

***More is better!* Current issues and challenges for museum audience development: a literature review**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to investigate how research on museum management has been approaching audience development and community engagement in our society – especially in Europe, where the development of democratic participation is proclaimed as a shared commitment. This literature review endeavours to grasp both the state-of-the-art in museum audience research and audience development and the most relevant issues emerging in the scientific debate on this topic in the last 20 years (1995-2015). After analysing the main challenges concerning the innovation of the museum sector, the paper discusses the gaps in visitor studies and museum communication, making suggestions for future research and practice. In the field of museum marketing, this review tries to build a theoretical framework linking changes in audiences, museum role, visitor studies and strategies for visitor involvement, to support cultural institutions in achieving their mission and maximizing value creation.

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Keywords:

Cultural heritage

Museum studies

Audience development

Audience research

Visitor involvement

To find, though, that paintings could be decoded, that they were intellectual as well as aesthetic experiences, was something of a relief because it straight away put them in a familiar and much more English context if only because a lot of iconography, saying who's who and what's what in a painting, could be taken as a higher form of that very English preoccupation, gossip (...) The truth is people come in for all sorts of reasons, some of them just to take the weight off their feet or to get out of the rain, to look at the pictures perhaps, or to look at other people looking at the pictures. And the hope is, the faith is, that the paintings will somehow get to them and that they'll take away something they weren't expecting and couldn't predict (Bennett, 2005: 458 & 476).

Introduction¹

The "Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society", signed in Faro more than 10 years ago (Council of Europe, 2005), definitively shared "the need to involve everyone in society in the ongoing process of defining and managing cultural heritage" (preamble). Even though the Faro Convention – as a "framework convention" – does not create specific obligations, allowing each State Party to "decide on the most convenient means to implement the convention according to its legal or institutional frameworks, practices and specific experience" (Council of Europe, 2014: 3), it invites the State Parties to develop cooperation networks to exchange experience and launch future initiatives. Among its priorities are not only the management of cultural diversity for cohesive societies and the improvement of living conditions and quality of life, but also the development of democratic participation, through the implementation of a "shared responsibility" (art. 8) involving citizens and civil society and the commitment from all social stakeholders. Finally, according to the Faro Convention, everyone "has the right to benefit from the cultural heritage and to contribute towards its enrichment" (art. 4).

Some recent European documents have confirmed and strengthened these objectives, including those in the EU agenda². Sharing a dynamic and proactive notion of cultural heritage and with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity, the "Conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe" called Member States to "continue to promote education on cultural heritage, raise public awareness on the potential of cultural heritage for sustainable development and to encourage public participation, especially of children and young people, in

cooperation with civil society" (Council of the EU, 2014: 3). Two months later, in order to enhance Europe's position in the field of cultural heritage valorisation, the Communication from the European Commission, "Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe", stated the need to "encourage the modernisation of the heritage sector, raising awareness and engaging new audiences" (European Commission, 2014b: 6). Moreover, in line with the objectives of the EU 2020 strategy, the Creative Europe and Horizon 2020 programmes put audience development and participation among their priorities in order to contribute to social innovation for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

As already stated by John Holden 10 years ago, cultural policy cannot remain a closed conversation among experts: the challenge is "to create a different alignment between culture, politics and the public" (2006: 11). If the best answer to the question "why fund culture?" is "because the public wants it", politicians should understand what the public values about culture, then cultural professionals should create and articulate that demand; in this way, the cultural system would succeed in working better to generate value for the public (Holden, 2006: 14). In order to face this challenge, more and better audience research is needed to help cultural organizations to reach new publics and satisfy their needs, attracting more funding from politicians and policymakers to improve the quality of cultural services and create public value (figure 1). According to accountability and evidence-based policy, information is required from strategic analysis on the actual and potential audiences, their characteristics, preferences and expectations (Reussner, 2003). These crucial issues will become more important in the near future, due to growing international migration and population change in Europe³ (European Commission, 2014a). In this context, cultural heritage plays an im-

1 A first version of this paper was presented at the 6th ENCATC Annual Research Session "The Ecology of Culture: Community Engagement, Co-creation, Cross Fertilization" (Lecce, 21-23 October 2015) and published in the ENCATC e-book of proceedings.

2 See also the Treaty on the European Union stating that "the Union shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced" (art. 3).

3 According to Eurostat data for 2012, at the beginning of 2013, the EU population was 503 million, of which 20.4 million were third-country nationals, corresponding to 4% of the total population. In 2012, 2.1 million first residence permits were issued to third-country nationals. Of these, 32% were given for family reasons, 23% for remunerated activities, 22% for study and 23% for other reasons (including international protection). The countries whose nationals were given the highest number of first permits are: United States of America with 200,000 third-country nationals representing 9.5% from the EU immigration total, followed by Ukraine (163,000), China (161,000) and India (157,000) with around 7.5% each from EU total. Significant number of permits (between 5% and 2.5% from EU total) were issued to nationals from Morocco (102,000), Russia (66,000), Philippines (62,000), Turkey (59,000) and Brazil (51,000). The total number of asylum applications in 2013 amounted to 434,160, which represents a strong increase of around 100,000 applicants compared to the previous year. The largest group of applicants came from Syria (50,470, i.e. 12% of all applicants), with other significant countries being Russia, Afghanistan, Serbia, Pakistan and Kosovo (European Commission, 2014a).

“IF MUSEUMS OPERATE IN THE SERVICE OF SOCIETY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT, THEY ACHIEVE THEIR MISSION CONTINUALLY AND HOLISTICALLY SERVING THEIR AUDIENCES AND COMMUNITIES, CREATING LONG-TERM VALUE BOTH FOR THEIR STAKEHOLDERS AND FUTURE GENERATIONS”

portant role in contributing to the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. Even more important is the role of museums as institutions that provide a cultural service for public benefit.

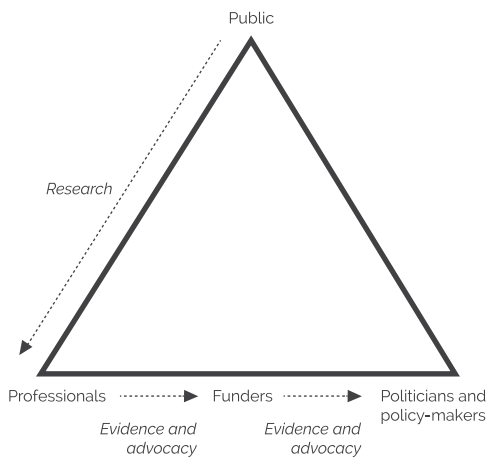


FIGURE 1. INFORMATION FLOW

Source: Holden (2006: 48).

Sharing these assumptions, the following research investigates how museum studies have approached audience development and community engagement over the last 20 years, highlighting research achievements and advances both in visitor surveys and communication strategies. After showing the changing role of museums in our society, a literature review is conducted, to grasp both the state of the art and the emerging issues concerning the scientific debate on this topic. Finally, gaps in the literature and ideas for future research are discussed.

The context: changing museums in a changing world?

Developing the ideas introduced in the 1980s by the “new museology”, particularly by Hughes De Varine and Georges-Henri Rivière, at the beginning of the 21st century, the International Council of Museums

(ICOM) has fully recognised the social role of museums in our society. As definitively stated in the 22nd General Assembly of the ICOM held in Vienna in 2007, a museum is an “institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM Statutes, Article 3, Section 1). If museums operate in the service of society and its development, they achieve their mission continually and holistically serving their audiences and communities, creating long-term value both for their stakeholders and future generations. According to a sustainable approach, equity in the treatment of different generations over time (inter-generational equity or inter-temporal distributive justice) is a key issue (Throsby, 2002: 107). In this framework, the challenge for museums is twofold: on the one hand, they must reach a wider and more diversified audience, reflecting the complex demographic composition of contemporary society; on the other hand, they must ensure that the value of cultural heritage is understood and cultural capital increases. Therefore, they are required to: (1) understand the context in which they operate, (2) engage with communities, and (3) create value for all potential stakeholders.

As far as the first point is concerned, if we consider challenges emerging in current society, more attention should be paid to social changes that are occurring in Europe and all over the world, which also have implications for cultural heritage management (Black, 2005; American Association of Museums, 2010; European Foresight Platform, 2012). In particular, international migration and an aging population play an important role in European population change. These changes set new goals for museums: international migration increases the cultural diversity of a population and, as a consequence, creates more diverse culture providers and consumers to satisfy, whereas an aging population implies more spare time for an increasing number of people, hence a wider potential audience for museums. Furthermore, the increasing familiarity of young generations with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) – see Prensky’s digital natives (2001) – has reshaped the way that museums provide services, improving user involvement and participation.

“THE MUSEUM THAT SUCCEEDS IN CREATING CULTURAL VALUE FOR ITS USERS CREATES ECONOMIC VALUE FOR ITSELF, ATTRACTING MORE RESOURCES TO GUARANTEE THE LONG-TERM CONSERVATION OF ITS TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE”

Secondly and more generally, as shown by case studies discussed in the volume *Looking Reality in the Eye* (Janes & Conaty, 2005), social responsibility and accountability towards communities become crucial issues for museums. For example, in their chapter of the book, Sutter and Worts (2005) consider museums as agents of social cohesion and active facilitators of social change because of how they contribute to history and cultural diversity being understood:

Just as today's societies are incredibly diverse and complex, museums are no longer the monolithic institutions of the past. Instead, many are focusing their efforts more narrowly, telling particular stories with larger meanings. Often, these stories reflect issues and people that have been marginalized by mainstream society – First Nations, immigrants, and chronic illness. This approach can also lead to an activism that embraces community issues and inspirations, in an effort to provide value and meaning (Janes & Conaty, 2005: 3).

Sharing this approach, the European Commission, too, recognizes that:

Museums are increasingly community-oriented, led by people and stories, for instance proposing heritage-based narratives that weave the personal stories of community members into the interpretation of larger historical events. They place audiences on a par with collections, at the heart of their activities, do not shy away from exploring sensitive and difficult issues, and address contemporary topics that speak to more diverse audiences (European Commission, 2014b: 5-6).

Finally, in order to satisfy this commitment, the results of museum activities and the value they create should be measured, communicated and evaluated (Koster, 2006; Weil, 2006; Koster & Falk, 2007; Scott, 2013).

Considering value creation in the museum sector as a democratic mandate, Scott (2008) identifies a *use value*, which is direct consumption; an *institutional value*, when well-managed institutions generate trust in the public realm and add value to government; and an *instrumental value*, describing governments' expected return on public investments related to evidence of the achievement of social and economic policy objectives: “the recipients are (a) the economy – through civic branding, tourism, employment and the multiplier effect on local economies; (b) communities – through increased social capital, social cohesion, tolerance for cultural diversity, urban regeneration and civic participation; and (c) individuals – through benefits such as learning, personal well-being and health” (Scott, 2008: 34-35).

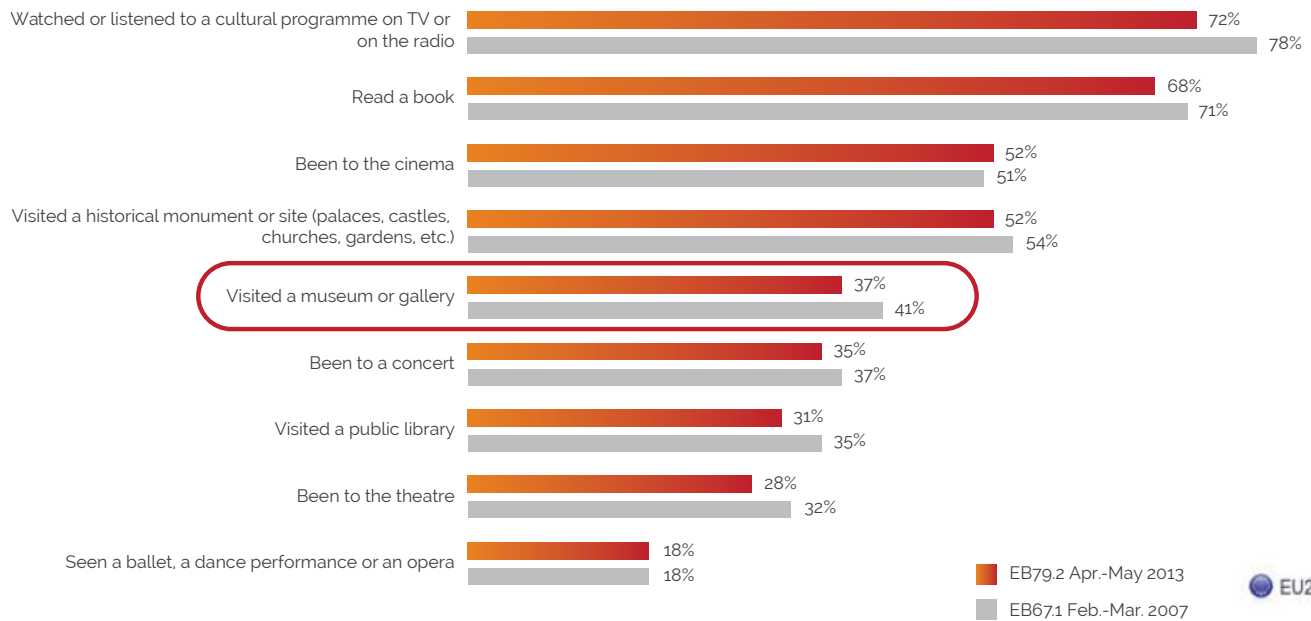
In a nutshell, activating a virtuous cycle, the museum that succeeds in creating cultural value for its users creates economic value for itself, attracting more resources to guarantee the long-term conservation of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage – directly, through revenue from tickets, and indirectly, through public and private funding. By continuously improving its performance, the museum could innovate its offer, satisfying new audiences that increase in number and creating benefits for the local context, e.g. development of economic and professional opportunities and higher quality of life (Montella, 2009; Cerquetti, 2014).

Shifting from theory to practice, despite a shared and increasing interest in value creation in museum studies, data on museum attendance reveal several gaps to fulfil. A survey on the participation of Europeans in cultural activities conducted by European Commission in 2013⁴ showed that less than half of respondents had undertaken a range of cultural activities once or more in the last years. Only 37% had visited a museum or gallery (4% less than in 2007), while 62% had not visited a museum or gallery in the last 12 months (figure 2).

⁴ The survey was carried out by TNS Opinion & Social network in the 27 Member States of the European Union (2013) and in Croatia between 26 April and 14 May 2013. Some 26,563 respondents from different social and demographic groups were interviewed face-to-face at home in their mother tongue.

QB1. How many times in the last 12 months have you...?

Total "At least once"



QB1.7 How many times in the last 12 months have you...?

Visited a museum or gallery

	Not in the last 12 months	1-2 times	3-5 times	More than 5 times	Don't know	Total 'At least once'
EU27	62%	23%	8%	6%	1%	37%
♀ Sex						
Male	61%	23%	8%	7%	1%	38%
Female	63%	24%	7%	6%	-	37%
🎓 Education (end of)						
15-	83%	12%	2%	2%	1%	16%
16-19	68%	22%	6%	4%	-	32%
20+	43%	31%	14%	12%	-	57%
Still studying	45%	35%	11%	9%	-	55%

FIGURE 2. MUSEUM ATTENDANCE IN THE EU (2012)

Source: European Commission (2013: 9 & 19).

Beside lack of time, lack of interest is the main barrier to visiting museums and galleries more often⁵ (the first answer given in 21 Member States). An analysis of the results using socio-demographic categories

reveals other interesting patterns by education and occupation, which appear to be important factors. Among the most frequent reasons given for not visiting a museum or gallery in the last year, only 21%

⁵ Respondents are least interested in visiting museums and galleries in Cyprus, where 61% said this was the main barrier; this is also the main obstacle for more than half of respondents in Malta (52%) and Portugal (51%). Lack of time is mentioned as the main barrier in the UK (41%), Latvia and Luxembourg (both 39%), Sweden (35%), Estonia (34%) and Romania (32%). The cost of museums or galleries is generally a secondary issue, but was mentioned by 18% of respondents in Hungary, 15% in Italy and 14% in Portugal. The quality and choice of museums and galleries was mentioned by 26% of respondents in Romania and by 17% in Greece, Estonia and Sweden (European Commission, 2013: 28).

of managers gave lack of interest as a reason, "compared to 42% of the unemployed or 39% of manual workers. Similarly, 48% of the respondents who left school before the age of 16 mention lack of interest as a reason, whereas this figure falls to 23% for those leaving education after the age of 19" (European Commission, 2013: 37). Despite changes having happened in society since the beginning of the 21st century, it seems that museum visitors are still upper education, upper occupation and upper income groups (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1966; Hood, 1993; Coffee, 2007). What about unemployed or manual workers, immigrants or less-educated audiences? The lack of visitors belonging to these categories confirms that there is a problem of social exclusion and a need for innovation that can no longer be ignored. This picture looks even more complex if we consider an interim finding from a study-in-progress aiming to examine long-term changes in cultural attendance in the UK (Voase, 2013). Richard Voase expected the growth of the knowledge economy and the expansion of the middle class in 2000⁶ to generate an increased levels of cultural attendance:

However, the picture is one of unchanging levels of attendance at cultural events and facilities. These two facts could be reconciled by theorising that an expanded middle class somehow loses its specificity: that its middle-class behaviours become diluted and as it expands. Thus, its propensity for cultural attendance lessens (Voase, 2013: 171).

In summary, if museums and cultural organizations are supported by public expenditure, they should create value for a higher percentage of people, attracting and satisfying new audiences and measuring how valuable their visits are through a strategic marketing approach (Arts Council of England, 2011). Sharing this need, a meta-analysis has been conducted aiming to analyse the contribution that museum studies have provided on this topic over the last 20 years.

Research methodology: the state-of-the-art in museum studies

In order to understand the state-of-the-art in museum studies, an exploratory literature review was conducted, searching two of the largest electronic databases of peer-reviewed literature (scientific journals, books and conference proceedings): Elsevier's Scopus and Thomson Reuters' Web of Science⁷. The two databases cover some of the most significant scientific journals within the museum and cultural heritage sector: *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, *Visitor Studies and International Journal of Heritage Studies* (Scopus); *Curator – The Museum Journal and International Journal of Arts Management* (Web of Science); *Journal of Museum Education*, *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* and *Journal of Computing and Cultural Heritage* (both Scopus and Web of Science). The research used two keywords adopting inclusion criteria ("museum" AND "audience") and was limited to the period 1995-2015. The selected keywords drew focus to both audience research and strategies for audience development in the museum sector, while the selected period grabbed the main changes that have occurred in our society and in the museum sector between the 20th and the 21st centuries to this day. In Scopus, the basic search was made in the field "Article Title, Abstract, Keywords" – in WoS it was made in "Topic". In the selection of "Document type" and "Language" an exclusive criterion was adopted, restricting the search to articles – conference proceedings were excluded – in English. In total 662 records were found, 387 in Scopus and 275 in WoS (table 1).

The total amount of records included duplications in the two databases, different scientific fields (e.g. education, anthropology, marketing, etc.) and papers analysing policies and case studies from Europe, USA and Asia. The first qualitative analysis of these

Databases	Search fields	keywords	Period	Document type	Language	Results
Scopus and Web of Science	Topic (Scopus): Article Title, Abstract, Keywords (WoS)	museum AND audience	1995-2015	Article	English	682 records: 387 (Scopus) + 275 (WoS)

TABLE 1. THE SEARCH IN ELECTRONIC DATABASES

Source: Author's own elaboration.

⁶ The middle class of the 2000s is much greater than that of the early 1990s: "the number of middle-class, ABC1 [upper middle, middle and lower middle class] households increased from some 19 million to 27 million. The number of C2DE [skilled working class, working class and those at lowest level of subsistence] households declined from 26 million to something over 21 million" (Voase, 2013: 172).

⁷ The research was conducted in October 2015, with a second check in June 2016.

results led to the selection of papers that supported museums in achieving their mission and discussed strategies and tools to know, understand, reach and satisfy new audiences. As a consequence, the analysis excluded papers relevant for teaching (e.g. teachers' training, science education) or dealing with representation issues (e.g. national identity, prejudices, cultural differences, etc.) or institutions that are not museums (e.g. zoos). Even preferring a managerial perspective, the selection included papers having an interdisciplinary approach (besides marketing and management, education, digital technologies, museology and architecture), registering that management and marketing scholars have shown scant attention to these topics until today. Moreover, the research focuses on the European and Anglo-Saxon context – even though it included some Asian studies with international relevance. Therefore, a wide approach was adopted in order to understand not only trends emerging in a broad scientific debate, but also the complexity of some issues and the interdisciplinary connections they involve. Finally, 145 titles were selected and deeply analysed⁸.

Research results: towards an audience-centred approach

In 1933, when studying the “museum fatigue” (Gilman, 1916) from a psychological point of view, Edward S. Robinson, the first scholar to carry out extensive and systematic museum audience research, wrote that if visitors could not discern the museum's philosophy, the philosophy must be changed and the outlook of the curators must change (cited in Hood, 1993: 18). At the end of the 1990s, this need for change in museum management definitively arrived at a turning point⁹, supported by the dissemination of a new notion of museums and their role in society (Adams, 1999; Briggs, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000): from places of exclusion to places of inclusion (Coffee, 2008); from places of education to places of learning, or rather “free-choice, or informal, learning environments” (Kelly, 2004: 47); mediators of “information and knowledge for a range of users to access on their own terms, through their own choice, and within their own place and time” (Kelly, 2004: 47). Moreover, in 1999 Weil argued that museums need to change their vision from being *about something* to being *for somebody*, strengthening the role of museum responsiveness (Lang, Reeve & Woollard, 2006; Ocello, 2011). Therefore, the challenges museums face (e.g. the increased competition and the proliferation of leisure choices) have resulted in a conceptual shift “from being primarily curator-driven to becoming market-

responsive, focusing on the needs of audiences and their learning” (Kelly, 2004: 48-49).

Today, an audience-centric approach is considered a vehicle to achieve museum sustainability (Villeneuve, 2013; Di Pietro et al, 2014) and audience development is a relevant democratic mandate for museums in contemporary society. For this reason, since the beginning of the 21st century, handbooks, toolkits and guidelines have been provided all over the world to support cultural institutions in this process and many museums have already adopted an audience development strategy or plan. Audience development is an interdisciplinary domain, including museology and education, sociology and psychology, leisure and information science, consumer behaviour and marketing. Indeed, all these disciplines are involved in “reaching and engaging people in local communities by increasing the number or types of people who participate in arts activities, or deepening an existing audience's level of participation. It includes serving both new audiences and the present audience more deeply” (Connolly & Hinand Cady, 2001: 7).

When analysing publications on museum audiences of the last 20 years, two different, but tightly linked, research paths emerge: on the one hand, audience research, including both visitors and non-visitors, theory and practice, methods and objectives; on the other hand, strategies for visitor involvement, which concern a majority of papers here selected and discussed.

As far as the audience research is concerned, even though visitor studies have been ongoing in the United States since the beginning of the 20th century, it was only during the 1990s that the proliferation of empirical studies was accompanied with a worldwide, new theoretical approach to audience research, shifting the focus from museum collections to museum services. At the beginning of the 1990s Marylin G. Hood pointed out that “most of the things people object to in museums are related to amenities and services, or lack of them, rather than to the collections, exhibits, or programmes” (Hood, 1993: 24). As institutions are supposed to function for the public benefit, museums have been required to ensure the critical understanding of the value of their collections, and audience research has become a means of measuring the quality of visitor services (Sanivar & Akmehmet, 2011). This kind of innovation has been developed above all in science museums, which are more aware than other institutions that “effective communication takes account of and involves museum audiences in shaping a museum's messages” (Fitzgerald & Webb, 1994: 278).

According to a visitor-oriented approach, the need to identify, understand and respond to different interests and perspectives has been highlighted, considering demographic data as useful tools for mu-

⁸ The references list only articles that are mentioned in this paper.

⁹ This has a precedent in the late 1970s with Robert Wolf's research about naturalistic evaluation, which considers the role of museums in society and also the interpretation of visitors – visitor experiences, rather than the knowledge obtained (see, for instance, Wolf & Tymitz, 1977).

“OVER THE LAST 15 YEARS STUDIES HAVE PAID MORE ATTENTION TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH, ADOPTING UNOBTRUSIVE AUDIO OR VIDEO-RECORDING OF VISITORS’ BEHAVIOURS AND CONVERSATIONS AND NARRATIVE METHODOLOGIES TO INVESTIGATE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE”

seums to compare the profile of their audiences to that of their communities. They need to “identify fast-growing populations they might want to target, check assumptions, and re-examine standard operating procedures, as the world changes around them” (Mintz, 1998: 67). Since the 1990s at least, in order to explain cultural consumption, the analysis of social structure has been integrated with arguments relating to individual or culturalistic characteristics (i.e. lifestyle or milieu-based or dynamic-temporary states) (Kirchberg & Kuchar, 2014: 175). Above all, the concept of audience identity has progressively broken down in favour of audience diversity, shifting from audience to audiences (Werner, Hayward & Larouche, 2014). Finally, at the beginning of the 21st century, a research culture arose, moving from *practice* to *theory of practice*. This approach is supported by different methods and focuses on “visitor experiences and learning that, in turn, contributes to organisational learning and change” (Kelly, 2004: 62): “audience research in museums is uniquely placed to add value to organisations, not only through attending to the interests, learning needs and understandings of those who use their services, but to provide a meaningful and strategic role in the learning that takes place within the organisation” (Kelly, 2004: 67). Moving from these assumptions, a new paradigm has been adopted based on a transaction approach. In this model, audience research is the intermediary between mission and market approaches to museum programme development (figure 3).

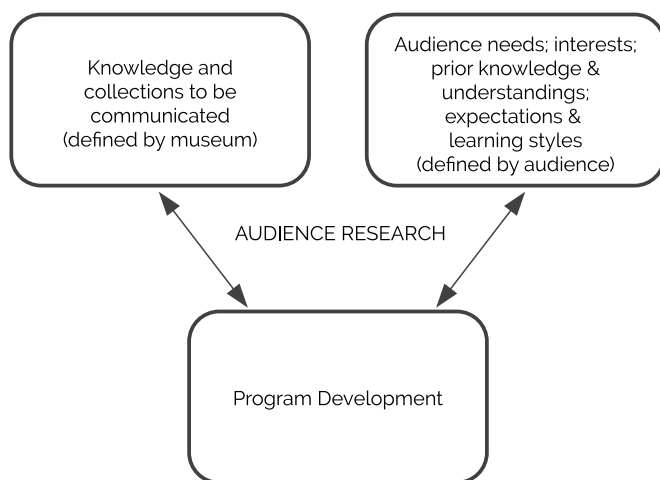


FIGURE 3. A TRANSACTION APPROACH TO MUSEUM PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

Source: Kelly (2004: 50).

When closely scrutinising research methods and objectives, over the last 15 years studies have paid more attention to qualitative research replacing traditional quantitative approaches, adopting not only interviews and focus groups (Avery & Prnjat, 2008), but also unobtrusive audio or video-recording of visitors’ behaviours and conversations and narrative methodologies to investigate museum experience (Everett & Barrett, 2009). In particular, ethnographic methods have been preferred (Jensen, 2013) as an effective tool to understand how people interact with computer-based exhibits (Meisner et al, 2007) and to evaluate the limits of museum interactive exhibits (Scott et al, 2013) and public engagement in science museums (Shea, 2014).

Considering the effects of demographic changes on cultural attendance, the impact of an ageing population has also been debated, analysing challenges and opportunities that museums will have to face in the near future (Benitez, 2013). Moreover, the importance of understanding the reasons of non-attendance has been discussed (Miller, 2011), focusing on young people and examining teen-centric programmes (Szekely, 2013). As argued by Mason and McCarthy, the younger age groups – teenagers and young adults – are the groups that “museums continually fail to cater to, despite their efforts to broaden and diversify their audiences” (2006: 22). In particular, so few young people go to art galleries because they are excluded by a kind of psychological barrier (“threshold fear”): they feel museums are not for them and do not feel as if they are part of museums. Immigrant populations, too, have been put on the agenda. As suggested by Kirchberg and Kuchar:

The question then arises, for example, as to whether increased efforts to integrate immigrants into German society will decrease their exclusion from high culture events or whether continuing high culture exclusion will reveal that long-term cultural integration is unsuccessful. Non-attendance could, then, reflect either society’s lack of integration (obstacle) or the conscious and understandable refusal of these groups to assimilate to high culture (Kirchberg & Kuchar, 2014: 176).

As some recent projects confirm (Jochems, 2008; Bodo, Gibbs & Sani, 2009; Filippoupoliti & Sylaiou, 2015):

With their ability to provide possibilities for people to associate, interact and find common ground regardless of ethnic background, museums can play an integral part in helping immigrants to connect to their new home country and society. The full potential of this has not yet been harnessed. In order to make better use of their capacity, museums need to be more active and versatile in their outreach programmes, engage more deeply in work with multiple audiences, and encourage participation (Hautio, 2011: 61).

Analysing strategies for visitor involvement, participation should not only be connected to the notion of museum as a social practice, involving social interaction with other visitors and dialogue with exhibitions (Coffee, 2007), but also be considered a dimension of accessibility, firmly linked to the use of the museum as a public space (Hautio, 2011). To become relevant organisations, it is essential that museums adopt new participatory practices (Nielsen, 2015)¹⁰: engagement means innovative presentation and interpretation techniques through interactive panels, guided tours, videos and audios, themed interactive exhibitions (Taheri, Jafari & O'Gorman, 2014).

As a consequence, the approach based on one-way mass communication is considered out-of-date and even the concept of different clusters of users based on socio-demographic categories is facing a crisis in favour of a new paradigm based on the concept of "identity formation in everyday life", where visitors are simultaneously "members of an audience (*cultural consumers*) and performers (*cultural producers*)" (Stylianou-Lambert, 2010: 135). Moving from this new approach, visitor studies have emphasized the need to encourage the participation of museum users in different forms (Simon, 2010), even through co-production (Davies, 2010). According to a constructivist approach, museum exhibitions have to be designed and set up as an open work, providing different perspectives and viewpoints, to facilitate open-ended learning outcomes (Sandell, 2007: 78).

In particular, the role of new technologies and the digital empowerment of museums have been considered crucial in attracting young generations and new audiences (Parry, 2007; Marty & Burton Jones, 2008; Tallon & Walker, 2008; Carrozzino & Bergamasco, 2010; Bakhshi & Throsby, 2012; Jarrier & Bourgeon-Renault, 2012; Howell & Chilcott, 2013; Alexandri & Tzanavara, 2014; Rubino et al, 2015; Enhuber, 2015). Both academics and practitioners highlight this idea: thanks to *edutainment*, interactivity and immersive experiences (Mencarelli, Marteaux & Puhl, 2010; Brady, 2011; Ntalla, 2013), ICTs could stimulate people's commitment, understanding, creative engagement (Dindler, 2014), also becoming an activating factor in lack of motivation and context

(Baradaran Rahimi, 2014). Even though there is a risk of dramatization, trivialization and *disneyfication* resulting from technologies (Balloffet, Courvoisier & Lagier, 2014), ICTs can create effective narrative environments (MacLeod, Hanks & Hale, 2012), facilitating the communication of the historical value of the exhibits through storytelling, thematization, spatialization and scenarization (Mencarelli & Pulh, 2012). Finally, in the era of the Internet, over the last five years more attention has been paid to the role of social media and their application in the museum sector from *one-way* to *multi-way* communication strategies (Srinivasan et al, 2009; Chae & Kim, 2010; López et al, 2010; Fletcher & Lee, 2012; Marakos, 2014; Gronemann, Kristiansen & Drotner, 2015; Pulh & Mencarelli, 2015).

Conclusion: research gaps and future challenges

Since the end of the 20th century important innovations have affected museums studies. In order to face social changes (ageing population, international migration, etc.) and attract and satisfy new audiences (e.g. digital natives and new immigrant communities), a new notion of a museum has been debated and finally shared, encouraging museums to become more relevant and responsive – to be places of learning rather than of education, for somebody rather than about something, inclusive rather than exclusive. Aiming to achieve a museum mission, audience research too has progressively developed its theoretical approach, addressing non-audiences and implementing innovative methods and techniques (i.e. qualitative research). As a consequence, visitor involvement has gained a central role: audience participation and engagement have been implemented through ICTs, promoting edutainment, interactivity, immersive experiences and narrative environments (figure 4).

Moving from these advances and achievements in museum studies, some possible further developments are listed here:

- Much more attention and consideration should be paid to the multicultural composition of our society. Studies confirm that many programmes have been developed in ethnological, anthropological or historical museums like immigrant museums (Horn, 2006; Hautio, 2011; Dixon, 2012; Johler, 2015; Schorch, 2015), rather than in art museums (Ang, 2005), that are also required to innovate their approach to new audiences;
- Museum audience research needs to become a shared resource for a museum learning "community of practice" (Kelly, 2004), sharing

¹⁰ In the papers retrieved in this literature review, a lot of interactive and participatory museum projects, programs, and exhibitions are analysed that deserve further analysis and a deeper discussion.

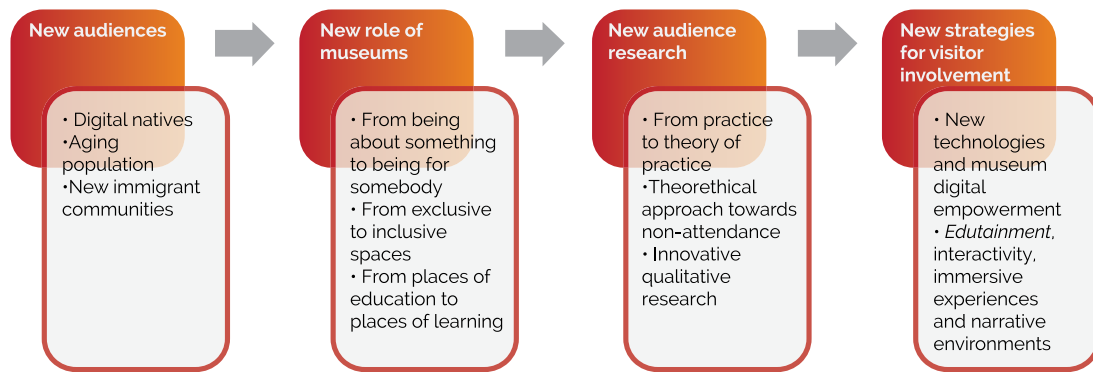


FIGURE 4. MUSEUMS AND AUDIENCE RESEARCH IN A CHANGING WORLD

Source: Author's own elaboration.

expertise, methods and objectives and promoting interdisciplinary cultural networks across Europe (Innocenti, 2014 & 2015) and building evaluation capacity in museum professionals (Steele-Inama, 2015). This approach could allow the comparability of studies and their results in an international framework to identify best practice examples for high-quality analyses (Kirchberg & Kuchar, 2014) and promote the innovation of research – more theoretically based, collaborative, interdisciplinary and longitudinal (Patriarche et al, 2014);

- Audience research should develop the theoretical explanations for non-attendance, deepening the investigation of diverse audiences' needs (e.g. young people, immigrant communities, etc.) and levels of understanding also through qualitative studies (Kirchberg & Kuchar, 2014);

- New strategies to involve people should not neglect the innovation of communication contents. To become relevant organisations, it is essential that museums develop new content to match different levels of understanding (Montella, 2009; Cerquetti, 2014).

In addition, this literature review confirms that theoretical research can provide useful suggestions not only for further studies but also for museum management, particularly for a museum community that is required to promote audience development. A much stronger cooperation between academia and professionals could be a good starting point.

In conclusion, this study investigated the increasing attention paid to audience development in the museum sector through a literature review. In scrutinizing two international databases, it discussed the achievements and advances in museum studies, highlighting emerging issues and future challenges for museum management. The analysis of papers on

museum audience development confirms the central role of digital technologies for museum innovation, both for the improvement of service quality and the attraction of new audiences, especially in the last five years. As far as visitor studies are concerned, an increasing attention to evaluation methods and a deepened attention to different clusters of visitors are registered, beyond traditional socio-demographic categories. However, the focus on immigrants is still low in museum studies, except some projects in education. This conceptual paper tries to fulfil an identified need to promote the development of museum studies to support museums in achieving their

mission and maximizing value creation, with implications for the innovation of cultural policies. In particular, further research is needed from marketing scholars. To sum up, *more is better*: in order to increase the number of visitors (*more*), *better* audience research and *better* communication are required.

This descriptive overview shows some limitations, which will require further studies to suggest future research paths. First of all, even though it provides a review of the most diffused topics and issues in the scientific debate, it is not exhaustive. Therefore, it could be useful to refine the research, also analysing conference proceedings, non-English papers and

"THE ANALYSIS OF PAPERS ON MUSEUM AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT CONFIRMS THE CENTRAL ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES FOR MUSEUM INNOVATION, BOTH FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY AND THE ATTRACTION OF NEW AUDIENCES, ESPECIALLY IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS"

papers that are not included in the selected databases. A deeper research could systemically analyse the index of some specific journals, extending the research to papers not emerging in the search through the selected keywords, but relevant for the topic. Secondly, the limits of citation indexing databases should be considered, where some topics could be "overexposed" (e.g. the role of digital technologies) and others analysed just in one case (e.g. the role of written texts in museum exhibitions, discussed in Ravelli, 1996), because journals in information systems are much more indexed than journals in the humanities. Finally, each of the topics that emerged from this literature review deserves a deeper analysis. Despite these gaps, the conclusions provide useful suggestions for future case studies.

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