

“Kids, Today We’re Going to the Museum!”

Discriminating Factors in Museum Visiting for Families With Children in Italy

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Introduction

By all appearances, children are now a main target of many cultural institutions. There is no museum that does not devote space and activities to children, and now concert halls, orchestras and opera houses are also opening their doors to young people and families.

Cultural institutions dedicated to children are springing up at every level, including at the international level. Children’s museums seem to be flourishing, with the sector growing and becoming more and more structured. The Association of Children’s Museums, whose members are located mostly in the United States, is reporting more than 30 million visitors annually. In Europe, interest in museums as spaces for children’s “edutainment” has been growing since the establishment, in 1994, of Hands On! This was the first network dedicated to promoting the children’s museum concept in Europe (Colbert 2011).

Children’s cultural heritage – from the intangible made up of games and stories to the tangible made up of places and spaces (Dudek 2005) – is finding new interest on the part of both the general public and the scientific community, with the establishment of new museums and a lively debate on “the diversity of ways in which children’s history can potentially be preserved and represented in museums” (Darian-Smith and Pascoe 2013, 219).

In a country rich in museums such as Italy – the focus of this article – almost 2,800 museums and archaeological sites out of the 4,900 registered nationally provide some form of

activity for kids, such workshops and other educational projects, and more than 1,500 offer courses and informational materials specifically designed for children (Mibact 2015).

However, in this increasingly complex supply scenario, the picture on the demand side is still not clear or systematized, and nationwide information on museum attendance by children in Italy is virtually non-existent. In particular, there is a need for research on which factors a family takes into account when deciding whether to visit a museum with their children.

The first contribution of our study, therefore, is to offer information that is not otherwise available for Italy. Another contribution is to deepen our understanding of factors driving the frequency of family visits to museums, paying special attention to the difference between families who visit museums regularly and families who visit only rarely.

Due to the collection of an extensive amount of data on the participation of over a thousand children in Italy’s F@Mu National Day of Families at the Museum, our findings add to the body of knowledge concerning museum participation by children. However, since the engagement of children in cultural activities is mediated by adults, our research takes into account both families and schools, the two main agents involved in children’s discovery of the world of museums.

There has been increasing recognition at the international level, both by families and by policy-makers, of the importance of arts education in personal development and in the acquisition

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of a taste for cultural consumption that will endure into the future. This has given rise to a blossoming of cultural entertainment for children, which is also a result of the development and consolidation of specific marketing practices by cultural institutions (Gofman et al. 2011; Rentschler and Gilmore 2002) aimed at attracting larger audiences and cultivating future attendance practices.

Within this scenario, our study focuses on museums, in an attempt to shed light on how many children go to museums with their family and/or their school as well as on the importance that families give to the various attributes of museums' cultural offer, which are the factors that drive the frequency of family visits to museums.

For museums, the results of our analysis will be central to having the information necessary to draw up cultural access plans for families and schools, offer appropriate services for the public with children, develop strategies to retain current audiences and reach new ones, and motivate occasional visitors to become regular ones. A number of managerial suggestions for museum management can be drawn, leading to the design of broader cultural policies at both the local and the national level.

Literature Review

The growing attention paid to families by museums and other cultural institutions is a phenomenon evident in many countries, as described in academic studies (Friel 2014; Glow and Johanson 2012; Johanson 2010; Mai and Gibson 2011) and cultural policy reports (Australia Council 2003; Creative New Zealand 2009; Oskala et al. 2009). Although the museum and curatorial research literature has paid some attention to the issue of children's cultural participation and how the experience of young

museum visitors has been changing over time (Diamond 1986; Wolf and Wood 2012; Wolins et al. 1992), cultural economics and cultural management have dealt with the subject only marginally, especially with regard to museums (Piscitelli and Anderson 2001).

There is a vast literature on the determinants of adult cultural consumption and what role these determinants play during childhood. Using Bourdieu's (1979, 1986) theorization of cultural capital as a starting point, a number of studies discuss the link between parental and adolescent participation in highbrow cultural activities and explore the role of early exposure to art in the process of taste acquisition for future art and cultural consumption as well as for instilling behavioural qualities related to culture.

In the United States, studies have used the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts to investigate the links between childhood participation and adult engagement (Bergonzi and Smith 1996; Gray 1998; Kracman 1996).

A number of scholars have focused on factors entailed in cultural transmission, in particular family influence (Lahire 1995; van Hek and Kraaykamp 2015), arts education (Bergonzi and Smith 1996; Morrison and West 1986) and peer influence, and on how these factors can shape the evolution of consumer behaviour at heritage sites and within cultural institutions (Colbert and Courchesne 2012). These findings have important implications both for policy-makers and for cultural institutions in defining their audience development and marketing strategies. However, despite these contributions to the literature, many topics remain unexamined and constitute an interesting ground for research.

While some studies have analyzed ex-ante decision-making processes in a family's choice to visit a museum, and the influence of children in this choice (Wu et al. 2010), and while researchers have investigated the "push-factors"

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ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing attention that museums are paying to children and families, demand by these targets has been little investigated and official statistics in many countries offer limited information. This study is intended to contribute to our knowledge about children's museum attendance by analyzing and discussing data collected during F@Mu National Day of Families at the Museum, an Italian annual event held nationwide. The study explores the main characteristics of museum visits by children – both with their family and with their school – in order to identify high- versus low-attendance discriminant factors and to outline some strategic considerations in terms of museum management and cultural policies.

KEYWORDS

Museums, children, cultural participation, museum management

in parents' motivation for taking their children to a museum (Wu and Wall 2017; Zhou et al. 2019), the determinants of a family's decision to visit a cultural space with their children, and the frequency of this kind of cultural activity, have been little analyzed. From a marketing and museum management point of view, there has been virtually no research on the importance given by families to a series of attributes of the museum offer. Moreover, there is a void in the literature that connects some of the factors recognized as enabling the cultural consumption of children, namely cultural consumption with their family, participation in cultural activities with their school and the availability of easily accessible cultural infrastructure in their community.

All these aspects are important for guiding museums' audience development strategies and for cultural policy interventions at the local and national levels.



Methodology

Data Collection

In order to investigate the above aspects and to better understand the role of museums with respect to families with children, a survey was designed and interviews were carried out during the 2018 edition of F@Mu National Day of Families at the Museum.

F@Mu is a one-day nationwide event that has been held in Italy every year since 2013. The project was born out of the experience of kidsarttourism.com, a portal dedicated to museums, arts sites, and cultural associations offering services and experiences to families with children, designed and managed by Associazione

delle Famiglie al Museo in collaboration with municipalities and public and private cultural institutions. F@Mu involves some 700 museums – nearly one fifth of all Italian museums – in cities and towns both large and small. During F@Mu Day, participating museums spontaneously organize activities for families, targeting mainly preschool or primary school children, supported and promoted by the F@Mu team of professionals.

The activities offered by museums during F@Mu Day consist mainly of guided tours and workshops for children and families. Museums organize these activities autonomously, but each year the organizers suggest a guiding theme for the day (e.g., Sport, European Heritage). Museums can choose whether to provide activities free of charge and whether to make their museum freely accessible or to require an admission fee.

The choice to use F@Mu visitors as a sample was based on the quality and relevance of the event, as attested to by a number of important awards, such as the Medal of the President of the Italian Republic, and the patronage of the ministry of culture, the International Council of Museums, the Italian Federation of UNESCO Clubs and Centres, and a number of municipalities.

The uniqueness of this event makes it a suitable field for investigation due to both its national presence and the number of participating museums and visitors. In addition, it offers a rare opportunity to collect detailed data on a phenomenon not officially monitored and measured using statistics. The 2018 edition of F@Mu Day involved 790 museums and almost 70,000 participants (children with their families) engaged in a variety of activities.

A questionnaire was developed and 17 closed and semi-structured questions were formulated to explore the main characteristics of museum visits by children – both with their family and

R É S U M É

En dépit de l'attention de plus en plus grande qu'accordent les musées aux enfants et aux familles, la demande de ces groupes a été peu étudiée et les statistiques officielles disponibles dans différents pays offrent finalement assez peu d'informations. Cette étude est donc destinée à enrichir nos connaissances sur la fréquentation muséale des enfants, et ce, grâce à l'analyse et à la discussion de données recueillies pendant la Journée nationale des familles au musée (F@Mu), un événement annuel italien. Les auteures explorent les principales caractéristiques des visites muséales des enfants – avec leur famille ou avec leur école – afin de déterminer les facteurs discriminants liés à la fréquentation faible ou élevée des musées et de présenter certaines considérations stratégiques en matière de gestion muséale et de politiques culturelles.

M O T S C L É S

Musées, enfants, participation culturelle, gestion muséale

with their school – and the factors rated as satisfactory by families visiting with children. The questions were selected with a view to gathering two types of data:

- behavioural data: frequency of children visiting a museum with their family in last 12 months; frequency of children participating in a workshop in last 12 months; frequency of children visiting a museum with their school in last 12 months
- attitudinal data: degree of importance given by families to the fact that a museum has an offer targeting children and families when deciding whether to visit; importance of various museum services and facilities in the decision whether to visit with the family

One member of each family was surveyed by museum staff at the end of the visit or at the end of the workshop/activity for families.

A total of 800 interviews (771 after data cleaning) were conducted at 50 museums. The selected museums were distributed throughout Italy, covering 17 of the country's 20 regions, with a concentration in the North (56%) and in the South (32%), as presented in Figure 1.

A database was constructed based on the information gathered during the survey and was integrated with the contextual data for our analysis – that is, the population (according to the national census) of the city/town in which each museum was located and the number of other museums located in the same city/town (according to national statistics on museums gathered by the ministry of culture).

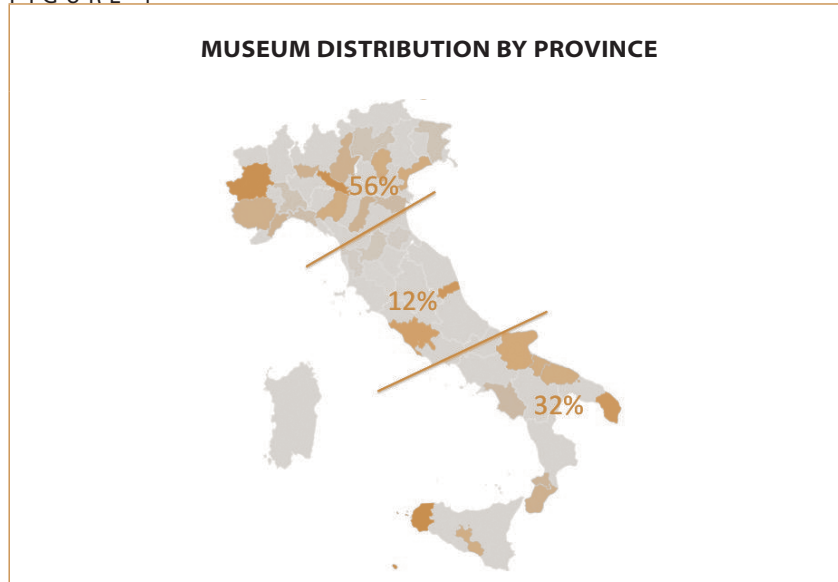
Data Analysis

The data analysis was developed in two parts. The first part consisted of a descriptive analysis addressing the lack of knowledge due simply to

a lack of data available on the subject. Based on the data collected, descriptive statistics measured the phenomenon of children at a museum, both with their family and with their school.

The second part was aimed at deepening our understanding of the variables that drive the frequency of museum visiting by families with children, isolating and quantifying the variables that characterize and distinguish between high- and low-attendance families. For this task, two statistical methods were considered: cluster analysis (CA) and linear discriminant analysis (LDA). Both methods are, from a statistics viewpoint, concerned with classification and are used extensively in the literature to analyze group characteristics in many sectors, including the cultural sector. Robbins and Robbins (1981) use LDA to analyze high-, moderate- and low-attendance segments in museums, to better define museums' marketing strategies.

FIGURE 1



RESUMEN

A pesar de la atención creciente que los museos proporcionan a los niños y a las familias, ha habido poca investigación de la demanda de parte de esta clientela, y en muchos países las estadísticas oficiales brindan una información limitada. La intención de este estudio es contribuir a nuestros conocimientos sobre la asistencia de los niños a los museos mediante el análisis y la discusión de datos recogidos durante el Día Nacional de las Familias en el Museo F@Mu, un evento anual italiano que se celebra en todo el país. El estudio examina las características principales de las visitas de los niños a museos – tanto con sus familias como con sus escuelas – para identificar los factores discriminatorios de alta versus baja asistencia y esbozar algunas consideraciones estratégicas en relación con la gestión de los museos y con las políticas culturales.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Museos, niños, participación cultural, gestión de museos

Todd and Lawson (2001) use LDA to understand how museum and art gallery visits fit in with a number of aspects of visitors' lives, suggesting the use of lifestyle segmentation to better understand museum attendance. Gürel and Nielsen (2019) adopt a mixed methods approach, using both CA and LDA to analyze the habits of omnivores and highbrow univores in an Italian art museum.

As our ultimate goal was to discriminate between two distinct groups – high- and low-attendance families – and to look for motivating factors specific to these two groups, discriminant analysis was deemed preferable. Discriminant analysis is designed to leverage linear combinations of variables, called discriminant functions, or scores, with a view to identifying those that best separate two or more groups, maximizing between-group variance. Unlike CA, which seeks to maximize in-group homogeneity and between-group heterogeneity, LDA seeks variables that best differentiate existing groups.

With the goal of comparing the two groups, family visitors were divided into two segments based on their reported attendance frequency. Families visiting museums three times a year or fewer were considered low-attendance, while those visiting four times or more were considered high-attendance. The cut-off points were consistent with the literature on museum audiences and with the thresholds adopted by Eurostat for cultural statistics (Eurostat defines “frequent visitors” as those attending at least four times a year and “occasional visitors” as those attending one to three times a year).

Discriminant analysis identified a discriminant function that is a linear combination of predictors maximizing the differences between low-attendance and high-attendance families. Considering each individual's discriminant score Z_i as a linear function of the independent variables, this is:

$$Z_i = f_0 + b_1 X_{i1} + \dots + b_n X_{in}$$

where

X_{ni} is the i th individual's value of independent variable

b_n is the discriminant coefficient for the independent variable

Z_i is the i th individual's discriminant score

Z_{crit} being the critical value for the discriminant score, the classification procedure is as follows:

$Z_i > Z_{crit}$: individuals classified as belonging to group 1 (low-attendance)

$Z_i < Z_{crit}$: individuals classified as belonging to group 2 (high-attendance)

The sign and size of b_n determine the effect of the independent variables X_{in} . Since the size of the coefficient b_n in the discriminant function

is clearly influenced by the scale that we use for X_{in} , data were normalized.

Considered predictors X_{in} were as follows:

- (a) number of museums in the family's city/town of residence
- (b) population of the family's city/town of residence
- (c) age of the child
- (d) museum visits with school
- (e) all 10 factors – namely the list of items used in the questionnaire – affecting the decision to visit a museum with family (prepared staff; ad hoc itinerary for children and parents; presence of educational activities; spaces dedicated to children; reduced prices for families; content/theme of the museum; multimedia supports/audioguides; informational materials on exhibitions and collection; resting points; presence of auxiliary services such as cafeteria, bookshop)

Data for predictors (a) and (b) were taken from official national statistics, while data for predictors (c) and (e) were taken from the questionnaire.

Results

Families at a Museum With Children

The first descriptive analysis allows us to observe some evidence regarding museum visits by families participating in F@Mu Day and to better understand what role different family members play in bringing children to the museum.

Of the respondents, only 30% took their children to a museum more than four times in the past year (Table 1). According to the threshold adopted by Eurostat for cultural statistics, this shows that 30% of the F@Mu audience can be considered high-attendance families and that

TABLE 1

FAMILY VISITS TO MUSEUMS WITH CHILDREN	
Number of visits	%
This is the first time	20.1
1 to 3 times	49.3
4 or 5 times	17.0
6 or more times	13.6
Total	100
Question: How many times did you visit a museum with your children in the last 12 months?	

for one fifth of respondents F@Mu Day was an incentive to bring children to the museum for the first time.

Confirming the cultural importance of F@Mu Day, the 2018 edition managed to attract new museum visitors: 20% of the participating children had never been to a museum before.

Most of the children participating in F@Mu Day were between the ages of four and 12. Only 10.4% were under four and just a few were over 12. Children aged four to seven represented 49% of the sample, while those aged eight to 12 represented 38%, a result that can be explained by the kind of activities offered by museums during the event, which were specifically designed for a preschool and primary school audience.

Not surprisingly, as the age of the children rises, attendance also rises (Table 2). There are practical reasons for this: families with small children have greater difficulty participating in cultural activities, and museums tend to provide services and activities aimed at school-age children rather than at toddlers. The latter explanation, however, is valid only for children up to the age of 12, after which it loses strength; the literature highlights museums' difficulty in finding activities and tools dedicated to teenagers (Linzer et al. 2014; Wyrick 2014), a very important segment who have an increasingly autonomous relationship with culture, one that is less mediated by school or family.

The members of the family most active in promoting the cultural participation of children are parents, and mothers in particular: 30% of the children in our study went to the museum with their mother, 56% with both parents and just 8% with their father only. The incidence of grandparents and uncles accompanying children to an activity was marginal.

Valuable Museum Attributes for Families

To complete the picture, it is important to understand which characteristics of museums are taken into consideration by those wishing to visit with their children, and the degree of visitor satisfaction with museums' current offer for families and children.

A number of museum services have been identified in relation to content and collections, visitor support services (informational materials, audioguides, etc.), auxiliary services such as bookshops and restaurants, the quality of the staff, and the organization of spaces.

Families were asked to rate the importance of these different components with respect to their experience of visiting the museum with their children. Although all the services

mentioned were rated as important, the data presented in Table 3 show that the presence of competent and prepared staff was considered by all families to be one of the chief factors in a quality experience. This was followed by the presence of ad hoc itineraries/paths for children and parents and by the presence of educational activities and spaces dedicated to kids. Rated less important were technological supports as well as generic or auxiliary services such as bookshops, restaurants and resting points.

These findings can help to identify a number of strategic indications for museums to improve their offer and their services with specific reference to this target audience. In particular, the roles played by prepared professionals, as discussed by Munley and Roberts (2006), and by kid-friendly content in attracting children and

TABLE 2
CHILDREN'S AGE AND MUSEUM ATTENDANCE

Age range	This is the first time (%)	1 to 3 times (%)	4 or 5 times (%)	6 or more times (%)
0–3	16.5	8.9	9.2	8.4
4–7	53.0	50.2	47.1	42.7
8–12	28.5	37.3	41.4	46.9
13 or over	2.0	3.6	2.3	2.1
Total	100	100	100	100

TABLE 3
MUSEUM ATTRIBUTES OF IMPORTANCE TO FAMILIES

Museum attributes	Score
Prepared staff	4.77
Ad hoc visit itinerary/path for children and parents	4.70
Educational activities	4.67
Spaces dedicated to children	4.67
Reduced prices for families	4.56
Content/theme of museum	4.35
Multimedia supports/audioguides	4.21
Informational materials on exhibitions	4.10
Resting points	4.04
Auxiliary services (cafeteria, bookshop etc.)	3.56
Question: How important to you are the following aspects when visiting a museum with your children? (0 = not important at all; 5 = very important)	

families appear to be fundamental. Those who decide to bring their kids to a museum have it in mind to offer them a cultural experience, and it is the values associated with this experience that are given the more weight in their choice.

Workshops and educational activities are an important component of the cultural offer in museums. Only 27% of the respondent families participated with their kids in museum educational activities and workshops for the first time during F@Mu Day (Table 4).

TABLE 4

CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS/EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN MUSEUMS	
Number of times	%
This is the first time	27.4
One to 3 times	52.5
4 or 5 times	13.4
6 or more times	6.7
Total	100
Question: How many times in the last 12 months have you taken your children to workshops/educational activities in a museum?	

The final part of the questionnaire concerned satisfaction with the F@Mu event and the activities specifically organized by museums for the day, which were mainly guided tours and workshops for families with children.

In general, satisfaction with the initiative proved to be very high: 74% of respondents were “very satisfied” with the experience. Competent and kind museum staff again proved to be the greatest strength of museums during F@Mu, far exceeding all the other components – that is, the family’s involvement, educational materials and specific content for the event.

Visiting a Museum With School

Beyond museum-related family habits, F@Mu Day is an opportunity to explore the role of the school in promoting access to museums, a role that the literature confirms to be very important but also very difficult to monitor.

As shown in Table 5, less than 10% of the children had been taken to a museum by a teacher three or more times during the school year, while 39.3% had *never* visited a museum with the school. These results are rather alarming, for two reasons: (1) they project an image of cultural heritage that, although much in

evidence nationally (Santagata 2010) and relatively accessible, is underutilized by Italian schools as part of their educational activities; and (2) they suggest that a large number of children have few opportunities – even through school – to access museums.

TABLE 5

VISITS TO MUSEUMS WITH SCHOOL	
Number of visits	%
Never	39.3
Once	33.3
Twice	18.0
3 or more times	9.3
Total	100
Question: How many times in the last 12 months did your children go to a museum with the school?	

Low-Attendance and High-Attendance Families

The distribution of children’s museum visits with family and school reveal that kids who have little access to museums with their school show low museum attendance even with their family (Table 6).

While 20% of the children, on average, were in a museum for the first time during F@Mu Day, the value rises to 30% for children who had never been to a museum with their school. These figures could be attributed to the age factor: younger children would not have had an opportunity to visit a museum with the school. However, the age factor also applies to children with high attendance: 34.7% of the children who had visited a museum with their school

TABLE 6

ATTENDANCE WITH FAMILY AND WITH SCHOOL					
Number of visits	With family (%)	With school (%)			
		Never	Once	Twice	3 or more times
This is the first time	20.1	31.0	15.6	10.8	8.3
One to 3 times	49.3	47.5	57.6	48.9	27.8
4 or 5 times	17.0	12.5	14.8	24.5	29.2
6 or more times	13.6	8.9	12.1	15.8	34.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100

TABLE 7

HIGH/LOW ATTENDANCE WITH FAMILY DISCRIMINANT FACTORS	
% of overall correct classification	68.6
Number of museums	0.0
Size of city/town	0.3
Age 0–3	0.0
Age 4–7	-0.2
Age 8–12	0.1
Over age 12	-0.3
Number of visits to museum with school	0.8
Presence of activity targeting children	-0.1
Content/theme of the museum	-0.1
Ad hoc visit path/itinerary for children and parents	0.1
Multimedia supports/audioguides	-0.2
Informational materials on exhibitions and collection	0.1
Educational activities	0.1
Prepared staff	0.1
Spaces dedicated to children	-0.1
Resting points	0.2
Reduced prices for families	-0.1
Auxiliary services (cafeteria, bookshop etc.)	-0.3

three or more times had been to a museum six or more times with their family, against an overall average of 13.6%.

Table 7 summarizes the results of the discriminant analysis. The coefficients found via discriminant analysis define the optimal linear function that can be used to predict the museum visitation frequency group (high or low) via the chosen explanatory variables. In other words, the coefficients show the importance of the variable in distinguishing between the two groups and therefore in characterizing high-attendance versus low-attendance families. In terms of quality, the model shows a value of 68.6%, which represents the proportion of respondents correctly classified via the discriminant function and can be considered a good level of classification accuracy.

The results indicate that the first variable that discriminates high-attendance families is the high frequency of museum visits with the school ($b = 0.8$ coefficient). This means that children who have an opportunity to visit a museum with their school are likely to also be taken to a museum with their family. At the same time, while children who have few opportunities to

visit a museum with their family are more likely than children in the first group to attend a school that does not visit museums. Hence, there are children who frequently have an opportunity to go to a museum and children who do not. This result underlines the central role that schools can play in facilitating children's cultural access.

The other variable that distinguishes high-attendance families is the size of the city or town where they live (rather than the number of accessible museums): children residing in a large city are more likely to live in a family with high museum attendance (Table 8). Less evident but still important: living in an urban area also positively influences the possibility of children visiting a museum with their school.

TABLE 8

FAMILY MUSEUM ATTENDANCE AND SIZE OF CITY/TOWN		
	Low-frequency families (%)	High-frequency families (%)
Population 300,000 or more	59	41
Population under 300,000	73	27

Source: Istat 2018 in addition to F@Mu 2018 questionnaire

In general, schools rarely take children to museums, whatever frequency measure is chosen to distinguish between high- and low-attendance schools. What remains stable, however, is the greater possibility of visiting museums among those who attend school in an urban environment. Given that 67% of the Italian population live in small towns or rural areas, differential access to museums due to family and school conditions is an issue that should be addressed by policies aimed at supporting cultural habits.

It is interesting to note that these discriminating factors for high-attendance families are of a structural nature and do not directly relate to the museum's offer. The "enabling system" for cultural participation therefore prevails over the museum's offer.

From a socio-demographic perspective, families with children between the ages of four and seven ($b = -0.2$) or over the age of 12 ($b = -0.3$) are more likely to be low-attendance families. This result confirms what emerged in the descriptive analysis presented above.

Moreover, low-attendance families make their choices on the basis of the presence of auxiliary services, such as a bar or cafeteria, and technological multimedia supports that can enhance their experience ($b = -0.2$ and -0.3), rather than on the basis of the museum's theme or content.

Families in the low-attendance category, therefore, seem to place a higher value on those services that make a museum visit accessible as entertainment, while high-attendance families are more interested in the learning experience.

These are all important aspects that should be taken into account if the ultimate goal is to increase museum visiting among low-attendance families, within the frame of the debate around the democratization of cultural consumption.



Discussion

Promoting children's cultural participation and access via families and schools is a central and strategic issue for museums today and with respect to their future visitors.

The results of our analysis centred on children in museums may, then, be useful both for the management and promotional strategies of museums and for the development of public policies aimed at promoting access to culture.

As we have seen, economic research in the cultural field has focused little on children's cultural consumption and on cultural policies specifically targeting the young. However, for all intents and purposes, children are cultural consumers today and will be especially so tomorrow, and, in addition, it is much easier to build loyalty among the segment that they constitute than among the adult segment.

Marketing has for decades sought to keep kids hooked on brands "from cradle to grave" – and, more recently, even "from conception to grave" – with billions of euros spent every year on advertising products for children (Linn 2004). Museums and cultural institutions should act accordingly.

The theories of "addiction" and "exposure" in cultural economics see culture as a drug, since it is addictive: the more you consume today, the more you will consume tomorrow. Furthermore, as consumption grows, taste is refined and cultural consumers increasingly become the manufacturers of their own cultural pleasure.

It is crucial that museums have the information necessary for the development of cultural access plans for children, their families and their schools.

The elements of the offer that are considered most by high-attendance visitors are those related to the core cultural experience, so the values associated with this experience have greater weight in the choice. Also central are the human element and the professional/educator who accompanies the children during their cultural experience. Therefore, the first strategic issue for museums is staff training, in order to improve and develop specific skills. In addition, it is essential that museums design high-value cultural experiences and promote them in different needs contexts.

It is also important that museums develop interpretive means of becoming more accessible to low-frequency audiences, both inside the museum – with playful features – and outside, interacting more closely with schools and other educational institutions and identifying the cultural barriers that hinder close collaboration with them.

Our findings highlight a lack of connection between schools and museums in Italy, especially with regard to museums in small towns. Schools in Italian rural areas, scattered throughout vast and often hilly or mountainous areas, face logistical difficulties that need to be addressed in terms of educational field trips. In Italy, school buses cannot, by law, be used for extra-urban travel or for any purpose other than the journey between home and school. In addition, the times and routes of public transport are not always convenient, leaving organizers of field trips with no recourse but to use private transport. Therefore, educational trips tend to be restricted to the main museums and cultural institutions in a particular area, the smaller ones being less accessible even though they may be geographically closer.

There are some possible solutions to this situation. One solution would be for museums in rural areas to hold workshop days, with educational staff travelling to schools in order to provide workshops and other activities onsite. Another would be for local museums to enter into agreements with private transport companies in order to negotiate lower transport costs and thus make museums more accessible. Yet another solution would be for museums to organize roadshows in town squares, similar to how library services are dispensed.

Finally, our findings reveal that events such as F@Mu National Day of Families at the Museum have the ability to attract new audiences for museums. A limitation of this event is that almost all the families surveyed were of Italian background, with very little participation by immigrant families. Moreover, F@Mu has a

narrow target: children between the ages of four and 12. It would be worth considering a similar initiative targeting teenagers, a category virtually absent from the participating public even though this age group could well be interested in the activities and content offered. Future research should concentrate on these two groups – immigrant families and teenagers – as important targets for museums.



Conclusion

It should be emphasized that the work undertaken by museums cannot be isolated: the strategies around promotion and cultural access implemented by cultural institutions must be connected to the broader issue of cultural policies developed at the local and national levels. Such a connection is still lacking in Italy. Beyond the specific promotion and marketing strategies of museums, there are a number of reasons why cultural policy-makers need to focus more on young audiences.

From the viewpoint of “culture as development,” the subject of cultural policies for children is a central and delicate one, both because “children’s culture is always highly inflected with societal purpose” (Kline 1998, 95) and because of the mediating role that children can play in cultural policies. It is now widely acknowledged that the nurturing of creative talent is a discontinuous stochastic process over time, but the occasion or the social environment can generate extraordinary conditions that provide a critical mass of creativity and produce concentrations of talent in space and time (Santagata 2010). This is where the second point of reflection on the importance of policies supporting the cultural participation of the youngest comes in: from a perspective of future consumption and demand but also with a view to regeneration and adjustment of the supply.

While it may be true that “the long-term foundation of the cultural industries is built upon the talents and skills of artists and other creative workers” (Throsby 2010, 102), the cultural industries are also built on the creative cultivation of new generations, and upon new cohorts of consumers seduced by the pleasures of culture.

In Italy there are more than four thousand museums. These institutions can tell stories to children, reveal their identities, help build a sense of place and community, and act as a place for comparison and communion.

Let’s go to the museum with the kids today!

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