

Robin Nelson
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The Significance of Employment Policies to Cultural Policies¹

Abstract

Museums use public programming to build relationships with stakeholders and these relationships are vital to their long-term stability. As such, government policies that influence the public programs a museum can and does offer has an effect on the future of those institutions. My Master's research investigated this influence, asking: how has New Brunswick cultural policy influenced community museum public programming from the release of the Government of New Brunswick's (GNB) first comprehensive policy articulation in 2002 – *Cultural Policy for New Brunswick* – to the release of the renewed policy in 2014 – *Creative Future: A Renewed Cultural Policy for New Brunswick*? This paper summarizes the principle findings of my thesis, arguing GNB has shaped public programming through the Exhibit Renewal and Museum Activities Support Program as well as the Student Employment and Experience Development (SEED) program. Notably, SEED is not part of *Cultural Policy for New Brunswick*, but has had the most consistent and widespread influence on public programming as it provides museums with employees that they would otherwise be unable to afford. The program's effect highlights the importance of studying policies that are not labeled cultural, but nonetheless influence cultural organizations and, more specifically, employment in cultural organizations.

Introduction

Museums in New Brunswick use public programming to build relationships with their publics. Discussing an increase in changing exhibits at the Kings County Museum, Chris White (2014) stated, "Engagement at the community level has gone up... we've seen increased school visits, we've seen increased requests to go out into the community, and that's exactly what we are hoping for." As building relationships with stakeholders is vital to organizations' long-term stability, government policies that influence the public programs a museum can and does offer has an effect on the future of those institutions. My Master's research investigated this influence, conducting 17 interviews with museum and government representatives to answer: how has New Brunswick cultural policy influenced community museum public programming from the release of the Government of New Brunswick's (GNB) first comprehensive policy articulation in 2002 –

¹ This paper is edited from my Master's thesis *Museums and Money: The Impact of Provincial Cultural Policy* - https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/70512/3/Nelson_Robin_201511_MMSt_thesis.pdf

Cultural Policy for New Brunswick – to the release of the renewed policy in 2014 – *Creative Future: A Renewed Cultural Policy for New Brunswick?* This paper summarizes the principle findings of my thesis, arguing GNB has shaped public programming through the Exhibit Renewal and Museum Activities Support Program as well as the Student Employment and Experience Development (SEED) program. Notably, SEED is not part of *Cultural Policy for New Brunswick*, but has had the most consistent and widespread influence on public programming as it provides museums with employees that they would otherwise be unable to afford.

First, I provide definitions for cultural policy and public programming used in my research. Second, I outline of the development of an official cultural policy in New Brunswick, discussing its influence on museum public programming. Third, I discuss the influence of the SEED. Fourth, I elaborate on some of the implications of my research. Finally, I conclude that there is a need for increased understanding regarding how implicit and explicit cultural policies work together to influence public programming in Canadian community museums.

Definitions

Cultural Policies: Culture policies are any “actions that a state and its many operational entities take that affect the cultural life of its citizens, whether directly or indirectly, whether intentionally or unintentionally” (Mulcahy 200, 267). Since the government’s effect can be direct or indirect as well as intentional or unintentional, I discuss both explicit and implicit cultural policies in my thesis. Explicit cultural policies are “policies that are explicitly labeled as ‘cultural’” (Ahearne 2009, 141), while implicit cultural policies are “policies that are not labeled manifestly as ‘cultural,’ but work to prescribe or shape cultural attitudes and habits over given territories” (Ibid.). For example, *Cultural Policy for New Brunswick* (Culture and Sport Secretariat 2002a), as well as its associated support programs, are labeled as cultural and are, therefore, explicit cultural policies. Conversely, GNB’s Student Employment and Experience Development (SEED) program is not labeled cultural but has a significant influence on museum operations because it provides non-profit organizations, such as museums, with summer employees. As such, it is an implicit cultural policy.

Public Policy: In a document outlining skills needed by the museum workforce, the Canadian Museum Association (CMA) defines public programming as activities that “provide

informal learning opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds with emphasis on experiential, developmental and interactive learning” (Canadian Museums Human Resource Planning Committee 1997, 22). This definition is included within knowledge sharing competencies and is accompanied with definitions for educational programming, interpretation, publications and products, design, production, as well as exhibitions. During my interviews, I asked participants to discuss the programs at their museums and they talked about guided tours, school programs, exhibit openings, exhibits, workshops, lectures, community outreach, and other special events. Further, the Smithsonian Institute states, “exhibitions are the principal public programs of museums” (2001, 5). As such, I use the CMA’s definition for public programming, but have amended the definition to consider all of the knowledge sharing competencies, including exhibits. Public programming activities, therefore, involve providing the museums’ communities with learning opportunities and are distinct from administrative activities or knowledge creation and preservation activities.

The Evolution of Cultural Policy in New Brunswick

GNB was actively involved in heritage in the 1960s and 1970s, purchasing historic sites and developing support structures for museums. These structures continue to exist and shape policy direction. For example, community museums began receiving provincial funding according to the recommendations of their local politicians. The operational grants continued though the Department of Historical and Cultural Resources, which began as the Historical Resource Administration in 1967, and continues today as the Heritage Branch within the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture.

The 1980s and 1990s saw reduced funding to heritage as GNB released a heritage policy that advocated the application of standards to community museums and the use of private sector partnerships. The Branch responsible for historic sites began devolving its responsibility for operations, such as the Madawaska Museum, and shifted its focus to providing services. The formation of an advisory committee in 1987 to study cultural policy in the province began an era that involved provincial consultations on cultural policy development every few years. There were consultations as part of FORUM ’87, a strategic planning study on provincial parks and heritage sites, the heritage policy review, FORUM ’95, and a cultural policy review. As stated by Barrieau and Bourgeois (2011, 86), the issue of cultural policy was discussed at great length and

stakeholders, including organizations or individuals working in culture and education as well as the general public, had expressed themselves repeatedly. These consultations resulted in some action, such as the creation of the New Brunswick Arts Board in 1990, but did not lead to the requested comprehensive cultural policy that would set “forth the government’s desire to affirm New Brunswick’s cultural identity and support artists, businesses, and organizations who excel and wish to be part of the international scene” (Therriault, Fry et. al 1997, 13).

Entering the twenty-first century, the Provincial Government’s approach toward community museums shifted again. After a failed attempt to create a policy without consulting the cultural community in 2001, GNB formed a working group with representatives from various arts and heritage organizations, involving the wider community through consultations both before and after the release of *Cultural Policy for New Brunswick*. The cultural policy is comprehensive and involved stakeholder participation in its formation.

GNB announced funding increases with the policy, supporting their articulation with action and leading to new support strategies. *Cultural Policy for New Brunswick* resulted in the establishment of the Museum Network and an initial \$100,000 investment in its development, which is the only new support program for museums articulated in the policy. In order to develop the Network and new funding programs, the Heritage Branch divided the province into nine regional zones and invited participants to Fredericton for workshops, covering travel and accommodation costs (Burley 2002). They then held workshops to determine what funding programs the community believed they needed. Within the year, the Branch implemented funding for marketing, professional or organizational development, as well as exhibit renewal and other museum activities. The following November, the Heritage Branch held additional stakeholder meetings, leading to the Museum Collection Inventory Program. The Branch also implemented a fine arts conservation program and built heritage funding, but these programs are only available, respectively, to museums dealing with fine art or housed in a historic property and are, therefore, not my present focus.

From 2002 to 2014, all of the new and increased grants offered by the Museum Services Section have had some effect on museum public programming. The Exhibit Renewal and Museum Activities Support Program has had the most direct influence through the provision of funds specifically for public programming. Museums use the grant to create new or renovate existing exhibits, demonstrating that money for an activity can increase that activity. Further,

museums now spend more on each individual exhibit, which may elevate the quality because they can afford professionally printed didactics and other materials for the displays. The work involved in creating an exhibit often encourages community museums to develop more activities and provides the inspiration for programming. The most pervasive examples are guided tours of museums' permanent and temporary exhibits. Other examples are children's workshops, lecture series, and special events.

Student Employment and Experience Development (SEED)

While GNB has influenced museum public programming since 2002 through an influx of funding that shapes museum activities, Bill Clarke (2014) with the Restigouche Regional Museum notes, "public programming is ultimately dependent on the people who are involved and set policy in the individual museums. You have places where there are wonderful things going on, places where there is not much going on, and everything in-between." Sarah Goulding (2014) with the Chocolate Museum observes she does not necessarily need a lot of money to do public programming, but she needs people. People are her "biggest resource and biggest asset" in operating the museum. However, many New Brunswick community museums do not have the budget for full-time, year round staff and are dependent on volunteers as well as student summer employment.

Only five of the thirteen interview participants that represented non-profit community museums were from institutions with a year round staff person. Further, few community museums have more than one staff member. It is challenging for museums to operate and provide programming with only one person. As such, even museums that can afford a paid director are heavily reliant on volunteers and summer students. For instance, the Fredericton Region Museum (FRM) employs a director year round and also has a budget for part-time hours. However, the Museum relies on its board and other volunteers for various activities, including writing exhibit didactics, cataloguing artefacts, and giving tours. The past-president, Fred White (2014), said the Museum has an average of sixty-five volunteers a year and can have as many as one hundred, depending on the year. As stated in a Facebook post, "The FRM is ... dependent on the willingness of volunteers to give their time and summer student grants" (FRM 2012). When discussing the approximately 600 volunteers and 500 employees at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Susan Ashley (2012, 108) states, "volunteers are a means to stretch budgets and offer

additional services.” In New Brunswick, there are no museums with that many employees and the volunteers far out number the paid employees. Volunteers in the province’s community museums are a means of offering basic services rather than additional services.

Within this context, funding through SEED provides money for full-time employees for about two months of the year, enabling museums to open and offer additional programming. Whereas about 50% of museums and historical societies receive less than \$5,000 from GNB for operations, and a full-time student at minimum wage for ten weeks costs more than \$4,000, the program enables museums to have an employee for around eight or ten weeks that they would otherwise be unable to afford.

GNB began a formalized student summer employment program in the spring of 1971. The goal was to “play a significant role in providing employment opportunities and functioning as an information centre to assist students in obtaining jobs at other sources” (Christie 1971, 1). The program has continued and is now SEED. The Department of Post Secondary Education, Training and Labour (PETL) operates SEED with the same intent – to provide students returning to post-secondary schools in the fall with money for tuition and skill development. It funds student jobs at non-profits, provincial departments or agencies, First Nation communities, and municipalities full-time for a specified number of weeks at minimum wage.

From the program’s inception, GNB has provided community museums with student employees during the summer. In 1971, the Historical Resource Administration (HRA) employed eighteen students through the employment program. By the summer of 1979, the HRA facilitated fifty student positions. In 2014, SEED funded a total of 102 student employees or 947 weeks in New Brunswick community museums and historical societies (Allen-Scott, Godin, and Tremblay 2014).

Through SEED, GNB provides funding for Priority Student Employment (PEP), which is first mentioned by the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Heritage in 1990. Although PEP is funded through SEED, they are awarded differently. PEP provides a number of student weeks to a government branch or department, which distributes positions to support a targeted activity. For example, in 1994 GNB provided Community Museum Attendants through the Heritage Branch, noting the positions are essential to continue operating most museums during the summer (Ministers Committee Employment Development 1994). Alternatively, SEED is administered through the Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs). The politicians receive a

certain number of weeks to distribute within their riding as they find appropriate. Since they are given a number of weeks rather than jobs to allocate, SEED positions generally range from eight to ten weeks and are usually only eight. Museums can, therefore, apply for both PEP and SEED, sending their application to the Heritage Branch. Most museums receive at least one PEP student and they can receive one or more SEED positions depending on the wishes of their MLA. Without summer student employees, many New Brunswick museums could not open and others would offer much less public programming. The Student Employment and Experience Development (SEED) program influences when and for how long museums are open. For example, the summer is the only time the majority of NB community museums open to the public for regular hours because they hire a student or students through SEED/PEP and, in cases where the organization has enough financial capacity, the federal employment programs. Discussing the fall season, one participant stated, “We lose our students and have to close our operations” (Interview Participant D 2014).

In many cases it also affects what programming a museum can offer during the summer and how they create their exhibits. In some institutions, permanent exhibits have developed with the expectation that there will be students available to give guided tours. As such, the artefacts are exposed and could easily be stolen or vandalized without the attention of a tour guide. Alice Folkin (2014) with the Keillor House noted they would have to change their exhibits if they did not have summer students, adding Plexiglas and securing objects in place. In other words, exhibits have developed without certain security measures because students are available to walk with guests through the museum

While SEED/PEP is necessary for many institutions, its administration leads to certain challenges. The number of weeks museums can have student employees has declined since the 1990s and eight to ten weeks is a short contract. With the exception of those finishing high school that will go to university or college in the fall, eligible students are often free for longer than eight weeks. Further, even if a museum only wants to be open for two months, an eight-week contract is restrictive in terms of training.

SEED/PEP also places museums in rural areas at a disadvantage because they have difficulty attracting students that fit the criteria (Interview Participant B 2014; Interview Participant D 2014). Museums have to hire individuals going to college or university full-time in the fall. Fewer students attending post-secondary education live in rural areas without

universities or colleges than in the cities that have those institutions, making it more challenging to find eligible students (Interview Participant B 2014). It is also difficult to hire suitable employees because students are already out of school and looking for employment before museums know whether they have SEED/PEP funding. There have been instances where museums prepare to open for the summer without knowing whether they will receive funding for any student employees (Clarke 2014; Folkin 2014; Interview Participant D 2014; C. White 2014).

There is a lack of consistency in museum operations as there are no multi-year hiring contracts and the SEED jobs are awarded by MLAs without clear criteria. PEP has offered a level of consistency since 2009 as it assigns a number of student employees to community museums. Through PEP, community museums will ideally receive at least one student for ten weeks every summer. However, as one participant noted, the number of students is not guaranteed and it “is a gamble each and every year” (Interview Participant B 2014, personal communication). The absence of certainty hinders long term planning and the development of public program plans. As stated by Chris White (2014), with only one student you are just “trying to keep the door open and manage lunch hour.” With multiple students, a museum may be able to conduct some public programming.

In sum, SEED/PEP funding has a significant influence on museum public programming because it allows museums to open their doors when they may not otherwise be able. One of the primary methods of engaging the public is through guided tours, which students give. The availability of students has influenced the way some museums exhibit their materials and the hours they can open. The increase in employees enables a museum to develop and offer programming. However, issues with SEED/PEP’s administration influence the program’s effect on operations. There are eligibility requirements that are difficult to meet in some areas and by the time museums are able to hire, many quality students have already found summer employment. Further, the lack of consistency from year to year influences museums’ ability to plan ahead as well as the quality of programming they can offer.

Discussion and Conclusion

A significant outcome from my research is that an implicit cultural policy – SEED – has had a greater and more widespread influence on museum public programming than GNB’s

explicit cultural policy. The Museum Services Section recognizes SEED/PEP's importance to the museum sector and, to some extent, acts as an intermediary between PETL – the Department of Post Secondary Education, Training and Labour – and museums, administering PEP and paying museums' SEED/PEP students directly. In this way, SEED/PEP has been implemented as part of GNB's explicit cultural policy. However, the Museum Services Section advises community museums to discuss the benefits students' receive from the employment opportunity when applying for SEED instead of the fact community museums "need students and without students [they] cannot operate" (Interview Participant H 2014). The program's explicit aim is to benefit student employees and not to keep museums open from one year to the next.

That an implicit cultural policy has a greater influence on museum public programming compared to the province's explicit grants raises the question: why? Simply put, SEED provides museums with the resource that is arguably most needed to accomplish both operational activities and special projects – namely, people. The broader implication is that if governments would like to influence museum operations, they need to provide funding for the people who operate museums. This aligns with research arguing human resources are a critical factor in nonprofit goal attainment (Misener and Doherty 2009) and that an organization's ability to provide services is "dependent on the quantity and quality of suitable labour" (Nickson et al. 2008, 20).

The influence of an employment program outside the explicit cultural policy emphasizes that it is crucial to consider the influence of policies that governments have not designated as cultural, but nevertheless have an affect on the cultural life of its citizens. Since I approached the research from the perspective of the museum community, using interviews with broad open-ended questions, it provided a more comprehensive understanding of GNB policies influencing museum public programming. As most interview participants mentioned the student employment program when discussing cultural policy, I was able to investigate SEED, even though it is not part of GNB's explicit cultural policy. An avenue for future research would be to conduct interviews asking: what government actions, inactions, or policy articulations influence your operations? I believe the research would bring to light a broad range of topics that are not usually discussed as part of the cultural policy conversation.

In conclusion, New Brunswick has influenced museum public programming through the provision of project-based grants. However, human resources play a crucial role in most aspects

of museum operations, including public programming. As such, a policy that influences employment has had a widespread and substantial influence on public programming. Without SEED, it is doubtful the direct grants would have had as big of an influence because museums lack human resources. Significantly, museums interact with a range of state actions in a variety of ways, which are not often studied in cultural policy research but contribute to the support network within which museums operate. I am currently building on these conclusions to develop research that looks into the effects of multiple government instruments that involve museums as a target and delivery organization.

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