

## APPENDIX 2: SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATION

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The following scenario development process offers an example of how this methodology could be applied for AICCM purposes. It is important to reiterate that such a process would ideally include the input of ideas from a broad spectrum of conservation professionals.

### Defining the problem

Given the limitations of developing scenarios by an individual, the following set of questions are largely influenced by my role as an institutional conservator, however attempts have been made to broaden their relevance to private and educational conservators. Questions to pursue are:

- is conservation important in this future, and if so how and why?
- who are the employers of conservators in this future?
- who is in charge of cultural heritage in this future?
- how do people engage with cultural heritage in this future?
- what type of skills are valued by conservators in this future?
- what can we do to prepare for or prevent this future?

### Gathering inputs

We gather information about what changes may be occurring every day in focused and wide reading, professional and informal conversations and our general observations of the environment and world around us. However, as individuals we need to be mindful that we are inclined to seek out information with which we are comfortable, thereby reinforcing our beliefs. Of greater difficulty, is looking beyond the familiar to trends that we do not expect to affect the profession by considering the potential effects of emerging trends and wild cards. We must try to

broaden our perspectives beyond our comfort zones. Table 2 outlines a range of quantitative and qualitative trends unfolding across Australia as well as some collecting institutions abroad and their impact upon the cultural heritage institutions.

### Creating scenarios: Conservation 2030

The following three seed scenarios provide hypothetical stories of the future roughly twenty years from now. They are based around the trends and impacts from Table 2. They describe how these changes might unfold and suggest what these changes might mean for conservators and the collections they care for. These scenarios present a range of alternative futures that should not be judged on their predictive value with “Yes this will happen” or “No, that could never be!”, but are best approached with an open mind of exploring “What if?”

#### The Great Release

Key drivers of change:

- slow economic growth due to global market volatility and the transition of an Australian economy from a resources and manufacturing base to a service industry base;
- withdrawal of government funding and growing reliance upon philanthropic revenue sources;
- social shift toward re-localisation and community.

The monthly renewal of information and communication technology plus the costs of treating and storing ever more varied, complex and inherently unstable collection material and the exponential growth of acquisitions have become the biggest financial obligations of institutional collections. Under the burden of rising costs, several state and regional museums and galleries close their collections between 2017 and 2021.

Across Australia, the economic stagnation that had started in 2011 and was relieved by the biotech-boom of 2019-23, gave way to the stagflation of 2024 as the country confronted a post-mining economy. Philanthropic funding, upon which the sector has come to rely after recommendations made in the 2012 National Cultural Policy, dries up. However revised de-accessioning policies in museums management alleviate some of the pressure. Works deemed of low significance and problematic in nature are offered on the market. Nevertheless, a call for 38% redundancies is enforced across government institutions in 2028.

In the social domain, localisation and co-opting have established a new market economy. The rise of de-accessioned artworks spurs growth in private and co-operative collections. Conservators (92% now consider themselves self-employed, working between private practice and contract and casual work) form co-operative conservation labs to alleviate high overhead costs and professional isolation, thus creating centralised cultural heritage skills centres. In addition to treatment, many of these labs now advocate for and teach materials management and 'lost trades'. This feeds into the booming market of the 'Thing-ers' who, in the vein of the 2010s 'Maker Movement' and the 'Arts and Crafts Movement' over one hundred years before, return to the comfort of tangible artefacts in what has become an ever more virtual and dissociative world.

### **GaME on**

Key drivers of change:

- gamification of education and cultural heritage experience;
- growth of commercial activities within the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums) sector;
- consolidation of and controlled access to the valuable cultural resource;
- increasing risk of damage by both natural disaster and terrorist attack.

Following several sizeable donations from technology entrepreneur Joy Bruce of PastVark in 2019, the Gallery and Museum Enterprise of NSW (GaME NSW) was able to digitise and 3D scan its collection of over 18,130,000 items by 2024. This allowed GaME NSW to set new benchmarks for collection access through both the development of its on-line content and introduction of its haptics<sup>14</sup> technology lab, facilitating visually impaired access to gallery and museum collections.

As the exhibition spaces have had to make room for immersive art experiences to feed the growing demand for sophisticated edutainment, the collections and the conservators who care for them have been sequestered away to stores across several cities in regional NSW (including Mudgee and Temora) where the risks of natural disaster and cultural terrorist attacks are reduced and land values are lower.

Collection items are highly valued as research reference material from which biological samples are available for purchase by commercial enterprise. This has become a key source of income for GaME NSW along with accurate 3D reproductions of collection material. A growing push for no intervention as well as the ubiquitous use of 3D scanning and rapid prototyping has seen the conservator role specialise into two streams; that of cultural heritage scientist (CH scientist), focused on analysis and research and that of cultural heritage analyst (CH replicator) focused on 3D documentation; database management and assisting in the development of accurate virtual experiences.

### **Conservation 2030: Museogora**

Key drivers of change

- rise of volunteerism
- cultural renaissance with increased community and corporate engagement

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<sup>14</sup> Haptics technologies are based on touch as the primary communications interface, allowing people to hold and manipulate objects in virtual space using a glove or remote sensor.

Following the ongoing success of the MWM Blockbuster series through the first half of the 2010s and with its commitment to broaden visitor access, in 2017 the National Museum of Victoria (NMV) not only lengthened its visiting hours to 24/7 but expanded its activities. The move was made possible by a sharp increase in volunteerism from both the highly skilled and retired Baby Boomers working by day and PhD-wielding yet unemployed Millennials working nights. Greater rates of participation and community engagement see museum attendance rise to new heights.

As the NMV recognises the importance of a thriving arts and culture sector, functions expand in the early 2020s to incorporate learning, creativity and exploration in all its guises including concerts, rallies and protests. The museum now also offers tertiary education in museum, culture and heritage studies in partnership with RMIT and has in conjunction with CSIRO, converted the green spaces around the buildings into botanical arks.

In 2028, miniNMV and mobileNMV units spread into corporate Victoria as collections are loaned to businesses to furnish the Culture and Recreation (CaR) spaces they create within their buildings. This commercial activity helps to finance the growing collections management needs including the recurrent treatment of artefacts, made necessary by frequent transport and display. The demand for more efficient remedial treatment grows and is assisted by advances in nanotechnology and molecular engineering that allows for targeted regeneration of areas of material weakness or loss.

### **Discussing the implications**

The questions outlined at the beginning of the scenario development process provide a starting point when considering the potential implications of each of the scenarios for the profession to help inform your own personal or organisational activities. Additional questions that help the group determine what common desirable outcomes and futures would include:

- is this future possible, probable, preposterous or preferable?
- what can we do to prepare for or prevent this future?
- what can I do to prepare for or prevent this future?

### **Defining a course of action**

The intention of scenarios planning is not prepare for one future but develop policies and processes that will be robust in many futures and create specific plans to deal with potential risks or take advantage of opportunities. Using the questions outlined above, discussions should then focus on generating explicit strategies or activities to deal with each of the scenarios from which to draw common themes for action.

	General trend	Impact on collections and collecting institutions
Social	ageing population	spaces and exhibitions designed for access; tightening of government funding with fewer working population able to support aged; rise in volunteerism as Baby Boomers remain active in retirement years
	globalisation	transnational audiences and re-emphasis on localised relevance (Müller 2008: 7); reconsidering conservation practice to accommodate alternative cultural perspectives beyond the Western lens
	fragmentation, specialisation and rapid change	cultural heritage (CH) institutions act as unique centres for shared memory; arbiters of 'common knowledge'; museums as centres of retreat (Centre for the Future of Museums 2008: 19)
	growth of participatory engagement	visitors and community driving narrative (Hooper-Greenhill 2000)
	continuing role of evidence-based research	continued specialisation of the industry; developing scientific capacity; computer-modelling of 'collection value over time' (Michalski 2008)
	growth in services sector (Hajkowicz et al 2010)	increasing importance of commercial activities within institutions
	increased attendance to museums and galleries (Forrest 2011)	growing support for activities
	growth of Asian Middle class (Kharas 2010)	increased cultural tourism; increase in number of loans to Asian countries; growth in Asian art market; and value of Asian collection items
Technological	access to information	gamification of museum activities (McGonigal 2009); will there be a tightening or loosening of controls over content usage and sharing?; growth in user generated content (Chan 2010) and a counter-trend of return of the expert? (Müller 2008: 7)
	new materials in artworks and rapid changes in technology	redundant technologies means redundant content for some collection items (Ashley 2008); some newer materials require greater resources for care; increasing costs to maintain status quo
	3D scanning and rapid prototyping	new ways of documenting and treating artefacts (Cignoni et al 2008; UCL Museums 2011); changes to skill base of conservation
	augmented reality and gesture-based computing	new ways of interacting with artefacts for wider audience inclusion (NMC Horizon Project 2010: 6); strengthens museums position as source for the authentic (Centre for the Future of Museums 2008: 14)
	nanotechnology and biotechnology	precision in material analysis, material development and engineering, targeted conservation treatments and better resolution of complex sample types (Max Planck Institute for Intelligent Systems 2009: 387)
	visual data analysis and semantic web	more comprehensive understanding of particular issues or activities e.g. mapping processes of deterioration (NMC Horizon Project 2010: 13; Graham 2004)
	continued global instability	restricted funding from government
Economic	rise of philanthropy	growth in collections; preferential development of collection areas based on desires of donor
	growth in number and size of museums and galleries	cultural renaissance or building for failure? (Bradburne 2009); fewer resources stretched between more organisations with growing needs
	emerging model of sustainability over traditional model of economic rationalism	could this include fourth pillar of sustainability? <sup>15</sup> recognising the relationship of culture to social health, productivity, innovation etc.
	free access to information e.g. Creative Commons	review of copyright law (NMC Horizon Project 2010: 9)
Political and legal	development of National Cultural Policy	impacts on governance and potential restructure of resource sharing and management frameworks
	political party support, disillusionment with current two-party model	Liberal focus on funding larger institutions and Labour preference for broader arts community; future alignment with minor parties and independents?
	introduction of carbon tax or similar	possible reduction of long-distance loans/exhibitions and visitor travel; redressing energy usage of facilities incl. widening of ideal environmental parameters and including passive controls (Staniforth 2011: 13)
Environmental	increasing variance in weather patterns (Hajkowicz et al 2010)	disaster preparedness planning (Cassar 2011: 11)

**Table 2 | STEEP analysis of drivers of change relative to collecting institutions**

<sup>15</sup> The 3 pillars of sustainability are: economy, society and environment. Hawkes (2001) argues for a fourth pillar to be added, that of culture which Hawkes defines as the transmission of values, meaning and purpose.

## APPENDIX 3: IMPLEMENTING SCENARIOS PLANNING IN THE AICCM

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### Scenario development at AICCM National Council level

At the AICCM National Council level, scenarios could inform not only the strategic plan of the organisation but provide an on-going assessment (for example every four years) of what conservators and the AICCM deem to be significant long-term issues and opportunities that face the profession. It seems obvious that the National Council would provide the platform to develop a set of scenarios for use and distribution but given the resources required to oversee such an activity it may more appropriately be conducted by a working group or taskforce such as the AICCM Blue Sky Group.

As noted previously, the key to organisational learning requires the involvement of the broader conservation community and as such the opportunity to both inform AICCM members and draw upon their knowledge should be a key factor in determining how to implement scenario planning. The option outlined below provides opportunities for the membership input and draw from the content generated.

### Scenario development through on-line forum

Given the geographic spread of the AICCM membership, the development of an on-line forum to share thoughts on trends and emerging issues could be a more effective means for engaging the broader membership than holding localised forums for discussion. This lessens the impact of time constraints and supports greater inclusion for those interested. The forum content could be used for input toward scenario development or strategic planning by individual and organisational members as well as the AICCM itself.

More elaborate forums of this kind have been developed for the broader museums profession

including the American Association of Museums Center for the Future of Museums, The Museum of the Future and in Australia, Museum 3.0<sup>16</sup>.

### Scenario development workshops at the State Division or SIG level

In August 2011, the AICCM Victorian Division held an 'Off the Record' session to focus on scenario development. The session was divided into:

- an introductory overview of what scenario development was before attendees were invited to describe different agents of social, environmental, technological and economic and political change that would probably impact the cultural sector; and
- scenario development based on the issues described in the first half, as groups of 3–4 wrote or drew possible futures for the profession. These futures were then presented to the wider group.

The evening was successful in gathering a broad cross-section of members and opening up the discussion to areas not commonly discussed across the Victorian Division membership. However, time constraints (each session ran for an hour) meant that although issues were identified, little time was available for more meaningful discussion about their impact on the profession. Similarly, there was no time to discuss the probability or preference for the six scenarios outlines developed.

Given the commitment of time and energy required to generate scenarios, it is more appropriate that both State Divisions and SIGs utilise pre-developed scenarios at the national AICCM level for their own planning purposes.

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<sup>16</sup> While there do not appear to be similar forums designed specifically for a conservation futures however emerging issues and broader issues relating to conservation are being discussed in a number of conservation related blogs including AIC's '[Conservator's Converse](#)' and Julian Bickersteth's '[Museum Musings](#)'