'Educative leisure' and the art museum

Laurie Hanquinet* and Mike Savage**

Abstract

This paper argues that although museums have increasingly changed their mission to embrace 'spectacular' and 'commercial' goals in recent decades, their audiences resist this redefinition of the museum's role. Based on a structural equation model derived from a survey of 1,900 visitors of the six main galleries of modern and contemporary art in Belgium, it shows that different kinds of visitors tend to share the same conceptualization of what museums signify, as a kind of 'educative leisure'. They continue to differentiate museums from more commercial forms of leisure, and associate them with schooling and educational processes. We demonstrate that this appreciation of 'educative leisure' is shared by visitors from different socio-demographic backgrounds and is affected by other dimensions of the visitors' profiles, such as the practice of creative activities or recent experiences of other art places (commercial galleries, fairs, contemporary art centers).

Keywords: art museums, visitors, leisure, image

Introduction

It is now commonplace to argue that art museums have shifted from being central bastions of 'high culture', to become part of a post-modern commercial complex over the last thirty years (Vander Gucht 1998; Van Aalst & Boogaarts 2002). Seen as part of an assemblage, which includes more 'exciting' activities (theme parks, recreational centers), it has been argued that they have exchanged 'the canonical, auratic art and educative-formative pretensions for an emphasis upon the spectacular, the popular, the pleasurable and the immediately accessible' (Featherstone 1991: 96-97). Driven in part by policy concerns to expand their audiences, the image of museums has been impregnated by a more commercial interest in consumption and entertainment. As McClellan put it,

> Perhaps no development in the art museum of the last half-century has been more dramatic or controversial than the increase in commercialism, by which I mean the expansion of museum shops, the rise of the blockbuster exhibition and corporate sponsorship, and the influx of marketing and fund-raising personnel. (2008: 193)

Progressively scorning its 'disciplinary' character (Trodd 2003; Bennett 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 2000), museums have distanced themselves from overt cultural paternalism and have increasingly embraced a 'museum experience', seeking to elicit feelings, sensations, and imagination. Using unusually detailed studies of museum audiences in Belgium, this paper argues that these recent changes have not been as profound as is sometimes imagined. Visitors tend to share the same conceptualization of what museums represent and of what they mean, as a kind of 'educative leisure' (Foley, McPherson 2000), which continues to differentiate them from more commercial forms of leisure, and associate them with schooling and educational processes. We also demonstrate, however, that this appreciation of 'educative leisure' is shared by visitors from different socio-demographic backgrounds but is influenced by aspects of visitors' cultural profiles (i.e. their tastes and cultural and leisure activities).

We begin by discussing how recent trends in museum audiences have been seen by commentators as possibly marking the erosion of traditional cultural capital. Rather than simply reading off the meaning of art museums from the social composition of the audiences, or their simple responses to particular traits of the museum, we instead show how a complex mapping of visitor perceptions allows us to demonstrate the autonomy of museum preferences from a socio-economic position. We explain in our third section how we obtained the data for this exercise and explain why structural equation models offer unusual value for the analysis of the image of the museum. The fourth section explains the importance of educative leisure as a latent structure for unraveling the image of the museum.

1: The Museum Audience

The relationship between the art museum and its audiences has long been a complex question that has strongly influenced the shaping of museums. The association of museums and galleries with high and 'legitimate' culture, most famously outlined by Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1979), is well established historically (see for instance Fyfe 2003; Prior 2002, in the British case). Bourdieu and Darbel (1969) showed that art museums were integrated into upper and middle class culture and that unconscious mechanisms kept at distance those without cultural capital (i.e. without cultural resources and references) from legitimate culture institutionalized in art galleries and museums. Although, as we are going to see, these kind of studies have led museums to redefine their image, Bourdieu's claims about the complicity between the museum and institutional cultural capital has been underscored by the recent resurgence of cultural sociology. Surveys on cultural participation still associate museum attendance with those schooled in high culture (Lahire 2006; Warde & Gayo-Cal 2009) and the role of the socialisation of children by parents into high culture still has a determinant impact on cultural participation in developing an 'aesthetic disposition' or an apparently natural inclination towards art (Bourdieu & Darbel 1969; DiMaggio & Useem 1978; Scherger & Savage 2010; see also Lievens *et al.* 2005). Even though some researchers argue that the 'cultural omnivore' (who enjoys a variety of genres) has replaced the 'highbrow snob' (see Peterson and Kern 1996; Chan and Goldthorpe 2007), it is nonetheless widely agreed that visitors to art galleries and museums are associated with the well-educated middle classes. This is the conclusion of Bennett *et al* (2009) who draw on a large national sample survey, focus groups and qualitative interviews. This finding is also underscored by Scherger (2008) and Scherger and Savage (2010) using data from the UK's *Taking Part* survey.

Interestingly, at the very same time that social scientists have explored the museum's relationship to educated middle class culture and partly as a consequence of it, this image of the traditional museum has been in crisis. Such museums have been seen by a variety of practitioners, academics and policy makers as a symbol of elitism. They were seen to be complicit in regulation and control systems (Bennett 1995) and their apparent democratic ambitions were deemed to be in need of wholesale rethinking. These criticisms helped generate a wider movement in favor of a reconsideration of the underlying logic of museums: the logic of 'the myth of the innocent eye' (Goodman 2001: 73). This 'highbrow' logic, which pleads for the simple and naive confrontation of people to art works in order to let the enchantment operate without mediation, has been challenged by those insisting on helping audiences to interpret museums with appropriate tools and interpretative devices.

The period that followed was characterized by a strong search for new kinds of democratic mission to 'open up' galleries and museums. This was accentuated by the considerable expansion of museums in the latter decades of the twentieth century and a search for more inclusive forms of experience. Several utopian streams of thought were developed at this time. The most important of these was the championing of the 'spectacular'. Here, there was a rising attention to the visual appearance of museums, to technical rationality, to events and fun policies, and to 'political correctness' (Mairesse 2002: 136-137). Having progressively absorbed a market logic coupled with democratic concerns, the spectacle-museum relies on new relationships with visitors, which are more sensational, more direct and more accessible. This increasing link between art museum and the idea of spectacle has also been forward by Vander Gucht (1998) drawing upon Guy Debord (1992).

The spectacle-museum turns towards the popular audience and tries to be more open. This might be read as an example of 'omnivorous' culture, as the museum seeks to position itself, not as a bastion of highbrow culture, but as part of a cultural smorgasbord that could have wide appeal. Nevertheless, this is a fraught encounter. Popular audiences can still be treated suspiciously and leading museums are concerned not to be seen to be caving in to market pressures, resulting in the destruction of sacrosanct values (such as education). Ross (2004) showed well how some museum professionals see themselves as forced to move away from the educational mission in order to cope with new requirements coming from the market and the state. McClellan illustrated similar tensions in the field:

> Though on some level everyone in the art world benefits from the increased popularity of museums, a good number of academics, art critics, and museum professionals fear the erosion of the museum's integrity and scholarly profile through a 'dumbing down' of standards in pursuit of larger audiences and enhanced revenue streams. (2008: 195)

Nonetheless, such focus on audiences becomes mandatory. Museums are expected to draw in visitors from a wider social milieu. They are now expected to integrate entertainment in their functions if they want to be viable in the leisure field. Museums need audiences to get financial support as well as public legitimacy.

This shift goes along with a reshaping of the classical function of the educator attributed to modern museum. Traditional museums, indeed, were framed from 'a scholastic point of view' (to use Bourdieu's terms) or 'a didactic approach of expert-to-novice transmission' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 127) in which novices were expected to absorb the cultural values of the hallowed artefacts through learning the distant and detached gaze. But the concern to expand audiences has led to this conception of the museum's function to be strongly disputed. Notably, the argument that education should be more interactive and dialogical has progressively found its way, along with a critique of didactic assumptions of cultural superiority of specific cultural works (see Hooper-Greenhill 2000).

As a result, museums have undertaken many changes (shops, blockbusters, new architectures, new ways to display and communicate, etc.) that might affect the way visitors conceive them. Our paper investigates whether these modifications have affected the visitors' image of art museums (i.e. how they see them) and more specifically whether museums are conceived as leisure places by visitors and how this relates to their cultural outlook.

2: A Common Grid of Perception?

Hitherto, there have been few studies of what image visitors hold of art museums. This is partly because museums are complex institutions for audiences to interpret. Their physical character and material identity reduces, *per se*, the range of possible individual interpretations that are open to those visiting. They convey charged symbolic significances, given their role in forging modern national identities to occidental societies. We take an 'active' view of audiences (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998) where we see visitors, as actual consumers of museums, contributing to the production and stabilization of shared meanings by repeated performances and enactments. This process explains the persistence of structuring forces acting on the way people perceive museums. Therefore, visitors might be likely to conceive all the art museums visited in a relative similar way. Even though museums of modern and contemporary art might appear to quite different from one to another, all art galleries might be seen to share major characteristics so that they structure the museum experience. Visitors may interpret them through a relatively common grid of perception of what an art museum is or should be: 'visitors to museums impose the same overriding conceptualization on structures they perceive as being museums – and these can vary to a significant degree […]' (Prince 1985: 245).

Few previous empirical researches on visitors have systematically studied the museum's image. Bourdieu and Darbel (1969) and Merriman (1989) asked people which kind of institutions they would associate museums with (e.g. church, temple, library, department store, classroom...). In the former, the association with a church was the most frequent among all the social classes, following by a library (especially among the middle and upper classes). In the

latter, the associations with a monument to the dead and with the library (especially among the regular visitors) were the most frequent choice. Nevertheless, the interpretation of these analogies remained uncertain. More recently, Stylianou-Lambert (2009) was interested by the ways visitors perceive museums but ended up by focusing on their motivations for visiting. These researches do not really tell us how museums are conceived by visitors and, more specifically, whether they become leisure places and, if it is the case, what kind of leisure activity it turns out to be.

It is likely that museums have not turned into a sheer entertainment place as post-modernists might claim (Urry 2002). The social implications associated with art museums are likely to prevent them from being transformed into an amusement park, despite fears among the art and museums professionals. To our knowledge, no research demonstrated that visitors now perceive them in such a way. The large gap between entertainment sites and museums appears to be one of the main reasons for actually avoiding museums (Lin 2006). The idea that museums would become leisure places is more relevant, in so far as the entry of museums into the leisure market means that museums are expected to provide visitors with 'pleasure'. Of course, the notion of 'leisure' can be unpacked into different dimensions, as Gunter and Gunter (1980) point out. They differentiated four types of leisure experiences, 'pure leisure' (pleasurable involvement without constraints), 'anomic leisure' (plenty of free time without being able to deal with it, as, for instance, for unemployed people), 'institutional leisure' (pleasurable but constrained involvement, e.g. for work), 'alienated leisure' (embedded in institutional structures but provoking little enjoyment, e.g. linked to family responsibilities or to a social role), according to the degree of pleasure and constraints they incorporate. If museum visits can be associated with constraints, it cannot be said that it is only a social and unpleasant duty, especially in a postmodern context where high-culture is deemed to have lost prevalence (Michaud 1997; Lash 1989). Therefore, museums are forms of leisure that encompass different nuances or dimensions according to what pushes people to visit and their cultural and social background.

Prince (1985) demonstrated that elitism is not predominant in individual perceptions of museums, visitors or not; in his survey, a great majority of respondents disagree with the statement that museums are for the benefit of the highly educated. This issue of symbolic accessibility is likely to play a larger role in non-visitors' imagery than that of visitors, though, given the unconscious mechanisms making them feel that museums are not for them (Bourdieu & Darbel 1969). In contrast, perceptions of the museum environment, once accessed, are more important for the concept of museums as leisure and might lead, if not exciting enough, for some visitors to feel bored or uneasy in the museum environment. This perception of museums as boring or unfriendly, however, is associated to a larger extent with people who are not familiar with cultural institutions (Prince 1985).

Although recreation is not a new function of the museum, its development within the strategy of 'pleasure management' based on market principles is quite recent (Foley & McPherson 2000), as we have seen in the previous section. The creation of extra services (shop, coffee-shop, library, restaurant) leads some specialists to state that museums have been transformed in a 'pleasure palace' (William Rubin, cited by Davis 1990: 18). This conceptual evolution raises resistance among a part of the professional sector, which perceives this change as disrespectful towards the traditional museum mission (Zolberg 1994; Ross 2004). In extreme cases, it might even be taken to signify the end of the educative scope of museums. Yet, even if the educative mission is submerged by new commercial and recreational orientations, one can wonder if pleasure and education are really mutually exclusive for visitors. Foley and McPherson (2000) rejected this idea and rather conceived museums as 'educative leisure' places. They envisaged museums as a leisure experience that could not be limited to an educative one. Museums have now to get detached from the image of an austere education place. Otherwise, visiting a museum would not embody any added value in our society that is largely based on a leisure economy. Potential visitors would search for other more attractive activities.

Yet, museums remain a place where people learn. Surveys showed that museums are still mainly educative in the mind of visitors (Prince 1985; Vaughan 2001). The pleasure associated with museums has foremost to rely on an educative mission, in addition to an entertainment aspect. As McPherson put it, 'today's museums are in a situation where they must

reconcile entertainment and education if they are to ensure that people continue to visit, rather than see them as one-off leisure experiences' (2006: 50). Then, both dimensions, pleasurable leisure and education, might be part of the image of museum. Museums would then correspond to educative and pleasurable leisure places, where people feel at ease. Art museums would be simultaneously characterized by an educative dimension and an entertaining one. In this way, we might identify museums as articulating aspects of 'high' with 'popular' culture. Therefore, visitors' appreciation of art museums might be semi-autonomous from socio-demographics background (contrary to Bourdieu and Darbel's findings linking museum image to class), but more susceptible to be influenced by factors underlining visitors' 'cultural profiles', as such frequent cultural outings and the practice of frequent cultural activities. Hanquinet (2010), indeed, showed that there is considerable heterogeneity on the level of tastes, cultural, creative and leisure activities and knowledge of art, which cannot be straightforwardly reduced to sociological determinants of class and educational attainment.

3: Data and Method

Data

The data were collected through a survey of visitors to the six major museums of modern and contemporary art in Belgium: the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium – Modern Art Department (MRBA – Brussels), the Ixelles Museum (XL[1]– Brussels), the Museum of Modern Art and Contemporary Art (MAMAC – Liege), the Museum of Contemporary Arts (MAC's – Hornu), the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art (SMAK – Ghent) and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp (MuHKA). Our database is unique. It is drawn from the audience of all the museums of modern and contemporary art in Belgium that have an international collection and that regularly organize temporary exhibitions of modern and contemporary art.

These museums are ideal sites to test the nature of change in art museums as they exemplify recent trends towards 'leisure' and the 'spectacular'. The Royal Museums, located in the heart of Brussels, have more than two centuries history that started under the French Regime (1794-1815). The Royal Museums are mainly divided into two museums, Museum of Ancient Art and Museum of Modern Art, but are also linked to other Brussels museums (including the bright new Magritte Museum). The Royal museum is one of the major tourist attractions in Brussels and, more generally, in Belgium. Our survey only investigated visitors to the Museum of Modern Art, though these might have visited the Museum of Ancient Art before or after. It has been renovating in line with museological trends for more than twenty years: the restaurant, library, and cafe have been totally transformed into trendy consumption spaces.

XL, also situated in Brussels, is much smaller. It is a museum of one of the administrative areas 'Ixelles' in Brussels. It was created in 1892, after a donation from a Belgian painter. Having progressively increased its impressive nineteenth and twentieth centuries collection, the museum had to expand twenty years ago. It is known for its dynamism with regard to temporary exhibitions of modern and contemporary art. In many ways, MAMAC is similar to XL. MAMAC and its collection, covering the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, belong to the city of Liege, one of the main cities in the French-speaking part of Belgium. It reopened in 1993 after the renovation of its buildings (a former pavilion in a park). It hosts several artistic biennials. MAMAC and XL are small but are characterized by dynamism in their exhibitions.

MAC's, MuHKA and SMAK are quite recent museums (set up after 1970) and only present contemporary art. MAC's, located in French speaking Wallonia, is the most recent. It opened in 2002 in an old coalmine, the site of the Grand-Hornu. As part of Wallonian heritage, this site was already a touristic place before the opening of the museum. The museum does not permanently show its recent international collection but only works through temporary exhibitions (of modern and/or contemporary art). SMAK belongs to the city of Ghent. It opened in 1975 but had to wait for 1999 to have its own independent buildings, a renovated casino. Before that, it was hosted in the Ghent Museum of Fine Arts. Its collection focuses on artworks since 1945. Finally, MuHKA, also located in the Flemish part of the country, is the contemporary art museum of the city of Antwerp, which draws its origin from the first public contemporary art institution in

Flanders, the *Internationaal Cultureel Centrum* opened in 1970. MuHKA officially opened in the middle of the 1980s in a former grain silo. It is coupled with a Media section (contemporary films, etc.) that was not investigated.

The surveys took place in each museum during three non-consecutive weeks, including one week of holidays. During these weeks, specific timeslots in the morning, at noon and in the afternoon were selected during which interviewers asked visitors (aged at least fifteen) to complete a self-administered questionnaire (available in French, Dutch and English) at the end of their visit. It is important to note that, in Belgium, there is an important distinction between art galleries and museums given that art galleries are seen as commercial places (contrary to the UK). The sample sizes per museum are: 173 for MAMAC, 182 for XL, 254 for MuHKA, 284 for SMAK, 312 for MAC's and 695 for MRBA (N=1,900). This is fairly representative of their respective size; MRBA (including the Museum of Ancient Art not investigated here) attracted more than 400,000 visitors in 2007, whereas all the others tend to count less than 100,000 visitors a year (with MAMAC, XL and MuHKA without the media section being usually below 50,000 visitors a year).[2] The total response rate goes from forty-four per cent (for MRBA) to sixty-two per cent (for SMAK). This is a relatively high response rate; four museums out of six have, indeed, a response rate higher than fifty per cent. The sample characteristics confirm the usual trends of a museum audience (Baugard 2000; Ranshuysen 2001). Visitors tend to be older and to have a high-education level, compared to the general Belgian population.[3] A significant majority of visitors (seventy-nine per cent) hold a higher education diploma, whereas less than a quarter of the general Belgian population has such an education level. The average age is forty-five years old. Seventeen per cent are younger than twenty-five. Twenty-eight per cent are between twenty-five and forty-four years old. Fifty-six per cent are older than forty-four. Forty-one per cent are men and fifty-nine per cent are women (they are overrepresented).

The quantitative survey was followed by eighteen qualitative interviews to help us understand further quantitative findings. The interviewees were selected among those who answered the questionnaires (and left their contact details) and according to their configurations of tastes and leisure and cultural activities. Our sample is composed of nine women aged between twenty-five and seventy and nine men aged between twenty-six and sixty-nine.

Method

Our analysis is more particularly based on a Structural Equation Model (SEM), performed with LISREL. SEM associates 1) path analysis with 2) factorial analysis to handle measurement error. 1) A path analysis assesses hypothesized causal connections between sets of variables, modelled by a set of equations and best represented by a path diagram. 2) Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) tests 'the probability that a particular or hypothesized factor structure is supported or confirmed by the data' (Cramer 2003: 28). CFA enables us to support the existence of latent attitudinal constructs that could not be measured by only one indicator, such as xenophobia or trust for instance. Through CFA, one assesses whether different items are likely to measure a latent factor. A latent factor is not directly measured, but is estimated using several items 'outlining' the latent factor.

This method allows the hypothesized relationships between observed variables and a hypothesised latent construct to be tested through CFA; this is called the measurement model (see figure 1). This also allows us to evaluate the causal relationships and (in)direct effects between the latent traits; this is called a structural model (see figure 3).

Our paper breaks new ground by applying this statistical technique to the study of audiences. Given that we seek to establish a latent concept – the nature of the museum image – which is not directly measurable from one question response alone, SEM allows us to develop a more robust measure. The technique is able to shed light on the museum image by assessing its various components, and to evaluate which factors can influence this complex image as a whole.

Variables

We choose eight items to develop the latent structure of the museum image. Respondents were

asked how much they agreed with the following sentences. The first five refer to visitors' perception of the museum experience.

- This museum is a real pleasure (Pleasure) (*M*: 3.73; *SD*: 0.89). Given that 'pure' or 'institutional' leisure experiences are associated with pleasure, this item enables to assess whether museums are considered as hedonistic leisure.

- This museum is a place where people have fun (Fun) (*M*: 3.09; *SD*: 0.91)

- This museum is a place where people learn (Learn) (*M*: 3.84; *SD*: 0.83). The two last items aim to establish the functions attributed to museums and to examine the duality between entertainment and education.

- I feel at ease in this museum (Ease) (*M*: 4.13; *SD*: 0.82)

- This museum is not boring (Not Boring) (*M*: 4.07; *SD*: 0.87). These two last statements refer to the environment of museum experiences. They complement the three previous ones. If museums appear to be boring, educative, not entertaining and uncomfortable for visitors, the hypothesis of the image of museums as educative leisure places does not hold.

Since it has been argued by sociologists influenced by Bourdieu that the visit to art museums can be discouraged by symbolic barriers, we need to check whether this dimension of social exclusion is linked to the idea visitors have about art museums. We have to test the argument that museums are perceived of as inaccessible or inhospitable. However, as already mentioned, the accessibility of museums might concern more non-visitors than visitors. Three items are selected in order to assess the role of inaccessibility in the museum image.

- This museum is restricted to an elite (Elite) (*M*: 3.52; *SD*: 1.03)

- The attendants of this museum are like guards (Guards) (*M*: 3.68; *SD*: 1.05)

- The exhibited works of art are often too difficult (Difficult Works) (*M*: 3.59; *SD*: 0.97)[4]
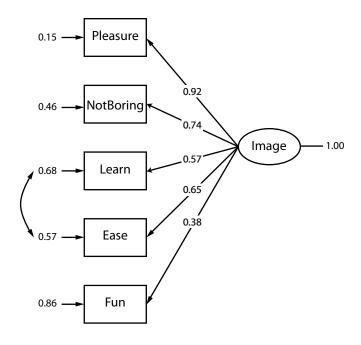
4: Results

A Shared Vision of Museums

Among these eight items, five constitute a common latent factor (Pleasure, Not Boring, Learn, Ease, Fun). The scale composed of these five items has a reliability of .746 (Cronbach's α). The reliability of the scale for each museum is also acceptable. *Elite, Difficult Work* and *Guards* do not refer to the same latent construct and, then, are withdrawn from the analysis. This indicates that the dimension of inaccessibility is not central to the visitors' museum image. Figure 1 shows our model, which appears robust.[5]

We now test the equivalence of this latent image among museums through an invariance analysis;[6] we need to know whether the museum image can be applied to each museum in our sample (all five items concern the specific museum visited by respondents). The model[7] we obtain enables us to establish that all the six museums are relatively perceived by visitors in the same way (configural equivalence). MuHKA and SMAK are characterized by a slight difference compared to the other museums; visitors of these museums have a constant tendency to answer more positively to the idea of 'Fun' than visitors of the other museums. Besides, for SMAK, visitors tend to interpret slightly less positively the rating scale of the item 'Not boring'. But these differences do not prevent us from concluding that visitors tend to envisage these six art museums in the same way as long as configural equivalence holds.

To summarize, the items selected for the accessibility dimension do not characterize the image. Museums appear to be mainly pleasurable with an educative connotation. They are perceived as friendly environments, and their image does not embody an uncomfortable feeling. Concerning the distinction between education and entertainment, museums are seen more as a learning place than a place where people have fun. However, no opposition emerges between these two roles. This image supports then the idea of 'educative leisure' (as we have

Chi-Square=4.43, df=4, P-value=0.35112, RMSEA=0.008

Figure 1. Measurement model: museums' image
Note: Ordinal variables with Weight Least Squares estimations methods; n=1,631
with listwise deletion of the missing values. Coefficients are standardized.

defined it) as a central component of understanding the image of the museum for their audiences today. They might be seen as a form of activity that encompasses some aspect of cultural capital, but links this to a more hedonistic activity.

	Mean
XL (n=146)	0 (fixed)
MRBA (n=605)	-0.08 (0.063)
MAC's (n=277)	-0.07 (0.075)
MAMAC (n=148)	-0.32 (0.085)***
SMAK (n=255)	-0.53 (0.080)***
MuHKA (n=224)	-0.77 (0.081)***

***p. ≤ 0.01

Table 1. Unstandardized Means Differences between Museums

This test of equivalence permits a comparison of the means of the latent variable 'Image' across museums. XL, MRBA, and MAC's tend to have the same mean concerning the museums' image (see table 1). This image involves a combination of pleasure and of being comfortable and not boring feelings. They also seem more related to learning than to fun; fun is linked to this image but to a lesser extent. MAMAC has a slightly smaller mean. Its image as educative leisure

is less positive than the others. MRBA and MAC's have almost the same mean (respectively -.08 and -.07). Therefore, we put an equality restriction on these two means.

The mean of the latent variable 'Image' for SMAK and MuHKA is much smaller than the others. This indicates a less good museum image as an educative leisure place. The invariance measurement indicates that SMAK and MuHKA are more appreciated in fun terms. An analysis of the impact of SMAK and MuHKA on the 'fun' item, controlled for the community's origin, shows that this difference is rather due to the origin than to the museums' specific orientations. If the Flemish museums are seen more as fun places than the others, this should pertain to specific relations between museums and Dutch-speaking visitors. As the educational system in Belgium is separate between the linguistic communities, different socialization to the culture by the school can be deemed as important here.

In conclusion, we found an image that is conceptualized in the same way. This latent construct can, therefore, be inserted in a model based on the whole population of visitors.[8]

Influence of Cultural Factors

We now consider how stable this image is, by examining whether cultural background influences the way visitors perceive museums of modern and contemporary art. Do cultural factors have a greater impact than social origin and position? How is the museums' image influenced by socialization to high-culture activities by the parents during childhood and adolescence? This will allow us to test how far Bourdieu's arguments regarding the role of cultural capital in affecting perception of the museum image. This cultural socialization is represented in our analysis by the following five-point items (never, rarely, from time to time, often, very often): listening to classical music, going to art museums and to the theatre as well as reading books (apart from school programs). We call this latent factor 'Home Socialization' (Homesoci), inspired by DiMaggio and Ostrower (1990). Strikingly, the home socialization has no direct impact on the museums' image (standardized coefficient: -.03, insignificant at a .05 á-level). Having experienced socialization to highbrow culture does not differentiate visitors with regard to their museums' image. This is a striking confirmation that the image of 'educative leisure' is shared widely, regardless of the social background of respondents. Even if the audiences tend to belong to middle and upper classes, we could expect an effect of social background in so far as Bourdieu and Darbel (1969) found a link between social class and museum image among visitors. Education (measured by years of education) was also introduced in the model but had no impact on the image. This is different to what the theory of cultural capital would *a priori* suggest (Bourdieu & Darbel 1969; DiMaggio & Useem 1978).

This is an important finding, but we have to test it further. Earlier socialization to highculture might have an indirect effect on the image through recent frequent visits to cultural institutions and creative activities. Indeed, recent contact with art museums might have an effect on the way visitors perceive them. According to Vaughan (2001), people who have been quite recently to a museum develop more positive attitudes towards museums (not a waste of time, not a boring place, etc.) than those who have (almost) never been to such a place. Verdaasdonk *et al.* went further and suggested that 'recent experiences with museum shows might have a more direct impact on actual cultural behaviour than experiences dating from the past, no matter how informative these have been' (1996: 186). Moreover, Prince (1985) put forward the argument that visitors tend to apply the same conceptualization to museums as to other institutions that look like them. Accordingly, we have to test whether 1) the current frequency of visits of art museums[9] (FreqMod), 2) the current frequency of visits of other art spaces, namely art fairs, galleries, places of contemporary art (FreqArt) and 3) the current practice of creative activities, namely painting, photography, and writing (CultProd) positively influence the museums' image (five-point items from no attendance to very frequent attendance). With regard to the last hypotheses, the rise of reflexivity (Giddens 1991), and more specifically of aesthetic reflexivity (Lash 1994), linked to the deployment of aesthetic modernism, has put the need for self-expression at the heart of the identity construction. Creative values are more and more valued in postmodern consumer society where individuals are seen to be in constant search for self-development and expression, which might influence the way visitors see art museums. Even if he focused on what he called 'the creative class', Florida (2002) explained the fall of arts
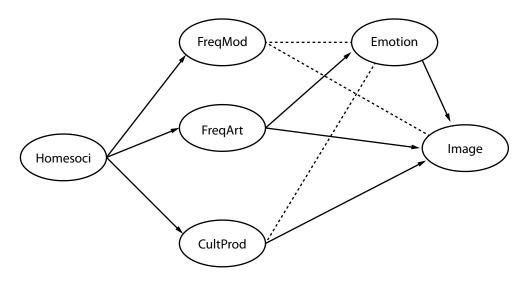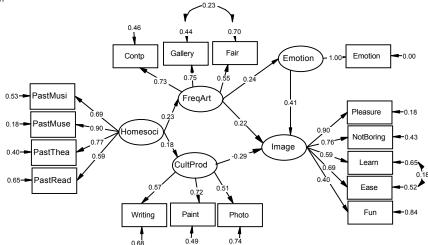
Figure 2. Conceptual diagram of the model
Note: The hatched lines mean that the relation was not significant and was not kept
in the final model.

audience by arguing that museums are too static and do not propose enough stimulations and emulations. Such an argumentation – if we extrapolate it – might also hold for people engaged in a self-expression process through creative leisure activities.

Furthermore, having a specific expectation for the museum visit might influence the perception of museums as educative leisure, if this expectation translates an 'aesthetical disposition' (Bourdieu 1979). We, therefore, add to the model a motivation for visiting that reflects such a disposition: seeking an emotion or enjoying the works of art (five-point scale with five being very important). The new model is, thus, based on the following hypotheses (see figure 2):

Chi-Square=236.79, df=96, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.030

Figure 3. Path diagram of the selected structural model
Note: Contp = other places of art contemporary than galleries and museums. Ordinal
WLS. Imputation of missing values n=1,598. Coefficients are standardized.

- Home socialization has a positive impact on the attendance at art museums and other art institutions as well as on the practice of creative activities.

- These three factors, in turn, have a direct impact on the museums' image and an indirect one through the emotional expectation that itself positively influences this image.

Contrary to our expectations, the practice of creative activities (CultProd) and the frequency of visits of art museums (FreqMod) have no significant impact on the emotional expectation (at a .05 á-level). The frequency of visits to art museums does not significantly influence the museums' image either. This goes against our hypotheses but confirms that familiarity with museums does not affect the perception of museums as educative leisure places.

Then, figure 3 presents the final selected model.[10] The model explains twenty-three per cent of the variance of the museums' image.

Home socialization has a moderate impact on the attendance at art institutions (other than museums) and on the practice of creative activities. The frequency of visits to art institutions and the practice of creative activities have a moderate impact on the museums' image. Both factors are significantly and positively correlated.

The practice of creative activities induces a moderated distance from the museum image as educative leisure. The more creative visitors are, the less art museums are considered as educative leisure places. We introduced age in the model (*RMSEA*< .05). Age has a positive impact on all the dependent variables, except on the creative practices on which it has a negative one. 'Creative' people and youngsters are then positively associated (i.e. creative visitors are more represented among young generations). This result suggests the idea of a value change from one generation to another, modifying slowly the perception patterns of visitors. This is supported by our interviews with visitors. Among the youngest we interviewed, who were also for the most part involved in creative practices, the art museum does not appear to be simply a place of leisure.

> It would be nice to transmit the message that museums can also be entertaining.
> (Ingrid, 25 years old)

There is still a gap between what young people might see as leisure and the way art museums present themselves to their audiences and the society as a whole. This appears to be partly due to the constraining and sacred dimension the visit has for them.

> You come in and you have to tell yourself: I'm not going to talk, I'll have to be silent, still, I'll not make noise, I'm not going to disturb. (Fabienne, 34 years old)

Art museums seem also to be not experiential and inclusive enough for younger visitors involved in a reflexive quest. Art museum visits seem hardly to satisfy the quite new motivations of these young 'creative' visitors, such as inspiration and entertainment, through visual and sensorial renewed experiences.

> What bothers me a lot, it is the way museums compartmentalize things: yes, one makes paintings, but this does not mean that there is no cultural and sociological context around the works. They isolate that, it is vacuum-packed. […] It's hermetic; everything can happen outside its walls. (Nathalie, 25 years old)

These interviews suggest also that the more a museum presents itself as a traditional educative place, the more it will be criticized for its detachment from the spectators, the rest of the society and from ordinary life. These young and creative visitors would search in art museums for a 'figural' sensitivity based on a visual immersion rather than a 'discursive' sensitivity based on a priority of words over images, rationalist view of culture and a distancing of the spectator from the cultural object (Lash 1988). Museums would not be vivid and 'living' enough, but would also be too detached from the rest of the social world, in brief a sanctuary without social function. On the other hand, among older people, this dimension of social inclusion is less important. Some even denounced trends towards commercialism quite ferociously.

> For instance, the Louvre, it looks now a bit like the inside of railway station. […]
> It's not very inspiring. We are in a mall! (Elisa, 58 years old)

In addition, the model indicates that, contrary to the attendance at other art institutions (galleries, fairs, centers), visits to art museums do not influence the museums' image. Although the frequency of visits was demonstrated to be an important factor to differentiate visitors (Verdaasdonk *et al.* 1996), our model shows that the image has a tendency to remain stable among visitors, whatever their frequency of visits is. It is rather influenced by other dimensions of the cultural profile, such as the attendance at other art institutions and the practice of creative activities. These two forms of cultural participation seem to relate this image to other reference frames.

Going to more specialized art institutions is the sign of a pronounced interest in the arts. This interest coupled with a specific expectation (feeling an emotion) translates as a particular orientation toward art works. The emotional inclination, whose impact on the museum image is the strongest, might be interpreted as the search for a detached aesthetical emotion, what Bourdieu and Darbel call 'L'Amour de l'Art' (1969). Visitors who come to feel such an emotion are more inclined to perceive art museums as educative leisure places. The educative specificity of museums permits the aesthetic delectation associated with a sanctified vision of art; therefore, art museum visits are not ordinary leisure activities. The educative mission does not seem to be rethought in a more inclusive and experiential way.

5: Conclusion

We have argued that we can usefully treat art museums as cultural 'objects' that have to be interpreted by its consumers. The meanings are associated with them through past experiences and related sensations in such a way that they have an evocative power on people (Hooper-Greenhill 1999, 2000). This is not simply a product of social background, as simplistic conceptions of cultural capital might suggest. This meaning-making process does not only depend on the personal interpretative capacities of people, but also their social and cultural attachments delimit the range of possible interpretative repertoires that they can draw upon (Hooper-Greenhill 2000).

We demonstrated that visitors perceive museums of modern and contemporary art in Belgium in a relatively similar way. These art museums are conceived as educative and pleasurable leisure places, where people feel at ease. Art museums involve, then, an educative dimension and, to a smaller extent, entertainment in the visitors' mind. These effects are shared amongst those with different socio-demographic backgrounds, and are not simply the product of coming from households with cultural capital among art museum visitors.

If museums contain a hedonistic dimension for visitors (it is a pleasure for them), they have, however, not become a place of sheer entertainment for them. Education plays a larger role in the construction of the image than entertainment. This educative aspect is even essential to museums if they want to compete with other leisure facilities. Museums would lose their distinctive identities if they were transformed into amusement parks. Non-visitors would not come to any greater extent, given the persistent social prejudices against museums, but museums would lose their usual and potential audiences. The worries of some museum professionals (Zolberg 1994; Ross 2004) are understandable given the 'spectacular' evolution of museums; the introduction of market values into cultural fields has, therefore, led to an unstable compromise, represented in the form of educative leisure.

The cultural profiles of visitors, here measured through the practice of creative activities and the attendance at art sites, influence such a perception of art museums as educative leisure places, and notably the respective role of entertainment and education in this perception. As a consequence, museums have to take into account the cultural diversity of their publics. More specifically, people involved in creative leisure activities expect from museums a more sensational and inclusive experience, given the emphasis they put on self-development and self-fulfillment. For them, re-thinking education in a more entertaining and experiential way might be an added value for museums in the leisure market. On the other hand, people engaged in an aesthetical quest seems already to have quite a good image of art museums and would not expect more changes with regard to their educative mission.

Visitors engaged in creative activities, especially the younger ones, appear to invest slightly different values in these institutions. They seem to look for a more self-centered, more surrounding dimension into arts and imagine museums in a slightly less conventional way. This attitude is be fed by a growing need in the society for new experiences, self-expression, and immersion rather than the distance of the detached spectator (Lash 1988). For these visitors, a more developed experiential and entertaining dimension (with workshops, interactive art works, discussions with artists, etc.) might make a difference in the choice of art museums to visit. This would also help reduce the sacred and, therefore, constraining dimension that seems to prevent museums truly being leisure for a substantial part of the audience.

The model, then, pointed out the possibility of subgroups among visitors, for example those who only visit museums, those who find an equal interest in other events, 'creative' people who only visit museums, 'creative' visitors who consume diverse sort of experiences, etc. All these visitors' subgroups connote the image of museums as educative leisure differently.

By transforming the architectural envelope and by adding new services, marketing did succeed in shifting museums into leisure but one might wonder whether it modified the ratio of entertainment versus education. New museum policies should focus on how to become more stimulating, participative and inclusive, while staying educative and enriching. Museums should propose a multidimensional offer to visitors, without falling into an empty event promotion.

Notes

[1]   XL = abbreviation by the author.

[2]   Based on data given by the museums at the beginning of the survey; see also Daenen (2007).

[3]   For details on the Belgian population, see http://statbel.fgov.be/ as well as the following publication: Direction générale statistique et information économique (2007). *Emploi et chômage. Enquête sur les forces de travail 2005*, Bruxelles: Direction générale statistique et information économique, downloadable at: http://www.statbel.fgov.be/pub/d3/p311y2005_fr.pdf (18/12/08).

[4]   All the items have a five point-scale. The positive items (Pleasure, Learn, Ease, Fun, Not Boring) have the following response categories: *totally disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, totally agree*. Reverse coding was performed when necessary, so that the higher the mean of an item is, the more positive the attitude towards museums is.

[5]   The chi-square is insignificant at a .05 á-level, p=.35112 >.05 and the Root Mean Square (a measure of discrepancy per degree of freedom) is lower than .05. Both suggest a good fit. All the loadings linking the latent trait to the indicators are significant.

[6]   We perform a structured means analysis taking into account intercepts and means and based this time on interval values, given the low subsamples. In this case, the structured means analysis must be based on an augmented moment matrix.

[7]   We obtain a model with an acceptable fit: $\div^2(90)=178.211$, $\div^2/df=1.98$ (recommended d" 3.00). We can consider the model as an acceptable approximation of the reality (RMSEA=0.06; CFI and NNFI>.9). In the chosen model, RMSEA is .06 (recommended d".05, however values up to .08 are tolerable errors of approximation), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) .996 and Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) .996.

[8]   One could argue that the full equivalence of the loadings is desirable but it has been admitted not to be strictly necessary in order to establish an equivalent conceptualisation of the concept (Steenkamp & Baumgartner 1998).

[9]   The attendance at art museums ('FreqMod') relies on the following question:
        How many times have you been to 1) the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium: *the Museum of Modern Art* (Brussels) these last 12 months, 2) the Ixelles Museum (Brussels), 3) the Museum of Modern Art and Contemporary Art (MAMAC - Liege), 4) the Museum of Contemporary Arts (Mac's - Hornu), 5) Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art (SMAK - Ghent), 6) the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp (MuHKA), 7) another museum of modern or contemporary art, 8) an art museum from Antiquity to 20th century? *None – 1 to 3 times - 4 to 6 times - 7 to 12 times - More than 12 times*
        The two last items *Attendance at Other Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art* and *Attendance at Museums of Old Art* were chosen as indicators (five point-scale).
        Moreover, we constructed a variable corresponding to the attendance at Belgium art museums by summing the answers of the six first variables. We tested the model with the three variables, as well with the two first selected variables (*Attendance at Other Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art* and *Attendance at Museums of Old Art*). The effect of the latent factor was in any case insignificant.

[10]   RMSEA suggests that our model represents a good approximation of reality. CFI with a value of .975 points out the same pattern (>.9). All the parameters are significant (at a .05 á-level) and substantial (equal to or above .4).

Bibliography

Abercrombie, N. & Longhurst, B. (1998) *Audiences*, London: Sage Publications

Baugard, D. (2000) 'Que savons-nous, en Belgique, des publics de nos musées?', in S. Jaumain (ed) *Les Musées en Mouvement. Nouvelles Conceptions, Nouveaux Publics (Belgique, Canada)*, 103-117, Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles

Bennett, T. (1995) *The Birth of the Museum*, London: Routledge

Bennett, T., Savage M., Silva E., Warde A., Gayo-Cal, M. & Wright, D. (2009) *Culture, Class, Distinction*, London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. & Darbel, A. (with Schnapper, D.) (1969) *L'Amour de l'Art. Les Musées d'Art Européens et Leur Public* (2nd ed.), Paris: Minuit

Bourdieu, P. (1979) *La Distinction*, Paris: Minuit

Chan, T. W. & Goldthorpe, J. H. (2007) 'Social Stratification and Cultural Consumption: Music in England', *European Sociological Review* 23 (1) 1-19

Cramer, D. (2003) *Advanced Quantitative Data Analysis*, Maidenhead: Open University Press

Daenen, W. (2007, 15 janvier), 'SMAK uit de gratiebijmuseumbezoekers', *DeMorgen*, 2-3

Davis, D. (1990) *The Museum Transformed: Design and Culture in the Post-Pompidou Age*, New York: Abbeville Press

Debord, G. (1992) *La Société du Spectacle*, 3rd ed., Paris: Les Éditions Gallimard

DiMaggio, P. & Useem, M. (1978) 'Cultural democracy in a period of cultural expansion: The social composition of arts audiences in the United States', *Social Problems,* 26, 180-197

DiMaggio, P. & Ostrower, F. (1990) 'Participation in arts by Black and White Americans', *Social Forces,* 68 (3) 753-778

Featherstone, M. (1991) *Consumer Culture & Postmodernism,* London: Sage (in association with Theory, Culture & Society)

Florida, R. (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class...and How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, & Everyday Life*, New York: Basic Books

Foley, M. & McPherson, G. (2000) 'Museums as leisure', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 6 (2) 161-174

Fyfe, G. (2003) *Art, Power and Modernity: English Art Institutions, 1750-1950*, Leicester: Leicester University Press

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Goodman, N. (2001) 'La fin du Musée?', in Goodman N. & Elgin C. (eds), *Esthétique et Connaissance pour Changer de Sujet*, 2nd ed.68-81, Combas: L'Eclat

Gunter, B. G. & Gunter, N. C. (1980) 'Leisure Styles: A Conceptual Framework for Modern Leisure', *The Sociological Quarterly,* 21 (3) 361-374

Hanquinet L. (2010) The Art of Representation and the Representation of Art. Meaning and Good Use of Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art in Belgium. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Université Libre de Bruxelles.

Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1999) 'Education, communication and interpretation: towards a critical pedagogy in museums', in Hooper-Greenhill, E. (ed) *The Educational Role of the Museum,* 2nd ed., 3-27, London & New York: Routledge

Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000) *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture,* London & New York: Routledge

Lahire, B. (2006) *La Culture des Individus. Dissonances Culturelles et Distinction de Soi*, Paris: La Découverte

Lash, S. (1988) 'Discourse or Figure? Postmodernism as a 'Regime of Signification', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 5, 311-336

Lash, S. (1989) *Sociology of Postmodernism,* London: Routledge

Lash, S. (1994) 'Reflexivity and its Doubles: Structure, Aesthetics, Community' in Beck U., Giddens, A. & Lash, S. (eds), *Reflexive Modernization. Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, 110-173, Stanford: Stanford University Press

Lin Y.-N. (2006) 'Leisure. A function of museums? The Taiwan perspective', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 21 (4) 302-316.

Lievens, J., De Meulemeester, H. & Waege, H. (2005) 'Naar een verklarinsmodel voor publieke kunstenparticipatie', in Lievens, J. & Waege, H., *Cultuurkijker. Cultuurparticipatie in breedbeeld. Eerste analyses van de survey "Cultuurparticipatie in Vlaanderen 2003-2004"*, 45-84, Antwerpen: De Boeck

Mairesse, F. (2002) *Le Musée, Temple Spectaculaire,* Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon

McClellan, A. (2008) *The Art Museum. From Boullée to Bilbao*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press

McPherson, G. (2006) 'Public memories and private tastes: the shifting definitions of museums and their visitors in the UK', *Museum Management and Curatorship,* 21 (1) 44-57

Merriman, N. (1989) 'Museum visiting as a cultural phenomenon', in Vergo, P. (ed), *The New Museology,* 149-171, London: Reaktion Books

Michaud, Y. (1997) *La Crise de l'Art Contemporain,* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France

Peterson R., Kern R. (1996). 'Changing Highbrow Taste : From Snob to Omnivore', *American Sociological Review*, 61 (5) 900-907

Prior, N. (2002) *Museums and Modernity: Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture*, London: Berg

Prince, D. R. (1985) 'The museum as dreamland', *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship,* 4 (3) 243-250

Ranshuysen, L. (2001) *8 Publieksonderzoek in de Vlaamse Musea 2001*, Brussels: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap

Ross, M. (2004) 'Interpreting the new museology', *Museum and Society*. 2 (2) 84-103

Scherger, S. (2009) 'Cultural practices, age and the life course', *Cultural Trends* 1 (18) 23-45

Scherger, S. & Savage, M. (2010) 'Cultural transmission, educational attainment and social mobility', *Sociological Review,* 58, 408-426

Steenkamp, J.-B. E. M. & Baumgartner, H. (1998) 'Assessing measurement invariance in cross-national consumer research', *Journal of Consumer Research* 25, 78-90

Stylianou-Lambert, T. (2009), 'Perceiving the art museum', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 24 (2) 139-158

Trodd, C. (2003) 'The discipline of pleasure; or, how art history looks at the art museum', *Museum and Society* 1 (1) 17-29

Urry, J., (2002), *The Tourist Gaze*, London, Sage (2nd edition)

Van Aalst, I. & Boogaarts, I. (2002) 'From museum to mass entertainment: The evolution of the role of museums in cities', *European Urban and Regional Studies* 9 (3) 195-209

Vander Gucht, D. (1998) *L'Art Contemporain au Miroir du Musée*, Bruxelles: La lettre Volée

Vaughan, R. (2001) 'Images of a museum', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 19 (3) 253-268

Verdaasdonk, H., van Rees, C.J., Stokmans,M., van Eijck, K. & Verboord, M. (1996) 'The impact of experiential variables on patterns of museum attendance: The case of the Noord-Brabant museum', *Poetics* 24, 181-202

Warde, A. & Gayo-Cal, M. (2009) 'The anatomy of cultural omnivorousness: The case of the United Kingdom', *Poetics* 37 (2) 119-145

Zolberg, V. L. (1994) 'Museums face to face with the millennium: The view of a sociologist', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 13 (2) 184–190

Websites

Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique (MRBA)

http://www.fine-arts-museum.be/

http://www.buildingsagency.be/realisatieberichten_fr.cfm?key=56

Musée d'Ixelles (XL)

http://www.museedixelles.be/

Musée des Arts Contemporains (MAC's)

http://www.mac-s.be/

Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain de la Ville de Liège (MAMAC)

http://www.mamac.be/

Stedelijk Museum voorActueleKunst (SMAK)

http://www.S.M.A.K..be/index.php

Museum van HedendaagseKunst van Antwerpen (MuHKA)

http://www.muhka.be/

* Laurie Hanquinet

Laurie Hanquinet is Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of York. Her main fields of interest are sociology of culture and art as well as social sciences methodology. Her PhD research focused on the profile of visitors to modern and contemporary art museums in Belgium. She has also collaborated with the French-speaking government of Belgium in order to treat data about cultural participation in this part of the country.

    Dr Laurie Hanquinet, Lecturer
Department of Sociology
University of York
Wentworth College
Heslington
York YO10 5DD

Tel: 01904 324735
laurie.hanquinet@york.ac.uk

** Mike Savage

Mike Savage is Professor in Social Sciences at the University of York. He is interested in 'cultural class analysis', which is concerned with the relationship of cultural processes on the formation and reproduction of social inequalities. He is co-author of *Culture, Class, Distinction* (Bennett, Savage, Silva, Warde, Gayo-Cal and Wright, Routledge 2009), and *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford 2010), which uses archived social science data to examine changing identities over the past seventy years. He is currently consultant to the BBC for a major project they are conducting on 'Britain's Big Class Survey'.

> Prof. Mike Savage
> Department of Sociology
> University of York
> Wentworth College
> W/210
> Heslington
> YO10 5DD
>
> Tel: 01904 43 4561
> Mike.Savage@york.ac.uk