



Exploratorium- San Francisco , 2013

<http://www.exploratorium.edu>

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1. Exhibition Concept

The Exploratorium in San Francisco is a hands-on-science museum with the approach of changing the way of learning. It was founded in 1969 by the physicist and educator Frank Oppenheimer. Since January 2013 the museum has a new location on Pier 15 and 17, which is in the touristically well frequented area of the Embarcadero. It is one of the most influential and most important science museums opened since the mid-20th century. The mission is to change the role of the visitors by putting them in an active position and let them experience and tinker with science. Kids of all ages are supported to use their curiosity to understand basic natural sciences and are encouraged to use the museum as a playground of science. Additionally the Exploratorium offers a lot of educational programmes centring on informal learning.

2. Reception

It had 570,000 visitors in 2012 and from the time of establishment around 400 science centers worldwide were build after the example of the Exploratorium. They built up the ExNET program where they share their experience of exhibition and teaching with other science centers around the world. A lot of school classes make their way to the museum as field trips as part of their courses. The classes are accompanied by 'Field Trip Explainers', experienced educators who help, inspire and empower the young learners to experience the exhibition but let the teachers guide their classes through. Teachers can attend special programs to strengthen their knowledge and improve their ability of teaching. The Teachers Institute Programs is very well received. Teachers are supported in building their own teaching materials and try a new way of inspiring the kids by experimenting and making things on their own.

3. Exhibition Design

The big exhibition space is a two level storehouse which was completely renovated and adapted for the new purpose. There are six main topics each presented in a different content group.

1. West Gallery - Human Phenomena - Experiment with thoughts, feelings, and social behaviour.
2. South Gallery - Tinkering Think with your hands.
3. Central Gallery - Seeing and Listening - Experiment with light and vision, colour, sound and hearing, and motion and spatial perception.
4. East Gallery - Living Systems Investigate the living world.
5. Bay Observatory Gallery - Landscape Observation, Explore the local environment.
6. Outdoor Gallery - Open your senses to this place by the Bay.

In these sections almost 600 exhibits can be found. Almost all are designed to try them out and play with them.

4. Visitors Approach-Activation/Participation

The main approach is the active participation of the visitors and to encourage them to educate themselves. By not just presenting the theoretical science but enhancing it with the playful hands-on exhibits the museum attracts a huge group of non-museum visitors.

Furthermore a lot of activities/exhibits are placed outside of the museum and are made available outside the business hours. This outdoor gallery and the good view over the bay of San Francisco makes the area around the Exploratorium very lively and attracts a lot of people.

The Exploratorium was one of the first museums which had an online appearance. The website is very well equipped and a lot of experiments can be found online. It is possible to take part in most of the public events, talks and special interviews via webcast. There is a digital archive of images, books, videos and instructions online. They also offer free downloadable apps and an Instagram photo-section which is very well received by the younger fans of the Exploratorium. The visitors can post images of their trip to the museum and are able to comment on others. The website has 24 million visits annually. The Exploratorium is also active in different social networks like Facebook where they built up a community of around 30,000 fans. Generally community is build upon all activities.



5. Conclusion: in respect to the COP1 and COP2

Toolkit 1 – to make Europe visible: Not applicable

Toolkit 2 – integrating cultural Europe (social arena): The museum offers a broad range of possibilities. The visitors from all levels of knowledge are welcomed and assisted and encouraged to participate. The outside exhibitions make the information and experience open for people of all social ranks and make it possible to absorb the knowledge without an entry fee.

Toolkit 3 – activation, participation and & role modification: The **Exploratorium** shaped a new education concept and changed the way of knowledge transfer. The visitor is not simply the consumer of the exhibits he is an active part in exploring and trying out the objects. Visitors appreciate that kind of approach and are willing to take the active position.

Toolkit 4 – synaesthetic translation of perspective: A lot of the exhibits deal with complex correlations. They are stripped down and demonstrated as easy to understood hands-on-exhibits enriched with the techniques of new media and digital interactions.

Toolkit 5 - Social web and interaction: the Exploratorium has a big fan-base on the social networks and they keep in touch with the users in many different ways. They have photo-contests on current topics and regular postings of news and inside stories of the museum. They offer apps for download to encourage to play with science additional to the museums-visit.

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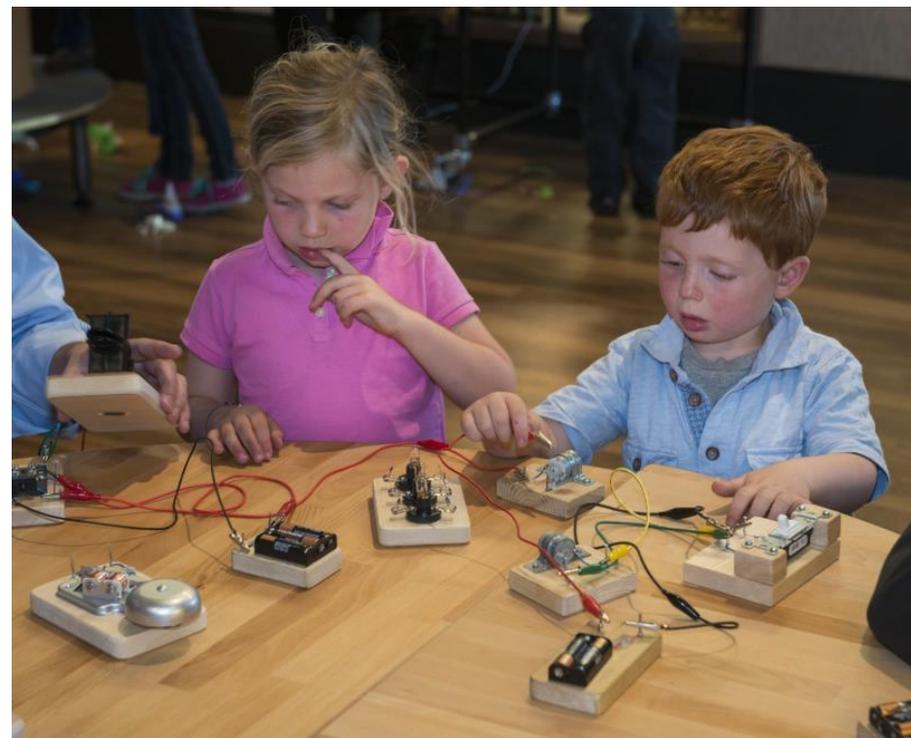
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