The effects of the museum environment perception on visitors’ experience

A pilot study

• The outcome of this exercise was the definition of 16 semantic differentials that describe Vibrancy and Spatiality as shown in table 1. Following Forrester’s guidelines, the Order dimension was eliminated.

Application of the methodology

• The final instrument of this study was applied by two previously trained University students to 150 visitors over two months.
• The following procedures were carried out:
  - The evaluation instrument was applied to 50 visitors for each of the selected museum halls.
  - At the end, a total of 150 interviews were obtained.
• The first part of the instrument has a quantitative approach focused on the demographic data of the surveyed visitors.
• The second section of the instrument is a semantic differential with 15 different descriptions for the two above mentioned dimensions: Vibrancy and Spatiality.
  - The semantic differential scale is composed of a series of descriptive characteristics with their corresponding opposite, ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 stands for the positive qualification, 4 is for the neutral and 7 is for the negative one. Of these descriptions, 10 refer to Vibrancy and 5 to Spatiality, for each of the museum halls studied.

Results

• Databases were created for each of the five halls.
  - With the systematized data, Vibrancy and Spatiality qualitatively assess the environment for each hall.
  - The average values of the descriptors were also obtained for each hall and located in the quadrant obtained by Forrester.
  - The meaning of each quadrant resulting from the analysis was for Vibrancy and Spatiality of paramount importance to interpret the results obtained.
  - When the descriptors of the hall are located in the upper right quadrant, there is a perception of High Vibrancy and High Spatiality, which shows that the visitator is cognitively and emotionally involved with the exhibition.

Conclusions

1. Visitors are able to describe the atmosphere in the exhibition environment according to the variables proposed by Forrester.
2. The perceived atmosphere in the studied museum halls could be described by two dimensions: Vibrancy and Spatiality.
3. Vibrancy is described by variables that detail the appearance generated by the design of the exhibition space. It is as well a dimension of the perceived atmosphere that refers to the perception of the design of an exhibition in terms of its eloquence, while Spatiality refers mainly to the perception of the gallery size and the height of the ceiling.
4. According to Forrester, these two dimensions are very useful to characterize the exhibition environment and to relate specific aspects of the perceived atmosphere with the visitant’s experience.
5. It should be mentioned that according to Forrester’s work, in particular the Spatiality measure offered the best correlation with the space perceptions, such as the gallery size and the height of the ceiling.
6. It is clear that the instrument can be used to characterize the museum environments in a novel and simple way for showing different environments to be compared according to how visitors perceive them.
7. But more than anything else, this study has shown that it is possible to theoretically and consistently quantify the perceived atmosphere in a museum for the planning of new exhibitions.