

Visitor Research Forum 2017 Just Do It – The Changing Face of Visitor Research

Royal Exhibition Buildings – Melbourne
Tuesday 14 February 9.30 – 4.30

 #VRF17

9.30 – 10.00 Welcome and Overview

10.00 – 10.30 Sarah Rusholme – Experience Wellington and Andrea Milligan – Victoria University of Wellington

Capital Collaborations

Experience Wellington and Victoria University of Wellington's collaboration started with the 150 Years: 150 Buses project: an exploration of how best to support connected learning when students engage with multiple institutions while visiting the capital. Since then the work has evolved into the development of a data set that includes a city-wide collective of nationally-significant cultural sites. Our agile approach brings together conversations with teachers, students and informal educators to better understand the impact of a school visit and the changes that can be made to ensure excellent learning experiences. Drs Andrea Milligan and Sarah Rusholme share insights into more effective collaborations: bringing together the research, teaching and cultural communities to provide support and advice with a very practical focus.

10.30 – 11.00 Caroline Winter – William Angliss Institute

Visitor offerings at military cemeteries and war memorials

Geographic places, where battles, death took place, are thought to have a closer association with the people involved in those events, than sites that are at a distance. The landscape itself which holds the bodies of the dead is often regarded as a sacred place. The collection of data on-site, directly from visitors, such as by a questionnaire or interview can, at times be confronting for all involved. Importantly it can risk disturbing the visitor's experience, which is especially relevant for sensitive places such as cemeteries and war memorials. In other cases, where visitation is irregular or infrequent, it is simply not feasible to spend the time necessary to capture data from visitors on-site. For a researcher, an alternative is to analyse the traces that visitors themselves leave in the landscape. At military memorials such as cemeteries, visitors leave a range of objects. These can be interpreted from a number of respects, reflecting practices of religious ritual and notions of reciprocity for their heroes.

This paper presents a preliminary analysis of three sites, two located on the battlefield (the Arras memorial and the Adelaide cemetery in France) and the Runnymede (Air force) Memorial in Britain. Commonly, visitors leave poppies and small crosses together with comments written in the visitor books. In some cases however, visitors have clearly spent some time and effort, and considerable expense in crafting an offering. Conversely, last minute decisions to leave items such as scraps of paper expressing personal messages to the dead are also evident. Clearly, interpretation of these offerings needs to be supported by more direct information from visitors, but this data can provide some understanding of the importance of such sites without disturbing what can be very personal and emotional experiences.

11.00 – 11.30 Morning Tea

11.30 – 12.00 David Perkins and Sandra Carluccio – Museums Victoria

Getting Down With the Youth: Active Audience Research when Developing New Museum Exhibitions

At Scienceworks we're developing a new permanent exhibition targeted at teenagers. We are seeking increased engagement with this age group to better understand and cater to their needs. Working with this audience is a new challenge for the project team so we have taken a different approach to audience evaluation and formed a youth advisory group - the JBoard. In this presentation we will share the process for assembling and facilitating this group, what we hope to gain from this method of evaluation, and what we have learned from the process.

We will detail the pros and cons of the process, and support the presentation with images, videos, with time at the end for questions and answers.

12.00 – 12.30 Catherine Beavis – Deakin University

Taking The Voyage: History, videogames and the Museum

There is increasing interest in the role and possibilities of videogames to support learning, both within the formal context of the school and in informal and 'not-school' contexts such as the Museum. The capacities and affordances of games to engage, complexify and provide insider experience can offer deep insights and possibilities. But while generalisations are easy, the specificity of what and how young people learn from games is both more individual and more nuanced. Drawing on long term research on literacy, learning and digital games in Australian schools, this paper reports on the experiences and perceptions of three groups of year 9 students (aged 14-15) as they engaged with one purpose built digital game —The Voyage— at the Australian National Maritime Museum in 2015. Following the game, students were asked for feedback on the strengths, weakness and possibilities as they saw them, associated with using games in museum contexts. Sociocultural perspectives on gaming emphasise the importance of attending to the context within which any games based project is located, with learning understood as 'situated intricately and intimately in a matrix of "transactions": experiences, life trajectories, voluntary and involuntary learning contexts, affective frames and social groupings that make up experience across our life-worlds' (Erstad and Sefton-Green 2015). In exploring student use of new and emerging cultural practices the study contributes to museums' capacity to maximize the potential of digital games, to enhance historical awareness and understanding, build links to formal curriculum, and strengthen partnerships between schools, museums and homes.

12.30 – 1.00 Kai Eris – Mobflic

Transforming Visitors into Extraordinary Storytellers

Online content is evolving. Ten years ago, people mostly communicated through text. Today, it's mostly visual and photos. Tomorrow, video will be the dominant form of online content and we're already seeing massive growth of video on social networks like Facebook. According to Youtube, nearly one in three people created mobile videos last year and this year Cisco estimates that nearly three quarters of internet traffic will be user generated video (UGV).

This creates an opportunity for museums and other cultural institutions to leverage UGV as more and more visitors will seek new and exciting ways to tell stories and share their experiences online through video. In this talk, Kai Eris, CEO & Founder of Mobflic - a Video Co-Creation Platform - shares his research and insights on why transforming visitors into extraordinary storytellers - through the medium of UGV - is the new big thing in content marketing.

1.00 – 1.30 Lunch

1.30 – 2.00 Xuejiao Han and Joseph M. Cheer – Aus & International Tourism Research Unit, Monash University

Are Chinese tourists satisfied? The case of Chinese Tourists in the Great Ocean Road region

In recognizing the importance and potential of the Chinese visitor market, this presentation reports on exploratory research conducted into Chinese visitor satisfaction and perceptions of regional Australia. The Great Ocean Road (GOR) is the study site with the key purpose to understand Chinese visitor decision-making processes, trajectories of travel and visitor behavior in regional Australia. This study aims to bridge the gaps in understandings of the Chinese traveller experience in Victoria's most visited region. This aspect of the larger research project was conducted through a survey (in Chinese) of Chinese visitors to GOR region in the first half 2016. Semi-structured interviews were employed with respondents recruited at key townships including Lorne, Apollo Bay and Port Campbell. Some of the key findings from the first phase of research suggest:

1. An increasing shift from group to independent travel
2. Chinese tourists demonstrate particular information sourcing traits
3. Tensions evident between Chinese group tourists, tour operators and communities
4. The allure of iconic and unique natural beauty of the region endures
5. Food and shopping components of the travel experience remains a key limitation

2.00 – 2.30 Alison Kevan – Questacon – The National Science and Technology Centre

The path less travelled: Visitor tracking as an exhibition development tool

Understanding visitor movements throughout exhibitions provides useful insights into the visitor experience in museums and centres. Observing visitor paths through exhibitions, and dwell times at individual exhibits, can inform future exhibition layouts and exhibit modifications. Here we present visitor observation data collected during the *Spiders* Exhibition at Questacon's National Science and Technology Centre. Using an in-house developed App, trained observers tracked the paths that sixty-three visitors (intended to be representative of Questacon's demographics) took through the exhibition, and the time they spent at each exhibit. Heat maps generated from the tracks provided, for the first time at Questacon, an illustration of how visitors moved through an exhibition and which exhibits were highly attended. Tracking visitor flow also provided interesting information on exhibition choke points, as well as hot and cold areas in the gallery. Results from this low-cost tracking method support the use of more sophisticated (and digitised) visitor tracking methods, used in conjunction with intercept surveys and focus groups, to provide valuable insights to inform iterative exhibit refinements, exhibition design and layout, and exhibition occupancy levels.

2.30 – 3.00 Robert Brown – University of Melbourne and Liz Suda – Museums Victoria

'Telling stories to know what we know': Making the relational museum visible

Museums are challenged to develop innovative methodologies to capture and interpret the personal, fleeting and often 'invisible' experiences of young children and their families (Kirk & Birkingham, 2013). A research project conducted at Melbourne Museum during 2016, which employed a range of methods, found that narrative inquiry can be an empathetic and critical way to do so. The museum experience is invariably social for families, though the relational encounters families have with others, including staff, are rarely revealed through visitor exit surveys. Through direct contact staff develop experiential knowledge of family agendas, their levels of engagement, and their learning preferences. Each situation, however, is different, which requires museum professionals to continually grapple with questions such as, When should we step forward or stand back? Drawing from experience, they read and respond to the diverse needs and interests of families, an ability that requires empathy and pedagogical tact (Van Manen, 2015). What staff may, and can know about young children and families is rarely shared and interrogated. This presentation will explore how the invisible experience and tacit knowledge of the museum professional, when made explicit, can provide an emancipatory methodology with which to know more about the 'invisible' museum experiences of young children and their families.

3.00 – 3.30 Afternoon Tea

3.30 – 4.00 Mark Goggin – Sydney Living Museums and Ginny Cartmel – Morris Hargreaves McIntyre

The reinterpretation and development of Hyde Park Barracks Museum.

This was a large-scale, mixed methodology consultation project, with input sought at key stages of the planning and development phase of the Museum's renewal. The work also built on previous investment Sydney Living Museums had made into Culture Segments – a sector-specific market segmentation system used by heritage organisations, museums and galleries to help better understand audiences.

Within this presentation, we hope to:

- Provide background on the specific context of the development of Hyde Park Barracks Museum
- Detail the methodology that was used and the rationale behind our approach.
- Reveal some of the key insights resulting from the research and the impact that this has had on the overall project and future Museum
- Summarise more broadly how audience research is being applied across SLM to help planning and decision making

4.00 – 4.30 Jan Packer – UQ Business School

Perceptions of the roles of zoos and aquariums: A comparison of staff, visitor and non-visitor perspectives.

This paper compares the perceptions of zoo and aquarium staff, frequent visitors and infrequent or non-visitors regarding the roles of zoos and aquariums. A total of 1200 staff, 1600 frequent visitors and 400 infrequent or non-visitors from 12 cities in Australia, USA and Canada completed an online survey in August-November 2016. Their perceptions of the roles of zoos and aquariums are compared, along with their level of conservation awareness and demographic characteristics.

4.30 Close

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