

Balancing Between Sustainability and Reality: How to Remove Impressions Into Scientific Action? Case-Study from Perm Regional Museum

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Background. Sustainable development concept lead minds of scientists and politicians, its goals are clear and seems to be affordable. But reality requires a lot of time and effort to adapt the slogans in real action. What is the role of museums (including natural history ones) in this process? How museums should unleash their potential as highly respected cultural platforms and re-translators of sustainable development ideas, and use public credit of trust given them? Are museums responsible for promoting ideas among their audiences, or should they start from themselves? These questions, initiated several years ago by leading museums, are now insinuated into a wide professional discourse.

Perm Regional Museum, with its 620.000 objects in storages and 11 branches across the Perm Region, is presenting the heritage of Permian Period of geological prehistory, discovered here. Permian was ended by the greatest mass extinction ever occur, which gives us a chance to be included into the modern agenda of sustainable development, corresponding to the experience and data from prehistorical global event. At the same time the museum is currently entering the process of moving into the new space and planning its future, thus we need to find the cutting-edge discourse, which would remain relevant for the next decades.

In 2017–2018 Perm Regional Museum got a chance to reconsider its attitude in terms of sustainable development: its project “Welcome to the Anthropocene!”, supported by the grant from Vladimir Potanin Foundation, suggested to find pioneering for Russian museum approaches and develop exact steps towards ecological efficiency. The project idea “was grown” from two events: recognition of the anthropocene epoch in 2016 (carte blanche from scientific community), and ICOM NATHIST Conference in 2017 (gave us wide context of museum approaches). Inspired by both of them, we decided to start a long-term collaboration with Perm State University and Higher School of Economics to establish the platform for testing different approaches available to ordinary regional museum, which holds natural history collections and located in old buildings from the times when sustainable development was not yet thought.

Project cycle, material and methods. During two years project cycle museum developed new mechanisms in two aspects: scientific (research and presentation of collections with the involvement of scientific audiences, as well as scientific research of the eco-efficiency of the museum buildings) and artistic ones (invitation of non-scientists). Both branches intersect and help each other. Instead of starting preparing any exhibitions devoted to the Anthropocene and “to teach” the general public, we decided to start from ourselves and reconsider museum attitude, based on the adaptation of global Anthropocene agenda to the reality of regional museum.

First of all, we decided to change the prevailing perception of natural history collections as “unimportant” or “children-oriented” among local people, and highlight their scientific and symbolic meaning, focused on the new opportunities of their interpretation and research. For example, guest artist-in-residence Axel Strashnoy (Argentina–Finland) proposed to start new “Permian Collection” of urban “insects” picked up in the museum building during storage prophylaxis as an obligatory process twice a year. During six month – from spring to autumn – we

museum staff was collected the “pests” on the exhibitions and storages. Scientific definitions of collected items was made in Perm State University. Collected items were defined as belonging to the 35 families of *Arthropoda* (*Insécta*, *Crustacea* and *Arachnida*). We have clarified that only 10% of them could make real harm to the collections while all the others are just our neighbors in the urban ecosystem. On the one hand, this first replenishment of the museum entomological collection since last ten years raises the question of what modern museum acquisition is? Probably it is a precedent in museum practice – to collect a natural science collection of 199 items without leaving the museum building. On the other hand, artist Axel Strashnoy uncover the question of the balance between the life and death in the natural history museum, glorifying biodiversity and keeping museum “dead” objects safely through annihilation of the living insects, which potentially make any harm to dead insects, mammals and birds.

Another guest artist Piotr Stabrovskiy (Perm, Russia) have presented the local view on the natural history museum collections, made a “Frame for” visual research in the storage, suggested the aesthetic perception for the museum objects packaging, which itself is a sign of the times not less than museum objects. He also put attention to the patient of the museum staff working in the storages, and created a special “platform” for the interchanging exhibitions upon visitor’s request. As a result of collaboration with the museum team, Piotr have also suggested the so-called “anthropocenoscopes” – a simple tool of invasion into the permanent exhibition to connect the prehistorical collections (geological and paleontological) with the modern ones (zoological, botanical and entomological) respectively (helloanthropocene.ru/eng).

Environmental engineers form Perm State University conducted the eco-audit and develop an eco-efficiency improvement plan adequate to our opportunities. As mentioned above, Perm Regional Museum has 11 branches, all located in buildings constructed from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. We have no opportunity to adopt museum building into the “green” standards immediately. Nevertheless, the result of the eco-audit suggests exact steps to improve the water consumption, power consumption, heat consumption and waste management.

Conclusion. During two years of project implementation we have realized that even small or medium sized museum is able to find affordable tools to follow the strategy of sustainable development. The most important result is our “mind shift” from “closed storage” concept, which was existed almost since the end of the XIX century – to collect objects based on the systematical principle and put on display upon request. We are now much more opened to the scientific communities through the agreements with the universities and so called “scientific volunteers”, who are able to fill the gap between lack of museum staff, specialized in particular field of studies. At the same time, we were probably the first regional / local history museum in Russia to invite artists-in-residence into the scientific natural history collections. Both branches of the project – artistic and scientific – make museum more visible to the society, transparent for the specialists and general public, more variable in the sphere of research and interpretation, and thus more sustainable from the social attitude.

We are now facing even more ambitious challenges:

- To intensify the role of the museum as an organization with the great credit of society trust, following up the environmental issues into the public agenda.
- To develop environmentally friendly strategies into the different types of museum events, which all have some specific features (e.g. festivals produce a lot of “clear” letter such as plastic bottles, etc.; or conferences with their variety of paper materials such as programs, promotional materials or lunch boxes packaging)
- To join the network of eco-friendly regional communities to provide them an opportunity of using museum facilities as the platforms for spreading the ideas and mix themselves at our communicational platform.