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Uma experiência museal satisfatória: dimensões e componentes contextuais dos museus espanhóis

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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Introduction

- 1 Although the term “museum experience” has been used by numerous authors (Graburn 1977; Falk and Dierking 1992, 2000, 2016; Prentice, Witt and Hamer 1998; Packer 2008; Hennes 2010; Perry 2012; Roppola 2014), it has not been sufficiently defined to date. It has been widely studied in the fields of leisure and tourism, where it has been regarded as a memorable internal impression (Carbone and Haeckel 1994; Carù and Cova 2003; Amigo and Cuenca-Amigo 2017). From a more psychological perspective, experience is conceived as a subjective response to a given environment, and this perspective has been the most successful in museum audience research so far (Falk and Dierking 1992, 2000, 2016; Silverman 1995; Kirchberg and Tröndle 2012; Yi et al. 2022).
- 2 Museum experience can thus be understood as a process of subjective and personal mutual interaction between a visitor and their environment. Packer and Ballantyne (2016) extensively reviewed the term and defined the museum visitor experience as an

individual's personal, subjective, and immediate response to an activity, setting or event outside their usual environment. This paper draws on this view in order to study the experience. This involves both the subjective aspects of the experience and the interpretation of the environment where they occur, as they all may be involved in the achievement of a more or less satisfactory experience. Experience can therefore be considered to be an individual psychological phenomenon in which certain dimensions play a more important role than others for each person, depending on their personal characteristics and previous experiences. Some experiences may be enhanced to a lesser or greater extent by the visitor's own interpretation of the characteristics of the museum context, such as the activities, the physical environment, the services, other visitors, companions, and any other elements with which they may interact (Chang and Horng 2010).

- 3 Given the great disparity of approaches used and the potentially relevant variables involved in promoting successful museum experiences, analysing experience dimensions has certainly proven to be complex (Kirchberg and Tröndle 2012; Packer and Ballantyne 2016). Over the last twenty years, numerous attempts have been made to classify different types of experiences and dimensions of experience to facilitate their evaluation, without denying their holistic nature (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 1990; Pekarik, Doering and Karns 1999; Packer and Bond 2010; Perry 2012; Packer, Ballantyne and Bond 2013; Roppola 2014). A particularly interesting understanding of satisfactory museum experiences was that provided by Pekarik, Doering and Karns (1999). They identified four types of experiences that the users found to be satisfying: object-centred experiences; cognitive experiences; introspective experiences; and social experiences. Based on this taxonomy, they found that the type of satisfying experiences varied according to the characteristics of the museums, their contents, and their visitor profiles. Other studies have emphasised that fun, relaxation, wonder (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1995; Packer 2006), and emotions (Immordino-Yang and Damasio 2007; Sander and Scherer 2009; Mazzanti and Sani 2021) are all essential elements of satisfactory museum experiences.
- 4 This study focuses in the Spanish context, building on the previous research carried out by the Permanent Museum Visitor Studies Laboratory where the Positive Museum Experience Scale was developed as a first attempt to quantitatively measure museum experiences in Spain (LPPM 2013).
- 5 In a nutshell, this study aims to identify the factors involved in ensuring that museum visits can yield satisfactory experiences. It was conducted in some of the main Spanish museums in order to clarify the role played by subjective factors and the museum environment, and how the relationship between them shapes the visitor experience.

Method

Instrument

- 6 A self-administered questionnaire was designed to collect information on various aspects related to museum visits. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, two of which concerned the dimensions of the visitor experience and the contextual components of the museum environment.

- 7 In relation to the former, visitors were asked about the type of experiences that made their visit satisfactory. Therefore, an ad-hoc scale of nine aspects was developed based on the highlighting characteristics of museum experiences identified by the literature (Pekarik, Doering, and Karns 1999; Falk and Dierking 2016), including: amazement and learning (Mazzanti and Sani 2021), relaxation and fun (McIntyre 2009), as well as aesthetic experience (López-Sintas, García-Álvarez, Pérez-Rubiales 2012).

Table 1 – Question about the dimensions of the museum visitor experience

Please indicate to what extent the following aspects contributed to how satisfied you were with your visit to the museum. Response options range from “Not at all” to “Very much”. A “Don't know/ Not applicable” option is also included.						
	Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much	Don't know/ Not applicable
1. Amazement, fascination						
2. Learning						
3. Knowledge of the subject						
4. Enjoyment, entertainment						
5. Aesthetic experience						
6. Emotional connection with the museum						
7. Relaxation, unwinding, taking a break from routine						
8. Fun						
9. Stimulus for reflection and awareness						

- 8 Concerning the contextual components, visitors were presented a list of eight aspects mainly related to what Falk and Dierking (2016) call the physical context (exhibition content, comfort, services, signage, materials, and complementary activities, among others), but it also included a social-related item about companions (Packer and Ballantyne 2005; López Sintas, García Álvarez and Pérez Rubiales 2014). Respondents were asked to reflect on the importance attached to each of them.

Table 2 – Question about the contextual components

Indicate the importance you attach to the following aspects when you visit a museum. The response options range from “Not important” to “Very important”. A “Don’t know/Not applicable” option is also included.						
	Not important	Of minor importance	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Don't know/Not applicable
1. Content of the collections						
2. Comfort during your visit (availability of benches, rest areas, toilets, etc.)						
3. Cafeteria, parking, store...						
4. Wayfinding and signage						
5. Appropriate room temperature						
6. Company you go with						
7. Complementary activities to the visit (workshops, courses, presentations, etc.)						
8. Supporting interpretive materials (audio guides, brochures, specialised guides...)						

- 9 Both questions were developed *ad hoc* for this study and rated on a 5-point Likert scale, including an extra option for “Don’t know/Not applicable”.
- 10 The questionnaire also collected sociodemographic data, data related to visiting habits, and other information related to the visitors' perception of the museum and the practice of visiting museums.¹

Participants and data collection

- 11 The sample (table 3) consisted of 685 visitors to 16 Spanish museums in different locations that belonged to different categories. The visitors surveyed were randomly selected both at the entrance and exit of each museum, and the sampling unit was considered to be the individual. The questionnaires were administered in Spanish to both Spaniards and foreigners². Additionally, in Bilbao and Barcelona the questionnaire could be answered in the Basque and Catalan languages, respectively, for those who wished to do so.

Table 3 – Distribution of the sample according to the museums participating in the research

Name of the museum	Location	Category	Number of collected questionnaires	%
Sorolla Museum	Madrid	House Museum	98	14.3
National Archaeological Museum (MAN)	Madrid	Archaeology	88	12.8
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum	Bilbao	Fine Arts	82	12.0
National Sculpture Museum	Valladolid	Fine Arts	78	11.4
National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC)	Barcelona	Fine Arts	63	9.2
Guggenheim Museum	Bilbao	Contemporary Art	47	6.9
Museum of Romanticism	Madrid	Specialised	47	6.9
Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA)	Barcelona	Contemporary Art	33	4.8
National Museum of Underwater Archaeology (ARQVA)	Cartagena	Archaeology	29	4.2
National Museum of Ceramics and Sumptuary Arts "González Martí"	Valencia	Decorative Arts	26	3.8
Altamira National Museum and Research Centre	Santillana del Mar	Archaeology	22	3.2
National Museum of Anthropology	Madrid	Ethnographic-Anthropological	19	2.8
Lázaro Galdiano Museum	Madrid	Fine Arts	16	2.3
Cerralbo Museum	Madrid	House Museum	16	2.3

Museum of America	Madrid	Ethnographic- Anthropological	11	1.6
National Museum of Decorative Arts	Madrid	Decorative Arts	10	1.5
Total			685	100.0

- 12 The administration of the questionnaire was carried out by the researchers between November and December 2019, on both weekdays and weekends. Each respondent completed an informed consent form related to pooled data analysis.
- 13 Table 4 presents the characteristics of the sample analysed based on the independent variables used in the analysis.

Table 4 – Characteristics of the sample analysed based on the independent variables used

Sociodemographic variables		%
Sex	Women	58.9
	Men	40.6
	Non-binary	0.4
Age	18-29	22.8
	30-45	19.9
	46-64	34.8
	65 or more	22.5
Education level	No formal education	0.7
	Primary Education	1.9
	Secondary Education	3.1
	Intermediate Vocational Training/Baccalaureate	20.2
	University degree or similar	52.1
	Master's degree or PhD	21.9
Habit variables		%
When you visit museums, who do you usually go with?	I usually go alone	13.2
	I usually go with other people	86.8

Number of museums visited over the past year	Zero. This is the first one I have visited this year	4.4
	Between 1-2	22.0
	Between 3-5	30.9
	More than 5	42.8
Perception variables		%
In general, how would you rate museums as institutions? 0 being the lowest and worst rating and 10 the highest and best rating	Between 1-6	5.9
	Between 7-8	41.0
	Between 9-10	53.1
Compared to other cultural practices that you engage in, how important is visiting museums to you?	Less important	3.8
	Equally important	29.1
	More important	67.1

- 14 As can be observed in table 4, the sample selected corresponds to people who place visits to museums at the centre of their interests. According to the survey of cultural habits and practices 2021-2022 (MCD 2022), in Spain, only 20.1% of the population visited a museum in the last year. However, the sample presented here is not intended to be representative of the general population, but rather to analyse in depth satisfactory museum experiences. This explains why the sample is composed of people who are frequent visitors to museums and who tend to be described as “heavy users”.

Data analysis

- 15 SPSS (version 26) was used to analyse the data collected. A factor analysis of the questions selected for this study was performed. The Pearson Chi-square test was then applied to examine whether there was a significant association (p -value < 0.05) between the different factors, and between each of the factors and the selected independent variables (see table 4).

Results and discussion

- 16 One of the preliminary results referred to the grouping of the dimensions of the museum experiences and components of the museum environment relating to the different factors involved.
- 17 The nine items associated with the question on the visitor experience (see table 1) were initially automatically grouped into two factors, accounting for only 49.7% of the variance, with some of the items being poorly explained. This result was not surprising if one considers that the museum experience is holistic in nature, as the different types

of factors that influence it are closely interrelated. Therefore, the factor analysis was repeated invoking a forced extraction of three factors. In this way, the percentage of variance explained rose to 61%. These three factors became the three dimensions of experience which, following the proposals of the studies reviewed, were called: (1) the playful-hedonistic dimension; (2) the cognitive dimension; and (3) the emotional-affective dimension.

Table 5 – Factor analysis of the question about the dimensions of the visitor experience

	Rotated components			Factor analysis
	1	2	3	
Fun	.826			Playful-hedonistic dimension
Relaxation, unwinding, taking a break from routine	.771		.300	
Enjoyment, entertainment	.751			
Learning		.849		Cognitive dimension
Knowledge of the subject		.621	.397	
Amazement, fascination	.382	.594		
Stimulus for reflection and awareness		.452	.451	
Emotional connection with the museum			.783	Emotional-affective dimension
Aesthetic experience			.739	
Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalisation. Rotation converged in 5 iterations. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy: .743 Bartlett's test for sphericity. Sig. .000 Variance explained: 61%				

- 18 The eight items from the question related to the contextual components were automatically grouped into three factors, explaining 62% of the variance. These three factors became the three components of the environment, and were labelled as: (1)

welcoming and comfort (restorative) components; (2) communication and social components; and (3) content components.

Table 6 – Factor analysis of the question about the components of the museum environment

	Rotated components			Factor analysis
	1	2	3	
Comfortable visit (availability of benches, rest areas, toilets, etc.)	.794			Welcoming and comfort (restorative) components
Appropriate room temperature	.716			
Cafeteria, parking, store...	.714			
Signs to indicate the different areas and routes	.674			
Complementary activities to the visit (workshops, courses, presentations, etc.)		.788		Communication and social components
Supporting interpretative materials (audio guides, brochures, specialised guides...)		.702		
Whether you visit the museum on your own or with other people		.680		
Content of the collections			.926	Content components
<p>Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalisation. Rotation converged in 4 iterations. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy: .720 Bartlett's test for sphericity. Sig. .000 Variance explained 62%</p>				

The dimensions of a satisfactory museum experience

- 19 Next, the three dimensions identified in a satisfactory museum visitor experience were analysed: (1) playful-hedonistic dimension; (2) cognitive dimension; and (3) emotional-affective dimension. Each of them reflects different types of visitor experience.

Playful-hedonistic dimension

- 20 This dimension grouped the items of “Fun”, “Relaxation, unwinding, taking a break from routine” and “Enjoyment, entertainment”. Experiences related to enjoyment, fun

and entertainment are frequent motivations for visitors, since being carried away by curiosity, fascination and growing interest leads to intense concentration, which focuses attention. Visitor involvement in leisure activities is self-rewarding, as skills increase as changes in the environment increase (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1995), which favours concentration and, therefore, learning (Packer 2006; Ballantyne, Packer and Falk 2011).

- 21 The analysis of this playful-hedonistic dimension together with the independent variables revealed that there was a significant association between this dimension and age, and with the importance given by the respondents to visiting museums compared to other cultural practices.
- 22 The younger the visitor, the more important the playful-hedonistic dimension was (chi-square 0.000). Thus, for 66.7% of respondents aged between 18 to 29 years old, this dimension considerably contributed to their satisfaction with their museum visit experience, while for those aged 65 years and over, this percentage was only 42.7%.
- 23 As for the importance given to visiting museums in comparison with other cultural practices, the greater the importance, the more the recreational dimension contributed to a satisfactory museum visit experience (chi-square 0.002). Some 38.5% of those for whom visiting museums was less important than other cultural practices considered the leisure dimension to be important or very important, while this percentage rose to 61.3% among those for whom visiting museums was fairly or much more important than other cultural practices.

Table 7 – Significant relationship between the playful-hedonistic dimension of the visitor experience and the independent variables “age” and “importance of the practice of visiting museums”

		Playful-hedonistic dimension			Total
		Not important at all or hardly important	Somewhat important	Important or very important	
Age * chi-square 0.000	18-29	8.5%	24.8%	66.7%	100.0%
	30-45	3.7%	31.3%	64.9%	100.0%
	46-64	14.6%	24.5%	60.9%	100.0%
	65 or more	17.5%	39.9%	42.7%	100.0%
Importance given by respondents to visiting museums in comparison with other cultural practices * chi-square 0.002	Less important	0.0%	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
	Equally important	11.5%	32.3%	56.3%	100.0%
	More important	12.3%	26.4%	61.3%	100.0%

Cognitive dimension

- 24 The second dimension identified was the cognitive dimension, which grouped the items “Learning”, “Knowledge of the subject”, “Stimulus for reflection and awareness”, and “Amazement, fascination”. Museums are generally considered as places associated with a learning experience (Pagel, Maaß and Kendall 2015; Mastandrea and Maricchiolo 2016). These components of experience are perhaps the best described in current research. Comprehension, knowledge acquisition, memory, increased curiosity and intellectual reflection from facts, objects or works of art have traditionally been included as processes involved in meaningful learning in museums (Perry 1992; Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1995). However, given the informal nature of the learning that happens in this context, motivation, and attention are key factors in understanding the cognitive components of the experience; but so are absorption, immersion, fun and enjoyment (LLPM 2013; Pérez Santos 2019). The experiences of awe and fascination found as part of this dimension may reflect this view.
- 25 The analysis of the results of the cognitive dimension showed a significant association with education level, to what extent the museum is highly valued as an institution and, again, the importance given to visiting museums in comparison with other cultural practices. Thus, when analysing the relative frequencies, it was found that the higher the education level, the more important the cognitive dimension in the experience of the visit was (chi-square 0.001). If the two ends of the scale were compared, 60% of visitors with no formal education recognised that the cognitive dimension contributed quite a lot or a lot to how satisfied they were with their visit to the museum, while for those with postgraduate studies this percentage rose to 92.6%.
- 26 The cognitive dimension was more important the more highly the museum was valued as an institution (chi-square 0.001). In this sense, 82.5% of respondents rating the museum between 1 and 6³ stated that the cognitive dimension was for them important or very important, in contrast to 93.0% who rated the museum between 9 and 10.
- 27 Finally, the cognitive dimension was also more important the greater importance respondents attached to visiting museums compared to other cultural practices (chi-square 0.002). Some 69.2% of those for whom visiting museums was less important than other cultural practices considered the cognitive dimension to be important or very important, while this percentage rose to 89.2% among those for whom visiting museums was fairly or much more important than other cultural practices.

Table 8 – Relationship between the cognitive dimension of the visitor experience and the independent variables “level of education”, “appreciation of the museum as an institution” and “importance of the practice of visiting museums”

		Cognitive dimension			Total
		Not important at all or hardly important	Somewhat important	Important or very important	
Education level	No formal education	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	100.0%
* chi-square 0.001					

	Primary Education	7.1%	0.0%	92.9%	100.0%
	Secondary Education	0.0%	14.3%	85.7%	100.0%
	Intermediate Vocational Training/ Baccalaureate	0.7%	14.5%	84.8%	100.0%
	University degree or similar	0.9%	11.7%	87.4%	100.0%
	Master's degree or PhD	0.7%	6.8%	92.6%	100.0%
Rating of the museum as an institution (scale from 0 to 10) * chi-square 0.001	Rates between 1 and 6	2.5%	15.0%	82.5%	100.0%
	Rates between 7 and 8	1.5%	15.7%	82.8%	100.0%
	Rates between 9 and 10	0.3%	6.7%	93.0%	100.0%
Importance given by respondents to visiting museums in comparison with other cultural practices * chi-square 0.002	Less important	7.7%	23.1%	69.2%	100.0%
	Equally important	0.5%	11.3%	88.1%	100.0%
	More important	0.9%	9.9%	89.2%	100.0%

Emotional-affective dimension

- 28 The third dimension resulting from the factor analysis was the emotional-affective dimension, which grouped the items “Emotional connection with the museum” and “Aesthetic experience”.
- 29 Emotional or affective aspects have also been generally considered to be part of the museum visitor experience. Emotions such as surprise, joy, delight, inspiration, etc. are frequent ways of describing sensations among museum audiences. As Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) stated, emotions are often based on personal associations and past experiences, although the strength of the emotional response may differ from moment to moment. In museums, it is logical to think that affective responses are mediated by cognitive evaluations of stimuli, as established by cognitive appraisal theory (Sander and Scherer 2009). But, at the same time, recent advances in neuroscience have found a connection between cognitive and emotional functions that influences the understanding of learning in formal and informal contexts, such as museums (Immordino-Yang and Damasio 2007). In general, although the term “emotion” has been widely used in this context, it is more appropriate to use the term “affect” to

encompass emotions, moods, and attitudes (Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer 1999; Hosany and Gilbert 2010; Sander and Scherer 2009) which are less intense and not triggered by a specific stimulus or event (Hosany and Gilbert 2010).

- 30 The emotional-affective dimension was significantly associated with the importance given by the respondents to visiting museums compared to other cultural practices and the fact of going to the museum alone or in company.
- 31 The greater the importance given to visiting museums, the more the emotional dimension contributed to a satisfactory museum visit experience (chi-square 0.003). In this sense, some 38.5% of those for whom visiting museums was less important than other cultural practices considered the emotional-affective dimension to be important or very important, while this percentage rose to 63.0% among those for whom visiting museums was fairly or much more important than other cultural practices.
- 32 The emotional dimension had greater influence when people reported having visited the museum alone (chi-square 0.007). Some 73.3% of those who visited museums alone declared that the emotional dimension had a considerable or great influence on their satisfaction with their visit to the museum, while this percentage was reduced to 56% in the case of those who went accompanied.

Table 9 – Relationship between the emotional-affective dimension of the visitor experience and the independent variables “importance of the practice of visiting museums” and “whether I visit museums alone or with other people”

		Emotional-affective dimension			Total
		Not important at all or hardly important	Somewhat important	Important or very important	
Importance given by respondents to visiting museums in comparison with other cultural practices * chi-square 0.003	Less important	23.1%	38.5%	38.5%	100.0%
	Equally important	13.0%	37.3%	49.7%	100.0%
	More important	9.4%	27.6%	63.0%	100.0%
When you visit museums, who do you usually go with? * chi-square 0.007	I usually go alone	4.7%	22.1%	73.3%	100.0%
	I usually go with other people	11.9%	32.1%	56.0%	100.0%

Components of the museum environment that influence the experience

33 The dimensions described above can be enhanced to a greater or lesser extent by environmental factors generally present in museums. These dimensions were related to the three contextual components resulting from the factor analysis of the question on the importance attributed by visitors to museum characteristics. Before analysing the relationship between dimensions and components, the three contextual components and their relationship to the independent variables are described below.

Content components

34 The objects, works, and pieces that make up museum collections offer the visitor an experience either of the object as a whole, or as a compendium of special characteristics, such as beauty, form, colour, tactile qualities, or evidence of the artist's process (Kirchberg and Tröndle 2012). Interacting with the formal and symbolic characteristics of objects enables satisfying experiences, as shown in this study. Feeling fascinated by beauty, appreciating the value of unique things, admiring real objects, thinking about what it would be like to own these things, are some of the rewarding experiences referred to by museum visitors (Pérez Santos 2019).

35 The content components are significantly associated with three of the independent variables analysed. First, the more visits the respondents had made during the previous year, the more importance was given to the content of the collections, (chi-square 0.005). Even though the difference might not be as large as in other cases, it can be observed that for 91.3% of those who visited one or two museums over the past year, the content components are important or very important, whereas this percentage rises to 98.6% when it comes to respondents who visited more than 5 museums over the past year.

36 Second, the content components were considered as more important the more respondents valued museums as institutions (chi-square 0.000). 85.0% of respondents rating the museum between 1 and 6 stated that the content components were for them important or very important, in contrast to 98.0% who rated the museum between 9 and 10

37 Third, the content components were valued more the more respondents valued the practice of visiting museums compared to other cultural practices (chi-square 0.002). In this sense, some 88.0% of those for whom visiting museums was less important than other cultural practices considered the content components to be important or very important, while this percentage rose to 98.2% among those for whom visiting museums was fairly or much more important than other cultural practices.

Table 10 – Significant relationship between the content components and the independent variables “visits in the last year”, “appreciation of the museum as an institution” and “importance of the practice of visiting museums”

	Content components	Total
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		Not important at all or hardly important	Somewhat important	Important or very Important	
Number of museums visited over the past year * chi-square 0.005	Zero. This is the first one I have visited this year	0.0%	3.6%	96.4%	100.0%
	Between 1-2	1.3%	7.3%	91.3%	100.0%
	Between 3-5	0.0%	2.9%	97.1%	100.0%
	More than 5	0.0%	1.4%	98.6%	100.0%
Rating of the museum as an institution (scale from 0 to 10) * chi-square 0.000	Rates between 1 and 6	0.0%	15.0%	85.0%	100.0%
	Rates between 7 and 8	0.4%	3.6%	96.0%	100.0%
	Rates between 9 y 10	0.3%	1.7%	98.0%	100.0%
Importance given by respondents to visiting museums in comparison with other cultural practices * chi-square 0.002	Less important	0.0%	12.0%	88.0%	100.0%
	Equally important	1.0%	5.6%	93.4%	100.0%
	More important	0.0%	1.8%	98.2%	100.0%

Communication and social components

- 38 The communication and social components included “Complementary activities to the visit (workshops, courses, presentations, etc.)”, “Supporting interpretive materials (audio guides, brochures, specialised guides)” and “Company you go with”. This component therefore grouped together certain characteristics of the museum environment that met the needs of understanding, obtaining explanations to the questions posed, satisfying curiosity in a not too demanding environment, and being able to choose and make decisions with control (Perry 1992). As Dufresné-Tassé (1999) stated, having a good time, getting answers, and feeling reinforced by having succeeded in making sense of the objects by activating one's own knowledge and skills with the help of the information in the exhibition, is fundamental to a satisfactory experience.
- 39 Additionally, visiting museums is an eminently social activity; interaction with companions is one of the main sources of satisfaction of the museum experience and a reason for visiting (Packer and Ballantyne 2002). Social interaction in museums provides visitors with the opportunity to develop an inclusive intergenerational form of leisure that is conducive to human development (Pérez Santos 2019). The verbal

exchange with companions and the observation of other people in the exhibition rooms enrich the experience (McCarthy and Ciolfi 2008).

- 40 The analysis of the communication and social components together with the independent variables yielded two significant relationships. First, regarding the level of education, respondents with lower levels attached greater importance to this component than those with higher levels (chi-square 0.042). As it can be observed in table 11, 66.7% of respondents with a primary education level considered the communication and social components to be important or very important in contrast to only 48.3% of those with master's degree or PhD level.
- 41 Second, participants who tended to visit the museum alone gave less importance to the communication and social components than those who usually go with other people (chi-square 0.000). Some 59.9% of those usually going with other people considered the content components to be important or very important, while this percentage declined to 33.7% among those usually going alone.

Table 11 – Significant relationship between the communication and social components and the independent variables “education level” and “whether I visit the museum alone or with other people”

		Communication and social components			Total
		Not important at all or hardly important	Somewhat important	Important or very important	
Education level * chi-square 0.042	No formal education	40.0%	40.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	Primary Education	8.3%	25.0%	66.7%	100.0%
	Secondary Education	4.8%	9.5%	85.7%	100.0%
	Intermediate Vocational Training/ Baccalaureate	9.6%	33.1%	57.4%	100.0%
	University degree or similar	8.4%	33.2%	58.4%	100.0%
	Master's degree or PhD	11.7%	40.0%	48.3%	100.0%
When you visit museums, who do you usually go with? * chi-square 0.000	I usually go alone	16.9%	49.4%	33.7%	100.0%
	I usually go with other people	8.5%	31.6%	59.9%	100.0%

Welcoming and comfort components (restorative)

- 42 These components included aspects such as the “comfortable visit” (benches, rest areas, and toilets available, among other components), “appropriate room temperature”, “cafeteria, parking, store...” and “wayfinding and signage”. Comfort and guidance are two of the factors that most influence the quality of the museum experience. Feeling comfortable in a place and knowing that one can find the right itinerary has a very important effect on being satisfied with the visit and psychological well-being (Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter 1993; Packer 2008; Packer and Bond 2010). These types of needs meet certain demands or basic needs of the visitor (physiological, safety, or belonging) that are essential for any meaningful interaction between the visitor and the museum to take place. They are the basis and support point for other more complex needs (Black 2005).
- 43 The welcoming and comfort components were significantly associated with the independent variables of perception. These components were more highly valued by those visitors who valued museums as institutions (chi-square 0.046) and those who valued the practice of visiting museums more than other cultural practices (chi-square 0.038), although in both cases the differences might not be as large as in previous components due to the higher values of both chi-squares.
- 44 First, 52.5% of respondents rating the museum between 1 and 6 stated that the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components were for them important or very important, in contrast to 58.7% who rated the museum between 9 and 10.
- 45 Second, some 50.0% of those for whom visiting museums was less important than other cultural practices considered the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components to be important or very important, while this percentage rose to 56.3% among those for whom visiting museums was fairly or much more important than other cultural practices.
- 46 Table 12 – Significant relationship between the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components and the independent variables “appreciation of the museum as an institution” and “importance of the practice of visiting museums”

		Welcoming and comfort (restorative) components			Total
		Not important at all or hardly important	Somewhat Important	Important or very important	
Rating of the museum as an institution (scale from 0 to 10) * chi-square 0.046	Rates between 1 and 6	20.0%	27.5%	52.5%	100.0%
	Rates between 7 and 8	8.4%	36.9%	54.7%	100.0%
		6.5%	34.8%	58.7%	100.0%

	Rates between 9 and 10				
Importance given by respondents to visiting museums in comparison with other cultural practices * chi-square 0.038	Less important	19.2%	30.8%	50.0%	100.0%
	Equally important	10.2%	30.6%	59.2%	100.0%
	More important	6.0%	37.6%	56.3%	100.0%

Relationships between dimensions and components of the museum visitor experience

- 47 The study of the visitor experience requires taking into account the interaction between the subjective aspects of the experience and the characteristics of the museum context in which it occurs. It is to be assumed, therefore, that certain subjective experiences may be related to different components of the context.
- 48 The analysis revealed that the greater the value placed on the playful-hedonistic dimension in terms of having a satisfactory museum visitor experience, the greater the importance attributed to the communication and social components (chi-squared 0.000) and to the restorative components of welcome and comfort (chi-squared 0.002). As it can be observed in table 13, 41.9% of those respondents for whom the communication and social components were not important at all or hardly important, considered the playful-hedonistic dimension to be important or very important. That number rose to 68.9% in the case of respondents for whom the communication and social components were important or very important. The same happens with the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components. Also, 55.8% of those respondents for whom the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components were not important at all or hardly important, considered the playful-hedonistic dimension to be important or very important in contrast to 65.6% for whom the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components were important or very important.
- 49 Presumably, this dimension, which is especially important for younger visitors and for those less familiar with museum visits, entails greater support for those components that facilitate understanding and well-being.

Table 13 – Relationship between the playful-hedonistic dimension of the visitor experience and the communication and social components and the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components

	Playful-hedonistic dimension			Total
	Not important at all or hardly important	Somewhat important	Important or very important	

Communication and social components * chi-square 0.000	Not important at all or hardly important	30.6%	27.4%	41.9%	100.0%
	Somewhat important	10.7%	41.5%	47.8%	100.0%
	Important or very important	8.8%	22.3%	68.9%	100.0%
Welcoming and comfort (restorative) components * chi-square 0.002	Not important at all or hardly important	13.5%	30.8%	55.8%	100.0%
	Somewhat important	14.9%	35.7%	49.4%	100.0%
	Important or very important	8.9%	25.5%	65.6%	100.0%

- 50 However, when the cognitive dimension prevailed in terms of considering a visitor experience satisfactory, the museum characteristics that most influenced this experience were equally the content of the collections (chi-square 0.000) and the communication and social components, such as complementary activities, supporting interpretive materials and companions (chi-square 0.000). Therefore, for those visitors for whom learning, understanding, or reflecting on exhibition content was essential to enjoy a satisfactory museum experience, but the communication and social components were also essential.
- 51 As it can be observed in table 14, 50.0 % of those respondents for whom the content components were not important at all or hardly important, considered the cognitive dimension to be important or very important. That number rose to 89.4% in the case of respondents for whom the content components were important or very important. The same happens with the communication and social components. 77.8% of those respondents for whom the communication and social components were not important at all or hardly important, considered the cognitive dimension to be important or very important in contrast to 89.4% for whom the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components were important or very important.
- 52 Table 14 - Relationship between the cognitive dimension of the experience and the content components and the communication and social components

	Cognitive dimension			Total
	Not important at all or hardly important	Somewhat important	Important or very important	
Content components	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

* chi-square 0.000

	Not important at all or hardly important				
	Somewhat important	0.0%	40.9%	59.1%	100.0%
	Important or very important	0.8%	9.8%	89.4%	100.0%
Communication and social components * chi-square 0.000	Not important at all or hardly important	6.3%	15.9%	77.8%	100.0%
	Somewhat important	0.9%	10.6%	88.5%	100.0%
	Important or very important	0.3%	10.3%	89.4%	100.0%

- 53 Finally, when the satisfactory experience was more closely linked to the emotional-affective dimension, both the content of the collections (chi-square 0.028) and the restorative components of welcome and comfort (comfort in the rooms, services and signs) (chi-square 0.013) were the components most valued by visitors.
- 54 As it can be observed in table 15, 40.9% of those respondents for whom the content components were somewhat important, considered the emotional-affective dimension to be important or very important. That number rose to 58.8% in the case of respondents for whom the content components were important or very important. The same happens with the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components. 49.1% of those respondents for whom the emotional-affective dimension was not important at all or hardly important, considered the cognitive dimension to be important or very important in contrast to 63.4% for whom the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components were important or very important.
- 55 This emotional-affective dimension was found to be more related to the exhibition content itself and the restorative component than to communication or social aspects. This was more important for those who visited museums alone and for visitors who attached great importance to visiting museums.

Table 15 – Relationship between the emotional-affective dimension of the visitor experience and the content components and the welcoming and comfort (restorative) components

	Emotional-affective dimension			Total
	Not important at all or hardly important	Somewhat important	Important or very important	
Content components	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%

* chi-square 0.028

	Not important at all or hardly important				
	Somewhat important	0.0%	59.1%	40.9%	100.0%
	Important or very important	11.1%	30.0%	58.8%	100.0%
Welcoming and comfort (restorative) components * chi-square 0.013	Not important at all or hardly important	15.1%	35.8%	49.1%	100.0%
	Somewhat important	14.7%	33.2%	52.1%	100.0%
	Important or very important	7.9%	28.7%	63.4%	100.0%

Conclusion

- 56 This study has focused on identifying the factors which, in the opinion of a sample of visitors to Spanish museums, most influence whether a visit can be considered to be satisfactory. The results confirmed that the museum experience is the result of the interaction of the person with the stimuli of the environment (the museum), its characteristics and contents, and the interpretation made of them. The dimensions of the experience feed into each other, influencing each other incrementally and are therefore subtly interrelated for all visitors. However, at the same time, the results showed that a satisfactory experience occurs when this interaction has a more significant impact on some dimensions rather than on others, and how they were reorganised according to the personal characteristics and the visitors' evaluations of the exhibition context.

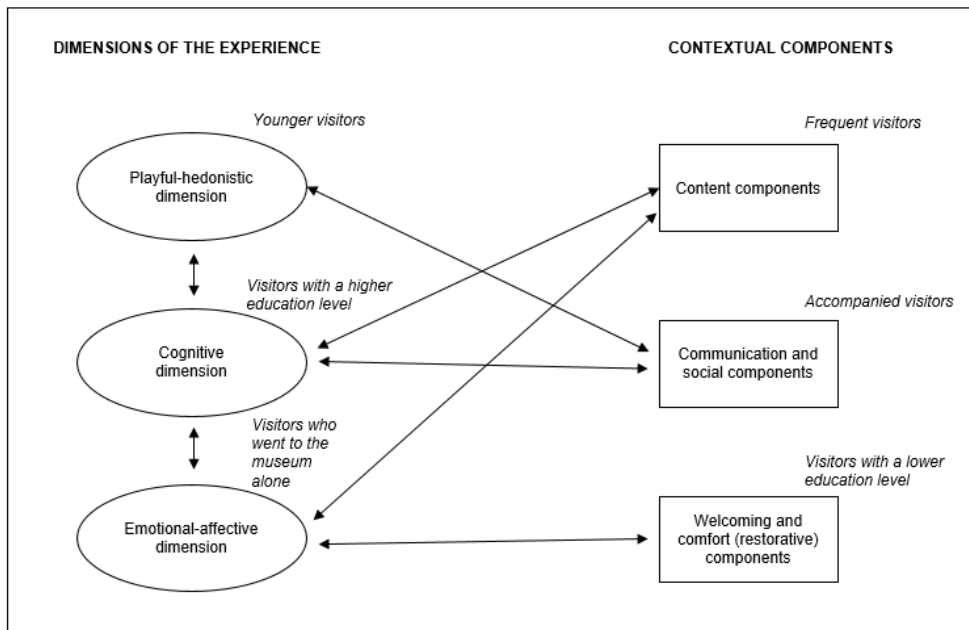


Fig. 1 – Dimensions and contextual components of a satisfactory museum experience

- 57 The cognitive dimension was the one that most contributed to a satisfactory visit for participants with higher education levels, who valued museums more and attached more importance to museum visits than to other cultural practices. This dimension refers to the acquisition of knowledge as one of the returns on which satisfaction is based for these profiles, reaffirming the importance that some studies (Perry 1992; Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1995) placed on understanding as an essential condition for a satisfactory museum visit. The fact that those who gave prominence to this dimension had high education levels explains the central role of understanding as a gateway to knowledge and a source of satisfaction in museum experiences. These were also people who attached great value to museums as institutions. This fact, together with the importance they assigned to the museum visit in comparison with other cultural practices, suggested that they had a certain attachment to and involvement with museums. It is particularly interesting that the greater the contribution of this cognitive dimension to a satisfactory visit, the greater the importance given to the contents of the collections, enriched by complementary activities and supporting interpretative materials, and to companions. It can be stated, therefore, that the cognitive dimension was closely related to the content, communication and social components of the environment.
- 58 The central position of the museum's content was shared by those who considered the emotional-affective dimension to be key to satisfactory museum visits. For these people, visiting alone encouraged them to experience their emotions and, therefore, led to a satisfactory experience. It could be said that the fascination, amazement, and concentration that promoted the flow experiences mentioned by Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (1995) are more viable alone than in the company of other people. Those participants who made this central to the emotional dimension in their museum experiences also attached great importance to the services on offer, signs and comfort, in other words, to the restorative components. These issues are undoubtedly essential for visitors to connect emotionally with the museum and its contents.

- 59 Reflection on the playful-hedonistic dimension shows the importance of this aspect for younger groups. The results indicated that the younger museum visitors were, the more important this dimension was to ensure a satisfactory experience. In the light of this data, museums should continue to seek innovative programs to guarantee the enjoyment of children and young people, making museums attractive spaces not only for their relationship with knowledge and significant learning, but also for their ability to promote fun and satisfying experiences, in which the acquisition of knowledge takes place almost by default, as a direct consequence of visitor enjoyment.
- 60 The results of this study have shown that, despite the profoundly subjective nature of the museum experience, museums have much to say as facilitators of satisfactory experiences. They can modulate the role played by the various components of the museum context in their visits, depending on the profiles of their visitors and their orientation toward one type of experience or another. A challenge that undoubtedly involves obtaining further knowledge of their audiences. Something that is becoming increasingly difficult, given the dynamic and changing nature of the preferences, interests, and expectations of museum visitors. Therefore, this article may be of special interest to researchers, professionals and experts in the management and strategy of museum audiences.
- 61 Future research should explore, among other issues, museum satisfaction and its sources in groups of people with no or infrequent visits to museums (“not heavy users”), as well as the role of satisfactory museum experiences in the long-term adherence or loyalty of cultural audiences to museums.

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NOTES

1. During January and February 2019, prior to the administration of the questionnaire, 75 exploratory interviews were conducted at the Fine Arts Museum and the Guggenheim Museum (Bilbao), and at the National Museum of Decorative Arts (Madrid). The main goal was to refine some of the questions and response options that were generating more debate among the research team members. In total, 10 open questions formed the interview protocol and the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed in their entirety. The interviewees were selected at the exit of the aforementioned museums and were adults over 18 years of age. Of the 75 people interviewed, 42 were women and 33 were men.
 2. According to their country of origin, 92.1% were from Spain, 5% from Latin America and 2.9% from other European countries.
 3. Using a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 expressed the highest value.
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ABSTRACTS

Over the last 20 years, there has been a growing interest in the analysis of museum experiences. Different authors have approached this subject from various perspectives, but only a few have focused on the idea of satisfactory experiences. This study sheds light on this field of knowledge, exploring the factors involved in satisfactory museum experiences. It clarifies how subjective factors (experience dimensions) and the museum environment (contextual components) are related and play a role in shaping those visitor experiences. For this purpose, a quantitative methodology was selected. In 2019 a questionnaire was administered to a sample of 685 visitors to 16 Spanish museums, which confirmed that their museum experience was the result of their interaction with the museum, its characteristics, and its contents. The visitor experience was satisfactory when their interaction had an impact on some dimensions of their experience. This varied according to each visitor's profile and what they valued most. The results showed that, despite the subjective nature of the experience, museums play an essential role as facilitators of satisfactory experiences. They can modulate the role played by the various components of the museum context in their visits, depending on the profiles of their visitors and their orientation toward one type of experience or another.

Nos últimos 20 anos, tem-se registado um interesse crescente na análise das experiências em museus. Diferentes autores têm abordado este tema sob várias perspetivas, mas apenas alguns se

têm debruçado sobre a ideia de experiências satisfatórias. Este estudo lança luz sobre este campo de conhecimento, explorando os fatores envolvidos em experiências museais satisfatórias. Esclarece como os fatores subjetivos (dimensões da experiência) e o ambiente do museu (componentes contextuais) estão relacionados e desempenham um papel na formação dessas experiências do visitante. Para este efeito, foi selecionada uma metodologia quantitativa. Em 2019 foi aplicado um questionário a uma amostra de 685 visitantes de 16 museus espanhóis, que confirmou que a sua experiência museológica era o resultado da sua interação com o museu, as suas características e os seus conteúdos. A experiência do visitante era satisfatória quando a sua interação tinha um impacto em algumas dimensões da sua experiência. Isso variava de acordo com o perfil de cada visitante e com o que este mais valorizava. Os resultados mostraram que, apesar da natureza subjetiva da experiência, os museus desempenham um papel essencial como facilitadores de experiências satisfatórias. Podem modular o papel desempenhado pelas diferentes componentes do contexto museológico nas suas visitas, em função dos perfis dos seus visitantes e da sua orientação para um ou outro tipo de experiência.

INDEX

Keywords: museum experience, satisfactory museum experience, visitor studies, museums – Spain, museum visitors

Palavras-chave: experiência museal, experiência museal satisfatória, estudo de público, museus – Espanha, visitantes de museus

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