



Reaching Young People: youth friendly museums

Although young people are an age group that is included in many categories of audiences, such as tourists, local people, minorities, people with disabilities, etc., and varies according to country and regions, it is important for museums and heritage sites to record them as a distinct group. Young people should appear as an important target visitor group in a wide range of activities included in Cultural Heritage Management (CHM), such as audience development, collection management, marketing, digitisation, exhibition, etc. The ReInHerit project places particular emphasis on persons between the ages of 18 and 29. Cultural Heritage (CH) professionals who participated in the focus groups were particularly eager to make CH more relevant to these ages, to attract and convince them to attend museums and heritage sites, and to make them positive stakeholders of CH.

What problems do museums face in attracting young people?

Museums and heritage sites are facing many problems in attracting young people from the time when youths leave school (i.e., 18 years old). The ReInHerit project identifies the following obstacles in the engagement of young people with CH:

- **Young people are not a homogeneous group and differentiation is needed.** For example, there are differences between young people in urban environments and young people in the countryside or between young people in different countries. Furthermore, this age group includes many adolescents and children who are considered digital natives and use computers, social networking services and text messaging as their main means of communication and learning. Digital natives consume fast and in visual formats. They not only choose their content but also co-create and produce audiovisual content, which is dynamic and not static.
- There are conflicting views between CH professionals & young people on the nature of CH. **Many young people perceive CH as something boring and museums and heritage sites as boring spaces.**

- Younger generations are reluctant to learn about the history of their region or about the CH of another country. **Living in a globalised world, they often lose touch with their own roots, and they do not see the need to re-connect.**
- The inevitable shift towards digital technologies has a serious drawback when looking at the age group of 18 years and above. No matter how good the digital medium that museums are developing, it has not reached the sophistication and artistry and refinement already found in commercial digital media through games and other types of digital encounters. **On many occasions museums and sites need to compete with commercial/state of the art technology.**
- **The relationship between young people and CH cannot be seen as a mere matter of enjoyment.** The interest in CH is not usually a stand-alone interest. It is also linked to history, education, ethics, personal development and fostering a culture in young people to respect and preserve CH for future generations.

How can museums overcome these obstacles in order to be youth-friendly?

Recommendations

- **Understand** young people in order to determine their specific needs as well as how they perceive CH, how they experience it, how they want to engage with it, and what is important to them. This can help CH professionals renew the current view of CH and establish a new relationship based on collaborative and strong interaction, fostering innovation. To gain more knowledge about young people it is necessary to undertake research, consult, listen, analyse, respond and most importantly interact with them. In this respect, it is important for CH organisations to set out an **audience development plan**. A recommended tool is **audience segmentation** that involves thinking about audiences as distinct groups (e.g., organise social media campaigns to collect their views, etc.). For instance, understanding the behaviour of the emerging digital natives is important: they consume fast, in visual formats, they choose their content, they pursue variety and they do everything in a speedy way. Primary research, secondary research, quantitative research, and qualitative research, are important approaches that could be combined.
- **Promote real-time dialogue between young people and the CH professional.** Give young people space to reflect on the whole idea of what heritage is and become part of the dynamic process of shaping information about heritage. A recommended tool is to create chat rooms for discussions between young people and CH professionals on the organisations' websites or interact with them on social media.
- **Introduce seminars, games, and digital tools** (Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality/Mixed reality, Gesture Technology/Non-touch Interactives, Haptic technologies, Mobile Technologies, Virtual touring, etc.) in museums and heritage sites to attract younger audiences. As evidenced by the visitors' survey conducted by the ReInHerit

project, young museum visitors (18-29 as well as 30-44) are more likely to use digital tools in a museum environment. Younger people in general have a strong tendency to be interested in technology related experiences and in gamification approaches.

- **Foster synergies with other CH organisations and sites** to develop maker-space environments and travelling programs to build new relationships with young people using new technologies.
- **Train CH professionals** in audience research, marketing, and communication (e.g., social media), in order to better understand and approach young people, lifting the barriers that prevent them from engaging with CH. It is important to convince the staff of museums and heritage sites that young audiences are relevant for their work and that it is worth developing a mutual understanding.
- **Design and implement outreach work/activities to schools, universities, and youth organizations** in order to educate youth before they come to the museum or create the desire for them to visit the museum and the heritage site. It is important to bring schools/universities and museums/heritage sites together in a context of a fruitful interaction. Perhaps CH professionals can bring them some intriguing artefacts and encourage them to visit museums and heritage sites to see the rest.
- **Make the learning material more memorable** with a creative storytelling approach and inspire children to pick up an interest and learn more.
- **As an educational tool, digital services can make abstract concepts more concrete** so that visitors can visualize and understand them, especially children. An example would be to educate them on curators' methods. This would help them to reflect on historical stereotypes and would involve them in co-creation.
- **Promote dialogue and collaboration between CH professionals, schoolteachers and university professors** in order to develop a common strategy on how young people should be connected to CH.
- **Involve people who are working with music, sound and acting to create new language for communicating with digital natives.** This very much changes the perspective and can help professionals understand different formats of communication.
- **Explore new funding opportunities** to engage young audience.

The Project

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