Strangers, Guests or Clients?

Visitor Experiences in Museums

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Abstract

This paper discusses three different attitudes that museums hold towards their visitors: stranger, guest, and client.

> *Stranger*: This attitude arises when the museum believes that its primary responsibility is to the *collection* and not to the public.

> *Guest*: From this point of view, the museum wants to "do good" for visitors out of a sense of mission, primarily through "educational" activities and institutionally defined "learning objectives."

> *Client*: This paper suggests that social trends will force museums to adopt attitudes and behaviors in which the museum is *accountable to* the visitor. Institutions will then acknowledge that visitors, as clients, have needs, expectations, and wants that the museum is obligated to understand and meet.

The paper also discusses four major categories that describe the types of experiences that individuals prefer and find most satisfying in museums. The categories are based on empirical research conducted in nine different Smithsonian museums. The categories are:

> *Social experiences* center on one or more other people, besides the visitor.

> *Object experiences* give prominence to the artifact or the "real thing."

> *Cognitive experiences* emphasize the interpretive or intellectual aspects of the experience.

> *Introspective experiences* focus on the visitor's personal reflections, usually triggered by an object or a setting in the museum.

The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the museum settings, or "servicescapes," that support or detract from the experiences of visitors.

Preface

This paper was prepared for a conference and a workshop held under the sponsorship of the Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh, Germany. The conference, *Managing the Arts: Performance, Financing, Service*, was held in Weimar, Germany on March 17-19, 1999. It was organized to mark the occasion of the Germany Presidency of the European Union and was a cooperative effort between the Bertelsmann Foundation, the German Federal Foreign Office and the European Commission.

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Introduction

> Museums, like many other heritage attractions, are essentially experiential products, quite literally *constructions to facilitate experience*. In this sense, museums are about facilitating feelings and knowledge based upon personal observation or contact by their visitors. (Prentice, 1996, p. 169)

Three major attitudes on the part of museums characterize their relationship to visitors. The history of museums might appear to suggest a sequential development from one to the other. But, even a cursory examination of current museum styles suggests that all three still exist across our institutions and even co-exist or conflict within single institutions. These attitudes, styles and approaches to visitors are the products of historical situations, collections, and individuals.

Strangers.
In this mode the museum signals that its primary responsibility is to the *collection* and not to the public. Many curators understandably take this posture, as do institutions primarily devoted to research. Such museums emphasize "object accountability." The public, while admitted, is viewed as strangers (at best) and intruders (at worst). The public is expected to acknowledge that by virtue of being admitted, it has been granted a special privilege.[1]

Guests.
In this posture, perhaps most common in our museums today, the museum assumes responsibility for visitors. The museum wants to "do good" for visitors out of a sense of mission. This "doing good" is usually expressed as "educational" activities and institutionally defined objectives. The visitor-guests are assumed to be receptive to this approach.

Clients.
In this attitude the museum feels *accountable to* the visitor. The visitor is no longer subordinate to the museum. The museum no longer seeks to impose the visit experience that it deems most appropriate. Rather, the institution acknowledges that visitors, like clients, have needs, expectations and wants that the museum is obligated to understand and meet.[2]

What are some of the precursors of these attitudes or styles and how do they inform the present?

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[1] Hudson (1975) provides some vivid descriptions of "strangers" in museums.

[2] Tobelem (1997) uses the term underline exchange to characterize the relationship between visitor and museum. He contends that most museum professionals have misperceptions of marketing and do not realize that (i) the consumer has been moved increasingly to the center of the marketing operation [i.e., there has been a shift from product-centered to consumer-centered marketing]; and (ii) that it has been extended into the world of public service and non-profit institutions.

Institutional Development: Visitors as Strangers

Solinger (1990) reminds us that the ancient Greeks referred to a museum (Gr. *mouseion*) as a center of learning. She goes on to note that "the most renowned early museum was housed under the auspices of the library of Alexandria, founded in the third century B. C." and then describes how the museum's resident scholars took part in scholarly discussion, research and teaching. This museum also contained "statues, scientific instruments, zoological specimens and a botanical and zoological park" (p. 1). In the description, we recognize the precursor of present-day universities, museums, and libraries. Universities, she notes, have become "formal sources and prime purveyors of higher education, while libraries have evolved into resource centers" (p. 2).

In their historic transformation, museums certainly maintained their scholarly or teaching roles, but this specialization of functions between universities and museums led to particular emphases. Thus, the museums' focus on collecting, preserving and exhibiting objects has redefined the scholarly function as research related to objects and the education function as teaching the public about objects in the collection.

Given their object-based orientation, it is not at all surprising that museums expended considerable resources on maintaining their collections, and took "accountability for objects" as a paramount responsibility. Conservation and preservation, security, and safety are givens in the museum environment, and collections management systems have kept pace with technological development.

The rationale for making some collections available for public viewing, especially in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, relied on ideas such as moral uplift, character development, skill training, education for the masses, and acculturation. At the same time, as reflected overtly in very restricted visitation hours, dress codes, and regulations governing visits, the orientation was to the "stranger" in the title. Most institutions existed to collect, preserve and study their collections – whether or not they were visited. Historical forces have compelled cultural institutions to retreat from this position, at least publicly, but it is still part of the culture of many institutions and the more traditional departments within them.

While maintaining distance from the public, 19th century museums saw themselves as having an educational role, both in Europe and the United States. In a brief history of education in museums, Hein (1998) notes that in the latter half of the 19th century, governments increasingly assumed responsibility for social services and education and viewed museums as one of the institutions that "could provide education for the masses." At the same time, however, schools supported by public funds were developing as social institutions. Of special importance for our later discussion of measurement is Hein's observation that schools 'measured and tested' while museums did not:

> But, unlike museums, they [schools] quickly developed an accountability system – inspectors, tests, and standard curriculum as well as public discussion of what schools were for, how they should be run, and whether they were doing their intended job.... Museums, although equally public institutions in most countries, did not establish similar approaches to assessing impact on their clients. It was

assumed that people would learn, be enlightened, and be entertained by their visits to museums without any reference to the study of visitors' experiences. (Hein, 1998, p. 5)

Institutional Development: Visitors as Guests

In the United States, the number of museums has grown four-fold in the last twenty-five years. The most recent estimates (1992) count 8,200 independent museums.[3] The same 25 years have seen an increasing emphasis on the educational role of museums. Between 1969 and 1992, the American Association of Museums visited the overall mission of museums in three publications: *The Belmont Report* (AAM, 1969), *Museums for a New Century* (Commission for Museums for a New Century, 1984) *and Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimensions of Museums* (AAM, 1992). All three reports stressed the responsibility that museums have, together with other social institutions, to educate. The latest report did so forcibly:

> ... enrich learning opportunities for all individuals and to nurture an enlightened, human citizenry that appreciates the value of knowing about its past, is resourcefully and sensitively engaged in the present and is determined to shape a future in which many experiences and many points of view are given voice. (AAM, 1992, p. 25)

An educational mission implies a relationship with visitors akin to that of "hosts" and "guests," in which museums are not only more accommodating to visitors but also take some responsibility for what happens to them.

Having welcomed an ever-increasing public into their buildings, what do museums offer these guests?

The visitor paradigm most commonly found among museum staff who accept this "hosting" role today is the "baby bird" model, which regards the visitor as a relatively undeveloped appetite needing our wise and learned feeding. The staff generally intends to provide these hungry minds with motivation and with learning experiences. An eloquent description of this attitude is found in the opening scene of Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times* in which the adults, including the schoolmaster,

> ... swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts pours into them until them were full to the brim. (Quoted in Hein, 1998, p. 21)

As most of us would agree, the actual range of visitors' expectations is more sophisticated, more complex, and more challenging than this model suggests -- in part because the visitors themselves do not accept this image of their behavior.

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[3] The National Research Center of the Arts, Inc. (1975) estimated 1,821 museums in 1971-72.

In the visitor-as-guest model, museums pay considerable attention to hosting functions. Advertising, outreach programs, and affordable membership programs, among other methods, are used to invite the public to museums. Restaurants, shops, and theatres have been added as amenities appropriate to hosting behavior. In some cases, museums have been totally rebuilt in order to provide more of these amenities.

Institutional Development: Accountability to Clients

Today, increasingly, there is pressure on American social institutions to be accountable for "products," to demonstrate effectiveness and social worth -- to show that they are "successful." Social institutions are being called on to justify both public and private support in an increasingly competitive environment. The pressure is pushing museums towards a client approach.

In fact, Weil (1997) has suggested that museums will have to go even further, into a "partnership" relationship with the public. He suggests that the museum's role towards the public will change radically and

> ... will have been transformed from one of mastery to one of service. Toward what ends that service is to be performed, for whom it is to be rendered, and how, and when – those are all determinations that will be made by the museum's newly ascendant master, the public. (p. 257)

The idea that a museum is accountable to a client originates in the corporate world. Corporate management principles and approaches, especially from the service sector, are being applied to museums with increasing frequency.

In the museum field itself, there seems to be a general and growing sense that the familiar paradigms of both the institutions and their visitors are inadequate. Four colleagues (Perry, Roberts, Morrissey, & Silverman, 1997) recently wrote,

> Once defined primarily in terms of their collections, museums are now collections-based only as far as their collections serve people -- through research, education, stewardship, and more. This shift means that the institution's role must be defined as much by how it serves people as by how it preserves objects. (p. 26)

In response to this situation they propose: "First, the museum field needs a clear articulation of what it means to be a museum today.... For only when museums have a clear notion of who and what they are and should be, especially in relation to their communities and society, will they be able to assess the many different ways they are and are not effective" (p. 27).

Do we need to redefine museums? I am not sure. Instead, museums may need to more clearly and accurately recognize their present roles within a larger society and take advantage of its implications. We *do* need to re-define our relationship with visitors.

First, I think, we need to fully acknowledge that museum-going is a *leisure-time activity*. As a leisure-time activity, museum-going is one of many activities that serves our need for "personal self-definitions and agendas for development," in the words of Kelly and Godbey (1992, p. 449).

In their book <u>The Sociology of Leisure</u>, they write...

> However, leisure is not just a social phenomenon that reflects the institutional structure of the society. It is also a realm of openness in which individuals take action that has consequences for who they are and who they are becoming. There is a developmental dimension to leisure that runs through the entire life course. Children learn and develop in play. In fact, most critical early socialization occurs in play. Throughout the life course, individuals inaugurate and revise lines of action that are intended to enable them to become the kind of persons they want to be and to have some sort of ongoing community with others with whom they want to share some significant part of their lives. Leisure, then, is closely connected with personal self-definitions and agendas for development. Its meaning is more than momentary, however much it may be focused on the quality of the experience. (p. 25-26)

Most of the people who enter our museums, as with those engaged in leisure activities generally, are probably motivated by

> (1) a desire to strengthen their self-identity through association with the subject matter of our museums; and

> (2) a desire to continue their self-development, intellectually, culturally, emotionally, and socially.

If, then, museums were to fully acknowledge their leisure activity role, it follows directly that they would also be acknowledging their role as "service" institutions, perhaps more akin to libraries. They would see themselves as a resource for personal development, places in which the needs of the user (like those of the reader in a library) are *primary* and respected as such.

The United States Federal Government has also been emphasizing its role as a service institution. The public sector is under intense scrutiny to improve its operations so that it can deliver products and services efficiently and at reduced cost to the taxpayer. Program effectiveness considerations have led many agencies to ask what the public sees as their mission. This review, in turn, has led to the reshaping of missions and performance measurements.

In 1993, Public Law 103-62, the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), was passed. It represents a federal commitment to strategic planning and performance measurement. Under GPRA, beginning with the fiscal 1999 budget cycle, all federal agencies will be required to have performance measurements in place and to report

annually on their progress. This shift to outcomes, rather than inputs and outputs, represents a paradigm shift.[4]

A review of the extensive literature spawned by GPRA shows a clear recognition that although agencies rely on Congress and other stakeholders to clarify their mission and to agree on their goals, they also, like private sector organizations, must address customer needs. The term "customer-driven strategic planning," for example, frequently arises in these discussions.

What might all this mean for museums? What does it mean for their relationship with visitors? What does it mean for "performance measurement," or for assessing the effectiveness of exhibitions and museums more generally?

Generally, programmatic performance has been measured from an *institutional* perspective, by asking whether or not the exhibition or program meets the needs of the institution at this particular point in its cycle of growth and change. Those institutional needs may focus on the visitors, on the staff, or on non-visitors, but they are still seen from the point of view of the museum.

Exhibitions for visitors, for example, have had goals such as involvement, learning, attitudinal or behavioral change, increased income, or expanded donations. Exhibitions for staff have aimed for the recognition of peers or advancement of knowledge. Exhibitions for non-visitors have sought publicity, notice, recognition, favorable opinion, or an expanded audience. *Whatever goal was chosen, it was chosen on the basis of professional opinion as to what accomplishment would best serve the museum at that moment.*

Whether relying on expert opinion, or peer review, or scientific studies of visitors, the underlying assumption has always been that "we," the museum staff, know what it is we want to accomplish and the yardstick of "success" is the extent to which "they," the visitors, respond to our offerings in the ways that we intend them to. As we noted above, this is the classic "host and guest" relationship.

But, accelerating change in our environment suggests that we start to consider some alternative scenarios. As a colleague phrased it, "What might we learn if studies were owned by the visitor rather than by the institution?" What if we began to seriously think of visitors as "customers" or "clients" with needs which museums were responsible for meeting? For one thing, success of an exhibition, a public program or a museum visit might have a very different meaning for visitors or potential visitors than it does for an institution.

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[4] A similar approach towards client focus and satisfaction is emerging in Canada, as well with an initiative called Public Service 2000 (Hewson, 1991).

What DO Visitors Want?

When the Institutional Studies Office (ISO) was established at the Smithsonian, we began conducting studies aimed at assessing how successful exhibitions and programs were in achieving the goals of the planning staff. Our initial working paradigm was the guest model, and our work was generally directed to informing the hosts of the extent to which they had succeeded in effective communication. We started, in every case, by working closely with the exhibition team to make sure we understood their goals and objectives for visitors. While we asked visitors why they came in a general way, we never explored in depth what they wanted or expected from the visit or an exhibition.

Several years ago, upon reviewing the studies our office has conducted, we found that exhibitions and programs designed to be communication media rarely conveyed the desired messages to even half of their visitors. Can this be called success? What does it mean that 50% or 65% or 20% of visitors understood the basic themes and messages? If we assume that everyone who came to the exhibition wanted or expected to get a message and, hence, was available to receive it, then 50% or less seems to be a rather low level of accomplishment. But what if all visitors were not willing to receive messages in the exhibition? Perhaps, we reasoned, these individuals who got the message were the *only* ones who came to the exhibition or program seeking that type of experience or information. Perhaps the other 50% or 35% or 80% had equally legitimate needs that were not even considered by the museum and perhaps not met. Or, if they were being met, we did not know it.

We stepped back, reviewed our work and summarized our conclusion in two short sentences: "Visitors make use of museums for their own purposes, and from varying perspectives. The museum can influence these outcomes but cannot control them." This position became our framework for organizing past and future research.

When we assumed that visitors use museums as leisure time activities, we saw in our own work evidence that visitors arrive with their own visit agendas and sense of time. As leisure time participants, people come *without* sharply defined "learning goals." Most visitors -- like the rest of us -- recognize that there are better, faster, more comfortable and more efficient ways to gather factual information. Books, magazines, newspapers and, more recently, the expanding electronic media, are widely available.

Our studies also showed that people tend to attend the exhibitions that they think will be congruent with their own attitudes, with whose point of view they expect to agree, and that they respond best to exhibitions and themes that are personally relevant and with which they can easily connect. We found, consequently, that most museum visitors acquire little new factual knowledge.

Some of the exhibitions we studied aimed to change attitudes and alter individual behavior. For some of the same reasons that mitigate against acquisition of facts, visitors are unlikely to fundamentally alter their view about a subject as a result of visiting a museum. While we found that exhibitions were both inefficient and ineffective methods for communicating new information or changing attitudes, we

recognized they are powerful tools for *confirming, reinforcing* and *extending* existing beliefs.[5]

We acknowledged that individuals come to museums with different *entrance narratives,* and with different perspective and approaches to the experience.[6]

The entrance narrative, or internal story line that visitors enter with, has three distinct components:

> (i) a basic framework, i.e., the fundamental way that individuals construe and contemplate the world;
>
> (ii) information about the given topic, organized according to that basic framework; and
>
> (iii) personal experiences, emotions and memories that verify and support this understanding.

This model suggests that the most satisfying exhibitions for visitors will be those that resonate with their entrance narrative and confirm and enrich their existing view of the world.

Some researchers have focused on the context and texture of this experience of "finding resonance" or "enriching existing views." Silverman (1993, 1995) for example, describes it as "interpretation" or "meaning making," of the kind identified in studies of history. From this point of view the museum visitor engages in active, creative, intellectual and emotional processes that include remembering, imagining or revering objects, taking objects as symbols, and using objects to tell stories to others. When visitors are viewed as "meaning makers" the museum's educational role shifts from providing authoritative interpretation to facilitating the varied interpretive activities of visitors and encouraging dialogue and negotiation among those different views.

Carr (1993) has written of this meaning making as an act of personal transformation

> To see the museum as an open work is to recognize that it is always discovered by its users in an unfinished state, not unlike seeing it as a laboratory, or a workshop for cognitive change. It is a setting where the museum offers tools, materials and processes for systematic exploratory approaches to experience and purposive thought that leads one further toward insight – and toward the occasional, exquisite transforming surprise. The great museum allows its users an opportunity to understand the transformations of others. The great museum assists its users to ask – and to answer – the question, *What transformation is possible for me here?* (p. 17)

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[5] In this respect, as Treinen (1993) points out, museum-going resembles mass-media consumption (p. 90).

[6] Aside from our work, we find evidence to the entrance narrative in various visitor studies. A good example is in Macdonald (1992). The study underscores the entrance narrative of visitors, both specific content and cultural dimensions. It show that exhibitions have "implicit messages" that exist in the minds of visitors even before they visit it and that the museum may unintentionally reinforce.

Hein (1998) is one of the leading proponents for a "constructivist museum," i.e., a museum that organizes itself around the principle that visitors construct their own knowledge in the museum. He stresses the need for museums to help the visitor connect with what is familiar and to offer a range of "learning modalities" that reflect the learning styles and individual needs of visitors.

Our work has also benefited from the increasing consideration of museum issues by the individuals based in academic consumer research. Prentice (1996) for example, affirms that the emphasis in evaluating the success of museums and exhibitions should be on the experience of visitors, rather than the goals of the museum staff. Prentice accepts that much of the museum experience is provided by visitors as a result of prior (or subsequent) ideas, and he emphasizes the relationships between museum consumption and all other acts of cultural consumption. He writes, "through what they seek and do visitors to museums contribute to the production of their own museum 'product' (namely, their experience) and the settings formally used ... are only part of the 'production' process" (p. 170).

More specifically, Prentice draws attention to visitors' "demand for insight," and links this to a typology of experience that is based on the distinction between "insiders" and "outsiders."

Consequently, we have begun to devote some of our effort towards empirical research based directly on the visitor's point of view, rather than the institution's. We began to be concerned with how visitors approach museums and what types of "museum experiences" they want. We knew that this approach would not be well received by everyone in the museum field. There have been at least two, somewhat overlapping, traditional objections raised by museum professionals to judging performance or assessing needs from the visitor's viewpoint. The first is that it might influence museums to "pander" to visitors, thus damaging the present mission and destroying the value of cultural institutions. Many staff members assume that visitors really want amusement, entertainment, simplicity, and a watered-down experience. The second objection is that visitor-centered research resembles marketing research in the profit-making sector. In both cases the underlying assumption is that *the values and desires of the visitors are inherently inferior to those of the museum professional*, and consequently suspect. Do we believe it? The evidence clearly shows that museum visitors are "just like you and me." They are relatively well-educated and obviously go to museums in order to have the kinds of experiences that they cannot easily obtain elsewhere. Are we saying that we and our families and friends would be satisfied with what a colleague has called "an intellectual Disneyland or cultural McDonald's"? This is not what we want for ourselves and we are not so cynical as to ascribe such motives to the majority of museum visitors.

Our recent research is founded on the basic assumption that, out of a range of other leisure activities, some individuals select museum-going because they want something in *particular* that museums can offer. They want specific "museum experiences." And, they seem to want these experiences very much as part of their lives.[7] What are these

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[7] In the United States, at least, two out of three American adults visit at least one museum, zoo, aquarium or historical site each year. Many visit multiple venues many times (Doering, 1995).

museum experiences that visitors come to museums to get? Through in-depth interviews, sample surveys, and analyses of visitor comments, our office has constructed a working list of types of museum experiences that can be divided into four major categories: social experiences, object experiences, cognitive experiences and introspective experiences.

Social experiences
    Spending time with friends/family/other people
    Seeing my children learning new things

Object experiences
    Being moved by beauty
    Seeing rare/uncommon/valuable things

Cognitive experiences
    Enriching my understanding
    Gaining information or knowledge
    Reflecting on the meaning of what I was looking at

Introspective experiences
    Feeling a spiritual connection
    Imagining other times or places
    Thinking what it would be like to own such things
    Recalling my travels/childhood experiences/ other memories
    Feeling a sense of belonging

Whether they are asked about remembered experiences, recent experiences, or anticipated experiences, people are generally able to choose their "most satisfying experience" from this list without difficulty. And, if asked, they can give more specific information about what that experience entails for them. Some people have well-formed ideas about the way they approach museum experiences. As one visitor volunteered:

> People come into exhibitions with different frames of reference. I come in to learn because I don't know anything. They [my friends visiting with me] are much more advanced about this type of art, so they come to confirm or re-confirm or question. That's the next level. We're all getting something out of it at a different level.
>
> -Freer Gallery of Art

This list of satisfying experience has evolved in the course of our work. We are adding some additional sub-categories as we pursue the research. Data from nine different Smithsonian museums[8] tends to support the four experience types as distinct.[9]

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[8] Freer Gallery of Art/Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (Asian art), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (modern art), National Museum of American Art, National Portrait Gallery, Renwick Gallery (American arts and crafts), National Museum of Natural History, National Zoological Park, National Air and Space Museum and National Museum of American History

[9] For examples of these experiences in the words of Smithsonian visitors, see Appendix A.

<u>Social experiences.</u> Some visitors select an interaction with someone else as their most satisfying museum experience.

<u>Object experiences.</u> In the social experiences visitors describe as most satisfying, the focus is on one or more other people. In the grouping we have called "object experiences" the focus is again on something outside the visitor, in this case the material culture object or the "real thing."

<u>Cognitive experiences.</u> Individuals whose experience is clearly enhanced by contextual presentations tend to describe cognitive experiences as most satisfying. While the objects are still important, these visitors find their primary satisfaction in the interpretive or intellectual aspects of the experience. This segment of the audience comes closest to typifying the behavior pattern for "guests" preferred by many museum educators.

<u>Introspective experiences</u> are those in which the individual turns inward, to feelings and experiences that are essentially private, usually triggered by an object or a setting in the museum. Gurian (1995), for example, describes visitors to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as preparing themselves "to take on the visit as a journey of personal introspection." (p. 33).

Overall the responses of visitors show that the four major types of museum experiences tend to conflict with one another. In particular, object experiences and cognitive experiences work against one another, just as social experiences and introspective experiences interfere with one another. Object experiences call for settings unencumbered by text and other cognitive-oriented media, while introspective experiences require the kind of quiet that can inhibit social exchange. Thus, a display that shows a preference for object experiences will inevitably place a lower value on cognitive experiences and vice versa.[10]

As a result of both personal inclination and past experience, individuals prefer certain kinds of museum experiences to others in a particular setting. In our work we find, for example, that some visitors to art museums consistently prefer object experiences, while others prefer cognitive experiences, and yet others prefer introspective experiences. (Very few visitors to art museums seem to prefer social experiences.)
Just as individuals tend to have experience preferences, so do different kinds of museums tend to emphasize one kind of experience over the others. Art museums, for example, are often designed as if object experiences were their primary goal. They give secondary positions to cognitive elements, such as texts and other word-delivery systems. Living history museums or heritage sites, by contrast, usually emphasize introspective experiences, especially imagination and memory. Science museums tend to emphasize cognitive experiences. Children's museums usually seem to prefer social experiences.

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[10] There are other categorizations, not based on empirical testing, that resemble ours. Kotler and Kotler (1998), for example, propose recreation, sociability, learning experience, aesthetic experience, celebrative experience, and enchanting experience. Some of these categories correspond to the major clusters of the ISO schema.

Some museums are very consistent internally and each exhibition shows the same preference. Other museums demonstrate more variety and might have some exhibitions that are primarily designed to be an object experience, and others that are designed to be a cognitive experience, for example. In an article on the two newly renovated natural history museums in Paris (the Grand Gallery and the Gallery of Paleontology), Newhouse (1999, p. 33) describes the "opposite approaches to the problems of a contemporary museums." The Grand Gallery has embraced the "idea of museum as entertainment as well as enlightenment," while the Gallery of Paleontology "remains true to the 19th century notion that natural history should be shown, not explained." The former's didactic purpose is accompanied and reinforced by labels, videos, and computers. The latter offers "the thrill of discoveries made on one's own terms rather than packaged for us." In our terminology, one expresses a clear preference for cognitive experiences and the other for object experiences.

How do exhibitions and museums end up favoring one type of experience over others?

In some cases, the subject matter or content may lend itself to a particular approach: An exhibition on evolution, for example, is more naturally positioned as a cognitive experience than as an object experience. While an exhibition on an extraordinarily beautiful and unique artwork is more readily designed as an object experience. While an exhibition on recent history is more likely to be presented as an introspective experience.

In other cases, the experience preference of an exhibition reflects the composition of the planning team. If most of the individuals on the planning team themselves prefer a certain type of experience, they are likely to produce an exhibition with the same preference.

Recently, we encountered the example of a museum that changed the experience preference of an exhibition. The Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts shifted the emphasis of its Greek and Roman art display from aesthetic to cognitive, as a result of conversations with and studies of visitors. Apparently, the reinstallation and reinterpretation of its collection has inspired more local high school students to learn Latin. According to Director James Welu (Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, 1998).

> The previous installation assumed visitors had a background in art history.... We shifted the emphasis from aesthetics and connoisseurship to providing a social and economic context for the objects. (p. 13)

Visitors are diverse in their interests and are looking for different types of experiences in museums. And, if museums want to be truly accountable to their clients, they should equally respect and consider as valid each of the four major types of museum experience.[11] Shouldn't the person who wants to learn find some place in the museum that treats learning as a first-rate experience? Shouldn't the person who wants to imagine the subject matter in a personal, private way, be encouraged in that experience? Shouldn't there be a place in the museum clearly designed for the person who wants

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[11] "Equal" respect is not to be misunderstood as "equal proportions" or "equal floor space;" we support balance (i.e., not strict equality but representation).

the direct experience of objects, as well as the one who wants to enjoy the museum with others?

The Setting: Access to Experiences

If we acknowledge that the museum is accountable to visitors for certain kinds of experiences, it follows that the museum is responsible for providing a setting that supports and enhances those experiences and for removing barriers or constraints that interfere with or detract from them.

It is difficult to separate an experience from its setting, since they are closely intertwined. For simplification, and taking a more traditional perspective, it may be useful to consider exhibition spaces separately from the public or service spaces within museum buildings (although the issues that apply to non-exhibition areas are important within exhibitions, as well). Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that people are capable of making distinctions between experiences and setting attributes.

"Servicescape" is a current term used to describe all aspects of the environment in which a transaction takes place, exclusive of the product (Bitner, 1992). Thus, for example, the location of a central bank, its imposing columnar façade and grand staircase, uniformed doorman, polished stone floors, hushed voices, neatly arranged brochures, complimentary coffee and trimly dressed cashiers can be the servicescape for a banking transaction. In this example, the servicescape communicates a distinct message of grandeur and tradition, imposes specific behavior patterns on the clients, and invokes definite feelings.

The servicescape concept has been extended to leisure services where, it is asserted, both functional and hedonic (emotional) motives drive consumption (or use). Put another way, the utilization of leisure services is driven by non-utilitarian motives. Research that examines the impact of servicescapes (or service environments) shows that clients' perceptions of service quality and their resulting satisfaction with the primary service rendered is related to decisions to return (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). In Bitner's definition, (i) spatial layout and functionality, and (ii) elements related to aesthetic appeal, are two critical aspects of the servicescape. The former affects the comfort of the individual directly. The latter affects the ambiance of the place.

A recent services marketing text (Kurtz & Clow, 1998) suggests four dimensions:

    (i)   Physical facility (exterior and interior);
    (ii)   Location;
    (iii)   Ambient conditions (temperature, noise, odor); and
    (iv)   Interpersonal conditions (between clients and staff).

In museums, what aspects of the servicescape should be considered and monitored? Stokes (1995) stressed the importance of the arrival experience (setting the tone for the experience), the physical setting (layout and wayfinding), the type and quality of communication between museum personnel and guests (communication strategies), and theming and entertainment. Rand's work (1997) also suggests comfort, orientation, and

welcome. Looking specifically at museums, Kirchberg (1998b) in research conducted under the auspices of the Bertelsmann Foundation, focussed on three clusters of setting attributes:

(i)   Arrival experience and welcoming (e.g., hours, signs, initial personnel attitudes);
(ii)   Orientation and peripheral service in the museum (e.g., museum guides, amenities); and
(iii) Personal communication (e.g., manner and responsiveness of interactions).

Concluding Comments

I admit to a bias in favor of listening to visitors and respecting their needs and interests. This encourages museums to treat visitors as clients, to respect and provide the kinds of experiences they report as most satisfying, and to ensure a setting in which such experiences are facilitated. I am pragmatic enough to know that change will be both difficult and slow, as Conforti (1995) noted specifically with regard to art museums:

> Programmatic change in museums is also limited by the rather simple reality that these institutions are less than perfectly flexible social entities, constricted as they are by their own history and past programmatic assumptions. Museums are shaped by the structures and narratives, the aesthetic values and critical perspectives of art histories past, as well as by the pedagogical and political goals of societies and regimes which have now evolved further. And in museums, the values and assumptions of the past have been structured into stabilizing mechanisms that ultimately constrict change.
> (p. 340)

He argues that among the impediments to change, forces that are simultaneously stabilizing and constricting include museum founding charters and mission statements, governance and professional structures, permanent collections and architecture. I believe that we have a responsibility to adjust before change is imposed from the outside. The direction seems inevitable and unavoidable, but I do not think it should be viewed negatively. Change also offers the promise of renewal and revitalization. The more we respect and understand the needs of diverse audiences, the closer we come to them and the more we engender trust. Only thus can we improve the museum experience.

Note: The author would appreciate comments. Please address them to zdoering@iso.si.edu or Institutional Studies Office, 900 Jefferson Drive, S.W., Washington, DC, USA 20560-0405.

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Appendix A:
Types of Satisfying Experiences
In the Words of Smithsonian Visitors

Social experiences

SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS/FAMILY/OTHER PEOPLE

And when I tell my friends about this museum it's not just about the art because it's – in the middle of the old building there's kind of an indoor garden with a cafeteria where you can buy a cappuccino and sit and talk....
In Copenhagen it costs money to get into any museum but that one has free admission on Wednesday mornings and Sundays. So it's quite popular to take your friends or family, see art, have a cup of coffee, talk, buy a postcard or two.
- National Museum of American Art

SEEING MY CHILDREN LEARNING NEW THINGS

Well I love when my children, when I've seen that they've learned things, that they're learning things. I know that's he's absorbing things. I feel like I've achieved something when my children – because I guess they say you live through your children – when I feel that my children have learned things and are absorbing things, because that's how you know you've made a good person. You're making a good person, right? They'll know things.

- National Museum of American History

Object experiences

BEING MOVED BY BEAUTY

I don't really have a background in art, [there's] just something that takes your breath away when you see something that really hits you.

- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

If it's a piece that has that kind of impact on me, it will do more than click. It will almost take your breath away. [In the National Gallery] I would turn the corner and Boom, there would be some really famous painting. Usually an impressionist. I like impressionists. It would cause me to stop in my tracks and I would sit there and study that painting for 10/15 minutes. And those certainly register in my mind.
- National Museum of American Art

SEEING RARE/UNCOMMON/VALUABLE THINGS

> Well, just seeing something that we don't normally see, where we live. I think that's what we find most satisfying about it, or what I find satisfying about it. Just because we don't have the opportunities, just because it's a couple of hours, to get to anything that would be remotely modern like this. That in itself is satisfying.
> - Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

> Well, I would say the special and the valuable things. The special, that had some kind of meaning in history, that's something special. Just like that drag racer there. There's something special about it. It's the first one built [to go] 275 miles an hour. There's special things about every little thing that's here.
>
> - National Museum of American History

THINKING WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO OWN SUCH THINGS

> I'm very pleased you chose Barbie to show the strides women have made in flight - stewardess to astronaut! Way to go, Barbie. I love the exhibit. Now I want to find the Shimmerons in the doll shows to bring my Barbie-in-aviation collection up to date.
> - National Air and Space Museum

Cognitive experiences

ENRICHING MY UNDERSTANDING

> I think people pick and choose what they want to read, and having more there is better than having not enough. But I also think that these [exhibition texts] were really well written. I've gone to exhibits before where they just made no sense whatsoever. I couldn't figure out what was going on, and I ended up getting frustrated and leaving. We went to that Potlach exhibit a few years ago. They had beautiful masks and beautiful everything, but I couldn't understand – they never explained what a potlach was.... They never explained. So everything made no sense. So I thought, this is pretty but I just don't understand.
> - Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

> Well, that old boat up there on the third floor. I guess it was before they even broke off from the English. The fact that that's how crude of a boat they were trying to fight out of. Compared to just modern day technology of warfare. There you have it. A big shell, that big around, I don't know what they call it, that actually sunk the boat. I mean, that would be really primitive for nowadays. You can't quite comprehend people going out to fight a war on something like that.
> - National Museum of American History

I like the portraits because you can episodically go through different periods, and then put faces with it, which you can't do, even in an American History museum, which I enjoy going to, but it's too overwhelming.... [Here] it's so much information and it's so in-depth in each one. There is a lot more novelty there, there's a lot less novelty here. It's just the portraits, there's a story we're going to tell with each one, so that's why I've always liked coming here.... I find this more satisfying than the American History Museum, which I feel in some way is much more low brow. I don't think its trying to dig deeper than people already want to know. In other words the history is things they all know about really well, and it's just a lot of <u>things</u> to look at. Whereas I feel this is things you're not going to know about, people you're not going to know. You might have heard their name; you might have seen their name at some point. I mean I've studied this, and am very interested in it, and I don't know half the people in the room, so I feel like most people are going to come here, and they're going to learn a lot if they want to look at it.

- National Portrait Gallery

REFLECTING ON THE MEANING OF WHAT I WAS LOOKING AT

A lot of the old paintings are about portraits and famous people at the time, it's just a portrait. But when it's something very abstract I think it makes the viewer think a lot, try and look at - like I saw the exhibition upstairs and there are a lot of eyes, and I was trying to think about that. That wouldn't happen to me in the Metropolitan museum. And I think the whole thought process, what you go through, is very different.

- National Portrait Gallery

Well, I just find that you can learn about the people by the possessions they bought or they designed. For instance the plates that Mrs. Johnson, Lady Bird Johnson designed - you can tell that she's walking a fine line between what she felt was important, the flowers, and her husband's political career, which was the eagle, and trying to put a very masculine, kind of hunting looking eagle with the flowers, and how she did a pretty good job of it.

- National Museum of American History

Introspective experiences

FEELING A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION

Very much like when I was younger I would go to the Episcopal church that was very old and beautiful. But the art gallery has a wonderful feeling because it's creation and I can feel a vibration, a positive energy. And it's very quiet in an art gallery. Even when people are talking or shuffling, it's a kind of a gentle talking. So, it's such a contrast to out there on the street where people are running back and forth.

- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Well, for us, it's a spiritual thing, also. Because through this, we see God's creation. These are things that we didn't have as we grew up, okay? We only heard about them, or saw them on television, but this is a way of us looking back at what God created way back, way back, before the existence of man in time. You know, it started with all of this, with the animals.

- National Museum of Natural History

IMAGINING OTHER TIMES OR PLACES

Down in the African American section where you had the sharecroppers, cabins and things, I was imagining what it must have been like there. And different exhibits where you see the houses set up with the Japanese- American too, is another one, where you saw where they lived.... So I think just about what it must have been like for other people to be in these actual settings...I think you understand what people have gone through to get you to where you are today. I mean, you know, there was sacrifice on all, and commitment.

- National Museum of American History

RECALLING MY TRAVELS/CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES/ OTHER MEMORIES

There's a display case with dollhouse furniture. And there's a bathtub and a sink and a toilet exactly like I had when I was a little girl and I played with dolls. That was really interesting to see. 'I had that! I wonder what happened to it.'
- National Museum of American History

Appendix B
Practical Considerations: Tools and Measures

How can we determine more precisely what a particular population WANTS in museums and what it GETS out of the museums that it visits? What tools and measures can help us provide satisfying experiences for visitors?

Museum professionals on the whole have been reluctant to acknowledge that they compete in the leisure market and, hence, have been slow to adopt service measurement methods or to engage in market research. But museums do have a history of visitor studies of other kinds. It is a remarkably recent history; one closely tied to the emphasis on the educational role of museums.[1]

Demographic Surveys. The first major trend, and the most universal type of visitor study conducted in museums, has been the demographic study. It is usually conducted as a survey in which visitors, either on their own or with the assistance of an interviewer, answer basic questions about who they are and why they have come to the museum. From these studies as a whole we have learned that museum-goers in general are well-educated and relatively affluent. These sorts of surveys are conducted sporadically by many museums and regularly by a few.

Museum Visitor Studies. Under the influence of developments in psychological research, museum visitors have also been studied from a behavioralist viewpoint. Researchers observe and note what visitors do, how long they spend, and how they respond to features of information or design. Such studies foster a view of the museum as a closed stimulus-response system whereby positive outcomes in visitors can be achieved by manipulating the physical variables of the space. The study of these systems is often referred to as "evaluation" and the aim is to find the weaknesses in the system so that it can be made maximally efficient and effective. From these studies as a whole we have learned that visitor behavior is susceptible to changes in design elements.

Such investigations have progressed to where they can prevent mistakes rather than simply correcting them after the fact – what is generally called "formative evaluation." In this type of study the response of real visitors to prototyped design features are investigated in the hope of creating a better design before production. Another form of visitor study, "front-end evaluation" or "background study" is used to determine if the audience grasps basic concepts and to assess their level of subject matter knowledge. From these methods we have learned that talking to visitors at an early stage in the planning process can not only produce better designs, but can also have positive effects on the overall thinking of the planning team.

The world of marketing research influenced visitor studies starting in the 1980's through studies with non-visitors and the introduction of focus group methods.

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[1] Hein (1998) counts approximately 50 studies in the first half of the century, and a burgeoning in the 1960's. He notes that a 1993 bibliography includes over 300 studies in the 1980's (Hein, p. 53).

Studies of non-visitors are still relatively rare because they are expensive, difficult to understand, and suggest that museums should somehow be responsive to people who are unlike existing audiences.[2] Responsiveness to customer needs forms the heart of modern marketing, but it often seems like dangerous territory for institutions that pride themselves on their higher purposes and on their authority. Focus groups have been the market research technique most readily accepted by museums, partly because focus groups are relatively manageable and their results fairly predictable.[3]

The most recent trends are visitor studies that focus on the ideas visitors bring with them into the museum, research into how visitors interact socially with their families, friends, and other visitors during a visit, and studies that investigate the long-term memories of museum visits.[4]

Most visitor studies concern themselves primarily with cognitive learning. Very few recognize alternative interests of current or potential visitors. Content, in the contemporary visitor-guest model, is the main business of the museum as far as its visitors are concerned. Visitor studies are usually relegated to describing the audience and dealing with the design of content delivery systems. In other words, the researcher tries to understand where the individual fits into the life of the museum and how the "fit" – from the institution's perspective – can be improved. If we seriously acknowledge the premise that museums are leisure-time activities and that museums are truly accountable to visitors, we will be required to study events in people's lives and the role of museums and cultural institutions in a broader social context.

Economic Impact Studies. The economic impact study is one type of current research that looks at this broader context. These studies rely on economic models that were developed to analyze commercial activities. Museum economic impact studies seek to describe and place an economic value on the role that museums and other cultural organizations play in their communities. Although I can understand the political benefits of the economic impact argument, I do not find it especially satisfying or convincing. A few museums, and probably many more historic or heritage sites, are major tourist destinations and generate high levels of local economic activity. Most, however, generate less local revenue than the nearest shopping mall.[5]

Visitor Opportunity System. Wells and Loomis (1998) recently proposed another approach that sets the museum experience in a broader social context. The model proposed in "A Taxonomy of Museum Program Opportunities" encourages a systematic approach to program planning by placing a particular museum within the

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[2] See, for example, Schafer (1997), Kirchberg (1996), and Prentice, Davies, & Beeho (1997).

[3] The best known example of museum focus groups in America is a project sponsored by the Getty Foundation (Walsh, 1991).

[4] See, for example, Smith and Wolf (1995) on how individuals construct their aesthetic experience, Silverman (1993, 1995) on meaning making, McManus (1987, 1988) on the social context, and McManus (1993) on long-term memories of museum visits. Our own recent work falls in these areas.

[5] A methodology for economic impact studies which has been adapted to many settings is described in Fuller (1994).

range of leisure alternatives in a geographic context. Like ISO, Wells and Loomis assume that museum-going is a leisure activity and should be viewed in the context of the supply and demand of leisure activities. Increasingly, museums compete with other leisure activities for attention and a share of leisure time.[6] They also assume that museums need to structure their offerings (i.e., provide a "supply") to meet the needs ("demand") of audiences. Our office and Wells and Loomis agree that the "product" that a visitor seeks in a museum is an "experience."

Wells and Loomis draw on work from the outdoor recreation discipline, which defined a "recreation opportunity" not as "a simple activity, but rather as a combination of the activity along with the attributes of the setting, the experiences sought by the participants, and the hoped-for benefits to individuals and society."[7]

Setting attributes represent the supply side of recreational opportunities. For example, a given activity (e.g., fishing) might be available at a remote wilderness lake or an urban community pond. Experiences desired by the public (e.g., solitude and introspection) represent the demand. This type of extensive mapping of supply and demand in outdoor activities results in a tool, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, that has been used by park managers as a planning and marketing tool and also as a way of informing visitors of a range of leisure time options.

By analogy, Wells and Loomis propose a Visitor Opportunity System that would allow for classifying and describing cultural institutions. The activity is "museum going;" it is accompanied by setting attributes, visitor experience preferences and desired benefits. Thus far, their work has not focussed on assessing the quality of the attributes nor quantifying distributions of experience preferences and benefit.

ISO Satisfying Experiences Model. The thrust of our work has been to provide museums with tools that would help them give their diverse audiences the kinds of experiences that they most want. Our research proposes to offer:

     (i)   a model for conceptualizing the main types of museum experiences,
     (ii)   simple survey instruments for identifying experience preferences in the museum audience, and
     (iii)   simple survey instruments for assessing the degree of fit between preferences and outcomes

When more of our research is complete, we hope that it will be used in exhibition planning and in understanding visitor behavior, both at the Smithsonian and

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[6] The relationship of "high culture" (museums, orchestras, and performing arts) compared to "popular culture" (movies, spectator sports and popular music) in Germany has been studied by Kirchberg (1998a). He demonstrates conclusively that "high culture" activities are leisure activities and that they compete in the leisure arena.

[7] Prentice (1996) summarized several theoretical models useful for the analysis of consumer experience, including this hierarchy (activities, settings, experiences, and benefits), which he called "the Manning-Haas-Driver-Brown Sequential Hierarchy of Recreation Demands," and another conceptualization, "Means-End Chain" that links attributes of a product (means) with consequences (ends). Much of this work directly relates to efforts to improve the efficient use of natural resources pioneered by B. L. Driver and P. J. Brown. See Driver, Brown & Peterson (1991).

elsewhere.[8] Even at this relatively early stage, our model helps to clarify the kinds of disagreements that frequently occur within exhibition planning teams.

Assessing Servicescapes. A tradition of measuring setting attributes clearly exists in the service sector and has been broadly applied in the leisure industry. More recently, such studies are moving into museums, as well.

Whenever addressing quality of service, several inherent complexities must to be kept in mind. First, evaluating the quality of a service is more difficult than evaluating the quality of a product. In the case of museums, this is especially complex since the service *is* the product (i.e., the experience). Second, service quality is based on clients' perceptions of the outcome of the service and their evaluation of the process by which the service was performed. In the case of museums, it is difficult to separate the spontaneous activity of the visitor from the "service performance" of the institution.

The accepted definition of "service quality" in the services marketing literature is the measure of the difference between the expectations a consumer had before the "service encounter" and the perception of the service after it takes place. Consumer expectations are usually defined as predictions made by consumers concerning what they believe will occur during the service encounter. (See Clow, Kurtz, Ozment, & Ong, 1997).

About ten years ago, an instrument called SERVQUAL was developed to measure service quality based on the premise that service quality is the difference between expectations and evaluation of the service received (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Customers are asked to react to a series of 22 statements, using a seven-interval scale anchored with "fully agree" and "do not agree at all." The statements are based on five evaluative dimensions assumed to relate to service quality (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance/competence and empathy). In a detailed discussion of SERVQUAL (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990), customer expectations are assumed to arise from word-of-mouth, personal needs, past experience, and external communications.

The original SERVQUAL instrument has been modified and used effectively in numerous studies of recreation areas, especially in work undertaken in United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service facilities.[9] We have also encountered this approach in a study of a heritage site (Laws, 1998). Thus far, we have not found an application to a museum.

Increasingly, comment cards and surveys have been used to solicit client perceptions and evaluation in the service sector. These have two inherent weaknesses.

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[8] If you would like to participate in this research through studies that you are planning, contact the Institutional Studies Office, 900 Jefferson Drive, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20560-0405 or zdoering@iso.si.edu.

[9] B.L. Driver, U.S. Forest Service, started this line of research. See Footnote #16, p. tk.

First, unless you get responses from representative samples of visitors and ensure its collection and analysis by an independent, outside agency, you will collect biased information. Otherwise, there is considerable evidence to show that the most vocal and cooperative respondents are at the two extremes: those who are most satisfied and those who are most dissatisfied.[10]

Second, much of this information is difficult to interpret without comparative information. Ideally, comparisons could be made with comparable institutions or services, but establishing a benchmark and monitoring over time would probably be a more reliable and realistic method.

Among the thousands of American cultural institutions, systematic and on-going measurement of setting attributes is the exception, rather than the rule. Such measurement is most common at facilities heavily dependent on tourist traffic, such as Old Sturbridge Village (Sturbridge, MA) and The Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village (Dearborn, MI). Old Sturbridge Village, the country's third largest outdoor museum, has been engaged in assessing visitor satisfaction repeatedly (Simmons, 1995). Similarly, The Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village started systematic focus groups and mailback studies in 1984. The nearby Automotive Hall of Fame in Dearborn initiated a mailback survey in its first year.[11]

Colonial Williamsburg, established almost 70 years ago, is the largest outdoor living history museum in America. The restored 18th century town covers about 173 acres[12] with working craftsmen, costumed interpreters, livestock, and almost 4 million visits a year. It now owns and operates numerous visitor amenities including four hotels, four historic taverns, seven historic shops, and a range of modern restaurants and stores. Colonial Williamsburg has had an established and active program of studying visitors, particularly as related to content and concept issues. Several years ago, it took a somewhat different turn in measuring satisfaction among visitors.

Beginning with focus groups and personal interviews, Colonial Williamsburg's *Visitor Satisfaction Study* identified the aspects of the visit that people consider important and that contribute to the overall visit experience. The resulting survey, administered on a regular basis via telephone, explores satisfaction with both interpretive and servicescape issues. As noted by Brown (1999), the program's manager,

> Customers will always expect clean rooms, friendly service, good food, and value for their money. But, these tangible aspects of our business aren't the reasons we're in business. Generations of Americans have learned about being American by visiting this 18th century town.
>
> … A satisfying experience also includes: learning about the past, relaxing, having much to see and do, stepping back in time, and building special memories.

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[10] Our office developed a method for the analysis of comment cards. See Pekarik (1997).

[11] Personal communication, G. D. Adams, 1999.

[12] 70 hectares or 700,000 square meters.

On a monthly basis, visitors to the historic areas are given a coupon (about 3 x 6 in. or 7.5 x 15 cm.) as an attractive "survey invitation." The coupon, a $5.00 telephone calling card, is offered as an incentive for completing a telephone survey. The survey is conducted via Interactive Voice Response, an inbound automated telephone interviewing. In addition to rating a series of statements on a 5-point scale, visitors help anchor the scale for analysis by then indicating if they were satisfied (Yes or No). The target score for management purposes in the average performance rating of satisfied respondents.

To assist the National Park Service in complying with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), a survey was conducted in each of the 310 parks in the U.S. National Park system. It was designed to measure each park unit's performance related to the Park Service's goals of "visitor satisfaction" and "visitor understanding and appreciation." Summer visitors (June-September 1998) were given cards and asked to rate service on a 5-point scale (Very Good to Very Poor). The current plan is to repeat the survey on a regular basis. By necessity, the items rated are very general (e.g., "walkways, trails and roads"); however, individual parks are encouraged to supplement the national data collection with more focussed local surveys (Bergerson & Machlis, 1998).

Mystery Visitors. Looking specifically at museums, Kirchberg (1998b) has focussed on measuring quality in three clusters of setting attributes -- arrival experience and welcoming, orientation and peripheral service in the museum (e.g., museum guides and amenities) and personal communication (e.g., manner and responsiveness of interactions).

For measurement purposes, Kirchberg defined ten major service areas and created a score sheet. In an application of the instrument, each of 21 German museums was scored by a group of six "mystery visitors." One "mystery visitor" in each group was an experienced scorer who supervised the other five testers. All testers were employed by a professional market survey institute and lived in the city of the tested museums. They were selected by specific socio-demographic characteristics to resemble a representative composition of German museum visitors. In addition to grading every area, they also assigned an overall "service score." The results indicate that this is a useful management tool and supports notions of an interaction between the "place" or "servicescape" and the types of satisfying experiences sought by visitors.