

Open Air - Open Communications

An Open Air Museum is a wonderful place. Open, free spaces with lots of possibilities for visitors to interact and be social. The physical museum is a platform. And it is just one of the many, that can be used for interpretation, learning, fun and passion for cultural heritage.

More and more people use social platforms to connect, communicate and explore heritage in new ways. As a public institution, it is important to “follow the crowd”, to go where people go and continue to make new spaces for interaction with heritage. What can be done and how? Actually a lot besides posting information about opening hours and pictures of activities onsite.

Armémuseum (Royal Armoury Museum) in Sweden has been one of the first museums to use internet memes as part of their online presence. By posting well-known memes such as “Success Kid” or “Batman slaps Robin”, the museum is tapping into the spirit of contemporary online culture, and demonstrate a willingness to live in the same world as everyone else - and speak the same, visual language.

As scholars and citizens of Academia, museum curators are part of a culture where “words matter”. Words do indeed matter, but at the same time, an increasing amount of our communication is becoming very different, from what it used to be. Platforms such as Instagram enables us to enter dialogues about heritage, that are based on the visually appealing. The great Instagrammer does not tell her story in a lot of words; she’s eloquent in the way she frames her motif as well as in the filters and hashtags she chooses. The clever Viner uses the stop-motion technique with great skill or captures just the right funny, cool, surprising and engaging content, that gets attention by being liked and re-vined. The top Pinner understands how to choose just the right pictures, with the aesthetical qualities, that will appeal to others and make them “re-pinnable”. Such platforms also provide new ways of engaging with heritage content.

Visual is not the only challenge, that a museum is facing today. Digitization and the opening up of collections sweeps away the monopolies, that curators have had for decades. Others will - increasingly - interpret and use “our” material. There are so many other places - not at least online - that people will turn to for information and knowledge. Because these places are more visible and meet the needs of users in the digital space. Chances are, that many more people read on e.g. Wikipedia about the topic that a museum is supposed to convey and interpret - than do so on the museum website or inside the museum.

Digital and the virtual spaces provides an opportunity for museums to take their missions to a new level. Digital and social enables us to scale. The physical space is a great place where we have the opportunity to create great experiences for people. We can connect with - say 50.000 or 300.000 visitors onsite. But online, we can connect and provide content about cultural heritage

to twice or three - or even more - that amount of people. And we can combine digital and analogue presences through social, by allowing visitors in both spaces to interact: with us, with each other and with history.

Digital and social are opportunities and challenges combined. They challenge the way and channels we usually combine in our work. But they also give us important tools to connect in new ways and try out new paths in pursuing the core of our missions.

Social platforms have yet another advantage - they keep us on our toes in an everchanging world. In his recent book "The Future" former vicepresident of the US, Al Gore argues, that we are living an age of "hyperchange". Our world is changing rapidly, continuously - and in a pace, never seen before. Constant transformation is the central reality of our lives - change is, what we can expect to be constant. Gore's book is about climate change, but if the thought of hyperchange has even some validity, it must affect most aspect of our lives - including the way Open Air Museums and other heritage institutions conduct their affairs. Being in constant touch and dialogue with visitors, users - and people interested in heritage will - hopefully - help us keep up.