

## SUMMARY

The following thesis *Experiment, dialogue, art - an experimental investigation into new forms of museum communication* examines how the use of participatory communication (defined as a dialogical strategy of communication which involves the participant) can invigorate the collection at Randers Art Museum, and thereby create an opportunity to attract different audience groups to both the internal and external spaces of the museum. Furthermore, this thesis examines different forms of participation and dialogue within the museum space, and how these can contribute to the promotion of citizen participation and affect the relationship between visitors, the institution and the art. The focus of the research questions is two-fold: they are partly formulated on the grounds of the research programme Our Museum and its objective to examine Danish museum communication both historically and contemporarily, and partly on the basis of Randers Art Museum and their need to qualify their own communication practices and strategies.

In Denmark, a growing interest in the concepts of dialogue, participation and citizenship in a museum context has been observed in the last decade. These concepts are often applied at a cultural policy strategic level, but they can be challenging to implement practically. This thesis contributes to the field of research by connecting the theoretical and practical levels through the development of experimental methods of communication within the museum space, and by discussing the possibilities and problems derived from such experiments.

The research questions are examined through a qualitative study comprising observations, interviews with museum visitors and a number of communication experiments at Randers Art Museum. This was carried out by applying an experimental methodological approach which allows for a reflective practice of research within both academic and specific museum contexts. This approach offers different ways of accessing and producing knowledge, and indicates that it is possible to undertake smaller, dialogue-based communication initiatives within the museum using only few resources.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion paragraphs, this thesis is composed of seven chapters. The first three chapters outline the framework. In Chapter 1, I introduce the theory behind the research questions and their subsequent analysis. This includes a

discussion of the relationship between the project and the museological field of research, as well as a definition of the concepts of communication, participation, dialogue and citizenship. Chapter 2 investigates the specific context of the research, in this case in the form of Randers Art Museum, and I discuss and analyse the museum as a place and an organisation, while further investigating their existing communication practices. In Chapter 3 I turn my gaze towards the methodological framework of the thesis, and introduce the reflections and the specific research design.

In the following three chapters, which contain my analysis, I will discuss my research in relation to the communication experiments I carried out. Chapter 4 concentrates on the first communication experiment 'Art in the box' where Randers Art Museum temporarily put their collections on display inside a large container made from glass on the lawn outside the museum building. Changing the setting challenged the museum visitor experience and confirmed that it is possible to rethink their engagement with the art and the exhibition space in a way that makes it more accessible to a wider range of visitors, and creates a more equal relationship between the visitors and the institution.

In Chapter 5, I analyse the use of thematic exhibitions and activities in the communication experiments. The chapter examines what happens when art is put in relation to something else, and how thematic frameworks can affect how the art is communicated and the visitors' experience of their encounter with the art. The analysis indicates that thematic exhibitions and the interpretative framework they provide can sometimes make visitors feel excluded. At the same time, the thematising of visual, linguistic and physical elements in an exhibition can provide the art and the museum space with a new function, which is experienced differently by the institution and by the visitors.

Chapter 6 outlines one experiment where museum visitors were asked to share their experiences of an encounter with art in the exhibition space. I analyse and discuss how the visitors' own voices can be included in the communication surrounding the exhibition, and how this inclusion is of significant importance, both when the voices are used as individual tools for reflection, and when they are shared and made visible within the space. Making these voices visible in the exhibition space establishes a pluralism that can affect both the relationship between the visitors and the institution, between the visitors and the art as well as between the visitors themselves. Furthermore, based on this analysis, my conclusion is that the motivation for visitors to visit the museum varies greatly, and that equally, their individual experiences of the museum differ widely.

The three analytical chapters explore how it is possible to establish a closer connection between the museum experience and the visitors' everyday lives by focusing on themes that reach beyond art, and by making their personal thoughts and reflections visible within the exhibition space. The analysis indicates that this approach can also be successfully used to reach and speak to a wider range of visitors.

Conclusions are drawn in Chapter 7, in which I discuss the significance of the general concepts of participation and citizenship, and as well as the methodological approach taken and how this impacted the research questions.

This thesis reveals how participation is a very complex concept, especially at the intersection between theory and practice. As an institution, it is important to be aware of which types of participation you are engaging with and at which level. Within the theory of the current research, a tendency to consider participation based on contributory influence as the norm can be observed. This form of participation can be considered essential in many contexts, including within museums, but research within this thesis demonstrates how other forms of participation, more closely related to sociality, dialogue and performativity, can be meaningful and indirectly make visible and challenge existing power structures.

Taking into account the discussion of citizenship and participation, the ambition to establish a closer connection between the everyday lives of individuals and a visit to the museum can be considered a valid attempt to promote citizenship on a smaller scale. This thesis illustrates how this particular micro perspective can facilitate the specific potential of the museum. Museums can offer visitors a less formal public setting, where the individual is given the opportunity to build civic skills and encounter voices and opinions which differ from their own.

Furthermore, the thesis demonstrates that art in and of itself plays a significant role in correlation to citizenship, particularly when it serves as the starting point for conversations and reflections. One important conclusion here is that the framing, curation and communication of an exhibition or an art work to the public has a crucial impact on the quality and type of dialogue amongst the visitors, and therefore on the ability of art to promote citizenship.

Finally, this thesis concludes that historically, museums are developed and created in the field of tension between enlightenment and experience, thus confirming the overall thesis of the research programme *Our Museum*. In the thesis experiments, enlightenment and experience are intermingled to a great extent, and the analysis indicate that the

relationship between the academic and professional (enlightenment) and the personal (experience) content is an area with no black-and-white certainties. The personal experience and motivation is of great importance for the development of civic skills and competencies. Seen in the perspective of cultural citizen participation, this can potentially serve as a starting point for a professional or academic dialogue. Here, participation and dialogue can act as mediators between enlightenment and experience – e.g., when the ambition is to create a more equal relationship between the institution and its visitors. In this light, this thesis considers a new type of museum professionalism, where personal and professional skills and competencies are put into play – by employees and visitors to the museum alike.