

# What are we doing anyway?

## The Problem of the Effectiveness of Museums

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# Synopsis

Current Museums & Practice

Approach to Visitors

Research Results Summary: Individuals in Museums

Goal for Museums: Individual Perspective

Memorial Museums as Special Category

Definitions

Context

Societal vs. Individual Needs

Summary

Caveat



# Current Museums & Practice

- *Visitors as Novices*



But... we should view

*Visitors as Experts*



# Research Results Summary – Individuals

- Visitors make use of museums for their own purposes and from varying perspectives. The museum can influence these outcomes but not control them.



Visitors make use of museums ...  
... often in ways that staff don't expect or consider



For their own purposes ...  
... meeting real needs, many of them not explicit



# From varying perspectives...

i.e., the experience, knowledge and attitudes visitors arrive with



The museum can influence visitor outcomes but not control them...



# Proposed Effectiveness Goal

*Museums, like many other heritage attractions, are essentially experiential products, quite literally constructions to facilitate experience. In this sense, museums are about facilitating feelings and knowledge based upon personal observation or contact by their visitors.*

- *Prentice (1996)*



# Memorial Museums: Definitions



# Memorial Museums: Context



# Memorial Museums vs. Individuals

The agendas of memorial museums and the agendas of individuals who visit them are likely to be divergent



# Memorial Museums vs. Individuals



# Summary

- “Trust your mission, but also trust your visitor. Your goal is not to replicate yourself and your idea in the mind of the visitor, but to present your visitor with a tool and then to watch, and to learn from what she does with it.
- ...But to have real impact, big ideas [presented by museums] must also be adapted to the vast range of conditions in which people actually lead their lives.
- The museum must trust its visitors to make those creative adaptations, for each visitor knows her personal world in ways the museum cannot.”

**Rounds (2011)**



# Disclaimer...



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