

**"Beyond The Survey:
Combining Evaluation Methods With Ethnography" / Dr. Anat Hecht**

Abstract

The twentieth century has witnessed an exceptional 'boom' in museum growth, in terms of both physical expansion and ideological progression, affecting the museum's diverse role, image and popularity. According to the Museum Association there are currently ~ 3,000 registered museums in the UK, with an estimated average of at least 80 million visitors per annum. This alone signifies the importance of museum consumption as a contemporary cultural phenomenon.

The core objective of the presented study has been to explore this phenomenon and produce a detailed, analytical ethnographic account of museum consumption, from the diverse perspectives of both museum producers and, especially, museum consumers. Advocating an interdisciplinary approach the study combined a variety of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods together with ethnography. These complementary methods included "fly-on-the-wall", "space syntax" and participant observations, alongside visitor surveys, monthly leisure diaries, and a series of semi-structured interviews, life histories and informal conversations, all of which were conducted over an extended period of on-going contact.

Applying such a broad methodology to the studied cultural-contexts of this research, namely: the museum environment (comparing different museums with the core field site of *Lifetimes*, Croydon's innovative local history museum); the school environment (comparing different school visits); and the home (comparing different households) - enabled a much broader exploration of contemporary museum culture.

The presented paper highlights this approach, with the aim of demonstrating how a combination of complementary evaluation methods and ethnography can provide 'layers' of data, which contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of museum culture and museum audiences. The underlying message is one of inclusion, integration and collaboration.

As mentioned above, the paper is part of a broader, PhD study of contemporary museum consumption and its role within present-day practices of leisure, education and localism. The thesis, titled – *"Past, Place & People: An Ethnography of Museum Consumption"* proposes a much-expanded view of local history museums as a figurative meeting point of – *Museum, Past, Place and People*. The overall study therefore explored people's perception, discourse, practice and experience of museum culture, as well as history, locality, community, identity and belonging.

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