

# Building a research profile and applying for Postdocs

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# How to start

- The three things that are central to building a research profile:
  - 1) Building a storyline around your research interests
  - 2) Getting away from your PhD but building on it
  - 3) Building a network of colleagues

- Start with a question: who am I? What makes me tick?
- Me: former curator turned academic. Why? What does it mean for my work as an academic?

# 1. Intellectual reasons:

- Keeping a balanced view of issues - what is at stake for practitioners on the ground? How can we use 'practice' to speak to theory? Is there such a divide anyway?
- Dialogue: Ability to work 'between and across' (for me this means exhibitions, editing a journal, convening conferences, committee work - all leading to material for case studies in articles and books).
- Wider network of 'colleagues', sense that academic world is not the only forum for exchange of ideas.

## 2. Potential partners for research projects

- ARC - both Discovery and Linkage - National Trust
- Consultancies and Industry based projects (Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, Jewish Holocaust Centre)

# 3. Using relationships to solve problems

- Sense of belonging to a 'community of common interests' not just a commercial relationship
- Therefore able to go to them for help when needed above and beyond 'official contract'. (letters of support to redesign personnel and financial structures of projects for example)
- Sense of faith in you and your project - open to new requests, understanding of changing circumstances

## 4. Why is this important?

- Sense of dialogue leads to exchange of ideas, feeling that work is contributing to reflexive practices. This is intangible but important.
- Not a one way street. They get avenues to present their work and have it discussed with new perspectives/new audiences.

- Pleasure of being understood, seeing how other people make sense of their practices - a window into another world for them too. Or perhaps a recognition of common aims conducted across different registers.

# What I have done in the past

- **Museology:** *Re-Imagining the museum: beyond the Mausoleum*, Routledge, London, 2003.
  
- Themes:
  - a) relations between museums and communities
  - b) Museums and tourism
  - c) Interactivity

# How it broke with the PhD:

- 1) Internationalised the case studies (American market)
- 2) Got over the 'radical break thesis'. Moderated the tone.
- 3) While still important, got over the critique of the one large figure in the field and lifted it into a wider set of issues

# What that led to:

- Continuing interest in interactivity. A series of book chapters and articles in that area:
- Andrea Witcomb (2007) "The materiality of virtual technologies: A new approach to thinking about the impact of multimedia in museums" in Fiona Cameron and Sarah Kenderdine, *Digital Cultural Heritage: A critical discourse*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, pp.35-48.
- Kate Gregory and Andrea Witcomb (2007) "Beyond nostalgia: the role of affect in generating historical understanding at heritage sites" in Simon J. Knell, Suzanne MacLeod and Sheila Watson (eds.) *Museum Revolutions: How museums change and are changed*, Routledge, London, pp.263-275.
- Andrea Witcomb (2006) "Interactivity: Thinking beyond" in Sharon MacDonald (ed) *Companion to Museum Studies*, Blackwell, London.
- Andrea Witcomb, (2007) "An Architecture of Rewards': A new poetics to exhibition design?", *Museology e-journal*, vol. 4, *Performativity, Interactivity, Virtuality and the Museum*, October, pp.19-33. At <http://museology.ct.aegean.gr/>

In its turn that led to an interest in cross-cultural dialogue. How could interactive, immersive approaches lead to cross cultural forms of understanding?

- Witcomb, A. (2010). "Remembering the dead by affecting the living: the case of a miniature model of Treblinka" in Dudley, S. *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, Routledge, London/New York, pp. 39-52.
- Witcomb, A. (2010). "The politics and poetics of contemporary exhibition making: Towards an ethical engagement with the past" in F. Cameron and L. Kelly, *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge, pp. 245-264.
- Witcomb, A. (2013). "Using Immersive and interactive approaches to interpreting traumatic experiences for tourists: potentials and limitations" in R. Staiff, R. Bushell and S. Watson (eds) *Heritage Places, Tourists and Tourism*, Routledge, London.

# Relations between museums and communities

- Andrea Witcomb, (1993) "Rockhampton Heritage Village: Cultural Policy and Local Identity" in *Culture and Policy*, vol. 5, pp.177-184.
- Andrea Witcomb, (1994) "Postmodern space and the museum - the displacement of 'Public' Narratives", *Social Semiotics*, vol 4/1-2, pp.239-262.
- Andrea Witcomb and Verena Mauldon, (1996) "Local museums and cultural policy: Reforming local museums?", *Culture and Policy*, vol. 7(1):75-84.
- Andrea Witcomb (1997) *Travellers and Immigrants: Portugêses em Perth*, exhibition catalogue, Research Institute for Cultural Heritage, Perth.
- Andrea Witcomb, (1998) "On the side of the object: An alternative approach to debates about ideas, objects and museums", *Museum Management and Curatorship*, vo.16 (4), 1997, pp.383-399.
- Chris Healy and Andrea Witcomb (eds.), 2006, *New World Museums*, Monash University E Press, Melbourne.
- **Witcomb, A.** (2006) How Style Came to Matter: Do we need to move beyond the politics of representation?, in Chris Healy and Andrea Witcomb (eds), *South Pacific Museums: Experiments in Culture*, pp. 1-16, Monash University ePress, Australia
- Invited keynote speaker at the University of New Caledonia, Glasgow, March 2007. Presented two papers at the Enabling Access: Heritage and Communities Seminar supported by the ESRC. They were:  
Revisionist History and the loss of community: Some questions about the professionalisation of heritage interpretation  
Coping with the tensions between the need for social cohesion and the existence of cultural diversity: Can museums move beyond pluralism?

Bringing those two strands together into an interest in cross cultural forms of engagement through exhibitions and heritage sites:

- Witcomb, A. (2009). "Migration, social cohesion and cultural diversity: Can museums move beyond pluralism?" in *Humanities Research*, vol.XV (2) *Compelling Cultures: Representing Cultural Diversity and Cohesion in Multicultural Australia*, pp.49-66.
- Work in Thailand and Vietnam

- Note the length of time it takes to build this up. The book gets noticed. You get asked to do things. You say yes if they follow your trajectory. No, if they don't.

# What that might lead to:

- ARC applications
- 1) Linkage with the National Trust
- 2) Heritage Abroad (Discovery)
- 3) Collecting Sector, cultural diversity and citizenship\_

# Other Projects

- The Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre.
- One initial outcome: “Remembering the dead and affecting the living: The case of a miniature model of Treblinka”

# Along the way

- Built expertise in institutional histories
- National and international profile
- Mix of books, book chapters and journal articles
- Track record and partnerships for grant applications
- A satisfying and stimulating intellectual life with lots of exciting dialogue with colleagues all over the world

# How to build all this into postdocs

- Three things to think about:
  - 1) who you are and what your research narrative is (track record)
  - 2) How that relates to your research proposal – are you the best person to undertake that project
  - 3) How do 1 and 2 fit with the institutional narrative that will support your project

# What are we looking for in Postdocs?

- Track record:
  - 1) What is their publication record (quantity and quality)
  - 2) Is it relevant to the current proposal?
  - 3) Is it relevant to our needs (way in which we want to build our research narrative, FOR codes we want to specialise in – are there some quick things we can get value from)

- Do they show initiative?
- Are they well networked or still attached to their supervisor?

# Research proposal

- 1. Is it relevant to our research narrative?
- 2. Is it well structured? (is there a significant problem, are the aims clear, is the methodology designed to meet those aims? Where is it innovative? (theoretically, methodologically, empirically) Is it significant? (to whom is this important and how?)
- Is it feasible – can it be done within time and financial constraints?)