

# What We Know About Our Audiences: Utopian or Cynical Behaviour?

Gloria Romanello

## Abstract

*Visitor Research in art museums is increasingly becoming an issue in cultural management on an international level. However, even among specialists in the subject, the role of this research is not absolutely clear. Through twenty interviews with museum staff members conducted in four French and Spanish art museums, this paper attempts to highlight various incongruities in the application of Visitor Research, and aims to be an initial endeavour in analysing the significance of these studies in the everyday life of museums. Museum staff express their perceptions, opinions and doubts about their use of Visitor Studies as a set of tools for designing public-oriented cultural policies. Our principal results show a relatively homogeneous landscape: what appears to be a widely applicable and practical analytical instrument, visitor studies, may in fact betray its own primary (utopian?) ideals<sup>i</sup>.*

**Keywords:** Visitor studies, Art museum management, France, Spain, Qualitative methods

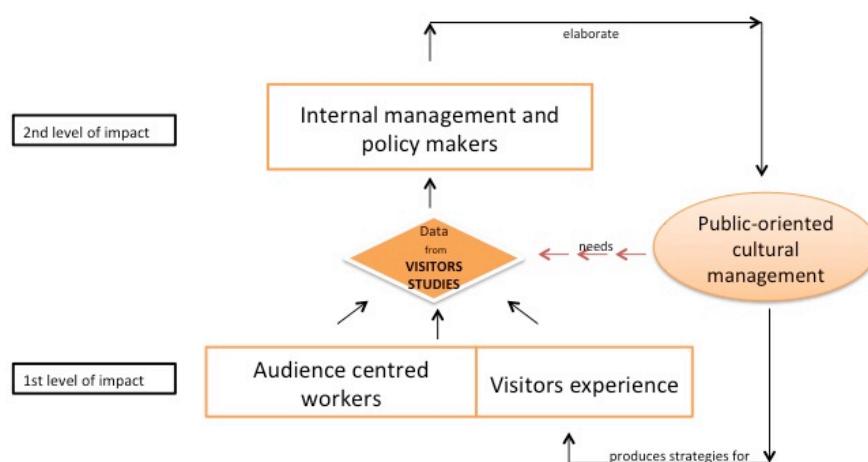
## Visitor Research: themes, problems and analytical approaches.

There is a large body of scientific literature seeming to indicate the efficiency of Visitor Research in aiding cultural institutions and, in this specific case, art museums, to pursue their missions and to define their targets (Colbert, 2003: 32-33; Kotler et al., 2008: 87). Also, significant changes in museum organization have taken place: museums have changed from being predominately custodial institutions to becoming increasingly focused on audience attraction (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002: 757). From this perspective, the philosophy of Visitor Research is also usually associated with audience development. The term ‘audience development’ is used by the Arts Council of England<sup>ii</sup> and other institutions with a broad range of meanings: it emphasizes a certain democratizing intent and a strong participatory spirit<sup>iii</sup> which ‘goes beyond the concept of just *audience building*’ (Bamford and Wimmer, 2012: 9).

However, in its praxis, particularly within the field of art museums and galleries, this kind of research encounters several obstacles in establishing itself (Savage, 1996: 3). While it seems to be a topic of interest at the moment (as proved by some very recent examples in the VSA Annual Conference<sup>iv</sup>), its use in some French and Spanish art museums seems to conceal certain dark areas, even in cases where Visitor Studies are a well-established practice of evaluation. As an ‘evolving, controversial and dynamic field’ (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007: 362)

Visitor Research is currently criticised for its inability to bear on the internal management of museums, on political and strategic decisions, and for its lack of influence in patterns of cultural democratization and legitimation (Caune, 2006), elements typically related to Visitor Research.

For the purposes of this paper, we can consider Visitor Research as having a double level of influence. The first level is measured at close hand: it is based on those activities that directly involve visitors and their experiences within the museum. The second level of impact should be considered from a broader perspective, taking in the transfer of results to internal management and the production of information significant for policy makers: in this case Visitor Research is the practical consequence of an interpretative paradigm of public-oriented cultural management which includes the points of view of audiences in the conceptualization of policies and strategies in museums and cultural institutions. In this paper we assume that some current concerns in the field of Visitor Studies probably flow from some of the weaknesses and ambiguities perceived within their first level of impact, where direct contact with the public in the everyday life of the museum takes place (See diagram 1).



**Diagram 1.** The double level of influence of Visitor Research. Elaborated by G. Romanello

Our starting point is the holistic observation of a certain degree of distrust towards this kind of research displayed by those who are responsible for producing the studies, and who do the actual audience-centred work. Making use of the evidence and data collected through interviews and case study work, our focus of observation shifts from audiences to museum employees. Instead of openly observing the aims and the results of visitor studies (which could be, as we know, the social composition of audiences, their exhibition-attending habits, their judgments and behaviours, their satisfaction with the services offered, etc.), we direct our

attention, first, to the root causes of the need for visitor surveys. Subsequently we focus on the consequences that visitor studies have or may have in the everyday life of the museum.

As far as possible we let our first-person narrators express their perception from the inside of their own institutions; thus they can provide us with insights on how Visitor Studies, as an instrument for producing data, are received, and above all, the way in which such data is interpreted and exploited. This will afford us insights into the public-oriented cultural policies promoted in the museums concerned. Through the narration of experiences and impressions, we try to give Visitor Research a different meaning; we ask whether the theoretic framework of Visitor Studies is respected, or whether, on the contrary, and as we assume, these premises merely cover over a very different substratum.

Art museums have traditionally been underrepresented in the visitor studies community, due in part to the fact that most don't employ internal evaluators and in part to a perception that art museum curators and directors aren't interested in scientific, objective measurement of visitor outcomes (VSA Conference 2012: 48).

This perception is not something new. The artistic, political and economic motives driving art museums do not always coincide with the day-to-day issues of staff working with visitors' experience, and this generates frictions between departments. Our hypothesis is that an interest in knowledge about visitors and audiences can also yield us information on the relationships between the different levels of museum organization. Particularly, the flux of information offered by Visitor Research is found to be dependent on a previously existing hierarchy, a rigid chain of command between the departments, which avoids changes inside museums, contrary to recent public-oriented management and social trends. In fact, what emerges is that the possibility of including audiences' needs in the museum management design, based on the use of information resulting from Visitor Research, is hindered and turned into a functional attitude; a 'ceremony' used to show the 'correct way' of working, while at the same time being disappointing in relation to its (perhaps utopian?) ideals; it tends to generate a wide-ranging theoretical framework, without having any relevant effects on internal management.

Answering the question of whether or not Visitor Research can afford museums an opportunity to modify museum programming, and take on the challenge of public-oriented policies and cultural democratization, is beyond the aims of this paper. However, we do raise some objections to the role currently played by Visitor Studies, though from a limited perspective of four particular cases. Finally, we leave open some questions on how the value of audience-focused approaches is perceived.

### **Some notes on methodology**

We consider methodology to be a fundamental feature of our research, since it is in itself a way of approaching the subject. Here we have applied a qualitative method in both collecting and analysing our findings; and it is worth remembering that the goal of qualitative inquiry is not to reproduce reality descriptively, but to add insights and understanding (Morse and Richards, 2002: 88). Incidentally, some level of subjectivity may also result.

The information on which our analysis is based was obtained from twenty in-depth interviews. This technique allowed us to have access to information which is very difficult to collect in other ways, such as accounts of past situations and controversies or internal meetings for which formal records simply do not exist (Taylor and Bogdan, 1986: 101). In this particular case, in-depth semi-structured interviews allowed us to gather opinions, assumptions, beliefs and values enabling us to reconstruct the symbolic universe of reference points underpinning action in these museums. These personal and subjective contributions help us to identify the essential elements of the issue (starting from the relative presence of the concept of democratization of culture), as a theoretical justification at the root of actors' actions. The participants, all members of the museums' staff, were selected according to the degree of their direct involvement with community members and visitors, due to the more in-depth knowledge of visitors we expected them to have developed. Table 1 shows the distribution of the interviews over the selected museums (see next page).

We consider these people as key informants on their contexts, since they are the principal actors at the outset of the process of public participation. Most of them are the people who physically carry out the studies; they are the first to generate this kind of knowledge in their museums.

The information from interviews was supplemented with empirical research (analysis of recent and older visitor studies, scrutiny of the public policy of each institution, and observation of audience development activities) and documental analysis, including reports, statements, studies and internal communications provided by the participants<sup>v</sup>.

For the purpose of this paper, and to be able to include a comparative angle to our case studies, we selected four museums, two Spanish and two French. They are all leading institutions in the contemporary art field, comparable in visitor numbers, organizational typology and management models: the Centre Pompidou (CP) and the Palais de Tokyo (PT), both based in Paris, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (MNCARS) and the

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (MTB), both Madrid-based. As an empirically-oriented piece of research, this paper is centred on observation of these specific cases. The framework is designed to be homogeneous: four major contemporary art museums, two per country and, alternatively, two public institutions plus two partially externally financed museums; all of them located in the heart of their respective capital cities; in all these museums the core activity centres on promoting temporary exhibitions, though not forgetting the exploitation of their permanent collections in attracting tourists. Although this coincidence of internal variables does not afford us a representative view, it lends a certain homogeneity to the subject of research.

Interviewed	Departement / Service	Museum
E1	Direction de l'action éducative et des publics	CP
E2	Direction de l'action éducative et des publics	CP
E3	Direction de l'action éducative et des publics	CP
E4	Departement des publics et de l'education	PT
E5	Departement des publics	PT
E6	Departement des publics	PT
E7	Departement des publics	PT
E8	Dirección de actividades públicas	MNCARS
E9	Dirección de actividades públicas	MNCARS
E10	Dirección de actividades públicas	MNCARS
E11	Dirección de actividades públicas	MNCARS
E12	Departamento de educación	MNCARS
E13	Departamento de educación	MNCARS
E14	Departamento comercial	MNCARS
E15	Departamento de Desarrollo educativo	MTB
E16	Departamento de Desarrollo educativo	MTB
E17	Departamento de Administración e informática	MTB
E18	Recursos Humanos	MTB
E19	Recepción	MTB
E20	Area de Promoción y difusión	MTB

**Table 1.** Distribution of interviews in the four study case museums. Elaborated by G. Romanello

### Visitor studies in the French and Spanish national contexts: traditional and new scenarios

According to Hooper-Greenhill, 'looking at the development of visitor studies internationally, the degree of development is very uneven' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007: 363).

In France, Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel's work *L'amour de l'art; les musées et leur public* (Bourdieu et al., 1969), which rapidly established itself as a classic, is generally considered the starting point of research on art consumption and museum visitors, underpinned

by the social and political goals of André Malraux's concept of cultural democratization (Donnat, 2003: 9). This work had a deep impact among museum professionals (Gob and Drouguet, 2006: 89) and had the merit of pushing the thrust of museum audience research towards a clear sociological and statistical approach, allowing Bourdieu's theories to have a widespread influence up to the present (Donnat, 1999: 148). Having recognized the disparity, ambiguities and inequalities in people's access to culture (Donnat, 2003: 10), France developed strategies which were (and are) aimed at finding some sort of cultural balance between social classes. The activities of the Department of the Prospective Studies and Statistics (*Département des Études de la Prospective et des Statistiques* - DEPS<sup>vi</sup>) are excellent examples of this approach (Eidelman et al., 2007). In this context Visitor Studies in France have consistently earned increasing authority and autonomy, both in the professional (as the growth of private consultancies demonstrates) and in the academic fields; and the growing number of publications and specialised academic degrees is also proof of this<sup>vii</sup>. Further, with the setting-up of the Permanent Observatory of Audiences<sup>viii</sup> in 1989 and the activities of the Department of Audience Policies (*Département de la Politique des Publics*, part of the *Direction des Musées de France* - DMF, an organ of the Ministry of Culture specifically devoted to museums), Visitor Research achieved a wider perspective.

The two French museums we have selected here for the purpose of our research are both active participants in ministerial programs and initiatives; they collaborate actively in the development of a large range of institutional projects, but above all they are accustomed to communicating with state institutions, as evidenced by our interviews. These reveal an intense activity of communication involving personally both museum staff and the DMF, with a powerful and continuous exchange of data and opinions.

In Spain, the interest in museum visitor studies, as a praxis and as a discipline, is much more recent. The first available works in this field emerged in the early eighties (Alarcón, 2007: 1), but it was not until a decade later that Visitor Research became a wider subject of study and started to gain currency among experts and cultural managers. Previously, the main lines of research were focused on visitor behaviours – the frequency and pace of visits – within a mostly descriptive approach. Nevertheless, this body of research does not seem to have led to any methodological development, since it basically stemmed from sporadic and personal curiosity and initiative. Also, those initial works have been criticised because often they did not respect methodological constraints regarding coherence and objectivity (Pérez Santos, 2008: 23). From the early nineties onwards increasing awareness and use of visitor studies, both in

theory and in practice, has provided subject matter for conferences and has likewise stimulated academic debate. Some major personalities stand out: Angela García Blanco for her educational approach (García Blanco, 1999), Mikel Asensio for his cognitive perspective<sup>ix</sup> and Eloisa Pérez Santos, a psychologist working on Audience Research since the very beginning and author of perhaps the most important publication in the field in Spanish, *Estudio de visitantes en museos: metodología y aplicaciones* (Pérez Santos, 2000).

Today Visitor Research is a growing field and the current climate of change in the cultural sector has partially increased its significance. Just a few years ago, in 2009, and with Perez Santos' direct involvement, the Permanent Laboratory on Museum Audiences (LPPM)<sup>x</sup>, a service within the Ministry of Culture, was created in Madrid. From the point of view of internal organization, it is worth mentioning that the Laboratory is not a fully developed service, as the French Department of Audience Policies essentially is; moreover, the research projects they are carrying out remain at a very preliminary stage. In fact, only recently the Reina Sofia Museum was involved in a visitor study conducted by the LPPM.

We would like to focus on two major questions that were raised during our interviews in Spain. The first deals with the lack of engagement that staff members complain of: 'We were not asked for our opinions or services' (E12, MNCARS) and 'Nobody took part in the decision-making process, we just received the proposal, and we accepted it, as it stood' (E8, MNCARS). This statement becomes yet more meaningful when we take into account that, while most public-centred work is carried out by the Education Department, this study involves, in the organization of both economic and human resources, only the Administrative Department of the museum. Furthermore, we could consider the LPPM as a good practical example at national level, as it is not free from museum staff's prejudices and scepticism: 'I'm afraid it will be just another tool used to control our work...' (E9, MNCARS).

Despite this, what seems noteworthy is the current on-going improvement of cultural policies (and with that, attention to audiences). Here we can highlight the difficulties that Spanish cultural policy has to face in becoming a strong government sector of action, whereas in France over the last decade it has been a recognized reality. The creation of public cultural institutions in Spain, although fragmentary and local, seems to suggest that France will not always be considered an exception in southern Europe; indeed, French structures seem to have been taken as a model (as more than one Spanish informant confirmed to us), perhaps not accidentally.

**Internal consumption, unpredictable decisions, the need for validation: how visitor studies arise.**

The first range of issues that we came across concerns the identification of the reasons for museums deciding to perform a study of their visitors. The data we collected reveals some tendencies: contrary to what we generally tend to think, the interests that lead museums to collect information on their public do not emerge from a general need for an audience development strategy, nor from the desire to democratize culture or, in this specific case, to democratize access to contemporary art<sup>xi</sup>. Among the criteria that motivate a commitment to visitor studies, there are no high ideals, but a more modest degree of self-awareness, a personal sensibility shown by the individual who freely decides whether or not to carry out the study:

Nobody asks me to do it; I decide when we need to know something more about my (*sic*) visitors [...] I know the management wants to receive some data about visitors, the way I do it doesn't matter; so I prefer to build up a survey, because I need it to be written down (E7, PT).

What seems to motivate the undertaking of a visitor study is the personal experience of the individual and her/his staff. The majority of interviewees described themselves as experts in this specific field and in audience development strategies. Most of them had received a specialised academic or professional training in these areas. Furthermore they stated that when the decision is taken to put a visitor study on their agenda, it is neither the consequence of a pre-existing internal need, nor an organized and scheduled operation, but simply a voluntary individual decision. This attitude suggests a hypothetical approach to the internal consumption of the visitor study itself and may indicate the absence of any kind of detailed plan or internal strategic vision which might later require the information eventually produced. In fact, according to several interviewees, the order does not come from any higher level. If this is so, it is easy to imagine how knowledge about visitors is still far from being perceived as a priority for the museum's functioning. The presence of specially trained staff and their professed autonomy in decision-making does not automatically mean a mutual awareness of the benefits of visitor studies within the cultural organization. Our interviewees' stories of difficulties in internal communication and interdepartmental cooperation increased this impression.

One of our informants, speaking about the beginning of his career, declared: 'The management once expressed its intention of engaging in visitor studies, but finally nothing really happened!'(E5, PT). However, this weak interest shown by the management and curatorship departments does not really rule out some kind of personal engagement, although



its potential action is fairly limited: as a matter of fact, despite all the difficulties (for example, there are constant complaints of lack of human and economic resources), some kind of survey or enquiry is usually scheduled.

When asked directly about the aims of the research under way, one informant states candidly: ‘...for reasons that have not yet been thought through, we have not yet decided’ (E3,CP). This statement seems to denote a certain unpredictability in fixing study objectives. This reported weakness of the initial research project, as its lack of a clear structure of objectives seems to indicate, may prevent the entire project from reaching any positive conclusion.

Another finding that emerged concerns the need to produce concrete and objective data on museum staff’s day-to-day work and tasks. This need for the validation of their actions towards their managers turns visitor studies into a monitoring tool in the service of the organisation, which seems to provide information on accounting, as well as an assessment of staff’s professionalism. ‘It mostly means validating what I do’, one informant says, and, ‘This will enable me to justify my goals and issues’ (E4, PT).

So, from being an instrument especially elaborated to provide knowledge about audiences, it became clearer that Visitor Studies have progressively evolved into self-regarding initiatives responding more to internal power struggles than marketing strategies, probably parallel to concurrent changes in museum organizations (Bayart, 1993; Tobelem and Rosenberg, 2005). Visitor figures are essential, but, as one of the informers tells us: ‘Yes, here we have some little details, important details, but in the end they have infinitely little weight compared to the sponsors or the curatorship’ (E7, PT).

The deeper meaning of the social approach to improving policy-making strategies in the field of cultural access, which was at the origin of the development of visitor studies in France, is apparently overshadowed by more practical and tangible concerns, as we have just seen. It is possible to judge this behaviour as rhetorical and hypocritical: while on the one hand, museums are capturing visitors (by supporting educational programs or claiming that they cater to specific communities), on the other, they are aware of excluding visitors from consideration in other areas: ‘Curatorship remains the priority, in terms of budgets, strategic orientation and stakeholders’ needs. We just have to learn and be satisfied; the artistic side of museum is still dominant!’ (E7, PT).

Observing the organizational charts of these museums, it becomes obvious that curatorial services still hold a dominant position, subordinating public and educational services

even in terms of allocation of human and economic resources, as Vera Zolberg affirms in one of her most important critiques (Zolberg, 1981: 123). Once more, the official institutional intention, stated explicitly in official documents, seems to conflict with what is actually subjectively perceived by our informants, who generally contradict or deflate the authorized version<sup>xii</sup>. Aside from the rhetoric always found in these types of statement, they seem to contrast sharply with our informants' views; the latter clearly believe that there exists a certain cynicism in their institutions' presenting a friendly face to the public, although this impression is not (sufficiently) supported by the facts.

### **After the studies: probing the data is not always possible**

When speaking about the effects that visitor studies produce or should produce, and, later, staff's perception of the effects they actually have, what mostly emerges is not an entirely positive assessment. First, the results achieved seem to be perceived as weak and unconvincing: as one participant exclaimed: 'This isn't exactly a big surprise!' (E3, CP) Second, these results are rarely capable of crossing the boundaries of the service or department they have been produced by. If this is so, visitor studies seem to have no consequences in the other levels of the museum organization. Once more, this suggests a certain internal need and an economy of internal consumption of knowledge about audiences or, as one interviewee explained, insufficient interdepartmental communication and cooperation: 'After that, I really don't know what they'll do with it!' (E14, MNCARS). In response to an outright request for some practical example which could specifically demonstrate the importance attached to visitors' experiences recorded in a survey, most interviewees hesitated over their answer: 'Unfortunately, to tell the truth, I haven't been able to examine or really exploit my survey results; I haven't had time to do it, and nobody but me is in charge of doing it, so...' (E4, PT).

Visitor research seems not to be a priority among staff's tasks. Lack of time and shortage of human resources: as we have seen time and again, this situation seems to suggest insufficient organization skills. The preliminary proposal for a visitor study of this type does not include the need for the extra time and hands which would ensure the study a fruitful outcome. Moving from data to knowledge and from knowledge to action does not seem to respond to the initial aims of a visitor study. So, if data analysis is not a priority, why carry out a study?

Given this ambiguous perception of Visitor Studies, what could this paradox, this perceived distance between ideals and reality, mean?

They respected our work, but they didn't do much with it. Or they had a utilitarian attitude; they took what they wanted, the numbers ... but the truth is that I have this feeling of isolation, and I think that certain managers were interested in certain figures, well, only in certain figures (E7, PT).

This may be seen as a complaint about a certain laxness in management and curatorship, a complaint condemning the utilitarian use of information about audiences, as an unexpected consequence of the managerial emphasis on marketing and economics (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002: 750). Thus: 'We can't close our eyes to it! The artistic management is stronger than us!' (E15, MTB). Consideration is given to carrying out some visitor studies; as a sort of politeness, 'They're tolerated because of their social value more than for any benefits that could be got out of them.' (E7, PT). The example of the Centre Pompidou is even more significant: this museum has a long and powerful tradition of inquiry into its audiences. At their origins Visitor Studies in the Beaubourg were thoroughly grounded in Bourdieu's social theories and deeply committed to the French project of democratizing culture. Yet the interpretations and the uses made of these studies has progressively shifted towards marketing approaches (Quemin, 2011: 59), even though their formal contents have not significantly changed.

We have to be realistic. We have to admit that we all depend on the Minister of Culture. This means that audience development is always seen by them as a good option. Our managers are always delighted to know that some kind of visitor studies are being carried out, even more when there's no budget required for it. So they let us get on with our job. But we will never have any decision-making power (E7, PT).

What emerges here is one of the core ideas which has been present throughout this analysis: the lack, in the upper levels of museum organizations, of commitment to producing and making use of knowledge on audiences, is strongly perceived by museum staff, even in the context of more general public-oriented policies. In addition, they confided to us their feelings of low self-esteem, alienation, disillusion, and these feelings strongly suggest that this may not be a perception, but possibly an actual practice: that in these museum organizations, doing research into audiences is considered an appearance-based action, an alibi which is very useful in order not to forget that 'Our public mission is not so clear as it seems...' (E6, PT). Ideals do not coincide with reality. The common feeling of responsibility towards museum visitors is in conflict with the impossibility of respecting this ethic. In fact, our interviewees show a clear-headed assessment of the facts, with no illusions about the consequences of their activities: 'In the end [in visitor studies] ... it seems to me that what we call the time-utility relationship is too complex, in terms of the relationship between effort and results, I mean' (E14, MNCARS).

## Discussion

This paper does not represent a definitive assessment of the situations described. These remain open to multiple readings; some statements may even be interpreted as contradictory. However in these few lines, with the aid of some evidence, we have tried to point up some of the ambiguities around the use of Visitor Research, particularly in public-oriented management schemes. We have tried to identify some essential points: despite a significant body of international literature, what appears to be a widespread and useful analytical instrument of cultural management seems to be undervalued and underused. In spite of appearances, in our encounters with museum staff we hoped that their feedback would be more positive, or at least more sympathetic, mirroring a well-recognised paradigm shift within museum management toward more public-oriented policies. The results we obtained show that, on the contrary to what might be expected, the desire to cultivate audiences by increasing our knowledge of them, and the desire to democratize access to culture (and the art world) should not be considered the main motive behind the interest in learning more about audiences. These desires are seen by staff as a utopian model, but not one that enables museums to innovate in public-oriented strategies. On the management side, a lack of clear objectives, a perceived insufficiency of resources, a sceptical view and, above all, a perception of a lack of direct benefits: all seem to indicate that Visitor Studies, in the institutions we looked at, are used as an alibi to justify actions and decisions already taken, much more than for audience development and improvements in services. Knowledge coming from research on museum audiences, even while it may evidence some kind of utopian foundation (in participants' references to democratisation and audience development), seems to have an additional almost ethical or even aesthetic function: Visitor Research is seen as the 'nice and good' way of going about things, regardless of the results obtained.

The active involvement of the audience in museum management thus appears as a functional attitude, a 'ceremony' used to demonstrate the 'correct way' of working, but it remains far from accomplishing its (possibly utopian) ideals; it tends to generate a wide-ranging theoretical framework, but without effective impact on management, policy or practice. Thus we may project a certain cynicism in the behaviour of the institution, which on the one hand continues publicly to recognise the importance of Visitor Studies, but on the other does not act on the information gathered by those studies. The hypothesis of the persistence of interdepartmental hierarchy (Zolberg, 1984: 386) preventing the flow of information toward

decision makers, and at the same time promoting neither cooperation nor change, may explain this behaviour: by supporting Visitor Studies, museums seek the complicity of their publics, but not in the way these studies might suggest.

Is this the answer to the challenges currently faced by museums: to turn to the visitors? Which visitors are we talking about? Are they merely neutral presences who interact commercially or politically with cultural policy? Or are we once more in the presence of a hierarchical culture, distant and insensitive to the needs of its audience, who are not admitted to participation in its entirely private decisions?

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## Author

Gloria Romanello

PhD Candidate and Researcher in Culture and Heritage Management

Dep. of Sociological Theory, Philosophy of Law, and Methodology of Social Sciences

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Faculty of Economics - University of Barcelona

[gromanello@ub.edu](mailto:gromanello@ub.edu)

<http://about.me/gloriaromanello>

<http://es.linkedin.com/in/romanell gloria>

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<sup>i</sup> This paper is part of the work developed in my PhD dissertation. A previous and partial version of this research was presented at the seminar *Arts, culture, représentations. Europe, internationalisation, mondialisation* at the *Institut d'Etudes Européennes* of the *Université Paris-8* and an article has been accepted for publication by the French review *Marges*, n°15 “*Démocratiser l’art (contemporain)*”.

<sup>ii</sup> ‘The term audience development describes activities undertaken specifically to meet the needs of existing and potential audiences and to help arts [and cultural] organisations to develop on-going relationships with audiences. It can include aspects of marketing, commissioning, programming, education, customer care and distribution’. *Audience development and marketing*, Arts Council of England, (2010) [www.artscouncil.org.uk/.../audience\\_development\\_and\\_marketing](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/.../audience_development_and_marketing) (last view 27/11/2012).

<sup>iii</sup> ‘Participatory’ should be understood the way Nina Simon uses it in her enlightening work: Simon, N. (2010). *The participatory museum*, Santa Cruz.

<sup>iv</sup> VSA – Visitor Studies Association Annual Conference ‘Knowing our past, shaping our future: what's next for visitor studies?’, Raleigh 2012; we refer specifically to the session ‘Are Art Museums Behind or Ahead of the Evaluation Curve?’ where some examples of studies helping institutional shifts came from within the sector, usually dominated by the Science Museums (VSA Conference 2012: 46).

<sup>v</sup> All collected data has been treated using the software for qualitative analysis Atlas.ti: through the use of categorization and coding, this software helped us in doing an efficient analysis of words and observed situations by identifying relationships and dependences of cause and effect.

<sup>vi</sup> DEPS - *Département des études de la prospective et des statistiques*, *Ministère de la Culture et de la communication*: ‘Thanks to the development of cultural statistics, it adds a qualitative and quantitative insight to the definition, orientation and decision-making process in the field of national cultural politics’. In ‘Études et statistiques’, <http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Politiques-ministerielles/Etudes-et-statistiques/Le-DEPS>, (last view 14/09/2010).

<sup>vii</sup> MA degree on “Management of cultural projects. Knowledge about publics” (*Conduite de Projets Culturels. Connaissance des publics*) in the *Université Paris Ouest-Nanterre-La Defense*.

<sup>viii</sup> OPP - *Observatoire Permanent des Publics*; in 2001, after ten years of visitor research they published a study which involved one hundred museums: *Observatoire Permanent des Publics & Mironer, L. (2001). Cent musés à la rencontre du public*. Castebany: France Edition.

<sup>ix</sup> About this author, see also [http://www.uam.es/personal\\_pdi/psicologia/asensio/](http://www.uam.es/personal_pdi/psicologia/asensio/) (last view 09/11/2012).

<sup>x</sup> LPPM - *Laboratorio Permanente de Publicos de Museos*, *Ministry of Culture*, Madrid.

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<sup>xi</sup> The contemporary art field mostly remains a deeply elitist artistic field (Quemin, 2011: 58).

<sup>xii</sup>Statement from the mission of the Museum Reina Sofia in Madrid, [http://www.museoreinasofia.es/museo/mision\\_en.html](http://www.museoreinasofia.es/museo/mision_en.html), (last view 15/05/2012).

Creating alternative narrations, developing new forms of intermediation and forming active spectators are the Museum's main priorities. (...) The Museum proposes an educational conception that eliminates hierarchies and highlights the revitalizing power of culture, based on its conviction that each one of us knows how to rediscover and redefine knowledge.