

DANUBE TRANSNATIONAL SURVEY 2021

Research report

The Danube Transnational Survey, investigating public awareness of the Art Nouveau heritage, was carried out in 2021 on behalf of the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts. It involved online and offline questionnaires completed by a non-representative sample of museum visitors.

The research, part of the project DTP3-748-2.2 ART NOUVEAU 2 funded through the Danube Transnational Programme, is being coordinated by the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts. Lahost Kft. provided the personnel and technical services for the survey, and the data was collected by the international project partners.

The objective was to use visitor research to assess awareness of the Art Nouveau heritage through the lens of sightseeing, travel, cultural consumption and museum visit habits. The approach specified by the client was: general awareness of Art Nouveau, Art Nouveau in architecture, Art Nouveau cities and routes, Art Nouveau motifs, and facts about Art Nouveau.

Under the contract with the Museum of Applied Arts, the comprehensive research tasks divided into the following phases:

Task/objective	Status
Prepare questionnaires, explore ideas, make recommendations	implemented, completed
Finalise Hungarian questionnaires, release for translation	implemented, completed
Develop software for online questionnaire in English, Hungarian, German, Serbian, Slovenian, Romanian, Croatian and Slovak	implemented, completed
Perform tests before going live with the questionnaires	implemented, completed
In the questionnaire completion period, constantly check and monitor the online questionnaire interface	implemented, completed
Close online questionnaires, export data	implemented, completed
Match up and merge databases in different languages into Hungarian	implemented, completed
Data entry of paper on-site questionnaires	implemented, completed
Merge data from on-site questionnaires in Hungarian	implemented, completed
Data cleansing in online questionnaire database	implemented, completed
Data cleansing in offline questionnaire database	implemented, completed
Process and check data	implemented, completed
Graphic and tabular data presentation	implemented, completed
Break down findings by demographic groups	implemented, completed
Tabular presentation of subsamples	implemented, completed
Prepare executive summary	implemented, completed
Weekly consultation	implemented, completed

The full survey consisted of two separate questionnaires. We started gathering data with the questionnaire containing questions 1–22 online, basically using the google.com system. Data gathering was planned to take place in the period 27 December 2020 – 31 January 2021, but we experienced that the international partner organisations took a long time to start gathering data, requiring multiple rescheduling of the project. The target sample size was 2,000 respondents per country, which was attained only by the Hungarian partner, the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts. Ultimately, by decision of the client, the data gathering period was extended to the end of July 2021, with the following participation figures:

Language	First questionnaire completion	Last questionnaire completion	Total number of completions
German	9 February 2021	15 June 2021	199
Croatian	8 January 2021.	28 July 2021	652
Romanian	15 February 2021	13 July 2021	705
Slovak	29 December 2020	24 May 2021	335
Serbian	9 January 2021	26 May 2021.	*5
English	7 January 2021	5 June 2021	61
Hungarian	29 December 2020	25 July 2021	2098

**all five responses were almost identical, and because of the disproportionately small number of completions, they were not used*

The second questionnaire (Questions 51–55) was distributed by partners offline, in paper, timed for World Art Nouveau Day events in June 2021, when the epidemic had reached a stage where museums, cultural venues and events could be visited. This questionnaire concentrated specifically on Art Nouveau and surveyed public attitudes to Art Nouveau motifs primarily through visual elements. The target sample size was 200 per country, and the completed questionnaires were sent to Budapest by post after the events.

language	total number of completions
German	200
Croatian	208
Romanian	59
Hungarian	333

An important objective for both questionnaires was to reach both professionals and the general public in all countries, and we also wanted as many age groups as possible to make their voices heard on the subject. One of our recommendations was that we should have approximately equal numbers of responses from the participating countries, providing proportionality to enhance comparisons among countries. This was unfortunately not attained through either online or offline questionnaires. Nonetheless, we gained notable information in several questions, including respondents travel and cultural consumption habits, giving a good basis for further use and possibly publication of the results.

Questionnaires and questions

The research focused primarily on surveying public awareness of Art Nouveau and on assessing the potential for the Danube Transnational Programme to raise the level of awareness. Also important to our mission was to give lecturers in the Kodolányi János University in Budapest a resource for another part of the current project – the development of tour guide training material.

The first questions covered cultural consumption habits in leisure travel, followed by questions about general museum visiting habits. Then came the subject of Art Nouveau, asking about the Résau Art Nouveau (RANN) network, the cities of the RANN network, and the World Art Nouveau Day events. Finally, we asked about changes in cultural consumption habits that have emerged because of the coronavirus epidemic, partly for the purpose of informing – through this sad current situation – a broader public of the international cooperation on the subject being implemented in the project and of our rich Art Nouveau heritage.

The primary focus of the later, paper-based questionnaire was the visual perception and knowledge of Art Nouveau. We sought responses through simple, playful tasks involving photographs of Art nouveau buildings and art works.

Methodology

The research involved anonymous and voluntary responses to questionnaires disseminated through internet channels and at events run by the international partners in the project. The sample of 4050 online and 800 personal respondents is not representative. We must bear in mind that all means of collecting data have their limitations: internet questionnaires do not reach the most disadvantaged members of society, and high-placed social groups are not easily reached in person. Nonetheless, the people reached by the Art Nouveau research – museum visitors and participants in museum events – may be assumed to be open to cultural questions, and so their responses should be particularly suited to the clients' purposes.

We should also note that any interpretation of the findings must, by the nature of the subject, bear in mind that cultural consumption is strongly correlated with level of education. This is clear from the fact that more than 80% of the respondents – who encountered, and responded to, the questionnaire through museum channels – had higher educational qualifications. The findings therefore cannot be interpreted as applying to society as a whole, but may be regarded as valid, for example, in respect of educated people in a region of a country involved in the research.

Executive Summary

The purpose of the visitor research was to survey awareness of the Art Nouveau heritage through the lens of sightseeing, travel, cultural consumption and museum visit habits. The approach specified by the client was: general awareness of Art Nouveau, Art Nouveau in architecture, Art Nouveau cities and routes, Art Nouveau motifs, and facts about Art Nouveau. As a secondary objective, we surveyed the effects of the coronavirus epidemic on cultural consumption, primarily as regards museums.

Survey of 4050 respondents online

A total of 4050 responses to the online questionnaire were received, in six languages, from forty countries, in just over six months, between the first and third waves of covid-19. The majority of the people who completed the internet questionnaire were middle aged, active and independent travellers/cultural consumers; 78% of them were women, and 82% of them had higher educational qualifications.

A large proportion of respondents can afford to spend their leisure time away from home several times a year, and 19% go on holiday at least once a year. Overall, therefore, the survey was taken in a prosperous, highly-educated population. At least 3,000 respondents (75%) indicated preferences for the following activities in their holidays: individual sightseeing, museums, historic buildings and historic sites. They attached less importance to leisure time on the beach, in restaurants or green environments, and hardly any of them bought tickets for concerts, organised sightseeing or festivals. Members of this sample overwhelmingly travelled by public transport or on foot in a city they visited, and the use of bicycles, taxis, scooters or cars was very low.

The majority also regularly visit museums at home, within their own country, and abroad, but 443 of them (11%) only on their holidays, and 99 not even then. The most-mentioned motivational factors for going to museums were for the experience, to acquire information and to find out about other cultures. Most spent one or two hours in an exhibition, 39% more than that, but the number of visits of less than one hour was minimal. The exhibits in museums they most liked to look at were paintings, statues, photographs and archaeological finds. About half of the overall sample also liked to view furniture, jewellery, ceramics and costume, but fewer were interested in design objects or graphics.

The favourite style era of the eleven on the list was Art Nouveau, followed by Renaissance, Impressionism, Gothic and contemporary art. The least popular were Historicism and Naturalism. Half of the sample had first encountered the expression “Art Nouveau” during their studies, and only one fifth of them had learned about the style through from their family. To the question of where Art Nouveau motifs appear, nearly everyone mentioned architecture, 2783 also mentioned applied art, and half also considered it common in painting.

The events of World Art Nouveau Day were still unknown to 54% of respondents, suggesting that these events are worth advertising even among this group. Only 19% of respondents had attended such an event. The events that seem popular are city tours and guided tours. We found a surprisingly low level of awareness of European cultural routes: only the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage routes were well known, and many were unfortunately known only to a very few. The route that the highest proportion had consciously come into contact with, however, was the Mozart route, but even this proportion was only 6.56%. In second place was the Réseau Art Nouveau network, with 6.4%.

As regards the coronavirus epidemic, the majority returned to cultural venues as soon as they could, and seven out of ten of them travelled away from home for this. There was a lesser inclination to return to seated events (cinema, theatre, concerts), but cultural consumers were slightly quicker to go back to museum exhibition spaces. There were substantial differences by country in this respect: Austrians returned to museums in considerably higher proportion and more actively than did Romanian, Hungarian and Slovak respondents.

The majority considered that museums could be visited in safety between waves of the epidemic, but considered it important for institutions to prevent the accumulation of crowds, to reduce group sizes and require the use of masks and hand-sanitisers. They expressly did not, however, expect museums to reduce ticket prices.

The coronavirus does not seem to have reduced trust in museums: most assumed that the museums had arranged for a suitable level of safety when they opened after the epidemic, and in most cases they enquired about this on websites and at the museums.

On-site survey of 800 respondents

During June 2021, an on-site paper-based survey coordinated with World Art Nouveau Day was taken in four languages and reached 800 visitors from twelve countries. The sex distribution was about 7:3 in favour of women, and the most active age group in the survey was 30–49 years.

The questionnaire tested knowledge of Art Nouveau through a light-hearted visual approach, starting with two odd-man-out questions: to a list of synonyms for Art Nouveau, we added the term Art Deco. This was picked out by 27%, while 30% accepted the mistake. Of the legendary Art Nouveau architects, only 11% spotted Alfons Mucha, and twice as many thought that Gaudi was the one who did not fit.

We then showed thumbnail images of fifteen art works. Twelve were products of the Art Nouveau period, and the other three were earlier. Very few respondents considered the latter to be Art Nouveau, but unfortunately the same was true for Koloman Moser's cigar cabinet and a sideboard from the Thék works.

We also hid false statements among sentences describing aspects of Art Nouveau. The majority got only three questions wrong out of eleven, concerning the origins and distinguishing marks of Art Nouveau and its relation to crafts. The essential characteristics were therefore properly identified by most respondents.

The final task was to pair up interiors and frontages of Art Nouveau buildings from photographs. Two of the six pairs were identified correctly by a very high proportion: the Karlsplatz Stadtbahn station in Vienna and Red House in Bexleyheath. For the other buildings, many chose the wrong interiors: the Reök Palace in Szeged, the Palace of Culture in Târgu Mureş, the Hotel Tassel in Brussels and even Casa Batlló in Barcelona, a prime destination of international mass tourism.

Overall, the highly-qualified, actively travelling and culture-consuming public are well aware of – and like – Art Nouveau, but the organisations who participated in the research still have much to do in disseminating knowledge of it, especially if they wish to reach and attract the less active public and people with lower levels of education. For them, we recommend producing accessible, brightly illustrated publications, outdoor and/or interactive installations and exhibitions, and possibly distributing leaflets and giftware bearing Art Nouveau motifs or setting up Art Nouveau infopoints.