

## Museums in a Time of Change

### The state and development of audio-visual and data-processing media in the museums of the five young States of the Federal Republic of Germany

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The museums in the five young States of the Federal Republic of Germany, in the former German Democratic Republic were an important instrument of the power structure to incalculable awareness of the "broad masses". The museums did not have to worry about the masses visiting them, as they were often ordered to do so by the State. The museums set little store by the use of audio-visual media, which can be adapted to the educational interests and habits of assimilation of all classes of the population. Western technology could not be obtained, there was a lack of funds, and after all there were enough visitors anyway.

After the so-called Turn-around, after the integration of eastern Germany into the Federal Republic, the museums in the five young States were confronted by immense problems. There was a huge fall in the number of visitors to many museums in the East. People preferred to spend the weekend in the West, with its shopping and leisure facilities, among which were perhaps well-known museums. The State-influenced concepts and didactics could not be changed fast enough to keep pace with political developments. Admittedly, there were also the famous castles, the birthplaces and workplaces of famous personalities which could at last be visited by an increasing number of people from the West. But many museums were threatened with closure, either due to falling attendances or to the dissolution of the institutions which supported them.

The museums and their directors, who have meanwhile been replaced in many cases, and their backers will have to hurry. There are good, even first-class exhibits as well as employees, there is scientific documentation which is to be taken seriously. The presentation of exhibitions, from the architecture to didactics, is maturing in many places, and running into financial limits as well.

Some years after reunification what does the landscape of museums in eastern Germany look like, with regard to audio-visual and electronic media, but also with regard to working materials behind the scenes of exhibitions? What developments are there? Has there been a turn-around in museums' didactics, too?

Thanks to the financial help of the QUALIFIZIERUNGSFONDS KULTUR / GERMAN MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE, AVICOM was able to conduct a survey in the summer of 1992 into how well equipped the museums of eastern Germany were with audio-visual and data-processing media. Information was requested from 375 museums, including institutions with collections or bearing a similarity to museums, in that they fulfilled the criteria of having a scientific directorship and/or were regularly open to the public for several days at a time. Also included in the survey were

castles with documentation similar to a museum. The survey focussed on the current use of audio-visual and data-processing media in permanent and special exhibitions, within the framework of specific educational measures (lectures, projects...), as well as behind the scenes (administration, inventory, research and documentation), but also looked at mid-term planning and estimates of realizing such plans. Specific enquiries were made about the availability and use of films and videos of different systems, slides and sound+image displays, computer systems and interactive media. Furthermore, institutions were asked about technical equipment, employees' expertise with regard to media, and the possibilities for cooperation amongst them.

The feedback was surprisingly high, with 215 questionnaires returned. That roughly 60% of the institutions responded cannot be solely attributed to the "duty bound" attitude toward enquiries "from above" which used to prevail in East Germany. What is remarkable to me about the high response is that in a time of radical economic change in eastern Germany and its museums, such lively interest in increased use of audio-visual and data-processing media and in exchanging ideas with experts in western Germany and internationally should be reflected.

Of the 215 returned questionnaires, it turned out that five museums had been closed or dispersed, and two museums thought to be university collections for teaching purposes could not be addressed as such. The answers given by one museum could not be assessed, because it belonged to the trust of "Preußischer Kulturbesitz" in Berlin, along with several other museums, and had not replied to questions relating solely to that one museum. 29 museums registered their inability to comply. This left 207 questionnaires to be evaluated. Here is an account and breakdown of the results of the survey:

The current use of media in eastern German museums:

Of 207 museums

62 (29.9%) use audio-visual media in permanent and/or changing exhibitions

94 (45.4%) use media in teaching activities or in accompanying programmes for exhibitions, in workshops, seminars, but above all for lectures

62 (29.9%) use media for scientific work.

Audio-visual media, primarily conventional and mostly in use before the integration of eastern Germany into the Federal Republic, namely slide- and film-projectors, occasionally with the addition of conventional acoustic systems to guide visitors:

121 (59.4%) museums have slide-projectors at their disposal

9 (4.3%) set up a sound+slide show (simple form of a slide multi-image)

40 (19.3%) museums possess film-projectors, of whom only 19 have projectors suitable for 16mm, the most common films for hire

7 (3.4%) museums own a film camera, one museum even has a cutting-room

50 (24.2%) museums possess videorecorders and monitors

15 (7.3%) museums offer guided tours through portable players (walkmen) with headphones, or through stationary acoustic information.

If we compare these results with the public importance of the museums, which we determined by the number of visitors in 1991, there are hardly any differences worth mentioning. Nevertheless, it is interesting that 4 out of 58 museums in the category "up to 10,000 visitors per year" and 2 out of 42 museums with up to 50,000 visitors per year stated that they used sound+slide shows, whereas those visited by 50 to 150,000 people, only one set up a sound+slide show. In addition, there were 19 museums who gave no statistics about the number of visitors, of whom 2 museums have sound+slide shows. Obviously what is largely meant are simple custom-made slide and tape shows, which are the sole form of audiovision presented by the museum.

Acoustic guided tours, on the other hand, dominate in museums who receive over 25,000 visitors. At the top of these museums are those with more than 150,000 visitors, 3 out of a total of 11.

With the rising frequency of visitors, the number of professional film-projectors also increased. Thus amateur 8mm projectors were only found, with one exception, in museums with less than 50,000. The same goes for film-cameras, which indicates that in these museums custom-made productions without professional quality are often shown, to say nothing of their unsuitability for broadcasting. It is characteristic that the only cutting-room mentioned in the survey is in a regional museum with less than 2,000 visitors. Here the museum director made numerous super-8 films about archaeology and folklore in that catchment area of the museum. Since 1992 he has produced video films for the museum with a borrowed VHS compact-camera. In the museums with over 15,000 visitors we find a growing number of 16mm projectors, with which, almost without exception, films are shown which were not made on those museums' equipment.

50 of the 207 museums (24.2%) claim to have video technology. With one exception these are museums with more than 5,000 visitors per year, and as soon as we look at those with between 5 and 10,000, 7 out of 27 (25.9%) already possess recorders and monitors. 4 out of 8 (50%) museums with more than 75,000 and 5 out of 11 (40%) museums with more than 150,000 use video presentation. 34 of 207 museums (16.4%) have their own video-camera or camcorder, 5 museums (2.4%) have a cutting-room. As with films, it is obvious that here too videos are made and cut by museum employees, without professional quality. The amateur character of museums' video-films, as well as video presentations, becomes particularly clear when one assesses the video systems used:

By far the most common system is VHS:  
Of 50 museums, 37 (74%) use VHS,  
8 (16%) use Super-VHS,  
and 5 (10%) have the newer Hi-8 system.

In eastern Germany there are no "U-matic-lowband" or "U-matic-highband" video-systems. These were introduced into western German museums as initial procurements, as they conformed to industrial standards of projection and were used in the (semi-) professional sphere. Although they are somewhat obsolete, they are still in use in the West. The professional video-systems "Betacam" and "M II", which conform to television standards, are also totally absent in eastern German museums. After the Turn-around, the unification of the eastern States with the Federal Republic of Germany, it seems that eastern German museums procured simple and amateur video equipment from the newly opened western market, as this was then affordable in terms of their small budgets. It is possible that the museums, whose efforts to use audio-visual technology in presentations for their visitors must be respected, may in many ways have scored an own goal. When they realize that the equipment they acquired does not in the long term meet the demands of video production in museums, nor is it suitable for permanent projection, and they apply for procurement of new equipment, they will frequently be told by their financial backers that they already have video equipment!

Nevertheless, 4 out of 50 museums (8%) use video-beamers for enlarged projection, which were all acquired after reunification. Of these, one museum is in the category receiving less than 50,000 visitors and a second in the category of less than 15,000.

The laser-disc is of little significance in eastern German museums. There are merely 2 museums who use laser-disc for presentations to the public. These are museums who consider it important to offer a variety of audio-visual information; the "Lindenau Museum" Altenburg (with only 11,000 visitors) uses a slide-projector along with their laser-disc, offers guided tours with cassette-recorders, shows

VHS videos accompanying exhibitions, and records museum projects with its own VHS camera. In the "Museum für Jagdtier- und Vogelkunde" of Augustusburg Castle in the Erzgebirge (approx. 40,000 visitors) the public can view information about animals on laser-disc or imported VHS videos, with tape-loop-commentary, shortly to be offered on walkman.

Interactive media have hitherto hardly played any part in eastern German museums. Only 5 out of 207 museums (2.4%) use them at all: The "Deutsches Hygiene Museum" in Dresden (85,378 visitors) is equipped with 20 VHS recorders and monitors, a video-camera and cutting-room, and provides the public with information through a PC. The "Technisches Museum" in Dresden (no figures supplied) also has a video-camera, video presentation, slide- and film-projectors, and uses a computer, too.

The "Müritz Museum" in Waren (still closed in 1991) will be offering data-processed information within the bounds of a special exhibition in the second half of 1992.

Other museums with interactive media are the "Brandenburgische Kunstsammlungen" in Cottbus (24,000 visitors) and the "Otto Lilienthal Museum" in Anklam (approx. 10,000 visitors).

What use is generally made of computers in eastern German museums? Of 207 museums, 84 (40.6%) have data-processing at their disposal, 116 (56%) do not yet have facilities, and 7 museums (3.4%) failed to answer this question.

Taking into account the numbers of visitors, data-processing was shown to be used in 19.6% of museums with up to 5,000 visitors

38.5% of museums who receive between 5,000 and 10,000

43.5% of museums who receive between 10,000 and 15,000

45.0% of museums who receive between 15,000 and 25,000

68.4% of museums who receive between 25,000 and 50,000

83.3% of museums who receive between 50,000 and 75,000

62.5% of museums who receive between 75,000 and 150,000

72.7% of museums who receive over 150,000 visitors.

These statistics clearly show how important data-processing is seen to be in the museums of what was the G.D.R. That even small museums receiving less than 10,000 visitors per year often have computers reveals a development which is ahead of western German museums.

The computer is still primarily used to deal with general and simple administration, for example for clerical work. Personnel and finance administration were mentioned less often as tasks. 65 of 84 museums (77.4%) use computers for administration; similarly 65 use them to produce manuscripts for publication. Desk-top publishing is on the increase, but has yet to play a significant role.

44 museums (52.4%) use data-processing within a framework of scientific documentation, i.e. also largely for quite normal writing tasks in this context, as well as for inventories of objects.

28 museums (33.3%) use data-processing in the running of their libraries - a high proportion in relation to those in the West.

Only 10 museums (11.9%) use data-processing as a teaching aid, whereby they have not disclosed exactly what pedagogical uses they serve (compare with the information given about interactive media).

The answers given to questions about which systems and programmes are in use support the view that computer hard- and soft-ware were among the first priorities for procurement by museums after

reunification. IBM- and MS-DOS-compatible systems dominate the field by far (75 out of 84 museums; 89.3%). Only 4 museums (4.8%) use Apple-Macintosh, 4 museums use Atari, and 3 museums (3.6%) failed to name a system.

Plans of eastern German museums to introduce audio-visual and data-processing facilities:

122 museums wish to procure (further) audio-visual media in the near future. However, only 65 museums (53.3%) believe that their plans can be realized in the mid-term, i.e. within the next 5 years. The remaining 57 museums, which regard the future more pessimistically, and all the museums who have no plans, gave lack of funds as the principle reason:

No money was mentioned 121 times,

No space 40 times,

No qualified personnel 30 times.

18 museums see no particular usefulness in employing such media.

A desire for video facilities is at the top of the list of 73 questionnaires; of these 2 wished they could have a video-beamer.

An improvement in slide-projection equipment was wished for in 23 cases, of which 14 specifically named slide-audiovision (4 museums with 15 to 25,000 visitors).

3 museums need 8mm, or rather 16mm film-projectors.

Only one museum expressed a wish for laser-disc, and 2 museums are striving explicitly for media with dialogue system (interactive media).

Thoughts about procuring a computer were mentioned 15 times, and 13 of those wanted information on tape.

The 123 museums which had no computers wished to use data-processing media, but only 76 (61.8%) believed that the installation of computers could be realized in the mid-term.

What about the experience of museum employees with audio-visual media? Do they exchange information with other museums, institutions, experts and specialist companies?

A mere 33 out of 207 museums (15.9%) claimed to have employees with experience of media. Such experience, if one reads between the lines, is as a rule not very valuable. It is mostly limited to selftaught knowledge, together with experience of using the museum's own audio-visual technology. Only 27 museums (13%) had any kind of exchange of experience with other institutions. Here contacts between museums and umbrella organizations like the "Deutscher Museumsbund" and the regional "Landesstellen für Museumswesen" dominate. Although there were only 2 exchanges with specialist firms and institutions other than museums, the umbrella organizations or the central museum authorities play a very important part in giving advice on audio-visual facilities. It is not known how far these institutions themselves have adequate experience of all areas of audiovision. Actual cooperation with outside companies of public media was seldom mentioned. In those cases where it happened, it was often not initiated by the museums concerned, but arose from the interest of the media bodies in productions which did not necessarily lead to their later use, for example within exhibitions.

With regard to working together on media productions, 20 museums (9.6%) mentioned the following:

10 museums had worked with outside companies

3 museums with radio stations

5 museums with television stations

3 museums with non-commercial studios (college studios, phonotheques)

1 museum with other museums.

So much for the data and assessment resulting from the survey. It shows that audio-visual presentation in the museums of eastern Germany is gradually growing out of its infancy, that some things, even though for the most part not particularly professionally (due to lack of funds and in many cases insufficient know-how) have already been realized, above all that plans have been formulated. The museums are receptive to audio-visual and data-processing media, wish to use such media, even when their own forecasts of financing are bad. They would like advice from AVICOM and other audio-visual/data-processing specialists, and AVICOM regards it as an important part of its work to help these museums, primarily through making contacts with experts and specialist institutions, producers and perhaps also sponsors, but also through promoting professional exchanges between museums in East and West.