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# Sustainable space, games and the increasing variety of museums.

## Barry Lord on the changes in the museum world

An interview with Anette Rein

*In 2007, when I visited your office in Toronto, I was very much impressed by your institution. Together with your wife Gail you founded Lord Cultural Resources in 1981. Today you have worked ON 2000 projects in over 50 countries (in 6 continents), and you have 9 offices worldwide. If you think about the last 30 years, how the enterprise had to be changed and which concepts are still valuable from the beginning?*

When we started our Lord enterprise, facility planning was the focus of interest for the first few years. It is still important, particularly the development of detailed briefs for architects. That led to an emphasis on interpretative planning for the exhibitions in the galleries, which began our service of exhibition planning, design and project management of the construction and installation of exhibits. Some years later we have another change: now we observe an emphasis on operation, on business planning and the importance of the economic side. The whole field of operation - and the making of an institution sustainable. The latest edition of our book ("The manual of museum planning, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition), has the subtitle: sustainable space, facilities and operations. Meanwhile in the galleries concerning the ways of presentations our clients changed from purely aesthetic and didactic to highly interactive and contextual displays.

*How do you estimate the trends of the new museums in the last years and what do you expect for the future?*

First of all I want to emphasize that our firm has been associated with the "idea museum". Museums Previously were almost always based on a collection - but even those museums are there because of an idea. Now we have seen the emergence of museums based essentially on an idea rather than on a collection. For example the Museum of Tolerance and other Museums of Conscience are based on ideas rather than collections. for about ten years now we have been assisting the planning and development of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, which will be opened in 2015. If you ask me for a development in the last years, I would identify it as the development of "idea museums".

Another more recent and general trend is the "participatory museum", in which the community is

encouraged to play some part of the role of curator or to cooperate with the museum for the decision As to what should be shown in an exhibition. This is not easy to do. People do not want to show negative aspects of their culture. But this can be negotiated and there are many different ways one can try to incorporate people.



Now we are getting involved into the Cultural plan of Chicago. The city becomes part of a cultural plan. If we think of the case Stuttgart we understand in a better way that transport and planning culturally are connected with each other. In the cultural heritage we can discover new opportunities which are inherent in culture. As we say: collaborating with people to plan and manage cultural plans, programs and



resources that deliver excellence in the service of society.

Museums are now part of a city development plan. Every cultural activity has to be connected with each other within a city. Let me give you an example: A science museum brings artists and scientists together exclusively in a “laboratory”. This is rather an experiment than an exhibition - and at the end it will not be really an attractive one. But, one has to investigate the collaboration between a scientist and an artist. And the result is: if they work together, this leads us to a point of stimulation. And this seems to be an emerging trend.

The media are of great influence. The way of learning has to be through discovery in order to follow and to understand an exhibition. There have to be opportunities for discovery - especially for the younger generation. They learn through multiple choices, they want to decide and to be actively involved. For a game one has to build the whole thing of winning and losing positions and furthermore a multiplicity of positions. This means for the museum to present different options with a meaningful interaction. As one

key for the future I see games in the center of museum exhibitions - the future is much more a game than an exhibition. As an example I want to mention the environment conference in Rio. Accompanying the conference we developed a game about energy.

I see “interpretative planning” as the most important key of a process. What is it precisely what do you want to say - and how do you make it? We have to work together with an institution on its own mission. If you add  $2+2=4$ ; a successful exhibition or a museum is much more than a “4”. The whole area and a range of issues which are connected with a project have to be explored - and times the complexity of a project is not obvious on the first spot. If we speak with a client we always ask them: what is it, to whom we want to speak about? Which are the target groups of any planned exhibition? What are the best ways to say for any given messages. Lord helps a client to achieve to design the mission and to give their ideas a form.

“Cultural sustainability” is the recent key word and it is preferred to work in a soft way rather than with hard issues with strategic reflections. Also the de-



signer changed their attitude. This has to be seen connected with the occupy movement. We can no longer think of the no ending process - it was injured and one has to change to sustainability and to ask the question: how much does a life cycle cost? Since 2007 the triple bottom line (people, planet, profit) became the dominant approach to public sector full cost accounting.

The most important experiences over the last 30 years you find in the book "Artists, Patrons and the Public - Why culture change" published in 2010. In the last years we found us essentially involved in cultural change, helping the birth of new cultural forms like a midwife. We are in a period characterized by a - in this context I would like to use the German expression - "Zeitgeist" with intensive processes of cultural change. Why does culture change at all? Where does the change come from? I am writing a book about cultures of energy: resp. energy sources, the compromises and the costs which characterize the energy source. Referring to the nuclear energy e.g. we have to accept the culture of anxiety, where the world is seen as a potential victim. In the coming book I will characterize different energy source

and the connected cultural values and life styles. My future prospects for museums is that their variety will increase.

*Thank you very much for taking your time and letting us to learn more about your professional experiences with museum and cultural work.*

I am happy to be here as a guest of Uwe Brückner, who in my eyes is one of the great leaders in design and of scenography and I am looking forward to this conference.

Pictures: p. 5 by the author, p. 6/7 by Stefanie Klinge, Atelier Brückner

[From the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2012, Atelier Brückner invited for the International Scenographers' Meeting into the "Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste" in Stuttgart. Barry Lord (B) was one of the speakers. He is one of the world's leading museum planners.] □

