

2021-05-20

Understanding the Library as a Commemorative Exhibition Space

Theresa Ryan

Technological University Dublin, theresa.ryan@tudublin.ie

Bernadette Quinn Dr

Technological University Dublin, bernadette.quinn@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/tfschmtcon>



Part of the [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ryan, T., & Quinn, B. (2021). Understanding the Library as a Commemorative Exhibition Space. Technological University Dublin. DOI: 10.21427/J5BM-ZF75

This Conference Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Conference papers by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie, gerard.connolly@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#)
Funder: Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA)

Understanding the library as a commemorative exhibition space:

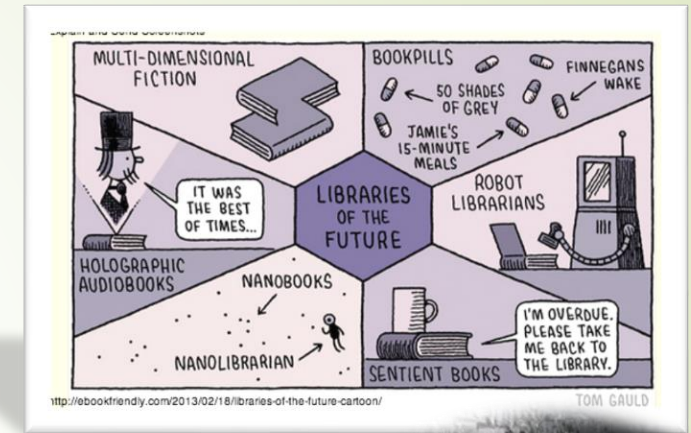
A focus on the 'Goodbye Dublin The War of Independence in the City' commemorative exhibition in Dublin City Library & Archive

Dr. Theresa Ryan & Dr. Bernadette Quinn
Technological University Dublin



Research Context: The Future of Public Libraries

- Public libraries have long been recognised as holding 'an intangible value for society' (Tokić & Tokić, 2018: 444).
- Questions regarding how they can continue to be of value in a society increasingly dominated by digital content (Scott, 2011; Smith, 2019)
- Additionally, the need 'to bridge the gap between the public's perception of the library's importance and their actual use of libraries' continues to be a challenge (Ring, 2018: 3).
 - 'tend to be taken for granted' (Moore, 2004: 27),
 - are frequently overlooked (Ireland, 2013)
 - understood only in the context of lending books (Bodnick, 2012)



Research Context: The Future of Public Libraries

- Libraries have been adapting to become 'a hybrid of different specializations and services' (Mickiewicz, 2016: 239).
- However, access to their collections remains their central tenet (Robinson, 2012).
- Exhibitions are one such means through which library collections are made accessible.
- 'Creating exhibitions, previously considered an interpretive activity beyond the scope of ... librarians ... is now an accepted part of the work' (Chen et. al. 2015: 63).



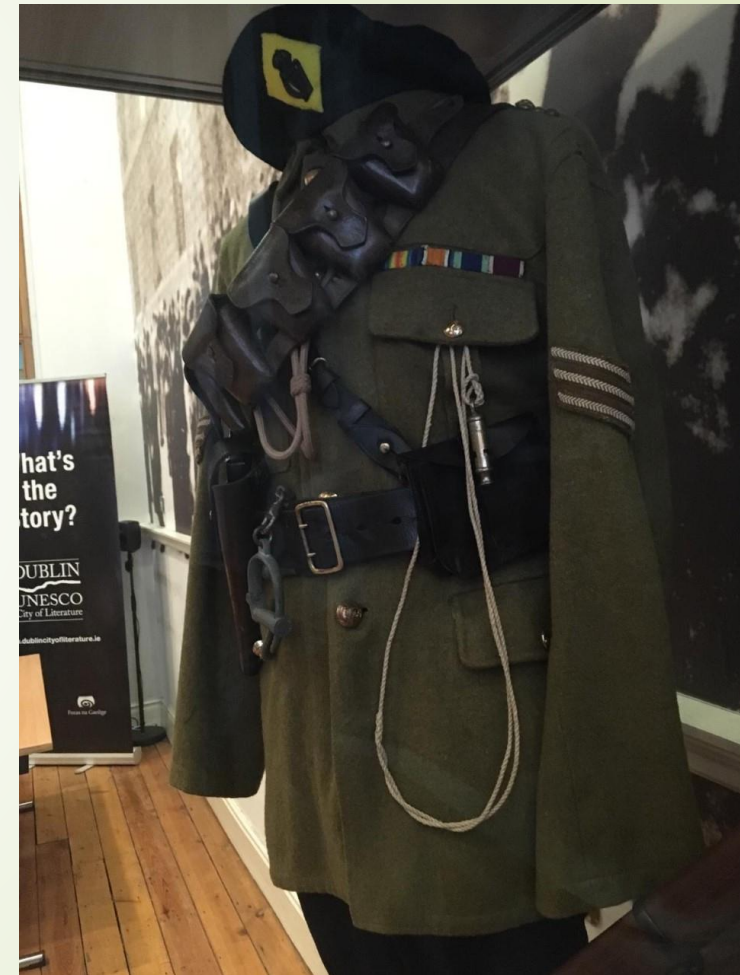
Public libraries and exhibitions

- ▶ Research on library exhibitions in general has been scarce & 'more ... theoretical investigation into them is needed (Fouracre, 2015: 378)
- ▶ Rogatchevskaia (2018: 175), describes them as an 'underexplored beast'.
- ▶ These comments hold for commemorative exhibitions - a type of exhibition that is often / widely / frequently associated with libraries
- ▶ To date, little has been done to further our understanding of the meaning & significance of commemorative exhibitions, particularly in the context of public libraries.



Public libraries and commemorative exhibitions

- ▶ The focus on remembering distinguishes commemorative exhibitions from others (Frost & Laing, 2013).
- ▶ Their meanings are strongly linked to the construction of both individual, personal identities and collective, national identities (Drozdowski, Waterton and Sumartojo 2019).
- ▶ Cutcher et al. 2016 argue that the acts of commemoration and remembrance transforms spaces into places of meaning and agency.
- ▶ But much more scope remains to explore all of these ideas in library settings.





Research Questions & Contribution

This research seeks to address this by asking:

- Does the staging of a commemorative exhibition encourage more/different engagement with the library?
- Does the staging of a commemorative exhibition transform the library and if so how?
- What significance does the exhibition have for visitors to the exhibition?

The Research Site

- ▶ Dublin City Library & Archive,
 - ▶ the largest library authority in the Republic of Ireland
- ▶ The 'Goodbye Dublin: The War of Independence in the City' exhibition
 - ▶ 14th of August - 31st of October 2019
- ▶ Focused on the central role that Dublin played in the Irish War of Independence 1919-1921



Methodology

- A phenomenological approach, focusing on the subjective experience of visitors to the exhibition.
- 30 field interviews at various times of day and week, over the period of the exhibition (14th of August to the 31st of October 2019).
- Random selection: Respondents ranged in age, nationality and background.



GOOD BYE
DUBLIN

THE WAR OF
INDEPENDENCE
IN THE CITY

14 Aug – 31 Oct
144 Pearse St
Dublin 2

VISIT THE
FREE EXHIBITION

#goodbyeDublin1921

- www.dublincitylibraries.ie
- twitter: @dubcilib
- Insta: @dublincitylibraries



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council



Does the staging of a commemorative exhibition encourage more/different engagement with the library?

'It would certainly make you more familiar with [the library] and comfortable ... and happy ... using them'.

'Events like this help people see the library as a public space'

'you're welcome to walk around and be free and it's casual, there's nobody watching you'

'The exhibitions encourage people to use the library'

- A significant finding was the way in which the exhibition connected & engaged respondents with the library.
- Many visited only to attend the exhibition
- A 'different' way of engaging with the library.
- Made them aware that libraries have 'a lot of things going on'.
- More likely to use the library again.
- Realisation that the library was more of a 'social setting'.



Transforming the library: A multi-sensory, immersive environment

- A contextual, multi-sensory space that captured respondents imaginations.
- Enabled them to understand the story but also experience it through the original texts, objects, sounds & images.
- The visual representations of death, destruction and trauma elicited quite strong, emotive reactions.
- Stimulated memories and resonances.



What is the significance of the exhibition for visitors?

- A collapsing of time, that brings the past into the present.
- Critical reflection on issues of war in the context of contemporary meanings.
- Adds meaning to the present, & makes the past seem 'real'.
- Connecting to personal & collective national identities.
- Provided insights into '*the behaviour, the culture, the values*' of the country.



'We can learn from history, learn about the lives of others and other societies hopefully so we're inspired to think differently about the past, present & future'.


Concluding discussion

- In the context of questions regarding the future and relevancy of public libraries the findings were significant.
- Through the exhibition the library is transformed into a multi-sensory, dynamic, emotionally charged space.
- Providing new & immersive meanings for visitors to explore & engage with the library.
- This is a highly engaged, multi-faceted & complex encounter.
- Facilitates critical reflection, confrontation and debate.
- A 'safe' and 'trustworthy' environment for learning about themselves and others & reflecting on contemporary issues.





What does this all mean for libraries?

- ▶ All of this points to the need for better resourcing of libraries.
 - ▶ Need for better marketing, use of social media, widening of mailing lists, etc.
 - ▶ This of course is all very problematic as libraries are chronically under funded (Gray, 2018).
 - ▶ Have been subjected to public funding cuts which seem likely to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as demands on the public purse intensify (Quinn & Ryan, forthcoming).
- 



Taking the research further

- ▶ There is much scope for further research
 - ▶ To further explore the library exhibition as a multi-sensory encounter – questioning the diversity of experiences.
 - ▶ Library exhibitions as spaces of contestation & debate.



Thank you for listening
Any questions?



<http://festspace.net/>

Dr. Theresa Ryan: Theresa.ryan@tudublin.ie & Dr. Bernadette Quinn: Bernadette.quinn@tudublin.ie
Technological University Dublin

References

- Bodnick, M. 2012. Will public libraries become extinct? Forbes, Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2012/10/02/will-public-libraries-become-extinct/> [Accessed: 2nd MAY, 2021].
- Cutcher, L. Dale, K. Hancock, P., Tyler, M. (2016) Spaces and Places of Remembering and Commemoration. *Organization, Volume 23, No. 1, pp. 3–9.*
- Drozdzewski, D., Waterton, E. & Sumartojo, S. (2019) Cultural memory and identity in the context of war: Experiential, place-based and political concerns. *International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 101 No. 1, pp. 251–272.*
- Fouracre, D. (2015) Making an Exhibition of Ourselves? Academic Libraries and Exhibitions Today. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 377-385.*
- Frost, W. & Laing, J. (2013) *Commemorative Events: Memory, Identities, Conflict.* Routledge, London & New York.
- Ireland, R. (2013), Public Libraries as Rhetorical Devices: Reimagining Print, Dewey, and Memory as Invention in the Digital Age, *Public Library Quarterly, Vol, 32, No. 4, pp. 306-318.*
- Mickiewicz, P. (2016). Access and its limits: The contemporary library as a public space. *Space and Culture, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 237–250.*
- Moore, N. (2004) Public library trends, *Cultural Trends, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 27-57.*
- Robinson, H. (2012) Remembering things differently: museums, libraries and archives as memory institutions and the implications for convergence, *Museum Management and Curatorship, 27:4, 413-429*
- Rogatchevskaia, E. (2018) Revolution Collected and Curated Russian Revolution: Hope, Tragedy, Myths at the British Library. *Slavic & East European Information Resources, Vol. 19, No. 3-4, pp. 175-200.*
- Scott, R. (2011) The Role of Public Libraries in Community Building, *Public Library Quarterly, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 191-227.*
- Smith, M (2019) Top Ten Challenges Facing Public Libraries, *Public Library Quarterly, Vol. 38, No. 3, pp. 241-247*
- Tokić, k. & Tokić, I. (2018) Tourism potential of libraries. *Tourism Review Vol. 66, No. 4, pp. 443 – 460.*