

Designmuseum Danmark: Why Designmuseum Danmark intends to postpone reopening until late 2021?

by

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Since Designmuseum Danmark announced on Wednesday 13.05 that we, due to the effects of the coronavirus, intend to remain closed for visitors until the end of 2021 and much worse, probably have to lay off 50 employees, we have received many reactions. Shock, sadness, anger and wonder. Thank you. It is nice to feel that we mean something to so many. And I understand the reactions well. Not least because many were based on the media headlines, where only few could read behind the paywall. And therefore, didn't get the full explanation. So here it comes - in brief, but enough to make you understand that it's not just a matter of asking for more money. The problem lies far deeper and concerns the foundation on how we operate museums.

The decision is a response to two simultaneous occurrences. One has a short perspective, reacting on what has happened and the other is more long-term, looking forward. Firstly, along with the rest of the country, we were forced to close down on March 12th due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In retrospect, our immediate response, was to focus on mitigating a financial loss in a time of zero income, where Designmuseum Danmark must be kept 'afloat' and where the employees were secured as best as possible - the vast majority of them were sent home with full pay. It has been a time of treading water while thinking different and acting fast with a much-reduced staff. This has included, strengthening collaborations and boosting digital platforms.

Looking ahead, we are facing a post-COVID-19 scenario, where the vital functions of society, including the cultural institutions, can slowly re-open. And this post-corona perspective is a main concern for us now. We are convinced that we need to go through a complete transformation, to rethink our business model. Forecasts show that it will be a very lengthy process and of course we don't expect to bounce right back to pre-corona times. We are looking at a radically changed and critical situation, when it comes to international visitors, which will affect the museum, businesses

and institutions operating within the experience industry, for a long period in the future. The decline in major international tourism flows makes our visitor base, and thus economy, extremely uncertain.

Some museums are different, but we are based on an economy, where at least 2/3 is own-generated income, "money on the door" so to speak, generated by income from entrance, shop, tours, learning programs and events. Secondly, we generate income from private funding and project grants. And normally 80 percent of our visitors are international guests. A large part of the year, we have between 1000 and 2000 visitors every day. In 2019, we had 310,000 visitors. It will be absurdly expensive for us to stay open for very few visitors.

All in all, it is a very unfortunate combination of conditions that in good times is the strength of the museum, but in the light of COVID-19 and its inferred consequences, becomes our Achilles heel and paints a particularly bleak picture for the near future, where we for the next couple of years primarily have keep the wheels running on our government grants, totalling a third of our normal income.

If we go through with our plans, we will close Designmuseum Danmark for a longer period, until the end of 2021. We will balance expenses with revenue, and this will mean we have to say goodbye to valued employees. It is necessary, that we prevent accumulating a large deficit when the museum opens again, but we will still have the opportunity to develop and operate the museum on a profitable basis with room for growth and development. In every respect. That way, we also have the opportunity to give something back to society through all our non-profit initiatives that you know from recent years. We will continue to share design and keep our position as Denmark's epicentre for design.

There is a lot of talk about 'New Normal' right now. And yes ... We have all lost our innocence and must look into a radically changed future. We have no idea what awaits us. I imagine that managing a museum will take a new direction, where we all need to reinvent ourselves. This is the next step Designmuseum Danmark will take now. For some time to come, this may be very painful. And I can think of at least 50 reasons for that.

However, there will also come a day when we will realize, that we made the right decision, because we have shown due diligence. We have stopped while we still had time - and acknowledged that now we need to change course. Our business model must be geared in a way that fits a changed reality, with new behavior patterns for many, so that we can also look into a future where the museum, together with other museums and cultural institutions, can thrive, grow and enrich as much as possible. Along with all that, we will complete a much-needed renovation of our listed building from the 1750s. We have funding to go through with this from the very generous private funds that have supported our project in recent years.

I am convinced that Designmuseum Danmark will step out of this historical crisis, which has turned everything upside down, even though our intended actions are drastic. I believe it is necessary because the museum, along with other cultural institutions, is an essential part of our cohesion as humans and as societies. We have to fight, to continue fulfilling our important role and offer perspectives on existence, simply and rightly. All that is more necessary than ever.