

“For some a museum, for some an oasis”. Museum audience development strategies: the case of the Städel Museum of Frankfurt.

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The arrival of the new Director, Max Hollein, at the Städel Museum of Frankfurt in 2006, according to many people has deeply changed the profile and managerial politics of the Institute, boosting a renewal especially of the choices concerning the museum's image and its cultural and educational activities. Today the visitor's perception, once entered into one of the most famous and esteemed museum in Germany, is that of a dynamic institution that is on the forefront of planning and production skills.

The three meetings I had with the Heads of the Marketing, the P.R. and the Educational Departments on April 24th, 2008, gave me the chance to draw a picture of the new guidelines chosen for the activity of the last years:

1. integration of the marketing, communication and fund-raising politics of the Städel Museum, Liebieg Haus and Shirn Kunsthalle
2. total revision of the profile of the Städel Museum's image and marketing strategies
3. a firm policy of strengthening the cultural offer addressed to different audiences and of the outreach, according to a coherent strategy

1. Functional integration of Städel Museum, Liebieg Haus and Shirn Kunsthalle

In order to strengthen their cultural offer, the Städel Museum and the Shirn Kusthalle, which is the most important exhibition space of Frankfurt, have completely unified their press, P.R. and *fund-raising* offices, on the basis of a very strict cooperation that is rooted on the role of the Städel as “museum of the city”, that hosts important collections owned by the City of Frankfurt.

Starting from these premises, the city has charged the Städel Institut with the management of the Leibieg Haus, the closed municipal museum dedicated to plastic arts. The cultural and educational programmes of the two institutions have been gathered in the same offices, while the cultural programme of the Städel and that of the Shirn are managed independently but based on a strict coordination.

2. A new communication and marketing strategy of the Städel Museum

The Städel'sches Kunstinstitut was founded in 1816 thanks to a testamentary legacy made by Johann Friederich Städel, a rich trader of Frankfurt. Since the beginning two functions were unified: the creation of the academy for young artists, still existing and active today (www.staedelshule.de), and the opening to the public of the founder's rich artistic collections.

Year after year these collections, grown thanks to the purchases made by the institute and the City of Frankfurt, have been moved from the school to a new independent institution, but they are still run privately according to J. Städel's testamentary wishes. The institute's administration is run by 5 individually appointed members, without any participation of public bodies, with whom it cooperates and from whom it receives a quite interesting, though minor, share of its revenues. Since the beginning under the Hellein's direction, a strong investment was made in terms of marketing, aiming at increasing the museum visits, as well as at renewing and empowering its image and *brand*. The new profile and the positioning the museum wants to achieve is intrinsically linked to the renewed range of offer that aims to make the Städel an open museum able to attract all kinds of audience.

According to Chantal Eschenfelder, the Head of the educational activities, the Städel intends to "give back the value received by public grants" and it therefore needs to be perceived as a museum "of" the citizens of Frankfurt and of Land Essen.

The marketing strategy started by the new direction, as illustrated by Kersten Schulteis, responsible for the marketing of SM, Liebieg Haus and Shirn Kunsthalle, is then an answer to three essential goals: developing the museum's audience, multiplying the visit frequency of the already existing visitors by giving them the opportunity to come back to the museum, and finally strengthening the penetration and the attractiveness of the SM brand basically at a national level.

In order to reach these aims, three actions came out from the discussion with Mrs. Shultheis.

a. A strong attention is paid to the museum's **audience segmentation**, addressed by **targeted and tailored actions**. This means that each communication from the museum towards its public, as well as each cultural offer, is based on the premises of an irreducible diversity of the reasons, of the previous experiences and of the cultural education, and finally of the scenarios of expectations and interests of potential groups of heterogeneous visitors, that have to be equally taken into consideration. The most relevant consequences of adopting this line of action are registered on the cultural and educational museum offer, that is one of the distinguishing elements of the new season of the SM (see point 3.)

b. A global consideration of the museum **communication**, at every level – the promotion and the institutional communication as well as the internal one, with cultural/educational purpose – **consistent with** the museum strategies regarding the relationship with its different audiences. The museum communication is then a whole, planned in each part in order to respond to the need of **widening the possibilities to access and to use to the museum** and its effectiveness is carefully measured through surveys on the audience. The museum has to get in contact with its different visitors, **communicating in a transparent way its identity**, its responsibility for the collections it holds and their history, and its strategies for improving the value of those collections. Quoting the museum's Direction, the museum shall "put the collection into context" and for this purpose the entrance hall - the stairs, the Rotonda - and the rooms for the temporary

exhibitions “should be seen as the programmatic backbone of the institution's identity”. In the stairs the institution's birth and history are shown illustrating the debates they arose, while la Rotonda and the exhibition rooms host exhibitions in rotation that, simultaneously dealing with different themes and collections' cores, illustrate from time to time pieces on which new knowledge has been produced (with a catalogue published in two languages): in other words, each time a museum's work of art is chosen and it is submitted to the crossed analysis of many disciplinary and critical perspectives. The “blockbusters”, i.e. the bigger and more attractive exhibitions in terms of number and of value of the works of art, take place instead in the exhibition wing of the museum.

It is worth to mention some other examples where this philosophy was applied. The internal communication of the museum, explaining objects and collections, was planned from scratch by writing texts not longer than 100 words, where the contents are deliberately approached in a not “specialised” language which can be understood by everybody.

A striking aspect of the Städel - clashing with its quite classical context - is the use of the walls for writing the texts offering a very problematic and interlocutory interpretation of the means of the shown objects and, in the stairs, information for understanding the museum's history. The explanatory panels, which are not in every room and can be fixed or mobile, do not emphasise only the historical and critical approach to the shown works of art, but from time to time they give the nuances of other values of the objects, such as aesthetical, expressive, symbolic, or human ones. Types and styles of the panels change according to the rooms: the permanent ones have a sober classical appearance while in the temporary rooms the communication can also be made by writing on the walls, or through copies or plastic bags hung on the wall thus losing solemnity.

The audioguides are another distinguishing element. Seven of them have been produced, based on seven different itineraries covering master pieces of the museum as well as different thematic perspectives (the territory of Frankfurt, the faith, the history, the artistic techniques, “power” and efficacy of the art, and finally an itinerary for children), each one illustrated by voices of popular characters of the public scene or of the performing arts.

As to the promotion, it shall achieve the not easy aim to safeguard what belongs to the image of a museum known for its fantastic collections and for the high scientific profile of its initiatives and, on the other hand, it also has to communicate in a simple and direct way the various possibilities of an emotional, versatile, always renewed approach, that the museum's collections offer to the different profile of visitors.

The most relevant example maybe comes from the communication made by the closed Liebieg Haus, which now the Städel manages: a sculpture museum, that until today had a quite old and not attractive image and was almost never visited, despite the great value of its collections. The external communication, made through big panels and posters which cover bridges and wharfs along the Main in front of both museums, is now focused without any doubt on the emotional and also ironic approach to collections, putting emphasis on their aesthetic-sensory quality. The messages are quite clear: “*For some a museum, for others an oasis*”, “*We take care of every*

body" (slogan used for a sensual copy of the Apollo del Belvedere) and other similar ones intend to propose a non erudite and non historic approach to objects proposed in this case as pretexts for the visit, while in the first slogan, the museum room is presented without a traditional and institutional connotation, in order to propose a very intimate visit, tailored to the personal and internal interests of the visitor.

In the end, the foreseen development of the Internet communication goes towards a more and more customised, interactive and dialogical approach with the institutions and with other visitors, according to the guidelines of the so-called Web 2.0. The Liebieg Haus's web site (www.liebieghaus.de) is already equipped with an interactive platform which will be soon extended to the other partners, and that will give the possibility to select the information chosen on the basis of one's interests, to create one's own calendar, and to share with the community of users comments and hints.

c. Building **partnerships**, instead of simple sponsoring relationships, with players active at local level: not only big industries and banks, always linked to the museum's life as granting bodies (some groups and some dynasties of Frankfurt traditionally consider and feel it as "their own institute"), but also economic players and other subjects active in the social field, for projects that change at each exhibition and programme. For example, for the current exhibition "*The magic of things*", dedicated to the history of the still life, cooperation with some wide producers of the Land has been started (they have produced a line of bottles especially dedicated to the event), while for the blockbuster exhibition dedicated to Lucas Cranach in the last autumn-winter 2007-2008 a chain of biological supermarkets was involved throughout Germany. With them a cooperation started that led to a sort of exchange of image: the museum help designing showcases dedicated to Luca Cranach that each supermarket of the chain has then shown inside, giving also promotional leaflets of the exhibition created ad-hoc by the museum and the sponsor. The museum was thus able to reach kind of audience generally unreachable by its initiatives.

A similar action has been taken for managing the relationship with the press. The Press and P.R. Office of the Staedel, integrated with that of the Shirn Kunsthalle's and Liebieg Haus's ones as above explained, propose besides the communication to the media of each initiative, the starting and the managing of common projects that can attract the permanent attention towards the three institutions, not limited to the major events: for example the production of press inserts, periodical columns in weekly and daily newspapers, interviews and articles on backstage of the museum that tell also about the personalities working in the museums, short films for TVs, etc. (as explained by Mrs. Dorothea Apovnik, Responsible for Press and Public Relations, Städel Museum and Shirn Kunsthalle).

The pursuit of an ambitious marketing strategy such as the one explained above is carried out through **a permanent search of balance between the cultural and institutional purposes**, that is to say the audience development and the sustainability of the related costs. For this, besides the cultural activities and initiatives programmed, there is a solid fund-raising strategy,

aiming as already mentioned at multiplying and differentiating the alliances and the partnership for covering the expenses for each project, otherwise not economically sustainable.

3. Strengthening of the cultural offer to the different audience and the outreach strategies

The most interesting aspect of the new Städel's season, because of the quality and of the innovative approach of the solutions, is probably the range of cultural and educational opportunities that the Städel and partners put into their offer addressed to a number of audiences.

The offer of the guided tours and of the educational activities inside the three canter (Städel, Liebieg and Shirn) is different also in the proposals for the undifferentiated audience. Besides the traditional "frontal" guided tours, where the visitors are passive, there are for example "in team" visits, where the guides poses the questions making then a shared exercise of analysis of the works of art, to which the visitors take part in teams: the result is a very participated discussion, to which the guides give their contribution of knowledge at the same level of the visitors.

Evening tours, guided by experts or in turn by the curator and by the rest of the technical and scientific museum's staff, conferences on the "work of art of the month", presentation and lecture on the works taken both by theologians and historians, short visits like "sneak" for tasting the artistic experience in its most inviting and astonishing aspects: these are some of the proposals that differentiate the museum's offer for its generic audience, besides special initiatives addressed to more specific targets.

Summing up and listing by defect, some of the most original examples are:

a. Children and families

A wide range of activities during the week is addressed to them, including among other things labs, workshops, storytelling tours, tours of children guided by other children (available in three foreign languages), meetings with artists, with theologians exploring the religious means of the art, and (for the older ones) labs on museum contents focusing on the museum's rooms and functions. Special activities are offered during weekends and summer holidays. Thanks to a sponsoring made by JPMorgan, children can be part of a club, the **KinderKunstKlub**, proposing specific activities at the Städel, the Liebieg Haus and the Shin Kunsthalle.

b. Schools

As usual, for school a rich educational programme is thought

c. Students coming from disadvantaged social groups

Specific projects address them, with dedicated grants. For example, in the framework of the KiderKunstKlub, a specific action, foreseen for two primary schools in poor neighbourhoods inhabited by a high number of immigrants, provides free membership to the club and lasting

activities in school classes with museum personnel, followed by an exhibition. Great attention is paid not to mix the museum's generic educational and cultural offer with its social and cultural inclusion purposes, for which specific projects are created where the success factor consists in coaching the addressees, on the basis of specific needs and of medium-long term objectives.

d. Teenagers (not involved in activities at school)

For every museum, teenagers represent a particularly critical and detached audience. The Städel addresses them an activity that is worth to be mentioned because of its originality and its outreach approach, aimed at reaching teenagers playing in their most congenial arena, that is to say the search for, and the determination of the self. It is a **Sommerakademie**, experienced in 2007 by 75 participants and now waiting for the second one that will increase the number of involved young people up to 270.

The project consists in a one-week workshop held in summer in the rooms of the Shirn Kunsthalle and of the Städel, based on the discovery of who one is, what one is able to do, how one represents himself and how one communicates in the society: the work is assisted by the museum personnel and by actors and students from the psychology faculty, as well as by popular players from the art world and the show business who will tell about themselves and their own biographies. Labs, rooms, works of art of the museum are the context in which they will make the experience of the artistic translation of the self, theatre-therapy, body expression, role playing, cultural and personal conflicts solving. The museum's offices – involving their heads in the role playing – become the theatre where the conflicts regarding museum jobs (for example about the aims crossing different offices of the institute) are interpreted, analysed and lived with the teenagers, with the purpose of coaching the young to the discovery of the adult working dimension, especially the museum one.

The initiative had great success and it will be analysed as an interesting model of approaching teenagers to a museum, where the focus of interest is not the museum itself (not so likeable, from the teenagers' point of view), which rather becomes a marginal learning object at the service of the core aim: the psychological and cognitive growth, much more immediate and crucial for the teenagers. At the same time this experience builds the basis for raising again the interest for museums that can be accomplished in the adult age.

e. University students

The most tested initiative is the **Studentenfutter** (the name is taken from the dry fruits sold as a snack the students use to munch during the preparation for their exams). It is made of a calendar of tours guided by university students properly trained, even though not professionals addressed to their study colleagues. The tone of the tours is intentionally provocative, the subject is usually spicy and the method is dialogic in order to encourage a critical and open debate among the participants.

f. Unemployed people, at the margins of the society and at risk

This is another special project with the purpose of social inclusion and recovery, as mentioned above. A cooperation with a centre for young with previous conviction allowed the museums to build up a long-term programme where coaching the young addressees, starting from their biographies and interests. The artistic experiences and the museum visit can be used during the work, as instruments and as long-term cognitive approaches starting basically from the self.

g. Young adults, evening workers

The "**Art after work**" programme is a monthly appointment, in the three museums (SM, Shirn e Liebig), combining evening visit to the collections and to the temporary exhibitions with the possibility to have a drink and spend the night in the elegant Holbein Cafè, in the Städel Museum. It can also be linked to music performances and dj sessions.

h. Companies

On market basis or in the framework of partnerships with the museum, for companies there is the opportunity to organise tours focused on specific themes of the collections, labs; and to organize parties in the Holbein Cafè.

i. Students attending foreign language courses (adults)

The "**Art Talks**" programme organises conferences and guided tours in English and Spanish, for mother tongue foreigners living in Frankfurt, as well as for students and, thanks to the museum, it helps them to practice and to improve those two languages.

l. Elderly people

The "**Kunstgenuss**" programme links to the guided tours on a specific theme a following moment of resting in a quiet room in the museum's cafè, where it is possible to go on with the discussion with the speakers and guides, enjoying the company while tasting at the same time some sweet chosen from the wide range of offer

Staedelsches Museums Verein, that is to say the Association of the museum friends, exists since 1899, and it especially aims at attracting the attention around the institution and at involving the private sector and the citizens. It is a tool to build the customer loyalty, as well as to finance the museum, from which a relevant share of revenues comes. From 2003 the Verein created a youth section, the Städelclub, that develops independent programmes.

A tangible result of this consistent politics of the museum openness towards different types of audience and of this global renewal of its marketing strategies was achieved already in 2007, the first year under the Hollein's direction. During that year the number of the SM's visitors has grown up to 270.000, with an increase of 40% of the visits compared with the previous year.