

THE COPENHAGEN MUSEUM WALL AS A PLATFORM FOR CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

DOWN TO EARTH, OUT OF THE BUILDING, INTO THE STREET AND THE COMMUNITIES

As the big cities become more powerful and more independent of the national context, many city museums, as the Museum of Copenhagen, begin to revise their missions, their methods and their working relationships with their cities and surrounding communities.

The Museum of Copenhagen has thus initiated a series of outreach projects, research programs, exhibitions and public activities that invite user participation and involvement and make the museum more relevant and present in the life of city and its residents. These are initiatives that bring the museum down to earth, out of the building, into the street, into the communities.

The Copenhagen Museum WALL is the most well-known and high-profiled of these projects, for its democratic platform, facilitated through cutting edge digital technologies.

A DECLARATION OF FAITH IN THE CITY OF COPENHAGEN



The WALL has been called a declaration of faith in the city of Copenhagen. In technical terms it is a 10 by 2 meter digital, interactive, multiuser, multitouch screen, composed of four high definition plasma screens, mounted into a customised container, run by 30 dedicated softwares drawing on a database containing now around 18.000 images from historic and contemporary Copenhagen.

EQUAL ACCESS TO CULTURE FOR EVERYONE

A promise of equal access to culture for everyone is fundamental for Danish cultural policies for more than half a century. However, all research into the audiences and user groups of cultural institutions point to the consistent and persistent patterns of exclusion of major segments of the population from access to the cultural resources. This bias in favor of people with higher education is true also for the Museum of Copenhagen, so the museum wanted to create platforms for dialogue and explore media for communication that stood apart from those traditionally used in the museum.

The WALL is navigated through simple intuitive hand movements, following a simple intuitive grammar of tapping, pushing, pulling, flicking. The cityscape is organized by geographical urban districts, as Copenhageners tend to identify themselves by specific local neighborhoods. Users of the WALL can simply drift, observe and enjoy the cityscape. They can open individual elements, explore local albums, or citywide thematic album in which they take a special interest.

They can also add their own images and their own comments and stories, at the WALL itself or through the website, spoken or in writing.

THE PERSONAL AND EMOTIONAL TOPOGRAPHY OF A CITY

When the WALL opened in one of the busiest city squares of the city in 2010, its database held around 10.000 digital images, uploaded by the Museum of Copenhagen, from the image archives of the museum, organized in a lovely, multilayered, dreamlike cityscape. Recent material includes the contemporary stills, video and soundscapes created by a concurrent outreach project, in which a group of young people were employed by the museum to document their own – underrepresented and politically contested – neighborhood.

Working on an agenda of equal access to culture for all - or of cultural democracy or of social justice - it was essential for the museum to facilitate a user experience that

empowers people to interact with the WALL on their own terms, both when they explore or comment on existing material on the WALL, and when they decide to contribute with their own material.



Eva and Keld Dyhl in Dyhl's Hardware Store, uploaded by Asger Hunov, March 2013

The database structure is non-hierarchical. It is structured through traditional themes as architecture, art, archaeology, or time and place, but also through experiential categories as anger, hope, resistance, communities. The museum is encouraging and inviting the personal meaning and narratives, the topographies of the first kiss, of barking dogs, of the lingering sound of the fish monger woman shouting her wares.

The museum is aiming to chart the personal experiences of everyday life in the city, and everyone, resident or visitor, can invent and add their own factual and poetic tags as their personal experience, emotional realities, secret and sacred places, are slotted into the urban landscape.

ENCOURAGING, ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION

Copenhagen is a lived-in, well-worn city, where every corner is an intersection in the matrix of time and place and meaning. The past lives visibly in the present, also where it has long gone to ashes or is now actually physically dismantled.

Individual users contribute to the WALL with images - and memories - from their family albums, with new informal shots from everyday life, as well as ambitious and unique artistic photos from contemporary Copenhagen.



Activists. Uploaded by Red Dragon, May 2010

Annual photo competitions on specific themes are conducted for the WALL by the museum, often in collaboration with other partners. Outreach continues into new neighborhoods. Small and large thematic collections of contemporary images are donated and uploaded by libraries, schools, social institutions, groups of boy scouts, groups of prisoners, local archives. Temporary specific features are added by the museum or other organizations in connection with major events in the city.



DOG ETC. Uploaded by Theo, June 2013

The new images, when harvested by the museum archives, radically strengthen the collections from the contemporary urban context, with material that citizens of the capital have found significant.

After three years on the streets and squares of Copenhagen, the WALL has had an estimated 1.3 million individual user, who opened 9.6 million images, sent 150.000 postcards from the WALL, These are user figures that for a museum like the Museum of Copenhagen were unthinkable before, and are still unthinkable in the physical museum.

But even more interesting is the active participation and the 7.400 new images and an equal number of comments that have been uploaded by users to the WALL.

The WALL creates relationships between the museum and people who do not usually use or participate in museum content or interpretation. But even more significantly it supports people in engaging in an active visual and verbal exchange with each other. A high level of public participation is driving and developing the WALL into an increasingly interesting mix of documentation, personal narratives and metaphors, memories and meanings.



Lights in the night, uploaded by Skyllemiddel, June 2013