

3.3

Educating and informing

An appropriate educational experience is one that fulfils a teacher's need to impart knowledge to a student, and enables the student readily and agreeably to receive that information. In the context of a site, the equivalent would be an appropriate communications experience between a site's presenter and the visitor. The ideal is achieving a mutually beneficial dialogue.

Perhaps the most common error in communication is for the communicator to use his own natural or preferred style of communicating rather than that of the person to whom he wishes the information to be imparted. Museums used to be—some still are—particularly victim to this syndrome, their information adopting a lofty and dry 'know all' tone. This approach either fails to appreciate, or ignores the fact that visitors are unlikely to be able to share curators' specialist understanding and knowledge of a subject or even their general level of education, and that visitors' styles of communication might be different from their own.

1 Learning lessons

Example I: York Archaeological Trust

In terms of communication with visitors to a heritage site, probably the break-through was made by the York Archaeological Trust, with the Coppergate site at York. They regarded it as a duty and obligation to make suitable provision for visitors, treating them as both welcome and vital. From this experience, the York Archaeological Trust came to realize the methods that were necessary for communicating with the public of the present day. The Jorvik Viking Centre used methods more usually found in a fairground, amusement or theme park, and then opened its hands-on educational facility, the Archaeological Resource Centre, which now has an offshoot housed in the Eureka! Museum for Children at Halifax. The York Archaeological Trust has learned how to bring its subject alive for mass audiences, while maintaining its academic integrity.

Essentially what the 1980s heritage industry was 'about', in the UK as in other

countries, was a mass of organizations learning the lesson that a huge audience could be reached with heritage information, provided that information was communicated effectively, i.e. in a way that was comprehensible to the visitor but enjoyable at the same time. The average education level of visitors was assessed and presentations were geared correspondingly. If a particular visitor niche was identified and deemed to be sufficiently large to be worth bothering with, or suitably necessary by other criteria, the attempt was made to produce information in a guise that was suitable to it.

Example II: The Eureka! Museum for Children

The Eureka! Museum for Children is representative of what was described above in that, ostensibly at least—and as a PR tool—children with parents, rather than parents with children, were identified as a market. As was indicated in Chapter 3.1, the main approach on foot to the museum is along a yellow brick ‘road’. The museum’s address is Discovery Road. Certainly (once the necessary entry fees have been paid!) a strong impression is communicated to adults that they are allowed in only on sufferance and that activities and presentations are geared to the very young. Essentially there are a lot of large and colourful visuals, many exhibits requiring active participation, a great deal of high-tech wizardry—children see how to send a fax—but also some core, old-time activities like shopping and visiting the bank. Staff, called ‘enablers’, are more like playgroup leaders; indeed, this new-breed Museum has been described as ‘an educational playground.’¹

2 Communicating information in visual form

It is not only children who respond to information transmitted visually. Across the world, many adults too are readily attuned to absorbing information in this manner. For a start, obviously the **illiterate** can be communicated with through illustrations, but so too can an **international** audience. This has been understood at a range of public facilities across the world, with their use of pictograms to convey information. Nations and societies whose written means of communication features pictures and signs may have a head start in the society of the future. The Japanese language, for instance, is not only visual, it is almost pictorial,² giving it a fluidity as a means of expression which seems to allow a degree of dynamism and freedom of expression which cultures with the written word as their main means of communication might envy. Regarding such languages as archaic could be a mistaken tendency; it seems possible that they are far better equipped for the coming world’s future style and character of communication than those which deploy words. If we ever attain a common world language, it may be that it will be pictorial in style.

The world community is being encouraged to become more visually literate. We ‘read’ images on television, on videos. Our instructions to computers are produced through

the building up of different combinations of signs, having a marked resemblance in this to the style of language of the Japanese, for example. With a lead in advanced electronics and technological innovation, its heritage of being first with computers, video games, VR, etc. plus its capacity for assimilating and using the best from other cultures, its language style, and an ability for changing old for new quickly and without regret, we should not wonder if Japan becomes *the* place of tomorrow.

3 Changing subjects and styles of communication

The subject to be communicated at or about a cultural site is as much liable to change and development as the method of communication; the topics and style of its system of educating will demonstrate a society's concerns. It might be imagined that it would always be appropriate that museums and cultural sites should shift the styles and emphases of their communications according to the context in which they and their material currently are. Since their purpose overall is conveying information about periods of time other than the present, however, that sites too are revealing, through their style and content, about the time when they were originally presented for the public, or were later refurbished or their collection regrouped, may be useful. For sites to be revamped or a collection to be re-ordered will not necessarily be for the best, educationally and for other purposes of information, if in the process one piece of information removes and replaces another.

Example I: The Museum of African and Oceanic Arts, Paris

A museum and collection 'of its time' is the Museum of African and Oceanic Arts in Paris, housed in a building put up for the 1931 Colonial Exhibition. The place reeks of an era of unconscious European superiority in attitude to the rest of the world, and to dark-skinned natives in particular. It is an education in itself.

Similarly, fusty museums, with row upon row of the same type of exhibit placed on view, tell us about a time's style of presentation and approach to collection.

Certain subjects are only belatedly being addressed in museums, just as there are currently some things too sensitive to be acceptable for presentation as a site or in a museum—sites of recent riots in urban areas, perhaps? The USA is only now, on its home ground, facing up to the holocaust with the recent opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and its counterpart, although very different in style of presentation, the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. A museum due to open in Bristol—a city with a history of profit from the slave trade—changed its projected name from the Museum of the British Empire to the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, and is now destined to be called the Empire and Commonwealth Museum.³

Our culture in the western world is, outwardly at least, largely a pale **green** colour nowadays. It is also the style in this type of society to be well disposed towards **political correctness**. These tendencies show themselves in the methods and content of education, and find an echo in approaches to education and information at sites and museums. There is a predisposition to be as helpful and informative as possible, rather than to be secretive and unwelcoming. In the UK a Citizen's Charter has resulted in government commitments in print to offering improvements in services. In many places in the world recycled paper is much in evidence for leaflets and pamphlets. Issues relating to **minority groups** are being addressed; for example, serving one sector from among those having special needs will be the provision of braille information panels.

Among informational initiatives in the UK is the organization Common Ground which, through its Parish Maps Project, seeks 'to make people more aware of the textures, sights and experience of their local environments'.⁴ Young people, in addition to using the traditional voluntary service routes, are participating in such schemes as the National Trust Acorn camps, undertaking physical work in the repair and conservation of National Trust properties. The nomenclature and imagery are, of course, significant implying, as does as a whole the Trust's acorn logo, growth through conservation into maturity. In an urban context, at Birmingham's Centenary Square, focus of its new cultural complex, citizens and visitors are being educated about the city's projected future role with an almost socialist state style sculpture, 'Forward', depicting the burghers bursting enthusiastically from the smoke stacks of old towards a new dawn.

The mission to inform, as seen at visitor centres in National Parks, State Parks, Country Parks, etc., has taken a new shape in the city, ubiquitous tourist information centres apart, with the setting up of generalized centres of information about the built environment. At the Pavilion de l'Arsenal, for example, information is provided about the city of Paris in the form of models, photographs, plans and special exhibitions, many using innovative display styles.

Most museums or sites have some sort of designated educational facility, which may be in the form of an education room, an education officer, special education and information packs, or material for various ages and types of visitor. Teachers are accustomed to leading, and students to joining in, study tours. Now most children are used to seeing enacted, or themselves acting in, **living history** at cultural sites, whether in the company of teacher or parent. The National Trust has established its own theatre company, which tours Trust sites. In 1992, the Counter Reformation was considered in the play *An Endless Maze*, whose aim was reported to be 'to examine motives, ideas and evidence rather than events in isolation'.⁵

Adult education was boosted in France in 1992 with the scheme of the minister then responsible for education and culture, Jack Lang. He introduced as a pilot scheme in Ardennes, Aquitaine, Calais, the Loire Valley, Provence, Rhône and Paris, a system for employers to provide culture vouchers, rather in the manner of luncheon vouchers.

Among participating venues were the Louvre and the World Heritage Sites of Versailles and Fontainebleau.⁶

Meanwhile various organizations—UNESCO, for example, through its activities and publications—continue long-established educational work; this apart from designating World Heritage Sites. Using a bilingual brochure on World Heritage, produced by Environment Canada and the Canadian National Parks Service, as a platform for educating and informing, Viviane Launay, Secretary General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, introduces it saying, ‘Entrusted to our care, but not ours alone, for these sites are part of the common heritage of the human race and allow us as Canadians, to join the global family.’⁷ The influential role of Canadians in expanding good tourism practice will be referred to in Chapter 4.1

4 Modern communication

Some of the traditional and commonplace types and styles of material giving information and educating people about cultural attractions have already been briefly described. Recently, however, there have been massive innovations in the method, type and style of information dissemination. We live in an information age. It seems appropriate in the context of the concerns of this chapter, and this book’s subject, therefore, to take a deeper look at the newer, and most widely available methods of information communication. It is assumed that ways of communicating such as by exhibition or sign board, leaflet, lecture or book, are well known enough not to require further elucidation and expansion here.

In Chapter 4.1 reference will be made to Japan’s computer generation, the so-called *otaku*. In our efforts to educate the next generation, it could be that we are in danger of not paying adequate attention to a large cultural division that has occurred in recent years: the divide occasioned by modern **technology**, and more especially the computer. On one side are those who cannot, or will not, use a computer; on the other are those for whom using a computer is an everyday occurrence. It is similar, but much, much, more prevalent, to the divide which earlier separated (and sometimes still does) those who do and do not watch television. In terms of education, these divides can be the result of a museum or cultural site presenter being out of touch, and failing to understand how best to communicate with his young audience.

An interesting article in this respect was published in UNESCO’s *Museum* with the title ‘For lots of us, museum rhymes with humdrum’.⁸ Written by two children, Sandrine Rona-Beaulieu and Stéphane Janin, it was the result of a survey of adolescent children in a **multi-ethnic** class at a school in a Parisian artisan neighbourhood. It begins: ‘A Museum usually means a compulsory class trip led by one of the teachers. Students can’t ever choose the museum—that’s always done by the teachers, who want to use

the museum to liven up their lessons. The only problem is, teachers aren't necessarily capable of sparking the class' interest in the topic they have chosen.' The authors observe, 'Going to museums with your school doesn't make you want to go back on your own or with friends at the weekend. Young people prefer different kinds of amusement when they're free.... It's not the "in" thing to go to museums.' Of some museums' communications, they say, 'Museum guides from the old school—the ones who reel off a speech they've learned by heart—don't make us feel like going to museums to listen to them and their boring spiels don't inspire us to ask questions, discover new things.'

Of museums' efforts at publicizing themselves, these young writers complain, 'You never hear about museums in the street or on the Metro, or on the television or radio, whereas any newspaper will provide you with a complete list of films, plays and concerts.... Going to the cinema is an easy thing to do, while going to a museum is quite an exploit.' As to how museums should promote their facilities, Sandrine and Stéphane say, 'One idea would be to put up museum advertisements in the schools and change them periodically. Distributing pamphlets in classes is another, along with holding contests and showing commercials on prime-time television between spots for detergents and disposable nappies, advertising in magazines read by young people, in television guides, on independent radio stations.'

This article has been quoted extensively because it reveals a lot about the way the young feel they are (or rather, as they consider, are not) communicated with by teachers and museum officials. Rarely do television or radio get the credit they deserve for providing general information, let alone for their capacity for chance, serendipitous transmittal of new information to an audience. The 'random' element, the 'accident' is, of course, only in relation to the receiver: as far as a TV or radio station is concerned, it will have planned its schedules meticulously. The point has been encapsulated by Alan Bennett, when introducing his retrospective view of BBC television, 'A Night in with Alan Bennett', on 5 July 1992. He said: 'One of the virtues of television is that we are able to blunder into watching a programme we hadn't intended to watch. There is great virtue in the random. We don't always know what we want, where we are going. We are not the single-minded customer which cable TV is predicated on.'

The National Museum of Photography, Film and Television [NMPFT], located at Bradford, in the north of England, claims it 'is now the most popular national museum outside London'. If this is so, it is as well to ask why, and especially since many might regard its location as distinctly less than ideal. The reason why the NMPFT is a success, apart from the fact that it is a unique attraction in the UK, is fairly obvious: it communicates about and through media which a present day audience finds appealing and approachable. At the time it opened, the NMPFT was arguably the most interactive museum presentation in the UK. To put it in context, though, it should be said that the cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie at la Villette in Paris easily surpasses it in terms of successful communication. It should also be noticed that even such a 'high-culture'

city as Paris has recognized the need to communicate its history to visiting tourists in a mass market way through the idiosyncratically romantic film presentation 'Paristoric', referred to already. This is shown on the hour, 365 days a year, accompanied by commentary in a range of languages.

In the UK, if only for financial reasons, brought about through a change in the focus of political culture, the need to rethink styles and methods of communication, to make them noticeably more effective has been recognized by most people involved in the 'heritage industry'. This applies even to the more esoteric museum circles although, for a variety of reasons, there were 'outposts' remaining at the end of the heritage industry decade. It had become obvious to the majority of museums and sites that the information they had at their disposal could be explained more easily and to a wider audience if it was communicated in a way that that audience found **entertaining**. For a money-making cultural site to be lucrative, unless a very high spend per capita could be expected for some particular reason, it was necessary for it to be attractive and that included the style of presentation, plus the add-on facilities like restaurants and shops. Emblematic among national museum revamps in the UK encapsulating new communications styles are those of the National Maritime Museum, which has a new Twentieth Century Sea Power gallery featuring 'a nine screen audio-visual display,'⁹ and the Natural History Museum where there are 'robot dinosaurs...interactive video quizzes and computer animations'. The head of PR at the latter museum, Dr Roger Miles, emphasizes that 'education comes first and presentation second'. Miles told Hugh Pearman: 'We always start by thinking what we want to say. Only then do we consider how we are going to say it. But we *are* trying to communicate science in a way that is relevant to visitors' own lives.'

Multi-media communications techniques range from the already relatively routine interactive compact disc system to virtual reality, a process, born of flight simulation, still undergoing development and refinement.¹⁰ Between the two extremes are a variety of developments, ranging from the relatively technically simple visitor experience to items of considerable sophistication, both technically and in terms of their characteristics of reality. Virtual reality, whose development is driven principally by the demands of the games industry, is also being used as an overtly educational tool. In the autumn of 1991 the Australian Jeffrey Shaw's VR 'Le Musée Virtuel' was displayed in the Atelier du Virtuel at the 'Machines à Communiquer' exhibition at the cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie. Also, for a three-day period, admission was free to all the cité's exhibits. In 1993 at the Imagina conference, generally regarded as a showcase of the most bow-wave introductions, a monk's tour of 11th-century Cluny Abbey in televirtuality was on show. A VR trip to a temple at Luxor (likely to be much safer than a real visit) has been developed by the Japanese. A company called Black Dog Productions has produced 'Virtual Egypt' which 'combines surrogate travel with excursions into the mythology of ancient Egypt'.¹¹ From spring 1994, VR was scheduled to be shown in Rome at the Museum of Roman Civilisation. And this is just the beginning.

Of course developing a virtual world raises a lot of issues.¹² It is reported that 'Psychologists are particularly interested in VR because they want to find out how easy it is to "fool" the human mind into thinking it is actually in the virtual world.'¹³ With regard to education, Cotton and Brown devote a section in their book specifically to the educational applications of hypermedia, beginning it with the assessment: The impact of hypermedia in education is likely to be the most controversial of all the application areas we examine...as well as offering a promise of positive change that will improve the quality of education for all, hypermedia also represents a threat to the traditions, values and practices that have grown up over the years.'¹⁴

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that almost cataclysmic changes are in process. They are not confined, of course, to the field of education but are occurring in society in general. However, the educational changes—are particularly well pronounced because that subject's main focus is the young, representing the new generation, as guided and informed by the less young, the older generation; together with a consideration of the type and content of the information matter that is transmitted (or not) between young and less young. A comment by the Chair of Women in Computing, Helen Watt, is relevant here. According to a *Guardian* report,¹⁵ she said, 'There is no doubt that computing at all levels is failing to attract women.' Not only, therefore, might there be a **horizontal division by generation** in information transmission to be addressed, but also a **vertical split by gender**.

5 The material and aims for communication

The method of education used at or about a cultural site is only one of two aspects of information. This channel of communication is one aspect, but *what* is communicated is one of the issues that is most challenging and difficult. As has been demonstrated in regard to various cultural sites in various countries, often the most 'bow-wave' and sophisticated response on an issue is likely to have come from the direction of Paris' cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie at la Villette. As the cité's President says, in his Introduction to the *Guide to the Permanent Exhibition Explora*,¹⁶ 'The message we want to get across could be summed up by a word to the wise: "Don't blindly entrust experts with the fate of future generations.'" This passage transmits empowerment, the essence of all education and information communication. The concept of empowerment is central to this chapter and is therefore a suitable item with which to conclude it.

Issues and questions

- * Communication styles between young and old.
 - * Range of audience knowledge levels.
 - * Virtuality.
 - * Reinterpretation and evaluation.
 - * 'New' audiences.
-
- a) What are the main audience groups at a tourist site and what are their distinguishing characteristics in communications terms?
 - b) Is it possible to communicate to a mass audience simultaneously and if so, how?
 - c) How can information about a site be made compelling and interesting to people round the world?

Further reading

Centre for Environmental Education, *Visitors Welcome*, English Heritage, London, HMSO, 1988.

Tabata, R., Yamashiro, J. and Cherem, G. (eds) *Proceedings of the Heritage Interpretation International Third Global Congress, Joining Hands for Quality Tourism: Interpretation, Preservation and the Travel Industry*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii, 1992.

Issues of the USA magazine, *Wired*, and from March 1995 of the UK edition.

3.4

Entertaining

In Chapter 3.3, appropriate ways of educating and informing about cultural sites were considered. The emphasis was upon communicating relevant knowledge effectively, in a way that would be as compelling as possible, and in that context, therefore, how to entertain was considered. The aim, though, was not to show how to entertain directly, but rather how to use entertaining methods when communicating for the purposes of education and information dissemination. This chapter's aim, on the other hand, takes as a primary objective how to make a cultural site entertaining for a visitor in a way that is appropriate to that particular site.

1 Enjoyment at sites

Example: The Pont du Gard, France

One of the places at which the public can be seen having the most entertaining time without doing any obvious harm to a historic monument is at the Pont du Gard, a World Heritage Site, in southern France (see also Chapter 2.3). On a warm, late summer's day, as the massive Roman aqueduct comes into view, delighted squeals and splashes can be heard from the direction of the idly running river below. A mass of sunbathers on the exposed river gravels soak up the late summer sun, a happy scene with no perceptible threat to the Pont du Gard. That people had gathered there specifically meant, presumably, that they saw some particular benefit in being near the historic aqueduct; it was interesting that they were there rather than at the coast. The Pont du Gard was being used, quite appropriately, as a backdrop to 20th-century fun.

2 Why and how to create an enjoyable experience

As has been indicated in Chapter 2.1, the reasons people go to historic sites are many and various. If people go to sites, as surely the majority of them must, with the aim of deriving enjoyment from the experience, how can this be delivered appropriately? If

the avowed intention of a presenter is to get a message across, and **if the experience of absorbing information is made enjoyable for the visitor, the process will occur all the more easily.** If, first and foremost, an enjoyable experience has been provided for visitors, they may also acquire a lot of information as part of it; had it been presented to them as a purely educational experience, they might have stayed away.

Heritage stories and themes provide marvellous material for entertainment, because of their **innate differentness** from 20th-century daily life. They seem so 'other' that they and their images are as good as myths, legends and fairy tales for providing fantastic experiences. For some promoters, that history is history or that a site is old is not really the point: the point is that it looks different, quaint or picturesque. If a site is not perceived as adequately visually exciting or novel, then the instinct nowadays may be to vamp it up a bit, for example by dressing up in period costume, staging medieval banquets or mock battles, jousting, giving displays of falconry or producing a creepy dungeon display. In trying to be entertaining, some historic sites and museums may occasionally encroach on the territory of theme parks. In a desperate effort to provide the proverbial family day out, a mish-mash of facilities can develop, not all of them sympathetic or appropriate to the site and its character. Yet, very often, entertainment adds to the spirit of a place and augments a site's ability to communicate its particular meaning and role. Making the necessary mental leap across centuries sometimes requires some assistance. Events and entertainments can help bring a site alive to its visitors.

Example: National Trust fêtes champêtres

These events at certain National Trust sites cater to the whim to dress up and have picnics, and are in their design and conduct suitable to their sites. They help convey the 'presence' of a site, at an unusual and especially atmospheric time of day, for they are night occasions. They also generate extra income for sites' upkeep.

Provided they are chosen appropriately, such attractions and entertainments as *son et lumières*, music concerts of various types, plays, dance, poetry readings, etc., only serve to enhance sites. The great benefit too is that they attract regular new adherents to visiting these historic sites, by the provision of what is an add-on attraction: a subject area will have a separate audience of its own so a new group can be introduced to a site.

3 Presentations by ethnic groups

A problem with cultural entertainment which features live presentation by ethnic groups of aspects of their culture—native dances, displays of folk crafts and customs, etc.—may be that, during the process of entertaining tourists, the human dignity of the performers can come perilously close to disappearing. If the performers are trying to earn a living from the activity they are, ostensibly, in an intrinsically weak position,

even though they will probably at least have the strength of being on home ground. So-called 'natives' are potentially easy victims in the game of entertaining westernized tourists who, due to their wealth and 'education', are likely to be 'in the driving seat' in the situation. It has to be said that some such 'native' entertainment displays can possess constituents that render them inappropriate as items of cultural tourism. The main message at the Global Conference, *Building a Sustainable World Through Tourism*, in 1994, was that for the exchange between a tourist and his service provider to be appropriate and fruitful, there ought broadly to be a *balanced* exchange between them, not a situation of exploitation of one by the other. This applies generally, as well as to the circumstances described above.

4 Stimulation and sensation

When we look for entertainment at a site, essentially we are looking for heightened sensation, a 'buzz'. What will represent that sensation for an audience will be as different as our tastes. From the newer entertainment attractions in the heritage field, it is possible to gain an impression of by what means presenters believe we seek and achieve sensation: performance, seeing roles enacted or acting roles ourselves, as in a range of types of contest, battles, teacher-pupil dialogues, produces excitement and interest, for example. With these, such presenters seem to seek to offer life with an exclamation mark.

5 Characteristics of entertaining sites

In perusing the promotional material for four of the UK's principal new heritage attractions—the one 'Award winning', another 'Voted Visitor Attraction of the Year', and two others from Heritage (in its earlier guise, the celebrated Heritage Projects)—certain key words and phrases are encountered. From these, it is possible to obtain a sense—to use a not inappropriate word—of the character of definition of these attractions. Among words and phrases that occur are: 'thrill, challenge, stimulate', 'light, sound and smells!', 'see, feel, hear and do!', 'play an active part', 'entertaining and educational', 'fun and excitement for everyone', 'educational and entertaining, but most of all—it is fun!'. Reviewing 'Les Martyrs de Paris', a new attraction from the team which produced the Dungeons at London and York, Patrick Weber asked 'Where are we? In one of those tourist attractions where sensation-seekers can satisfy their morbid cravings by immersing themselves in the murkier aspects of history...the martyrs of the past make good scapegoats for today's ghouls.'¹

6 Does seeking to entertain lead presenters to go too far?

Should we regard such activities as inappropriate or see them as harmless and suitable aids to stimulating curiosity about the past and opening up routes to it which would otherwise never have been found, still less explored? Is a message debased by being made entertaining? Journalist Hugh Pearman, reviewing two exhibitions, one from France but showing in Glasgow, called 'Home of the Brave', and another, 'Pirates—Fact and Fiction', at the National Maritime Museum, considered the 'very fine line between the populist cultural show that succeeds in conveying its message, and the populist cultural show that fails'.² The former exhibition aimed high whereas the latter did not, according to Pearman. Both pulled in the crowds—and this is Pearman's point: 'You can draw the crowds *and* keep your integrity.'

7 To be entertaining or not

It is easy to deride entertainment's role in cultural communication, and criticize the heritage industry for its popularization of culture and cultural sites. A visit to a part of the world where the tentacles of the heritage industry have yet to reach is salutary. It is a reminder that perhaps something has been lost in the effort to popularize and to communicate through entertainment; but it also reminds us how much has been gained.

Example: Hungary

Overall, visits to Hungary's sites and museums are a salutary experience, acting as a reminder of what such places, for example in the UK, often used to be like. The visitor from a westernized country may long for the whole panoply of user-friendly facilities and information that have come to be regarded as the norm for site and museum visits in the west. Such a tourist may yearn for a little glitzy presentation, some modern information boards, custodians who aren't dressed in drap nylon overalls, a few audio-visual displays, a good shop on site or just a decent place to have a cup of coffee.

Having said this, the example of Hungary's National Museum of Agriculture in Budapest, with its sheer astringency, air of respect for knowledge, sense that learning needs to be achieved and that to do so requires effort, its general air of earnestness, lack of glamour, and the basic quality of its exhibits, may be what makes it a memorable and appealing experience for the visitor. To have put in smells, a ghost train, or something similar would have been to insult its integrity and utterly inappropriate. On the whole, though, in Hungary, the lack of easily available, easily assimilable and well-presented information produces what appear to be wasted opportunity after wasted opportunity for potential communication.

8 *Appropriate entertainment*

The crucial factor when producing entertainment at a site, as has been suggested, is to determine what entertainment will enhance, not reduce, a site's meaning or stature. At its best, entertainment is not a mere diversion but a vehicle for creating greater knowledge, understanding and awareness, joy and uplift. Entertainment can help bring out the best in a site, or show its hidden depths. Small plane, glider or balloon trips over sites are instances of what can be appropriately entertaining ways to view them. They literally provide a new perspective. A cruise on a lake should also be diverting, and it too would offer a different 'angle'. However, a restored boat, such as the steam yacht which tours Lake Coniston in the Lake District, gives an extra dimension of interest to the entertainment of the experience, because of its historical authenticity.

When considering ways of educating at a site or museum in Chapter 3.3, some technological devices for communicating information were described. Many of these are part of the entertaining experience of a site: in entertaining they inform.

The heritage industry was criticized for using heritage as a vehicle for entertainment. It might seem that images from history were merely adopted for use in entertainment because they looked picturesque and strangely different, rather than for what they meant or represented as history. But the industry can equally be praised (as in the example of absence in Hungary, mentioned above), for attracting a whole new audience of visitors, by making sites entertaining and therefore approachable. Often in the heritage industry the entertainment has got out of hand, or has been wholly inappropriate from the outset, but though some criticism may be justified in relation to accusations of rampant 'theme parkery', it should not be forgotten that these methods have attracted new audiences for history and for historical sites and collections.

9 *The evolution of site entertainment*

Perhaps colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, which started to be established in new mode in the inter-war era, was the first historical site to be made positively entertaining. Here, 'dressed-up' attendants and demonstrations of traditional skills are among the devices used to help visitors enjoy the process of trying to relate to and understand an era other than their own.

Example I: Ironbridge Gorge Museum

In the UK, this entertaining style of history began to be used from the 1970s, with the establishment of Ironbridge Gorge as a museum. Ironbridge's most entertaining and controversial aspect and, it should be said, the most crowdpulling as well was Blists Hill, a creation of old buildings—some erected on new territory, some not—together

with a number of entirely new 'old' buildings. In line with the custom at many an authentic historic site in the USA, the staff at Blists Hill wear period costume and act out historical roles for visitors' erudition and entertainment.

Example II: North of England Open Air Museum

Similar activity to that described above was meanwhile occurring at the North of England Open Air Museum at Beamish. The collections for this museum began to be assembled by Frank Atkinson, its founder, in the 1960s.

Example III: Arbeia

Recreation *in situ* has been tried out at a Roman site near South Shields, in the UK. A controversial decision was taken, in an area of high unemployment, to construct a west gate at the Roman fort of Arbeia, as it might have looked in the Roman period, upon the original west gate's foundations. On high days and holidays, support to its appearance is given by the presence of a guard of men dressed up in appropriate costume for the period.

Example IV: Berlin

So appealing to some is the polyester sheeting and scaffolding Schloss in former East Berlin (described in Chapter 3.1), put up temporarily and regarded by those who disapproved of it as 'a crude Disney-style publicity stunt', that some demands are being made that it be re-created in more permanent and substantial form.

When considering heritage that is entertaining, it should be remembered that theatricality and pastiche have been present in cultural forms, overt follies among them, down the ages. Many of them are among the most deeply regarded heritage items nowadays.

10 In summary

Entertainment at a site or museum often gives it a necessary zest and provides a vital stimulus to that place's recognition in historical terms. The concern must be, however, that the entertainment should be appropriate, accentuating the presence and meaning of a site, not demeaning it.

Issues and questions

- * Sensation.
 - * Dignity.
 - * Ethnic presentations.
 - * New perspectives.
-
- a) What might be the benefits of using entertaining methods at a site?
 - b) What types of entertainment might be appropriate in attracting tourists to which type of site?
 - c) Can entertainment affect a site?

Further reading

Waters, I., *Entertainment, Arts and Cultural Services*, Second Edition, Harlow, Longman/
Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management, 1994.

3.5

Commercializing

To produce a situation that is commercially lucrative to a presenter, it is necessary not only to encourage people to visit a site but also to create an environment in which they are persuaded that it is worthwhile paying for the experience. The ways and means of doing this, in a manner that is appropriate to the circumstances, is this chapter's subject.

1 Ways and means

Often the automatic assumption by some presenters is that a good financial return will need to be obtained through the 'gate'. While this may often be so, it can be far better in some situations to have a low or non-existent fee for admittance to get people to come to a site. This may be with the straight aim of increasing visitor throughput, or with the purpose of providing other attractions to tempt expenditure once customers are over a site's threshold. Side attractions may achieve higher expenditure per capita than could be obtained at a site's entry point without causing the 'turn-off' that might occur there. Once an audience has been achieved, a mood to spend can be generated as result of being at a site and experiencing its aura. On the other hand, a high entry fee can generate an air of exclusivity about a site, and is likely to produce a market segment of people who are wealthy or have a higher than average disposable income or who are extremely keen to see the site. If goods are provided at a site shop, or food is served at its café or restaurant, which are suitably upmarket to suit a clientèle that is particularly discriminating in such areas of its lifestyle, or if a sense of 'once in lifetime so we won't stint ourselves' is produced across the board, the spend per person can be high. It should be emphasized, however, that to keep a broad-based audience, in terms of categories of economic affluence and also therefore by implication those of social group, a low basic fee of admission needs to be the objective.

Example I: Buckingham Palace, London

Buckingham Palace has provided an exemplarily high quality of goods for sale. With the sense of specialness to a visit there, especially for those who come from long

distances away overseas and who may never travel to London again, it would appear that Buckingham Palace has an audience which, though quite large and also wide in range of type, is in this particular situation disposed to be high-spending.

Albeit that the market here is in some ways very mixed, a message to be drawn is, essentially, that pricing can be used to select an audience. A 'specialness' of circumstance produces a situation of special, not everyday, spending to match. In general, **the techniques of the marketplace—pre-eminently the supermarket—are just as applicable in the creation and building up of a customer-base for a cultural attraction as for anything else.**

The use of 'brands' like the Tate and Guggenheim has been mentioned. Attractions like Club Med and some theme parks have shown the invitingness of the 'all in price' to certain sectors of the market. For some types of purchaser it is helpful to know that he need not be nervous about hidden or additional costs and he may pay quite dearly initially to achieve this assurance. Pricing can also govern an audience's size, often usefully. Fewer people means less site damage, and if spend per person is increased fewer people need not mean a consequent loss of some revenue.

Example II: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

A useful and necessary exercise in analysing the qualities of a cultural attraction that are likely to appeal is to conduct what in marketing terms is called a SWOT analysis. This process seeks to define what are the direct strengths and weaknesses of a 'product'—the site in this instance—and to assess its opportunities and threats in terms of its relation with its external environment.

As has been indicated, when assessing the commercial potential of a cultural site it would be necessary to identify: its distinctive characteristics, for example, a unique collection of Russian books; and then its disadvantages, no room for temporary exhibitions, say. Then, in analysing the external circumstances, one might find that: to its advantage, it was near a bus station and in a centre of population; to its disadvantage, it was in a town with a sizeable Estonian community, was a long way from an international communication-link node, and it was in an area of poverty and high unemployment. It is easy to see from this what it would be appropriate and inappropriate to focus on, and what could be envisaged as the site's most appropriate audience in both commercial and other terms.

2 Difficult situations for earning revenue

Example I: Inaccessibility to a prime audience

Compensatory factors for any defects need to be identified. An example of an ostensibly difficult cultural site on which to capitalize is the collection of Andy Warhol-iana in an old communist centre in a small Czech town near the painter's birthplace. The best commercial option for the presenter would seem to be to publicize and operate a strong mail order system to generate revenue.

Example II: Sensitive situations

Sometimes it is simply not regarded as appropriate to make commercial capital from a cultural attraction, at some religious sites for example. Though certain Christian cathedrals have decided positively to request voluntary donations, most cathedrals or churches at least provide the opportunity in the form of a donation box for the collection of alms for repair and maintenance of their fabric or for charitable purposes. At Christian sites which are still being used for religious purposes, however, there is a general reluctance to be overtly commercial in what is regarded as God's house. A solution here, as in other instances where it is judged inappropriate to sell or make money on site, is to make an add-on provision, at a location where commercial activity *would* be appropriate. At the World Heritage Site of Chartres Cathedral, a new museum is being built at its front. It will be interesting to see what type of commercial operation occurs there, if any.

3 High quality and standards

The main message from the commercial sector of society which also applies in the particular context of cultural sites and the attempt to achieve financial benefit from them, is that in general people will pay a reasonable amount provided they are getting what they want. What they want, on the whole, quite understandably, is a **high standard of facility** for the relevant category of type. In western society the 1980s saw the general burgeoning of the service and retail sector, and this taught customers to expect as the norm good standards of presentation and quality of service. In general, in their leisure activities as in other facets of their lives, larger numbers of people expected facilities and resources of a higher level of excellence than hitherto. To compete successfully with other attractions providing leisure and spending opportunities, principally shopping malls, cultural sites and venues need to excel in what they offer or offer something different as a reason for attendance at them.

4 Promotion

As has been indicated, the right cultural attraction in the right place is a wonderful starting point in the pursuit of commercial activity at a site. A site will not be in the 'right' place, in terms of attracting an audience and market, unless that audience and market is aware of its existence and thus able to go to it. So marketing a site is necessary, in whatever way is deemed appropriate to that site and its projected audience.

5 The best response all round

Though the purpose of this book as a whole is to look at what could be considered appropriate activity in regard to a cultural site, it is necessary here to look at what might or might not be appropriate **commercial** activity for the site in question. The particular concerns of religious sites have been referred to already. In general, the ideal is that any commercial activity should be that which is most suitable simultaneously to meet the needs of a site, its presenter and its audience. Mismatches, where activity is inappropriate, spoiling the atmosphere of a place, simply 'grate'.

6 Types of 'selling point(s)'

Economic necessity may require that people and places must realize the commercial potential of their area. It has been suggested how that potential may be evaluated. Having understood the needs of a suitable market for a certain area, it should be possible to meet those needs appropriately. In terms of a site having an ability to be commercial, it appears everything has the potential. Even ostensibly quite nasty areas can be promoted and presented to catch a market. It is reported that 'Walking tours of sleazy areas such as Pigalle are popular',¹ and that some Swedes 'tired of London's more conventional attractions' are going on 'slum visits' of a north Peckham Council estate. Though no longer operating, the ultimate nasty-popular excursion might appear to have been 'Bob's Intifada Tours...which specialised in tours aimed at members of the American Jewish Defence League on holiday in Israel'. Bob, 'Packing his well-protected minibus with tourists...would drive deep into Palestinian settlements on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the hope of provoking local residents into stoning the bus.'

It might have been anticipated that the set of the ill-fated television soap opera *Eldorado* would become a tourist attraction. Sure enough, even before the last reel of *Eldorado* had been shot, two-hour tours, at 1,500 pesetas a go, were in operation and T-shirts were being sold. An *Adios Eldorado* video was made for sale too.²

7 Indirect opportunities

Example I: Good associated facilities

In Italy, a country not previously at the top of the league in terms of considering the needs of the market for its cultural sites, an effort is now under way to make its state museums self-financing. The Italian Minister of Culture is reportedly ‘convinced that there is a big market in museum-related products, such as books, cards, T-shirts and information packages’.³ The Minister, Alberto Ronchey, has said that ‘World-famous works of art should be able to maintain themselves.’ If he can ‘bring private enterprise into the museums with cafés, restaurants and cloakrooms’, he hopes to encourage people ‘to spend more time and money in the museum’.

Example II: The supporting attraction

Side attractions helping to support a main attraction are quite usual nowadays. One cultural attraction providing direct support to another, though in practice commonplace, is still not usually done in an overt and extended way. With the headline ‘Van Gogh bails out Mondrian as Dutch slash arts subsidies’⁴ the situation changed. The plan was for profits from a Van Gogh exhibition to pay for a proportion of the 1994 Piet Mondrian exhibition, and the decision was made in the context of increasing recession and of ‘intense debate in the Dutch parliament on future funding of important cultural events’.

Example III: Being sure of meeting the sponsor’s needs

During the boom years of the 1980s sponsors became the cultural heritage’s traditional saviours and benefactors, but the recession did, of course, lead to pressure to generate financial support for culture and cultural events from other sources as well. In the harder times, sponsors became more discerning, and to still get their support, supplicants had to meet sponsors’ needs that much more appropriately and well.

8 Causes and effects

As has been indicated, pricing at a high level may serve to exclude those with less wealth. This has apparently happened in Czechoslovakia, where in Prague prices at facilities like restaurants and pubs have risen to a level such that visitors can still afford them, but locals are priced out of the market, causing the development of a tourists’ rather than a citizens’ city.

Vermont in the USA on the other hand is determined not to fall victim to change brought about by greed. To protect itself, most particularly from a shopping mall invasion, the entire state was in 1993 put at the top of the “‘endangered” historic places”⁵ list produced annually by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

9 The need for careful evaluation and assessment

Just as it has been assessed as inappropriate for Vermont to go overboard for commercial gain, so it is necessary to evaluate the level and type of commercial activity that may or may not be appropriate at the rest of the world's cultural sites. As has been indicated, what may be quite acceptable in one situation will be utterly unsuitable and inappropriate elsewhere. If the commercial activity associated with a cultural site does not allow that site to stay true to its essence and type, it will have sold itself short in a fundamental and damaging way. This holds true for even a single cultural item. Unfortunately, examples are legion of the inappropriate representation of cultural images on products for commercial purposes. Recently obtainable from London's Museum Shop was a '50 inch high plastic blow-up' of the figure depicted in Edvard Munch's painting 'The Scream'.

In summary

It must be emphasized that if a site is to attract visitors, and therefore potential sources of income, it must represent a more desirable location for leisure activity than any other of a variety of attractive opportunities available.

Issues and questions

- * Market-place approach and techniques.
 - * Sensitive situations.
 - * Standards.
- a) Are there types of site which are not suitable to be treated as commercial commodities?
 - b) How can a site be evaluated for visitor attractiveness and revenue-generating capacity?
 - c) If a site is not able to operate as a commercial enterprise itself, how might income for it be generated?

Further reading

Laws, E., *Tourism Marketing: Service and Quality Management Perspectives*, Cheltenham, Stanley Thornes (Publishers) Ltd, 1991.
Ohmae, K., *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy*, London, Collins, 1990; London, Fontana, 1992.