

CALL FOR BOOK CHAPTERS

Understanding Visitor Experience at Holocaust Museums and Memory Sites
Submission Deadline: 30 November 2020

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Holocaust education and commemoration are becoming more visitor centric. Given this shift, the opinions, and perceptions of the ordinary members of the public interacting with Holocaust exhibitions, works of art, memorial museums and memory sites urgently need to be better understood. Gaining understanding of visitor experience in all its dimensions is essential also given the importance of human rights, social inclusion, and collective responsibility which inform Holocaust education and memorial work. As many museums and memorial institutions around the world are currently developing new permanent exhibitions dedicated to the Holocaust, they are also renewing their efforts to engage with diverse audiences and include new groups and communities. Furthermore, many institutions have responded creatively to the challenges posed by the pandemic. They have developed online versions of their exhibitions or learning programmes, including virtual tours, applications, and Virtual Reality experiences. These new media inevitably shape visitor engagement, and affective response in fundamental ways which need to be better understood.

Despite the central place visitors occupy in museums and their learning programmes, there is a significant gap in scholarship regarding visitor responses to difficult histories, as mediated by museums and heritage sites. Engaging with the Holocaust, without doubt, produces a range of reactions among visitors. Yet, we know little about how diverse these reactions are, the meanings which visitors associate with the Holocaust, and their thoughts and feelings about the relevance of this history in their personal lives.

This edited volume aims to foreground the voice of the ordinary visitor, with the goal of piecing together a collective portrait of the visitor as a primary subject. It seeks to bring together evidence-based research studies which adopt different methodologies to examine diverse aspects of visitor engagement with the Holocaust, both inside the museum (e.g. the historical museum, the art museum), and outside of it, at public sites (e.g. memorials/monuments, memorial sites, and former concentration camps).

Key questions and thematic strands this volume aims to tackle include:

- Museum-based conceptualisations of visitors: how museums define, engage with, and appeal to audiences in different time periods and geographies. What are the changes in museums' approaches towards visitors since the end of the World War II? How do museums representing different national narratives of Holocaust involvement engage with their audiences?
- Empirical research focusing on experiences of different age groups, including young people in primary, secondary, and tertiary education; adults; and elderly/senior groups; as well as audiences of diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- Research looking at the relationship between museum intentions and learning outcomes and the actual learning impact as experienced by audiences. Is there a match/or mismatch? What is causing it?

- Analysis of visitor responses to exhibitions (historical or art exhibitions), memorials, and memorial sites recorded on online platforms such as TripAdvisor, as well as in social media.
- Museums are now using apps, interactive platforms, and new technologies such as Virtual Reality. How do users engage with these media? What are the advantages or the drawbacks of the virtual exhibition or work of art? In what ways are visitors' learning, understanding of and affective response to the subject of the exhibition/work/site shaped by these media? What is distinct about visitor engagement with the Holocaust by virtual medium as opposed to physical?
- Studies focusing on emotions (e.g. empathy, identification, distancing, and disengagement). Are there significant differences between what visitors experience emotionally and what museum professionals assume they experience? What are these differences? What in museum exhibitions or memorial sites trigger the strongest emotions? Can we classify these affective responses into dominant or less dominant ones? What role do visitors' ethnic or national background play in shaping emotional responses?
- The question of ethics as it emerges in visitors' reactions to Holocaust exhibits. Do visitors perceive the presence of an ethical dimension to how historical sources and historical subjects are presented in exhibitions by designers and curators? What ethical questions do visitors ask before, during and after their visits to museums and memory sites? What ethical questions are visitors encouraged to ask by the exhibition producers during person-guided tours, audio-guided tours, or through questions posed by textual panels in the exhibition space? How do visitors position themselves in relation to the historical subjects they become intimate with during their visits? What moral messages do they draw from their visits? How can we categorise, or understand these messages in relation to the national, social, generational, or ethnic backgrounds of visitors?
- Comparative studies looking at similarities or differences in visitor experiences at different museums and memorial sites, between different age groups, national or ethnic backgrounds.
- Comparisons between visitor experience at Holocaust sites and experiences at exhibitions dealing with more recent genocides.

Contributions should address the above-mentioned themes, as well as other topics related to the question of visitor experience at Holocaust museums and memory sites. The goal is to bring together work conducted by academic researchers, as well as researchers working for museums, museum curators and educators, and exhibition designers. In doing so, this volume would achieve a broader, more nuanced and a deeper understanding of this under-examined topic.

Please send abstracts of up to 500 words including a maximum of 4 keywords, alongside a 200-word biographical note to the editor, at d.popescu@bbk.ac.uk. The deadline for abstract submissions is 30 November 2020. The edited volume is intended to be published with Routledge, subject to peer review.