

Welcome to Room 3: Are we entering the era of the post-ethnically specific museum? Can museums only succeed in reaching the middle and upper classes?

PHIL KATZ: Hi.

Stacey Mann: Hi Phil

Amelia B: Hi Phil

PHIL KATZ: Hi, this is Phil Katz, AAM's assistant director for research. I'll be moderating the chat room on "the big picture." The biggest picture is that museums in the US have traditionally drawn their audiences from the ranks of white Americans – especially those with higher-than-average income and education. But this group is becoming a smaller portion of the population all the time – so who will be coming through the doors of museums in 10, 20, 50 years?

PHIL KATZ: Are there parts of the "big picture" that Rodriguez missed?

Amelia B: Phil - those coming through the doors will be those who have the time to, those who can afford to, those who can travel to, and those who feel a visit will be worthwhile

Freer & Sackler Galleries: the world is changing too fast to be thinking 50 years ahead

PHIL KATZ: How about 10 years?

Stacey Mann: Greg's point that we need to think beyond ethnic definitions is key

Kat Burkhart: Is this an issue that ICOM is discussing with a global scope?

PHIL KATZ: or, to make it a question, what time frame does your museum use for planning these things?

Kim Nichols: Concerning Tammy's statement of adapting to a audience and visitorship that is increasingly less established as they enter into the United States for the first time, do you know of any trends within the museum community to reach out to American families who are also struggling below middle-class?

Schroeder Cherry: We should remember that museums are very broad, and include zoos or small institutions, which are considered less "elite"

David Curry: If museums can forge a role for themselves as spaces for "safe" civic dialog, places equipped to empower creative activity, and places of exciting learning, I suspect that the doors will have lines to get in whatever the time horizon might be....

PHIL KATZ: Goof point, Schroeder --- and we know that Latinos are heavier users of zoos, per capita, than non-Hispanic whites

PHIL KATZ: er, good point, not goof!

Stacey Mann: I don't think most museums would identify themselves as ethnically specific

Amelia B: Do American museums actually want people of Latin American origin/culture to visit their museums? If so have any institutions actually asked a representative sample what they think of museums and what they would like to see in one?

Stacey Mann: the institutional models however are definitely skewed toward Western European

PHIL KATZ: What do we mean by "ethnically specific" anyway?

Diane Gutenkauf: We're a park, garden and 2 museums, we see many local Hispanic visitors who use the park but not the museums. Perhaps the family experience they seek is better expressed by picnicking in the park

Stacey Mann: is there a price point associated with the museums?

PHIL KATZ: Hi, Diane -- what do you do to bring people from the garden indoors?

Diane Gutenkauf: No one-entry fee to access all park amenities

Cecilia Garibay: Amelia, there is now a growing body of research on Latinos and museums...small, but growing. That was part of what I was speaking to.

PHIL KATZ: Amelia -- drop me a line at pkatz@aam-us.org and I can help identify the literature for you.

Diane Gutenkauf: Phil, that's part of our conundrum. We don't do a good job of it. Once we get the \$\$ we'll do more visitor studies to understand why and how this audience uses us and what we can offer to make their visit better

Stacey Mann: Socialization is a really important element in creating avid museumgoers - not an easy leap to make when the act of going to museums isn't a cultural norm for many minority populations

PHIL KATZ: Is it a "cultural norm" or a "middle class norm"?

Diane Gutenkauf: I'd argue it's a middle class norm

Claudia Ocello: It's both, I think

Stacey Mann: I used to think it was a middle class norm but I'm not convinced anymore

Diane Gutenkauf: I know plenty of 'white folks' who don't come here either

Cathy Blackburn: I wanted to point out that just because we don't think we are being ethnically specific in our museums, if our audiences is overwhelmingly ethnically specific e.g. white American born, then we are ethnically specific whether subconsciously...we need to raise our own awareness of the messages we deliver by choices of topic, approach, hours of availability...everything. Sorry it took me so long to respond to a point made several minutes ago!

PHIL KATZ: So, will museums' appeal be limited to middle/upper class groups with better-than-average education? (In other words, should we be less concerned about race/ethnicity than class/education?)

Joseph Gonzales: A difference I see between museums, and organizations or businesses that are able to reach Latino and other communities of color is that museums don't have any vendor or business, or hiring relationships with these communities. Museums tend to stick with a certain "class" or "kind" of vendor, contractor, or service provider. If museums can literally do a better job of buying into communities, that can help help build affinities and work of mouth support. This is not rocket science. It just plain makes sense.

Stacey Mann: Phil - I would argue it needs to be both

Cathy Blackburn: or does it come back to audience research. What do our communities need, want, lack? That would be within our mission to offer?

PHIL KATZ: Thanks, Joseph -- a good reminder of all the ways museums reach into their communities.

Cecilia Garibay: Interesting point about a class/cultural norm. I do think it's both. There are certainly class arguments to be made. But I recently conducted some research with Vietnamese communities where conceptions of museums based on museums in Vietnam suggest that there were some specific perspectives about museums rooted in cultural experience.

Cathy Blackburn: Cecilia I would love to know more about that!

PHIL KATZ: Cecilia -- this gets to your point that national differences are also important; we shouldn't assume that different Latin American countries have identical attitudes towards museums.

Cecilia Garibay: Cathy, drop me a line: cgaribay@garibaygroup.com

PHIL KATZ: New topic?

PHIL KATZ: In her comments, Lisa Lee seemed to suggest that "egalitarianism" is necessarily something that museums should promote. Did I hear her right? Do you agree with this?

Cathy Blackburn: I guess we need her here...I would ask is this something that would have a benefit to our audiences? Do they want this? What does it "look like" to/for our audiences?

PHIL KATZ: And what if we replaced "assimilation" in Gregory's talk with the word "egalitarianism"? Any difference?

Joseph Gonzales: Or pluralism.

Stacey Mann: absolutely... I think assimilation has more to do with identity whereas egalitarian is more about interactions

PHIL KATZ: OK -- but should museums be messing with identities or focusing instead on (inter)actions? Do they have a responsibility to engage in either?

Lisa Lee: I like pluralism because if we are indeed going to be "public" institutions we need to think about who the public is

Lisa Lee: and to broaden our understanding of the multiple publics out there

PHIL KATZ: Thanks, Lisa. Is "public" an identity or an interaction itself?

Stacey Mann: Lisa talked about ceding some (but not all) authority and control to their audience - that seems crucial

Lisa Lee: hmmm I think a truly dynamic public sphere is what allows us to realize our identities in all of their complexity and so maybe we need to be creating opportunities for more dynamic publics

PHIL KATZ: Yes -- authority and public also go together in interesting ways

PHIL KATZ: Thanks for participating in this chat. I'll be stepping away from my moderating duties in a few minutes - but you can keep on chatting. Please feel free to contact me at pkatz@aam-us.org with additional questions.

Kat Burkhardt: thank you!

Stacey Mann: Thanks Phil!

PHIL KATZ: And visit the Center for the Future of Museums at <http://www.futureofmuseums.org>