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The impact of experiential variables on patterns of museum attendance: The case of the Noord-Brabant museum *

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Abstract

Over the last twenty years, museum attendance has grown steadily. Increasingly, participation rates are being viewed as indicators of the success and legitimacy of policy in a given field of culture. Consequently, museums have become more interested in gaining insight into factors that affect museum attendance. This paper focuses on variables that shape patterns of attendance of those who are already museum-goers. It is assumed here that assessments of the experience visitors have with museums serve to explain variations in patterns of attendance. Variables measuring museum experience range from the preference for a museum's collection of modern art to specific titles to rebates on admission prices. Very probably, such variables mediate between socio-economic background variables and outcome measures such as frequency of annual museum attendance and choices of specific shows, i.e., a show documenting important events of World War II and a show presenting neo-classical sculpture. The research is exploratory in nature: it identifies a number of experiential variables and assesses their effects on patterns of attendance and selections of those who are already museum visitors. Data were collected at a Dutch provincial museum with an archeological and an art collection.

1. Introduction: Changes in arts policy

Over the last ten years, designers of cultural policy have tended more and more to view participation rates as indicators of the viability of funding projects. In its 1975 document, *Art and arts policy* ['Nota Kunst en kunstbeleid'], the Dutch government

* The authors wish to express their gratitude to Paul DiMaggio for his incisive comments on an earlier version of this paper.

stated that its objective was to create conditions for participation in art. Subsidies for theater, concert and museum tickets, the funding of regional symphony orchestras, and the obligation imposed on subsidized theater and dance companies to tour the Netherlands were the main instruments through which the government hoped to eliminate or reduce impediments to participation in art. Essentially, the goal was to distribute cultural goods more evenly across the nation. The decision whether or not to participate was left entirely to individual consumers. Today, this attitude has been abandoned. The government's 1988 Document on Literature ['Nota letterenbeleid'] is an early case in point. Figures on the structural decline of the sales of trade books and on the decrease in the amount of time spent on reading led to the decision that 'furthering reading' should be a major target of the government's policy in the years to come. The document is strongly in favor of a radical change in the population's cultural behavior, urging that expenditure of time on reading should substantially increase. In this respect, the Document on Literature sharply breaks away from the much more lenient view formulated in the 1975 document *Art and arts policy*, in which 'the creation of conditions' for the production of art and for the participation in art is presented as the major aim of national arts policy, and respect is expressed for those who, in spite of the government's efforts, prefer not to participate.

More generally, there is a tendency in Europe to measure the performance of cultural institutions in terms of participation rates. Of course, decisions pertaining to subsidizing and funding such institutions are affected by this view of cultural performance. Museums have been very keen on attracting new groups of visitors, especially the young. Perhaps the focus has been less on strengthening the ties with those who are already museum-goers. Presumably, those who have developed a pattern of museum attendance will respond positively to a museum's new products and be willing to intensify their pattern of attendance. The object of this paper is to shed some light on factors shaping patterns of attendance of museum visitors and affecting their choices of specific types of shows. Socio-economic variables, in particular 'level of education', 'occupation' and 'age' shape cultural participation and differentiate strongly between participants and non-participants. We hold that experiential variables, indicating experience with museums, differentiate more strongly among those who have developed a habit of museum-going. Our research is exploratory in nature in that it gives the results of a case study of the Noord-Brabant Museum, a provincial museum located in 's-Hertogenbosch, the capital of Noord-Brabant, a southern province of the Netherlands.

Section 2 briefly reviews recent research on museum visits and then raises the question of which factors other than the usual demographic and socio-economic variables may account for variations in museum attendance. Section 3 describes the method, the sampling procedure, and the dependent and independent variables in the analyses. Section 4 reports the results of a regression analysis and a discriminant function analysis in identifying the major variables affecting museum patronage and the choice between two widely diverging shows at the Noord-Brabant Museum. To conclude, results of two LISREL analyses are presented, illustrating the mediating role of experiential variables and the indirect effects of demographic background characteristics on museum attendance and on choices of specific museum shows. Section 5 presents some suggestions for museum policy and for further research.

2. Factors affecting museum attendance

Approximately 650 Dutch museums are the property of foundations, businesses, or private individuals. The remaining 172 are funded by the government or by provincial or municipal authorities.¹ Their aim is to protect and to preserve cultural heritage. The 1985 policy document on museums ['Nota museumbeleid'], marks a turning point in the government's approach, in that it specifies which (48) museums fall within its competence and which (124) museums are the responsibility of the provinces and municipalities.

In 1991, government expenditures on museums amounted to Dfl. 128,300,000 (US\$ 73,314,000). In that year, regional and municipal authorities spent Dfl. 25,100,000 (US\$ 14,312,000) and Dfl. 194,900,000 (US\$ 111,371,000), respectively. In 1989, museums owned by the state welcomed 6,114,000 visitors; attendance at provincial and municipal museums totalled 126,000 and 4,065,000 persons, respectively.

Museum attendance is growing dramatically. In *Cultural Policy in the Netherlands* (1994: 191f.), it is pointed out that from 1980 to 1990, the number of tickets sold rose by 40 percent. From 1970 to 1990, the numbers of visitors to subsidized museums more than doubled. In commenting on these figures, the authors of *Cultural Policy in the Netherlands* point out that one-time visitors account for the greater share of the increase in museum patronage. However, they do not provide data on the characteristics of museum visitors. Earlier research has established that museum patrons are highly educated, generally middle-aged and relatively affluent.

Bourdieu and Darbel (1969) found that art museum visitors in four European countries (France, Greece, the Netherlands and Poland), on average, had at least a high school diploma. The largest group of visitors was between 25 and 35 years old, the age of the most frequent patrons was between 35 and 45. In their reanalysis of data on 137 groups of attendants to art and historical museums, comprising a total number of 83 Dutch museums, Ganzeboom and Haanstra (1989) observed that none of the groups had a level of education below that of the average for the Dutch population. The visitors' median age was 39. Schuster (1993) presents data on museum visitors in seven countries. He reports a strong overrepresentation of the highly educated, the middle-aged and the higher income groups. Haanstra's (1992) survey of patrons of three historical Dutch museums yielded similar results. The highly educated comprised 69 percent of the visitors, the patrons' mean age was 44.3 years, and most of them had high-status occupations. Data on the Dutch and foreign visitors to the 1991 Rembrandt exhibition at the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum were in line with these findings. A substantial number of the interviewees said they were frequent museum-goers (Nederlands Bureau voor

¹ Data on Dutch museums were drawn from *Cultural Policy in the Netherlands* (1994), a report prepared by the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs for the European Program for the Evaluation of National Cultural Policies. The authors of the report note that their data do not allow them to give the numbers of provincial and municipal museums separately.

Toerisme [Dutch Bureau for Tourism] 1992). Since no further statistical information (means, standard deviations) was supplied, the reported range of four to eleven visits a year cannot be taken as a characteristic of the entire sample.

Statistics from several countries show that museums have been successful in reaching new groups. Evidently, museums are not only interested in turning one-time and sporadic visitors into regular customers, but also in attracting those who have already developed a pattern of attendance. The conditions under which both objectives might be achieved are not the same. In performing these respective tasks, different characteristics of the museum's product and of its patrons have to be considered. It is important, therefore, to take a closer look at the factors affecting attendance of museum shows of those who are already museum visitors.

In the following, a framework is presented for analyzing museum attendance of frequent and infrequent museum visitors. Our aim is to highlight a number of factors pertaining to experience with museums and to assess their impact on rates of museum visiting and choices of individual shows. In doing so, we go somewhat beyond current research on cultural participation. Therefore, many of our views must be regarded as hypothetical in nature. The suppositions which are most central to the framework outlined here will be tested (see section 3).

Consumers of high-culture products are members of the audiences of the specialized agencies distributing these goods. Membership depends, in part, on such socio-economic variables as level of education, place of residence, and family background. In the eyes of its audience, a cultural agency's successive products mark its position towards other agencies and at the same time contribute to the image of what the regular product of this agency is. Big museums have the means to mount spectacular shows, e.g., displaying treasures from Tutanchamon's crypt or all the paintings by Rembrandt which experts qualify as authentic. Small museums must restrict themselves to exhibitions of works by lesser artists and/or of works epitomizing a well-known genre or school (Biedermeier paintings, landscape or seascape paintings). As to the image of what constitutes the regular product of an individual museum, or of all museums taken together, the extent to which museums can distinguish themselves from their competitors depends, on the one hand, on the renown of the objects on display (paintings by Vermeer, jewelry by Fabergé) and, on the other hand, on the variations in the types of objects that are shown. Roughly, the distinction is one between specialized museums showing items from modern art, design, archeology, technology, or arts and crafts, and museums with a broad program ranging from archeological exhibitions to minor forms of established currents in the plastic arts.

An agency's audience can be differentiated according to frequency of patronage. An important distinction is the one between very frequent and sporadic visitors. The more intensive one's patronage is, the greater one's knowledge of the range of products offered by individual museums and all museums taken as a whole. The dimensions along which frequent patrons will perceive and judge museum products will differ from those which are constitutive of the perception and appreciation of less frequent visitors. Frequent patrons are able to differentiate between museum shows to a greater extent than sporadic customers. They can categorize more shows in more classes than infrequent visitors. Frequent museum-goers have a broad scope, i.e., they not only see

more shows than less frequent visitors, they also favor a more varied array of shows.² The urge to exercise highly developed powers of differentiation sustains an interest in increasing the opportunities to apply them. There will be a stronger and more articulated agreement among frequent patrons than among sporadic visitors on what constitutes the regular fare of a particular museum or of all museums in a given category. This serves as a framework for evaluating individual shows and differentiating between them.

Of course, the above is anything but a full-fledged segmentation of museum audiences. However, it highlights an important difference between frequent and infrequent visitors: in light of their strongly developed skills in differentiating between museum products, frequent visitors will be much more inclined to see shows which are not spectacular and epitomize a small museum's regular offerings. Thinking along these lines, it can be inferred that infrequent museum visitors will favor shows that do not require a substantial effort of differentiation, in the sense that the objects on display have to be linked in various ways to the museums' regular fare.

Two points should be underscored here. First, cultural products are neither perceived nor appreciated in isolation, but always in the context of other products in the same category. Selection always implies comparison. Second, consumers' experience with cultural products leads to the development of skills particularly suited to rating products in terms of their 'otherness' from similar products.

A major consequence of these views is that, contrary to current sociological research, no match is assumed to exist between the characteristics of a product and its patrons. Bourdieu's influential stand on cultural participation is based on the idea that there is a match between a product's properties and the socio-economic characteristics of those who acquire it. Bourdieu and Darbel (1969: 114f.) admit that a museum's 'level of information' is never perfectly homogeneous and that patrons' 'level of culture' cannot be strictly defined. However, they believe it is possible to explain variations in the 'level of information' of museums by variations in the level of education of museum visitors. Their view that the reception of museum exhibitions will proceed 'adequately' if the levels of 'transmission' and 'reception' are identical is based on the conviction that variations in museum attendance can be explained by the degrees of correspondence between the intellectual efforts a museum's product requires and people's abilities to live up to these demands. According to Ganzeboom (1989: 176), subjects' varying capacities for processing information are the most powerful determinants of differences in cultural participation. In a vein similar to Bourdieu, he holds that cultural products conveying 'the most complex information' appeal to audiences whose capacities for processing information are most elaborate. Kraaykamp (1993), one of Ganzeboom's students, has tried to match the degree of complexity of reading material (newspapers, magazines, and (literary) books) with readers' cognitive powers and socio-economic variables, in particular their level of education. In assessing the complexity of reading material, Kraaykamp uses a readability formula and the judgment of experts. The latter procedure is based on the assumption that experts perceive the

² Cf. Seegers and Verdaasdonk (1987: 367), who report that users of public libraries who borrow large numbers of books tend to select titles from various genres.

material to be rated as homogeneous in nature. However, this supposition is not warranted (cf. Van Rees, 1994; Verdaasdonk, 1995). Moreover, independent evidence is needed to support the assumption that specific interactions between a product's complexity and patrons' intellectual abilities affect the latter's rates of cultural participation. The use of terms stemming from a specific domain of discourse, i.e., such terms as 'cognition', 'capacity for processing information', 'knowledge', 'level of information', 'level of reception', in denoting cultural products as well as characteristics of their consumers, might suggest a stronger similarity between product and patron than there really is. This terminology is typical of connoisseurs trying to lend legitimacy to their refined tastes and the products they pertain to by presenting these as intellectually complex in nature.

This is not to deny that consumers of cultural products develop specific skills or that a high level of education is common to participants in high culture (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978; Bourdieu, 1979). Although current theories on cultural participation take into account the effects of early socialization (in the family and through formal schooling), we feel that recent experiences with museum shows might have a more direct impact on actual cultural behavior than experiences dating from the past, no matter how formative these have been. 'Level of education' is constitutive of interest in culture. However, the effect of this variable on the shape and intensity of patterns of patronage is often indirect. Factors indicating experience and familiarity with items available within a given sector of culture mediate between consumers' socio-economic characteristics and the behavior they adopt towards the cultural products in question.

3. Claims to be tested

In the following, evidence is provided for some of the views given above. In light of the interest museums have in making visitors intensify their patterns of attendance, it is important to take a closer look at the variables affecting these patterns. The number of annual visits paid to museums depends on socio-economic characteristics, such as 'level of education', 'income' and 'age', and on characteristics pertaining to museum experience. In line with the assumption that previous experiences and the skills they help to develop are highly relevant to frequency of attendance and consumers' choices, it was expected that variables related to recent museum experience will have a more direct effect on frequency of attendance than background variables: models comprising solely the latter variables will explain less variation in museum attendance than models with variables measuring recent museum experience.

As has been said, frequent museum-goers are more likely to see any show that belongs to a museum's regular offerings than infrequent visitors are. Do they also visit more categories of museums? They could favor a restricted set of museums and see every show that is presented there, or their choices could range from museums with collections having an international renown to museums serving mainly regional audiences. It is hypothesized here that choices made by frequent visitors comprise a broader set of museums than those of infrequent visitors. The opportunities to exercise highly developed powers of differentiation not only involve items on display, but also venues

where these items can be seen. Top-rated museums and smaller museums both attract frequent museum-goers. This category of visitors might very well constitute the greater part of a small museum's clientele.

We also expect that although shows targeting an audience of novices will appeal to visitors whose frequency of attendance is less than that of intensive museum-goers, they may not attract visitors with hardly any museum experience and with a low level of education. In diversifying its products, a museum remains strongly bound to the groups which qualify as its audience. These groups have a high level of education. Furthermore, a museum certainly is a venue, but it is also a cultural agency displaying a specific line of products. The appeal of any individual show, then, cannot be isolated from extant patterns of attendance which are responses to a museum's line of products, i.e., to what is seen as its regular fare. A description will be given of the patrons of two very different shows, one of which is in line with what is regularly offered at an art museum and caters to the tastes of regular museum-goers, the other of which falls outside the domain of art and is intended for novices. It is expected that the visitors to each of the two exhibitions will differ in the extent to which they have experience with museums. No significant differences are expected between the levels of education of the two groups.

How is experience with museums to be measured? This question cannot be fully answered with our present state of knowledge. There are many ways of manifesting an active interest in museums. Indicators of museum experience range from the annual number of visits to enrollment in programs entitling to rebates on admission prices. As to the latter indicator, there are two highly successful programs in the Netherlands stimulating cultural participation. One is the 'Cultural Passport for Juveniles', offering substantial reductions to purchases of books, cd's, magazines and to admission prices of concerts and museums. Every year, about 150,000 'Cultural Passports' are issued. Students at schools preparing for higher education and students at vocational schools and universities are overrepresented among the passport holders. The other program is the 'Museum Card', entitling its holders to free admission to major Dutch museums. The number of people enrolled in this program is 2,800,000. This huge number is mainly due to the adoption of the program by a large Dutch bank, which gives free 'Museum Cards' to its clients. Most holders of 'Museum Cards' are affluent and highly educated. The 'Senior Citizen Passport' may also have an effect on museum-going. Although it is not a cultural program, it entitles its holders to rebates on the costs of many facilities, e.g., public transportation and several kinds of cultural venues, including museums.

Another indicator of experience with museums is the preference for a museum's collection of modern art. There is less consensus about the value of modern art than about archeological objects and works of old art. A considerable experience with museums and galleries compensates for the lack of stable and reliable information about the status of works of modern art. Therefore, preference for modern art will reflect expertise gained from frequent visits to exhibitions presenting recent developments in art.

Membership in the 'Friends of the Noord-Brabant Museum' also provides a good indicator of museum experience. The 'Friends' raise money for special projects, the

costs of which exceed the museum's regular budget, e.g., the purchase of a very valuable item or the publication of an expensive catalog. The money is obtained by successfully applying for grants at foundations and businesses. The 'Friends' are recruited from those social groups which have considerable social status and networks enabling them to plead the museum's cause effectively. As a token of gratitude, members in the 'Friends of the Noord-Brabant Museum' get a rebate on the admission price and are offered excursions to museums in foreign countries.

It is hypothesized here that by virtue of their greater experience with museums, frequent museum-goers differ from infrequent visitors in their ratings of the collection of the Noord-Brabant Museum. Given that frequent visitors perceive this provincial museum within a frame of reference encompassing a very varied set of museums, the outcome of their rating could be different from that of respondents whose frame of reference is smaller. Frequent visitors' refined experience might make them very critical of the fare of a provincial museum.

4. Method

A survey was conducted among the visitors of the Noord-Brabant Museum. This museum is located in 's-Hertogenbosch, a middle-sized town (population: 93,000), which is the capital of the province of Noord-Brabant in the south of the Netherlands. In 1993, the museum's budget was Dfl. 4,774,530 (US\$ 3,819,624).³ The provincial and municipal authorities provided subsidies in the amount of Dfl. 3,470,251 (US\$ 2,776,200). In that year, the museum welcomed 70,000 visitors, which was exactly its annual average number.

The authorities subsidizing the museum wish to be kept informed about the composition of visitor groups. They also require the museum to expand the circle of its patrons to the young, members of ethnic minorities, and those living outside the region where the Noord-Brabant Museum is located. The museum has to document its efforts in its annual reports.

The museum has an archaeological and an art collection. Both of them are small. Although the archaeological collection records the intricate political history of the region, it cannot sustain a steady and growing flow of visitors, let alone of patrons from outside the region. This also applies to the museum's art collection, which has a certain focus on works by artists from the region. To augment the number of its visitors and to compete successfully with other art museums, the Noord-Brabant Museum organizes numerous exhibitions. In 1993, 19 shows opened, devoted to archaeological themes, floral paintings by contemporary artists, work by regional photographers, sculptors and painters, ancient silverware made in 's-Hertogenbosch, etc.

³ The data on the Noord-Brabant Museum were taken from its 1993 Annual Report (Noordbrabants Museum, 1993).

4.1. Respondents

The survey was conducted from September 8, 1994 to January 30, 1995 on all days of the week, including Sundays. On entering, every fifth visitor was asked to participate by filling out a questionnaire at the end of the visit. In all, about 400 visitors were asked to cooperate. Approximately fifty of them refused immediately. Roughly fifty other visitors responded positively, but said at the end of their visit that lack of time prevented them from keeping their promise, or they showed up when the two poll-takers were busy asking other visitors to collaborate or collecting filled-out forms. Non-response totalled 25%.

Since our interest was in factors affecting choice and frequency of attendance, there was an age cut-off. Only visitors of 18 years of age or older were included in the sample. This was supposed to be the point at which people develop, by themselves, a pattern of participation in high culture. If couples, families or groups entered the museum, an effort was made to ask every fifth visitor to complete the questionnaire. In approximately ten out of 150 cases, the group allocated this task to a person other than the one who was approached by the poll-takers. In total, 298 completed questionnaires were obtained.

4.2. Design and procedure

The major objective of the survey was to gain insight into the profile of the visitors to the Noord-Brabant Museum, i.e., their socio-economic characteristics and features pertaining to museum attendance. A substantial number of questions assessed the respondents' experience with the Noord-Brabant Museum and with other museums. These questions pertained to the number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum, the average number of annual museum visits, the ratings – on ten-point scales – of the museum's permanent collection, of the show that was on, and of other museums the respondents had visited.⁴

The scores on the questions about respondents' preference for the Noord-Brabant Museum's archaeological collection, its collection of old art and modern art, provided the basis for the creation of two dummy variables with 'preference for the archeological collection' as the omitted category. Respondents were also asked to state whether or not they were entitled to reduced rates. If so, they were asked to specify whether they qualified because they were senior citizens or members of a group paying a visit to the Noord-Brabant Museum or because they were members of the 'Friends of the Noord-Brabant Museum', holders of the 'Cultural Passport for Juveniles' or the 'Museum Card'. Again, two dummy variables were constructed with 'not eligible for reduced rates' as the baseline. One dummy variable captured those who paid reduced prices because they were senior citizens or paid a group visit to the museum; the other dummy variable pertained to reductions one was entitled to through enrollment in a program furthering museum-going, membership in the 'Friends of the Noord-Brabant Museum'

⁴ For Dutch respondents, scoring appreciation on a ten-point scale strongly resembles the task of grading students' papers. In Dutch schools, marks that are given range from 0 to 10.

included. The latter variable was taken as indicating a stronger interest in museums than the former.

Data were also collected on the respondents' level of education, income, age, occupation, marital status, place of residence, expenditure of money on their visit, and the activities they engaged in on their visit to 's-Hertogenbosch besides visiting the Noord-Brabant Museum.

Of the other museums the respondents reported they had visited, the first two they mentioned were divided into two classes: the first included museums located in a big city and/or with a collection of national or international renown (e.g., the Kröller-Möller Museum, which is located in a small town); the other category comprised museums located in small towns and/or with a collection of modest renown. The first two museums the respondents mentioned were those which they visited most frequently. Therefore, it was held that the respondents considered these museums as epitomizing the category of museums they usually visited.

Five analyses were undertaken. First, a distinction was made between frequent or sporadic museum-goers. Respondents who reported a maximum average number of three annual museum visits were classified as 'infrequent patrons'. All others, reporting an average number of four to ten or more visits a year, were considered as 'frequent visitors'. The first group comprised 52 subjects, the second 244, i.e., 18% and 82% of the sample. This division between frequent and infrequent patrons is somewhat arbitrary. It might seem that an average number of two or three annual museum visits is substantial and does not constitute a good ground for qualifying a person reporting this number as an infrequent museum-goer. (It must be taken into account that the sample refers to museum visitors.) However, if the median were taken as a basis for distinguishing between frequent and sporadic visitors, we would have obtained two groups, one reporting an average number of visits ranging from two to seven a year and one reporting seven to ten or more visits a year. Given the exploratory nature of our research, we were interested in comparing two groups between which the difference in museum experience is greatest. This optimizes the chance of finding factors that may account for these differences.

The groups, frequent and infrequent attendants, were compared on their level of education, income, age, area of residence ('s-Hertogenbosch area vs. elsewhere), sex, their appreciation of the Noord-Brabant museum's collection, their preference for the museum's collection of old art, modern art, the number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum, and, if applicable, the type of reduction they are entitled to ('cultural' vs. 'other').

Second, a regression analysis was performed. The aim was to identify the factors affecting frequency of museum attendance of the visitors to the Noord-Brabant Museum. 'Reported number of annual museum visits' was the dependent variable. The independent variables epitomizing socio-economic factors relevant to cultural participation were 'level of education', 'age' and 'income'. The independent variables pertaining to museum experience were the appreciation of the collection of the Noord-Brabant Museum, the dummy variables measuring preference for the museum's collection of old or modern art and the dummy variables containing information about the type of admission price reduction the respondents were eligible for.

An attempt was made to pinpoint factors influencing the choice of specific museum shows. We took a closer look at the visitors to two very different shows the Noord-Brabant museum presented in the period during which the survey was done.

One show, entitled 'Homesick for the Classics', presented sculptures by Dutch and Belgian artists. Most of the items dated from the first half of the 19th century. The exhibition celebrated neo-classical sculpture from the southern part of the Netherlands. The work of Mathieu Kessels (Maestricht 1784–Rome 1836) was presented as a touchstone of the perfection this form of art had reached. Although famous in his time, nowadays Kessels has no international reputation, nor do his followers count as innovators in the realm of neo-classical art.

A number of indicators identify this show as a regular art museum product. The objects on display were works of art dating from the past. They epitomized a specific period and style. The show presented objects constituting a Dutch-Belgian variant of neo-classical sculpture as practiced in other countries by artists who made the style famous. Information was provided about the careers of the artists. For these reasons, it is assumed here that the show targeted an audience of experienced museum-goers.

These indicators do not apply to another exhibition, 'Peace Fought'. This show featured photographs of the conquest of 's-Hertogenbosch by the Allied Forces in 1944. The show commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the Southern Netherlands. Some memorabilia were also on display: a motorcycle used by the Allies, an ambulance, and the uniform worn by the liberators.

The objects shown were documentary in nature. Similar material is to be found in many historical books on World War II. 'Peace Fought' may be characterized as a deviation from what the Noord-Brabant Museum regularly offers, in that the items featured were not works of art illustrating a specific genre, that is, representative of a certain period or national tradition.

With this show the Noord-Brabant Museum wished to enhance its appeal to those living in the area and in the town of 's-Hertogenbosch, who had very little experience with art museums.

'Homesick for the Classics' was shown from October 1, 1994 to January 8, 1995; 'Peace Fought' from October 1, 1994 to November 13, 1994.

Respondents were clustered into two groups according to whether they stated that 'Homesick for the Classics' or 'Peace Fought' was the reason for their visit. Because only patrons present in the Noord-Brabant Museum participated in the survey, our data do not allow to generalize to other museums' audiences. The grouping of respondents into two groups was done *a posteriori*. The periods during which both shows could be seen overlapped: from October 1, 1994, to November 13, 1994, both shows were on together. Very probably, those who visited the Noord-Brabant Museum then saw both shows. It is significant that many of the respondents stated that one of the two shows was the reason for their visit. In doing so, they identified themselves as a member or non-member of the group targeted by each of the shows. To ensure that the sample effectively comprised respondents who could see both shows, only visitors who attended the Noord-Brabant Museum when both shows were on together were included in one of the two groups. The group of visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics' comprised 45 persons; the group of visitors to 'Peace Fought' included 49 persons.

The third analysis involved a comparison of the two groups of visitors on the variables in the first two analyses. Membership in one of the two groups is the dependent variable.

The aim of the fourth analysis, a discriminant function analysis, was to find out whether socio-economic variables ('level of education', 'age', 'income') or variables pertaining to experience with museums are better predictors of membership in one of the two groups. Since 'Peace Fought' was supposed to be of special interest to those living in the town of 's-Hertogenbosch or the surrounding area, a dummy variable was added separating those living in the area from those living elsewhere. Another dummy variable, 'sex', was also added.

Finally, LISREL analyses were carried out using the variables in the regression and discriminant function analyses. We wished to assess whether the effect of demographic variables on the frequency of museum visits was mediated by preference and previous experience.

5. Results

There was an overrepresentation of college graduates (64.7%). The mean age of the visitors was 52.1 years. A substantial number of them (44%) belonged to higher income groups. In these respects, the respondents resemble the museum-goers who were interviewed in the investigations mentioned in section 2.

5.1. The number of annual museum visits of the respondents

Table 1 gives the scores of infrequent and frequent patrons on all variables in the regression and discriminant function analyses. Means and standard deviations are given of scores on metric variables. The median is the central tendency for scores on ordinal variables. The largest percentage (of the two) is given for each score on a nominal variable.

Although infrequent patrons visited museums located in big cities somewhat less intensively than frequent patrons, the difference in the average number of visits paid to these museums was not significant. However, their attendance at small-town museums tended to be significantly lower than that of frequent museum-goers ($t = -1.93$, $df = 91.85$, $p = 0.056$). Sporadic visitors also differed significantly from frequent visitors in that their level of education was lower ($U = 4531$, $n_1 = 52$, $n_2 = 244$, $p = 0.000$). Frequent patrons had a stronger preference than low-frequent customers for the museum's collection of modern art ($\chi^2 = 3.66$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.055$). They reported a higher number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum ($t = -5.85$, $df = 103.41$, $p = 0.000$). Sporadic customers were more often entitled to reduced rates because they were senior citizens or members of groups paying visits to the museum ($\chi^2 = 35.55$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$). No significant differences were found between the two groups in their incomes, age, area of residence, sex, the degree to which they were entitled to reductions because of their participation in programs furthering cultural activities, and

Table 1
Scores of infrequent and frequent museum patrons on the variables in the regression analysis

	Infrequent patrons (<i>n</i> = 54)	Frequent patrons (<i>n</i> = 244)
Level of education	Lower vocational school (median)	Vocational school (median)
Income	From Dfl. 1,000 to Dfl. 1,500 (median)	From Dfl. 2,000 to Dfl. 2,500 (median)
Age	Mean: 49.3 S.D.: 15.00	Mean: 52.78 S.D.: 14.60
Sex	Female: 30 (55.6%)	Male: 140 (57.4%)
Living in 's-Hertogenbosch area	24 (44.4%)	128 (52.5%)
Number of previous visits to Noord-Brabant Museum	none (median)	4 to 7 (median)
Preference for the collection of old art	21 (38.9%)	91 (37.3%)
Preference for the collection of modern art	11 (20.4%)	85 (34.8%)
Appreciation of the museum's collection	Mean: 7.7 S.D.: 0.83	Mean: 7.3 S.D.: 1.1
Entitled to reduced rates because of affiliation with cultural agency	8 (14.8%)	22 (9%)
Entitled to reductions for other reasons	34 (63%)	57 (23.4%)

preference for the museum's collection of old art. The difference in their appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum's collection was not significant ($U = 4044$, $n_1 = 44$, $n_2 = 217$, $p = 0.09$).

Before carrying out the standard multiple regression analysis, tests for normality, linearity and homoscedasticity of residuals were run. They yielded satisfactory results, as did the test for multicollinearity. A few (10) outliers were found. Since the scores and their combinations did not reveal any inconsistencies, the outliers were not removed from the analysis.

The correlations between most variables included in the regression analysis were low. The highest (negative) correlation was $r = -0.540$ (between 'preference for the collection of old art' and 'preference for the collection of modern art').⁵

⁵ Other correlations exceeding $r = 0.300$ were: 'reported number of annual museum visits' * 'entitled to rebates because of other reasons than affiliation with a cultural agency' ($r = -0.310$), 'level of education' * 'age' ($r = -0.346$), 'income' * 'age' ($r = 0.355$).

Two regression analyses were run, both with 'number of reported museum visits per year' as the dependent variable. In the first analysis the independent variables were: 'income', 'level of education', 'age'. In addition to these variables the second analysis used 'entitled to reduced rates because of affiliation with an agency connected with museums', 'entitled to reduced rates for other reasons than being affiliated with a cultural agency', 'preference for the museum's collection of old art', 'preference for the museum's collection of modern art', and 'appreciation of the collection of the Noord-Brabant museum' as independent variables. The standardized regression coefficients of both analyses are given in Table 2.

In the first analysis, 'level of education' ($\beta = 0.24$) and 'age' ($\beta = 0.18$) contributed significantly to the statistical explanation of the variation in the number of reported annual museum visits. However, the total proportion of variance they explained was very low: only 4.7 per cent. (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.04$, $F = 4.42$, Signif. $F = 0.005$.)

In the second analysis the variables 'entitled to admission at reduced rates because of affiliation with cultural agencies' ($\beta = -0.15$), 'entitled to reduced rates for other reasons' ($\beta = -0.30$) made significant contributions to the statistical explanation of the variation in the reported average number of annual museum visits. The total proportion of explained variance is 16 per cent. (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.15$, $F = 5.4$, Signif. $F = 0.000$.) 'Education' is no longer significant.

To determine whether the difference between the results of the two analyses was significant, a test for sets of coefficients was run (Hanushek and Jackson, 1977: 124ff.). The sum of squared residuals was computed from the two regressions. The quotient that was obtained exceeded the critical value of the F distribution (2.90; 6, 230 *df*) which is 2.90 ($\alpha = 0.01$). The test showed that the difference in explained variance between the two regression models is significant. This means that the variables pertaining to

Table 2
Effects of experience on reported number of museum visits per year (standardized regression coefficients)

INCOME	-0.08	-0.02
EDUC	0.24 **	0.13
AGE	0.18 *	0.11
CULTRED		-0.15 *
OLDART		0.09
APPREC		-0.02
OTHRED		-0.30 **
MODART		0.15
Explained variance: 4%		Explained variance: 15%

Legend:

** Significant ($p < 0.01$)

* Significant ($p < 0.05$)

EDUC = level of education; CULTRED = entitled to reduced rates because of affiliation with any agency connected with museums; OLDART = preference for the museum's collection of ancient art; APPREC = appreciation of the collection of the Noord-Brabant Museum; OTHRED = entitled to reduced rates for other reasons than being affiliated with a cultural agency; MODART = preference for the museum's modern art collection.

experience with museums are very important in explaining frequency of visits among visitors of the Noord-Brabant Museum.

5.2. The choice between 'Peace Fought' and 'Homesick for the Classics'

Table 3 gives the scores of both groups of patrons on all variables in the regression and discriminant function analyses. Again, means and standard deviations are given of scores on metric variables. The largest percentage (of the two) is given for each score on a nominal variable.

First, a number of analyses were performed to get a closer look at important differences between those who reported that either 'Homesick for the Classics' or 'Peace Fought' was the reason for their visit.

The two groups had different patterns of museum patronage. The reported number of annual museum visits of those who came especially to see 'Peace Fought' was

Table 3
Scores of visitors to two exhibitions ('Peace Fought' and 'Homesick for the Classics') on the variables used in the discriminant function analysis

	Peace Fought (<i>n</i> = 45)	Homesick for the Classics (<i>n</i> = 49)
Level of education	Vocational school	Vocational school
Income	From Dfl. 2,500 to Dfl 3,000 (median)	From Dfl. 1,500 to Dfl. 2,000 (median)
Age	Mean: 56.4 S.D. 14.17	Mean: 51.2 S.D.: 15.50
Sex	Male: 42 (79.2%)	Female: 27 (51.9%)
Living in 's-Hertogenbosch area	38 (71.7%)	28 (53.8%)
Reported number of annual museum visits	4 to 7 (median)	7 to 10 (median)
Number of previous visits to Noord-Brabant Museum	2 to 3 (median)	4 to 7 (median)
Preference for the collection of old art	11 (20.8%)	29 (55.8%)
Preference for the collection of modern art	6 (11.3%)	16 (30.8%)
Appreciation of the museum's collection	Mean: 7.6 S.D.: 0.668	Mean: 7.4 S.D.: 1.156
Entitled to reduced rates because of affiliation with a cultural agency	9 (17%)	3 (5.8%)
Entitled to reductions for other reasons	18 (34%)	14 (26.9%)

significantly lower than that of those who preferred 'Homesick for the Classics' ($t = -2.65$, $df = 102$, $p = 0.009$).

The two groups differed slightly in regional origin ($\chi^2 = 23.58$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.058$), but strongly in sex ($\chi^2 = 11.04$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$), as well as in their preference for the museum's collection of modern art ($\chi^2 = 5.99$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.014$) and the collection of old art ($\chi^2 = 13.65$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$).

No significant differences were found between the level of education of both groups, their ages, the number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum, their appreciation of the museum's collection, or the extent to which they were entitled to reduced rates for reasons other than being affiliated to a cultural agency furthering museum patronage.

A discriminant function analysis was carried out. The predictor variables were the variables in the second regression analysis. Two dummy variables were added: 'sex' and 'place of residence'. The latter (dichotomous) variable separates those living in the 's-Hertogenbosch area from those living elsewhere. Since both groups were about the same size ($n_1 = 49$, $n_2 = 45$), prior probabilities of belonging to one of them were set at 0.5.

The pooled within-groups correlation matrix lists low correlations between the variables. Two values exceeded $r = 0.300$: one between income and age ($r = 0.42$), the other between the preference for the museum's collection of modern art and its collection of old art ($r = -0.53$).

The canonical discriminant function is significant ($\chi^2 = 40.5$, $df = 6$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that the centroids of each group are so far apart that there are reliable differences between the groups.

The analysis resulted in a correct classification of 75.8 percent of all 95 cases. The rate of success for the visitors to 'Peace Fought' was 67.3 percent and 84.8 per cent for attendants of 'Homesick for the Classics'.

As to the variables contributing significantly to the classification of respondents in one of the two groups, Wilks' lambda identified as such: 'reported number of annual museum visits', 'preference for the collection of old art', 'sex', and 'place of residence'. The variables 'entitled to rebates because of affiliation with cultural agencies which further museumgoing' and 'preference of the Noord-Brabant Museum's collection of modern art' were not significant ($p = 0.058$ and $p = 0.052$, respectively).

These results indicate that, in this sample, variables pertaining to museum experience are good predictors of group membership.

A second discriminant analysis was run with 'level of education', 'age', 'income', 'place of residence', and 'sex' as predictors of group membership. The discriminant function was significant ($\chi^2 = 12.3$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.016$). A correct classification was obtained for 64.2 percent of all 95 cases (71.4 per cent for 'Peace Fought' and 56.5 per cent for 'Homesick for the Classics'). Variables contributing significantly to the classification of respondents in one of both groups were 'sex' and 'place of residence'. The first model yielded much better results than the second. Given that random assignment of cases to one of the two groups had resulted in a correct classification of 50% of the cases, the first model exceeds this value by 25.8%; the second model results in a score (64.2%) which is only 14.2% better than pure chance.

5.3. *The effects of background and experiential variables*

To assess the indirect effects of the demographic variables in the regression and discriminant analyses, LISREL analyses have been performed. Since variables pertaining to museum experience contributed more than socio-economic variables to explaining attendance, we were interested in determining whether the effect of socio-economic variables on museum attendance was mediated by variables measuring museum experience. This proved to be the case in a LISREL model with 'number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum' as an additional variable. This variable is to some unknown extent also captured by 'number of annual museum visits' and was therefore left out of the regression and discriminant function analyses. The LISREL analyses have an illustrative purpose, giving a crude idea how variables measuring recent experience with museums might be related to background variables that are highly relevant to museum attendance. Therefore, insertion of 'number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum' in the LISREL models might be forgivable.⁶

The LISREL model (Fig. 1) shows how the impact of socio-economic variables on annual museum attendance is mediated by the variables pertaining to the preference for one of the three collections of the Noord-Brabant Museum and previous experience with the Noord-Brabant Museum.

Using LISREL (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993), all exogenous variables ('age', 'level of education', and 'income') were allowed to affect each of the endogenous variables ('preference for one of the three collections of the Noord-Brabant Museum', 'appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum', 'number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum', and 'number of annual museum visits'). In addition, each endogenous variable was allowed to have an effect on each of the subsequent endogenous variables, rendering a fully saturated base model. Subsequently, effects that were smaller than one standard deviation, were removed from the model. Other insignificant parameters remained freed, because their removal reduced the model fit. This resulted in 7 degrees of freedom, with χ^2 reaching only 2.77 ($p = 0.91$).

Of the remaining parameters pertaining to the effects of socio-economic background, only three turned out to be significant. 'Income' had no significant effect on any of the endogenous variables. 'Age' had a significant negative effect on 'preference for old versus modern art', indicating that modern art is mostly appreciated by younger respondents, and a significant positive effect on 'number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum'. 'Level of education' only affected the number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum significantly. No significant direct effect of education on annual museum visits was found (the standardized coefficient was 0.12).

⁶ In an attempt to compensate for the degree of contamination between the two variables, we computed the number of annual museum visits less the number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum, by dividing the number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum by (A–20), subtracting this quotient from the number of annual visits. This yielded only small differences with the model presented in the text. The direct effect of education on number of visits remained nonsignificant. The effect of Noord-Brabant Museum visits on annual visits decreased from 0.04 to 0.026.

Fig. 1. LISREL model with number of annual visits to museum as dependent variable. Only significant (standardized) parameters are displayed. Model fit: $\chi^2 = 2.77$; $df = 7$; $p = 0.91$.

The relations between the endogenous variables turned out to be more salient. 'Preference for one of the collections of the Noord-Brabant Museum' had a negative effect on 'appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum'. The more people prefer modern art, the lower is their appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum. On the other hand, 'preference for one of the collections of the Noord-Brabant Museum' affected the number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum positively. Thus, although visitors who preferred modern art were not particularly enthusiastic about the Noord-Brabant Museum, they were more frequent visitors of the museum than respondents preferring old art. This finding might imply that those who prefer modern art, which is considered to indicate a substantial degree of experience with museums, are more regular visitors anyway, irrespective of their judgment of the Noord-Brabant Museum. This interpretation derives some support from the finding that appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum did not affect the number of previous visits to this museum.

Finally, both 'preference for one of the collections of the Noord-Brabant Museum' and 'number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum' had a significant positive effect on the number of annual museum visits. Since these were the only two indicators that affected the number of annual visits directly, it can be concluded that museum experience, which is tapped by both 'preference for one of the collections of the Noord-Brabant Museum' and 'number of previous visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum', is the most important determinant of museum attendance. Socio-economic variables are only relevant in that they partially account for differences in preference (age) or patterns of previous visiting (age and level of education). The proportions of explained variance were 3% for 'preference for one of the Noord-Brabant Museum's collections', 10% for 'appreciation of the collections of the Noord-Brabant Museum', 7% for 'previous number of visits to the Noord-Brabant Museum', and 15% for 'reported number of annual museum visits'.

Beside estimating the LISREL model for the entire sample, differences between two sub-groups of visitors were also investigated. The same causal model was estimated

separately for visitors to 'Peace Fought' and visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics'. One by one, model parameters were fixed to be equal for both groups. This yielded significant differences between the groups for three parameters.

First, it was found that the effect of educational level on appreciation of one of the collections of the Noord-Brabant Museum was positive in the 'Peace Fought' group ($\beta = 0.13$) and negative in the 'Homesick for the Classics' group ($\beta = -0.22$). Although neither of these effects was significant, the opposite sign did cause a significant difference in parameter estimates. Among the visitors to 'Peace Fought', the more highly educated rate the Noord-Brabant Museum highest, whereas among the visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics' the highly educated show less appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum. Second, the effect of income on number of annual museum visits, which was insignificant if both groups were taken together, becomes significant for the visitors to 'Peace Fought' ($\beta = 0.29$). Within this group, those who earn more are more frequent museum visitors, whereas this association is absent in the group of visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics'.

The third difference between both groups concerned the effect of appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum on the number of annual museum visits. This effect, although it remained insignificant in both groups, turned out to be larger for visitors to 'Peace Fought' ($\beta = 0.27$); for the visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics', this effect was -0.07 . Visitors to 'Peace Fought', who are less frequent museum-goers than visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics', are more likely to favor the archeological collection or the collection of old art. Therefore, their appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum is a better indicator of their overall pattern of museum attendance.

Finally, when the same structural model which was estimated for the entire sample was estimated for each group separately, the residual variance in 'appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum', that is, the variance not explained by the model, was significantly larger for the visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics' (1.03 vs. 0.41). The larger residual variance resulted partly from the fact that the total variance in 'appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum' was also larger for the visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics' (1.39 vs. 0.51). This implies that visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics' differed more strongly in their appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum than visitors to 'Peace Fought'. Yet proportions of explained variance also showed that 'appreciation of the collection of the Noord-Brabant Museum' was better explained for visitors to 'Peace Fought' ($R^2 = 32\%$) than for visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics' ($R^2 = 15\%$), relatively as well as absolutely. The prediction of 'appreciation of the Noord-Brabant Museum' was therefore less successful for the visitors to 'Homesick for the Classics'. This group has the largest amount of museum experience. Their judgment might also be based on other factors which are not accounted for in our model.

6. Discussion

In this paper, a case was made for considering variables reflecting experience with museums as major determinants of variation in patronage of museums and of specific shows. The results of the regression analyses and discriminant function analyses

indicated that such variables had a greater explanatory power than socio-economic variables. This is not to deny the importance of the latter type of variables to cultural participation. Socio-economic variables contribute much to shaping a life-style in which cultural participation plays an important role. As far as specific patterns of participation are concerned, variables indicating experience with the products available in a given sector of culture mediate between background variables and outcome variables.

Further research on cultural behavior should examine respondents' perception (classification and appreciation) of cultural products. Some evidence has been provided here for linking consumers' choices and preferences to their powers of differentiating between cultural products. Cultural goods are celebrated for their differences from other similar products. Art critics often stress the 'uniqueness' of individual products. 'Masterpieces' are thought to be considerably, sometimes even absolutely, different from other 'masterpieces' and *a fortiori* from products of lesser renown. At the same time, however, cultural products are characterized and evaluated in the context of other products with which they are held to be similar in nature (cf. Verdaasdonk, 1994). If these findings are taken as a starting point for analyzing consumers' perception of cultural products, assessment of the way in which differentiation between products takes place will be a major topic of research. Cultural participation is the result of a process of choice. It seems to us that the acquisition of cultural products (e.g., books, records, magazines) rests on a positive appreciation of differences between alternatives of choice. While the acquisition of everyday goods involves a selection procedure in which candidates for purchase drop out till only one is left, the choice of certain cultural products could, for specific groups of customers, involve a positive appreciation of differences between them leading to the acquisition of several of them at one time or in a relatively short period of time. Of course, the study of the perception of cultural goods goes beyond sociology. It requires interdisciplinary research in which insights from studies of consumer behavior, in particular economic psychology, and sociology are combined.

Given that consumers' characteristics indicating experience with museums affect attendance, it is of prime importance to further clarify the nature of these variables. Here, museums also have a task, since many of them conduct surveys to get a better picture of the characteristics of their visitors.

Our results show that entitlements to rebates on admission prices exert influence on attendance. However, in the regression, these variables are related to low attendance. As can be seen from respondents' socio-economic characteristics, they do not belong to socially disadvantaged groups. They have some pattern of museum attendance. It seems to us that the efforts put forth by the Noord-Brabant museum to make visitors intensify their rates of attendance might be too global, in that people entitled to discounts are not treated as a special group. In marketing its products, the Noord-Brabant Museum should point out that being entitled to discounts makes one a member of a group that is of special interest. It is worthwhile to be more explicit about the non-material benefits that can be reaped from entitlements to rebates. One way of doing this is to point out in the documentation on a given show why it has also a special appeal to the young (holders of the 'Cultural Passport for Juveniles'), or senior citizens, or holders of the 'Museum Card' (who certainly will be keen on developing their museum experience). As to the

programming with which the Noord-Brabant Museum may generate a larger influx of visitors, our findings suggest that it should continue its policy of bringing a varied line-up of shows, ranging from exhibits catering to the tastes of art connoisseurs to shows documenting events of regional or national interest. Since consumer experience is vital to a museum's rate of attendance, the Noord-Brabant Museum should publicize its shows by stressing their similarities to exhibits mounted by other museums. Visitors to the Noord-Brabant Museum also visit other museums. For them, museum-going is a specific and valuable activity. As suggested above, consumers will perceive and judge an individual show as part of a museum's programming and as belonging more or less to the regular fare of all museums. In its publicity, the Noord-Brabant Museum should position its shows as belonging to the kind of shows that make museum-going valuable. It should not only focus on what makes the show stand apart (except, of course, when only masterpieces of great renown are on display), but it should also stress what links the show in question to other shows, so as to give a clear idea of the type of experience the show may develop and enrich. Those having developed a pattern of museum attendance will be receptive to opportunities to hone skills and experiences that may tighten their grip on products offered in a particular sector of culture and, as such, seem flexible and more widely applicable.

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