

Danmarks Mediemuseum – From Printing Museum to Media Museum

I cannot say, that the transformation of the printing museum, that I represent, into a media museum started with the wish to make our exhibitions less boring. In reality I think that our exhibitions around 1990 met the need of our visitors at that time.

But of course in our plans for the new exhibitions we will try to make interesting, innovative, userinvolving exhibitions – and thereby – I hope – not boring.

In the following I will shortly present the Danmarks Mediemuseum. I will then give you some of our deliberations why we had to change our field of responsibility, our vision and last but not least the plans for the new exhibitions and activities.

1. Introduction

Visiting Danmarks Media Museum to-day you will find exhibitions, of course, but also empty space. It is due to a proces, starting in 2001 and lasting another couple of years, to transform the former printing and press museum into a museum of Danish media-history.

2. Brandts

At first a little about the address and our house. The museum is situated in the center of the city of Odense in the middle of Denmark in an old textile factory (cloth mill)- shut down of economical reasons 1977. It was emty til 1982 when the proces of making the buildings suitable for cultural and other activities started.

The Danish Printing Museums moved in 1984, same year as the Academy of fine Arts, and 1987 The Art Exhibition Hall Brandts and the Museum of Photographic Art followed.

Administratively we cooperate, but we are three independent and selfgoverning institutions with our own profiles.

The rest of the buildings of Brandts Klædefabrik were meant for shops and restaurants.

To-day you will see, that it was a foresighted project. It is now a sort of center for shopping and culture in Odense. In the background is an open-air stage for music- and theater-events.

3. The Printing and Press Museum

Founded 1981 as the Danish Printing Museum the museum moved into Brandts Klædefabrik 1984.

1989 it incorporated the Danish Press Museum in Århus, Jutland, and moved the collections to Odense. We did so, as we saw great possibilities in a synergetic effect and as we wanted to attract more visitors. We could see that in the long run we might have too few visitors, interested in a museum like ours. Press-history, combined with printing history, might attract a new and broader group of visitors, we thought.

The first permanent exhibitions had special focus on the history of printing technology and from 1991 also on the history of the Danish Press.

They were rather traditional exhibitions with workshops but they fullfilled the purpose: For

the first time in Denmark we had a museum to expose the history of a strong and important printing industry as well as the history of one of the cornerstones of the democratic society, the printed press. At that time it met the needs of a broad target group, as mentioned earlier

4. The Media Museum

As you might know we to-day struggle to transform the museum into a media museum
Why are we doing so? How will we do it?

Soon after the joining of the two museums we started to considerate the future of the new museum. We had now too little room for new permanent exhibitions, and we thought that it would be difficult or impossible to fullfil the task of the museum -that was to describe the development within the graphic trades and the printed press - without having in mind what was going on elsewhere within the media industri – especially the electronic media?

That was our startingpoint but as times went by – in the 1990'ies and later on – we also met other challenges we had and still have to deal with.

Let me in the following give you some of our considerations in this connection. I am sure that you will recognize many of them:

5. challenges for museums in general

demands for more lively and user-inclusive methods of exhibiting

demands for more use of it-technology and audivisual aids

more clearcut and targeted exhibitions

competition from TV, computerplays and digital media as well as from experience centers and Zoos

demands from central government, municipalities, sponsors etc. for higher visibility and financial adaption

All these demands are understandable as such, because museums do not exist in a void that is not influenced by developments elsewhere in society.

6. challenges especially for the printing museums

The printing industry in all of our Western-European countries has witnessed an increasingly rapid structural, financial and technological development that has left us with an industry characterised by big units and heavy investments into new IT-controlled technology. To this must be added globalisation which has resulted in outsourcing of work assignments to the Far East. In any event, major consequences have affected the size and professional composition of the workforce, etcetera.

In other words, the trade and the industry that we knew 25 years ago no longer exist!

These economic, technological and structural changes within the graphic trades have had impact on the working conditions of the printing museums:

- economical threats:

The outlined development of the printing industry has been reflected very specifically in the

economy of the museums, since it has become more and more difficult to find sponsors from printing enterprises and organisations. There are fewer enterprises to choose from and many of these are now run by people with another professional background than the printing industry. In a number of cases, this has led to a failure to understand the need to support the work of the museums.

If you take a look also at the membership of the associations of friends of a museum such as Danmarks Mediemuseum, we have lost members over the last six to eight years corresponding to about two-thirds of the annual subscription income from membership fees. This decline is the result first of all of company closures, bankruptcies and mergers among member companies. On the other hand, the number of personal memberships seems rather stable, but economically it has no effect.

All in all, contributions from the friends of the museum have declined dramatically and there is no likelihood that this situation will change.

To this must be added that no museum is protected against sudden cutbacks demanded by the central government, the regions or the municipalities – even if some of the fundamental tasks of the museums are hit hard or the museum may even have to close down.

- changed composition of the user group:

The former, primary target and user group of the museums, in particular consisting of people from the printing industry itself and a group broadly defined as elderly book people / book lovers has continued to shrink. Obviously, we need to continue passing on information to this group, but it is absolutely necessary to find new target groups as well. In this connection, younger generations are of particular interest. But how do we get hold of them and how can we then maintain their interest in the history of the printing industry? I have often met young people, who roughly seem to think that history started when the computer was invented. You cannot make much progress here at first by talking about exquisite typography, beautifully printed incunabula, etcetera.

- lacking previous knowledge among the new users of the printing museums:

Quite many of the present and potential users of the museums – primarily the younger generations – do not have the basic background for understanding the production processes, working conditions, etc., of earlier times. To many of these visitors, the use of lead types, printing blocks and lithographic stone will be entirely unknown. Or the name of Gutenberg means nothing to them.

Obviously, we should not stop passing on knowledge for that reason, but we need different information content and such features as interactive video or similar just to give visitors a basic concept of the development of the printing industry down through history.

To this must be added that the speed and information volume often used by museums when passing on knowledge are very different from what our young visitors meet in the electronic media and experience centres. It might be too slow!

I do not necessarily see it as a negative that museums work differently from these media or experience centres, but I am just mentioning these issues to stress the possible distance between the way the museums pass on knowledge and the expectations of their (young)

visitors.

7. A lot of challenges/threats!

Year 2000 we were recognized by the Ministry of Culture to incorporate also the history of the electronic media. This means that we from then on are the museum of the printed and electronic media.

At the same time we started a preproject analysing our possibilities of transforming the museum into such a media-museum

Some of the conclusions of this project were

More space for the exhibitions

New basic exhibitions with central media-historical content

new exhibition technologies

a tv-studio and a department for education

Economy for financing the new museum-project – both working capital and investment funds

We have got more space and we have got more working capital and therefore been able to employ another curator, an educator and a producer for our tv-studio.

As you will understand the project also suggested completely new basic exhibitions and new communicative activities. Let us take a closer look at our plans for the exhibitions:

8. ExhibitionPrinciples:

Cultural history instead of technical history

From Present to Past – backwards cronology

Few essential points – not the whole story

Digital and interactive mediation

Three tracks: Technology – products – society

Theme isles

Workshops – live storytelling

Flexible solutions – modules

9. Towards Museum 2.0:

Our goal:

to reach a new and younger audience

The challenge:

become relevant

create interest

get exposure

Our strategy:

give the target audience what they need

give the target audience what they want

rethink our pr- and marketing efforts

what they need:

critical awareness about media power
new digital literacy and skills
assurance that their culture is valuable and a worthy subject of museum exhibitions

what they want:

engaging and interactive exhibitions
learning through play and games
exhibitions about their everyday life.

Our solutions: The MediaCenter

a place where the audience can discover and engage with Denmark's cultural heritage of media products

a place where the audience want to spend their leisure time, not just visit once

a informal learning space where the audience can learn about media history and acquire the digital skills required of the modern individual

The activities:

The Hot Seat

The Rocklab

The Exhibition Stage

The MediaLab

Last: the project also establishing an education center and a tv-studio recommended. Both are in function with great success.

10. Conclusion

It is important for Denmark's Museum – as for all museums – to be aware of our uniqueness: our collections but of course the knowledge of the media-history and of the skills of past and present graphic trades are also characteristic for our museum. We can put three dimensional objects into a relevant context. An exhibition without objects might as well be shown on video, in a book, facebook or whatever.

Then it is up to the museums to use the objects to make the exhibitions interesting. Well some themes might be difficult to make exiting but then we have the new electronic equipment , computerplays a.s.o. to help us. But we must remember, though, that the electronic media are to be used for one way to make the communication better – Sometimes digital techniques will be inexpedient in the exhibition. We have to find a balance.

I have now sketched how we in Odense will try to make our new exhibitions attractive for our visitors.

I am sure that we can't lean back and relax, though. We have to see if our new activities function as we expect them to do(e.g. we will use focusgroups) and if not we have to be ready to make changes.

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