

Chapter 14

VISITOR MOTIVATIONS IN ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

A regional context

Kim Lehman, Mark Wickham and Ian Fillis

■ ABSTRACT

Although research into arts and cultural production and consumption is increasing, there remains a lack of empirical knowledge about visitors' motivation to visit museums in regional locations. We utilise a visitor survey to assess the motivations for consuming cultural experiences at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG), a regional museum in Launceston, Tasmania. The results of this study both conformed to and deviated somewhat from extant research across the areas of 'cultural involvement' and 'motivation', which has important implications for marketing management and strategy development in regional contexts.

■ INTRODUCTION

The significant contributions that arts and cultural institutions such as museums make to the economic and social development of regional economies is now widely recognised by practitioners and policymakers alike.¹ This recognition has underpinned a drive by museum practitioners to better understand the bases for

museums' economic and social contributions to society, and the means by which they can be maximised.² As a result, museums have embraced a range of research programs to better understand the nature of their visitors, looking at, for example, the mix of locals versus tourists. Much of the information museums collect about their market segments is derived from visitor research.³ While such research has been conducted since the 1930s, many of the early studies undertaken were either not effective in eliciting visitors' motivations, or were simply implemented poorly.⁴ During the 1960s, museum visitor research changed its focus to the burgeoning marketing phenomenon, and in particular, the manner in which museums could be more effective if they conceptualised their visitors as 'consumers'.⁵ The resultant research was largely dependent on visitor surveys, which were viewed as useful tools for providing data for policy and strategy making; the marketing-led rise and increasing use of visitor studies can be seen as:

...an important step toward [museums] developing a client orientation in that it signals a shift from a functionalist, 'object-centered' ideology toward a humanist, 'people-centered' one.⁶

More recently, there has been growing interest concerning the psychographic profile of museum visitors (understanding the bases of their preferences, experiences, and satisfaction levels). For the greater part, this has allowed museums to be more aware of the nature, diversity and needs of their market segments, and to be more attuned to providing a quality cultural experience that evokes the authenticity desired by the modern visitor.⁷ For museums, understanding visitor motivations is critical to more sophisticated customer segmentation and the ability to influence visitation; as noted by Slater:⁸

Understanding motivations is important as it reveals the underlying reasons why visitors choose to participate in specific leisure activities.

With a sound understanding of what motivates potential visitors, arts and cultural organisations are better able to formulate and communicate their product offerings.⁹ This is certainly important for museums which now operate in an openly competitive environment for visitors and financial resources. Practitioner-led research has not yet examined the motivations of visitors to arts and cultural organisations in regional locations, which face a range of very different social and economic challenges.¹⁰ As Winkworth¹¹ notes, there is a lack of supporting government infrastructure in the regional Australian context that has led to a 'sustainability crisis facing museums...exacerbated by a lack of policy and equitable funding structures for museums and heritage collections'. The opportunity to attract alternative funding is also limited by a lack of sponsorship

opportunities, a constrained economic and physical resource base, and an inability to attract drawcard exhibitions due to relatively lower tourist numbers, geographic isolation etc.¹² Overall, the majority of research into museum visitor motivations has been conducted in metropolitan contexts (e.g. the Tate Modern in London, the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, the Louvre in Paris, and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington), and does little to assist museums in regional locations understand their potential and actual visitors. Given these challenges, and the paucity of research in this context generally, this chapter discusses an empirical examination of visitor motivations to an arts and cultural organisation conducted in a non-metropolitan location, namely, QVMAG in regional Tasmania. The study concentrated on on-site visitors, with the aim of capturing behaviour patterns linked to physical visits. This is an important consideration as QVMAG is a significant cultural institution for Launceston and the surrounding regions, serving multiple social purposes for the host population.

■ MUSEUM VISITOR MOTIVATIONS

Research into art and culture visitor motivations tends to focus on two key criteria: the visitors' level of involvement in the art and cultural sector, and the specific motivations driving visitation to museums. Both of these criteria serve as the basis for our survey of the motivations of visitors to a regional arts and cultural organisation.

■ VISITORS' LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

A visitor's 'level of involvement' refers to the relative importance of a given product or service as it relates to their needs, values and interests at a given point in time.¹³ As a result, a museum visitor's levels of involvement could be either stable and enduring in nature (a repeat visitor to museums), or transient and situational in nature (a casual visitor to museums). Stable and enduring involvement is manifest in an ongoing concern for a product class, independent of specific purchase intentions.¹⁴ Transient and situational involvement is manifest as a temporary perception of product importance based on the consumer's desire to obtain particular extrinsic benefits.¹⁵

■ SPECIFIC MOTIVATIONS DRIVING VISITATION TO MUSEUMS

Understanding specific motivations provides a means to assess how and why visitors to museums engage in their art and cultural consumption.¹⁶ In arts and cultural research, a number of approaches to motivation have been taken to better understand the cultural

consumer. For example, Hood's¹⁷ early research introduced the study of 'values', as opposed to simply considering demographics, and used frequency of visitation as a framework. While there appears to be a confusion between 'values' and 'motives', this study centred on the values which were found to be the bases for leisure-choice decision-making. Falk and Dierking¹⁸ found three main motivating factors for museum visitation: social recreation, education and reverence (that is, escapism from daily routine).

...non-metropolitan cultural institutions serve multiple social purposes within their host population, as well as in the surrounding regions. This was clearly the case for QVMAG and the Launceston region.

SURVEY METHOD

As noted in the introduction, our study took place at QVMAG. Originally opened in 1891, QVMAG is Australia's largest regional art gallery and museum, and is situated on two sites in the regional city of Launceston. One is a dedicated art gallery and the other houses the natural sciences and history collections in a former nineteenth century railway workshop. A survey approach was adopted in order to obtain insight from a comprehensive sample of QVMAG visitors, with the survey instrument administered on both of QVMAG's sites by trained volunteers and staff over 21 days in January 2016. In total, 2104 visitors returned responses to the survey.

FINDINGS

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The majority of the visitors surveyed in this study identified as female (61.8%), and reported having a university qualification (59.9%), and being older the average age in Australia (78.5% were aged above 35 years). Diverging from the findings of metropolitan museum visitor research somewhat, a minority of respondents reported above-average income: 45.9% reported a household income in excess of the average Tasmanian wage (A\$70,000). In terms of place of residence, this research found that the visitors to QVMAG were predominantly from the local region (36.4% reported living within 20 kilometres of the museum) or from interstate/overseas (55.8%). Table 1 presents an overview of the demographics of the QVMAG visitors surveyed.

Table 1. Visitor profiles.

Gender		
Female	Male	Other
61.8%	37.9%	0.3%

Age range						
18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75 +
8.7%	12.8%	16.8%	20.5%	19.1%	16.9%	5.2%

Gross household income per annum				
Under \$30,000	\$30,000 - \$49,999	\$50,000 - \$69,999	\$70,000 - \$99,999	\$100,00 and over
24.2%	12.3%	17.6%	28.1%	17.8%

Educational background					
Secondary	Senior Secondary	University degree	University postgraduate study	VET/Trade certificate	Other
9.9%	15.4%	31.5%	28.4%	10.7%	4.1%

Place of residence				
Launceston area	Southern region	North West and Western regions	Interstate	Overseas
36.4%	4.1%	3.7%	45.9%	9.9%

■ CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT

Consistent with previous surveys involving visitors to metropolitan museums, our survey results demonstrated that visitors to the regional QVMAG predominately comprised those already engaged with cultural matters. Data relating to the levels

of visitation firstly indicated that the majority of visitors (53.1%) reported visiting the museum a minimum of three times in a given calendar year; 85.6% when including those that visited at least once per calendar year. The survey indicated that only 7.2% of respondents visited a museum once a year (see Table 2).

Table 2. Visitor frequency.

	None	Once a year	1 or 2 times	3 to 5 times	6 or more times
In a typical year, approximately how many times do you visit a museum or art gallery?	7.2%	7.2%	32.5%	27.7%	25.4%

Secondly, the survey indicated that the majority of visitors were favourably predisposed to cultural activities and experiences with 66.7% reporting having ‘serious’ or ‘intense’ interest in cultural institutions. Interestingly, 30.1% of visitors indicated that they had ‘neutral’ or ‘no interest’ in museums and/or other cultural institutions (see Table 3).

Table 3. Level of interest in museums and other cultural institutions.

	No real interest	Neutral	Some interest	Serious interest	Very intense
How would you describe your interest in museums and other cultural institutions?	1.2%	28.9%	3.2%	49.9%	16.8%

The survey indicated that the majority of visitors to QVMAG rated museums’ roles in underpinning community well-being, curating local history and culture, and a place for education as either ‘important’ or ‘very important’ (88%, 94.4% and 95% respectively). While the proportion of visitors that did *not* perceive museums as important curators of local history and culture or as places for education were marginal (4.8% and 4.5% respectively), a proportion those surveyed (10.4%) did not perceive that QVMAG had an important role in improving community well-being (see Table 4).

Table 4. Attitudes towards museums and galleries in general

	Not important	Neutral	Slightly important	Important	Very important
Museums and art galleries should add to a community's well-being	0.5%	9.9%	1.6%	33.1%	54.9%
Museums and art galleries should be a place to see local history and culture	0.1%	4.7%	0.8%	28.6%	65.8%
Museums and art galleries should be of educational value to the community	0.3%	4.2%	0.5%	27.3%	67.7%

■ **MOTIVATION**

The survey sought information linking motivation variables to the individual's visitation to the QVMAG by focusing on the visitors' perceptions of 'well-being', 'learning', and 'family and social interaction'.

■ **WELL-BEING**

The majority of visitors surveyed agreed that QVMAG provided a place to have 'a stimulating cultural experience' (80%), a 'pleasant environment to spend some quiet time alone' (68.2%), and to a lesser extent, a 'place to invigorate creativity' (54.7%), and a 'place to relax and relieve stress' (53%). Somewhat inconsistent with previous research relating to metropolitan museums, however, the majority of visitors to QVMAG (63.9%) were either 'neutral' or 'disagreed' with the statement that museum helped them 'escape the hustle and bustle of their daily activities' (see Figure 1 below).

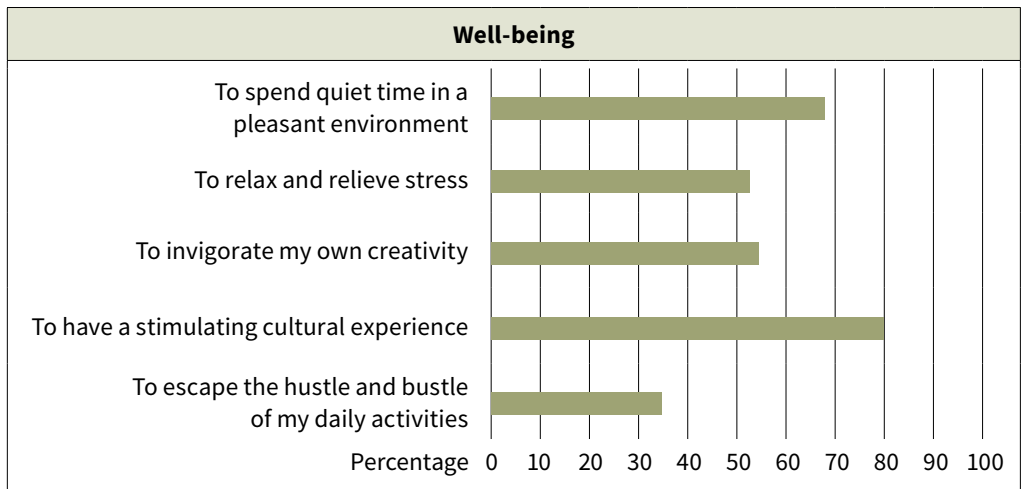


Figure 1. Visitors motivated by well-being.

LEARNING

This research indicated that the majority of visitors to QVMAG agreed that the museum provided ‘a place to discover things I do not know’ (85.9%), ‘a place to learn about art, history or science’ (84.8%), ‘a place to expand my interests in a particular area’ (62.9%), and ‘a place to seek personal fulfilment’ (63.5%). Interestingly, the data indicated that only 37.4% of the visitors surveyed were motivated to visit the regional museum in order to do something that they have never done before (see Figure 2).

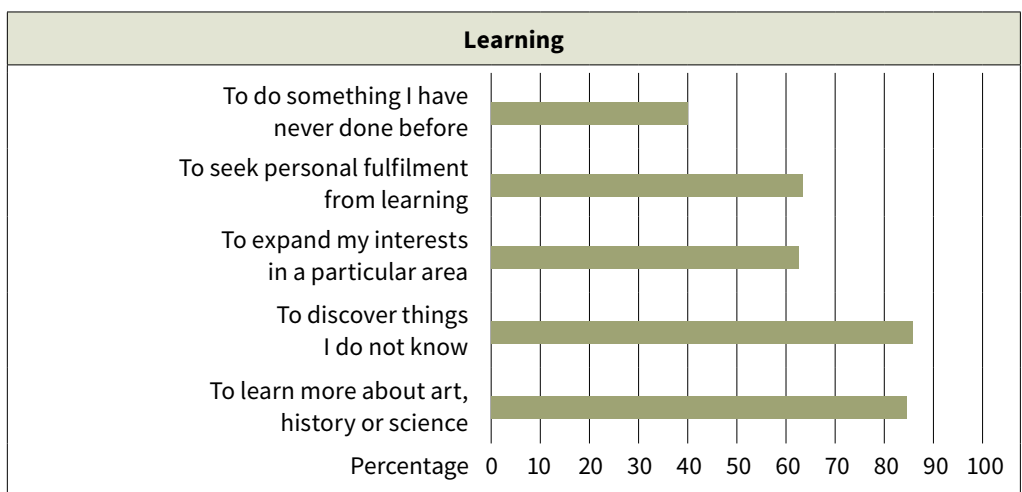


Figure 2. Visitors motivated by learning.

FAMILY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

This survey indicated that the only statement which gained a majority positive response was the measure relating to ‘spending quality time with my family or children’ (55.7%). All of the other measures failed to achieve a majority of positive responses with regard to regional museums’ role in providing a place for family and social interaction (see Figure 3).

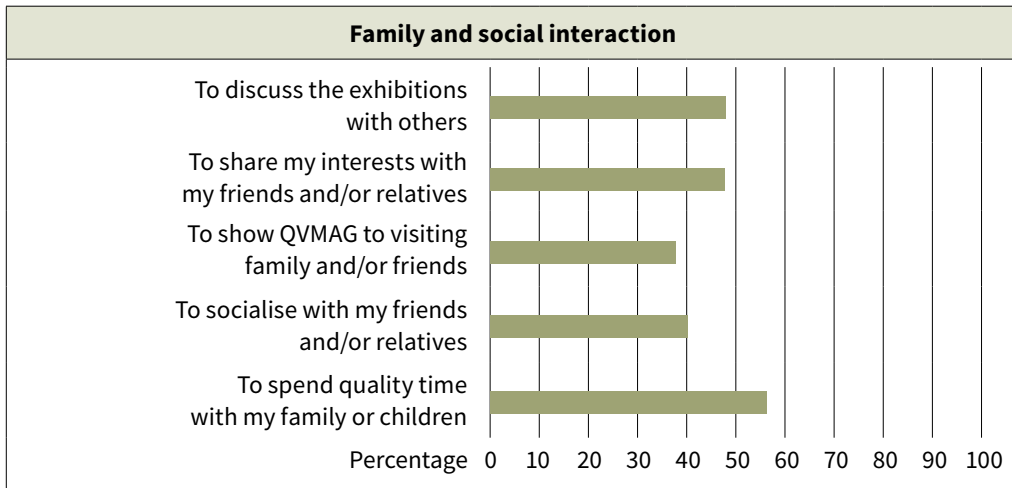


Figure 3. Visitors motivated by family and social interaction.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of our survey both conformed to, and deviated somewhat from, previous research within arts and cultural organisations in relation to demographic characteristics, ‘cultural involvement’ and ‘motivation’ of visitors to QVMAG. In terms of demographic characteristics, the profile of the visitors to QVMAG were similarly older, predominantly female and more highly educated than average, which aligns closely with similar surveys focused on museums in metropolitan locations. Also consistent with previous surveys, the majority of visitors to QVMAG (63.6%) reported being ‘tourists’ to the region (53.7% domestic and 9.9% international). Diverging from the previous surveys, the majority of visitors in our study reported earning less than the national average – which is consistent with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)¹⁹ reports that have consistently demonstrated lower annual earnings by employees in regional locations. This divergence has implications for the pricing and product/service offerings of museums in regional locations, in that they are economically constrained by the

Photo courtesy of Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery



Figure 4. The Royal Park campus of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

prices they can charge and the quality and range of products and exhibitions that they are able to offer. Interestingly, while the data indicated that QVMAG was able to attract visitors from interstate and international locations, the visitation rate by domestic Tasmanian residents from outside a 20-kilometre radius was less than 8%, which is a significantly different proportion than those reported in metropolitan studies. The implication for QVMAG (and other museums in regional locations) is that its current products and services (or the marketing of them) do not present an attractive enough value proposition to motivate domestic tourists to undertake travel to the regional location on its own. It may be that museums in regional locations need to enter into cooperative arrangements with a range of businesses and services to create a visitor experience that domestic visitors will find holistically attractive.

In terms of involvement in cultural experiences evident in our survey, the majority of visitors reported being highly culturally involved and being favourably predisposed to cultural experiences as visitors to museums in metropolitan locations. While it is not surprising that museums attract cultural consumers, attracting the non-visitor – perhaps those not particularly ‘interested’ in art and



Photo courtesy of Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery

Figure 5. The Inveresk campus of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

culture – has been an issue for both practitioners and policymakers for some time. In our survey, a significant proportion of visitors (30%) reported having ‘neutral’ or ‘no interest’ in museums and/or other cultural institutions. Taken together, this presents two important marketing issues for museums in regional locations; firstly, there is a need to define a range of new products and services to attract ‘new’ visitors to museums in regional locations.²⁰ Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, a significant number of visitors in regional locations may not belong to what would be considered ‘traditional’ museum target market segments. This raises important marketing research imperatives to understand the market segments of visitors to museums in regional locations in finer detail.

On the whole, the survey findings demonstrated that there was support for the notion that QVMAG, and its range of products and services, was linked to societal contributions in terms of community well-being, history and culture, or education. However, ‘community well-being’ was perceived by the visitors surveyed as the least important of the three listed roles (see Table 4). It seems that the potential role museums can play in this regard is undervalued by visitors in the regional context. Previous research has shown how crucial the museum sector can be in the broad area

of health and well-being, and it may be that future marketing strategies will need to communicate the potential role museums can play in building community well-being in order to improve this level of perception.

In terms of the three groups of motivation factors (well-being, learning, and family and social interaction), a majority of visitors to QVMAG indicated a strong belief in the role that museums generally play in improving individual well-being, in terms of providing 'a stimulating cultural experience', a 'place to invigorate creativity' and a 'place to relax and relieve stress'. While these findings are consistent with previous surveys relating to museums in metropolitan locations, visitors to QVMAG did not perceive the role of 'helping visitors escape the hustle and bustle' as particularly important. We believe that this is likely affected by the location of the museum being outside of capital city infrastructure and the day-to-day pressures associated with it. While 'hustle and bustle' can be a relative term, perhaps the role of a museum as a place of sanctuary is simply not relevant in non-metropolitan locations where the pace of life is relatively slower. Similarly, visitors to QVMAG did not perceive the museum as a place for socialisation, or a place of meeting; it is likely that other specialist providers (cafes, parks etc.) fulfil this role in regional locations. This implies that museums in regional locations need to consider a range of augmented roles to position themselves as options for social interaction (opening museum cafes, guided and virtual tours, seminar series etc.). An interesting finding was in relation to QVMAG visitors wanting to spend 'a quiet time in a pleasant environment'; with 68.2% of visitors reporting this an important motivator, it would seem pertinent for museums in regional locations to include related cues to this in their marketing strategies.

With regards to 'learning', the most significant motivators for the QVMAG visitors were to 'discover things I do not know' and 'learn more about art, history or science'. While visitors were predominately 'repeat consumers' of cultural experiences, they remained interested in broadening their artistic and cultural knowledge base. Perhaps the most interesting point to be raised in this study was the lack of any significant relationship between 'social and family interactions' and motivations to visit. Socialising with friends and relatives, and 'showing' the museum to visiting friends and relatives was not reported as important by the visitors we surveyed. The factor 'To share my interests with my friends and/or relatives', however, was considered as important. We feel that this could relate to the 'learning' group of factors above, where the visitor is seeking to share their education experience with others. More significantly, the factor 'To spend quality time with my family or children' had just over half of visitors indicating it was an important motivator for visitation. Again, there are potential links to the education role of the museums, as well as to the importance of the concept of a 'cultural

experience'. Clearly, non-metropolitan cultural institutions serve multiple social purposes within their host population, as well as in the surrounding regions. This was clearly the case for QVMAG and the Launceston region. Given the findings of our survey, we recommend that additional studies be undertaken within arts and cultural organisation in other regional locations to account for non-metropolitan differences that may play a role in motivating visitors, which could then provide a finer-grained causal analysis between visitor motivations and actual consumer behaviour within a regional context.

■ **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to acknowledge the assistance, both financially and administratively, of QVMAG, Launceston, Tasmania. We also thank the staff and volunteers who administered the survey.