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Historical Art Museums and Art Education Finding Audience Experiences

ABSTRACT

“Museums and Art Education finding Audience Experiences”

Museums need their audiences. The tradition to show exhibitions made by museum curators has changed for more active way to let audiences speak. Hands on-strategy to minds-on thinking has a multiple context; people want to share, tell a story via new technology. Museums are more global and they have opened the doors to volunteers and taken people to everyday life. Art education used in museum pedagogy is not only for school children. Kindergartens want to have curriculums at museums. Senior citizens want to continue year after year visiting museum’s senior club. Non-visitors may change their mind after visiting web pages. How can we fill expectations, understand the motivation and needs of our audiences, update our skills to use technology and still collaborate in a human way to collect, preserve and share knowledge. Are we even talking about audiences or more of “users” or “choosers”?

International museum collaboration and art education has an important role to mediate between old traditions and new demands. We can speak of different audiences and not all want to learn or get involved to interactive processes. How can we change the visit to an experience through art education?

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Introduction

From storytelling to narrative analysis in audience research

Audience research is an interesting but at the same time a challenging task. Language and cultural environments are connected to a certain time period and they change rapidly which makes long-term comparisons of museum visits difficult. George E. Hein has explained that the same consistency of phenomena cannot be applied to data about visitors to museums. Emigrants in Liverpool in 1884 are not the same people as immigrant children in Buffalo in 1920’s, and neither

group is identical to families Hein has observed in Boston 1998 (Hein, 1998). In Finland Senior Head of Education Marjatta Levanto did experimental audience research in practice and developed a customer value approach to the Finnish National Gallery (FNG) audience work since 1970's and has been an example for many educational curators at museums I'm working at the Sinebrychoff Art museum which is both a historical art museum as a house museum. In 2006, a government demand to develop collaboration between regional art museums (SDK 1192/2005), (Kinanen, 2007), which also concerned audience research, impacted on the FNG and worked especially with collaborative audience research.

According to Professor Matti Hyvärinen (lecture, Jyväskylä, November 17, 2014) one has to separate memory from the story, while a story can help to remember and organize memory. He quoted an independent scholar Marie-Laure Ryan (2005) who has written that a story is a "semiotic object" – in this case a verbal or written story of museum visitor's own experience – which has known minimum features connected in time. As to narration, it is a larger characteristic, connected to subjects and phenomena. It encourages make narrative interpretations. The sociologists Jaber F. Gubrium (2001) and J.A. Holstein (2001) developed ideas of Narrative practice, Narrative control (where a story is told and by whom) and Narrative environment (the same subject but completely different stories).

Narrative is functional and will be considered as one verbal technique for recapitulating experience. Professor Dan P. Hutto (2007) supported a natural and listening interaction between the narrator and interviewer. This has been my method at the workshop interviews at the museum. People like to tell stories. The researchers Labov and Waletzky (1997) have developed a radical model for a verbal narrative. They separated so called "narrative sentence" of which among others they got orientation and evaluation. The order of the story must be in original form because it influences the context. The model consists of the abstract; subject of narrative "do you want to hear this"; orientation "time, place, persons"; complication action "what happened"; evaluation, results of resolution and code. The most interesting part is usually evaluation because the narrator has expectations of what they are willing to tell afterwards. Pauses, nods, sighs and laughs as well as the stories are noted in an interview diary. Being aware of importance of non-verbal codes has helped me to collect information which can be reconnected to the interview's natural atmosphere.

Arnulf Depperman (2013) wrote a critical article, "How to get a grip on identities-in-interaction, (What) does 'Positioning' offer more than 'Membership categorization'?" The article advocated an understanding of 'positioning' as key to the analysis of identities in interaction within the methodological framework of conversation analysis. It may be problematic to have the distance to make a research of one's own work. I see, however, more benefits than problems in this precise

research of regular visitors. With narrative method it is possible to see the meanings of actions and phenomena in authentic surroundings and see how people build their stories when telling of their experiences and memories to other people.

According to my research and work experience, kindergartens have found museums to be an essential part of their curricula, and storytelling has arrived in the exhibition halls. Senior citizens want to continue visiting the museum's senior club year after year. How can we fulfil expectations, understand the motivations and needs of our audiences, update our skills to use technology in an appropriate way, and still collaborate in a human way to collect, preserve and share knowledge? Do we need new technology with augmented reality or open access for files to give more value to collections and create more interesting museum environment for its audiences? Are we talking about museum guests, visitors, educated entertainers or consumers?

Building on research by Bamberg (2006), Georgakopoulou (2007) and others, a performative, interaction-based approach to positioning is outlined and compared to membership categorization analysis. This research is one of the key elements when I'm doing narrative analysis of the regular visitors. The line between terms 'mixed methodology', 'multi-methods', 'multi-method approach' and 'triangulation' is very thin. I have used half-structuralized method with open answers. A complementary model suits best in combining qualitative and quantitative methods because they are examining same things but in a different ways. It is a kind of dialogue when quantitative questionnaire gives exact answers to numbers of visit, accessibility and level of service unlike narratives tell about memories, wishes and feelings. I find that these two methods validate, they examine and complete each other, and give a clearer picture of examined area - it is called triangulation. The qualitative material is essential to elaborate or expand how the used methods work in practice.

By using quantitative questionnaires from the period 2003-2013 and qualitative narrative methods such as interviews and letters, it has been possible to learn about audiences' expectations, experiences and influence on museum practices, which can be connected to art education, museum pedagogy and museology. In my case study of senior citizens I have used both interviews and a written form "A letter to my friend –tell about your experiences at senior club". As Senior Researcher, PhD Tuija Saresma has pointed out in her lecture (lecture, Jyväskylä December 12, 2014), narratives are always social – stories are told to somebody. Interviews were conducted at the museum's workshop and recorded using a H4 Zoom – recorder. The questions were: What kind of hopes and expectations do you have of your visit at Sinebrycoff Art Museum? What things are the

most important for you during your visit? Would you like to share any specific information about your museum visit? What makes you come to a museum?

I found a difference between the written stories and interviews. In the letters, people wrote more about their past and individual feelings concerning their own life. There was abstract, orientation and evaluation in each letter, but in the complication action the context changed from individual sorrows to a happy reunion with a childhood's friend. Only few persons wrote about art. In the interviews, the situation was different. Some persons said that it is good to be in a company without saying anything. The importance of art education of school was mentioned in several interviews –some of the seniors were still in contact to their art teacher. There were also bad experiences at school in general, which success in drawing had helped to overcome. The art at the museum was mentioned many times and one informant was happy that Sinebrychoff Art Museum did not have photographs. People liked lectures, workshop activities and dining together. Social aspects arouse important: people mentioned many names and thanked them for their good spirits. Dewey's (1934) 'experience' here linked art experience and being an active member of a club.

Interpreting, mediating and experiencing art

Museum education is a lifelong exhibition process, which examines the personal and individual experience of museum visit and Arts. According to Johnston (1992) through objects, museums can provide unique experiences associated with the collective meaning, sharing, discussion and debate that are the foundations of good citizenry, and can reinforce personal identity and belonging. Objects convey a sense of place and can, therefore, introduce outsiders to the significance of a culture through its material heritage. (Johnston 1992). The idea of thinking museum today as a host or hostess welcoming people to enjoy of art and social life seems real to me. One part of my conceptual framework lies on Dewey's theory of experience and aesthetics of art. "He posits that the root of aesthetic experience lie in common place experience, that is, in the consummatory experiences that are ubiquitous in the course of human life"(Konlaan, 2001, page 26). Particularly in contemporary art museums there are many natural ways to create collaboration with contemporary artists and new media. Exhibitions may be stable, attract, invite, sometimes irritate and make people curious and interested in arts but what is the role of the audience? Lind (2011), however, worried about the limited interest in communication beyond the select audience. The context usually focuses on the idea of the curator, or otherwise working with artists or students creates a danger of symbiosis where others are kept outside. According to Lind, in both situations, a third term –a wedge to trigger a dialectical dynamism –is missing. She believed that the moment has come to insist an experimentation while simultaneously attempting to develop new forms of mediation –to consider

earnestly the question of what art does in culture and what its function can be in society and to be more generous with the material in hand. Lind uses critically the terms ‘educated and entertained consumer’ and wants more openness in audience work.

The works of artists from 1300 to 1800 do not only stay inside museum walls. We also deal more broadly between the most famous European artists and contemporary audience. Museum offers virtual tours “Virtual tour” and “Paul’s friends, works of arts in his study”. It also shares young visions created by the Harju youth center by the video “Art, Life, Love”. Students of Museology from Helsinki University have been studying social media, and I have taught participatory museum concepts. The students wanted to publish their vision of the home museum in Youtube, too, with the name Sinebrychoff Art Museum. We learned to use Google drive, share files and make a photo story and movies with music. Collaboration with both Helsinki and Aalto University’s students has been interactive and provided fresh views of the home museum.

The Sinebrychoff Art Museum is working to developing appropriate ways to open its files for public www.sinebrychoffartmuseum.fi. Accessibility is part of its everyday work and the museum is aware of different physical and psychological needs. Helsinki Pride-festival is a theme week of gender and sexual minorities and the festival runs art tours also at the museums. The Web, Wi-Fi, personal digital assistants, cell-phones, mixed-reality immersives and digital libraries enable international engagement with interactive media. *The Digital Museum* (Din & Hecht, 2007) gives a picture of the general situation:

The current discussion on technology in museums has been informed by two decades of debate. It takes place within a context of constant change and adaptive persistence. Contemporary media specialists engage new formats, new audiences and new protocols, as did their peers ten and twenty years ago. The essential dichotomy remains between museum – collector of real objects – and media- electronic approximation of the ‘real’.

Sherry Hsi (2007) continued in her article “Evaluating Museum Technology”: Experiences from the Exploratorium/Evaluation of future museum technologies:

”Future media and technology design will no doubt be more fluid, participatory and networked. In participatory media environments, visitors can now contribute stories, observations, photographs, scientific data, music, sketches, videos or other personal media messages onto publicly shared online graffiti boards, global earth watches or digital library collections. The onsite and remote online visitor can now participate in forums, multi-user online games and collaborative design experiences that shift one-

way media consumption into museum experiences with artists, developers and other visitors.”

It should be noted here that the Sinebrychoff Art Museum is an old building with thick walls which limits the use of modern technology.

Audience work giving visitor value

The aim of museum education is to give value to our museum visitors. Art itself has its value but museum’s role as a media is to be an interesting interpreter which bases its activities on scientific research. There are many contrasting views, even at the museum, on how to work with the audience. As Mark O’Neill has written in his article “The good enough visitor” (O’Neill, 2002):

What is the relationship between aesthetic standards applied to works of art and traditions of display, and the ethical standards that shape the public services provided by art museums, which receive public subsidy either directly or through the tax system? (O’Neill, 2002,p.24)

At the Sinebrychoff Art Museum, the staff has traditionally balanced between scientific research, which is very much of interest of museum directors and curators, and inspiring educational audience work, which sometimes needs efforts in simplifying theoretical contexts and an active audience work. With a small staff, we need a good will to be able to make place for all groups and ability to collaborate with different audiences. The traditional way to approach visitors is to give information by joint public program like lectures, films teaching, concerts, guided tours and workshops for all ages in the context of the exhibitions, and teacher training.

According to Carol Duncan (1995) there are three main views about what art museums are for. All three theories claim that art in the art museums has the power to affect or transform people, but in very different ways. The aesthetic view claims that the serious pleasure of aesthetic contemplation of works of art has an inspirational value, which needs no other justification. In my research, I call a person with this approach in my research a *Visitor*. The educational view, often seen as in opposition to the aesthetic view, claims that art museums should be part of the process of educating people, aesthetically, visually, socially and historically. Thus, the visitors have either before their visit or subsequent to the visit the willingness to learn – so we shall call them *Learners*. (1995) At Sinebrychoff Art Museum we can recognize all views, but the essential issue is to find balance for curatorial and educational work. There is a good will to wish everybody welcome, but can we find

the resources for the audience to develop segmented activities for themselves? Most museums are publicly funded. The FNG changed from the governmental organization for a foundation. This has meant a change in economics and audience work. In spite of the museum's glorious history as a brewery owner's home and the governmental institute there will be a new start with self-reflection and evaluation; what shall we take with to a new museum life? The political view sees art museums as social institutions, carrying out an ideological function, reinforcing the power structure of society, transforming visitors into willing acceptors of the status quo. They are called *Consensus people*. (Sandell, 2002). "I think this new time in a foundation has however strengthened visitors' activity more than made them willing acceptors. The Friends of Sinebrychoff Art Museum have given a positive effect on collaborative audience work by supporting museum in various ways, organizing many events with concerts and lectures.

Gallery talk

Carmen Mörsch (2013) describes the expectations of museum visitors:

For the most part, the public expects to receive an explanation of as many works as possible in the shortest possible time, while being entertained and made feel comfortable. This service should be provided by a person with a habitus suited to the museum, the appropriate dress code and a form of speech that is perceived fitting.(p.8)

This is very much true, although as an educator I prefer Cecilia Nelson's method. Anna-Lena Lindberg described Nelson's model of 'visnongspedagogik' in her thesis. She has developed a Swedish museum pedagogy with children by using methods which needed time, knowledge, training, active observation and much openness. It is very close to storytelling and narratives, and also the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) method. The VTS method was developed for using art to deepen learning across school disciplines in collaboration between psychologist Abigail Housen and former education director of New York's Museum of Modern Art, Philip Yenawine (2013). The method differs from the others by its strictly structured three questions that are posed after a minute's observation of an art work: What's going on in this picture, what more can we find, what did you see that made you say that? The idea is to tell what you see, not what you know theoretically. This method is old but it has returned to art institutions in Finland because of active educational curators who have found the method to work in their gallery tours. I have tested the method with a regular groups and more often with special children. The method requires training and I was trained at the Brooklyn Museum, New York in 2013. Other examples of gallery talks from the book *Teaching in the Art*

Museum – Interpretation as Experience (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011). The book starts with two examples of guided tour at the J. Paul Getty Museum. In the first example, the class is studying only one painting; the museum educator has invited the assembled visitors to look ever more closely, guiding the class toward an understanding both on painting itself and of our reason for studying it. The painting is *The Abduction of Europa* (1632), a picture from Greek mythology. When the class comes to an end, people move closer to the painting and continue conversation. In the same museum, another museum educator is leading a group and begins with a Roman statue of Venus, followed by French terracotta bust of Madame Récamier. For each sculpture he asks the students to focus on only one detail, the hands. At the end, no one wants to leave. In both cases, the students and the instructor are animated, concentrated, focused and active.

The old European culture that is appreciated all over the world has not received too much attention in everyday life of Finnish museum audiences. A museum experience, the exchange of expertise and the creation of best practices among professionals in the global art and museum education field are essential elements of contemporary benchmarking and recreating refreshing museum education. Where are volunteers and participatory collaboration? Creating an exhibition is a long process: the work is done on many levels with professional staff and possible co-partners that might be the museum Director, Chief curator, Curators, Head of Education, Marketing Coordinator, Technicians, Customer Service Supervisor, Registrars and Guides. In the U.S., museums such as the Metropolitan Art Museum, The National Museum of Women in Arts, The American Museum of Natural History and Merchant House all have trainee programs for volunteers usually directed by Education department. One of the main goals of museum education is to strengthen individual and personal museum experience by giving a customer value through the museum expertise.

Dusts and skeletons of imagination

Gaynor Kavanagh (2002) has written in her article *Partnerships with museum authorities* that even when museum professionals have sparkling ideas, great collections and good contacts, things may go wrong. The explanation for this is that people want evidence, persuasive argument backed up by relevant case studies, and a strong sense of well-placed purpose. Then they might wish to be associated, and to work in partnership to agreed ends.

Skeletons have been dug from cupboards with great enthusiasm and the dust has been wiped off the projects. The next three examples of participatory audience collaboration has been conducted with the regular audience – meaning in this case school teachers and colleagues from other museums, with the Sinebrychoff Art Museum as the project leader. In first project, one of the most

active art teachers was Riitta Pouttu from Turun suomalainen yhteiskoulu (TSYK). She created a digitally documented school project as a part of museum's Garderobe-project. Her school created dramatized, historically based narrative Storytelling project with self-made costumes made from recycled material and waste paper. The students created a historical drama project of von Bondsdorff family life. All of this was also carefully documented digitally also by the students and Kimmo Kauvo. It was created as a book and online version *Luovuuspedagogiikka* (2006). It has also been translated into Estonian.

To learn the 'otherness' and build a bridge between the past and today, we had another international school project called *Along the street* with four schools and three museums (the Hallwylska Museet in Stockholm, the Helsinki City Museum and the Sinebrychoff Art Museum) involved. The students studied the history of Helsinki from archives, literature, and old photos from the Sinebrychoff brewery and interviewed educational curators, and we ended up with an exhibition and plays. One inspiration for this project came from New York's Tenement Museum, which has a mission to promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a past gateway to America. We saw the connection to Sinebrychoff family who were immigrants, too, and were never really accepted among the highest society because they were 'Russian merchants' in a politically difficult period. (Mäkelä – Alitalo, 2009). The Tenement museum has interactive drama tours in tenement buildings and it has excellent webpages. In the *Along the Street* project we found immigrants from all over the Europe who came to Finland in the hope in finding a better future. Three famous immigrant names we know today are connected to today's luxury: coffee – Paulig; chocolate – Fazer and the 19th century fashion warehouse – Stockmann. They all came from abroad during the same period, and, like Sinebrychoff, are familiar household names in Finland.

Konlaan's studies about Art's influence on well-being (2001) inspired us to work with mixed age groups. The last two school projects were called *From Home* mixed age and *Meetings*. The first one was created together with Turun suomalainen yhteiskoulu and Kallion lukio. The second project invited museum seniors to interact with Helsinki University and Kallion lukio students. We continued the fine collaboration with Hallwylska museet from Stockholm and had a new partner, Museet HEM from Turku. The aim was to get young and older people together. Students and senior citizens communicated in various ways, students wrote plays about home and these performances were seen at the museums in Finland and in Sweden.

Working from facts to illusions

Digital documentation has a customer value and also strengthens visitor identity. I had the opportunity to be an observer of the online teaching of teachers' blended summer course which was run in New York by the American Museum of Natural History and Metropolitan Art Museum. The project leader was Head of education, William Crow and there were some good examples of shared spaces and ideas. Online and blended museum-based teacher-training needs innovative attitudes. Of course we are talking about very different amounts of visitors and museum staff because there are 18,000 museums in the USA, and only 1,000 in Finland. In spite of the difference in size, you can still pose the same questions: Can I get access to collections and archives, can I get help from experts, can I be creative and do new things on basis of collections? (Crow & Din, 2011). Many experimental projects have been run with different audiences which have given new approaches to collections. Sinebrychoff Art Museum has organized online education by giving Global Collaboration lectures. It has also undertaken digital documentation and benchmarking with its audience work. The Siff atelier collaborated with the Les Lumières-festival (director, Marja Rumpunen) in Suomenlinna, where the famous baroque musicians and dancers from France, Italy and Portugal have collaborated with children in 1700s style: in 2013 Raffaele Dessi, who was the choreographer for the movie *Casanova* and in 2014 Divino Sospiro, the most famous baroque orchestra from Portugal worked with the workshop participants. The 300-year-old Qwensel-house in Turku found a common context of 1700s education with Sinebrychoff Art Museum in terms of drama. We created the role of Maria Sederholm (visiting her daughter Maria Pipping who lived in Turku) who came to prepare young girls for the ball and helped them to use a "mouche" and fans and learn dancing and make hair-dressing. The museum participated in Tall Ship Races 2013 mass happening with sailor spirit. It was a mass happening at the museum park, entering into sailor spirit. The City of Helsinki had organized a children's program, the Annantalo Arts Centre and Sinebrychoff Art Museum made knots and sent signals with flags and we had 1,500 visitors to the park workshop over three days. Sinebrychoff Park was reserved for children.

Conclusion

Today, museums are more virtual and global than ever before. On the other hand, with their audience work, museums have come back to similar practices to when private collections were opened to the public two centuries ago. Partly because of global economic crisis, and partly because of participatory programs, some museums have opened the doors to volunteers in order to gather more resources to enrich services. Much has been done to increase the use of archives in both

national and international levels. The relations between Sinebrychoff Art Museum's regular visitors, museum's practices and local and global processes are very complex, because they are connected into complicated cultural heritage structures of research, networking, actions and cognitions. Identity is a process that takes place during concrete and specific interactional occasions and can be strengthened during the museum visit by giving a customer value through well-prepared programs. I hope that through narrative analysis we can better understand our audiences and improve interaction between them and the museum staff. Does a regular visiting mean membership in social categories, and do cultural experiences improve health? Can a museum have an identity through participatory collaboration? There is a need to enlarge the practice exchanging experiences through collaboration. Schools and museums should create a sustainable collaboration between educational curators and co-organizers, with opportunities for expanding communal activities, professional training, and education programs, and organizing future initiatives in the fields of art and museum education.

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