

International
Conference
6th and 7th May
2025
at the Hôtel de la Marine in Paris

**BRINGING MONUMENTS TO LIFE:
THINKING ABOUT VISITOR
EXPERIENCES**

CALL FOR PAPERS
SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES

**CENTRE DES
MONUMENTS NATIONAUX**



In the first edition of the symposium *Faire vivre les monuments : mises en scène, espaces, publics* (June 2024, Université Catholique de l'Ouest Bretagne Sud), we sought to examine, from a multidisciplinary perspective, the way in which institutions and civil society actors brought monuments to life, particularly through their various stagings. This second edition, co-organised with the *Centre des Monuments Nationaux* (CMN), aims to bring together studies that question how the public experiences the monuments.

When we say “monuments”, we mean heritage buildings (Davallon, 2000), which may include remarkable buildings such as châteaux, palaces or luxury homes (Villa Cavrois); the homes of illustrious people (Jules Verne's house, Condorcet's birthplace, etc.); former industrial sites (Lewarde); former prisons or forts (Château d'If), or archaeological sites (Carnac alignments, Font-de-Gaume caves, etc.). These buildings can be set in a variety of environments and landscapes, whether urban or rural, with or without a tour of the park and gardens. Moreover, built, developed or shaped by the hand of Man in societies that preceded us, they question our present-day societies, that choose them and raise them to the status of heritage (Choay, 1992). Thus reclassified, these monuments are intended to be open to the public, attracting people on account of their symbolism in terms of their antiquity (Riegl, 1984 [1903]), as well as their historical, social or aesthetic value. In France, these monuments, including those administered by the CMN, attract a wide range of visitors and, through their appeal to tourists, represent high economic stakes. For example, in 2022¹, the national monuments were visited by 10 million people.

The aim of this conference is to examine the relationship between the public and monuments using the notion of experience, and to do so on an international scale. The term experience, which is often polysemous, lies at the crossroads of several disciplines (museology, sociology, information and communication sciences, tourism studies, etc.) that examine the way visitors interact with and appropriate heritage sites. According to John Dewey, the notion of experience is a dynamic process at the heart of learning, combining bodily perception, emotion and cognition (Dewey, 1934;

¹ Patrimostats, *Heritage visitor numbers*, 2023 edition.

Merleau-Ponty, 1945). When applied to visits to heritage sites, the experience is part of a co-construction process, in which the visitor plays an active role in the way they experience and perceive the monument (Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2024; De Certeau 1990). When visiting a monument, the experience may be shaped by individual elements linked to the visitor's life course (motivations, expectations, interests, knowledge) but also by the context of the visit (companions, temporal and spatial framework, support systems). Monuments are no longer just heritage objects then, but places of interaction, emotional investment and production of the imaginary, "places of memory", as Pierre Nora (1984) calls them, which maintain the group's link with its past. They are seen not only as witnesses to history, but also as living spaces where the public's experiences constantly renew their meaning and appeal. In this context, examining the notion of experience raises the question of the ways in which the public become involved and the conditions that make a visit a memorable moment, structuring or otherwise, for the individual or the group. But it also raises the question of how heritage, as a dynamic process, is replayed from generation to generation.

The goal of the conference is to bring together studies on the experiences of the public, whether they be successful and unsuccessful, analyses of the diversity of uses of the monument, from expected uses to uses that are hijacked by the public, and work that questions the boundaries between the monument and its public. How do these monuments live on as heritage for the public today, whether they be outside or inside the monument? The conference is also open to proposals that might look at the design process for the different representations of monuments, such as digital twins, facsimiles, etc.

AXIS 1: Experiencing the monument from outside

This theme examines the way in which monuments circulate trivially in social space (Jeanneret, 2008), looking in particular at the way in which they radiate outside their buildings. The papers selected for this theme will thus deal with monuments in their peripheries, their environments, but also in their media exposure (digital substitutes [Renaud and Appiotti, 2024], 3D representations, film sets, video games, etc.). Considered in this way, monuments extend well beyond their physical materiality.

This section will first look at the ways in which various players - engineers, IT professionals (3D, digital), cultural industry professionals (cinema, publishing, etc.) and *designers* - present monuments to the public. For some years now, digital

representations

of monuments have enabled heritage professionals to offer audiences digital experiences outside the monuments, as is the case with virtual or remote visits. What's more, monuments have long been the backdrops for numerous films and video games. How are these experiences produced? What questions do they raise in terms of design and our relationship with the heritage object? What values are contained in these reconstructions and what relationships to monuments do they propose? What role do they assign to the public?

It will also look at the experiences of individuals who encounter the monument from the outside, as part of a rural, urban, digital or even distant or imaginary landscape. The aim will be to analyze the symbolic links that people develop when they are not interacting with the physical reality of the monuments in the context of media exhibitions (in fiction, video games), digital experiences (such as online visits), or even out-of-home arrangements for impeded visitors (hospitals, prisons) (Saurier, 2015). These visitors are a privileged audience for monuments as part of cultural democratization and inclusion policies. Proposals could also address the specific case of residents who share their urban space with a monument on a daily basis, without necessarily entering it. For the latter, how do the outdoor spaces of monuments (forecourts, gardens, esplanades) become places of life and interaction? How do residents or tourists interact with the simple presence of these buildings?

Finally, a lot of people are excluded and exclude themselves from heritage sites for various reasons (social, cultural, economic or practical barriers). Who are these people who don't enter monuments? *Ultimately*, this theme will question the notion of the public in its broadest sense, based on experiences of monuments, sometimes unexpected, not thought of or controlled by cultural institutions.

AXIS 2: Entering the monument

The second theme explores the different experiences of visitors who pass through the doors of the monuments and take the time to discover their interiors.

Firstly, we need to analyze the diversity of visitors (schoolchildren, tourists, locals, people with disabilities, *etc.*), their expectations and their relationships with monuments. While it may be a one-off visit for tourists, can a visit to a monument become an integral part of the cultural and leisure activities of the local population, and if so, how? How do these heritage sites appeal to different categories of visitors? What are the expectations of visitors, from tourists to locals?

This approach will also look at the way in which the staging of monuments' interiors, such as furnishings, reconstructions, the ability to make visible what is no longer visible (Flon, 2012; Gellereau, 2005), the events on offer (temporary exhibitions, live shows, *etc.*) and the mediation systems deployed, whether digital (3D, projection, virtual or mixed reality, *etc.*) or not, influence visitors' experiences. In response to the diversity of content and devices offered within the tours, audiences adopt hybrid behaviors, from avoidance to appropriation of the devices (Vidal, 2017). Nevertheless, the mediation systems deployed - whatever their nature - can play a key role in supporting the experience by modifying the sensitive and cognitive apprehension of monuments (Deshayes, 2014; Dalbavie, Da Lage and Gellereau, 2016). Which mediation systems are preferred by the public to experience monuments? What expectations do visitors have in this area? Do the mediations that are offered meet the needs of all categories of the public? Proposals could focus on a specific category of audience, such as young people. Artistic and cultural education (Carasso, 2013; Jonchery et Octobre, 2022) is developing schemes to raise young people's awareness of monuments and encourage them to visit them at least once in their lives. How are these outreach programs designed? What experience do these visitors get from their visits? How do the systems put in place influence their perception of monuments? To what extent do these practices encourage the development of truly autonomous cultural habits?

More broadly, this theme aims to explore the links that visitors forge with heritage sites during their visits. Can a memorable experience transform a visitor into an ambassador for the site, anchoring the image of the monument in their imaginations for a long time to come?

AXIS 3: Taking ownership of the monument, between knowledge and emotions

As places of scientific research, sometimes supported by collections, heritage buildings have the mission of conserving, producing and transmitting knowledge (Poulot, 2009), particularly historical knowledge, to their audiences. To do this, heritage institutions develop a discourse on heritage and put in place a wide range of mediation tools (labels, guided tours, audio guides, digital reconstructions, films, *etc.*) with the aim of bridging the gap between the people of the past who built these monuments and modern visitors (Davallon, 2006). So many multimedia discourses about heritage are being circulated for the general public. But what kind of knowledge (historical, archaeological, artistic, architectural, *etc.*) do they contain, and for what kind of

audience? According to the Patrimostats 2023 survey, "more than half of visitors to museums and monuments come to 'learn' or 'discover something new'". What experiences are offered to visitors who do not all have the same heritage connection with monuments? How can we take into account the diversity of visitors, whose level of information and knowledge varies according to their cultural and social background? What knowledge do visitors take away from their visit? How do they perceive the scientific content presented and how do they appropriate this knowledge? What forms of mediation (digital, human, artistic, immersive, etc.) are best suited to bringing visitors together and engaging them?

In addition to the circulation of formal and non-formal knowledge (Jacobi, 2001), the experience of monuments is also made up of emotions (Favre, 2013) and affects (Glévarec, 2021). Yet it is recognised that emotion "is one of the means of access to the world available to us: it mediates experience" (Crenn, Vilatte, 2020: §10). While for a long time emotions were not explored by heritage institutions, in recent years they have been moving towards museographic choices that leave more room for emotion (Varutti, 2020). What do these emotions reflect? How do audiences relate to these sensitive forms of mediation? Are emotions different for different types of audience? To what extent, and at what risk, can monuments play on visitors' emotions? How can these emotions be captured and investigated (Détrez, Octobre et Diter, 2024)?

Finally, this axis proposes to examine problematic or critical experiences of monuments. In the case of dissonant heritage (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996), for example, how do visitors deal with these difficult histories, this embarrassing heritage and the issues surrounding it? What are the reactions of rejection of these monuments or the construction of an alternative discourse to the institution? From boredom and tiredness to disinterest and embarrassment, how can we question these frustrated experiences of monuments and the reasons for them? And, more generally, what can spoil a visit to a monument?

Co-organised with the Centre des monuments nationaux, this scientific meeting will include academic sessions and formats open to professionals, encouraging exchanges between socio-professionals and researchers on the conference themes. This international colloquium promotes an open, multidisciplinary approach and aims to bring together researchers from a wide range of disciplines, including museology, information and communication sciences (ICS), history, art history, anthropology, architecture, geography, literature, sociology, social sciences and humanities, management, but also engineering sciences, computer science (human-machine interaction) and *design*.

Presentations will be selected by the scientific committee on a double-blind basis. The conference proceedings will be published online, and other publications in partner journals are under consideration.

Terms of submission

Proposals for papers are due by **31 January 2025**. The document should include: surname/first name, e-mail address, status, institutional affiliation of the author, five lines of biography, the title of the proposal and key words.

The paper **must be written in French** should not exceed **5,000 characters (excluding bibliography)**. It should present the disciplinary and theoretical framework, the methodological approach and be based on results linked to a field study and present a few items of indicative bibliography. It should be sent in Word format with a separate bibliography.

Proposals for papers should be sent to :

- Olivier Hû: olivier.hu@univ-angers.fr
- Julie Pasquer-Jeanne: jpasquer@uco.fr

Calendar

- **31 January 2025**: Deadline for submitting proposals
- **10 March 2025**: Return to the authors
- **7 April 2025**: Final programme

Venue and dates of the conference

- **6 and 7 May 2025**

- **Hôtel de la Marine, 2 Place de la Concorde, 75008 Paris**

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