Extending Museum Walls

Reaching out with site-specific, digital, and participatory interventions

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Abstract: *As museums are shifting their traditional focus away from collections and toward their audiences, they are experimenting with new strategies for communication and participation. Consequently, in recent years, a large number of outreach and visitor engagement projects, implemented by museums, have seen the light of day. Although these projects vary significantly in design and setting, they are typically informed by ideas of inclusion, dialogue, and sharing of knowledge – principles that have been inspired by social media and significantly improved by developments in digital technologies. Despite the increasing numbers of museum-facilitated outreach projects, we still know relatively little about the qualitative outcomes for either users or museums. This article investigates the potential impact of including an outreach component in a new museum project that combines an urban setting and the use of digital media.*

Key words: Digital outreach, interaction, user participation, personalization, authority, trust.

All over the world museums are trying to meet their visitors and non-visitors in new ways and places, opening up their walls and allowing for co-creation, participation, and interaction. Recent publications such as *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century* (Black 2012), *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Adair et.al. 2011), and *Det interaktive museum* (Drotner et.al. 2011) provide various good examples of this practice. This changed focus, away from collections and toward the audience, symbolizes a paradigmatic shift through which museums,

rather than being institutions of exclusivity, have become inclusive of the societies that surround them. Museums no longer just disseminate knowledge; instead they have become facilitators for a multitude of voices and opinions. This turn, away from monologue to dialogue, means that now, curators often turn to the public to gain new knowledge and insights – a strategy also known as outreach.¹

This article examines how, when carried out in practice, the conceptual ideas of interactive and participatory museum outreach, are reformulating the relationship between

36 museums and their audiences. The impetus for this inquiry is the visitors' reaction to one museum outreach project that combines digital media, physical installation, urban location, and participation in new and unconventional ways. The WALL, as the project is called, was developed by the Museum of Copenhagen as part of the communication strategy following the archaeological excavations that preceded the construction of a new metro line in Copenhagen. Set in a shipping container and placed in a busy city square, four digital plasma screens allow people to interact with a 3D historical and present time version of Copenhagen and to browse a vast number of images. Users passing by are invited to interact and contribute by uploading their own images. According to the museum's website, The WALL's objective is to create a platform, at street level, for recording the stories and thoughts of the residents in the surrounding community about their own city, thus leading to new insights about the common cultural heritage of the capital.² In this way, the museum is placing a strong emphasis on the citizens' participation in the definition and interpretation of the capital's heritage. In opposition to most digital outreach projects that take place within the realm of museums, either in the physical space of museum exhibitions or on museum web pages, The WALL possesses a special outreach potential, due to its digital participatory design and its placement in an urban setting. However, the innovative combination of medium and location also means that the visitors' interaction with and reception of The WALL take place under previously under-interrogated conditions.

Outreach and user-engagement strategies build on the claim that interaction, participation, and collaboration can provide visitors with more

interesting and satisfying experiences (Satwicz & Morrissey 2011; Simon 2010). However, the process of "letting go" and "letting people in" also raises important questions of authority and trust, for museums and users alike, as museums are finding their voices under these changed conditions. Drawing on empirical studies, I will analyze and discuss the benefits and implications of extending a museum's walls (physically and virtually) and inviting users to take part in a narrative traditionally told by the museum. The aim of this article is twofold. The first part will look at the potential of an installation, which is digital and site-specific, to reach out and allow for personalized interaction. How is this newly acquired access to museum collections leading to novel experiences and narrative forms? The second part will look at the outcomes and implications of the collaborative and multi-authored aspect of The WALL. A consequence of digital outreach and interaction is often participation in the form of user contributions and co-creation. This is also true in the case of The WALL. How is this challenging the museums traditional role as holder of expert-knowledge and authority? And how are users responding to these changed conditions?

In the following pages, I will first outline, from museological and political perspectives, the underlying ideas and strategies associated with outreach. Next, I will outline the potential for outreach in The WALL project. My investigation will begin with an analysis of the meaning-making processes that this particular installation's participatory, digital design and its location facilitate. The intention here is by no means to exhaust the various meanings produced by the interactions between users and The WALL through creation of a register or a catalogue. Rather, by exploring

issues and concerns raised by the visitor interaction, I wish to investigate patterns and to determine the potential that this urban digital installation has to offer. It is an aim of this article to improve our understanding of how digital media in urban spaces can be used as a tool in the outreach strategies of museums, in order to improve digital outreach projects in the future.

OUTREACH AS A STRATEGY TO ENCOURAGE VISITOR ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Outreach is a strategy that has been employed by many museums in the last 30 years. Over the years, the purpose of outreach has changed from being a response to an initial concern about disseminating knowledge related to museum collections to non-visitors of museums. Now, the purpose is to develop new strategies and methodologies for allowing users to get ownership of and influence on the institution and the knowledge created there. One of its main underlying ideas is the museum's potential to include broader segments of the population and impact positively upon the lives of individuals and communities (Sandell 2002). Consequently, the notion of outreach has shifted from the museum attempting to bring people into the museum or merely transplanting existing museum efforts beyond its walls to community engagement and participation, which entail the museum playing a larger role in civic life, operating outside of its walls, inviting dialogue, and encouraging personal creative practice and more visitor involvement. This focus on audience-engagement and experiences represents a shift in policy and practice from the 20th to the 21st century museum, according to the English scholar Graham Black (2012). Black argues,

that this call for museums to transform themselves, to be more civically engaged, and more relevant to the communities in which they are located, is necessary if they are to remain relevant to twenty-first century audiences.³ In the process of doing so, the potential for engaging visitors have been highly influenced and enhanced by developments in digital and social media. Indeed, the design of outreach projects today often has a particular focus on participation (Simon 2010), with the purpose of inviting individuals and communities to share their personal experiences. Thus, what differentiates museum outreach from other market-oriented communication and marketing strategies, and makes it particularly interesting in a qualitative sense, is that the underlying purpose is not just to raise visitor numbers, but to create a positive intervention and change to people's lives.

From a theoretical and museological point of view, ideas of outreach and visitor engagement are closely connected to the initially mentioned changes in communication practices that witnessed the museum modifying its role of authority figure and disseminator of expert knowledge, to become the initiator of dialogue with the surrounding community, while encouraging reciprocal reflections and understandings with the members of that community. The integration of people's lives and stories into the museum's narratives is, thus, part of a larger paradigm shift addressed by a number of scholars who have built on thoughts about inclusion (Sandell 2002), communication and dialogue (Hooper-Greenhill 2000), and participation (Simon 2010). It is in line with current museum practices that attempt to use both traditional and new means to take museum information and expertise outside the museum walls and to

38 integrate the voices and values of the surrounding community into the work of the museum. The Greek museum researcher, Konstantinos Arvanitis, suggests that the concept “outreach” best describes the idea of museums moving outside their walls into the everyday environment and lives of people (Arvanitis 2006: 63). As such, outreach can be understood as “an attempt to establish a communication channel with the everyday, in order to enrich the ways museums document, interpret and exhibit their collections” (Arvanitis 2006: 64). Advocates of museum strategies to engage visitors also agree with broadly accepted research findings in the field of learning and meaning making that emphasize the role of the visitor’s personal background and context in the meaning-making processes of the museum experience (Falk & Dierking 2000). This derives from postmodern and poststructuralist paradigms in knowledge creation, which have fundamentally challenged the existence of inherent objective truths and fixed meanings, replaced them, instead, by the belief in polysemic interpretive models (Cameron & Robinson 2007). As such, the concept of outreach also builds on the assumption that knowledge formation is a process of co-creation. Consequently, reaching out to an urban community also draws on the idea that everyday life is shared among people who participate in it (see Michel de Certeau 1984 and Henri Lefebvre 1974) and, thus, share common understandings and meanings as they belong to the same “interpretive community” (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). In the use of *The WALL*, the personal experiences and everyday perspectives become particularly revealing in the users’ uploaded contributions and in the ways in which the users navigate the 3D artificial collage of Copenhagen.

OUTREACH AND THE POLITICAL AGENDA

Outreach as a means of public inclusion is a practice that has been encouraged, for many years, by the government in the UK, in order to familiarize new audiences with museums and create events and exhibitions that are relevant and accessible to a larger segment of the population (Black 2012; Arvanitis 2006: 63). In Denmark, the political focus on outreach has been more recent and here particularly digital media have been singled out as the means to reach younger and more underrepresented audiences, because of its inherent abilities to do so in new ways and places than within the traditional four walls of the museum (Kyed et.al. 2006; Moos & Lundgaard 2009). In a report from the Cultural Ministry of Denmark, which is particularly engaged with prospective strategies for museum dissemination and communication, it was recommended that museums should, henceforth, think in terms of new combinations of different digital and physical dissemination forms (Kyed et.al. 2006: 98). The argument given in support of this was that such new types of dissemination of cultural heritage can renew the role of the institution and its relationship to citizens, thus becoming a tool for dialogue and knowledge exchange with a more differentiated group of users. Thus, in a Danish museum political context, digital media are regarded as possessing a special potential for outreach, due to their great potential to involve and engage visitors and to create new experiences. A large number of Danish museums are already testing new ways of creating digital outreach projects that can provide new and different ways of experiencing cultural heritage (see, e.g., Løssing 2009 and Drotner et.al. 2011). In this process, there is no doubt that the potential

for outreach, dialogue, and interaction with visitors has been significantly improved by developments in digital media. However, the role of digital media and outreach within and outside of museums is still in a phase of experimentation and development, making this a research area that needs particular attention.

COLLECTING EMPIRICAL DATA AT THE WALL

This article is based on empirical data from observations of and interviews with users at The WALL in Kongens Nytorv (The King's New Square) in Copenhagen. The body of data comprised approximately 40 hours of observations and 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews including 30 informants. The data was collected in the summer of 2010 and the winter of 2011. The interviews varied in duration, from a couple of minutes to 30 minutes. The observations covered 300-400 situations – also varying in length from approximately 10 seconds to 40 minutes – in which one or more users interacted with The WALL on their own initiative. The interviews and observations covered an equal number of men and women and included participants of all ages – from young children to people in their 80s. The interviewees were all Danish speaking and lived or had been living in Copenhagen. Although in the observations, it was impossible to make a distinction between speakers of Danish and others, Danish-speaking users and their conversations about the capital were of focal interest in the process. This focus on Danish-speaking participants is justified by the fact that not all information or text at The WALL is available in English. Although The WALL is frequented by a large number of tourists and persons speaking foreign languages, the target audience for the

facility has been defined by the Museum of Copenhagen to be Danish speaking and primarily from Copenhagen. It is important to point out that The WALL also comprises a web page, where users can upload images and browse all the images from The WALL's database.⁴ The primary subject of this analysis is, however, the interaction that takes place at the physical installation in Kongens Nytorv.

In addition to the above-mentioned data, I am drawing on a user survey carried out at The WALL for the Museum of Copenhagen by the Danish user research company, Snitkergroup, between September and November 2010. It consisted of a usability test and analysis of 15 user-interactions at The WALL, in addition to three focus group interviews involving a total of 11 participants.

REACHING OUT WITH A WALL TO THE COMMUNITY

In April 2010, The WALL was launched at Kongens Nytorv, following the archaeological excavations for a new metro line. Over the course of four years it will be moved around to meet users and communities in other neighborhoods and locations in the city. The WALL allows users to interact and participate in a number of ways. Each of its four large touchscreens presents an artificial 3D version of Copenhagen constructed as a collage from 1600 images highlighting historical and current high points, locations, and events associated with the city. Passersby can navigate this artificial cityscape and choose to recall earlier stages of the history of the capital, or they can search through images or films uploaded by the museum and other users. By clicking on images and objects in the cityscape, the users can gain access to

40 approximately 10,000 images and film clips uploaded from the museum's collections – a collection previously accessible only from the museums analogue image archive. Users are invited to create their own user profiles; they can send postcards, make video comments, take snapshots, and upload their own material either at The WALL or, at home, from The WALL's webpage. In mimicking participatory features from social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace, the intention is to attract new audiences by allowing for personal perspectives, creativity, and sharing.

One of the curators at the Museum of Copenhagen describes how one of the fundamental philosophical ideas behind The WALL was to create a dialogue with the Copenhagen community:

(...) it became clear to us that it wasn't the tourists' experiences with Copenhagen we wanted to hear; it was the citizens' own stories about the city and their own relations to their neighborhoods (...) building on the premise that the inhabitants of Copenhagen know the city in a completely different way, than if you are just passing by. (Jakob Parby, 2010)

The museum webpage explains that:

The museum aims to provide the citizen's [s] of Copenhagen with access to, and a sense of ownership towards, the cultural heritage of the capital. (...) While emphasizing upon the citizens' own voices as part of the narrative on Copenhagen, groups and individuals, formerly underrepresented in the cultural life of the city are now being included within the city's communities.⁵

This outreach approach towards the surrounding city communities is supported by a general shift in the Museum of Copenhagen's

strategies – a shift in which the underlying motivating factor “is the desire to increase the variety of narratives represented within the museum, together with a desire to make room for the voices and communities that traditionally have not been represented within the museum's public programmes.” Additionally, this participatory outreach approach is described by the museum as “a reciprocal process, whereby both parties listen to and learn from one another.”⁶

This signifies a deliberate change in the museum's self-perception from being an institution holding cultural authority and autonomy, toward providing a space where interpretations are individually and socially determined – a transition which signifies a move from modern to postmodern institutional practices (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Cameron 2007). Whereas, previously, the museum had the role as an expert and educator, now, the invitation to participate gives nourishment to the idea that museum visitors and users can also teach the museum something. Outreach and participatory strategies thus imply a development away from the traditional authoritarian museum towards an institutional acceptance of knowledge as something that is shared and constructed during the course of mutually beneficial exchange.

In the following paragraph, I will use an observation as the basis from which to look at the relations and emotions that interaction with the content of The WALL can trigger for the individual user.

INDIVIDUALIZING THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

It is a Sunday afternoon in February 2011, Kongens Nytorv, Copenhagen: At The WALL, a small group of three, consisting of a teenager

Fig. 1. The WALL at Kgs. Nytorv i København. Photo: Caspar Miskin.

Fig. 2. Users interacting with The WALL. Photo: Caspar Miskin.

42 and two men around 60 years old, are browsing the interface with exciting outbursts and comments such as: “Look at that! This is fantastic! See, there’s another tram! Yes, this is perfect; we have to write a comment to that! What do we write? Write that this is very fancy!” The WALL’s four screens allow all the members of the group to be active at the same time, and at some points, they split up to browse individually, while at other points, they step together to talk about what they see on the screens. In the following interview, I learn that one of the men (a 59-year-old professor) has a life-long infatuation with trams and is utterly excited about the fact that he can see them here in The WALL. His partner has a great interest in architecture which explains his search for images from Frederiksberg Castle. They have brought their 16-year-old visiting nephew here, to show him around Copenhagen, and the teenager explains to me that this is a great way to catch the interest of young people, such as himself. The group members all find the interactive aspect fantastic and exciting: The fact that you can browse neighborhoods and go back in time in an exploration of the city’s local history – a history they find important to tell; the fact that they recognize sites from their childhood surroundings and from the Copenhagen environment, which recall memories; the fact that you can touch and browse according to your own interests – something that they recall not having been allowed to do on their childhood visits to museums.

Australian scholar Fiona Cameron explains how digital media have allowed for an “expansive interpretive framework”:

Digital technologies have the potential to rewrite the meaning and significance of collections. By promoting

polysemic (plural) models for interpreting collections, for instance, they bring into question absolute claims about meaning, enabling alternative and sometimes conflicting interpretations to appear. (Cameron 2003: 327).

In interactive browsing systems, such as The WALL, user interests become the main searching principle. Before their digitization, the archival images in The WALL’s database were not easily attainable (one would have to physically visit the museum archive during their limited opening hours), where now, in principle, their organization in a free browsing system allows for the creation of an infinite galaxy of meanings and relationships. A non-linear way of presenting information enables users to experience parts of the museum collections in a less static and objective and more dynamic and subjective manner. It allows users to “follow their own path, creating their own order and meaning out of the material” instead of following the order of the storyline set out by the curator (Cameron 2003: 334). Thus, the interactive features of browsing have the potential to adapt to the interests of the individual user, generating highly personal relationships between images and topics while the user is searching.

Research on the museum visitor experience has shown, that a personal interest in, and familiarity with, the displayed content matter in exhibitions is crucial for museums visitors’ motivation to visit museums (Falk & Dierking 2000). Drawing on extensive user studies, the influential museum researchers, Falk and Dierking, sums up the engaging museum visit as one in which users are “able to personally connect in some way, with the objects, ideas, and experiences presented and often expect to do more than just look at things, perhaps even

become physically involved” (1998).⁷ The WALL allows for a great range of browsing options and the personal aspect there is often seen in the visitors’ searches for images from their neighborhood, their childhood or other places to which they have a connection, or of which they can recall memories. The observations contain many examples in which people use The WALL as their starting point to spur conversations about subject matter related to the city with comments, such as: “Where is that from? Is that where we live? Do you remember when we went there?” People search for places they know and love. This is seen in their browsing through the cityscape and their searches for the clusters of pictures from specific neighborhoods.

Although previous research on visitor reception has mainly been carried out within the physical context of the museum building, it is easy to see how users are relating in similar ways when interacting with The WALL. A feature that distinguishes The WALL from the traditional and non-touchable museum exhibition is the fact that it allows users to physically interact with the content and personalize their experience through the many varied ways of browsing. In fact, every visit can be different from the last. The potential to individualize and personalize the experience through the interaction is highlighted in the user studies as one of the most positive aspects of The WALL. A 27-year-old female explained how she rarely visited museums because she found them boring compared to many other cultural offers:

It just gets better when you get involved and is a part of it yourself. You’re active in a different way and it becomes more relevant and fun (...) when I’m at

museums (...) I lose interest. It’s different at The WALL where I become inspired to take more pictures, contribute, participate ...

This indicates an exciting potential for The WALL to help change visitors perception that the museum is the same kind of institution as in the past.

A DIFFERENT MUSEUM VISIT

The WALL’s conceptualization rests on an assumption that it has a special potential to reach out, create new meanings and experiences and meet (new) visitors in a different manner. Inherent in this idea, is the notion that it is different from the conventional museum experience and visit; that it can show a different side of the museum to visitors not familiar with museums or not liking museums because of previous experiences with them. In the interviews the informants were often asked what kind of experience they felt this could generate, as opposed to the physical or conventional museum visit. With no exception, the interviewees expressed excitement about the idea and concept underlying The WALL and about the fact that the museum had moved to street level to meet the surrounding community and the users of the city’s facilities, creating a presence outside the conventional museum buildings. In addition, the feature most often pointed to by participants was “interactivity” and the fact that The WALL allowed people to participate and browse the content freely. This did not mean that all users would, in fact, participate and upload their own material, but the idea of participation was singled out as being positive. Also, The WALL was singled out for its inherent potential to present things in a different manner or simply

44 to do things differently. A-49-year old male focus group participant explained:

I think that what The WALL can do, as opposed to the museum, is to tell stories from people as they would tell them themselves (...). This is not something that the museum would normally do; it is more about the larger lines and perspectives (...) the personally told stories that otherwise don't exist anywhere; that could be interesting to see. Even contemporary family pictures as they will also become history one day.

Consistent with these views, the users agreed, overall, that the experience at The WALL was very different from that of a conventional museum visit. This had an impact on the level of contemplation that users would experience, and the time that they would invest in interacting with the installation. The WALL was described as a "teaser" or "appetizer" for the real museum, very different from the "real" or traditional museum because there, you have time to explore in depth, the "real" objects. As one user put it, The WALL "...can give a snapshot of what Copenhagen and the museum have to offer." The main reasons for this were related to The WALL's location in a busy urban setting, to the character of the medium, and often, to both. The digital design of The WALL's interface itself, its composite, collage-like presentation of thousands of images that can be browsed but are not linked together in a time-space narrative, prevents some users from having the same in-depth experience that they would expect from a conventional museum visit.⁸ Thus, although excited about its potential, the previously mentioned 59-yearold professor (and frequent museum visitor) also asserted:

The WALL is exciting exactly for the purpose of

outreach, and for meeting a younger audience such as my 16-year-old nephew, but because of the flickering character of the digital experience there is a risk of getting lost in the medium and of losing the larger historical picture that a well-planned museum exhibition can give. The authenticity of the real object gives you a different experience from a digital copy, which is why I prefer visiting the 'real' museum to get a more in-depth experience. This is something I would spend maybe 15 minutes on, while passing by.

DEMOCRACY — LETTING THE COMMUNITY INSIDE

So far, I have touched, mostly, on the quality of the experience that takes place in the interaction between The WALL and its users. The main idea of The WALL was, however, not only to create a positive presence or intervention in people's lives but also to learn from users' perspectives and interpretations of their city. In the section, "What is The WALL?" on the museum webpage, the museum invites users to upload their own personal images of Copenhagen:

Just as Copenhagen has continually developed up through history and will continue to change in the future, The WALL will also undergo changes during the next four years. The database encompassing the rich collection of pictures of Copenhagen will steadily grow as The WALL invites its users to expand upon the portrayals of the life, history and identity of the town shown on The WALL by uploading personal memories, pictures, films, music, or texts. (...) In this way you can convey your personal stories of Copenhagen to the world at large.

American scholar Olivia C. Frost argues that digital media and digital communities are a major force in utilizing the ability of users to

become creators as well as consumers of information objects (Frost 2010:239). The self-publishing aspects of digital communication now make it possible for museums to invite large and diverse groups of users to contribute their own material. In terms of reaching new audiences and changing museum images, this process of democratization has obvious advantages.

The WALL has a special potential for participation, in that it invites users to share by uploading their own images of Copenhagen. A vast majority of The WALL's users choose only to participate in the experience that it offers by interaction, and not by contributing their own material. Still, by the summer of 2011, The WALL had received approximately 4,500 user-generated images from and of Copenhagen (in addition to the 10,000 images from museum archives); not surprisingly, these images varied in technical quality and thematic approach. Although I shall refrain from further analyzing the content and subject matter of the material here, it is clear to see how, from a museum's point of view, a project like The Wall can give access to the surrounding community's current and historic stories and images that they would otherwise never even hear about.

In using The Wall, the visitors can go well beyond the mere viewing of an object to create their own images or extend already existing knowledge by commenting on or adding information to the museum's images or those uploaded by other users. In the empirical studies, this feature of participation is recognized by the users as one of the most positive aspects of The WALL. As one 21-year-old male user put it, when asked why he found it "cool that you can browse the images and upload your own material": "Because no one has decided what is politically correct to

put in here, and everyone can participate." A history teacher of students in the sixth grade also commented on the fact that everyone can participate in telling the story of Copenhagen: "I think it's great that it has been made that way – that it's about something else than the traditional story about the history of Copenhagen. Earlier on, it was the upper class that told the history and decided what was written in the history books."

Statements like these attest, first of all, to the fact that there is a strong public opinion concerning what a museum is, and how it has traditionally exercised its position as a cultural authority. In this respect, the value of allowing for other perspectives, through user-generated material, is acknowledged and appreciated. Whereas this opens exciting new perspectives for institutions, it also raises important questions regarding truth and trust and quantity versus quality. These questions are not only of concern to the museum but are also raised by users in the observations and interviews. As such, there are also downsides to participation, as will be evidenced in the following section.

SHARING OPENS UP FOR QUESTIONS OF DEMOCRACY, TRUTH AND RELEVANCE

Studies on museum visitors' expectations of the museum visit show that the knowledge that museums are about "the real stuff" is critical to the expectations, the excitement, and thus, the quality of the museum experience (Dierking & Falk 1998). To quote: "(...) visitors believe that there is an inherent sense of integrity to the objects, ideas and experiences presented within the museum" (Falk & Dierking 1992; Shoup & Associates 1995 quoted in Dierking & Falk 1998).

46 Traditionally, according to American scholar Olivia C. Frost, “When an object or unit of information resides in a collection, that collection serves a filtering or sanctioning role” (Frost 2010: 243). Museum visitors rely on the expertise of museum professionals for the selection and organization of the objects available for public view. This expertise and the evaluative component that it involves represent a value that the museum provides and they assure the visitor that the objects represented have been carefully selected on the basis of their quality, representativeness, or other criteria (Frost 2010: 243). With the addition of the autonomous dimension of self-publishing, Frost argues, visitors or viewers may not have the same assurance that what they are viewing represents the best of a genre or the opportunity to determine whether the information given is even authentic or true.

With regard to The WALL, this is the case, particularly when it comes to the user-generated material. As the user images are uploaded, they are shown alongside the images from the collections of the museum. As such, there is no hierarchy separating the users’ images from those of the museum. Following the ideas of the collaborative and co-authored museum of the 21st century, outlined in the beginning of this article, this can be regarded a positive feature: Having user-generated images side by side with museum images, with no particular indication of their sources, except from a small subtitle indicating a user’s name, has the potential to create completely new connections and allow The WALL to set an example as an institution that is truly democratic in its approach to interpreting a common past.

However, in the empirical studies, questions of authorship, authenticity, and authority are

raised by users concerned with issues of truth and trust. Whereas most users like the fact that The WALL invites everyone to upload stories and images and participate in the story told about their city, they also expect the museum to remain the editor and expert. They want to be able to trust what they read. (This depends, to some extent, on what they expect to be able to use The WALL for; that is, whether it is just for fun and play or for more educational purposes.) This was evidenced, for example, in an observation and interview of two teachers of sixth-grade history (above-mentioned) shortly after the launch of The WALL. They had read about the installation and, on behalf of themselves and their students, they felt excited that something like that had been introduced, as they expected to be able to use it for educational purposes. When they realized that everybody could upload material alongside that of the museum and also comment freely on the museum’s images, thereby providing information that might not be historically correct they were disappointed, and stated that:

That simply means we can’t use it! Then, at least, the museum should be visibly present and they should have a museum professional editing all incorrect material. If not, it’s completely untrustworthy and useless. You expect the information to be true when it has the museum’s name on it. There is so much talk of source criticism today. It’s a big theme when it comes to the Internet and something that we really discuss in class, exactly because when you search the Internet you don’t know if it’s a five-year-old or a professor who wrote the text. This is something we teach our students.

Thus, on the one hand, the teachers approved of the museum’s attempt to reach out and

communicate differently to the young people in their classes, and on the other hand, they still expected the museum to be the expert, editor, and educator. This is supported by user research done by scholars Fiona Cameron and Helena Robinson stating that, despite museums' efforts to appropriate postmodern, polysemic approaches in their digital representation of collections, many users "continue to look to the museum to provide trustworthy, authoritative, and meaningful scholarly information." (Cameron & Robinson 2007: 179). This is an interesting paradox, in that it touches on larger questions about bringing digital participatory media into museums; questions that might be lost in the excitement of the outreach process.⁹

SHARING FOR WHOM?

Outreach ideas are based on an assumption, that participation is more engaging and thus more satisfying for the visitor (Satwicz & Morrissey 2011; Simon 2010). This assumption derives, according to the American museum researchers Satwicz and Morrissey, from "hands on" learning theory: "Perhaps the most basic assumption is that engaging visitors in contributing content has benefit" (Satwicz & Morrissey 2011: 198). Nina Simon, the American museum exhibition designer and author of the influential book *The Participatory Museum* (2010), is one of the advocates for participation in museums. However, although she describes participation as practical ways to enhance traditional cultural institutions, she also points to the importance of museums carefully considering why they wish for user participation and what they expect will come out of it that the museums can't produce or procure themselves (Simon 2010). Thus,

while participation and sharing content might be interesting to the persons participating, the museum must also ask itself if participation is really interesting to users other than the participant – and to the museum. Based on user interactions at The WALL, one could ask who benefits from the participation: Are the user contributions augmenting the representation, experience, and knowledge of Copenhagen and its history? How do visitors experience, interpret, and trust the contributions by non-experts? These questions are not easily answered but are, nonetheless, relevant.

In regard to The WALL, a number of users have raised concerns as to the sheer number of images of seemingly impersonal Copenhagen street views, architecture, urban landscapes, and sunsets whose primary interrelatedness seems to be that they all look the same. When discussing the website part of The WALL, from where all user images so far have been uploaded, members of one focus group expressed a concern with "drowning in images" that seemed meaningless and uninteresting because of their lack of connection to the overall cultural historical narrative of Copenhagen. In relation to this, one could ask how involved the museum should be in managing the platform for user stories they have created: is there, and should there be, a line between the museum's role of facilitator of public contributions and its responsibility for putting the pieces together in a larger puzzle? Although the users appreciated the idea of the museum trying to communicate in new ways and places, also by employing participatory features from social media, such as Facebook and Flickr, as a means to engage new target audiences, they also seemed apprehensive about the potential lack of relevance of content matter that this could

Fig. 3. Woman transporting children on bike, 2007. User-generated image at The WALL tagged with "Childhood". Photo: Mikael Colville-Andersen.

potentially generate. One 19-year-old female informant explained this concern: "That's the disadvantage of The WALL, I think, that people can upload all sorts of things (...) It's not that interesting to look at other people's party pictures."

This touches on an important point brought up by Simon (2010) about museum scaffolding when designing opportunities for user participation. Based on extensive experience with participatory museum projects, she draws attention to the fact that most visitors do not want open-ended participation. Rather, in order for visitor participation to be meaningful and

appealing for the participant, the institution, and the audience, it has to be "about" something and must have a clearly defined outcome (Simon 2010). Following Simon's notion of scaffolding it is interesting to note, how, so far, the user-generated material in The WALL that stands out the most in terms of quality and its ability to bring out new and interesting perspectives in the existing material, has come from museum-defined initiatives and activities.¹⁰

The task of mediating between opening up its doors and inviting participation, thus allowing for a multiplicity of voices in the interpretations, and, at the same time setting

Fig. 4. Father and son on bike, ca. 1900. Tagged with "Childhood" and uploaded to The WALL by the Museum of Copenhagen. Photographer unknown. Photo: Dansk Cyklist Forbund (Danish Cyclists' Federation).

50 limitations on the user-generated content can be difficult. This challenge of achieving balance between user-generated content and museum expertise also represents a learning curve for the museum. It is a process that museums have to learn to master in the upcoming years, as they move towards the fluid and increasingly transparent museum described by Hooper Greenhill: "The museum in the future may be imagined as a process or an experience. It is however, not limited to its own walls, but moves as a set of processes into the spaces, the concerns and the ambitions of communities" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 152). As has been argued here, part of this process is to continue to meet the visitors' expectations of integrity.

USER UPLOADS MUST BE RELEVANT

This article's introductory sections have already described how ideas and preconceptions of what museums are, and should be about, have changed significantly since the 1980s, when museums started rethinking their relationship to their visitors and challenging the political, ideological, and aesthetic dimensions that comes with collecting and representing the past (and present). Australian scholar Linda Ferguson argues that a number of the principles that the modern museum represented are dissolving in the postmodern museum, where also more controversial themes like religion, racism, drugs, and homosexuality are up for debate. As examples of these dissolving values, she cites the idea of providing visitors with factual information and the task of helping to create a sense of one's place in the world, while spreading generally accepted values. Ferguson's analysis of the reasons given by museum staff, visitors, and the wider public as to why these

topics should or should not be exhibited, reveals a great deal about people's general perception of the role they feel today's museums should play (Ferguson 2010: 35-36). Ferguson argues that the postmodern museum concept creates doubt in visitors and that, in light of these changes, they find it hard to understand the role of the museum.

At The WALL, a dialectic response to the postmodern and participatory museum is expressed both in the ways the users articulate their thoughts on the appropriateness of the content and the themes of the images shown at The WALL, and in what could be called the visual dialogue between museum images and images uploaded by users. Here, the users' preconceptions with what a museum should represent seem not to relate so much to the controversial nature of topics, as proposed by Ferguson, but rather to the limitation in their perceptions of what content they find relevant for this museum forum. This not only relates to the users' expectations of expertise, integrity, and authority discussed in the previous sections. It also indicates that as museums are rapidly changing towards becoming collaborative and user-generated institutions of the 21st century, they still have some work cut out for them in explaining to visitors the ideas behind this new museum concept. This implies that it takes time to change users' perceptions of museums and stresses the importance of museums to be clear in their communication about what they are trying to do.

MUSEUM GAINING NEW PERSPECTIVES

There is no doubt that allowing "everyday" people to contribute and have their narratives included in the historical record can multiply

the views and interpretations of contemporary Copenhagen – one of the goals of participation outlined in the beginning of this article. In some cases, the juxtaposition of user images and archival material creates interesting visual dialogues. Such is the case in a series of user-uploaded images taken by a homeless man named Csaba in 2010.¹¹ The pictures addressed deeply personal aspects of Csaba's everyday life, showing his personal shelf in the shelter that holds all his belongings and reflecting his homeless friends taking pictures for *Hus forbi*.¹² – a magazine for the homeless. The museum has many black and white photos of homeless people in their archives; however, they are mostly taken by the law enforcement agents for registration purposes, thus presenting the homeless from a highly distanced and impersonal perspective.¹³

Another example shows, at the same time, the diachronic and synchronic view of the theme “childhood”: In a user upload from 2010, a person describes, with affection, the door of his childhood nursery school and the personal significance it has for him.¹⁴ This highly personal representation of what it means to be a child is uncommon in the museum's archives and may generate new interpretations and perspectives on the theme – or at least add to the ways in which “childhood” has previously been represented in the museum's collections. In general, recently uploaded images have the capability to create new connections. In the case of “childhood” user-generated images, when juxtaposed with images from the museum's archives, showing infants on bikes and playing ball, bear witness to the idea that growing up 100 years ago might not have been so dissimilar to growing up today. Without doubt; visual dialogues, such as these, can

contribute new perspectives to the heritage of Copenhagen and change traditional ways of integrating and representing personal perspectives in museum narratives. In that sense, The WALL, being a publicly located image archive and exhibition site, has an exceptional potential to reach out and present a new and more inclusive museum concept.

As a public and specialized institution, the museum holds a special role in deciding what to collect and preserve for the future. It is intended that eventually, a number of the user images in The WALL will enter the museum's collections. It has not yet been decided how to select user images for the museum collections, but it is already easy to see how this raises a number of questions. As the museum curator at the Museum of Copenhagen, Sarah Giersing, puts it, the limitations on what can be considered relevant are few, due to their diversity and individual characteristics (Giersing 2011). Also, she claims, a study of the material and consequent decisions on what to admit into the museum's collections face both methodological and epistemological challenges: “How does one categorize, interpret, and evaluate material like this without reducing its diversity and dismissing its multiple meanings? Who has the authority to do so?” (Giersing 2011) Although, in the case of The WALL, these questions are still left to be answered, they touch on an important ongoing discussion of integrity, authentication, and validation of digital and user-generated objects in museums.

CONCLUSION

According to the number of publications containing descriptions, analyses, and discussions of museum outreach projects in recent years (Satwicz & Morrissey 2011;

52 Drotner et.al. 2011; Løssing 2009), museums have entered a fruitful phase of experimentation, as they learn how to use interactive and participatory strategies to enhance both the visitor experience and the professional practices relating to the collection, study, and interpretation of objects. This is much in line with a political focus that stresses the importance of museums' attempts to reach out and to do so in new and engaging ways and places (Black 2012; Kyed 2006; Moos & Lundgaard 2009). In this respect, The WALL represents an excellent example of an outreach strategy in which the digital and physical have been combined in order to create new connections and relations between the Museum of Copenhagen and its surrounding community.

Based on the outreach project and on user studies discussed in this article, it is evident how participation, interaction, and facilitation of free access to museum archives can lead to different and more inclusive and personalized experiences. This is an important step, as the museums are increasingly expected to be providers of platforms that allow multiple perspectives on, and representations of, the past and the present. However, as has also been discussed in this article, user participation, particularly in the form of co-creation, can lead to confusion, as the traditional boundaries between expert and layman are being redefined. Outreach of the participatory kind seen in The WALL must necessarily lead to reflections of a more epistemological character, in which the museum is forced to rethink its role as collector, preserver, and knowledge-creator of the past and to balance its new role as facilitator for dialogue and co-creation. As museums are navigating this difficult task,

they must find a way to still hold on to their special role as preservers of cultural heritage in all its multiplicity.

So far, user participation in digital outreach projects is still a relatively under-researched area. Due to the increase in these types of museum outreach projects, it can be expected however, that the upcoming years will provide new and exciting insights into the user participation and interaction that politicians and museums alike wish to obtain by coupling museums and digital media.

(Quotes from user studies in Danish have been translated to English by the author).

NOTES

1. Typically the concept "outreach" describes former models of working with non-traditional museum audiences, whereas "community engagement" adopts more postmodern strategies, such as shared-authorship and co-creation. It could be argued that the latter connotes a more involved, collaborative, and community informed activity rather than a unilateral strategy or campaign by a museum. The terms are, however, often used interchangeably. As the museum in question quite consistently calls its user engagement and participatory strategy *outreach*, I have chosen to do the same in this article.
2. http://www.copenhagen.dk/en/whats_on/the_wall/what_is_the_wall (accessed on January 16, 2012)
3. There is also, of course, a political and financial incentive in being valuable to the public and staying funded. As a result of the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 museums' funding has declined dramatically and the economic

imperative of increasing visitor numbers and generating income has become ever more important (Black 2012: 44). Rapid developments in the cultural experience economy and cultural tourism also mean that museums now compete increasingly for visitors' attention.

4. Although conceptualized as a whole, in reality, the interactions facilitated by the urban installation and the website, respectively, are quite different.
5. <http://www.copenhagen.dk/en/about> (accessed on January 16, 2012)
6. http://www.copenhagen.dk/en/whats_on/outreach_english/ (accessed on January 16, 2012)
7. Although quantitative surveys show very high visitor numbers at The WALL, indicating that it has great potential to attract passersby – tourists and locals alike – a question still left unanswered is whether the museum actually succeeds with one of its main goals of reaching new audiences, or whether The WALL mainly attracts users who are already interested in history and in visiting museums.
8. With this comes technical problems and a interface design perceived by a large number of users to be quite intricate – this to an extent where it prevents some users from having the desired interactive experience. See also Rudloff 2011
9. Questions of the museum's role in editing the user material, e.g., in the case that people might be contributing material of unethical or profane nature, were, in fact, discussed at the Museum of Copenhagen before the launching of The WALL. It was decided to go along with the democratic process and deal with any problems as they occurred. So far, any anxieties regarding inappropriate material have not been vindicated by actual events. In fact, it seems that historic material and contributions are uploaded

primarily by local experts with a genuine interest in, and knowledge of, the city's history. The museum primarily plays an editing role in the case of nonsense comments that are due to technical problems.

10. The museum has, so far, entered into a number of external partnerships; e.g., with a yearly Copenhagen photograph festival. The photograph contests have been a great success and have generated many interesting, creative, and high-quality images. Additionally, in the outreach process, the museum has employed young people from marginalized neighborhoods of Copenhagen, asking them to produce material for The WALL representing their perspectives and their lives in the city. The original group consisted of ten young people, of various ethnic backgrounds, from Nørrebro. A recent project consisted of eight young people from Sydhavnen.
11. The homeless person was given a camera by an employee from the Nørrebro Outreach Project and asked to take pictures of things that mattered to him. The images were uploaded to The WALL afterwards, by the employee at the Museum of Copenhagen.
12. <http://www.vaeggen.copenhagen.dk/media/12559>.
13. See also museum curator Sara Giersing's discussion of this, in her paper for the Fourth International Conference of the Inclusive Museum 2011.
14. <http://www.vaeggen.copenhagen.dk/media/40397>.

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