

# Museum Nights

## - A Success Story

Germany

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THINK

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The idea for a public event "Lange Nacht der Museen" ("The Long Night of the Museums") was first born in 1997 in Berlin. Co-ordinated by the *Museumspädagogischer Dienst Berlin*, about 50 museums and cultural institutions agreed to open their doors late into the night, preparing a wide-ranging programme of activities for this occasion. The event was very well received by the public and has since become a tradition not only in Berlin, where it now takes place every January and August and involves up to 100 institutions, but also in many other cities across Germany and all over Europe.

Founded by tourism bodies and the Berlin government, the event was initially greeted with reluctance by some museum staff. The reactions ranged from positivity at a new idea to attract visitors, to fears that the museums

would be used simply as a backdrop for an event that had little to do with the museums themselves.

In order to gather more concrete information, the Institute for Museum Research was asked to undertake a survey about the event in 1999, with a follow-up study in 2003 for comparison. 15 of the 71 participating institutions took part in the first survey, in August 1999. Between 6 p.m. and 2 a.m. 892 interviews were carried out. It established that *neither* view mentioned above, "new visitors can be reached" versus "museums as mere background for an unrelated event", proved to be relevant. Most of the visitors at the event continue to be people who regularly visit museums. A large proportion of the visitors at the "Museum Night" were middle-aged and well educated,



Kulturforum SMB-PK,  
Berlin, Germany.  
Picture by Sergej Horovitz



The successful example of Berlin was followed in other cities in Germany and Europe. Over the years, the "Museum Night" has developed into an institution, awaited by the public with great anticipation

with more female than male visitors, conforming to the traditional profile of "museum-goers". Another important finding was that the visitors were overwhelmingly local, with 85% coming from Berlin and the nearby area. Despite significant public advertising, the number of tourists from further away was relatively small.

A point of particular interest was that visitors seized the opportunity to go to museums that they did not usually visit during normal hours: for example, a typical art museum visitor would rather choose the Natural History Museum.

developed into an institution, awaited by the public with great anticipation. The event always has a major presence in newspapers, radio and TV. It has been a great success for the city, and likewise for the public impact of museums and cultural institutions. The concept has even been adopted by other institutions not just museums, but also theatres, scientific institutions ("Die Lange Nacht der Wissenschaften"), palaces, and even churches have developed their "nights".

The "Museum Night" typically covers an area such as a town and involves many different institutions. Thus it is important that the programme theme is not too restrictive or specific, but inspires museums to establish their own events. The event involves a close cooperation with the public transport com-

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Abguss-Sammlung  
Antiker Plastik,  
Berlin, Germany.  
Picture by Sergej Horovitz





Kunstgewerbemuseum  
SMB-PK,  
Berlin, Germany.  
Picture by Sergej Horovitz

panies, who provide special routes of shuttle services connecting the participating institutions at regular intervals, for a fixed price which is included in the general entrance fee.

In summary: extraordinary events and opening hours, as put forward by the "Museum Nights", provide an excellent opportunity to overcome the reluctance that prevents many from stepping into museums, inspiring curiosity and new experiences. The thrill of discovering new places or already-known places in a new way, under new circumstances, is a great

advantage of the scheme. Every year the expectations are high among visitors as well as the museums: more venues, more publicity, different prospects, more visitors, new visitors ... and many of these expectations are fulfilled. Of course there is always a certain proportion made up of the "usual museum public", but they can also be motivated to visit different museums which they have not visited before. Most importantly the Long Night of Museums has been an overwhelming success in creating stronger ties between museums and the general public.



Gemäldegalerie  
SMB-PK,  
Berlin, Germany.  
Picture by Sergej Horovitz



Naturwissenschaftliche  
Sammlung,  
Berlin, Germany.  
Picture by Sergej Horovitz

