



University of
Western Sydney

INSTITUTE FOR
CULTURE AND SOCIETY

2015 Seminar Series

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Museums and Community Engagement: Recognising Care in Practice

Dr Nuala Morse

Date

Thursday 23 April

Time

11.30am – 1pm

Venue

EB.2.21 Parramatta (South)
Campus

Abstract

Participation is a key focus of museum policy and practice, increasingly used as a strategy for securing the museum's continued relevance in contemporary society. This paper argues however that so far, certain models of community engagement have dominated both theory and practice. Established models tend to prioritise institutionally-bound forms of engagement, and as such, despite an optimistic and transformative rhetoric, such models ultimately maintain and redeem the museum institution as it is. Based on ethnographic work conducted in Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, in the North of England, this paper puts forward the notion of care to reconfigure community engagement in museums. The paper introduces the geographies of care literature as a starting point to examine the practices and ethics of care already existing in museum engagement work. It then considers how care might open up new ways of imagining museums and their roles within more distributed networks of engagement. The final part of the paper presents emerging findings from research conducted as part of an Endeavour Research Fellowship, looking at community engagement in the context of Australian museums.

Biography

Dr Nuala Morse is an interdisciplinary researcher with a background in cultural geography and museum studies, and specialisations in participatory research and practice. She is currently an Endeavour Research Fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society. Nuala recently completed a doctorate at Durham University in collaboration with Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, which examined the cultures of participation in museums – in particular, how museum professionals across different teams understand, practice and perform ideas of participation, as well as the organisational challenges for embedding participatory practice and democratising museums. Nuala's research also focuses on the role of the museum as a space of social care, and the links between museums and wellbeing. She is also interested in the co-production of museum knowledge and exhibits and the distinctive nature of professional museum work.