

Inclusive Museums Literature Review

Jacob, Joe, Yuna, Ericka, Kendall, Joy

Trinity College / Capital Community College

LAAL-201-02-F22: Action Lab HHRP Inclusive Museums

Dr. Laura Minor

November 6, 2022

Abstract

Our group collected scholarship on young adult interest in museums, with particular attention paid to museum learning strategies and the experience of marginalized visitors. The two areas of research of most interest to us were inclusivity and exclusivity in the museum setting and the learning impact of museums on young adults. We also identified several gaps in museum scholarship that make our research with the Connecticut Historical society unique, mostly owing to its status as a historical society and historic house museum. The age demographic of our research will also encompass a more modern vision of young adulthood than existing research.

Introduction

The Inclusive Museums team, in collaboration with Connecticut History Society (CHS), is seeking to investigate the level of participation in the Connecticut Historical Society by the target population - young adults ages 18-28 living in Hartford or surrounding cities - and the structural and personal barriers that prevent them from participating. While public cultural institutions provide important opportunities for education and discovery, the perceived lack of young adult interest in these institutions poses a potential threat to their future survival. Cultural institutions are organizations that work to provide cultural and intellectual information to a community or group, and preserve this information for future generations. Our literature review focuses on the interactions of young people, who are approximately between the ages of approximately 15-29, and minority groups with public cultural institutions, the cultural and social definition of public cultural institutions, and the problems and response strategies faced by contemporary cultural institutions. The primary goal of this study is to not only assist CHS in reaching a larger audience of young adults, but also to provide insight into what factors would encourage the target population to participate in state cultural learning opportunities, and what barriers may prevent them from visiting. By addressing the barriers facing more vulnerable populations in Hartford, we hope to identify which target populations are not aware of the services CHS offers, or have not opted to take advantage of them. In addition to identifying these

barriers, we also seek to help these target populations better understand and connect with aspects of our state's history.

Theoretical Framework

The goal of our research is to broaden our insight into CHS's target populations in order to encourage visitation to the museum and active participation in CHS's activities and programming. To better identify the barriers preventing young audiences from accessing CHS, we plan to analyze the principles of diversity and inclusion and how they intersect. Accessibility is the ease of entry into as well as navigation throughout cultural institutions for all ability levels, and racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic groups without significant financial or intellectual barriers. There were three common themes in our journal readings. One of them was how various programs or exhibits had a learning impact on the visitors. Sometimes, demographics would be an important aspect of the effectiveness of learning. Learning impact is how much information from a visit to the museum or activity within is retained, usually measured by a pre and post assessment. Another common theme we observed was how these institutions would target and attract young people. A museum's focus should not just be to attract young people, but keeping their attention and interest. A third recurring theme was how museums, exhibits, and staff would make visitors feel emotionally and mentally. Descriptive data from the US, the UK, and other international surveys depict that informal science education institutions are not inclusive places (Dawson, 2014). Research by Olivares and Piatak (2021) further show a need for more inclusivity in museums in the U.S. by the lack of participation of various minority groups compared to White and English populations, which museums are often catered to. They cite ethnicity and race as major factors in visitors' experiences (Alexandra Olivares & Jaclyn Piatak, 2021).

Constructuralism, applied in Tuffy's research (2011), gives a general overview of museum output and audience access to information. The theory holds that rather than merely absorbing information, students actively build knowledge in an effectively utilized museum setting (Tuffy, 2011). People construct their own representations of the world and incorporate new information into their prior knowledge as they experience it and reflect on it (Tuffy, 2011). Regarding the comprehension that the museum experience is an immersive learning experience, Chang (2006) and Tuffy (2011) analyzed the research data in light of the notion that visiting a museum is an immersive learning experience by looking at the procedures and behavioral patterns of students' knowledge acquisition there.

Beside empirical studies, the Interactive Experience Model and Contextual Model of Learning are examined in Chang's studies (2006) as ways to explain the nature of museum experiences and learning. Interwoven with Chang's approach, the Student Engagement Theory applied in Tuffy's research (2011) provides a more detailed connection with curriculum design and students' experience to assess the effectiveness of the museum trip. These structures start with a very precise definition of the institution's curating or information transfer process, as well as the effective learning process and knowledge acquisition by students. This standard will better enable us to assess the efficacy of CHS messaging during subsequent data analysis processes and will further suggest communication and audience engagement strategies. Engagement being visiting and participating in an institution's services or activities.

However, according to Hughes and Moscardo (2019), different cultural and social contexts may result in significant differences in cultural institution and museum function and definition, which may influence the research audience group's redefinition. Given the diversity of demographics of young adults in Hartford area, to better understand how social and racial

characteristics influence their accessibility toward CHS, Social Representation Theory (SRT) as well as Bourdieu's theory of capital and habitus, applied in Dawson's (2014) research, should be adduced in the research analysis. The SRT applied in Hughes and Moscardo's research (2019), is a "theory of knowledge" which explains how people interpret and interact with their surroundings by anchoring them with the known subjects. In other words, when people interact and share experiences, social representations are created (Hughes & Moscardo, 2019). To create a shared social reality that directs individual behavior and experience, these shared experiences are filtered through shared values, social norms, experiences, and group identity (Hughes & Moscardo, 2019). The emergence of various social representational types can be observed when numerous social groups are associated with a subject or object (Hughes & Moscardo, 2019). Bourdieu's approach toward analyzing complex relationships between institutions and visitors amplified existing basic understanding of cultural differences. Dawson (2014) cites research from Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) that these behaviors and dispositions can change over time and are similar between groups of people that spend time together which is called "class habitus." Types of capital include cultural capital, linguistic capital, symbolic capital, social capital, and economic capital which can be seen in knowledge, skills, social connections, money, and intuitiveness (Bourdieu, 1998; Dawson, 2014). SRT is the perfect framework to lead the Inclusive Museum project to developing further understanding of Hartford youth perspectives toward local cultural institutions like CHS. SRT provides a comprehensive structure to better recognize the specific reasons why young people today may feel excluded in a museum setting by combining the behavioral, cultural, and socializing traits of the local population. It's also noteworthy to understand that, as Bourdieu (1998) and Dawson (2014) discussed, there is more to lack of visitation than just physical barriers and CHS's goal of repeat visitors can only be

achieved by making sure that visitors are comfortable and gaining value from their visits. In the study from Lade (2010) about the Swann Hill Pioneer Settlement, they did focus on the barriers model which included factors such as distance, cost, and interest level although the distance is much further and the cost is much more in that research because they surveyed people from hours away. Lade (2010) considered the different types of visitors based on their levels of motivation and reasons for visiting which include visitors who are highly motivated to take part in the activity, visitors who are also taking part in other tourism locations, people who will take advantage because they happen to be nearby, and people who go by accident or only because they are with other people that are going (Hausmann, 2007; Silerberg 1995; Mckercher & Du Cros, 2002; Richards 1996). These varying levels of interest and attitude can have a major effect on whether people will actually take the effort to visit an institution. Lade states how it is difficult to turn interest into participation. This perspective gave us a head start on knowing what levels of priority various visitors may have for experiencing a historical institution.

Discussion of Findings

Inclusivity or Exclusivity

An important concept to consider in museum visitation is social inclusion and exclusion; making sure that the museum experience is useful to people who have various forms of capital (Dawson, 2014). There are many different ideas on how to make these spaces more inclusive, but it takes a perspective of people in the community (Alexandra Olivares & Jaclyn Piatak, 2021) Barriers influence some people's visitation with cost, distance, and level of interest being the major factors (Lade, 2010).

Learning Impact on Young Adults

New technology in exhibits can be complicated and are tough to measure the various aspects of learning impact (Panagiotis Apostolellis et al., 2018). Multisensory,

technology-focused exhibits will not win over young people who are museum-averse unless they are cohesive and well-designed (Fors, 2013). Making a website interactive and engaging is also important for conveying information and making visitors want to spend more time on an institution's website (Lin & Gregor, 2006).

Minor Themes

The research discussed the effectiveness of attracting people between the ages of 18 and 28 to the museum. Two misconceptions about millennials are that they aren't interested in visiting museums, and are anti-social. This generation is more social and reachable than ever before, despite the fact that they are frequently more dependent on their smartphones than their vital organs. While some may feel reticent about visiting museums, they are not apathetic - they are able to clearly articulate what they like and dislike in a museum setting (Fors, 2013). The new generation of museum visitors is drawn to hands-on activities and interactive learning. They hope to feel part of an exhibition and leave having learned and enjoyed themselves. Pre-planning exists as a way to define the goals of the visit and establish what teachers' want students to get out of the experience.

Key factors contributing to museum curriculum design include: meaningful interaction with an exhibit or artifact; any activity that can assist in focusing and organizing the information for the student to assist in enhancing their learning experience and possible recall of information; and class discussions about the museum itself can help foster life-long museum learning in a student since it allows students to ask questions about what they saw. Separate from the content of topics being learned, the experience itself for each museum patron should not be overlooked.

Concerning the niche that the Connecticut Historical Society falls into, it's important for us to study the relationship between historic museums, which focus on topics in the past, and societies and the youth of that community. The Connecticut Historical Society is an especially

important case, as we're focusing on a museum in a city whose goal is to reach the young people that live, work, and learn in that city. In our research we also learned that the values and learning styles of newer generations are different than those that have come before. "They value diversity and inclusion...They display greater social activism than previous generations (Diez, 2022)." We know a little bit more about how communication is different for our target age group, but because learning differently means teaching differently, that also means changing the way that museums curate and share and display information.

According to the findings of Christina Kreps, a researcher from the University of Denver, the small size and niche appeal of university museums should be seen as an asset because it provides much more room for experimentation than larger museums, which are often beholden to powerful donors and interest groups (Kreps, 2015). In her research at the Denver University Museum of Anthropology, she also found that the relationships forged between the museum and outside groups, such as the Amache Historical Society, were invaluable to creating exhibits that engaged vulnerable members of the community. The utility of museums as a teaching resource is not just limited to the classroom.

Comparing and Contrasting Journals

Qualitative studies made up the majority of our selected journals for our literature review. We also found three quantitative studies and three that used a mixed approach. Six of these journals used interviewing methods while five of them used surveys. This diversity of studies was important in our aim to create a mixed methods study as our final product. We also examined several journals involving focus groups, although we didn't intend to pursue this method of research. Some of the journals relied on data collected by another study, but analyzed them and processed them differently. In each of the various topics of investigation, many of the

journals suggested there was a need for improvement. Some of these improvements are about topics such as how to get more of a learning impact, how to be more socially inclusive, or making features of the institutions more valuable.

Analysis of Research Gaps

Many of the journals we have focused on have explored museums as a general category or, conversely, tackle a more niche subject such as art museums or science centers, which differ in terms of visitor experience and potential educational value. Many of the studies did not focus on historical societies or historic house museums, both of which are of interest to CHS. Historic house museums in particular are absent from much scholarship in this area. The Connecticut Historical Society, which is housed in a historic Hartford building, is closer to the definition of a historic house museum than to a traditional art or history museum because of its niche appeal and small size.

Many research journals are interested in exploring interactivity from members of Generation Z and Millennials, as opposed to people who belong to the community surrounding a specific museum. Generation Z is a more specific buzzword for young people which has a connotation of being technology-savvy, and describes people born between 1997 and 2012. Millennials are people who were born between 1981 and 1996, and who were the first people to grow up in the internet age. These journals also tend to focus on students, and while many of those in our age demographic are students or recent graduates, this label does not represent many people within our age range. Some researchers chose not to focus on age at all and opted for a random sampling approach to data collection that incorporates all ages. There is also a lack of research or many publications on how to include values important to our target demographic, such as diversity and social justice, effectively in museums and public institutions.

Several of the gaps we found in the literature have to do with location and time of publication. Many of the journal articles we read came from researchers in countries such as Sweden, China, and Spain, and as such may have different demographic breakdowns than the United States. We also found that much of the research we accessed had been conducted before the late 2010s, which could fail to account for recent changes in the internet, social media, and the Covid-19 pandemic have affected museum visitation. Several articles referenced the Barriers Model, which was found to be overly simplistic in its depiction of issues that affect learning institution visiting (Dawson, 2014). Learning institutions are places where there is information to learn in various methods such as exhibits, books, old manuscripts, documents, and other like materials.

Conclusions

Three of the most recurring themes were how much learning impact museum visitors gained, how museums attract young people, and how museums can be more inclusive physically, mentally, and emotionally. These scholarly journals show us what kinds of questions have already been asked and give us the ability to focus our research questions and our survey/interview questions in more relevant directions. Each journal has findings that show us further insight that can be applied to our research topic. Even the ones that were about different types of cultural institutions can be applied to historic museums and societies to some extent. The knowledge we gain from our studies will be shared with our community partner and online for other researchers and institutions to use to help further the goals of bringing more people into the museums and other learning institutions. Reading literature that discusses multiple kinds of museums can help us understand how to tailor our recommendations to an organization like CHS, which exists at the intersection of several types of institutions. It also

shows us that history museums are an important gap in this literature that needs to be further researched in the future.

The themes, findings, and conclusions can all be used to further our goal of getting more young adults in the Hartford area to not only interact with learning institutions such as CHS, but to gain value from them and retain the impacts of these experiences when they leave. This is important because these kinds of informal learning institutions can benefit visitors by being fun, relaxing, and a good learning opportunity. They provide diverse sets of information in an interesting and organized way that people might not otherwise know unless they visit these institutions. Ensuring that the community knows of and values these institutions will also prove to be integral to their survival in the future. The Connecticut Historical Society has the added benefit of having a research center that has millions of research sources that are rare and interesting. A second feature of CHS is their frequent extra events that take visitors beyond the exhibits, giving the community a place and reason to come together. Museums are changing to support new generations of people and new methods of conveying information. Museums hope to revitalize their services and spread culture and knowledge to the people who take the time to learn from them.

References:

- Ainhoa Simón Diez (2021) Working to Create Value: Spanish Museums and the Challenge of Connecting with Generation Z, *Museum International*, 73:3-4, 44-53, DOI: [10.1080/13500775.2021.2016276](https://doi.org/10.1080/13500775.2021.2016276)
- Aleck C. H. Lin & Shirley D. Gregor. (2006). Designing Websites for Learning and Enjoyment: A study of museum experiences. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v7i3.364>
- Alexandra Olivares & Jaclyn Piatak. (2021). Exhibiting Inclusion: An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Museum Participation. *International Society For Third-Sector Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00322-0>
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (R. Nice, Trans.; 2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Chang, E. (2006). Interactive Experiences and Contextual Learning in Museums. *Studies in Art Education*, 47(2), 170–186. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3497107>
- Clare M. Lade. (2010). POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO VISITATION: A RURAL CULTURAL HERITAGE MUSEUM CASE. *E-Review of Tourism Research*, 8(3).
- Dierking, L. D. (1989). The family museum experience: Implications from research. *Journal of Museum Education*, 14(2), 9-11.

- Dawson, E (2014). “Not Designed for Us”: How Science Museums and Science Centers Socially Exclude Low-Income, Minority Ethnic Groups. *Science Education*. <https://doi.org/DOI.10.1002/sce.21133>
- Fors, V. (2013). Teenagers’ Multisensory Routes for Learning in the Museum: Pedagogical Affordances and Constraints for Dwelling in the Museum. *The Senses and Society*, 8(3), 268-289.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258883225_Teenagers'_Multisensory_Routes_for_Learning_in_the_Museum_Pedagogical_Affordances_and_Constraints_for_Dwelling_in_the_Museum
- Hausmann, A. (2007). Cultural Tourism: Marketing Challenges and Opportunities for German Cultural Heritage.“ *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 13(2): 170-184.
- Herle, A. (1997). MUSEUMS, POLITICS AND REPRESENTATION. *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 9, 65–78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793582>
- Hughes, M & Moscardo, G (2019). For Me or Not for Me? Exploring Young Adults’ Museum Representations, *Leisure Sciences*, 41:6, 516-534, DOI: 10.1080/01490400.2018.1550455
- Kreps, C. (2015). University Museums as Laboratories for Experiential Learning and Engaged Practice. *Museum Anthropology*, 38(2), 96-111.
<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/muan.12086#muan12086-bi-b-0034>
- McKercher, B., & Du Cros, H. (2002). *Cultural Tourism: The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management*. Haworth Press Inc, USA.
- Panagiotis Apostolellis, Doug A. Bowman, & Marjee Chmiel. (2018). *Museum Experience Design Crowds, Ecosystems and Novel Technologies* (Arnold Vermeeren, Licia Calvi, & Amalia Sabiescu, Eds.; pp. 20–43). Springer International Publishing.

Paynter, B., Zuleta, C., Rebolledo, D., Bascuñán, K., Marishane, L., & El Khamlichi, M. (2018).

Rooted in the past, active for the future: Museums and inspiring a new generation of citizens. *Journal of Museum Education*, 43(2), 137–147.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2018.1457320>

Rennie, L. J., & Johnston, D. J. (2004). The Nature of Learning and Its Implications for Research on Learning from Museums. *Science Education*, 88.

Richards, G. (1996). The Scope and Significance of Cultural Tourism. In *Cultural Tourism in Europe*, edited by G. Richards. CAB International, Wallingford, UK.

Robinson, C. (2011). *Into the Future: Adult Professional Groups and the 21st Century*

Museum. *The Journal of Museum Education*, 36(1), 103–111.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23118039>

Silberberg, T. (1995). „Cultural Tourism and Business Opportunities for Museums and Heritage Sites.“ *Journal of Tourism Management*, 16 (5): 361 – 65.

Sachatello-Sawyer, B., & Fellenz, R. (2001). Listening to Voices of Experience: A

National Study of Adult Museum Programs. *The Journal of Museum Education*, 26(1), 16–21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40479199>

Tuffy, J. (2011). The Learning Trip: Using the Museum Field Trip Experience as a Teaching Resource to Enhance Curriculum and Student Engagement. In Online Submission. Online Submission.