

Challenge 4: Identifying gaps in knowledge about 'Thresholds' and 'foyers'

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Our task was

- 1) to identify existing knowledge about threshold spaces (and museum foyers in particular)
- 2) to generate research questions based on the current gaps in knowledge
- 3) to identify challenges for developing knowledge about foyers

Research in the following fields might be useful to the Network:

wayfinding, design, visitor flow, architecture, anthropology, geography (but been applied only to outside spaces, not inside spaces), online reconnaissance (rehearsing a journey first), marketing, geosemiotics

Questions based on our current gaps in knowledge:

1. How do we segment visitors who enter museums, and what criteria is that segmentation based on (eg people's entry narratives and how we find out what they are), and how satisfactory are those categories and criteria?
2. What is the relationship between foyers and thresholds?
3. Do people navigate through virtual, 3D and physical spaces relate in the same way, and what factors influence their navigational choices? What difference do immersive and abstract contexts for environments make?
4. Where do people look when they go into the foyer and how might this influence where we might put signs and objects? What is the psychology behind visitor behaviour, and how might this relate to the scripts and schemas that are activated on the basis of previous experience?
5. How might we use responses from visitors to establish where the nucleus of a threshold might be in relation to their wider transition through the threshold of inside/outside the museum?
6. What do people know about the museum before they arrive (hard information, and more subjectively, their expectation and misconceptions) – how does this relate to learnt behavior from other museums (eg asking for the cost – and where you have to pay to get into particular parts of the museums)?
7. What are visitors' digital expectations? Do people notice any kinds of digital technology in museum spaces? Can knowledge from marketing and convergence help us here (e.g. in the use of marketing materials, use of QR codes etc. to prompt visitors to enter museums)?
8. What are the temporal expectations of a museum visit and how does that relate to the way that a foyer is structured? (e.g. how long a visitor might intend to stay, how quickly they might need to move through a foyer)
9. What do people want to get out of a visit – how do we frame questions that help us evaluate visitor desires, especially in relation to foyers
10. What are the factors that most influence how people use museum foyers?

11. How do foyer spaces function as exit points from the museums? Is this the same for museums with multiple entry points?
12. How do multiple entry points influence the visitor's perception of whether they are in the museum or not?
13. What are scripts activated and brought to the museum and how do they influence the visitors' behaviour in foyers, how can we meet them and subvert them and so change people's behaviour? What is the best way to define and distinguish the factors which influence those scripts how do they play out? Motivation? Who they are visiting, first or return?
14. How are foyers different from exhibition spaces? How far can we use frameworks used for exhibition spaces to inform how foyers are designed and how visitor behavior in them is evaluated?
15. How are foyers different from streets?
16. How transferable is the research that has been used in other contexts to explore foyers?
17. What are the distinctive elements of a foyer in a museum as compared to other foyers or other spaces
18. How can the foyer space encapsulate the museum's identity as a whole?

Challenges to developing knowledge about foyers

- Knowledge from commercial sectors is often embargoed
- Research is presented in disciplinary formats which may not be easily transferable (e.g. shown in images, rather than told in words)
- The interdisciplinary nature of the knowledge means that we do not have a shared definition, vocabulary, methodology or goal for finding out about foyer spaces.
- We don't know how transferable knowledge from other sectors might be: the existing research might not be useful.

Definitions of the foyer and thresholds

We discussed the differences between 'thresholds' and 'foyers', suggesting that the 'threshold' was a conceptual point of transition that took place in the visitor's mind, and which could unfold variously across a number of layered physical spaces. In contrast, the 'foyer' was a distinct physical space in which particular types of preparatory interactions took place prior to and subsequent to entry into exhibition spaces. In this sense the visitor's transition into a foyers could be treated in a Boolean sense (they are either in the space or they are not), whilst their progress across the threshold of a museum could be understood in a 'fuzzy' sense (as being more or less immersed in the activity of visiting the museum or not). There is a porous relationship between the foyer and exhibition spaces (the content, design and interactions envisaged between visitors and exhibits can more or less be introduced into foyer spaces and pre-visit preparations). The question of how we define what the 'threshold' of the museum is matters in terms of where you go for knowledge, both academic and practical.