CultureCase

The factors that make local museums more vulnerable to funding cuts

This research was conducted by **Bethany Rex** at **Newcastle University**

Summary

This paper examined why – in the face of government cutbacks – some museums ‘retain funding and status as part of direct public provision while others are identified to be transferred to community groups via the asset transfer process’. It discovered that ‘certain types of museum’ are more vulnerable to being treated in this way. In general, local authorities are motivated to ‘renounce responsibility for museums that represent financial liabilities to the council’, feeling obliged to spend their resources instead on cultural assets that might generate economic or financial returns. Certain assumptions about which types of neighbourhood or community has the ‘capacity to undertake transfer’ and which also might be less deserving of a subsidised museum ‘make it more likely for museums located in areas considered to be of greater affluence to be designated for transfer’.

The findings were based on 24 interviews and observing 21 meetings in two local authorities in the UK undergoing an asset transfer process between 2014 and 2015

Interviewees included ‘senior service managers, council leaders, frontline officers and elected representatives with cultural portfolios’. In both cases the transfers involved small groups ‘formed for the purpose of averting the closure of an individual museum, rather than partnership approaches where entire services were transferred to leisure trusts’ which is also common in the UK.

‘Austerity forces decision-makers to act quickly and with limited information’

This meant they were ‘heavily influenced by dominant narratives where the worth attributed to a museum has to do with its contribution to the economy, even if the evidence to demonstrate this does not exist’. The individuals responsible for the process were operating under considerable strain, often dealing with policies they did not devise and with which they may not have agreed.

Keywords

interview **observation** **museum** **asset transfer** **UK**

Title	Which museums to fund? Examining local government decision-making in austerity
Author(s)	Rex, B.
Publication date	2019
Source	Local Government Studies, online
Link	**https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03003930.2019.1619554**
Author email	**bethany.rex@warwick.ac.uk**

By **Culture.Case** | | **Organisational change in arts and culture** |

King's Culture
© Copyright 2026
Designed, developed and maintained by **King's Digital Lab**
Originally built by **weheartdigital Ltd**
Accessibility Statement