

Yates, M.F. (2020). *Ældre kunst og nye brugere: Nye metoder til formidling af Skovgaard Museets samling*. Department of Communication and Culture: Aarhus University. In Danish. <https://voresmuseum.dk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Mia-Yates-phd-afhandling.pdf>

## Abstract

The PhD dissertation examines whether new narrative and sensory communication methods can motivate the local population in Viborg to use the Skovgaard Museum and its collection. The research question represents a museological concern with how the Skovgaard Museum as an art museum can become more inclusive in its communication strategies. At the outset of the PhD project in 2016, local citizens were poorly represented in the user statistics of the museum. The museum wanted and still wants to become more present in the lives of the local population. Therefore it is seeking new strategies for how to communicate about their collection in ways that are meaningful to local citizens. The dissertation explores the research question by studying and experimenting with communication methods at the Skovgaard Museum in Viborg. The research question is based on interdisciplinary theoretical assumptions that narrative and sensory aspects of museum communication have an impact on the accessibility and relevance of a museum and its collection as a whole. The dissertation investigates how changes in these aspects of the museum's communication can help the Skovgaard Museum become more relevant for local citizens. The studies were carried out at the Skovgaard Museum in Viborg and focused on a number of activities and methods that were presented to the local population during the project period. The research project was organised as a qualitative study, inspired by ethnography and design thinking. It is structured in three main parts, each of which represents a phase of the project's chronology: PART I consists of preliminary studies of the methods of communication hitherto used by the museum as well as of the specific target group, which is new local users, defined as local adult citizens who rarely or never use the museum. The research methods applied in the studies consist of document analysis and analysis of linguistic and sensory communication in the permanent exhibition as well as of in-depth interviews with local citizens about their leisure time priorities, their experiences with art museums in general and with the Skovgaard Museum in particular. These preliminary studies provide an insight into the lives and cultural habits of the target group, and into the barriers and potentials that exist for their use of the collection and the museum. PART II consists of designing and testing a range of new communication activities at the museum, using qualitative knowledge from the preliminary studies as design criteria for the development of these activities. The activities, also termed prototypes, explore different narrative and sensory methods of communication. Design activities, such as mapping and brainstorming, were used for the conceptual development of the prototypes, which consisted of one sound installation in the permanent exhibition and two events held at the museum. Local adults were invited to participate in these activities (prototypes), and in order to study their experiences, the activities were documented by video recordings and discussed in semi-structured interviews. PART III consists of analysing the data. An inductive approach was applied in the organisation, coding and analysis of the data, which were carried out by means of the digital coding software NVivo. The analysis of actions and meaning-making processes provide insights into how the narrative, sensory and social dimensions of the prototype activities impact the interests and motivations of the participants. The analysis also sheds light on how different interpretive and communicative strategies affect the accessibility and relevance of the collection for new local users. The dissertation confirms that the narrative and sensory aspects of museum communication influence new local users' interest in the collection and in the museum. By creating narratives that illuminate the social and societal context of the art collection, the museum can present an interpretive framework that new local users find interesting and relevant. The findings show that prior knowledge and prior interests are crucial for users' motivation to participate in a

museum activity, as well as for the ways in which participants connect with and find interest in the knowledge content and the objects presented in the activities. Especially when recognisable elements are included in the knowledge content, new local users are able to connect with the content in ways that are experienced as valuable and enriching. The findings also show that the personal stories of the Skovgaard family's everyday life and emotional world provide new ways for participants to connect with the collection. It is suggested that the museum can enable empathetic insights into the lives of the Skovgaard family via 1st person-narratives, presented through sound and based on the museum's letter archive. Especially the sound of human voices and of 19th century Danish contributes to the experience of human presence and fosters compassionate insights into lived life. The findings also reveal how sensory interaction in museum activities are particularly motivating for new local users when these activities have an explicit social dimension. Furthermore, the analysis reveals how shared experiences of touch and taste can encourage social relations and create an informal and motivating social atmosphere at the museum. The possibility of such shared sensory and social experiences has a significant impact on the motivation of the new local users to participate in museum activities. Therefore, in its future communication efforts, it is recommended that the Skovgaard Museum understands and applies sensory activities as a significant part of its communicative and social strategy. Overall, the dissertation creates knowledge about the changes in communication methods that can benefit the Skovgaard Museum if they want to approach and attract new local users. At the same time, the dissertation contributes to museological research targeted museum communication by uncovering that the reasons for not using art museums can be found in the museum's interpretation and communication choices as well as in non-users' social and cultural backgrounds.