

An Interview Study of Visitors to

Folklife Festival 2018

Armenia and Catalonia

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Smithsonian Organization
and Audience Research

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Following are the key findings from in-depth interviews with 32 visit groups to the Folklife Festival 2018. The majority of interviewed visitors expressed that the Festival was a worthwhile experience. Collectively, the findings suggest that the Festival has an important role to play in promoting diversity and cultural awareness in a globalizing world.

Culture Through Food and Marketplace:

- Visitors considered affordable food to be an essential part of the Festival experience, allowing them to experience culture in a way that could not be replicated virtually.
- Visitors without personal connections to the cultures being displayed in the Marketplace were drawn to standard souvenir items such as foods and crafts, whereas visitors who identified with the cultures on display intentionally sought out items related to their respective cultures.
- Visitors seldom mentioned food or the Marketplace without prompting by the interviewer.

Perceptions of the Festival:

- Visitors appreciated the blend of written information and hands-on activities.
- Many adults were hoping to find interactive elements that would allow them to participate in and contribute meaningfully to the programs.
- Both visitors with and without prior knowledge about Armenia and Catalonia were able to gain a deeper understanding of the two places that could occur only in-person.

Reactions and Reflections:

- A number of visitors left the Festival with a desire to learn more about the two locations.
- Many of the visitors who identified as members of the Armenian or Catalanian communities (primarily Armenian in these interviews) visited the Festival not only for the programs, but also to meet and connect with other members of their community.

Authenticity and Accessibility:

- Visitors pointed out a lack of awareness about the Folklife Festival among communities in D.C. and suggested that advertising across public spaces could bring a more diverse audience.
- While some visitors applauded the in-depth focus on two places, others were hoping to find a wider variety of themes and activities.
- For the most part, the Festival appealed both to visitors looking for a vibrant and energetic Festival scene and those looking for an informational and educational event.

Future Relevance:

- All adults, but especially those visiting with children, appreciated the value of hands-on activities in an otherwise technology-oriented world.
- Young adult visitors (early to mid-20s) believed that experiencing the Festival in-person was incomparably better than learning about Armenia and Catalonia through online resources. They expressed interest in taking part in other Folklife-related activities throughout the year.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	i
INTRODUCTION	1
METHODOLOGY	1
FINDINGS.....	2
<i>Food and Marketplace</i>	2
<i>Perceptions of the Festival</i>	5
<i>Reactions and Reflections</i>	8
<i>Authenticity and Accessibility</i>	13
<i>Future Relevance</i>	17
CONCLUSIONS	21
DISCUSSION.....	21
APPENDIX I: BASIC NEEDS AND LOGISTICS	23
APPENDIX II: FOLKLIFE IN ONE WORD	25
APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDE	27

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INTRODUCTION

The following report serves as the qualitative component of Smithsonian Organization and Audience Research's (SOAR) evaluation of visitor experiences at the 2018 Smithsonian Folklife Festival featuring Armenia and Catalonia. During two consecutive five-day periods in June and July 2018, SOAR conducted a total of 32 interviews to understand how visitors utilized the Festival's resources, their perceptions of the Festival's role within D.C.'s broader cultural landscape, and their thoughts regarding the future relevance of the Folklife Festival.

Upon its founding in 1967, the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH) has been guided by the concept of a "cultural conversation" that provides visitors with the opportunity to interact with individuals they otherwise would never get to meet. Over 50 years later, the Festival has evolved alongside the arrival of the 21st century, and a new question has emerged: What is the role of the Folklife Festival and cultural conversations in a rapidly globalizing world? This report seeks to understand Folklife in a setting where both technology and diversity are ever-present and contentious topics. By positioning the Festival as a way to escape the ubiquity of technology while simultaneously promoting diversity and cultural awareness, the Festival can leverage these growing issues as a way to promote the necessity of in-person cultural conversations in a collective Festival experience.

METHODOLOGY

Between June 27 and July 8, 2018, three SOAR team members interviewed 38 adult visitors (32 interviews) at various locations throughout the Armenia and Catalonia programs. SOAR attempted to limit the interviews to individuals who had experienced both programs. However, the location of Armenia and Catalonia on opposite sides of the National Mall resulted in a few interviews with visitors who were able to experience only one of the two featured places.

Abiding by an open-ended rationale, SOAR team members refrained from explicitly asking visitors about their opinions of the Festival. Rather, team members conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews ranging from four to over 40 minutes in length. The open-ended nature of these interviews allowed for the unfiltered emergence of visitors' Festival experiences. Following the interview process, the 32 audio recordings were transcribed, sorted, and coded by the three interviewers. They systematically developed a coding scheme in collaboration with other SOAR team members who acted as sounding boards to unearth recurring themes.

Due to the qualitative nature of the methodology, generalizations regarding the Folklife Festival's entire visitor population should not be drawn from this sample of visitors. However, the reflexive and interactive nature of the interviews provided space for the interviewer to probe more deeply, revealing a detailed and enriched narrative. The findings presented below should enhance the analysis from the survey results and provide a deeper understanding of the sentiments underlying visitors' experiences and opinions.

FINDINGS

Regardless of age, group composition, and place of origin, a majority of visitors expressed that the Festival was a worthwhile experience. The findings are organized around the five underlying themes emphasized by visitors during interviews.

1. Food and Marketplace: Visitors' perceptions of the connections between food and the Marketplace to culture.
2. Perceptions of the Festival: Visitors' observations and impressions ranging from specific elements and activities to general impressions of the Festival.
3. Reactions and Reflections: Visitors' understanding of the Folklife Festival's messages, their own cultural identities, and the intersections of the two.
4. Authenticity and Accessibility: Visitors' thoughts about having an authentic and accessible Festival experience and its scale and atmosphere.
5. Future Relevance: Visitors' thoughts regarding the Festival's positioning within D.C.'s larger cultural landscape as well as the actions CFCH should take to maintain the relevance of the cultural conversation in the future.

Food and Marketplace

When asked to describe their Festival experience, visitors seldom mentioned food or the Marketplace without prompting by the interviewer. However, when probed about these features, their reactions demonstrated that both have the potential to enhance a visitor's experience by introducing them to new and affordable culinary traditions.

Food

Food is inseparable from cultural identity and often acts as a visitor's initial conduit to understanding other cultures. Some visitors enjoyed the diversity of food offered by the Festival while others were not as impressed by the variety. Some wanted concessions to be located throughout the Festival space.

You had a little bit for everyone's palate.

I haven't had the food ... I wish there was more variety.

I don't eat too much of the food ... I'm allergic to a lot of this stuff.

I wish there were more food options even if it were within the same country, but more stations around.

Although visitors demonstrated mixed reactions to the variety of foods offered, the majority agreed that it was overpriced. For some who wished to fully experience Armenian and Catalonian cultures, the price range was a barrier.

We did just eat a grilled cheese sandwich that was way overpriced.

I'm a graduate student so the price range of the food...

One visitor who identified as a member of the Armenian community regretted that Folklife's audience would not be able to sample a range of foods from her homeland.

I'd like to see food a little more indicative of Armenia...

The value of having stronger connections between food and culture emerged when visitors described their perceptions of the food demonstrations. Those hoping to taste Armenian and Catalonian cuisine were unable to do so at several demonstrations; as one interviewee noted, visitors who looked to understand the two countries through interactive Festival experiences missed out the most.

One thing that was very frustrating: when they cook stuff, everybody was dying to have a piece but they can't give you any of the food ... I know what it tastes like, but they don't.

Again, food was an important part of visitors' experiences by adding another dimension to the cultural conversation, as two younger visitors aptly stated.

You can read stuff on the internet, but actually talking to people who live there and tasting the lavash...

Any time there's an outdoor Festival, people want to eat. Trying all the different ethnic foods...

Marketplace.

As with food, souvenirs are physical representations of culture, and their tangibility serves as a reminder of the Festival after its conclusion. While visitors without personal connections to the cultures being displayed in the Marketplace were drawn to standard souvenir items such as foods and crafts, visitors who identified with the cultures on display intentionally sought out items related to their respective cultures.

Those who were not members of the cultures represented in the Marketplace were hoping to find:

Handmade stuff. I really like when ... they reuse things and do another thing.

I'm a jewelry fanatic ... I was definitely going to be looking for that.

I really liked the way they did their tiles. That's something we didn't buy in Barcelona ... that might be fun to take back.

I like pictures of the rural area. They are a lot more authentic when you're travelling around the country. In the city they're usually for tourists.

Below are selections from interviews with visitors who had personal connections to the cultures featured in the Marketplace: Armenia, Catalonia, Ghana, Niger, and the African Diaspora.

One visitor who flew from the Midwest to D.C. to attend the Festival found the Marketplace items to be too expensive and cumbersome to bring back to her community at home.

I was disappointed that there wasn't as much about Armenia that I would've liked. I hesitated to buy the pottery because I didn't want to travel with it. The rugs are big and a big investment [...] you need things that are something that you can carry and afford. I would've loved to have bought something and taken it back to all my friends. Maybe a \$10 item that I can buy 10 of, but there was no such thing.

Another visitor, also from the Midwest, found that the Marketplace met her needs.

I got soap for my grandmother because her parents were the ones who came from Armenia ... She's never left the country, so I thought she would like to have a piece of something from Armenia.

Many visitors expressed neutral to enthusiastic feelings towards the Marketplace's addition of Ghana, Niger, and the African Diaspora.

Non-member of the African Diaspora community:

I was a bit surprised to see Africa there. I don't think it hurts to have the other cultures. But definitely make sure you have the ones that are present covered.

Member of the African Diaspora community:

I picked up some African art. A lot of times I can find pottery and mosaics where I am from. But I don't find a lot of authentic African art or textiles.

A factor that may have prevented additional cultural conversations from occurring was the long line to enter the Marketplace. During more crowded days such as the Fourth of July, the Marketplace's lines grew visibly lengthy. One visitor revealed that the extended wait time deterred her from exploring what the Marketplace had to offer.

There was a long line inside and I did not stand it ... See, I missed that.

To combat the crowds, the same visitor suggested that the Festival disperse Marketplace items in various locations throughout the space, so Festival-goers would be able to browse and purchase at every opportunity; this would save visitors the effort of dedicating time to seek out the Marketplace.

In the Marketplace there are ... African textiles. But they're over there, and I wanna be here. ... Have some things where people could buy [them] as they're moving around ... The artists there display their goods and people can actually buy.... foods, textiles, pottery.

As the interview progressed, the visitor rethought this suggestion, realizing that the Festival would resemble a bazaar rather than the educational event that she initially sought out.

To keep the uniqueness, the Marketplace may be somewhere else ... because it's all about the people. All about the life and what they're crafting. It's showcasing, not trying to sell.

The separation of the Marketplace from the other exhibits reveals her perceptions on what falls under the umbrella of "culture" by suggesting this separation between items for consumption and items on display. This particular visitor seems not to have considered the Marketplace as life or craft, and ultimately does not regard it as an extension of culture.

Perceptions of the Festival

This section illustrates how visitors perceived the Folklife Festival's demonstrations, performances, and various themes. Below are a series of visitor reflections that range from surface-level observations of the programs to deeper insights about their learning experiences. Visitors especially emphasized their interactions with culture bearers and the need for interactive features, demonstrating continued interest in person-to-person engagement.

Program-related observations.

Although both the Armenia and Catalonia programs included demonstrations, performances, and interactive activities, one visitor immediately noticed the differences in the way the two countries were being portrayed.

Catalonia seems to be more creative. Armenia is more lifestyle. But in a way, both are good.

Economic development was another thing that I took away from Armenia. More work-related.

Catalonia seems to be more artistic, creative, and comfortable.

Many visitors considered the Catalonian Human Towers a highlight of their Festival experience.

I never thought something so demonstrative could be so ingraining, could have so much more meaning to it...

This Human Tower I've seen on TV but never known who did it. And a whole art to that. This whole thing with balance is amazing.

Delivery-related observations.

The reflections below focus on how visitors perceived the organization and delivery of content related to Armenia and Catalonia. The word "content" refers to the information presented about the two countries, whether through interactions with the presenters, written material, or performances.

Many visitors, regardless of whether they had a connection to Armenia and Catalonia, recognized the importance of clothing to both places and felt that their experience could have been enhanced had the presenters donned clothing reflective of their cultures.

Our clothing is beautiful. The people presenting could've been better off wearing Armenian stuff.

Armenian culture is just so feisty and fiery. They've got to wear national costumes.

Another highlight for visitors included the signs displaying information written in both English and Armenian/Catalonian.

I like the fact that the signs are in English and Armenian.

I like the language signs. It's cool that you can do it in whatever the language is.

Visitors commented on how the organization of the Festival gave it a warm and relaxed environment in which to experience new cultures.

...There's just a warm, attractive, picturesque way to demonstrate what [a country] is about.

I like the little corners. They have the different crafts that you can actually see.

...Seeing stuff where the performers are performing live ... It's like all around, so you can wander and you can hear live stuff no matter where. It's not a set time.

Perceptions of interactive activities.

A number of visitors emphasized that the hands-on activities were instrumental to their experience. For the most part, the Festival managed to meet their expectations with attentive presenters and performers.

The interactives are really informative: these are real people, real lives...

These smaller stands mean it's easier to ... ask questions to the facts-people. Not just people on a stage and everybody listening. You can engage on a personal level.

Other visitors noted that the combination of theoretical information (written knowledge) with practice (hands-on knowledge) enriched their experiences.

A good way to get a hands-on experience. I like how outside most of the booths there's ... text that went along so we can read up on it later.

You can read and then go to the actual stand and connect what you read with what they're doing ... the theory and the action.

Interactive activities were especially popular among visitors with young children, since they offered either a hands-on component for children to “learn-by-doing” or a meaningful way to contribute to the exhibit.

The storyteller would collaborate with the public to come up with the stories ... not just communication one way; it's interactive.

The puppets were great ... we let the kids carry the frames around.

Kids can ... get their hands dirty. That tactile is important for them to connect that learning experience. And that's better than looking at somebody on the stage...

The girls really like the Tree of Life, the Casa. You give them different things and they can also be part of it.

These visitors also saw the Folklife Festival as a way to educate their children about other cultures at an early age.

You are exposed to another culture, and since we don't have that often, is great for them to know.

Having the reality, the visuals.

To experience those other cultures through some practical application ... Educational activities are invaluable to especially young audiences.

One visitor revealed that although the Festival provided its share of hands-on activities, these interactive features were packed with younger audiences, making it difficult for adults to experience any participatory activity besides wine-tasting.

The interactive aspects of it are focused towards kids so if [adults] want to try something. It feels more hands off ... with culture, you wanna be involved in it.

Other adult visitors expressed similar sentiments:

If it's more of an observation thing, it's not as exciting...

With the crafts, I probably spend more time bouncing from one to one ... watching the people rather than listening to the presentations.

The few booths that we did go to had a bunch of art exhibits that were fun to look at. They weren't very interactive though.

Although the Tree of Life was memorable for some visitors, one woman mentioned that the time it would take to create an ornament deterred her from participating.

You can, but you can't just do it walking by.

She instead suggested an activity with less involvement.

Like if participants could ... sprinkle some flowers. It would've been really cool ... like, "Oh I was there, and I helped build the whatever."

When asked to suggest interactive elements that would particularly engage adult visitors, other interviewees emphasized the idea of creating lasting contributions that added to the presence of the Festival. For these visitors, "interactive" went beyond tasting food or watching a performance as an essential part of cultural education; they desired meaningful participation.

It'd be neat if you could just create something. Contribute to that.

To build something and leave it ... accessible to anybody at any time.

More active participation like dancing, engaging theater where people have a chance to experience the different culture. Not just by enjoying exotic food and forgetting ... actually learning and thinking.

Observations about cultural learning.

Almost all visitors emphasized the ideas of education and learning during their interviews, albeit with varying degrees of satisfaction. Below are visitors' observations about their learning experiences and cultural education through the performances and demonstrations.

Visitors who did not have previous connections to Armenia or Catalonia found the demonstrations and performances full of information and revelation.

I had never thought about these cultures ... I've heard the name but never known what the people look like or where it's located, none of that.

I didn't know Armenia had wine. I didn't know they grew grapes!

You know you don't think of dance as a masculine medium, but ... their dancing was extremely masculine. And it was very arousing, very different from most dance that I've seen.

People forming cultural associations based on common interests, and it was part of the movement to revive Catalanian culture, and that was very interesting. The communalism...

Even visitors with cultural ties to Armenia and Catalonia were able to discover new knowledge about them.

I'm learning all sorts of little nuances that I didn't know about my own culture. There's this salts pottery container ... supposed to signify the woman's nipple ... for fertility, because salt was so important.

I learned we have an Armenian pizza ... It could be used for the rich and the poor, but the amount of meat indicated how wealthy you were.

A common theme for these visitors was cultural pride, as they learned to understand how artisan crafts could be considered physical products of their culture's legacy.

Legacies that have gone back thousands of years. They have a lot of the key symbols of things that we have that are unique to our country.

One visitor was especially proud of the artisans' finesse, expertise, and sheer amount of time dedicated to their work, connecting these characteristics to his cultural identity.

The carpet weaving. ... A skilled person working on something for a year. It's not something that comes quick or easy. So that's impressive.

It makes me proud to see a lot of things like those stone-cross-carvings.

These are all things when you ask someone about Armenian culture, those are the things that come to mind. It's rich in those ways.

Reactions and Reflections

This section provides deeper insight into visitors' Festival experiences. Here, the definitions of visitors and culture bearers begin to conflate, as visitors who were members of the Armenian and Catalanian communities took on the role of sharing their cultures. That is, cultural conversations occurred not only between visitors and culture bearers, they occurred between the visitors themselves.

Reactions to the festival.

For some visitors, the Festival served as a catalyst, inspiring further learning about the two places.

It's a lot to absorb ... I've taken notes so I can go home and Google a lot of.

Others thought that Folklife offered a diverse and accessible “sampling platter” of activities.

A low risk, easy way to do something without major commitment. One it being free, there's a variety of things to do, it's a mix of hands-on experiences with reading or listening, it varies.

One young woman appreciated how the Festival provided a ripe setting not only to participate in activities, but also to relax and take in the surroundings.

Plenty of seats for people who take in the sights ... We've been hanging out, people-watching, looking ... what people are showcasing ... I didn't know what to expect coming in ... It was great.

Cultural exposure.

Many visitors without connections to Armenia or Catalonia were able to increase their cultural awareness by gaining exposure to the different cultures. Further, these visitors were able to connect their Festival experiences to aspects of their own identities as well as understand how the Festival’s themes could be situated within a broader cultural framework.

This is an opportunity to meet other countries and experience their art, performance, cuisine in our nation's capital. It's free, it's accessible. If you can get yourself to Washington, you can learn and be part of another culture for an afternoon.

We gain more with [Folklife] because we're very upset about the political climate we're in ... it's a gay crowd.

Being involved in politics and just being a little better read, it's always a little interesting to see...

It brings me back to when I was in Germany because you get to experience people around the world. And at home we don't get to see them.

To see the values of other countries ... to get out of your own little bubble.

We love travelling ... doing international stuff. ... It's more affordable and a great way to give us ideas of what we might want to do in the future.

Others were able to see the similarities and differences between their own cultures and Armenia or Catalonia during the Festival, emerging with a greater sense of worldliness.

It's been really interesting, comprehensive in terms of all the different aspects of a society, what really makes a culture out of people...

Everyone makes their bread in a different style. ... When you get to look at what people get to create and how they exist when they're not fighting, it can be very beautiful, especially when it's very different from your own.

It's also nice to see no matter how far away or how different somebody is from you, you might have something in common.

There was some discussion about how different that is from modern American culture where people are so disconnected.



Below are passages from a well-travelled visitor who was hoping for a more authentic depiction of Armenia and Catalonia, claiming that the lavash demonstration seemed performative due to the presence of a translator.

I felt a bit of a barrier to have the person on a microphone not be the expert ...I'd like to hear it from the guy himself instead of through a filter of someone on a microphone as he sits there teaching kids how to do pottery.

It felt like they're trying to be authentic and telling you the culture. But there's a filter. This is America, not their home country. Maybe more pictures of the person's home? Workshop? As they go through these explanations: "This is what it actually looks like."

The same visitor expressed doubt about the authenticity of the lavash demonstration.

Having the bread was good. But then again, you're in an exhibition. ... The way it's set up, it feels like a stage and a stove. What's heating the stove? That's all hidden from people ... It's not just cooking ... there's a whole ecology of how this culture has evolved. And it's not separated like this, it's actually connected.

Through his use of the word "stage," this visitor revealed skepticism about the Festival's ability authentically to replicate a culture. This visitor, by emphasizing "ecology," appeared to be looking to understand the bread demonstration within a broader cultural context than the presenter explained.

However, another visitor observing the clay demonstration did not share the previous visitor's high expectations and claimed that the act of going through the work did not interfere with her ability to appreciate the culture.

All these people were gathering to watch this gentleman do the clay. ... It didn't bother him at all... He took whatever time he needed to do to gather his materials and get everything set up ... I would feel pressured ... but he didn't. This was a part of him, part of his culture, and part of who he is.

That same visitor was also satisfied with the Catalonian mosaic demonstration and actually contrasted the artisan's authentic portrayal of her everyday life to a performance that would supposedly strip away the cultural elements.

The lady with the mosaics ... it was like she was at home and going about her days. It wasn't like it was on a performance ... she was just doing her work. And that's what it should be because people are here to see what the culture is like.

As Americans, everything is rushed and a performance. It's good to see other cultures and their lifestyles ... I don't see the hustle and bustle or stress. ... This is what life is like for them.

Other visitors had pragmatic views on the question of authenticity, believing that a slightly more palatable preview of a culture is a first step in the right direction to attract visitor attention.

We're kind of Disney-ing the cultures. ... It has to be promoted to family and the kids.

I think it's always a little different when you experience [it] in its natural habitat as opposed to at a Festival. ... But showing people this aspect of things, even if it's just a small sliver of it, it gains appreciation, it gains interest.

The presence of the aforementioned translator appears deeply connected with a visitor's belief of how culture should be portrayed. While certain visitors resisted the idea of artisans speaking through a translator and claimed that deprived the demonstration of its authenticity, other visitors actually appreciated the translator's ability to break down language barriers.

A woman doing an aromatherapy demonstration ... sat with my wife for maybe thirty minutes and there was a translator there whenever they couldn't communicate effectively ... Having the translator there was really unique because they got to communicate across boundaries they wouldn't otherwise encounter just the two of them.

As opposed to serving as a barrier, these visitors felt that a translator could help disseminate the culture, and they experienced a sense of intimacy.

Personal connections.

Visitors with personal connections to the two countries had more complex experiences. Some attempted to understand how Armenia and Catalonia were being portrayed, others came in hopes of finding community.

For a majority of interviewees with ties to the two places, their connections were to Armenia, despite the best attempts of the SOAR team to interview people with different perspectives. One reason could be Armenia's diasporic history – a greater number of Armenians than Catalonians present in the United States reside in proximity to D.C.

One visitor who had previously travelled to Catalonia discovered that the Festival's setting provided more in-depth understanding.

I'm especially attracted to Catalonia because we've been there, and it's nice to connect what we saw on a much deeper level ... and then just learning about it in a more controlled environment.

Another visitor was able to see aspects of his own heritage reflected in the Festival.

I'm Latino and part of my heritage is from Spain, and it's funny seeing very similar foods, just a slightly different twist.

Visitors with connections to Armenia were mostly members of the Armenian American community and had personal motivations for visiting. Some desired to meet other Armenian Americans while others hoped to pass along Armenian culture to their children. Many expressed appreciation and surprise that Armenia, a lesser-known country, was being featured.

When you're Armenian ... everybody hears about it because it's so unusual ... It was all over Facebook.

My heritage, the culture that I didn't know ... that's being covered right now; that's cool.

One fourth-generation Armenian American who wanted to learn about her ancestral home found the Festival to be an immersive experience, claiming that it was “as much assimilation as I can get without being physically there.” The visitor also noted the value of an interactive experience; in spite of her Armenian ancestry and the information available online, she would not have been able to attain an in-person experience without the Festival.

It was never really a big part of my culture growing up ... this is a festival half dedicated to my culture that I never knew, so I thought this would be a great way to get an idea of what Armenia is like ... You can read stuff on the internet, but actually talking to people who live there and ... the lavash ... tasting it.

This visitor saw the Folklife Festival as a way to connect with her otherwise distanced Armenian heritage; interestingly, the Festival was able to provide her the space and resources to understand her family’s culture, even outside of her family.

Another Armenian American visitor conveyed similar sentiments, using the Festival as a means to educate herself about Armenia’s accomplishments. The use of “we” reveals how she identifies herself as an Armenian, and through Folklife’s resources was able to further understand the importance of her Armenian identity.

I’ve never been to Armenia, so seeing the different types of ways we’ve contributed to art and culture in that way was very interesting to me.

Although one visitor recalled growing up in a tight-knit Armenian American community, she still enjoyed how the Folklife Festival brought to life foods that she had previously only seen online. Furthermore, she expressed how she benefitted not only from seeing Ghapama in-person, but also from her experience with other visitors.

I’ve never seen Ghapama before ... only on Facebook. And Ghapama’s such a famous dish there’s a song. And so a gentleman saw the Ghapama, and he ran in and walked around singing the Ghapama song for us. That was a fun little impromptu event.

A significant portion of her Festival experience as an Armenian American involved the presence of other individuals with similar backgrounds. Aside from the performances and demonstrations, having a physical space for the Festival created a collective experience for these visitors.

I look around and can see who’s an Armenian. I’ve had numerous conversations with strangers just because we’re Armenian. On whether the recipe was right ... we discuss our churches and locations: whether there’s a lot of Armenians there or not. You’ll be sitting there waiting for the next presentation or somebody speaking Armenian and you start talking to them ... I met the owners of Tamar and Tomas ... we all sat there after hours and talked as if we were best friends. They invited me back ... so I met their grandchildren; it was really beautiful. Total strangers, but by the time I left we felt like we were best friends.

During the interview, this visitor also mentioned that what prompted her to come back was the invitation of other Armenian American visitors. Rather than revisiting to learn more from the demonstrations or performances, she was lured by the promise of meeting even more Armenian American visitors.

Other visitors provided similar reasons for their visit, their motivations being to connect with members of their community.

We heard a lot of other people were coming from all over the country, really, and apparently the world. So we figure we'll see people we've met through our lives and also meet some new people.

Additionally, this visitor travelled with his entire family in tow, hoping to instill a sense of pride in his children. From his perspective, the Festival's purpose should be to preserve and protect a culture by sharing it with others.

It's keeping the next generation in touch with previous generations ... the only way you remember your culture is to pass it down.

While many Armenian American visitors were satisfied with the information displays that celebrated Armenia's many contributions and accomplishments, some were disheartened to discover that Folklife remained silent about the more contentious aspects of Armenian history.

They're portraying Armenia the best that I know it. ... It'd be nice for there to be things I don't know about. It's absolutely nothing on history; looks like everybody's trying to run away from the political aspect of it.

It would be nice to have something somewhere about the genocide. The world does need to know about it. You may not want to dwell on it, but there should be something.

On the other hand, a few visitors appreciated the lack of political discussion and utilized the Festival as a way of escaping from potentially controversial issues.

And not talk of politics ... just really enjoying everything that's here ... it's the weekend. Even if we are in the nation's capital and the White House is right there ... we aren't talking 'bout that right now.

Altogether, the ways in which visitors made use of the Folklife Festival varied depending on their motivations for visiting. Some looked to broaden their horizons about different places, while others utilized the Festival as a space to further their connections to the Armenian and Catalonian communities.

Authenticity and Accessibility

Interviewees often mentioned public awareness, scale, and atmosphere as ways of making the Festival as accessible as possible to all audiences while remaining authentic to the idea of an educational experience.

Awareness.

Many local visitors who attended the Festival every year were surprised by the lack of advertising about the Festival. Repeat visitors often mentioned how the number of physical advertisements paled in comparison to those of previous years, making the Festival less accessible to newer audiences.

Is there advertising on the buses? Living in the D.C. area I didn't hear much about it or even know who's being featured until I got here.

I had to go online to find out ... There used to be posters going around ... signs about it.



I have been here for seven years ... but I've not really been aware of this. ... There needs to be broader and better outreach...

It comes down to more advertising because Smithsonian does amazing programs ... but if you don't hear about it, you're not accessing it ... More public awareness of the programs and concerts ... free, accessible by Metro.

On the other hand, some visitors thought that the diversity of the audience was evidence of public awareness of the Festival, but at the same time suggested continued outreach.

Use the public or regular FM station. Hip hop stations. Diversity in the crowd is good. That's something we always want to work on. That's what this country's all about. I think you do a good job of that.

Other visitors recognized that the most effective way to generate awareness across all demographics is to take the Festival to audiences who may not have the resources to visit D.C.

The next major thrust for the Smithsonian is taking it to locations. ... This physical expression can be hosted in other cities ... that are more underserved ... Smaller ones that could use more culture.

Variation and scale.

Regarding the size of the Festival and number of cultures presented, there was a contrast between visitors who appreciated the focus on Armenia and Catalonia and the in-depth exposure to each place, and those who were disappointed by only having two places represented.

When repeat visitors were asked about how Armenia and Catalonia compared to previous years' programs, they often mentioned the Festival's decreased scale.

Well it used to be bigger; I remember years when there were four exhibits and when they had two big tents for musical presentations and dance. That would be nice if we had that. This is a smaller Festival.

There's not as much as there was last year ... at the Circus there was a lot more going on constantly.

It's rather small in scale compared to prior years ... usually the Mall is packed with pavilions, this is unbelievably nothing ... There are fewer activities.

More cultures that were explored ... more diversity in performance ... back in the '90s.

I feel sad that it's shrunken ... they used to have three cultures ... it used to take up a larger part of the Mall. Now it's off to the sides ... off the grass.

These repeat visitors were primarily based in the D.C. metropolitan area. They also recalled when the Festival featured cultures from within the United States, and recommended that Folklife provide "local cultures" along with those from other countries.

One thing we don't see this year is representation from a part from the US. I have enjoyed that in the past: seeing parts of ethnic culture in the US.

I'd enjoy the public lecture in American history.

Something that's local and American that brings us here, and then we get exposed ... a nice mix.

Visitors who had travelled from across the country also asked for a greater variety of programs.

If you get down here for the day ... you're kind of committed for the day ... so just more countries.

That's what I see here ... When I come to D.C., I want a larger scale.

However, some other visitors who travelled from outside the D.C. metropolitan area to attend the Festival indicated that they visited on multiple days. This suggests they did not find the Festival limiting.

I gotta read up about it, so when I come here tomorrow, I know more about it.

We're from Alabama, and we came up specifically for the Festival. I'm taking a course at the University of Alabama ... there's something called local festivals and ... this was one of the ones we had to view as a video project, and when I saw it, I thought ... I'd like to see it ... And so we were here yesterday.

Well I'm Armenian ... so I came from Chicago for this very reason...

We came from Boston ... brought our family too...

Other visitors appreciated what Folklife has evolved into and valued the intimate nature of focusing on cultures in greater depth, making an otherwise distanced country seem intimate and accessible. One visitor felt compelled to visit one of the places following her Festival experience.

It feels very authentic ... a more in-depth understanding of ... the cultural experience you were seeing.

Yes, it's interesting to learn about US culture. But I don't know when I'm going to Armenia. So what a cool thing for it to come to me. Even if it's just a little bit.

Narrowed down and becoming more informative ... we enjoyed listening to people because they seem very nice, and I thought, maybe we should go to Armenia.

Atmosphere.

Another contributing factor to visitors' experiences was the ambiance of the Festival. Depending on the date and time of their visit, visitors experienced different Festival atmospheres. Those looking for a "typical" summer Festival setting commonly mentioned music and other festivities when talking about their experiences and the Festival. Others questioned whether a cultural Festival should even fall under that category.

One visitor in her mid-20s enjoyed the energetic, casual atmosphere.

Everybody seems like in a good mood ... Not like ... crammed in ... a laid-back atmosphere.

Upbeat, fun, laid-back ... Monday's looming and everyone has to go to work. ... Something to break the monotony of my Sunday.

Because this is the place to be! This is where everyone is!

Voicing another perspective, an elementary school educator stated that the Festival space is not the most conducive for student-teacher engagement. Rather, it's more suitable for children visiting with their families.

You want your students to have access as a family ... because in a classroom environment everything becomes a teaching point and kids get exhausted. But in a family environment [... they] have the time; learning is more real and deeper than in a classroom environment.

Other teachers acknowledged that students do not receive as much individual attention in a crowded environment, but still thought the Folklife Festival offered a unique space for them to engage with each other and benefit from the Festival's atmosphere.

I work in education, so I bring some students with me. Come out, have that experience. Also myself as well.

I really like the music. Students are really liking the hands-on activities. And I really liked the dance workshop back there.

Several interviewees emphasized that the Folklife Festival had a distinctly informational atmosphere in comparison to other festivals they have attended.

When I think of festivals, I think of celebration ... I don't see that with those of us who are visiting. ... This is more of an informative thing. Children ... seemed to be having fun. But the general atmosphere is not fun.

People are taking it more seriously than fun ... Maybe it's the nature of what the theme is. At other festivals you could see smiles and balloons. But that's not what this is. ... They may be having fun. And I'm enjoying it. I'm just observing people.

This visitor's sentiments were echoed by many others who felt there was a distinct lack of festivities.

We need more festivities like music: it makes everyone happy ... Music and dancing and balloons and happiness ... definitely blasting from everywhere.

Vibrancy. ... We need a little bit of noise.

However, she later acknowledged that this festival had a different goal than the others she's attended—to edify rather than solely entertain the public.

Still other visitors believed that the ethos of the Folklife Festival was created by the other visitors rather than music.

I like the sense of community. ... It made me realize that New York is not the only melting pot ... And so that sense of history, I love.

The people who come are very interested in interacting, and I think that really helps.



I love experiencing other peoples' culture in any format. But it's just cool to see it appreciated and even by other people here.

Future Relevance

The following section details visitors' perspectives regarding the relevance of Folklife to their own lives in a society where cultural diversity is growing, as well as the role the Festival should play in educating the public on cultural awareness.

Targeting younger demographics.

One visitor, a mother of several young children, valued the interactive learning that festivals provide, even more so now that her children are surrounded by technology.

[The girls] have iPads but we don't use them because for us it's better if they experience by themselves.

Another young Festival-goer in her mid-20s enjoyed the Armenian cuisine and believed that festivals were increasingly relevant for people her age due to the availability of food and entertainment in the same space.

They hear the music, they're gonna flock to that. Entertainment is number one. Second is food.

Anytime there's an outdoor Festival, people want to eat.

Great food, easily accessible with Metro. That's the most important thing for any type of gathering or Festival in the city.

Other young visitors agreed and felt that the ubiquity of the internet actually heightens the need for experiences like the Folklife Festival. They were enthusiastic towards the idea of Folklife events throughout the year.

You can learn anything online, but I don't think you can really experience everything online. ... I could watch them bake [lavash] online, but I wouldn't taste it. There's a lot to be gained from hands-on experience and from talking to people that are not just a Wikipedia article.

Meeting people who are actually from the places, you learn a lot more than just reading about it or seeing videos or seeing it on TV.

If I were to end up here, I would love to go to any sort of workshop that's available.

One interviewee was especially eager to experience the Folklife Festival as a volunteer rather than a visitor, mentioning that the Festival "was the place to be." What prevented her from volunteering in previous years was the lack of information available for young people like herself.

People need information about the Festival ... I would be interested in that. No matter where in the metropolitan area, if my calendar permits, I'm there. But I haven't the opportunity to volunteer at any of them.

She later revealed that volunteering could serve as a form of service for her, both to engage with the community in general while also educating them about her identity.

Giving back ... for me, if it was an African American being highlighted. I'm African-American. Who else would be better to enlighten people ... about our history and our culture?

Future themes.

A common interest regarding future themes included lesser-known and historically underrepresented countries. Visitors who proposed these themes could be sorted into two categories: those who identified as members of the underrepresented culture they suggested, and those who did not.

Those who were members of underrepresented cultures generally preferred themes that would promote greater understanding of their identities.

Little countries like Armenia that no one has heard about.

What would motivate me is understanding how it, like, intersects with my every day.

We are Latino, so maybe some Latin countries that they can also experience, and people can know our culture. So if they can know it would be great ... We come from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Peru. You can experience the Indian tradition they have, like Maya, Aztecs.

African countries and African American culture were often suggested.

I have two grandchildren, and I'm looking for books about African culture I can take to them ... I want them to have that knowledge. I wanna look and see ... things that they would enjoy.

We have such a large population of people of African descent ... and there's not a lotta information that's been available. I see ... an opportunity for children to learn more about that culture. Especially if they are of African descent.

Africa is that big open spot where everyone knows it's there. ... 53 different countries, but most Americans know them as African.

Visitors who did not identify with the underrepresented communities they suggested as themes often felt the Festival and the Smithsonian Institution as a whole had an obligation to use their influence to advocate for minority voices.

I love that the focus is on underrepresented people groups ... I love ... locals telling stories, and it's being translated ... I would continue to bring back people groups from across the world.

If people can appreciate it on this level, then I think it makes it easier to appreciate it every day.

I would point out that there's hardly any women talking in Armenia or Catalonia.

Some suggested themes that are current in a globalizing world that would help visitors better understand other cultures as opposed to celebrating cultural heritage.

Introduce us to cultures that are suffering now like Yemen and talk about what's going on ..., people we don't know. ... Can we bring someone in from Saudi Arabia to see ... the women's



movement? ... What are the women doing? The minorities? What's going on with gay rights in Nicaragua?

How other countries are adapting to the changes in our climate ... Indigenous cultures are the ones who are doing it: Bangladesh. Hundreds of millions of people and the country's close to sea level ... Even the Dutch with a similar environment...

Social responsibility and the exchange mindset.

Given the Smithsonian's positioning as a prominent cultural and civic institution, visitors argued that the Festival has a responsibility to the invited culture bearers.

Visitors stressed that the Smithsonian should use its platform and the power of art to advocate for marginalized peoples.

The Smithsonian may also have a role to play in highlighting misogyny, racism that still pervades US society. ... Smithsonian is our culture, history and platform ... Highlighting that problem might also be very important because we've got a lot of work to do still at home.

Now more than ever we need to be celebrating ... to showcase our interest in other cultures ... This Institution, the Smithsonian, has a vital role to play to maintain our integrity in the celebration of diversity, the culture and history of what's come before. Setting a path for the future and educating people in our community; that's a mission that is vital more than ever.

The Folklife Festival has a very important role in our society, and it's very important that it's in the capital and accessible to people who cross the country to Washington, because not many leave the country.

Culture and art are ways of bridging the divide between people, and it sets the framework for discussions ... and create a conversation that can help educate.

The question of whether Folklife should prioritize the needs of visitors attempting to educate themselves or the needs of participants emerged during these interviews. A few visitors believed that the Festival should serve as a platform for cultural exchange, but also the less-resourced countries were not equal partners, slightly undermining the agency of these visiting cultures.

I appreciate that as a more wealthy country, we're able to invite people over, help [with] their expenses when coming over, and give us a chance to engage with natives of another country whom we might not otherwise come anywhere near to.

However, other visitors felt that the Festival was a mutually advantageous relationship that benefitted both parties, rather than the case of a wealthier country extending a hand to one with less economic power.

I mean, it's for our learning ... but not just about our consumption.

In a way you could see it as sort of, like, on display. And it is on display, but it's also genuine in a way because they're talking in their own language, and they're just doing their work, and they'll answer a question if you ask them, but they're also doing it for themselves.

...There's a way you can look at these things and say, "Well, is this put here for me to sort of consume it in some kind of way." But you are involving the people, actually getting to see the people involved in this and doing it for themselves, and who they are. And they're real people, and they're still living cultures.

The artisans are working for themselves ... not just for our consumption. It prevents cultural appropriation.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the variety of visitors' insights, it is important that the Festival achieve a balance among:

1. Having both "in-depth" activities for those who want to engage for an extended period of time, and "breadth" activities for those looking to participate in a less-committed manner.
2. Creating a vibrant yet intimate atmosphere that is both welcoming and upbeat, but that is also conducive to learning and introspection.
3. Meeting the needs of visitors who believe Folklife should advocate on behalf of underrepresented communities, while simultaneously remaining a neutral and celebratory space.
4. Portraying the cultures of tradition bearers in an authentic and genuine manner, while ensuring that the information is relatable and accessible to diverse audiences.

A single generalizable conclusion cannot be made from one study alone. However, the narrative provided by the report suggests that the Festival remains appealing to a wide array of visitors who have varying motivations for attending. The next step, as revealed by the visitors, is to understand and balance the contrasting needs stated above.

DISCUSSION

As visitors emphasized, Folklife's value lies not only in culture bearers telling of their stories, but also in facilitating conversations between visitors and culture bearers in a festival space where collective experiences are generated. To best explore a multi-faceted, living concept like cultural heritage, information presented in a manner that is both engaging and digestible to visitors of all ages and backgrounds is the most effective. Cultural learning, as described by the visitors, is most compelling and fulfilling when imparted through hands-on activities that not only engage both visitors and culture bearers, but also allow for the natural emergence of cultural conversations, thereby generating understanding between people from very different backgrounds.

In-person activities are not restricted to performances and interactive crafts. Enhancing access to traditional festival activities such as food concessions and souvenir shopping can also fulfill visitors' needs for meaningful, in-person interactions. Eating, especially with others who are there to learn and share in the same space, creates an irreplaceable experience. The act of tasting food in-person along with other Festival visitors is an experience presented through technology cannot match. In addition, to providing another platform for cultural conversations, breaking bread with other visitors and culture bearers provides visitors with an opportunity to further immerse themselves in a culture.

Likewise, the Marketplace could potentially serve as a space for visitors to understand culture from a different angle. While the products themselves appealed to many visitors, the process through which visitors purchased these goods also increased their cultural capital: buying and bartering from vendors provide visitors with different insights than those from the performances and demonstrations. Based on the interviews, the commercial aspect of the Marketplace seemed to lead visitors to consider it a less authentic aspect of an otherwise free and educational Festival. This suggests an opportunity to redesign the Marketplace experience to offer meaningful interaction between visitors and culture bearers. Framing the Marketplace as yet another part of culture heritage for visitors to experience, not simply as a space for consumption, could reinvigorate the Marketplace to become another space for cultural conversation between vendors and visitors.



The continued relevance of cultural conversations was evident in the comments of visitors who utilized the Festival Folklife not only for the information it provided, but also to expose themselves to new ideas and art forms, thereby accruing cultural capital. Some visitors indicated that the Festival was an accessible platform and appreciated its accepting climate.

These experiences tie into a broader question about the Festival's audiences—what is the best way for Folklife to go about creating a Festival that is both authentic to and respectful of the people of a culture while also disseminating cultural information in an accessible manner to very different audiences? It is clear that many visitors appreciated how the Festival communicated authenticity in both the little details (language signs) as well as through the Festival's values and messages: culture bearers are not collections from a museum, and the relationship must be mutually beneficial rather than a cultural exposition where one party learns from the other on display. Framing Folklife as a space for cultural exchange through conversations would allow both parties to learn and benefit, a contrast from an exposition where cultures are paraded or displayed.

Beyond the exchanges between visitors and the culture bearers and program activities, the Folklife Festival created a great sense of community that provided a welcoming environment in which visitors could interact with other visitors. The combination of individual experiences and interactions among visitors in the Festival space generated a collective experience that offered visitors a sense of each other's communities. The personal exchanges within a collective effervescence is a very important part of the setting Folklife provides, and something that is lacking in presentations of facts or via impersonal technology. Almost every interviewee alluded to the importance of engaging with the culture bearers and their fellow visitors, a communal experience that can only occur in a physical space. For many visitors, especially those who identified as minorities, a bold next step is for Folklife to further explore its identity as an advocacy platform and to speak for underrepresented communities. Rather than simply providing a space for cultural conversations with the hope of promoting greater understanding, these visitors want Folklife to send a message of its own.

APPENDIX I: BASIC NEEDS AND LOGISTICS

Below are visitor suggestions on adjustments to best meet visitors' needs for safety and comfort.

One senior visitor noted that although she herself would not mind the presence of dogs at a festival, she believed that for a festival to be accessible to everyone, pets should not be allowed.

I like that there are no animals because not everybody is comfortable around them.

Multiple visitors appreciated the benches on the Catalonia side, since they contributed to comfort.

It's good to have some seating place you can take a break from this for a while.

Interviewees had suggestions on how the Festival can best equip visitors to handle the summer heat. They offered long-term suggestions—planting trees—as well as near-term adjustments aided by technology.

More trees. It's so hot.

Try to keep a decent amount of shade going....

Misters ... especially as we're crossing over the areas ... where you can cool down.

A suggestion was to provide water and restrooms in multiple locations to prevent visitors from having to cross the lawn under the sun. The lack of obvious signage on both the hydration stations and beverages tent made it difficult for some visitors to access these services.

There were no [drinking fountains] on the Armenian side.

Restrooms and water. It's gotta be somewhere you can get to.

There's the big beverages tent there, but I don't know if that's only purchased beverages or if there's water.

In terms of logistics, visitors suggested maps and schedules to best enhance their Festival experience.

I have seen schedules spaced throughout. But if everyone had a schedule where everyone goes by, you'll know that at this time this is going to happen.

A map ... to show where more of the countries are ... an interactive screen where people attend can actually remember where Armenia is.

Location-wise, most visitors noted that hosting Folklife at the National Mall was an obvious choice due to its location near a Metro station and other D.C. attractions.

It's natural. The National Mall; where else would you put it?

Great because it's very accessible ... We can come by Metro or we can park nearby and come ... My favorite area is the National Mall.

Easily accessible with Metro. That's the most important thing for any type of gathering or Festival in the city.

It's a good location. If you're gonna come here, you have options for doing a lot of things.

You can't have a better location than this.

A number of visitors very much liked Folklife's open-air environment on the National Mall. Although many acknowledged the sweltering heat when describing the Festival's location, the weather did not deter them from insisting on an outdoor Festival.

It's more relaxing in the outdoors.

I'm very glad that they've continued to allow us to be outside ... it's really a lot nicer being outside, even in this heat.

Visitors expressed positive sentiments about the way the Festival displays were organized on the Mall.

Each side mimics each other so you know where the food and water is at, where to get in and out. ... Volunteers at the trash stations ... makes everything easier. You don't have to think as much. You just feel safe.

I like ... the stalls and stations to go around and no huge crowds.

Visitors with young children especially appreciated how the arrangements of the booths created a sense of order. However, they also acknowledged that the spacious lawn separating Armenia and Catalonia made it less convenient for families with strollers.

It's more organized to have different stations ... like a train. ... With small kids it's a good way you can go to one, and then the other one, and you have an order.

Of course you get this in nice area but I mean if you put things a little closer so we don't have to walk a lot.

APPENDIX II: FOLKLIFE IN ONE WORD

Below are visitors' response to the prompt "What is one word you would use to describe the Folklife Festival, and why?" Out of the 32 interviews, only two visitors commented on the vibe of the Festival.

*It's **enjoyable**, it's **relaxing**, I dunno. It's just like a low-key...I can't do it in one word. Everybody seems, like, in a good mood. It's not, like, going to shows somewhere where we're just like crammed in. You know, that sort of thing. So it's just kinda like a laid-back atmosphere; it's what I like.*

*A **celebration**. A celebration of being citizens of the world.*

Words related to education and learning were by far the most common responses among visitors. Interviewees appreciated both the knowledge they gained and the ways in which the educational material was presented.

*I think it's **educational** ultimately. I've seen various groups of children around, and it's good to know, you know, that we're hosting something that can teach people more about cultures. And you know, I consider myself well-traveled, and I have to say I don't know much about Armenian or Catalan cultures. I like the interesting choices.*

***Educational**. Well as I said...I learned some little things, to get a little nuance on the food tradition, to hear about pottery and fertility, that's all.*

*It's **educational** in that you can ask questions, you can read and then go to the actual stand and connect what you read with what they're doing, so then the theory and the action.*

Some visitors felt that the Festival's interactive components allowed them to engage with the content on a more holistic level and ultimately gain an intimate understanding of the two cultures.

***Engaging**. You get to interact, you get to engage with what you're seeing. You don't just get to see them making bread, you get to taste the bread. Don't just see the flowers, you can make it. The kids are actually engaged with the pottery. I saw the kids making the pottery.*

*I would say **engaging** because having these smaller stands means it's easier to get in there and ask questions of the facts-people, and yeah, it's not just like people on a stage and everybody listening. You can engage on a personal level.*

***Informative**. That was the word I was looking for. We live in a weird age where it's like, yeah, I could go online and find all of this, but that would require me thinking, "Today, I'm gonna go on Wikipedia and read everything there is to read about Armenia or Catalonia or anything you know." This is a good way to sorta get a hands-on experience. I like how outside most of the booths there's like the little, whatever you call that, with all the information on it. Uh, I think that's cool and informative in that way too. I told my mom I was here, and she was like, "Oh my god! Take pictures!" So you know I was by the stone cutting thing, and I took a picture of him carving the stone, and took a picture of the text that went along with it, so you know we can kinda read up on it now or read up on it later. So I think having actual reading material too.*



One visitor even revealed that if not for the Folklife Festival, she would never have known about the existence of Armenia and Catalonia.

***Enlightening.** I had never thought about these cultures. Much less walk around, read about, look [at] them, think about them, and read about them. I've heard the name, but I've never known what the people look like or where it's located, you know, none of that.*

Two visitors recognized the Festival's dedication towards education and subsequently expressed their gratitude to Folklife.

*I think we're appreciative of the effort. So the word **appreciative** or **thankful**; if I have to pick a word, that's the word I would pick. Of D.C. or of the Smithsonian museum specifically, to stage this.*

*No, **thank you** for everything, thank you for all you have to do. Like I said, keep up the good work. For us to continue to educate ourselves.*

APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

“Hi, [introduce yourself: name and title]. I am talking to visitors to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. The Festival wants to hear from attendees about their experiences at the Festival to enhance them. Are you 18 or over? If so, I would like you to share your thoughts with us. Your feedback will be shared with the Folklife Festival team and a summary report may be posted on our audience studies webpage to share the results with the public. This interview is voluntary and anonymous. You can skip questions you don’t want to answer and quit at any time.”

If the respondent agrees to participate, *“Would you mind if I record the conversation so I can accurately record your responses? I won’t be asking your name or any personally identifiable questions. If you want me to stop recording at any time, I will.”*

If the respondent agrees, start the recorder and proceed with the questions below. If not, the interviewer will take notes.

Overall Thoughts about the Smithsonian Folklife Festival

How did you feel about the festival?

Tell us about your experiences at the Festival today.

Probe as respondents mention: How they learned about the Festival; what motivated them to attend the Festival; The Marketplace (how they learned about it, why they were interested).

What were some of the more enjoyable aspects of your experience?

What is the one word that best describes your Festival experience, and why?

What do you feel makes the Smithsonian Folklife Festival a unique event?

Who amongst your family members or friends do you think would enjoy the Folklife Festival?

What could have made your experience better?

Festival Culture

Have you ever attended a festival like this before?

How would you compare Folklife to other festivals you’ve attended?

Future/possible programming

If the Festival had other programs throughout the year, would you be interested?

Probe specifics such as about venues and areas and levels of interests.

If we offered classes or workshops from cultural experts affiliated with the Festival and its topics each year, would you be interested?

Probe specifics such as about venues and areas and levels of interests.

Could you describe a few themes you'd like to see in the future for Folklife? Why?

Visitor Profile/Demographics

Collect following from the interview or by observation and enter the information into the interview log spreadsheet:

*From interview: Residence (DC area, Elsewhere US, or Another country): "Are you local/from the DC area?"
The projects would like to know where respondents are from broadly, State for domestic or Country for international visitors.*

By observation: Sex, Age, Group Composition (alone or with adults/with youth.)