



Rap under the Rubens

How after-hours events can help break down barriers to museum participation

An exploration into how Emerge Festival and other evening programmes reach underrepresented communities

Executive Summary

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Foreword by Zak Mensah

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Whenever I look at audience data from across the sector I am always underwhelmed and disappointed that young adults don't seem to be buying our offer. Yet a Museum space can be many things and tell many stories. Museums were originally conceived for mass participation. We open diligently all day every day, yet this doesn't appeal to them. We close in the evenings - just as they are looking for something to entertain them throughout the evening.

If you do more of the same thing, is it any surprise that the results are the same over and over?

We say we want to be more useful to more people but we have been failing to do so with our normal offer and business model. We have been sticking to the script. We open 10am to 5pm and hope that maybe one day young people will suddenly rediscover us.

Museums have struggled to reach young people aged 16-34, no matter what we programme during the day. A segment that makes up just over 24% of the UK population is an opportunity surely worth pursuing.

The ideas in this report follow a brave attempt to pull off something that was different. It worked too, mostly. In short, to make change happen we clearly need to change ourselves. We must think of the night at the museum as a way to reduce a clear barrier for many and form a connection that may lead to increased repeat visits and improve lifetime value.

Here is the sales pitch:

By doing after-hours activity there is strong evidence young people and people of colour will attend. An emerging new business model may be lurking too, that places them at the centre of creation and consumption - which nicely meets a policy aim. All without disrupting our typical daytime activities. Finally, the report shows us that we must experiment and who knows, it may even pay off.

See you tonight at the museum?

Summary

In this report, we ask the question: **how can Museum Lates dismantle barriers to participation that exist for young people from underrepresented communities?**

We do so in the wake of recent museum audience orientated reports by The Audience Agency (AA)¹, Arts Council England (ACE)² and the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)³ which show that overall, museum visitation is still predominantly middle-aged, white and middle-class, demonstrating a concerning lack of progress in reaching the demographics Emerge and other Lates are trying to address. After-hours events may point to a way forward. Demographic data from audience surveys show that museums are making progress in attracting these missing audiences by opening up their doors in the evening, often providing innovative programming that is sociable, fun and relevant to both audiences and venues.

There is very little published research that has focused entirely on after-hours museum events. The research that has been published and explored in this report shows that after-hours events provide a strong motivation for people to visit and revisit museums, suggesting this is an exciting area of museum practice that largely remains untapped. Our research shows that museum after-hours programming can help to broaden museum audience demographics, and open connections to museum collections in ways that are relevant and meaningful to those new audiences. Lates could be a viable and direct route for museums to begin to turn statements about diversity into action by providing content and experiences that enable a broader range of people to have their cultural heritage reflected in museum spaces. This report has found that Lates are providing a relevant entry-point for new people to feel welcomed into museums. As new people interact with the museum, they begin to bring new voices and experiences that can filter through into other areas of practice and policies, enabling museums to respond to social demands and changing cultures more quickly.

This timely report is co-authored by Nick Stockman, Culture24's Emerge Festival Director, and independent research volunteer Elizabeth Duru. It is based on qualitative evidence through interviews with museum professionals; desk research into audience demographic statistics, annual reports and mission statements; and quantitative data presented through other research and studies. Interview participants represent museums from London, Melbourne and Amsterdam, providing a global context of the development and impact of Lates practice.

The findings are grounded within the landscape of Lates practice over the last twenty years. In building a clearer picture of the value of this practice, we aim to reveal what it can offer all museums in building sustainable, inclusive public institutions that stay at the heart of our communities, and to encourage the development of this area of programming as a socially purposeful practice. The findings reflect the mood of large parts of the professional museum community and the new investment principles of Arts Council England (ACE) of 'Inclusivity and Relevance' and 'Dynamism' and the ambition that "*England's diversity is fully reflected in the organisations they support and the culture they produce.*"⁴

¹ The Audience Agency, *Museums Audience Report*, 2018.

<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/resources/museums-audience-report>

² Arts Council England, *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case*, 2020.

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/equality-diversity-and-creative-case-data-report-2018-19>

³ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), *Taking Part Survey 2019/20: statistical release* (London: DCMS), 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201920-museums/museums-taking-part-survey-201920>

⁴ Arts Council England, 'Our Investment Principles', *Lets Create: Strategy 2020-2030 Arts Council England*, January 2020, p.29. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/our-strategy-2020-2030>

Findings

The proportion of the total number of adults visiting English museums who are 16 to 34 years old has seen no improvement in recent years from 26% in 2017/18⁵ to 25% in 2019/20⁶. Looking at the figures more closely the proportion of 16-24-year-olds has dropped from 10% in 2017/18⁷ to 9% in 2019/20⁸. In 2019/20, 28% of Black British people in the UK visited a museum compared to 53% of white people⁹. In 2019, only 39% of the most deprived decile of respondents to the Taking Part survey visited a museum, compared to 59% of the least deprived decile¹⁰. In a period when attracting young and diverse audiences has been a priority for the museum sector, this continued lack of progress in the number of young adults attending and such a wide disparity in attendance numbers between ethnic and socio-economic groups is notable.

In contrast, in 2019, Tate Lates, Friday Lates at the V&A and Culture24's Emerge Festival attracted tens of thousands of people to after-hours events. Emerge's audiences consisted of at least 75% 16 to 34-year-olds and at least 30% people of colour. 88% of the visitors to Emerge had never before been to at least one of the museums they visited at the festival.

Using Emerge Festival, other sector-leading after-hours activations, and examining the latest reports and available data, this report considers why this area of programming is successful in attracting a range of underserved audiences and identifies challenges that may be limiting further progress. By doing so, we can better understand the next steps necessary in developing this area of programming to best support the continual reinvention of museum spaces in line with the needs of their communities. We provide recommendations for museums, funders and policymakers on practical steps that can be taken to realise this vision.

After-hours programming includes a diverse range of activities that a museum can provide outside of daytime operations. These can range from curatorial talks and interactive workshops to music performances. We focus on after-hours events in this report, which we define as an evening or night-time event, usually social, performative and less formal in nature, in museums when they would normally be closed. This report focuses on events that took place before the global pandemic, included audiences in the room and were not streamed or broadcast. We see Lates as a key area of after-hours programming for attracting underserved audiences. However, the research, insights and challenges are relevant to all types of evening programming that are social in nature, across the culture and heritage sector.

⁵ The Audience Agency, *Museums Audience Report*, 2018, p.4.

<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/resources/museums-audience-report>

⁶ Arts Council England, *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case*, 2021 p.34.

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/equality-diversity-and-creative-case-data-report-2019-20>

⁷ The Audience Agency, *Museums Audience Report*, 2018, p.4.

<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/resources/museums-audience-report>

⁸ Arts Council England, *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case*, 2021 p.34.

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/equality-diversity-and-creative-case-data-report-2019-20>

⁹ DCMS, '4. Who visits museums and galleries?', *Museums - Taking Part Survey 2019/20*, 16 September 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201920-museums/museums-taking-part-survey-201920#who-visits-museums-and-galleries>

¹⁰ Ibid, 'Figure 3.6: Proportion of respondents who have visited a museum or gallery in the last 12 months by age group, 2019/20'.

Key findings

These findings are offered as a way to support the cultural sector to use museum after-hours events to better reach all underserved audiences.

1. **After-hours programming can have a considerable impact in attracting young people and people of colour into museums.** The report focuses on three demographics that are not equitably represented in UK museum visitation in 2020: these are young people under 34 years of age; people of colour, particularly Black British people; and working-class people. We have found enough evidence and data to reasonably conclude that after-hours events can have a considerable impact in attracting young adults and people of colour. This report shows that the flexible, social dynamic of after-hours events can be a powerful way to create responsive programming that can target specific audiences, creating a much-needed welcoming entry point for many people.
2. **After-hours programming is changing the way people view museums.** Relaxed social spaces make museums more welcoming and provide different ways for visitors, particularly young people, to access and connect with culture. After-hours events provide an important social space within which civic dialogue and informal learning can take place, in turn helping to broaden the identity of museums as destinations for leisure and social activity. As after-hours events (and Lates festivals in particular) attract large numbers of new visitors, they can provide an experimental space for new voices to influence and help shape a more dynamic and relevant museum.
3. **After-hours events inspire visitors to revisit the museum.** Using evidence from recent reports¹¹ and research examining after-hours visitor behaviour, this report found that visitors are motivated to revisit museums after they have had an enjoyable experience at after-hours events. This demonstrates that after-hours events are an opportunity to form new, longer-lasting relationships with underserved audiences and that these events may help to change the perception of museums among these visitors.
4. **After-hours events are a valuable testing ground for museums to experiment with new partnerships and ways of working.** After-hours programmes that successfully reach underserved audiences are typically co-curated events in partnership with a diverse range of organisations who authoritatively represent a specific demographic or community of interest, introducing new voices to the museum. These events can create a shared space that is less mediated by museum authorities, more open to the unorthodox and more able to respond to society's changing needs and modes of behaviour.

¹¹ See: Hilary Easson and Anna Leask, 'After-hours events at the National Museum of Scotland: a product for attracting, engaging and retaining new museum audiences?', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23(11), 2020, pp.1343-1356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2019.16258751352>

See also: Paul Barron and Anna Leask, 'Visitor engagement at museums: Generation Y and 'Lates' events at the National Museum of Scotland', in *Museum Management and Curatorship* 32(5), 2017, pp. 473-490. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2017.1367259>

See also: Dynamic Concepts Consultancy, *Foundation Museumnacht Amsterdam: Experience Monitor 2016*. (Unpublished), 2016.

5. **Collaborative, multi-venue after-hours events are particularly successful in bringing in new visitors.** Our research found that multi-venue 'museum nights' such as the Emerge Festival attract very high proportions of first time visitors for participating venues. This could be partly due to the format which enables multiple venues to be visited on one ticket, giving new visitors the freedom to try out museums they have never thought of visiting before. When combined with the finding that all the after-hours programmes we studied attracted higher numbers of young people and more young people of colour than daytime visitation, it can be concluded that they successfully attract underserved audiences.
6. **A clear organisational commitment to representative audiences is key to building a successful after-hours programme.** Though very different in nature, all the museums or organisations studied had a strong ethos, determined leadership and a dedicated workforce. A strong vision can help to give a museum confidence to take clear ethical positions, which builds trust with marginalised communities when reaching out to them to co-curate after-hours events. New organisational approaches that place value in lived experience are contributing to a power shift in museum practice, empowering new people to successfully design and produce after-hours events and creating a platform for other voices to be heard.
7. **Museums do not currently collect and publish enough demographic data about their after-hours visitors.** There are gaps in the collection and sharing of data across the museum sector, significantly regarding visitors to after-hours events where there are big gaps in the collection of ethnicity and socio-economic status information. There are no published sources of data that only focus on after-hours visitor demographics across a range of museums in an area or genre.
8. **Free events are no more successful than charged events at attracting underserved audiences.** Emerge, and other after-hours programmes that charge, are succeeding in reaching underserved audiences at least as well as free events. Furthermore, there are some indications that charged-for programmes are reaching more working-class audiences than free after-hours events. These insights challenge the notion that cost is always a barrier to participation, suggesting that intelligent discounting and incentives can attract people with less disposable income if they identify with, and value, relevant programming.
9. **Visitors from lower socio-economic groups are not being reached by most after-hours programmes.** None of the after-hours programmes studied, or any of the data published from other museums, indicate that working-class audiences are currently being fairly represented in museums. Although some organisations have succeeded in attracting working-class audiences with daytime programming, far fewer have successfully brought in these audiences after hours. This report found evidence that Lates can successfully reach a range of demographics suggesting that with targeted programming, more working-class audiences could be reached. Emerge Festival made some progress in attracting working-class audiences, indicating that annual multi-venue events particularly could help museums to engage with this segment of society.

Recommendations

These are offered as a way to help the museum sector harness the potential for after-hours programming and progress a more representative audience agenda.

1	Prioritise strategic support for after-hours programmes	Leadership teams, funders and policy makers to acknowledge the role after-hours events can play in transforming museums' commitment to improve representation into programmes that deliver meaningful social change.
2	Nurture a community of practice for museum professionals to evolve after-hours programming	Sharing expertise and good practice around after-hours events will ensure continued fresh thinking and allow smaller museums to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of larger museums and festivals. Sector Support Organisations like Culture24 could be helpful in providing a service to facilitate peer-to-peer learning.
3	Proactively support after-hours programmes	As part of the growing commitment to inclusivity, museums should adopt a clearly communicated position on after-hours programmes to help effectively develop deeper, more sustainable relationships with new communities.
4	Embrace community co-curation	Invest in community co-curated museum after-hours events that actively progress a representative audience agenda.
5	Develop a flexible approach to pricing policies for after-hours events less reliant on public funding	Devise after-hours programmes that are attractive enough to underserved audiences to demand a reasonable ticket price. This will ensure the audience values high-quality work, artists and performers are paid fairly and new programmes are not limited to only what can be subsidised from grant funding.
6	Experiment with new incentive schemes for after-hours events	Learn from Museumnacht Amsterdam and offer discounts for under-30s on charged-for exhibition tickets with an after-hours ticket. Collaborative schemes demonstrate the sector is collectively taking action to address participation barriers.
7	Set clear targets to improve representative audiences in museum business plans and funding agreements	Audience data capture needs to include a range of diversity characteristics such as ethnicity, socio-economic status and geographic location, and be published to ensure accountability. The interpretation of data needs to be aligned with a focus on addressing the very real gaps in museum visitation.
8	Develop a systematic approach to capturing data around after-hours audiences to shape engagement widening strategies	Tracking revisitation data is key to understanding the longer-term impact of after-hours events. By tracking individuals' purchasing records (e.g. using discount incentives for future events) it will be clear whether attending an after-hours event increases the likelihood of revisiting a museum.

Further research

This report highlights that a lot can be learnt from the success of after-hours programming and that more research is needed to help to shape and inform future museum practice. In particular:

- The link between developing after-hours events and engaging new and young audiences, especially in different institutional contexts. This would help to build a bigger picture of how effective this practice is on different scales, and how it can best be developed to support different communities.
- More work to understand why multi-venue annual festivals such as Emerge are particularly successful, compared to regular Lates programming, at attracting new audiences.
- Understanding the factors deterring working-class young people from visiting museums, and if Lates, in particular, can address this issue.
- The potential of digital Lates programming in reaching underserved audiences, particularly those who struggle to visit museums as a physical destination, is yet to be tested. A small number of Lates events have been streamed since March 2020 and others are in the pipeline for 2021. These events also merit further exploration into if and how they can develop museums' reach into underrepresented audiences, particularly to those who face physical or financial barriers to attending events in person.

About The Full Report

Culture24 and its work with Museum Lates

Culture24 is an Arts Council England-funded Sector Support Organisation that provides strategic advice and practical support to arts and heritage organisations to help them connect meaningfully with audiences of today.

Our previous three research reports on the landscape of Lates practice published in 2018 (A Culture of Lates, An International Culture of Lates, and Late Like a Local¹²), sought to establish a conversation around the value of museum Late events as audience development tools and income generators, within the context of the night-time economy (NTE). The subsequent evening activation, Emerge Festival¹³ (September 27 and 28, 2019), piloted a two-night museum event which, for the first time in the UK, enabled young people to access multiple night-time events in museums on one ticket. Emerge enabled London museums to tap into the Experience Economy and contribute to the NTE in a way they had never done before.

Scope of the report

The demographic and museum visitation data in the report focuses primarily on London in comparison with the rest of the UK. As a diverse cultural capital city with a variety of evening activities in its museums, as well as being home to the Emerge Festival, it offers a valuable source of data to interrogate. We look at two Museum Lates programmes outside the UK to contextualise this research within global practice.

We present evidence from:

- Tate Lates, a regular event at Tate Modern in London
- Nocturnal at Melbourne Museum, Museums Victoria's flagship Late
- Emerge Festival in London, produced by Culture24
- Museumnacht annual festival in Amsterdam (the closest programming model to Emerge), produced by youth marketing organisation N8

We recognise that these findings might not directly translate to other locations which may have vastly different demographics and infrastructure to these cities. However, the principle strategies that these programmes use can be applicable in many contexts:

- Partnering with representative people, communities and organisations
- Programming artists and performers from the target communities
- Providing a more social, welcoming space

We examine the role of benchmarking, target setting, data gathering and publishing and ask whether more can be done to make progress around audience development more transparent and accountable. Is the right data being collected, is there a benchmark to compare progress against, and is this progress published so that the public museums serve can hold them to account? Certainly, it is very difficult to find some key datasets, such as comprehensive visitor ethnicity stats across all London museums, which would help establish some quantitative parameters for this discussion.

¹² See Culture24's reports on after-hours events: <https://weareculture24.org.uk/lates-research/>

¹³ See: <https://emergefestival.co.uk/>

We look at pricing and the arguments for and against charging and in doing so explore the role of discounting. We also provide a useful list (in Further Reading) of some organisations, reports, initiatives and people who are working for progress both in the area of Lates and more generally in building a sustainable and equitable sector.

Methodology and approach

The case studies and data were examined from an evidence-based perspective through an inductive reasoning approach, to arrive at findings and recommendations intended for the sector to build on. There was a recognisable pattern at Emerge Festival, that it attracted young adults, people of colour and working-class people who had not visited the participating museums before. The hypothesis drawn from this, which we aim to test with this research report, is that after-hours events might provide an ideal environment for museums to attract these demographic groups that are often underrepresented in museum audiences. In doing so, we have identified some elements that make after-hours events successful and made observations that can help museums to utilise after-hours programming in attracting these demographic groups. Whilst this research focuses on these three demographic groups, we believe more research into this area of targeted programming might reveal its ability to attract other underserved communities.

Data collection and analysis

To create an accurate understanding of UK and London museums' audiences, data collected was only considered if it met the following criteria:

- It had to come directly from the source or be fully referenced from rigorous and reliable research
- Audience profile data no older than ten years was the main focus, however, there are report citations older than this where relevant
- Longitudinal studies needed to have relatively consistent data captured by either the same source or sources with similar capture methods, with a representative/suitable sample size
- No data from surveys were included which had small samples or very much lower than average numbers of respondents (for that organisation or source)

The published data used in this report on the numbers of museum visitors across age ranges in England and London differs in that data from England is calculated as a proportion of over 16 visitors only, whereas the data from London is calculated as a proportion of total audiences. The population and visitation comparison charts produced for this report reflect this by converting the available population data into proportions of adult or total population figures, corresponding to the way museum visitation is calculated.

The data about visitation to London museums comes from DCMS-sponsored London national museums¹⁴. Though there are only 17 London nationals, they account for a high proportion of visitors to all London museums. During our desk research period, we could not find any aggregated visitor age or ethnicity data from some or all of the hundreds of other museums and galleries in London. These other institutions are likely to be very different from the national museums and this may well translate to very different visitor demographics. However, without more and better data collection, this cannot be definitively confirmed.

¹⁴ Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *DCMS-sponsored museum visit trends: An analysis of factors impacting on visits to DCMS-sponsored museums*, 2020, p.76.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dcms-sponsored-museum-visit-trends-an-analysis-of-factors-impacting-on-visits-to-dcms-sponsored-museums>

Research objectives and process

Key objectives of the research were

- To understand the statistical context in which the UK museum sector seeks to use Lates to boost audience diversity by:
 - Mapping population demographic data for UK/London to provide a benchmark
 - Mapping recent statistics on ethnicity, age and socio-economic status for general and Lates museums audiences in the UK and London
 - Comparing the datasets for evidence of representation (or lack thereof)
- To understand the issues around audience diversity and representation in the museum sector, particularly focusing on how Lates can help communities build cultural equity and social cohesion
- Examine and explain how Lates are currently helping museums to attract underserved audiences
 - Evidence from Tate Lates, Friday Lates at the V&A, Museums Victoria's Nocturnal Late at the Melbourne Museum and Museumnacht in Amsterdam
 - Evidence from Emerge Festival
- To explore the opportunities the museum sector might now have to build on the work they do with Lates to better represent UK society in their institutions

Three members of Culture24's Board of Trustees, Stella Toonen, Liane Robinson, and Gillian Jackson, formed a strategic review team and were invited to provide insight and challenges throughout the process. Their experience spans museology studies, digital marketing and programming for underserved audiences.

We hope that our findings and insights provide practical tools that can help all museums to benefit from evening activations in helping them diversify their audiences. Whilst we publish this report for sector learning, the findings will also help Culture24 to consider how to develop Emerge going forward to maximise its potential value as a socially engaged programme. To do so, we present an honest picture of our experience with Emerge, recognising the opportunity for learning and growth by acknowledging its shortcomings as well as its successes.

Definitions

There is a comprehensive list of definitions available in the full report.

Societal context - Black Lives Matter and COVID-19

This report is written in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement - a call to action for society to address and extinguish deep-rooted inequalities. It is a global movement of mass anti-racist protests by minoritised ethnic groups who have been oppressed by societal systems, policies and cultural norms that privilege white people. As the museum sector begins to bring communities together to collectively heal and process the impact of this movement, there is an opportunity for museums, as places for civic arbitration and intercultural dialogue, to lead by example.

As a sector already struggling towards financial sustainability, museums have had to navigate a global pandemic that has resulted in a government-imposed shutdown and a decrease in revenue. Before 2020, some museums were already utilising evening programming as a way to create social, relaxed spaces and to occasionally address contemporary societal issues. During periods of 2020, some institutions turned to extended opening hours as a way of adjusting to

reduced capacities caused by social distancing restrictions. Some others sought new accessible ways to connect audiences with collections through online Lates events on their digital channels.

Black Lives Matter and COVID-19 are global events and catalysts for the sector to take stock, listen, see and evolve. Lates are demonstrating their value to open up the potential of what a museum is and should be, who it is for and what it can provide in a time when society is calling for change and needs museums to step up and face the challenge. The responsive and agile space that Lates provides can help to drive sustainable change. Indeed, many Museum Lates programmers, and the underserved communities that they are working with, are co-curating events that are leading change, demonstrating to other parts of their organisations how to place representation at the heart of good practice. Lates present an opportunity for museums to reflect and ensure that future museum spaces are accessible when people want to visit, are representative of the community they serve, and lead a transformation in cultural provision the world can point to as genuinely progressive.

You can download the full report from: <https://weareculture24.org.uk>

Credits

Culture24 asserts that the data and evidence used in this report is accurate, to the best of our knowledge at the time of publication, and is reproduced in good faith. We welcome any updated evidence, data or comments that might contribute to a better understanding of the issues raised in the report. Please contact latesresearch@culture24.org.uk

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Cover photo: Emerge Festival event at Banqueting House, © Culture24 2019

Many thanks to the following interviewees for their time, expertise and enthusiasm.
Melbourne Museum, Australia: Linda Sproul, Carolyn Meehan, Carla English, Peter Tullin, Pippa Budge

Association N8, Netherlands: Emma Waslander, Jordy den Haan

Tate, UK: Liat Rosenthal, John Duncan

Many thanks to all Culture24's trustees for helpful input.

Thanks to Jenna Mason and Melissa Bentley from the V&A and Stein van Klaveren from Markteffect for providing data.

Culture24 is an independent charity that brings arts and heritage organisations closer to audiences. Our vision is for a thriving and relevant cultural sector able to connect meaningfully with audiences of today. Our mission is to support arts & heritage organisations to have the confidence, imagination and skills to make this happen.

<https://weareculture24.org.uk/>

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