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EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN MUSEUMS 2.0 – GERMAN MUSEUMS AND THE WEB 2.0

Abstract

This article focuses on the questions »What kind of Web 2.0 elements are already being used for Museum Education Services on-line?« and »How do German Museums use the Internet to enhance their Museum Education Services on-line?« Some case studies about Museum Education Services on the Internet will show the possibilities of on-line education and learning within the museums' field. The Websites of the **Jewish Museum** in Berlin and the **Städel Museum** in Frankfurt represent best practice examples for the German museum's world. The **Brooklyn Museum** in New York uses various Web 2.0 tools on its Website and builds a role model for the usage of Web 2.0 to fulfill museums' objectives.

Education and Learning in Museums 2.0 – German Museums and the Web 2.0

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Museums are places of education and learning. As part of the society they perceive themselves nowadays even more as places of learning than as simple warehouses of cultural heritage. Schools already use museums as learning places to improve and complete their academic learning.¹ Even education networks evolve between museums and schools (e.g. schule@museum²) or institutions for adult education (e.g. European Socrates Projects³). Furthermore the individual visitor is requesting informal learning opportunities at museums (e.g. guided tours, audio guides, terminals, smartphone applications).

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As museums now exist in a real building as well as on the Web, they try to improve and connect their participatory strategies on-site and on-line to guarantee discussions, knowledge production and -exchange. This article will focus on the Internet as an educational supporting system for German museums.

Lifelong learning in museums

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Lifelong learning is essential for the success and development of our knowledge-based society.⁴ Most of the German museums have consequently been professionalizing their learning strategies since the 1970ties to enable learning. Spickernagel (1979) describes how much Germans wanted their museums to become places of shared knowledge during this time. She asked for pedagogic support and didactic comprehensible exhibitions to find learning opportunities in a museum.⁵

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The **European Museum Forum** defines the museum as a place of lifelong learning in **The Museum Environment**:

»Museums all over Europe have been reviewing their role, adding a new facet to their mission in terms of their relationship with society and the local community and have undertaken significant actions to become agents of social change and social integration, bringing more people back into the learning cycle. Nowadays it is largely recognized that most of what we learn is acquired in informal contexts and that museums are ideal places for learning throughout life, as they offer free choice learning and can address all age ranges.«⁶

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This quotation by the **European Museum Forum** from 2005 illustrates that the discussion and the implementation of the museum as a learning place is still in progress, but the foundation for a participatory museum was already built in the 1970ties.

The Internet as an educational supporting system

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In 2007, 46 % of the Europeans already used the Internet at home at least once a week.⁷ By 2009 the regular Internet use had risen significantly, with 67 % of Germans stating that they used the World Wide Web at least occasionally in their leisure time. Most of the users prefer to download music infrequently (27 %), some listen to radio broadcasting services on-line (25 %) and 41 % sometimes watch videos. 65 % of the Internet Users, who occasionally use the Web, are popular with Wikipedia, 52 % utilize video portals and 34 % are familiar with social networks.⁸

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Developments on the Internet and medialisation tendencies in society have changed leisure behaviour but also the basic structures of learning.⁹ Astleitner (2004) points out four basic developments for learning on-line:

1. Learning on the Internet is self-directed. The learner decides about the learning path (order of the learning units and the medial representation (text, video, audio)), learning speed and/or learning goals (what kind of learning units he prefers).
2. Local distance: Learning in the World Wide Web is peripherally organized and spatial closeness is therefore no requirement.
3. Cooperative knowledge acquisition: Learners build communities for cooperative learning and they exchange their knowledge via wikis, social networks or bulletin boards.
4. Diversity for pluralistic thinking: Since diverse information is available on-line, the learner is enabled to learn about the different aspects of an issue and is probably animated to think about a question pluralistically.¹⁰

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Baring in mind these facts and the fact that the Internet user already changed his behaviour from a consumer to a prosumer, the museums do not only get the possibility to start with digitization projects to save and archive the information about cultural heritage, to guarantee public access via on-line databases or portals¹¹ and to inform about the real museum on the Web, i.e. to present the museum static and one-way communicative but also to offer participatory learning opportunities using Web 2.0 elements on the Internet.

Digital Museum Education

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Possibilities arise for the Museum Education Services. German museums present themselves in various complexities, demands and with various intentions on the Web.¹² The Internet is basically used for public relations, i.e. posting general information about events and other press releases to advertise activities of the real museum. Digital learning is still an exception in the German museum's world. In 2008 43 % of the museums utilized their homepage just to indicate their educational program on-site. The gap between the presentation of general information like address and phone number to educational work on-line is still large.¹³

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The digital Museum Education in Germany can be separated into three categories:

1. General information, such as address, contact person and other contact details;
2. Specialized information about the educational work as well as an on-line registration form, download centre, information about projects or educational programs;
3. Educational support and learning opportunities through information about the collection or exhibitions, on-line games, databases, on-line exhibitions, download centre, detailed explanations and general information about the educational program.¹⁴

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The **Jewish Museum** (<http://www.jmberlin.de>) in Berlin is an example for this last category. It concentrates on its educational work on the Website (figure 1). On the one hand, the virtual guest is enabled to retrieve a variety of on-site related information (e.g. guided tours, workshops). On the other hand, the museum offers teaching aids, on-line games and a glossary for Jewish words. On the menu item **Rafael Roth Learning Center** the Internet user can retrieve more information for children, teenagers and adults (e.g. on-line exhibitions). Web 2.0 functions are not integrated into the Website. Access points to **youtube** or **flickr** (both file sharing services), **facebook** (social network) or **twitter** (microblogging service) do not exist. Web 2.0 is certainly not used for the digital Museum Education.

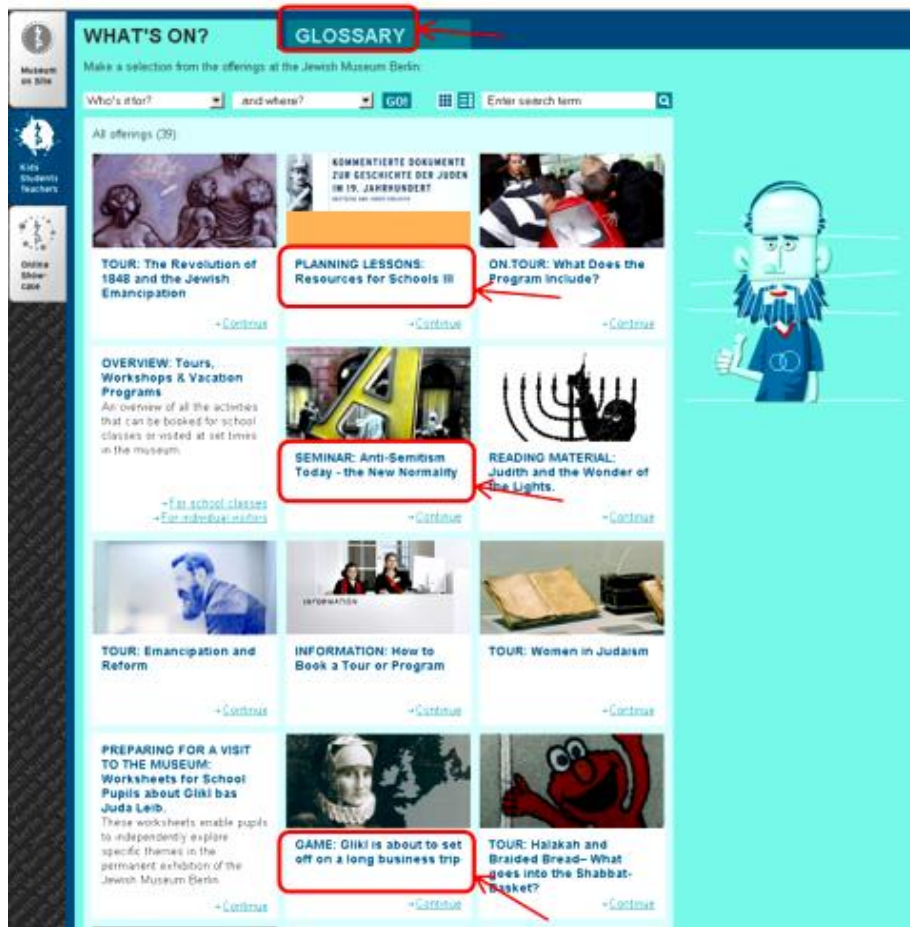


Figure 1 Digital Museum Education of the Jewish Museum Berlin
(Jewish Museum Berlin, WWW. Last access: 02.09.10.)

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A fourth category of the digital Museum Education involving use of Web 2.0 functions and the focus on communication, interaction and participation has not been established in Germany yet. Just a few museums have started getting involved with Web 2.0 elements.¹⁵ Different Web 2.0 tools (such as MySite concepts, mashups or social bookmarks) or services (such as flickr or youtube) are not explicitly used for groups or individual visitors to enable learning on-line in Germany. Web 2.0 can be characterized as an experiment for the German museum's world. This category has therefore to be explained on the basis of an example from the US-American museum's world. The Brooklyn Museum in New York demonstrates how a museum could be used as a unit consisting of the real building and its virtual complement.

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For the Project **Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition** (Figure 2) the museum used the real site as well as the Website to arrange this exhibition in 2008. Initially the museum called for

artists on the Internet. Then the museum presented the artists' digital photographs about a Brooklyn theme without telling the artists' names to the on-line community. Then the community (i.e. people who were registered on the Website) was allowed to judge the photos and to work as a curator because the photos were finally installed at the museum and also on the Website along with the artists' names in different size depending on their relative rating. Connections between the museum and the virtual part were given via laptops in the real exhibition. The exhibition was also included into the on-line exhibition menu. A publication summarizes the project results and experts on art, on-line communities and crowd theory discussed the project's outcome.

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The **Brooklyn Museum** (<http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/>) uses Web 2.0 tools on this project to personalize content, to offer information, to guarantee communication, to offer participation, networking and exchange (figure 2). Web 2.0 tools have been used to activate and integrate the people who were interested in curating an exhibition and to offer learning opportunities. The users were enabled to select and compare photos, to tag or to share their most favourites via bookmarking. They could also comment on the artist's statement or on the blog.

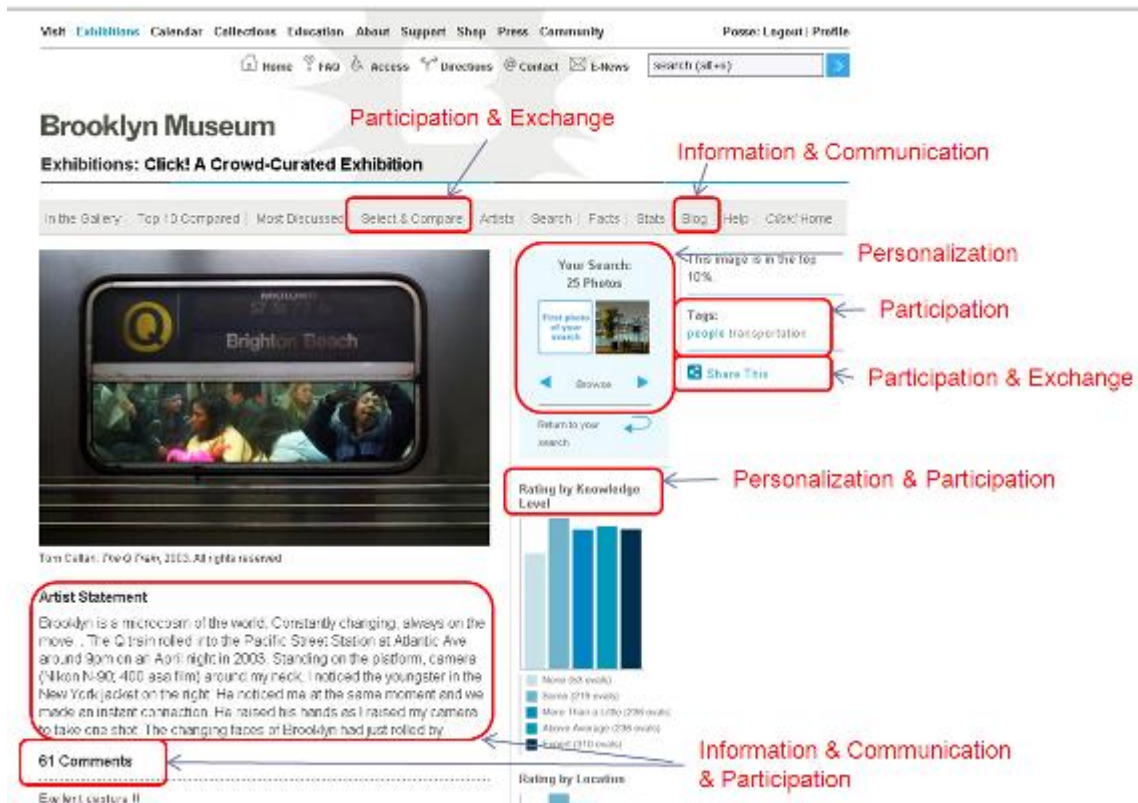


Figure 2 Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition, Most Discussed.
(Brooklyn Museum, WWW. Last access: 08.08.10.)

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In general, Web 2.0 elements can be divided into four functional areas which represent different purposes of Web 2.0:

1. Personalization: MySite concepts, download centre, databases, social bookmarks
2. Information and Communication: RSS newsfeeds, podcast, weblogs, microblogging
3. Participation: Wikis, social tagging, comment functions, participatory projects
4. Network and Exchange: Flickr, youtube, myspace, facebook, social bookmarks, mashups.¹⁶

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The **Brooklyn Museum** provides many of these Web 2.0 functions:

- Participation: Open to any photographer who had produced work with a Brooklyn theme, participation via rating, selection and comparison, tagging
- Communication: Blog and comment function on the photos
- Personalization: MySite concept, embedding the blog in personal sites, e.g. igoogole, social bookmarking
- Information: RSS function on the blog
- Combination of on-line and on-site activities

What are the benefits of a participatory Museum Education on-line?

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In today's knowledge-based society the desire for a discursive, communicative and participatory relation between museums and their visitors gains more and more importance. The museum on its real site and with its virtual complement develops into a *»place of mediation and moderation«*¹⁷ for active exhibition participants:

- to guarantee public access to cultural heritage
- to enable visitors to prepare and review their visits individually
- to offer participatory opportunities
- to communicate and activate dialogues
- to connect and expand educational work by combining on-site and on-line activities
- to guarantee a communicative and participatory relationship between the museum and its visitors on-site and on-line.

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The *»Museum 2.0«*¹⁸ becomes a platform for visitors to generate and exchange content as well as connect with the museum and each other.¹⁹ The entire Museum 2.0 is *»open-minded, communicative, it opens its doors – at least virtually – to the whole world, it cooperates, it knows its visitors, it learns, it interacts directly and remains open to criticism, it wins.«*²⁰

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Web 2.0 is a cultural and social phenomenon, not only a technical development. It should be an issue for every department of a museum and not only for the public relations and marketing section or the Museum Education. Museums are part of the society and must fulfill their required role to be accepted and valuable. The adoption of Web 2.0 by museums is still at an early stage but museums are getting more and more aware of it.

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Fig. 1: Jewish Museum Berlin: Digital Museum Education of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Internet URL: www.jmberlin.de/ksl/was_gibts/was_gibts_EN.php. Last access: 02.09.10.

Fig. 2: Brooklyn Museum New York: A Crowd-Curated Exhibition, Most Discussed. Internet URL: www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/click/highlight.php?id=45. Last access: 08.08.10.

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