

Libraries are tops of the (cultural) pops

New ABS Survey shows that public libraries are runaway winners over other cultural activities such as museums, galleries and concerts

THE AUSTRALIAN Bureau of Statistics survey of the cultural interests of Australians looked at visits to libraries, art galleries, and museums, and attendance at classical and popular music concerts, musical and other theatre and dance performances. The findings are based on about 16 000 interviews conducted in June 1991 during the monthly Labour Force Survey.

Almost four and a half million people went to a library at least once during 1990-91; 630 000 went more than thirty times in that year. These numbers were far in excess of those that attended other cultural institutions—art galleries 2.9 million visits, with 166 000 going more than 10 times, and museums 3.6 million visits, with 79 000 going more than 10 times.

An estimated 3.5 million people attended at least one popular music performance during the year, with over a quarter of a million going to more than 10 performances. Also, just under a million people attended at least one classical music concert, while 51 000 people attended more than 10.

Musical theatre (musical comedy and opera) attracted 2.4 million people to at least one performance during the year. Other forms of theatre, including drama and readings, attracted about 2.2 million people.

Excerpts from the ABS report help to build up a profile of library visitors:

- participation rates ranged from 53.4% for females aged 35 to 44 years to 25.0% for males aged 55 to 64 years;
- there was a marked sex difference in attendance levels particularly in the 35 to 44 years age group with a female participation rate of 53.4% compared with 32.3% for males;

- after the Americas (58.3%), people born in the United Kingdom and Ireland had the highest participation rate (46.7%). There was no difference between the participation rate for those people born in Australia and those born outside Australia;
- those never married (primarily young people) had the highest participation rate (41.4%). There was little difference between this group and other marital status categories, except for widowed which had a lower rate (27.7%);
- a participation rate of 53.3% for unemployed females contributed to unemployed persons having a higher participation rate (43.8%) than the employed and persons not in the labour force. Part-time workers, though, had a significantly higher participation rate than full-time workers and the unemployed;
- looking at levels of qualification, the highest percentage participation rate was predictably that of people still at school (78.7%), but this was a small group in the survey which supposedly included only persons 18 years and over. People with Bachelor or higher degrees also had a higher participation rate at 62.8%, compared with only 30.2% for those with no qualifications;
- there were only small variations in frequency of library visits between Capital city and 'Rest of State' regions;
- the ACT led the States with 45.7% participation rate, compared with 43.9% in the NT, 43.3% in WA, 41.2% in SA, 40.7% in Tasmania, 36.2% in Victoria, 34.5% in Queensland, and 34.4% in NSW;
- frequency of visits tended to increase with age: 48.1% of library users aged 65 and over visited more than 15

times during the 12 months compared to 23.7% of library users aged 25 to 34 years.

The publication, *Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues, Australia, June 1991* (Cat. No. 4114.0), the first such report from the ABS National Culture/ Leisure Statistics Unit in Adelaide, is available from Government Bookshops in all capital cities at \$12.50 each. □

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Libraries are full of action, colour and life!

Des Stephens, State Librarian for Queensland, comments, 'I'm not surprised that the ABS report shows a visit to the library is the most popular cultural activity for Australians. The popularity of libraries is obvious. Libraries are no longer silent mausoleums, but places full of colour, action and life.'

Libraries have become part of popular culture, thanks to librarians who have been very astute at understanding community needs. For a group of people who often seem to be introverted, librarians have an excellent track record. Branch libraries came before the establishment of branches by shopping centres; libraries moved to self service ahead of retail stores.

This flexible approach by libraries has stimulated an increase in library users. Twenty years ago 20% of the community were registered as library users in Queensland; this figure is now 40%. □