

Museums and Identity - An investigation about the value of museums

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The industrial Ph.D. project "Museums and Identity" aims to investigate how users perceive, value and use the museum visit. The success criteria for the project are that an evaluation model is developed that can systematically identify what the guests bring home from the visit, and that this knowledge of the guest's reflection and reflections on the visit can be incorporated into the museum's strategic and practical work.

In order for the project to create a new evaluation practice for the museum area, an implementable valuation method must be developed around the museum guest's benefit from the museum visit. The visitors' benefits and the identity creation that the museum visit can support are seen in this project as a process over time, and not as a thing or service that can be examined only by studying the visit itself. The evaluation method will therefore also be based on innovative and realistic evaluation practices that think context, process and time perspective into the evaluation design (Dinesen and de Wit 2010, Pawson & Tilley 2004). This project will, to a greater extent than previously completed projects in the sector, focus on the museums' real core service: the long-term benefits that visitors get out of the visit. And this project - with an analysis of the long-term benefits of the museum visit - has the aim to change the museums own practice of developing strategies and product development, and will influence the outside world's view of the museums' usefulness.

These analyses can be used to gain insight into questions like: What role do the museums play in identity formation, attitude formation and knowledge sharing? At the same time, the project can be used to develop the museums 'self-understanding and commercial work by clearly uncovering the museums' value proposition (Osterwalder & Pigneur 2013). An effect of this will be that the museum can become more relevant to the museum user, and that the degree of recommendation of the museum will be increased, which should result in a larger number of visitors can be attracted to and made interested in museums (and then visit them). The project will have the significant significance that for the first time there will be a realistic analysis of the museum guests 'benefits - personal, social and identity - which can be used to develop products and express the museums' value to the museum guests. The same analysis will then also, which will be a useful parameter in terms of attracting partners and external funds from private and state stakeholders and grantors.

In order to ensure a long-term significance for the museum sector, both a method model and an applicable process model must be developed so that this analysis can take place continuously at the museum. This is done by developing a survey design that moves the surveys of the user's dividends into the company, instead of happening in external state or private evaluator systems, where results must be translated into the company's context before the results become usable. This will make an outcome that will be an analysis model that continuously looks at the museum's product, analyses the use and perception of the product, so that an adjustment can then be made to the product in order to be able to measure the outcome again, etc.

Specifically, this will be done by developing a method so that the museum's employees can easily carry out the evaluation themselves and thus build a motivation to see how their product is perceived and used by the users.

Research question and hypothesis

In response to a catastrophic economic situation caused by the corona crisis the mayor Danish Open-Air Museum Den Gamle Bys launched in the spring of 2020 a collection, aimed at their users, and the result was impressive. Over the course of three months, more than DKK 1.6 million was collected. This shows support from users that no public or private company can match, and it shows that you have a unique product that these users demand far beyond the individual experience, such as a visit to a museum. But the fact is that museums have only vague notions of what this product is. The claim of this project is that the answer must be found in an understanding of the user's processor's perception of the museum and the role the museum has in relation to the users' understanding of identity.

This project works on the hypothesis that the great support is rooted in the museum's function as identity-giving / creating for the user - an identity creation, which among other things takes place in the user's processing of a museum visit. So how can this be investigated? The study design will be based on the assumption that what best describes the value of museums to museum visitors is the perception of the museum that guests have gained after they have processed the museum visit themselves, and that a data collection and analysis of this perception should be the basis where the museum's value can be uncovered, and a further development of the museum's product can take place on that basis.

The hypothesis is based, among other things, on the fact that the Den nationale Brugerundersøgelse [National User Survey] from the Danish The Agency for Culture and Palaces has shown in their surveys the last 12 years that the two most important reasons why people visit museums are 1) they have been there before or 2) they have had the museum recommended by others. The main reason is not that they stumble across a booklet or see an ad about something they have not encountered before, but because they want to relive a previously experienced relevant realization created through museums, or because they have talked to someone who has processed his or hers visit and so purposefully has retold a story about the museum to them. It is a reflected and processed version of the museum visit, which results in new museum visits.

The concept of identity is used as an operational framework for the guest's processing of the museum visit. Identity will be examined both from the visitor's perception of his or her own individual and collective identity [Frello 2012]. It will be both a focus on the person's self-understanding and understanding of the world around them and the mechanical ones, where the museum supports, changes or challenges the understanding of identity. As part of identity formation and self-understanding, the social aspect and the social interactions that take place through the museum visit are also included. In this project, it is this broad use of the concept of identity that is referred to when referring to identity.

The project's two primary research questions are:

- How can one measure and valorise the museum guests 'identity-based benefits of museum visits and how can this strengthen / qualify the museums' professional activities and work?

And in order to do that, these sub-questions will be addressed:

What identity reflections do museums offer - and how?

How to measure visitors' reflections?

How can this insight be translated into new museum practice?

How can this insight be used to create a more nuanced and accurate assessment of the museums' value for the individual and at the societal level?

However, the project will not only investigate the significance of the museum for the visitors' identity formation. It also aims to create a workable evaluation method so that this value can be continuously valued and brought into play in the museum's strategic and operational development. Therefore, an underlying question in the dissertation is this:

How can an operational evaluation practice be created that can continuously valorise the identity-based benefit of the museum visit?

Theoretical background

The dissertation will in its analysis include research on identity formation, use of history, memory studies and theories about the visitors' use and construction of the museum experience.

A key element in the last three decades of research in identity formation has been about the individual's place and understanding when central societal structures, such as nation states, classes and the importance of the family, are no longer as self-evident as before. The possibilities of postmodern society for choosing and opting out of identity are used by, among others, Stuart Hall (1997), Manuel Castells (2000), Anthony Giddens (2006), Zygmunt Bauman (2006), Andreas Reckwitz (2019), to describe and discuss power structures or structural changes. Within political science, there has also been a focus on the meaning and influence of parameters such as dignity and identity (Fukuyama 2018).

These classic examples from identity research shed light on power relations between groups in society in various ways, but also around the identity formation that takes place on an individual level and how one's own identity is connected to perceptions of the outside world and vice versa. This can be used to put the identity production that takes place at the individual level in connection with the museum visit into a societal context and analyze the roles that museums have as identity builders and identity supports.

The theoretical field around history culture's interconnection of the concepts of past interpretation, contemporary understanding and future expectation can be used to link the use and interpretation of the past with the identity formation that takes place in the individual, and this research will be used in the study of the role of the past in a museum context has for self-perception and identity formation. In 1979, with an approach from the didactics of history, Karl-Ernst Jeismann focused on our use of the past by linking the three concepts of past interpretation, contemporary understanding and future expectation: *Meht als blosser Wissen oder reines Interesse an der Geschichte, umgreif Geschichtsbewusstsein den Zusammenhang von Vergangenheitsdeutung, Gegenwartsverständnis und Zukunftsperspektive [More than mere knowledge or a pure interest in history, historical awareness encompasses the connection between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and future prospects]*" (Jeismann 1979: 42). Within history theory, there was also a focus on the creation of historical identity. History theory professor Jörn Rüsen described the connection between the two functions of historical identity creation and temporal practice orientation as follows: *"Geschichte als Inhalt von Geschichtsbewusstsein ist ein Zusammenhang von Gegenwart und Zukunft, der an und mit der erinnerten Vergangenheit erscheint. Geschichtsbewusstsein ist diesem Zusammenhang verpflichtet; es ist der Balanceakt des Menschen auf dem Drahtseil der Zeit, das zwischen dem „Nicht mehr“ und dem „Noch nicht“ ausgespannt ist und auf dem sich konkretes und reales menschliches Leben vollzieht [History as the content of historical awareness is a connection between the present and the future that appears on and with the remembered past. Historical awareness is committed to this context; it is the balancing act of*

mankind on the tightrope of time, which is stretched between the "no more" and the "not yet" and on which concrete and real human life takes place]" (Rüsen 1994: 7). Also outside the didactic discourse, several researchers in the Nordic countries have dealt with this field around historical culture, historical awareness and the use of history (Warring 2011). A common focus has been that history is not only the past itself, but just as much the use of history, which is also evident in the titles of several of the works within Nordic research: "Historien är nu" [The History is Now], "Besættelsestiden som kollektiv erindring og Historie" [The Occupation Period as Collective Remembrance and History] : "Fortidsbrug og erindringsspor" [The use of the Past and Traces of Remembrance] (Karlsson & Zander 2012, Bryld & Warring 1998, Jensen 2014).

This research will be used in the study of the role of the use of the past in a museum context for self-perception and identity formation. This can be supplemented by, among others, Morris Moscovitch's, Dorte Berntsen's and Robyn Fivush's memory studies of the individual's formation of perception of reality and processing of external influences in relation to their own identity formation [e.g. Berntsen & Rubin 2012].

Museums have traditionally focused on creating content and meaning, but since the 1990s, researchers in new museology have pointed out that something as important as museums' meaning making is the visitors' meaning construction. In George Hein's influential book about learning in museums, he defines museums as constructivist institutions, where "Visitors make meaning in the museum, they learn by constructing their own understanding." (Hein 1998: 179). Other museum researchers such as Kenneth Hudson, Gaynor Kavanagh and Elaine Heuman Gurian became in that period also aware that the visitors themselves helped to construct their museum visits (Gurian 1991, Hudson 1998, Kavanagh 1999). The understanding of the museum experience should no longer be based solely on the objects and the museum's displays, it should also include and be seen from the guests' own stories and the agendas the visitors themselves brought to the museum. In relation to examining museums as constructivist institutions, museum researchers John Falk and Lynn Dierking dealt with the "long term effect" of museum visits (Falk & Dierking 1992/2013, Falk & Dierking 2000). They did that by conducting interviews with the visitors for weeks or months after the visit, most often with a research aim within learning in the field of natural science (Falk, Brooks & Amin 2001, Falk et al. 2019). Since January 2018, Den Gamle By has led a network of Danish and Swedish cultural history museums, where we have tested this method [Djupdræt 2019], which will be used in the dissertation to collect data.

For the past 20 years, museums have, as part of the leisure industry, also focused on theories about the importance of experiences for commercial initiatives. The theories of 'experience economics' [Pine II & Gilmore 1999] have been central to the museums' transformation towards market orientation, and a focus on the museum experience as a product. With the concept of identity, this project will take this a step further, and to a greater extent see the visit as a means of identity creation. For that shift in focus, the project will rely on more recent business economics research directions. Among economists, there has been an interest in identity after the Nobel Prize-winning economist Georg A. Akerlof together with Rachel E. Kranton [2010] published the book 'Identity Economics'. The starting point here is that 'people's identity defines who they are in their social category' [Akerlof & Kranton 2010: 13], and puts it into traditional economic models. This provides a good starting point for valuing people's identity, but lacks to unfold how individuals create their identity in the social categories. This, on the other hand, is addressed in branding research, where e.g. in Corporate Branding [Hatch & Schultz 2001], focuses on the relationship 'external' image of organizations, as there is their brand and their identity. Historians at Copenhagen Business School have taken up these directions and shown how history and narratives help to create identity, which can be used strategically by companies to market their products through identity categories

[Mordhorst 2014, Hansen 2010]. This focus on Identity Economics will in a business development be supplemented with Osterwalder & Pigneurs [2013] definitions of the meaning of value proposition.

In relation to museums and leisure activities, there have also been theories and analyzes about changes in the view of the museum and the cultural sector in relation to the concepts of experience economy. Trine Bille and Dorte Skot-Hansen [Bille 2012, Skot-Hansen 2008] among others have dealt with this field. A third group of relevant museums studies are those compiled by British councils in recent years to uncover the economic, cultural and social values that the cultural sector contributes [Carnwath & Brown 2014, Crossick & Kaszynska 2016].

Existing surveys of the visitors at museums in Denmark

In the last ten years, there has been a growing interest in research and surveys of museum users.

The scientific research in Denmark has been concentrated on the two major research projects DREAM (2004-2015), which made a number of studies on learning and digital forms of communication, and Vores Museum [Our Museum] (2016-2020), which also focused on digital communication, but who also dealt with Danish museum history (Vores Museum, DREAM). There has been a focus on the actual dissemination at the museum, at for that purpose user surveys have been used in those projects. This dissertation will supplement these major research projects by clarifying the significance that has therefore been more focused on the development of dissemination and individual dissemination elements than on the overall identity-based benefit the visitors have had from the museum visit.

At the same time, The Agency for Culture and Palaces, the central Danish authority around the museums, has also in recent decades focused on data collection around the museum's users. This has happened through Den Nationale Brugerundersøgelse [The National User Survey] from The Agency for Culture and Palaces, which began in 2009 (Lundgaard et al. 2012). There have been small changes in the study through the year, but it is still being carried out at the Danish museums. In addition, the museums- and attraction association Topattraktioner's audience surveys, initiated by major attractions and museums. These two nationwide qualitative questionnaire surveys examine in particular who the museum's guests are, where they know the museum from and their satisfaction with the visit. The study design in both studies is that the audience answers questions about the museum experience in connection with the visit, not after their visit. Common to the above studies is that they do not look at the subsequent use and reflection that the museum visit has given the individual.

How can the value of museums be investigated in an easily implementable way? It requires a new research method

In order to uncover the identity significance of the museum visit, it is necessary to use a study design with a more qualitative approach than the above-mentioned studies and also an approach that uses several data collection methods.

Tracking and interview method

In 2017, the museum Den Gamle By started working with studies of the long term effect of the museum visit. In the following year I took the initiative to use the method in a study network that in addition to Den Gamle By also consists of the Danish museums Arbejdermuseet [The Workers Museum], Nationalmuseet [The National Museum of Denmark], Kongernes Samling [The Royal Danish Collection] and the Swedish museum Regionsmuseet i Skåne [Regional Museum of Scania]. The method looks at the effect of the museum visit after some time, and

will be suitable for examining how the museums are used in relation to the visitors' understanding of identity and identity formation.

The method consists of two elements: 1) tracking of guests at the museum and 2) follow-up interview a few weeks later. Through this design, a connection can be established between the experiences the visitor has at the museum and then his interpretation and use of the visit. The method is based on an interview protocol developed by Lynn D. Dierking (Dierking 2018) and further developed in Den Gamle By for use in Danish museums (Djupdræt 2018). More than 100 interviews have already been collected, which can be used in this study, as they contain reflections from museum visitors about their use of the visit. However, they are not sufficient this means that an important part of the research project is to collect more interviews also in a better setup, which more purposefully examine the visitors' reflection on the use of the museum in relation to their own identity.

Methodologically, part of this project is to further develop this long-term effect-oriented study design, and test a temporally larger longitudinal study, where data is collected both after a month and after a year to be able to follow the reflections on the museum visit.

Statements on social media

But the tracking and interview methods described above provide results that can be a challenge in easily implementing the method at also minor museums, as it will require some resources. A place where it is conceivable that there may be some of the same a type of statement is through statements on social media about the museum visit. Just making the post and notification the social media is an act of sharing the story and thus an action that will be asked about in the interviews, and by doing so show the interests of users and show a social and cultural capital to the outside world. Can this data uploaded by users on social media about their museum visits also be used to investigate users' identity formation? To investigate this, data of this type must be collected and a comparative study must be made between the words and images that are linked to the museum and the museum's meaning when the statements are promoted on social media, and the words and images that are used in more private context in connection with interviews with the visitors. In this part of the study, I plan to look at content posted on visitors' own social media profile (eg Facebook / Instagram) and also at content posted on digital rating sites (eg TripAdvisor / Expedia).

My hypothesis is that there is a difference between the data collected from social media and what is collected through interviews. Possibly, the digital data will primarily show the visitors' public statements and is a promotion of their cultural capital, while the interview data is more an expression of their personal meaning-making of the museum visit. This has to be investigated further.

For both data sets, they will basically be analysed through sentiment analysis and qualitative research methods (Abirami & Gayathri 2017, Flick 2018, Tang 2009, Patton 1990). But a consideration that must be done are the statements that are expressed when images on social media will have more layers in communication context than the purely textual. It is a problem that i.a. Tim Highfield, Tama Leaver and Maria Schreiber has highlighted in their research on visuality in social media (Highfield & Leaver 2016, Schreiber 2017).

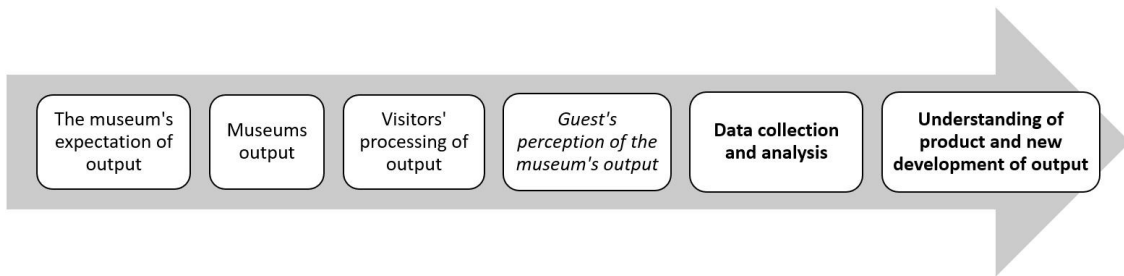
Another problem is the relationship between "encoding" and "decoding", which are the concepts Stuart Hall explored in his classical article on the encoding and decoding of television discourses (Hall 1973/1980). Hall point out there three ways a receiver can decode a message, here in the words of Adrienne Shaw: "This first is dominant or preferred readings, in which the message is decoded with the same meaning as was intended when it was encoded. Second, negotiated readings involve a mixture of preferred and resistant readings. Third is the

oppositional reading in which the audience member decodes the message in the opposite way as was intended by the producer” (Shaw 2017: 593). Shaw further points out that there is an additional challenge if there is a lot of activity and interaction associated with the decoding, as it can provide the opportunities for extra layers of meaning that are then associated with senders' understanding and function of communication (Shaw 2017). Shaw's case is around video games, but also when communicating on social media, there is an ongoing interaction in the communication with the layer that communication is a practice and this must be taken into account in the analysis of it (Couldry 2004, Schröder 2019). This discrepancy between encoding and decoding will always be there, but in the qualitative interview it is possible to address the issue and it can also be taken into account through the design of questionnaires. And that will not be the case when working with data harvesting for social media. It will not be possible to control the context in which the communication took place and therefore it will to a greater extent only depend on the interpretive framework.

Process of the project and the research

On order both to solve the methodological challenges and to develop a method implementable in the museums sector there need to be made several tests and evaluations. In the beginning of the questions asked visitors about the outcome and value of their visit. Later there has to be need experimental studies where data (from the same persons and/or about the same museums) collected in interview can be compared to data collected in social media. In parallel, the aforementioned theories will be examined in relation to the value of museums. And an overview and analyses of the existing research within museum public surveys and definitions of the museums' value will be made.

In terms of audience research's method, the dissertation will follow this figure, which is my thesis of element in museums communication and perception and what this dissertation focuses on.



The museum's expectation of output is the museum's expectation of what output is delivered.

Museum output is the factor that museum research today has paid particular attention to, and when an analysis of the reception of this output has taken place, it has often taken place in an immediate connection with the experience, in that the data collection has taken place at the museum.

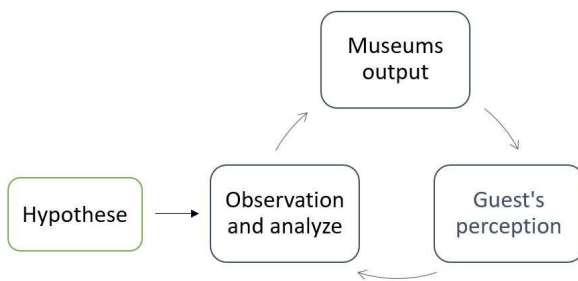
Visitors' processing of output is a factor that is neglected in the usual data collection at museums. This project will take into account this processing by waiting with a data collection at least two weeks after the visit.

The main research area for the project is the **Guest's perception of the museum's output**. This is what the National User Survey with great evidence has shown is the reason why guests visit museums today either know that they want to relive the experience and the museum, or that they tell others about this processing of the visit. The guests' perception of the museum visit is the museum's real long - term benefit and therefore a crucial factor to examine in order to understand the museum's value.

The next two elements in the figure are the contribution of this dissertation to the field of research. **Data collection and analysis**, where the collection takes place after the visitors have processed the visit and reworked their experiences into elements that make sense in relation to their identity understood in a broad sense: who they are, how they see themselves in relation to an outside world and how the museum's output supports, builds or challenges what they already know or act within. The analysis of the collected data will lead to **Understanding of product and new development of output**. By analyzing the collected data, this dissertation will provide a coverage of the guests' perception of the museum. This will be able to clarify what the visitors see as the real product the museums offer, and the museums will be able to develop new products based on that. For example: If museums realize that there is too great a discrepancy between what the museum sees as the museum's output and what museum visitors have as a perception of the museum's output.

This study design uncovers the first research question: How can one measure and valorize the museum visitors' identity benefit from the museum visit?

The dissertation's second question on how this valorisation can strengthen / qualify the museums' professional activities and work requires that an operational evaluation process be developed that continuously examines the relationship between output and the guest's perception, and that new insight can be added in that process and focus can be adjusted. For this, this workflow will be used:



Specifically, this means that a model is tested and developed in the project, so that the **Guest's perception** of the **Museum's output** is continuously **observed and analyzed**, and this observation and analysis will be made based on the **hypotheses** and insights that previous analyzes have uncovered. The hypotheses for the analysis may also vary, based on which part of the museum (the arrival situation, the exhibitions, the restaurants, etc.) may be the focus of the individual analysis.

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