

surveyed stated that they were interested. Of these, half were prepared to join spontaneously, and the other half said one would first have to obtain more information.

All in all, the study demonstrated that the art subscription is sufficiently attractive and varied to hold a permanent place on the cultural scene. It is a means of bringing art to the public that draws a very special sector of art enthusiasts, which had tended to be underrepresented in art museums before. The essential prerequisites for subscribing are the desire to expand one's knowledge of art and the willingness to make art a regular, scheduled part of one's free time.

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### **Visitor Studies in the Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Museum for Contemporary History in Germany)**

Hermann Schäfer  
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The *Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Museum of Contemporary History of the Federal Republic of Germany) originated from an initiative of Federal Chancellor Dr. Helmut Kohl, who opened the museum on June 14, 1994. More than one million visitors have seen the permanent exhibition (4,000 square meters) and over 400,000 people have visited the various temporary exhibitions. The "everyday" visitor is the target audience, visitor orientation is our motto and interactivity and multimedia are our tools.

Harris Shettel convinced us in our first meeting in February 1988 of the methods of visitor studies. Since then, the *Haus der Geschichte* has availed itself of the series of independent evaluation consultants from Germany and the United States for a variety of projects and with diverse goals. These have included identifying future visitors and their needs and thus creating an exhibition that is visitor oriented and geared to the "everyday" visitor; examining exhibition design and testing different alternatives. With the help of these evaluation methods, the museum, which has grown from an initial staff of some dozen people in 1987 to about 100 people today, found its own exhibition "style"; further – and especially important given the political controversy and heated debates surrounding the museum – we were able to win public support for this project, its approach, and for its goals. As early as 1989 the first evaluations of label copy, presentation of objects and use of media in various exhibitions throughout Germany were conducted. Further, prior to opening, the socio-demographic composition of the anticipated visitors to the *Haus der Geschichte* and their expectations were evaluated.

During the preparations for the permanent exhibition, mock-ups of important sections of the exhibit were evaluated in terms of effectiveness and message and, thus, were significantly improved in this regard. Evaluation projects were conducted for exhibition units on selected political topics and for elections as well as on themes of daily life. Other questions such as the effectiveness of acoustically enhanced spaces, the use of media and interactive computers (including touch-screens); visitor circulation, label copy and the reception of certain terms were also studied. These evaluation projects accompanied all of the preparation and planning. Indeed, just a few months prior to opening, the results of a survey of selected visitor groups and of cued persons have given us important information that helped us with completion of the permanent exhibition.

These evaluations were all the more important after the unification of Germany, since visitors from East Germany and West Germany bring to an exhibition of post-war German history different levels of prior knowledge and different expectations. These projects were carried out by both Germany evaluation experts (Prof. Dr. Hans-Joachim Klein, Karlsruhe; Prof. Dr. Heiner Treinen, Bochum; Dr. Bernhard Graf, Berlin) and experts from the United States (Harris Shettel, Prof. Ross Loomis, Prof. Chandler Screven).

Since opening, the museum has moved to a new phase of evaluations. In a large scale survey consisting of three waves, the reaction of the visitor to the different facets of the permanent exhibition was analyzed. Some 90% of the visitors rated the exhibition good or very good; an even higher percentage would recommend a visit to their families and friends; over 80% indicated that they would come again; 70% of the visitors rated the audio-visual stations as easy to use and informative; a similarly high percentage of visitors praised the label content and design; over 75% of the visitors rated the presentation of East and West Germany as basically balanced. Naturally, the socio-demographic data of individual and group visitors were also surveyed.

Over the course of one year (1994/95), Prof. Ross Loomis, at the invitation of the *Haus der Geschichte*, conducted a series of evaluation studies which provided us with valuable information for the continued improvement of the permanent exhibition, for working with both individual and group visitors, for docent training and for marketing and public relations. These studies included specialized projects on individual exhibition elements such as visitor use of interactive mechanical systems, the use of media and touch-screen terminals, the attractiveness and message-diversity of certain exhibition areas, circulation routes and visitor "choice points" as well as many other questions.

At present, a nation-wide survey of 25,000 households commissioned by the *Haus der Geschichte* is being conducted and analyzed; this will provide comprehensive results

about the knowledge level of and familiarity with the *Haus der Geschichte* among the broad German public.

In light of the wide use of evaluations in the *Haus der Geschichte* it can be said that almost no other museum has taken visitor orientation and evaluation in the pre-opening planning stages as seriously as the *Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. We feel that, especially in times of declining public funding, the methods of visitor orientation combined with the evaluations will grow in importance and in use. The more visitor-oriented museums operate and the more they target a broad range of "everyday" visitors, the more willing political decision-makers and the public will be to invest the level of funding necessary for museum and exhibition projects.

Broad public approval and support for the *Haus der Geschichte* is demonstrated not only by its high attendance figures, but also for the unanimous award of the Museum Prize 1995 conferred by the European Council. Also, the *London Times* has suggested that the underlying concept of the *Haus der Geschichte* – under its literal title "House of History" – should be a model for other European countries, and is already in the planning in Great Britain.

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## The Cultural Audience Network for an Urban Area

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Culture is increasingly becoming a significant location factor and an important condition for urban quality of life. I am particularly referring to the range of possibilities for inhabitants of a region to participate in cultural practices and take advantage of a wide cultural offering. Culture is also significant in the establishment of a "regional consciousness" among the inhabitants of a densely populated area and is part of the regional image used to draw investors.

The region of the Rhine-Neckar triangle, about 100 km south of Frankfurt am Main, is the sixth most densely populated area of the former West Germany. It contains the cities of Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, and Heidelberg and is home to 2 million people. Historically, the area has been repeatedly cut up by the establishment of legal borders; and even today, its territory is divided among three different German federal states governed by different legal statutes. Geographically, it is divided by the Rhine, which flows through it from south to north. Nevertheless, it represents a historically unified region and in the last ten years has begun to cultivate a stronger regional identity.

In 1993, the Department of Sociology of the University

of Karlsruhe received the assignment of studying the variety of regional cultural attractions over a period of two years. The objective of the investigation was to determine the current amount of participation and thereby find ways of improving the cultural infrastructure.

The comparative analysis of visitor structures is unique because of its regional character and the wide assortment of (mostly municipally owned) locations investigated: museums, theaters, parks, and historical sights. The results furnish insights relevant to the cultural image of the area and to marketing aspects for both regional cultural politics and the specific institutions involved, by showing how the visiting public differs from attraction to attraction. For this reason, they offer a basis for future planning.

In a *target place survey*, consisting of a detailed, standardized questionnaire, 17,000 people interested in culture provided information on their cultural activities and needs, their evaluation of the available cultural offerings with which they were acquainted, their preferred informational sociodemographic data, including their town of residence.

Special attention was given to the regional and cultural network (*Kulturelle regionale Vernetzung* = KURVE). The *regional* network refers to the cultural mobility of the inhabitants within but also beyond the region: What distance are they willing to travel to witness a special cultural event? How great is the attraction radius of the cultural institutions? What characteristics single out institutions that are visited often—or seldom?

The term *cultural network* applies to favorite cultural activities and areas where interests tend to accumulate: What is the most popular and frequent cultural activity among visitors? Are there visitor types who are interested in a variety of different cultural activities? How strong is the cultural network? It is possible to discover a hidden visitor potential for institutions that are less well known? What are the differences between devotees of high culture (art museums, theater, opera, etc.) and those of "popular" culture (movies, musicals, etc.)?

The answers to the questions on the regional network show that the individuals surveyed are closely bound to the region. However, this also means that they are prepared to travel distances of over 50 km to take part in culture only in the case of special events. Thus, in terms of mobility for culture's sake the regional network is not (yet) very robust. The Rhine still divides the region in two, yet the survey results on the cultural network show that there are interest overlaps between the two halves. So the potential for strengthening the cultural network does exist. This would entail that more attention be paid to marketing, especially by attempting to reach desired target groups via other informational media.