Tourist Apprehension of Heritage: 
A Semiotic Approach to Behaviour Patterns

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Introduction

In France, there is a quantitative imbalance between visitors to a heritage site who pay an admission fee to visit the monument and those who do not but remain in the vicinity of the monument (Collardelle and Monferrand, 1993). Given that all individuals who visit a site are assumed to want to visit the monument, the gap between site visitor numbers and monument visitor numbers should be explained by the market-product relationship theory. This means that although the nature and intensity of site visitation vary according to individual characteristics, most of the time the discovery mode does not sufficiently take this variability into account.

If we are to offer visitors alternative discovery modes, we must find out why some visitors are prompted to pay for a detailed visit while others are happy with a cursory visit to the surroundings. This study of visitor behaviour at heritage sites is based on a qualitative survey of tourist visitation patterns at three French archaeological sites. I will first draw up a typology of discovery modes by presenting behavioural similarities and differences, and then attempt to explain the typology of visitation flows using a semiotic interpretation of the visitors’ value systems.

The term “heritage site” refers to the entire heritage area, including the immediate vicinity of a monument. Although a heritage site may have the same historic and aesthetic qualities as the monument (in terms of period, architecture, etc.), the surrounding area is not the primary purpose of the visit. As an illustration, the historic centre of a town is the heritage site, while the cathedral and the castle are monuments. Usually, access to a historic monument is subject to limitations (opening hours, admission fees, guided access), while access to a heritage site is unlimited.

I shall describe first the context of the research, then the criteria for choosing the field of application, the methodology and the results. I shall conclude by discussing the limitations and implications of the work. The appendix goes into some of the technical aspects in greater detail.

Research Context

A Challenge for Heritage Managers: Understanding the Behaviour of Site Visitors

Visitors are sometimes a threatening presence at historic sites (Addyman, 1989), but they are a significant source of income. Consequently, in the face of declining subsidies, heritage managers must become more attuned to the expectations of site visitors as well as those of...
monument visitors. With the exception of the Observatoire des Publics, which since 1997 has been conducting studies on historic monument visitation, heritage managers in France have followed the example of their museum colleagues. They seem to assume that individuals have a “natural ability” to understand and appreciate a heritage monument so that attention to their needs is not necessary (Dupuis, 1992). This disregard for visitor expectations appears to preclude accurate targeting of the various programs offered at the site.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to our understanding of visitor behaviour at heritage sites and to recommend ways of convincing visitors to a site to pay an admission fee to visit the historic monument. However, the study is limited to one particular public, tourists to the area, in order to ensure homogeneity of the sample. As tourists can represent up to 75% of visitor numbers (Greffe, 1990, p. 67), managers of historic monuments have become increasingly reliant on tourist admission fees. Therefore, the visitor behaviour of local residents was not observed.

The Target: Tourist Visitors to Heritage Sites

Marketing managers generally begin a study by appraising the market. It is often relevant to distinguish between the current market and the potential market, for two reasons: a knowledge of client profiles makes more effective targeting possible; and existing clients, being already sold on the brand and product, require less attention. The marketing manager focuses on the potential market by categorizing consumers, selecting the most interesting market segments, and setting up a coherent marketing mix for each targeted segment.

In the context of heritage sites, the current market is that percentage of visitors who pay an admission fee to tour the monument, while the potential market – people who are likely to purchase the product (Kotler and Dubois, 1991, p. 271) – is divided into two sub-markets: an immediate market and an external market. The immediate market is composed of people who display an interest in the site’s focal point, the monument, even though they do not pay an admission fee to visit it. The external market is composed of holiday-makers or day-trippers who stay in the site’s catchment area but have no intention of visiting the monument itself; their non-attendance indicates either a lack of interest in the monument or a lack of awareness of its existence and value. Of the two markets, the more promising for the heritage manager is the former. Since the very presence of these people on the site implies a desire to be in contact with the monument, the marketing effort required to induce them to pay an admission fee will be less than for the more distant external market.

Previous Work on Heritage Visitor Behaviour

A review of the literature on monument and museum attendance shows that the approach generally consists in simply counting the number of visitors. While attendance counts are essential to gauge overall impact, they do not show the full picture. Beyond the seasonal and daily variations in total numbers, the experience of visiting a heritage site differs widely from one visitor to the next. For instance, individual apprehension of a site can vary greatly in approach and intensity.

However, most of the surveys that have measured these qualitative aspects of attendance – defining visitor profiles and drawing
up precise consumer typologies (De Mengin, 1993) – have focused on the current market. There have been few studies of the behaviour of consumers who visit a heritage site without necessarily visiting the monument itself. Descriptive studies of visitor routes from the car park to the monument entrance are generally intended for internal use only and are not published. Among published studies, three in particular stand out: a study of tourists’ discovery of a famous heritage site (Maillard, 1992), a study of attendance at an exhibition (Véron and Levasseur, 1983) and an analysis of attendance at an art gallery (Umiker-Sebeok, 1992). In seeking to understand the reasons for the behavioural diversity of visitation patterns, these researchers note that although the cultural product is the same, visitor apprehension and behaviour vary. Moreover, they report a correlation between visitation behaviour and individual and situational characteristics.

On the basis of this postulate, I sought to identify the specificity of each visitation mode at heritage sites. Before describing the study objectives, it is necessary to ask whether a visit to a heritage site is an aesthetic experience in itself, or a process of deciding whether or not to purchase the product – that is, to pay an admission fee for the monument.

The Heritage Visit: Both a Decision-Making Process and a Cultural Experience

According to Hirschmann (1984), consumers seek both a sensory and a cognitive experience. In the context of consumer culture, Davallon (1992) argues that heritage serves three purposes: it possesses historical value, which refers to a cognitive experience and vision; it has emotional potential, in that it bears witness to a bygone era (Davallon, Poulot and François, 1989); and it is both a catalyst for emotional responses (i.e., the aesthetic experience) and a cognitive experience.

Given that pleasure is essential to the consumer process (Hetzel, 1993) and that a preference for culture depends on the individual’s ability to find this type of activity pleasurable (Ganzeboom, 1987), heritage visitation may be considered an emotion-led experience.

However, because people arriving at a heritage site are faced with consumer choices, decision-making and purchasing processes cannot be ignored. Although visitors may not conduct a formal and cognitive appraisal of every alternative, they do have to decide which kind of experience they wish to have. Do they simply want an entertaining tour with the family? – consumption as play, in Holt’s (1995) typology. Do they want an aesthetic and very personal experience? Do they hope to increase their knowledge? Do they seek pedagogical or cultural enrichment?

In fact, visitation to a heritage site implies not only cognitive processes relying on a rational vision of consumption, but also affective and emotional processes related to aesthetic appreciation and experience-seeking. An investigation of such phenomena requires a wide-ranging methodological and conceptual framework (Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982; Bourgeon and Filser, 1996). This choice of a broad conceptual horizon ensures faithful analyses of consumer behaviour in the cultural context (Bourgeon-Renault, 2000).

Exploratory Research Objectives

This study uses observable behavioural characteristics and their underlying meaning to achieve three objectives: (1) to identify a typology of visitor routes and behaviour patterns; if it is to lead to further quantitative investigation, the typology must refer to
measurable, available, substantial segments (Kotler, 1980); (2) to determine the rationale guiding and underlying each behavioural type; and (3) to identify the distinguishing characteristics of each segment. Depending on the statistical significance of the survey data, managerial advice can then be offered. Although the quantitative surveys themselves are not reported here, they should be taken into account in the research protocol.

**Site Selection and Methodology**

**Site Selection**

Two criteria were used in selecting the specific field for the study: the sites chosen had to be located in a popular tourist area; and they had to have similar artistic and historical characteristics – as the purpose was to describe variations in tourist behaviour at the site, not the motivations that have brought tourists to the site. On the basis of these criteria, the megalithic sites of the Morbihan area of Brittany in northwestern France were selected: they are homogeneous as to monument type and history (i.e., sets of standing stones raised by human beings during the Neolithic period), while featuring variety both in site-to-site notoriety and in terms of products on offer (strong or weak notoriety; presence or absence of organized activities such as guided tours). Assuming that these features can lead to variations in tourist behaviour, three sites were finally selected on the basis of trustworthiness guidelines (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

The historic site of the Kermario alignments in Carnac was selected on the basis of its strong notoriety and the fact that it does offer a free cultural product. This site, which is managed by the CNMHS, has been undergoing major experimental soil restoration work since 1991, following extensive erosion due to visitor numbers. The Ménec alignments in Carnac and Locmarioquer were selected on the basis of their relative proximity to Kermario, their notoriety (strong in the former case, with its Archéoscope, weak in the latter) and the fact that they charge for different types of site-related products. The main characteristics of the three sites are listed in Table 1.

**Data Collection**

To ensure corpus compliance with the rules of homogeneity and representativeness set out by Barthes (1989, p. 80–81), five constraints were established. (1) All visitation behaviour was described using the same narrative format – micro-stories identical for each corpus unit. To ensure homogeneity, data collection was carried out by a single investigator. The investigator described the tour pattern: the route, pace and stops along the way (location, duration, and activities – e.g., waiting, family discussions, viewing, seeking information, taking photographs). (2) To avoid distortions due to the time factor, data collection was carried out

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Cultural Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Archéoscope, Ménec alignments (Carnac) | Strong notoriety, access charge:  
Display: slides with special effects  
Building: Archéoscope  
Admission charge: 45 French francs per adult  
Exhibition area: free access, some information about the Neolithic and the megaliths |
| Kermario, Kermario alignments (Carnac) | Strong notoriety, no charge:  
Free access to an exhibition and sales area (bookshop)  
CNMHS Building  
Free access  
Belvedere: free access |
| Locmarioquer, “Table des Marchand”  
“Er grah” tumulus  
Large broken Menhir (Locmarioquer) | Weak notoriety, access charge:  
Exhibition with documentary + site access + guided tour  
SAGEMOR Building  
Admission charge: 25 French francs per adult  
Exhibition area: accessible after the ticket counter |

Chargeable products include the entire range of cultural and educational products available to visitors to the site. A chargeable product is a product or service that: (1) is an organized and standardized way of discovering the site; (2) has cultural connotations either in the visitor’s perception or built up through proactive marketing and promotion.
over a brief period, between 14 July and 15 August 1995 (the peak tourist period for French provincial heritage monuments).

(3) Given that cultural sites vary in terms of notoriety and products on offer, and given the importance of situational context, behaviour was studied at three sites chosen for their representative features.

(4) As sites can cover a wide area, observations were not restricted to one car park for each site.

(5) In order to ensure representativeness of visitor samples, all visitor types were considered (single persons, couples of all ages, families, groups of friends, etc.). However, given that foreign visitors to heritage sites in France are likely to have a particular interest in French sites and therefore to behave differently from domestic visitors, and given that possible distortions due to language barriers (e.g., extra time spent reading information might be the result of language difficulties rather than a greater thirst for information), I chose to focus on a national sample and to limit data collection to visitors in cars bearing French licence plates.

Sample and Corpus of Behaviour Patterns

Since the objective was to study diversity (Evrard, Pras and Roux, 1993/1999, p. 100), the same rule was applied to data collection at all sites – that is, the observation process was halted whenever no new behaviour patterns were observed. Consequently, the large size of the Médoc site resulted in the recording of 26 behaviour types. At Locmariaquer, a less complex site, 10 behaviour patterns were observed. Finally, at Kermario, the survey was halted after six identical behaviour patterns had been observed. The final corpus consisted of 42 behaviour patterns.

After each observation, I attempted to interview the subject (i.e., the driver of the car) to obtain further information. Four visitors refused but demographics are available for all the others. Given the qualitative nature of the analytical process, the personal information obtained is meant only to throw additional light on the person interviewed. The limited size of the corpus detailed in the appendix precludes generalization and statistical analysis. Nevertheless, the data gathered lead to some interesting conclusions.

Analytical Methodology

Given that the physical environment is not only the background for the product on offer, but an integral part of that product, the way the visitor strolls about the site is more than simply a motor function. It also expresses the way consumers appropriate the spatial dimension of a site (Aubert-Gamet, 1996). In the heritage visitation context, the route taken, the information sought, hesitations and so on all express the meaning and value of the site to the visitor. Semiotics provides a way of shedding light on these hidden meanings and, as a methodology, allows an interpretation of human behaviour. Furthermore, structural semiotics offers a means of ascertaining and interpreting the “immutable order within the seeming disorder” – “the unvarying skeleton or frame lying in the patent heterogeneity of phenomena” (Wacheux, 1996, p. 209). Semiotics thus appears to be a precise methodology for structuring and understanding phenomena related to heritage visitation patterns, allowing us to first present a typology of tourist behaviour patterns in the context of heritage sites, and then discuss the different

RESUMEN

Para la mayoría de los sitios patrimoniales la gestión de las visitantes constituye un reto mayor. En el presente artículo, se presentan las conclusiones de un estudio exploratorio de 42 experiencias de visitas turísticas en tres yacimientos arqueológicos franceses llevado a cabo por el autor con miras a crear un marco que propicie el establecimiento de políticas de comercialización cultural in situ. Apoyándose sobre la semiótica como enfoque metodológico el autor constituye, en una primera etapa, una tipología de las visitas para luego, teniendo en cuenta la percepción por parte del turista de la dimensión patrimonial y de su actitud hacia las prácticas de descubrimiento de bienes del patrimonio, brindar una interpretación del comportamiento turístico in situ.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Comportamiento del consumidor, comercialización, semiótica, turista, patrimonio, circuitos de visitas, tipología
TABLE 2  VISITOR SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 1995 corpus according to site</th>
<th>Locmariaquer</th>
<th>Kermario alignments</th>
<th>Archéoscope (Ménéc alignments)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observed: 42 routes</strong>&lt;br&gt;Questions: 4 refusals to answer</td>
<td>10 (5 North car park, 5 South car park) 0 refusals</td>
<td>6 (5 North car park, 1 South car park) 0 refusals</td>
<td>26 (5 Archéoscope car park, 16 South car park, 5 North car park) 4 refusals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of visit</strong></td>
<td>Minimum = 7 minutes Maximum = 98 minutes Average = 44 minutes</td>
<td>Minimum = 25 minutes Maximum = 42 minutes Average = 30 minutes</td>
<td>Minimum = 3 minutes Maximum = 146 minutes Average = 33 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of holiday</strong></td>
<td>8 stay; 2 itinerant</td>
<td>6 stay; 0 itinerant</td>
<td>21 stay; 1 itinerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average distance from holiday location</strong></td>
<td>32 km</td>
<td>42 km</td>
<td>37 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure of visitor groups</strong></td>
<td>Couple: 3 Family: 6 Friends: 0 Family and friends: 1 Alone: 0</td>
<td>Couple: 1 Family: 4 Friends: 0 Family and friends: 1 Alone: 0</td>
<td>Couple: 9 Family: 9 Friends: 4 Family and friends: 3 Alone: 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 1  STAGES IN SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS AS APPLIED TO VISITATION BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

Observation and recording of behaviour

Classification of visitor routes according to similarities and differences

Checking stage: Behaviour patterns in light of typical visitor route patterns

Analysis of the general oppositions noted among all behaviour patterns

Identification of the underlying meaning for each typical visit mode (using the semiotic square)
heritage apprehension approaches displayed by visitors.

This exploratory study combines traditional descriptive analysis of observations and semiotic interpretation. Figure 1 shows the stages in this analytical process, whose main innovation is the writing down of observations to make the behavioural data conform to the requirements of semiotic tools.

Technical details regarding the foundations of this semiotic analysis are included in the appendix. The reader wishing to learn more about the use of semiotics in behavioural analysis may refer to Floch’s (1990a) study of behaviour patterns in the Paris subway.

Results

Descriptive Analysis: Identifying a Typology of Visitation Patterns

The diversity of tourist heritage discovery modes can best be understood by grouping behaviour patterns according to their similarities and differences. After the behavioural constants are identified, the different types of heritage discovery patterns are described.

Behavioural Constants in Heritage Discovery Patterns

On the basis of the behavioural corpus, the following similarities were identified:

– Visitors always try to discover a site’s implicit operational rules, especially if the structure and routes are ambiguous.

– Stopping points are virtually identical for a route: there is a kind of behavioural passivity for any given route.

– Free will finds expression in the choice of route when diverse routes are available: visitors make their personal choices.

– Visits are short on average (less than 20 minutes).

– The visitor’s reaction to admission charges has an essential impact on the mode of discovery adopted, and consequently on the differences noted regarding routes and behaviour patterns.

Tourist Visitation Flows: Routes and Behaviour Patterns at Heritage Sites

Different site visitation patterns developed in the context of chargeable products: I observed five typical routes and tour modes. The behaviour pattern and the associated route form what I call a “visitation flow.” The five flows are as follows:

Flow 1. Visitors who are interested in cultural products with admission charges and are willing to pay them. Their tour route is simple, generally consisting in a path from the car park to the point of sale and then the monument, and back.

Flow 2. Tourists who avoid having to pay. They organize their tour of the site so as to avoid areas with admission charges. They note the product on offer but deliberately avoid it or look elsewhere.

Flow 3a. People who approach the product at the end of their tour but only after much hesitation. These visitors do not end up consuming the product. Their belated attention to it is merely a way of confirming its lack of interest for them.6

Flow 4a. People who are attracted by the product and who pay to experience it. However, their expectation of its educational value is lower than that of people in Flow 1. Though their route clearly is planned with the product in mind, they are easily diverted from their objective. When they finally arrive at the point of sale, they obtain information about the content, price and duration of the visit, and then, logically, pay for it. Then they go back to their car but, as on their way in, may be diverted.

Flow 4b. This flow is a variation on Flow 4a. In fact, these visitors are identical to those in Flow 4a except that they do not pay for the cultural offer even though they appeared ready to do so. What has happened at the information desk? After stopping at the point of sale, they walk directly back to their car. However, they are more likely to look for other focuses of attention and to take detours (alternative activities?) than those who purchase the product.

Now, semiotics may help us to take these results further.
Semiotic Analysis: Understanding the Typology

As noted above, visitation flows must be identified, understood and quantified. The first postulate, identification, is confirmed above. As the third, quantification, will be corroborated by a further survey, this section will deal only with understanding these tourist visitation flows. First I will describe the main behavioural opposition, then use the semiotic square to explain the underlying meaning.

From Behavioural to Semantic Opposition: The Logic of Behaviour Patterns

As shown in Figure 2, tourist visitation at the Morbihan megaliths varies as follows: if a product with an admission charge (visit or show) is available, visitation consists of many flows; otherwise, visitation is homogeneous and uniform. Thus the variable (the “invariant”) is linked to the offer available at the site. More precisely, we could conclude that changes related to discovery behaviour centre on an invariant factor that is connected to visitor reactions to the admission charge for the cultural product. If the graph shows that notoriety interacts with the frequency of each visitation flow, this variable does not in itself result in the emergence of behavioural variation. In fact, there are significant differences in the visitation patterns at Archéoscope-Ménec and Kermario despite almost identical notoriety. Therefore, further surveys might statistically test monument notoriety as an explanation for flow distributions within total site visitation.

In order to more precisely determine the nature of the connection to the offer, I examined the behavioural opposition between the most antagonistic flows – that is, Flow 1, those who seek out the product with an admission charge and pay for it, and Flow 2, those who avoid it. The clear-cut opposition between tourists who seek out the heritage product and tourists who avoid it cannot be ignored.

This opposition between seeking behaviour and avoidance behaviour can be interpreted in terms of desire and rejection: as shown in Figure 3, the behavioural opposition between seeking and rejection can be interpreted as the observable manifestation (surface structure) of an underlying semantic opposition (underlying structure) identified by the opposition between desire and rejection.

The Logic of Heritage Discovery Patterns

Using the notion of semantic opposition, I will attempt to explain the logic of choice and a philosophy of heritage visitation (through semionarrative structures).

As chargeable products and free products elicit behavioural differences (surface structures), it can be assumed that visitors fall into a particular behaviour pattern according to their perception of what the heritage tour should be and what role the chargeable product should play in this discovery process. This leads us to reflect on the concept of the chargeable product and how it is viewed by various visitors – what it represents for the visitor to the heritage site and what it means in relation to the monument itself.

We know that monument notoriety is what makes a heritage site appealing. However, although guided by this notoriety, tourists do not always know why the site is famous or why it has cultural value for them. The cultural value is only assumed. The heritage site is raw material for tourists, who most often lack the necessary knowledge or cultural and
historical background to fully appreciate it. Thus the product on offer is an intermediary between individual and monument. More precisely, by pointing out to the tourist the elements that give the monument its value (whether historic, aesthetic or moral), the product acts as an interpreter for the monument. Why, then, do some visitor behaviour patterns reflect an acceptance of that intermediary, and thus a desire to purchase the product, and others a rejection of it?

Those who deliberately seek out the product (Flow 1) want the intervention of an intermediary. They are helpless in the face of the complexity of the site but do want to understand it. Such an understanding, or interpretation, is furnished by the chargeable product. Thus the monument serves as an instrument of education and culture; it offers an intellectual and cognitive view of heritage whereby visitation leads to the acquisition of knowledge. The chargeable product is a means of ensuring the profitability of the route and the time spent touring it.

On the other hand, those who avoid the chargeable product (Flow 2) want no third-party intervention. They seek direct contact with the monument and reject all potential intermediaries and interpreters, fearing that the personal experience they expect to have8 will be spoiled. An analogy could be made here with pilgrims who approach and touch the object of worship in the hope of a miracle, revelation or redemption. Similarly, rejection of the chargeable product might be seen as indicating that the visitor hopes to have a personal revelation of the significance of the site or a revelation of his or her inner self (heritage sites as a means of transcendence?). According to this philosophy, personal emotions determine how the tourist relates to the site.

To sum up, in the intellectual and cognitive approach, the chargeable product is a means to cultural betterment – a product or service to be used and enjoyed. In this case, the logistics of production and “servuction” (Eiglier and Langeard, 1987) of culture is accepted and even sought. Touring a site must be an educational experience. Consequently, the heritage tour has utilitarian value. In the emotional approach, on the other hand, services and products are useless. Formalization of the tourist experience is considered an anachronism or even a perversion. The organization and merchandising of culture is rejected because touring a site is a personal, direct, self-fulfilling and challenging experience. The heritage visitation has existential value.

This opposition between utilitarian and existential valuing of heritage recalls the semantic category described by Floch (1990b) and Dano (1994). As it “implies both a distinction and a connection of the main conceptions of consumption” (Dano, p. 59), heritage must also comply, apparently, with a logic of valuing that seems to govern general consumer behaviour.9

In the next section, by matching this structuring opposition with the semiotic square, I will identify four visitation philosophies that allow us to propose an explanation for each tourist flow.

The Meaning of Tourist Behaviour at Heritage Sites

Central to semiotics is the idea that all meaning stems from comparison and exchange. In the case of a conversation, the terms used find their meaning through confrontation with the other terms used. The process is the same for
behaviour patterns. Significance proceeds dynamically and according to the context of the communication.

To represent the interrelationships between these terms, and the meanings they convey, semioticians use the semiotic square model. This instrument makes it possible to apply the concept of semiotic category – that is, an axis of meaning where each extreme position presupposes the opposite, such as "good" implies "evil" and vice versa. This model of meaning representation consists of static elements (differential positions) and dynamic elements (feasible routes). Its main interest lies in organizing the coherence of a conceptual universe by predicting routes and meanings according to clearly defined relationships.

**Value Systems Associated with Heritage Discovery**

By projecting the opposition of utilitarian and existential values onto the semiotic square, we can suggest a topography of tourist behaviour on cultural sites. Four distinct positions, complementarily defined, can be identified: espousal of utilitarian values, espousal of existential values, denial of utilitarian values (a kind of hedonism) and denial of existential values (an expression of consumerism). Figure 4 depicts the value systems (an "axiology") as applied to the heritage tour. These rationales explain and underlie the tourist flow differences.  

**Towards an Apprehension of Visitation Flows**

Whereas descriptive analysis allows us to identify the various tourist flows, and thus visitor behaviour, by applying the semiotic square to heritage discovery we are able to qualify that behaviour according to the value systems of the visitors. However, it must be borne in mind that this typology applies to behaviour patterns, not to individuals. In fact, the prioritization of a value is not constant for an individual; it may vary according to the circumstances or according to the monument visited.

**Flow 1 (convinced visitors).** These people look for and enjoy chargeable products, thus expressing utilitarian values. Even if they have emotional experiences during the visit to the monument, they expect some cultural or educational return for their money.

**Flow 2 (free sightseers).** This group is characterized by rejection and avoidance of the product, thus expressing their prioritization of existential values. They seek a personal encounter with culture when they tour the site, rejecting any formalization or merchandising of heritage.

**Flow 3a (hedonist vacationers).** For these people, products on offer at the site are apparently not attractive. Prioritizing non-utilitarian values, they seek pleasure and entertainment (hedonist components). These elements are not usually available at a heritage site. Consequently, as they are used to not finding what might tempt them, they check what is available in a matter-of-fact manner only: just to affirm the appraised or perceived shortcomings of what is on offer.

**Flow 4a (consumerist vacationers).** These visitors look for and pay for the educational product, but less eagerly than those in Flow 1. What differentiates these people is their capacity for comparing and evaluating a product (even if it is cultural). They look for and obtain information at the point of sale, deliberate, discuss, and weigh the pros and cons. Therefore, we can conclude both that their purchasing decisions are essentially made on the spot and that for them the purchasing process is a complex one. In sum, this behaviour pattern clearly expresses consumerist attitudes which are the result of a prioritization of non-existential values.

**Flow 4b (consumerist visitors).** These people display the same behaviour as those in Flow 4a except that they do not pay for the product even though they seemed ready to do so. This alternative pattern consists of visitors who appear to reconsider their position after obtaining information about the product (price, timetable, content) and the conditions of its delivery (waiting time, etc.). The consumerist elements they prioritize (non-existential values) are particularly important during the purchasing process, in that they may decide that the conditions do not justify the investment of time and money.

Finally, there may possibly exist an additional flow, **Flow 3b (hedonist vacationers).** This group of consumers, like those in Flow 3a, would prioritize non-utilitarian (hedonist) values. However, they would reconsider their position in view of the characteristics of the
product on offer because the hedonist aspects of the visit are essential for them.

Conclusion

This exploratory study of tourist behaviour at three archaeological sites in France confirms the existence of consumer links between visitor behaviour patterns and individual characteristics. The study also indicates the suitability of semiotics for analysing heritage consumption. In this specific study of heritage visitation, it has allowed us to define and apply a typology of in situ tourist flows.

Based on a limited sample of 42 individual tourist visitation routes, I observed five behav-
journal modes of discovering heritage sites. However, the use of the semiotic square suggests a sixth mode. A future quantitative survey might corroborate this conclusion, and would also be an opportunity to test hypotheses statistically. For instance, it would be useful to assess the impact of monument notoriety on the relative distribution of visitation flows, as well as on the variance within each flow. Similarly, it would be relevant to test the possible relationships among the rationales underlying the discovery of heritage sites and other variables such as demographics.

This typology of behaviour patterns based on tourists’ evaluation of heritage is the result of an interpretative process. Therefore, it will remain debatable until confirmed by additional qualitative and quantitative studies. Although both methodologies are interesting, they cannot meet the same research objectives. On the one hand, a good qualitative study would include an analysis of interviews of visitors in each flow, in order to include their personal views in the interpretation. On the other hand, the research aim suggests the need for a practical quantitative survey to identify the variables (demographics, location, monument type, etc.).

This exploratory investigation has promising implications. The typology of behavioural patterns offers the prospect of segmented marketing at historic sites. Heritage discovery products have so far been restricted to a single formula for all visitors, despite their different needs. Enhanced knowledge concerning the reasons for diverse visitor behaviours should facilitate effective management. For example, information panels could be placed for maximum visibility to the particular visitor flow each is addressing. The panel for “convinced visitors” could focus on cultural aspects, while the panel for “free sightseers” could focus on the value that consumers prioritize are shown in italic in Figure 4.

Finally, it is worth applying this analysis of heritage visitation to different historic and cultural sites. This might be a useful complement to a future quantitative survey of the same three archaeological sites. It would also be useful to test these conclusions by applying the analysis to the entire range of heritage monuments.

Notes
1. A service of the French ministry of culture devoted to gathering statistics on the numbers of visitors to national historic and natural monuments.
2. For example, in a paper on the difficulties of managing heritage site visitation, Claude Origet du Cluzeau (1994) quotes from an unpublished study of visitor routes in the Musée du Louvre.
3. A public organization responsible for managing and financing France’s main cultural and natural tourist sites (approximately 100 national sites).
4. Representativeness has no statistical significance here. In fact, the approach is qualitative, so that the method consists in investigating a few cases but in more depth than quantitative surveys. Consequently, representativeness refers to diversity in the cases collected.
5. Foreign tourists are known to be particularly attracted by French heritage and culture (cf. the survey carried out during the recent refurbishment of the Louvre museum: “Grand Louvre” project.
6. However, I noticed the presence of a behavioural variation, which for some of the visitors in this flow consists in expressing greater “motivation.” They made an effort to more thoroughly investigate the content of the product. I emphasize that although I did not observe any of them purchasing the educational product, this possibility cannot be ruled out (Flow 3b).
7. It is called “invariant in the variation” because, whatever the situation, it is always this element which explains and leads to variations within the observable phenomenon.
8. “Traduttore è traditore” (the interpreter is a traitor).
9. The elements corresponding to the values that consumers prioritize are shown in italic in Figure 4.
10. A question remains: if we want to change the minds of people who are opposed to paid cultural consumption, or if we want to convince people who are disposed to paying to actually make the purchase, how are the mental processes (assertion and involvement) to be set in motion?

References
Aubert-Gamet, V. 1996. Le design d’environnement dans les services: Appropriation et détournement par le client. Thesis, management department, Université d’Aix-Marseille III.
Semiotics in a Few Words

Semiotics (or semiology: De Saussure, 1964) might be described simply as attention to meanings. However, it has three additional features: (1) It can be defined through its investigative field: all languages and meaningful practices. (2) It corresponds foremost to a qualitative and holistic approach. (3) It aims more to address the relationships between signs than the signs themselves: “...relationships are primary; terms (signs) are only the result of intersections between relations” (Floch, 1989).

Semiotics and the Study of Consumer Behaviour

Semiotics responds to the need to understand the meaning of human behaviour. Christian Pinson (1988) states that “researchers in consumer behaviour have already accepted the symbolic nature of consumption and the importance of the investigation of implicit and explicit signs available on the marketplace. Once it is known that the world of the consumer is pregnant with signs and that every communication act presupposes the existence of a signification system, semiotics appears as an obvious and natural research paradigm for the study of marketing communications.” For more on the relevance of semiotics for consumer behaviour, see the special double issue of the International Journal of Research in Marketing (1988) dedicated to this theme.

A Brief Glossary

**Code** – “convention essential to understand every sign” (Barthes); “the social dimension of a sign: the agreement of numerous users on the accurate usage and answers” (Fiske)

**Corpus** – “a set of meaningful manifestations considered as homogeneous” (Barthes)

**Interpretant or signified** – “facing the sign, the reaction of the interpreter (an individual) with its social institutions and its culture” (Sebeok)

**Object or referent** – “physical entity or event or factual action” (Pierce)

**Semantic category or semantic opposition** (Courtès, 1991, p. 158) – the invariant meaning of a phenomenon (each phenomenon expresses something permanent, although the ways used to express it can vary; the invariant refers to this permanency)

**Seme** – “the smallest entity of meaning of a sign” (Greimas)

**Semeion** – sign in Greek

**Semiosis** – “an action or an influence which is or implies the cooperation of the three elements: object, sign, interpretant” (Pierce); “the communication process of all signs, which allows things and events to be recognized as signs” (Mick)

**Semiotics or semiology** – “every kind of research dealing with meaningful forms” (Cercle Parisien de la Sémiotique)

**Semiotic threshold** – “passage from the utilitarian and functional aspect of objects to the meaningfulness of their use which converts them into signs” (Barthes).
comportement dans le domaine culturel: Une exploration conceptuelle et méthodologique." 


