

Museums – where people and heritage meet

A TellTale workshop for MUSEOFORUM, Ljubljana

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DIFFERENT TYPES OF VISITORS

For many visitors interpretation is just one element in their visit to a place. People in a cultural landscape are likely to have different reasons for being there.

Visitors will enjoy interpretation and find helpful if it is relevant to them and to what they want from their visit. They are at leisure, and are unlikely to give attention to things that do not interest them.

Extensive, international work on why people visit heritage and cultural attractions has identified a range of motivations. (For more detail of this work, look at the Cultural segments work carried out by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre at <http://www.lateralthinkers.com/culturesegments.html>)

There are four main categories of visitors (each of which can be subdivided). Not all the categories will be represented everywhere. The relative importance of the categories will be different at different sites. Understanding these groups and their motivations will help you see what your site or landscape can offer them and to develop interpretation that works well for them.

1. Social Visitors

These people visit in pairs or groups. Being in that group is important to them. The primary purpose of their visit is to spend good quality time with family and friends and to create a shared experience.

These visitors may not be particularly interested in the subject matter of your museum. They would like the museum displays to add interest and stimulation to their visit and their conversations. They will like 'talking points' and maybe things they can do together.

Social visitors like people. They are attracted to relationship and interaction, participating in it, hearing about it and seeing it.

Social visitors will particularly like:

- conversation with site staff (but not necessarily a guided tour if that stops them being able to talk together)
- points of interest and small bits of information – triggers to conversation, talking points and issues to discuss
- human stories – including gossip, scandal and intrigue
- empathetic storytelling that highlights relationships
- writing with a conversational tone
- novelty and variety
- social spaces

2. Learn Together Families

These are the families most likely to visit heritage sites. Like Social Visitors, they are looking for 'quality time' together but these are multi-generational groups.

It is important for these families that there are things that people of all ages can do together. They want to have shared experiences and learn together.

They will particularly like:

- stimulation and active learning, the opportunity to do things
- worthwhile experiences that are energetic and enjoyable
- sensory experiences incorporated into activities.
- activities that adults and children can do together
- self-directed exploratory and play opportunities
- close encounters with art, history or nature
- things that allow them to question, talk and reflect

3. Intellectual visitors

These people have some interest and curiosity in the subject of your museum. They are keen to learn more. They are likely to have a wide range of interests.

They may not be particularly knowledgeable about your topic area so will need support in understanding it. On the other hand, this group can also include enthusiasts and specialists.

Intellectual visitors will particularly like:

- an opportunity to find out more about your place and the things in it
- links to their life experiences and other things they know about
- links to wider trends, events and issues
- things that stimulates curiosity and enquiry
- stories of real lives and hidden stories
- insight into the work 'behind the scenes'
- talking to knowledgeable people who can answer their questions
- talking to people who share their interest
- detailed information

4. Sensualists

These people relate to places on an intuitive, aesthetic or spiritual level. They like time to relax and reflect and 'just be'.

They see spending time in beautiful, inspiring places as important. They tend to be quite self-sufficient in terms of the provision they require and may well visit alone.

Sensualists will particularly like:

- quiet areas or times – these are essential to their enjoyment
- opportunities to linger and look – seating can help

- to be able to take their time
- refuge areas
- sensory opportunities
- sites that are well-designed aesthetically
- artistic expressions and interpretations (including participatory arts activities)

