

Consideration of Visitors Cultural Backgrounds in BSR Museums

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Introduction

Museums can be found all over the world addressing different topics in various ways. Visitors with diverse cultural backgrounds, therefore, have individual expectations on the setting, content, and display of exhibits. The challenge for museums is to develop a concept to attract not only people from the home country but furthermore visitors from foreign countries.

Museums in some countries already show improved handling with different cultural backgrounds. To a small number of museums - on the other hand - only visitors from the home country are attracted to due to barriers of language and expectation.

The definition of the term "museum" has changed over the last centuries in the sense of characterizing historically a place towards a service provided by an institution to society today. (Lewis, 2000) Due to the long existence of museums, they tend not to be making full use of technology. Recently opened museums integrate technological exhibits from the beginning whereas museums which have been open to the public for a longer time struggle to adjust to the advancing technology.

As part of the research at the University of Applied Sciences a survey was conducted on the internal and external communication in museums throughout the Baltic Sea Region. The goal was to determine the offers made by museums and to compare those among the participating countries.

Additionally, questionnaires were sent out to cultural institutions in order to receive a perspective on the factors valued by people with different cultural backgrounds.

About Museums

“A museum is a non-profit, permanent 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, 2007). To be considered a museum does therefore not depend on the location, size or content. If an institution meets the indicators stated in the definition of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) it may function as a service to society.

The term “museum“ has been used since the Roman times describing mainly a location where philosophical debates were held. The early definition of museums was commonly spread until the 15th-century when the characterization of the term was changed. From this time forward a museum was not relating to a specific place but to the comprehensiveness of a collection. In Europe, the term referred to items being rarely found as of the 17th-century. The expression “museum“ became more specified over the centuries. In the 18th-century a museum needed to be open to the public to conserve and exhibit a number of items. Furthermore, the building of the exhibition received decreasing attention in the following centuries due to changes in the display of material. Social and environmental factors lead to the need of preserving the history of individual countries creating awareness of certain aspects in the past.

The difference between the traditional museums and museums today is technology. Many modern institutions “transform their public programs, digitize their collections, and share their research.” (Richman-Abdou, 2018) Therefore the aim to educate can additionally be traced outside of the building.

“Traditionally, the museums aimed principally at the acquisition, conservation, research and exposition of objects and were oriented to a reduced group of people and highly concerned with cultural interests and with pedagogic activities.” (Capriotti, 2013) Communication has developed a greater importance to museums due to the change in visitors. Nowadays these institutions are open to the public and furthermore need to attract many different groups of society. Museums need to take on their role of cultural agents in creating cultural sensitivity and awareness towards people’s own historical and cultural background but more importantly towards others. Thereby challenges like funding and changing social demands were and still are faced requiring new strategies. “The mission of the museums is significantly changing: they have become entities of knowledge and leisure.” (Capriotti, 2013) Today a museum is not only competing with many other museums but furthermore with leisure institutions like shopping malls. The goal should, therefore, be to attract a large number of visitors and to create a relationship between the museum and its visitors.

Due to the need of forming a relationship with the guest, special emphasis should be given to the values and habits shared by people from different countries. A more exact implementation of these expectations will lead to a more satisfying visit and a higher chance of creating a strong connection.

Survey Results

The survey conducted on museums from different countries in the Baltic Sea Region put special emphasis on the communication in- and outside of museums.

The study was done online to reach as many museums as possible. 70 museums from six different countries including Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Lithuania, and Russia were asked to participate in the survey. At the end of the time span of over one month a total of 14 institutions participated in the study. The study is therefore not representative and can be continued to receive improved knowledge on the topic.

The questionnaire consisted of 35 questions covering aspects of general information, the size of the museum, information concerning the visit and marketing.

The evaluation of the survey will be divided into different aspects and later compared to the expectation of people from Denmark, Lithuania and Sweden.

The evaluation of the survey is based on the location of the museums which is then being linked to various factors. The country the museums are situated in, provides information that can be compared to the expectations of people with different cultural backgrounds.

Share of international visitors - Major differences can be noticed when considering the share of international visitors in the participating countries. Lithuania is the country where international guests make up one-third of the total number of visitors followed by Sweden with 15 percent. Germany is to be found at the other end of the scale with only three percent.

Languages spoken by staff members - Due to the large share of international visitors, it is not surprising that employees working in a Lithuanian museum are required to speak

three languages. Other museums with fewer international guests usually demand two languages of which one is English.

Entrance fee - The regular entrance fee for children is on average the same of 1€ - 5€ in all participating countries. Only Sweden does not charge any fees for children nor for adults to enter the museum. When considering the entrance fee for adults Germany and Denmark tend to be more expensive with prices between 12€ - 20€.

Greeting - German museums tend to greet their visitors with a short personal introduction. On the other hand museums in Poland give out a flyer or a sheet of paper with information about the museum. Considering Lithuanian museums no specific greeting can be determined. A personal introduction, a flyer or a sheet of paper and a short movie are used to welcome visitors to the museum.

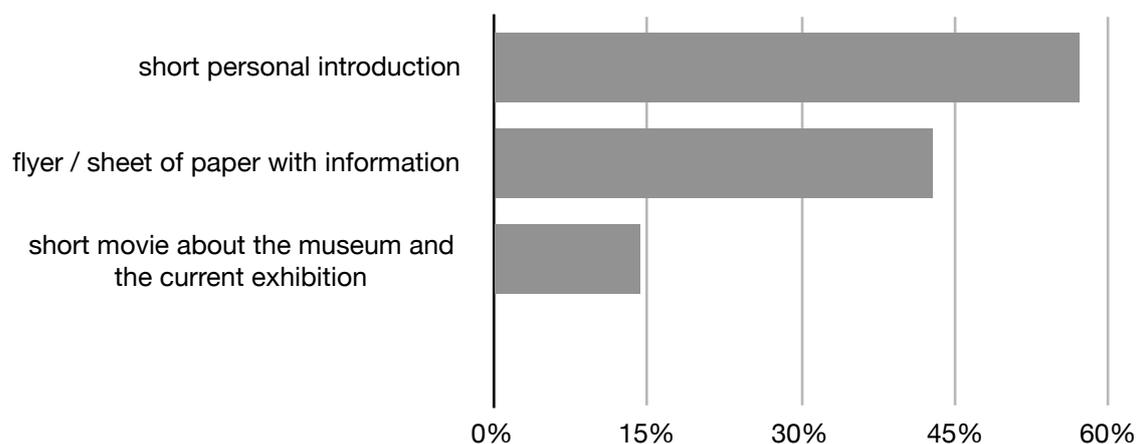


Figure 1 Greetings in Museums, 2018

Items for further information - German museums are making use of almost all technological items. The range includes applications for smartphones, interactive tables and screens, audio and smart guides and many more.

Audio and smart guides are offered by the majority of the museums. Only very few museums offer tablets and applications for smartphones and tablets.

When looking at the items which are available free of charge the number decreases. German museums offer close to all items without any additional fee. The widely offered audio and smart guides need to be paid for by visitors. Free of charges are mainly QR codes, iBeacon, and RIFD.

Audio and video projectors offered during the exhibition are used to a level of close to 100 percent on an average day. Audio and smart guides, on the other hand, are rarely used possibly due to the additional fee.

The promotion of the items offered is evenly distributed and not dependent on the country. Flyers, website or a suggestion given by the staff at the beginning of the tour are utilized.

Guided Tours - Guided tours are offered by over 90 percent of the museums but also require an additional fee irrespective of the location of the museum. 85 percent of the guided tours are furthermore offered in multiple languages leading to the possibility of many people being able to participate.

Information boards - 85 percent of the museums use traditional information boards rather than digital ones. Lithuania is the only country providing visitors with information on digital information boards. A reason could be the large share of international visitors and to attract them with advanced technology. Furthermore, Lithuania is the smallest country considered in the survey and might need to attract even more foreign guests to reach the same number of visitors as other countries.

Most museums provide two different languages on the information boards. Only the Danish museum offers four and Lithuanian museum offer on average three languages.

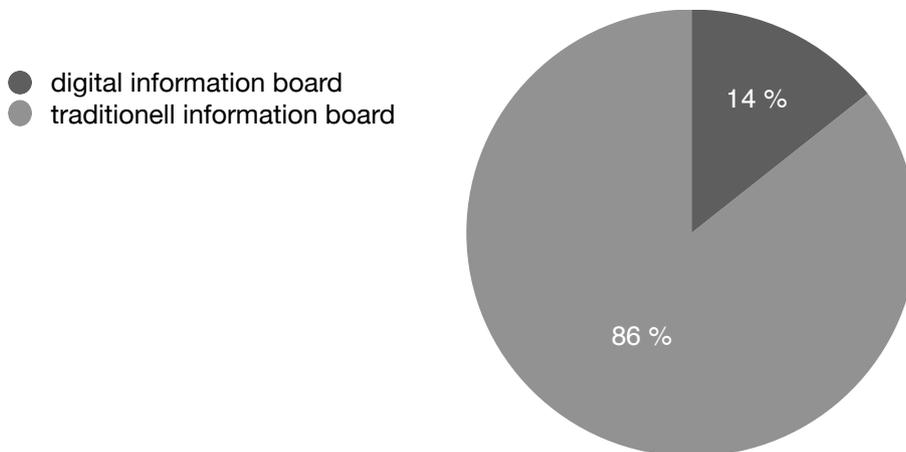


Figure 2 Information Boards in Museums, 2018

Activities - Many museums share a positive attitude towards activities being provided to visitors. Therefore close to 80% of the museums offer visitors to try out activities on their own. Two out of three Swedish museums which participated do not provide activities for guests to experiment.

Approachable staff - During the exhibition visitors might feel the need to have more specific questions answered by staff members of the museum. In 57 percent of the museums, it is possible for visitors to approach staff members along the tour. Staff members are majorly approachable at the start and the end of the tour in 36 percent of the museums.

Follow-up - Follow-ups are not commonly done in the museums which participated in the survey. Only 29 percent of the museums stated that they follow up on their visitors after the visit. A frequently used method is to conduct surveys to receive visitors' suggestions

but also the possibility of a monthly newsletter is provided. Sweden is the country getting back to their customers after their visit the most.

Information gathering before the visit - Due to the large presence of social media museums use different mediums to attract more guests. Over 90 percent have a website and 85 percent have a Facebook account where updates about the museum are posted. Instagram and YouTube accounts are also used by a large number of museums. Twitter is only considered by less than 50 percent of the participating museums.

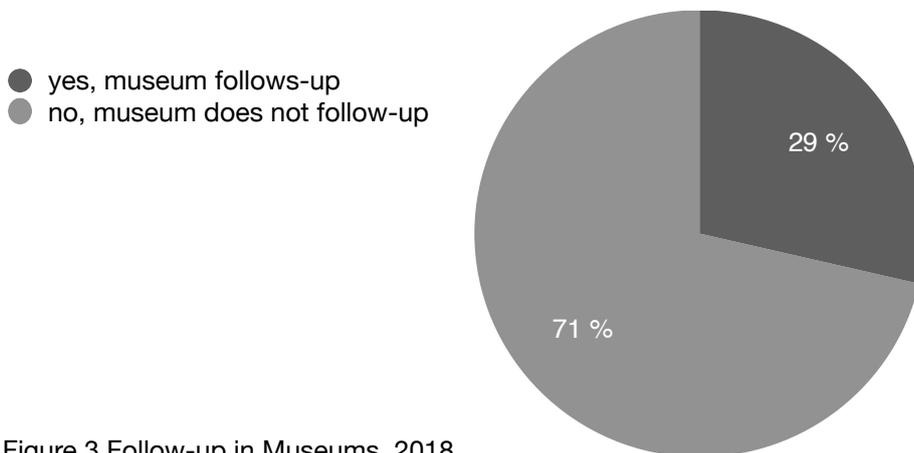


Figure 3 Follow-up in Museums, 2018

Marketing - Poland and Sweden are the leading countries regarding the implementation of marketing activities by own marketing departments in museums. Museums in other countries do not show the existence of own marketing departments. The marketing department and marketing campaigns do not show a positive correlation due to the fact that museums without a marketing department run marketing campaigns too.

Surveys - The conducting of surveys is widely used among the museums. German museums tend to ask visitors on a regular basis whereas museums in other countries conduct surveys when data is needed.

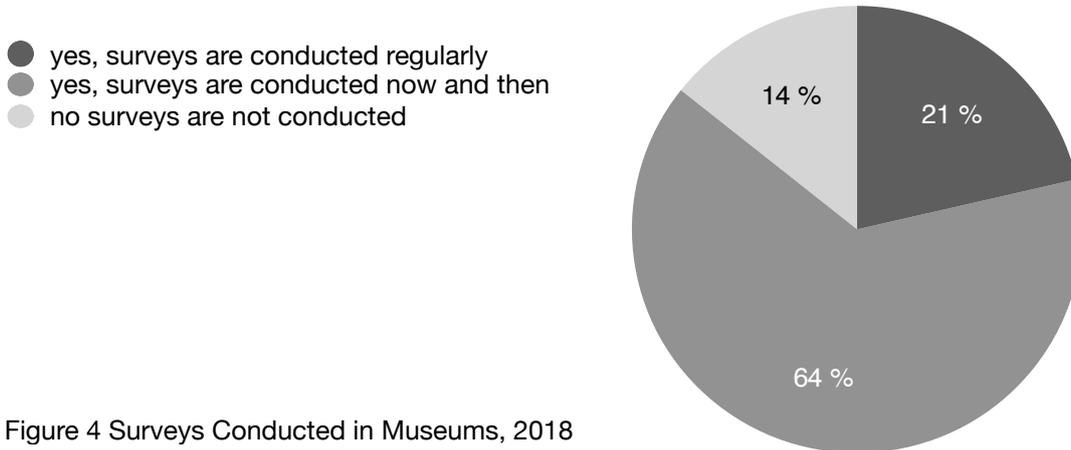


Figure 4 Surveys Conducted in Museums, 2018

Cultural Differences in Preferences

People of different countries have individual preferences concerning the visit of a museum. The behavior of the preparation before the visit and the stay at the museum of people from other countries is important to be aware of. A positive experience by visitors can be increased by adjusting certain routines and habits to different cultures.

An evaluation of preferences of Danish, Lithuanian and Swedish people will follow stating their behavior towards specific offers made by museums.

Denmark - Danish people do not make use of a website provided by museums often. Only 10 percent (Agency for Culture and Places, 2015) of the people visiting museums consult this offer. 28 percent (Agency for Culture and Places, 2017) of Danes rather rely on recommendations made by friends and family. Information about the museum is additionally received from tourist brochures by 23 percent of people who have been to this museum before and by 33 percent who will visit the museum for the first time.

The surrounding of the museum plays some role if Danes consider visiting the museum or not. Once they arrived at the museum usually a flyer or a sheet of paper with information is accepted among Danes. 85 percent (Agency for Culture and Places, 2017) of Danes would also prefer shorter texts in the museum rather than longer complex texts.

Guided tours are not frequently made use of by Danes. Only 16 percent of visitors would attend a guided tour through the museum.

Activities provided are likely to be tried out by Danes but the engagement with staff members is only favored by 31 percent (Agency for Culture and Places, 2017) of the Danish people.

(Sidsel Risted Staun, personal communication, April 9, 2018)

To attract Danes it is a good strategy to present the museum in a brochure for tourists. Since Danes rely highly on recommendations made by family and friends the stay of every visitor should be pleasant to secure a positive feedback to potential visitors.

Keeping information on boards rather short is of great importance to ensure a continued high level of interest. Staff members should also be approachable to answer questions that might arise.

Lithuania - Lithuanian people are in favor of visiting museums. Every third Lithuanian person visits on average one to three museums per year. Due to the relatively high number of visits, the websites of museums are consulted by almost 48 percent. (Ministry of Culture, 2017) Not only the website is of great importance but furthermore, reviews written by previous visitors influence the decision-making process of visiting a museum or not. 533,503 people (Ministry of Culture, 2018) were additionally attracted by marketing campaigns in 2017 compared to 476,454 people (Ministry of Culture, 2017) in 2016. A growth can be noticed and marketing campaigns continue to attract Lithuanian people to museums.

Once Lithuanian people arrive at the museum it is very important to them finding an outstanding interior and exterior environment. The surrounding is therefore highly valued among visitors from Lithuania.

The greeting at the museum depends more on the age and needs of visitors. Therefore, no specific greeting can be stated to be favored. Considering guided tours and audio guides the number of Lithuanian people requesting those is constantly rising. Since in Lithuania audio guides are mostly free of charge it could be an expectation of Lithuanian people to not be asked to pay a fee for additional information in foreign countries.

The more activities visitors can try out on their own the better. Interactive museums and their educational activities are highly valued in Lithuania. 25,777 (Ministry of Culture, 2016) educational activities in museums were found to have attracted 526,639 visitors in 2017. The educational activities, therefore, grew by almost three percent and the number of visitors increased by 12% in comparison to 2016.

Despite their preference for interaction in museums, Lithuanian people accept traditional information boards as well as digital ones.

The contact to staff members is also valued among Lithuanian people.

(Lolita Valužienė, personal communication, May 10, 2018)

Lithuanian people should be attracted through recommendations and marketing campaigns. Museums should consider implementing such campaigns when visitors from Lithuania should receive interest in visiting the museum. Museums should also value their surroundings and make it pleasant to avoid negative reviews. Guided tours should be free of charge to please Lithuanian people as well as audio guides. A large number of possible interaction activities is highly valued in Lithuania and makes it easier for museums with such offer to attract visitors.

Sweden - According to a study conducted by Eurobarometer (EU Open Data Portal, 2017) Swedes like to visit museums more often than the average European person. Most Swedes receive the required information from the website of the museum. Additionally, reviews by previous visitors are important to Swedes as well. They are very likely to read recommendations on Trip Advisor or other online platforms. Marketing campaigns shown on TV or in subways have indicated a larger number of visitors in these museums.

The appearance of the outside of the museum is highly valued among Swedish visitors. In Sweden, up to one-third of visitors is lost if the outside of the building is worked on. Therefore, if the museum building is kept in good condition Swedish people are more likely to be attracted by it.

Swedes also do not favor any specific greeting when entering the exhibition but a short personal introduction is commonly used in Sweden and could be preferred. A guided tour is also preferred by visitors from Sweden but if signs and suggestions are provided during the tour then Swedes would more likely walk through the exhibition themselves. Furthermore, Swedish people like to discuss their experience during their walk which would not be possible if a guided tour is attended.

Swedish visitors additionally like to try out things on their own and receive further information through audio guides and QR-codes. The provision of traditional or digital information boards is not crucial to the overall performance of the museum. As in every other country too a different social background leads to individual preferences.

To receive further information on the exhibition staff members will be approached to receive answers.

(Maria B Olofsson, personal communication, March 9, 2018)

Special emphasis when attracting Swedes should be put on the website and on positive recommendations by previous visitors. It is, therefore, necessary to make sure that all visitors have a pleasant stay and will tell their friends and family about it. Guided tours and audio guides should be offered to give further information to visitors if needed. Swedes should be given the opportunity to discuss their experiences and would therefore not like a museum where silence needs to remain.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that not many museums took part in the survey, some interesting facts could be identified.

Important for many people from different countries is the possibility to receive information before visiting the museum. Since social media is receiving increased attention museums should be able to be found on various online platforms. This furthermore helps to attract visitors from foreign countries.

Most museums need to improve the use of new technology. A great amount of institutions provide information on traditional boards which is acceptable for most visitors but depending on the age group younger people will most likely require digital information boards to have a high level of interest throughout the whole exhibition.

More visitors would make use of items providing additional information if they would not be required to pay an additional fee. Therefore, museums should think about including this offer in the entrance fee allowing for further information.

After evaluating the different countries Lithuanian museums seem to be more technologically advanced than museums in other countries. A large share of international visitors leads to the requirement of more than two languages to be spoken by staff members. Furthermore, guided tours and audio guides can be required without any additional fee.

Museums should pay close attention to factors valued differently among various cultures to secure the attraction of a large share of international visitors.

Factors	People from		
	Denmark	Lithuania	Sweden
use of website before visit	used by few people	used by almost 48% of visitors	used by most people
recommendations/ reviews	28% of Danes rely on recommendations	important to visitors from Lithuania	important to visitors from Sweden
surrounding of museum	plays some role	very important	highly valued
guided tours	16% would attend a guided tour	important to visitors from Lithuania but expect to not pay a fee	favoured by Swedes
greeting	flyer or a sheet of paper with information	no preferred greeting	short personal introduction
activities	likely to be tried out	the more, the better	like to try out things on their own
information boards (traditional or digital)	no preference but short texts	no preference	no preference
engagement with staff	staff members should be approachable	valued among visitors from Lithuania	staff members will be approached for further information

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Figures

Figure 1. Greetings in Museums.

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Figure 2. Information Boards in Museums.

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Figure 3. Follow-up in Museums.

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Figure 4. Surveys Conducted in Museums.

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Appendix

Discussion Results

A discussion held with team members of the project „Baltic Museums: Love IT“ lead to an insight of how museums currently handle communication towards international visitors. The questions proposed were based on the findings of the previously conducted survey.

Making visitors feel welcome once they arrive at the museum is crucial for an overall satisfying visit. Therefore the idea of using interactive touchscreens with different languages was considered. Visitors from foreign countries would be able to find various flags or even the word „welcome“ in different languages. By selecting their mother tongue it would enable them to receive information about the exhibition in ways they are familiar with. Furthermore it was perceived to be interesting for visitors to know how many people from their home country and other nations are currently walking through the exhibition offering the opportunity to engage with them. Additional information about the origin of exhibits or species presented in the museum might lead to an instant connection and a greater interest in the exhibition.

When it comes to personal greeting staff members should be able to welcome their guests in different languages. An advantage for visitors to engage with staff would be the display of languages spoken by staff members on their uniform.

Since social media is constantly rising a great use of the museum's website and social media accounts was found to be of large value.

Different cultures mean different ways of communication - suiting everybody is almost impossible nevertheless some actions can be taken to please the majority. Starting with the website which is usually consulted before making the decision to visit the museum a short teaser could be offered to guests from low context cultures. People from low

context cultures or direct communication are not in favor of using metaphors or other linguistic features. They therefore get right to the point when having a conversation. High context cultures on the other hand need to have a larger amount of context when having a conversation. For this type of visitors more information should be provided either in a longer video or in written form.

Once people have arrived at the museum it was suggested to offer different guided tours depending on the preference visitors have. A highlight tour would focus more on getting as much information across as possible in a short period of time whereas a longer tour would provide more information and deeper knowledge.

When it comes to texts on the information boards short text should be provided. If visitors feel the need of receiving a larger insight on the topic drawers with further information to pull out or additional boards should be provided. Including pictures is seen to be very important to maintain the visitor's interest in the topic.

Members of museums stated that the appropriate handling of visitors comes natural and it is not being a major issue to make sense of who needs how much context in a conversation. In guided tours for example people from high context cultures are likely to interact with the tour guide between the points where information is provided. A suitable way to avoid misunderstandings would furthermore be asking visitors about their expectations on guided tours and other possible engagements with staff.

Despite, a native speaker is always the superior option for giving guests the information they need in a familiar and understandable way.

International signs are the best way for non-verbal communication with visitors from foreign countries. Furthermore pictures of people who used the item previously should be depicted to avoid a wrong usage.

When it comes to attracting people from foreign countries it became clear that visitors need to be attracted to the city where the museum is located in first before the museum is able to make use of their marketing strategy. The marketing campaign of the city is therefore a crucial part of how well the museum is performing. A cooperation with various service providers is from great importance. Including joined work with the city but more importantly with transport and tour operators might not only increase the number of national visitors but moreover the share of international guests.

Like for any other institution it is valuable for museums to receive qualitative assessment in order to improve their performance. It can be challenging to receive an honest and high quality feedback from visitors. If staff members are able to engage with their guests and ask about any suggestions people will be more likely to answer in an appropriate way. This practice was stated to be even more successful if visitors are relaxing for example in the café of the museum.

Since most people are attracted by saving money discounts or even free visits can be a way of motivating visitors to give feedback. Additionally a tour behind the scenes might be possible in some museums to reward visitors after taking part in the survey. Visitors furthermore feel respected if suggestions provided are being followed and changes compared to their last visit can be noticed. Due to this mind setting it is very important to museums to appreciate the feedback of visitors and handle it appropriately. Further explanation should be provided if certain changes cannot be put into reality.

Communication inside and outside of museums

Seite 1

Thank you for supporting my work by taking part in the survey!

Please note that any data should be from 2017 in order to allow a proper evaluation of all museums.

The results will be presented at the "Baltic Museums: LOVE IT" Project Meeting in Gdynia, Poland in June 2018.

Tanja Titel, Student of Baltic Management Studies, Stralsund, Germany

General information

1. Name of museum

2. City, Country

3. Type of museum

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> archaeological museum | <input type="checkbox"/> museum for natural history |
| <input type="checkbox"/> art museum | <input type="checkbox"/> museum for a specific person |
| <input type="checkbox"/> castle museum | <input type="checkbox"/> technical and natural-scientific museum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> museum for children | <input type="checkbox"/> museum for children toys |
| <input type="checkbox"/> design museum | <input type="checkbox"/> zoological museum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> museum for local geography and history | |

4. Opening Date

Month and Year

Size of museum

5. Number of locations

6. Exhibition area (in square meters)

7. Number of visitors

8. Share of international visitors

 %

9. Number of employees (full-time equivalent)

10. How many languages are spoken by staff members on average?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- more than 4

11. Are staff members required to speak several languages?

yes

no

12. If question 11 was answered with "yes", which languages are required?

About the visit

13. How much time do visitors spend on average in the museum?

less than 2h

2h - 4h

4h - 6h

more than 6h

14. What is the regular entrance fee?

for children

0€

1€ - 5€

6€ - 10€

more than 10€

15. What is the regular entrance fee?

for adults

- 0€
- 1€ - 6€
- 7€ - 11€
- 12€ - 16€
- 17€ - 20€
- more than 20€

During the visit

16. How are visitors greeted?

- short personal introduction
- flyer/ sheet of paper with information
- short movie about the museum and the current exhibition

17. Which of the following items are offered by the museum?

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> applications for smartphones/ tablets | <input type="checkbox"/> interactive tables and screens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> audio / smart guides | <input type="checkbox"/> QR codes, iBeacon, RFID |
| <input type="checkbox"/> audio and video projectors | <input type="checkbox"/> tablets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> others: <input type="text"/> | |

18. Which of the items may be used free of charge?

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> applications for smartphones/ tablets | <input type="checkbox"/> interactive tables and screens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> audio / smart guides | <input type="checkbox"/> QR codes, iBeacon, RFID |
| <input type="checkbox"/> audio and video projectors | <input type="checkbox"/> tablets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> others: <input type="text"/> | |

19. Which percentage of your visitors use the following items of your institution on an average day? (%)

audio/ smart guides	<input type="text"/>
audio and video projectors	<input type="text"/>
interactive tables and screens	<input type="text"/>
tablets	<input type="text"/>
applications for smartphones/ tablets	<input type="text"/>
QR codes, iBeacon, RFID	<input type="text"/>
others (please name)	<input type="text"/>
no statistics available	<input type="text"/>

20. Are the items in the previous question promoted?

- yes
- no

21. If question 20 was answered with "yes", how are they promoted?

22. What kind of information boards are presented in the exhibition?

- traditional information boards
- digital information boards

23. How many languages are provided on the information boards?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- more than 4

24. Are guided tours offered by the museum?

- yes
- no

25. Are guided tours included in the entrance fee?

- included in entrance fee
- additional fee required

26. Are guided tours provided in different languages?

- multiple languages are offered
- only the language of the country is offered

27. May visitors try out activities on their own?

- yes
- no

28. Is it possible for visitors to approach staff members easily during the exhibition?

- yes, employees are approachable along the tour
- yes, but majorly at the start and end of the tour
- no, enough information is provided by the exhibition itself

29. Does the museum follow-up on their visitors after the visit?

yes

no

30. If question 27 was answered with "yes", how does the museum follow-up?

Marketing

31. Which of the following is offered by the museum to allow the gathering of information before the visit?

Facebook

Instagram

Pinterest

Snapchat

Twitter

Website

YouTube

others

32. Does the museum have its own marketing department?

yes

no

33. Are marketing-campaigns used to attract visitors?

yes

no

34. Does the museum conduct surveys on their visitors to receive certain information?

- yes, surveys are conducted regularly
- yes, surveys are conducted now and then
- no, surveys are not conducted

Evaluation

35. Would you like to receive the results of the survey ?

The results will be send to you after the conference in Gdynia, Poland has taken place.

- yes
- no