

Motivations and Expectations of Residents Revisiting Small Museums in Communities: The Case of Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum

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Abstract. The management of small museums is closely related to the understanding and participation of the surrounding residents. However, this topic has not aroused enough attention in the academic area. As an integral part of community culture, residents' evaluations and visiting patterns can significantly impact the reputation and business status of small museum. To investigate audience participation and motivation at the Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial, the researcher conducted interviews and natural observations. The study highlights personal, work, and social needs as the primary drivers of residents' re-participation in community small museums. These findings hold value for guiding the future development of small museums in the community.

Keywords: Community, small museum, community resident, revisit.

1. Introduction

The operation of the small community museum is closely related to the surrounding residents' understanding, word of mouth, and re-participation in the museums. Nonetheless, the academic field has received insufficient attention. The museum is a non-profit, permanent institution open to the public. It acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits humanity's tangible and intangible heritage and its environment for education, study, and enjoyment [1](Sandahl, 2019). Researchers conducted extensive research to improve museum audience satisfaction. However, academic research on small museums, most of which are located around neighborhoods, with fewer exhibits and organized around a single exhibition theme, encourages us to investigate the meaning and consequences of the relationship that is developing between the community and the museum, either by museums attempting to engage better with their communities or by community groups becoming more actively interested in heritage activity [2](Crooke, 2006). Therefore, this study will investigate residents' motivations and expectations to re-participate in their community's small museum and the ways and means by which they want to participate in this type of museum. This paper will concentrate on the user experience to comprehend the issues above. Using the Beijing Guo Shou Jing Memorial Museum in Xihai Wetland Park in the Xicheng District of Beijing as an example, we can understand the participation needs and expectations of the surrounding residents of the small museum located in their community through the research methods of interviews and natural observation.

This paper is divided into four sections: the first introduces the location and mode of operation of the small museum; the second describes the research site and research methods; the third will detail the analysis of the study's findings; and the fourth will discuss the study's conclusions.

2. Positioning and Operation Mode of Small Museums

Small museums must have precise positioning and sufficient characteristics to establish their advantages compared to large museums. Therefore, understanding and exploring audience visit intentions and expectations requires a positioning analysis of small and large museums.

2.1. Positioning and Features

Medium and small museums are critical components of China's and the global museum systems. By the end of 2021, 51.7% of all museums in China will be medium and small below the prefecture level, with their total collections accounting for only 14.9% of total museum collections [3](Lu, 2022). Simultaneously, there are numerous small museums, such as historic sites, historic memorials, and ancient architectural sites. These small museums are frequently concentrated in community or residential areas, and surrounding residents and those who work nearby frequently visit them in their spare time. However, unlike large museums with abundant collections, permanent and temporary exhibitions, and social education programs. Small museums typically face problems such as small galleries (no more than 1000 m²), the inability to replace exhibitions, lack of venues and professionals to develop systematic social education programs, and the inability to provide audiences with adequate and multiple engagements from their existing resources.

The Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum is a typical example of a small museum in the community. It is located in Xihai Wetland Park, Xicheng District, Beijing, and covers an area of 800 square meters. The museum contains no tangible heritage. The exhibition hall, which features a permanent exhibition titled "World Celebrity Guo Shoujing, World Heritage Grand Canal," tells the story of Guo Shoujing and the Beijing Grand Canal, which Guo designed as the chief designer. The exhibition, based on the life of Guo Shoujing, describes Guo Shoujing's crucial role in the construction of Yuandadu City, the opening of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, and the subsequent development of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal. It is part of a single-thread unified theme exhibition with Guo Shoujing at its center. The museum's location is not in an area with a high concentration of foreign tourists. Most visitors are residents of the surrounding area, and the primary groups serving the museum are residents of the surrounding area, school students, and relevant businesses.

2.2. Correlation Research

Museums' development has always been a prominent topic among scholars. Arguably, small museums worldwide have been facing specific problems and bottlenecks in their development. The small museum's current development status and problems can be summarized in several aspects based on relevant literature research.

The International Museum Association identified "education" and "serving the public" as critical elements of museums in 1990. It stated that education is the museum's priority, which has become a cornerstone of museum service [4](He, 2019). It shows that museums, even small ones, have essential social and educational responsibilities. Small museums typically employ fewer than five people, many of whom have multiple skills. Small museums experienced volatile cash flows, intense economic pressures, and frequently disrupted operating activities. It is, however, very close to the community and is under less political pressure, focusing on the audience's needs, serving the community, and requiring little from local governments [5](Ambrose et al., 2018). Despite these issues, the smaller and younger an organization is, the fewer its intended audiences, and the more critical it is to understand how its services relate to the community and beyond to sustain a vibrant museum [5](Carissa, 2019). It demonstrates the community micromuseum's adaptability and close relationship with the community. At the moment, the development of small museums is gaining the attention of experts, scholars, and the general public. However, there is no academic community for small museum audience research and literature.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Question

Serving the surrounding residents and becoming an essential part of the local community is one of the directions for developing such museums, as the Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum is an

infrastructure of history and culture. In this study, the researchers attempt to understand what factors lead to the surrounding residents frequently visiting the community's small museum and what results have been harvested or obtained, thereby providing reference ideas for future museum management. The research problems can be summarized as follows:

- 1) the objective and subjective assessment of the small community museum by the surrounding residents;
- 2) the characteristics that motivate surrounding residents to revisit the small community museum; and
- 3) the types and characteristics of the community residents' revisiting expectations and purpose.

3.2. Research Object

The study randomly selected 43 visitors for seven consecutive days from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (the most intense part of the day based on natural observations of the week), with 32 surrounding residents serving as the main subjects. There were 18 men and 14 women among them.

To determine the number of spectators, the age distribution, and whether the distribution is consistent with the regional age distribution, observe the number of visitors, the period, the number of people in each exhibition hall, and the age distribution.

3.3. Research Method

This study employs both interviews and natural observation methods. The naturalistic observation method focuses on the main observation content of the audience.

The audience was interviewed at random at various times, beginning with the museum's interest points, and the audience answered three questions: the reasons and expectations for coming to the museum, the experience of visiting the museum, and the reasons for revisiting the museum.

4. Research Results

4.1. Main Characteristics of the Audience Visiting the Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum

According to natural observation, the total number of visitors from April 21 to April 26, 2023, was 1,239. Among them were the following:

- 1) The main visitors and subjects of this interview and research are young and middle-aged people aged 26-60 years and the elderly aged over 60 years. Fig.1 depicts the statistic for the age distribution of the audience.
- 2) According to time-sharing traffic statistics, exhibition halls one and three are the focal points of the audience's visit, following the exhibition hall area and content. Fig.2 depicts the statistical distribution of that personnel in the exhibition hall.
- 3) The busiest times for visitors are between 10 and 11 a.m. and 2 to 3 p.m., corresponding to the times for two public welfare explanations inside the museum.
- 4) Throughout the process, the audience primarily exhibits peer communication, photography, questioning interpreters about relevant issues, and purchasing creative behavior. Fig.3 depicts the distribution of the number of people in the various time phases.

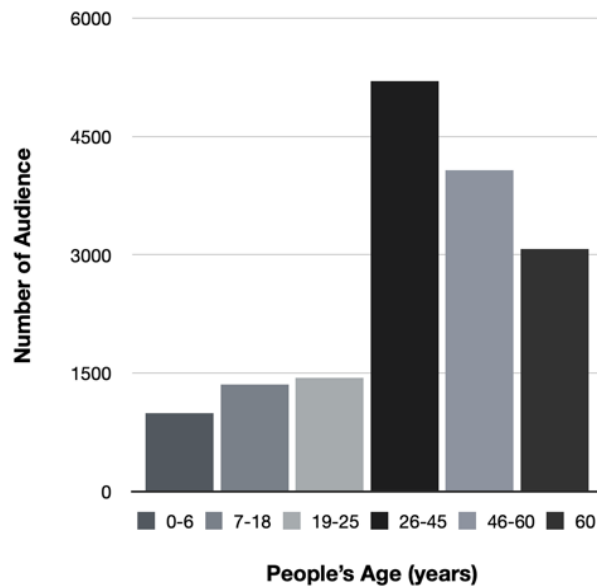


Figure 1. Audience age distribution

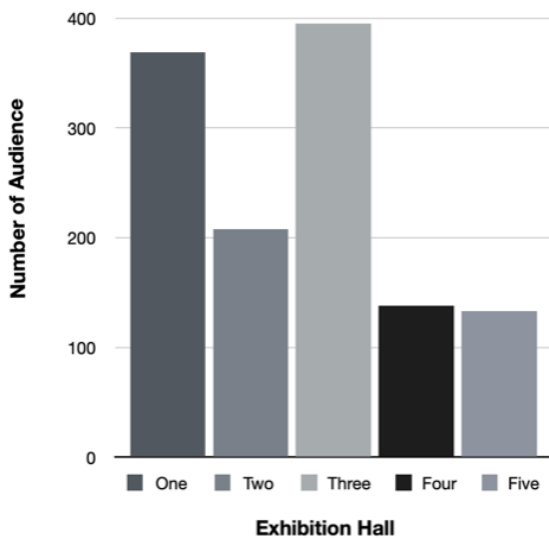


Figure 2. Audience distribution in Different Exhibition Hall

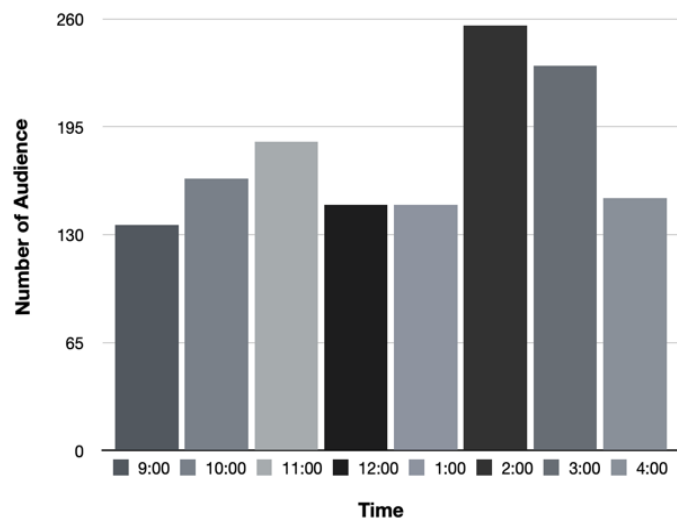


Figure 3. Audience distribution in Different Time Period

4.2. Motivation of Community Residents to Revisit Small Community Museums

38% of the 43 interviewees returned, indicating the museum has undeniable revisit value. It also implies that visitors, whether first-time or repeat visitors, are motivated to participate again.

4.2.1. Audience visiting demand

According to the survey, the visits of the surrounding residents were primarily focused on personal needs and passive visits. Among them were the following:

1) Personal needs accounted for nearly 60% of the total, primarily the desire to learn in museums, purchase creative, obtain ticket access, or listen to an explanation.

2) A small portion of the audience also has work obligations, such as making videos and volunteering. Nearly 20% of residents in the park's vicinity have no apparent purpose. Xihai Wetland Park is part of the tourist destination. They must also visit the Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum while visiting Xihai Wetland Park. This audience segment has no specific reason or intention to visit; their visits are sporadic.

4.2.2. Revisiting willingness

Residents in this interview expressed the following opinions about revisiting the museum:

Only a tiny portion of the audience believed there was no need to revisit. This audience segment believes that, based on individual needs, Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum, as a small museum, can provide a complete tour of the museum's exhibitions in a single visit without the need to return. Other viewers' reasons for revisiting are primarily personal, social, and professional needs.

1) Personal demand accounts for up to 40% of total demand. Most visitors need deep learning, access to derivatives, and memory. Mr. Guo, who is from Xingtai, Hebei Province, and now lives in Beijing's western district, is from the same city as Guo Shoujing. Because of this background connection, Mr. Guo is involved again and willing to study the museum in depth. Almost half of the audience desired to return to the Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum while visiting West Sea Wetland Park. This segment of the audience focused on the connection between the Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum, Xihai Wetland Park, and the community. They believed that the three promoted and helped each other.

2) Work demand accounted for 34% of the total. During the visit, some audience members investigated the relevance of the museum's work and life, such as volunteering, taking pictures and videos, and collaborating with the museum.

3) Social demand accounted for 23%; this part of the audience believes that the museum environment, exhibition content, and other regions can meet the needs of their learning work and stimulate family, friends, and students' participation and learning interest. Indeed, some of the audience believes that revisiting as tourists will encourage others to participate; the re-participation motivation of this audience segment can be denoted as social needs.

4.2.3. Operation advice

During this interview, audience members offered suggestions for the small community museum's operation, primarily regarding publicity and collaboration.

1) During the interview, nearly 30% of the audience mentioned that hearing about or visiting the Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum for the first time was a coincidence. The coincidence happened while he was strolling through Xihai Wetland Park and eating at a well-known nearby restaurant. These residents argue that the museum's publicity in the community should be increased because they were unaware of its existence, even though they had lived nearby for a long time.

2) According to some interview viewers, visiting the Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum was not part of the day's full itinerary. They will visit other museums in Beijing's western city district or explore the surrounding attractions before and after visiting the Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum. These museums and attractions are also small and medium-sized museums or memorials in the same neighborhood as Guo's memorial. As a result, the Beijing Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum should prioritize collaboration and contact with other small museums in the region to jointly provide more affordable and convenient travel options and planning for the surrounding residents.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1. Conclusion

5.1.1. Personal needs remain dominant, while other needs rise when audience revisit

Personal needs account for most of the audience's reason for visiting and motivation for returning. However, when the proportion of the unique needs of the audience revisited was compared, visitor demand decreased by approximately 20%, while social and work needs increased. It implies that on their first visit to the museum, most of the surrounding residents can meet their individual needs, such as visiting exhibitions, listening to lectures, and purchasing souvenirs. Moreover, this audience segment is pleased with the small museum and will return, albeit for different reasons. As a result, small community museums should include temporary exhibitions, educational activities, derivatives, and other forms. To entice these residents to revisit, attention should also be paid to the comfort and beauty of the venue environment.

5.1.2. Exhibitions remain the primary focus of museums

According to the study's findings, content directly impacted the audience's satisfaction with the small museum and willingness to participate again. At the same time, community museums are more about museums built around the region's history, artifacts, and notable figures, and residents of the region understand the content. As a result, they are demanding more accurate and detailed exhibitions in which curators can meet the needs of all groups in society as well as the residents of the community, for example, by having a live exhibition.

5.1.3. Museum size does not affect the audience's expectations

The audience's expectations and requirements of small museums will not be reduced because of their small size, and the audience will continue to judge small museums based on their standards and evaluation of the museum. They will comprehensively judge and demand the museum's contents, exhibits, environment, exhibition forms, and other aspects. As a result, if the small museum wants to encourage the surrounding residents to participate again for different reasons, the construction and promotion of venues must be completed. Second, innovating and developing as much as possible in venue tours, exhibition hall environments, and souvenir displays is critical.

5.2. Discussion

The same community's historical and cultural heritage and geographical location have created a close relationship between its small museums and residents. The museum should be more community-based when considering the residents, community culture, and history. The surrounding residents, for instance, brought up publicity concerns. Even in this day and age of highly developed networks and social media, the community museum should prioritize posters, leaflets, and other forms of ground publicity so that the surrounding residents can understand the trend of the community museum and choose the best time to participate in it.

Furthermore, because of its geographical location, the surrounding residents have more opportunities to comprehend, participate in, evaluate, and visit the small museum at home, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the museum. Small museums are subjected to more stringent requirements, which frequently refer to the content and format of large and medium-sized museums. The small museum should look for external collaboration and development opportunities in this case. The city's western district has eight famous people's houses or memorials, including the Guo Shoujing Memorial Museum. These museums can collaborate with each other and use their geographical advantages to connect small and medium-sized museums with shorter visiting times, enriching the audience's visiting process. While recommending the celebrity memorial hall theme tour route to the audience, the various venues can also jointly promote and transform the original users among the various venues in order to realize the shared prosperity of small museum communities.

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