

MUSEOLOGY

ESTABLISHING THE VISITOR'S INTERACTION BETWEEN
RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND EXHIBITION IN THE
DITSONG: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CULTURAL HISTORY

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Project title Museology. Establishing the visitor's interaction between research, education and exhibition in the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History

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Location 149 Visagie Street, 25°45'09.7"S 28°11'05.7"E

DECLARATION

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I further state that no part of my thesis has already been, or is currently being, submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification.

I further declare that this thesis is substantially my own work. Where reference is made to the works of others, the extent to which that work has been used is indicated and fully acknowledged in the text and list of references.



Carli de Klerk

ABSTRACT

This dissertation originated from a lifetime of museum visits and thus a passion for museum design.

The site is the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History located in Pretoria. The dissertation will argue that the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History has a well thought out organisational approach within their collection management. The museum's design approach to the interior however is not successful. The research surrounding the artefacts, the learning experience of the visitor and the exhibition design should all be linked.

This will create an opportunity to establish a physical and experiential link between the above mentioned aspects and to engage the visitor to create a lasting memory after their visit is complete. User experience will be argued to be the connecting element between research, education and exhibition.

This dissertation considered the interface between the museum visitor and the museum facilities, and how they can be connected through a design intervention to provide an optimum visitor experience at the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History.

The design intervention consisting of the ramped walkway, main entrance, foyer and atrium aims to create a positive first impression to visitors of the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History. The onset visitor experience of the museum aims to stimulate the visitor's curiosity and encourage them to keep returning.

EkSERP

Die verhandeling se oorsprong lê in 'n lewe van museum besoeke en dus 'n belangstelling in museum ontwerp.

Die perseel is die Ditsong: Nasionale Museum van Kultuur Geskiedenis wat geleë is in Pretoria. Die verhandeling sal aanvoer dat die Ditsong: Nasionale Museum van Kultuur Geskiedenis 'n goed deurdagte organisatoriese benadering het in hul versameling administrasie. Die museum se ontwerp benadering to die interieur is nie suksesvol nie. Die artefakte se omringende navorsing, die besoeker se leer ervaring en die uitstalling ontwerp moet verbind wees.

Dit sal 'n geleentheid bied om 'n fisiese en ervaringsgewyse verbintenis te tref tussen die bogenoemde aspekte en om die besoeker te betrek om 'n blywende herinnering van die museum te skep. Besoekerservaring sal aangevoer word as die verbindende element tussen navorsing, leer ervaring en uitstallings.

Die verhandeling het die interaksie tussen die besoeker en museum fasiliteite ondersoek asook hoe bogenoemde aspekte verbind kan word deur 'n ontwerp ingryping.

Die ontwerp ingryping wat bestaan uit 'n aantrede, hoof ingang, portaal en atrium, poog daarin om 'n positiewe eerste indruk te vorm van besoekers aan die Ditsong: Nasionale Museum van Kultuur Geskiedenis. Die eerste besoek ervaring van die museum poog daarin om die besoeker se nuuskierigheid aan te wakker en om die besoeker aan te moedig om terug te keer.

KEYWORDS

Museology
Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History
Visitor interaction
Atrium
Reception

SLEUTELWOORDE

Museum studie
Ditsong: Nasionale Museum van Kultuur Geskiedenis
Besoeker interaksie
Atrium
Ontvangs

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1.1.1. Ramped walkway to main entrance of the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History.

“(IT) SHOULD MAKE YOU THINK, THERE IS NO POINT IN DOING IT IF IT'S NOT GOING TO CREATE SOME SORT OF EMOTION” (MQUEEN 2011:12).

1.1. BACKGROUND

This dissertation originated from a lifetime of museum visits and thus a passion for museum design. There are various definitions used to describe museums. Museums are, according to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) ...

“... a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment” (ICOM 2010).

The South African Museums Association (SAMA) defines museums as ...

“... dynamic and accountable public institutions which both shape and manifest the consciousness, identities and understanding of communities and individuals in relation to their natural, historical and cultural environments, through collection, documentation, conservation, research and education programmes that are responsive to the needs of society” (SAMA 2013).

The process of establishing the discourse of this dissertation is the choice of site, the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History (Figure 1.1.1.), a museum located in Pretoria's CBD. The existing museum is outdated in terms of front of house, initial impression and its exhibitions and is in need of rejuvenation.

The way in which information and artefacts are made available to visitors is becoming increasingly interactive. Interactive in this sense means interacting with the visitor physically and experientially. “Designing today's exhibition spaces is about creating an atmosphere where visitors inherently understand that there is a magnetic attraction to the (object)” (Rumler 2009).

Visitors should be enticed into learning. In traditional museum design, information is communicated through text and images, and what or how the visitor absorbs this information is up to them. There are three basic methods of gathering information, through words (both heard and read), sensations and images (visual stimulation being the strongest, most memorable method). (Dean 1994:26).

Museums deprive objects of their contexts by bringing them to a central repository for interpretation to the public. In some instances the museum may reconstruct a context but the original spirit is lost. As technology's influence begins to increase, more museums begin to incorporate 'immersive', 'theatrical', 'state-of-the-art' or 'destination' experiences into their facilities. (McKenna-Cress 2013:175.) These types of environments are designed to evoke an emotional response from the visitor and to enhance their experience.

Visitors should be allowed to interpret the museum and its objects in their own way, while still understanding the facts supplied. This visitor interpretation starts with the initial glance at the museum and is reinforced by their first interaction with museum facilities. “(E)ach visitor learns in a different way, interpreting information from their previous knowledge, experience, and beliefs” (McLean 1997:82).

“You never get a second chance to make a good first impression” (Rumler 2009). The impression given by the museum may be altered by

the exhibitions within the museum, but the overall first impression will be the lasting impression.

The design intervention will aim to revitalise the museum, by investigating the user's interaction with museum facilities. According to McLean (1997:78) there are four factors that dictate the visitor's decision to visit the museum, these are “awareness, accessibility, relevance to the visitor and perceptions of the museum”.

The theory of museums – museology – is researched to understand how museums function, how international museums apply the standards set out by the International Council of Museums and thus how the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History should apply these standards as well.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

“Museums are always evolving, always adapting to changing circumstances” (Vollgraaff 2013:23). Although the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History has been designed specifically to host rotating and temporary exhibitions, this element of adaptability is not evident within the museum.

Many existing museums in South Africa are aimed at complying with council standards in terms of collection management and not in terms of the physical manifestation of these standards. Whereas new museum developments do strive towards excellence in museum design. (SAMA 2006.) The study will argue that the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History is on the verge of becoming obsolete as a visitor attraction due to its outdated design. The design challenge of the museum will be to attract new visitors and engage returning visitors.

Lighting plays an important role in museum design. The current lighting conditions of the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History is not appropriate to help shape the visitor's museum experience.

This dissertation will argue that the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History has a well thought out organisational approach within their collection management, the museum's physical approach with regards to research, education and exhibition are not connected. The museum's design approach to the interior however is not successful. The research surrounding the artefacts, the learning experience of the visitor and the exhibition design should all be linked. This will create an opportunity to establish a physical and experiential link between the above mentioned aspects and to engage the visitor to create a lasting memory after their visit is complete. User experience will be proven to be the connecting element between research, education and exhibition.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION

How can the visitor's interaction between research, education and exhibition be established in an integrated manner within the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History?

1.3.1. Sub-questions

- What is the underlying link between research, education and exhibition within the existing Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History?
- How can the intervention allow for a better visitor interaction with museum facilities?
- How can the museum spaces be made understandable for various types of visitors?
- How does user interaction improve user experience?

1.4. Aim / Objectives

- Define the link between research, education and exhibition.
- Encourage interaction between visitors, between visitors and displays and between visitors and museum facilities.
- Create a memorable onset to the visitors' museum journey.
- Establish an experiential environment for visitors to fulfil their museum journey.

1.5. Methodology

1.5.1. RESEARCH METHODS

1.5.1.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of relevant literature on museology, learning theory, and the history of the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History will be conducted. Where available, primary sources will be given preference, while secondary sources will be used as supporting research. According to Groat and Wang (2002: 60) primary sources are original sources relevant to the topic, secondary sources are sources that comment upon the primary sources.

1.5.1.2. OBSERVATION AND DOCUMENTATION

Observations conducted as part of site visits are documented in the form of notes, sketches and photographs. "If you are observing people, you can choose between two common ways to observe: participant observation and unobtrusive observation" (Driscoll 2011:160). The observation method that will be used is unobtrusive observation. Unobtrusive observation will occur in public spaces where people will not notice an 'intruder' to their experiences. This relates to the flaneur who "removes himself from the world while he stands astride its heart" (Stephen 2013). The flaneur disassociates himself from his surroundings to observe at a distance, the flaneur is thus an unobtrusive observer.

1.5.1.3. CRITICAL REFLECTION

Critical reflection will involve the documentation of multiple experiences within the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History. This will involve the denoting of feelings, reactions and evaluations. These situations will be critically analysed to come to a conclusion that will in turn influence further investigations. (Kenny 2010)

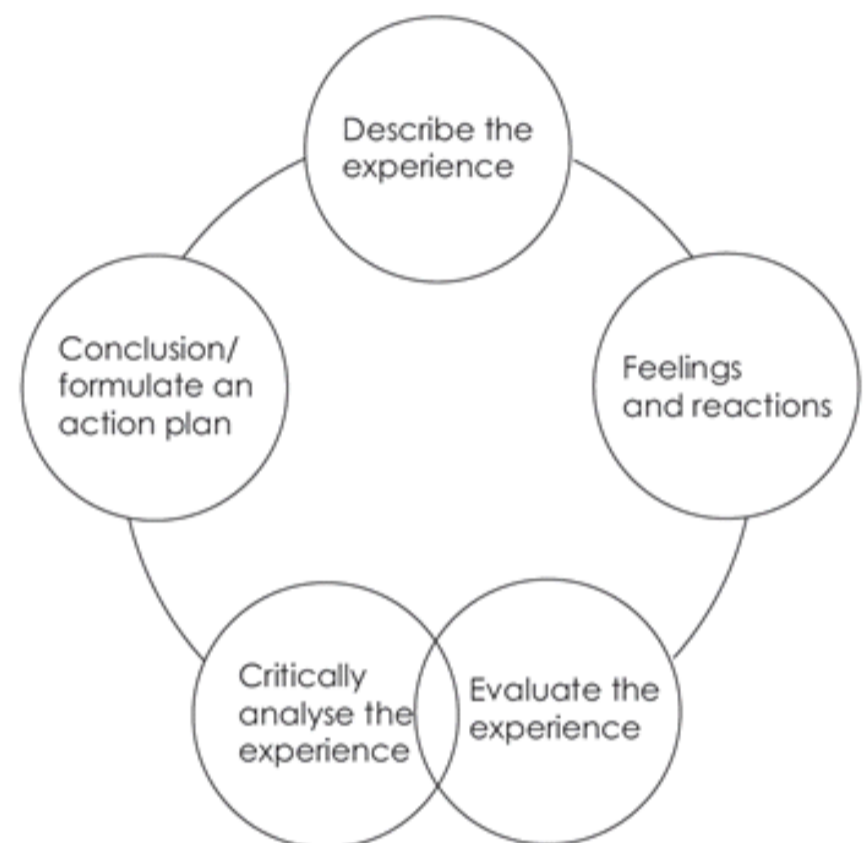


Diagram 1.1. Process of critical reflection. (Adapted from Kenny 2010).

1.5.1.4. PRECEDENT AND CASE STUDIES

Appropriate precedent and case studies will be researched. These studies will relate to the project in terms of typology, conceptual approach and technical resolution. Museums that were physically visited will be used as case studies. These precedents will be critically analysed to help inform the design. Typological precedents will include entire museums and museum facilities (information area, exhibitions, wayfinding). Precedents on conceptual approach will be researched to inform the conceptual development of the design and act as inspiration to enrich the design. Precedents that will inform the technical resolution of the project will include the relation to technical aspects and theory application (museology, visitor interaction, learning environments, wayfinding systems). All these studies will enrich the design process and thus the final design as well.

1.6. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following definitions and abbreviations are used in the study.

CBD	- Central Business District
D:NMCH	- Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History This abbreviation is used to separate the Ditsong: National Museum of Cultural History from other Ditsong museums.
ICOM	- International Council of Museums
Museology	- The study of museums
SAMA	- South African Museums Association

1.7. AREA OF FOCUS

The study will focus on key areas within the D:NMCH. On a zoning level, the entire building will be considered, however on a detailing level the design intervention will be limited to the ramped walkway from the parking lot to the main entrance, the foyer and the open gathering space. These spaces have been purposely selected as they are the first spaces encountered before the visitor begins viewing the exhibitions. They are critical in creating a first impression and stimulating the visitor's curiosity. A temporary exhibition on ground level will also be included in the design. These key areas will serve as an introduction to a language for future intervention in the museum.

1.8. OUTLINE OF STUDY

The order in which the study chapters are arranged reflect the process I followed within the project. The dissertation starts with site choice and context study, a theoretical investigation, which informs the design development.

Chapter 1 - Introduction and problem statement.

An overview is given on the study. The research question is established: *How can the visitor's interaction between research, education and exhibition be established in an integrated manner within the D:NMCH?*

Chapter 2 – Context and site analysis

This chapter will investigate the context in terms of immediate site, the D:NMCH itself and personal museum experience at the D:NMCH.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical investigation

Museology and the evaluation of the D:NMCH are the main focus of this chapter.

Chapter 4 – Design discourse

Precedents, case studies and design development are analysed in this chapter. The final design will be explained and documented.

Chapter 5 - Technical investigation

The technical investigation will include detail design and other related technical aspects.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

A resolution to the research question and problem statement will be given together with recommendations.

1.9. CONCLUSION

The project will focus on the key areas (ramped walkway, main entrance, the foyer and the open gathering space) in the D:NMCH to provide the visitor with a good first impression of the museum and to stimulate their curiosity.

The research questions highlight the visitor's interaction with the museum facilities and will inform the project going forward.

