and *LONEHILL* recognised that museums, local studies libraries and archives shared a common purpose in maintaining and responding to the heritage of their local communities, while at least one member of staff at *LONEHILL* believed that typological similarities between the museum and local studies collections had stimulated thinking about convergence at her institution.

Likewise, two staff members at *MAUNGA TAPU* noted that the previously independent museum had already held archival and historical photograph collections normally associated with libraries, so it made sense to integrate those services formally.

Finally, one respondent at *LONEHILL* pointed out that the potential of convergence to facilitate programming across all collection areas, and thereby exploit connections between collections, had been one of the motivations for the restructure:

> *An important consideration for us, and it relates very much to the audience development, was the potential for programming across library and museum services. The way the structure ended up going initially was across the gallery as well, but we just thought, in terms of programming for various demographics, and educational services, there were so many advantages to*

> *having one team that was able to program across all our cultural services and facilities.*
> Library Manager, *LONEHILL*

For example, a member of the Learning and Outreach team at *LONEHILL* spoke of the benefits in designing of children's educational programs to incorporate engagements with library books and thematically related objects in the museum display in a single visit, thereby reinforcing learning outcomes.

7.2.2 Improving access to cultural amenities

However, it was the prevalence of pragmatic rather than philosophical rationales for convergence that predominated the accounts of convergence offered by respondents across the five cases.

At all the case studies except for *SOUTHSIDE* (which, at the time of the interviews, had a converged management structure but operated at separate physical locations), the desire to create a central cultural precinct as a vibrant community focal point and tourism hub – often epitomised by investment in 'iconic' architecture - featured prominently as an incentive in pursuing convergence. As one staff member at *WESTLANDS* put it*:*

> *I guess it was seen as just a common sense approach… because they* [local councils] *are all for precincts now and having these things in one place. It just came out of a need; they weren't going to have all these* [separate] *places and say we are going to have an art gallery over there and a museum over here.*
> Centre Coordinator, *WESTLANDS*

Considering that respondents at every case study conceded that existing museum, library, gallery and archive facilities had needed to be upgraded (or actually relocated) before the idea of convergence was mooted, the advantages of establishing a precinct simultaneously addressed the need for infrastructure renewal.

Specifically for audiences interested in heritage, the benefit of co-locating facilities was easy access to diverse collections and resources in a single location.

In this way, convergence was seen as a tool for audience development, capitalising on existing demographic similarities between visitors at, for example, libraries and museums. In particular, with traditionally lower visitation than their library counterparts, the museum components of the convergences at *LONEHILL*, *SOUTHSIDE*, and *MAUNGA TAPU* were seen to be the main beneficiaries of audience crossover:

> *We basically saw it as a good thing that the library and museum would be joined together. We saw a number of synergies between libraries and museums. Whilst more people come to the library and they come more frequently because they're borrowing books, they're using technology, they're attending programs, often it is a very similar demographic that* [visits] *libraries and museums.*
> Library Manager, *LONEHILL*

Interestingly, while the extract above illustrates audience development as an important consideration in convergence, none of the respondents offered concrete explanations of the strategies through which visitor crossover between collection areas would be promoted or maintained. For example, could it be assumed that library visitors would automatically be interested in what the museum had to offer? What levels of engagement with museum collections would be achieved with users who 'wandered' into the museum as an adjunct to their library visit?

Finally, a single participant at *MAUNGA TAPU* discussed the increasing pervasiveness of digital technology as direct competition to collecting institutions as information providers, and envisaged convergence as a way of responding to user demands for greater information access by uniting collections as sources of 'knowledge':

> *My feeling is that in ten or twenty year's time, we're going to look back at the idea of 'converging' and think that was based on foresight, because I think we're going to be forced to become more of a singular institution. The idea of a*

> *'knowledge centre' is the critical concept for me. When I think about knowledge, the only way it's been thought of is in books until recently. Before that, it was spoken word, then books, and now books have got competition and people can find knowledge anywhere. So, we need to capitalise on that idea. We've got competition from the virtual world and a surprising amount of people trust the internet.*
> Manager, Exhibitions, *MAUNGA TAPU*

The same respondent predicted a shift in the professional roles of librarians, curators and other collection professionals from custodians to "mediators of knowledge", implying that collecting institutions would embrace a more 'curatorial' approach in sifting through information, guiding the information search and helping users piece together information from numerous disparate sources to create meaning.

However, the reference to digital technologies by only a single participant was unexpected. Given the amount of recent international literature concerning the impact of digital technologies in creating the expectation of instantaneous, 'democratic' and unhindered access to information among users of cultural institutions - as well as corresponding moves by institutions around the world toward digital convergence of collections - the absence of this consideration among reasons given for physical convergence was conspicuous.

7.2.3 A response to funding opportunities

In quantitative terms, the most common reason for convergence given by participants in the research was not based on the philosophy of delivering accessible cultural amenities or increasing meaningful engagement with collections, but rather pecuniary reasons. As I have outlined in Chapter 5, one important external incentive for convergence came in the form of special state government grants created to support convergence projects. Official sanction for convergence was ratified in 2006 with the signing of the Third Cultural Accord between the NSW State Government and the LGSA (Local Government and Shires Association). Many participants in the research perceived both funding incentives and the promise of cost savings for local councils as the primary drivers for convergence.

On a number of occasions throughout her interview, a senior member of staff at *LONEHILL* referred to the connection between state government grants and the decision to converge at her organisation, explaining how the availability of funding for convergence projects had influenced the kind of restructuring undertaken at the institution:

> *At that stage we were also thinking about operating as a co-located* [facility] – *we were in that mode of planning for a new library and museum – and again, because there were funding opportunities available for some elements of 'convergence', we started exploring it, we started doing the research.*
>
> *…as I was saying, when we started our convergence journey, funding was prevalent for anything that said the word 'converged' in it or talked about working together in whatever way.*
>
> [and] *We said we needed a Collections Manager - a Collections Manager who would be across the library, the museum and the gallery. So we put in a funding application and in about 2002-3, we were successful with that grant and employed a Collection Manager across our library, our local studies, our museum collection and our visual arts collection. That was, I guess, our first converged move.*
> Library Manager, *LONEHILL*

Interestingly, the amount of designated convergence funding allocated to the *LONEHILL* project amounted to only a small fraction of the total capital works and administrative costs of establishing the converged institution. Here and elsewhere, it is therefore surprising that a relatively small amount of state government funding provided enough incentive to get convergence 'over the line' as the preferred organisational model for local governments seeking to redevelop their cultural amenities. In addition, it is often the case that neither state government grants nor local government allocations made adequate provision for the ongoing operational costs of converged institutions, such as staffing and building maintenance. As such, converged organisations became 'locked in' to an operating model and physical infrastructure

without the financial security of long-term financial support, with subsequent consequences for effective museum practice.

Perhaps the lack of attention given to the longer term funding viability of converged institutions came as a result of the cost efficiencies that local governments anticipated to gain through the model. Certainly, respondents across all five case studies indicated that the expectation of lower expenditure - especially in the form of so-called 'economies of scale', shared building costs, reducing duplication of resources and facilities (office space, toilets, parking, etc.) and reduction of staff numbers – provided a persuasive argument to local governments wishing to implement convergence, albeit at the expense of developing a rigorous conceptual rationale for the restructure:

> *In relation to convergence, they liked the idea of that. Certainly, it can be sold to council in different ways. One of the ways that it was sold was about effective use of resources.*
> Museum and Social History Coordinator, *LONEHILL*

> *…it was agreed that a co-located library and museum would be a sensible idea financially, in terms of rationalisation of buildings, of resources, and all those financial elements.*
> Library Manager, *LONEHILL*

> Interviewer: *So do you know what the rationale was behind the idea to combine the various functions of this cultural centre?*
> Respondent: *Money.*
> Manager of *WESTLANDS*

> *I think a cynical person would say it was purely a way of combining administrative resources. It may have seemed to have made economic sense on some level, because we're funded by the local council and they're always looking at ways of working more efficiently.*
> Manager, Exhibitions, *MAUNGA TAPU*

At *SOUTHSIDE*, the Manager explicitly highlighted that the council's take-over of the floundering local historical society collection, together with the implementation of integrated management of the museum, local history and library services, was an important factor in ensuring the ongoing existence of the museum collection. Likewise, in view of finite resources, the Community Services Director (City Council) responsible for *WESTLANDS* emphasised that convergence provided the only mechanism by which all the affected collecting organisations could maintain professional staff:

> *Obviously we've got the economies of scale too. We couldn't have had a museum off at another site and duplicated that and had two managers of that… And obviously, if it had been split, it would have been to the detriment of-- saying this facility's going to have a collections officer, this one isn't. Or, this one's going to have an education officer and this one isn't.*
> Community Services Director (City Council), *WESTLANDS*

As outlined by the CEO of a NSW Museum and Gallery agency interviewed for this study, the prospect that convergence could deliver financial savings to local governments – who are responsible for multiple cultural facilities - often trumped the philosophical rationale for restructuring. Or, as noted by the Curator at *RIVERBANK* and Collections and Exhibitions Officer at *LONEHILL*, the attention given to crafting appropriate staff structures or recruiting adequately qualified staff was not always equal to the emphasis on achieving cost savings:

> *… quite frankly, I think half the convergence places are a matter of economics; 'Oh yeah, we can have one person managing it, as long as they know how to manage it doesn't matter what their knowledge base is', and you might be lucky to have someone who's good, or you might not.*
> Curator, *RIVERBANK*

> *I think the idea with convergence was to take away the art gallery person and the museum person, and get one person to do both jobs. They advertised that job at the same rate as the previous curatorial job, and the curator at that time*

> *said 'I'm out of here! I'll take the redundancy thank you very much – I'm not going to do two institutions worth of work for the same wage…'*
> Collections and Exhibitions Officer, *LONEHILL*

Furthermore, as the following dialogue shows, the primacy of putative concerns over a theoretical justification for convergence gave rise to cynicism among staff about the stated aims of their institution:

> Respondent 1: *Then, somewhere along the line, someone had the idea 'well, why are we duplicating a lot of the services? Why are we duplicating staff rooms, toilets, those sorts of things? Why don't we combine them all in one and have this new beast, called* [*MAUNGA TAPU*]*, which is going to be the combined library, museum, visitor information centre and the first of its type in the world.'*
> Respondent 2: *Was it really just about toilets and staff rooms?*
> Respondent 1: *That's probably simplifying it a little bit! But it was seen as a rationalisation of some of the resources.*
> Respondent 1: *Rather than that grandiose 'Knowledge* [Centre]*'. Like 'ta-da!' under lights, 'we're about Knowledge'. Well, actually, maybe we can cut down on admin staff.*
> Heritage Collections team interview, *MAUNGA TAPU*

In the end, a number of respondents across the case studies acknowledged that financial efficiency is problematic as a long-term rationale for convergence. As I have already noted in the previous chapter, where the emphasis on cost-reduction dominated the restructuring processes, converged institutions lacked the focus and resources to consistently deliver innovative and engaging services and programs.

7.2.4 *Convergence had no reason:*[96] the absence of a vision

As discussed above, respondents who took part in this research identified three core rationales for the emergence of the convergence trend in NSW. First, a small minority of participants cited the possibility of combining diverse forms of cultural expression,

[96] Group Leader Cultural Services (City Council), LONEHILL.

and the subsequent potential to creatively exploit relationships between those cultural forms, as an overarching goal. Others referenced improvements in access to collections, primarily in the tangible context of co-located cultural facilities and 'Precincts', as a significant factor. Finally, of those respondents who were able to articulate a rationale, many pointed to the expectation among local government bodies that convergence would result in financial efficiencies as the overriding motivating factor.

However, quantitatively speaking, it was staff members who were not able to articulate a clear reason for the convergence at their institution who were actually in the majority, ostensibly because no conceptual rationale had been articulated to them.

At *RIVERBANK*, *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU* the lack of a strong conceptual vision for convergence was identified most unambiguously. For example, respondents at *LONEHILL* speculated that the convergence arose as a form of "managerial reorganisation"; a "bureaucratic model" where the possibility of developing greater access to disparate collection resources was a secondary concern:

> *I think that was there* [the information-sharing rationale], *but probably only after a decision was made that we were going to be together. That's when we started exploring those convergence opportunities – after the decision was made that we would be together.*
> Library Manager, *LONEHILL*

In fact, the Council's Cultural Development Manager at LONEHILL conceded *"I actually haven't been able to find myself that definitive document or that argument that says 'this is our vision, this is where we want to go'"* - a sentiment echoed by the Manager of WESTLANDS:

> *I think there might have been one paper raised about the theoretical implications of it, but I think it was more of a discussion paper and it never really ironed out what the final thing would look like, other than physically. It didn't lay out a path as to how the new centre was going to act, what it was going to feel like and what it was going to do. It was very much about what it*

was going to look like: where was the museum, where was the art gallery and so forth.
Manager, *WESTLANDS*

Like those at *LONEHILL*, participants at *MAUNGA TAPU* described their ongoing uncertainty about the role of their institution and the purpose of convergence. A member of the Exhibitions team complained about the lack of institutional vision, saying "*it's not very clear what the institution is trying to be. Our Mission Statement is basically meaningless as far as I can tell, and it's laden with policy-speak*". His team manager, concerned about the organisation's ability to communicate effectively to its users, similarly stated:

I think we really struggle ourselves to articulate what we are as a whole. I think we still operate as a library and a museum and a research centre. Which is disappointing, I guess, that after eight years people working here still can't fully explain to outsiders what we are as a whole…
… We don't have a vision. You know, if you ask anyone here what [*MAUNGA TAPU*] *is, you're going to get a hundred thousand different answers, but you're not going to get that singular vision that makes sense of what* [*MAUNGA TAPU*] *is. And until we get that, we can't sell ourselves to the community very well.*
Manager, Exhibitions, *MAUNGA TAPU*

So, how do museum professionals collaborate effectively with staff from other domain backgrounds, apportion budgets, assign collection management priorities, or design programs in the absence of a clear organisational vision to guide their work? A member of the Heritage Collections team at *MAUNGA TAPU* described how she and her colleagues were forced, out of desperation, to create their own decision-making guidelines where none existed from the organisation as a whole:

In regard to that lack of leadership that we've been talking about; that lack of vision for the whole institution. In the absence of that, what it has required is for individual teams, or even individuals themselves, to find meaning behind their own working strategy. We've said 'right, well, we are going to prioritise

> *this, and whatever else is going on out there, we'll just try to forge ahead and do some good stuff based on what we've identified as being important for us'. That's not at the exclusion of others or wanting to be different to them. It's just the only way of looking forward.*
> Heritage Collections team member (Pictorial), *MAUNGA TAPU*

Extrapolating from these findings, it appears that teams and individuals within a converged organisation counteract the inertia created by a lack of institutional vision by creating a surrogate mission and strategies in support of their own department or area. Where converged institutions remain conceptually adrift as a result of the largely economic rationales that have driven their establishment, staff move to define their own direction and strategies, thus, ironically, isolating themselves from other departments and collecting areas within the 'converged' structure. Especially where reductions have been made in staff numbers (or the responsibilities of existing staff have been expanded as a result of the convergence) staff focus becomes more 'siloed', stymieing potential for collaboration and eroding trust between departments. The resulting frustration of some staff at *MAUNGA TAPU* was summed up well by a member of the Heritage Collections team:

> *I think that one of the things that rides us off is-- there is no real sense of direction. Like, the Heritage Team is working on updating our collections plan to give us priorities over the next period of time, but we have no idea if, and I don't believe they* [the Exhibitions team] *have, an Exhibitions Plan. Where are they going? And how do we fit into providing material that's required for forthcoming shows? What are the kinds of* [thematic] *threads that they're trying to promote through their programming? There isn't any strong articulation of that, which creates a whole lot of other issues.*
> Heritage Collections team member (Pictorial), *MAUNGA TAPU*

As a result, cross-disciplinary projects at *MAUNGA TAPU* had been initiated by staff members rather than by the institution's leadership. The conceptual benefits of convergence were being realised only sporadically, depending on the initiative shown by individual staff rather than being driven by a well-articulated vision and set of strategies forged at the level of management.

7.3 Management issues

7.3.1 Planning and management

The previous section detailed how respondents at the case study organisations described the institutional vision and rationales for convergence (or lack thereof). Extracts from the interview research highlight the mixed messages and frustrating lack of conceptual foundations that characterised the experience of convergence for many of the participants in this research. But the idea of convergence and its realisation as an operational reality is also mediated through a framework of management structures, as well as planning processes, that establish strategies and mechanisms for the day-to-day functioning of institutions and their staff. This section focuses on these administrative areas and considers the role and enactment of museum practices in these contexts.

7.3.2 Challenges in implementing change

A significant theme that developed through the analysis of the interviews concerned the planning and implementation of change in converged institutions, and associated issues of leadership, organisational restructuring and sustainability.

The need for strong leadership through the change process was clearly expressed by a number of participants, primarily as a means of driving and sustaining collaboration across various collections and professional disciplines. In reference to *MAUNGA TAPU* in particular, the CEO of the district council described the need for strong and inspirational leadership as a goal that had yet to be fully realised at the institution and, without which, divisive competition between sections was likely to prevail, inevitably undermining any holistic vision for the organisation. According to her, staff commitment to the idea of collaboration had first to be demonstrated by all levels of management as 'holders of the vision':

> *I always find it really easy for people to intellectually embrace a vision, but the test is actually to see how they behave. I see it all the time, even in my own executive, we will intellectually embrace the idea of a certain culture in our organisation and a certain style of leadership, and then you watch them settle back into their old patterns of behaviour. And they don't even know they're*

> *doing it. So I think that's a great challenge in convergence; the way in which the staff are led and brought together…*
> *… cracking the whole potential of convergence takes a lot of time, strong leadership, the selection of the right people, and someone to uphold that vision and not let it go. I think it's very easy to slip back …into old behaviours.*
> CEO, District Council, *MAUNGA TAPU*

SOUTHSIDE was the only case study where participants expressed positive responses to the way in which their leadership team had managed the change process.[97] Through the availability of change management workshops and opportunities for staff input into strategic planning, many staff at *SOUTHSIDE* felt validated, respected and supported through the convergence restructure. According to the staff, essential attitudinal shifts, such as promoting communication and collaboration across domain boundaries, were actively promoted through the transition. As one member of the museum staff noted:

> *The main thing that resonated with me was going to those 'coping with change' workshops and meeting with other staff to talk about our strategic plan. And that was the bit that I was most pleased to be involved in, because working together to form new goals and new visions was, I felt, really important. It gave all the staff an opportunity to have a voice in where we were heading, and the vision statement was developed in consultation with staff. I thought that we* [at the museum] *had quite a good mission statement, but things had changed in our community and it was good to be able to incorporate those.*
> Curator, *SOUTHSIDE*

Overwhelmingly, however, inadequate change management resulted in many negative experiences of restructuring for participants at other case studies.

[97] It should be acknowledged that a number of staff either resigned or failed to reapply for new positions during the restructure at *SOUTHSIDE*. As none of these former employees were interviewed, the information supplied here may be biased in favour of reporting positive staff views of the change management process at that institution.

A number of respondents from *LONEHILL* acknowledged that poor planning for the convergence, combined with insufficient communication to staff about the rationale for the changes and the radical reconfiguration of job descriptions to fit a converged organisational model, left many employees feeling disenfranchised and confused about their new roles. One senior staff member, who had experienced the restructuring, observed:

> *I think people were spread very thin across areas-- and there was a lack of change management, people put into positions without the appropriate skills, or training, or support. Disgruntled staff, lack of motivation, a whole heap of things happening and it wasn't ideal.*
> Library Manager, *LONEHILL*

The resulting resistance to change among some staff sabotaged the potential for the idea of convergence to be fully adopted.

At *WESTLANDS*, respondents observed that the lack of museum representation in the initial design of the converged organisational structure had created a legacy of disadvantage for the museum collection. The council's move towards convergence saw the promotion of the previous gallery manager to the overall leadership of the new institution, involved only limited consultation with existing staff, and side-lined employees who had previously worked with, and were passionate about, the museum objects, leaving no museum staff to advocate for the needs of the museum. The Local Studies Officer – one of two staff who had overseen the museum collection prior to the convergence – described her ongoing resentment about the abrupt and non-consultative change process that had characterised the restructure:

> *Then we had a meeting with the Manager, who rarely had a meeting with us, and I said to her 'my contract's coming up next month', and she said 'oh, you're not going to be here* [at the museum] *anymore'. I said 'beg your pardon?!' . She said 'you're going to the library' and I was gob-smacked, because I'd never heard of it before, and I was about to go on holidays to New Zealand. At 4.20 the director from here* [the library] *rings up and says 'when you come back from New Zealand you're coming straight back here', and*

> *that's how it was. So I did pack up as much as I could, I rang my husband bawling my eyes out.*
> Local Studies Officer, *WESTLANDS*

Likewise, at *MAUNGA TAPU*, a number of employees felt that the convergence had been imposed on them, rather than being developed in consultation with the staff. For example, members of the team responsible for management and research of the museum collections regarded as unnecessarily rigid the insistence by the institution's former director on usage of the new name given to their institution (rather than allowing staff to refer to its component collection areas). Feeling disassociated from the decision-making process, few staff felt ownership of the idea of convergence, perpetuating the tendency for staff to revert to less collaborative ways of working.

7.3.3 'Converged' leadership

For many respondents, the leadership of a converged institution represented a crucial starting point for setting the tone for collaboration, participation and validation of professional skills across the organisation. For this reason, successes or failures in strategic planning and restructuring, as well as systemic problems in communication and collaboration, were seen by many to stem from the professional background and particular managerial approach of institutional leaders.

An important facet of leadership was identified as the ability of management, and especially the overall leader, to appreciate and equally value different collection areas and the expertise their staff, together with the ability to manage the institution holistically. However, only at *SOUTHSIDE* did participants in the research indicate their satisfaction with their manager in this regard. At the remaining four case studies, respondents articulated various levels of concern about the influence of their manager on the operation of the institution, ranging from guardedness regarding shifting goals and a bias towards one collecting area over another, to exasperation about the inability to communicate significant collection issues to an unresponsive management body or leader.

At *RIVERBANK*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, a major concern was the extent to which the professional background of the manager or leader can influence the direction and priorities of the facility overall.

For example, the archivist at *RIVERBANK* complained that vital aspects of archival work were not given enough priority "*when you have a manager who doesn't understand what you do*". Likewise, the curator at *RIVERBANK* was concerned that interpretation of the museum collection would be skewed towards the previous experience and non-museum background of the institution's manager:

> *What would probably be different is the way that things are interpreted. Generally, how our work is informed, it is informed from a particular perspective which, I think, is quite tourism based. That's also been driven by other parts of council, because it's being driven by the professional experience of our manager. And those have upsides, but I happen to think that the museum aspect is often not recognised in the same way.*
> Curator, *RIVERBANK*

Coming from a similar perspective, members of the museum collections team at *MAUNGA TAPU* were emphatic about the disadvantages posed to museum resourcing and funding as a result of the director's partiality towards the library component of the institution:

> *I think one of the major problems with convergence as a model is that generally you'll have one Director, or Manager, and as they come from a particular background, how fair or reasonable is it to expect that they have the same level of knowledge and passion for two or more aspects of a business? The reality is, from my point of view, I don't really care how the library staff* [members] *do what they do, as long as they do what they do and the customers are happy. Whereas, from my point of view, what I have a passion for is museums and that's what I like to put my energy into. So, I don't see how it can work with a Manager who has knowledge and passion with regard to one aspect of the business. How do you not lose out? How does the other aspect not lose out?*

Heritage Collections team member (Pictorial), *MAUNGA TAPU*

Ironically, those staff at *SOUTHSIDE* who wholeheartedly supported their Manager acknowledged that, because their institution's Manager was from a museum background, her professional bias had actually worked in the museum's favour:

> *I think that if you had had somebody who had a library background, who had never worked in a museum, no background knowledge of museums, they wouldn't have necessarily given us as much staffing resources perhaps, or as much prominence.*
> *… things like looking after our collection, it's a very different collection to a library collection and has very different needs. So they may not have realised the importance of having staff with specialist training.*
> Curator, *SOUTHSIDE*

In acknowledging that conventional role descriptions for organisation managers were inadequate for the needs of converged institutions, two respondents expressed alternative ideas about the qualities that effective 'converged' leaders should possess. At *LONEHILL*, a member of the Exhibitions team speculated that converged institutions required specialist managers with experience in overseeing collaboration across multiple collecting areas. At *MAUNGA TAPU*, the Manager of Exhibitions called for the establishment of a new job title to reflect the holistic responsibilities of converged administration: *"sort of like having a Creative Director who knows about the cultural sector but not necessarily a 'librarian' or a 'museums person"'* – in other words, a leader who can transcend disciplinary boundaries to provide an inclusive, collaborative vision for the organisation's wider contribution to culture.

7.3.4 *Done 'on the foot'*:[98] planning and organisational structures

Subsequent to conceptual questions surrounding the rationale for convergence, as well as reflecting on the influence of institutional leadership on a museum collection's position in the 'pecking order' in a converged organisation, the interviews conducted for this research provided insights into the planning and development of converged

[98] Group Leader, Cultural Services (City Council), *LONEHILL*.

institutions. Once more (aside from *SOUTHSIDE*, where the responses of the research participants indicated that the requirements of the museum had remained at the forefront), many interviewees discussed problems for museum (and other) collection areas arising from the strategic planning phase and implementation of the convergence.

At the core of many respondents' comments about the planning process (and related closely to questions surrounding the conceptual rationale for convergence dealt with earlier) was the perception that local government had little understanding of the cultural mission of collecting institutions, nor how such a mission would be advanced through the formation of a converged organisation.

A significant complaint, articulated by staff members as well as representatives of collections sector advisory bodies, was that local councils emphasised the construction of monumental buildings to house newly converged institutions over and above the design of effective organisational structures and long-term operational funding provisions. As the Library Manager from *LONEHILL* pointed out, the local council in that region had very little involvement with the management of the museum or gallery prior to the convergence, so it was only *after* the restructure that the council management became more aware of the daily activities of those organisations. Likewise, at *WESTLANDS*, where the converged facility fell under the council's department of community services, employees expressed frustration at the council's ignorance of their specialised activities:

> *I believe that people don't know what you do. I remember people saying "what do all those people do over there?" They think a truck just pulls up and they just hang pictures on a wall. They don't see planning, or programming, or collection-based items, or education and outreach. People don't see what's happening.*
> *… The general council, as in the executive, wider afield, they have no idea about what the gallery or the museum do. They just don't get what those 7 people do.*
> Centre Coordinator, *WESTLANDS*

A similar set of circumstances evolved at *LONEHILL*, where the Group Leader, Cultural Services (a City Council role) acknowledged that:

> *…the actual implementation of the restructure was done 'on the foot' – it was done and changed and quite flexible, in that they had the launch date and 'bang', they had to have it all sorted out by that time.*

In the case of *MAUNGA TAPU*, the district council's CEO, who had been the first Manager of the converged institution, recalled how, during its development phase, the council had ignored professional advice regarding the cost of funding the ongoing operational requirements of the new institution:

> *And it was really a big increase to our ratepayers at the time when* [*MAUNGA TAPU*] *was created. I was Manager in those early days trying to do work on draft budgets. The budgets that I put forward to my manager and the budget we got were two different things. I remember saying to them: 'we are going to need these sorts of staff, and it's going to cost us this much money'. The answer was 'no, you're not going to get that'. My answer was 'well why are we building this thing, if we don't have the budget we need to run it?'*
> CEO, District Council, *MAUNGA TAPU*

According to this respondent, the district council feared that the project would lose community support if realistic estimates of its running costs were acknowledged and made public from the outset. Effectively, this handicapped the institution, creating a staffing structure and budgets that were insufficient to allow the organisation to function successfully.

In other words, the ability of converged institutions to resource the development of engaging, locally appropriate programs was compromised by councils that were unaware of the complexities and professional standards of collection work. Instead, local government authorities appeared preoccupied with the construction of impressive buildings, developing proposed restructures without sufficient input from the professional staff affected by the changes.

Respondents at all the case studies, except *SOUTHSIDE*, complained that their institutions were under-resourced, with employees regularly working outside the 'official' structure to assist with staffing shortfalls in other sections. The necessity of 'multitasking', combined with intensive schedules for the delivery of exhibitions and public programs, meant that the priorities of staff shifted constantly, leaving respondents frustrated that tasks were sometimes not achieved to a high enough standard or left incomplete:

> *We had a few museum shows that were curated in house that probably weren't the best exhibitions that we've ever done, and there was a sense that they were like that because there was no time to do anything more.*
> Collections Officer, *WESTLANDS*

> *When it comes to the team that* [the Exhibitions Coordinator] *works with - that's the Exhibitions team - so he's responsible for installing any exhibitions, moving artwork around, accepting exhibitions from outside and touring them around. He's got a 'team' of himself and one other person as well. For either 'team' to achieve anything, you have to use someone from the other team. So, each time you take somebody out of this team to do the other team's work, this team does nothing. It actually becomes a negative process, because you are constantly being taken away from work that needs to be done systematically. It's one of my biggest frustrations.*
> Collections and Exhibitions Officer, *LONEHILL*

As the CEO of a NSW museum and gallery sector agency concluded in his interview, the preoccupation of local councils with the development of iconic cultural facilities without factoring in realistic ongoing operational costs was a pattern repeated in relation to many convergence projects:

> *There's always been an issue there about the current costs and staffing and programming, and the councils have never really bitten that bullet. But they've always* [had] *that 'edifice complex' thing.*
> CEO, NSW Museum and Gallery Agency

In these ways, investment by local governments in high profile new buildings, together with lack of a clearly articulated strategic vision, insufficient operating budgets, dramatic recasting of staff roles (and often less staff to perform them), and the difficulty experienced at organisations such as *WESTLANDS* and *LONEHILL* in attracting suitably qualified personnel, combined to undermine the potential success of the convergence model.

7.3.5 *It's not enough to change labels and share staffrooms*:[99] lack of true convergence

While some respondents believed that convergence had served as a catalyst for innovation (members of the council's cultural services team, *LONEHILL*; museum respondents, *SOUTHSIDE*), a far larger proportion of those interviewed highlighted the lack of true 'convergence' at their organisation. As the selection of interview extracts listed below reveal, convergence ideals such as cross-domain collaboration and integrated use of collections in programming and research was impeded by the realities of managing a functioning converged institution. Problems such as bureaucratic inertia (brought about by larger, more complicated management structures), lack of strategic direction, short-staffing, disunity and the tendency for professional staff to slide back into 'siloed' work patterns all contributed towards inhibiting harmonious integration:

> *I think the original philosophy thought that there would be a lot more cross-fertilisation, a lot more mixing of the collections in that sense. And I think there has been some work towards that, but if you really look at it, the Curator looks after the social history and art collections, and the archaeological collections, the Archivist looks after the archives and the Local Studies Librarian looks after the local studies collection and the historic photos in that collection. So, even though ideally and theoretically, there was the idea that there would be a lot more talking and working together, it doesn't really on a day-to-day basis happen in that way.*
> Manager of *RIVERBANK*

[99] Former Manager of *MAUNGA TAPU*.

…if you're looking for a general learning from the experience at [*MAUNGA TAPU*], *then I would say that it's not enough to change labels and share staffrooms. I think it really is about being able to demonstrate to the customer – because if you demonstrate it to the customer, the staff will see it as well – what value is derived from that convergence. And if you're simply doing it to share-- to have one manager doing two jobs, or sharing back office costs, I think that will not be a good example of convergence.*
Former Manager of *MAUNGA TAPU*[100]

I think that co-location, with some convergence in customer services… might have been a better model for here, and probably would have been easier to swallow, rather than the full on, in your face, "your jobs don't exist anymore" [approach, where] *you're now the 'cultural/customer service/information development' person. Or you are the 'cultural/ marketing and audience development' person, and having four of those roles. And I think that people who had meaning in their roles suddenly had no meaning and that's where the friction and problems started.*
Group Leader Cultural Services, City Council, *LONEHILL*

I find that both [the Education Officer's] *and* [the Curator's] *positions have very short-term goals or projects, in terms of exhibitions or events, or education programs, and they are sort of monthly turn-overs…*
…I think that's one of the reasons why the collections haven't converged as much. It's because time-wise we haven't had a chance to look at it from a strategic point of view about what a converged collection really means.
Collections Officer, *WESTLANDS*

The full range of implications of managerial decisions, including strategic planning, organisational structures and financial allocations, on the experiences of staff working in converged institutions are discussed more fully in following section of this chapter.

[100] The same respondent conceded that genuinely cross-domain projects, which had the capacity to break down barriers to cooperation between departments, in fact proved difficult to manage and draining on resources, so few of them were ever attempted.

7.4 New roles and expectations

Moving from the general and conceptual (strategic vision, management structures, etc.) to a more granular examination of the operation of converged institutions, this section of the chapter reports on the direct experiences of the collection professionals working in the five case studies used in this research. While the specific context of each case is unique – as are the particular working environments, workplace relationships and events encountered by their staff members – my analysis of the interviews once again produced strong thematic connections in the accounts given by the respondents. The resulting discussion of these themes covers both the positive effects of convergence on workplace interactions and the skills of staff, as well as the unexpected or negative impacts of the model on the capacity of staff to carry out their roles effectively, with reciprocal influences on the performance of museum practices.

7.4.1 Communication and collaboration across domain boundaries

As referenced in the review of literature in Chapter 2, the promise of professional cross-pollination and the sharing of skills across domain boundaries is regarded as a cornerstone of the convergence model. The ability of employees in converged organisations to pool their experience and build expertise across disciplines is seen as an important stepping-stone towards the goals of integrated programming and innovative use of collections. And indeed, respondents across all five case studies acknowledged that the convergence model had enabled greater communication between the various sections of their institutions in a number of different ways.

In the context of formal communication, the establishment of regular cross-departmental, cross-disciplinary meetings raised awareness of the variety of programs occurring around organisations, enabling the different sections to promote each others activities and streamlining programming schedules to improve audience development. The Manager of *RIVERBANK* raised a number of additional advantages to regular official meetings among staff members, including an increased general awareness of the contents and significance of each collection area, as well as staff becoming more adept at articulating the significance and needs of their collections as a result of the requirement to communicate across disciplinary boundaries:

> *There are some challenges, but I think that overall that because of the convergence, because staff are working together, there's a better understanding that it's about trying to balance all the different needs out. And certainly I think I've also found that, as they realise it's about a negotiation for limited resources, they've become a lot more savvy in being able to articulate the requirements and why they need them.*
> Manager of *RIVERBANK*

Many of the respondents across case studies also highlighted benefits to informal communication brought on by convergence. At *SOUTHSIDE*, participants reported that a culture of mutual respect, teamwork and sense of joint purpose had developed, even though all staff members were not co-located in the same office. Other participants (*RIVERBANK, MAUNGA TAPU*) described a shared appreciation for other collection areas and the specialist skills of colleagues through the communication necessitated by the converged structure. For example, the Library Manager at *MAUNGA TAPU* (who was Acting Manager of the institution at the time of the interview) described how working together with museum exhibition staff had expanded her understanding of exhibition research and development processes:

> *It's the process of developing an exhibition that is quite fascinating. I can't stand in an exhibition and think 'wow, this must have taken, like, half an hour'. You understand intellectually that there is an enormous amount of time and effort that has gone into it. I think that being on the other side has really been interesting, and the involvement of people like* [the] *research centre staff, depending on the topic, in gathering huge amounts of information out of our collections and elsewhere to contribute to that is really great. Just the skill – the design skill – and the different type of people* [and] *skills that the Exhibitions team needs to create what it is that ends up on the floor…*
> Library Manager (and Acting Manager), *MAUNGA TAPU*

Furthermore, for the archivist at *RIVERBANK*, the converged work environment provided an opportunity to extend and enrich the content of exhibitions and programs:

> *If you have a set-up where you have, like* [*RIVERBANK*], *you have advantages where people from different professions can learn from each other and teach each other, and also communicate on a professional level about projects. So, for instance, part of the role of the Local Studies Librarian and myself is to do displays. That can lend itself to a very interesting alternative approach to your work that you might not get the opportunity to do otherwise. It can be quite exciting too. And it gives you an idea of where you can link in with stories that might be connected with what you have* [in your own collection].
> Archivist, *RIVERBANK*

For the library, archive and museum staff at *RIVERBANK*, increased communication across collection areas was a common sense response, recognising that items in the collections of small organisations often do not reflect the 'ideal' typological profiles of specific domains. In institutions such as theirs, attempting to reinforce distinctions between libraries, archives and museums could be seen as imposing an artificial order on collections that had evolved more organically. Greater communication between staff meant that all collections could be used more creatively, circumventing the sometime arbitrary divisions between thematically related materials.

Finally, the formal integration of collecting institutions into local government bureaucracy (which, to varying extents, occurred in tandem with the convergence restructure at all five case studies) created new channels of communication between collections staff and local government employees. Participants at *LONEHILL* noted that their council had become more conscious of, and receptive to, the requirements of the various sections of the converged institution, while the Manager of *RIVERBANK* observed that the necessity for collaboration with the council had enhanced the ability of staff to articulate the strategic and community benefits of their activities and programs.

Nowhere was the positive response to increased cross-institutional communication more pronounced than at *SOUTHSIDE*. All the museum staff who were interviewed attributed various benefits, including an increase in collaboration with library staff around program planning and scheduling, access to a broader range of staff skills and

knowledge, and greater responsiveness to the needs of the local community, to the converged organisational structure.

In the context of museum practice, the ability to access professional staff from diverse collecting areas, with their specialist knowledge about available research materials and local history, held out the promise of enriched museum collection documentation, expedited and enhanced exhibition development processes, and simplified delivery of thematically linked programs to relevant community audiences and other users.

However, for all their potential benefits, numerous respondents described the negative impact of the communication channels facilitated through convergence on innovative programs and staff workloads. For many respondents at *LONEHILL*, the obligation to engage in the expanded and increasingly hierarchical reporting structure developed through convergence created barriers to efficiency. Staff members were often tied up in meetings, removing them from other activities, such as researching and cataloguing the collections. For example, when asked how her role at *LONEHILL* differed from experience at other organisations, the Visual Arts Coordinator responded:

> Respondent: *There are a lot more meetings. A lot more meetings! A lot more communication that has to happen…*
> Interviewer: *I guess that can take away from time you have to actually do the work?*
> Respondent: *Yes, it does that. Because you get these sub-groups and one team - as an example here in the gallery - one team is a supervisor and a trainee, and although there are only 2 people, they have to operate as a 'team' and have those team meetings and communicate up. Although its not a vast body of people. It's the same with my team. There are only 3 people in it including me. So, we still have to have those team meetings and communicate those decisions up.*
> Visual Arts Coordinator, *LONEHILL*

As the extract demonstrates, staff members were often frustrated by the obligation to participate in an unnecessarily complex management system, limiting their ability to focus on practical aspects of their roles.

A number of specialist staff at *LONEHILL* and *RIVERBANK* found that the converged reporting structure made it difficult to obtain consensus for innovative (or domain-specific) projects. For example, participants at *LONEHILL* described how ideas for new programs or exhibitions could be diluted through the iterative meeting process, while staff at *RIVERBANK* questioned the rationale behind organisation-wide consultations on museum projects that were outside the remit of most staff:

> *A network becomes too large, too unwieldy…*
> *Someone comes and says 'I've got this good idea that we can do', but by the time it goes through the whole convergence model and everybody who's got input puts into this idea, what you end up with is not what you started with in the first place. And it's not necessarily a better product – it's probably a bit watered down because of the whole committee and consultative process that has to take place.*
> Collections and Exhibitions Officer, *LONEHILL*

> *The people who actually were the creative thinkers and could easily put an exhibition together and had some really fantastic ideas weren't allowed to do it to full fruition. So everything had to go to 'committee', and you'd just get debated out of the room.*
> Group Leader, Cultural Service (City Council), *LONEHILL*

> *We have one meeting a year where the curatorial thing is planned out. My problem with that is that we have a professional curator here, and quite often the thing that determines what's going to be done is voted by the people in the group, rather than what the curator thinks we should do…*
> *I think these meetings are important because we like to have some input, but I think it should be her* [the Curator] *saying what she's going to do and us saying 'that could be changed slightly' or 'we think something could happen to that', rather than us saying-- the idea is completely shot down because people didn't think for one reason or another that it would be interesting. I mean, you know, it's her job as far as I'm concerned.*
> Local Studies Librarian, *RIVERBANK*

> *So, each of us are making decisions about areas that we have no idea about. …Some things may not get up that are actually really important for a particular area.*
> Curator, *RIVERBANK*

In addition to cumbersome reporting structures and the disadvantages of over-consultation, respondents at *RIVERBANK*, *WESTLANDS* and *LONEHILL* also cited personality clashes, problems understanding technical language and different attitudes to collaboration in the professional cultures of collecting domains as barriers to effective cross-institutional communication. Together, these comments reveal how the incorporation of cultural facilities, often previously independently established, organised and run, into local government structures, forced rigid bureaucratic processes onto those institutions. These processes sometimes stymied, frustrated or at least complicated natural workflows and the authority of professional staff in decision-making situations.

Finally, in the case of *MAUNGA TAPU*, the convergence proved no guarantee of improved communication between the different sections of the institution. In outlining the consequences of a partial 'de-convergence' of the organisation in a management restructure that took place a few months before the interviews, the team responsible for the museum collection described the deterioration of communication across the institution into a state of complete dysfunction. Having lost a sense of control and oversight over their own collection area, (which had become subject to decisions made in other areas that they were no longer necessarily privy to), the Heritage Collections team expressed frustration at the lack of coordination between staff:

> *From my point of view, where we fall down so much is in the structure of communication. There is no-one who is requiring from any teams that they collaborate in the way that we should be. We have no fricking clue what Exhibitions is up to at any given time, and we may be lucky if we find out a couple of weeks beforehand. Shouldn't we be the people promoting* [those projects] *when we're out in the community, possibly? I don't know-- It's hard to keep touch with who you are suppose to be dealing with through Marketing*

> *and Comms, and then events stuff happening-- Nobody links up very well. It's a massive challenge for* [*MAUNGA TAPU*] *to sort that out. That's where good leadership is required.*
> Heritage Collections team member (Pictorial), *MAUNGA TAPU*

In summary, it is possible to conclude that convergence had both positive and negative consequences for staff collaboration. On the one hand, participants credited the convergence model with increased opportunities for improved communication between staff, while a large number simultaneously criticised the lack of communication and cooperation within their organisations. How can such an apparent paradox be explained? The following discussion, focussing on the alteration of job descriptions and new expectations on staff within converged institutions, will demonstrate the reasons why the collaborative potential of convergence remained unfulfilled at the majority of the case studies presented here. As I will show, while convergence created a framework conducive to communication and cooperation, other circumstances prevented the staff from converting these opportunities into sustained engagement and collaboration.

7.4.2 The restructuring of staff roles: *Ahhh, what am I supposed to be doing?*[101]

In combination with the pressure to deliver cost efficiencies, insufficient resources for ongoing operations, and poorly planned organisational and reporting structures, the implementation of convergence at all the regional case studies (*LONEHILL*, *WESTLANDS* and *MAUNGA TAPU*) produced varying degrees of competition between the component collecting areas. That is not to say that the development of new roles through convergence was always unsuccessful. For example, the Manager of *SOUTHSIDE* confirmed that the extension of publicity and information technology roles to traverse all facets of the organisation had benefitted the promotion of the institution's programs and developed synergies around the delivery of technology services.

[101] Library Manager, *LONEHILL*, recalling her reaction to her initial converged role description, in which she became responsible for library, museum and gallery collections.

Overwhelmingly, however, convergence of role descriptions contributed to overburdened staff, with resulting tensions proving counterproductive towards the effective communication and meaningful, streamlined inter-departmental collaboration.

A common complaint across the cases centred on new 'converged' role descriptions and the confusion and stress they engendered. Among the concerns expressed by the respondents were reductions of staff numbers to achieve financial rationalisation, the allocation of roles to staff members who were not qualified for the work, and even the establishment of 'converged' role descriptions as a tool for achieving staff redundancies. As the cultural development officer at *LONEHILL* admitted, the implications of poorly designed roles extended beyond the ability of staff to successfully perform their roles, thwarting the institution's capacity to deliver important programs:

> *There were lots of opportunities that were missed because there either was a team of people of who could have done it but it wasn't their role, or, they didn't have the time to do it or the skills. Or, we just fumbled through without going through that process.*
> Group Leader, Cultural Services (City Council), *LONEHILL*

What the extract above underscores is that certain cases of convergence were instigated by local councils without a thorough understanding of how the new institutions could function effectively, especially in regard to the redesign of management structures and individual staff responsibilities. At *LONEHILL*, the initial restructure created management positions overseeing all collection areas simultaneously, placing staff with only one area of expertise in control of library, museum and gallery services. As one senior library employee who had originally assumed one of these managerial roles remarked:

> *I didn't get staff. There wasn't a curator, there was no-one from the museum to come under me. I could get a few technicians from the gallery to come under me, but there was no museum staff. I didn't get any extra staff when my*

> *position expanded because council wasn't sure how big a success this would be and what was going to be required when you opened a facility like this.*
> Information and Library Collections Coordinator, *LONEHILL*

Likewise, the emphasis in many accounts offered by participants at *WESTLANDS* centred on the untenable scope of converged roles, which spanned gallery, museum and community arts centre responsibilities. The Manager at *WESTLANDS* described maintaining a calendar of over 30 temporary exhibitions each year as "maniacal", while the Curator (with a background in the visual arts but responsible for both museum and gallery displays) repeatedly described the difficulties in achieving adequate rigour in research of the museum collection and resulting exhibition development:

> *There's a number of issues because, being curator of both institutions means that your time is non-existent. So, it's the pressures of making sure a museum show is rigorous, but at the same time done in a timely manner. So, there's tremendous problems in that. It's wanting to give that side of things* [exhibition development] *more time, and at the same time keep everything else afloat.*
> Curator (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

Furthermore, the Centre Coordinator observed that staff members were reaching the point of complete exhaustion attempting to maintain professional standards in their work. In particular she noted that, as a result of the extreme time-pressure experienced by the staff, the institution had no capacity to research and develop its own travelling exhibitions:

> *It is overwhelming sometimes! It's a lot of people going that extra mile, probably to the point where they just go, 'I'm not doing that anymore'-- I don't know whether* [the Manager] *knows either how to fix where we are, unless we start putting down overtime or somehow showing it* [how much extra work we are doing].
> *…Certainly, curation-wise, they can't above, or in front of everything just say 'oh, I'm going to put a bit more time into touring a show'. I mean, it's just*

impossible. At the moment there is no way they can tour a show, because they can't get [even] *what we've planned done.*
Centre Coordinator, *WESTLANDS*

What these examples illustrate is that the supposed organisational 'efficiency' of a converged framework, where formerly specialist roles were broadened to include a range of collecting areas and activities, created artificially high expectations of individuals assigned to those roles. The requirement for disciplinary knowledge and professional experience across multiple collecting fields was unspecified in these roles, allowing the appointment of staff members who specialised in only a single collection area. Furthermore, the practicalities of fulfilling such broad duties proved unmanageable for many staff. In combination, respondents perceived that these factors had a detrimental effect on the amount and quality of collection research, exhibitions and collection development.

In the following section I examine, in greater detail, issues introduced here – the role of specialisation, sharing of expertise, professional development opportunities, and cross-functional role descriptions - that combined to produce this outcome at the majority of cases studied for this research.

7.4.3 Cross-disciplinarity: an achievable goal?

Many respondents, across all five case studies, agreed that convergence had introduced exciting potential for up-skilling at their institutions. For a number of participants, convergence signalled opportunities for individual staff to "step outside the old boundaries"[102] of their professional areas and experiment with alternative approaches to collections. Within the small cohort of staff at *RIVERBANK*, for example, co-location within the single workspace promoted both freer communication (as previously discussed) as well as a degree of professional skill sharing. As the Curator observed:

We had one previous archives staff-member [who] *really wanted to do something on the history of the council ...She had never done an exhibition*

[102] From interview with the CEO, District Council, *MAUNGA TAPU*.

> *before, didn't have a clue, but was game enough to give it a go. And so I helped her through the process of developing an exhibition and doing a catalogue, and she did it. The same with the previous Librarian. Great. And we had a great time and learnt about things.*
> Curator, *RIVERBANK*

Once again, *SOUTHSIDE* proved to be a 'deviant' case, in the unanimity of agreement among participants about the positive professional development opportunities resulting from the convergence restructure. In this case, a designated professional development role had been established as part of the convergence, demonstrating a commitment on behalf of the institution and the local council to the continuing education of its staff. Many of the respondents also attributed improvements in their own practice to the converged staff structure, which gave them direct access to people with a range of knowledge and expertise. This was most pronounced on the museum aspect of the organisation, where participants highlighted the benefits of access to the library's technology team in improving the museum's online presence and range of digital programs:

> *Also, having the Technology team has been great, because we were able to start doing virtual exhibitions, which is something we've been wanting to do under the old model but couldn't. We have a new website, which is a lot prettier than the old one we used to have …and we use all that social media. We couldn't have got that off the ground without the people with those skill-sets.*
> Curator, *SOUTHSIDE*

Likewise, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, respondents at *SOUTHSIDE* emphasised that the integration of the local studies section of the library with the museum had allowed museum staff to expand and accelerate their research activities, as well as revealing thematic connections between the two collecting areas.

However, the resounding enthusiasm around professional development opportunities and the sharing of professional skills expressed at *SOUTHSIDE* was not necessarily echoed across all five case studies. Predominantly, the remaining cases differed from

SOUTHSIDE in that there was no dedicated role, or consistent institutional processes, to formally support professional development and the sharing of expertise. At *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, for example, some respondents observed that staff needed to establish mentorship and professional networks on their own, while others explained how, once installed in converged roles, they had had to personally take the initiative in organising additional training to overcome 'gaps' in their expertise (or that they wished to do so but did not have the time). The Curator at *WESTLANDS*, whose role encompassed both the museum and visual arts collections, underscored the practical difficulties entailed in pursuing further professional training:

> *I do feel that I would be doing the museum a slight disservice if I didn't do it* [cataloguing, exhibition development, etc.] *properly. I'm not even sure if I know what 'properly' is. I just feel a discomfort with-- I don't feel resistant to it, I feel it's something I would love to jump into and really explore, but I'm conscious of the time that will take and it would probably take a lot of my own time.*
>
> Curator (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

Significantly, this staff member, whose training and previous experience was exclusively visual arts-based, was expected to function effectively across both the gallery and museum aspects of his role. As evidenced in this extract, while his commitment to the job remained intact, his confidence as a collection professional had been eroded through the lack of institutional recognition and support to undertake the training he felt he needed to effectively perform his role. Across *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, participants highlighted lack of time and the absence of institutional frameworks for professional development as barriers to the extension and 'cross-fertilisation' of professional skills.

One of the most persistent themes to emerge from the research centred on problems associated with the restructuring of job descriptions, and the filling of those positions by staff who were either unskilled or insufficiently experienced to perform the new roles. From converged role descriptions given to staff who specialised in only one collection area, to the dilution of professional quality and neglect of certain collection tasks, many respondents highlighted ways in which an idealistic model of convergence

had been imposed on their institutions without fully taking into account the effects on the collections, programs and services impacted by those changes. Primarily at the regional cases study organisations, it does not appear that the additional opportunities for communication, cross-disciplinary collaboration and (in some cases) professional development, were enough to mitigate the negative effects of the restructure.

At *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, the pace of restructuring and rate at which staff were expected to adjust to fundamentally changed roles adversely affected the capacity of employees to function effectively across the full scope of their job descriptions, with detrimental consequences for aspects of their roles that they were less familiar with. As the Library Manager at *LONEHILL* explained:

> *Our very first model of convergence went across the library, the museum and the gallery, and in a way a lot of us, including myself, were totally out of our depth. I was given responsibility for exhibitions, across library, museum and gallery, and programs, which was fine. But* [responsibility for] *the exhibition area, for someone who was library-trained and half-way through a museum course, was really not a great move. Basically, people like* [another librarian], *like myself, were put into positions without the experience and skills. And OK, I up-skilled a lot, and it was great in some ways and incredibly challenging, but we were riding on a wave and things were neglected as a result.*
> Library Manager, *LONEHILL*

In this instance, the parts that remained 'neglected' were the aspects of museum and gallery work potentially invisible to someone coming from an exclusively library background: the ability to critically evaluate the cultural significance of individual collection items; creating thematic linkages between objects; pursuing the acquisition of important artefacts and building relationships with potential collection donors; performing time-intensive research of the collections; and developing locally relevant exhibitions.

Many respondents reinforced this perspective, identifying the expectation that an individual employee can be equally specialised across all collection areas as both idealistic and unrealistic. Again, the Curator at *WESTLANDS* summed this up quite

overtly in his statements, which describe his response to the pressure on employees to achieve a high level of cross-disciplinarity in 'converged' roles:

> *I find it very difficult. I'm constantly concerned about my lack of museum rigour, or experience I suppose. I think this is partly a symptom of convergence in that I don't know how staffing can be adequate; I don't think you're going to find this two-headed beast who's good at both.*
> Curator (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

Here, the respondent indicated he lacked the qualifications and experience to perform the museum aspect of his role to a professional standard, leading to insecurity and self-doubt. Other participants concurred with this sentiment, expressing the view that collections, programs, and the public service of the institution, were put at risk when staff from particular disciplinary backgrounds assumed positions requiring cross-domain qualifications and experience that they did not possess:

> *Most of our staff do not have multiple qualifications, have not had experience in multiple sorts of institutions, then you really are forcing staff into areas that are totally foreign to them. Librarians don't really work well in an art gallery, and visa versa.*
> Team Leader, Art Gallery and Collections, *LONEHILL*

> *It's headspace really. You can't have people dealing with one type of activity and expect them to be able to effectively also develop another totally different lot of activities, and be responsible for both. I think you need to specialise and you need people with that focus, or it doesn't happen.*
> Regional Services Coodinator, major NSW museum[103]

> *There was a noticeable difference in the shows-- I mean, if* [the Manager] *curated a gallery show I think there would be a noticeable difference in that and a museum show that he did, because innately people's interests and*

[103] This respondent worked in an advisory capacity to regional museums, including a number of converged institutions.

> *loyalties lie in one or the other. It's very hard to find staff who are equally passionate about both institutions. Everyone gives it 100%, but their 'passion' for it is probably not* [there].
> Collections Officer (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*

Moreover, as participants at *WESTLANDS* and *LONEHILL* noted, at the time this research took place there were no tertiary or other professional education courses training collection professionals for work in converged institutions. In this regard, the reformulation of role descriptions and organisational structures according to the converged framework was set up to fail. Its introduction as an institutional and professional model, before the emergence of enough appropriately trained and experienced staff to take up roles in such a structure, meant that the capacity of employees to effectively perform cross-disciplinary roles, and harness the potential to create innovative programs and interpretation across diverse collection holdings, was unlikely to be realised.

Another criticism, articulated by a number of respondents across all cases (excepting *SOUTHSIDE*), was that convergence structures - comprised of broad, sometimes cross-domain role descriptions and/or fewer staff to carry an increased workload - predispose staff to working on a more superficial level, skewing roles towards becoming more 'generalist' even when specialisation is still needed. As the curator at *RIVERBANK* noted:

> *The important part, to me, about the convergence is the possibility of dialogue between the professions. That, I think, is great. But I think there's knowledge within the professions that gets lost when people try to fit it all into one box.*
> Curator, *RIVERBANK*

An interesting insight was provided by the former Manager of *MAUNGA TAPU*, who unambiguously expressed the need to maintain excellence within the individual collections and associated professional fields that were combined in converged institutional structures. In his view, the library section in particular had been compromised through convergence, with the relegation of specialist librarians to back-of-house duties in favour of a generic customer service model:

> *The complaint was made that… there was a derogatory expression that was used, "checkout chicks", to describe the frontline staff who were serving people in the library of* [*MAUNGA TAPU*]. *They were "checkout chicks" with no product knowledge and no professional knowledge.*
> Former Manager of *MAUNGA TAPU*

He elaborated further, explaining that the reason why the converged institution had not achieved its potential impact in the community and within the cultural sector was due to its failure to emphasise the importance of specialisation and expertise within each of its component areas:

> *I was very clear, that to have an excellent integrated service, we needed to have excellent component parts, in terms of our professional knowledge and skills.*
> *…I was very clear that we needed to build the reputation of both the library and the museum activities in their own sectors to have any chance of succeeding in saying that the integrated offer was something where the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. The parts have to be excellent and, if the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, you would expect it to be fabulous.*
> Former Manager of *MAUNGA TAPU*

Interestingly, this respondent stopped short of articulating precisely how specific professional areas – even when functioning at what might be considered 'optimal' levels – would collaborate to achieve an institution valued as a 'knowledge centre'; exceeding the expectations of co-located, but essentially independent, services. The evidence suggests that the bureaucratic breakdown of disciplinary boundaries was not accompanied by a new model of 'converged' professional identity and practices, once again pointing to shortcomings in leadership and strategic vision for convergence. The mechanisms for achieving a conceptually integrated model of convergence remained to be adequately planned, implemented and explained to staff.

Finally, according to many respondents across all five case studies, the persistence of bias towards original area of specialisation continued to pose a barrier to the

development of cross-disciplinary expertise and functionality among staff working within the convergence model. This view was particularly strongly held by participants at *RIVERBANK*, *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, where a range of factors was seen to come into play.

One significant problem related to the time pressures created by under-staffed organisations attempting to fulfil busy exhibition and programming commitments. In these situations, staff members who needed to improve their knowledge in a certain collection area did not have the time to undertake further studies, or to engage deeply with the collections outside of their area of expertise - with clear consequences for the management and interpretation of those collections. As the Manager at *WESTLANDS* noted when describing the processes of exhibition development at his organisation:

> *…especially with the current Curator, being from a fine arts background, he works much more efficiently and effectively within the sphere of art. If you go over to the museum, it is clearly harder for him to wrap his head around it.*
> Manager of *WESTLANDS*

Noting the Curator's reluctance to undertake museum exhibition development, the collections officer observed that the heavy workload on staff was impacted further by the need for employees other than the Curator to take up responsibility for displays, even if this activity was outside their official job description:

> *So, a lot of the museum shows are falling to other staff members because* [the Curator] *didn't really want to do them. It wasn't his area of interest. It became a problem of whatever kind of background you brought to your position meant that you didn't necessarily attack the gallery and the museum with the same vigour and the same interest, as you would if you were just a gallery curator or just a museum curator.*
> Collections Officer (Museum and Art Gallery), *WESTLANDS*[104]

[104] The Cultural Development Manager at *LONEHILL* made similar observations, stating that competent staff members were compelled to compensate for those who were less effective in their roles.

Staff professional bias played a significant role in dictating the overall scope of a converged institution's activities, and the capacity of employees to give equal attention to the development, documentation, and interpretation of all collecting areas. Interview responses indicate that, at *WESTLANDS*, staff preferences resulted in the institution's overall activities becoming disproportionately weighted in favour of visual arts programs. By contrast, staff at *SOUTHSIDE* experienced difficulty compiling art gallery collection policies, because they only had museum training and experience. At *WESTLANDS*, it was clear that staff doubted the viability of converged curatorial roles and would have preferred a collaborative framework that allowed for specialists to focus and build on their established areas of expertise.

With individual staff gravitating towards their original area of specialisation and 'siloed' work habits, the converged institutions under study remained at risk of disintegration. Beyond simply re-writing job descriptions, this placed an additional burden on senior management to sustain their organisation's focus on convergence and collaboration. Managers at both *RIVERBANK* and *WESTLANDS* highlighted the constant effort required to maintain a converged structure and work practices:

> *One thing I will say is that, as I said, we haven't really changed in the last 10 years. And when I came into the management role, my message was really about the holistic experience; that the visitor walking in does not see the lines between a library and an archives and an exhibition. For them it's all heritage and it's all information and it's all experience. And similarly, if they're coming in as a tourist, they just see it as a whole heritage centre.*
> *So, I've always been pushing that collaboration, collaborative projects, everybody having an input into each other's projects. And I just found, for the last four or five years, that because there's still that very traditional falling back into 'what you know' philosophy ethos-wise, it works sometimes, to an extent, on a particular project, but not always and not consistently.*
> Manager of *RIVERBANK*

> *One of the board members asked how we measure our success – 'how do you rate that? Is it just bums on seats or is it something more?' I said, 'bums on*

seats' is one way, but the 'something more' is that, at this stage of convergence, we haven't torn ourselves apart. That is successful! Which, it think in other institutions, they haven't been able to do that.
Manager of *WESTLANDS*

7.4.4 Morale and job satisfaction: *It is overwhelming sometimes!*[105]

As many of the interview extracts reproduced here indicate, the emotional responses of staff subject to convergence restructures was a significant influence on the attitudes they brought to their work and collaborations, with reciprocal impacts on professional practices and productivity. Many participants referred to a "situational frustration" within their roles, resulting from overwork and uncertainty in regard to cross-disciplinary responsibilities. While a number of participants did express satisfaction with their job descriptions, it would not be exaggerating to say that stress, cynicism and, in some cases, despondency permeated many respondents' descriptions of their experiences working within a converged setting.

The very general nature of converged role descriptions proved particularly troublesome at *LONEHILL*, where some employees felt insecure in their ability to perform their roles or failed to take full ownership of their work. *LONEHILL*'s Cultural Services Group Leader - a role similar to that of the Managers of the other case studies - clearly outlined these issues in her accounts of the convergence restructure:

There were also new jobs created – it was about "seamlessness" – so you actually had a lot of PDs [position descriptions] *with the same job description and the same title. If you have a group of 10 people with the same customer service roles and tasks, then who is actually accountable for it? So, there was a lot of non-accountability, which made people feel very frustrated. A lot of people left. A lot of people's behaviour and attitude became so disruptive that they had to be asked to leave, but they weren't replaced.*
…So, it just felt that people who you really wanted to get 150% out of were only getting 70% because they were confused, unsure, they were pushing

[105] Centre Coordinator, *WESTLANDS*.

> *boundaries, and they weren't comfortable and confident in what they were doing. Which is a real shame and a lot of people left because of that.*
> Group Leader, Cultural Services (City Council), *LONEHILL*

Not only did the stress of the restructure cause staff attrition (placing added pressure on remaining staff); team leaders themselves felt uncomfortable and out of their depth in their new roles.

Across all five case studies, respondents described stressful circumstances that were a direct result of convergence, and that threatened their institution's capability to perform essential functions such as exhibitions and collection development. As the Manager of *WESTLANDS* explained, the Curator, whose previous experience had revolved around the art gallery, lacked confidence in museum work, giving rise to his reluctance to embark on museum exhibitions:

> [The Curator] *has a 2013 aim to begin a series of shows in the museum that are going to be called 'Village Town City'. Three separate shows-- He is very keen to do it because he's a local boy, so he wants to tell that story. So, I think the desire is there, but it's just a daunting task ahead of him. I think sometimes it stuns and scares him a bit, makes you think 'I don't know if I'm capable of doing that'.*
> Manager of *WESTLANDS*

Indeed, at the time the interviews were conducted in 2011, the Manager stated that twenty four of the thirty one exhibitions staged by *WESTLANDS* in the previous year had been visual arts-based, indicating the degree to which the Museum component had become less active than the Gallery.

Even at *SOUTHSIDE*, where the staff who were interviewed expressed the highest levels of satisfaction, the addition of a gallery component to their established museum roles created uncertainty about their authority to make decisions about acquisitions of art into that collection:

> *It's more that we want to make sure that the art we collect will have meaning and relevance in 1000 years time to this community; that we're not collecting the wrong things, whatever the* wrong *things may be. There's a bit of nervousness on all of our parts on how we do that and make sure our collection benefits the community. Our nerves come when we're actually spending public money on artworks…*
> Manager of *SOUTHSIDE*

Above all, these examples underscore the counterproductive effects of the broadened, cross-domain responsibilities attached to the new roles ushered in through convergence. In many cases, new job descriptions fragmented employees' time to focus on specific tasks, failed to recognise the value of specialist expertise, set up hasty transitions into cross-disciplinary roles, and neglected to support staff through constructive professional development and training. According to many participants, these factors, combined with increasing expectations on services and program delivery, challenged employees' self-confidence and motivation, and therefore the sustainability of the existing organisational structure. Summing up this sentiment, the Cultural Services Group Leader at *LONEHILL* stated:

> *With the cultural precinct we have and the budget we have, why aren't we* [achieving] *a national profile? Why aren't we being the innovative* [centre of] *creative excellence we should be? Why aren't we role models, why aren't we leading the way? And you don't want to think that everybody is not 'the best'-- I don't think that's true. I think we're working within a framework that couldn't make anybody be 'the best'.*
> Group Leader, Cultural Services (City Council), *LONEHILL*

7.5 Key themes: organisational structures and management

The findings described in this chapter demonstrate a range of outcomes of convergence that are significant to management, organisational structure, role descriptions and responsibilities, and professional cooperation within cultural institutions. However, the fundamental question guiding this research is to what extent the convergence of

museums with other types of collecting institutions affects museum practice that produce interpretations of collections. How do the management, planning and organisational structures of converged institutions contribute to improving our understanding of this issue?

While the formulation of administrative and organisational frameworks for converged institutions mostly occurs at the level of local government and cultural policy managers, the effects of these contexts filter directly down to everyday professional practices, collaborations and performance of staff. Rather than remaining peripheral to the daily function of individual departments and employees, the interview findings indicate that issues such as strategic planning, change management processes, leadership, resource allocation, professional development and the reconfiguration of professional roles are central to the ways in which staff were able to deploy their skills and expertise to enhance both physical and intellectual access to various collections.

Some would argue that resistance to change is a common by-product of organisations undergoing major restructuring, and the expression of related frustrations by interviewees in this research is not unexpected, nor does it necessarily reflect negative outcomes for the converged collections. However, the information provided by the participants demonstrates that some of the negative results of convergence we more than attitudinal. With regard to museum collections in particular, my analysis reveals that staff at the majority of case studies felt that their fundamental professional obligations in areas such as the preservation, documentation and research of collections, as well as exhibition development and renewal, were compromised through the convergence model. With limitations on staff time and 'head space', combined with the stress of keeping up with demanding temporary exhibition schedules, backlogs in basic tasks such as accessioning and extended research of museum collections – essential prerequisites to the future use of those collections in exhibitions and public programs - were likely to remained unresolved.

The following is a summary of the impact of convergence as a management model, and subsequent restructuring of institutions, as derived by considering the findings I have detailed above.

The convergence concept

Ambiguity characterises the vision for convergence models. In four of the five case studies, the benefits that organisations were supposed to derive from integration were not clearly articulated to staff members and stakeholder communities. Rather, convergence projects were often motivated by a desire to take advantage of government funding or reduce local government expenditure.

The absence of a strong conceptual rationale for convergence led to poor planning decisions regarding staff and operational requirements, threatening the capacity of institutions to deliver high quality, locally relevant programs. Without a strong corporate vision to guide their activities, staff members at some of the case studies developed their own goals and strategies, often with a narrow focus on their particular collection area. Isolated professional 'silos' were reinforced through this process.

Management issues

Where change management is poorly executed, staff members feel disenfranchised and antagonistic to the idea of convergence, predisposing them to less collaborative work practices. Many respondents identified the (currently lacking) need for leaders of converged institutions to embody and demonstrate the core competencies inherent to the convergence model: cross-disciplinary competence; equal respect for and understanding of different collecting areas; and openness to collaboration.

Another major concern was the lack of sufficient operational budget allocation. According to respondents' accounts, the local councils associated with the case study institutions appeared preoccupied with the development of iconic cultural facilities, privileging capital works budgets over long-term funding for activities including ongoing collection development, documentation, and exhibitions.

New roles and expectations

Convergence appears to be an effective model for promoting communication between staff through the formulation of official reporting structures, as well as informal communication potentials (such as those created by the co-location of staff in shared office spaces). However, as a process of incorporating collecting institutions into the

bureaucratic structures of local government, convergence necessitates formalised processes of consultation that can both aid and impede communication, collaboration and project development.

In terms of professional cross-fertilisation and the acquisition of cross-disciplinary expertise, the benefits of convergence were not demonstrated conclusively in the accounts provided by respondents. At some of the organisations, the appointment of under-qualified staff into converged collection and management roles limited the capacity of institutions to deliver exhibitions curated in-house and other forms of researched content. For example, generalist job descriptions failed to recognise the value of specialist expertise and fragmented the time that employees' were able to devote to specific tasks. In addition, the absence of institutional commitment and frameworks for professional development, together with time limitations experienced by staff, can act as barriers to cross-disciplinary training.

While I have outlined the various management issues here as distinct thematic sections, in reality they are deeply interconnected; each one influencing the others in a complex interplay that shapes the converged institutional context for museum collection work. For example, the absence of a clear, theoretically informed rationale for convergence, together with a non-consultative change management approach, can create the impression that convergence is simply a bureaucratic efficiency model that is externally imposed on an organisation's staff. In turn, negative responses by staff can turn to recalcitrance towards the concept, making the potential benefits created by the convergence structure, such as improved communication between employees, cross-domain collaboration, professional cross-fertilisation, enhanced research and innovative programs, etc., difficult to realise to their full potential. Alternatively, the tendency for local governments to allocate resources to the building of new converged cultural facilities, rather than their ongoing operational requirements, creates a precarious position for collection professionals. Tasked with fulfilling government and public expectations for increased numbers of exhibitions, public programs and services while juggling restricted staffing and budgets, staff members are placed under pressure. In response, they may retreat to their established areas of expertise and work patterns, diminishing the possibility for meaningful engagement and collaboration across professional fields.

Significantly, this research challenges the feasibility of some of the basic assumptions about convergence. For example, respondents across the case studies viewed the prospect of gaining genuine cross-disciplinary expertise with scepticism, observing that staff retained a bias in favour of their original area of specialisation regardless of revised job descriptions or additional professional training. Likewise, the promise of convergence enabling the integrated use of diverse cultural collections, and highlighting the connections between different forms of cultural expression, remains unfulfilled when 'silos' of professional practice persist within converged institutions.

Speaking metaphorically about convergence, one respondent underscored the under-development of the model, comparing it to the monster created by Dr Frankenstein that, once brought to life, is abandoned to find its own meaning and viability under sometime adverse circumstances:

> *So much sorrow and pain for that monster who gets created, almost through a flawed concept. It sounds pretty negative doesn't it!*
> *…Here is this thing that should be working, it should be fine, it does a lot of things that a normal organisation should do, but it's these aspects of it that haven't been resolved... I look forward to seeing convergence 4.0 because it will probably be getting closer to being a practical thing. By then, people will be used to working across a number of institutions and be able to maintain enough specialist experience to make that a worthy place.*
> *…We've given birth to this monster, now how do we control it, how do we get it to do what we want it to do, how do we stop it from hurting people?*
> Collections and Exhibitions Officer, *LONEHILL*

This participant's description draws attention to several issues raised through this research, all of which diminish the capacity of converged institutions to live up to their potential. These factors include the lack of substantial vision for convergence beyond the construction of facilities, insufficient planning for the practical realisation of convergence goals, the shortage of qualified cross-disciplinary collection staff (with

experience working in converged institutions) to fill newly restructured roles, and the effects of over-work and lack of professional confidence on morale and productivity.

8 Keeping the promise? The theory and practice of museum interpretation within the convergence model

In the previous three chapters, my account of the case study findings reflected two thematic pillars underlying the results: interpretive museum practice within converged institutions, and the organisational and management contexts for convergence. Within this structure, the research indicates a variety of influences associated with convergence that impact museum professional practice in significant ways.

In order to further assess the wider implications of these findings, I now return to the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis and consider the contribution of my research in relation to these questions. I bring together and compare the conceptual issues with the results of the primary research conducted as part of this study, evaluating the impact of convergence on the realisation of museum practice, as well as the consequences of modified practice on the interpretation of, and provision of intellectual access to, museum collections.

In my review of the literature I established convergence of collecting institutions as a broadly under-researched trend within the cultural sector, with many references characterised by over-simplification, and speculation about, the significance of convergence for the provision of cultural collections. For example, Dempsey refers to individual documentary techniques applied by each domain as "arbitrary historical practices" (Dempsey, 2000, 4), thereby trivialising the idea that the evolution of separate collecting domains was the result of gradual differentiation based on societal, cultural or collection needs. Likewise, without providing evidence of shifting audience expectations, Michelle Doucet, writing in 2007 as Director General, Services, of the Library and Archives Canada, speculated that contemporary collection users already regard disciplinary differences between libraries, archives and museums as obsolete (Doucet, 2007, 65).

Acknowledging a range of potential research directions, I chose to focus my study on the affect of convergence on museum practice, with a view to assessing how changes

to practice reshape the interpretive context for museum collections and, subsequently, the extent and ways in which their meanings and significances can be expressed. More specifically, I identified the need for critical investigation of the claim that convergence of museums with libraries and archives produces favourable conditions for the production of knowledge around collections. That is, what is the impact of convergence on the cultural product of museums, and the ways in which this product is presented to audiences?

In the following pages I extend and consolidate my analysis of convergence, examining the fundamental assumption that convergence produces what are termed 'knowledge institutions', and that the integration of collecting organisations creates improved potential for knowledge production. In this way, the theory comes into active dialogue with the practice of convergence, forging a new connection between museological scholarship, cultural policy development, and institutional planning, as well as informing conceptual frameworks for practitioners within the museum (and wider collections) sector.

8.1 Convergence in theory versus convergence in practice

As I have discussed in Chapter 4, museum professionals are in the business of crafting encounters with collection information for users and visitors, rather than disseminating knowledge. As a 'species of information retrieval system', museums rely on an interconnected framework of processes for accumulating and organising information around collections, such as development of collection policies, object description and cataloguing, research, conservation, narrative construction, exhibition design and public program development. These processes, and the staff who perform them, orchestrate the ways in which visitors and other collection users engage with information in museum contexts. If we accept this as the mechanism through which 'knowledge' is produced in museums – i.e. as a dialogic process involving the museum producers of information and the users who interact with it - then the onus falls on the capacity of museum staff to carry out the activities that support and enable these user engagements.

I now return to my original research question and the findings of my case studies to consider the extent to which convergence, as an organisational model, assists (or inhibits) the professional practices that produce information, and information encounters, around museum collections. The key themes that emerge attest to both gains and losses to the 'knowledge potential' of collections through convergence, but highlight that gushing enthusiasm for convergence, based on expectations of cultural benefit, are unfounded based on the end products that converged institutions are able to deliver.

8.1.1 The benefits of convergence: connecting collections through integrated sites, management and programs

> *To me, we will eventually… see that you can tell the story of humanity through all of it's objects, all presented together, complex and dynamic in narrative.*
> Manager of *WESTLANDS*

As discussed in Chapter 6, a number of respondents recognised the value of the convergence model in bringing together typologically and descriptively diverse collection material, creating the potential for all kinds of artefacts and documents to be cross-referenced and juxtaposed to produce new, enriched understandings of culture and its development. A selection of participants from across all five case studies agreed that convergence broadly makes sense as a concept of uniting forms of cultural information, based on the recognition that materials held within the supposedly distinct collections held by local libraries, museums, archives and local studies collections is often typologically similar, or that convergence creates potential for integrated programming across thematically related collections. For example, the Collections and Exhibitions Officer at *LONEHILL* described how converging collecting institutions embodies the concept of an interconnected cultural exchange, where vibrant discourse based on engagement with all forms of culture can be facilitated.

On the basis of the accounts provided in the interviews, it can be surmised that a consistent number of staff employed in converged collecting institutions recognise the potential advantage of the model in serving as a catalyst for activating dynamic exchanges of collection information, as well as facilitating encounters between

different methodologies of collection description and interpretation. In these ways, convergence can, ideally, contribute to deeper and more holistic exploration of local histories and cultures, exposing the interdependency between diverse objects (i.e. artefacts, art works, documents, images, literature, etc.) and allowing for thematic relationships between different cultural forms to be made explicit.

From the standpoint of interpretive practices that construct collection information in the museum context, a strategic commitment to this culturally integrative model of convergence would certainly influence the adoption of cross-disciplinary collaboration and sharing of expertise, to which many proponents of convergence aspire (see Chapter 2). In an ideal situation, organisational leadership, the design of staff structures, recruitment and day-to-day professional practices would align around mutual respect across disciplinary boundaries, manifested also by the fair division of financial resources, recognition of the value of specialist expertise, and institution-wide dedication to collection research, preservation, provision of collection access, and delivery of diverse public programs across all domains. Acknowledgement of the role of professional museum practice in framing unique contexts for understanding collection objects would be retained, while simultaneously encouraging museum specialists to collaborate with other collection professionals, allowing for the emergence of poignant, innovative interpretations of collection content. In these ways, convergence would facilitate the production of collection information and provide scaffolding for user interactions with objects and information resources. Converged institutions would be more that the sum of the individual organisations that had been brought together in their formation, creating a new collaborative, relational context for interpreting and engaging with collections.

The case study findings do provide evidence of the potential for staff to coordinate their activities, and prioritise higher levels of collaboration in pursuit of integrated cultural experiences through convergence. Without reiterating the findings in full, below I provide a summary of the advantages offered by the convergence model in the context of enabling museum practitioners to produce and present collection information for users.

8.1.1.1 Bringing together thematically related collections

In the cases of *RIVERBANK*, *LONEHILL*, *SOUTHSIDE* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, convergence brought together, and allowed for joint management of, museum (largely social history) and local studies collections, with the purpose of maintaining and responding to the heritage of their geographical regions. In the case of *SOUTHSIDE* in particular, the combination of these collections facilitated an integrated approach to the preservation, cataloguing and research of objects, documents and photographic images that were already characterised by inherent thematic links. By contrast, at *WESTLANDS*, regular impediments to documentation of, and public access to thematically related items were perceived to be a direct result of the splitting up of the local studies collection and museum collections.

8.1.1.2 Programming across the domains

The cross-departmental remit of public programs staff at *LONEHILL* also embraced the concept of unifying interpretation of cultural heritage across collection boundaries. Here, development of programs that traversed the content of discrete collecting areas created opportunities to forge stronger narratives and tailor programs to suit the needs of a variety of demographic groups. The linkage of collections via public programs can also take advantage of the different forms of public access to collections, broadening the scope of collection experiences available to visitors. For example, one Learning and Outreach team member at *LONEHILL* described a multi-faceted learning experience designed for school students around the theme of stained-glass windows. A variety of activities took place in different collection zones, allowing the group to interact creatively with a selection of content:

> *Today we've actually got a group coming in and they are going to the kids space in the library, and they're going to be designing stained glass windows, so that when they move into the museum, they will see the link with the exhibition in the Burley-Griffin window. We do try to do that sort of thing.*
> Learning and Outreach team member, *LONEHILL*

However, while such programs demonstrate the interrelationships that can be established across collection boundaries in a converged institution, their utilisation of museum content is heavily contingent upon the availability and quality of information

and displays produced by museum staff. In the conventional workflows of collecting institutions, museum education staff members interpret content that is already the product of interpretive practices enacted in the processes of collection research, documentation and exhibition development. In this way, public programming outcomes are directly determined by the capacity of museum staff to create the bedrock of original, extensive and diverse collection information.

8.1.1.3 Establishing cross-disciplinary communication frameworks

As I have already detailed in the findings in Chapter 6, the creation of both formal and informal communication frameworks through convergence translated into tangible benefits for the documentation and interpretation of museum collections. Many respondents across all five case studies agreed that greater communication between staff meant that all collections could be used more creatively, circumventing the sometimes arbitrary divisions between thematically related materials, and leading to the exploration of alternative readings of collection significance and a collaborative approach to the development of exhibitions, publications and other public programs.

8.1.1.4 Improvement of physical infrastructure for collection work

At all case studies except for *SOUTHSIDE*, convergence was accompanied by the relocation of facilities into new buildings designed and constructed to house the various collection areas.[106] In these cases, renewal of infrastructure was important not only in increasing the public profile of institutions, but also provided better facilities for collection storage and conservation, as well as new exhibition spaces. These improvements contributed to physical collection environments more conducive to collection care, preservation, research and presentation; in other words, improving the potential to maintain accessibility to collections and facilitate interpretive processes.

8.1.1.5 Sustainability of small museum collections

Finally, it is important to remember that any discussion of the creation and provision of museum collection information becomes purely academic if a museum ceases to exist. It needs to be acknowledge that local council take-overs of the management of historical society collections (*WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL*, *SOUTHSIDE*), together with

[106] It should be noted that the building at which *RIVERBANK* was located had been newly built but was not designed specifically for cultural use. The fit-out was retrospectively modified to better suit the requirements of the converged institution.

the subsequent formalisation and professionalisation of museum services (*RIVERBANK, MAUNGA TAPU*) enabled improvements in interpretive practices simply by virtue of sustaining the existence of those collections.

For example, the formal acknowledgement of museum collections through their incorporation into local council administration, and the subsequent recognition of a duty of care towards such collections, resulted in improvements to preservation and storage conditions (*RIVERBANK, WESTLANDS, LONEHILL, SOUTHSIDE*). Furthermore, according to respondents at *RIVERBANK, WESTLANDS* and *SOUTHSIDE*, the restructuring that accompanied convergence included the employment of qualified staff to manage the museum collections (even if the number of staff and budgetary allowance for collection documentation and curatorial work ultimately proved insufficient in some cases, as I discuss below).

In summary, the restructuring of organisational structures, staff communication and collaborative frameworks, and improvements to physical infrastructure that come about through the adoption of a converged institutional model, substantiate the potential of convergence to broaden and deepen cultural engagement. By bringing together typologically diverse but thematically related collections, while simultaneously creating opportunities for staff from different disciplinary backgrounds to cooperate across domain boundaries, convergence reshapes the operational parameters of collecting institutions and creates new possibilities for the innovative use of collection information. In the ideal scenario, the beneficiaries of these changes are public users, for whom convergence enables easier access to different kinds of collections, the information resources surrounding them, as well as the production of unique and compelling programs that interpret the collections in terms of local significance. However, by considering the accounts of respondents at the case studies examined for this research, is convergence able to consistently deliver on the promise of improved access and engagement with cultural collections?

8.1.2 Convergence and museum processes for the research, documentation and interpretation of collections: mitigating factors

If one were to judge the success of convergence purely according to the general benefits articulated above, it would be difficult not to conclude that convergence achieves its principal goals. That is, as an integrative model for the provision of cultural collections, convergence realises the aim of uniting the different products of human society and culture, creating the potential for those different forms to interact to produce enriched understanding within each field of collection practice, as well as enabling objects to be interpreted from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints.

In reality however, this research shows that the ideals of convergence are seldom realised to their full potential. Not only does the leadership of converged institutions rarely embody or articulate this vision of convergence with sufficient clarity, but work practices in different collection areas reflect a lack of joint purpose around such a goal. As I have discussed previously in Chapters 6 and 7, many of the changes brought about by convergence, such as organisational restructuring, cross-disciplinary role descriptions, perceived leadership bias, and high expectations on the turnaround of exhibitions (and associated public programs) actively work against the realisation of comprehensive engagement by staff with museum collections, the creation of original and wide-ranging information around those collections, and productive dialogue between collection areas.

8.1.2.1 Lack of conceptual justification for convergence: privileging cost reduction over collaboration and cultural output

Despite allusions to the creation of innovative 'knowledge institutions' through convergence of collecting institutions, my case study research shows that employees perceived convergence as an overwhelmingly efficiency-driven economic model (*RIVERBANK, WESTLANDS, LONEHILL, MAUNGA TAPU*) with only loosely expressed conceptual objectives. Institutions' failure to clearly articulate a unified purpose had a cascading effect on 'downstream' planning and decision-making regarding the change management of restructuring towards integration, the design of role descriptions, budget allocation, the desired balance between in-house versus touring exhibitions on offer, and so on.

At *MAUNGA TAPU* in particular, analysis of the research reveals that an important consequence of the absence of a clear, unified institutional vision has been the reinforcement of disciplinary divisions ('siloes'), competition for financial resources and personnel, lack of coordination of supposedly collaborative projects, and other insular practices counterproductive to cross-domain teamwork and innovation.

Where the emphasis on cost-minimisation dominated the restructuring processes (*WESTLANDS, LONEHILL, MAUNGA TAPU*), converged institutions lacked the focus and resources to consistently deliver innovative and engaging services and programs derived from in-house collection research and interpretation.[107]

8.1.2.2 Leadership bias favours the resourcing and development of certain collection areas over others

The persistence of professionally siloed practices within *MAUNGA TAPU* (and, to varying extents, at all the other case studies) was accompanied and reinforced by what respondents perceived as prejudice on the part of institutional managers, who often appeared to privilege programs, interpretations of content, and departments in the organisation that reflected their own original area of specialisation. In other words, at the five case studies of convergence used for this research, none had leaders who embodied the cross-disciplinary ideal of the model.

As discussed in Chapter 7, at all case study institutions except for *SOUTHSIDE* (the only one with a manager from a museum background), museum staff expressed concern about the non-museum based expertise of their organisation's leader. The potential effects of management bias on interpretation of museum collections was highlighted by the curator at *RIVERBANK*, who regarded the emphasis of the organisation as overtly tourism-based because of the previous experience of its leader, which influenced the focus of programming and exhibition development, and

[107] This finding is in contrast to Duff et al., who's case study findings suggest a generally inclusive and collaborative approach to planning, involving staff from across departments and disciplinary backgrounds in consultations about the objectives of the convergence and how it would be achieved (Duff et al., 2013, 14). However, the authors also acknowledge that the anecdotal accounts of implementation given by the research participants were not combined with independent data on these processes.

subsequently the focus of research of the collection.[108] Likewise, members of the museum team at *MAUNGA TAPU* considered the leadership emphasis on the library service, coupled with misunderstanding of the complexity of museum work, as one of the causes of ongoing funding shortfalls for basic museum activities, including cataloguing and researching the significance of individual collection objects.

As discussed earlier in Chapter 5, another characteristic of the convergence trend across small to medium cultural organisations in NSW has been the assumption of local government control over the management and funding of these institutions. The influence of local council bureaucratic objectives adds a further dimension to understanding leadership bias in converged institutions. Many respondents perceived their local councils as not especially receptive to the complex and individual needs of different types of collecting institutions. Respondents from both museum and other collection areas, across *RIVERBANK, WESTLANDS, LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU,* expressed frustration about the difficulty of constantly lobbying lay councils to support the needs of cultural collections.

8.1.2.3 Excessively complicated reporting structures inhibit productivity

While the formalisation of organisational structures and corporate processes served, on the one hand, to improve formal communication frameworks between different collection areas and departments (*RIVERBANK*, *LONEHILL*, *SOUTHSIDE*), many respondents begrudged the obligation to adhere to rigid reporting hierarchies, which impeded their ability to carry out other day-to-day work. In particular, a number of respondents at *LONEHILL* reported that it was often necessary to set aside fundamental activities, such as cataloguing and researching the collections, exhibition development and conservation assessment, in order to participate in meetings.

The introduction of committee-style decision-making processes, while favourable towards information sharing and potential collaboration, also had detrimental impact on the ability of specialist museum staff to gain consensus for pursuing museum-focussed projects. Given the backdrop of a lack of unified cooperation around a clear

[108] Duff et al.'s 2013 study of convergence similarly identified restrictions on curatorial research of collections, as a result of both management and institutional bias and reductions of staff numbers, which created less specialised role descriptions (Duff et al., 2013, 11-12).

conceptual vision of convergence (especially at *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*), and subsequent competition developing between collecting areas, some respondents (*RIVERBANK*, *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL*, *MAUNGA TAPU*) perceived collective decision-making as a constraint on development of innovative or highly specialist programs. As participants at *RIVERBANK* and *LONEHILL* explained, such processes favoured approval of more conservative and conventional projects, rather than the development of the unorthodox or avant-garde.

8.1.2.4 Converged role descriptions limit emphasis on specific collection requirements

At *WESTLANDS* and *LONEHILL* convergence restructuring penetrated down to the design of individual position descriptions, where roles focussing on designated collection areas were repurposed to encompass the entire scope of collection holdings.[109] Likewise, staff members trained in specific disciplines – such as librarianship, archives management and museum collection management and curatorship – were re-deployed into these newly devised roles and expected to function competently across all collection areas.

However, the case study research shows that rather than engendering professional growth and genuine cross-disciplinarity, staff employed in converged roles encountered a compounding series of difficulties that prevented them from engaging equally, and productively, with each collection within their area of responsibility.

An important underlying factor at both *WESTLANDS* and *LONEHILL* was the mismatched recruitment of staff into roles for which they lacked training and experience, coupled with inconsistent (and often retrospectively implemented) strategies for professional development. At *LONEHILL*, generalist role descriptions had the effect of scattering employees' attention and responsibilities across too many areas simultaneously, reducing accountability and productivity in any single area of activity. Employees felt challenged by the requirements of diverse collections at odds with their particular area of expertise and professional practice. For example, the

[109] Note that the original converged organisational structure at *LONEHILL* was revised several times and had substantially reverted to operating around singular collection areas at the time of this research.

Library Manager at *LONEHILL*, who had been responsible for collections across the library, museum and gallery in the initial organisational structure, described becoming aware of her need to adjust her approach to the operation of all three areas, taking into account that libraries placed much more emphasis on providing rapid public access to book stocks and collection information than museums or galleries, where (by contrast) interpretation and contextualisation of collection content had much higher priority.

The result of staff working in roles for which they were under-qualified or inexperienced resulted in what one respondent at *WESTLANDS* described as "process conflict": a sense of uncertainty and insecurity surrounding appropriate levels of interpretation for different collections, how much time to invest in researching objects, appropriate content and quantity of exhibition text, frameworks for collaboration and expected contributions of various departments in delivering joint projects, meeting the requirements of various user groups, and so on. In such situations, the risk is not only that museum functions – especially those that contribute to collection documentation and construction of thematic linkages between objects - may be given lower priority in comparison with activities familiar to staff trained in another discipline. Staff that are not trained or experienced in museum work may be blind to these processes, simply because they do not know how they are performed, or perhaps that they even exist.

At *RIVERBANK, WESTLANDS, LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, accounts provided by the research participants indicate that high expectations on productivity of institutions, especially in the museum area, were not reciprocated by the employment of the necessary complement of professional staff. Respondents at all case studies (except *SOUTHSIDE*) perceived their organisations as understaffed, creating an environment where overburdened employees lacked the time necessary to develop competencies in other collection areas.

For museum collections and the production of information about them, these limitations had considerable impact. Combined with the self-doubt experienced by some staff working outside their area of expertise (*WESTLANDS, LONEHILL*), a number of non-museum trained respondents described their reluctance to embark on museum collection research, revisions to permanent exhibition spaces, and development of travelling exhibitions using the in-house collections. In effect, the

interpretive potential of collections was not being explored because of the organisational structure and management priorities brought about by convergence.

8.1.2.5 Under-development of permanent exhibitions and temporary exhibitions

As discussed in Chapter 6, a common feature of permanent (or 'semi-permanent') exhibition areas, as identified by respondents at *RIVERBANK*, *WESTLANDS*, *LONEHILL* and *MAUNGA TAPU*, was a lack of narrative cohesion and representativeness in the thematic content of displays. At *RIVERBANK* and *WESTLANDS*, problems with the scope, inclusivity and accuracy of permanent exhibitions were identified. Participants perceived inadequacies in the displays as a consequence of the use of external curators and designers in the initial set-up of those displays. These contractors had little pre-existing knowledge of the local region and collection content.

At all the case studies cited above, respondents pointed to condensed timeframes for research-intensive tasks such as significance assessment, thematic construction and object selection as factors that compromised the eventual narrative flow of the exhibitions, as well as the capacity for display areas to be modified to accept changes to content at a later stage. While these shortcomings can be attributed to the pressure accompanying the opening of new facilities and not necessarily the implementation of convergence per se, subsequent staffing and resourcing issues more closely related to convergence proved influential in placing constraints on the ability of museum collection staff to make improvements and necessary changes to permanent exhibitions.

In the context of knowledge production - that is, providing frameworks for user interactions with collection information - respondents at all the case studies reported feeling limited in their ability to conduct original or extended research of collections, improve collection documentation, or produce innovative exhibitions and programs. For example, the Manager at *WESTLANDS* criticised the permanent exhibition's failure to engage with the history of European settlement in the region and the resulting conflicts and displacement of local aboriginal populations, which continued to have a lasting impact on community relations and social issues in the area.

Combined with the fixed design of the permanent exhibition area, the Curator at *WESTLANDS* expressed frustration at his limited capacity to reconceptualise the permanent exhibitions. The pressures accompanying the Curator's combined duties across the museum and gallery collections, as well as his exclusively visual arts training, represented constant impediments to the effectiveness of his work. With the same constraints limiting the development of temporary exhibitions, it meant that local aboriginal and contact history remained an under-interpreted theme within the institution, implicitly alienating a significant segment of the local population and rendering these aspects of the region's history invisible to tourists and local community members alike.

In the context of changing exhibitions, respondents at all case studies, except for *SOUTHSIDE*,[110] expressed concern at the imbalance in temporary exhibition programs that favoured imported travelling displays over exhibitions developed in-house. Most remarkable was the admission, made by one respondent at *MAUNGA TAPU*, that his organisation originally had no budget allocation whatsoever for the development of temporary exhibitions. Respondents at *LONEHILL* noted that the predominance of imported exhibitions reduced the organisation's ability to explore the cultural uniqueness of the local area. Not only was this a detrimental outcome for visitors, who were less likely to perceive a connection with exhibition content produced elsewhere that had limited significance to the region's history and community groups. It also reduced the priority given to behind-the-scenes activities such as cataloguing and research of the in-house collections, as staff scrambled to keep up with the demands of a busy exhibitions and events calendar (*RIVERBANK, WESTLANDS, LONEHILL, MAUNGA TAPU*). In effect, the collections remained in stasis, warehoused as pre-packaged touring 'product' was shipped in and out.

[110] While participants at *SOUTHSIDE* did not raise the issue of travelling exhibitions, it should not be assumed that the majority of temporary displays at that institution were produced in-house.

8.2 The ‘knowledge’ product of museum collections under convergence

Based on the case studies presented in this research, convergence has undeniably been a success in terms of delivering stability and sustainability to sometimes amateur run, and potentially at-risk museum collections. In many cases, the infrastructure funding provided for convergence projects has resulted in new bricks-and-mortar facilities, and the consolidation and professionalisation of collection management and preservation. However, evidence provided in this thesis indicates that convergence is a much more problematic proposition when it comes to demonstrating appreciable benefits of the model for the production of meaning around museum collections. As such, convergence becomes problematic when considering the goals of state and local governments in increasing accessibility to arts and culture, acknowledging cultural diversity, and facilitating the representation and participation larger sections of the population in cultural programs.

The influence of strategic planning, management frameworks, leadership, reporting structures and other institutional frameworks, that set the context for collection work, come into focus as strong determinants on interpretive practices in converged collecting institutions. The inability of staff to productively interact with collections may be caused by circumstantial constraints, such as understaffing, insufficient budget allocation towards collection research and exhibition development, the absence of clear institutional goals, or a poorly devised organisational structure that reduces staff productivity. Alternatively, difficulties stem from insufficient staff expertise in converged role descriptions. Employees may lack either the necessary training, time, confidence or authority to adequately research, document and perform activities related to extended collection interpretation, in the form of exhibition narrative production, writing exhibition texts and other museum publications, designing user engagements with objects and displays, and so on. Furthermore, the under-utilisation of in-house collections, both for rotation of objects in permanent exhibition areas and in the creation of locally-specific temporary displays, restricts the ability of institutions to explore and communicate important narratives about a particular area’s history, or the relationships between its constituent social and cultural groups.

Constraints on staff engagement with collections have the potential to effect the creation of information at all stages of the museum object life-cycle; from initial classification, provenance gathering and documentation at the point of acquisition, creation and maintenance of object files and electronic databases, to significance assessment, project-based thematic research, and the development of exhibitions. Each of these activities produces tangible information artefacts that exist in relation to collection objects, each representing a potential point of access for collection users. And so, a reduction in the availability or quality of those information resources equates to a reduction in the scope of the kinds of user interactions with collections that produce meaning, or 'knowledge'. To borrow the words of Michael Buckland, they compromise a museum's function as a type of 'information retrieval system' by denying the processes that lead to the creation of the information in the first place.

As I have explained in Chapter 4, meaning that develops around collections is 'situated and contextual' (Macdonald, 2006, 2). That is, the meaning of objects is not innate, fixed or pre-ordained, but rather evolves in direct relation to the performance of museum processes within specific organisational settings. As such, meaning is tied to the aptitude and skills curators and other collection professionals, the employment of particular methodologies for building the informational record around collection objects (i.e. classification, research, interpretation of social, historical, artistic and other forms of significance, etc.), and the aims, disciplinary bent, resources and policy frameworks of the institution. Objects are fundamentally 'multivocal' (Annis, 1994, 21), and individual institutions provide the particular contexts within which the array of potential significations of objects are filtered and then amplified through tangible information resources.

From this perspective, practices associated with collection documentation, research and public presentation come into focus as fundamental to ways in which the information end-products surrounding collections actually take shape. At this level, differences between libraries, archives, museums and galleries are less about the typological distinctions between the material collected by each domain, and more about the discipline-based approaches to the provision of collection access, and practices for identifying, organising and communicating collection value. Here, the

maintenance of disciplinary differences becomes important in preserving multiple contexts for interpreting collections and individual collection items.

Conversely, in situations where professional, domain-specific practices are thwarted or break down – for example, through the recruitment of under-qualified staff into cross-disciplinary collection roles, the absence of clear institutional goals, organisational structures that inhibit collaboration, or the simple lack of funding or time for basic cataloguing and research of collections – the potential of collections to acquire meaning also becomes limited.

In my earlier critique of the labelling of converged collecting organisations as 'knowledge institutions' (Chapter 4), I have referred to the differences between data, information and knowledge, but also the progressive dependency of one on the preceding other (Buckland, 1991, Hislop, 2002, Stehr and Ufer, 2009, Jones, 2010). From this point of view, the risk of convergence – as evidenced by my case study research - is that if collection professionals are prevented from interacting with objects, those objects may never transcend their existence as *data*. If the processes of 'perceiving' objects – in other words, recognising their relevance and value – are impeded, so too is the reification of this perceived significance as *information*. It follows that the production of knowledge around collections, which is contingent on interaction with collection information, is also restricted. Without appropriate levels of contextualisation, the mere existence and preservation of objects, whether co-located or not with other collections, becomes inconsequential.

8.3 Conclusion: activating the unfulfilled potential of convergence

The principal question for this research has centred on whether the convergence model facilitates the creation of cultural knowledge through the medium of museum collections. By considering the available literature and existing studies of convergence, in combination with my own primary case study research, I examined whether the amalgamation of museums with libraries, archives and galleries alters established methodologies for documenting, interpreting and communicating the significance of museum objects. In particular, my analysis explored the ways in which changes to the interpretive context of 'converged' museum collections – brought about through alterations to organisational and management structures, staff roles, specialist skills and processes fundamental to museum practice - affect the ultimate knowledge potential of those collections, and their capacity to support the development of community and cultural identities.

In 2009, the Collections Council of Australia released an 'issues paper' discussing the value and needs of Australian regional museum collections in the areas of facilities, collection management, exhibition development and collection accessibility via new media (Winkworth, 2009, 1-2). As a subset of these broad areas for concern, the paper highlighted the need for more concerted significance assessment of collections, with special regard to themes, stories and unique objects that attest to the characteristic cultural values and history of each region (Ibid., 2). The paper argued that identifying and disseminating the significance of regional collections was intrinsic to preserving regional identity, developing tourism, and other forms of cultural and economic growth. In particular, the quality and consistency of collection documentation needed to be improved to enable the significance of collections and particular objects to be recorded and communicated.

In the context of convergence, several issues for concern arise when considering the centrality of consistent, quality collection information to the identification of significance of collections, and the ability for users of collections to access these interpretations. First, if financial investment is required to improve resources for

collections (staff, training, facilities, etc.), and assuming that this need continues even if integration with a library, archive or gallery occurs, is this investment maintained and channelled into the 'museum' component of the converged organisation? Second, are the significant 'distinctive themes and stories' associated with museum collections enhanced or obscured within the larger collection of the converged facility? Third, if existing collection documentation is poor, is this addressed during the convergence process, or are existing problems simply migrated into the new collection environment?

Extending the work of Bastian and Harvey (2012) and Duff et al. (2013), my findings provide new evidence confirming that organisational issues, such as leadership, change management, strategic planning, design of roles and professional development, all play an important role in determining the effective function of converged facilities. More importantly, this research demonstrates the profound impact of converged institutional frameworks on the interpretive potential of museum collections.

The case studies show that convergence undoubtedly sets up the potential for changes to work practices that can lead to enriched engagement with museum collections and their significant meanings. The co-location of exhibition areas, establishment of frameworks for official and informal communication between staff across disciplinary boundaries, improved physical infrastructure for the preservation and presentation of collections, and ease of access for visitors and users, puts in place important prerequisites for convergence to trigger vibrant interplay between collection areas that could result in new insights and forms of engagement with community heritage, local histories and creative expression.

However, my case study analysis demonstrates that the model simultaneously sabotages the ability of staff to realise this potential by creating significant impediments to the performance of museum practices that are essential to building comprehensive information frameworks around collections. By failing to articulate the cultural value of collections and how collection meanings can be activated in a convergence context, poorly defined institutional aims and strategies run the risk of allowing bureaucratic goals for economic efficiency to gain the ascendancy and relegate labour-intensive specialist collection tasks to secondary importance. The

absence of a conceptual vision can give way to mechanistic convergences, where the personal disciplinary backgrounds and predilections of organisational leaders, inadequate professional development and training, unworkable role descriptions, and insufficient funding and staff numbers, all contribute to the difficulties placed on individual collection workers in identifying, researching, documenting and building contextual relationships between objects.

Rather than being guided by a unified philosophical approach, the remodelling of organisational structures, funding allocation, role descriptions, expected workloads, and performance indicators become focussed on conforming to local government bureaucratic frameworks and superficial programming goals, such as rapid turn-over of travelling exhibitions. Fundamental aspects of museum work, such as accessioning and provenance research, study of collections independent of immediate programming deadlines, the compilation of comprehensive documentation, and maintenance of databases and finding aids, all come under threat with these changes.

Likewise, the work of library, archives and gallery professionals can be impacted, not only placing constraints on the expertise and practices within specific collecting areas, but also limiting the potential for intellectual linkages to be made across domain boundaries. The rich cultural insights that can only result through the fulfilment of these processes are jeopardised, including the discovery of thematic linkages between collection objects, the construction of multi-layered exhibition narrative and development of innovative, fresh insights into local heritage. When the informational content surrounding collections is compromised by restricting the breadth and depth of interactions with collections that can be offered to museum users, the potential for knowledge creation is ultimately obstructed.

Listening to Canadian media theorist Darin Barney,[111] who recently featured in a podcast series that deals with the impact of digital technologies on museums, I was struck by parallels between Barney's remarks about the utopian expectations for the effect of technological development on democratic processes, and the idealism

[111] Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Technology & Citizenship, McGill University, Montreal (current in 2014).

surrounding the benefits of the convergence model for cultural engagement. In the podcast, Barney states:

> *Some of our values around democracy – transparency, access, and participation - are 'potentially good' but do not achieve justice and equality on their own. Institutions cannot fall into the trap of thinking that just by enabling access to information and transparency, that they automatically achieve the strengthening of democratic participation. It is only a starting point, which requires ongoing effort and programs to achieve these ends.* (Darin Barney in Inscho et al., 2013)

Likewise, in the context of convergence, there has been a tendency to assume that simply combining the physical spaces of museums, libraries, archives and galleries, and (or) integrating their organisational and management structures, will automatically result in institutions that enable greater access to cultural collections and enriched opportunities for the production of knowledge.

By focusing on museum practice, my research demonstrates that these assumptions overstate the potential of convergence. They fail to acknowledge or oversimplify the complex processes – the "effort and programs", in Barney's words - through which the construction of collection information, as the prerequisite for knowledge creation, can take place in a converged institutional context.

There is a reductionist tendency implicit in the assumption that convergence enhances the function of museums, together with other collecting organisations, as 'knowledge institutions'. Glossing over these terms as if they are self-evident and require no definition seems founded on the idea that, simply by virtue of simply being stitched together in one way or another, collecting institutions become more than the sum of their parts. This approach overlooks the theoretical and operational frameworks that characterise the different collecting domains, and subsequently the ways in which fundamental philosophical concepts and professional practices risk becoming unintentionally altered or decontextualised through convergence restructuring.

From an epistemological perspective, the significance of museum processes – such as classification, cataloguing, documentation, exhibitions and public program development – gives rise to two important conclusions. First, because museum practitioners and the processes they enact function to 'pre-digest' collection objects as sources of information and thereby make them more readily intelligible, any organisational change that disrupts museum practice also has consequences for the potential of a collection to be interpreted for meaning. In other words, determining the significance of collections and the individual objects within them is contingent upon the ability of museum staff – both in terms of their expertise and the practical circumstances of their work place – to engage in the various stages of collection interpretation. To deny or restrict these processes will always have a detrimental knock-on effect on the formation of evocative and compelling encounters for collection users, and therefore the perceived meaning and value of collections of material culture.

Second, and as a consequence of the first issue, there is no guarantee that the availability of different types of collections within a single institutional framework will automatically result in improved knowledge acquisition for users of the collections. If the ability of professionals in any domain context to effectively interact with and manage their own collections is compromised, there is little hope for productive collaboration across collection domains.

As I have identified in this research, the reshaping of institutions through convergence may create new possibilities for cross-disiciplinary communication and cooperation, professional development and innovative use of collections. However, to realise this potential, institutions require clearly identified and articulated goals for convergence, practical and aligned strategies for its implementation, and a sustained commitment to encouraging cross-domain collaboration, while recognising the ongoing value of specialist collection work. My case studies indicate that the absence of these conditions, including the lack of a strong conceptual justification for convergence (often accompanied by an over-emphasis on achieving economic efficiencies through the integration of cultural facilities) can sabotage these ideals, instead producing impediments to effective museum practice.

Paradoxically, this eventuality contradicts the ideals of inclusion and cultural democracy that have underpinned shifts in cultural policy (and funding) towards local government administration of community arts, cultural facilities and programs from the early 1980s, and which form the backdrop to the adoption of the convergence model by NSW councils. How can the communities (whose rates pay for converged cultural facilities) feel genuinely represented by and invested in the collections, if active and innovative interpretation of those collections is not allowed to occur?

Because convergence of museums with libraries, archives, and galleries changes both the institutional frameworks and interpretive context for collections, the convergence model amounts to a new lens for understanding the meaning of objects. Its potential lies in sharpening the contours of our understanding of artefacts, magnifying granular details of the provenance, history, significance of artefacts, as well as allowing us to distinguish subtle differences between objects. Through convergence, collecting institutions ought to be able to extend their depth of field, enabling them to focus on a multitude of thematic relationships between objects (within and across collection boundaries) and to create diverse forms of access to collections for the communities and cultures that produced them. Conversely, this research shows that convergence can also limit our vision, restricting the ability of institutions to focus on particular objects, and – through restrictions on interpretive processes - obscure others to the point of invisibility. The case studies demonstrate that convergence can create near-sightedness, condemning collection workers to see only what is closest to hand, forcing them to work at a superficial level with objects they already know, while sentencing the remaining content of collections to remain hidden and mute in collection stores.

Surely, cultural organisations and governments should consider the value of museums, libraries and archives as institutional settings for interpretation; not merely for the informational utility of the individual objects and associated documentation that make up their collections, or the cost efficiencies to be gained by combining facilities. By engaging in a discussion about the production of knowledge and meaning around cultural collections, scholars, collection professionals and policy-makers can build a deeper understanding of both the range of significances that can pertain to a single collection item and the role of institutional context in shaping collection information,

thereby developing a theoretical rationale for practical decision-making around convergence. With this awareness, those with the capacity to influence convergence projects may indeed be able to identify and develop whatever opportunities are offered by the model for enhanced knowledge creation for end users, and perhaps a more critically and conceptually informed model for convergence can begin to take shape. Without it, we cannot take for granted that the extensive resources invested in achieving convergence will deliver promised improvements in knowledge acquisition and intellectual access to cultural heritage.

Glossary and Definitions

Community Arts

An earlier term for CCD that came into popular usage with the creation of the Community Arts Committee of the Australia Council for the Arts in 1973.

Community cultural development (CCD)

The field of activities associated with arts and cultural provision in local government areas. An earlier popular term with similar meaning is Community Arts. In this thesis I prefer to use 'cultural development' or 'cultural services', as these terms are more inclusive of cultural forms beyond the visual arts.

Council

An alternative term for a local government authority. It is used in this thesis interchangeably with LGA or LG.

Local government (LG)

An administrative body for a small geographic area, such as a city, town, or rural region. Local government representatives are elected from among the population of the district. In Australia, local government is the third tier of government, following national and state legislatures. Local government areas in Australia are also frequently described as cities, towns, municipalities or shires.

Local government authority (LGA)

A generic, frequently used term to describe local government in Australia.

Local Studies collection

A mixed collection of original items and replica materials, often including personal archives, historic photographs, oral history recordings, etc., that pertain to the history of a particular local government or geographical location. Local studies collections often fall under the administration of local (city or regional) libraries.

Regional NSW

Areas outside of the greater Sydney metropolitan area (which includes the Sydney CBD, Parramatta, Central Coast, Blue Mountains and Campbelltown areas). NSW is divided into fifteen geographical regions such as the Far West, Orana, Central West, Murray Darling, South East, Riverina and Hunter.

Appendix 1: Interview Questionnaire

Spaces of Knowledge:

Negotiating epistemologies within converged collection environments

CASE STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

State: Interviewee's name, location, date, time…

1. **Rationale for convergence**
    - How would you characterise the type of convergence at your organisation?
    - What do you think led to the decision to converge the existing collection organisations into one entity?
    - How were you involved the planning process before the convergence? [was there any 'needs assessment' conducted, audience research / community consultation, etc.]

2. **Collections**

    Collection holdings

    - Can you describe how collections are managed across the organisation?
    - How has the centralisation of separate collections affected the use of your collection?
    - Does the organisation have a joint collections policy? How well is it working?
    - What are the most valuable and significant parts of the collection? How have these been affected by the convergence?
    - How would you rate the general compatibility between the converged collections: both in terms of collection management & use, as well as staff?

    New acquisitions / accessions

    - What factors have/are influencing the rate of acquisitions?
    - Can you describe the process of acquisition approvals?

    Deaccessions?

    Collection storage space

    - How has provision of collection storage space affected each collection area?

3. **Exhibitions**

Permanent exhibitions

- What proportion of the museum collection is on permanent display?
- How have permanent exhibitions changed since the convergence?

Temporary exhibitions

- Who in the organisation is responsible for exhibition development?
- Are all collections used for exhibition purposes?

4. Administration

- What is your response to the changes to organisational structure?
- Can you describe the reallocation of staff roles in the transition from separate organisations to a converged institution?
- Are there professional development opportunities available for staff?
- How has convergence affected professional expertise, collection interpretation or collection care?
- Do you feel that the organisation is living up to its mission?

Appendix 2: A selected chronology of convergence: key events and organisations

Date	Title	Country	Description
1996	Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)	USA	The IMLS is formed by the merger of the Office of Library Programs in the Department of Education with the Institute of Museum Services. Using funds provided by the USA federal government, the IMLS supports collaboration between museums and libraries, including collaborative projects and professional development (Martin, 2007, 82-83, Yarrow et al., 2008, 17).
1998	Parramatta Heritage Centre	Australia	This facility opens as a single venue housing a regional museum, local studies library, council and community archives, and a visitor information centre.
2000	Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)	United Kingdom	The UK government launches the MLA (or MLAC) to provide joint strategic direction, promote standards, and allocate funding across the collecting domains, as well as to provide policy advice to Government (Beasley, 2007, Gibson et al., 2007). With an emphasis on developing access to "high-quality culture" across the UK, the MLA is created as a substitute for the separate Library and Information Commission (LIC) and Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC), whose services it

Date	Title	Country	Description
			incorporates and aims to extend through research, digital projects, collaboration with the educational sector and funding opportunities (Yarrow et al., 2008, 18).
2000	Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (SCRAN)	United Kingdom	a project initiated in 1995, SCRAN is an online collection of over 370,000 images and multimedia resources from archives, museums, galleries and the media in Scotland and the UK. From 1995-200, SCRAN provides grants to cultural institutions for digitisation of collections, which SCRAN uses under license. It partners with over 300 institutions to provide educational access (via subscription) to culturally and historically significant digital materials (SCRAN, 2014).
2003	Puke Ariki	New Zealand	Puke Ariki (located in New Plymouth, New Zealand) is conceived as a "Knowledge Centre" merging the New Plymouth public library and Taranaki museum. It includes a touring exhibition space and tourist information centre (Boaden and Clement, 2009).

Date	Title	Country	Description
2003	Committee on Archives, Libraries, and Museums (CALM)	USA	CALM is formed as a joint venture of the American Library Association (ALA), Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the American Association of Museums (AAM). The Committee encourages collaboration across and the development of common standards across the collecting domains.
2004	Collections Council of Australia (CCA)	Australia	The CCA is established by the former Cultural Ministers Council to represent and encourage collaboration between Australia's archives, galleries, libraries and museums sector.
2004	Library and Archives Canada (LAC)	Canada	LAC is a merger of the Canadian National Library and National Archives (Doucet, 2007). It exists to preserve and provide access to publications, archival records, sound and audio-visual materials, photographs, artworks, and electronic documents pertaining to Canadian heritage and government (2014b).
2005	[UK Government]	United Kingdom	The UK Governemnt's Department of Culture, Media and Sport includes, for the first time, jurisdiction across all three collecting sectors (libraries, archives and museums) (Gibson et al., 2007).
2005	Gosport Discovery Centre	United Kingdom	Located in Hampshire, UK, the Centre is an integrated public library, museum and exhibition space that also houses a conference centre, learning centre and ‘technology areas’ (Boaden and Clement, 2009).

Date	Title	Country	Description
2006	Harry Ransom Center	USA	Renovations completed circa 2006 at the Center, University of Texas, Austin, have included large museum-like exhibition spaces on the ground floor, large library reading room and seminar facilities on level 1. (Dupont, 2007)
2006	Western Plains Cultural Centre	Australia	The WPCC is completed in Dubbo, NSW. It includes a regional art gallery, regional museum and community arts centre (Khoshaba et al., 2010, 28).
2007	Albury LibraryMuseum	Australia	This institution has been described as an integrated cultural community space, where “the building was to incorporate the functions of a public library, research and technology centre and social history museum but with limited barriers between the zones in the building to encourage integration of spaces and experiences” (Boaden and Clement, 2009, 10). Drivers for this project included the desire to revitalise the existing cultural precinct of the central town square, attract State and National funding, providing ‘one-stop’ access to collections and information, and to take advantage of the economies of scale in operating a joint facility (Boaden and Clement, 2009, 11).
2008	Winchester Discovery Centre	United Kingdom	The Centre combines a library, reference centre, touring exhibitions space and community gallery, as well as public internet access (Boaden and Clement, 2009).

Date	Title	Country	Description
2008	BAM Portal	Germany	Developed between 2001-2008, BAM is Germany's national cultural and information Internet portal, which provides access to diverse collection records from libraries, archives and museums around the country. BAM encourages collaborations across collecting domains, supporting digitisation of collection databases and development of metadata standards (BAM, 2013).
2009	Europeana	EU	Europeana provides online access to millions of object records from over 2000 galleries, museums, libraries and galleries around Europe: "Books and manuscripts, photos and paintings, television and film, sculpture and crafts, diaries and maps, sheet music and recordings, they're all here. No need to travel the continent, either physically or virtually!" (2014a). The federated search system connects users to the full digital records located on the sites of participating organisations.
2009	Wanneroo Library and Cultural Centre (WLCC)	Australia	The WLCC opens in September 2009 as the first facility in Western Australia to accommodate a range of cultural services. It includes a library, regional museum, community history centre, exhibition gallery, and function spaces. Foreseen benefits of the centre include urban revitalisation, cost efficient provision of services, improved preservation conditions for collections and enhanced education

Date	Title	Country	Description
			programs (Robinson, 2011, 160-161).
2009	Hurstville Library Museum Gallery	Australia	Located in Hurstville, Sydney, the LMG opens as a convergence of a regional museum and library service, including a local studies collection. A regional gallery space is also included as part of the institution.
2009	The Glasshouse	Australia	The Glasshouse, built in Port Macquarie, NSW, is a cultural and entertainment centre. It serves as a theatre, regional gallery, visitor information centre, offers function spaces and hosts heritage displays (Boaden and Clement, 2009).
2010	Collections Council of Australia (CCA)	Australia	The Collections Council of Australia is closed as the Australian Federal Government decides not to renew funding for the enterprise.
c.2010	Trove	Australia	Describing itself as "a community, a set of services, an aggregation of metadata, and a growing repository of fulltext digital resources", Trove is developed and managed by the National Library of Australia. The website offers access to over 377,000,000 online resources, including books, images, historic newspapers, maps, music and archival records from libraries,

Date	Title	Country	Description
			archives and museums across Australia (2014c).
2010	Kogarah Library and Cultural Centre	Australia	Described as an "integrated community cultural hub", this organisation is located in suburban Sydney and incorporates a public library and exhibition space (Boaden and Clement, 2009).
2012	Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)	United Kingdom	The MLA is abolished in 2012 as a result of government budget cuts.
2014	[Australian Government]	Australia	Australian Federal Government proposes the merger of (unspecified) back office functions of seven national collecting institutions in its 2014 Federal Budget. Affected are the National Portrait Gallery, National Gallery of Australia, National Library of Australia, Old Parliament House, National Film and Sound Archive, National Museum of Australia and the National Archives of Australia.

Appendix 3: Issues for research raised by convergence

THEME	ISSUES
Cognate institutions	Are typological and professional distinctions between the domains redundant in era of digital access to collections?
Management	Does the convergence model deliver on the promise of economies of scale and lower staffing and operational costs? Does repositioning of collecting institutions as revenue-generating businesses lead to meaningful engagement with collections?
Professional expertise	To what extent does professional cross-pollination occur and can staff work effectively in areas outside their professional expertise and experience? How are different practices and priorities across collecting professions reconciled in converged institutions?
Interpreting collections	How are different approaches to collection interpretation managed in integrated collection settings? Does convergence modify the internal logic and cohesion of collections?
Audience development	In what ways does convergence improve audience development and participation? In what ways does convergence alter established conventions for use of different collections?
The international context	How does the experience of convergence in Australian collecting institutions compare with international examples?

Appendix 4: Case Study Comparison

Case Study Title	Location	Year of formation	Initial capital cost	Type of convergence	Annual operating budget (approx.)	Staff (FTE)	Staff inter-viewed	Interviewee job titles
RIVERBANK Museum, Library, Archive & Visitor Centre	Sydney metro	1998	N/A (building cost covered by private developer)	Regional museum, local studies library, Council and community archives, visitor information centre	Unknown	15	4	Curator; Manager; Archivist; Local Studies Librarian
WESTLANDS Museum, Gallery & Arts Centre	Regional NSW	2006	$8.2M	Regional museum, regional art gallery, community arts centre	Unknown	7-8	8	Manager; Centre Coordinator; Collections Officer; Curator; Assistant Curator; Education Officer; Community Services Director, City Council; Local Studies Officer

Case Study Title	Location	Year of formation	Initial capital cost	Type of convergence	Annual operating budget (approx.)	Staff (FTE)	Staff inter-viewed	Interviewee job titles
LONEHILL Library, Museum & Gallery	Regional NSW	2007	$15.2M (library and museum building only)	City library, regional museum, regional art gallery	$5.3M (incl. branch library & entertain-ment centre)	25	12	Visual Arts Coordinator; Museum and Social History Coordinator; Collections and Exhibitions Officer; Library Manager; Cultural Services, Customer Service & Operations Coordinator; Learning and Outreach Coordinator; Group Leader Cultural Services, City Council; Exhibitions Coordinator; Information and Library Collections Coordinator; Cultural Development Officer, City Council; Team Leader, Art Gallery and Collections; Learning and Outreach Officer

Case Study Title	Location	Year of formation	Initial capital cost	Type of convergence	Annual operating budget (approx.)	Staff (FTE)	Staff inter-viewed	Interviewee job titles
SOUTHSIDE Museum, Library & Gallery	Sydney metro	2009	N/A (existing buildings)	Regional museum & art gallery, regional library	$5M	63	7	Programs and Collections Officer; Historical and Cultural Services Coordinator; Curator; Local Studies Officer; Customer Service Librarian; IT Coordinator; Manager
MAUNGA TAPU Museum, Library & Visitor Centre	NZ	2003	NZ $26.5M	Regional museum, regional library, visitor information centre	NZ $10M	78	10	CEO, District Council; Former Manager; Acting Manager; Exhibitions Project and Technical Administrator; Exhibitions Manager; Research Manager; Manager of Heritage Collections; Curator of Pictorial Collections; Pictorial Collections technician; Curator of Archives

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