

Visitor Data in an International Context: Comparing Three Large-Scale Projects

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Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies



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Overview

Large-scale research initiatives – in the visitor studies context, those systematically collecting data across multiple museums or locations – have expanded in recent years. Three national projects are presented here: the Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies (COVES, U.S.), Leibniz Platform for Advancing and Supporting Visitor Research in Museums (LePAS, Germany), and Museum And Gallery Insight Consortium (MAGIC, U.K.). Each has the goal of promoting access to and use of high-quality visitor data to allow for organizational benchmarking and improving museum experiences.

Project Backgrounds & Methods



COVES began in 2016 and currently has 102 participating sites. Data are collected using an electronic survey, with random sampling conducted in-person at museum exit. The survey is available in English and Spanish and takes 5 minutes on average.



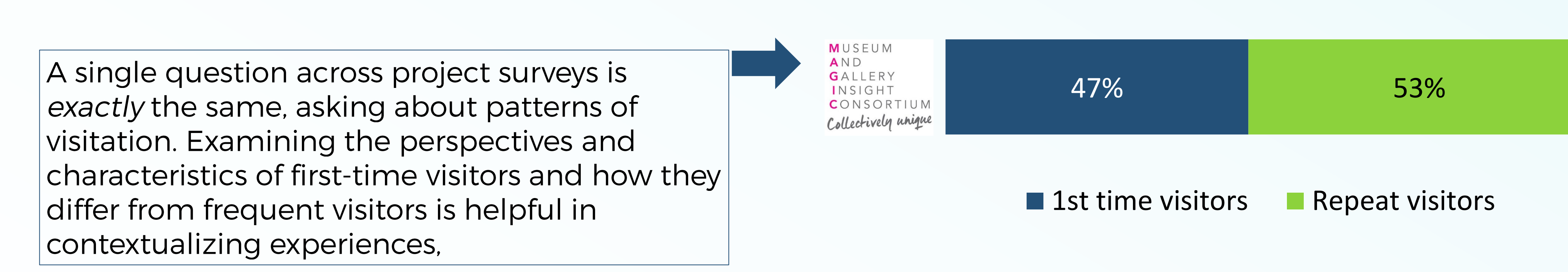
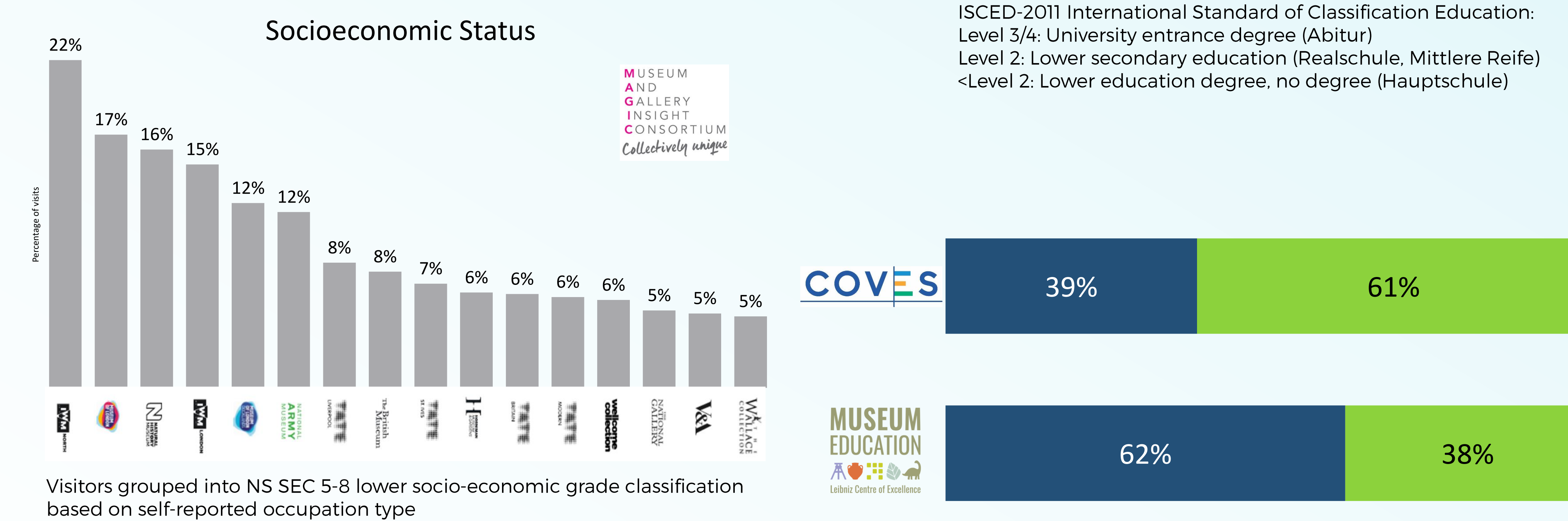
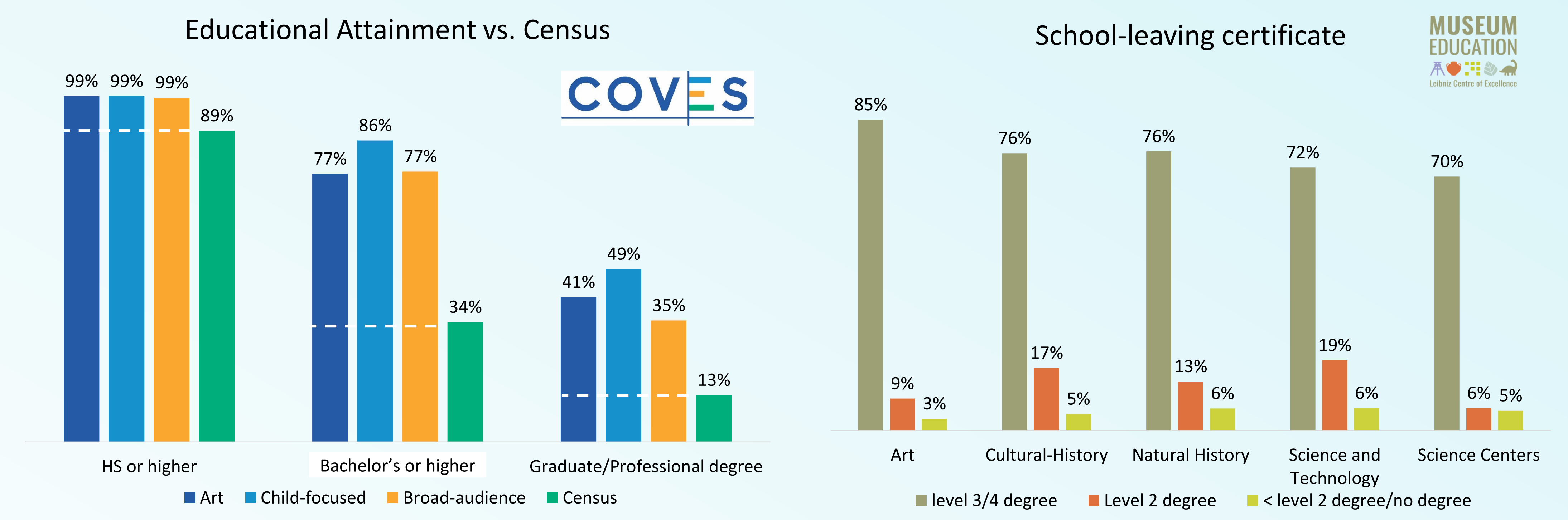
LePAS began in 2018, and has 22 participating sites currently. Data are collected using a mid-visit demographic questionnaire and a post-visit experience & recollection survey. The survey is available in German and English, and takes 15 minutes on average.



MAGIC began in 2009, and has 17 participating sites currently. Data are collected using in-person exit surveys and optional follow-up email surveys. The survey is available in English and 8 other languages, and takes 12 minutes on average.

Comparing Data

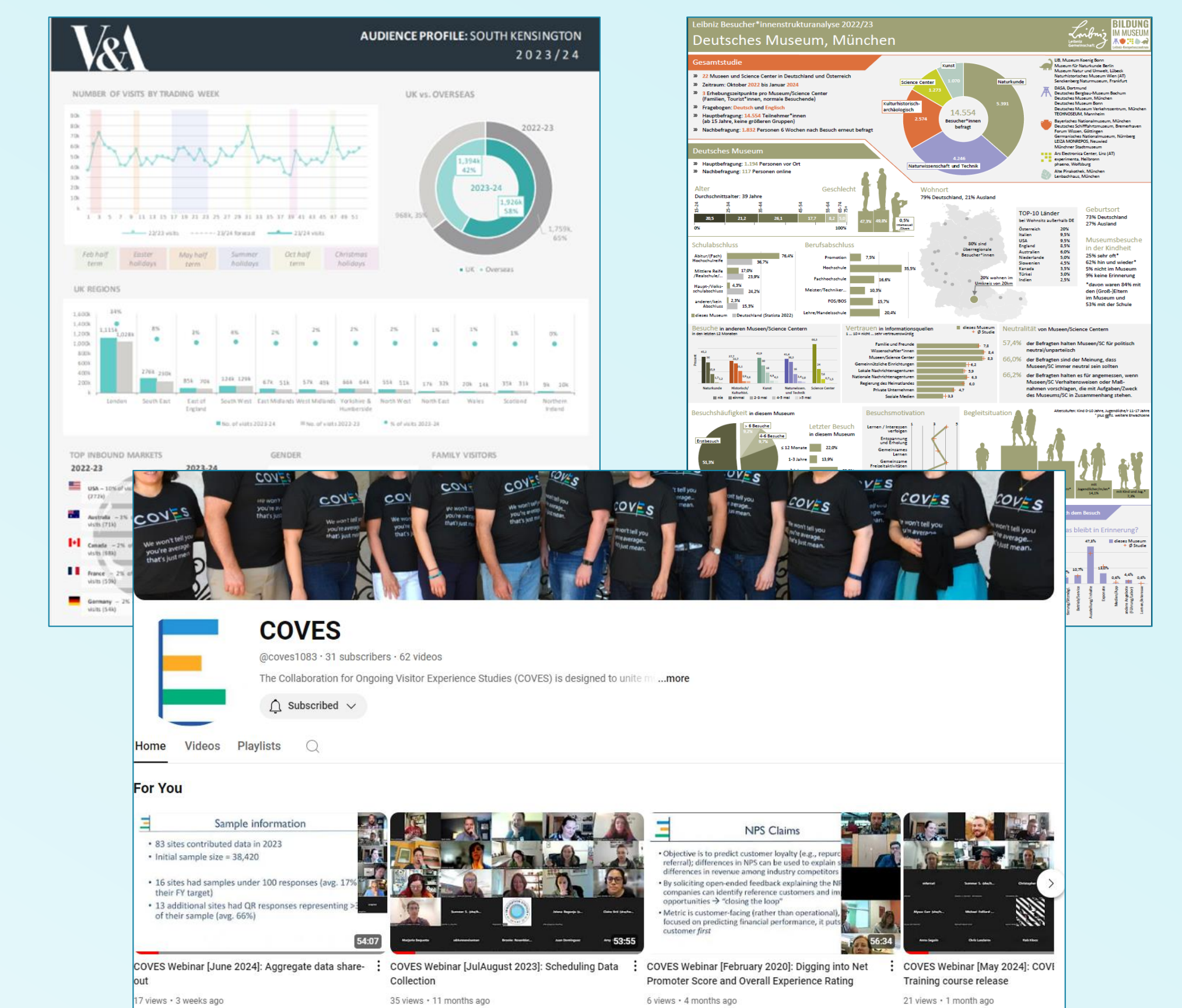
Key differences in survey design due to differences across cultures and regions complicate direct comparisons, but core practices are largely similar for all three projects, with questionnaires asking who visits, why they come, and how they feel about their experiences. One example of measuring visitors' educational background highlights the challenge in aggregating data globally, while drawing attention to the similar pattern of visitors who are typically more well-educated than local populations.



A single question across project surveys is *exactly* the same, asking about patterns of visitation. Examining the perspectives and characteristics of first-time visitors and how they differ from frequent visitors is helpful in contextualizing experiences.

Supporting Data Literacy

Putting data into use and supporting actionable insights have been core to all three initiatives. One method for supporting data literacy common to all is the preparation of data in visual formats, such as reports, infographics, and online dashboards:



Establishing Communities of Practice focused on shared meaning making and supportive practices has also been critical to sustainability over time and across participating sites.

Importance

Understanding visitors, their motivations for visiting, and their experiences are critical to helping museums improve practices and transition towards relevant social actors that promote and shape both dialogue and active participation of different interest groups.

For more information about COVES, or to be put in touch with project leads from LePAS or MAGIC:



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