

What feelings and/or experiences do visitors report having at heritage sites?

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Introduction

This essay will report on a survey that investigates “What feelings and/or experiences do visitors report having at heritage sites”, and compares the responses with previous studies. The research proposal can be seen in Appendix A.

Firstly the aim and the academic rationale of the survey will be outlined. The chosen research methodologies will be described, to be followed up with a discussion on the experiences gained by using these research methodologies. An initial analysis of respondent's answers will be provided. A check will be made if the responses are comparable with previous studies. The essay closes with a conclusion.

Aim of the survey

A survey is conducted in order to form a tentative notion about the people's personal feelings and/or experiences when visiting a heritage site. The term *heritage site* is interpreted loosely and largely self-defined by the respondents, as sites can be geographically and typologically widespread, for instance: natural features (mountains, landscapes); pre-historic monuments (stone circles, Newgrange, Stonehenge); historic monuments (castles, holy wells); war memorials (graveyards, concentration camps); and contemporary monuments (churches, museums). Respondents are allowed to describe their feelings/experience for a specific site (like 'St. Brigit's well') or a single type of sites (like 'holy wells').

Respondents will be asked about any influence the site has on their thoughts/ feelings/ lives and any material or other conditions that might have enhanced or diminished their feelings/experiences.

Academic rationale

The popularity of heritage sites is well recognised. Their attraction to contemporary visitors has been examined in numerous academic studies.² These studies commonly

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² John B. Gatewood and Catherine M. Cameron, "Battlefield Pilgrims at Gettysburg National Military Park," *Ethnology* 43, no. 3 (2004)., Catherine M. Cameron and John B. Gatewood, "Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past," *Ethnology* 42, no. 1 (2003)., Christopher Chippendale, *Stonehenge complete*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1994)., Paul Devereux, *Places of power: Measuring the secret energy of ancient sites* (London: Blanford, 1990)., Institute of Public Understanding of the Past, "Qualitative audience research methodologies.," Univeristy of York, <http://www.york.ac.uk/ipup/projects/audiences/methodologies.html>.

suggest that visitors to heritage sites describe experiences reminiscent of those general human experiences described in literature as for instance: historical; numinous; oceanic; peak and communion.

As quoted by Klompenmaker, Huizinga describes the *historical experience* as a sudden realisation of distinct closeness to the past, a strictly personal experience.³ Otto described the *numinous experience* as a feeling that “may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship”.⁴ Steele refers to Rolland’s definition of *oceanic experience* as a feeling of something limitless, unbounded.⁵ The *peak experience* of Maslow boils down to a “multitude of words: truth, beauty, wholeness, dichotomy-transcendence, aliveness-process, uniqueness, perfection, necessity, completion, justice, order, simplicity, richness, effortlessness, playfulness, and self-sufficiency”.⁶ Not directly related to a physical heritage site, but related to possible experienced links with past people, is the concept of *communion* as defined by Newby and Bell being “the form of human association which refers to affective bonds”.⁷

It has been suggested that these human feelings/experiences could be induced by energies in the cosmos: according to Devereux, many cultures have words for such energies like: ch’i (Chinese); mana (Pacific islanders); pneuma (Greeks); po-wa-ha (Pueblo Indians); prana (Hindus); and wakonda (Sioux).⁸

The above experiences are aspects of daily life; but they are reported to occur comparatively frequently in the heritage environment, as discussed for instance by Gatewood and Cameron. Gatewood and Cameron’s exploratory surveys are of interest to this survey as they consider visitor’s reactions to several heritage sites: “Some indicate a quest for a deeper experience at heritage sites and a desire to make a personal connection with the people and spirit(s) of earlier times”. Borrowing Otto’s terminology, they describes this as ‘Numen-seeking’.⁹

They defined three dimensions of this Numen-seeking concept: 1) a deep engagement or transcendence; 2) a strong affective experience of empathy; and 3) an experience of being in the presence of something holy: awe and reverence.¹⁰

They propose a Numen-index to provide a quantitative index for measuring the Numen-seeking motive.¹¹ A respondent’s Numen-index (a Likert scale) is calculated by averaging each respondent’s rating-scale responses to a set of statements. Gatewood and Cameron’s set of statements has been chosen by using a unidimensional

³ Hein Klompenmaker and Henk Nijkeuter, *Dichter bij het hunebed* (Zuidwolde: Het Drentse Boek, 2005), 8.

⁴ Rudolf Otto, *The idea of the holy: An Inquiry Into the Non Rational Factor in the Idea of the divine*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford Univeristy press, 1926), 12.

⁵ Robert S. Steele and Susan Virginia Swinney, *Freud and Jung, conflicts of interpretation* (Law Book Co of Australasia, 1982), 322.

⁶ Abram Maslow, *The farther reaches of human nature* (Canada: Penguin Books, 1976), 106.

⁷ C. Bell and H. Newby, "Communion, communalism, class and community action: The social sources of the new urban politics.," in *Social areas in cities: Processes, patterns, and problems*, ed. D. Herbert and R. Johnston (Chichester: Wiley, 1978), 291.

⁸ Devereux, *Places of power: Measuring the secret energy of ancient sites*: Chapter 1.

⁹ Cameron and Gatewood, "Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past," 57.

¹⁰ Gatewood and Cameron, "Battlefield Pilgrims at Gettysburg National Military Park," 208.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

Likert/summative scaling model.¹² My survey will utilize the Numen-index idea of Cameron and Gatewood.

Some heritage sites could have a possible past or contemporary cosmological/ religious/ ceremonial significance (like passage mounds, churches, landscapes), while other sites could have a contemporary historical/political significance (like graves, museums, landscapes, concentration camps).¹³

The act of travelling and visiting such heritage sites can sometimes be seen as a type of pilgrimage; in either a traditional (Religion/Church) or in a secular (non Religion/Church) context.¹⁴ According to Margre, pilgrimage's themes can be related to; a group or an individual activity; the travel itself and/or the object/shrine itself; a touristic or spiritual/sacred reason; and a religion or secular context.¹⁵

Urry provides ideas why humans travel to other people, objects, landscapes or events. First he presents four methods of travel; the observer travels in person: *corporeal travel*; the observer makes an *imaginative travel* through real-life situations (for instance using spoken words, radio, TV); the observer makes a *virtually travel* by using simulated situations (for instance through the Internet, game consoles, films, guided imagery); or the travel is realised by the *object moving* to the observer.¹⁶

The result of this travel can be threefold; a *face-to-face* meeting with other people, a *face-the-place* meeting where the encounter is around some particular landscape/site; and a *face-the-moment* meeting for a particular event.¹⁷

Bowman relates these different types of meetings to the concept of pilgrimage around Glastonbury.¹⁸ While meeting like-minded people can be important (face-to-face), the place/site itself is most of the times the reason for the travel (face-the-place), and such a meeting can be stimulated by a certain event; like a solar eclipse (face-the-moment).

Chippendale mentions three streams of experiences linked with Stonehenge: archaeology (excavating and experiencing the material object/world), astronomy (the possible relations with the celestial world) and alternative archaeologies ("a feeling that the measure of a wonder like Stonehenge is not to be had by the narrow and reductionist mind of a 'rational scientist'").¹⁹

By making Chippendale's first two streams more general; archaeology and the general recognised 'raisons d'être' (aka 'reasons to be') of a site are covered by the following

¹² McIver, J. P. and E. G. Carmines. Unidimensional Scaling (Newbury park, Sage publications, 1981, Chapter 3.

¹³ Cameron and Gatewood, "Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past," 56.

¹⁴ Peter Jan Margry, "Secular pilgrimage: A contradiction in terms?," in *Shrines and pilgrimage in the modern world: New itineraries into the sacred*, ed. Peter Jan Margry (Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 13, 17.

¹⁵ Ibid., 20-32.

¹⁶ John Urry, "Mobility and proximity," (2001),

<http://www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/mobilenetwork/downloads/urry1stpaper.doc.>, Section 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., Section 2

¹⁸ Marion Bowman, "Going with the flow: Contemporary pilgrimage in Glastonbury," in *Shrines and pilgrimage in the modern world: New itineraries into the sacred*, ed. Peter Jan Margry (Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 246-47.

¹⁹ Chippendale, *Stonehenge complete*: Chapter 15.

phenomena: the physical site/landscape;²⁰ mythology;²¹ astronomy;²² acoustic²³ and artistic²⁴ aspects of the sites. Furthermore Chippendale²⁵ and Klompenmarker²⁶ describe the changes over time in people's perceptions of respectively Stonehenge and the Dutch Hunebedden.

Chippendale's third stream; the alternative archaeologies, is related to present day experiences of sites: Wallis/Blain describe how pagans utilise certain sites;²⁷ Richardson provides accounts of informants who are established in for instance the Druid, New Age, Pagan movements;²⁸ and heritage site curators commission research with a view to maintaining sites' popularity by maximising visitors' site experiences.²⁹ Others write about how people are physically affected by sites: Bond describes the rituals, cures and cults of holy wells³⁰ and some people try to explain the reasons why sites exhibit such experiences/feelings, for instance the investigations of Devereux on the influences of magnetism, acoustic and radiation³¹ and Nelson's work on 'consciousness fields'.³²

Rarer are papers on the experiences/feelings of individuals not explicitly part of 'alternative' movements. My research project has collected experiences/feelings reported by visitors to heritage sites in anticipation of comparing my data with the studies mentioned above.

Chosen research methodology

My methodology for setting up research in general is that I ask ideas/feedback from people who I involved before in my archaeocosmology studies; by asking if they know others who have done similar surveys. At a certain moment one person mentioned the word 'Numen'! This opened a substantial lead towards finding studies, which were relevant to surveying the experiences and/or feelings of visitors at heritage sites. Cameron and Gatewood's article was one of these; they had done surveys at Bethlehem (USA) and Gettysburg National Military Park (USA) around 'Numen-seeking'.

Bryman discusses several advantages of combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies: the possibility of triangulating knowledge (if the methodologies support or contradict each other); facilitating quantitative research by qualitative research (and

²⁰ Michael J. O'Kelly, "Newgrange in early Irish literature," in *Negrange: Archaeology, art and legend* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1982).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Martin Brennan, "Introduction," in *The stars and the stones: Ancient art and astronomy in Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1983).

²³ Paul Devereux, *Stone age soundtracks; The acoustic archaeology of ancient sites* (London: Vega, 2001).

²⁴ Brennan, "Introduction."

²⁵ Chippendale, *Stonehenge complete*.

²⁶ Hein Klompenmaker, *Kijk op keien*, ed. Christine Waslander, Cultuurhistorische Reeks (Meppel: Edu'Actief B.V., 1994).

²⁷ Robert J. Wallis and Jenny Blain, "Sites, Sacredness, and Stories: Interactions of Archaeology and Contemporary Paganism," *Folklore* 114, no. 3 (2003).

²⁸ Alan Richardson, *Spirit of the stones: Vision of sacred Britain* (London: Virgin, 2001).

²⁹ Institute_of_Public_Understanding_of_the_Past, "Qualitative audience research methodologies."

³⁰ Janet Bond, *Cures and curses: Ritual and cult at holy wells* (Loughborough: Heart of Albion Press, 2006).

³¹ Devereux, *Places of power: Measuring the secret energy of ancient sites*.

³² R.D. Nelson et al., "FieldREG II: Consciousness field effects: Replications and Explorations," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 12, no. 3 (1998).

vice versa); providing a more general picture by combining the two methodologies: recognising micro level (qualitative) and macro level (quantitative) data; making sure that both process (qualitative) and structure (quantitative) are covered (and facilitating relationships between variables); and allowing phasing of the research project itself (e.g. start with a qualitative phase and base a quantitative phase upon initial information collected and vice versa).³³

Following Bryman's recommendation, my survey will combine quantitative methods (mainly closed-ended questions)³⁴ and qualitative methods (open-ended questions and unstructured interviews face-to face or by phone).³⁵

Gatewood and Cameron used closed-ended and open-ended questions when interviewing site visitors,³⁶ and a subset of these (related to their proposed Numen-index) have been used in my survey. I was not able to use more of their questions, as I only got access to their full questionnaire in the middle of my survey.³⁷

The Internet based questionnaire (using SurveyMonkey³⁸) can be seen in Appendix B and a paper based version in Appendix C. The questionnaire was conducted in an anonymous way.

Due to feedback of respondents in Question 25 (Q25: "Your feedback for improving this questionnaire is really appreciated"); some questions were changed while the questionnaire was on-line. The main changes were about making sure that the explanatory text describes the idea of 'type of sites' better (Q6) and adding additional statements around pilgrim feeling and group experiences (Q20).

Target groups used in this survey

Two different groups have been targeted in this survey. Group1 is a combination of friends, family and people interested in the archaeocosmology ('co-workers'). Group2 are visitors to Newgrange, which is a Neolithic and possibly solar aligned monument in Ireland.

Participants in the survey were adults (equal or older than 18³⁹).

Group1

Group1 consisted of three subgroups. Two subgroups are members of Yahoo Internet-based communities: the first community (called *archaeocosmology*⁴⁰) consists of ~150 people who are interested in cosmological aspects of ancient sites; the second community (called *irish-stones*⁴¹) consists of ~100 people who are interested in Irish megalithic sites. The interest of members of the internet-based communities includes qualitative aspects (like myths, experiences) as well as quantitative ones (like astronomy, measurements).

³³ Alan Bryman, *Quantity and quality in social research*, ed. Martin Bulmer, 3rd, 4th ed., Contemporary social research (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), Chapter 6 and 7.

³⁴ Ibid., Chapter 2.

³⁵ Ibid., 46-47.

³⁶ Gatewood and Cameron, "Battlefield Pilgrims at Gettysburg National Military Park," 197.

³⁷ John Gatewood. Gettysburg survey: July 22-23, 1999, Pers. comm: March 23rd 2011.

³⁸ Victor Reijs, "Experiences/feelings at heritage sites," SurveyMonkey, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NewgrangeExperience>

³⁹ United Nations, "Convention on the rights of the child," in *Article 1* (1989).

⁴⁰ Victor Reijs, "archaeocosmology: Discuss things around archaeocosmology," Yahoo, <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/archaeocosmology/>.

⁴¹ ———, "irish-stones: E-group on megalithic Irish buildings," Yahoo, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/irish-stones/>.

The third subgroup is family & friends and people who I involved in my past archaeocosmology studies (mostly at academic level). This subgroup comprised of ~180 people.

For these subgroups there is an insider aspect,⁴² as I am the owner/moderator of both these Yahoo communities or I am family/friend. This means that I will need to make sure that I take up a self-reflective standpoint when conducting this survey.⁴³

This Group1 (~400 unique persons) was asked to fill in an Internet based questionnaire and 126 people responded (from March 19th, 2011 to April 11th, 2011).

From Group1, two respondents were selected for an interview, based on; their willingness to be interviewed; the breath and uniqueness of their responses; and being a relatively unknown person to me. One interview was phone based and the other one was face-to-face (person A and B; see (available on request)

Appendix D).

Group2

Group2 consisted of people visiting Newgrange. I was allowed to do my field work at Brú na Bóinne visitor centre (after the University of Wales provided a liability insurance).

On the day of my survey (March 31st, 2011) some 130 people, excluding school groups, visited Newgrange. Finding the right moment to distribute the questionnaire needed some tuning. Early in the process I decided to hand the questionnaires out to people who were in the Brú na Bóinne restaurant waiting to go to Newgrange or just coming back from Newgrange. People eating a warm meal were not included. This was assumed to be the least disturbing process for the respondents. This though meant that only a small part of the potential people was asked to take part in the survey.

The paper based questionnaire was distributed in person to some 40 people, who said they would consider filling in the questionnaire; some 26 were returned. Three volunteering people have been interviewed in person (person C, D and E; see (available on request)

Appendix D).

Other aspects concerning the target groups

Invitation e-mails have been sent out to the subgroups of Group1. The number of filled-in questionnaires has been logged (see Appendix E1) noting the time of the invitation and reminder e-mails (only one reminder was sent). One can see from this log that an e-mail is reacted upon without one or two days; after that time the number of responses reduces considerable.

Unplanned and gladly accepted; some respondents put the questionnaire's link on their Facebook and web pages. Also unplanned discussions about the why and how of the questionnaire happened on the irish-stones community and during pub talks.

⁴² Russell T. McCutcheon, "General introduction," in *The insider/outsider problem in the studies of religion: A reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 1999).

⁴³ Barbara A. Babcock, "Reflexivity: Definitions and discriminations," *Semiotica* 10, no. 1/2 (1980): 1.

The respondents have been promised to get access to an on-line version of this essay.

Discussion of the survey

The discussion of the survey is at several levels. There are comparisons possible between the different Groups used in the survey and there is the possibility to compare aspects with comparable studies as mentioned in section Academic rationale. The publications of Gatewood and Cameron⁴⁴ will provide the bulk of this comparison, but also the points from Margre,⁴⁵ Bowman⁴⁶ and others will be used in this comparison.

First quantitative questions and then a discussion around more qualitative experiences and feelings of the people will be provided.

Discussion of quantitative data

Several closed-ended questions of the questionnaire will be discussed below.

Demographic characteristics

Question	Group1	Group2	Gettysburg ⁴⁷
Responses received	123	26	253
Response rate	~32%	~65%	63%
Q1: Residence	USA(27%) UK(23%) Ireland (21%) The Netherlands (12%) Rest of Europe (12%)	Ireland (60%) USA (32%) France (8%)	USA (98%) Europe (1%) Australia (1%)
Q2: Gender	Male (70%) Female (29%)	Female (63%) Male (37%)	Male (52%) Female (48%)
Q3: Age bracket	50-69 (58%)	50-69 (58%)	40-59 (52%)
Q5: Work/interest	Education (19%) Arts/Entertainment (19%) Life/Social sciences (13%) Retired (10%)	Student (38%) Education (17%) Architecture/Engineering (13%) Arts/Entertainment (8%)	Not asked
Q7: Site location	UK (29%) Ireland (25%) The Netherlands (8%) France (8%) USA (8%) Rest of Europe (12%) South America (7%)	Ireland (100%)	USA (100%) For most questions unknown
Q12: Visits	>=2 visits (81%) Average visits ~ 12	>=2 visits (50%) Average visits ~ 4	>=2 visits (55%) Average visits ~ 5

Group1 result maps the geographical dispersion of my friend, family and co-workers.

Group2 is expected to be around Ireland with a large amount of American tourists.

The Gettysburg distribution was expected from their perspective.

⁴⁴ Cameron and Gatewood, "Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past." and Gatewood and Cameron, "Battlefield Pilgrims at Gettysburg National Military Park."

⁴⁵ Margry, "Secular pilgrimage: A contradiction in terms?."

⁴⁶ Bowman, "Going with the flow: Contemporary pilgrimage in Glastonbury."

⁴⁷ Gatewood and Cameron, "Battlefield Pilgrims at Gettysburg National Military Park," 198.

The gender distribution of Group1 is mainly determined by the people I work together on my archaeocosmology studies. Group2's distribution is due to a large female student group.

The Gettysburg group distribution had an only slightly skewed male/female distribution.

The age group distribution for Group1 is close to my own age bracket (50 to 59). Group2 and Gettysburg age distributions are closer to each, when looking at the build up of the age distribution (see Appendix E2).

People in Group1 have their chosen (favourite or most-moving) site dispersed over several continents; (sacred) landscape (like Death Valley, Bennachie, Kilauea Volcano, Veluwe); Neolithic/bronze age sites (like Brú na Boínne, Glastonbury, Avebury, Hunebedden); cultural sites in Greece and Southern America; museums (like Munich), religious sites (like Islam, Jewish, Catholic), holy wells, war related (like Normandy, Westerbork, Auschwitz), rock art sites (like Native American, Peterborough) and a **web site** about archaeology. Group2 is, by definition, always Newgrange in Ireland.

The Gettysburg group gave responses to some Gettysburg related questions, while most of their questions were related to 'historic sites and museums' in general; so locations unknown.

It looks that Group1 people have visited much more their chosen site than Group2 and the Gettysburg group. This might be expected as Group1 includes many people who work (professionally or out of interest) on their **chosen** site.

The significance of the heritage site for the respondents (Q11, see Appendix E3) is for all groups (incl. Gettysburg group) comparable; it is the (pre-)historic with its recognised *raison d'être* and the personal connection following in importance.

The demographics of the three Groups are not identical. This perhaps does not have influence on the Numen-seeking aspect as, according to Cameron and Gatewood, the demographic variables don't significantly determine the 'Numen-seeking' aspect.⁴⁸

Numen-index_{VR} and pilgrim feeling

Group1 and 2 have been asked to rate (from 1 to 6) certain statements (Q20). This idea was gained from the Gatewood and Cameron.⁴⁹ Gatewood⁵⁰ analysed the responses received from Group1 and Group2 and proposed to use 7 statements to measure the Numen-index_{VR} (see Appendix E4); three statements less than Gatewood and Cameron's themselves used for their Numen-index. The Numen-index_{VR} (a summative Likert scale) has been calculated by averaging the rate-scale responses of these 7 statements for each respondent in Group1 and 2.

The cumulative frequency functions of the Numen-indexes_{VR} seem to be somewhat different for Group1 and 2 (see Appendix E5). Group2 seems to have overall a lower Numen-index_{VR} value. This might mean that Group1 and Group2 have a somewhat different level of Numen-seeking, which might be explainable as Group1 people were

⁴⁸ Cameron and Gatewood, "Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past," Table 4, page 64.

⁴⁹ Gatewood and Cameron, "Battlefield Pilgrims at Gettysburg National Military Park," 214.

⁵⁰ John Gatewood. Numen-index-construction process from Group1 and 2 responses, Pers. comm: April 10th 2011.

allowed to choose their favourite or most moving site, while Group2 people were only allowed to relate to Newgrange.

The above idea that Group1 and 2 have a different Numen-index_{VR} is mapped by the answers to the statement “I feel myself a pilgrim to my favourite site”. Group1 people feel themselves more a pilgrim than the people in Group2 (see Appendix E6).

This maps the idea that the cumulative frequency functions of pilgrim feeling (see Appendix E7) looks quite similar to the cumulative frequency functions of the Numen-index_{VR}.

Discussion of qualitative data

Several open-ended questions of the questionnaire and interviews will be discussed below. As the respondents provided textual or vocal input, a kind of classification has been done by me. One needs to be aware that this might have introduced generalisation and thus loss of nuances⁵¹. Nuances will be added by quotes from interviewees and respondents.

Meeting the site for the first time

The way how Group1 and Group2 meet the heritage site for the first time shows some differences (see Appendix E8). It looks that Group1 relied more on chance encounter during travel. Group2 seemed to have used study, books and TV more than Group1 for meeting their heritage site for the first time.

An example of someone encountering a site:

Avebury, England: “*Whilst house hunting in Wiltshire.*”

Responses related to planned visits (through for instance books, pictures):

Horseshoe Canyon, USA: “*Saw picture of Holy Ghost pictograph in book.*”

Easter Island, Chile: “Actually in a book by Peter Kolosimo, when I was probably 7.”

Palenque, Mexico: “*Misty morning, walking down a long walkway and then opened up into a circle. So reverent and spiritual.*”

Interviewee A talks about the very first time seeing a Megalithic site “which was the beginning of a journey of great discovery”:

Carnac, France: “We had heard about them, but we had no idea what we are going to see. We drove down the road, and you are driving and it is flat and you come through trees and suddenly you are at the edge of the town and there they were! And I remember we pulled over and I sort of leaped out and pressed my nose against the green metal fence there that keeps you separate from the stones and I was just ... What is this!? What is this about!? I was just astounded. Just completely astounded, something about the quantity ... that they just went on and on and on ... They were just amazing to me.”

⁵¹ A.N. Oppenheim, "The quantification of questionnaire data," in *Social research methods: A reader*, ed. Clive Seale (Routledge, 2003), 142.

Both Groups mention childhood (around 15%). This is an unexpected find, although experience in childhood can have a large impact on adult's interests. This maps on Hoffman's research on childhood peak-experiences where he found "that some of us undergo profound spiritual experiences during childhood, and that these can impart long-lasting meaning and direction in our lives."⁵²

One person stated:

Kilauea Volcano, Hawaii: *"On a secondary school music group concert tour. Our group was taken to Kilauea for a tour; I sat in the observation pavilion, looking at the blasted lava fields and the park ranger giving the presentation said, 'You are sitting on top of the most active volcano in the world.' Suddenly, I sat up and stared at the landscape with intense interest. What might happen? Would lava fountains suddenly erupt next to the building? It was the first time I had suddenly felt, deep within, 'the earth is alive'."*

Someone else:

Yosemite, USA: *"Parents took me there at age two and spoke of it to me with reverence. We then walked on foot for two weeks there (me in my father's backpack)."*

During the interview with person C such a link with childhood and planting a seed was mentioned:

Newgrange, Ireland: *"As a young fellow ... I suppose it planted a seed, a seed of curiosity ... Use it as an education centre for young children ... when they come back ... they have more appreciation what in the past people did ... this is a magnificent piece of culture, at least a civilisation was here before us, it should broaden our minds, open our eyes and open our ears. Some kind it should bring us together then divide us, you know."*

Experiences/feelings at the site

The people of Group1 and 2 were asked what type of experiences/feelings they had at the heritage site (Q14). This ranged from; auditory; sensory; expressional; to state of mind concepts (see Appendix E9). Both Groups seem to give a comparable distribution of feelings and experiences. 'Closeness to the past', 'something sacred', 'awe', 'uniqueness', 'beauty' and 'reverence' scored high in both groups. 'Empathy' and 'standing hairs' were scored more times by Group1, while 'astonishment' and 'limitless' were scored more times by Group2.

The above reported experiences/feelings map well on; *historical experience* of Huizinga;⁵³ *numinous experience* of Otto;⁵⁴ *peak experience* of Maslow;⁵⁵ and *oceanic experience* of Rolland.⁵⁶ Due to this, one can more or less deduct that the concept of Numen-seeking is applicable.

⁵² Edward Hoffman, "The wonder years," *Yoga Journal* January/February(1990): 91.

⁵³ Klompenmaker and Nijkeuter, *Dichter bij het hunebed*: 8.

⁵⁴ Otto, *The idea of the holy: An Inquiry Into the Non Rational Factor in the Idea of the divine*: 12.

⁵⁵ Maslow, *The farther reaches of human nature*: 106.

⁵⁶ Steele and Swinney, *Freud and Jung, conflicts of interpretation*: 322.

Someone visiting Grange Circle experienced the following:

Lough Gur, Ireland: *“I was eager to go there on our first trip to Ireland, and the Grange Circle really impressed me in many ways – it’s always been very special to me since. I really felt a personal connection and energy there. I’ve visited it each of the three times we’ve been in Ireland.”*

Some other people’s experiences/feelings:

Avebury, England: *“Every time I visit, it feels like a first visit.”*

Waterton Lake National Park, Canada: *“One of the most intense connections I had with my site were the memories I have about the people I was with at this site. Sharing my joy and interest in this site was very important to me.”*

The idea Bell and Newby’s affective bonds of communion⁵⁷ can be witnessed in the above quote.

A person visiting a lone soldier's burial site:

Rome, Italy: *“Feeling of empathy and sadness.”*

Interviewed person D was emotional (the person's eyes became watery) when talking about the first encounter with Newgrange:

Newgrange, Ireland: *“... When we could start seeing it, I started immediately getting the sense of some kind of sacred place ... we stood outside in this brisk wind ... the wind seemed to be an important part of it; blowing us around this place, either we needed to go inside or we did not belong here ... and when we went inside ... and I got in the main area, it was again the most sacred place I have ever felt, the hairs in the back of my neck stood up and ... I **love** the spiral, I use that as my personal spiritual symbol, and what I really wanted to do was touch them all, I couldn't, but I **really** wanted to rub my hands on them. When he turned the light off, even though it was a 40W bulb and not the sun, the feeling that that still travels down the same path, as it did that many thousands of years ... is ... was ... uh ... a very **confirming** and **spiritual** experience. That there is this place in the universe that goes on, and no matter what we do and no matter how you want to destroy it ...”*

Interviewed person E sometimes stumbled over the spoken words when telling about the experiences:

Newgrange, Ireland: *“This all is very overwhelming ... Obviously this is a personal experience ... It could be like a retreat ... You can't help to go that place, **I am sorry**, if you can't go to this place at some level of spirituality, you need to see a shrink, there is a problem, **a big problem**. I just think it is so primal ... as I said when he turned the light out, the brain stops, it just stops, *wwwhy?* ... sorry ...”*

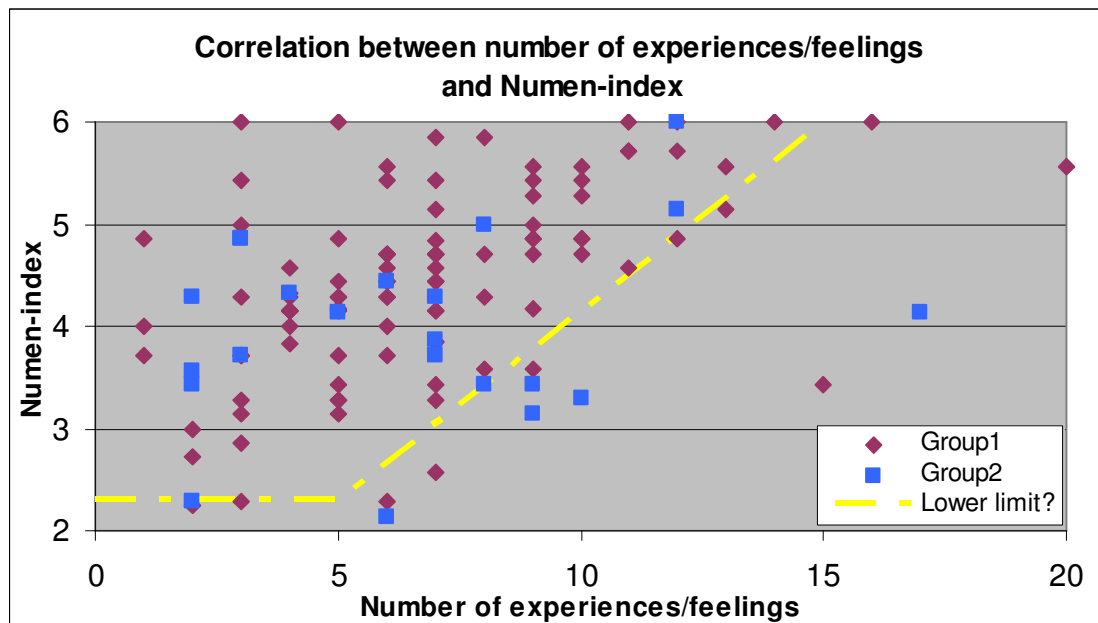
⁵⁷ Bell and Newby, "Communion, communalism, class and community action: The social sources of the new urban politics.," 291.

Gettysburg's survey measured this aspect differently, there the experiences/ feelings of people were measured in a quantitative way: people had to rate a fix list of adjectives applicable to Gettysburg Park,⁵⁸ thus removing some qualitative aspects.

Margre refers to Reader and Walter about their finding that “pilgrims find it difficult to formulate their motives.”⁵⁹ Interviewee B described this difficulty in formulating feelings when searching for a new or lost holy well:

Holy wells, Ireland: *“What I enjoy about holy wells in general is that every one of them is different, yet they are all the same. Very hard to put my finger on, why I enjoy them ... extremely difficult ... It is a very unique feeling, even to put the word calm or peaceful would not describe it. There is definitely excitement ... and even looking for a well the excitement of anticipation of finding. Particularly maybe one that I have not been to for a long time; it is a very special feeling of the place”*

Reader and Walter see the wide variety of pilgrim's motives as “striking, but even more so is their sheer number.”⁶⁰ Stimulated by this observation and Bryman’s ideas to combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies⁶¹; in the below graph for each respondent his/her Numen-index_{VR} (which uses a set of statements of Q20, see Appendix E1E1E4) has been correlated with his/her number of experiences/feelings mentioned in Q14. This gives the below correlations for Group1 and 2:



Looking at the above picture there is some correlation between the number of experiences/feelings and the Numen-index_{VR}, more or less regardless of which Group. It looks that the number of experiences/feelings reported by a respondent defines a lower limit of that respondent's Numen-index_{VR}. More study is needed to substantiate this.

⁵⁸ Gatewood and Cameron, "Battlefield Pilgrims at Gettysburg National Military Park," 200-01.

⁵⁹ Margry, "Secular pilgrimage: A contradiction in terms?," 29.

⁶⁰ Margry, "Secular pilgrimage: A contradiction in terms?," 29.

⁶¹ Alan Bryman, *Quantity and quality in social research*, Chapter 6 and 7

Influences of the site on your life

People in Group1 and 2 were also asked (Q21, Q22 and Q23) about what influences these visits have on their lives (see Appendix E10) and how this experience is enhanced (see Appendix E11) and diminished (see Appendix E12). The major influences mentioned are that their site 'asks' for respect and provides perspective to people's lives. The site also provides spiritual wealth; a sense of focus and belonging; and stimulates the intellectual interest.

Some responses:

Chaco Canyon, USA: *"Allowed me to meet some very interesting people and learn a lot about acoustics and archaeoastronomy."*

Bennachie, Scotland: *"It becomes part of my self identity and mythical being, like a focus of ancientness and presence through the age of people's lives and the land they live in."*

Loughcrew, Ireland: *"As a matter of intellectual interest about what its uses were and what it and its relationship to the landscape meant to those who used it, lived on it or visited it; and how these things related to legends about the place."*

Bryn Celli Ddu, Wales: *"Go at night or in the very early morning of the equinoxes and summer solstice when the light show of the rising sun is spectacular."*

The above quotes give a clear view that the ideas of Urry about face-to-face, face-the-place and face-the-moment⁶² are experienced using *corporeal travel* to get at the heritage site. The next quote gives a link to an *imaginative travel* after an earlier visit:⁶³

Texel, The Netherlands: *"A positive influence, I can become joyful when thinking back. Due to the peace I can clean my head. For some moments I am a little more distant from possible 'problems'"*

Another *imaginative travel* resulted in the following quotes written in the Internet guest book which collected people's experiences during the winter solstice Internet broadcasts at Maeshowe, Scotland (period 1998 to 2009):⁶⁴

Maeshowe from Austria: *"I have tried several times and always got a still picture. Beautiful though it was. Today I am thrilled to get a real 'live' picture. Thanks a million and keep up the good work."*

Maeshowe from Canada: *"Thank you so very much for creating such an interesting place. The pictures are magnetic and give me a sense of holiness with the universe."*

One of the interviewees (person B) has Facebook page on holy wells:

⁶² John Urry, "Mobility and proximity," Section 1-2.

⁶³ Translation from Dutch: "Een positieve invloed, je kunt er blij van worden als je eraan terug denkt, door de rust kan je je hoofd leegmaken, je staat even wat verder af van mogelijke 'problemen'"

⁶⁴ "Guest book Maeshowe: Megalithic Cam-page." html GEAR, <http://mercury.guestworld.com/wgb/wgbview.dbm?owner=maeshowe>, 13, 24.

Holy wells, Facebook: *“One of the things about the likes of Facebook, is that people tend to gravitate towards you, people that want to find out ... I find that there is absolutely huge interest in wells, just people that have come on asking where wells are in their area or some people might live a few door steps from a well and they might not know and it might be something they are really interested in.”*

Other reactions how sites influenced respondents:

Brú na Boínne, Ireland: *“It’s my main source of material wealth as I work there. It’s my main source of spiritual wealth as a pagan. That’s pretty influential!”*

Glencolumbkille Valley, Ireland: *“Hard to say – a reminder of what it is to be at peace?”*

Callanish, Scotland: *“Don’t really want to put into words. I am connected to this place at all times and part of me is always there.”*

Auschwitz, Poland: *“Helps me to forgive mankind for its inhumanity.”*

The Piper Stone, Ireland: *“The site set me on a passion and path to my present art.”*

Interviewee A reiterates on the changing aspects of site and visitor:

Powerful places: *“It has put us on a path, that we continue to follow and it does not end. No, it gets better. It is not a straight path, it is a spiral. I mean you go back to the same place but they are different. When you go back the next time, because you are different they are different, weather is different, the season is different, the star alignments are different. Who knows...”*

The influence of a site is enhanced due to for instance; the landscape; a sense of freedom and wonder; and weather conditions, but it is diminished due to for instance noisy, modern build-up environment and a touristy atmosphere.

An example of the weather conditions emerged during the interview with person B:

St. Columbkille's Well, Ireland: *“If you visit holy wells at different times, you get different feelings. Very powerful feeling; there is one St. Columbkille's well in Woodtown with a bridge over the stream, that is a very peaceful place, particularly when it is very windy.”*

Feedback on the questionnaire itself

Q25 asked for feedback on the questionnaire itself (see Appendix E13), like; ideas for new questions for a future survey; improvements which I was able to include during this survey; and the appreciation for doing this survey. Some reactions:

“Victor, some questions are a bit weird.”

“Maybe add a question: Was the ‘getting there’ part of the allure?”

A few reactions trigger another thought:

“I thought you studied astrology, but I noticed from your business card, your subject is archaeocosmology, interesting!”

“As you made the questionnaire, I expected to need to fill in a religious site, I should have realised that I could choose something else; something more favourite.”

It looks here that the informant is putting his/her values into the responses. In some way that is what an interview is about: to find out the informant's ideas. But if the informant is reacting on the researcher a biased informant's response might be provided. Even if that is part of the informant, the researcher needs to realise that prejudice⁶⁵ and social desirability bias⁶⁶ can happen.

Conclusions

The above experiences/feelings on heritage sites cover many aspects. It covers the three streams as proposed by Chippendale; archaeology; astronomy (or in general the recognised *raison d'être* of the site); and alternative archaeology, where “a feeling that the measure of a wonder like Stonehenge is not to be had by the narrow and reductionist mind of a ‘rational scientist’”.⁶⁷

Chippendale's feeling has been tentatively shown to be related to historical, numinous, oceanic and peak experiences. The proposed Numen-index of Gatewood and Cameron has been evaluated for this survey and it shows that the responses gained in this survey are more or less aligned with Gatewood and Cameron's results. Additionally it has been shown that there is a possible relation between the proposed Numen-index and the respondent's feeling of being a pilgrim and the number of expressed experiences/feelings. The secular pilgrimage context of Margre can be seen in the responses, as several see themselves as a pilgrim and because they related to the heritage site in a spiritual and/or sacred way; sometimes the heritage site provides a form of transcendence to the respondent.

Many received answers to the survey have not been (fully) evaluated, so this leaves more room for future research, possibly to reveal a wealth of more information. Other aspects need to be reflected upon when continuing this research, for instance; an evaluation of the proposed Numen-index's validity including its dependency on demographics; a more structured classification/taxonomy for the open-ended questions; inclusion of questionnaire changes proposed by respondents; a better hand-out procedures for the paper questionnaire; and a more balanced respondents base.

I want to end with the following quote:

“Thank you very much, Victor, I really enjoyed doing the survey. It helped me to put into words some of my feelings on this site... Good luck with the project!”

⁶⁵ Bernard E. Whitley and Mary E. Kite, *The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination* (Wadsworth Publishing, 2009), 227.

⁶⁶ Jan A. Krosnick and Stanley Presser, "Question and questionnaire design," in *Handbook of Survey Research*, ed. J. Wright and Peter Marsden (Emerald Publishing Group Limited, 2010), 285-86.

⁶⁷ Chippendale, *Stonehenge complete*, Chapter 15.

I am glad to have provided this opportunity and thank you all for your help and wishing me luck with my study.

Acknowledgment

I want to thank everyone who helped me with producing this essay: All the respondents; the tutors of the Sophia Centre for their valued feedback; Clare Tuffy for providing the permission and advice to conduct part of the survey at Brú na Boínne; and David Lubman for coining the term *numinous*. Without that term it would have been more cumbersome, as a non English native speaker, to find the interesting articles of for instance Gatewood and Cameron. Last but not least I want to thank John Gatewood for provided help to generate the statements for the Numen-index_{VR}.

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Appendix A

The research proposal (available on request)

Appendix B

The on-line questionnaire (available on request)

Appendix C

The paper questionnaire for Brú na Boínne (available on request)

Appendix D

Interviewees have completed and signed the Interview Release Form. They have been assured that their personal details will not be divulged and their identities guarded in my essay.

Interviewees information

Person A: interviewed for ~30 minutes using Skype at home

Person B: interviewed for ~30 minutes face-to-face in pub

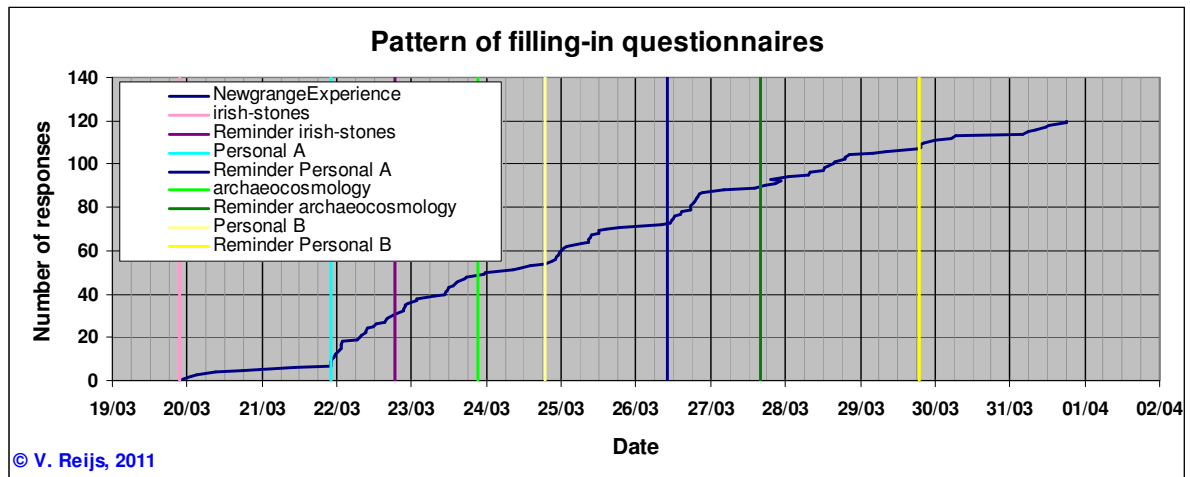
Person C: interviewed for ~25 minutes face-to-face at Brú na Boínne restaurant

Person D and E: a two person interview for ~15 minutes face-to-face at Brú na Boínne restaurant.

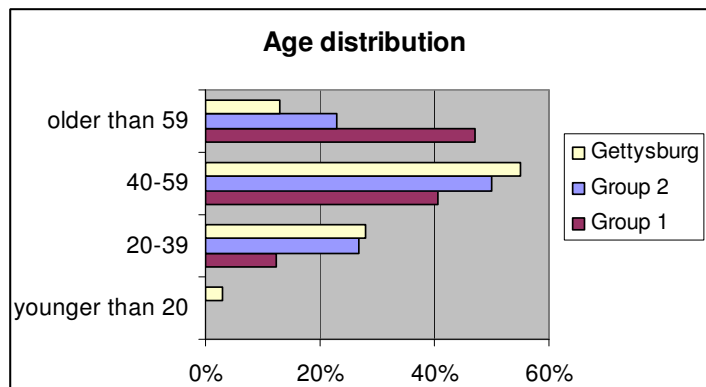
Appendix E

The percentages mentioned in bar graphs depict the percentage of people who gave responses on the particular question, so not necessarily every one who took part in the survey.

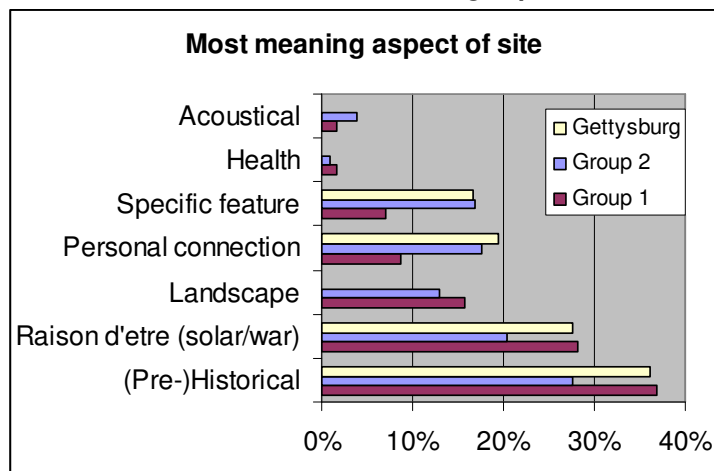
E1 Pattern of filling-in questionnaires



E2 Q2: Age distribution



E3 Q11: Most meaning aspect of site

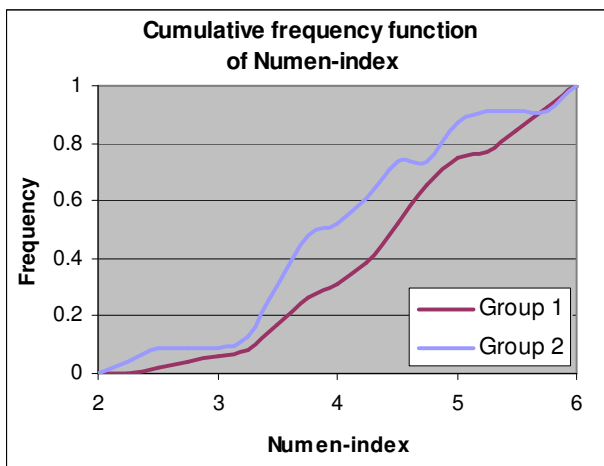


E4 The Numen-index_{VR}

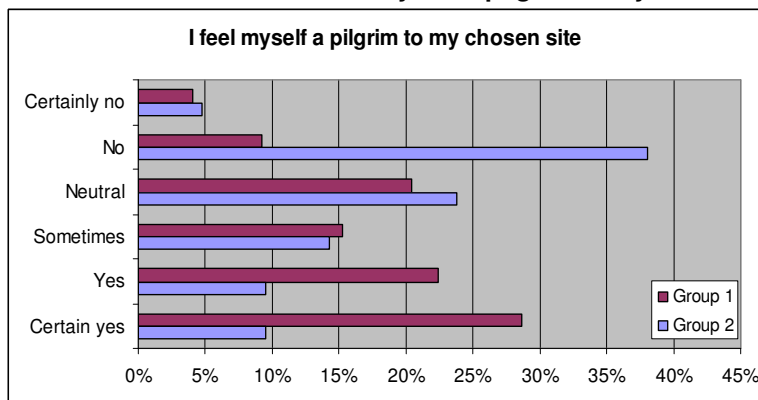
A set of statements in Q20 has been used for the Numen-index_{VR}. This set of statements, determined by Gatewood (mean item-to-item $r = 0.43$, Cronbach's alpha = 0.827),⁶⁸ is:

1. I like to use my mind to go back in time while visiting my chosen sit
2. I am able to connect deeply with this site.
3. While at my chosen site, I try to feel the aura or spirit of earlier times.
4. After visiting it, I enjoy reflecting on my chosen site.
5. This site provokes an almost 'spiritual' response in me.
6. At this site, I lose my sense of time.
7. I enjoy talking about my personal reactions on my chosen site.

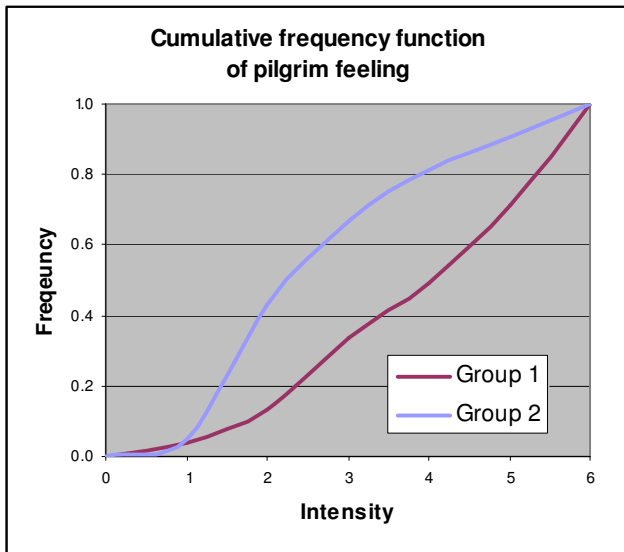
E5 Cumulative frequency function of Numen-index_{VR}



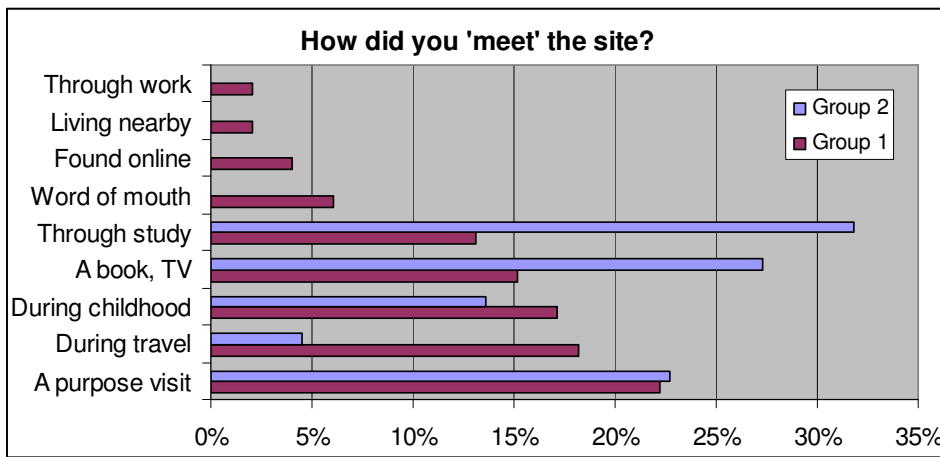
E6 Q20: I feel myself a pilgrim to my chosen site



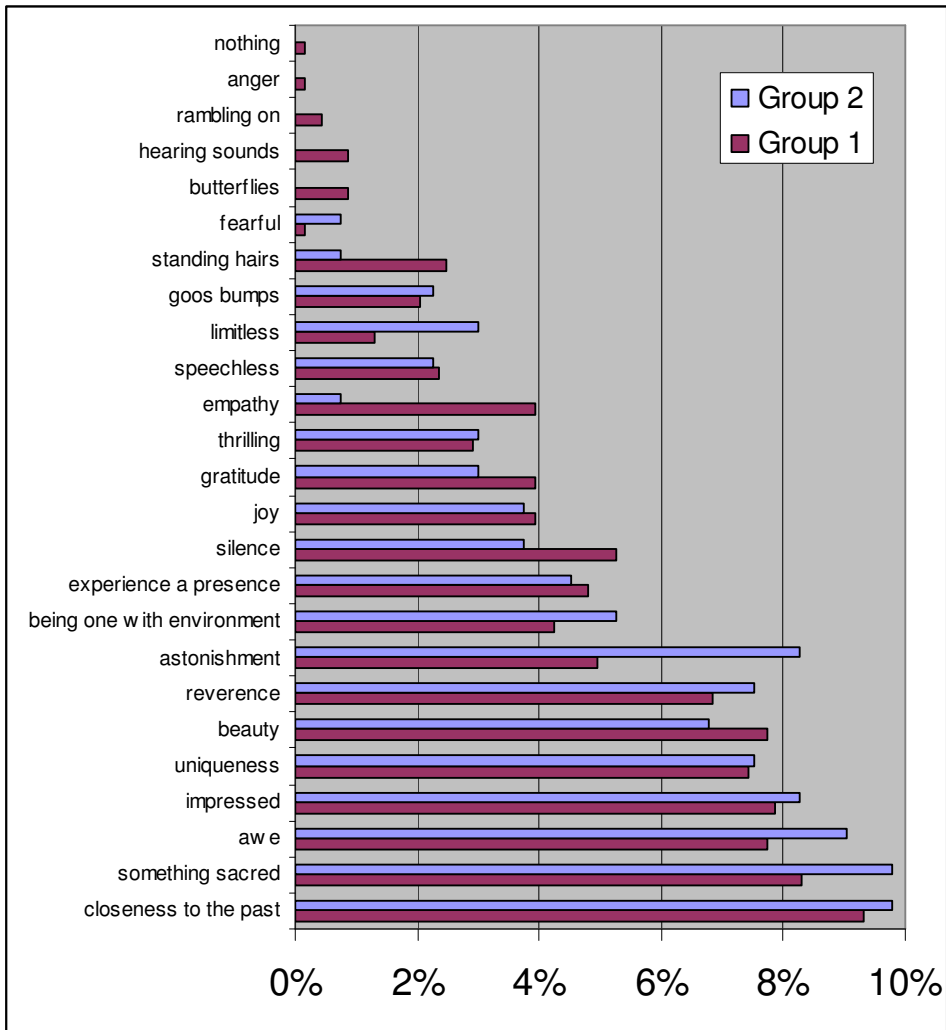
E7 Cumulative frequency function of pilgrim feeling



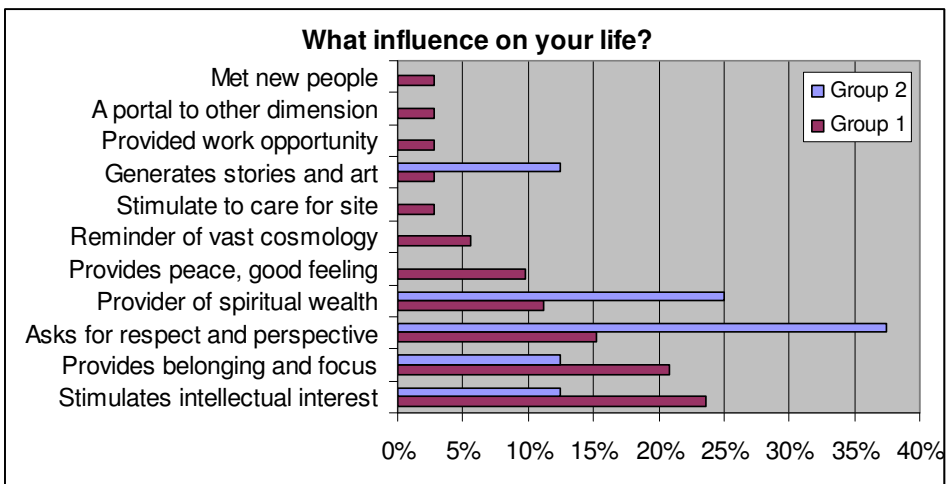
E8 Q10: How did you meet the site?



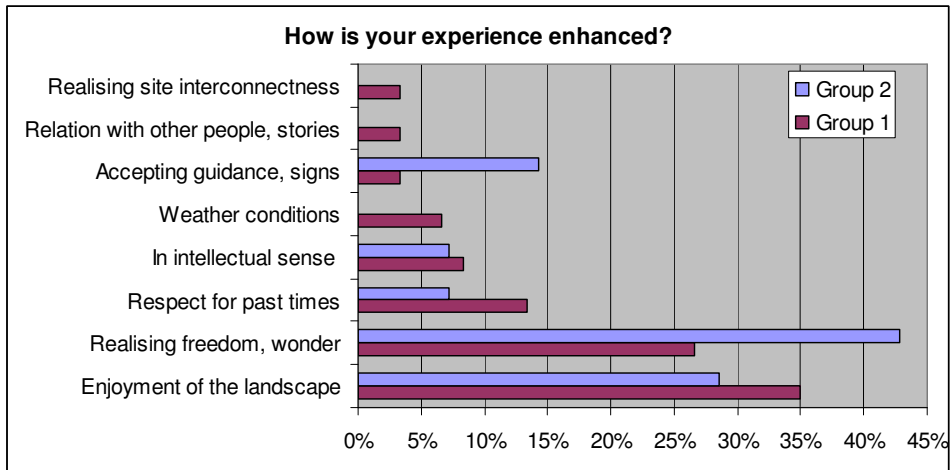
E9 Q14: Experiences/feelings



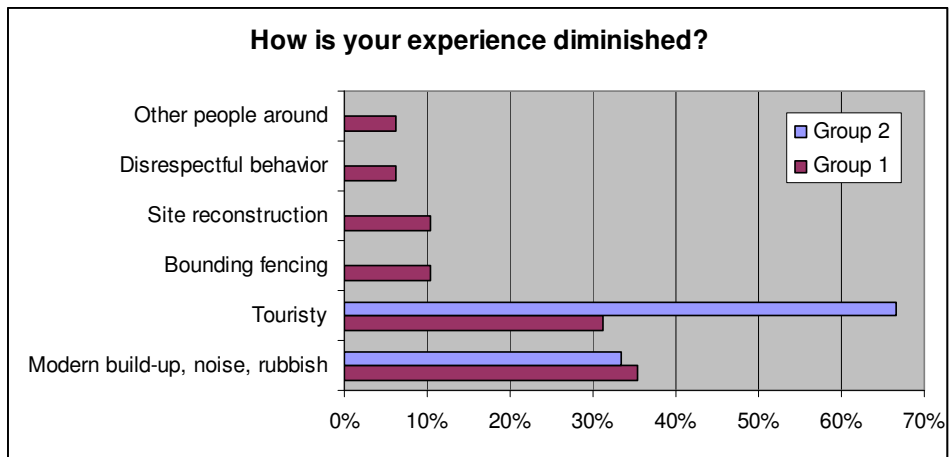
E10 Q21: What influence on your life?



E11 Q22: How is your experience enhanced?



E12 Q23: How is your experience diminished?



E13 Q25: Feedback received on questionnaire

