



An understanding of the visitor experience at the Egyptian and Te Papa Museums: The Other Roles of Traditional and Modern Museums

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Abstract

This study constitutes a first trial to examine domestic and international visitors' experiences at two different museums: the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt, a long established traditional museum, and Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand, one of the world's most modern national museums. The study presents a summary of key findings as well as the implications of those findings. The findings highlight the fact that the Egyptian and Te Papa Museums have much in common. The similar roles of both museums sabotage the reductionist trap of binary oppositions and melting the iron grid of either traditional passive learning experience and presentation of original artefacts or fun learning experiences. Both museums are important sites for: learning; social interactions; remembering historical and personal events; connecting visitors with the familiar and reinforcing their pre-existing knowledge; and settings for aesthetic, recreational and restful experiences. These insights can enable museum practitioners to better understand their visitors and the wider roles modern and traditional museums may play in visitors' experiences as well as to rethink the mission and goals of these types of institutions.

Keywords: Te Papa; Egyptian Museum; traditional; modern; visitor experiences; international visitors; domestic visitors.

Introduction

This study constitutes a first trial to examine domestic and international visitors' experiences at two different museums: the Egyptian Museum in Egypt, a long established traditional museum, and Te Papa Museum in New Zealand, one of the world's most modern national museums. It is also through visitors' experiences at both museums that other functions of traditional and modern museums emerge. This is a central, yet understudied issue in the expanding literature on roles of traditional and modern museums in relation to visitors' experiences. If we know the answers to the questions of what types of experiences different visitors prefer and find most satisfying, we will gain insights into the different functions of each type of museum. The research objectives and research questions in which the current study is based derive primarily from this argument, and are described in the following section.

This research is structured around the distinctions and similarities between domestic and international visitors' experiences at each site. A starting point for the consideration of the visitors' experiences lies with the topic of the visitor-museum relationship. The recognition of this



relationship has become increasingly important as museums endeavour to appeal, educate, entertain and offer a broad variety of presentations to equate to a valuable experience for visitors (Packer & Bond, 2012; Goulding, 2000). Different types of visitors have different motives, experiences and perceptions of particular museums around the world. The paradigm shift of museums in the 1970s towards visitors implies that museums need to pay greater attention to the needs of visitors who demand more from the experience. This demand has also been influenced by competition from other alternative forms of visitor experiences available (Foley & McPherson, 2000). In view of this, the period since the late 1980s has witnessed a blossoming of research focusing on visitors' motives and experiences at different museums in North America, Europe, Australasia, South America and Asia (Chen, 2007; Goulding, 2000; Packer, 2004; Noordegraaf, 2004; Davidson & Sibley, 2011).

Yet, there is very little understanding of the visitor's goals, interests, expectations and experiences at the Egyptian and Te Papa museums: one a long established traditional museum and the other one of the world's most modern national museums. Quantitative research (through statistical sampling) has been the backbone of the Egyptian and Te Papa Museums' audience surveys but they do not explain the visit experience of different visitors and the role of traditional and modern museums in relation to visitors' experiences (Davidson & Sibley, 2011; The Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, 2014). For example, Dr. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), admits that although many scientific studies, restoration and renovation of the existing museums have been carried out, "[w]e still lack academic studies that examine tourists' experiences to our museums and heritage sites" (Shahine, 2004: 22). Davidson and Sibley also (2011:189) also emphasized that further qualitative studies "focusing on various groups among Te Papa's audience" would help to better understand the motives and experiences that underlie their visitation and the different roles of the museum to different visitor types. In this context, I undertook a qualitative study (beyond broad, quantitative analyses) of international and domestic visitation to both sites.

Research objectives and research questions

Falk and Dierking (1992) conceptualized the museum visit in what they termed "The Interactive Experience Model," where the museum visit involves three contexts: the personal context, socio-cultural context, and the physical context. Their model defines the theoretical orientation of the current study and outlines research objectives to be pursued. Accordingly, the objective behind the research is to explore the types of experiences that emerged as central forces in the visitor experience across both museums; and subsequently suggestions are made in relation to the museums' varied functions relating to the visitors' personal and memorable experiences, recreational/leisure experiences, sociable experience, and aesthetic experiences. The key research question addressed is:

What are the key beneficial experiences of visitors and their values and personal thoughts attained in the Egyptian and Te Papa Museums?

What is a Traditional and Modern Museum?

What is a traditional museum? This question has been asked by a surprisingly wide range of people including members of the museum profession itself, museum theorists, heritage academics and art historians (Bennett, 1995; Weil, 2004; Witcomb, 2003). The understanding of what constitutes a traditional museum has been described largely in functional terms. The purposes of traditional museums have been perceived as tangible and concrete, equivalent to the



essence of the “material evidence” which in the past has been the focal point of museums (Weil, 1995: 47). In traditional museums, with the Egyptian Museum being a good example, artefacts were revered for their originality; provenance, for example, was a key characteristic of a legitimate museum artefact (Bennett, 1995). Traditional museums also have long been associated with visitor’s learning experience. They have positioned themselves in the market at the “serious education” rather than the “fun entertainment” end of the continuum and “departures from this tradition are disparaged” (Packer, 2004: 58). Indeed, notions of scholarship and seriousness have been also at the heart of the traditional museum brand and are a fundamental measure of its distinctiveness (Goulding, 2000).

Yet, modern museums, with Te Papa being a prominent example, are very different from museums of the past; the learning/educational experience and the role of the artefacts are increasingly blurred in the modern museum. Compared to the function of the traditional museum, the modern museum does more than just preserving, storing and displaying artefacts. The modern museum embraces creativity elements and ideas such as commercialization, communication and technology. Modern trends in museology have broadened the range of subject matter and introduced many interactive exhibits, which give the visitor the opportunity to make choices and engage in activities that will ensure the experience varies from person to person. Perhaps more importantly, modern museums have adopted an infotainment or edutainment mission to reach out to young audiences and families with young children and diversify the population of museum-goers (Black, 2005). The role of the modern museum is currently embroiled in a heated debate between those who claim that museums need to change by incorporating infotainment /edutainment experiences and those who defend traditional museum presentations and offerings (Abdelfattah, 2012; Witcomb, 2003). Driving this is uncertainty about how to define the role of the modern museum. Notions of leisure, infotainment, interactivity and hands-on experiences have been the components which lie at the root of all definitions of the modern museum (Davidson & Sibley, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2004).

However the nature of learning/educational experiences and visual and sensory experiences is not sufficient to explain all the differences in functions of traditional and modern museums. In seeking to demonstrate the other roles of traditional and modern museums, one needs to look beyond their undeniable educational value and interactive and fun learning experience, to a range of other visitors’ experiences. If we know what kind of experiences visitors take away from the museum, we will know something about the different roles of traditional and modern museums.

Theoretical background

This section drives primarily from the theoretical contributions of Falk and Dierking (1992, 2004). At a crucial stage of this research project’s formulation, the arguments of these academics resulted in a revaluation of the role of today’s traditional and modern museums. My interpretive investigation of their works did not produce narrow definitions or meanings of today’s modern and traditional museums such as their equation with education, learning, or infotainment, the achievement of cognitive and edutainment goals as postulated by other scholars (i.e. Leonie & Johnston, 2007; Packer, 2004, 2008; Roberts, 1997).

In this way, the perspective that shaped this study was that the roles of today’s traditional and modern museums are not just about education, preservations of valuable collections, presentation of artefacts and fun learning experiences. Traditional and modern museums can also offer recreational/leisure experiences, sociable experience, entertainment experience, personal and memorable experiences and aesthetic experiences. As the function of museums has changed



over recent years from focusing on objects to a focus on the visitors' experiences of other museum presentations and offerings, a deeper, more holistic discussion of visitors' experiences is important.

Review of visitors' experiences: The personal, social and physical contexts

A good starting point for such a review is Falk and Dierking's (1992, 2004) *The Museum Experience* which draws on a number of studies undertaken in the US, in order to develop an understanding of the way the visitor uses museums. They conceptualized the museum visit in what they termed *The Interactive Model*, where visitors' experience and learning are an interaction between three major contexts, the personal, the social and physical. In addition to visitor motives, such as those discussed above, the personal context includes the visitor's prior knowledge, interests, beliefs and previous experience. Social context refers to interactions between the visitor and others at the museum during the visit, including companions, museum and cafe staff, security guards, and other visitors. The physical context is embodied in the museum architecture, commercial facilities, exhibits, labels, objects, interactive multimedia, and the physical setting in which they are displayed. However, the physical context involves more than just museum exhibits. In ranking the museum experience, Abdelfattah (2012), Abdelfattah, Fisher & Fountain (2017) confirm Falk and Dierking's (1992:90) suggestion that "the average visitor deems the quality of the gift shop and food service to be as important, if not more important, as the quality of artefacts or exhibition design." This also echoes Kent's (2009) argument that the gift shop was an essential part of the museum experience, being both a recreational site and a place which supported informal learning through the availability of educational commodities. Similarly, in her examination of the various commercial facilities at the Louvre Museum, McTavish (1998) found that the consumer area occupied a very significant location which blurred the boundaries between visitor's experience of the artefacts and commercial facilities.

Dierking (2005), Falk and Dierking (1992, 2016) and Moscardo (1992, 1996) stressed the fact that the social context of the museum visit did not exist in isolation but was also strongly intertwined with the physical context. The interplay of the social and physical contexts creates social learning experiences. Much of the social behaviour that goes on in museums is focused on discussing and sharing information (social context) about the content of the museum (the physical context). Most museum visitors learn as much from their social group as they do from the exhibitions and programs (Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri, 2002). This socio-cultural mediation, either direct or indirect, plays a critical role in personalizing the museum experience for visitors and facilitating their efforts to learn (Moscardo, 1992). From observational studies, Silverman (1995) notes that the nature and focus of museum visits are changed by the companions during the visit. She proposes that the leisure experiences, social aspects and perceived benefits of the museum visit will impact the meanings visitors make from the visit. The current study looks at these connections in more detail.

Since the physical context of the museum is a socio-cultural one, all visitors, even those choosing to visit alone, find themselves quickly immersed in the socio-cultural milieu of other visitors and museum staff (Dierking, 2005). For example, Abdelfattah (2012) and Packer (2004) found in their studies that a number of visitors enjoyed learning about objects (the physical context) through their interactions with museum staff (social context). This attests to Falk and Dierking's (2016) view that the physical and social contexts can be seen to operate when visitors are thrilled when they encounter a knowledgeable museum staff member with whom they can share, interact and ask questions about the content of the exhibitions. Thus, one may notice that this type of interaction between the social and physical did not produce a narrow definition of the role of the



museum such as its equation with infotainment or learning; the achievement of purely cognitive goals. The museum can also be a site that offers visitors a rich social educational experience where learning of the exhibitions may be an outcome.

The scholarly discussion of the interplay of the social and physical contexts continues to shed light on our understanding of the other roles of traditional and modern museums. As Falk and Dierking (1992), MacDonald & Alsford (1995) and McTavish (1998) argue, not all of the social interaction in museums is content-focused. According to Falk and Dierking (2016), some of it involves spending time in the museum restaurant, bonding between individuals or, for example, within families, and behaviour management such as checking to see if the children are hungry or need to use the toilets. Besides, for some visitors, museums have become safe venues for “sociability, dating, networking and meeting friends” (Kotler & Kotler, 1998:43). This type of visitors considers the museums as experiential sites that offered social and pastime experiences. Falk (2009:192) calls this type of museum visitors “Facilitating Socializers” who seek a purely social experience which is devoid of cognitive engagement (for example, the museum is a site to have fun and joy with others, take out of town guests, or bring the children to play in the museum’s garden). In other words, their interaction with the physical context of the museum was “to gain access to what the museum affords socially rather than what it offers intellectually” (Falk, 2009:193).

Here also, a parallel exists between this type of museum visitors and McIntosh, Smith & Ingram’s (2000) typology of family fun lovers who visit a key attraction in the destination to spend a nice day out and to have fun with family or friends. What is also crucial to note here is that this type of museum visitor may match Moscardo’s (1992, 1999) non-mindful visitors who tend to have little interest in the content, but whose motivations are more linked to entertainment or socialization and therefore have little understanding or appreciation of the exhibitions. In this regard, once again one may notice that some museums push beyond the typical roles of infotainment/edutainment experiences, preservation, and displaying artefacts and temporary exhibits by engaging a segment of museum visitors in recreation and pastime experiences - experiences not usually associated with the public roles of museums (Davidson & Sibley, 2011).

Leisure and learning context

With regard to the aspect of interactive experience, Lumley’s (1988) extensive review of museums’ presentations argued that many museums offer a more interactive way of learning with videos, games as well as other hands-on exhibits which offer the visitor more variety in learning but also more choice. This in turn has meant that many visitors can learn more informally and at their own leisure while concurrently they can interchange their position of learning from being passive receptors to active learners. Several scholars have stressed the fact that the relationship between learning and leisure in museums is complex. For example, Moscardo (1992) and Packer (2004) argue that it would seem that museum visitors often search for enjoyable but purposeless mental stimulation, whereas mindful learning is effort demanding and purposeful. Further, arguments that people in our fast-paced, high-tech society are being overwhelmed by information, knowledge and technologies suggest that some people may retreat and pursue relief from information overload in leisure experiences that are information free (Falk & Sheppard, 2006; Packer, 2004). Still there is evidence that people have a powerful and natural drive to learn, that learning can be pleasurable, rewarding and provide the mental stimulation needed for intellectual growth and emotional well-being, that inherently stimulated learning may take place relatively



unconsciously, without effort and without much conscious control and can lead to implicit knowledge (Dierking, 2005).

Packer (2004, 2008) maintains that one facet of the relationship between learning and leisure that is particularly challenging is the fluidity of the boundary between entertainment and education. From the perspective of studies of informal learning and interpretation, entertainment is a fundamental part of the museum learning experience (Black, 2005; Dierking, 2005; Moscardo, 1992; Packer, 2004, 2008). The term entertainment often refers to the notions of public events or shows and distractions or leisure activities for visitors. However, the term is also employed to refer to those components of a museum experience that visitors consider pleasurable or amusing (Beer, 1994; Packer, 2004, 2008; Roberts, 1997). In the field of modern museology, considerable debates have taken place concerning the conflict between entertainment and learning (MacDonald & Alford, 1995; McManus, 1989; Packer, 2004). Museums like Te Papa that are more progressive in developing edutainment exhibits, emphasizing fun and entertainment experience, have been denounced as Disney-style amusement parks or “vulgar sideshows”, while those which focus on learning and educational experiences have been denounced as “elitist enclaves” (Dalrymple, 1999; Griffiths, 2002:xxiv). Along the same lines, it is important to note that a visitor attending a museum, heritage site, or a theme park buys an experience, which may incorporate both being informed and being entertained (Foley & McPherson, 2000; Noordegraaf, 2004). In fact, it is vital to keep a balance of educational and entertaining elements within an exhibition and across a whole museum (Packer, 2008).

While museum staff and academics may have different views than visitors about the purpose of museums, visitors do not seem to experience conflict between learning and entertainment in their visiting motives. Abdelfattah (2012), Abdelfattah, Fisher & Fountain, (2017), MacDonald & Alford (1995) and Packer (2004, 2008) suggest that while museum staff often perceive the museum as a place for scholarship and rich learning experiences, their visitors view the museum more as a site of entertainment and leisure. Dierking also (2005) maintains that fun can be a powerful aide to learning. Most museum visitors see “no apparent conflict between fun and learning” (Black, 2005; Falk & Dierking, 2000:73; Foley & McPherson, 2000; Packer, 2004). The majority of visitors do not distinguish between the value of entertainment and the value of acquiring knowledge, and both are effective motivations in learning (Packer, 2008). This contrast suggests that current understanding of museum visitor experiences is too limited.

Methodology

The research design was grounded in the context of the museum visit and consisted of the following combination of qualitative tools: a case study approach, documentary analysis and archival records, semi-structured interviews (face to face) and unobtrusive observation (Patton, 2002). This integrated qualitative methods approach explores further possibilities in the research setting. With semi-structured interviews, for example, the researchers can employ certain specific questions, but be free to probe beyond these if he/she sees fit. Also with observations, the researcher can observe museum visitors' behaviors and can observe the sequence of actions that precede and follow an incident or behaviour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Observation of behaviour can lead to deeper understandings than interviews alone, because it provides knowledge of the context in which events take place, and may enable the researcher to view things that participants themselves are not aware of, or that they are unwilling to discuss. A case study approach was adopted to provide detailed insights into the how, what and why of visitors' experiences (Patton, 2002). Choosing a limited number of sites was not only cost-effective but also provided limits to the research context by concentrating on a particular site, population,



phenomenon and characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Meanwhile, face to face semi-structured interviews were used since they are very effective in eliciting narrative and let the researchers adapt to the interviewees, probe for answers, clarify statements, and explore new ideas and views (Decrop, 1999).

An initial set of interviews and site visits were conducted over all the daytime hours during which the museums were open. Interviews at the Egyptian Museum were carried out during the months of May, June, July and August 2009. Interviews at Te Papa took place during the months of September, October and November 2008, and the months of November 2009 and January 2010. To improve the validity of the findings, a second set of interviews and site visits was undertaken during the spring and summer of 2016. The same ideas were revealed in both sets of interviews/site visits, indicating continuity of visitor motives and experiences at the two museums. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Selection of participants was limited to adult visitors aged 18 years or over. The researcher excluded visitors who were not fluent in either English or Arabic, as these were the two languages in which the interviewer was fluent.

A total of 172 visitors were interviewed on the completion of their visit to both sites. Of the 172 interviews there were 70 visitors at the Egyptian Museum (50 international respondents and 20 Egyptian respondents) and 102 visitors at Te Papa (52 New Zealand respondents and 50 international respondents). The majority of the interviews at both museums (156 interviews) were conducted one-to-one with single visitors, although 16 interviews were conducted with couples, family groups and friends/relatives according to the participants' preferences.

All interviews, field notes, observational data and documents were analyzed and categorizations were made with the support of the QSR NVivo software package for Social Sciences (Version 8.0) which was developed to assist in the analysis of qualitative research data. The software package 'QSR NVivo helps with the collection of data, content analysis and results of a project and contains various "nodes" and "documents" (Richard, 1999). Utilizing NVivo programme helped me greatly in organizing, analyzing and connecting the documents that represented the interviews, observations, field notes and existing documents made during this study. Once the documents were imported into the programme, I read and re-read them and began to make trees of the nodes that matched up, such as the different issues covered in interview questions or observational data (i.e. expectations and experiences and different visitors' behaviors). One example is when considering the experiences of participants at the museum, the relevant text from all interviews was coded as "experiences" and a coding report was typed of this node. The themes of "learning more about the objects" and "the desire to link the artefacts with their pre-existing knowledge and experiences" were identified from this node coding report and thus main ideas were formulated for a discussion in the research of the museum as a place to connect with the familiar and evoking previous knowledge. Also, as I read more of these documents, I refined some nodes and created new ones and gradually started to develop an understanding of different interests and experiences at the site; a picture of the study as a whole begun to emerge. At this point I achieved unity by making connections across the full body of data and with relevant literature; a process that is mirrored in the structure of the existing study.

Triangulation is one of the primary and commonly used methods to address credibility (Patton, 2002). Triangulation is a significant technique in the interpretation process as data from different methods and different stages of the research and from the different respondents in the study can be systematically compared. Triangulation was accomplished by using different methods to answer our research questions. For example, observational data was triangulated with interview responses and field notes which allowed me to move beyond a single view of the museum



experience. This can lessen the risk of the data being the result of a single technique of collection and therefore enhance interpretation. In the present study, the triangulation of the data was useful to offer additional explanations for visitors' responses and behaviour patterns when data from one method regarding a research objective did not provide enough detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Although the aim of the research presented here was to gain qualitative understanding of visitors' museum experiences, it is hoped that the research will inform and guide the development of a subsequent quantitative phase to substantiate the present research findings. As such, the study should be considered in the context of a two staged approach to data collection. Firstly, semi structured in-depth interviews based on qualitative principles are used to gain insight and capture salient dimensions in visitor's experience. Secondly, these dimensions can be used to derive categories that form opinion measures that can be tested on a larger sample to validate findings. In this way, the insights obtained from qualitative approaches can be combined with the generality that quantitative methods provide. The complementary strategy-combining the strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches-has been advocated or similarly applied in other studies of visitor experiences at heritage sites (i.e. Moscardo, 1992; Moussouri, 2003; Packer 2004, 2008).

Also, while every effort was made to interview a wide range of visitors, this was potentially limited by a number of factors. Time constraints, language and social and cultural barriers hindered the participation of other types of visitors. For example, the few Arab Gulf families who were visiting the Egyptian Museum during my fieldwork declined to be interviewed since they had limited time and did not see all the exhibitions. Besides, three female Arab Gulf tourists (two from Saudi Arabia and one from Kuwait) were approached for interviews but they declined since they were not escorted by girlfriends or male family members. Here the researcher's gender impeded the exploration of the motives and experiences of these visitors. Also, the time constraints of tour itineraries at both sites limited the opportunity for tour group members to participate in the interview and reflect on their experiences. Finally, language barrier also hindered the exploration of the experiences of a substantial portion of Asian visitors at both sites. Thus future research may be designated to explore the expectations and experiences of a large sample of Arab and Asian visitors, particularly Chinese visitors at Te Papa and Japanese visitors at the Egyptian Museum.

Study's Findings

International and domestic visitors' experiences at the Egyptian Museum

International visitors dominated the profile at the Egyptian Museum. The majority of international visitors came from Western countries such as United Kingdom, Italy, France and Germany. This data confirms that the museum is an attraction that has strong international demand (The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, 2016). With regard to domestic visitors, the majority of them came from the two largest governorates in Egypt: Cairo and Giza. International and domestic visitors experienced the museum's presentations and offerings in different ways according to their previous experiences, knowledge and interests.

All international visitors were interested in learning more about specific artefacts and statues they were already familiar with. Numerous responses suggested these interests, framed as: "I love to learn more about ..." "I wanted to expand my knowledge about ..." "Since I'm familiar with the Mummy Returns movie, I wanted to know more about them or see the actual ones up close and personal" and "I want to see and learn something about the statues I've seen on TV." This reveals the significance of the inter-connectedness of personal context for learning in museums and



supports Black (2005), Falk and Dierking (1992, 2000) and Moscardo's (1992,1999) arguments that learning is a more likely outcome of a museum visit when the exhibitions stimulate knowledge or experience with which the visitor is already familiar.

The setting characteristics of the museum were remarkably significant to the international participants. Many participants offered positive comments about the museum environment and its ambience:

It's a magical place. It has that musty old smell that makes you feel like you can almost taste the ancient history. It's not like the usual modern museum that is toddler buggy friendly . . . They [Egyptian curators] don't hide all the objects behind glass cabinets, many objects out in the open so that you can get up close and experience a piece of history

The physical presence and "close proximity" of the artefacts was also an integral part of the international visitors' experiences:

The close proximity of the objects bring the objects and their history more to life.....When I saw the statue of Akhenaton I felt like I'm seeing the real Pharaoh in front of me.

Analysis of interview data also found that familiar artefacts, such as the Greco-Roman collections, King Tutankhamen, the replica of the Rosetta Stone and Egyptian obelisks invoked visitors to remember historical events:

I was somewhat surprised it [the replica of the Rosetta Stone] was much larger and thicker than I thought but it was my best object because it reminded me of what I read in history books about Champollion and Napoleon. It is part of our French history.

We came here today to see the mummy of Ramses [II] and visit the Roman section. Last year we saw the Obelisk of Ramses [II] in Rome. There are many Egyptian obelisks in Italy, especially in Rome. I remember reading that the Roman emperors used to bring them to Rome as a symbol of their power. Some emperors like Augustus used the obelisks for their own mansions

For many international visitors, the museum also became a place of aesthetic experience. They came to the museum armed with previous knowledge about the art and craftsmanship of King Tutankhamen's treasures. One participant voiced the views of a significant majority of international visitors:

Over the years I've followed the documentaries on King Tut that explained and showed his skill and craftsmanship. Most of all I remember his famous mask. Yeah, it was amazingly carved. I love the simplicity of the design, very geometric, with it's cobra on the forehead and the falcon on the shoulders.

I learned a lot about King Tut and the treasures of Egypt in school. The thing I remember most about him was the stool and the mask. They're crafty and colorful. I remember reading that he used glass and stones to create the mask.



Here, the physical context does not exist in isolation but is intertwined with the personal context. It is the rootedness of the museum's objects in the Western culture that made them so distinctive to international visitors. The international visitor's pre-existing knowledge or familiarity with the Pharaonic objects (personal context) affected the quality of the museum visit.

Finally, the international participants' experiences of the actual objects—the physical context—was also mediated by this expanded notion of social context. Their responses indicated that some participants enjoyed learning about particular objects through their engagement in conversations with museum guides: "... her explanations [the guide] was enriching in learning more about his [the young King Akhenaton] life and thoughts. She kept telling us different things and I think talking to her was a great learning experience." Also, in the interviews, most participants did not report having engaged in interaction with friends, family members or other visitors, however observations made it clear that this interaction was an important part of the museum visit. For example, there were particular areas that attracted groups of visitors and seemed to provoke a few short conversations and interactions. For example, visitors stopped and commented near King Tutankhamen's gold portrait mask, the chariots, his sandals and his two coffins, and did the same near the identified mummy cases of Ramses V, Tuthmosis III and Hatshepsut.

Generally, domestic visitors tended to use the museum differently and had different expectations and experiences. The international admiration of the museum's antiquities had only very weak echoes among domestic visitors. Unlike international visitors, the majority of domestic visitors were not interested in the museum's ancient relics, and the exhibition environment was low on their list of destinations:

I wouldn't say we come to view the objects. I come may be once every month to have the children play around in front of the coffee shop and we have a long break from them to get something to drink and chat.

The question one may ask is: what was the cause of this attitude where those domestic visitors did not look forward to interact with the objects and statues inside the building? The majority of domestic visitors did not express a view on their reactions to the Pharaonic relics and the exhibition environment. However, little information was gleaned from a few interviewees (3 participants). The lack of interaction between the domestic visitor and the exhibition environment stemmed partly from past educational experiences and lack of previous knowledge. Since the establishment of the Egyptian Republic in 1952, much attention has focused on the Islamic heritage and history of Egypt, The Egyptian Revolution of 1952, Arab nationalism, the occupied Palestinian territories, and the October War of 1973. One participant lends support to this view:

I have been inside [the exhibition area] may be twice or three times only. If I go inside, I feel bored because I don't have a lot of knowledge about many of the items. I have sound knowledge about Islam, modern Egypt like Nasser and Sadat.

A prominent educational journalist, who had conducted a detailed content analysis of the education standards attained by French and Egyptian schoolchildren, found that at each level the standard was lower in Egypt and that "the French child knows more about the history of ancient Egypt than the Egyptian child" (as cited in Hyde, 1978:48). It seems that the neglect of Pharaonic Egypt in the state schools led many Egyptians to a total loss of orientation and a lack of connection with the ancient past of Egypt. Limitations of space are such that domestic visitors' underutilization of the exhibition environment at the Egyptian Museum could not be discussed in the existing



study, and future researchers may want to examine this phenomenon. This topic requires a deep investigation of the influence of the Islamic religion in Egyptian society and the power of Nasirist Pan-Arabism which has been dominating the Middle Eastern environment.

Still, despite domestic visitors' underutilization of exhibition area, they were able to find other 'spaces' in the physical context of the Egyptian museum to enjoy their visit. Their interactions with these 'spaces' revealed different roles of the traditional museum. They related their museum visits to the social experience and stated that the museum was the place to "hang out with family and friends." The social experiences of domestic respondents were limited to their own family members and companions, and did not extend to interactions with other visitors or museum staff. They also exhibited positive experiential themes related to the outdoor garden and the qualities of the café/restaurants such as the attractive setting of the place and the quality of the food service:

We come may be once every month to have the children play around in the garden and we have a long break from them to get something to eat and chat ... We like the restaurant a nice place for socialization it has an efficient central air conditioning. Also, the food is delicious they offer good plates of labna and olives and pickled turnips.

As soon as we got here, the first thing my son wanted to do was to run into the garden and play with his cousins. The garden gives the kids a space to play and have fun and for adults to have a nice social time to talk and relax.

Domestic visitors considered the museum as an experiential site that offered recreation and pastime experiences and, to a lesser extent, as a place for recalling personal and historical events. For example, the experience of some domestic visitors in the museum was imbued with childhood memories and meaningful intergenerational relationships: "My parents used to bring me to the garden to ride the bike and play hide and seek with other children. [Laughing] When I look back I remember I liked to hide behind this long statue." Some visitors appeared to view playing in the museum's garden and hiding behind the colossal statues of the Pharaohs standing outside the main building as significant marker events, taking place at particular phases of their lives, usually related to childhood memories and positive parent relations:

There is just something about this garden that takes me back to my childhood fieldtrip days and eating falafel sandwiches out on the huge lawn while playing cards and waiting for the bus to pick us up in front of the gate. Definitely nostalgic for any child who grew up close to central Cairo.

Finally, a few domestic visitors referred also to the significance of the museum as a place of refuge or escape, almost like taking a holiday from their work and everyday life. They frequented the museum because of its close proximity to their workplace and to sought solitude and refuge from the traffic and the double pressures of work and family life: "my work is close to the museum so I usually come to sit in the garden and relax and sort of shut my eyes and forget about my job."

International and domestic visitors' experiences at Te Papa Museum

Domestic visitors at Te Papa comprised 51% and international comprised 49% of the sample. The high overseas visitation rate has been generally attributed to Te Papa's ongoing work with international tour operators and the international touring exhibitions which are considered a major strategy for boosting the profile of Te Papa museum among the world's leading museums and art



galleries (Kaino, 2005; Te Papa, 2004/2005). The bulk of international visitors came from Western and English speaking markets such as Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and United States of America. With regard to domestic visitors at Te Papa, the majority of respondents (63%) were from outside Wellington, the capital city of New Zealand. Only three of the 52 domestic respondents mentioned they were born outside New Zealand: two were born in United Kingdom and one in Australia.

Unlike visitors' experiences at the Egyptian museum, research findings showed that a number of similarities between international and domestic visitors existed at Te Papa museum. For example, social experiences featured prominently in interviews with both groups. Equally, for many international and domestic visitors the social experiences were inextricably linked with learning. The two groups of respondents reported having engaged in learning and discussing or sharing information with the people with whom they were attending. This lends support to literature on museums and cultural heritage tourism that overwhelmingly emphasises that visiting heritage sites and museums tends to be a social occasion, combining free-choice learning or looking at something interesting while enjoying the company of friends and family (Leonie & Johnston, 2007). Two respondents voiced the views of a significant majority of domestic and international visitors:

I really enjoyed learning and talking about a lot of different exhibitions with Mark, my husband. When we go to the museum it's something that we want to know. So we share information and learn about what is in there, history, different objects, and it's a learning process. We are very curious people; we like to know why things are like they are.

You know, it's kind of our hobby to bushwalk and stuff, and we drive a little bit more knowledge. We like to exchange information and learn about native trees and shrubs. Taking a short bush walk through the native bush is always a lot more fun when you are with someone else to share the experience with and to talk over what you're seeing.

A number of international participants also recounted their interactions with museum staff and again allows us to witness the creation of the social learning experience at Te Papa:

We joined the 60 minute tour of the museum with a guide of Maori culture. He was warm and friendly, has a great sense of humor and taught us lots about the Maori exhibitions. He told us stories that have been told for generations and shared his own. He was very detailed in his explanation of the tribe customs and the Maori cultural dances and Maori carvings... So we all felt comfortable asking questions and learning new stuff and also sharing with him our stories.

Also of note, when explored in more depth, it was clear that Te Papa's international and domestic respondents correlated positively with particular features of the museum's physical environment, namely, Te Papa's Bush City and the café/restaurants. Both groups exhibited positive experiential themes related to the qualities of the café/restaurants such as the attractive setting of the place and the quality of the food service. For example, a number of domestic respondents referred to the significance of the museum's café/ restaurant as a place to get away from the pressure of life and work. They explained how the scenic qualities of the café/restaurant had a relaxing effect. These visitors referred to the value of the museum café/restaurant in terms of having attained a sense of relaxation, peace and tranquility, thus highlighting the importance of the physical



environment to the quality of the visitor experience (Falk and Dierking, 1992; Noordegraaff's, 2004), as one domestic respondents explained:

My current job is quite stressful so I come to the café to be refreshed. I take my delicious cup of coffee outdoors and enjoy the surrounding natural environment. Just sitting there for twenty or thirty minutes makes me feel less stressed, and calmer.

Similarly, for many international respondents the café/restaurant turned eating at Te Papa into an experience of visual landscape qualities. International respondents enjoyed eating while, at the same time, passively immersed themselves in New Zealand's diverse natural environment through the Bush City living outdoor exhibition of rain forest and other native plants:

The most memorable part of the museum was the restaurant. It's such a nice place with lovely scenery. It takes your mind off all types of things. I guess because the bushes and trees around the restaurant take your attention.

Although there were a number of similarities between international and domestic visitors, there were two major differences between the two groups of participants. First, Te Papa's exhibitions evoked a sense of belonging or connection to New Zealand culture and heritage. Domestic participants drew upon the exhibitions around them with their own past experiences and previous knowledge. Reminiscence seemed to be quite important among many domestic respondents. Different exhibitions prompted their old memories. They provided them with opportunities for recollections and stimulated remembering. Seeing particular exhibitions gave them the chance to relive past experiences. This seemed to be particularly the case with the *Golden Days* exhibition, which is a nostalgic multi-media experience that attempts to celebrate the past by appealing to visitors' emotions through images of recognizable and familiar events in New Zealand history. Accordingly, they described the exhibitions as "interesting", "memorable", "familiar", "personal", "enjoyable", "nostalgic" and "appealing": "I enjoyed the memorabilia inside the Golden Days exhibition. The bits and pieces remind me of my grandfather's house. They bring childhood memories back." Unlike domestic respondents, the majority of international respondents lacked the cultural and historical background to connect with the exhibits on their own. Accordingly, they described different exhibitions as "confusing", "vague", "irrelevant" and "boring." Some of them also expressed an interest in wanting more information. They briefly explained that while "Kiwis" found significant connections to the exhibitions, "uninformed visitors" found it "difficult" to link with the exhibitions: "The images just seemed irrelevant to me. I am not from New Zealand, so I couldn't appreciate many of the images from the film. Maybe a Kiwi would appreciate them more than I did." This is reflected in Robin Parkinson's (1998:62) argument that "Te Papa tells the New Zealand Story; it is aimed at the widest New Zealand audience and it is a uniquely New Zealand product."

Finally, there is no doubt that interactive technology is central to the presentations of Te Papa, as they are at many modern museums. In this regard, it is not surprising that many of the domestic and international participants described their experiences with the various infotainment presentations. Perhaps surprisingly, given the trend towards this type of presentation in modern museums, only a small minority of international responses (5 interviewees) expressed positive reactions to the interactive media. The small number of positive responses from international visitors is perhaps all the more surprising, given that these participants had acknowledged that their motives for visiting Te Papa was for social, edutainment and fun experiences, which this type



of technology is designed to encourage. Even more surprising is the fact that the vast majority of international participants (over 90%) expressed negative reactions to the interactive presentations placed throughout the museum. The primary complaint seems to be that the overuse of interactive technology distracted and interfered with their appreciation of the museum and its content, as several participants noted that “there was too much play and too little communication of information”; “perhaps it’s too interactive for those who want to gain a better understanding of New Zealand history”; and “lots of interactive stuff there. It’s kind of like an entertainment thing. Everything is made to entertain visitors without educating them.”

Little information was gleaned from a few international participants (2 participants) about their negative reactions to the infotainment experience at Te Papa. One possibility is that participants to Te Papa were overwhelmed by the large amount of multimedia interactive exhibits. They might have expected a national museum to be a more serious repository of artefacts. For example, one participant stated that she “had expectations a national museum was going just be a site that has rare historical objects in glass display cases and very few interactive exhibits. But then when I got there I was actually a little bit disappointed.” The second argument is that participants did not understand the meanings or historical information behind certain “interactive things” because they did not have the cultural baggage or knowledge. In fact, unlike international participants, the multimedia presentations did not draw any negative comments from domestic participants. There were a large number of positive responses among domestic participants. The reason behind this is unclear, but it may be due to the fact that the majority of domestic respondents were repeat visitors and had experienced the content of the exhibitions before. Another possibility is that they could relate to the interactive exhibit since they have the cultural baggage or knowledge, as several domestic respondents explained:

The numerous interactive and hands on exhibits scattered around the museum add a distinct flavor in the environment. You have the wall of postcards, the high rides and the earthquake house. You can envision that sort of stuff, it’s fascinating.

The multimedia material in the exhibition [Golden Days] made me think about the older days. It took me back there, as a child. I mean I can remember the Royal visit by the Queen in 1953 and the Wahine sinking. I lived through that.

Discussion and Conclusions

This research set out to explore domestic and international visitors’ experiences vis-à-vis the Egyptian and Te papa Museums presentations and offerings, and in doing so, drew out the key threads that reveal the role of traditional and modern museums from the visitors’ viewpoint. I first proceeded by establishing theoretical and methodological frameworks to explore international and domestic respondents’ experiences of the museum. In doing so, I uncovered the alternative roles of traditional and modern museums that went beyond simply infotainment, educational/learning experiences and presentation of original artefacts. The interactions between the physical and personal contexts and between the physical and social contexts in this study simultaneously capture important realities of the visitor as well as important realities of the traditional and modern museums. The interconnectedness between the contexts resulted in a set of visitors’ experiences suggesting that the Egyptian and Te Papa Museums have much in common. They are very much an informal educational institution providing much more than preserving ancient objects, infotainment, traditional passive learning experience and presentation



of original artefacts. These experiences may also include developing a connection with and reinforcement of past knowledge or memories, as well as social, aesthetic, restorative, recreational and pastime experiences. In other words, both sites have a number of similar characteristics: a setting for learning more about the exhibitions and seeing the familiar and remembering or evoking historical and personal events; a site for aesthetic experience; a site for visitors to rest, relax and escape from the pressures of work and everyday life; a site for social educational experiences; and a site for social recreational experiences.

These insights can enable museum practitioners to better understand their visitors and the wider roles modern and traditional museums may play in visitors' experiences as well as to rethink the mission and goals of these types of institutions. Recognizing the variety of museum visitor experiences that exist could cool the heated discussion on whether learning or play is more important to museum design, since Packer (2008) pointed out, there is no conflict between the two in visitors' eyes. The findings of the existing study suggest that rather than pegging museums into a traditional or infotainment/edutainment type, museums should go the opposite direction by promoting a broader variety of experiences, rather than a narrower one. Intentionally encouraging these other experiences could lead to pleasing museum visitors more. If museum curators and designers consider the kinds of experiences visitors enjoy getting out of the museum visit, they could intentionally design more areas or exhibits that allow for and encourage more of those types of visits and experiences. For example, since relaxation and getting away from the stress of work were identified as an attractive draw for visitors, more green spaces and relaxing café areas could be designed. Likewise, as connection to existing knowledge is a common experience of a number of visitors, exhibits could be designed to integrate a "pre-knowledge" question or activity to prime visitors to engage more fully in the actual exhibit itself, such as a set of questions asking "How much do you know about King Tutankhamen? Who deciphered the Rosetta Stone and cracked the hieroglyphic code? How much do you know about the New Zealand Treaty of Waitangi? What is the significance of that date?" could be included in certain exhibits to intentionally induce nostalgia and reminded memories, a common positive experience identified by visitors.

It is important also to note that behind the obvious similarities between the roles of the two museums lies glaring differences between international and domestic participants at each site. While a perfect match existed between the cultural and historical background (personal context) of international visitors at the Egyptian Museum and the museum's exhibitions, the majority of Egyptian Museum's domestic respondents lacked the historical baggage to connect with the objects. The same is true for visitors to Te Papa but the other way around. While Te Papa's domestic participants were armed with some prior knowledge of the exhibitions, the majority of international respondents lacked the degree of familiarity with the collections. Hence, for international visitors at the Egyptian Museum and Te Papa's domestic visitors, the two museums set a spark and planted the seeds of connectivity, familiarity, and interest which again mirrored another role of The Egyptian and Te Papa Museums as sites to view familiar objects and link visitors with what they already know. This seems to strengthen Falk and Dierking (1992, 2016), Goulding (2000), and Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri's (2002) argument that visitors usually reshape the museum's experience according to their socio-cultural and personal contexts.

This study also provides a good contrast to several other studies (i.e. Gieling & Chin-Ee Ong, 2016; Harvey, 2014) that focus too much on how visitors were subjected to political propaganda, narratives of national identity, various infotainment /edutainment presentations and learning and community programs. Riding on the crest of these restorative/leisure experiences, sociable experiences, personal and memorable experiences, the findings of the existing study goes beyond such mere infotainment presentations, narratives of



national identity and political propaganda to uncover the broadening and extension of the functions of traditional and modern museums through understanding visitors' experiences.

Moreover, the current research study provides a broader sense of the way in which visiting a traditional and modern national museums constitutes part of people's leisure lifestyles. The Egyptian and Te Papa Museums' offerings may closely resemble various family-friendly visitor attractions such as parks, forests, science centers, campgrounds, zoos and recreation areas. Similar to both museums, the family leisure provided at these family-friendly recreation areas revolves around multiple opportunities for social interaction, outdoor experiences, educational experiences, infotainment experiences, playfulness, relaxation and bonding time with children. While the focus of family leisure is on spending time together, these attractions also, like the Egyptian and Te Papa museums, allow for own time, especially for parents and full time workers, that is perceived as more restful relaxation (Kelly & Godbey, 1992). For a number of participants in this study, the main purpose of family outings was having fun and thus museums need to ensure they provide interactive and enjoyable activities. It seems that social interaction, rather than pure learning, has the most memorable effects on families in both museums. Hence modern and traditional museums, with Te Papa and the Egyptian Museums being good examples, can be seen as competing for a piece of the public's leisure time. They operate in the leisure industry; their major competition coming from other leisure and recreation providers (Black, 2005).

Although government agencies commonly use the term 'recreation' to describe sporting and physical activity (Kelly & Godbey, 1992), modern and traditional museums can be regarded as leisure, cultural and recreational spaces, both historically and in the educational and social purposes to which they subscribe (Foley & McPherson, 2000). Te Papa and the Egyptian Museums, for example, have become highly valued outside the traditional cultural realm as providers of leisure destinations, rich edutainment experiences, knowledge, and brandable entities that can revitalize Wellington and Cairo cities. They were seen as tourism/leisure products that generated a spark of sociability and, at the same time, created an informal learning experience. Visitors describe visiting the sites as one of the leisure activities they enjoy and do most frequently in Wellington and Cairo cities, especially with children; and as part of a "good day out" faring better than "shopping malls." Other respondents also spoke about museum visiting as being part of their weekend leisure activities, or within the context of taking a holiday from their work and everyday life. The visitors viewed both sites as places of quiet retreat and meditation locked away from the outside world. Accordingly, traditional and modern museums are regarded as one of the contemporary consumption sites that comprise the city (Davidson & Sibley; Chan, 2009).

Finally, such museums seem also to be going beyond their infotainment, educative and recreational realms and moving closer to leisure tourism and to becoming commodified as part of local heritage attractions (Foley & McPherson, 2000). Te Papa and the Egyptian Museums are key resources for touristic leisure infrastructures and may offer themselves in a manner consistent with this approach. They are heritage attractions that also cater to tourism, recreation and entertainment activities. They promote national identities that also encourage tourism which in the regional and international contexts has helped shaped Wellington and Cairo cities as the cultural capitals of New Zealand and Egypt, and the museums have been pivotal to the cities' transformation into an attractive leisure destinations (Davidson & Sibley, 2011; The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, 2016). Accordingly, the traditional or modern national museum is not about cultural capital in any narrow sense, but that it is much more part of the everyday life, contributing to Egyptians and New Zealanders' sense of place and providing them with opportunities for leisure as an escape from the obligatory commitment of usual work/life pressures and family life.



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