

The 1991 Visitor Studies Conference Ottawa, Canada

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The National Capital Region of Canada, Ottawa in Ontario and Hull in Québec, hosted the 1991 Visitor Studies Conference, August 6 to 10, 1991. Eight professional development workshops, located at the Canadian Museum of Nature, Canadian Museum of Civilization, National Gallery of Canada, and Maison Charron, were followed by 49 plenary and lecture presentations, held at the University of Ottawa. These papers, with additional poster presentations, well represented the field of visitor studies. Sessions included case histories, research results, descriptions of methods, and perspectives on the state and future of visitor studies.

Receptions were held at the National Gallery of Canada, Canadian Museum of Civilization, and Canadian Museum of Nature. The National Historic Sites (Parks Service, Environment Canada) hosted a reception at the Canadian Parliament, which included a tour of the House of Commons, and sponsored an afternoon at the historic Rideau Canal Locks in the center of Ottawa.

Seventy of the 226 registered delegates attended one or more of the professional development workshops. Delegates from France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (4% of total participants) joined colleagues from all parts of the United States (32% of participants) and Canada (64%). Delegates represented 125 different institutions or companies, and included exhibit evaluators and planners, educators, managers, writers, students, professors, consultants, marketing staff, curators, designers, and architects. Of the delegates, 44% worked at museums, 15% for private companies, 13% at universities, 10% for parks and interpretation centers, 9% for art galleries, 4% at aquariums, zoos and botanical gardens, and 5% for other government agencies, libraries and professional associations.

The Ottawa Conference was the first annual Visitor Studies Conference held outside the U.S.A. Its bilingual French and English presentations introduced delegates to the vitality of audience research in Canada, and introduced Canadians to many of the established workers in the field. Formal and informal conference evaluations indicated that participants valued the Conference's cosmopolitan style and the diversity of delegate background and experience. This Conference also marked the formal establishment of the Visitor Studies Association, with the confirmation of elected officers and board members, and the designation of several working committees.

The Conference was a collaborative effort of representatives of the Center for Social Design of Jacksonville, Alabama, and a series of local institutions: the Canadian Museum of Nature, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Centre de Recherche en Evaluation Sociale des Technologies (University of Québec at Montréal), National Gallery of Canada, National Museum of Science and Technology, Parks Service (Environment Canada), and Rosalyn Rubenstein and Associates, Inc., Museologists.

We applaud the institutions that provided facilities, sponsored events, and supported staff who volunteered to plan and organize the Conference. Leslie Munro, the Conference Coordinator, and all the volunteers deserve our special thanks for a successful Conference.