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*International Perspective on Museum Research:
A Comparison among Countries*

ABSTRACT:

The aim of the research was to conduct a survey on a large scale, in different Countries (Austria, France, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, Taiwan, USA) to investigate several psychological and pedagogical features like personality traits, motivations, emotions, attitudes and learning processes regarding the museum visit experience. The sample was composed by young adult-university students. Some findings show, among several data, that about the 25% of the whole sample did not visit any museum in the previous year and Modern art museums were the most visited types of museums.

Introduction

With this last paper we would like to give an overview of the research conducted in this project addressing some descriptive comparison of the data among all participating Countries.

From an educational point of view, as said at the beginning of the book, the museum is often described as an informal way of learning which covers several topics such as art, history, science, etc. We know, from several researches that museums very often are not very attractive for adolescents and young adults (Mason & McCarthy, 2008; Fleming, 1999; Prince & Schadla-Hall, 1985). As it was said before the literature on young adults participation to cultural events is not very systematic. According to different surveys (in the Australia and New Zealand, France, Germany, Italy, USA), the public between the age between 18 and 27 that visited at least one museum during the previous 12 months of the survey are not very numerous. These surveys suggest that in different parts of the world, museums do not look very attractive for many young people.

The aim of the research was to conduct a survey on a large scale, in different Countries (Austria, France, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal,

Taiwan, USA) to investigate several psychological and pedagogical features like personality traits, motivations, emotions, attitudes and learning processes regarding the museum visits experience.

Method

Measure

A questionnaire was designed for the research to explore socio-demographic variables (including parents education level), personality traits, art education, modalities in which participants were used to visit museums in the past (with school, family, and autonomously), numbers and typology of museum visited in the last 12 months, the experience of museum visits with particular reference to motivation, attitudes, emotional experience, and learning processes. Here we present and discuss only some of the measured variables.

Data collection. The questionnaire was administered either as paper and pencil or online using the LimeSurvey platform. The paper and pencil questionnaire was administered to students after the end of the classes; completing the questionnaire took an average of about 20 minutes. Regarding the administration through the LimeSurvey platform, students were invited to participate via email including the link to the online questionnaire. The collection of data started in May 2012 and finished after about 10 months.

Participants

Participants were 2,352 undergraduate University students of different Faculties: Education, Psychology and Sociology. We decided to have an homogeneous sample concerning the interest towards that arts and museums, therefore the students from Art Faculties were not considered. Regarding the gender, female were 72.3% and male 27.7%; the age range was 18-31, with a mean of 21.06 (SD 2.5). The numbers of participants were different among Countries. In [Tab. 1](#) the number and percentages are reported.

Tab. 1 – Numbers and percentages of participants for each Country

	N	%
Austria	217	9,2
France	649	27,6
Hungary	269	11,4
Italy	652	27,7
New Zealand	71	3,0
Portugal	213	9,1
Taiwan	176	7,5
USA	105	4,5
Total	2352	100

Results and discussion

One of the main question was the visits to museums in the last 12 months. With this question we wanted to have information concerning participants real interest in museum attendance.

Results showed that 24.4% of all participants had not visited any museum in the previous 12 months; in [Tab. 2](#) is shown the frequency and percentage of the museum visits.

Tab. 2 – Frequency and percentage of museum visits in the last 12 months for participants of all Countries (missings excluded)

	Frequency	%
No Visit	572	24,4
1 Visit	549	23,5
2-3 Visits	709	30,3
4-5 Visits	270	11,5
More than 5 Visits	241	10,3
Total	2341	100

As a general data, about one fourth of the sample did not visit any museum in the previous year. But there were quite big differences among

Countries; participants from Taiwan and Austria reported the highest numbers of visits (Tab. 3).

Tab. 3 – Percentage of museum visits (No visits, 1 visit, 2-3 visits, 4-5 visits, more than 5) in the previous 12 months by Countries

Country	Number of Visits (%)				
	No visits	1	2-3	4-5	>5
Austria	10.1	11.1	30.9	20.7	27.2
France	31.3	19.6	29.0	12.0	8.2
Hungary	5.2	43.9	23.8	13.0	14.1
Italy	32.5	26.2	27.9	7.2	6.1
New Zealand	14.1	32.4	39.4	5.6	8.5
Portugal	32.9	16.0	32.4	9.9	8.9
Taiwan	5.4	12.6	48.5	19.2	14.4
USA	31.1	30.1	29.1	7.8	1.9

Concerning the typology of museums, Modern art museums were visited more than other types of museums (39%), followed by Demographic museum (30%), Ancient art (27%), Archeological sites (21%), House museum (20%), Science museum (17%) and Architecture (17%). These findings show that the museums of Modern/Contemporary art were the most preferred; probably because the art language of the artworks hosted in these museums are seen as more similar to the language of the young adult visitors (Mastandrea, Bartoli, & Bove, 2007; Mastandrea, Bartoli, & Bove, 2009).

Participants reported a good level of satisfaction with their museum visits in the last year (M 3.7, SD 0.8, on a 5 points scale). They reported also a good level of learning from the museum visit (M 3.2; SD 0.9).

Participants reported to have received more art training at school than out of school, even if the difference is not significant, respectively 2.86 (SD = .86) and 2.64 (SD = 1.2). The correlation between museum visit and Art education was higher for Art education received out of school ($r = .278$; $p = 0.001$) than at school ($r = .181$; $p = 0.001$). The visit satisfaction was significantly correlated both to art education received at school ($r = .158$; $p = 0.001$) and out of school ($r = .125$; $p = 0.001$).

Regarding the question whom the participants visited museums with, it is interesting to note that only 2.7% never visited museum with the school. It means that the education at school offers a good opportunity to

visit museums of different typology. We have also to highlight that quite a big percentage of participants, exactly the 15.4% have never visited a single museum with their parents; their parents did not offer them this opportunity. The 21.9% never visit museums with friends, 48% never with the partner and 66.4% never alone.

Overall, the most prevalent emotions associated with museum visit were positive emotions. Answer on several emotions (positive: curiosity, interest, pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment, wonder, fun, well-being, and negative: melancholy, boredom, distress) were asked through a 5-point Likert scale. All these emotions were entered in a principal component factor analysis using a varimax rotation. All the items were loaded in 2 factors which explained the 54.26% of the variance. The first factor (eigenvalue of 4.48) included all positive emotions (*curiosity, interest, pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment, wonder, fun, well-being*). The second factor (eigenvalue of 1.56) explains the negative emotions (*melancholy, boredom, distress*). Moreover the aggregation of positive emotions reached a quite high mean score 3.49 while negative emotions 1.68; this findings show that the museum visit experience is mainly an overall positive experience. However, emotions varied according to the kind of museum visited. Performing three logistic regression analyses, with respectively ancient, modern and science museums as the dependent variable and emotions as the independent variables, findings show that specific emotions were related to different kind of museum; for example the aesthetic enjoyment was present in ancient and modern art museum while fun with the modern art and science museum and curiosity was concerned only with science museum (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4 – Scores of the regression analyses on the type of museum and emotion experienced
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

	Ancient art	Modern art	Science
Aesthetic enjoyment	4.714***	7.134**	
Interest	2.197*		
Wellbeing			2.160*
Fun		2.335*	4.001***
Curiosity			2.081*
Melancholy		2.862**	
Boredom		2.890**	4.270***

A question was dedicated to those participants that did not visit any museum in the past 12 months; it was asked what were the reasons in a multiple choice question with the following answers: lack of interest, lack of opportunity, lack of time, lack of people to go with, lack of information, high price of the ticket, limited hours of opening. These motives were entered in a principal components factor analysis using a *varimax* rotation. The items loaded on 3 factors that explained 60.39% of the variance. The first factor (eigenvalue of 2.02; we call it «External reason») comprised the following items: *lack of time*, *lack of opportunity* and *lack of people to go with*. The second factor (eigenvalue 1.17; «Internal reason») included items such as *lack of information* and *lack of interest*. The third factor (eigenvalue 1.10; «Museum related reason») comprised the items *high price of the tickets* and *limited hours of opening*. Interesting to note is that participants show also a positive attitudes towards museum, but they have no opportunity in terms of people to go with.

In the last question we considered the intention to visit a museum in the next 6 months. The answer were: not at all (9.0%), a little bit (18.7%), somewhat (34.6%), much (22.2%) and very much (15.5%). Compared to the question on the museum visit in the last 12 months the data are very different. In comparison to the about 25% of the sample who did not visit any museum, if the participants were asked about their willing to go to a museum in the next months, even if it is not the same question (in the first case was the real behavior while in the second was only the intention), there is a considerable decrease: only 9.0% do not want to visit museums in the future. Therefore it is plausible that if participants would have more opportunities in terms of information and people to go with they will consider to go to museum.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that about 75% of the total sample visited at least one museum in the last 12 months and about 40% visited between 2 and 5 museum in a year. Compared to the other data from the several surveys reported in the introduction, collected by other researchers in different countries in the past, the results obtained in our research show quite different and interesting results. Our findings show a sort of inverted direction regarding the museum visit per year compared to previous surveys: in those researches about the 75% of young adult never visited a museum in the last 12 months while from our data we can see that a 25%

of participants of the total sample never visited a museum in the last 12 months. Our sample was composed by university students, therefore people that are more interesting in cultural activities such a visiting museums. On the contrary there is still a 25% of participants that never visited a museum in the last 12 months, therefore some work from an educational point of view has still to be done. What is also surprising is that about the 15% of the total sample never visited a museum in their life with their parents. On the contrary only 2.4% never visited a museum with the school. Art training and museum visited received at school could be a good opportunity to improve the possibility to have a museum experience in the future.

In the future, in addition to descriptive data analyses, we are in mind to run analysis (for example, structural equation models) to test which predictors are more related to museum fruition in line with the three aims of the study: 1) individuate predictors of museum visit in the last year and conduct an evaluation of the visit; 2) individuate predictors of future intention to visits and the estimated usefulness of the visit; 3) individuate predictors of future intention to visits and usefulness of museum visit for the young people who did not visit a museum in the last 12 months.

We must highlight the limitations of the research, emphasizing the fact that it is a correlational study, therefore it is a bit risky to speak of true predictors. Further research should investigate the relationship between significant variables of the predictions in a field situation (e.g. in the museum) and through an experimental or semi-experimental design. The aim is to provide indications to school and other educational and social institution to incentivize young people museum visits. Furthermore, this survey was conducted collecting data from many Countries in different Continents. Further analysis of our database will be focused on the comparison of samples from different Countries in order to highlight possible differences and similarities. Preliminary analysis showed that the predictive relationships between the variables are very similar amongst the different samples, but such evidence must be tested statistically. It would then be possible to generalize both results and applicative implications.

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