



T.E.I. Thessaloniki  
Greece



Department of Tourism  
Management

UDC 069.6:658.56:338.48(410)  
Original scientific paper  
Received: 22.07.2006

## EVALUATION OF MUSEUMS SERVICE QUALITY A RESEARCH STUDY OF MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES VISITORS' SATISFACTION

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**Abstract:** As competition increases in the leisure sector, quality service is an advantage that increases the number of new and repeat users. The case study investigates whether or not the Cambridge & County Folk Museum delivers quality of service to external customers. The current visitor questionnaires are used to assess the Folk Museum's quality of service from the point of external customers through ten determinants of service quality. Staff and receptionists questionnaires identify the Folk Museum's perceptions of its service quality to the public and whether its operation is effective. The findings illustrate that there is no major disparity between the Folk Museum's internal objectives and the delivery of services. However, the Museum does need to explore which services outside audiences want the Museum to provide and to reinforce external communications in order to create positive and attractive images of the Museum for the public.

**Key words:** service quality, services marketing, non-profit organisations, museums policy, and galleries communication strategies.

**Sažetak:** PROCJENA KVALITETE USLUGE U MUZEJIMA: STUDIJA ISTRAŽIVANJA ZADOVOLJSTVA POSJETITELJA MUZEJA I GALERIJA. Kako konkurencija u sektoru odmarališta raste, kvaliteta usluge je prednost koja povećava broj novih i ponovnih korisnika. analiza pojedinog slučaja istražuje da li Cambridge & County Folk muzej pruža kvalitetne usluge vanjskim kupcima. Najnovije ankete za posjetitelje se koriste kako bi utvrdili kvalitetu usluga Folk muzeja sa stanovišta vanjskih posjetitelja pomoću deset odrednica kvalitete usluga. Ankete za osoblje i recepcionere utvrđuju kakvu percepciju muzej ima o kvaliteti pružene usluge i da li je njihov rad učinkovit. Rezultati pokazuju da nema velike razlike između internih ciljeva Folk muzeja i pruženih usluga. Međutim muzej treba ispitati koje usluge vanjska publika želi da muzej omogući. Također treba ojačati vanjsku komunikaciju kako bi pozitivno i atraktivno prikazao muzej prema javnosti.

**Gljučne riječi:** kvaliteta usluge, marketing usluge, neprofitne organizacije, politika muzeja, strategije komunikacije galerija

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Museums play an essential role in post-industrial society. They preserve and illustrate history, the achievements of humanity, culture and the natural world, promote education as lifelong learning and connect the gaps between past, current and future generations. While museums have raised their profile in the last decade, they also face the trial of social trends - highly increased competition, customer-oriented, higher level and varied demands and expectations, and a more critical and educated public. Thus, some questions have been raised: what do museums do? Do they provide value for money? How well do they provide their service? All these pressures and changes lead to the awareness within museums of the need to measure their service quality. However, how is the service of museums assessed? Government, specialist and scholars have brought up many standards and indicators (Museums & Galleries Commission, 1999, Museums Association, 1997, Middleton 1998, Adams, 1992, Williams, C. 1998, MacManus, 1993).

What is a museum? Some scholars proposed that the traditional understanding of what constitutes a museum was couched in functional terms. Thus the purposes of museums were perceived as concrete and tangible, paralleling the essence of the 'material evidence' (Harrison, 1993), which historically has been the focal point of museums. Collection, preservation, study, interpretation and exhibition of this 'material evidence' have been the components, which lie at the root of all definitions of what a museum is. The 20<sup>th</sup> century museum is a public democratic institution, and this does not flow smoothly from its conflicting 19<sup>th</sup> century scholarly and entertainment roots. Thus museums must have passed through some challenging times in search of firm foundations for their current mode of existence and its perpetuation.

It is also suggested that in an era of massive economic and social change that is valuing all aspects of cultural life and creative sectors for their future contributions to employment generation and quality of life, museums clearly have a functional role to play in post-industrial societies (Middleton, 1998). Indeed, nowadays museums are much more than a single element of contemporary society. They not only preserve heritage for current and future generations, make important contributions to the quality of life and support education, but also help to attract tourists and contribute to place marketing and the attraction of new investment to an area (Audit Commission Local Government, 1991).

## 2. THE GENERAL MUSEUMS SERVICES PROVIDED

The services that each museum provides are varied. The common point is that all museums contribute to the conservation of heritage. Exhibitions and visitor support are typical forms of services that museums aim at a wide public. Other services, such as providing scholars with access to collections or examining objects, target smaller and specialised groups.

The visible sources can be divided into two types: inanimate environment and animate environment. The first is the physical surroundings of the museum, such as object labels, direction signage, shops and other facilities. The other type of visible

sources is the people involved in the service encounter from staff who are in contact with users, individual users, and other museum users. This part is the most diversified factor that influences museum service delivery.

The model illustrates that a coherent and satisfying visit is formed by many factors of which some can be controlled by a museum, while others cannot. For example, a museum can decide its opening hours and what objects are on exhibition; however, a museum cannot control how much time visitors spend in the museum or what objects attract their attention. In other words, visitors control many aspects of their process.

Therefore, while evaluating the quality of museum service, understanding the progress of the complete visit experience is essential. The visitors' journey through the museum service experience consists of three main stages (Johns and Clark, 1993, Adams, 1992), pre-visit, on-site experience and post visit.

On the pre-visit level, all the information about museums that visitors obtained forms their expectations and contribute to a decision of whether to visit or not. Target groups research helps museums to understand visitors' desires and tastes about which services or atmospheres visitors seek, such as tour guides, and having fun. Museums can use this information to develop publicity and advertising themes that position museums to advantage in the marketplace. The second level comprises the visitors' on-site experience. How to present museum service in a way that will satisfy the visitors' expectations is the main mission for museums. Regularly and systematically collecting visitors' overall evaluations of their visits is the critical mission for museums. The final level focuses on the visitors' post-visit impressions and how they act upon them. After museums collect the information on visitors' evaluations, they should attempt to monitor how well they are meeting visitor expectations and improve their services. Providing follow-up information for the public can help museums to build the images of quality service in the long-term.

### **3. THE MAIN CHANGES INFLUENCING MUSEUMS TOWARDS BETTER QUALITY SERVICE**

#### **Post-Industrial Society**

Consumers have become more diverse, more demanding, more sophisticated, more quality conscious and more educated. However, the zeitgeist of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is consumer orientated and diametrically different from mass provision. It reflects differentiation according to people or other user interests and needs, and it is orientated around meeting the expectations of individuals or specifically targeted groups (Middleton, 1998). In other words, while museums propose *Access for All* in 1990s, they are required to pay greater attention to targeting and differentiation. Auditing service quality can help museums meet the need of this specific and diversified market.

#### **The Development of Information and Communications Technology**

Undoubtedly, we are in the global information society, due to the rapid development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the late 1990s.

This development leads to changes in the ways that customers think and conduct their lives. Through using ICT, customers have more opportunities to gain information, which provides them with more choices (Tahinakis et. all). Relatively, their expectations of what museums should offer become more sophisticated.

On the other hand, museums can benefit from ICT. Digital records for collection of data reduce storage space and facilitate review; the Internet provides broader access for users and communication with external environment; spreadsheets simplify the process of accounting. In addition, ICT can keep quantifiable customer databases to help museums improve standards and quality of services through better and efficient monitoring of user satisfactions.

#### **Government Attitudes, Funding & Performance Indicators**

Many Governmental bodies launched directions and policies that evaluate trends that will influence museums at national, regional and local levels over the next several years. Governments' directions signal a significant direction of policy, organisation, funding and management that will have to be reflected in the way that museums respond, individually and in partnership (Middleton, 1998), like modernisation and reform, Best Value for public sector funding, investment in culture, for the many not the few, regional priorities and targeting, education for life, partnerships with industry, enabling and facilitating, streamlined bureaucracy, economy and efficiency, effectiveness of outcomes, excellence and high quality of service provision, support for 'creative industries', transparency and accountability, and performance monitoring.

Among these government directions of policy, three points about the subject of this paper should be pointed out: Best value, excellence and high quality of service provision, and performance monitoring. When the public spends so much money on museums, a basic question is brought up: do museums give value for money? Best value means that museum management clear about their priorities and objectives, review a proportion of their services each year, examine every single aspect of a service's performance and make year on year improvements (Middleton, 1998). While museums receive or unlock public funding, they will need to convince the public sector by efficiently delivering quality service.

#### **4. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT IN MUSEUMS**

The museum sector has faced public pressure and become more aware of the responsibility of performance management in the last two decades. How to measure museum service performance forms the debate, which has been discussed for a long time. Many standards and indicators have been brought up. The following are the most common and useful for many museums to adopt.

The Museums & Galleries Commission (MGS) in U.K. introduced a Museum Registration scheme in the late 1980s with the assistance of the ten Area Museum Councils. It is now recognised as a national minimum standard for museums in the United Kingdom. The MGC's work is to raise museum standards and help all types and sizes museums to demonstrate that they share a common basis of operation. The main requirements of this minimum standards scheme are (Museums & Galleries Commission, 1995):

- Conformity with the Museums Association definition of a museum or if appropriate, the Museums and Galleries Commission's definition of 'national' museum;
- An acceptable constitution;
- A clear purpose and a planned approach to management;
- An acceptable statement of collections management policy;
- An acceptable provision for the care of collections;
- Public services appropriate to the nature, scale and location of the museum;
- Regular access to professional curatorial advice;
- An acceptable financial basis and compliance with legal planning and safety requirements.

In consideration of the changes in customers' expectations and wishes are set at a higher level in the 1990s. MGC published a booklet with guidelines on the Quality of Service in Museums and Galleries. The guidelines amplify the code on *The National Tourist Board's Code of Practice for Visitor Attractions* and place it in a museum context. The MGC (1992) lists many sectors of management, like museum practice, collections management, customer care policy, access, marketing, display and education, training, museum support on site care, safety, as well as, monitoring and evaluation. Each sector includes various items to indicate the quality of service which museum should be aiming at. The guidelines set out ways in which this quality is to be achieved and are designed to help with the forward-planning process and the setting of performance indicators.

In December 1997, the Museums Association (MA) published the paper *Benchmarking -Museums Briefing*. This briefing provides its members with information on a wide range of common activities and practices taking place in a cross-section of museums in the UK. The statistics included several sectors, such as admission charges, access, financial benchmarks and staffing. Although the MA claimed that the information on the leaflet 'is not intended to be taken as recommended levels of performance and should not be seen as best practice within museums', it shows what is actually happening in museums today.

Moreover, the Middleton Report (1998) suggested that a basket of performance measures should be considered. The role of museums in society is much deeper than that of visitor attractions and the measures needed to assess performance are therefore more complex. Accordingly, five dimensions of measurement are identified as relevant to assessing museum performance. The five dimensions are:

- *Curatorial performance*, including how well collections are documented, accessible, maintained and preserved;
- *Meeting user needs*; the knowledge of visitor or user profiles, research of visitor satisfactions and enjoyments, what services users expect from museums;
- *Efficiency and effectiveness of services provided for visitors (operational performance)*: specific audits of the visitor services quality evaluated against agreed standards. The assessment may include promotional literature for the public, signage to the site, the quality of reception and

admission, the effectiveness of interpretation and display, and the quality of facilities for retail and catering;

- *Effectiveness of management and synergy with other organisations:* is business and marketing plans effective? How many and what types of partnerships have been achieved and how they benefit museums;
- *Statistical and business performance measures and ratios:* annual and monthly numbers of visitors, and visitors by type (school, where from, the elderly, ethnic minority groups), non-visitor related revenue by category, revenue broken down by the main category of users.

Other standards or performance measurement systems have been established. It is not suggested that museums should adopt each of them. However, museums may establish their own standards by using standards, which have been developed externally. Middleton (1998) suggested that MGC Registration procedures could be used as a sound platform for developing curatorial measures. A voluntary quality assurance inspection scheme would provide operational measures. Participation in a data exchange such as AIM's Comparative Trading Survey provides key statistical and financial measures and the DOMUS annual questionnaire could be developed to record progress. Measuring performance against standards can assist managers and staff in gauging the success of their institution and their own achievements.

## 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

In many industries, providing quality service is no longer a matter of choice. However, previously quality control tended to be used in production or operations management. Service marketing really established itself in the 1980s, during the 'quality revolution' (Pickworth, 1996). The quick pace of developing technologies and customers who are more demanding make difficult for service industries to gain strategic competitive advantage. Thus service industries realised the significance of quality as a strategic marketing objective.

Services include all economic activities whose output is no a physical product or construction, is generally consumed at the time it is produced, and provides added value in forms (such as convenience, amusement, timeliness, comfort or health) that are essentially intangible concerns of its first purchaser (Quinn, Baruch & Paquette, 1987, Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996, Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996. Lovelock & Wright, 1999).

The construct of quality, as the service literature conceptualises it, focuses on perceived quality. Zeithaml (1987) defined perceived quality as 'the consumers' judgement about an entity's overall excellence or superiority'. Perceived quality is different from objective quality, which involves an objective aspect or feature of a thing or event. It is a form of attitude, related to satisfaction, and resulting from a comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). In other words, quality is customer defined. Service quality, as perceived by customers, is formed by a comparison of what they feel service organisations should offer (their expectations) with their perception of the performance of organisations providing the services.

There are two previous researches found in the literature that refer to this paper topic. Johns and Clark (1993) published a paper on 'Customer Perception Auditing', which discussed quality audit in museums and galleries. Williams (1998), also, contributed a paper, which investigated, whether or not, accredited and non-accredited quality management systems have affected service quality delivery to external customers at six leisure related research sites, including a museum.

## **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this research project is to investigate whether or not the Cambridge & County Folk Museum has delivered quality service to its external customers. The process and result may also benefit other independent museums of similar backgrounds.

Cambridge and County Folk Museum is located in Castle Street in Cambridge, and housed in a 5<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> century inn. It was opened in 1936 with the primary object to interest the ordinary citizen in aspects of local social life, which are disappearing in Cambridgeshire under changing conditions (Hawke-Smith, 1999). This illustrates that from the beginning the education role was paramount. The Folk Museum is an independent trust museum, and trades as a limited company with charitable status. In the early days its operation relied almost entirely on donations from a number of Cambridge colleges and private individuals. Visitor numbers had never exceeded 5000 before 1960, but they grew steadily over the 60s, 70s and 80s and reached a peak of 22,000 (for all users) in 1987. During these decades, despite increasing visitor numbers, finances remained insecure and were underpinned by Local Authority grants. In addition, the problem of the lack of adequate storage and exhibition space grew more extreme.

### **Questionnaires' Design**

The object of the research project comprises potential audiences, current visitors, staff and receptionist questionnaires. The first two are a measure of service quality from the customers' point of view (Gap 5), thus are based on the SERVQUAL model (Zeithaml et al., 1990), and the others examine Gap 1 to Gap 4 utilising the service-provider gaps model. These instruments are able to generate numerical values for the dimensions of service quality and the strength of the organisation's operation; higher values indicating that service is being delivered more effectively. The result can be compared to a diagnostic checklist and therefore give insight into possible causes of unsatisfactory service.

### **Potential Audience Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is designed to obtain general audience expectations of museums' service quality. It contains two parts. Part I includes 17 statements representing audience expectations of an excellent museum. The original SERVQUAL questionnaire (in both the expectations and perceptions sections) has 22 statements, which are grouped into five dimensions - tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. However, believing some of the questions on suitable for the museums' service and the willingness of respondents to complete the questionnaire, the researcher redesigned part of the statements and reduced the number of them. In

addition, the five dimensions in SERVQUAL were returned to the original ten dimensions, in order to gain more detailed information for analysis. Each statement has five ranges: respondents can choose from 'essential' to 'not at all important'. Standard Occupational Classification is used to group respondents' occupations (Office of Population Censuses & Surveys, 1991).

The research was undertaken by a street survey on an aimed sample of 100 people, conducted in Cambridge Market (CM), King's Parade (KP), Petty Cury (PC) and Cambridge Central Library (CL). The first three venue surveys were conducted on two Sundays and one bank holiday in the hope of reaching both local and non-local people in different types of groups. However, during research the interviewer found that a high proportion of respondents were non-local people, thus the last venue was chosen to obtain more local respondents.

Questionnaires were administered orally and recorded by the interviewer, encouraging clarity and continuity in style of response. A total of 102 respondents were interviewed; however, two of them did not provide personal information or answer all the questions. Therefore, 100 questionnaires are valid in the final result.

#### **Current Visitor Questionnaire**

When designing this questionnaire, the researcher consulted with the curator several times to ensure that the statements involved information which could benefit the Folk Museum, such as which facilities/services visitors wanted the Museum to provide. The final questionnaire contains four parts and is used to investigate the evaluations of the Folk Museum's visitors. However, in order to give more detailed information of visitor perceptions and therefore to benefit the Folk Museum's redevelopment, this questionnaire had more statements related to ten dimensions.

This research was carried out at the Folk Museum in the first half of 2003, mostly on weekdays. There was no focus group; the researcher interviewed all visitors who were willing to answer the questionnaire after completing their visit. The targeted valid number of responses is one hundred. The interviewer led respondents to exhibition Room 1 and emphasised that the interviewer was not on the Folk Museum's staff, in order to obtain more authentic opinions. Although the interviewer attempted to administer and record each questionnaire, a few respondents preferred to complete the questionnaire by themselves.

#### **Staff Questionnaire**

Quality service relies on an organisation's effective operation and the extent of the understanding of its customers. Both staff and volunteer questionnaires are designed to investigate the Museum's perceptions of its service quality to the public and whether its operation is effective.

The staff questionnaire contains two sections, both used to survey staff responsible for day-to-day management. The first section examines whether managerial staff understand how users evaluate the Museum's service quality from ten dimensions. The respondents are asked to allocate a total of 100 points among the ten determinations according to how important each determination is to their customers.

#### **Receptionist Questionnaire**

This questionnaire contains a set of ten statements that are used to survey receptionists. These statements pertain to potential antecedents of Gap 3 and Gap 4



represent performance shortfalls on the part of receptionists. The specific antecedents and the statements pertaining to them are:

Both staff and volunteer questionnaires were designed as a 'self-completion' type. Although the researcher did not attend whilst staff and volunteers completed the questionnaires, respondents were given clear instructions on a letter with the questionnaire, and encouraged to write down their opinions. All questionnaires were collected in a box. Staff questionnaires were successfully completed by a total of five staff in the Folk Museum.

## **7. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The method of assessing service quality is not the same as the original SERVQUAL model ( $SERVQUAL\ Score = Perception\ Score - Expectation\ Score$ ), because the statements and the sample of the respondents' backgrounds in these two types of questionnaires are not the same, nor are the number of responses to each statement in current visitor questionnaires.

### **Potential Audience Questionnaire**

Assessing the expectations of service quality involves computing the rating respondents assign to each statement. Each dimension plays, nearly, equally important roles in audience expectations of museums' service quality. 'Competence', 'Courtesy' and 'Responsiveness' are the three highest determinants of a museum's service quality, and all of them relate to the element of personnel. In contrast, 'Customer Empathy', the other determinant relating to personnel, plays the least important role whilst respondents evaluate service quality. Over half (53%) of the respondents rated the statement 'staff should recognise regular visitors' as 'not very important'.

### **Current Visitor Questionnaire**

The result of each average point in ten dimensions shows that the best of the Folk Museum's performances are in 'Courtesy', 'Customer Empathy' and 'Reliability'. All these three dimensions are related to receptionists' performance. In addition, the respondents also gave quite a high assessment in 'Credibility' which shows the Folk Museum communicates to public through trustworthy information.

'Access' is the dimension with which respondent visitors were less satisfied. Although over 70% of respondents described themselves as 'very satisfied' or 'quite satisfied' to the statement 'opening hours', many respondents think it is important for the Folk Museum to provide disabled access to upstairs (37.1% described it as 'important', around 45% as 'essential' and 'very important').

Moreover the respondents thought staff having time and knowledge to answer their questions (Responsiveness and Competence) is more important than that staff should recognise regular visitors and understand their particular needs (Customer Empathy).

The demand of visitors from particular backgrounds for some facilities or services that the Folk Museum does not provide at present is also investigated. The analysis targets four questions and is illustrated with cross-tabulations.

**Different Party Types versus the Demand of Restaurant/Cafe, Toilets, and Car Park**

<b>Restaurant/cafe</b>	Alone	With Family	With Adults
Essential	1.0%	1.0%	2.0%
Very important	1.0%	1.0%	2.0%
Important	8.0%	6.0%	7.0%
Not very important	16.0%	8.0%	21.0%
Not at all important	9.0%	4.0%	13.0%

Most respondents did not think a restaurant/cafe was important to their visit, no matter which party types they belonged to. Many of them said a museum providing catering facility is good, but not for the Folk Museum due to its small size and limited space.

<b>Public toilets</b>	Alone	With Family	With Adults
Essential	3.0%	6.0%	9.0%
Very important	10.0%	7.0%	6.0%
Important	16.0%	6.0%	12.0%
Not very important	6.0%	1.0%	15.0%
Not at all important	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%

Comparing each type of group with the five extents on statements, 13 out of 20 respondents attending with family described 'public toilets' as 'essential' and 'very important' to their visits. In contrast, respondents with adults tended to have less demand. However, over 40% of total respondents said public toilets are an 'essential' and 'very important' facility that the Museum should provide.

<b>Public Car Parking</b>	Alone	With Family	With Adults
Essential	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Very important	0.0%	1.0%	5.2%
Important	6.3%	4.2%	5.2%
Not very important	15.6%	3.1%	24.0%
Not at all important	11.5%	11.5%	9.4%

These figures show that a 'public car park' is not an important factor in influencing visitor perceptions of the Folk Museum's service. When the interviewer asked this statement, some respondents pointed out that they could use public transport or park their cars in other car parks nearby; many others said parking space is not necessary for this size of museum.

**Types of Newspapers versus the Demand of Computer Kiosk, CD-ROM and Website**

<b>Computer Kiosk</b>	High brow level	Middle brow level	Low brow level	Other
Essential	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Very important	1.1%	5.4%	1.1%	2.2%
Important	4.3%	3.2%	1.1%	4.3%
Not very important	22.6%	10.8%	6.5%	11.8%
Not at all important	11.8%	1.1%	2.2%	9.7%

Only a low proportion of respondents described a 'computer kiosk' as 'essential' or 'very important' facility that the Museum should provide; even 'higher educated respondents' said so. Some respondents said they preferred to see 'real things', or that a computer kiosk is not suitable for history museums.

<b>CD-ROM</b>	High brow level	Middle brow level	Low brow level	Other
Essential	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Very important	0.0%	2.1%	1.1%	1.1%
Important	2.1%	6.3%	0.0%	4.2%
Not very important	22.1%	10.5%	7.4%	11.6%
Not at all important	14.7%	2.1%	2.1%	0.5%

The result is similar as that for a 'computer kiosk'. Most respondents thought that they are not disappointed if the Museum does not have CD-ROM.

<b>Website</b>	High brow level	Middle brow level	Low brow level	Other
Essential	2.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%
Very important	5.3%	6.3%	0.0%	4.2%
Important	14.7%	9.5%	4.2%	9.5%
Not very important	10.5%	3.2%	4.2%	8.4%
Not at all important	7.4%	2.1%	1.1%	4.2%

Comparing the results of 'computer kiosk' and 'CD-ROM', more respondents described a 'Website' as 'essential' or 'very important' technology to obtain information about the Folk museum. These three results illustrate that if the Museum is considering providing high-tech facilities to their users, a 'Website' is the priority.

#### **Ages versus Value for Money**

<b>Value for Money</b>	Under 20	21-40	41-60	61+
0-25%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%
25-50%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%
50-75%	1.0%	6.0%	1.0%	0.0%
75-100%	4.0%	13.0%	16.0%	2.0%
100%	4.0%	21.0%	20.0%	10.0%

Over half of total respondents thought a visit to the Folk Museum were 100% value for money. In other words, the other half of respondents had contrary opinions, and this may be due to respondents thinking the admission charges were too high or they were not very satisfied with some parts of their visit. Visitors aged 21-40 contain the highest proportion of responses of '50% to 75%' (6 out of 40 respondents).

#### **Where do Visitors Live? Versus the Demand of Foreign Language**

<b>Foreign Languages</b>	Cambridge	Cambridgeshire	UK	Outside UK
Essential	1.0%	1.0%	5.1%	4.0%
Very important	5.1%	4.0%	18.2%	7.1%
Important	3.0%	12.1%	15.2%	5.1%
Not very important	1.0%	1.0%	5.1%	9.1%
Not at all important	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Around 45% of respondents said it was essential or very important that the Museum provides foreign languages information. It should be pointed that over {half of the respondents who lived in other areas of the UK (23 out of 43 respondents) regarded foreign languages as an essential or very important facility in the Museum; this proportion is higher than overseas group or the groups from Cambridge and Cambridgeshire.

### **Measuring Staff Questionnaire**

Three different types of questionnaires are calculated: staff questionnaire (ten dimensions), staff questionnaire (Gaps 1-2) and receptionist questionnaire (Gaps 3-4).

- **Governing Staff Questionnaire (Ten Dimensions)**

This part of the research is to identify whether staff understand how audiences and visitors evaluate the Folk Museum's service. The respondents were asked to allocate a total of 100 points among the ten dimensions according to the importance of each dimension. The result is obtained from three steps:

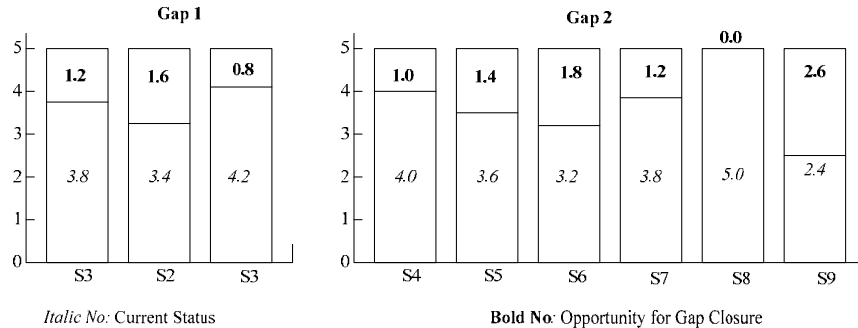
1. computing the total points of each dimension;
2. adding all points of ten dimensions;
3. total points of each dimension (step 1) divided by all points of ten dimensions (step 2).

Comparing this result with the results of audience and visitor questionnaires transformed to percentages, the findings show that except from 'Security' and a small range of 'Physical Environment', the results from the governing staff and current visitors are similar. This may be due to the contribution of the Museum's twice a year visitor survey. However, potential audiences pay more attention to 'Security', 'Communication' and 'Responsiveness' than staff conjectured.

- **Governing Staff Questionnaire (Gap 1 and Gap 2)**

Governing staff and receptionist questionnaires were designed to investigate the condition of the Folk Museum's internal operation. The computing points of five ratings in each statement on both the staff and the receptionist questionnaires are Strongly Agree 5, Quite Agree 4, Agree 3, Disagree 2 and Strongly Disagree 1. The average points along each dimension are obtained through adding all points of each statement and dividing by the number of respondents.

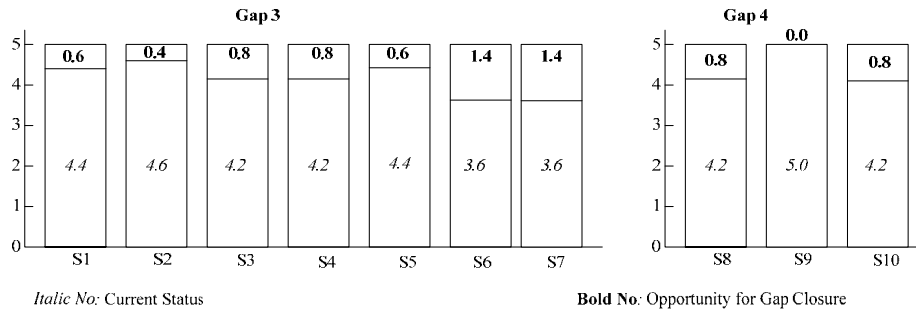
As it is shown, each bar of dimension contains 'current status' and 'opportunity for Gap closure'. The higher the point of 'current status', the more effective the Museum's internal operation is.



Gap 1 represents 'not knowing what customers expect'. As it is shown above, there is no big gap in 'upward communication' (S3), this may due to the Museum not having large numbers of staff or volunteers and sometimes staff need to take over reception. Statements 1 and 2 illustrate that the Museum still needs to do more in researching users' expectations to close Gap 1. Statements 4 to 9 pertain to potential antecedents of Gap 2, which represents 'the wrong service-quality standards'. The bar of statement 9 shows that the Folk Museum does not have enough resources and personnel to meet users' demands or requirements. The lack of personnel and resources is a challenge for the Museum's redevelopment. The result of statement 8 is impressive; all staff strongly agreed they ask receptionists to provide basic service quality to users. This can explain why visitors were more satisfied with the 'animate environment' (people) in the Folk Museum.

- **Receptionist Questionnaire (Gap 3 and Gap 4)**

The method of computing this questionnaire is the same as the staff questionnaire. The Gap 3 is 'the service performance gap', the difference between service specifications and actual service delivery. The statements in this Gap relate to the potential antecedents of whether receptionists are able and/or willing to perform the service at the desired level. The following figure illustrates that the Governing staff need to reinforce aspects to the receptionist's role: (i) when the Museum has new policies about serving visitors/users, it should clearly informs staff/volunteers who have contact with visitors/users in lime; (ii) there should be an easier system or facility for receptionists to find help from other staff when many visitors attend at the same time.



The fourth major cause of low service-quality perceptions is Gap 4, when promises do not match delivery. Receptionists are the first people who have contact with visitors and obtain information about visitor satisfactions or dislikes. The bars of statements 8 to 10 reflect that from the receptionists' point of view, the Museum provides credible information when communicating with the public, and does not over promise its service to its visitors/users.

## 7. MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### Gaps 1-2

1. Regular research of local and target potential audiences' needs and expectations is needed to achieve the aim of the Museum of attracting more local visitors and teenagers.
2. Setting customer care policy can help the Museum to ensure delivering at least minimum service quality to users.
3. Seeking more volunteers to share the tasks and projects of redevelopment is the way to create human research without increasing the financial burden.

### Gaps 3-4

4. More training and information for receptionists to serve visitors is required, such as selling different kinds of tickets. At the present, the Museum has several discounts for visitors (e.g. Cambridge City Leisure Card holders, Guide Friday Bus Tours) using the same tickets for 'Adults', 'Concessions' and 'Children', clear information on how to charge and which ticket to give can help receptionists deliver a deliver service to visitors.
5. Whilst the Museum has new policies about serving users, it is essential to ensure every receptionist knows them before they serve users. Service Quality in Museums, a Case Study: Cambridge & County Folk Museum

## Gap 5

6. In order to provide a better physical environment for users, the following facilities need to improve: labels for objects (renew, up-date and bigger print); the shop (more items and better display); indications of directions (or provide a floor plan).
7. Many visitors were attracted by temporary exhibitions; more objects and interpretation relating to them can balance the difference of objects' quantity against other exhibition rooms and increase visitor satisfaction.
8. At least a public toilet is necessary; however, considering the limited space in the Museum at the present, direction from signpost to the staff toilet may be needed, as some visitors do not ask when they are in need.
9. Although many respondents do not wish the Museum to rebuild the stairs for the purpose of 'security', they need improving. Brighter lights and warning marks should be considered.
10. Providing facilities for disabled visitors to access upper floors requires a change in the historic building's framework which visitors are not willing to see; however, it is required. Creating other accessible methods, such as using photos of exhibits with tapes introduction, CD-ROM, exhibiting some objects related to exhibits on upper floors, are necessary.
11. Information in foreign languages contributes to the quality of visitors' museum experiences; thus it is worthwhile using the languages of the Museum's most frequent visitors in brochures, leaflets and labels for long-term development.
12. Using high-tech is also the trend of the museum sector in the future. Websites can not only enable people to get much better access to museums' services, but benefit museums by promoting their reputation.
13. Reinforcing external communications and emphasising the merits of the Museum to audiences can help form positive and attractive images of the Folk Museum, such as a place where they can spend time with friends, have fun.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Museums possess important status in modern society, both in the cultural and economic sectors. However, museums are challenged by changes in modern trends. Society has become service and customer-orientated; however, the nature of the public changes all the time. They become more diverse, individual, sophisticated, quality conscious and educated; in other words, customers are likely to be highly discriminating and knowledgeable about museum services. Through regular research of customer expectations and perceptions, museums can ensure the needs of such specific market segments are met.

Rapid growth in the numbers of museums has led to a general fall of visitor numbers in many museums, while at the same time, many types of leisure activities have been established and are successfully increasing their visitor numbers. Museums certainly need to face up to increased competition. In addition, Government and the public has become more critical and careful to identify that their money is spent

effectively or not. All these pressures force museums to more awareness of the need for managing their service quality to increase advantage in this competitive world.

The Cambridge & County Folk Museum, like other independent museums, faces decreasing numbers of visitors and increasing competition from both the museum and other leisure sectors. As the Museum has entered the new millennium and prepares its redevelopment, it is necessary to review the quality of service the Museum provides. The aim of this study is to investigate whether or not the Museum delivers quality service to external customers by means of conducting surveys of audiences, visitors and staff.

As the outcomes of the potential audience and current visitor questionnaires illustrate, visitor assessment of the Museum's service quality is generally higher than audience expectations in most determinants of service quality, especially in the dimensions which relate the performance of staff/volunteers that have contact with visitors.

However, visitor assessments in 'Physical Environment' and 'Access' do not exceed audience expectations. When the causes are investigated, several results are obtained:

1. Compared with other facilities, visitors indicated that public/disabled toilets, a free floor plan and an audio guide are the most important things the Museum should provide
2. Visitors are less satisfied with interpretation panels (average point: 4.0) and brief guides (3.9); however audiences very much emphasised the importance of explanation of exhibits (4.3)
3. Nearly half the respondent visitors appraised 'shop' as 'satisfied' and 'not very satisfied'; compared with other statements which asked 'how satisfied they are', this is a low assessment,
4. although visitors comprehend that the Museum is located in a historic building and has difficulty in providing facilities for disabled visitors accessing upper floors, around 45% of them chose these things as 'essential' and 'very important'.

When visitors evaluated the experiences of their visit in the Museum, some respondent visitors were more tolerant of certain determinants of service quality, due to the Museum's size and physical environment (a historic building). Many respondents prefer a museum to provide a cafe or restaurant, but said it is not necessary for museums of this size. Although the stairs were not safe for some respondents, they did not suggest the Museum rebuilds them, because of the building listed status.

Moreover, the way visitors responded to 'Responsiveness' and 'Competence' is less important than the way outside audiences responded. This may be due to (i) most visitors believe staff have enough knowledge and always have time to answer their questions if they ask; (ii) they prefer finding answers by themselves; (iii) they accept the limited staff numbers in the Museum; (iv) the collections are related to the objects of daily life, so some visitors have knowledge about exhibits before their visit.



When the demands for facilities and services that the Museum does not provide are combined with respondent visitors' backgrounds, the following findings were obtained:

1. not many respondents in all three party types regarded a restaurant/cafe and public car park as important facilities the Museum should provide
2. public toilets are more important for family groups
3. the educational element does not have much influence on the demand for high-tech: most respondents described a computer kiosk and CD-ROM as 'not very important' and 'not at all important'
4. compared with a computer kiosk and CD-ROM, a Website is the most popular from the answers of 'essential', 'very important' and 'important'
5. over half the respondents from all age groups assessed their visits were 100% value for money
6. a higher proportion of respondents aged 21-40 considered their visit less than 100% value for money than other groups
7. more visitors from other regions in the UK regarded 'foreign languages' as essential and very important.

The results of the staff questionnaire (ten dimensions) show that governing staff understand how visitors evaluate service quality in the Museum due to the contribution of the twice 'yearly visitor survey'. However, potential audiences emphasise more the importance of 'Security', 'Communication', 'Responsiveness' and 'Competence'.

The biggest gap in internal staff questionnaires is that the Museum does not have enough resources and personnel to meet users' requirements. The shortcomings may cause the Folk Museum to spend more time on its redevelopment, perhaps re-interpreting collections and the building, or apply for funding to support many projects. In addition, as the result shows in Figure 6-3 (in the former chapter), a formal, up-to-date and clear customer care policy is required when the Museum sets service quality goals, which are based on customer standards and expectations.

The outcome of the receptionist questionnaire shows that the volunteers who have contact with visitors and users are not informed immediately when the Museum has new policies about serving external customers. The Museum needs to improve communication with receptionists about information related to policies for serving customers.

Taken as a whole, the outcomes of this research project reflect that there is no serious gap in the processes of delivering service; the Folk Museum provides good quality service to its visitors. The reasons for the decline of visitor numbers may stem from the overall increasing competition in the leisure sector, the shorter leisure time audiences have, or through not enough communication to the public to give them attractive images of the Museum, such as suggesting it is a place where they can spend time with friends and family, have fun, find interesting... etc.

Although a high proportion of visitors attended the Museum because of word of mouth, the Folk Museum needs to do more about creating other attractive methods of communication and promotion with public.

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