

What is Interactivity and How Much does it Cost?

Key ideas of the Novosibirsk Interactive Museum of the Book Concept

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Abstract:

“Priority of preservation over availability” as the main principle of handling a rare and collectible book changed considerably in the digital era. Today, rare books are available to the general audience in the glass shopping windows, but also on the displays of expensive multimedia devices in museums, libraries and archives. Modern multimedia technologies are called interactive, because they enable the viewer to interact with the book’s e-copy – that is, enlarge and diminish the image, elaborately examine small details and similar – and, for instance, augmented reality technology actually makes it possible to see on the modern gadget screens the monuments of the book culture that have not survived.

However, multimedia technologies, accompanying equipment and software all have a very high cost. In addition, technologies are continuously upgraded and equipment rapidly becomes obsolete, which ultimately leads to the constant supplementary costs of their maintenance and improvement. The Concept of the Interactive Museum of the Book that is going to appear in Russia, in Siberia, in Novosibirsk in 2018 demonstrates that the notion of “interactivity” is much wider than the “interactive technologies” term and purchasing of the multimedia equipment is the last and not the most important stage of the organization of an interactive book exposition. I suggest considering interactivity as an entire compound of phenomena, qualities and characteristics, rather than in its narrow sense.

Keywords: Rare books, interactive, reality technology, multimedia, exhibits

I

“Priority of preservation over availability” as the main principle of handling a rare and collectible book changed considerably in the digital era. Today, rare books are available to the general audience in the glass shopping windows, but also on the displays of expensive multimedia devices in museums, libraries and archives. Modern multimedia technologies are called **interactive**, because they enable the viewer to interact with the book’s e-copy – that is, enlarge and diminish the image, elaborately examine small details and similar – and, for instance, augmented reality technology actually makes it possible to see on the modern gadget screens the monuments of the book culture that have not survived.

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My experience of working on the Concept of the Interactive Museum of the Book that is going to appear in Russia, in Siberia, in Novosibirsk in 2018 demonstrates that the notion of “interactivity” is much wider than the “interactive technologies” term and purchasing of the multimedia equipment is the last and not the most important stage of the organization of an interactive book exposition.

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The first impression a visitor of the Museum of the Book gets is the design and overall atmosphere of the rooms that is positive, attractive and engaging the viewer into a “journey” over the history of the book art. This is why **Interactivity-I** is the general designer concept that concerns the museum locations’ arrangement and attracts prospective visitors of the Interactive Museum of the Book.

An important part of the designer concept is navigation within the Interactive Museum of the Book. The main objective of navigation is to help visitors to find their way around the premises and to suggest one of the possible trajectories of moving from one exhibition location to another. This is why **Interactivity-II** is the navigation, meaning the varied system of signs, pointers and informational signals that draw the viewers to the specific museum locations.

Librarians and museum staff still cherish a stereotype that exhibited objects are interesting in their own right and that it is the objects that are in the exposition’s center. It is not quite so. I believe that the exposition should concentrate not solely around an artefact, including a unique book piece, but around a person, a viewer that has come to the Museum. This is why **Interactivity-III** is an anthropocentric concept in accordance with that each museum location and each expositional area in the Interactive Museum of the Book is arranged. The main target of this concept is first, to draw the viewers to the exhibition location and then to keep them there as long as possible telling all kinds of interesting things about rare books and unique collections.

Interactivity-IV is a complex of educational, pedagogical, cultural and enlightening methods, procedures and practices due to which a visitor of the Interactive Museum of the Book may generate a desire, in addition to passive observation of the exponents, to participate in their exploration, the study of their history, unique features, and so on.

Interactivity-V is the infrastructure built around the Museum of the Book, namely library or museum cafés, restaurants, lofts, reading rooms, event facilities and recreation areas that will induce in a prospective visitor the feeling of variety and an attractive opportunity to choose: “I can go to a café if I want to”, “I can get books for reading if I like”, or “I can go to the Museum if I feel like it”.

And, finally, **Interactivity-VI** is the multimedia equipment we can set up both in the Museum of the Book itself and in the library loft, or in the café, or anywhere in the vicinity of the Museum. The important thing is for the modern technologies and multimedia equipment to attract the prospective visitors into the Museum and to generate in them a wish to learn more about the book art history and take an active part in all events occurring in the Museum of the Book.

II

The main principles of arranging an exposition at the Interactive Museum of the Book in Novosibirsk are:

- 1) A collection chronological principle that discloses collections of rare books of Novosibirsk state regional scientific library in a chronological order and in the fullest manner,
- 2) An interactive principle that implies an active creative participation of the museum visitor, his/her involvement and participation in the historical events whose witnesses are the museum exhibits – original antique books and authentic historical artefacts.

Display cabinet 1. Atlas of Prince-Elector Friedrich Wilhelm. The exposition opens with a rare facsimile edition of the most interesting work of cartographic art of the 17th century. Created to the order of “the Great Prince-Elector”, the prominent statesman, Prince of Prussia Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg (1620-1688), the atlas is an example of scientific, path-breaking thought of the early absolutism in German lands.

At interesting thing is that German learning of the late 17th century that was perceived by Russia in the 18th century became then the basis for advancement of sciences and industry in the era of Russian Empresses Elizaveta Petrovna (the daughter of Peter I) and Catherine II, when Kolyvan-Voskresensk metallurgical plants and their science and research libraries were founded in Siberia, in Altai. Most books from this unique library are stored in Novosibirsk and constitute the basis of Display cabinet 2 in the Interactive Museum of the Book.

Atlas facsimile is placed on a podium under a lighted transparent glass dome. The rays of light fall onto the upper binding cover and gleam off its metal decorations. Next to the display cabinet, there is an interactive table that helps to get familiar with the Atlas contents, specifically old maps of Europe, Asia, various countries and continents. The interactive tables enables one to leaf through the heavy cardboard pages of the Atlas with ease, enlarge and see its individual points in minute details.

Display Cabinet 2. The First Science and Research Library in Siberia. Kolyvan-Voskresensk mining (metallurgical) plants and their libraries played a primary role in the industrial development of the depths of Russian lands in Siberia and strategic training of highly-skilled personnel in mining engineering. This is testified by the personal patronage and control of the Empress (it is for a good reason that the plants were on record as being under the Cabinet of Her Imperial Majesty).

Kolyvan mining district is a “space” of inventive initiative and engineering discoveries, and a center of academic learning and education of the Enlightened Autocracy epoch that was unique for the 18-19th cc.

The main task of the exposition is to show people, mining engineers, inventors and their discoveries and achievements through their books and to express the idea of national and state importance of Kolyvan-Voskresensk plants and their libraries for the economic development of the Empire back in the 18th – the first half of the 19th century.

Portraits of mining engineers and investors and authentic books that were written by them or kept in their private libraries are true witnesses of the epoch and the great historical accomplishments. The exposition's background is gold cloth and sable fur that were elements of the ceremonial imperial mantle intended for special occasions. The imperial mantle symbolizes patronage of Her Imperial Majesty over the plants.

Display Cabinet 3. Theater of History. The border of the 19th and 20th cc. was a dramatic milestone for Russia. The furnace of the historical process mixed together wars and revolutions, human tragedies and, at the same time, the highest flights of creative mind: poetry, painting, architecture, theater – everything that is covered by mysterious name “Silver Age” of Russian culture (similarly with the “golden age” of Russian culture and literature that was represented by Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Lev Tolstoy).

Specifics of this exposition lie in the unique combination of the Silver Age and the revolutionary “blaze”. The exposition consists of two parts. In the first part, the works of the most prominent representatives of the Silver Age is demonstrated, specifically lifetime editions of Alexander Blok and Andrey Bely, a book from the library of world-famous ballet dancer Anna Pavlova, and art reproductions of stage sets created by artists of the turn of the 20th century.

The second part is dedicated to the epoch of Russian revolutions and presents a mortal battle of political parties, associations and leaders of that time. This part of the exposition demonstrates satirical magazines dating 1905-1907, agitation literature of 1916-1918, leaflets and posters, periodicals, and lifetime editions of Russian political figures of the early 20th century.

Display Cabinet 4. Man and Space. In Russian natural science and humanistic studies of the 19-20th centuries there is presented an entire assemblage of scientists whose main idea was the perception of a man as a space-planetary scale creature. These include founder of theoretical cosmonautics, self-educated scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, one of the originators of cosmonautics Yury Kondratyuk, cosmist academicians biophysicist Alexander Chizhevsky, naturalist and scientist Vladimir Vernadsky, and physician and scientist V্লাй Kaznacheyev. The lifetime editions of their works are kept in Novosibirsk state regional scientific library.

A shallow vertical display cabinet contains lifetime editions of the works about space and man by the above scientists and thinkers. The back panel of the display cabinet is designed like a shining starry sky with little lightbulbs serving as stars.

Next to the display cabinet, a stand holds the Solar system model corresponding to the description Konstantin Tsiolkovsky offered: Sun is in the center of the Solar system and planets rotate around it more or less in the same plane and in the same direction (counter-clockwise). The sun and all planets revolve round their own axes. Approximate proportions of the planets and distances between them are observed. Interactivity is achieved as the entire model comes into motion once one planet is touched and Sun can be turned on and off. A museum visitor can turn on and put into motion the Solar system on his/her own.

Display Cabinet 5. Religion and the Book. The history of book printing, in Europe, in the countries of the East, and in Russia alike, started with a publication of sacred texts. Those were predominantly Menaion Readers (texts intended for personal reading) and liturgical books (to perform a joint prayer).

Great Russian writer Nikolay Gogol wrote in his “Reflections on the Divine Liturgy” that a man who prays sincerely during the service, “once purified of all, is chosen by the God Holy, Mighty and Immortal to be His temple”, that is, the place of the Holy Spirit. Following the holy fathers of the ancient Christian Church, Gogol likens a person to a temple, a beautiful building with rich adornments. In a temple, every detail – icons, church plate, and clerical garments – is vested with a special sense and purpose in the process of a liturgy.

Two small display cabinets in a traditional museum and exhibition format present Russian editions of 18-20th century service books. Every book is opened on a page with text that corresponds to one liturgical act or another, such as incense burning in the temple before a service, the clergy putting on the garments, performance of various clerical and liturgical sacraments (confessions, communions) and other. Next to the service books in the display cabinets, there are placed items of church plate that is used during the specific service part described in the exhibited books. This way, the visitor sees both the liturgical text and its material embodiment in a form of the church plate.

In addition to the handwritten items and printed editions of the main denominations of Christianity (Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran), “Religion and the book” exposition will also present books of such traditional global religions as Islam and Buddhism that are popular throughout Siberia.

A small portion of the church plate items made of durable materials (metal) will be exhibited on open podiums so that the visitors can touch them with the same reverence and thrill as is felt by the clergy and sincere believers when touching them.

Display Cabinet 6. Examples of the Book Art. Centuries-long experience of book printing is full of various forms and examples of technological and artistic skill. Historical, national specifics, influence of epochs and styles all have translated into the book pages. The best European typographers and indigenous Russian publishers left the richest heritage and a paragon of skill and inspiration to the posterity.

The exposition looks like a big mysterious locked cabinet trunk. As we open the lid, we see a collection of various items placed in individual sections. Materials are shown in their natural, unprocessed way: pieces of leather (calfskin, hog skin), wood, metal, textile (velvet, satin, moiré, cord, and ribbons), and paper of different types, pains, and others.

The visitors are offered to take little pieces of materials in hand and detect their intended purpose, i.e. what they were employed to create. After a discussion and an advancement of hypotheses about the exponents’ fate, a “storage of book treasures” that remained unseen to the audience until then is opened revealing pull-out horizontal glassed boxes in the basis of the cabinet trunk. The books – examples of the artistic and printing skill made of the exhibited materials – give an insight to the variety of the book-publishing production in Europe in Russia.

Display Cabinet 7. Miniature Editions. Miniature book editions are an amazing combination of high artistic value and excellence of technological and printing art. Sophistication, extravagance and sparseness of the book miniature immerses the viewer into the fairy tale world that exist solely in the dreams and imagination.

The exposition is arranged as a miniature layout of a study of the late 18th – early 19th century under a glass dome. The imaginary study owner is quite an enlightened individual, a music lover and a literature connoisseur, a writer and poet himself, a skilled colloquist and a genial host.

This layout consists of miniature items handmade by cabinet makers and porcelain artists. Each item is an independent work of art. The following items will be exhibited in the miniature study: miniature books and book layouts, wooden furniture (bookcases, armchairs and sofas with silk upholstery, a desk and small tables), and porcelain figurines representing the guests and the host of the study.

The exposition is interactive, as the visitors have a free access to the copies of miniature editions and a collection of magnifying glasses of different epochs and nations that can be used to read these books.

III

Our concept of the Interactive Museum of the Book in Novosibirsk, prepared design project of the Museum and subject exposition plans of individual expositional facilities intend an implementation of six key interactivity components as follows.

Interactivity-I: Attractive Design. The Museum premises have two entrances: through the library building where it is going to be located and on the side of the library loft in an adjacent building.

Design of the Interactive Museum of the Book is primarily unique in that its static museum component is complemented by creative design of the loft in the adjacent building where any one can have coffee and read a book, whether brought along or taken from the book-crossing shelf. The loft facility will hold a large interactive display and furniture for a repose, work and study, which will make it possible to hold here various educational activities using the Museum's exposition.

Interactivity-II: Navigation. Navigation in the Interactive Museum of the Book can be effected in a number of ways. The first method demands for a guide that leads the visitors from one display cabinet to another within the tour scope, explaining specifics and history of each exhibit. The Museum will contain interactive devices enabling to exhibit and look through the documents independently, so in the instance where a visitor wants to do the exposition on his/her own, he/she can use the virtual navigation through a specialized info stand. The simplified interface of the info stand enables to display information about all display cabinets with a possibility to choose and familiarize oneself with one part of the exposition or another in more detail. Attractive headlines placed on each display cabinet contribute to the navigation as well.

The portraits of historical figures and famous persons whose history and activities found their place in the exposition of the Interactive Museum of the Book by means of the books help the prospective visitors, including the non-Russian speakers, find their way among the display cabinets and exhibits.

Interactivity-III: The Man-Centered Exposition. Capabilities of the Interactive Museum of the Book enable the visitors to immerse into any historical period and become a

participant of various technological, intellectual, emotional and psychological actions regardless of their age, education and social status. Every element of the composition sequence is selected while keeping in mind that it engenders interest in the visitor in each and every parameter, specifically size, color, shape, content, age, decorative and aesthetic characteristics; combined with other compositional elements, it forms a strong image, inspires admiration and makes one become a participant or a continuator of the “action”. It is as if the history was waiting for this particular person to become engaged in the process created by the great ancestors.

Interactivity-IV: Education and Enlightenment. The Interactive Museum of the Book is not yet completed, but master classes and lectures, research studies and laboratory classes to make paper and binding, to repair and restore the books, and to study the history of books and literature are already conducted using those unique funds that are going to be taken as a basis of the Museum’s exposition.

Interactivity-V: Infrastructure. Next door to the Interactive Museum of the Book, there are a loft, a library’s reading room, and event café. The Museum is located inside the library, therefore the entire library is available to the museum visitors. Nearby, in the same building, there are a single-viewer cinema, creativity areas, an anti-café, a reading room of the Presidential Boris Yeltsin library, virtual search systems and full-text e-resources, and reading rooms, including the one for rare books.

Interactivity-VI: Multimedia Equipment. A small set of multimedia equipment purchased for the Interactive Museum of the Book includes an interactive book in a form of a multimedia smart touch panel, an info stand, and a set of tablet PCs to be installed on every display cabinet in order to broadcast the virtual content dedicated to the collections exhibited in Novosibirsk Interactive Museum of the Book.