

Institution: University of Westminster
Unit of Assessment: UoA 28; Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Museums and Galleries and the International Visitor Experience (MGIVE)
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>'Visitor experience' is a familiar notion within the gallery and museum sector, as institutions strive to make their collections accessible and enriching to a wide audience. Although UK visitors are often well-served, international visitors are rarely given specific consideration. Information is generally not as extensive as that in English, and quality is usually inferior even though UK museums and galleries receive more international visitors than ever, and are aware of the need for improvement. The research, carried out with a range of UK cultural institutions, investigated the needs and expectations of international visitors and its findings led to more awareness of these in the sector and to the development of culturally-informed and audience-targeted materials to meet these requirements.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research took place in several stages. First, two pilot projects were conducted with focus groups in 2006 and early 2007. These were conducted in France, then Hong Kong, Spain, Germany, Russia and, the Arab Gulf States (Bahrain) in the respective native languages – an important departure from the usual in-house surveys conducted in English by the museums and galleries sector. Following these pilots, a project partner engagement meeting was held at Westminster on 1st November 2006 as part of the preparation of a funding bid. The series of AHRC-funded research workshops entitled 'Museums and Galleries and the International Visitor Experience (MGIVE)' was carried out at Westminster from July to December 2007 (workshops held on July 2nd; October 22nd, December 3rd) with representatives from the sector, firstly in London and then across the UK. Kelly as PI convened the workshops working with a project team comprised of Westminster staff with linguistic and intercultural expertise: Dr Robin Cranmer (Intercultural Competence); Dr Laurence Randall (French); Dr Gerda Wielander (Chinese); Dr Linda Aldwinckle (Russian); Maria Blanco (Spanish); Heiner Schenker (German); Paul Robertson (Arabic). Presentations, lists of participants and workshop details, and the final AHRC project report are available on the MGIVE Impact Case Study Website: www.westminster.ac.uk/museums-galleries-international-visitor-experience</p> <p>The MGIVE project found that the quality and availability of information for international visitors usually took the form of translations, varying in quality, of material originating from British cultural perspectives. As a result it showed little or no awareness of the needs, expectations and sensitivities of visitors from other cultural areas. It also revealed preconceptions concerning communication and culture - often negative in subtle ways - leading to lower outcomes in terms of cultural mission/economic sustainability. The problem was compounded by the fact that some museums and galleries believed they had developed a 'global brand' which obviates the need for different types of information for international visitors. In reality this was often inadequate and did not meet international visitor needs and expectations.</p> <p>The research led to a new way of approaching the creation of high-quality, culturally-informed, audience-targeted information for international visitors which the project team entitled: 'Communication for Intercultural Navigation' (CIN). This is an original model developed by the project team to inform the process for the production of high-value information for international visitors for use by linguistic/intercultural specialists in discussion with the needs of a particular museum or gallery. The model interrogates not only how to communicate most effectively with international visitors, but more generally how to package information meaningfully in the museum/gallery context. The research model is grounded in theories of intercultural communication and translation studies, and also partially based on semiotic analysis (including the notion of the 'semiosphere'). However, it extends beyond texts and translations to issues concerning social interaction and ethnographic encounters, incorporating methodologies from</p>

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sociolinguistics to inform not only the analysis of texts and their semiotic value, but also, crucially, their production by one culture for consumption by another.

A key aim of the research and workshops was to move from strategy to execution. As a result, during the workshops, researchers and academics worked together to draft new material in a range of languages, which were then tested in-house. At the final workshop, a wider range of marketing and communications professionals from across the UK visitor sector were invited to share the research findings and to comment on them.

3. References to the research**Publications:**

- Cranmer, R., 'Welcoming International Visitors: Communication and Culture', *Transcultural Visions*, 2, Autumn 2013 (see: www.westminster.ac.uk/francophone/journal). This is a scholarly article in a refereed journal which includes further reflection on the research since the funded workshops, following a series of conference papers (see below).
- Robertson, P., 'What can we see? London's Museums and Galleries and the International Visitor Experience', *Liaison*, 2, January 2009, 23-27; wide-circulation article which includes discussion of the CIN model, a main output of the funded research.

Conference Papers:

- Cranmer, R., 'Intercultural Competence - from research to teaching to research', Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Subject Centre (LLAS) Annual Conference, 'Languages in Higher Education Conference 2010: Raising the Standard for Languages', July 2010, London.
- Cranmer, R., 'Welcoming International Visitors - acknowledging cross-cultural complexities', International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication (IALIC) Annual Conference, 'Travelling Languages - Culture, Communication and Tourism in a Mobile World', December 2010, Leeds.
- Cranmer, R., 'Museums and their International Visitors - what might Linguists contribute to their experience?', University of East Anglia, School of Language and Communication Studies, Research Seminar Series, October 2011, Norwich.

Conference papers are available on the MGIVE Impact Case Study website:
www.westminster.ac.uk/museums-galleries-international-visitor-experience

Evidence of the quality of the research:

- Grant awarded to: Debra Kelly, University of Westminster
- Sponsor: AHRC
- Period of the grant (with dates): 01/06/07-30/11/07
- Value of the grant £16, 000 (AHRC Council Reference AH/F001185/1)

4. Details of the impact

The CIN model/process that was developed during the research project can have significant impact in stimulating effective intercultural communication because it questions the very assumptions that producers and consumers from different cultures bring to what constitutes 'information'. These questions address the surface notions of neutrality and efficiency that are normally anchored within a deeper, but ultimately mono-dimensional code/conduit metaphor of language/ideology of communication. Gallery 'interpretation' and educational/marketing 'information' are both re-orientated as part of the 'cultural navigation' process developed, which positions each communicative act within a carefully articulated response to audience and context. This is fundamental to the CIN model which is emphatically not about the translation of texts, but precisely about the production and consumption of information across cultures. The research that informs the CIN model now cuts across aspects of translation studies, intercultural studies, and applied language studies together with tourism studies (including tourism and intercultural exchange), museum studies and cultural policy. Put simply, no-one in the gallery and museum

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sector (and indeed beyond) thinks about audiences in this way.

After hearing the findings of the pilot project and focus group research, all of the marketing and communications directors of the institutions involved in the first engagement meeting in November 2006 (Tate Britain, National Gallery, V&A, Westminster Abbey Museum, National Portrait Gallery and British Museum) were receptive to the idea of improving the quality of their information and of increasing their knowledge of how best to support their international visitors with effective communication that meets their cultural and linguistic expectations. Discussion also generated other areas of improvement, such as reorganising information for home visitors and developing the institutions' websites. At the request of National Gallery's Director of Communications, Kelly also gave an invited address to the ALVA Annual Conference, Blenheim Palace, June 2007 (this is the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions whose members represent visitor attractions with over 1 million visitors a year, from Blackpool Pleasure Beach to UK historic houses and stately homes).

The purpose of the AHRC-funded workshops (July –December 2007) was primarily to redesign partner museums'/galleries' information leaflets. The research moved the issue of material targeted at the international audience up the partner institutions' priority list. Each institution (Tate Britain, British Museum, V&A, National Portrait Gallery, National Gallery and Museum of London) worked with a member of the Project Team to produce a culturally-informed, 'high-value' leaflet in one language: (from a choice of Arabic; Spanish; French; German; Chinese; Russian). The test material produced in the course of the workshops was also much more positively received by international visitors on whom it was trialled than was the original museum-produced material used in the initial focus groups; if the information provided is targeted and culturally-aware, visitors feel more comfortable, enjoy themselves more and the overall experience is more positive. The National Gallery in particular made changes to its strategy on the provision of information for its international visitors as a result of the project noting that: "despite the fact that preliminary research [by the pilot study] showed that the quality of its general information guides for international visitors already exceeds that of other leading UK museums and galleries, further research revealed a range of areas for radical improvement". Following participation in the workshop series, the National Gallery identified "provision of high-quality, culturally-informed and audience-targeted information as a priority area for development in the current climate of an increasingly competitive global cultural tourism market" (quote from a further 2008 funding application). The National Gallery also noted that, for its international audiences, the research allowed it to plan more culturally-specific resources - including guidebooks, audio guides, printed material and online information – of varying breadth and depth for first-time visitors and for more deeply engaged users. It enabled the Gallery to think about helping people prepare for their visits more effectively, to engage with the collection more during their visit and to continue their engagement after the visit. The Gallery further highlighted that the project was of benefit not only to international audiences, but also to the student community, to those in UK and globally who study culture in an international context, and to domestic multicultural audiences.

At the final workshop (December 2007), a wider range of marketing and communications professionals from across the UK visitor sector were invited to share the research findings and to comment on them. These new participants were from the following institutions: the Royal Academy, the National Maritime Museum, Historic Royal Palaces, Roman Baths (Bath), National History Museum, Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge), and National Museums of Scotland.

Looking towards the future, the research has further potential for wide-ranging impacts throughout the UK gallery and museum sector, and arguably throughout the UK tourism sector – anywhere, in fact, where presenting information in a straightforward and culturally-appropriate way is a key determinant of the visitor experience. There is also potential for replication across areas and other sectors whose needs and business are international and inter/multicultural in scope.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- The project was chosen as one of 150 best practice in-depth case-studies of University

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enterprise relationships with the community using an evaluatory protocol developed by UPBEAT (University Partnership for Benchmarking Enterprise and Associated Technologies) which used a combination of narrative analysis and grounded theory. UPBEAT was the result of a pan-European study to explore how HEIs can maximise the impact of university enterprises on business and communities; HEFCE-funded, it reported to HEFCE's Leadership, Governance and Management Committee.

See http://www.upbeat.eu.com/members/casestudy/community/?cs_id=152 and note the UPBEAT Evaluatory Matrix (under 'Supporting Materials'). The project achieved Level 4 'Mastery' ("confidence, ease and elegance in handling complexity and the unexpected, typically with regional recognition") in all four evaluation categories: Foresight Enabling Skill, Individual Performance, Social Networking Intelligence, and Academic Business Acumen.

- Former Director of Communications, National Gallery; currently Director of Communications, Universities UK; Former Head of Information, National Gallery; currently Museologist for the National Documentation Center, Athens.
- Other Marketing/Communication Directors in the London museums and galleries most involved: British Museum; V&A; Tate Britain; Museum of London; National Portrait Gallery.