

Thoughts - [continued from page 9]

experiences she had had. Few Westerners travel across China, and even fewer travel by train. As an "outsider" she had experienced something quite rare. Had she been a native Chinese, her travels might have been viewed as necessary tedium.

Of course "system maintenance" and the status of the "outsider" are integral parts of visitor behavior. They are inseparable. The vulnerability of being a visitor is precisely because the visitor is an outsider. But then, would such visitors want it any other way? □

Factors Affecting "Hands-On" Exhibits

From A. W. Melton (1936). Distribution of Attention in Galleries in a Museum of Science and Industry. *Museum News*, 14(3), 6-8.

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects on visitor behavior of manual operation of exhibits demonstrating electricity. Automatic operation of the exhibits was compared with manual operation. Before Melton intervened, five exhibits on electricity were programmed in a sequence such that the first exhibit would operate for ten seconds; a five second delay occurred; the second exhibit would operate for ten seconds; etc. until all five exhibits were completed. Under these conditions the mean time looking at the exhibits were 13.8 seconds. When visitors were allowed to manually operate three of these exhibits with a crank, the average time increased to 23.8 seconds. In addition, the average reading time increased from 4.5 seconds to 5.7 seconds after the manual condition was implemented. Melton argued that: "It seems reasonable to conclude that the manual operation stimulated interest of the type museums are attempting to foster." (p.7) □

Book Review - [continued from page 8]

MESC designed the study to help member museums understand and compare audiences so individual museums can become aware of their impact, and learn more about the role museums play in American society. The book presents the results of the study, a detailed analysis, and a copy of the questionnaire along with other procedural materials.

The first chapter discussed the demographic profile of visitors. The data are presented in a straight-forward manner with comparisons to 1980 U.S. Consensus data

and results from other visitor surveys. The second chapter provides an in-depth picture of key demographic characteristics in relationship to each other and to the type of museum visited. Matrices are used to compare the variables of age, sex and education with museum type. The results indicate that preferences for museum type is significantly influenced by these three variables.

Next is a detailed analysis of three (Asian American, Black, and Hispanic) ethnic minority audiences who are infrequent visitors (together they total 15.7% of the survey audience) to museums in Southern California in spite of the fact they comprise more than one-half of the regional population. The results show that younger ethnic minorities are a potential audience for museums in Southern California. The attention paid to the visiting behavior of minorities is worthwhile in that museums now have explicit information to help them develop specific programming for segments of this potential audience.

The final chapter examines with whom one chooses to visit the museum and the number of companions in a visiting group. The author uses the data to discuss the idea of the family and social group audience in a larger context: the role museums can play in American life. She suggests that museums re-examine current programming trends (group tours) and consider developing alternative programs for the small group, whether it be family or friends.

The data collected for this study were analyzed very thoroughly. The authors made excellent use of the data. As always, carefully defining the goals of a research project is the key to a successful and useful study. The apparent thought process behind the data analysis and the inclusion of the procedural materials are the most positive aspects of the book.

All surveys were conducted between January and March because other existing studies have shown more local visitors attend museums during this period and MESC wanted to focus on the local population. While there is an inquiry about place of residence, those results are not reported.

The book is a model for individual museums and those in regional associations who are interested in cooperating to conduct a visitor study; however, it must be realized that a project of this scope is not an easy task. There are many problems that are inherent with survey work that the book does not discuss. A description of some of the problems would have been useful to readers. On the whole, this inexpensive book is a worthwhile reference for those who conduct surveys and for those interested in museum audience statistics.

The book can be ordered from MESC Publications, Museum Educators of Southern California, P. O. Box 27854, Los Angeles, CA 90027. \$8.50 (\$7.50 MESC members) and \$1.50 postage (book rate) or \$2.50 (first class). Add \$ 0.40 postage for each additional copy.