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Museum treats and shopping sprees: The role of shops and restaurants in a museum visit

Museums operate under ever-changing conditions. Nowadays, museums are much more than merely heritage institutions. Museums of today offer activities such as dining, shopping and cultural events. Yet, more research needs to be done to further understand the dynamics of the museum shops and restaurants. This article, based on a Master's thesis, discusses the relations between the museum and its shops and restaurants. Based on empirical data gathered from three museums in Sweden through interviews and document analysis, the article also introduces a new set of concepts and models to describe the connection between the different facilities of a modern museum. These concepts are "profiles and ideals" that can be used to investigate how an establishment manifests itself physically based on certain desired ideals, "the product staircase" that evaluates the connection between the exhibitions and the products in the shop, and the "triple factor model" that describes how a museum restaurant can be managed in tandem with the museum.

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Introduction

The museums of today operate in a setting characterised by everchanging conditions.[2] These changes are not only economical; they may also be the result of changing political directives. Increased competition by other pastimes and changed expectations by museum visitors also contribute to this metamorphosis of the museum sector (Black, 2012, p. 34f, 39). In short, many museums face a decrease in public funding. While at the same time they find themselves contributing to a larger cultural economic context. Museums are often used in tourism promotion and to support the local community and surrounding establishments. The decrease in public funding also means that museums are expected to submit to market principles (Kent, 2010, p. 67f; Orea-Giner et al, 2021, p. 51).

When it comes to the visitors, several studies reveal a shift in their attitudes towards what a museum is and what to expect from the visit. Museums of today face fierce competition from other pastimes, one of them being shopping. Shopping is now one of the most popular pastimes in the Western world, second only to watching television (Black, 2012, p. 34). The museum sector in the United Kingdom faced a catastrophic decrease in visitors when shops started being open on Sundays in the 1990s. In parallel to this, some museums have begun to offer a wider range of activities, including but not limited to shopping, dining, concerts, and even events catered for singles ready to mingle. Some scholars, among them professor Graham Black, call these multi-activity museums "cultural hubs" (Black, 2012, p. 34f, 39).

[2] This article is a condensed version of a Master's thesis (in Swedish) named "Culture, commerce and culinary delights: Shops and restaurants in a holistic museum visit", submitted by the author at the department of ALM, Uppsala university, at the end of the spring term of 2021. (Link to DIVA)

However, something is clearly at stake when it comes to this change of image. Charles MacIntyre has conducted interviews with both visitors and museum staff that reveal that the interviewees harbour certain expectations when it comes to museum shops and restaurants (MacIntyre, 2010). For example, the items for sale in the museum shop should be of high quality, relate to the exhibitions and have a certain degree of uniqueness (the items should differ from those in any other souvenir shop). Some respondents think that a museum shop should be a boutique with somewhat pricier items, whereas others prefer cheaper gifts and products within a child's price range. However, the demands for quality, uniqueness and consistency are the same (MacIntyre, 2010, p. 187f).

Several scholars have discussed the role of consumption in a cultural heritage context. Daniel Miller writes that the activity of consuming has gotten a rather negative reputation, for example in academia. He argues that the very word "consume" has the underlying meaning "use up". To produce is to create, to consume is to exhaust. This also means that consumption has a moral dimension (Miller, 2006, p. 341f). Tony Kent also mentions the criticism aimed at consumption at museums. Critics argue that museum shops induce commercialism and superficiality, and that the products sold in the shop challenge the authenticity of the museum (Kent, 2010, p. 68). Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett on the other hand, argues that the hospitality industry and consumption shapes cultural heritage and supports it financially. Conversely, cultural heritage supports tourism by transforming places to destination and helps create a unique sense of "here-ness" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 151ff).

Ergo, shopping and dining are parts of this new museum experience. They are also very much part of the economy of the museum; museum shop customers at British museums spend roughly 100 million pounds annually (Larkin, 2016, p. 109f). However, the museum shops and restaurant are rather understudied aspects in the field of museology. Furthermore, professionals report a lack of theoretical frameworks and tools to further understand these establishments (Larkin, 2016, p. 109f).

By analysing three Swedish museums, I propose a conceptual apparatus in order to deepen our understanding of the shop and restaurant as part of a museum visit. Furthermore, this study identifies key concepts that define the relationship between the shop, the restaurant and the museum at large. These concepts are introduced in the discussion section below. In the conclusion, I elaborate further on what role these concepts play in a museum visit.

Apart from exploring the relationship between the museum and its shop/s and restaurant/s, this article discusses how these establishments let authenticity, sustainability and pedagogics shape their image. As mentioned, museum visitors appreciate items that possess some kind of elusive sense of "uniqueness", as well as items that clearly correspond to the exhibitions and artifacts of the museum in question. The museums analysed in this study also use sustainability terms in their marketing, which poses questions about how these "eco-friendly" attitudes take concrete shape.

Material and methodology

The empirical material for this study consists of three historical museums in Stockholm, Sweden; the Viking Museum, the Vasa Museum and Skansen. The theme of the Viking Museum is Viking age Scandinavia, whereas the Vasa Museum showcases a well-preserved battleship from the 17th century and Skansen is a large open-air museum showing urban and rural life in Sweden over the centuries.

Data collection took place in early 2021. During this time, the museum sector was still badly affected by the covid-19 pandemic. In practice, this meant that all of the three above-mentioned museums were temporarily closed. Hence, it was impossible to pay a physical visit to the facilities. Instead, I had to turn to their official websites and online shops. These were analysed via document analysis. Employees were also contacted and a number of them agreed to an interview. Invitations to participate were sent via e-mail, and the respondents were given the choice to reply via e-mail, telephone or video meetings. All of them chose to reply via

e-mail. The informants work in the shops, restaurants and/or at the museum's marketing department. The method used in this study is a combination of interviews and document analysis.

Museum shops and restaurants in practice

Shopping and eating have been integral parts of the museum experience at Skansen since the museum's very foundation in the late 19th century. One of the highlights of the year is the annual Christmas market. In order to be granted permission to sell products and produce at the market, a number of requirements must be met by the seller. These requirements can be found at Skansen's official website. First and foremost, the products at sale must be of high quality. Eco-friendly and locally produced items are encouraged, as well as salespersons that are part of the production process themselves (Skansen, 2020). At the Christmas market, the shopping is just a part of a bigger context. Already in the 80's, Margareta Tullander reports how the visual aspects (such as decorations and the historical outfits worn by the staff) as well as activities such as folk music and dancing all contribute to the market experience as a whole (Tullander, 1980, p. 236).

Apart from the web shop, there are a number of physical shops at the museum's premises. The informant at Skansen explains that Skansen's own collection of products inspired by for example folk costumes are popular. The same goes for children's books, magnifying glasses and other products aimed at children. Another important product category is so-called "service products", products aimed at fulfilling the visitors' physical needs. Skansen is a large open-air museum where the visitors engage in outdoor activities and walk long distances. Therefore, products such as sunscreen, umbrellas, gloves and snacks come in handy. The informant is of the opinion that a good museum shop should be of relevance in relationship to the museum as a whole. The shops should have the same atmosphere as the exhibitions. For Skansen,

this means that the products should reflect Sweden's history and geography. Traditions and patterns from all over the country should be represented. The informant also discusses the shops' financial impact. A little over 25 percent of Skansen's revenue is derived from public funding. The other 75 percent must come from elsewhere, such as retail (Informant A).

Skansen also hosts a number of restaurants. A member of staff at one of them agreed to an interview. The interviewee explains that their restaurant offers meals rooted in traditional Swedish cuisine. The menu should primarily reflect the everyday cuisine of older times, but the restaurant also offers food associated with taverns and upper-class environments. The main aim is to mirror the food culture from a time before "village shops and self-sufficiency were replaced by supermarkets and industrially made ready-meals" (Informant B, my translation). The interviewee also stresses the balance between meeting the guests' demands and staying true to the traditions of Swedish cuisine. Guest demands and traditions don't always collide. The most popular dish found at the restaurant's a la carte menu is meatballs served with boiled potatoes, lingonberries, pickled cucumbers and a creamy sauce; a dish heavily associated with traditional Swedish cuisine. A good museum restaurant, according to the interviewee, is a multi-sensory bearer of tradition and history defined by a well-formulated concept and a well-managed economy (Informant B).

The physical shop at the Vasa Museum was, at the time of writing, closed due to the pandemic. The online shop consists of a selected range of products, including but not limited to books, DVDs, refrigerator magnets and decorative objects such as ships in bottles. A collection of household utensils called "Blue nightingale" are inspired by a blue-and-white pattern of a plate found at the wreck. A number of replicas can also be found. Two types of fully functional cannons, albeit smaller than their original counterpart, and paper made of hemp from the battleship's actual ropes are examples of more spectacular products. The interviewee at the Vasa Museum says that the primary aim of the museum shop is to promote knowledge, offer mementos to the

visitors and strengthen the museum's brand. A sense of connection between the products in the shop and the artifacts at display is also of great importance. Examples include pens shaped like sculptures found on the ship, and a lion shaped cuddly toy to remind of the fact that the king of the time, Gustavus Adolphus, was known as "The lion of the North". All of the products don't necessarily relate to the Vasa ship per se, however. The informant gives examples of other objects that in one way or another relate to the 17th century rather than the ship itself, such as products relating to the royal family of the time. Another important policy mentioned by the informant is that the products must reflect the museum. The informant admits that cheap trinkets found at souvenir shops without a doubt would be popular. Still, that kind of product is not for sale at the museum. The products should instead give an immediate association to the Vasa Museum, according to the informant. Furthermore, the products should be of high quality and the shop should be managed with sustainability in mind (Vasamuseet, 2021, Informant C).

Sustainability is also emphasised in the Vasa museum's restaurant. A thorough account of the restaurant's sustainability policies can be found on its website. The restaurant is involved in a project to combat food wastage and the staff has minimised their usage of plastic. The dairy products used are organic, and so are several of the wines on the wine list. A range of dishes and meals are offered at the restaurant, some bearing names such as "Captain's dinner", "Sailor's meal" and "Boatswain's meal" (Vasamuseets restaurang, 2020a; 2020b).

The Viking Museum in Stockholm showcases the Viking age in Scandinavia. Perhaps a rather unconventional method to achieve this is the amusement ride "Ragnfrid's tale". The ride takes the passengers, guided by a narrator voice, past a series of theatrical sceneries (The Viking Museum, 2021a). The online shop at the museum offers a wide range of products. A number of replicas can be found, as well as household items inspired by archaeological finds from the Viking age. A series of trays with Viking age motifs are named Harald, Ragnfrid and Sigrid, "Vikingaliv's father, mother and daughter ("Vikingaliv" being the Swedish name

of the museum). Organic shaving products named after Norse gods, as well as "Viking ship rat" slippers and a raven shaped cuddly toy named Huginn (one of Odin's tame ravens) are part of the product range. The museum restaurant Glöd ("Embers") offers "Nordic food" in a setting characterised by Nordic design. Dishes found on the menu include salmon from northern Norway, sour dough toast with mushrooms, cognac and Dijon mustard, Eton mess with cloudberries, flounder meunière, arctic charr with white wine velouté and so-called "Viking hash". The hash consists of ham hock, smoked pork, cabbage, beets and shredded horseradish (Glöd, 2021; The Viking Museum, 2021b).

Discussion

In this section of the article, I will introduce three new concepts in order to contribute to the discussion about the connection between the museums and their shops and restaurants. These concepts are 'profiles and ideals', the 'product staircase' and the 'triple factor model'. They will be introduced sequentially below.

PROFILES AND IDEALS

What can be said about the patterns found in the shops and restaurants in this study? And how does this connect to the research questions mentioned above?

When studying the shops and restaurants, I identified they all had profiles and ideals. A profile is how the establishment manifests itself physically. The profile can be found in for example the menu, product range and marketing. It also manifests itself in the physical design and layout of the establishment. The profile gives us clues to what to expect from this particular shop or restaurant. I have chosen to call these expectations profile-based expectations. We'd be quite puzzled if we'd walk into an Italian-style trattoria only to find sushi on the menu. This dynamic also prevails in a museum context. Skansen profiles themselves as a museum about cultural history, a miniature Sweden that stays true to traditions. The statements given by the

interviewee at one of Skansen's restaurants, reflects the need of a connection between the museum and its restaurants. The restaurant in question serves traditional Swedish food, for example its most popular dish, meatballs. Likewise, given the fact that the Vasa Museum showcases a battleship, the maritime theme runs quite deep. The shop offers ships in bottles and in the restaurant, the visitors can enjoy Captain's dinners. The Viking Museum offers Viking hash, Viking age replicas and beauty products named after Norse gods. The profile runs as a common thread throughout the museum and its facilities. There are cases where the desirable connection isn't completely clear. Smoked pork and cuddly ravens aren't uniquely connected to the Viking age. However, if they are called "Viking hash" and "Huginn" they're given new properties. This type of active profiling is used to make a certain aspect of the establishment credible and match the profile-based expectations.

Apart from profiles, there are ideals. Ideals run deeper than profiles. A profile is what an establishment looks like, an ideal is what the establishment wants to stand for. For example, the restaurant at Skansen wishes to uphold Swedish culinary traditions and offer dining in a historical setting. Sustainability is a distinguished ideal at the Vasa Museum, since the restaurant gives a thorough account of its sustainability policies. An ideal at The Viking Museum could be to portray the Viking age in innovative ways, such as the ride Ragnfrid's tale.

THE PRODUCT STAIRCASE

The interviewee at the Vasa Museum stated that the products in the museum shop should relate to the museum's exhibitions. The museumgoers interviewed in MacIntyre's (2010) study voiced similar opinions. Based on my empirical data, I suggest four categories of products and their relation to the exhibitions. These categories, or "levels" are all part of a model I call the product staircase.

Products on the primary level are physical remnants of actual museum objects. An example of this is the paper partially made by hemp from the ropes of the Vasa battleship. The fact that the primary level products

completely or partially originate from actual museum objects makes them inimitable.

Secondary level products are products inspired by museum objects, such as replicas or products inspired by the design of museum objects. Products like Viking helmet replicas and utensils inspired by folk costume patterns are bearers of the museums' identities and are favourable from a marketing point of view. They offer a way for museum professionals to highlight particularities from the exhibitions. Secondary level products also have pedagogical properties since they can spark conversations when used in a setting outside the museum. An interesting aspect to mention is the trays at the Viking Museum. The patterns on the trays are given names (Harald, Ragnfrid and Sigrid) and are woven into the very identity of the museum. Ragnfrid is also the name of the main character in "Ragnfrid's tale", the amusement ride. This is a clear example of how products in the shop reference the museum's exhibitions and create a sense of familiarity and uniqueness.

Tertiary level products are products that don't correspond with the objects exhibited, but instead bear the museum's logo or reflect the museum's branding in a similar fashion. Classical souvenirs like cups and magnets belong to this category, and so do books, DVDs, tote bags and jigsaw puzzles.

Peripheral products do not correspond with the museum objects, nor with the museum's brand. The above-mentioned raven at the Viking Museum, and lion at the Vasa Museum, belong to this category. Cuddly ravens and lions could potentially be found at any zoo or museum of natural history. However, they are put in a relevant context when given an apt name (Huginn) or provided with additional information (The lion of the North). Thus, peripheral products can be prone to be actively profiled.

The product staircase can be used to examine how the products relate to the museum and its collections and to what extent the shop matches the museum's profile and ideals.

THE TRIPLE FACTOR MODEL AND THE RESTAURANTS

Another model I put forth is the Triple Factor Model. The idea is that three factors together create a holistic restaurant visit. The scenography is the restaurant's location, physical layout, furnishings and table setting. The people at the restaurant, both guests and staff, are the actors. Lastly, the associations are the result of the combination of the restaurant's profile and ideals. Put simply, the associations are how the restaurant is perceived. When applied to museum restaurants, the Triple Factor Model shows how intrinsic the connection between the museum and its restaurant can be. For example, the importance of scenography is especially apparent at Skansen. Skansen as a museum showcases cultural history of Sweden. Managing a restaurant in a historical setting creates associations to historicity and tradition. The restaurant at the Vasa Museum is characterised by its proximity to water. At the Viking Museum, the key word "Nordic" is reflected in the use of Scandinavian design at the restaurant.

Being a museum restaurant also has impact on the actors. A long day at the museum can make anyone tired and hungry, especially if the museum happens to be an open-air museum with long walking distances. Skansen combats this with strategically placed opportunities to purchase snacks and food. Another type of actors, the staff, is also impacted by the "museum-ness". The salespersons at the Christmas market are dressed in historical costumes. This is deemed distinctive of the Christmas market at Skansen (see above).

The associations are also of significance when it comes to museum restaurants. The museum's historicity and profile influence the restaurants, and so does the idea of the museum as a "social hub". The maritime profile of the Vasa Museum is reflected in the "Captain's dinner" and the "Sailor's meal" found on its menu. The Viking Museum lets its Viking identity shine through in dishes like the Viking hash. Ingredients such as cloudberries, salmon from Norway and arctic charr also relate to the museum's Nordic-ness.

Much like the product staircase, the triple factor model can be used to gauge how the restaurant matches the profiles and ideals of the museum.

Conclusion

In conclusion, profiles and ideal are important when the museums brand themselves. I identify a desire among the interviewees to stay true to the link between museums, shops, restaurant and the overall image and experience of the museum in question. In the beginning of this article, I highlighted that I sought to examine how authenticity, sustainability and pedagogics shape the shops and restaurants. The shop at the Vasa Museum don't sell cheap, low-quality trinkets that can be found in just any souvenir shop, despite admitting that those products would be popular among customers. Instead, the informant stresses the importance of selling products relevant to the museum at large. This is an example of how authenticity is important in the museum visit as well as in the shop and restaurant. The same applies for the restaurants at Skansen. The informant at one of the restaurants states that the food served should reflect the culinary traditions of a time before ready-meals and fast food. Likewise, the objects sold at the market at Skansen should be of high quality, and desirably hand-crafted by the salespersons themselves.

These establishments have in common a desire to create authenticity. They seek to evoke a sense of "the real deal", something different and unique. The product staircase points to how this uniqueness can be found to a different extent in different products. The desire to achieve this sense of uniqueness is particularly evident in peripherical products. They often need to be actively profiled to feel relevant to the museum's profile and ideals. Shops and restaurants that are aligned to the profiles and ideals help create a clear brand for the museum. The products in the shop and the dishes on the menu "make sense" in relation to the exhibitions and the museum's collections. Like so, the triple factor model is a way to examine how the dining experience in the museum restaurant "makes sense" in relation to the museum's profile.

Sustainability also contributes to a certain distinctiveness. The restaurant at the Vasa Museum gives a thorough account of their sustainability policies, ergo alternatives that are not eco-friendly are shunned. This distinctiveness adds

to the sense of authenticity and exclusiveness. The establishments seek to define what makes them unique. The restaurant at the Vasa Museum obviously puts pride in its sustainability policies. This eco-awareness constitutes an ideal that adds to the museum's brand and image.

The museum, shop and restaurant are also linked via pedagogy. The museum's aim to spread knowledge influences the shops and restaurants. The informant at the Vasa Museum states that one of the primary aims of the shop is to promote knowledge. This is done via books, DVDs and informative notes attached to the cuddly toys. The informative note that explains the connection between the cuddly lion to the Vasa ship both promotes knowledge and strengthen the link between the product and the museum. The food at Skansen's restaurants also has pedagogical properties. It informs the visitor about Swedish culinary traditions, whilst also fitting the profile and ideals of the museum.

There are some issues regarding shopping and consumption at museums that need to be addressed. Miller accounted for the negative viewpoint that consumption equals exhaustion and the moral dimension of consumption (Miller, 2006, p. 341). Kent described how critics of consumption in cultural heritage contexts argued that the products for sale devalues the sense of authenticity at the museum (Kent, 2010, p. 68). I have discussed how the shops and restaurants try to combat this. They carefully design their establishments in order to fit the museum's profiles and ideals. The objective is to work in accord with the museum. They don't seek to rob the museum of its authenticity, but to benefit from it. In exchange, they add to the museum's brand and offers its visitors a holistic experience.

Something is clearly at stake. The museum shops and restaurants are significant sources of income for the museums. In theory, they could just capitulate completely and let the shopping take over, using the financial gain as an argument. However, that isn't the case. Being selective about what to sell and maintaining the balance between the traditional museum role and recreational activities such as shopping, is a sign of safeguarding something. I believe that

this "something" is the visitors' trust and the museum's role as the collective memory bank of society.

Consumption is not merely the consumption of goods. A person can also consume culture and experiences. This type of consumption is central in a museum visit. Using this reasoning, one could argue that the visitor is a consumer throughout their museum visit. They consume culture in the exhibitions, goods in the museum shop and food in the restaurant. The visitor also changes roles in the different facilities. They are a visitor in the exhibitions, a customer in the shop and a dinner guest in the restaurant. If working in tandem, the museum, shop and restaurant can offer the opportunity to change roles seamlessly. The museum and its facilities can work as links that bridge between the financial and cultural values of the museum. They become places where the visitors can shop in a historical setting and experience history and culture in a store environment. This can be achieved when the museum's profile and ideals run as a common thread throughout the different facilities. The negative impacts of commercialism can be combatted if promotion of knowledge, one of the main purposes of a museum, is put front and centre. This article has shown how shops and restaurants work to create a modern museum visit without disrupting the core purposes of the museum. That is how to create a holistic museum visit.

To build on the results put forward in this article, one might for example explore in what ways profiles, ideals, and the connection between shops, restaurants and museums take shape in the physical room. I've put a lot of focus on web shops and interviews, but how do these models translate into the physical world? A phenomenological study could for example focus on the shops' design, the sensory aspect of a restaurant visit or the shops' physical positioning vis-à-vis the exhibitions.

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