

Analysis of visitors of the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia of Lisbon by means of questionnaires

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Abstract

The study hereby presented is an elaboration of data collected through questionnaires distributed to Portuguese and foreigners, between 18 August and 12 September, which were filled in at the end of their visits. Twelve questions were asked to the visitors concerning different aspects of their visit, such as knowledge about the existence of the museum, aim of the visit, satisfaction from the visit, expectancy concerning offered services, disposal to a new visit, etc. Which are the responses of the visitors to these cultural proposals? Which are their expectations? And, above all, do they later come again to the museum to see more expositions? It was in order to answer to these questions that this work was carried out, pointing mainly at uncovering the needs and wishes of the people who enter the museum to enjoy the cultural services offered there. 955 questionnaires were answered, equivalent to 14.1% of the number of visitors during that same period, which is a statistically significative sample data.

The overall picture of the museum as seen through this inquiry is undoubtedly positive. There is nevertheless a basic problem concerning the need expressed by visitors of a permanent exposition on Portuguese archaeology parallel to the thematic temporary exhibitions. These latter events should, in any case, continue, as they keep the museum alive attracting both new and affectionate visitors who, in turn, make this place an ever evolving occasion for cultural meeting.

Resumo

Durante o Verão de 1998, mais exactamente entre 18 de Agosto e 12 de Setembro, a autora promoveu, com o apoio do Museu Nacional de Arqueologia, um inquérito aos visitantes da instituição, tendo em vista o melhor conhecimento

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tanto dos utentes do museu, como do grau de satisfação expresso pelos mesmos em relação ao tipo e amplitude da oferta museal de que dispunham. O questionário preparado para o efeito, disponibilizado em português ou em inglês, constava de 12 perguntas para resposta breve, sendo distribuído juntamente com o bilhete de entrada a todos os visitantes. Nenhum esforço especial foi feito para incentivar a resposta ao inquérito, que passaria pelo seu preenchimento e depósito em urna caixa fechada localizada no átrio do museu. As respostas obtidas, num total de 955 (das quais 438 de portugueses e 517 de estrangeiros), corresponderam a cerca de 14 % do universo total de visitantes no período objecto de estudo, assumindo assim ampla validade estatística e correspondendo a um acto voluntário dos visitantes no sentido de “emitirem opinião” sobre o que lhe era perguntado.

A análise circunstanciada das respostas a cada pergunta, observando separadamente nacionais e estrangeiros, permite concluir que a imagem geral do museu, tal como resulta deste inquérito, é indubitavelmente positiva. Detecta-se no entanto um problema básico relacionado com a necessidade que os visitantes expressam na existência de uma mostra permanente sobre a arqueologia portuguesa, em geral, paralela às exposições temáticas, temporárias. Estes eventos deverão, em todo o caso, continuar a existir, já que mantêm o museu vivo, atraindo tanto novos como os já habituais visitantes do museu, fazendo deste espaço um local sempre renovado para o encontro cultural.

Aims of the research

This investigation focuses on the demands and offerings of services at the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia of Lisbon. This museum has not presently a permanent exposition, and for this reason it represents an interesting case study for analysing the flow of public which enter the museum in order to see temporary expositions. These latter events, in fact, attract many visitors, and make the museum increasingly known through the cyclic offering of new exhibitions.

Which are the responses of the visitors to these cultural proposals? Which are their expectations? And, above all, do they later come again to the museum to see more expositions? It was in order to answer to these questions that this work was carried out, pointing mainly at uncovering the needs and wishes of the people who enter the museum to enjoy the cultural services offered there.

This inquiry is meant as a contribution to the testing of the strategies already applied by the museum. It will furthermore help in singling out new possible approaches which may allow for an increasingly greater interaction between the museum and the visitor, and ever enhancing quality of the services provided.

Methods

The study hereby presented is an elaboration of data collected through questionnaires distributed to Portuguese and foreigners, which were filled in at the end of their visits (fig. 1).

Questionnaires were distributed between 18 August and 12 September 1998. In order to have statistically significant sample data (Aguiari e Amici, 1996), it was important that the number of the collected questionnaires was equivalent to, at least, the 10% of the number of visitors during that same period. This goal was largely reached: out of a total 6764 visitors, 955 questionnaires were answered, equivalent to 14.1%; of these visitors, 3386 were Portuguese and 3378 were foreigners, of whom the 12.9% and 15.3% respectively answered.

Dear visitor, this questionnaire is part of an investigation which aims at understanding the desires and the needs of those who come to see this museum. The results may help the museum staff to enhance the quality of the visits.
The validity of the results depends on the high number of answers.
Thank you very much for your help.

1. How did you come to know about this museum? (multiple answers are possible)
☐ radio
☐ TV
☐ revistas/jornais
☐ catálogos
☐ agências de viagem
☐ guias turísticos
☐ recomendações de amigos
☐ visita anterior
 outros.....

2. Quantas vezes já esteve neste Museu ?
☐ nunca
☐ uma vez
☐ mais de uma vez

3. Quais as razões principais que o levaram a visitar este Museu ?
☐ estudo
☐ trabalho
☐ para visitar uma exposição em particular
 por mera curiosidade
 por interesse geral
 outr s.....

4. Que meio de transporte usou para chegar a este Museu ?
☐ carro próprio
☐ carro alugado
☐ autocarro
☐ comboio
 outro.....

5. Foi fácil chegar a este Museu ?
☐ sim
☐ não
 Se não, porque ?

6. Com quem visitou este Museu ? (é possível escolher várias hipóteses)
☐ em grupo organizado
☐ sozinho
☐ com amigo/s
☐ em casal
☐ com filhos
☐ com outros familiares
 outros.....

7. Qual é a sua impressão geral em relação a este Museu ?
☐ excelente
☐ muito bom
☐ bom
☐ comum / banal
☐ monótono / maçador
☐ mau
☐ muito mau

8. Sugeriria alguma melhoria ? Qual ?

9. O que apreciou mais durante a visita ? (é possível escolher várias hipóteses)
☐ acolhimento / recepção
☐ modo de exposição dos objectos
☐ informação didáctica de apoio
 outros.....

10. Qual o serviço que mais gostaria ter encontrado neste Museu, para além dos que existem ? (é possível escolher várias hipóteses)
☐ visitas guiadas
☐ laboratórios didácticos
☐ abertura à noite
☐ conferências sobre arqueologia
☐ snack-bar ou restaurante
☐ livraria e loja mais ampla
 outros.....

11. Voltaria a visitar este Museu ?
☐ sim
☐ não
 Porquê ?

12. Que locais visitou (ou pensa visitar) durante a sua estadia na zona onde se situa este Museu ?

Finally, we would need some information about you:
 sex: ☐ male ☐ female
 age.....
 education.....
 profession.....
 nationality.....
 city / country.....

Finalmente, algumas informações a seu respeito:
 sexo: ☐ masculino ☐ feminino
 idade.....
 habilitações literárias.....
 profissão.....
 nacionalidade.....
 cidade/país.....

Fig. 1 – Facsimilae of the questionnaires distributed to Portuguese and foreigners (respectively in Portuguese and in English versions).

Twelve questions were asked to the visitors concerning different aspects of their visit, such as knowledge about the existence of the museum, aim of the visit, satisfaction from the visit, expectancy concerning offered services, disposal to a new visit, etc. (see figs. 2 to 11).

It was decided to involve both national and foreign visitors in the inquiry, as this would help in drawing a general picture essential for programming museum activities aimed at all users; on the other side, in order to better understand single characteristics of each of these two groups, and to get the possible differences and/or common points in demands and expectations, data elaboration's and analyses concerning Portuguese visitors have been split from those concerning foreigners.

Analysis of data

Question 1 – How did you come to know about this museum ? (fig. 2)

Portuguese visitors

In the 29.7% of cases knowledge about the museum was through magazines and newspapers, which thus proves to be an effective informative mean. Also "words passed on to by friends", 21.4%, is a good information channel. Rather discouraging is the indication concerning radio and television, 0.8% and 5.8% respectively; these media should in fact play a much major role in informing about the museum and its activities, considering also their capability of reaching also those portions of society with less probability of getting in touch with museums.

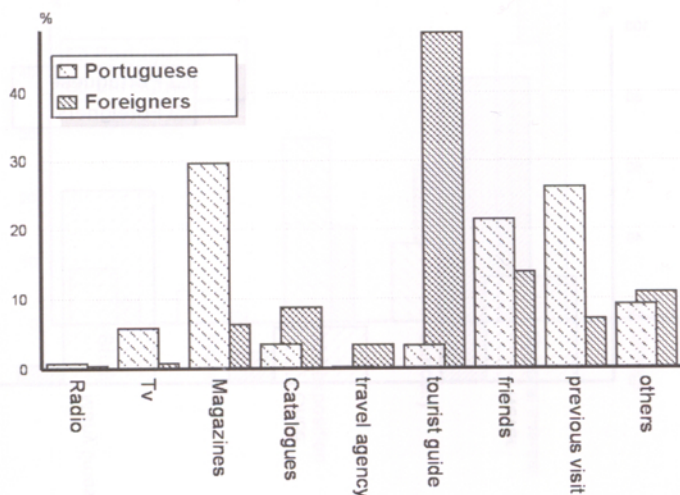


Fig. 2 – Question 1: How did you come to know about this museum?

Foreign visitors

48.6% of foreign visitors came to know about the museum through tourist guides, 13.9% was told by friends and 10.9% declared that they got to the museum by chance, during a promenade or after having visited the Jeronimus Monastery.

Question 2 – How many times have you already been in this museum? (fig. 3)

Portuguese visitors

A very interesting point comes out from the answers, as 54.6% of visitors declared that they had already been in this museum more than once, 15.7% at least once, and 29.7% had never visited the museum before. Thus around 70% already knew the museum and only ca. 30% was entering the museum for the first time. Undoubtedly the existence of temporary expositions influences on the behaviour of the public, inducing them to come again, but evidently expositions are satisfactorily arranged if visitors return to the museum and, moreover, tend to pass the word on to friends.

Foreign visitors

85.8% of foreign visitors had never come previously to the museum. Of interest are the following data: 8.9% had already visited once the museum, and 5.3% even more than once. Evidently, this people who have been coming several times to Lisbon felt the interest of coming again to the museum, probably attracted by new expositions and, possibly, by overall positive feelings about their previous visits.

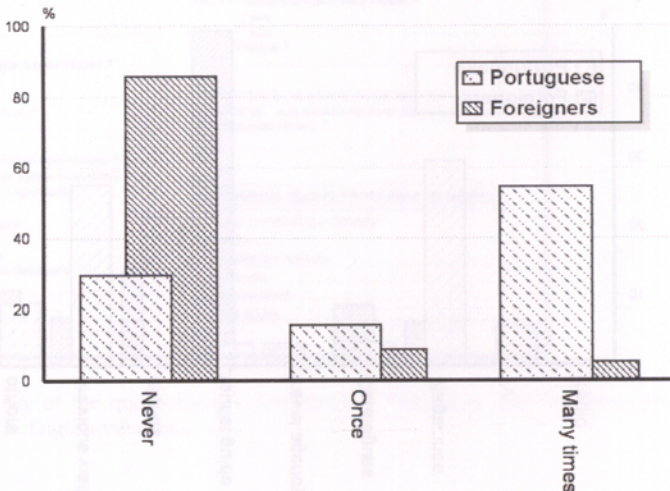


Fig. 3 – Question 2: How many times have you already been in this museum?

Question 3 – Which were the main reasons that have brought you in this museum ? (fig. 4)

Portuguese visitors

For 44.1% of visitors it was a matter of general interest, 29.2% came in order to see the exposition, 12.4% were pushed by curiosity and only 8.9% and 5.2% for study and work reasons respectively.

Foreign visitors

General interest pushed the visitor of the museum in 54.2% of cases, while 15.2% wanted explicitly to see the specific expositions open in that period. Just 24.9% came just for curiosity.

Question 4 – How did you reach the museum ? (fig. 5)

Portuguese visitors

Even though the museum is located in a part of the city which is easily accessible by public transports, 58.4% reached the place by car, and only 29.7% by bus.

Foreign visitors

44.9% reached the museum by bus, 20.1% by their own cars, 15.5% by train, 7.9% by rented cars, the 11.6% by other means.

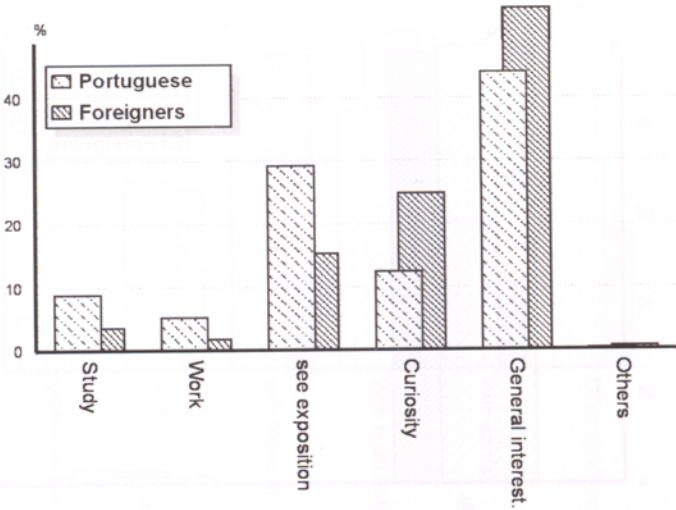


Fig. 4 – Question 3: Which were the main reasons that have brought you in this museum?

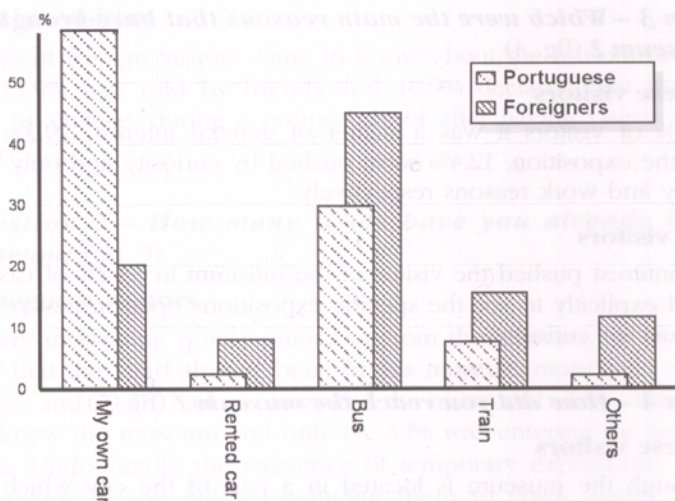


Fig. 5 – Question 4: How did you reach the museum?

Question 5 – Was it easy to get to the museum ? (fig. 6)

Portuguese visitors

98.4% answered positively to this question, meaning that the museum is well inserted both in the urban network and in the city touristic routes; this is surely facilitated by the presence of several other attractions nearby (Jeronimus Monastery, Belem Tower, Coaches Museum, etc.)

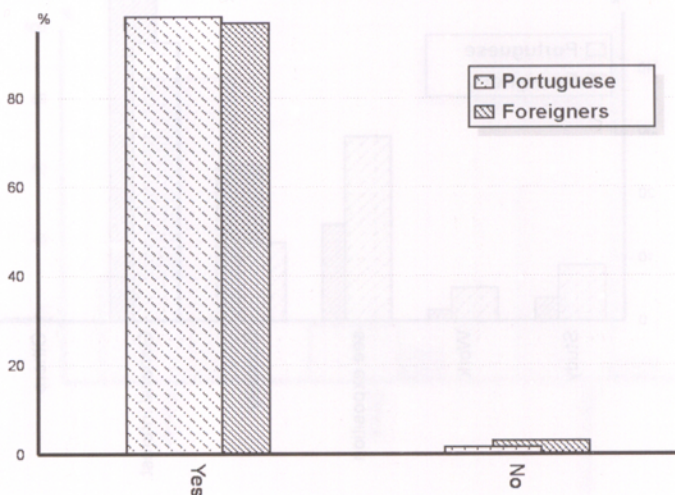


Fig. 6 – Question 5: Was it easy to get to the museum?

Foreign visitors

It is an interesting and positive indication the fact that 96.9% of foreign visitors declared they had no problems in finding the museum.

Question 6 – With whom are you visiting the museum? (multiple answers are possible) (fig. 7)

Portuguese visitors

Answers to this question show that the visit to the museum is mainly carried out in the company of relatives and, in a minor degree, of friends, thus being a somehow social and family practice. In fact, 24.4% of visitors came to the museum with their husband/wife, 13.8% with their daughters/sons, 19.5 with other relatives. Of the remaining visitors, 19.6% were together with friends, 17.7 were alone, while just 5% were in organised tours.

Foreign visitors

Also foreign visitors come to the museum together with friends and relatives. In fact, the 31.6% visited the museum with the husband/wife, 29.5% with friends, 16.8% in organised tours, 12.8% with “other relatives”, 8% with sons/daughters; just the 1.3% visited the museum alone.

Question 7 – Which is your general impression about this museum? (fig. 8)

Portuguese visitors

Most of the people who answered to this question have a general positive impression of the museum: 18.2% consider it as being “excellent”, 45.5% “very

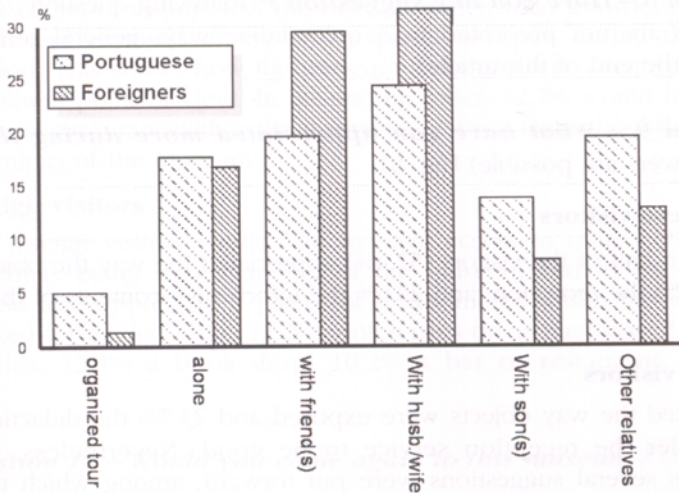


Fig. 7 – Question 6: With whom are you visiting the museum? (multiple answers are possible).

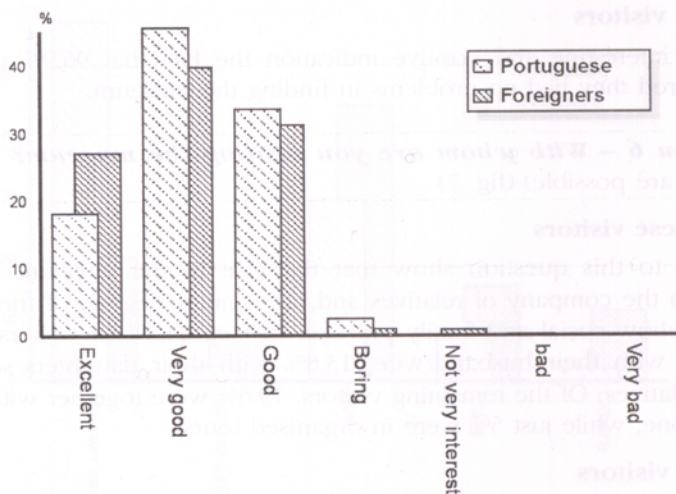


Fig. 8 – Question 7: Which is your general impression about this museum?

good”, and 33.5% as “good”, while just 2.6% regards it as “boring” and “not very interesting” and 0.2% “bad” or “very bad”.

Foreign visitors

Also the majority of foreign visitors who filled in the questionnaires was satisfied with the visit: 27.1% regarded it as “excellent”, 39.8% “very good”, 31.2% “good”. Just 1 % considered it boring.

Question 8 – Have you any suggestion ? (following question 7)

(answers are not presented in a quantitative way; general remarks are presented at the end of this article)

Question 9 – What have you appreciated more during the visit?

(multiple answers are possible) (fig. 9)

Portuguese visitors

More than half of the visitors (57.4%) appreciated the way the objects were exposed, 21.2% the reception, and 20.6% the informative contents of the display panels.

Foreign visitors

59.9% liked the way objects were exposed and 23.7% the didactic panels. 16.4% consider the reception service to be good. Nevertheless, in some questionnaires several suggestions were put forward, among which the more recurrent ones are: a) English and French versions of some didactic panels; b) better lighting of the rooms and of some of the exposed objects.

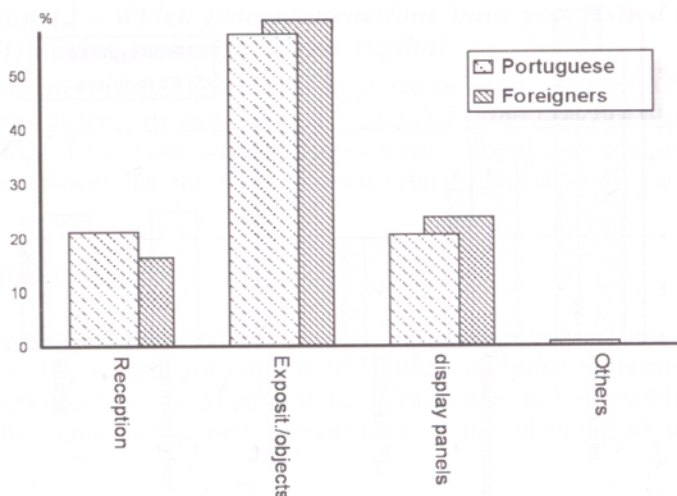


Fig. 9 – Question 9: What have you appreciated more during the visit ? (multiple answers are possible).

Question 10 – Which of the following services would you have liked to find in this museum ? (multiple answers are possible) (fig. 10)

Portuguese visitors

Even though most of the visitors have appreciated the way objects are exposed and the didactic informations provided, 27.1% would like to have a guided visit to the museum, 19.9% would appreciate conferences on archaeology and 18.3% would be interested in didactic laboratories. It thus arises that 65.3% of visitors feel the need to widen their knowledge on themes dealt with and exposed in the two expositions open during the period of investigation. This shows how the museum users are very attentive and exigent from a cultural point of view. In decreasing order, 12.7% would like to have a snack bar or restaurant within the museum, 12.4% a larger bookshop and 9.6% night openings of the museum.

Foreign visitors

Also foreign visitors would like to have access to other cultural services which permits better understanding of the museum and its expositions, and they would also appreciate a place for refreshments within the museum. The 30.9% asked for guided visits, 22.2% conferences on archaeology, 14.5% didactic laboratories, 12.1% a book-shop, 10.2% a bar or restaurant, 10.1% night openings.

Question 11 – Would you come again to this museum ? (fig. 11)

Portuguese visitors

97.5% of visitors would come again to this museum, just 2.5% would not.

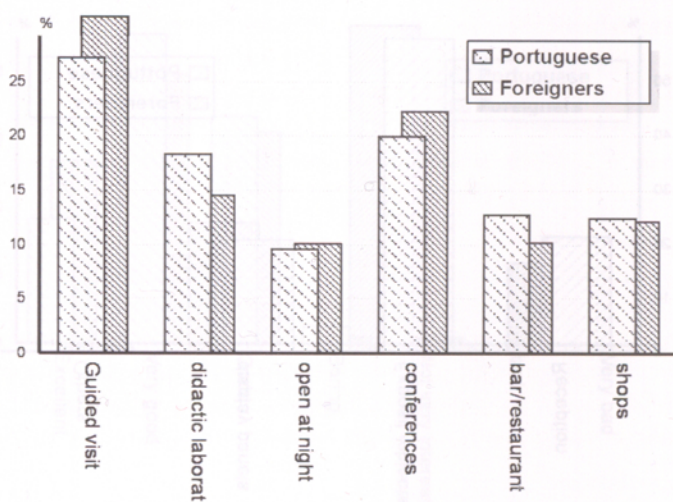


Fig. 10 – Question 10: Which of the following services would you have liked to find in this museum? (multiple answers are possible).

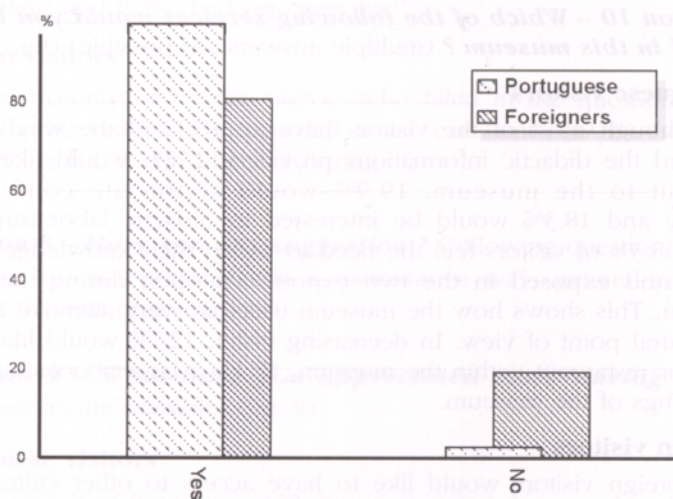


Fig. 11 – Question 11: Would you come again to this museum?

Foreign visitors

Almost all foreign visitors would come again to the museum (80.7%), considering also that most of the 19.3% who answered negatively specified that it was just because they were probably not coming again to Portugal.

Question 12 – Which places/attractions have you visited (or intend to visit) during your visit in this region?

(answers are not presented in a quantitative way; it is worthing to note that museums in the surrounding area – except for the Coaches Museum – are not at the top of the visited places; monuments, like the Jeronimus Monastery or the Belém Tower, are the most referred visited places).

Conclusions

This investigation carried out on 438 Portuguese visitors and 517 foreign visitors, for an overall amount of 955 filled in questionnaires, provides interesting information, shedding new lights on points to be possibly taken into account when considering new perspectives in the planning of the museum activities:

- it is interesting to underline that the Portuguese public came to know about the museum mainly through newspapers and magazines; television and radio did not prove to be effective channels of information concerning cultural events of this kind, possibly because of lack of interest/investments of these *media* in the ambit of cultural communication. Recommendation of friends to visit the museum is an interesting and positive data, as it indicates that those who have already visited the museum are enough satisfied to suggest other people to do the same;
- the existence of temporary exhibitions influences very much on the decision of visiting the museum especially, obviously, as far as Portuguese visitors are regarded. Most of national visitors had in fact already been to the museum, and returned for specific interest in the expositions or for general interest. To this regard, it must nevertheless be noted that there are many suggestions, mainly by Portuguese, to set up also a permanent collection on the archaeology of Portugal;
- the fact that the museum is well inserted within a touristic-cultural city route makes it visible and easy to be reached. This data is even more significative on the ground that 96.9% of foreigners did not have problems in finding the museum, and that 44.9% arrived by bus and 20.1% by their own car. Considering that these foreign visitors are, in most cases, in Lisbon for the first time, it can be deduced that there are good indications and connections with the important nearby monuments. To be noted is that in some cases, both Portuguese (9.1%) and foreigners (10.9%) “discovered” the museum by chance during a visit to the Jeronimus Monastery, the Belem Tower or the Coaches Museum;
- the visit to the museum is a social and family practice, as it can be seen from the high percentage of both Portuguese and foreigners who visited the museum together with relatives and friends. The people who go to the museum alone are really few;

– visitors, both foreigners and Portuguese, are generally very satisfied with their visit. It is interesting to note that the medium cultural level of those who filled in the questionnaires is generally rather high: in the majority of cases they are teachers, students or clerks and their expectations, though being of relatively medium-high quality, are largely fulfilled. Suggestions were provided by some foreigners concerning the translation of all panels in English (but some proposed also French) and better lightening of the objects exposed. Moreover there is the wish of both Portuguese and foreign visitors to follow some activities related to the museum and to the temporary expositions. To the question “Which of the following services would you have liked to find in this museum?”, 27.1% of Portuguese asked for guided visits, 19.9% conferences on archaeology, 18.3% didactic laboratories; most of the Portuguese visitors would like to culturally enrich their visit. Also among foreign visitors there is this same tendency; 30.9% would like guided visits, 14.5% didactic laboratories and 22.2% conferences on archaeology.

From the responses of the questionnaires it arises a need for communication, which may be translated, into a closer approach of visitors to the museum, involving them in dynamic cultural initiatives.

The overall picture of the museum as seen through this inquiry is undoubtedly positive. There is nevertheless a basic problem concerning the need expressed by visitors of a permanent exposition on Portuguese archaeology parallel to the thematic temporary exhibitions. These latter events should, in any case, continue, as they keep the museum alive attracting both new and affectionate visitors who, in turn, make this place an ever evolving occasion for cultural meeting.

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