



THE MUSEUM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

**Review of 20 years of Museum planning
Perspective into the next century**
20 years, 20 questions, 20 answers

Museumsplanung.com changes after 20 years.

Ines Miersch-Süss is an architect and has managed more than 60 projects since 1997. She dares to give a perspective of the museum in the 21st century. After 20 years, 20 questions and answers reveal this change.

20 years of Museumsplanung are coming to an end.

What made you take this step?

The radical need for change! In the field of museum planning, development is not taking place for several years. The creative impulse for renewal from the outside, e.g. which shapes the museum planning, has no more support in the museum world.

What is the reason for that?

When impulses from the outside are no longer demanded, then the museum rests in itself. This dormant state is deceptive. It is more a kind of a rigidity before a strong revolution. I mean, the museum will have to change radically in the 21st century. It will ask itself the question of its own ancient task and identity and then – hopefully – reinvent itself. And this complex and important process can no longer be directed from the outside.

How has this rigidity become noticeable, what were the indications?

It has become really clear to me for the first time during the project management for the interior expansion of the Humboldt Forum. Such a challenging project makes it clear at which point of development the museums are.

The Humboldt Forum is a great challenge for the museums. It challenges you to fill a new house with new messages that are outside of any art historical context.

How and when challenges are mastered depends on the readiness for development. But I have abandoned the project because the museums miss the readiness to grow beyond their own borders and to face the theme of the Humboldt Forum.

How long have you been working on the Humboldt Forum project?

Only 2 years. I started in summer 2009 and abandoned the project two years later in summer 2011.

What has attracted you on the project task of the Humboldt Forum?

First, the size of the project. With 40,000 square meters interior space, this was after the Dresden Castle, which I supported from 1997 to 1999, the second largest area of a museum, which I could view in the full context. This exists only at the most potent museum castle buildings, which can be counted on 10 fingers in Europe.

And second, it was the design by Franco Stelle. I belong and belonged to the few ones who could recognize in this draft the future potential of the Berlin castle to be reconstructed as Humboldt Forum.

How did this potential appear to you?

Franco Stelle has at no moment questioned the established parameters of the Humboldt Forum project with the restoration of the historical exterior facade of the Berlin Palace. To recognize the identity as Berlin Palace from the outside is a strong statement for the Humboldt Forum in the middle of Berlin. A rebuild could reflect it inside and outside in a modern way, but not give it that identity as the reconstructed castle would do: In the inside, Stella set with the cathedral-like entrance an accent of silence. Which suits for an overture when entering such a forum by the global society with its cultures, its diversity, its coexistence.

To approach such a theme through silence requires courage.

Today, at that position stands a large glass-roofed courtyard for events. You think that it is not needed?

No. Not at any price. With this changed draft architecture, the Humboldt Forum lost the architectural offer to approach the theme of the place in a unique way – through a colonnade hall of silence. A motive that is found in all religious buildings in the world – an „architectural gesture“ that makes it feel through its abstract form that the world is at home here. The abandonment of this motive as access into the building is a real loss to me.

And the museums in it, how did they meet the task?

Not at all!

In such a task, to shape the Humboldt Forum, is not about how something is exhibited and whether it is beautiful and corresponds to the taste of our time.

In such a task, the first of all and exclusive question is with which structures the theme is to be given the identity. To make it short: A radical abandonment, a break with the existing structures, the traditional museum units, would have been the only right thing here.

What exactly do you have to picture by that?

The dissolution of the museums as separate collections and the merger into a new identity of the 21st century – as the Humboldt Forum. In this way, you can put objects from a global context into a global context, but from the mindset of our century. The question is no longer from what time, from what place.

Please give an example of this form of restructuring!

Imagine the Humboldt Forum where the world cultures are no longer geographically separated but exhibited in a dialogue. An Eskimo, an Asian, an Arab, an American or an Indian, a European right next to each other in a showcase, from one time. What a scene is developing there! You receive a feeling for the development of the cultures of a time. The world view can completely change at this sight.

Respect for other cultures and appreciation, readiness for dialogue and not distanced viewing – that would have been the Humboldt Forum to me.

And you could not influence such a change to restructuring from the outside?

No, unfortunately not. Only when the awareness for changes already exists from the inside, you can shape changes from the outside. And that was not the case in the Humboldt Forum project during my time. And I assume not even today.

Will museums be able to further expand their role in the society?

Of course, but only with new tasks and a new self-understanding. Museums are and remain archives of contemporary history. However, department stores are much more appealing, although they offer things that are not affordable to everyone.

Museums must place the people at the center of their work.

Then the museums will succeed to still play a role in the society in the 21st century. The connection between people and museums is created through usability. So, only when something is usable, it is relevant to people. And this perception of usability has changed massively since the 19th century. Not reacting and responding to it means rigidity.

But we are still witnessing a museum boom of new buildings in the whole world?

Yes sure. But building alone is not enough. Two books on the topic have been published last year, which, viewed together, wonderfully illustrate this historical development of new buildings: The book on the 40th anniversary of the opening of the Center Pompidou by Francesco Dal Co tells the story of the making of. And it becomes clear quickly: It remains a museum of the 20th century and will keep the same role in the 21st century.

The book NEW MUSEUMS shows exactly the opposite. It has been published by the Hirmer Verlag. As I flicked through the book, I realized again that our decision to end Museumsplanung.com after 20 years was the only right one. In this century, a substantial and strong change is needed in this initially private passion for collecting by princes and kings of the 18th century, i.e. this politically or professionally controlled museum for the people from the mid-19th century.

What has been made visible by the book?

The further one scrolls backwards in the last-mentioned book, the more absurd become the designs for museum buildings. When architecture alone tries to give the museum a new self-image and is not followed by adequate content from the inside, but only teachings fill the space, or even when traditional gallery forms of the 19th century do not harmonize with the huge organic forms on the outside, then there is an attractive building task, nothing more.

A museum without identity cannot find its shape. Architecture alone cannot solve this task.

Is your experience not necessary here and on the right place?

Possibly yes, possibly no. Probably not. Identity has to be developed. For example, if a company gets in a position to have to change, to adapt to the market and time, this process cannot be directed and controlled from the outside. That requires a strong entrepreneurial leadership, and then it succeeds.

Museums and exhibition halls that are tied to companies are currently the successful ones. They magically attract people. Corporate collections or museums are from today's perspective the champions among the museums. They are focused on communicating with people, they want to be seen. Here lies the future!

Make an example

For example, the art hall of Deutsche Bank in Berlin. The exhibition halls of the Pinault Collection in Venice, the Prada Foundation and others that have emerged only in the last decade. They have recognized the gap very early and created their own offer for the public. With brilliance.

A phenomenon of this century?

No, not at all. Look at the big museums in New York, they are a crowd puller still to this day. Their origin lies in patronage, which is sustainable.

So, the private museums are the successful concept of the 21st century?

I think so. Transferring the museum to the political administration was a mistake that needs to be revised. Only by passion can emerge something great, something that is constantly renewing itself, that is constantly pushing for renewal and expansion.

A fine example is also the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. It is financed exclusively by patrons and enriches Paris with incredibly exciting exhibitions. Or Guggenheim in Venice – always full to the brim, although the changing exhibitions are rather small but refined. Refined and on the smallest space, sometimes covering not more than two rooms, to shape a big theme for Picasso.

So, what is your final recommendation for museums that want to outlast the 21st century?

Museums have to move as quick as possible from the dormant state into the process of change, make breaks and set radical renewal as the goal, without compromise.

How will Museumsplanung continue? Will you abandon the entire experience of 20 years?

Museumsplanung will take on a new role, but as one of many engineering services and services of MSAO Tech, our engineering division. We then focus on renewal and innovation.

We are looking forward to projects where these processes of museum renewal should take place and we can contribute as engineers. An exciting task for the 21st century.

MSAO

MSAO INTERNATIONAL
German Architecture & Engineering
www.msao.de
kontakt@msao.de