



The old Maribo Museum and Archive.
Photo: Maribo Museum

Lokal partnerships create new institution



Jens Thorhauge

The concept for a new kind of cultural institution is the first milestone in an ambitious plan to merge and redesign the library, museum and local archive in the small town Maribo in the Danish southern province. A report on how to do it has been politically approved. It may well be a model for many towns in a similar situation.



Maribo old library.
Photo: Alfred Christensen

You take an old museum, a local archive, an old library - and a professional partnership and create a vision for a new kind of cultural institution >>

Maribo is a unique but stagnating town and a clear example of a small town suffering from decrease in number of citizens (5,000 inhabitants).

Maribo is situated on the island of Lolland in the southern part of Denmark. And though the island is connected to the mainland by bridges, it is part of 'peripheral' Denmark where jobs and offers are shrinking, real estate is difficult to sell, and higher education does not exist.

Oldest public library

Local industries often close down, merge or move. The farming is highly automated and new jobs must be invented. Or you must create real fine living conditions to make the town attractive. Maribo is doing that. And the town is special by the fact that since the middle ages it has been hosting one of Denmark's 10 cathedrals. For centuries Maribo has thus been a cul-

tural centre in spite of its size. One of its spectacular institutions is a cultural museum from 1890, built with national ambitions, but today only open three days a week for five hours.

The local library is actually the oldest public library in Denmark with more than two hundred years of history, and it's a library that has up until present time been ambitious and striving to keep the highest professional standard. The town is old, well maintained and authentic and the surrounding nature beautiful. But the fact is that the town is shrinking or at the best stagnating.

What scenarios could you establish?

The museum was founded on local private donations, and the local interest therefore enormous. Likewise, the library and the local archives are institutions that citizens are proud of and they hold rich collec-

tions. In short, the situation is that Maribo is a borough with rich cultural heritage and strong traditions to be maintained and developed under difficult economic conditions.

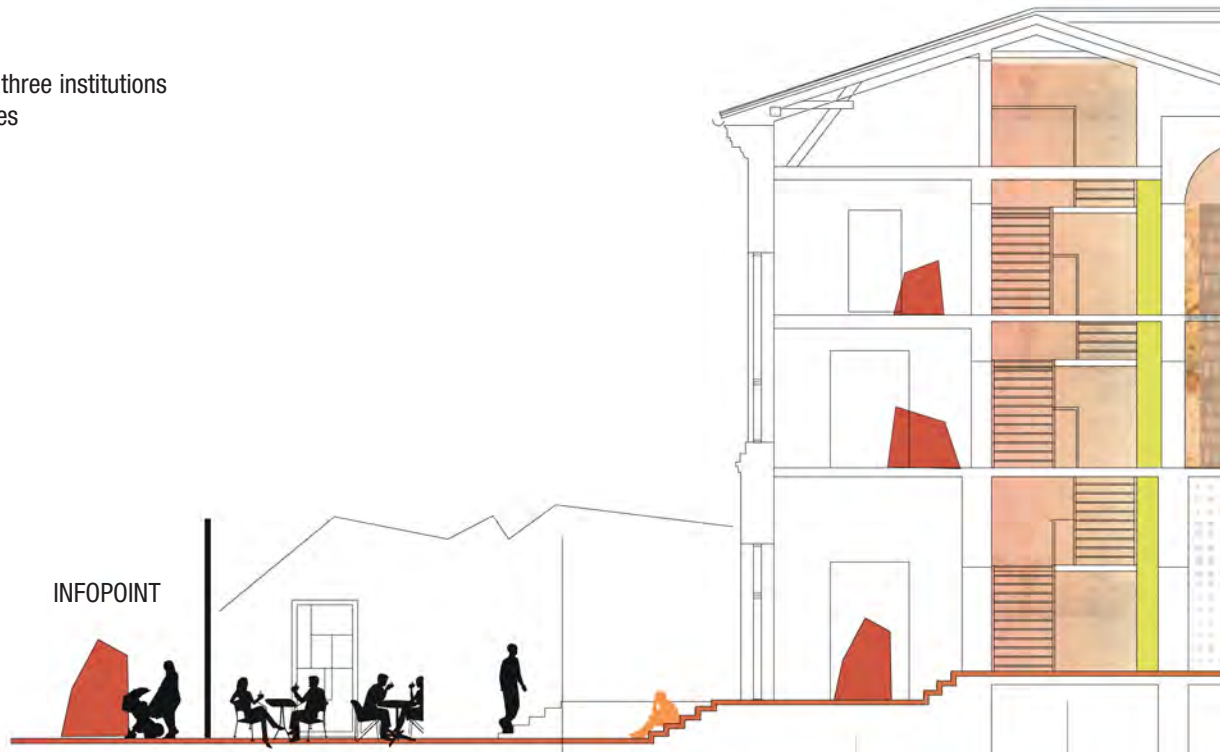
In the worst scenario the library, museum and archives in Maribo can look forward to ongoing cuts and shrinking and consequently few materials and mental resources to implement necessary innovations and keep pace with digital demands and new user behaviour. What alternatives could one imagine?

A radical vision

In dialogue the professionals from each institution created an idea of merging the three institutions into one: move together into the old museum, renovate and rebuild it for future needs and give up the venues of the library and the archives.

The idea was developed into a vision to

>> A merge and redesign of three institutions now housing the local archives



Just a few minutes from the new cultural centre you will find the old town hall

create a new kind of community centre. The main principle of the centre should be extreme openness, extended cooperation with local partners and volunteers, redesign of the parking lot and the bus stop outside the museum, turning them into a new open city space inviting to outdoor activities and presenting some of the offers inside the house.

The four space model

The vision was also to design the space with inspiration from the Danish 4-Space model developed to further a new library concept based on space for learning, inspiration, meetings and performance of the users.

The ideas were presented to the City Council. The council approved with enthusiasm and decided to start a proper planning and establish a working party

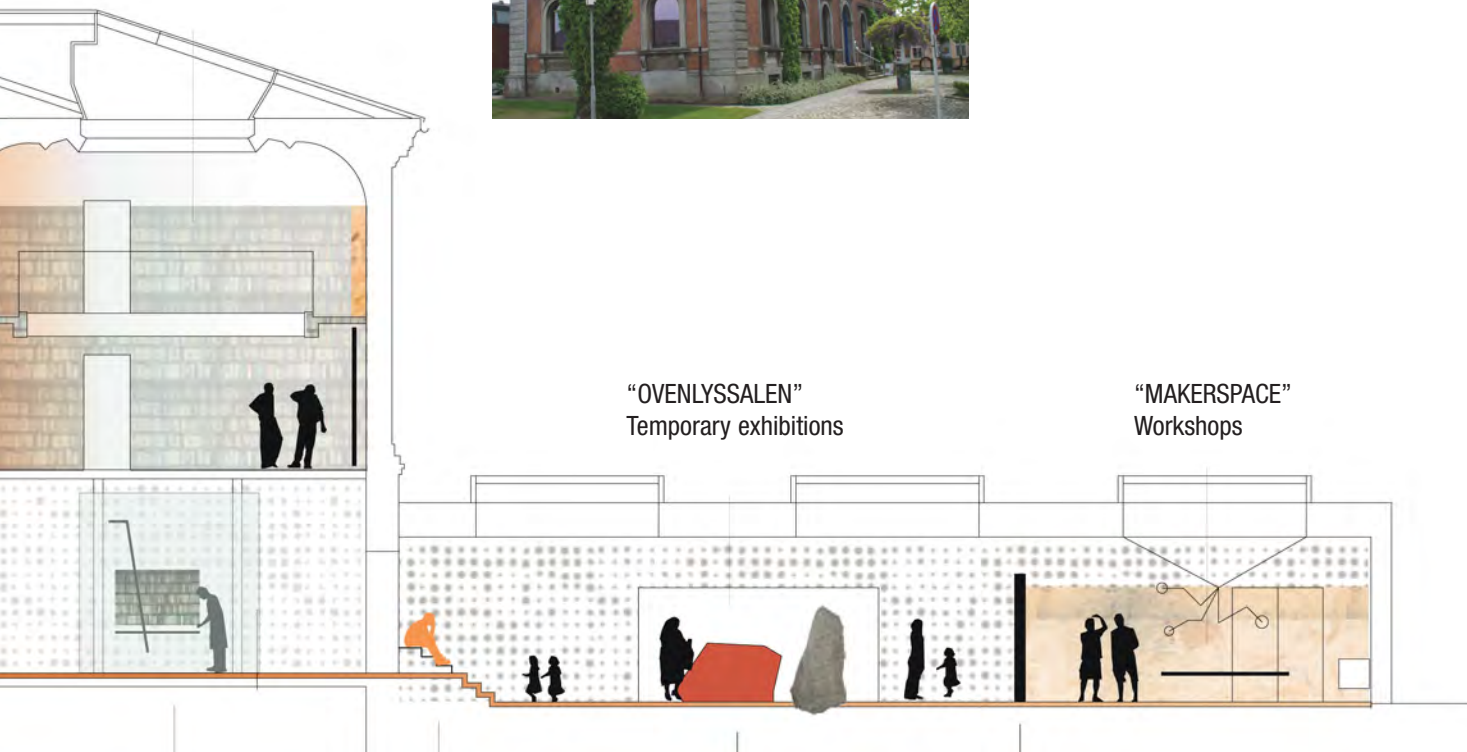
including a consultant and an architect. The Danish Agency for Culture supported the project with means from its Development Pool. The report is now completed, approved and the process to raise the estimated 3mil. euro to redesign the building has begun.

Dramatic changes in concept

A main inspiration for the new centre is the local open library which is open from 7 to 22. The museum is part of a number of merged museums containing some unique collections, but also similar collections to those that you might find in several other Danish cultural museums. To merge the three and house them in the museum demands a shift in paradigm.

The permanent museum collection must be replaced by new kinds of temporary exhibitions, the items displayed in con-

“MARIBOSALEN”
Exhibition room for all partners



“OVENLYSSALEN”
Temporary exhibitions

“MAKERSPACE”
Workshops

texts outside the museum or stored, and new kinds of narratives told. If the unique items remaining are displayed in safe showcases, the long opening hours also without any staff can be implemented in the new centre. Likewise the rich library collection must be reduced radically to make room for makerspaces, workshops and user driven activities.

New kind of institution

The working party has presented a report based on the ambitious vision of a new kind of institution open to the public, containing not only cultural offers and various workshops, but also housing a café, the tourist information, and a counter for basic public service, like passport and new driving license etc., like in many other Danish libraries.

The main plan for the new house is ba-

sed on the idea of an entrance area organized like a square, lively with a café, a play ground for the smaller children, an info spot, a lounge and a presentation of what activities, offers and collections you will find on the two upper levels.

The second floor will include workshops, makerspaces, exhibitions and space for group work. On the third floor you will find study cells and a quiet environment where you can immerse in the collections. The main concept is that the visitor moves upwards from the lively entrance square, following a path, presenting opportunities to study, work or investigate alone or in a group to a still quieter environment.

Is it possible?

The new organization must formally build on contracts between the partners. The

partnership agreement is crucial like the idea of one head and one budget. Actually several attempts in history have been made to create ABM institutions. This one will be successful as the alternative may be ... death. This is also underlined by similar thinking in other minor towns, like the merging of library and museum in Ebeltoft in an old malt factory, now called 'New Malt', situated in the eastern part of Jutland.

Jens Thorhauge
Thorhauge Consulting,
independent advisor
jt@jenssthorhauge.dk
jenssthorhauge.dk