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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Where are the numbers? Counting Museum Visitors in France

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ABSTRACT

In the early twenty-first century, the Louvre is the most visited museum in the world. Yet little is known about how visit numbers to French museums developed. Compared to the Anglo-Saxon world, the collection and publication of visit data began late and was initially far from systematic. Some figures were collected in the late nineteenth century, but correspondence from the early twentieth century indicates that not even the Ministry of Fine Arts, overseeing the National Museums, was always aware of them. More complete numbers appeared from 1922 when entrance fees were introduced. However, visitors entering on free days were not yet counted. In the 1930s, data collection for the National Museums was systematized by the Directorate of National Museums, but figures were rarely published. The aim of this article is, therefore, to establish the sources that might be used for a quantitative approach to museum visiting in France and to reflect on the reasons for the initial indifference towards the counting of visitors and the standardization with international practices over time. The article argues that the triggers for changes in the culture of counting in France were both internal and external. A prolonged debate about the introduction of entrance fees took place from the start of the Third Republic to the interwar years and let to the search for existing numbers in France and abroad. The Fine Arts Administration compiled data about practices in other countries and a number of monographs on the subject were published. The press also frequently referenced foreign examples. These documents provide a fascinating insight into comparisons and emulation of foreign practices at the time, allowing us to rethink the modern obsession with counting as the result of a transnational process.

KEYWORDS: Museums, France, transnational models, visit numbers, longitudinal data,

Entangled histories of counting visitors

When in 1923 the American Federation of Arts asked the Director of the Louvre about the 'number of persons who visited your galleries during the past twelve months' to understand 'the interest that the public take in national galleries' for the purpose of securing a building for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, a flustered search ensued. (Leila Mechlin to Director of the Louvre, 6 July 1923, AN F21 4420). Where were the numbers, and was such 'private' data to be shared? (Director of National Museums to Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, 28 July 1923, AN F21 4420).

Today, the Louvre is the most visited museum in the world with more than 9 million annual visits (*The Art Newspaper,* 2015), yet little is known about how its visit numbers developed over the long term. Drawing on the statistics published by the Ministry of Culture since the 1970s, a number of studies have traced how museum visiting changed in relation to other forms of cultural participation (Donnat, 2011a & 2011b; Ministère de la Culture, n.d) and have charted the effects of free admission (Gombault et al., 2006; Fourteau, 2007; Gottesdiener et al. ,2008; Eidelman & Céroux, 2009). However, almost nothing has been written from a quantitative perspective for the period prior to the publication of Bourdieu's (1966) critique of the exclusionary nature of the museum as an institution that had inspired statistical analysis since the 1960s. While attention has turned in recent years to the transformation of the experience of museums (Poulot, 1994; Bresc-Bautier, 2016; Griener, 2017), with the exception of Jean Galard's (1993) *Visiteurs du Louvre*, and a succinct evaluation of quantitative sources by Poulot (2008), most historical studies on French museum audiences have focussed on ideas about, and by the public, rather than its numbers.

The relative inattention to historic visitor and visit numbers is representative for the literature on museums elsewhere, as Sara Selwood (2018a) pointed out in her editorial to the preceding special issue of *Cultural Trends* on museum visits. The neglect in studies on France appears to be superficially vindicated by the fact that the systematic collection of visit figures began comparatively late and was initially far from systematic when compared to the collection of figures since the mid-nineteenth century in the Anglophone world discussed across this double special issue of *Cultural Trends*. Although Babbidge's (2018) work shows that the collection of numbers was also less perfect in Britain than nineteenth and twentieth century museum personnel would have wanted their audiences to believe, the strong emphasis on counting in Britain, across the British Empire and in the United States (Gilman, 1916; Schiele, 1993) was underpinned by the desire to prove the utilitarian function of the museum, Taylor, 1999; Conn, 2000; Trask, 2011). In contrast, we are only beginning to understand the more varied attitudes and practices across Continental Europe (van Wezel, 2018).

In France, with its more universal idea of the museum, accessible to all citizens (Poulot, 2008,) some figures were compiled in the late nineteenth century, but correspondence from the early twentieth century indicates that not even the Ministry of Fine Arts, overseeing the National Museums, was on top of them. More complete numbers appeared from 1922 when entrance fees were introduced. However, visitors entering on free days were not yet counted. In the 1930s, data collection for the National Museums was systematized by the Directorate of National Museums, but the figures were rarely published. Moreover, there is confusion in the sources between visit and visitor numbers. As Selwood (2018a) pointed out for the British case, although the numbers which most museums produce are referred to as "visitor numbers", they record visits rather than visitors. The French sources generally refer to '*entrées*' or 'entries'. While some reports made a distinction between visits and visitors, often the two terms are conflated in the sources. Unless otherwise specified, this conflation applies to the present account.

Nevertheless, there are considerably more sources available than are generally thought for writing a history of museum visiting in France. It is worth paying attention to the scattered materials that contain at least partial figures concerning the visitors to France's national museums and relating their development to the data discussed in the other contributions to these special issues to begin understanding dynamics comparatively and transnationally.

In particular, it is useful to reflect on the reasons for initially different attitudes towards the counting of visitor numbers in different countries and the standardization of international practices over time. First and foremost, the French sources therefore offer insights into changes in the *culture* of counting. Triggers for changing attitudes in France appear to have been both internal and external. Contemporaneous to, and interlinked with, developments in newly unified Italy, an important public debate about the introduction of entrance fees took place between the start of the Third Republic and the interwar years in France. Policies and debates were strongly informed by comparative and transnational perspectives. The Fine Arts administration compiled data about practices in other countries, monographs on the subject were published and a range of articles appeared in the professional publications and the general press. These documents, which will be discussed in detail below, provide fascinating insights into comparisons with, and emulations of, foreign practices at the time. An examination of the range of foreign correspondents and the use of examples can contribute to revealing the geographies in which the museum developed transnationally.

Despite the importance given to the flow of objects, peoples and ideas in transnational and global history, such perspectives remain largely to be developed in relation to museum history (Rolland & Murauskaya 2008; Gonzáles de Oleaga & Monge, 2009; Meyer

& Savoy, 2013). For the last twenty years, some comparative statistics are available from *Eurostat* on the five most visited museums in every EU country (Deroin, 2009-2011). The *European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen* (2010-13) project funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission, made insightful use of contemporary qualitative and quantitative visiting data, but there are no quantitative transnational historical analysis of museum visiting. Addressing this is necessary not only for a greater understanding of museums' evolution, but also for comprehending the nature of cultural engagement, citizenship, and leisure. Only through a perspective that combines comparison with attention to interactions, is it possible to understand how and why practices differed within and between countries and how processes shaped each other beyond borders.

The French case makes therefore a three-fold contribution to the comparative and transnational perspective adopted in this special issue. First, it illustrates strikingly how little attention was paid to counting visitor numbers through much of the Third Republic (c.1870-1940), in accord with the prevailing conception of museums as universal institutions, accessible to all citizens (with much less interest on how specific groups or individuals took up this opportunity). Second, it shows how the transition towards more quantitative methods occurred through processes of transnational comparison and transculturation. Third, by highlighting the falsity of conflating number of visits with numbers of visitors, and by drawing attention to the creative licence museum professionals took with the collection of numbers, the article reflects on the shortcomings of any crude matrix in measuring the democratisation of the arts. By showing processes behind the rise of quantification in the museum world, it aims to contribute to a critical perspective onto the instrumentalisation of metrics.

Examples, Sources and Archives

The sources available include statistical compilations, correspondence between different museums and ministries discussing approaches to visitors, letters from visitors about access, minutes of the parliamentary commission put in place to determine entrance fees and the ensuing parliamentary debates, as well as international comparative reports and debates in the press. The majority of the sources identified are located in the *Archives Nationales* (AN) in Pierrefitte: *Serie F 21 Beaux-Arts* gives insight into the policies of data collection. In particular boxes 4419 and 4420 contain a range of material on visitor numbers in connection to the reorganization of the National Museums (1892) and debates about entrance fees (1874-1939). The recently incorporated *Archives des Musées Nationaux* (AMN) (formerly housed in the Louvre) contain in Series AA *Direction des Musées de France* the comparative statistics, while other series on individual museums, in particular Série T on the Louvre have some earlier statistics and discussions about policy.[1]

Central to the analysis is the concept of France's 'National Museums' - a label that is, however, problematic as the number, definition and administration of national museum has shifted considerably over time (Bodenstein, 2011). Initially, this label applied to the four museums administered by the newly created *Reunion des Musées Nationaux* (RMN) in the 1890s: the Musée du Louvre (founded 1793), the Musée du Luxembourg (1818 - with two precursors since 1750), the Château de Versailles (1837) and the Musées des Antiquités Nationales (Museum of National Antiquities) at St. Germain en Laye, founded in 1862. These institutions respectively displayed ancient art, contemporary art, history and archaeology. Felicity Bodenstein (2011) listed the multiplication and changing administrative framework of museums considered 'national' over time. She points out the continuing clustering in and around Paris and a strong focus on art museums. A full analysis of all 'national museums' would far exceed the constraints of this article (and not be possible with the sources available). In seeking to understand the logic applied to counting, this article pays attention to which museums among the plethora of institutions administered by the state were chosen by contemporary actors for comparisons. It is evident that even among the members of the Fine Arts administration who compiled statistics, the number of institutions chosen for illustration varied greatly; it is rare for the same institutions (beyond the four initially mentioned) to be compared in analyses of consecutive years. However, across the files of the Museum Directorate, the Directorate of Fine Arts and the press, comparisons made in the nineteenth and early twentieth century seem to be limited to the institutions falling under the Directorate of Fine Arts. There were usually no comparisons with museums administered by different ministries, such as the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle or Les Invalides. Consequently, these have not been considered here.

When, how and why numbers became important in France will be discussed first in relation to the debates about the introduction of entrance fees. I go on to examine how foreign models were adduced before analysing the interpretation of figures collected after the introduction of fees in 1922.

The Museum for all?[2]

For most of the nineteenth century, there appears to have been little if any incentive to count visitors. The Revolution had founded the national museums with an ideology of democratic access emphasizing the educational and socially elevating potential of visiting. In practice, however, free access was limited as museums distinguished between persons frequenting the museum for the purpose of study and the general public. Until 1855 the Louvre and the Luxembourg only opened for the general public on Sundays. On the occasion of the Universal Exhibition of 1855 the Louvre was opened every day to all visitors, except for Mondays when it closed for cleaning. But, according to the 1862 testimonies of Ernest Chesneau (who estimated 20,000 visitors) and Ferdinand de Lasteyrie (who estimated 30,000)

most visitors still seem to have come on Sundays. Galard (1993) suggested that visit numbers increased during the Second Empire, but there are no figures to underpin this claim.

While the growing number (and vulgarity) of visitors was remarked upon by disgruntled artists and amateurs who wanted the place to themselves, the question of whether visitors should be counted only truly emerged during the Third Republic when museum budgets appeared too meagre to compete on the growing international art market for acquisitions. Internal reports within the Ministry of Fine Arts, as well as numerous articles in the press (AN 21 4419-20) suggested that given that French museums competed for art works with institutions in other countries that charged admission fees, visitors to French museums could to be turned into cash too. The argument was rather instrumental and conveniently left out that several foreign museums did not charge. To estimate what revenue might be gained if entrance fees were charged, one needed visit numbers. In 1875 visitors were first counted in the Louvre, but only on one single Thursday and one Sunday in April: this yielded 3,303 and 5,599 visitors respectively (AN: 20144794/50, Dossier Statistiques relatives au nombre de visiteurs 1875, 1938, 1948). Following the debate about the introduction of entrance fees, which started in earnest in 1891 with the introduction of the first of nine attempts to introduce legislation before the law was finally passed in 1921 (Samsoen, 2002). Each attempt led to a search for numbers. A larger counting exercise was thus undertaken in the Louvre between 27 October and 1 December 1892. Since the museum closed on Mondays and 1st November - for the All Saints Bank Holiday - attendances were counted on 30 days when 94,326 entries were recorded, of which 79,520 were logged over the month of November. The average of that month's 26 days amounted to 2,342 for weekdays and 7,153 for Sundays (Galard, 1993; AN F21 4419 Dossier 3). Over the same 26 days, Versailles received an average of 2,500 visitors (including Sundays), and the Luxembourg, 1,500. The average calculated for the same museum in 1893 fell to 1,100 (AN F21 4419 Dossier 3.). (For comparison, the Musée de Peinture et de Sculpture de la Ville de Rouen, which introduced fees in 1898, recorded an average of c. 3,200 visitors per year until 1907 (AN F21 4419 Dossier 3)).

According to Galard only one other counting exercise was carried out at the Louvre, before the introduction of fees, over seven days in November 1920 (excluding Sundays). This suggested an average of 2,442 entries – thus only 100 visits more than 28 years earlier – potentially reflecting the slow rise of population in France. Compared to the rest of Europe, the French population grew little in the last decades of the 19th century and declined as a result of the First World War. To the 38,343,000 inhabitants in 1891 corresponded 39,108,000 in 1921 (INSEE, n.d.). Interestingly, French and foreign visitors were now distinguished, the former amounting to two thirds and one third respectively (Galard,1993).

However, a range of other numbers are mentioned in the Archives Nationales' files, as well as in the press and in published works. It is, however, unclear how, or by whom, some figures were arrived at. A reference in *Le Siècle* (19 October, 1892) on 'La Caisse des Musées' argued that the Luxembourg figures could be ascertained at 700,000 - which suggested a dependable revenue stream, even if numbers were to fall. More reliably, the art historian Jules Guiffrey, who had administered the Manufacture nationale des Gobelins since 1893, told the journal *L'Artiste* in 1896 that the Gobelins annually received between 33,000 and 35,000 visitors - 'almost all foreigners'. (Lapauze, 1902: 195).

Within the Fine Arts Administration, the existing numbers were used to extrapolate annual averages. On 10 December 1896, in a report to the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, the Director of National Museums and of the École du Louvre stated that according to the Louvre's calculations, it had received c. 1, 200, 000 visitors; the Luxembourg's annual numbers amounted to 407,400 (and were, thus, considerably lower than the figure stated in *Le Siècle*), and Versailles had received 748,911 visitors in 1892. Thus, the three museums had generated a combined figure of 2,400,000 visitors. He also commented on the high, if unspecified, number of foreigners (AN F21 4419 Dossier 3). The figure for Versailles seems not to be based on extrapolation, as a note from the museum reporting its 1892 numbers listed monthly figures and pointed out that the variations in its attendances were too extreme to establish a meaningful average: numbers ranged from 11,979 visitors in January to 144,545 in July (AMN T 25A). (This appears to be a problem not only at Versailles: monthly figures collected for the Louvre after the Second World also show high monthly fluctuations (AMN 1 AA2), indicating that a calculation of yearly figures based on one month's numbers might be problematic). Numbers for the fourth of the early national museums, the Museum of National Antiquities at St. Germain were lower. A note transcribing the report of 20 November 1896 for a reading of the Bill, which eventually became the Law of 31 December 1921 introducing entrance fees, added figures for St. Germain (where Wednesday, Friday and Saturday were reserved for study) and where during its 209-210 free days, 100-125 individuals visited. It is, however, unclear which year these figures refer to (AN F21 4419).

Some of these numbers were disseminated via the press. For instance, in his important interventions on the question of free entries in *La Revue Bleue* of 10 March and 21 April 1894, Eugène Richtenberger, cites the 2,500,000 annual visits to the Louvre, the Luxembourg and Versailles (Lapauze, 1902: 190-92). The hunt for numbers re-emerged each time a new attempt was made to pass legislation introducing admission fees, but this usually resulted in the old numbers being rehashed. The *Note sur le droits d'entrée dans les Musées* from July 1912 mentioned the 1892 Louvre monthly figures and the estimates of 1,200,000 visits to the Louvre, 417,400 to the Luxembourg and 748,911 to Versailles (making a total of 2,366,300) (AMN T 25A). In response to a letter of 11 January 1917 from the Ministry of Fine Arts, which

urgently requested visitor numbers for 1911-12 and 1913 for the Louvre, Cluny, Luxembourg, St. Germain and the castle of Maison Laffite, as the Ministry only possessed numbers for Versailles and Trianon (AN F21 4420 Droits d'entrée dans les musées, 1c) the Director of National Museums clarified that no precise answer was possible as no study had been undertaken since 1896. Still, he added 275,000 visits to the Musée de Cluny (the National Museum of the Middle Ages) and 26,000-32,000 visitors per year (or an average of 29,000) for St. Germain, based on an estimate from its director Salomon Reinach, to the already mentioned estimates for the Louvre (1,200,000) and Luxembourg (417,400). As the Château at Maison Lafitte, had only opened in 1912, figures of 10,572, 15,144 and 6,120 were given for 1912, 1913 and 1914. (Director of National Museums to Undersecretary of Fine Arts, 17 Jan 1917, AMN T 25A).

An undated list, written prior to the passing of the Law of 1921 that established entrance fees, entitled *Nombre de visiteurs dans une année normale, rendements des droit d'entrée et observations* (F21 4420 1c) which was intended to project income, used most but not all of these numbers again to project the following figures.

- Louvre 1.200,000
- Luxembourg 417,000
- Cluny 275,000
- Versailles 690,000
- St. Germain 32,000
- Maison Lafitte 15,000
- Trianon 340,000
- Guimet 5,000
- Musée de l'Opéra 1,000
- Musée du Conservatoire 1,000
- École des Beaux Arts 3,000
- Musée de Sculpture Comparée 200,000
- Lannelongue à Castera Verduzan 2,000
- Malmaison 60,000
- Panthéon 100,000
- Arc de Triomphe 70,000
- Colonne de Juillet 50,000
- Colonne de Vendôme 10,000
- Compiegne 72,000
- Fontainebleau 135,000
- Pau 60,000
- Manufacture des Gobelins 35,000
- Manufacture de Sevres 65,000
- Manufacture de Beauvais 3,000

Another undated report concluded that as a result of the Great War 'the time for discussion about doctrine had passed' because it was now urgent to introduce fees given the depletion of the State's finances through the war. It gave figures for annual visits to the 'proper' national museums in Paris and its surroundings (Louvre, Luxembourg, Cluny, St. Germain) as 1,925,000. Estimating that half of these would have been paid entrances, an income of 950.,000 Francs [ca 935,800 Sterling in 2018] could have been generated.[3] To anticipate 'what entrance fees might yield', the report also listed average combined visitor numbers before the war for:

- Versailles and Trianon: 1,000,000
- Fontainebleau, Compiègne & Pau, 350,000
- Historic Monuments (Mont St. Michel, Grande Chartreuse, Pierrefonds, St. Chappelle) 235,000.

The report assumed that if visits on free days/with passes were subtracted ca 900,000 visitors paying the suggested flat fee of 1 Franc [roughly € 1.10 or £ 0.98 in current value] each could be expected. If other monuments depending on the Beaux-Art administration such as the Arc de Triomphe, the July and Vendome Columns or the Manufactures were included another 100,000 Francs could be obtained. To these, tickets for the establishments depending on the Ministry of Public Instruction, war monuments, the colonial gardens and the Conservatoire des Arts et Metier could also be added. (AN F214419 Dossier 3).

Looking abroad

Overall, however, it seems that more energy was expended in finding out about visitors to foreign museums than on establishing reliable figures for France. This was spurred on the one hand by the emergence of a common European heritage itinerary among tourists (Koshar , 1998). Keen museum visitors were continuously making comparisons between the different states they visited, and there was a need to manage audience expectations. It was also spurred by the growing professionalization of the cultural sector, through encounters during the world's fairs and a growing number of international congresses that set out to harmonise international practices. Comparative enquiries were common in the cultural sector across Europe at the time (Swenson, 2013). Hence, when the first counting exercise in the French national museums was being undertaken in 1892, it was accompanied by a large-scale comparative analysis of museums abroad, with particular emphases on museums in Germany (Munich, Nuremberg, Anspach, Aschaffenburg, Bamberg, Würzburg, Dresden, Berlin, Kassel, Frankfurt, Mainz & Cologne), Italy (especially Florence), the UK (National Gallery, South Kensington, Bethnal Green Museum and British Museum) and Spain (Prado) (AN F21 4419

Dossier 3). Further material looked at Belgian museums (AMN T 25A). While a Ministry employee highlighted the visitor figures for 1895 for the National Gallery in London published in the annual report, with a red pen, these were the only visitor numbers recorded directly; other tables referenced entrance times, fees and revenues rather than visitor numbers. This reveals a strong interest in budgets, rather than visitor numbers per se. A comparative table with English and German budgets (237,000 Francs for France versus 720,330 for German museums and 1,361,250 Francs for British museums) was used in an 1890 report to the Director of Fine Arts to underpin the argument that admission fees were necessary to increase funding (Rapport pour le Directeur des Beaux-Art (1890), AN F21 4419 Dossier 3). Salaries for museum employees and acquisition budgets were also often used as points of reference (Berger,1896).

A similar picture emerged in what was, arguably, the most important, published comparative study, *Le Droit d'entrée dans les Musées* (1902) by the art critic and conservator of the Palais des Beaux-arts de la Ville de Paris, Henry Lapauze (1867-1925). Lapauze's study exemplified the stake many museum professionals, artists and critics, had in the prolonged debate over entrance fees in the press. It set out the rationale for and against entrance fees and was based on extensive travels across Europe by the author. He also published questionnaires sent to museum directors abroad, and reprinted articles and enquiries commissioned by the main art journals. Together these sources tell us much about the relational geographies of museums across Europe and of shared silent assumptions. The reflective nature of the free texts sections in the returned questionnaires provide insights into attitudes towards free access to museums across Europe. Finally, the questions <u>*not*</u> asked are highly revealing too.

By far the highest number of returns were from Germany (21 museums in 11 cities) despite the continuously tense political situation, and from Italy (10 cities, 15 detailed questionnaires and information on 33 museums). These were followed by Switzerland (10 museums in seven cities in German and French-speaking territories); Holland and Belgium (with nine museums in four cities each); and Austro- Hungary (seven institutions in Vienna and Budapest). While Spain generated the fewest responses (with only one entry for the Prado, the UK and Russia were the penultimate lowest returnees, with three entries for the Hermitage and two Moscow museums, and the National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery and Victoria and Albert Museum. No American museum found its way into the publication. (Only in the decades after the Great War would American museums be recognised as leaders in counting visit numbers in France). Lapauze's report suggested that:

- These preferences in geographies are relatively similar to those that characterise other comparative studies of the same period – for instance, those on historic monuments

legislation (although here Italy was followed by Britain and Germany rather than the other way round, - but the overall focus of these museum studies is much narrower and does not look beyond the immediate neighbouring countries and entirely excludes the colonial sphere (Swenson, 2013).

- In their responses to questions relating to opinions about free entry, each museum director was asked to report on his views and that of his nationals. While some answered in a patronizing manner - 'they think like me', others noted that in cities where entry was not entirely free, most citizens preferred free entries. Overall, while some defended a mixed approach, the vast majority of respondents maintained that admission should be free, even if their own institutions had adopted a different practice for financial reasons.

- Respondents also reflected on the price of tickets to their museums, the value of revenues generated through admissions (although their willingness to share these varied) and the number of free days. No direct questions were asked about visit numbers or whether anybody had knowledge thereof. This reinforces the perception that visitor numbers were only of interest in terms of potential revenue generation, and were not yet used as 'a proxy measure for interest in, and so the importance of, a museum's collections and its activities' (Babbidge, 2018).

Yet those respondents who voiced objections against entrance fees generally argued that they might have an exclusionary effect. It was in response to the fear that fees would counteract the democratic mission of the museums – and through this democracy itself (*Bulletin de l'art ancien et moderne* 1907) - that one of the rare uses of actual foreign visitor numbers can be found in the press. In an article in the *Petit Temps* of 17 January 1902, Edouard Gerspach, administrator of the Gobelins Manufacture, whom Lapauze had identified as one of the most serious contributors to the question, tried to use the Italian's own use of evidence to argue for a change in French law (which would eventually happen in 1922). In Italy, admission fees were introduced progressively, and institutions learnt from others' experience. Pompeii, for example, had charged since 1862; in 1875, the government of unified Italy proposed a law to introduce fees. Numerous objections were voiced including that public access would be compromised, that the number of foreign visitors would decline; that artists would be disadvantaged. The minister, M. Bonghi, however, drew on foreign examples to pass his Law, citing the practices in Germany and Britain. He also referred to the experience of the Museum of Naples, where admission had been free in 1865, when the museum only received 17,278 visitors. After fees were introduced in 1867, with free Sunday entries, visitor numbers (free and paid) rose to 47,762. The Italian Law passed (with numerous exceptions about free days and the identification of those who would receive free admission

such as soldiers, students and artists). Fees were set at 2 lire for excavation sites and 1 lira for other establishments.[4] In the ten years prior to 1898-99 the entrance fees collected across the Kingdom rose from an average of between 250,000 -300,000 lire to 479,482. It was anticipated that this would rise to 500, 000 lire in 1902, the year of writing. Gerspach acknowledged that although this rise might be attributed to the ever-increasing number of foreigners travelling to Italy, yet 'the statistics shows that the progression in paid entrances is much stronger than the number of persons crossing into Italy.'

The effect of admission fees

What then were the effects of introducing fees in France with regard to visit numbers? Given the shaky nature of pre-1922 figures, it is obviously difficult to draw any methodologically sound conclusions. It is, nevertheless, interesting to analyse attempts to do just that.

An internal report destined for publication on 'Les Musées payantes' put visit numbers to the Louvre for 1922 at 894,000, a figure that included 192,000 paid admissions over a six-month period; and for 1923 at 1,115,000 with 583,000 paid admissions over 12 months (AMN T 25 A: Droits d'entrée et gratuité, contrôle des billets, new signature AN: 20144794/51). It claimed that not only had the number of visitors on free Sundays increased from 8,000 to 10,000, but so had visits during the week - from 3,000 to a maximum of 3.900. The explanation given was that people realized that there was something to see in the museum if it was worth paying for. The conclusion was drawn that the fear that the introduction of fees might end the democratic mission of the museum, which for so long had prevented legal action, had been exaggerated. The law introducing admission fees, the publication argued, did not seem to have had an adverse effect. Instead visits had risen and the new revenues 'helped the museums in the difficult financial situation after the victory so dearly paid for'.

In contrast to this outward facing publication, the response to the enquiry from Washington about the development of visit figures, with which this paper began, was rather more cautious, however (AN F21 4420 1c). Counting from 18 July 1922 (the day the new law on entrance fees came into force) to 31 July 1923, it specified the following numbers:

- Louvre 386,400
- Cluny 54,785
- Luxembourg 29,096
- Versailles 211,631
- Trianon et Voitures 120,753
- St. Germain 8,549
- Maison-Lafitte 1,345

It included the proviso that 'these numbers only reflect paid entries; free entries are outside of our controlling mechanisms; the statistic is thus necessarily incomplete and purely approximate'. If anything, the figures indicate that either pre-1922 approximations had been too high, that numbers did indeed fall on weekdays after the introduction of fees, or that, like for London's National Museums IWoollard, 2018), it took time for visiting numbers to recover after the war.

As the decade progressed, internal analyses remained mixed. A 1925 internal report for the Minister of Public Instruction on the perception of the effect of the Law found that museums' revenues had increased since 1922, as fees were increased, coupled with the ever-growing numbers of visits by foreigners (AN F21 4419 Dossier 3). The introduction of fees successfully filled the coffers of the RMN (Callu, 1994). However, a comparative table of revenue (rather than visitor figures) shows strong fluctuations between the early 1920 and early 1930s, with a noticeable decline after the depression despite the continuous reduction of free entries. After 1935 only the Louvre and the Luxembourg (and as its successor as museum for contemporary art the Centre Pompidou) maintained free Sundays till 1990.

For the Louvre, for instance, numbers did not reach the figures assumed for the pre-war period until after the Second World War. Table 1 shows the visits to the Louvre 1934-48: only paid entries were counted. Free, and hence total entries were estimated.

	Free	**Paid**	**Total**
1934	550,000	280,000	830,000
1935	520,000	270,000	790,000
1938		286,662	600,000
1948		393,913	1,000,000

Table 1 Visits to the Louvre, 1934-48. Source: AMN, T25: New signature: AN: 20144794/50.

Conclusion

The early history of visitor counting (or lack thereof) in France cannot be used for reliable statistical analysis. The decision to count or not to count – and how to do so – tells us more about how actors in the political and cultural sphere sought to construct arguments about policy than it does about 'real' visitor numbers. Rather, it contributes to an understanding of the growing instrumentalisation of metrics (Porter, 1995) and the close alignment of the rise of statistics with republican politics (Desrosières, 2000) and provides important comparative insight into the transnational development of visitor counting.

The approach to visits figures within national museums and the fine arts administration in France shows that, because of the universal rather than utilitarian vision for the museum

embraced since the Revolution, for most of the nineteenth century visitors were seen as a desirable abstract entity. While in Britain, numbers were collected to proof the success or importance of a given museum (Babbidge, 2018), in France there was not only little interest in finding out about how museums were used by the public, but visitors were in practice kept at bay to enable art training and connoisseurship. Even when fees were introduced, the practice of listing income rather than visitors when comparing years (and of not counting free entries) suggest that this attitude prevailed well into the second half of the 20th century and chimes with work on the on the persistent elitism within French cultural institutions (Lebovics, 1994; Heinich, 2018).

During the interwar years, attempts to understand the flux of visitors grew (as possibly explained by the increase of foreign tourism, competition with world fair attractions in 1937, special exhibitions, the weather and holidays) but without any plotting against external statistics. After the Second World War counting was substantially widened; attendances at a greater number of institutions were compared from 1949, and monthly statistics were compiled and contrasted across subsequent year. Yet free entries were still approximate. Only the Louvre had maintained free Sundays after 1935, but did not count entries. They were simply doubled in the statistics of the early 1960s with no explanations for the rational for this being offered.

As American museums kept sending and requesting figures, comparison to these often figured in the internal analyses – as yet without any apparent allusions to international competition for visitor numbers. Overall numbers (either imagined or 'real') grew only slowly till the early 1960s when the last files in the archives of the *Direction des Musées* were completed. In 1962 (AMN 1 AA2) the five museums with the largest visit numbers were noted as:

- Louvre 1,600,000
- Versailles 1,168,200
- Trianon 270,498
- Fontainebleau 353,142
- Jeu de Paume 253,802.

Galard concluded his visitor analysis of the Louvre across the century somewhat triumphantly, stating that in November 1892 there had been 79,520 visits; in 1992, these were 264 081 - 9,490 on weekdays and 18,811 on Sundays. Thus, over the century, attendances had multiplied by 4.05 and 2.63 times respectively (Galard, 1993). This rate of increase is well above that of the national population which over the same period, grew from 38,360,000 to 57,311,000. But the largest part of this increase appears to be foreign rather than domestic

visitors and reflects a consolidation of visits rather than visitors (Poulot, 2008: 172-3). This tendency is also illustrated by the rise by 60% of visitors on Sundays after the Louvre reintroduced free entries every first Sunday of the month in 1996: these free days are indeed the only ones when French outnumber foreign visitors (Fourteau, 1998). The growth in museum visit figures does thus not necessarily indicate a greater democratisation of access. As the longitudinal studies of French cultural practices conducted since the 1970s reveal, the percentage of the French population who visited a museum or exhibition remained relatively stable, at between 33-40%, and their social background largely remained the same: the higher a person's educational and employment status – the more likely were they to visit a museum. Only a substantial augmentation in frequentation among the population over 60, from 22 to 33 % could be observed (Donnat, 2011b).

This raises important questions about the growth narrative with regard to visit figures told in France and elsewhere and the tendency to conflate high numbers with success or democratisation. Further research on the development of visiting is desirable. While the figures for the period after 1922 are incomplete with regard to free entries, almost complete runs of data on paid entries exist for the mid-1930s and from the late 40s onwards to the 60s. These could, in future, be correlated against external factors and related to the conclusions and questions raised by the more recent sociological studies that cover the period from the 1970s to the early 2000s and the comparative historical data analysed in this special issue.

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Notes

[1] The old signatures that were consulted in the Louvre have been cited; these are maintained in the catalogue at the AN. Citation of new signatures indicates consultation after the transfer to AN.

[2] To the idea of the 'museum for the many' discussed for Britain by Selwood (2018b) corresponds in France the slogan of the 'museum for all', derived from the campaign for the 'Le Louvre pour tous' coined when Sunday fees were dropped at the end of the 20th century.

[3] Conversion from Ancient Franc (1921) to Euro (2017) via INSEE, https://www.insee.fr/fr/information/2417794. Conversion Euro to Sterling via Oanda.

[4] 1 Lira corresponded in 1867 to £1.20 Sterling and £1.15 in 1899 (Federico & Tena 2018) According to the inflation calculator of the Bank of England this would amount to £127.83 and £140.12 in 2017 respectively. However, if the purpose of the analysis is to compare absolute worth over time rather than relative worth than a comparison of what the same amount could buy in terms of consumer goods and services is more adequate. Here no direct comparison between 19th century Lira and current value in Sterling could be found in the literature, but Edvinsson (2016) can provide an indication: 1 Italian lira in 1899 could buy the same amount of consumer goods and services as 4.31 Euro could buy in Sweden in 2015 (when it exchanged at roughly 0.77 to Sterling as compared to the current 0.89). In terms of labour power 1 lira would correspond to 52.596 Euro in 2015. Alternatively 1 Italian lira could have bought 0.274 gram gold, which amount to 9.22 Euros in 2015. In contrast, the gram silver the 9.423 gram silver it would have bought were worth 4.282 Euros in 2015.