From a physical design museum towards a virtual design museum
Or how museology, new technologies and design meet.

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Introduction

In this short paper we present a research that took part during last year in the frame of cooperation between the Thessaloniki Design Museum and the Technological Educational Institute of Athens, department of Interior Architecture and Design. This research process was generously contributed on technological matters by the department of Telecommunications of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Our research concerns the expansion of the Design Museums' context to the new dimensions offered by Web. The research has been moved in two directions:
One was the consideration of the genesis and the history of Design Museums as a museological discipline.
The second was the exploration and description of:
  i)   the Web potentials regarding the presentation of Design Museums' permanent collections and contemporary exhibitions, in general
  ii)   a temporary 'virtual' solution to the housing problem of The Thessaloniki Design Museum
Within this project a cross-pollination of three different research fields takes part in a very interesting perspective. Actually, we observe how museology, new technologies and design meet.

The Design Museums Genesis

The discussion about the genesis of Design Museums is too complex. Their museological theme originates from a previously existed discipline and at the same time they exist with this name only the last decades. This vivid discussion is also a result of the different semantic polemics regarding the term Design, which are still in action.

The Design Museums own their birth to Museums of Applied Arts and Decorative Arts. This kind of museum originally appeared in Germany, with the **Deutches Gewerbemuseum** in **Berlin** at **1827**, but it seems that another one was the pioneer of establishing the Design object as a museological discipline, the **V&A** (**1852**). It was the time when great changes were taking place in crafts and design, caused by industrial development and the appearance of industrial design as an artistic approach to production. Once again -in history of museums- attention focused on the object and it became the museological theme par excellence, but these museums did not nurture the temple-of-art approach, the objects were not so untouchable, since they were timely placed close to the present [1]. Hundreds Museums of Applied Arts followed in almost every town.

But coming to nowadays, a question arises concerning the reasons that forced the Design to secede from Applied Arts, after 150 years of peaceful cohabitation [2], and to assume its own museological discipline. Although the related discussion may end up to the aphorism 'the best museum for design is the shopping mall", today they are about 20 museums with the title of 'Design Museum' along with a constantly increasing number of Applied Arts Museums that include design collections. It is important, however, to examine their museological themes and approaches.

The Applied Arts Museums consider Design as a part of the material civilization and they place it next to Decorative and Applied Arts which have existed before the industrial period. In that way, they state clear the difference between the handicraft and the industrial design process. We can dare to say that the Industrial Design notion is placed as Renato De Fusco proposes "design, production, sale and consumption are in parallel present" [3]. On the other hand, the above kind of products is exactly the main

and only focus of the Design Museums, handicrafts and decorative art are inevitably excluded. Furthermore the Design Museums have an 'ad infinitum' character, which we found only to the design collections of Applied Art Museums.

As a result of the above relationship, combined with the object approach of most Design Museums (influenced by the cult of the 'original' just as the art museums concern it) and also with the strategy of their collections' update (with references to the market strategies of trade, awards and "hypes") we put forward the notion that many of the Design Museums have been established in the 'foggy spirit'of our time. However, there are Design Museums that are focalizing on all the various aspects of Design with an honest historical-economical-sociological approach. One of those is the Thessaloniki Design Museum [4].

The Thessaloniki Design Museum

 The Thessaloniki Design Museum was founded in 1993, on a private initiative, and is the first in Greece to have as its aim a systematic approach to Design. The permanent collection of classic 20th century industrial design objects (3.500 pieces) covers all aspects of Design [5] and it is supported by a library of 6.000 books, magazines and catalogues related to Design. During the thirteen years since its foundation, the Thessaloniki Design museum has organized over 100 exhibitions- presentations, lectures, seminars and discussions with the participation of various Greek and international educational institutions and museums [5].

It is actually a man's work, Mr. Stergios Delialis, and we must be sure that when we compare the importance of the museum, with that of its sisters in other Metropolitan centers, we compare like with like. For that Thessaloniki Design Museum isn't located in a major industrial country. Another important fact is that the Museum is taking under consideration the reproduction, the "copy" and the anonymous design. In this way, the Design is an "open work", an ongoing interplay of signs which accompany and re-shape the object with the passage of time [6]. Summarizing, the importance of the museum lies in the way that it has drawn up a comprehensive strategy, embracing all the various different aspects of Design and in the experimental way to present that to the public. However, the museum still has no permanent house due to State-economical-political reasons.

Proposal

Considering Thessaloniki Design Museum's action and its housing problem we propose a temporary 'virtual' solution based on the Web potentials. Within the last years of wide use of Web, most Museums (Applied Arts' and Design's) feel obligated to present themselves through a web-site. The most powerful of them are able to fund experimental web applications for research, communication and entertainment (see last micro site for Modernism Exhibition to V&A [7]). On the other hand, many of them approach the Web with a strategy that refers to private companies, from the on-line shops to the treatment of visitors as consumers.

During our research we defined the basic principles that a contemporary Web site for a Design Museum must be based on. These are:
- the educational and research character of the Museum must govern the context of the website
- interaction will be the main key for the transition from physical museum towards virtual one
- hypertext is the medium to apply the content of the notion design, regarding its historical – sociological aspects
- the friendly interface is the key for a succeed continuous communication with the user
- it is very important and necessary that huge amounts of information will be placed on-line

These five principals applied to three main fields of the general site construction:
- the presentation of the permanent collection
- the exhibitions
- the research

Regarding **the presentation of the permanent collection** we propose a database of CAD modeling forms. The notion of Industrial Design involves the idea of multiplicity. Besides, the idea of the 'copy' and 'replica' exists in parallel. Assuming cooperation between the Museum staff experts the industries-companies and the designers, the transformation of the physical collection to the virtual one may be realized. Moreover, the norm of CAD modeling nowadays is an integral part of the design process. The idea behind this is to present to the guests the material, the dimensions and the aesthetical values of the collection's objects using the potentials the Web offers. Hypertext will support the CAD forms, so guests will obtain a spherical knowledge on the exhibits. Thus Design is placed in its historical, economical, sociological and ethical context linked to other aspects of our material culture (contemporary music, films etc.). Periodical focusing on designers and design movements accompanied by texts, biographies, collection index and bibliographies will also support the presentation of the permanent collection.

Concerning **the exhibition field** of the proposal we focus on the user-museum interaction. Past, current and future exhibitions, real and virtual, will be presented online by interactive applications with an educational and 'game' character (create the ideal house, your collection, your exhibition etc.). The virtual exhibitions can also be presented in special micro websites where guests, using forums or blogs, will be able to exchange comments. Also it is possible for the museum to try new applications or to schedule future exhibitions at public requirements. The exhibitions archive will be for sure a helpful material for the users [8].

Finally, in **the research field,** which will be an authenticated area of the website, we propose a detailed 3D description of the objects, and applications as research forums, user's library and presentation of conferences, papers or surveys that the museum is being involved with. The user, in that case the researcher or the student, will be able to approach the object in detail, with its dimensions, materials, form and aesthetics values as also to compare different variations, to find similarities and to understand totally the Design discipline.

Conclusions

To summarize, the aim is to build a Virtual Design Museum, based on the educational and research character of museum's definition [9], which adopting the spirit of the ages, focuses on the real context of Design as we analyzed it in this paper. The absence of the real object is substituted by the drawing CAD model, a critical part of the Design itself. Nevertheless, a long time will pass till the moment we will be able to define exactly the notion of a Virtual Museum, and probably we will be able to do it only after the evaluation of the results following the current and future applications.

References-Notes:
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6. "Thessaloniki Design Museum", S. Delialis, Thessaloniki, 1998
7. http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1331_modernism/
8. For better and further understanding check the below links:
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   http://www.designmuseum.fi/main.asp?sid=2&sivu=18&kpl=2,
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