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The Evolving Nature of UK Museums in the Era of Brexit

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Loyola Marymount University Honors Program

In this proposal, I request funding for research in the United Kingdom to study how the UK's membership to the European Union impacts the UK museums sector as well as how the impending withdrawal from the EU will impact the industry. In order to conduct this research, I will spend approximately three weeks traveling to cities and towns throughout England and Scotland visiting national and regional museums, viewing exhibits, and speaking directly to museum professionals regarding their concerns about how leaving the EU will impact museums and about the steps they plan to take to protect the interests of the museums sector. By assessing how reliant museums are on EU membership and by determining how museums plan to adapt to these impending changes, I will be able to make predictions about how the UK's withdrawal from the EU will impact the future of museums in the UK.

In June of 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union (EU) in the referendum known as Brexit. While the UK is set to leave the EU by March 2019, the terms of withdrawal from the EU have not yet been established. In Britain, many were unhappy with EU membership because increasingly often European law trounced British law, thus infringing upon the UK's sovereignty. That, in culmination with concerns over immigration, resulted in the referendum in which 52% of the electorate voted to leave the EU.¹ And while withdrawal from the EU will allow Britain to more closely regulate immigration, there is now a climate of uncertainty as lawmakers scramble to deal with the economic consequences. This collective feeling of uncertainty is also felt in the UK museums sector, which has long reaped the benefits of EU membership.

Prime Minister Theresa May announced in January that when the UK leaves the EU, it will also be withdrawing from Europe's single market economy.² As part of the single market economy, member nations remove all barriers to trade, allow the free movement of people, goods, and services, and people can live, go to school, and work within any member nation.³ Museums throughout Britain are likely to feel the impact of the UK losing access to this economy, particularly due to the restriction of free movement. Currently, EU nationals can work and live in any EU country without needing visas or work permits and receive equal benefits and treatments.⁴ Given the multicultural nature of the UK's museums, being cut off from the free movement of labor will not only negatively impact the number and diversity of museum visitors, but will impose upon museums' abilities to incorporate international diversity into their collections. This will likely occur in a number of ways, but most notably through partnerships with other European cultural organizations and the hiring of specialists from outside the UK.⁵ UK museums frequently partner and collaborate with European cultural organizations, and the success of such collaboration can largely be attributed to ease of networking between partners and the absence of visa complications.⁶ Moreover, because UK museums are constantly curating internationally significant collections of natural history, art, science, and technology, they need to be able to hire specialists with unique knowledge bases and skills, which often means hiring from outside the UK.⁷ When EU nationals are no longer able to work, travel, and live within the UK without complicated visa agreements and without the appeal of equal benefits, UK museums will likely lose access to those resources that made it possible to display impressive, multicultural collections and exhibitions.

¹ "EU Referendum: Final Results," *Bloomberg*, June 23, 2016. Accessed February 06, 2017.

² Ben Chapman, "Brexit: What is the single market and why should we care that the UK is leaving it?" *The Independent*, January 17, 2017. Accessed February 06, 2017.

³ Steve Cannane, "What will be the damage when the UK leaves the EU single market?" *ABC News*, January 17, 2017. Accessed January 31, 2017.

⁴ "Free Movement - EU nationals," *European Commission*, Accessed February 01, 2017.

⁵ "Review of the Balance of Competences between UK and the EU: Culture," *National Museums*, August 7, 2013. Accessed February 1, 2017.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Funding from the European Union has played a significant role in the development and sustainment of UK museums. A comprehensive report submitted by the National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC) in 2013 emphasizes that "The structure of the EU and the specific funds provide a structure and scale which an individual Member State could not replicate... the pool of possible partners is larger and the funding necessarily less prescribed, creating the opportunity for innovative projects".⁸ From 2007-2013, the UK received significant funding from the EU Culture Programme, and from 2014 onwards funding came through the Creative Europe fund.⁹ From 2014-2015, Creative Europe provided funding for 230 UK creative organizations for a total of 39.8 million pounds of funding.¹⁰ EU funding has helped create exhibits at national museums like Tate Liverpool and Tate Modern.¹¹ EU grants have allowed smaller museums to develop multinational projects that generate and exhibit new knowledge and discoveries.¹² EU research funding allows museums to employ scientists and develop research programs, and culture funds provide a kind of entry point for smaller regional museums to develop their collections and engage in larger collaborative projects.¹³ The UK government has promised to replace all funding for projects following withdrawal from the EU with the millions of pounds that were previously being spent on EU membership funding.¹⁴ But seeing how diverse and widespread the impact of EU funding is on the UK museums sector clearly demonstrates how EU funds create "a source of opportunities which do not exist within domestic funding".¹⁵ In combination with the fact that local governments outside London have made significant cuts on spending on culture and the arts, there is definite reason to question whether the continued growth and success of the UK museums sector is possible in a post-Brexit world.¹⁶

Through my research, I will survey national and regional museums throughout the UK to observe the influence of EU membership on UK museums and to assess the impact Brexit will have on the museums sector, making predictions regarding how the matters of funding and immigration will change the ways museums operate and the messages they convey to audiences.

In my research, I will travel to cities throughout England and Scotland to gain an understanding of how membership to the European Union is of value to museums in the UK. In each museum I visit, I will pursue interviews with museum employees and professionals, including contacts of my faculty advisor Dr. Amy Woodson-Boulton, to investigate how museums are responding to Brexit. I will primarily be focused on how museums will cope with losing employees to immigration restrictions and how they will seek out and replace lost EU

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Brexit Report," *Creative Industries Federation*, October 2016. Accessed January 3, 2017.

¹¹ "Review of the Balance of Competences between UK and the EU: Culture,".

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Rosie Collier, "What will Brexit mean for arts and culture in the UK?" *New Statesman*, July 11, 2016. Accessed January 04, 2017.

¹⁵ "Review of the Balance of Competences between UK and the EU: Culture,".

¹⁶ Collier, "What will Brexit mean for arts and culture in the UK?".

funding. I will inquire as to how museums might seek to keep their current non-UK citizen employees and how they plan to recruit non-UK employees in the future given the immigration restrictions. I will also ask how the loss of international employees might alter the multicultural scope of exhibits and collections. In regards to funding, I will ask how lost funds will impact the quality of museums. I will ask about the steps museums are taking to replace EU funds, and from whom they hope to acquire funding. I will ask about how museums could potentially be forced to change their structure and the message they communicate to the public in order to be competitive for new funding. I will inquire as to whether new sources of funding will change the kind of projects museums are able to engage in, because while EU funds encouraged multinational collaboration between museums, it is not guaranteed that new funders will share such multicultural motives. Additionally, I will make inquiries into how the museums plan to respond to and convey the questions aroused by Brexit about the conflict between multiculturalism and British identity and about the relationship between Britain and the rest of the world. My goal is to understand why UK museums value membership to the EU so much and determine how and in what ways museums will be affected by the referendum. Through my experiences, I will gain insight that will allow me to make predictions regarding how UK museums will change in response to Brexit.

To complete my research, I will likely spend six days in London, one day in Portsmouth, two days in Oxford, one day in Birmingham, two days in Manchester, one day in Durham, three days in Edinburgh, and two days in Glasgow. The schedule and itinerary may fluctuate slightly based on interview schedules and availability. At every museum I visit, I will observe the collections looking at how UK museums benefit from open borders with the rest of Europe. At each museum I will seek out dialogue with professionals, collecting unique perspectives about how museums will be affected by the potential loss of both international employees and EU funding. I will determine the methods by which museums plan to find replacement funding, and how this may require them to change the structure and message of museum content. Should I be granted funding, I will immediately begin the process of reaching out to museums and the contacts my advisor Professor Woodson-Boulton has at various institutions for interviews and meetings. I have allowed for flexibility in both my itinerary and budget should I have time to take advantage of any unaccounted for opportunities to visit other exhibits.

This is a crucial time for museums in the UK, because while the real effects of the vote will not be known for several years, how museums react to the vote and the steps they take to promote their interests in the post-EU era of the UK could shape the future of the UK museums sector for decades. Because this is such a unique time for Britain, swathed in the uncertain purgatory between a crucial vote and the vote coming into effect, I believe that I have a narrow window of time in which I can do research that will forecast the future of one of the UK's most famed industries. First, by experiencing first-hand the way EU membership interacts with and influences museums in Britain, I will be able to grasp what is really at stake for the sector in a way that cannot be achieved solely through reading articles and second-hand accounts. Secondly, by meeting with real people who work in the museum industry and who will be directly affected

by the terms of withdrawal from the EU, I can inquire about their predictions and hopes for the future and about what they themselves and what their colleagues are doing to promote the interests of the museums sector. The results of this research will work in two ways. Prior to the UK's official withdrawal from the EU, it can predict the ways in which museums may or may not be affected. Following the UK's official withdrawal, this research can be used in the future as a reference tool for scholars to explain why Brexit ultimately affected museums the way it did.

As I execute my research, I will take detailed notes on each museum I visit and in each interview I conduct. With the conclusion of my research, I will be able to use these notes as well as my experiences and overall impressions to form a cohesive report on the future of museums in the UK in a post-Brexit world. My findings will be valuable and indicative in the future as researchers seek to understand why Brexit influenced museums the way that it did, and how the attitudes and actions assumed by museum professionals in the years prior to Brexit ultimately determined this outcome.

Itinerary

The following itinerary details the cities I will be traveling to in my research. I have included lists of museums I will be reaching out to for interviews with professionals prior to my visit. The exact schedule of my museum visits will be depend on people's availability for these interviews. Therefore, instead of identifying now the specific museums I will visit and the day I will visit them, I have included the list of possible museums I might visit. The specifics of my itinerary will take shape as I arrange interviews at each location. For this reason, also note that my itinerary and schedule is subject to change.

Also note that my trip originates and concludes at the Seattle-Tacoma airport, as I will need to return home with all of my belongings from my residence hall following the conclusion of my Spring semester on May 5th.

Seattle (5/8):

- Depart from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on Monday 5/8

London (5/9-5/15):

London is the capital of the United Kingdom and a center for culture and the arts. It is home to some of the most renowned museums in the world. London and the surrounding area voted overwhelmingly to Remain in the June Referendum. In London I hope to meet with my faculty advisor's contact at the British Museum.

- Arrive at London Heathrow International Airport on Tuesday 5/9. Check into lodging.
- British Museum
- Natural History Museum
- Tate Modern
- Victoria and Albert Museum
- National Gallery
- National Maritime Museum
- Imperial War Museum

Portsmouth (5/15-5/16):

Portsmouth is a smaller city on the south coast of England. Because Portsmouth voted to Leave in the referendum by a considerable margin, the perspectives of professionals from both national and regional museums in Portsmouth will be of great interest.

- Arrive 5/15 via train
- Portsmouth Museum
- National Museum of the Royal Navy
- D-Day Museum

Oxford (5/16-5/18):

Oxford is a historic city best known for the hosting the University of Oxford. Because of the university, the city hosts a diverse array of fascinating museums. Oxford voted to Remain in the referendum.

- Arrive 5/16 via train
- Oxford Museum of Natural History
- Museum of Oxford
- Museum of the History of Science
- Story Museums
- Ashmolean Museum

Birmingham (5/18-5/19):

Birmingham is a major city in England that voted Leave in the referendum by a narrow margin. In Birmingham I hope to meet with one of my faculty advisor's contacts at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

- Arrive 5/18 via train
- Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
- ThinkTank Birmingham Science Museum

Manchester (5/19-5/21):

Manchester is a large city in England known for its strong culture and arts scene. It voted overwhelmingly to Remain in the Brexit vote. In Manchester I hope to get in contact with my faculty mentor's contacts at the Center for Museum Studies and the Manchester Art Gallery.

- Arrive 5/19 via train
- University of Manchester Center for Museum Studies
- Manchester Art Gallery
- Manchester Museum
- People's History Museum

Durham (5/21-5/22):

Durham is a small historic city in North East England. It voted to Leave in the referendum. Durham will be a valuable location for me to visit because I will be able to see how small regional museums will be affected in an area that predominantly voted Leave.

- Arrive 5/21 via train
- Durham Museum and Heritage Center
- Museum of Archaeology
- Oriental Museum

Edinburgh (5/22-5/25):

Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland and is renowned for its strong history and culture. Edinburgh offers many diverse varieties of museums. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to Remain in the Brexit vote. In my interviews I will look to see how the reactions of Scottish museums differ from English museums.

- Arrive 5/22 via train
- Museum of Edinburgh
- National Museum of Scotland
- City Art Centre
- The People's Story Museum
- The Writers' Museum
- National War Museum

Glasgow (5/25-5/27)

Glasgow is the largest city in Scotland that rose to prominence during the Industrial Revolution. As in Edinburgh, I will be looking to see how Scottish museums' take on Brexit differs from English museums'.

- Arrive 5/25 via train
- Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum
- St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art
- The People's Palace and Winter Garden
- Gallery of Modern Art

London (5/27-5/28):

- Arrive 5/27 via train
- Tie up loose ends
- Travel to London Heathrow on 5/28 for flight home

Budget

Seattle-London roundtrip airfare: ~\$1000

London AirBNB for 6 nights: ~\$480

Portsmouth Air BNB for 1 night: ~\$80

Oxford AirBNB for 2 nights: ~\$160

Birmingham AirBNB for 1 night: ~\$80

Manchester AirBNB for 2 nights: ~\$160

Durham AirBNB for 1 night: ~\$80

Edinburgh AirBNB for 3 nights: ~\$240

Glasgow AirBNB for 2 nights: ~\$160

London-Portsmouth train: ~\$45

Portsmouth-Oxford train: ~\$25

Oxford-Birmingham train: ~\$15

Birmingham-Manchester train: ~\$15

Manchester-Durham train: ~\$25
Durham-Edinburgh train: ~\$15
Edinburgh-Glasgow train: ~\$15
Glasgow-London train: ~\$70
Transportation in London: ~\$70
Transportation in Portsmouth: ~\$25
Transportation in Oxford: ~\$20
Transportation in Birmingham: ~\$15
Transportation in Manchester: ~\$20
Transportation in Durham: ~\$25
Transportation in Edinburgh: ~\$25
Transportation in Glasgow: ~\$15
London AirBNB for last night: ~\$80
Transportation from London train station to airport: ~\$15
Food for 3 weeks: ~\$1000
Museum and exhibit fees: ~\$200
Unexpected costs and emergency fund (for unexpected travel, transportation, lodging): ~\$150
Total: \$4325

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