

# MUSEUM ETHICS IN PRACTICE

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by

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## PREFACE

This online-publication is the translation of the book *Museumsetikk i praksis*, which was based upon my doctoral dissertation which I defended in December 2014. Its topic is what I consider a major task in contemporary museums - to be a dynamic actor that works to contribute to positive societal development towards a more just society in which a maximum number of different voices are heard. The role as dynamic actor is under evolvement, aiming at continuous improvement. A lot has happened since I defended my PhD, and I am thrilled to see the increased focus on working with sensitive issues, personal narratives, emotions and ethical dilemmas at museums and conferences around the world. This translation includes no update, though, but is an expression of the state of research in 2014.

Working on the dissertation was demanding and lasted for several years. The excitement and the fascination connected with the deep-dive into my field of work, the study of international publications and not least my own findings, gradually had to cede the way to stronger needs: I had to sum up and finish the doctoral project - with all its demanding formalities. 400 pages plus an extensive list of literature and more than 1200 footnotes have required accurate and continuous control, which has made it difficult to enjoy the writing process to the full.

When I got the opportunity to publish the dissertation in the form of a book, nothing was more welcome than the publishers' expressed wish: the book should be legible and informative, without too many references and theoretical approaches which characterize academic dissertations. With an approved dissertation as my basis, I could determine what the facts were and concentrate upon disseminating my message in a way I found appropriate.

My thanks to Museumsforlaget, my publisher, for their trust and all assistance with the manuscript of *Museumsetikk i praksis*, to my employer, Vest-Agder Museum, whose goodwill made it possible to submit my dissertation on a topic which was part of my daily work, and to Einar Tore Larssen and Erik Aalvik Evensen for translating the book into English. Last but not least, my thanks to you who think that this field of study is so important for museums of today that you have downloaded this translation.

Grimstad, March 1<sup>st</sup> 2019

Kathrin Pabst

# 1

## Introduction

In an article from 2002, Gaynor Kavanagh, an English Professor of Museum Science, summed up what might happen when museums work on sensitive topics in cooperation with individuals who contribute with their personal experiences. She indicates that working on memories implies working on feelings tied to both the past and the present. When museum professionals are working on sensitive topics, reactions and later actions become unpredictable for all parties involved. The moral responsibility of each individual staff member towards a fellow human being is put to the test. The wish to do something good can easily result in a superficial approach to something very personal, fragile and vulnerable, which in turn may result in a feeling of being violated again. This is especially true when it comes to memories based upon traumatic incidents. Such a situation requires a very conscious and professional approach.<sup>1</sup>

In this field of work there are many considerations to make and many needs to balance. Exhibition objects may deal with themes of war, violations, closed institutions, the breach of human rights, the limits of the freedom of speech, or the treatment of minorities. It may also touch upon the dark sides of contemporary society: poverty, mental health, or the abuse of alcohol. It is common to all these issues that the themes may trigger strong emotions and reactions among all persons involved: the individuals who are about to relate something difficult and painful they have experienced, visitors who must react to these testimonies and handle their own feelings attached to the revealed stories, the local society and its members who might have to reconsider their understanding of their own identity, and not least the museum employees who must respond simultaneously to their own and others people's feelings.

Working with sensitive topics and individuals is one way of meeting expectations and demands connected to the museums' societal mission. Political guidelines have in the last 20 years or so rendered it concrete that the mission also includes working on contemporary, sensitive themes that are considered taboo; something which most people are not aware of, do not want to know, or talk about. In many countries world-wide, museums are exhorted to behave as engaged societal actors who point to areas in society which ought to be illuminated, either to correct pictures from the past or to lift up minorities or individuals who have been victims of unfair treatment. The work is demanding for all parties involved, without the museum employees having full guidelines for their moves.

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<sup>1</sup> Kavanagh 2002: 111.

This is what this book is about. With my starting point in the individual museum professional's working day and the frames applicable for the museum employees in each institution and as part of a professional community, I intend to identify four central moral challenges and questions which the museum professionals in cultural-historical museums encounter in their work on sensitive, present-day related themes, involving external cooperation. These four are: 1) balancing the external participants' needs versus the needs of a large public, 2) subjective truth versus historical, objective truth, 3) own skills versus external - i.e. hired consultants - competence, and 4) personal judgement versus the establishment of guidelines. With recourse to concrete examples I intend to show how the challenges are usually handled - and how they *should* be handled, in the light of ethical theory and experiences which other museum professionals have made. I take my point of departure in a project of cooperation, which aims at producing an exhibition, an ordinary museal channel of dissemination, and which is to be disseminated to a broad public.

By using the expression "external participants" I refer to two different forms of cooperation. The first form is in use when the museum employees work together with individuals from the local society, who contribute with personal narratives about selected incidents and events from their own lives. Such a narrative is necessarily subjective and coloured by earlier experiences. Such experiences might have been traumatic and are difficult to handle, and it will be emotional to talk about them with a museum staff member who is perforce a stranger. Therefore it is very important how these persons are met by the staff members and how their narratives are prepared for a broad audience.

The second form of cooperation comes to use when one works together with competent external consultants. To meet the expectations of the public regarding reliable information, many museums choose to initiate projects of cooperation with expert consultants who contribute with professional knowledge of high academic standard on the theme of the exhibition. Such knowledge is often not part of the museums' own specialized knowledge or research material, especially if the themes are of current societal interest and approached from different professional angles. Compared to the subjective narratives of individuals, the contributions from the expert consultants are more objective and often considered facts with a holistic perspective based on verifiable sources, theories and methods. Working with people from the outside - whether they are individuals or professional consultants - may lead to different kinds of challenges during the cooperation process. At the same time one finds similarities regarding a feeling of ownership to the submitted material. This feeling of ownership can concern both personal narratives and the research material one has worked on for a long time.

The statement that cooperation with individuals is right and important is confirmed by relevant literature within museology and psychology. Two sides may be emphasized here: a) the audience/the society becomes more strongly affected and learns more when exhibitions are based upon personal narratives, and b) it is of positive value for the individuals that the museum disseminates their personal narratives, even if these are based upon painful experiences.

Personal narratives contribute on different levels to the learning process. The audience is most deeply affected when they hear a fellow human being narrate a personal experience in which they may immerse themselves. But for the audience to be affected by personal narratives, a “transmission” of emotions is required, from the interview situation to the exhibition. Here, not only the setting is different, i.e. place and space, but also the recipient who enters with his or her individual background and emotional framework.<sup>2</sup> In the exhibition setting the audience usually do not meet directly with the individuals whose experiences the exhibition is based upon, and therefore one must examine how feelings of empathy and compassion - which open up for reflection and new knowledge of the other person’s inner world - can be transmitted from the direct contact between an individual and a museum employee to the indirect contact between the individual and the audience.<sup>3</sup> How can one achieve that such insights from the *proximity ethics* are transmitted from a concrete interaction to a more impersonal encounter, characterized by a physical absence and information via text, sound, or image? This is where the interpretation of the theme and the choice of method of dissemination become significant, something I shall return to later in the book as it is of decisive importance to the learning effect.

The opportunity to learn through sensing what an experience really meant to another human being, presupposes that individuals are willing to share their narrative, even if it might be tough. To make collecting and displaying a personal narrative on a sensitive subject morally justifiable, one needs to answer the question if it will be good and positive for the individual to share their painful experiences and if it seems advantageous that the museum disseminates the account with a large group of strangers. The answer is yes, if the starting-point is based on a “philosophical background of dialectical relationship understanding”, rooted in the fields of psychology and psychiatry.<sup>4</sup> When the museum as an institution with a high degree of credibility invites individuals into a project, these persons get the possibility to share a personal experience which has been important for their lives. Anne-Lise Løvlie Schibbye,

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2 In Rice & Woodhead 2007: 20-53, the authors comment on the importance of an external physical framework when emotions rise and later are reactivated. For further reference, cf. Bonnell & Simon 2007: 66.

3 Levinas has also inspired the evaluation of a Danish exhibition, using video recordings and facial portraits to reach the audience, see Tinning 2013. For further reference, cf. Todd 2003.

4 Schibbye 2009: 19-56. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from sources whose original text is not in English, are by the translators. For quotations originally in German, the translations are by the author.

psychologist and Assistant Professor at the University of Oslo, emphasizes people's need to be seen and heard, including the importance of getting recognition in a direct encounter.<sup>5</sup> The recognition presupposes that one listens to what the other person has to say, that one is willing to try to enter into the other person's subjective experiences, recognizes the other person's feelings connected to the related experience, and shows acceptance and tolerance.<sup>6</sup> It is a requirement that whoever receives such a narrative, shows "receptivity, a willingness to be moved".<sup>7</sup> Schibbye emphasizes that "most people find it unpleasant to unveil themselves to a stranger"<sup>8</sup> and that a good, personal contact will be crucial for the outcome of the cooperation. This cooperation should have set prearranged frames, preferably made concrete in the form of a kind of contract and based on a reciprocal commitment. It is important that the individual gets a confirmation of his or her narratives and experiences, but without the museum professional having to take a stand on an objective degree of truth of the narrative: "The confirmation 'lies in' the way we listen."<sup>9</sup>

Psychiatrist Finn Skårderud has among other things studied closely the concept of shame and the importance of shame in relation to self-respect and the quality of life. He emphasizes that shame most often is connected to a low degree of self-respect, a negative self-evaluation, or a feeling of guilt, and may end in proneness to illness.<sup>10</sup> Shame as a feeling is often based upon earlier experiences in life of not being appreciated as a human being, and is therefore connected to an "exposure, to the fear of being exposed as someone different from the person one wishes to be".<sup>11</sup> Talking about what one experiences as shameful will lead to a better life-situation for oneself and others, if one experiences to be met and appreciated in spite of the story one has told. At the same time the feeling of not being met and appreciated by the partner in conversation, will lead to a stronger feeling of shame and subsequent withdrawal.<sup>12</sup>

But not everybody experiences this as equally positive, as has been shown empirically. In several British studies by both psychologists and museum scientists, it is pointed out that even though individuals have reflected upon if and how they should address a museum beforehand, they may experience strong emotional reactions in the interview situation itself, or after the conversation.<sup>13</sup> It is dependent on the individual, if talking about what has happened can be experienced as good and important. Not everybody profits from memorizing difficult experiences, even though for most people it may have a positive and healthful effect, it may

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5 Schibbye 2009: 243-280.

6 Schibbye 2009: 256-280.

7 Schibbye 2009: 268.

8 Schibbye 2009: 247.

9 Schibbye 2009: 278.

10 Skårderud, Haugsgjerd & Stänicke 2010: 32, 382. For further reference, cf. Martinsen 2012.

11 Skårderud et al. 2010: 189. Author's translation.

12 Skårderud et al. 2010: 181, 189, 207.

13 Kavanagh 2002: 115-116.



for others be painful and unnecessary.<sup>14</sup> Transmitted to the actual conversation between an individual and a museum employee, this requires a great deal of sensitivity from the part of the museum professional, both in relation to the reception and the further handling of the individual's narrative.

All kinds of work with sensitive topics implies by force *feelings* from all parties involved, museum employees, individuals, and visitors. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Johan Vetlesen, points out that feelings are the point of departure for all moral conduct.<sup>15</sup> To be able to act morally, one needs the capacity for empathy with the other individual whom the actions are directed towards, and cognitive abilities to acknowledge and interpret the moral aspects of a situation so that one chooses a morally correct action. Through feelings like empathy, one may understand and appreciate situations which fellow human beings experience, and thereby discover more contexts which may be important when alternatives of action should be weighed against each other. To use reason and rational evaluations in this process is very important, but without feelings the use of reason is not applicable. This refers to the importance of the ability of museum employees to use and exploit their own register of feelings, and their ability to meet individuals with their respective feelings. It cannot be overestimated how important it is to respect this in the direct encounter between the individual and the museum employee, also in regard to the feelings released among the visitors. I shall return to this several places in the book - the importance of feelings is the central point which is reoccurs in all moral challenges.

## **The Chapters in the Book**

In the following pages the reader will be accompanied through five chapters. Even though they represent a coherent whole, each chapter stands on its own feet and will hopefully give useful information also without reading the rest.

In this first chapter I shall first of all explain the basis of my conclusions and recommendations. In the dissertation I have studied seven exhibitions each of which has approached a sensitive topic, most often by help of individuals' narratives. My methods of collection and analysis of the material are explained thoroughly before I go on to concentrate on the results and their consequences in the following main chapters. There are running definitions. Concepts like 'sensitive', 'controversial', or 'tabooed' I consider, however, hard to define precisely. Since these words are in every-day use, I take as a starting point the

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14 Kavanagh 2002: 115.

15 Vetlesen & Nortvedt 1996a: 28-35; Vetlesen & Nortvedt 1996b: 62-77.

assumption that there is a common understanding of what the terms imply, at the same time as I am aware of the fact that they are also interpreted differently.

Chapter two examines the contents of the museums' societal remit and the background for their work on a given societal role. What is the actual meaning of the political guidelines, and how great a freedom do the different institutions have in interpreting the concepts? The *BRUDD*-project, a project which was carried on for more than ten years under the auspices of Norsk kulturråd (The Arts Council Norway)<sup>16</sup>, aiming at stimulating the museums' work on tabooed, sensitive and possibly controversial themes, will be examined and put into a context with contemporary documentation and experience economy. The remaining two parts of the chapter are about relevant ethical and legal regulations and international literature, relevant to the museums' societal role.

In chapter three I shall report on the work at the seven exhibitions, and the way the process actually was carried out in the different institutions in the different countries. The empirical material presented, shows in detail what challenges museum employees have encountered and what reflections they have made.

Chapter four picks up the threads from chapter three and sums up the four central challenges which have appeared in all exhibitions to a greater or lesser degree. Most project managers have told about challenges related to balancing individuals' need for care and protection and the society's general need for correct and factual information. Several questions are raised as to how the subjective narratives are to be used. The museums wish to maintain their reputation as institutions where facts are disseminated, and this problematizes the relation to the concept of 'truth' when working with narratives. The fact that museum employees often have not themselves carried out preliminary research on the theme of the exhibitions, leads to difficulties in finding their role and appreciate their own competence. Often, they feel torn between individuals with their subjective experiences and professional consultants with their expert knowledge. Both might have strong expectations as to how their contributions are dealt with, and the expectations cannot always be met. The need for considerable leeway to manoeuvre independently might become counter-productive: A large degree of autonomy is needed to be able to take on-the-spot decisions, at the same time as one must comply with different opinions and guide-lines spelling out what is right to do in morally difficult situations.

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<sup>16</sup> The Arts Council Norway is a Norwegian public institution under the Ministry of Culture. The Council has ten members, all appointed by the Government. The Council administers financial resources for cultural purposes and provides funding for cultural projects in accordance with political priorities. (Translator's note)

Chapter five centres on commonly accepted theories which may help museum employees cope with their challenges. They may also be helpful in defending approaches and explain why it is so important to act as a societal actor. My approach is multi- and interdisciplinary, with elements from the disciplines of ethics, philosophy, ethnology and sociology. I have selected three main theories as my basis: professional ethics, recognition theory and proximity ethics. In addition, the emotions of all parties involved play such a big role in the work that a theoretical approach to the importance of feelings is imperative.

The sixth and last chapter will try to give specific answers to the question of how museums and the museum employees should proceed when they are dealing with sensitive themes, in the light of ethical theory and international studies. The challenges which are described in chapter four are addressed separately and put into perspective on the background of the ethical theories from chapter five. Every point is addressed by aiming to achieve balance, and I shall try to point out which considerations and needs should be prioritized. Thus, this last chapter is close to being a memo of what museums and museum employees should have in mind when they work in this field, with individuals or groups of people with unique competence. Here, the reader will find a list with ten pieces of advice for enhanced professionalism and reduced personal strain.

I finish with a short epilogue, summing up what has happened between 2014 and 2016 in the museum world in Norway. The reader will also find a long list of literature at the back of the book which may be of interest if one wishes to know more about this field of work.

## **How to Study a Museum, an Exhibition, Museum Employees and an Audience?**

During the collection and analysis of the empirical material, I started with the individual museum employee, seen as a professional practitioner. Those who have worked at an exhibition have had many frameworks to relate to, some fixed, and others variable. To make the presentation more transparent, I have divided the working process in the exhibitions into four parts which all influence each other. Formulated as questions these parts are the following: How is the museum organized? What is important when cooperating with external participants, individuals, and expert consultants? What themes and forms of dissemination are chosen, and why? And what reactions have been received from the participants, the audience, and the media after the opening?

## **The Museum Internally and Externally**

The power relations between the museums and the Ministry of Culture are not unproblematic and have direct relevance for the museum employees' autonomy. Political and professional guidelines are not always known and may be interpreted differently. It is therefore not only a question of how the museums are structured and organized, but also how the guidelines are interpreted and rooted internally, both on the management level and in the everyday chores of the employees working at the exhibitions. What role do financial contributions play?

What do the individual employees see as their or the institution's primary societal remit, and what expectations, put forward by whom, do they try to fulfil? To what degree does the project manager work autonomously, what moral decisions does this person take alone and what moral decisions are discussed in the project group or with superiors? What ethical guidelines does one know and relate to, and how are moral challenges met in the daily work? Does there exist a common moral understanding or do people use their own, personal moral understanding? Are reflections made over the autonomy of the people responsible for the exhibition versus the ethical policy of the institution, if there is such a thing?

## **Cooperation with External Contributors**

Cooperation with external participants is one of the major fields of work when the exhibition is based upon personal narratives and external expert consultants. The museums are dependent upon individuals who are willing to share their subjective stories about incidents they experienced as difficult, and they are dependent upon external consultants when they plan exhibitions on subjects they have not researched themselves. A major question is therefore related to why and under what conditions external contributors are willing to cooperate with the museums. Why would individuals be willing to share sensitive personal narratives with basically unknown museum employees? And under what conditions would expert consultants contribute with their research material? Who decides the conditions for the cooperation? Which are the most important aspects here, both for the museum, the individuals, and the consultants? What weighs most heavily, the professional integrity of the museum or the principle of participation? How are compromises reached, and do conflicts occur between museum employees and external participants about who owns and who can best disseminate life stories and academic knowledge?

## **The Angling of the Theme and the Choice of the Dissemination Method**

How do museums find relevant themes and what factors are decisive for the selection? Those are very important questions which only partly can be answered without a separate study. I have therefore chosen a more superficial point of departure and assume that the choice of subject may be based upon guidelines from the Ministry of Culture to mark a jubilee, that it may have its source in current reports in the media, which the museum feels must be

followed up, or it may be the result of access to good and unique sources. Once the theme has been selected, and after the contact with external participants has been established, the project group must assess the available material. Is it broad enough? Is there a need for more information, and if so, what kind of information? Can some of the pieces of information and their sources be discarded? Which parts of the material should be presented - and how should they be presented? There are innumerable possibilities with a corresponding number of consequences. How do the different technological aids and ways of dissemination affect the audience's reaction and reflection? What are the parts played by human senses and emotions in such an exhibition and what kind of impact will objects and overall design have on the audience? Do the museum employees see the experience aspect and factual correctness as opposites? In that case, which has the priority and how does one try to combine the two aspects?

### **Reactions from the Contributors, the Public and the Press**

Last but not least, the reactions after the opening of an exhibition are interesting to study. How do the audience react to the presentation of the subject and its dissemination? Do the visitors find the exhibition exciting, educational, touching, challenging, unpleasant, or even aggressive? Do individuals find that their narratives are correctly reported and disseminated? Do the external consultants find that their research has been properly presented? In addition one may ask oneself to what extent the design of the exhibition and the use of different effects contribute to making the reactions stronger or weaker.

### **Method, Analysis and Interpretation**

To be able to answer most of these questions, I have collected an extensive empirical material by using several methods. First, I have studied six exhibitions in Norway, Denmark, and Germany, of which I was project manager for one. Subsequently, I have made a new exhibition to verify the research findings in the former exhibitions. I wanted to investigate if and to what extent the findings would appear once again, with a given approach or method of dissemination. This new, seventh exhibition, an exhibition about religion and faith, titled *Himmelen over Sørlandet* (literally: "The Heaven above Sørlandet"), was both an "ordinary" exhibition at Vest-Agder Museum and an ethnographical study taking its starting point in the research results which were available after the first six exhibitions.

The first six exhibitions had many things in common, at the same time as their point of departure, the framework, and the reactions differed. *Du skal ikke tænke paa din Far og Mor* (literally: "Think not about Thy Father and Mother"), an exhibition about children in an orphanage held at Svendborg Museum in Denmark, was headed by a project manager with

expert knowledge within this field, having conducted personal field research over several years. The exhibition attracted attention in Denmark and had important consequences for the self-esteem of many former children in orphanages. *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, (literally: “The Wehrmacht Exhibition”), an exhibition about the misdeeds committed by German soldiers during World War II, was also made under the auspices of historians who had done research in the topic. The reactions in all the towns where the exhibition was presented, in addition to enquiries from several thousand people, came as a surprise to the organizing institute, both in strength and size. The Norwegian *Quisling-utstillinger*, (literally: “The Quisling Exhibition”) which was produced at Telemark Museum, created a stir first and foremost prior to the opening, not afterwards. The project manager had no expert knowledge of the topic and therefore engaged an external consultant to contribute with expert knowledge. *Familiehemmeligheter* (literally: “Family Secrets”) at Maihaugen was a very short-lived exhibition, partly based upon the museum’s own curating of relevant aspects, partly in cooperation with one individual about the sexual abuse of children. *Våre hellige rom*, (literally: “Our Holy Rooms”), at Interkulturelt Museum in Oslo was based on the cooperation with an external consultant and his contact with different religious communities. *Min Kropp - Min Sannhet*, (literally: “My Body - My Truth”) at Vest-Agder Museum addressed the local community through advertisements, without expert knowledge round the theme of *body* being presented in the exhibition. In the seventh exhibition, the mentioned *Himmelen over Sørlandet*, advertisements in the local newspaper were also used to get into contact with all interested parties.

My informants, the people I have interviewed, represented a complex group, strongly dominated by museum employees who were directly connected to the work at the exhibitions, primarily project managers, but also project staff members and the project leaders’ superiors, in all nine persons. With regard to my focus on cooperation with external participants, I conducted interviews with four individuals who had contributed to some of the exhibitions. A board member was also interviewed, to be able to observe what a board member’s suggestion meant for the work at an exhibition. The interviews lasted for one to three hours, and were carried through by means of an extensive interview manual.

In the process of studying the museum employees’ understanding and interpretation of the moral challenges in their work, it was important for me to apply qualitative methods allowing me to go to the depth of specifically concrete aspects. I wanted to be able to follow a thread ad hoc and spontaneously, use more time than planned on individual informants if needed, and to select new sources if required and accessible. Typical qualitative methods I have used are observation, field work, interviews, and text analysis; all of these often in a combination to achieve a “thicker”, i.e. more extensive and diverse material. During the collection of the empirical material of the first six exhibitions, I mainly used qualitative interviews

and document analysis as method; in the seventh exhibition I mainly used participatory observation, document analysis, and questionnaires. Considerations of research ethics, declarations of consent, anonymizing, and the handling of confidential material have been normative for my entire empirical collection.

In all cases I have had a hermeneutical starting point. Several philosophers and sociologists have long argued in favour of the relevance of interpretation in the humanities and social sciences, among others, Dilthey, Gadamer, and Giddens. The German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey concluded as early as the end of the 1800s that every scientist bears the stamp of the epoch he lives in and that every understanding or interpretation of history necessarily must be a unique interpretation based on the experiences and the knowledge which the epoch has brought with it. He emphasizes also that the interaction between individuals is the basis for recognition and that the understanding of “The Other” always must be an interpretation based on the scientist’s own experiences and interests. It is, in other words, not possible to define basic connections which are independent of human experiences. The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, later expanded on this: The scientist’s own earlier experiences, his own situation and scope of understanding, is the starting point for his understanding of the research object. Any attempt to understand history or new contexts, is influenced by the situation which the scientist actually finds himself in, and it is not possible to put oneself into a larger or superior context to be able to decide if what seems to be evident, really is so. Consequently, all knowledge and understanding is finite and limited, and with that follows that an interpretation - based on one’s own unique and current situation - always is the starting point for any interpretation of a research object. The British sociologist Anthony Giddens contributed to the discussion with, among other things, the concept of ‘the double hermeneutic’: The reflexivity of science builds upon the reflexivity of every-day affairs; research on social structures necessarily builds upon cultural and ethnographical aspects which influence the basis for research. Human beings have only limited knowledge about their own position and the reasons for their actions; no matter how much one wishes to understand, one can never, ever, be neutral. This is so because there are too many factors which influence human behaviour and our interpretations of others’ behaviour, and they are subconscious and too deeply rooted in life to be discovered.

The interaction between theory, method and data in research processes is often termed a “circle dance”. Through the use of qualitative methods the research project may change continuously: New and unexpected empirical data may be added, hypotheses change similarly, methodological approaches must then be expanded, and suddenly one needs more theories than first assumed to analyse and interpret the empirical material one has collected. This is also what I have experienced during the collection of empirical material for this book: You learn as you go.

To meet the demands for transparency and possibility of control, interviews and conversations with museum employees, for instance, have all been recorded. Written field notes, newspaper articles, relevant e-mails - sent back and forth -, and questionnaires worked out and filled in by many, have been accessible to other researchers, to help verify conclusions, and to estimate the research project's validity and reliability.

To be able to compare the statements from my informants, and get an overview of the relevance of various aspects and reasons for the choice of action, I have established several specific, detailed analyses which are integral parts of the whole, overall analysis. Here, I have been mostly interested in finding repeated statements which could be perceived as typical, but also statements which were so strong that they indicated that an actual event or a viewpoint was perceived as especially important for the person in question. I also tried to look for statements which I had expected would come, but which were not mentioned by my informants. Then I made several schematic surveys in order to categorize what moral challenges were mentioned, who had mentioned them, how one had tried to meet them and if the course of action had worked. The surveys were primarily based on concrete aspects and were made both for the exhibitions and for single points connected to the superior research questions. Here I have not applied an electronic programme, but used the "cut and paste" method to make larger surveys where I could move parts of the text back and forth as required and throughout the whole working process. I have also made repeated perusals of notes and minutes of meetings, sound-recordings of the interviews were listened to repeatedly, the process was reconstructed from different angles, and the material was studied from a superior standpoint in order to decide if relevant pieces of information stood in contrast to each other or were missing.

The above-mentioned "circle dance" resulted in one method influencing the choice and use of the other. The result was a combination of several methods supplementing each other. "Method of triangulation" and "thick description" are here important keywords: When the same aspects are studied with different methods, one gets more information than by using one method alone. One may observe a phenomenon from several angles. By combining methods like interview, participatory observation, document analysis and enquiries, my study also resulted in the compilation of a broad and complex empirical material.

The reciprocal relation of the methods is founded on the fact that all of them - from a hermeneutical point of view - have complemented each other. The methods have in many ways also presupposed each other. The interviews connected to the first six exhibitions have supplied me with information about the nature of the framework conditions of project, but also given me insight into the foundation and the assessment behind the choice of action. Document analysis, which was also used, has for example given background information



about the exhibitions which I had not received from the participants, and which I thereby could apply to put my informants' statements into a broader perspective. In this way I had a bigger and more neutral survey of the situation which influenced the museum employees' choices of action and the result of these. In the seventh exhibition I changed my main method to participatory observation because of the many and diverse roles I had in the working process. I found it not very practical to carry through interviews, but have instead used questionnaires which allowed me to keep a certain distance to my colleagues and the two expert consultants I included in the work on the exhibition. The questionnaires were analysed afterwards by help of document analysis, which contributed to getting a maximum amount of information from the forms. Both document analysis and questionnaires have helped to put the results from the participatory observation into a larger context, and thus I have been able to correct my interpretations. Not least the interviews of the informants, tied to the first six exhibitions and the participatory observation of the seventh, stood in close relation to each other: Mainly, the answers from my informants helped establish the guidelines to what focus I subsequently chose. In this way all methods have influenced each other mutually, and contributed to the content and amount of the empirical material which I in the end was able to analyse and interpret. The material was not only illuminated from several angles, but also put under deeper scrutiny than a procedure with fewer numbers of methods would have allowed.

## 2

### **On the Museums' Societal Remit and the Premises for Working on Sensitive Topics**

Most Norwegian museum professionals are familiar with terms like *samfunnsoppdrag* (literally: “societal remit”), *samfunnsrolle* (literally: “societal role”), *samfunnsinstitusjon* (literally: “societal institution”), and *dialoginstitusjon* (literally: “dialogue institution”). These terms are often used without distinction, apparently quite by chance, but do essentially refer to the same concept: the museums’ handling of specific tasks on behalf of the society and in interaction with their environment. Some people argue that ‘societal remit’ and ‘societal role’ are not necessarily synonyms. The museums have a societal remit which to a large extent corresponds to a political assignment or mandate, entrusted to them by Kulturdepartementet (literally: “the Ministry of Culture”), and contained in various management documents. In these there is a specification of the tasks the museums are supposed to undertake, all of which are attached to the museums’ four primary fields of activity; research, management, dissemination, and innovation. As for ‘societal role’, it is a newer concept which is part of both the societal remit and of the political assignment. Many argue today that a societal remit is something you get, while the societal role is something you take.

### **Why Deal with Sensitive Topics?**

As far as commissioning is concerned, it is possible to argue that there ought to be a distinction between a political assignment, issued by the Ministry of Culture, and a societal remit which has been given by the society itself, whose representatives in the daily interaction with the museums are the visitors or the local population. Even though a societal remit may have a hidden political agenda, research shows that museum professionals distinguish between these two commissioners: Social entrustment, which implies that the members of the society should be given the best possible offer, seems to represent a factor of stronger motivation for many museum professionals than the obligation to follow the guidelines embedded in the political directives. In other words, it is to the local society and to people in general that the museums’ personnel are most deeply committed, and this is what most of them associate with the concept of ‘societal remit’.

‘Societal role’ points to a process of innovative thinking and directional guidance within the museum’s most prominent fields of activity: research, management and dissemination. More than earlier, the museums are supposed to operate as active, moral agents in the society. By way of critical questioning of established truths and by taking up current societal challenges,

the museums can and should contribute to a positive development in a society where as many people as possible are being heard. When the museums are seen as democratic and including institutions, which is exactly what they are supposed to be, they will also reach a variety of audiences in new ways.

The focus on the museum as a social institution with a societal role that to some extent has been redefined is expressed in several political documents after 1996, i. a. in three *Stortingsmeldinger* (literally: “White Papers”)<sup>17</sup>, two ABM reports, and in a number of the letters of allotment which accompany the government’s funding of the running expenses of the museums. “Dialogue” is a typical buzzword here, and so is “challenging”, or “emotional”. To challenge the public and promote reflection and innovative thinking is of importance, which is clearly expressed in *St. meld. nr. 48*,<sup>18</sup> *Kulturpolitikk fram mot 2014* (2002-2003), (White Paper no. 48: literally: “Cultural Policy Objectives 2014”): “If the museums are to function as useful social institutions, they have to seek dialogue with their environment.” Their audiences must be “surprised and challenged [...] both emotionally and intellectually.”<sup>19</sup>

These guidelines are part of a major, overarching ambition, which was launched in the mid1990s, the so-called *Kunnskapsløftet* (literally: “Elevating Knowledge”). It is now the Government’s policy to renew the dissemination of history so that it from now on, more purposefully than before, can stimulate critical thinking and open up new perspectives on social challenges in the society of today. The pedagogical ambition is to help people see the connection between past and present more clearly and attach particular importance to topics related to conflicts and injustice. The purpose of this is to improve people’s ability to handle current or future conflicts in our society. As conservers and disseminators of History, the museums are a natural part of this programme. There is a need for both taking a critical look at cultural diversity and minorities, and for a revision of earlier contributions to the building of a national identity and the policy of norwegianization<sup>20</sup>. This is clearly expressed in *St.medl. nr. 22* (1999 -2000), *Kjelder til kunnskap og oppleving* (literally: White Paper 22, “Sources of Knowledge and Experience”). Here it is emphasized that museums are supposed to contribute to an adequate and well balanced diachronic picture of the Norwegian society, among other things by exercising “a problem-oriented, socially critical function, e. g. through

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17 A *Stortingsmelding* is an official report from the Government to Stortinget, i. e. the Norwegian Parliament, which defines the official policy of the Government on a particular subject. It is more or less the equivalent of a White Paper in British usage. (Translator’s note)

18 *St. meld. nr. ...*, is the standard abbreviation for a specific *Stortingsmelding*. The number, *nr. ...*, which always follows, indicates the serial number of the report within a specific parliamentary session. (Translator’s note)

19 *St. meld. nr. 48* (2002-2003): 178.

20 The traditional “policy of norwegianization” has been a national effort to create a society which is culturally homogenous. In practical terms this has meant an effort to make ethnical and cultural minorities more like “ordinary” Norwegians. (Translator’s note)

[...] an exhibition of cultural history which documents how the political authorities treated the gypsies, or an exhibition of contemporary art with a reprimanding message”.<sup>21</sup>

The most detailed account of the societal role of the museums is probably the one given in *St. meld. nr. 49* (2008 - 2009), *Framtidas museum. Forvaltning, forskning, formidling, fornying*, (literally: White Paper 49, “The Museum of the Future. Management, Research, Dissemination, Innovation”). “The essence of the societal role or the societal remit of the museums is to develop and pass on knowledge about people’s understanding of and interaction with their environment.”<sup>22</sup>

Here it becomes evident that a change has taken place: from material to immaterial cultural heritage, from a focus on physical objects to a focus on man’s understanding of his environment and his interaction with the latter, which necessarily also implies that a diversity of opinions and critical voices are heard. In the same document it is pointed out that it is up to the museums themselves to determine how they are going to assume their social responsibility and fulfill their societal role. “Each individual museum has an independent professional prerogative to determine what is to be included in its collections [...]. By means of their acquisitive and disseminative activities, the museums establish milestones of cultural heritage.”<sup>23</sup>

It is an overall priority of the cultural policy to supervise “the selection which the museums as a whole put through and see to it that the picture they produce is as balanced as possible and covers the diachronic diversity of Norwegian societal life in the best possible way.”<sup>24</sup>

In the White Paper on *Framtidas museum* the importance of the dissemination is explicitly specified when it is pointed out that the museums are supposed to be “social institutions of current interest and relevance which stimulate critical reflection and creative insight” by means of “active adaptation and diversified strategies.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it is emphasized that the dissemination of knowledge must be critical and innovative, both in its form and in its means. It is up to each and every institution to devise its own strategies of dissemination, provided these contribute to supporting “the fundamental values upon which our society is founded” in such a manner that they “promote tolerance with regard to cultural differences” and “exercise a problem-oriented function of societal criticism.”<sup>26</sup>

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21 *St. meld. nr. 49* (2008 - 2009): 87.

22 *St. meld. nr. 49* (2008 - 2009): 145.

23 *St. meld. nr. 49* (2008 - 2009): 145.

24 *St. meld. nr. 49* (2008 - 2009): 145.

25 *St. meld. nr. 20* (2009 - 2010): 102.

26 *St. meld. nr. 20* (2009 - 2010): 102 ff.

In short, it is possible to say that the societal remit of the museums is a complex entity which says something about how the museums are supposed to serve their real employer - the society. There is a multitude of diverging goals and target groups, and the task of selecting what, who or how to prioritize has been delegated to the individual institutions and their staffs. As a principle the museums are accountable to all parts of the population. Even if it is necessary and legitimate to select specific target groups, the overall objective remains unchanged - and its target is “people in general”, “the man in the street”.

With the increased attention paid to societal and social diversity, a sharpened focus is required on those topics most people have been rather unwilling to talk about - since stigmatized groups, excluded groups, infractions of the law and injustice are topics that are going to be highlighted. The use of personal narratives can be considered as one method for challenging the society emotionally, and for promoting reflection and dialogue. Even though the phrase “cultural diversity” first and foremost refers to ethnic minorities, it should in my view be interpreted as a description of all underlying, marginalized phenomena and of voices which most often are suppressed when a description of culture in general is given.

### **The Documentation of Contemporary Issues**

However, collecting personal narratives is nothing new. Cooperation across human and social boundaries, for example for the purpose of shedding light on a particular period, on living conditions at some specified location, or on a socially relevant topic has been practiced at museums of cultural history since the 1970s. The documentation of contemporary issues has opened up new fields of activity which have been under continuous expansion and development, and now - 40 years later - there is still a need for new approaches and methods. The field of operations is so large and so complex that a continuous renewal of knowledge and competence is required at the museums.

The work aiming at documenting contemporary issues took off in earnest when a new generation of scientists started to investigate phenomena of their own age and individual points of view rather than cultural matters of national interest. The industrialization had resulted in an ever increasing quantity of physical objects, and there was a need for new ways of managing material as well as immaterial knowledge which did not require excessive storage capacity. The field work was intensified, new source material was adopted, and new questions were raised to investigate sources that already existed. A development of innovative methods and theories followed in the wake of this. Slowly, but steadily, the attention was directed towards challenges associated with subjective experiences and personal narratives.

*Oral history* was introduced as a denomination for the collecting of subjective narratives drawn from the narrator's own life, i.e. of people's lives and living conditions as described by means of personal recollections. Several questions of crucial importance were asked: could the subjective narratives and experiences contribute to a documentation of the contemporary period, and if so, under what conditions? How could individual narratives, memories or interviews related to a person's progress in life be used to map a major social development or change? What kinds of advantages and disadvantages were embedded in an extended use of such narratives and what were the limitations concerning the use of such material? Even the researcher's own subjective approach to his material was scrutinized, and critical questions were asked with regard to how much a chosen approach was likely to colour the researcher's interpretation and presentation of what had been found.

Studies and documentation of contemporary issues still constitute an important field of work for a large majority of the museums. The word "contemporary" can be understood as referring to the present, i.e. to one's own here and now, and the documentation of contemporary issues will therefore include sources which can contribute to answering questions about how members of today's society experience some of its particularities. Discerning what is 'contemporary' therefore calls for multiple concepts of time - past, present and future - always redefined with reference to where on the timeline the observer's viewpoint is situated. It is therefore possible to approach the relationship between history and contemporariness from several angles of attack: "The temporal delimitation of an investigation of what is contemporary will [...] vary as a function of what approach we have to the contemporary phenomenon in question."<sup>27</sup>

The documentation of contemporary phenomena implies the mapping of social changes. As an extension of this mapping it is common practice to look for events or elements which can explain the changes, and in this process there is often a need for adequate methods to avoid making too subjective interpretations of such attributes. Furthermore, this may open the way to discovering aspects of the society that are troublesome, problematic or tabooed, which is directly related to the BRUDD-campaign

## **BRUDD**

Over the last fifteen to twenty years a number of Norwegian museums have been dealing actively with current sensitive or controversial issues. Unfortunately, there is no survey of how many, at which museums, or of how these projects have been carried out. The work

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<sup>27</sup> Jensen & Swensen 2007: 29.

has been done under the museums' own management, as part of the ABM-development's<sup>28</sup> BRUDD-campaign, and later under the auspices of Norsk kulturråd.

The BRUDD-campaign was from its opening in 2003 designed to contribute to establishing a new way of thinking and new forms of practice within the museums. In focus here are topics which can be described as "disagreeable, tabooed, marginal, invisible, controversial" as well as questions concerning how such topics can be disseminated in a critical manner. The phrase 'critical dissemination' will here be used to refer to "a form of dissemination which raises questions without giving any answers, which present a topic from new and different angles, which uncovers processes and complex relationships and invites the public to reflection."<sup>29</sup> The personal narrative told by individuals is at the core of this. Moreover, questions concerning the handling of new challenges pop up, as a consequence of a new interpretation of the museums' societal role.

Until 2010, seminars were organized as forums of discussion which were open to a restricted number of participants who wanted inputs and help from colleagues at other museums who were actively involved in similar projects. Among the many inputs discussed in the group sessions was for instance the proposal of *en redaktørplakat* for museum directors, (literally: "a poster specifying the rights and duties of editors"), designed to help the museum employee in charge to take care of the museum's professional independence as well as of its societal role.<sup>30</sup> However, this proposal was never followed up.

After an evaluation towards the end of 2010, the group's composition and purpose were modified. Six museums from all over Norway were selected to make sure the BRUDD-philosophy took root in the organization of their own and their colleagues' institutions in a solid and efficient manner. In this way the *new* BRUDD-group was established. From 2011 plans were made for the elaboration of fundamental documents and joint projects within this new group with an ambition of being able to transfer new knowledge to museums outside the group as well. Two joint projects were carried through, of which one resulted in a concurrent photo exhibition in all six museums or in adjacent cities at the end of August 2014.

Moreover, most of the so-called HOT SPOT exhibitions have focused on critical dissemination of issues of societal relevance. A HOT-SPOT exhibition brings up a current topic at short notice. This is something that has happened in a number of countries worldwide

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28 ABM-development, Norwegian name *ABM-utvikling*, was a government agency under the Ministry of Culture. Its purpose was to promote and coordinate the activities and development of public archives, libraries and museums. It was established in 2003 and phased out after reorganization in 2010. (Translator's note)

29 Norsk kulturråd 2006: 10.

30 Rekdal 2009.

since 2001. In contrast to BRUDD-exhibitions these tend to be less comprehensive in size and to be scheduled for shorter periods of time.

The BRUDD-campaign at the museums is controversial and challenges both public opinion and the professionals' understanding of their purpose and identity. Anne Eriksen, professor of cultural history and museology at the University of Oslo, points out that the campaign's ambitions can be challenging in more than one respect: "Among the things at stake is [...] the fundamental understanding of what kind of "business" museums are running and what kind of institution they are. Are museums supposed to provide answers or raise questions? Confirmation or doubt? Narratives or fragments? What sort of responsibility do they have for the messages they seem to be backing up?"<sup>31</sup>

Eriksen is not the only one to question these new approaches which can have unpredictable consequences. Given the fact that the museums' traditional role as interpreters has been identified as "the one who knows" or "the one with preeminent moral standards"<sup>32</sup> the handling of these consequences may turn out to be a particularly demanding business. It is not obvious that a museum is able to give a "correct" representation of the history of a minority and here a wish for the rehabilitation of a social group which has been neglected for a long period of time can easily motivate an uncritical presentation and dissemination. This may also have serious consequences for the society as such: What societal aspects which are lifted and illuminated and the manner in which this is done, may to a large extent determine our perspectives on contemporary history and society. Per Rekdal, senior advisor and anthropologist at Kulturhistorisk museum in Oslo<sup>33</sup> and one of a handful of people who has kept a close eye on the BRUDD-campaign since its inception, points out that museums have to adopt a critical attitude, even when they disseminate on behalf of minorities. It is not possible for everyone to account for their own history in a satisfactory manner. Solid knowledge of how to disseminate and a superior perspective on the topic itself is required in order to find the most appropriate method of dissemination.<sup>34</sup> In Rekdal's opinion it is the project's focus on individuals which is of particular concern: The use of personal narratives and the focus on individuals constitute a "dramatizing stratagem"<sup>35</sup> which stimulates curiosity, provokes emotional reactions, and promotes engagement among the visitors. Such a device will therefore always require a thorough consideration of why it is going to be used and what possible consequences it may have.

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31 Eriksen 2009: 197.

32 Amundsen & Brenna 2003: 21.

33 Kulturhistorisk museum (KHM) is a museal organization at the University of Oslo. (Translator's note)

34 When dealing with national minorities the museums are obliged to cooperate about the production of exhibitions and documentary projects, cf. among others Holmesland 2006: 21.

35 Rekdal 2006: 22.



## Somewhere in the Middle between a Dissemination of Facts and Experiences

The moral challenges which constitute the core of this book are to a considerable extent related to questions of how a material is presented to an audience. The framework of a presentation is normally “an exhibition” with all its potential diversity as far as form is concerned. An exhibition may have a broad or a specialized approach and may vary in format from the presentation of one single object to a display of several thousand objects with corresponding texts. The composition of objects, the fitting of their showcases, the use of technology, and the exposition of text, image, or sound, together with the exhibition hall and overall design itself constitute a totality, and all these components are of great importance and require particular attention in the preparation.

Usually, there are many people involved in the working process; different curators as well as pedagogical advisors and designers. Their objective is to ensure that the exhibition responds to the expectations of the visitors in the best possible way. From a formal point of view, the exhibition is designed to disseminate factual knowledge through a stirring of the senses and is supposed to stimulate learning through reflection. Whereas exhibitions traditionally have been characterized by their display of objects, typical as well as rare, the trend of the past few decades has been to take a closer look at how immaterial knowledge can complete the objects and to exploit the potential of modern technological devices. This is done in order to touch a maximum of visitors in the deepest possible manner and in that way stimulate the process of learning.

Increased attention has been paid to the design of the exhibition and to how components like text, light and sound can be combined in the most efficient way. In 2011, a total of 1537 permanent exhibitions were shown in Norwegian museums under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. In addition to this came 1087 temporary exhibitions and 406 travelling exhibitions.<sup>36</sup> It is not known how many of these took up sensitive or tabooed topics. Nor is it known how many of them dealt with topics of current social interest or with themes to which museum staffs had devoted no research of their own.

According to the specification dedicated to the museums’ societal role in the White Paper on *Framtidas museum* one of the main objectives of the museums’ activities is to get through to the public with factual knowledge and experience and to be accessible for everyone.<sup>37</sup> But factual knowledge and experience may easily end up as conflicting values, even so

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<sup>36</sup> Norsk kulturråd 2015: 9. With regard to the exhibition movement in Europe since the early 19th century and world exhibitions in particular, cf. Brenna 2003.

<sup>37</sup> *St. meld. nr. 49* (2008-2009): 145.

when exhibitions are planned and designed. Factual knowledge tends to be attached to the professional role of the researcher - even when the actual results have been delivered by external experts - whereas the aspect of experience is connected with staff members' role as disseminators.

The term *facts* is here used as a synonym for 'documentation which supports a statement', above all documentation extracted from written sources or from physical objects. It is not an easy task to disseminate knowledge and facts in such a manner that a broad public, composed of people of different age and with different educational background, can be reached (and moved) through what they experience. The museums are dependent upon income from their activities in a proportion corresponding to about 30 % of their budget. Therefore they have to adapt what they offer to the increasing competition from other sources of social entertainment. Making people gather knowledge through experience can be regarded as an industrial strategy which has an increasing impact on what people of all ages consume in their leisure time. One wants to combine pleasure with further education, and learning while experiencing seems to be a good mixture. This is something the museums must have in mind in their effort to attract visitors to their institutions. A factor of ever increasing importance is whether the museums exploit new types of technology to attract members of a society where communication and learning more and more take place by means of advanced technology.

One of the major challenges is to offer excitement, trigger emotions and help the visitors to learn through reflection, while still clinging to the cornerstone of all museum activity - the dissemination of facts at a high academic level. For the majority of traditional museums it feels like an enormous compromise to disseminate assumptions in order to create strong and vivid histories centred on events about which factual information is utterly scarce.

Several institutions try to hold on to their professional ambitions by taking on external consultants if the members of their own staff do not possess sufficient competence within the relevant field of science or do not have time to conduct their own research. Such practice is becoming increasingly common since museums nowadays direct their activities towards topics of current social relevance in accordance with the objectives embedded in their new societal role. These topics can be as diverse as society itself, and it is often difficult to predict what topic will be relevant at a given point of time in the future. Moreover, when the topics are sensitive it seems to be even more important that the factual basis is as solid and as comprehensive as possible.

Here it can be relevant to open up for cooperation with the universities which represent the most prominent national institutions of research. Institutions dealing with cultural history may have much to learn from the research centres at the universities, while the museums, on the other hand, have excellent opportunities to disseminate the results which the university

researchers have achieved. Such cooperation can also be seen as relevant since museum employees in scientific positions also have studied at a university and therefore have been trained as researchers. Several members of museum staffs do in fact teach at a university or function as mentors for students. Still, there seems to be considerable uncertainty around the questions concerning the practical aspects of such cooperation and no one can say for sure how the roles should be distributed. This is something I shall come back to in detail later.

## **Professionals in Norwegian Museums**

There are many definitions of what a ‘profession’ is or is not, and of what it takes to be considered as member of a professional fellowship. Most people agree that the members of a particular profession have a formal education, practical know-how, a delegated responsibility based on trust and an authority which enables them, but not others, to exercise this profession. Harald Grimen, Professor at Senter for profesjonsutdanning, (literally: “The Centre of Professional Education”) in Oslo holds the opinion that professions are distinct from other job categories in the following three respects: organizationally, epistemically and politically.<sup>38</sup> All three levels are distinctive features of the museum profession. Museum staff personnel are both formal and acting members of the profession, and the museum as organizational structure defines the framework for their activities. The museums manage resources such as historical objects and collections, and give their employees access to a fellowship with comprehensive and varied professional competence. Special care is taken to make sure the trust granted them by the population is wisely handled by the employees, inter alia by checking that the museum’s internal rules and traditions are respected and that the staff have the scientific knowledge and the societal capacities required by their work.

The number of Norwegian museums and their organizational structures are constantly changing. Efforts of consolidation have resulted in a significant reduction of museums benefiting from government funding, and further consolidations are on their way. The statistical survey of Norwegian museums for 2014 lists 119 museums with a staff of minimum one employee. Under their management are a total of inter alia 5000 buildings of historical and cultural value, 21.3 million objects, and 32 million photographs. The figures for 2014 indicate a total of almost 11 million visitors.<sup>39</sup>

The total number of personnel at the 119 museums is 3563 employees in permanent positions.<sup>40</sup> Among these are people employed in technical or administrative jobs, curators,

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38 Grimen 2008b: 150-151.

39 Cf. Norsk kulturråd 2015: 4, 9, 13.

40 Norsk kulturråd 2015: 7.

pedagogical advisors, designers, craftsmen (with or without special competence in the conservation of buildings), cleaning staff and marketing specialists. Exhibitions, the most characteristic form of dissemination at the majority of museums, are generally created by a team consisting of several people, all with their specific roles and tasks. It is not uncommon that one employee operates in several roles simultaneously, and the borders between different roles will often be diffuse.

Like other professions the museum profession has its own specific ethics which stipulates the norms and the values which will govern the work of its members. A *norm* says something about what is required to act correctly. Norms of importance to museum professionals are for example that all kinds of dissemination should be based on facts, that all employees should be treated as equals, and that the management of the collections must be consistent with the regulations in force. Norms can be of different types; some will have to be obeyed - for instance all emanating from existing laws - others ought to be followed out of concern for common practice. A *moral norm* says something about how one can contribute to promoting “the good” in the society, in the lives of others and in one’s own life.

Norms protect those values which are important in and for a given society and which are shared by all its members. The values express in positive terms those issues which are essential in order to help a maximum number of people live together in the best possible way. For this reason each and every one of us has a responsibility for taking care of values like for instance justice, honesty or tolerance. Since the museums are actively working to fill their societal role and have a sincere wish to contribute to a positive social development, it is all the more significant that their professional activity is founded on values. Professional integrity, reliability, openness and respect are of prime importance in this context.

However, it is decisive also for all other types of activity at the museums that basic norms and values are known and respected. The essential norms and values are laid down and described in the ethical standards and guidelines for museums which have been issued by ICOM, The International Council of Museums. Here a museum employee will find a description of what is expected of museums as institutions and of their employees as professionals, both in their internal teamwork and in their interaction with the local population in a joint effort to strengthen the trust the profession has and holds both in the society and with regard to their own practice. These guidelines also contain advice concerning how to proceed in morally challenging situations - though only on a general level.

### ***ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums***

ICOM is considered to be the most influential international organization for museums and museum professionals. At the end of 2015 ICOM had approximately 35 000 members,

institutions as well as individuals, in 136 countries. The work is delegated to 30 international committees and 118 national committees, which include all member institutions within one specific country. In this context, Norwegian ICOM is one out of those 118 national committees.

ICOM *Code of Ethics* for Museums, hereafter called ICOM *Code of Ethics*, gives a survey of eight fundamental ethical principles. The Code is directed towards the individual employee in his capacity as member of the museum profession, but also, to a considerable extent, the museums' boards of directors who have a superior responsibility to supervise that the guidelines are observed. Furthermore, each of the eight principles contains several subparagraphs with specifications and it is of no avail to go through all of them here. But one principle is of utmost importance with regard to the handling of sensitive topics and to cooperating with external contributors: The eight and last principle, *museums operate in accordance with academic and professional standards*. Here it can be useful to take a closer look at what is meant by professional conduct and by the professionalism of the individual member of the museum profession.

The principle devoted to professional conduct contains eleven points where i.a. professional responsibility, professional conduct, academic and scientific responsibility, and confidentiality are treated in detail. Principle number eight clearly specifies the many concerns and moral assessments members of the museum profession are obliged to have in mind in their professional conduct. They must have “familiarity with relevant legislation [...] safeguard the public against illegal or unethical professional conduct, [...] follow the policies and procedures of their employing institution”, be loyal “to colleagues and to their employing museum”, show “allegiance to fundamental ethical principles applicable to the profession as a whole”, and have a “professional responsibility to consult other colleagues within or outside the museum when their own [...] expertise is insufficient to ensure good decision-making”, and they are always expected to render to all involved, visitors and partners, their “professional services [...] efficiently and to a high standard.”<sup>41</sup>

So, the activity is supposed to be directed towards different parties who all require specific attention: visitors, partners outside the museum, colleagues and employing institution. In this context the obligation to observe professional secrecy is worth mentioning: “Confidential information“, which the members of the museum profession have received “during their work”, shall always be protected as long as this does not interfere with the “legal obligation to assist the police or other proper authorities.”<sup>42</sup>

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41 ICOMs museumsetiske regelverk 2011: 31-32, points 8.1 - 8.11.

42 ICOMs museumsetiske regelverk 2011: 31, points 8.6 and 8.8.

## Other Judicial and Ethical Rules of Relevance

In ICOM *Code of Ethics* it is specified that its regulations are subordinate to other sets of rules and standards and in the end to general law. Of the latter the Constitution and the Criminal Law are of prime relevance: §100 of the Constitution on the freedom of speech and §209, §210 and §211 of the Criminal Law on infringement of the duty not to disclose confidential information. The Constitution's paragraph on the freedom of speech may be of importance for individuals who want to use the possibility to contact a museum and contribute to an exhibition by expressing their personal opinions. The paragraphs of the Criminal Law are important to keep in mind for a museum professional who receives confidential information and subsequently has to decide whether this is information which cannot be used lawfully in contexts other than those specified, or information which in actual fact has to be passed on immediately. The latter will be the case if the confidential information contains indications of a criminal act which still can be forestalled. One has to expect punitive sanctions if one deliberately "abstains from informing the police or in other ways neglects to take measures to prevent a criminal act or its consequences at a time when this is still possible, and it appears certain or most likely that the act will be or has already been committed."<sup>43</sup> This can for instance be relevant to museums when one of its personnel in the course of an interview or a conversation receives information referring to a criminal act.

Other rules of importance are the guidelines for researchers and journalists. Ethical standards are indispensable, both when material is being collected and when it is disseminated. But the ethical standards of the press can be relevant too, since the press has a societal remit which to a large extent corresponds to the new societal role of the museums.

The ethical guidelines for research have been set down by NESH, Den nasjonale forskningsetiske komite for samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora, (literally: "The National Ethical Committee for Research in the Social Sciences and the Humanities"). These guidelines are of relevance to the following three fields of application: 1) the freedom and customs of research, 2) the relations to individuals or groups directly concerned by the research, and 3) social relevance. Some of the norms mentioned here are unalterable imperatives, others are recommendations.

With regard to the issue of the freedom of research, it is emphasized that all research must be "free, innovative and critical", but always verifiable and impartially expounded. As for the concern for individuals or groups there is a list of contingencies where vigilance is absolutely essential. Most of the points here concern material related to sensitive issues: The museum's informants are people who may lose their "self-esteem or other vital values" if they are not

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<sup>43</sup> Straffeloven 1902 § 139.

met with respect and competence. It is important not to forget that they contribute actively to providing the museum with necessary information and that they in this role are identifiable by means of names, photographs, audio-recordings or film and therefore vulnerable. In this context it is also mentioned that the researcher has an obligation to assist his informants if these end up in trouble as a consequence of their participation in the project, and that the informants must be given the opportunity to correct possible misunderstandings which have occurred during their contact with the researcher. Of equal importance are informed and free acceptance of their status as informants, the need for confidentiality and observance of the law regulating the use of personal data.<sup>44</sup> The third and final point, social relevance, is of particular importance with regard to the overall objective of any research project. The researcher can contribute with scientifically founded arguments in the ongoing debate about topics of social relevance and present new perspectives which may result in heated public debates, which in turn can contribute to important social development. When working on sensitive topics, one will always have a special responsibility with regard to how the results of the research can be interpreted. The frame of reference which is established here, the quantity and the variety of the information which is simultaneously conveyed, must be of such a standard that it can contribute to “an informed shaping of public opinion”.

The ethical norms of the press have been summarized into *Vær Varsom-plakaten* (literally: “the Be Careful Poster”)<sup>45</sup>. This set of rules has been subdivided into four major points and it may prove beneficial to take a look at all of them: 1) The societal role of the press, 2) integrity and credibility, 3) the journalist’s conduct and relation to his sources, 4) rules of publication. Journalists interview informants every day and reproduce the information they have received in the media. There is a need for continuous moral assessment of how this is going to happen and what concerns ought to be given priority. Should the informants’ needs and desires prevail or those who think that the right to have extensive information is a social prerogative? There are considerable differences between the media which disseminate the new information, but the procedures followed when collecting, and the purpose of the work have many similarities. However, one difference seems to be that the museums may give greater weight to the wishes of the informants and to the interests of cultural groups. It also looks as if the population has more trust in museum employees than in journalists, which is of importance when people choose to contact a museum rather than the press.

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<sup>44</sup> This law, *Personopplysningsloven* in Norwegian, requires that research projects where sensitive personal information such as name, official reference number etc. is collected and stored, have to be reported to the National Data Service, NSD, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste.

<sup>45</sup> *Vær Varsom-plakaten* is an code of ethical practice used by newspaper editors in order to ensure that what they print is in accordance with socially accepted ethical standards. (Translator’s note)

## Relevant Research and Literature

When going to seminars and conferences devoted to the museums' societal role in Norway, one will easily get the impression that there is little awareness about the fact that work on contemporary, sensitive issues is going on in museums all over the world. In Europe, Britain has been in the lead for a long period of time. Among the most active centres here are the University of Leicester and The National Museums Liverpool. At the University of Leicester there have for several decades existed *museum studies* directed towards the museums' role in the society, also referred to as *social inclusion* or *social justice*. This University works closely with The National Museums Liverpool, an association of several institutions whose objectives are to promote social inclusion, cooperation with the local population, and *human rights*. However, other countries too have distinguished themselves within this field of activity. Courses and conferences are regularly being offered in most continents. Several scholars have published books of interest for all who are active within this field, others have specialized in specific aspects. New researchers working on the museums' societal role are being educated, and several of them are in the process of distinguishing themselves in a broader international setting. A lot of research has been devoted to various aspects of relevance, but a considerable amount of work is still left to be done. A short but incomplete survey of the status at the end of 2014 could look like the following:

### The Documentation of Contemporary Issues and “Social Inclusion”

Among the fields of work which are related to the question of truth are *oral history*, *minnepolitik* (literally: “policies of recollection” or “historical memory policy”) and the documentation of contemporary issues. These are among the traditional and well-known fields of work in most museums, and as a consequence there is a lot of literature written about them.<sup>46</sup> In Sweden several decades of work have been devoted to challenging aspects of today's society, and by extension the collecting of troublesome histories which people of today can narrate.<sup>47</sup> The interest for such topics had its origin in Great Britain, and in an overall perspective it is easy to see their connection to an increased effort to document contemporary issues, an intensified focus on the disagreeable stories and an ambition to direct the museums' activities towards all groups of people in the society.

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46 Among the publications there are also articles which display a critical attitude to the very concept of *samtidsdokumentasjon*, (literally: «documentation of contemporary issues»), and whatever is included in that within the different academic disciplines. Cf. e.g. Berkaak 2002.

47 Cf. e.g. Paulisch 2008; Silvé & Björklund 2006; Eriksen 1995b. In Germany there is a current discussion about how to make use of narratives from contemporary witnesses, so-called *Zeitzeugenberichte*, in the best possible way. As lately as the end of September 2010 a major conference on this theme was organized in the German city of Oldenburg, cf. Die Bundesregierung 2010.



To start from a basis where the wishes and needs of the population are pivotal has become known as *social inclusion*, *universell tilrettelegging* (literally: “universal adaptation” meaning to make the museum offers available to everyone, regardless of any disabilities), and *brukermedvirkning* (literally: “consumer contribution” meaning involvement and external cooperation).<sup>48</sup> This also implies an ambition of converting the museum into an open forum where all can feel they are welcome and visible.<sup>49</sup> In Great Britain and the USA *social inclusion* of the individual and of different social groups has been on the agenda since the 1990s, and today these trends have also reached the Nordic countries. Among those who have written extensively on this subject are Gaynor Kavanagh and Richard Sandell, the latter too an English Professor of Museology at the University of Leicester, which, by the way, emerges as a prominent institution for advanced studies within the fields of social inclusion and ethics in Britain. Among other things, the scientific publication *Museum & Society* has appeared in Britain three times a year since 2003.<sup>50</sup> This periodical brings forth studies of current activities and challenges at museums in Britain, the USA, Australia and the rest of the world. In the Nordic countries Swedish researchers and museum professionals distinguish themselves as particularly active within this field. In the wake of a series of seminars and an international conference in 2000, a comprehensive volume was published under the title *Museum 2000*. This volume offers a systematic survey of new fields of work at the museums and the challenges attached to these.<sup>51</sup> Admittedly, topics other than contemporary documentation and *social inclusion* are on its list of contents, but the very variety of the articles makes it clear how certain aspects have entered into a superior network of new fields of activity: Opening up for today’s social structures and for new social groups is an act directly connected to the social role, the handling and the interpretation of the collections, and the new moral challenges.<sup>52</sup>

Addressing all groups of the population is an ambition closely related to the fact that the museums have become increasingly aware of their role as important societal actors, which can and shall have an impact on the development of the society, a process which began as

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48 Cf. e.g. Paulisch 2008: 70-112; Kavanagh 1996; Sandell 2002a; Sandell 2012; Silvé & Björklund 2006; Simon 2009/2012; Janes 2012. The expectations and the rights of visitors are mentioned e.g. in Rand 2000/2012 and Lang, Reeve & Woollard 2006.

49 In this connection the concept of ‘identity’ is frequently referred to, i.e. how the museums can support the feeling of identity in a maximum number of social groups and individuals, cf. e.g. Gorbey 2001; Westman 2001.

50 Cf. University of Leicester 2013.

51 Ågren 2001b; Ågren 2001a.

52 At international conferences and seminars devoted to these themes, Norway is regularly represented, cf. e.g. Intercom, a subgroup of ICOM, which in September 2011 organized a four day conference on “Museum and Politics” in Copenhagen. Among other things the speakers dealt with questions concerning the role the museums are supposed to have in the society and how one can address difficult themes or human rights.

early as the 1980s in Britain and the USA.<sup>53</sup> Over the years new strategies have been devised with the purpose of directing the daily activity towards a maximum number of social groups and in particular towards those who in the past tended to be forgotten.<sup>54</sup> These include cultural minorities but also disabled persons or people suffering from dementia, whose access to museums has been hampered for years by the lack of appropriate accommodation.<sup>55</sup> The concept of *social inclusion* is founded on the assumption that inclusion presupposes that the personal ideas and topics which contribute to the development of one's own identity can be recognized in the museums' effort to disseminate. Achieving this requires a sharpened focus on the visitors' needs and readiness to contribute.<sup>56</sup> Several museums have started to invite the local community to take part in their exhibition projects in order to establish an arena where earlier forgotten social groups can present their opinions and points of view.<sup>57</sup> As an outcome of this it has been demonstrated that personal narratives represent an efficient method for promoting reflection among the visitors,<sup>58</sup> but also that cooperation with social groups locally may entail numerous challenges. Within the museums there is an ambition to create an arena for dialogue and reflection in and with the local community.<sup>59</sup> To find a solution as to how this is going to be implemented on the practical level is a time-consuming business. Various solutions have been brought up for discussion in the Nordic countries but with shifting focus and without coordination.<sup>60</sup> The English studies also include research done in order to find out how the museums can have an impact on individual lives, and here ethical

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53 The discussion about the social role of the museums has been going on in the USA since the beginning of the 1980s, but has been intensified as the interest has been more specifically directed towards forgotten groups in the society. Cf. e. g. Boyd 1991/2012. The discussion has also centred around the question whether the museums ought to open up for new social groups in order to follow up the trends which can be observed at other public institutions together with the need for increased income, i. e. what the reason is for internal changes in the museums. For this, cf. e.g. Ross 2004: 99-103. For newer Nordic publications on the role the museums can assume as an active moral operator in the society, cf. e.g. Cameron & Kelly 2010; Svanberg 2010. For further reference, cf. Tøndborg 2013: 4-7.

54 Sandell 2002a. There is a lot of literature dealing with «social inclusion», first and foremost from Britain, but also from other countries. Cf. for instance articles and lists of literature in Sandell 2002b. In an English master thesis which compares English and Norwegian museums' handling of social diversity, the conclusion is that the museums in Britain over the last ten years have dealt more efficiently with minorities and been more inclusive in their approach than museums in Norway - among other things because there are groups of immigrants who have lived longer in that country. On the whole there are several parallels between the work done in English and Norwegian museums. Cf. Folåsen 2008. ICOMs Code of Ethics has since 2000 also been used by AAM, The American Association of Museums, now referred to as The American Alliance of Museums, and Phelan 2006/2012 offers a survey of similarities in ethical approaches. That American and Norwegian museums have a comparable position with regard to societal remit and government control is clearly expressed in Boyd's article, cf. Boyd 1991/2012.

55 Cf. e.g. Sandell, Dodd & Garland-Thomson 2010; Sandell 2007; Bond, Coleman & Peace 1993; Bornat 1994.

56 Cf. among others Newmann & McLean 2002; Silverman 2002.

57 Cf. among others, Franco 2006; Bressey & Wareham 2010.

58 Cf. Franco 2006; Carnegie 2006.

59 Franco 2006: 6; Lagerkvist 2006: 52; 64-65. For further reference, cf. Janes 2009.

60 Here it is worth mentioning that Danish museums are working more on "social inclusion" after Britain paved the way. Furthermore, the attention paid to difficult end tabooed themes can be seen as a correlate of this and here Sweden was well ahead of Norway cf. e.g. Silvén & Björklund 2006. Universal adaptation of the museum's exhibition hall in response to the needs of disabled persons and increased access to new areas of the museums' activities, for instance via digital dissemination, are today among the priorities of museums in Norway as well as in Denmark and Sweden. Of Norwegian publications on consumer contribution and the needs of the audience are among others Brekke 2010a; Brekke 2010b. Naguib 2004 deals among others with estetic aspects related to the representation of "the others" in museal contexts.

and moral observations of the possible consequences of such influence are of great concern.<sup>61</sup> With only a handful of exceptions the focus has been directed towards influence as a product of learning and recognition among the visitors, whereas individuals who contribute to the museums' exhibitions have been neglected.<sup>62</sup>

## Dealing with Sensitive Issues

As mentioned earlier, the new societal role of the museums must be seen as the reflection of an increased political effort to promote the dissemination of historical topics. According to the objectives embedded in *Kunnskapsløftet*, pupils and students are to be trained in critical and problem-oriented thinking. To a considerable degree this implies taking a closer look at sensitive or controversial issues with particular attention paid to clear and unambiguous relations between the past and the present.<sup>63</sup> Within the historical disciplines there is a discussion going on about what measures will be most appropriate. Here too, a number of critical voices are asking questions as to whether the Government's policies are apt to bring about adequate procedures.<sup>64</sup> In Norway the historians' discussions have above all been focusing on World War II. The reflections coming from these scholars over how to handle the narratives of individuals are of importance also in a wider context concerning further work on sensitive topics in general.

To the museums inspiration came from abroad.<sup>65</sup> Norway's BRUDD-campaign is a result of trends coming from Sweden and Great Britain and can be seen as a logical consequence of the work devoted to contemporary issues and to social diversity - this is another way of understanding the concept of *social inclusion*.<sup>66</sup> Since the 1990s, dedicated attention has been paid in Sweden to the topic of troublesome recollections and how these can be handled by the museums.<sup>67</sup> In general terms the interest for the difficult aspects of History has grown continuously over the last decades, both at home and abroad. This can easily be observed when taking into account the large number of new memorials, research centres or museums disseminating Holocaust, which have been established across Europe.<sup>68</sup> There are innumerable books on Holocaust and the approaches it has been subjected to in the past and in the present, some of which have been angled towards the collection and representation of traumatic memories.<sup>69</sup> As already mentioned, there are many publications devoted to

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61 Cf. e.g. Sandell 2002a: 5 and Scott 2002: 47-51; Anderson 2012: 287-289.

62 An exception to this is for instance Carnegie 2006. Kavanagh too writes about "history exhibitions", which are based on the contributions of individuals, and "community involvement", but his eye is not directed towards specific, sensitive themes, cf. Kavanagh 2000: 141-147.

63 Cf. e.g. Lenz & Nilssen 2011.

64 Cf. e.g. Syse 2011; Ohman Nielsen 2011.

65 Cf. e.g. Storeide 2011; Ohman Nielsen 2011.

66 Cf. among others Norsk Kulturråd 2006; Kavanagh 2002; Sandell 2002b; Silvén & Björklund 2006.

67 Silvén & Björklund 2006: 7-8.

68 Jensen 2012: 17. For further reference, cf. among others Logan & Reeves 2009; Macdonald 2009.

69 Cf. e.g. Lehrer, Milton & Patterson 2011.

the “difficult” or “sensitive” narrative. These take up both general and specific challenges implied in drawing a picture of events which many people have experienced as traumatic.<sup>70</sup> Canadian Erika Lehrer, Professor of History and Anthropological Sociology at the University of Montreal, is among those who have specialized in the handling of traumatic memories and recollections in the aftermath of wars and major conflicts. In one of her newest publications she gives a survey of some of the challenges museum employees can encounter when they venture into “*curating difficult knowledge*”.<sup>71</sup>

There are certain publication projects of the BRUDD-campaign, among these are a few exhibition catalogues and some minor, unpublished documents, which summarize challenges and reflections taken down after the conclusion of specific projects.<sup>72</sup> Several publications of Swedish origin deal with work devoted to the handling of difficult topics at the museums; an example of this is *Svåra saker*, (literally: “Difficult Issues”), a book referring to objects which can trigger traumatic memories attached to difficult recollections or events. The Swedish ethnologists, Eva Silvéen and Eva Londos, who have worked a lot on the documentation of contemporary issues, are also worth mentioning in this context.<sup>73</sup> This concentration on objects and subjective recollections attached to them has been common practice both abroad and at Nordic museums over the last ten to fifteen years, and this is a field to which more and more work is devoted in Norway nowadays.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, one can now observe increased focus also on other topics which are being discussed in international studies. The periodical *Nordisk museologi*, (literally: “Nordic Museology”), devoted its second volume of 2013 to the theme “Museums and the Controversial”, and here a number of issues are brought forward which are also being discussed in Britain and the USA. Several of the articles show that the questions related to consumer participation, to museums as institutions of dialogue and, above all, to how subjective narratives can be used in museum exhibitions are now more frequently than before brought up for discussion in the Nordic countries.<sup>75</sup> What practical consequences the cooperation with individuals has and may have for the individuals involved, has up till now scarcely been investigated.<sup>76</sup> In 2009 a series of seminars named “Challenging History” was held in London with several dozen museum staff present. Here it was confirmed

70 Cf. e.g. Johnsen & Pabst 2011; Pabst 2011; Seland 2012; Jensen 2012.

71 This expression has been taken from a book with the same title, cf. Lehrer & alt. 2011.

72 Cf. e.g. Norsk Kulturråd 2006; Hamran & Lange 2012; Hamran & Lange 2013; Skogrand 2005; Rekdal 2006; Walle 2012; Olsen 2013; Ramskjær 2014.

73 Paulisch 2008; Silvéen & Björklund 2006; Hammarlund-Larsson, Nilsson & Silvéen 2004; Londos 2001; Londos 2009; Londos & Åkesson 2008. Of particular interest in the latter publication is the review of artist Lars Vilks’ exhibition of a roundel dog connected to the Prophet Muhammed, and its reactions in Sweden, cf. Wiklund 2009. Another scholar worth mentioning again is Jensen. Even though he does not write about museums, his publications devoted to «delicate narratives» are of relevance, cf. Jensen 2010: 182-191; Jensen 2012.

74 Cf. e.g. Edwards, Gosden & Phillips 2006; Berkaak 2002.

75 Tøndborg, Brenna & Silvéen 2013.

76 One exception to this is a recent article on one of the documentary projects at Teknisk Museum in Oslo, cf. Hamran & Lange 2013.

that the discussion concerning how museums can deal with and present exacting, difficult and sensitive issues is still going on.<sup>77</sup> Towards the end of November, 2012, an international conference with the title “Disturbing Past” was held in Vienna. Lecturers from all five continents took the rostrum, and Norway too was represented.<sup>78</sup> These seminars confirm that the work on controversial, sensitive themes as well as traumatic events of the past is of current interest to museum professionals and other disseminators of culture. Moreover, they signal that there is still a considerable need for sorting out certain aspects of importance, e.g. why museums should deal with such themes, what strategies they can apply in order to motivate visitors to respond positively to knowledge which may provoke feelings of discomfort, and why the narratives of individuals can be used as source material in such scenarios.

### **Collecting and Disseminating Traumatic Experiences**

There are many publications which provide theory for the handling of difficult and traumatic memories.<sup>79</sup> In Norway these publications are most often seen as contributions to the study of History in general, whereas several foreign publications are directly targeting the museums. In these it is emphasized that museums are just one category in a plethora of social institutions which deal with memories, and that the framework for the museums’ activities therefore has to be distinct and separated from those of other professions. Throughout the past decade, particularly in Britain and Canada, the moral challenges inherent in such activity have been highlighted, most often through the evaluation of specific exhibition projects which in Norway would be categorized as an outgrowth of the BRUDD-campaign.<sup>80</sup> In contrast to what has been practised in Norway, psychological theories have often been applied to help foresee possible reactions from the contributors and the visitors.<sup>81</sup> At the centre of interest are also questions asking how and why recollections change over time. The same applies to questions concerning whether and how one can distinguish between *recovered memories* and *false memories*.<sup>82</sup>

In her treatise on *social inclusion* Kavanagh gives a summary of a number of the challenges museum professionals encounter when dealing with personal experiences of traumatic nature.<sup>83</sup> She mentions for example the unpredictable dimension of all direct contact with other people, who often turn out to have patterns of reaction different from those one could

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77 Kidd 2011.

78 The Open University 2013. For further reference, cf. Ramskjær 2014.

79 Cf. e.g. 2012: 16-17; Antze & Lambek, 1996; Ågren, 2001b; Kavanagh, 2002: 116; Rosenzweig & Thelen 1998; Bennett 2004a; Lehrer et al. 2011.

80 In Kavanagh 2002: 116-119 several authors and studies are mentioned. Sandell 2011: 141-142 mentions that visitors tend to be more strongly affected if the voices of the museums are combined with personal narratives, without going further into details here.

81 Cf. e.g. Bond et al. 1993; Bornat 1994; Kavanagh 1990; Kavanagh 2002; Kavanagh 2000: 6-7.

82 The quotation is the title of a book, cf. Conway 1997. For further reference, cf. Conway 1999.

83 Kavanagh 2002.

expect. Another issue of hers is the pitfalls museum professionals may stumble into if they do not approach the challenges with particular circumspection.<sup>84</sup> Here she concentrates her argument on what reactions the recollection of traumatic events can trigger, not only in the individuals the museums are working with or are trying to reach, but also in the descendants of contributors or of visitors in general. Whether the framework of the exhibition paves the way for processes of recollection which have a positive or negative impact on individuals or the society in general, depends on a number of factors which can often be unforeseeable. This is something she goes deeper into in her book *Dream Spaces* from 2000 where she deals extensively with process as well as product: On their way towards the narrative, i.e. in the course of the process, museum professionals may encounter just as many challenges as they do when handling a complete narrative, i.e. the final product.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, Kavanagh outlines the interaction between the museums, which open up for personal narratives, and the individuals who contribute.<sup>86</sup> Canadian Roger I. Simon, emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto, has done a lot of research on museum exhibitions devoted to difficult topics and traumatic memories.<sup>87</sup> He takes a closer look at how difficult topics can be given a presentation which combines an optimum rendition of some personal experience with a scientifically correct dissemination of facts. In a comparative survey of museum exhibitions and their procedures and presentation techniques he points out what challenges may occur. Two of his articles on “difficult exhibitions” are of particular relevance here. They are based on interviews with museum employees and give a survey covering a number of important issues.<sup>88</sup> One of the conclusions he draws is that exhibitions devoted to difficult and tabooed topics can contribute to a better understanding of the “dark” sides of History and thereby open for important changes, now and in years to come, because they trigger strong emotions and move many people in a very personal and *intimate* manner. As a consequence, museums and museum professionals must pay even more attention to the moral and ethical challenges which are implied in the work devoted to such topics.<sup>89</sup>

## Research Done on How to Disseminate

A lot of work has been devoted to possibilities and challenges implied in the dissemination which museums practise. Worth mentioning here is some literature dealing with exhibitions as a variety of dissemination, and by extension, a survey of what it takes to reach the visitors

<sup>84</sup> Kavanagh 2002: 111.

<sup>85</sup> Kavanagh 2000: 5, 79-80.

<sup>86</sup> Kavanagh 2002: 120; Kavanagh 2000. Kavanagh approaches the work on traumatic memories on a more general level and does not specifically address a process of collection for minor exhibitions.

<sup>87</sup> Simon 2011b.

<sup>88</sup> Bonnell & Simon 2007; Simon 2011b.

<sup>89</sup> Bonnell & Simon 2007: 80-81.

and make sure the intended message is successfully put across.<sup>90</sup> The value of opinion polls has been studied at home and abroad. The same applies to the question of how technological devices can be utilized in order to reach new social groups.<sup>91</sup> In Britain Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, emeritus Professor of Museology, has a predominant position. She is the author of a large number of publications within the field of museum pedagogy. Of studies of interest done in the Nordic countries are two Danish master theses which take a closer look at the use of interactive media in exhibitions devoted to children in orphanages.<sup>92</sup> Here is outlined how interactive media - first and foremost the internet but also other technological devices - have been used actively in museums of cultural history since the beginning of the 1990s, i. a. as a response to the progress of the industry of entertainment.<sup>93</sup> The possibility of giving supplementary information adapted to the needs of the individual visitor is mentioned as one of the major advantages, and so is the opportunity to get in touch with the visitors and let them contribute to the theme and the purport of the exhibition.<sup>94</sup> A simple method described is to use a web site, which encourages people to write down the memories of their own experiences. In this way it is possible to reach people who are moved by the theme of the exhibition but normally would not be inclined to express themselves publicly.

However, there seems to be a lack of investigation into the question of why museum professionals prefer one particular angling of a theme or a specific method of dissemination at the expense of others, and how the public respond to the choices that have been made.<sup>95</sup> Even scarcer is the information about the background for problem-oriented exhibitions and the preparations they require when the topic is from a field into which the museum employees have done no research of their own.<sup>96</sup> There are some evaluations of Norwegian exhibitions which have been based on research projects conducted under the auspices of external institutions, i.e. where museum employees work as disseminators together with researchers for the purpose of deciding what is going to be exhibited and how it can be presented in the

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90 This concerns mainly international literature from Great Britain, Australia and the USA, cf. for instance McLean 1993; Hooper-Greenhill 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 2004; Ames, Franco & Frye 1992; Hooper-Greenhill 2004 parts III and IV. About the significance of physical objects in biographical exhibitions, cf. among others Albano 2007. One of the newest Norwegian publications in this field deals with the University museums and their possibilities of dissemination, cf. Maurstad & Hauan 2012; Storaas 2012; Steffensen 2012; Christensen 2012. In this book many of the problems also mentioned in international literature are discussed. Brenna 2012: 231-234, emphasizes in her conclusion that the work done at University museums is not necessarily different from the work done at other museums of cultural history.

91 Cf. e.g. Samis 2008/2012; McLean 1993; Falk 2010/2012; Hooper-Greenhill 1996; Hooper-Greenhill 2001; Hooper-Greenhill 2004; Brekke 2010b; Frøyland, Håberg & Brekke 2008.

92 Karkov 2006; Hansen 2004.

93 Hansen 2004: 4-13.

94 Karkov 2006: 63-71. For further reference, cf. Witcomb 2012; Simon 2012.

95 Eriksen 2009: 182. In international literature there are several studies which shed light on the fact that the visitors (audience) want to feel comfortable and how museum professionals try to give them this feeling in spite of the fact that the topic itself can be challenging, cf. e.g. Tyson 2008; Smith 2010; Brown 2013. In Nordic literature there is a treatment of this for instance in Tinning 2013.

96 Eriksen 2009: 194.

best possible way.<sup>97</sup> Among the things emphasized here is the necessity for all parties involved to compromise in order to find joint solutions. Other issues of concern are the importance the press has attached to the marketing of the exhibition and the fact that the reception of an exhibition always depends on the interaction with the public.<sup>98</sup> Several international studies underline how important it is to apply the right method of dissemination when an audience is supposed to respond meaningfully to difficult topics.

## Professional Ethics at the Museums

A survey of national and international literature devoted to professional ethics at museums of cultural history shows that Norwegian literature on this topic is scarce. ICOM *Code of Ethics* is more or less the only example. If we look to other countries the situation is different. Since the 1980s moral challenges of relevance to museums have been on the agenda first and foremost in Great Britain and the USA. The publications here are directly targeting museum employees as professionals,<sup>99</sup> at the same time as they in a more general scope deal with the museums' societal role.<sup>100</sup> Crucial aspects here are moral challenges attached to a public demand for more "transparency", the question of how to optimize leadership at museums, exhibitions and the audience's role in these, marketing, collecting,<sup>101</sup> the use of technological devices for dissemination, or cooperation with external partners. A considerable number of articles highlight ethical challenges implied in scientific projects,<sup>102</sup> but only a handful deal with theoretical approaches to moral challenges or dilemmas. Exceptions to this are publications by Gay Edson, Professor of Museology, Judith C. Stark, Professor of Philosophy, and Janet Marstine, Director of Museological Studies at the University of Leicester, UK. In several articles Edson investigates the most typical moral challenges which museums as institutions and museum employees as professionals ought to ponder upon.<sup>103</sup> The book offers many interesting perspectives but is above all concerned with the handling of physical objects. In one of her articles devoted to museum ethics Stark mentions among other things perspectives derived from utilitarianism, deontological theory of ethics and virtue ethics.<sup>104</sup> The article seems to be one of a very small number which deals with how ethical theories can be applied when museum employees are confronted with moral challenges. Among

97 Hemstad 2000.

98 Hemstad 2000: 138-139; Kavanagh 2000.

99 Cf. Kavanagh 1990; Kavanagh 1991; Fleming, Paine & Rhodes 1993; Kavanagh 1994. In Kavanagh 1996a there is a survey of relevant publications covering certain fields of work, only until 1995 though. I shall come back to each of the concepts later.

100 Cf. e.g. Sandell 2011; Marstine 2006; Knell, McLeod & Watson 2007; Lindqvist 2001.

101 Cf. among others Edson 1997f; Marstine 2011a; Marstine 2011b: xxiii; Marstine, Bauer & Haines 2013a; Marstine 2011c; Ocello 2011. One of the seminars held late in 2012 dealt with the question of how actively the museums are supposed to assume their social role, cf. «Museums, Ethics and Social Justice» 2012.

102 Cf. e.g. Wong 2013; Meijer-van Mensch 2013; Brown 2013; Bradburne 2011; Gardner 2011.

103 Edson 1997d; Edson 1997b; Edson 1997a; Edson 1997e; Edson 1997c.

104 Stark 2011: 28-29. For further reference, cf. Edson 1997f.



other things it emphasizes that the need for ethical consideration increases as the focus on contemporary issues and societal role is intensified.<sup>105</sup> Stark argues that museum employees ought to be trained in ethical reasoning and suggests quite specifically certain issues which can be examined in order to identify what she calls “ethical dilemmas”. Moreover, she takes a closer look at the different options for response and their consequences.<sup>106</sup> However, she gives no concrete examples and does not address challenges related to my investigation. Furthermore, Stark argues in favour of using discursive ethics if a theoretical approach to the question of how the museums can fulfill their societal role is applied - an approach based on the assumption that different parties have a need for being heard/want to be heard.<sup>107</sup>

By and large the conclusion seems to be that ethical guidelines can only be utilized and developed if one accepts that they will always appear as too static with regard to the practical issues to which they are going to be applied.<sup>108</sup> Marstine has a background as editor of several of the newest publications. She draws special attention to the importance of individual professionals who are looking for adequate operational strategies which can help them handle practical cases with more skill. These are the ones who give momentum to the progress of this profession and open up for a broader understanding for and a more comprehensive approach to ethical challenges.<sup>109</sup> At the same time there is a need for a common understanding of how the profession can take on new challenges.

“Twenty-first century museum ethics acknowledges the moral agency of museums, ‘the concept that museum ethics is more than the personal and professional ethics of individuals and concerns the capacity of institutions to create social change.’ It frames museum ethics as an opportunity for growth, rather than a duty of compliance.”<sup>110</sup>

In other words there is a need for a general, acknowledged moral code for museums, which still gives latitude for individual judgment and different approaches to the manifold activities of the profession.

There are several studies and publications - mainly English and American, but increasingly also Nordic - which shed light on important aspects of the work devoted to sensitive issues. Case studies are in the majority, while theory and method more and more are put on the agenda. An increasing number of studies highlight the need for letting moral and ethical standards serve as a basis for the handling of individuals and of sensitive or controversial issues, a view my own studies also corroborate.

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<sup>105</sup> Stark 2011: 28.

<sup>106</sup> Stark 2011: 31-32.

<sup>107</sup> Stark 2011: 34-36. In a footnote in my chapter on theory I shall shortly explain why I cannot completely endorse her ideas concerning this specific point.

<sup>108</sup> Marstine 2013: 8; Marstine 2011a. For further reference, cf. Bestermann 2006; Boylan 2006.

<sup>109</sup> Marstine, Bauer & Haines 2013b.

<sup>110</sup> Marstine 2013: 8. The inserted quotation is from a previous article of hers, cf. Marstine 2011b: xxiii.

# 3

## Seven Exhibitions

What follows now is a deep-dive into my empirical study. What was the theme of the selected exhibitions and what is the reaction of the project managers, the project associates, the directors, or the people who have contributed to the exhibition with their narratives? There are many exhibitions on sensitive topics around the world, and as many project managers. My criteria for selection were rather pragmatic: among the most important ones were knowledge about the exhibitions, their utility value for the research questions, and easy access. The exhibitions are introduced continuously from one to the other, and without summing up similarities and differences on the way. This is a deliberate choice to render visible the breadth and depth of the working processes which have been far more extensive than I can report here. The reader will probably recognize the challenges which one may have experienced oneself in a similar or other context, and based upon own experiences and interests one notices distinctive features in the exhibitions.

As project manager for one of the *BRUDD*-projects, I knew of several *BRUDD*-exhibitions in other museums in Norway. As a German, I knew of the Wehrmacht Exhibition and the reactions this caused in Germany. I had read about the orphanage-exhibition in Denmark in a newspaper and thought the repercussions the exhibition had had for former orphans in that institution were particularly interesting. For me the most important aspect was that the purposes and the results of the exhibitions I had chosen could complement each other and not that the exhibitions were as similar as possible. I wanted the widest possible scope, in view of what had been challenging in the process and therefore chose exhibitions where different challenges seemingly were especially prominent, at the same time as the choice fell on exhibitions I to a certain degree could place in similar categories. The exhibition *Min kropp - min sannhet* was for instance one it was important to include because the exhibition was made to learn more about the possibilities of cooperation between the Museum and the local community. The exhibition *Våre Hellige Rom* was focused on religion, with the same theme that I wanted to discuss in a new exhibition. Two exhibitions were foreign, four were Norwegian. All four Norwegian exhibitions were in some way connected to the *BRUDD*-project. Two of the six exhibitions were managed by a museum employee who had done research on the topic; in two other exhibitions an external consultant was engaged. The cooperation with individuals was prominent in four of the exhibitions. In one of them I was myself project manager, as I became in the seventh, subsequent exhibition.

All the selected exhibitions had, however, some central characteristics. A sensitive topic was introduced, the employees had to relate to several parties who each had concrete needs

or demands, and the work required a reflection over own morals and professionalism. All exhibitions have contributed to acquiring an insight into the central, superior factors which were relevant to the individual employee's choice of action, independent of how the different factors developed quite specifically. As this argument shows, the selection cannot be considered as representative. The volume is too small, and it is based upon my knowledge of the exhibitions and consequently on several coincidences. I nevertheless hold that the complex of themes illuminated in the six exhibitions and in the working processes behind them, give sufficient scope and foundation for a discussion of moral challenges and how the individual handles these challenges. This is the case because first and foremost, I am interested in my informants' thoughts and actions. These are indeed embedded in the plan of action itself, related to specific framework conditions, but can in my view be lifted to a more general level, since the basic framework conditions are relatively similar. For example, Norway, Denmark, and Germany have a cultural-political organization which to a certain degree encourages both keeping "the others" at arm's length, and a professional freedom in the individual institutions, even though there are differences in the more concrete ways of organizing the cultural field.<sup>111</sup> Working methods in sheer museum institutions or in an institute of social research may differ in the daily work, even though the employees belong to the same professional tradition and have a similar education. My research questions are directed towards the moral assessment which lies behind the choices for action and thereby towards a more general view of how the employees perceive their roles as professionals in an institution with a political mandate. This is brought to the fore in the selection of exhibitions which this survey is based upon.

## **An Exhibition about Children in an Orphanage, Svendborg Museum, Denmark**

Dansk Forsorgsmuseum is located in a former workhouse in Svendborg and directs its work towards earlier living conditions in different institutions. (The word "forsorg" in Danish means "social assistance"). Forsorgsmuseet works actively with *social inclusion*.<sup>112</sup> In 2002 the exhibition *Du skal ikke tænke på din Far og Mor* opened, the first in Denmark to consider the living conditions of Danish children in orphanages over a period from 1630 and up to ca. 1960.<sup>113</sup>

111 Cf. Norsk kulturråd 2014: 40 - 43 and Mangset 2012: 10 - 11. The main difference lies in the way the work and responsibility connected to the allocation of means and the follow-up of guidelines are divided between the Ministry of Culture and a semi-cultural agency. In Denmark for instance, a larger part of own capital is required compared to Norway, at the same time as more money is given to the museums without being followed by concrete guide lines. At the same time, Danish museums must, as mentioned earlier, comply with the Danish "Museumsloven". To a great extent this law regulates the work. Germany has a political-administrative structure where the responsibility of follow-up action is placed on a regional level.

112 Svendborg Museum was formerly known as Svendborg & Omegns Museum.

113 Information was collected during a visit to Dansk Forsorgsmuseum in August 2009 and from written prospectuses from Svendborg Museum.

The exhibition was prepared by a museum inspector who had done research in the topic over several years.<sup>114</sup> It was based on objects, photographs, interviews with nearly 60 former children in orphanages, and documentation from more than 30 former children- and youth homes.<sup>115</sup> The exhibition space was in 2009 relatively limited, ca. 200 square metres, and the subject matter of the exhibition, in addition to a lot of extended information, was also disseminated via the Internet and the exhibition home page.<sup>116</sup> The web page also functioned as a contact forum for everyone who was interested in or wanted to contribute to the topic. The page was better visited than the exhibition itself. The number of visitors at the exhibition itself was low compared to the repercussions the exhibition had provoked. Most of the visitors expressed the view that the exhibition was upsetting and stirring, and that the photographic material emphasized what the children had missed or were exposed to in an effective way. A room with newspaper clippings from the social debate that the exhibition had triggered constituted an important part of the exhibition.

From a general point-of-view the research and the exhibition of the living conditions of children brought up in care marked the beginning of a long and extensive process in Denmark, highlighting the theme. When the first research findings from the museum employees showed that the living conditions had been very poor and that there was little information from the children themselves, Danish national television showed a documentary based upon the above mentioned findings. In connection with the film, it was mentioned that the museum wanted to get in contact with former children in the orphanage who were willing to communicate their own experiences. This was the beginning of a chain reaction which led to the exhibition being based upon the personal narratives of several scores of people. Many of these told that they never before had talked about this and that their experiences were so painful and infested with shame that not even their nearest family members knew of them. The museum inspector was on account of his professional competence in the field, repeatedly interviewed when new information about bad conditions in orphanages was made public.

The documentary and the coming forward of some former children in orphanages made it possible for more and more children to dare talk about their experiences, and the living conditions of children in orphanages in the post-war period gradually became part of public life in Denmark, regularly illuminated in different media publications. In 2005 the

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114 Rytter 2011; Rytter 2002; Rytter 1998; Rytter 2001; 2003. The research was in large measure financed by Sygekassernes Helsefond.

115 Children in orphanages were commonly called "children without a history" because there was so little known information about them. The expression is adopted from Forsorgsmuseet 2002.

116 Cf. Dansk forsorgsmuseum 2013.

children who had been brought up in care founded their own special interest organization, Godhavnsdrenge, and the organization's web pages have up to 2009 had more than 650.000 visitors.<sup>117</sup>

In connection with my study of *Du skal ikke tænke på din Far og Mor*, I have visited the exhibition and carried through three interviews: one with the museum inspector, who was also the manager of the exhibition, and two with individuals who had contributed to the exhibition with personal narratives. In addition, the one person behind Godhavnsdrenge was interviewed. The project manager, a historian and anthropologist in the beginning of her 60s, was employed at Forsorgsmuseet, partly as a free-lancer, partly in a permanent position. The individuals I met were a woman and a man in the middle of their 70s, and the person behind the organization Godhavnsdrenge, was a man in the middle of his 60s.

### **The Museum Internally and Externally**

According to the project manager, the museums in Denmark were in 2009 still characterized by their tendency to treat the history of the “upper classes”. Not many museums were engaged in working with excluded groups or minorities. She maintained that her job as a museum employee was “to serve the public”. By saying this, she meant among other things that also the history of those forgotten must be lifted up, and that she was at their disposal when people had questions she was competent to answer. Concerning the history of the children in orphanages, she was the only employee in the museum who worked with this topic, who had done research in this field, and who answered questions from former children in orphanages, as well as from the press. She was free to work in the way she found appropriate. To be sure, she worked under the supervision of the museum director, but he assisted with counsel and support only when she asked for it.

The project manager told about a flow of enquiries from the moment the documentary was shown until many years later. It soon became apparent that many people needed time before they dared approach the museum; often she heard about newspaper clippings which were stored for several years before people contacted her. This supported the impression she had had during the interviews. It was very demanding for the people involved to talk about their own experiences or to ask for information about their parents or their own upbringing - and demanding for her to receive so many strong narratives. She used nearly three years to answer the many hundred enquiries she got after the opening of the exhibition, but emphasizes that using time to respond to enquiries was an important part of her professional understanding: If a museum initiates a project with such a sensitive and extensive theme, including so many people, it is a moral duty to follow up the work. Anything else would show a lack of respect

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<sup>117</sup> Godhavnsdrenge 2013.

towards the group of people affected. This view was based upon a thorough reflection over the responsibility she had as a scientist and museum employee, in addition to a moral understanding which partly was rooted in her own upbringing, partly derived from own experiences and partly from her own research in the field.

## **Cooperation with External Contributors**

The project manager was clear in her attitude of not being willing to initiate direct contact with individuals and explained this by referring to her fundamental respect for people who may have been exposed to traumatic incidents. She was therefore grateful for all the inquiries which came after the televised report. Here, she heard stories of children who were given away because the mother's new boyfriend did not like them, of children who were chained to their beds at night, of children who were exposed to physical abuse, and of children who for years were given insufficient or bad food. Several of those who approached her, began to cry on the phone or during the personal encounter, some of them to the extent that the interview had to be cancelled. In the beginning she reacted with such strong compassion that she in some cases suggested further contact with a psychologist to analyse the memories. She brought this reaction to an abrupt end after one of her informants had rejected her in this way: "I don't need a psychologist, I need a historian". The project manager quickly noted that it was more than enough to show interest, demonstrate respect, and listen to what the involved persons wanted to tell, and that most people reacted with astonishment and gratitude when a museum employee was actually interested in their story.<sup>118</sup>

*It is such a trap, that we try to meddle in people's stories [...]. It is so wrong. You should never do that. You should absolutely never [...] start to repair and meddle or bring up own examples. You should be a neutral historian who records and registers what is told, and only that, that a historian, that a scientist from a museum which is seen as something posh, is in itself enough to make the person who is telling the story feel that [...] there is respect.*

By and by she learnt that she should not take a stand on judicial questions or whether personal narratives were true or not. A museum employee's job is not to decide if a principal has carried out the misdeeds which are mentioned. At the same time, one should never question what an individual reports as personal experience. One should simply never take a stand

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118 Two of the exhibitions were foreign, and the quotations have been translated from Danish and German into Norwegian - and then into English. As a German the author has translated the German quotations she uses in the main text into Norwegian, and also the Danish quotations she has translated herself. In the latter case, it was done to make the text more fluent. All the same, the quotations may appear as somewhat mixed since they are the author's free translation with accompanying transcriptions of oral interviews into Norwegian. The translation of the author's published Norwegian text from Norwegian into English has been done by the translators.

judicially, neither one way nor the other. Since she was very conscious of these self-made, unwritten rules, she did not feel responsible for unforeseen incidents after the meeting, as for example when the individual did not cope with the memories which suddenly flowed in. According to the project manager, the responsibility of the employee lies only in the direct contact of the moment and does not exist later, connected to possible future repercussions. Having reflected over this and reasoned out such conclusions, she had helped herself a long way towards acting professionally and tackle the often heartbreaking stories of children who had been exposed to serious abuse. She told that she never wept during the interviews, but many times when she returned home. After many years of experience, her professionalism in the direct meeting got the upper hand, but she often needed talks with colleagues or her spouse afterwards to sort out her own feelings and impressions.

### **A Contributor's point of view**

A woman who contributed to the exhibition, told about her conversation with the project manager from her point-of-view. Her daughter had tipped her off about the museum's appeal to get in contact with former children from orphanages. Only her children and her nearest family knew that she early in her life had been placed in an orphanage. The shame she felt having lived in such an institution and the experiences she had there, made it impossible to tell others about it. Her daughter persuaded her to contact the museum and thought it was time to stop feeling ashamed of something she should not be ashamed of. Still, the woman had to get therapeutic assistance before she dared approach the museum, and brought her sister with her to the interview. All the same, the very act of relating to what she had experienced became so strong that both sisters wept intensely during the interview.

When I called her more than seven years after the opening of the exhibition, it became immediately evident that the topic was still very sensitive and sore. The woman began to cry several times during the interview. Both the answers and the way she answered my questions, clearly showed that the memories were vivid and difficult to handle. Concerning the interview situation in the museum, she told that the project manager had been a good listener, the correct questions had been asked, and she was met with respect. Some of her strongest feelings were still tied to a memory book which she later lent to the museum in order to have it exhibited:

*It was precious to me. I had got it from my mother, regardless of her wanting me or not. But nobody was to see that the name of 'Høng barnehjem' was written in the book, so I blotted that out. And a girl had signed "foster sister". I wrote "cousin" instead.<sup>119</sup>*

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119 Samvirke COOP 2004: 13. Author's translation.

It made her proud that her memory book became part of the exhibition: “Think that you could be somebody after you had lived in an orphanage”<sup>120</sup> Just the fact that she was “allowed” to tell how the important the book was and relate the rest of her history, she experienced as a “pat on the back” and a “kind of restitution”. The shame of having been a child in an orphanage gradually passed into pride that she was “one of them”. All the same, the interview situation was a bigger strain than expected, and the woman afterwards wished that a professional psychologist had been present, in addition to the project manager:

*You should be attentive to the fact that you walk around, carrying a grief and that you might well break down (obviously shaken), I don't think they are prepared for that. When you are about to tell your story [...] (crying) then there comes a bit of sorrow [...] it touches something inside you when you are relating something (crying).*<sup>121</sup>

Talking about her childhood and being part of the exhibition, she nevertheless experienced this as something good and important for her present life. She was not interested in meeting other children from orphanages afterwards or to join special interest organizations. “It was right to open up, but you should not stay part of that”.

The man who contributed to the exhibition was less scared of talking about his experiences and has even spoken about them. He stated the reason for his contact with the project manager in the following way:

*Here there was a possibility of contributing to the writing of history. [...] An exhibition [...] where a part of my material and my statements are used, a splendid way of getting a real message through and you could perhaps with that scotch possible myths.*

To add, he had a message to all who had been placed in an orphanage: “Never keep silent about the truth of your upbringing [...]. It is far too difficult for you to live your life in hiding”. He observes clear differences between the museum and the press who got more and more interested in his narrative. The media must be regarded as fickle, while the *museum* “must be regarded as a more permanent and material conserving institution”. The cooperation with the museum was characterized by respect and interest, and this was in agreement with the demands he had, that “you handle my information with the same respect and honesty they were transferred with”. Museum employees must be good listeners, and never arrogant on account of their education; the credibility of individuals should never be doubted. He was in no doubt that the museums gain by cooperating with individuals. Often they were capable of contributing with knowledge and information which the museum employees could not know of, or actually had not noticed.

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<sup>120</sup> Samvirke COOP 2004: 14.

<sup>121</sup> Author's comment in brackets.



I want to include in this connection a third person who founded a special interest organization for all former children in orphanages after having seen the documentary. Until then he had not talked to anybody except his live-in partner about his childhood which was marked by living in different orphanages. He told that he had had few friends; he had for the most part kept to himself and had mostly not talked to his siblings - who had also grown up in orphanages - about what he had experienced: “We didn’t talk about it [...] it was after all a shame to be in an orphanage”. Therefore it meant a lot to him when he saw the televised report. When he became aware of the fact that a museum had brought forward the topic and wanted to initiate an exhibition about it, it led to him making contact with the project manager without delay: A museum was in his eyes a respectable institution of high esteem. Through the museum’s web pages he got in touch with others who had been placed in the same orphanages as he, and he describes this as a turning-point in his life: “Instead of psychologists, we have used each other”. For the first time he felt that somebody understood him fully. The feeling and the certainty that the others had struggled with the same challenges as he had, he described as unique and as the actual foundation for true friendship. This has led to a heightened quality of life and to such a degree that he was willing to spend the greater part of his own working days to help others in the same situation.

The special interest group has grown and the web page has many visitors. The man told of a comprehensive cooperation with similar special interest organizations in other countries. In 2009 he daily followed up more than 100 enquiries on the organization’s web pages. He spent a corresponding amount of time talking to human beings who had been exposed to the same kind of incidents as he had. He had the impression that there were still many who wanted to remain anonymous because they felt that the memories were so infested with shame that they could hardly talk about it. He was in no doubt that it was important to open up for the memories: He had himself got a totally new life through contact with other human beings who shared his experiences.

### **The Angling of the Theme and the Choice of the Dissemination Method**

The angling of the theme and choice of a method of dissemination in the exhibition was thoroughly described in a master thesis which discussed the use of interactive media, for instance in the exhibition of children in orphanages.<sup>122</sup> Here one may read that the exhibition consisted of objects, boards, and a room furnished with four computers, i.e. so-called interactive media. Strong words appeared on introductory and more general boards, for example “awful”, “dreadful”, “inhuman”, or headlines like “anxiety”, and made it clear that the exhibition wanted to affect the visitors and that it disapproved of the abuses the children had been exposed to. The narratives the museum had received from former children in

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<sup>122</sup> Hansen 2004.

orphanages were related on other boards. The texts were so personal that an emotional bond was established between the visitors and the children from the orphanages.<sup>123</sup>

According to the project manager, the angling and the method of dissemination came “naturally” after she had interviewed the former children in orphanages. In a large measure the exhibition was made to show respect for those involved, and consequently it was important for her to bring forth the perspectives of the involved parties. At the same time, the exhibition was planned to appear as visually “elegant”, fine, and attractive. An exhibition about the children of orphanages ought to be as fine as an exhibition about “the Crown Prince”, not least as it was produced in a former poor house. Video recordings instead of texts had not fitted into the concept, but it was important for her to bring in physical objects. Several moral challenges were attached to such a starting point:

*Should I describe one of the big dilemmas from the building up of the exhibition of orphanages, I must concede that sad stories or physical objects - windows with bars, cell doors, and little souvenirs from childhood - were also good stories. Here I really had to find a balance, both in my compassionate relation to my informants and in my dissemination of the problems. [...] Besides, another paradox was embedded in the fact that even though the exhibition was filled with photographs of happy children in orphanages, photographed by staff members through 100 years, the pictures did not contradict the children's statements. On the contrary, they seemed to strengthen the impression of loneliness and horror.<sup>124</sup>*

The project manager also remembered some of the other central moral challenges in the working process. Among other things she got a photograph of a boy taking a shower while an adult is standing beside him, staring at him. An interpretation might be that he was sexually interested in the boy. Should the man in the picture be clipped out, or should he not? The project manager had no reason to think that the man was a pedophile, and chose to delete him from the picture to avoid misunderstandings. At the same time, she deliberately changed the photograph and its content; the picture lost much of its basis for interpretation. She told further that it had become a challenge to find the right balance between the wish of the former children in orphanages to appear with picture and name in the exhibition, and her own wish to protect them against the general public and the reaction of others. She wanted to guard them against being contacted by others, for example children of principals who had carried the responsibility of the orphanage. Such a contact, or enquiry from others who would suggest that the personal narratives were not true, could become a heavy burden for the individuals, and she saw it as her obligation to guard them against this. She found it, however,

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123 Hansen 2004: 35.

124 Additional information received in an e-mail from the informant, posted the day after the interview.

morally difficult to decide if this was a responsibility that the museum ought to shoulder, or if the anonymization would contribute to upholding the taboos surrounding the theme of the exhibition.<sup>125</sup>

### **Reactions from the Contributors, the Public and the Press**

The interest of the media for the exhibition was considerable already from the start, and new aspects connected to the living conditions in the orphanages, have repeatedly appeared both on TV, on the radio, and in the press.<sup>126</sup> Not least other cultural institutions had their eyes opened to the kind of material which could be found in their own archives, and the museum gradually received information of a considerable amount of material which nobody had investigated before. According to the project manager, the press has been of invaluable help and has proved to be “a fantastic support”. The attention of the press has led to the museum becoming known and able to position itself in society as a support for the population groups they want to tell about. This has in its turn resulted in increased grants and thereby better possibilities of employing more people, e.g. to improve the web pages. The individuals who have contributed to the exhibition, report of solely positive reactions from family and friends. Nobody seems to regret having taken part in the project; on the contrary the participation is described as fundamentally important in their lives.

The museum also received some enquiries from children of former principals in the orphanages. The children were not able to recognize their parents in the persons who in the exhibition were portrayed in a negative way and demanded that the information must be excluded. The project manager especially remembers one example: One photograph shows clearly that the children got different and far worse food than the principal himself. The principal's child demanded that the photograph should be removed. The project manager refused to do this, since there were several indications that what was shown in the picture, was correct and did not represent an isolated incident. But she was willing to put a black stripe over the principal's eyes, so that the person could not be identified. Such reactions most often came from the principals' descendants and seldom from the principals themselves.

The project manager finally concluded that the exhibition's goal was met: Society and its members had acquired a better understanding of a hitherto unknown part of Danish history and its consequences for many people.

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125 Samvirke COOP 2004: 14.

126 In the Danish Forsorgsmuseum 2006, TV-avisen 2002, TV2 Nyheter 2004 and 2005, TV2 Fyn Nyheter 2002, 2004, 2005, TV2-Lorry and TV2 2005 are mentioned. Fairly long reports (2 x 50 min.) were broadcast on the radio in 2003, and otherwise in Radio Fyn, Radio Syd and Kanal 94 since 2002. All the newspapers in the country have covered the activities in the museum, e.g. *Samvirke* (2004), *Socialpædagogen* (2002, 2004), *Børn og Unge* (2004), *Helse* (2002), *Dansk Service* (2005), and *Jyllandsposten*, *Politiken*, *Fyns Stiftstidende*, *Kommunen* et al.

## **The Wehrmacht Exhibition at Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (HIS), Germany**

The Wehrmacht Exhibition, *Wehrmachtausstellung* in German, consisted of two travelling exhibitions which were shown one after the other; the first from March 1995 till November 1999, the second (revised) from November 2001 till March 2004.<sup>127</sup> Behind the exhibitions stood several HIS researchers and external expert consultants. By means of extensive photographic material the exhibition showed that the misdeeds of the Wehrmacht during the Second World War to some extent were worse than had previously been recognized. Since the 1960s several studies have addressed this topic without having reached a major public.<sup>128</sup> The exhibition was made available free of charge to partners who wanted to show it in their respective cities, and combined the information, which at that time was common knowledge, with new, original documents, first and foremost a considerable number of photographs taken by Wehrmacht soldiers themselves during the war. The material was put into order and presented with regard to the geographical locations where the Wehrmacht's misdeeds were supposed to have taken place.

The headlines used in the exhibition were specific and deliberately explicit, for example "Crimes of the Wehrmacht" or "The War of Annihilation", the more than 1400 photographs were striking and the accompanying text lines straightforward. The German public had for a long time kept another, more positive image of the Wehrmacht's role during the war, so the information about the atrocities and the way these were presented had a shocking impact, both on the German public in general and on Wehrmacht veterans and their descendants in particular. Considerable attention was given to the association with violence during the war and the suppression of this after 1945, which entailed that the exhibition buttonholed the entire population of Germany.

Until 1999, the exhibition was shown in 34 cities and was seen by almost 900.000 visitors. Several prominent personalities have opened it, and more than 60 cities across the world have announced they are interested in hosting it. The exhibition has provoked innumerable reactions, both oral comments given inside the exhibition area, and written observations expressed in visitor's books and in local and regional newspapers. Support rallies as well as counter-demonstrations were organized in most of the hosting cities. In 1999, a bomb was detonated in front of the exhibition hall in Saarbrücken. The exhibition has also ignited a nationwide dispute between representatives of different German political parties concerning

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<sup>127</sup> Information about the exhibition has been extracted from literature or net pages, from newspaper cuttings which are being kept at HIS, from the interviews with the project manager of the second travelling exhibition, and from an interview with another HIS staff member in a central position, plus information about the exhibition which is available on HIS net pages (cf. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung 2013).

<sup>128</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung 1999: 9.

how the theme and the history of Germany ought to be approached, which in turn has resulted in a comprehensive debate in the German Bundestag.<sup>129</sup> The criticism from people with expert knowledge contended that the Wehrmacht was considerably more complex than the impression given in the exhibition, and that the latter was not sufficiently differentiated. In addition the critics argued that it exploited a German feeling of national guilt which should not be triggered in such a manner, and that it used language and photography in order to produce an unnecessarily strong shock-effect.<sup>130</sup> Other experts, however, welcomed both the way things were presented as well as all new information: All retrospective reflection and discussion was considered positive and significant. Among historians the exhibition has resulted in a comprehensive methodical discussion about how photographic material ought to be handled, since photographs have a much stronger emotional effect than other historical documents, in particular if the formatting is of a certain size and includes explicit text strips. It soon became evident that photographs used as historical source material had been handled too indiscriminately over the years, and the attention was now directed towards questions of source criticism which had never previously been raised.<sup>131</sup>

When the criticism against the exhibition started targeting its subject matter, above all its excessively uncritical exploitation of the photographic material, the board of the institute decided to withdraw the exhibition from further exposure. In November 1999, a commission of eight experts was invited to present a competent evaluation. This was ready in November 2000 and established that the main allegations of the exhibition were correct, but that a minor portion of the photographs were presented with incorrect texts. A new project manager was engaged, whose task was to rectify the factual deficiencies. With contributions from a team of as many as 20 experts, a new, revised exhibition came about, which opened in November 2001. Until it was taken down in March 2004 it had been displayed in eleven cities with a total attendance of 400 000 visitors.

This exhibition was a lot more specific concerning individual destinies and singular events, the photographic material was considerably reduced, and the texts displayed were generally toned down in their wording. The title of the exhibition retained the gist of its message, even though it was more differentiated and had been transformed from “War of Annihilation. Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944” into “Crimes of the German Wehrmacht. Dimensions

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129 Bildung 1996.

130 For further reference, cf. Thamer 2012.

131 It was relatively soon established that the texts accompanying the photographs had been too uncritically treated. The photographs had been removed from their context and remained unexplained, i.e. the background for the taking, the situation of the taking, the objective of the taking, the photographer's own situation and objective etc. were not divulged. Cf. newspaper articles in binders marked “Presse” from the end of October till the beginning of November 1999. For further reference, cf. Thamer 2012.

of a War of Annihilation.”<sup>132</sup> In contrast to the first catalogue where the photographic material dominated with relatively short texts and a modest use of details,<sup>133</sup> the catalogue of the second exhibition focused on incorporating the photographic material into definite contexts by means of other historical documents and relevant results from research.<sup>134</sup> Individuals were no longer recognizable and were therefore no longer “stigmatized” as criminals without a legally valid verdict. Accordingly, the exposition was seen as positive by experts who had criticized the first exhibition for being inaccurate, and the reactions from the politicians and the population were less severe. Even if the numbers of visitors were still very high, the press was less interested in this exhibition than in the first one. People with expert knowledge, who had welcomed the first exhibition’s tendentious statements because these had triggered off debates, criticized the new exhibition for not having the courage to provoke. They were convinced that provocation was the key to discussion and reflection, and felt they were better off with a presentation which, academically speaking, was less “professional”, but bolder. Nearly 140 publications which approached the theme and the exhibition from various points of view were issued in connection with the exhibition.<sup>135</sup> A German historian reviewed the exhibition’s importance for the study of history and for the German society as panoramic. Because of its enormous repercussions both in private and public rooms, the exhibition has “reached that domain where the academic-scientific argument no longer exists, where history is used as political argument, and where criticism primarily becomes a political instrument”.<sup>136</sup>

The topic of the description that follows is a set of challenges related to the second, new exhibition which opened in 2001. The interview was done with the project manager of the exhibition, a female historian who was in her mid-thirties when the opening took place.

## **The Museum Internally and Externally**

Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung has existed since the mid-1960s and had a staff of more than 60 when the exhibitions were shown. In 2009, approximately half of these were employed in research on contemporary issues. The institute was a private foundation entirely financed by a rich scholar. Research on a high level was considered one of the institute’s most

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132 The original German names of the two exhibitions were: “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944” and “Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944”. The English translations above are those quoted by the English Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wehrmachtsausstellung#Revised\\_exhibition,\\_2001-2004](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wehrmachtsausstellung#Revised_exhibition,_2001-2004).

133 Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung 1996.

134 The second catalogue was considerably more comprehensive. It was more systematically organized according to themes and the locations where the misdeeds were committed. It brought forth the source discussion concerning the photographic material, and tried to account for what options for action were available to the individual soldiers, in spite of the orders from above. Cf. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung 2002.

135 In the HIS library there were as of June 12, 2009, 106 publications with reference to the first exhibition and 32 with reference to the second one.

136 Thamer 2012: 490.

important objectives, and every year dozens of seminars, conferences, and professionally oriented events were organized. Moreover, an equally high number of articles and books were published.<sup>137</sup> It was not usual for the Institute to create exhibitions, and the Wehrmacht exhibition was originally just conceived as a by-product of another field of research.

The project manager of the second exhibition was recruited in order to help tackle the criticism the first exhibition had received. As historian she had previously accomplished a worldwide series of interviews with holocaust survivors, but she had not been involved in the project leading up to the first exhibition. In a hurry it was decided that a new exhibition was going to be launched in order to restore the excellent reputation of the institute. In addition a new exhibition catalogue was produced, which eventually reached a volume of almost 650 pages, plus some minor film projects devoted to certain aspects of the topic. The cooperation between the project manager and the chairman of the board was close all the way and was characterized as a “cooperation based on reciprocal feedback”. The project manager felt she had the chairman’s trust and support, but yet the freedom to make decisions she felt were important. According to the project manager, the chairman’s chief concern was to restore the stature of the foundation, and she expanded on this explaining that for him the situation was very demanding. He was preoccupied with scientific work of high academic standard, but he himself had no personal competence in this particular field. Therefore he was obliged to have trust in his staff, and at the same time be ready to defend the subject matter of the exhibition against external critics. The interest and pressure from the public and the media was considerable and resulted in his being constantly short of time and having a continuous discussion of the exhibition’s content and its planned method of presentation.

The project manager perceived her task first and foremost as “translation work”: The concept and the scientific results that had been accepted and agreed upon, had to be converted into an exhibition. To achieve this, she had a staff of 15 to 20 project associates at her disposal. Their task was to cover the detailed study of the archives. The quantity of available and applicable material was enormous. The cooperation was excellent, including the contact with other relevant staff members like for example the editorial manager. When ethical challenges popped up, talks and discussions with the best qualified staff member would help sort out the issue. If questions relative to content appeared, she would address those associates who had spent most time covering the theme. Questions related to the catalogue or to other publications were given to the editorial manager, whereas those which concerned the concept of the exhibition or the reputation of the Institute ended up on the chairman’s desk. The project manager could not remember having had any kind of schooling in ethical topics

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137 Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung 2006. Axel Honneth has written an article about the chairman of the board, his motivation and his competence, cf. Honneth 2012.

of relevance to museums, neither educationally nor jobwise. She therefore emphasized two points as absolutely decisive when moral challenges had to be addressed: The first was her personal, moral conscience, the other her professional competence based on education and earlier experience.

It was not only the topic and the material which made the job exacting. The pressure caused by the shortage of time was occasionally so heavy that all the tasks that were waiting could not be overcome within a period of five years. At an early stage it was decided that the exhibition was going to open on a specific day, which entailed serious consequences for the project manager's health: "I have never ever, neither before nor later, worked as hard as in those months. And that is [...] a kind of experience I never want to have again". In addition came the reactions from the outside which she felt were extremely demanding. Inquiries from visitors and descendants of Wehrmacht soldiers demonstrated how vigorously the exhibition had affected a number of family constellations. All this came on top of hatred from people who disagreed with the way the theme was handled in the exhibition, contending this was not correct. The whole institute was fitted with bulletproof glass in front of the windows because of bomb threats. Extraordinary security procedures gradually became so commonplace that she had to be accompanied by security officers when going to an opening session, and she became an eyewitness to violent demonstrations where people protested against the exhibition. After having heard the project manager speak with unflagging resolution and clarity, I could now see how difficult it was for her to talk about these experiences.

*It gives a strange feeling to have the impression that one has to have police protection when going to one's own exhibition [...]. What I found most problematic was [...] that the topic I am working on and where the point is to try to differentiate by means of fact based arguments, that another kind of argument takes place on the street in a way [...] words become pointless.*

She was supported and encouraged by her colleagues and "a common understanding was established [...] which implied that the first exhibition has set something in motion, something which gave the impression that emotions have been triggered by a set of misleading facts." She elaborated on this saying that the entire staff of the institute had been surprised by the strength of the reactions and the consequences of the exhibition for individuals.

*The institute feels responsible for [...] having ripped open old wounds, and the dynamics [...] in the families, how strongly this actually affected the personal relations within the families of the visitors, this is [...] something that really surprised the Institute and its staff.*



Here the professional understanding concluded that topics which could trigger so violent feelings and provoke so vigorous reactions had to be approached as correctly and extensively as possible, so that feelings at least took off from a basis of correct factual information. There was a tacit agreement among the staff members that correct and socially relevant information had to be brought to light even though the reactions were strong and partly violent. What mattered most to them was the responsibility for making sure that the information was correct.

Gradually, the attention the project received over a period of more than ten years, became a strain of its own, also in other contexts. The institute's information service worked exclusively with responding to the requests and enquiries from the media, and thousands of phone calls and e-mails from individuals came pouring in. The topic was approached by so many and from such different angles that innumerable new projects were initiated. Little by little it became essential to put an end to the work on the exhibition in order to open up for other themes and topics the Institute was actively involved in. Eventually, the exhibition was taken down without further evaluation. The project manager was granted maternity leave right after the exhibition had been disassembled and was absent from work for more than a year. In retrospect she considered it vital to have taken such a break in order to put some distance between herself and her professional activity and have the possibility to work through the personal pressure that all the interest around the exhibition had brought about.

### **Cooperation with External Contributors**

The Wehrmacht Exhibition did not rely on contributions from individuals. The contact with former Wehrmacht soldiers, their descendants and other visitors began only after the exhibition had opened. The institute had received a series of requests after the first exhibition opened in 1995, and this took off again when the new exhibition was inaugurated.<sup>138</sup> The project manager assumed a well calculated role in her contact with individuals. She describes these incidents as numerous, varied and interesting from a professional point of view. "This is exactly what we want, that such a narrative recollection of the past begins, and here these memories are crucial.."

The majority of those who contacted the Institute told about personal experiences or asked for help to be able to find out more about their parents or grandparents. The project manager told about enquiries which clearly showed how many had become uncertain and feared their nearest relatives had committed crimes like those drawn up in the exhibition. Now they wanted certainty and therefore asked for help. The project manager had already foreseen this

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<sup>138</sup> The requests have not influenced the purport of the exhibition and will be mentioned again when the reactions from the public are discussed.

and had designed her own tactical plan: all requests were to be answered, but briefly, so it would be possible to answer everyone. She considered her own possibilities to offer help as limited. Her role would primarily be to advise people about where and how they could get answers to their questions. She could for instance direct the enquirers to specific archives or groups of interest where relevant information about the person in question might be available.

The project manager had earlier worked with Holocaust survivors in several countries, which now helped her distinguish between roles. By virtue of her position and competence she received a lot of strictly personal information from individuals without offering anything in return. Things had quite simply to be like that; everything she did was related to her role and function, never to herself as a person. Even though the experiences she had had prior to her employment at HIS had nothing to do with the Wehrmacht Exhibition, mentioning them here is of relevance, because they clearly show what moral challenges may arise in an encounter between an interviewer and an informant. As historian she had already acquired a lot of experience from the interview setting and had therefore arrived at a clear idea about the use and the value of the collected material.

*It is not important to learn exactly what happened on a particular day, generally that is something they (the informants) are not able to account for. What they can tell me is what significance it has for their own lives to have been compelled to make such experience. [...] These narratives have, independent of the question about what they contain of historically relevant material, an authenticity which lies beyond what is factual knowledge; here the subject is lived history, and specifically lived traumatic history.*

Her objective has been to pass on narratives from survivors to find out “what perspective these people have on their own lives. They are biographical constructions which still may have a value of their own, a value which does not lie in the reconstruction of certain facts.” When using the narratives of the informants in a book or exhibit, her starting point was always a clear, but tacit distribution of roles. It was up to the informants to choose what they wanted to share and how they wanted to communicate it; she was the one who would later use these narratives in what she considered to be the most appropriate way. So it was really she who constructed a new narrative based on the material she had got from her informants.

*Here there is no longer question of their narrative, here we are talking about mine. [...] I am not only a medium, [...] of course I tell the story and I put certain things in the foreground and others I just mention or not at all [...] it has to be like that [...] I do have an immense quantity of material, of possibilities, of methods I can use to disseminate, and all the time I make decisions [...] I construct [...] a narrative which I can develop, which I put forward for discussion.*

In this way she has necessarily told a story that differs from the informants' narratives and inserted different parts into a superior perspective.

The impressions she got during the interview sessions were strong and burdensome, and she had received professional assistance to handle the impressions and the feedback from her informants. Afterwards she recognized this as having been decisive and held it as an important prerequisite for being able to proceed with the interviews as planned. Help of this kind would have been invaluable also when working with the Wehrmacht Exhibition.

*It helps a lot to let things fall into place and to be able to say [...] those things belong to that person and these things are mine. To have a real possibility to fix the limits, to make distinctions, to see to the bottom of the situation, to really be able to say that here are challenges which I cannot respond to and which I do not have to take on, but where I ought to find a way to handle these.*

She justified the fact that she, in spite of this, did not seek external assistance during her work on the exhibition, by saying that this would have been considered unusual and that the pressure caused by the lack of time would have increased even more.

### **The Angling of the Theme and the Choice of a Method of Dissemination**

Since the investigating commission in November 2000 had concluded that the basic profile of the first Wehrmacht exhibition had been correct, the theme was angled in the same way in the second exhibition too, but in a more specific and differentiated manner. Moreover, the dissemination concept included conferences, discussions and books which could be associated with the exhibition.

The first exhibition had among other things been criticized for its indiscriminate use of *photographic* material. Therefore most of the ethical decisions made now concerned what photographic material was to be used, how this material should be used and where the limit was to be drawn with regard to its public value. Innumerable discussions were held and many colleagues were involved throughout the process. The project manager remembered particularly well the discussions about a film sequence showing how naked Jews were driven down into ditches before they were executed. Were these scenes going to be used in order to visualize the atrocities? Or would this be irresponsible out of moral concerns for the victims? The outcome of these discussions was that the film excerpts were rejected in order to protect the dignity of the unknown victims. It was impossible to obtain clearance from possible descendants of those involved. Even more important was to find out what could be conveyed by means of such excerpts, and determine whether these, in the end, represented "nothing but horror". It was the project manager who made the final decision implying that the film sequences were not going to be shown. She admitted, however, that there were existed strong

arguments for showing them, which would have been a “demonstration of the reality of the policy of extermination which we all want to shut our eyes for”. The decision making was for her “a very personal, very intuitive and emotional process” after having heard and considered all the pros and cons.

Another crucial moral challenge was a fundamental decision about how the photographic material was to be handled. In many cases only a few of the photographed persons were known, or it was assumed that the photograph had been taken at a certain location, but without any possibility to have it confirmed. How could such uncertainty be conveyed to the public, and would such admissions put the reputation of the institute at stake? How could the visitors be told that the selected material was used to emphasize the overall point of the exhibition, but at the same time be informed that the same material was flawed by some uncertainties because some of the details pertaining to the photographs and their takings were unknown?

*Can we present this in such a manner that we can admit that this photograph may not show the perpetrator, but assert that the picture (shows a crime committed) by the Wehrmacht, even though the person we see in the picture is not necessarily the perpetrator. [...] Do we altogether have any kind of latitude for differentiating in the exhibition?*

This question was also important for the scope of interpretation which the institute wanted to give the visitors. To the project manager the scope of interpretation or frame of reference represented the purport of the exhibition and the combination of different compositional aspects. The totality, the final outcome, had to be as correct as possible and as comprehensive as necessary in order to give the visitors a chance to construct their own correct image.

*Obviously, the visitor has been pieced together in such a manner that he presumes that ‘if I visit an exhibition devoted to crimes perpetrated by the Wehrmacht, I can assume that what I see there are crimes perpetrated by the Wehrmacht’. If this is not so, the visitor will justly conclude that he will be informed that this is not so [...]. It is a reasonable and in no way a peculiar matter and also a justifiable expectation to say that ‘all I see here’ will automatically be connected to the frame of reference by the visitor. A vigilant visitor of this kind is what we want [...] but that requires that the material is handled in a certain way.*

In other words, the visitors were considered as watchful consumers who were to receive correct and comprehensive information which they themselves could apply according to their own competence. The pressure for making the right decisions as to what information that had to be exposed, and in what manner, was exceptionally heavy because of the criticism which

had been raised against the first exhibition. The project manager often thought about the advantage of writing a book for only a couple of hundred readers. Even before she had begun, she knew here that several hundred thousand people were going to scrutinize the exhibition with a critical eye, which in turn could provoke strong feelings and reactions within many families. In order to be able to handle this responsibility altogether, she had to remind herself that the material she was working on was “a historical object, for which one can obviously formulate established truths up to a certain point, but where there are always unknown variables. Always.” This recognition prompted her to decide to be intent on unveiling the areas where she did not have sufficient knowledge: “In cases of doubt” the solution chosen was “to document our vacuities, our intellectual vacuities”.

In retrospect the project manager was on the whole reasonably comfortable with the choices she had made and satisfied with the discussions raised also by the second exhibition. The history of the Wehrmacht soldiers has been illuminated and is now more correctly presented than it used to be, which she held to be by far the most remarkable objective of her project. “When one creates an exhibition [...] over a theme and can contribute to a change in the social communication about the topic, one has [...] achieved everything that can be achieved by means of such interactive public methods.”

### **Reactions from the Contributors, the Public and the Press**

The reactions from the public and the press were enormous and kept on coming over a period of ten years. The social composition of the public and the reception of the first exhibition were topics discussed during and after the first exhibition.<sup>139</sup> Later it turned out that the reactions from the visitors reoccurred in the second period. The reactions varied from denial or acknowledgement from the soldiers themselves, via disbelief, frustration and anger in the following generation, to personal attacks on the project team or the Institute’s director from people who thought that the exhibition spread lies. In an evaluation, attempts were made to categorize the reactions. Categories like “the frustrated”; they were those who had lost their faith and their ideals during the war and were now willing to contribute to shedding light on all the crimes committed, or “the contemplative”; they were those who tried to understand why they themselves had acted as they did during the war.<sup>140</sup>

The reactions varied from one generation to the next and turned out to be much stronger in the second generation, i.e. among the children of the soldiers. These reactions provoked family conflicts which in many cases were of considerable animosity.

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<sup>139</sup> Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung 1999; Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung 1998.

<sup>140</sup> Boll 1999.

*The exhibition has uncovered the conflict between repression and disclosure as a symptom in an entire society. The controversy which arose in its wake is in actual fact three generations' strenuous attempts to correlate subjective recollections from the war generation with historical facts. Both have existed side by side for half a century without influencing each other. The subjective experiences of the soldiers were not a theme for the majority of the historians, and the veterans saw no need for comparing their own recollections with the historians' account of the war.*<sup>141</sup>

After the exhibition, nearly 2900 letters to the editor were assembled in an independent study.<sup>142</sup> In spite of a more positive reception and media coverage of exhibition number two, the content of these letters had not changed significantly. Between 20 and 25 percent of all the letters contained personal narratives and biographical information. One newspaper used the headline "As if a valve had opened" to describe the impressions of a journalist who had received many letters and expanded this in his article. "Several of the letters are extremely moving, because it is obvious that people after decades of silence for the first time open up their hearts. Over many pages in fine handwriting they describe their lives."<sup>143</sup> In the letters too, there were reactions like denial, shock, admission, excuses or attempts at explaining away.

The project manager was surprised by the strength and the depth of these reactions, and once more she observed a difference between the generations: Whereas the soldiers themselves can fall back upon their own recollections and in that way relativize the statements of the exhibition and adapt them to their own memory, the second generation struggles hard to piece together the new information and the impression they have of a human being who has been very close to them:

*In the second generation [...] emotions are up against each other [...]. The discrepancy between the positive binding to one's own father and the picture showing the same father as perpetrator, as a soldier who has killed others [...] these pictures, they do not fit together [...] here this ardour comes forth [...]. Germans of the second generation do not talk about what has happened in battle xy, they talk about their father.*

In one of the many interviews which were given by among others the chairman of the board, the project manager and the professional experts, the question was raised as to whether it

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141 Boll 1999: 161. Author's translation.

142 Hennig 2007. Here a closer look was taken at letters to the editor which daily and weekly German newspapers have received and which are related to the Wehrmacht exhibition. Of the 2900 letters, about 2350 concerned the first exhibition and about 550 the second.

143 Greiner 1999: 35.

is necessary to provoke in order to have discussions about topics most people rather would like to forget or not have to think about.<sup>144</sup> The experts were unanimous in their view that dramatization and shocking effects in the presentation contribute to opening discussions, while certain topics seem to be ready for resumption after a certain period of suppression. When the discussion was new, the press was interested in the Wehrmacht Exhibition, but their interest dwindled when it turned out that the second exhibition was less controversial. The public, on the other hand, was just as interested as before, which was explained in the interviews by the fact that the topic of the exhibition has influenced a new generation of the public, the generation of grandchildren. The experience from the work on the exhibition shows that these are better prepared to take a closer look at what their grandfathers did and at new information about the Nazi period than the second generation has been. This has paved the way for new dialogue inside the families, now between three generations: the veterans, their children and their grandchildren.

As mentioned, the project manager experienced a number of these reactions as challenging to handle, but she emphasized in her conclusion that the institute's possibilities for controlling how the exhibition was received, necessarily were limited:

*In actual fact, an auto-dynamic effect is brought about, an effect which cannot be controlled. Once the exhibition has opened it will follow its own course. Admittedly, it is possible to exert influence by means of conferences and announcements, [...] but an acquisition process has taken off which is no longer controllable and which is not supposed to be controllable. In the end it is expected that there is some form of acquisition, but we have to accept that this may take on forms we really do not like ourselves.*

## **The Quisling Exhibition at Telemark Museum, Norway**

In May 2006 Telemark Museum opened an exhibition devoted to Hitler's principal supporter in Norway, Vidkun Quisling. Since the late 1990s, when the museum under the leadership of its director at that time started to discuss the plans publicly, its opponents had protested vigorously against the project. Their main argument was that "*Quisling was guilty of high treason*" and that "*this is not a suitable topic for an exhibition*".<sup>145</sup> In October, 2005, after years of public debate and some internal planning, the new director of the museum, who had just started in her new job, decided that the exhibition was going to take place. She

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<sup>144</sup> *Die Zeit* 2004b: 5.

<sup>145</sup> *Dagens Næringsliv* 2006: 56. Here the deputy leader of the Museum's board of directors was quoted, and the content of his statement reappears in several contributions to newspapers before the opening of the exhibition.

appointed a project team of four with the museum's pedagogical adviser as project manager. Throughout the following six months and with a low-cost budget as basis, an exhibition chiefly meant for young people aged 14 to 20 was created. Over a surface of 250 square metres housing a selection of texts, photographs, films, and objects, the visitors would get acquainted with Vidkun Quisling's personality, his life, his deeds and misdeeds. Among other things the exhibition showed the last letters written by members of the Resistance who were executed on Quisling's orders, statements from a number of people who were active during the war, and a film sequence symbolizing Quisling's own execution, a sequence which drew the lines forward to combat areas in the world of today. At the exit the visitors were given the opportunity to write comments on the exhibition and its theme. Until the opening of the exhibition the newspaper headlines were dominated by critical voices arguing it was a mistake to focus on Quisling in a museum exhibition. Among others, SOS Rasisme (literally: "SOS Racism")<sup>146</sup> expressed concern about a possible emergence of neo-Nazis and gave warnings that demonstrations and heated debates had to be expected. But such reactions failed to materialize and the opening took place peacefully and without counter-demonstrations.

The feedback given to Telemark Museum from the media, from pupils, and from the public has been predominantly positive. More than 16.000 people had seen the exhibition when it was taken down, which made it the most visited exhibition in the history of Telemark Museum.<sup>147</sup> Internally, the process leading up to the exhibition has been difficult in more than one respect.

In the following, three people will be given the opportunity to speak: The former director of the museum, a historian in her early 50s who originally came up with the idea for this exhibition, her successor who pulled off the plan - she too a historian and in her early 40s, and the project manager of the exhibition, who was the museum's pedagogical adviser.

## **The Museum Internally and Externally**

The process leading up to the exhibition was to a considerable extent marked by internal organizational reshuffles. When the plans for a Quisling Exhibition were launched by the end of the 1990s, the background was directly related to a locally rooted drive aiming at developing the identity of the region. This was something to which the museum wanted to contribute, admittedly not by exposing the regional fellowship most others wanted to emphasize, but by showing the diversity of the region. There was a common understanding

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<sup>146</sup> SOS Rasisme is a Norwegian anti-racist organization. (Translator's note)

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Walle 2012; Olsen 2013.



among the employees of Telemark Museum that museums ought to give up their traditional ways of thinking and working and dare embark on new ventures. When the former director proposed the name of Vidkun Quisling for a contest, the purpose of which was to select “tidenes telemarking”, (i.e. “the local hero of all times”), she justified her choice by emphasizing how important it is to remember in order to prevent unwanted historical episodes from repeating themselves.

*We must have a dialogue on what in our history we want to adorn ourselves with, and what it is we want to repress. Collective repression is a dangerous business, and since museums operate within the repressive branch, we have to be extremely aware of what it is we repress.*

The reactions came at once, both from the local community and from the media whose journalists asked for the reasons behind the proposal. The director interpreted the interest from the media as a confirmation of her assumption that Quisling incarnated “something” which had not been sufficiently illuminated. She welcomed the reactions from the media and the local community and justified her proposal by referring to the existing structure in the local society.

*If you run a media campaign like “Selecting the local hero of Telemark”, values we are supposed to stand for, will appear. [...] There is a need for negation, and we must make sure the anti-value comes forth. [...] I did not ask for trouble, all I wanted was a discussion about the values we are supposed not to stand for. For [...] Telemark is a complicated county as far as Nazism is concerned, and there are still ghosts of the past looming within the confines of Telemark.*

This explanation did not convince, and the museum was met with strong opposition to plans which so far had not been written down or come to life. The director saw this as a sign that an exhibition on Quisling would be relevant and important for the local community, which she upheld and defended during the interview: Quisling, as a member of the community, had to be extracted from his own era in order to explain that certain universal ethical rules must apply, whatever the time or culture people live in.

*If we [...] say that Quisling was exceptionally evil, we exempt ourselves from the human responsibility which at all times must be the measure of things going as they do. [...] It is imperative to extract from history both what is timeless and universal and what is contemporary and accidental and then bring it into the light of the day.*

She gathered a reference group of well-known specialists whose mission was to help her make important ethical decisions. The group consisted of among others a social scientist, a historian, a philosopher and a representative of NMU, (literally: “Developing Norwegian

Museums”)<sup>148</sup> In hindsight she described the group’s discussions about the ethical challenges inherent in the plans for a Quisling exhibition as decisive for proceeding with the project and for taking on the local opposition: She would not have been able “to make decisions on her own in a matter of such complexity”. The group concluded that it was important to challenge the visitors, and contended that one of the ways to achieve this meant letting people who still honoured and admired Quisling have an opportunity to be heard. The museum’s own opinions were to be withheld to the benefit of voices coming from individuals on the outside. At the same time the director held it as evident that there were moral limits as to how much and in what ways it was advisable to challenge public opinion. In this context concepts like ‘responsibility’ and ‘offence’ were essential.

*As museums we have a responsibility, we have to be careful, we must not offend anyone. [...] We received written messages from people who had suffered during the war and who felt it [...] indignant that the museum had plans for putting Quisling on a pedestal. We brought this to the museum’s board of directors and had a thorough session of pros and cons, and we discussed ethics [...]. We did not want to insult anyone. This is something one should always keep in mind when one is in charge of a museum. Sooner or later there is a risk of offending someone, which is none of our business. Our task is to clarify, to inform, to create interest, but of course we must not offend.*

To ensure Telemark Museum took its responsibility seriously, she was going to be explicit with anyone who wanted to contribute to the exhibition: The editorial responsibility was hers, the right to decide was hers, and she could therefore limit or reject any contribution. She was fully aware of the fact that in this way she would exercise “some kind of censorship [...] to make sure there was no offence.” Many discussions in her reference group would circle around such issues. How could one succeed in provoking discussion and publicly stand out as fearless, without deliberately offending someone? “It was the fear of offending, but at the same time I was afraid of confirming [...] that this was going to be another well intended but toothless exhibition.”

In spite of her carefulness, she was confronted with strong opposition - even within her own camp.

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<sup>148</sup> NMU is a government financed agency whose task is to incite Norwegian museums to develop their roles.  
(Translator’s note)

*I was extremely scared when I received a mail from X and his professor Y over in the USA [...]. When I received a letter from them after I had sent over a draft for a manuscript, the first manuscript I had worked out both with my reference group and with Z, [...] then I sent it out for comment to X, who in turn sent it to Professor Y. The answer I received from them was that if Telemark Museum intended to go forth with such postmodernist rubbish, it was their resolve to see to it that Telemark Museum would be dishonoured [...] under the eyes of the entire Norwegian public and of all their colleagues in other Norwegian museums. This scared the s... out of me [...] and made me fear I was about to do something terribly wrong.<sup>149</sup>*

According to the director, the main objection from these critics was that the museum had planned to let a Quisling supporter have a voice in the exhibition. In spite of her fear for further criticism from these external specialists, she went ahead with her project, from now on working even more closely with her reference group. The opposition against the plans did not subside, and several other Norwegian museums publicly acknowledged the criticism that had been raised against her. The director was accused of being “arrogant who could confront experts in a manner like this.” These critical objections hit her hard.

*There were headlines and articles in Dagbladet<sup>150</sup> and in the local press and the project was on the news [...], and all that was all right. What was not all right was what I got from academia. That hit me right in my bowels because I do not have the competence to get involved in BRUDD. None of us have.*

In the course of the interview it became ever more obvious that this was what she saw as her major ethical challenge. She was intent on fulfilling the societal role she felt had been entrusted to her and the museum by the government, at the same time she was convinced that it was a matter of principle for museums to bring up tabooed, sensitive themes most people did not want to talk about - but she did not know how to proceed in order to put the plans into practice. She saw her competence as insufficient when it came to working with such themes and felt that museums lacked the tools they needed in order to work in accordance with what the government expected. She went on to elaborate on the way museums are organized, which keeps them “at arm’s length” from the government, but inevitably entails their being solely responsible for the consequences of their choices.

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149 The letters X,Y og Z stand for three different experts, with Z being the museums expert advisor. The names are removed in the author’s transcription of the interview. (Translator’s note)

150 *Dagbladet* is the name of a national, Oslo-based newspaper. (Translator’s note)

*Then I start reading these good things which appear early in 1995 and are followed up in a series of White Papers, very reassuring, we acknowledge that traditions should be challenged etc. etc. I start feeling a bit shaky, what is all this really about? Then you cry out into the wilderness and get no answer. I had to plunge into this philosophy thing [...]. The few extracts quoted in the documents [...] give me nothing. You have to take on Skjervheim, Habermas, Aristotle [...], all these are things I have tried to sort out.*

Her answers to my questions about her understanding of ethical issues and her educational background for this clearly told me that morals and ethics to a considerable extent were part of her working days, and that she was very committed to reading and learning more about this, both personally and professionally.

*I can feel that I orient my thinking sensibly and properly because I am preoccupied with ethics. But the important question concerns my relations to ethical rules for our profession, and in fact I have been to some minor courses, and we have had a survey of ICOM's Code of Ethics for Museums for our entire staff, and everyone has had a copy and we have studied them and discussed them [...] that is obviously something that has to be done continuously.*

The exhibition was still in its planning when she quit her position as director of Telemark Museum and took up a job as director of another institution. Her newly appointed successor was not aware of the fact that there existed a formal decision from the board that the Quisling exhibition was to be held. The board left it to her to decide whether the project was going to be carried through. As her predecessor she experienced the internal and external pressure as heavy. "I got a very strong feeling that this was something we had to do. Not doing it would be seen as a sign of frailty and cowardice from us [...] it would be too stupid of Telemark Museum to talk about something for so long without pulling it through." The starting point was difficult. She knew neither her board nor her staff. The media had the museum under close observation, there were neither any extensive written plans for the exhibition, nor any kind of adapted material for its purport, and no money had been granted from government funds or from private sponsors. The trade and industries of the region had no intention to support the project, what the new director interpreted as a sign that the businesses considered the risk of being seen as Quisling supporters was too obvious. The fact that the financial resources for the project were so scanty had a lot to say for the continuation of the process, since this among other things entailed that there were few options for buying services from the outside. However, these were not the only challenges confronting the new director: "I found the process difficult. In actual fact I was completely green as director, [...] and felt I stood alone. I knew of course that every word that was going to be written into that exhibition would be my responsibility [...], which I felt was quite a burden."

At short notice a new project team was constituted consisting of herself, the museum's pedagogical adviser as project manager, an exhibition designer plus an external specialist, a historian with expert competence within this particular field. The project manager had already been a member of the original team which launched the plans for a Quisling exhibition and had appreciated the commitment and the initiative the former director had shown. Moreover, the exhibition was on several occasions discussed at BRUDD meetings, and from here came many inputs which she considered appropriate and important. The project manager was convinced that museums should not abstain from presenting gloomy and scaring aspects of the society, whatever opposition this might provoke in the local population. Accordingly, it was important for her that the plans were realized and she voluntarily assumed her role as project manager. Attached to this were responsibilities and authorities, while the new director wanted to retain the possibility to intervene if there was a need for that.

*I immediately said: 'it is the project manager who coordinates and governs', and in my own view put myself on an equal footing with the other members. [...] Solutions were found after thorough discussions, but I should like to think that if we had disagreed fundamentally over some issue, it would have been up to me to cut in and prevail since I am the one who eventually bear the full responsibility.*

Little by little the public pressure grew in intensity. Several people in the immediate environment gave critical comments to the process, and a high number of letters to the editor showed that many newspaper readers had contrary ideas and objections. One of the strongest opponents of the exhibition was the deputy leader of the museum's board of directors, who according to the new director was by no means "a male anyone" in this context. He justified his opposition saying he was concerned about the local status of culture in general, and of the museum in particular, and therefore had little esteem for the topic of the exhibition. "Letting the traitor in a way dominate over all those hundreds, not to say thousands, who died in their struggle for freedom, was in my opinion a miserable choice." As member of the board he felt personally responsible for what the museum did and found it appropriate to take care of this by criticizing the museum in public. "What I said internally in the closed meetings of the board was of little avail, so contacting the press was one way of making myself understood."

It was now more and more obvious that the director and the project manager had different reactions to the constant influx of interventions from the local population, the media and the member of the board. According to her own account the project manager wanted to stretch the exhibition even further, inspired as she was by the criticism from the outside, which convinced her that the exhibition was heading in the right direction. The director, on the other hand, was chiefly concerned about holding a low profile towards the opponents. From her point of view the public declarations of distrust were humiliating and she felt the situation

called for a number of urgent measures in order to calm down outraged staff members. “In the midst of the process I felt I had to straighten out every tangle wherever it appeared, so I addressed the board in separate meetings, the employees in other forums, we tried [...] to handle the press”. She also found the acid remarks or public statements coming from colleagues at other museums or museum related institutions as particularly hurtful. These were people who against their better judgment criticized the preparations for the exhibition or its purport without having discussed this openly with the director.

The exhibition was taken down after the number of visitors had declined in the course of the second season of its existence, and because the museum needed the area for new exhibitions. After the exhibition had been disassembled, reports were sent to the two institutions which had supported the project financially. Beyond this there was no extensive internal evaluation of the exhibition.

### **Cooperation with External Contributors**

The project manager received a number of enquiries from individuals who wanted to contribute with information or tangible objects to the exhibition. Several of these wanted to “smear” other people, and their initiatives were for this reason considered as useless. The background for this was the *Vær varsom-plakat* of the press, which the project manager used diligently to evaluate what courses of action were open. Eventually, the exhibition reproduced only a handful of initiatives coming from individuals. Two of these were video recordings, one of which was an interview with a well-known member of the Resistance movement during the war, the other a conversation with one of Quisling’s followers who still persisted in his conviction that Quisling was one of the noblest people he had ever met. The project team had a thorough discussion in order to decide whether this supporter could be rendered in the exhibition and concluded that this recording ought to be used since it represented the personal view of one individual. Both informants had previously come forward in the media and were able to express their ideas with precision and clarity. The project manager had wanted to open up for other Quisling supporters in order to create some balance in the exhibition: “some of the best qualities of the exhibition [...] that we also give [...] the losing side access and leeway to express how they experienced the war from their point of view”. She spent a lot of time going through history books where she could only find the “history of the victors”. This may have had some influence on her motivation for including also representatives of the other side, the one that up till then had not been heard. For her, the most exciting part of the exhibition had been “to be allowed to have interviews with people from both sides”.

The project manager experienced the cooperation with the external expert consultant as positive and efficient, while she herself felt she was not sufficiently competent within this field of knowledge. How could she be expected to argue against the consultant’s recommendations

for bringing forth specific aspects or for angling these in a particular way? Often it turned out to be impossible to combine the dissemination method she preferred with what the expert proposed or favoured. Situations like these were most often sorted out through a common internal discussion in the project team. The project manager, however, emphasizes that she listened extensively to the advice and suggestions of the expert consultant.

### **The Angling of the Theme and the Choice of the Dissemination Method**

How the topic ought to be angled and how these perspectives were to be communicated were continuously discussed in the project team, with normally unanimous' outcome. Two short film sequences took up central points in the exhibition: One imitating Quisling's execution, the other drawing the lines from the Second World War till other on-going wars in the world of today. The sequence devoted to Quisling's execution provoked a long internal discussion in the project team, particularly after a photograph had been made available to the museum during the final preparations for the opening of the exhibition: This photograph allegedly showed Quisling's corpse and was reported never to have been exhibited publicly. While the photograph was being scrutinized in order to decide whether it was genuine, the project team were discussing whether they wanted to exhibit it if it turned out to be genuine. A central moral challenge was to decide whether the photograph's historiographical value was more important than the respect for the lifeless body of a human being. Before a decision had been made, it turned out that the photograph did not show Quisling's corpse, so the discussion came to an end without any conclusion being drawn. The project manager thought there was little chance they would have exhibited the photograph in any event. As the project team saw it, there was an essential difference between, on the one hand, a symbolic film sequence - even if this had been fabricated using the sound of salvoes and pictures of rifles at an execution in a strive for authenticity - and, on the other, a genuinely dead person and, not to forget, true "blood".

Generally the moral decisions were made spontaneously and by the project manager herself: "here it is fair to say that it is my own moral convictions that have settled the matter". Still, a considerable number of team discussions was needed in order to bring forth a maximum of information and a full range of viewpoints when decisions were about to be made.

### **Reactions from the Contributors, the Public and the Press**

Before the visitors left the exhibition area, they were invited to comment on the exhibition and write down their immediate impressions. According to the project manager, only 5 of the more than 600 comments which were later transferred to one of the museum's own documents were unambiguously negative. Consequently, a huge majority of them were predominantly positive, even if words like "frightening", "exciting", "moving", and "sad"

were frequent. Most of the visitors saw it as important that such a theme was brought forth. A very small minority used words like “speculative”, “disappointing”, and “biased”. This corresponds to the impression the project manager got after the exhibition had opened; she perceived almost all the reactions as thoroughly positive. All the same, she has received some comments via telephone and e-mail criticizing the exhibition. Some people stopped her on the street to give vent to what they thought about the topic, but these incidents were not experienced as a nuisance. Once the exhibition was over, the project manager summarized the repercussions of the exhibition: the museum was now undoubtedly in the centre of interest, but she found it hard to believe that the exhibition had provoked changes in the political attitudes in the county of Telemark.

Eventually, the director of the museum reflected upon what changes she would make if she was ever going to develop similar projects in the future. Here she mentioned first and foremost more time for preparation of the subject matter, better funding and more personnel. She considered these conditions as essential in order to be able to enter into such a topic in a way she felt was consistent with what it ought to have been in the Quisling project. The subject matter was the prime target, and there had to be enough time and resources for a full appreciation of angling and presentation.

*I should have liked to have a project manager whose academics were so solid that I knew he or she would be able to answer 100 percent for the content of the exhibition. And the reason for this is partly because I want to save my bacon. [...] I should have felt so much more secure that what we presented was right.*

She also reflected upon the lack of resources which she perceived as more acute in a small town than in a major city. Too many subsidiary tasks to look after, too tight economy, and too few personnel made this important project difficult, not to say impossible. There will always be more attendance in large cities and the museums there would also be given more resources.

In a fundamental evaluation of the exhibition she draws the lines to her personal ethical standards, her own professional background, and her own ideas of what role museums should have in a society.

*I clearly see that it is of great importance that we pay attention to that part of history which has been painful, too [...] I think we are way off target if we think our sole vocation is to focus on rose-painted chests and beautiful old pillar-mounted storehouses [...] that is not what history is about, that is not what life was like [...]. Sure, we created a biographical exhibition [...], but we did not do what I think people had expected us to do, this painful business of exposing all the other shadowy sides of our society, we did simply not have the guts to bring to light that sordid recollection*



*of Nazi-infested Telemark [...], all the support the Nazis had in Telemark. We did not have the nerve to confront the problematic sides of post-war Norway, the neo-Nazism [...]. I think we were excessively toothless, probably, that we were too afraid.*

As an example of what it was in the exhibition that made the deepest impression on her, she mentions the video recording of an elderly, resourceful man who straightforwardly said that he was and still is an admirer of Quisling. “How many there are who still support such ideas, but dare not speak out about them, ought to have been expressed more vigorously.” She explains the fact that this did not happen by referring to the fear of being misunderstood. The museum was quite simply not competent enough to distinguish clearly between such voices and the museum’s own - contrary - position. Personally, she did not experience the work they devoted to the exhibition as incriminating, and added that this almost made her sad: Her own “intestinal daredevil” still argued the museum should have risked more. The contradiction between her feeling that the exhibition had been a success under the given conditions and her own understanding of how it ought to have been under optimal conditions, was so overwhelming that she could not point out what she herself really thought about the project.

## **An Exhibition about Abuse, Maihaugen, Norway**

The exhibition titled *Familiehemmeligheter* (literally: “Family secrets”) was arranged as a HOT SPOT-exhibition<sup>151</sup> and was opened in November 2005 at Maihaugen in Lillehammer. It was the first time Maihaugen was responsible for such an exhibition, and the choice of theme fell on what might happen in families without it being discovered from the outside. Gradually, one reached the conclusion that the exhibition should branch off: one part became the responsibility of the museum employees, and this was to deal with family secrets on a more general level, among other things alcoholism, abuse, and violence. The second part was about one particular “family secret”, sexual abuse of children, and was to be developed by an external participant who had herself as a child been exposed to sexual abuse. To present family secrets in general, the museum project group constructed a dark and narrow, new room in the museum entrance area, into which the museum visitors were invited to enter. On the walls they could read what abuse, violence, and molestation could mean and what consequences it had for those involved. This was also visualized in a painting further into the room. Physically separated from this newly constructed room, visitors could study pictures and a poem by the woman who thereby told her own story of sexual abuse in her childhood

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151 A HOT-SPOT exhibition brings up a current topic at short notice and only for a short while. (Translator’s note)

and the far-reaching consequences this had had for her life.<sup>152</sup> The exhibition staged a major opening conference where e.g. a professor of psychology gave a lecture on family secrets which often appear in therapeutical connections. The woman gave a lecture about her experiences and the police and Amnesty contributed with information concerning the volume of violence against women. The exhibition was open to the public for only three weeks, and the number of visitors was not registered.<sup>153</sup> Later Maihugen has displayed five other HOT SPOT-exhibitions, but still mentions *Familiehemmeligheter* as the most successful one.

As part of this study three people were interviewed, thereof two project members: a project member in his late 40s with an education in history, a project member in her middle 30s with a master's degree in ethnology, and the woman in her late 50s who contributed with her own part. She had for more than 20 years worked as a nurse and teacher for sexually abused children before she became aware that she had been abused by her own father from she was six until she was 12 years old. She has analysed the experiences and the memories of what she calls "the way back to my body and my life" through lectures, photographs and poems. In the following part the views of both museum employees and individual will be presented at the same time.<sup>154</sup>

## **The Museum Internally and Externally**

A project group was early established at dedicated to work with HOT SPOT-exhibitions. Maihugen was in 2009, second to Norsk Folkemuseum, the largest museum in the country with nearly 90 employees. The project group was relatively large and consisted of six employees including curators, an educationalist, a photographer, and a librarian. Since this was the first HOT SPOT-exhibition, there was a lot of uncertainty connected to the working process and the course of action in general. The project group had a distinct leader, and theme and method had been authorized by the museum management at the initial stages of the process. The importance of informing the other museum employees about the HOT SPOT concept and the content of the first exhibition was also emphasized. There was a lot of discussion about the physical exhibition area and it was known that elements in the exhibition could have unanticipated symbolic interpretations which in turn might trigger strong reactions. Was it altogether advisable to render personal narratives? If "yes", did the museum have the competence? The uncertainty was based upon the feeling that sufficient knowledge and tools to handle sensitive themes in cooperation with external participants were not available. One project member maintained firmly that one could not answer this question in advance; it must be tried out before any conclusion could

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152 The informant has also produced several brochures, leaflets, and catalogues, e.g. titled "Født til liv", "Tilbake til kroppen", and "Til frihet" where photographs, poems, and texts are gathered. The informant has also on several occasions made contributions to larger newspapers and the contributions are also collected in a leaflet. The material is not published, but can be bought directly from the informant.

153 According to received information which earlier had been published on the museum's web pages.

154 Unless otherwise specified, the quotations refer to statements from the male project employee.

be drawn. The need of guidelines might be understood as a fear of meeting new challenges, vulnerable people and strong destinies:

*This is simply about daring and realizing that you are not always in control, that there are not always rules for everything [...]. A meeting between people cannot be predicted or controlled, so there will always be surprises or unexpected incidents.*

Consequently, the project member thought that unknown situations and moral challenges would arise. As long as one would consider every single case in relation to given framework conditions, there was no reason why one should not disseminate the strong personal narratives, which in his view absolutely must have a place in the museums.

### **Cooperation with an External Contributor**

The project member had found information on the Net regarding a woman who had given lectures about the sexual abuse she had been exposed to. She disseminated her experiences via photographs and poems, and she had been open about her experiences for a long time. As a starting point she was invited by the museum to contribute to the superior theme of *Familiehemmeligheter*, but it soon became obvious that her history was more wide-ranging than there was room for in the planned exhibition area. The project group discussed the matter both internally and with her how the exhibition could show simultaneously both the general theme and her personal history. During the discussions it became clear that they had different views of the distribution of roles and responsibilities:

*There was [...] a bit of fighting in relation to who should decide what the exhibition would look like [...]. There were some people in our project group who were preoccupied with the thought that it was our exhibition [...] and that we therefore ought to have slightly more influence on what was going to be exhibited.*

It was argued that the museum should not give up power and control, that an exhibition should always have an overall angling and expression, and at the same time give room for strong personal narratives and listen to external participants. The woman had clear demands and the discussion ended in an agreement. The museum employees became, not least, assured that the woman actually could endure coming forward as the plans now indicated.

*After we had met her [...] we felt reasonably safe [...]. She was after all a very nice and strong woman, so we felt assured that this part of the exhibition was reasonably well handled in itself. In as much as she had already gone public with her history and used the exhibition before [...], our worries towards her were not very serious because we thought she was that kind of person who would fix it. And then we talked to her when there were things we were wondering about.*

The woman's basis for taking part in the exhibition was a strong wish to change the handling of the topic "sexual abuse of children". Sexual abuse of children must not remain a shame-infested taboo that most people would not talk about, but must become open, in the way that it got more attention among the general public. Due to own experiences, the work with the exhibition was very demanding for her personally:

*To meet that shame [...], meeting something that made you feel dirty, meeting everybody [...] those things that are connected to abuse [...] to meet them, to recognize them, to share them, that has been a very heavy process [...], but it is the only way out.*

That was why she felt it important to be taken seriously by the museum employees, that she was met with humility and respect, and that she could do her job on the basis of her own premises without being pushed. She had very clear thoughts as to how she wanted to present her own history; every picture and poem was a part of her and her processing of the traumatic experiences she had been exposed to. To be able to retell the atrocities she needed "beauty" around her, something "beautiful", like fresh flowers. She soon got the feeling that her narratives were too extensive for the little room which the project group wanted to construct in the entrance area, and was therefore pleased that she could use some of the walls nearby. Later, in a letter, she elaborated on what the work at the exhibition meant to her personally and what it meant to others.

*To organize exhibitions and give lectures started as a part of the way back to a free and worthy life. [...] On the way I experienced that many people expressed their gratitude in relation to this. The fact that I was sharing this helped them, too, so many of them.*

It was especially important that a museum showed interest in her personal history

*To be able to share a feeling of shame, it is necessary that there is someone to share. Many cannot do that. When museums are willing to handle tabooed topics, the feeling of shame is shared. It is lifted into dignity. [...] Museums are to me institutions that have respect in society and stand for seriousness. When they want to disseminate such a delicate topic like abuse, it makes me feel that my wounds are being taken seriously. The shame is placed where it belongs. I and my pain are seen and heard and need no longer be kept a secret and carried alone. Many of us do precisely that: carry the secret, the shame, and the pain, alone.*

### **The Angling of the Theme and the Choice of the Dissemination Method**

The woman was invited into the project in order to concretize and visualize an example of a family secret. But how it should be done and what pictures should be brought in, was decided jointly. She brought more pictures than necessary to let the museum employees take part in

the selection process. The possible consequences of showing quite specific pictures were discussed thoroughly. What might the different pictures trigger in the visitors? The project group was then thinking of persons who had themselves been exposed to abuse and how one should respond to possible reactions? The woman herself was uncertain if the pictures would be too strong for the audience; “[...] do I invade the territories of other people by hanging my pictures on the wall?” The project group contacted a psychologist beforehand to learn as much as possible about prospective reactions and how they should be handled. The psychologist was also asked to give a lecture at the opening conference, and the police were asked to do the same. The employees who worked in the reception at the museum were told to be extra attentive to visitors who seemed to react to the exhibition:

*We were very concerned that those who were available to the public, like the employees working in the shop and the ticket and such things, [...] that they knew something about the exhibition, so that they had a chance to take care of people who possibly showed a reaction [...]. We had brochures from women's shelters and information about contact telephones and [...]. We informed them a lot more than is perhaps usual in order to make them ready to handle reactions [...], but I have not heard that they received precisely such reactions.*

### **Reactions from the Contributors, the Public and the Press**

The strong and obvious reactions never came. This did not change the project member's view of the exhibition: “This was one of the few opportunities, at least for my own part, where I really experienced having done something [...] that was meaningful in a museal connection.” In spite of relatively few people visiting the exhibition, there was compensation by the interest and the response from the visitors. Several of the visitors expressed gratitude for the museum having considered the theme, so did the police. Some of the visitors wanted a meeting with the psychologist during the opening of the exhibition. Several of the visitors wanted to talk to the woman, often under four eyes. The project member interpreted this as a confirmation that the theme had touched some people in a larger measure than exhibitions on less sensitive topics often do. He regarded the number of visitors as inferior in value compared to what the exhibition obviously had meant to some.

The project member concluded that there was a marked difference between the two parts of the exhibition as far as the reactions were concerned: The attention was directed towards the woman's part of the exhibition which undoubtedly made a bigger and stronger impression upon the visitors than the superior part in the specially constructed room. This agreed with his own reactions: Personal narratives touched him on a deeper level and triggered more reflection. He thought the museum ought to have followed up: “When you approach such questions you may also have a responsibility to follow them up in some way after the

exhibition is over, so that it does not leave a void, but that you continue working at it.” This was not done, he thought, because of a busy working day in the museum.

### ***Tilbake til Kroppen at Vest-Agder Museum, Norway***

In the continuation of my contact with the woman she was asked to show her exhibition at Vest-Agder Museum, from October 2009 until April 2010, though under a different title and a somewhat different concept. Internally at the museum, this led to discussions already before it had been decided if the museum wanted to present the exhibition. Some of the employees thought that the theme did not belong in the museum; others thought they had worked with enough sensitive themes during the last year,<sup>155</sup> now they ought to concentrate on “ordinary fields of work” again. But since the exhibition area was well suited and the theme of the exhibition would fit the museum’s effort to cover societally relevant topics, it was after all decided to show the woman’s photo exhibition. Already at the woman’s first visit to Vest-Agder Museum it became clear that she yet again had a firm idea of what the exhibition area should look like, and in what way the pictures and the photographs should be arranged. She had expressed several times beforehand that the work at the exhibition was a severe strain on her, and at the same time that she was looking forward to putting it up. All the employees in the section had in advance been informed both of the theme and the necessity of making allowances for the strain that the work entailed for the woman.

The exhibition turned out to be strong and stirring. Those of the museum employees who had earlier been against the exhibition, changed their view during the woman’s opening lecture: It was important that the museums dare bring forth such themes, it touched many people on such a basic level that the topic must be brought forward. A number of school classes and institutions signed on to get guided tours, and another lecture was prepared, only some weeks after the first one. It lasted for one and a half hours, and the succeeding discussion in the audience for another two hours.

Even though the number of visitors was relatively low and the lectures were heard by 40 - 50 people, many of the museum employees have expressed that they never before had had such a strong feeling that an exhibition really could touch the visitors. They experienced that school pupils in the course of a few minutes in the exhibition area changed from being tough and loud, quarrelsome teenagers, into deeply touched young people who started talking about their own experiences or sought advice for girlfriends who needed help. Some of the visitors travelled scores of miles in order to talk to the woman, many wept during the lectures. The

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<sup>155</sup> The exhibition *Min kropp - min sannhet* was set up in 2008. In 2009 the mobile exhibition *Nasjonens barn* was shown at Vest-Agder Museum, again in the same section. The exhibition discussed the treatment “the Travellers” had received from the Norwegian State during the last 100 years. The focus was on the children who had been taken away from their parents and the exhibition was seen by the museum employees and the visitors as strong and very effective. For further reference, cf. Eide & Aanensen 2008.

visitors evidently sought the woman's presence and advice, and she told afterwards that many had expressed that they for the first time felt understood and capable of sharing "their secret" with somebody. Apparently the woman's presence was very important for the exhibition's impact. Interestingly enough, the press has ignored the repeated invitations and requests to write about the exhibition.

## **An Exhibition on Religion: *Våre Hellige Rom* at Interkulturelt Museum (IKM), Norway**

At the end of October 2009, the exhibition *Våre hellige rom* (literally: "Our holy rooms") opened at Interkulturelt Museum (literally: "Intercultural Museum") in Oslo, an intercultural section of Oslo Museum. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Judaism were here presented in physically separated areas and through reconstructions of holy rooms respectively. The exhibition thus showed a Catholic church, a Jewish Orthodox synagogue, a Pakistani mosque, a Tamil Hindu temple, a Vietnamese Buddhist temple, and a *Sikh gurdwara*, spread over a total of 700 square metres on two floors.

The aim of the exhibition was to visualize religious diversity, increase the knowledge about the different religious communities, and to promote dialogue and respect between people with different religious convictions. This was to be achieved by giving the visitors an impression of the religious communities' most central aesthetic and ritual expressions. The designing of the rooms took place in close cooperation with representatives from the various communities. This cooperation has been very extensive and went on over several years.

Seminars on the different religions and on religious dialogue generally, were arranged both prior to the exhibition and on the way. Further, the exhibition was followed up by means of an exhibition catalogue of more than 100 pages and an extensive brochure containing a general presentation of the communities in eight different languages. It was originally planned to take down the exhibition in December 2011, but due to the great interest shown by the visitors and the public, this was postponed indefinitely. *Våre hellige rom* had been the largest production at IKM ever, and the employees were satisfied both with the concept, the implementation and the reactions.

In connection to the exhibition *Våre hellige rom* two interviews were carried through; one with the section leader at IKM, a sociologist in her middle 40s who had a long experience with morally challenging fields of study, and one with the project manager of the exhibition, a collage-trained social worker in her middle 60s.

## **The Museum Internally and Externally**

In 2009 IKM became one of three sections in Oslo Museum. The main focus in the daily work was directed towards promoting understanding and respect for cultural diversity in Norway. Some of the employees originally came from other countries. The role of the museums in society and the moral challenges experienced in the cooperation between people from different countries and cultures were very often debated, though without using the words morals or ethics directly. The section leader had attended several courses on ethics and was therefore very aware of his moral decisions and those of her colleagues, mainly because of a lot of contact with people who had either been refugees or exposed to persecution:

*How can we in the capacity of museum employees handle these themes, [...] we are not therapists, we are not suppliers of care anymore than others [...] by gathering information from political refugees for example, a strong following up of that person is demanded, and do we have the capacity, do we have the possibility to do that? That kind of question is very often raised at IKM.*

He was clear that the museums had to take a firm standpoint and be an active societal actor, something which implied a responsibility to bring hidden histories to the surface. This was important to create a debate and not least to be able to “ask critical questions to the politicians to get solutions to the question of how are these people treated. “ Here it was of crucial importance that it was done in a careful way, provocation must not be a goal in itself. He therefore preferred the words “challenging” and “mirroring” instead of “provoking”. Visitors should “move a bit” at the meeting with the exhibition, and to make that happen, sensitive themes had to be treated carefully. The theme of the exhibition - religion - he saw as challenging in itself: “This is about such fundamental questions for people; it is about life and death for many.”

The project group at the exhibition consisted of the project manager, the section leader, an external consultant - a sociologist with an expert background from studies of religion - , an external design consultant and a craftsman. Gradually it became clear that the project group was made up of some Christians, one Buddhist, and one Humanistic Ethicist, and even though this was not a conscious composition, it led to good and constructive discussions that the group would not be without. Most decisions were taken by the project manager, who was in constant dialogue with the external consultant, who also functioned as the link to the communities. The work in the project group was on the whole harmonious; the project members were “mainly in agreement”,<sup>156</sup> but disagreements also arose as to how extensive and detailed the exhibition ought to be, or how the texts should be angled. The section leader

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<sup>156</sup> Quotation from the section leader.



had full trust in the project manager and the external consultant. The section leader thought it was a relief that the religious historian attended to the professional content:

*He was a historian with expert knowledge of religions, knew this field better than any of us, and I very much trusted both (name of consultant) and (name of the project manager) and not least the cooperation between the two, the form it had, that it all worked well.*

The trust in the external consultant's competence also gave him the assurance he needed to defend externally the professional content of the exhibition: "He was the professional who was in contact with the religious communities and who explained the most important decisions we made."

### **Cooperation with External Contributors**

The exhibition was first and foremost based upon the cooperation with one external contributor - the external expert consultant. Even though he worked closely with representatives from the different communities, the views or narratives of other individuals were not disclosed in the exhibition. The project manager was the person who was in closest contact with the external consultant, and she described the cooperation process as generally close and good. In spite the fact that she attended many meetings with representatives from the communities, the distribution of duties was pretty clear: She had the superior responsibility for among other things the design of the rooms, the progress of the whole project, and the many sub-projects connected to the exhibition, while the consultant carried the responsibility for the professional content and the contact with the representatives of the religious communities. The project manager had no professional competence in the theme of the exhibition, and was therefore dependent upon the consultant's assessment and contributions. The result was that she most often yielded when disagreements arose about the content of the exhibition or how it should be designed. As an example, the project manager mentioned that she would have liked to see individuals contribute to the exhibitions, in order to show a wide range of individual opinions. The consultant did not agree and held that the exhibition then would have a totally different focus. The project manager saw no chance of finding approval for her arguments, even though she was in no doubt that the contribution from individuals would have been important: "It was mainly about the arguments he had [...] I was in a way the weaker part [...]. That a person with so much competence did not follow my arguments, [...] I did not feel capable of having it my way."

The process of cooperation with the different communities went on for a period of nearly two years. The project manager told of an equal relationship between the museum and the communities: The museum most often came up with ideas and suggestions and asked for a

response from the representatives from the communities. On the museum web pages this was concretized: “Resource persons in the communities have had both an advisory and approving function with a view to the form and the content of the exhibition.” The communities were thus given great influence on the work and the section leader later admitted that the cooperation often took place on the conditions made by the representatives from the communities:

*We were totally dependent upon a close cooperation with the communities to get the exhibition we wanted, and it is difficult to cooperate if you enter into a conflict. [...] The most important thing for us was to present how [...] these rooms, these meeting places, function on the premises of the communities. It is their voice [...] we hear here. It is not our interpretations of it.*

During the process it became clear that there were differing opinions in each community, and the museum often faced the challenge of satisfying several community members simultaneously. For the section leader it was important that the cooperation was characterized by respect towards everybody involved, but gradually he had to realize that it was impossible to avoid that somebody felt misunderstood or misinterpreted:

*We had done all we could to do this without offending somebody. But: We could not be sure that we had avoided that! Because [...] there were many debates and disagreements within the communities and between the different communities [...]. I thought that was a shame [...], but, [...] we could not actually be assured that we did not offend somebody [...]. It was not possible to do more than we did. [...] I am not able to ensure that nobody feels offended, that does not work; I cannot take that responsibility.*

The section leader and the project manager were aware that there were several controversial topics that the communities did not want to include in the exhibition rooms. But since the rooms were to be designed on the communities’ premises, they had to find other ways of problematizing topics they thought were important to introduce. A series of seminars became the solution to be able to discuss themes connected to different communities; themes the employees knew were regarded as so sensitive or controversial that they had to be presented with the utmost care. Themes which were discussed in the seminars were for instance homosexuality, gender perspectives, or rituals for the slaughter of animals, “that is, such themes which often provoke conflicts. [...] Pretty intense discussions came about [...] then the disagreement came to the surface”.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Quotation from the section leader.

## **The Angling of the Theme and the Choice of the Dissemination Method**

The fact that the exhibition was to show holy rooms and thereby give a more general view of six different religious communities, was at the basis for the angling of themes and choice of the dissemination methods. Architectural questions and aesthetics were also very important. Everything was to be presented from a neutral and well-informed standpoint, not from an individual point-of-view. The dialogue between the museum and the single community and between all the communities was therefore central. The employees met the representatives from the communities separately and invited all of them to common evenings in the museum thereafter. In the meetings with the separate communities, the external expert consultant was present and here drafts for texts were examined. In addition, the physical design of the rooms was discussed, something which the exhibition designer used as a starting point for his work. As a consequence, the expert consultant and the communities had decisive influence on the professional selection of content in the rooms.

The project covered much more than these conversations and meetings. The project manager told of extensive renovation and construction work in the rooms, cooperation with artists and many discussions concerning the financial framework. In addition, the project group carried through a lot of fieldwork, visited, and documented feasts in the religious communities.

## **Reactions from the Contributors, the Public and the Press**

The exhibition opened in October 2007 and was marked with a large celebration where all the partners were invited. The section leader told in the interview of a very special atmosphere, triggered by seeing all six communities gathered and in dialogue with each other, in addition to the many interested visitors who expressed their appreciation of the exhibition concept. Representatives from the communities who had not been in contact before, showed their holy rooms to each other and began talking together. After the opening, the museum developed an offer for schools which turned out to become very popular. Through the school offer and the debate evenings the museum succeeded in disseminating knowledge of the different religious communities, and at the same time highlight superior themes like dialogue and mutual respect. The communities brought their own guests, and both other groups and institutions wished to make use of the museum and its facilities for seminars and religion-related themes. Consequently, the museum's goal was reached: "The exhibition has been used more than we could dream of".

All the same, the museum employees discovered that some people refused to enter the rooms which represented the synagogue and the mosque at a time when the media focused most intently on the conflict in the Middle East. It also happened that visitors did not want to enter all the rooms. But there were fewer such reactions than expected: "Some of these religions are, after all, in serious conflict with each other, for example the Jews and the Muslims [...]".

And we built a synagogue and a mosque wall to wall and thought that here, there might be reactions.” Since also the press referred to the exhibition solely in positive terms, there were no public discussions or critical reactions after the opening of the exhibition.

The museum’s superior goal was reached: A “change in attitudes” among the visitors and a contradiction of the myth that the predominant relation between the different religious communities is conflict. Increased knowledge brought more people to having a new view of “the other” and the repercussions were “absolute dialogue in the best sense” - though not in the form of a public debate where also critical voices were heard. The section leader was left with a feeling that perhaps they had been too afraid to bring up the more controversial aspects: “I have probably learnt that you should dare more [...]. You think you take a long stride, and then it is perhaps shorter than you thought. You could take a longer stride, it is not that dangerous.”

The project leader had never doubted that the exhibition would be well received, the work effort had been extensive and thorough, and she felt sure that no essential aspect had been forgotten. Nor did she feel any kind of uncertainty regarding the reactions from the communities; the contact had been too tight and extensive. Nevertheless, she thought that this might have developed differently if she had included the individuals’ narratives. The focus had probably been another from the press and the visitors, and the uncertainty even bigger. Now she was mostly concerned with her colleagues’ reactions. This was so because she had largely felt alone with the work. Even though she knew that she could always turn to the section leader or her colleagues, she assessed the total workload in the section as so heavy that she chose to handle most of the moral challenges on her own. The workload increased on the way, without this possibility having been discussed in advance. It was therefore not possible to allocate more personnel to the tasks, something which led to a large workload for the project leader: “I felt alone [...] and I felt ever so overworked.” This had severe consequences for her health: During a whole year after the opening of the exhibition she felt exhausted and worn out.

She experienced in her own body how demanding the work on such exhibition concepts may be, and she emphasized in the interview with me how important it is for the museums to be more conscious of this. Projects about sensitive or controversial themes must be handled very thoroughly and with care. They demand a more accomplished preparation and a larger number of project employees than other projects. In advance, it is important to prepare for unpredictable changes in the project. From the moment the process is launched, you must have human resources available to follow the development persistently, and it is precisely this development which is difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate.

## ***Min kropp - min sannhet at Vest-Agder Museum, Norway***

In January 2008, Vest-Agder Museum in Kristiansand approached the local population, inviting all who might be interested, to take part in an upcoming exhibition project. The invitation was issued by means of a newspaper advertisement, posters and short announcements over the radio and in the local press. The questions raised in the advertisement made it clear what was to be the focus of the exhibition: What are your relations to your own body, are you willing to be interviewed and photographed, and what do the concepts of “beauty” and “ideal” mean to you? For the museum staff this represented an opportunity to learn more about the possibilities of cooperation between a museum and a local population and to find out whether their own museum could create an exhibition based on unknown premises: There was no way of finding out in advance how many would contact the museum, what themes might be brought up through different perspectives on bodies, or what personal stories might be told.<sup>158</sup>

The scientific and technical basis of the project consisted of established methods and approaches used in order to document contemporary social issues, such as different interview techniques, video recording, how to handle sensitive information, as well as a strong focus on the dissemination of individual emotions. Behind the questions and the preplanned approach - an in-depth interview with each participant followed by a photo session on individual conditions in a specially designed studio - were several months of preparations. These included a comprehensive internal test project carried out at the museum, interviews with a psychologist in order to learn more about the handling of personal matters of delicate nature, and contact with a lawyer who controlled the declaration of consent which each participant was supposed to sign.

Over a period of three months the museum was contacted by 17 individuals, aged 18 to 76. Each of them stayed at the museum for several hours explaining what “body” meant to them, being interviewed and finally photographed under conditions they themselves defined. 16 of the participants were later presented in the exhibition *Min kropp - min sannhet* (literally: “My Body - My Truth”), which opened in September 2008, exploiting a combination of sound, photographs, and text for the presentation. It was the hope of the project group that the combination of photographs and interview extracts would inspire all visitors to reflect upon their own ideas of “ideal” and “normal” and reconsider their prejudices against the looks of other people. What is it that defines one’s own notions about the “ideal body”? How far is a human being willing to go in order to adapt his or her body to a fixed idea of beauty? And what lies behind the desire to adapt or to stand out?

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<sup>158</sup> The project was also connected to *Mangfoldsåret*, which was the overall label for a number of cultural projects in 2008, in accordance with Government guidelines and the ongoing ABM-development.

The exhibition also dwelt upon changes in women's fashion from 1750 until today, showed how people reacted to nudity in the past, and gave a short survey of beauty ideals from about 1800 to the present. As a supplement were shown works by a textile designer who had created fashion models for disabled persons. The total area of the exhibition was about 150 square metres and the museum received no financial support for this project. About 20.000 visitors had seen the exhibition before it was taken down in the autumn of 2010. The museum had received a lot of positive feedback, in particular for having brought forward a hot social issue and for having organized a "different" kind of exhibition. In this context it is interesting to note that the local newspaper reviewed the event as an art exhibition and not as a project of current social documentation.<sup>159</sup>

I was myself the project manager of this exhibition. Ethnologist by education, I was in my late thirties when the planning of the exhibition started. In the project group was also a photographer, equally in her late thirties, and as we moved along, the museum's designer and two craftsmen joined in.

### **The Museum Internally and Externally**

Kristiansand Museum, one of the sections of Vest-Agder Museum, had a staff of eleven in 2008. I was one of its three curators and the one responsible for the documentation of themes of current societal interest in the society. Internally, there was considerable leeway for working independently, as long as the economic framework laid down by the administration was respected. The theme "body" popped up during a joint session where the entire museum staff took part, and was chosen as a project after a discussion of how the museum could assume its societal role in the best possible way, satisfy the Government's demand for higher ambitions in the field of research, and develop its capacity for disseminating experience and for work on tabooed themes.

All the interviews with individuals were done by me alone, and all the photographs were taken by the project photographer, who incidentally was assisted by a colleague. Ethical challenges were sporadically and spontaneously discussed with several of my colleagues, but the final decisions were in general taken by me, based on my own personal moral understanding or after a consultation with the photographer. Decisions that could possibly affect the public standing of the museum were discussed with the director.

After the opening of the exhibition we were all pleased with the result. The display of exhibits, the theme and the angling were seen as satisfactory, considering the fact that this was the first time such an approach was put to the test. It was evident that all the participants

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<sup>159</sup> *Fædrelandsvennen* 2008.

were actively involved with their own bodies. Personally, I did not in any respect consider the exhibition as provocative or controversial, but all the same I had experienced that the theme was sensitive to a high number of participants and visitors. I was equally left with a feeling that too much respect had been given to the wishes of the participants, the consequence of which was that the exhibition had not appealed to the public as much as it might otherwise have done.

### **Cooperation with External Contributors**

The contact with external participants was the core of the entire project, which also raised the question as to whether a museum of cultural history could meet the local population on their own terms and bring up something that was important to them. The traditional view had been that museums should organize exhibitions based on what the museum staff felt was important. Now we wanted to give the local population the possibility to contribute with something they themselves saw as significant. Only the framework circumscribing the project was pre-established, the rest was to be governed by the response we received.

Altogether the exhibition was based on texts, sounds, and images from a total of 16 participants from four different nations, three of whom were men and 13 women. Two of these wanted to remain completely anonymous, quite a few had been bullied as they grew up, and several had suffered from eating disorders. Some were tattooed or had piercings, and a good number had over the years adjusted their own bodily self-image. Most of them were reasonably happy with their body at the time the photographs were taken, but made it clear that the process of achieving this had not always been easy. The participants were particularly concerned with eating disorder, naturism, and bullying, so we designed specific text-boards devoted to these themes for the exhibition.

The following selection of cases may illustrate what I experienced as morally challenging issues during my cooperation with the participants, and what actions I chose to take in response:

A pregnant woman wanted to take part in the project, among other things because she wanted to document her pregnancy through photographs taken at two different stages of its development. She was extremely afraid of being recognized, asked for full anonymity, and it became evident that on several occasions she had to sort out her participation with her boyfriend. She asked us to modify certain key items of information in the text presenting her case which were important for the content of her narrative, such as for instance her nationality. My response to this was negative: we could omit such information, but not deliberately falsify the facts.

A student who had contacted the museum soon turned out to be extremely critical to the approach we had planned. On several occasions she had questioned me about my own motivation for the exhibition and made it clear that she wanted complete control over everything that was going to happen to her story and photographs. Among other things she refused to be photographed in our studio and had precise ideas about where in the exhibition arena her photographs should be displayed. She justified this by referring to her interest in and knowledge about art, a background which gave her in her opinion a clear advantage when it came to deciding in what way her contribution should be presented. Out of ten photographs taken where she wanted, she had authorized one for exhibition. We assessed this participant as too demanding and not relevant enough. Our cooperation came to an end and her contribution was excluded from the exhibition.

In the interview, another woman told us about a childhood dominated by a mother who had had strong opinions about her daughter's weight, which she considered to be excessive. This had provoked serious eating disorders and self-inflicted injury with the daughter. The latter's motivation for contributing to the exhibition was again related to her mother, who at that time had begun to comment on her grandchildren's looks in a similar way. The woman therefore had a clear message to all mothers based on her own experience - do not do what my mother did - and she confronted the audience with her own face in the exhibition. Balancing the need to convey the woman's message without paying too much attention to the mother, a person who was not part of the exhibition and who had not been given the opportunity to comment on her role in the narrative, was a delicate task for us.

Yet another woman had vividly reported how an earlier husband had forbidden her to breastfeed her children or stop smoking because he was afraid she might risk losing her figure. Her own and her husband's different nationalities were particularly relevant for the narrative, which would have given an exciting contribution to the exhibition. We were allowed to report the case but only separated from and independent of the woman's narrative. In my view this was too impersonal, so we decided to omit this part of the narrative.

One participant wanted to include her nine-year-old child in the photographic documentation, contending that such a project would be beneficial to the child. Seen from a moral point of view, declining this request did not appear as particularly challenging to me. A child of nine would not be able to understand the consequences of taking part in an exhibition, and our project was exclusively focused on adults.

For me personally the project has brought about a considerable amount of "practical learning" and given me a lot of new experience. Among other things it demonstrated how important



it was to adapt to the personality of the participants and equally how my encounter with the participants and their stories often spontaneously triggered empathy, sympathy, or antipathy in my own mind.

Six weeks after the opening of the exhibition a comprehensive evaluation form was sent to all the participants. Several of these answered the question of how they experienced the difference between talking to a newspaper and participating in a museum project. “The media turn your words upside-down, but not the exhibition, then I am myself” and “one is not ‘profiled’ to the same extent. In fact there are [...] more people who read the newspaper or watch television than those who visit an exhibition”, were two of the comments here. Some were surprised by the interest shown by the media: “It was suddenly very intimate to see oneself on television and in the newspaper. It was in the presence of everyone else. Not disagreeable, but different from the photo session. But I am proud of having been part of this exhibition.”

### **The Angling of the Theme and the Choice of the Dissemination Method**

After the interviews and the photo sessions we were left with overwhelming photographic material, a large number of audio recordings and several hours of recorded interviews plus innumerable pages of interview notes. Out of the nearly 100 photographs taken of each participant, a selection of ten to twelve was made and sent to the participant for approval. Here we chose the photos which in our opinion best reflected the personal impressions the participant had made during the interview. In addition the interviews were condensed into short written texts, based on my personal impressions. The chosen photographs and the text were subsequently sent to the participant for approval.

In extensive declarations of consent each participant had to cross out what parts of the material the museum was authorized to use, e.g. first names, age and voice recordings, and whether the authorization was valid only for the permanent installation or if it applied as well to a planned follow-up travelling exhibition, to the museum’s home page or to the marketing of the exhibition in general. Based on the authorizations given, I decided which parts of the approved material were to be used in the exhibition, and how the different elements were to be combined into a unified whole.

The decisions concerning how the participants’ narratives, the text-boards with supplementary information about the themes or the contributions of the textile designer were to be used inside the area of the exhibition, were discussed with the museum’s designer. The participants’ narratives were to be highlighted and presented in such a manner as to be “experienced” by the visitors and preferably impress them to the highest possible degree. Each participant was therefore presented by means of voice, images and text and a

large- scale photographs measuring 1x1.5 metres.<sup>160</sup> In addition to this we inserted several effects intended to satisfy the audience's need for experience, this in the form of mirrors and possibilities for taking photographs of themselves. The whole project was otherwise disseminated through conferences, minor articles, a travelling exhibition, invitations to school classes, a touring of schools under the auspices of Den kulturelle skolesekken (DKS), (literally: “<sup>161</sup>The Cultural Satchel”), and on the web pages of the museum.

## **Reactions from the Contributors, the Public and the Press**

The feedback from our visitors was entirely positive. Many said they would have liked to be part of the project, but had not seen the advertisements. Comments coming from an even larger group implied that such an exhibition at a museum of cultural history was something completely new, never seen before. A man telephoned the museum several times to make sure he would be contacted if the museum ever decided to embark upon a similar project in the future. Others wanted to suggest ideas for other contemporary socially relevant themes the museum ought to bring up. The comments given in the visitors' book rendered reflections on the exhibition - which repeatedly was described with words such as “deep”, “inspiring”, “courageous” and “fresh” - but there were also several who had written down thoughts on their own body. The museum was visited by a large number of school classes and the dissemination programme used for the permanent exhibition, like the one included in the subsequent travelling exhibition, invited the students to discuss in what ways today's idealized body images affect their own body image.

From the very beginning the press was interested in the topic, and the project was on several occasions covered by radio, newspaper and television.<sup>162</sup> *Fædrelandsvennen*, the local newspaper, printed several extensive articles. In one of the early articles the cultural editor asked for a clear intention with the project and wanted to know whether this was something a museum ought to spend time on. When the exhibition was over, one of the critics working for the newspaper evaluated the project and concluded that “the exhibition is pedagogical and well intentioned, and it is marked by an unmistakable touch of solicitude, respect and

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<sup>160</sup> Voice, photographs and text were linked together. Each participant was given a personal banner with several photographs and a corresponding text on their own upbringing and ideas. One of the pictures was given an independent banner with a chosen quotation which condensed the essence of the participant's message as understood by the project leader. The visitors could hear the voice of the person displayed in the pictures, both independently and in a film of approximately 20 minutes' duration where all the participants were presented one by one. Here the participants explained what they considered to be an ideal body, what they thought of their own body, and what beauty meant to them.

<sup>161</sup> DKS was a government financed cultural programme for schools. (Translator's note)

<sup>162</sup> NRK radio and local broadcasters had news and features on the project on the following days: 08.01.2008, 17.01.2008, 14.05.2008 og 17.09.2008. *Fædrelandsvennen*, the leading local newspaper, had articles on 19.01.2008, 26.01.2008, 13.09.2008 and 18.09.2008, and *Kristiansand Avis*, another local newspaper, on 16.09.2008. In addition to this there were some articles on the net.

interest for those who take part”.<sup>163</sup> It was obvious that the media took a particular interest in individual destinies and first and foremost in strong narratives, and I experienced it as morally challenging to consider whether individual participants ought to be asked if they wanted to talk to the press. On the one hand this would stimulate the interest for and the attention paid to the exhibition and its theme, on the other some of the participants might be exposed to the public in a manner that could have negative consequences for them.<sup>164</sup>

Internally we reviewed the response from the public and the press by noting that the feedback the museum had received after the opening of the exhibition had been too positive. Everyone seemed to be satisfied. As expected, the message was perceived in accordance with what was intended: It is only of subordinate significance how a person looks, and everyone ought to be satisfied with the body he or she has got. The cooperation with the external participants had been impressed by respect for their conditions, maybe at the cost of further information to the public. My conclusion was that we had been too afraid of not respecting the privacy of the participants or of bringing in a more provocative undertone into the exhibition, which might have provoked some people. At the same time it was from the beginning our intention that the exhibition to an unusually large extent was going to focus on the participants. As we saw it, a major problematization or a controversial angling of the topic would only have been to their cost.

## **The Religious Exhibition**

### ***Himmelen over Sørlandet, Vest-Agder Museum, Norway***

*Himmelen over Sørlandet* (literally: "Heaven above Sørlandet")<sup>165</sup>, was the second major exhibition project within contemporary documentation at Vest-Agder Museum, and was based upon 30 narratives from individuals who told what faith and religion meant to them personally. As was the case with *Min kropp - min sannhet*, the museum had sought contact with local people via advertisements in the five biggest local newspapers in January and February 2010. Again I was project manager, but in addition to the exhibition being a rather ordinary - though big - exhibition project, this was in fact an exhibition which was created to assure the quality of the findings from the study of the six other exhibitions. The wording

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<sup>163</sup> *Fædrelandsvennen* 2008.

<sup>164</sup> On two occasions after the exhibition had opened, the participants were contacted. First, as mentioned, to answer an extensive evaluation form, and later to ask whether they might be willing to take part in a recording for *Migrapolis*, an NRK television programme on the multicultural society in Norway. The recording session gathered half the number of participants more than a year after the opening of the exhibition. Again it had been demanding for the project manager to find out whether it would be appropriate to contact the participants once more because of a television taking. Since the project was over, she felt that further contact with the participants was not appropriate.

<sup>165</sup> Sørlandet (literally: "the Southern Country"), is the established name for the region of South Norway.  
(Translator's note)

in the advertisements made it clear that we wanted to reach as many people and religious communities as possible. Beforehand, the museum had started cooperating with Universitetet i Agder (UiA), (official English name: “The University of Agder”), where a relatively large research project had looked into religious changes over the last 30 years. The narrative from local people was the starting point of the exhibition. These narratives, combined with the relevant research findings from my study, were to be put into a larger context. The exhibition was opened in March 2011 at Christiansholm festning in Kristiansand, a fortress from the 1600s, and was displayed on approximately 800 square metres over two floors. In addition to the 30 narratives, the exhibition consisted of text banners with excerpts and summaries of research results, a timeline with information on religious changes from 1700 until today, some significant objects connected to the religious life in the region through the years, and contributions from ten religious and secular humanistic communities who were active in the region. Several well-known *sørlendirer* (i.e. people from *Sørlandet*, a defined area in the South of Norway) had been challenged to comment on some critical allegations about faith and religion, and these comments were now displayed.

A well-known textile artist contributed with two tapestries in the exhibition. The museum presented also the results of both a cooperation project with pupils at the age of Confirmation<sup>166</sup> and a extended cooperation with the FTL, Forum for tros- og livssynssamfunn (literally: “Forum for Belief and Life”). A large part of the material which was collected - consisting of texts, poems, audio- and video recordings, film, photographs, objects, and paintings - were displayed by means of modern technology. In the exhibition period at the fortress, from March to September 2011, four theme evenings were arranged,<sup>167</sup> and from October 2011 to October 2012, parts of the exhibition were on display at Vest-Agder Museum, section Kristiansand. In the same period, other parts of the exhibition were used for a travelling exhibition. In all, more than 130 people had contributed to the exhibition, among them scientists, individuals, school pupils, and representatives from several religious communities. With a budget of ca. 1.2 million kroner, which did not include the hours of work for employees and consultants, *Himmelen over Sørlandet* became the largest exhibition project at Vest-Agder Museum so far.

In the exhibition period, about 8000 people visited the exhibition, including between 700 and 800 pupils. Two catalogues were produced, one exhibition catalogue, and a “book” containing all the narratives as texts.<sup>168</sup> Newspapers, radio, and TV covered the exhibition on several occasions, both in the preparatory phase and after the opening.

<sup>166</sup> In Norway usually at the age of 14-15 (a civil or religious ceremony). (Translator’s note)

<sup>167</sup> The four theme evenings were: A concert with hymns and songs about religious change since the 1970s, a dialogue meeting with several religious communities on the topic of “What does a good neighbourhood imply”, a debate evening about the children of missionaries, and one evening on the theme of new-spirituality and its importance.

<sup>168</sup> The «book» consisted of ca. 160 pages and was printed in only 35 copies. It was mainly for use in the exhibition room - for everybody who did not feel comfortable operating the *touch-screen*.

## **The Museum Internally and Externally**

In 2010 and 2011 work at Vest-Agder Museum was still marked by internal reorganizations, mainly in the form of a transition from activities based in sections to interdisciplinary work across sections. *Himmelen over Sørlandet* was one of the first joint exhibition projects. Working on the exhibition went on for nearly one and a half years. The museum's board was in advance informed in writing about the project and warned that it possibly might ignite reactions in the press or in the public. The core of the internal museum group consisted of me, another curator - an art historian in the beginning of her 40s-, and an exhibition designer in his middle 40s. Later the group was extended with the museum's temporary leader of dissemination, a pedagogical advisor in the beginning of her 40s. Craftsmen and several curators were at need drawn into the work. Vest-Agder Museum has for a long time been active in the national *BRUDD*-group, and thereby the museum's societal role and the consequences of this for the practical work at the museum, were often discussed - both in the project group and in the *BRUDD*-group. The professional, internal work at the museum was already before 2010 directed towards the *BRUDD* philosophy, and one of the exhibition's most important goals was to promote reflection and discussion about different conceptions of religion and the importance of faith. Religion as a theme was not understood as something controversial or tabooed, but as a private theme which demanded special considerations during the collection of personal narratives. On a superior level, the objective of the project was to study, evaluate, and optimize continuously the cooperation process with individuals, expert consultants and the local people about a private theme which seemed to be important and interesting for the local community.<sup>169</sup>

## **Cooperation with Individuals**

The establishment of contact started with two advertisements in the local newspaper. The questions in the advertisements were centered on the issues how faith has marked one's own life, or what faith or lack of faith means to one's life today. It was also arranged that the museum could be contacted via e-mail, letters, telephone, or blog. The project was also marketed through several lectures, broadcasts, and newspaper articles. 31 persons contacted the museum, of these 30 were included in the exhibition; all of them primarily on their own premises. This meant that they could themselves choose whether they wanted the interview to take place at home or in the museum, whether they wanted to make their narrative in writing, or via sound recording or film, and how extensive the contribution could be. On

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<sup>169</sup> Thus the employees were prepared for a working process which might change continuously. Faith and religion was chosen as the theme due to the proximity of the University through the PhD-programme and the impression that the attention of the media and the local population was often directed towards questions of religion or philosophy of life. For the research process itself it was without importance which theme one worked with, as long as the theme required that the museum had to proceed cautiously in the process of collecting the personal narratives. This goal may have contributed in having the applications for financial support granted.

account of ethical research considerations everybody was encouraged to think thoroughly through possible consequences of being recognized and advised to choose a large degree of anonymity if they were uncertain.<sup>170</sup> Most of the participants wanted to be advised as to what modes of presentation were best suited. Most of them wanted the museum first to sum up the conversation, so that the participants could have their own chronologically reported narratives sent over, for review. This entailed a lot of work for the employees, but gave at the same time the possibility of writing down the history in a way which represented what the museum saw as most interesting for the public. In the declaration of consent, which all the contributors had to sign, several of the methods of dissemination, which the museum considered putting to use, were examined. Here all the individual participants were given the opportunity to choose what they wanted to make reservations against. Each participant had for instance to tick off if the museum could use age and first name, and if the contribution could be used in the exhibition room or in a travelling exhibition. The participants were continuously informed about the process in two information letters, and they were after the opening asked to fill in an evaluation form where they could report back how the cooperation with the Museum had functioned.

Men and women of different creeds were presented in the exhibition, and the age of the participants was between 34 and 80 years. Most of them had personal meetings with the museum employees.<sup>171</sup> The museum ended up with a rich material, consisting of letters, poems, life histories, photographs, paintings, video recordings, and sound recordings of voices, music, or prayers, in addition to objects which represented various memories for the participants.

The following selection of cases may visualize what the project group experienced as morally challenging in the cooperation with the participants and what decisions were taken:

During a long interview a woman told about her childhood in a sect which is still active at Sørlandet. Her contribution to the exhibition gradually became very extensive since she took the opportunity of having a confrontation with her past and the experiences she was left with. Beside a text of nine pages where she among other things wrote about the lack of care and organizational culture in the sect, two poems, and a survey of what she considered to be the 100 commandments of Pietism, she wanted to include several self-composed

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170 Cf. i.a. Alver & Øyen 1997: 11-36; Ruyter 2003.

171 Among the participants, nine came from Aust-Agder County and 21 from Vest-Agder County. 22 of them made contact with the museum, and eight became interested in the project after the project manager had told of the exhibition in private contexts. 26 have had personal meetings with the museum employees, four have sent in texts or poems without further contact. Two wanted to remain completely anonymous, eleven permitted that the presentation contained voice recordings, video, photos which might lead to identification. The remaining 17 came forward with first name, age, or both. 23 wanted that their history should be presented by means of esthetical elements like poems, photos, paintings, music, or prayers, seven wanted only texts. Most of them were connected to Christian environments, but some told of transitions between religious communities and from belief to non-belief or the other way round.

surveys of literature connected to Pietism and what she considered the possible psychological consequences of a childhood spent in such a pietistic community. This case was challenging for many reasons, first and foremost because of the personal meeting with a woman who obviously struggled after many difficult experiences in childhood, which still marked her life. The woman expressed repeatedly that participating in the exhibition was her way of confronting a difficult childhood and a possibility of having sorrow and anger dealt with.

On the other hand, the museum had to find a way of presenting the extensive material, so that it could be appreciated by the public. As in several other cases, I consciously disapproved of editing or changing texts, which in this case was a survey of literature about Pietism and definitions connected to it.

Another woman told about her experiences connected to meetings with demons, which she could only avert with the help of her Christian faith and specific words from the Bible. On sound- and video recordings she related vividly of when and how she had experienced the demons' presence, and how she had managed to tackle the situation. Further, she described the happiness she daily received through her faith. I understood that the participant's contact with the demons was an important contribution to the exhibition, but had not heard of it earlier. Therefore I used the expert consultants to assure myself of this being a known aspect of the Christian faith, something the consultant confirmed. The video-recording which demonstrated the general importance of demons and faith, was too long and had to be edited to make it more suited for publication. We wanted to include the sequence about demons to show the diversity of the exhibition, while the woman on the other hand, experienced the meeting with the demons as less important and wanted to focus more on the happiness which her faith gave her. The woman's wishes were fulfilled in order to make her able to identify herself with her own contribution. Further, I found that we needed background music to make also the shortened contribution more interesting. When the woman was introduced to her recording followed by the background music which the museum had suggested, she expressed that she almost felt ridiculed: The music did not suit what she felt. Also in this case we complied with the woman's wishes and the music was removed.

Several participants admitted of contacts with ghosts or a belief in possible contact with the dead. Two participants told during the interviews in detail that they often had been in contact with dead persons whom they both saw and talked to. In the middle of an interview, one of them started talking to a diseased relative and asked him to wait with his comments until the interview was over. Both persons were active members in Christian congregations and the incidents were common-place in their daily lives. The participants had told that the contact with these diseased persons had a calming effect and were important to them, and that it strengthened their faith in God. But when I included this in the texts which summed up their

life histories, both texts were returned with a request to delete the paragraph which dealt specifically with the contact they had with the dead. None of the participants were familiar with the other participants' histories, and were neither aware that there were many who had related similar incidents, but both were all the same determined that it should not be referred to in the exhibition. I interpreted communication with the dead to be tabooed, based on the strong belief in God expressed by the participants, and that this was a non-accepted practice in the Christian communities which the participants belonged to. This impression was also based on newspaper articles I had come across where statements from community or church leaders were quoted. Personally, I thought that this was one of the most important findings and that such a tabooed theme would complement the exhibition: To communicate with the dead seemed to be a natural and important part of life for several persons. In case participants would not dare speak out about this because it was not in line with the communities' or the church's interpretation of what was generally accepted in their circles, I thought it was even more important to let it be revealed in the exhibition. But how could this be done without exposing the participants who did not want this to be revealed? A general exhibition text containing information about the fact that several of the participants from Christian environments often communicated with the dead, might lead to a reaction from either the persons involved or other participants, especially if this was such a tabooed theme as I assumed. On the other hand, one of the exhibition's main goals was to initiate a debate in the society. After a discussion in the internal project group, it was decided to drop this from the exhibition: Promoting a debate should not be done at the expense of the participants.<sup>172</sup>

After the termination of the project period, we concluded that the balance between meeting a human being who told a very private and often strong history, and challenging an unknown audience on the background of this history, had been the most demanding aspect. Several private histories had been related so vividly that I more than once had reacted with compassion and a wish to protect the participant and her history. This could not be combined with the goal of making a challenging exhibition. Even in the cases when the participant left the decision of what should be displayed in the exhibition to us, we chose solutions which we thought best benefitted the participant. The focus of the project was markedly changed during the working process: From a goal of challenging the audience by using personal narratives, to considering what was most consistent with the needs of the participant. The same conclusion was drawn by the curator who had carried through three of the interviews. After the exhibition, she summed up what she had experienced as most challenging in the following way: "Having met these people, they became "my" informants, and I felt a need to take care

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172 This finding from *Himmelen over Sørlandet* was later followed up in a book project in cooperation with philosopher of religion Jan-Olav Henriksen, see Henriksen & Pabst 2013. The starting point was with the same problem for discussion, but with a new material.



of them and protect them, and that nothing should happen that was unpleasant for them.” Moreover, she described why she had changed focus during the working process:

*It would have been very wrong for me if the exhibition [...] had asked directly critical questions about something the informants related. Therefore we became much more of an uncritical transmitter than we had planned at the start. [...] From an ethical perspective in relation to the participants, we could not allow the exhibition to criticize directly some of the things they told or thought.*

As a practical result of the work, we both noted that the process had been much more time-consuming than originally planned. The follow-up of the participants in some cases devoured several scores of hours per person, and the more we wanted to accommodate, the more work fell on us in practice. When paintings or poems were part of the contribution, the participant had in addition often distinct wishes as to how these should be displayed. If several poems were sent over from one participant, they were often supposed to be arranged in a special order in relation to each other, paintings should preferably be illuminated after very specific instructions etc. Some participants wanted their contribution to be followed by accompanying music or a drawing which the museum was expected to find.

### **Cooperation with Expert Consultants**

The theme of the exhibition, religion and faith in Southern Norway today, was among other things chosen because of the expertise found at the University of Agder, where more than 20 scholars had been involved in a large research project, *Gud på Sørlandet* (literally: “God in Southern Norway”). It addressed the religious changes which had taken place in Southern Norway during the last 30 to 40 years and resulted in extensive scientific production.<sup>173</sup> The project manager of *Gud på Sørlandet* was invited to become a permanent member of the museum’s project group during the period of working on the exhibition.

After an initial meeting with several scholars a project group was established, consisting of the internal project group at the museum and one external expert consultant - the above mentioned project manager of *Gud på Sørlandet*. The project group met regularly and all questions related to the exhibition’s scholarly foundation were discussed here. After the work load and the time pressure began to increase persistently, the project group was expanded with two members in the autumn of 2010; another expert consultant from the university and one educationalist from the museum. The discussions in the new and extended project group were intense, with several prolonged meetings every four to six week and frequent contact via

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<sup>173</sup> Published in the form of four scientific books and a long series of articles in national and international scientific journals.

e-mail in the meantime. At the same time, the internal core of the project group - the curator, the designer, and I - worked closely together and held regular meetings at short notice.

The cooperation and the discussion forum turned out to be of crucial importance, something I later summed up in this way: "I experienced that the cooperation [...] was very good and efficient. As project manager I see quite clearly that it had not been possible to implement the project without the kind of supporters whom one works well with." Scholarly questions of a religious character were discussed in meetings where the expert consultants were present. In the beginning, the questions most often concerned formulations connected to advertisements or questionnaires, but also how one should angle the themes of the exhibition and what kind of research existed already. Later, the meetings dealt with questions as to how the material should be presented, how deeply one should go into some smaller details and what elements had to be included to make a correct picture. After the work was finished all the group members answered, independently of each other, that the working process had been instructive and mainly positive. This answer came in spite of the fact that the working process had become much more extensive than planned at the start and consequently more time- and work consuming than expected. The atmosphere at the meetings was for the most part characterized by good discussions, reciprocal sympathy, and a will to reach a common goal. All parties have continuously through conversations and discussions tried to find solutions one could agree on.

The moral challenges in the cooperation were above all connected to the reciprocal expectations, which we had not sufficiently clarified beforehand. Who would deal with what, what should the external expert consultants quite specifically contribute with, and how should we work together, apart from meeting regularly? To me, these questions were also connected to the starting point, which indicated that the university was an official co-partner and that two professional consultants used a lot of time contributing with expert knowledge to the exhibition; working hours they did not get paid for. The museum utilized the cooperation with the university among other things in the marketing to show scientific weight in the working process and the exhibition. The university was allowed to disseminate its research results in a new arena of dissemination - but how much was this worth? Could the museum "order" texts, or could the expert consultants at short notice be asked to make suggestions to the museum's plans? To what degree should one comply with the expert consultants' wish to make visible the *Gud på Sørlandet* project? How much should one consult a co-partner towards whom one wanted to show consideration, while one at the same time disagreed with certain pieces of advice and was aware that the responsibility for the exhibition rested with the museum? I felt a great deal of uncertainty throughout the working process as to what ought to be prioritized: the museum's need for professional assistance or respect for the expert consultants' use of time resources? Should the museum's opinion of how the exhibition ought to be displayed,

or the respect for scholarly grounded suggestions from the expert consultants on topics and volume, come first?

From the outset I had expected that “the museum could focus on the design of the exhibition and the cooperation with external partners, and that the external expert consultants would pave the way so that professional background information, related to the participants’ ideas, would fit into place”. This expectation was not well enough clarified with the expert consultant, who thought that “we, on the research side, were expected to come forth with ideas and suggestions, and that the museum would be responsible for the exhibition itself, take a stand on the choice of material and develop presentation forms”.<sup>174</sup> Both researchers wanted to bring into the project relevant, historical background material and to disseminate research results on religious change in Southern Norway. The expert consultant, who participated from the beginning, expected that “some important traits from the research on *Gud på Sørlandet* would be presented in a varied way”, while the other expected that “I should suggest central themes and deliver basic material which the museum employees would use as a basis for working out the texts”.

One consequence of these deviating expectations was that the museum employees several times were encouraged to intensify their studies in the discipline religion in Southern Norway, something the expert consultants had seen as an implicit condition for the cooperation. I had, however, concrete reasons why one should not venture into a more superficial reading of one’s field of study, but got the impression from the external expert consultants that they disagreed. The encouragement was repeated several times and probably led to frustration both among the museum employees and the researchers. I had the responsibility for the exhibition and the authority to decide how the process should be driven forward and saw few possibilities to solve the problem. The project had become so big and time-consuming that it was no longer possible to make oneself as acquainted with the special discipline material as one would have done at an ordinary exhibition, where no external competence had been used. Conversations with the expert consultants about this turned out to be difficult, since both had already spent a lot more time than planned at the exhibition. An agreement of cooperation had been made, and both parties were no doubt very competent and therefore important to the exhibition’s professional foundation. When the expectations and the working process were evaluated after the opening of the exhibition, it became evident that thorough clarifications beforehand would have led to a better and easier form of cooperation. All parties would have been willing to go to considerable lengths to comply with the expectations one had agreed on in advance.

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174 Quotation from the professional consultant who had functioned as the project manager of *Gud på Sørlandet*.

In the continued working process moral challenges came to the surface, connected to the question if and how the university's research results should be used in the exhibition. As mentioned, the university employees expected that as many as possible of the research results should be displayed. As a starting point, the museum employees used the texts the researchers had written, but changed them in a way they thought was necessary to make them accessible to an average public, consisting of school pupils, youngsters, elderly people, believers, non-believers; in short, most people. Several challenges were connected to this process. The texts had to be abbreviated and partly simplified, and continuously one had to choose what parts of the extensive material from the university should be shown in the exhibition. The choices were almost impossible to make without special competence of one's own. How should one find out which of the historical incidents had had the largest relevance for the development of the region? The texts which the museum employees had abbreviated should be presented to the researchers for approval, since the researchers were to have their names on them. Together with the challenges connected to the wish to accommodate single individuals' needs and desires, this gave the employees a minimum of operational latitude for choosing something without having the full picture and who in addition must have everything they had written approved. The challenges were partly solved when the expert consultants more or less got exclusive responsibility for a portion of the texts, something which again led to misunderstandings about the distribution of work, a feeling of helplessness in me and an increased workload for the expert consultants.

Rapidly, it became evident that research results did not always exist for all the aspects which individuals had brought forward or those that the employees thought were important. In two cases the museum chose to contact scientists outside the university to acquire further and divergent information. Four theme evenings were arranged after the exhibition, also with the aim of investigating some of the themes more thoroughly. The internal project group wanted to direct attention to certain sides of the religious life in Southern Norway, without the expert consultants being in agreement. Several of the individual subjective narratives seemed to indicate something that did not appear in the university's research. But how should one highlight themes or aspects which the museum found more relevant than some of the research results which were crucial to the *Gud på Sørlandet* project? The curator in the project group finally summed up the limitations she experienced in the following way:

*VAM must be given the opportunity to use possible research results from UiA in a more critical way. [...] The museum ought to be allowed to collect and present research results which are incompatible with or reach other conclusions than the people at UiA do.*

It further became apparent that the very word “challenge” was connected to moral challenges. The museum wanted to make a challenging exhibition, but what was interpreted as “challenging”, was a very personal matter. Was it challenging to relate to new methods of dissemination or critical approaches, or was it challenging enough to relate to a great mass of knowledge? Also internally in the museum there were different opinions of what was controversial or tabooed and how such themes should be handled. Reaching an agreement of which concrete words should be used turned out to become a long and demanding process.

The designer finally expressed that he had expected to raise “critical and puzzling questions about religion”, something which presupposed that one dared make new contexts by putting together elements which originally were opposites. The goal of the exhibition was, as mentioned, to create dialogue and debate, and the museum employees wanted to test several initiatives in the exhibition. The expert consultant on his side was critical to what he saw as “less weight on the research material” and that “the work with ‘the apt wording’ [...] took too much time and was insufficiently connected to religion in Southern Norway. Which approach should one choose: The museum’s way or the expert consultant’s? The museum employees possessed a wider competence when it came to making exhibitions and felt a strong desire to create debate through the exhibition. The museum’s target group was, not least, different from that of the researchers. The expert consultant on his side knew the field of research which provided the frames for the exhibition, and had better knowledge of the religious environments and knew of the possible reactions to the exhibition that loomed large in the region.

An important last point to be mentioned here became apparent in a follow-up interview with the expert consultant after the opening. The expert consultant, who joined the group near the end of the project, was very pronounced that she would not have accepted the use of the material if she had known that her research results were going to be dismantled by the museum employees in order to create a controversial or provoking context:

*This has to do with my professional integrity. [...] It may be compared to how you can be used by a journalist, when you hand over something, and then it is clipped and cut and intertwined into a context where you lose your bearings and where the meaning becomes distorted. I am not saying that such a thing would happen in a museum, because precisely in a museum you have the basic trust that there are professionals with competence in history, who are there at the outset.*

If she were to be willing to contribute to the project, a dialogue would be required between the museum and her how the research could be used to draw a more correct picture of how religion was observed in Southern Norway. Here both parties must be willing to approach the other.

At the evaluation after completed cooperation all the participants in the project group were asked to present some general view-points about possibilities and challenges found in a project of cooperation between a museum and a university. From the side of the museum it was among other things mentioned that one “can put a strain on the professional competence which a museum does not possess”, in addition to the advantage of being able to refer to the “professionalism represented by the universities”, but also that “the disadvantage can be that a marked dividing line is felt in opinions of how to sharpen a message”. From the university’s side it was mentioned that “the museums have channels of dissemination and dissemination competence which should be valued by us researchers. The biggest challenge is to find a good balance between what the researchers see as professionally justifiable and the simplification necessarily implied in the dissemination.”

The museum employees afterwards summed up the practical knowledge that such a project of cooperation always ought to be initiated with a thorough clarification of what to expect from both parties and what commitments the partners make. If one enters into a project of cooperation with expert consultants who have done research in the theme of the exhibition, one must be prepared that they will have clear thoughts of how the research can and ought to be used. The cooperation must in that case be based upon finding solutions that both parties are comfortable with, something which may happen at the expense of the museum’s wish to create discussion and debate. In the last analysis, the cooperation is to a large extent dependent on the persons who participate in the work and who work closely together over a long period. Reciprocal sympathy and mutual good communication, common wording and working methods, trust in each other’s competence and flexibility in relation to own desires, are important aspects here. This does not only apply to the cooperation between museum employees and researchers, but also to the work internally in the museum.

### **The Angling of the Theme and the Choice of the Dissemination Method**

The exhibition was to be displayed in a fortress from the 1600s, which was a challenge in itself. Among other things, the indoor climate was not suitable for the objects which the project group wanted to exhibit, and in that manner the exhibition area influenced the choice of methods of dissemination on several levels. The large amount of material had led to an early decision to produce more than one exhibition catalogue, one should in addition produce a “book” which showed all the subjective narratives in their entirety.

The museum did not know who would approach the museum at the start of the project, what themes would be brought forth or what kind of wishes possible participants would have. A tangible method was decided beforehand; one would include everybody who wanted to join in, but without the museum itself making contact with anybody.

As mentioned, the museum had after a while in its possession an extensive amount of material of texts, photographs, video recordings, sound recordings, paintings and objects. Most of the contributions were based on long interviews, often covering the whole life of the participant. Here so much information was disclosed that one constantly had to assess what to focus on and how it should be presented in the best possible way. Such decisions were taken continuously by me or the curator who was in closest contact with the contributors. With a view to public accessibility, two questions had to be considered: What appeared to be most important for the participants' faith? And what might give the exhibition fresh points-of-view and approaches? But also central questions were also connected to how these personal contributions could be presented to visitors who did not experience the same close contact with the participant as the project group did. An audience who in most cases would not see a face or hear a voice, but who all the same was meant to be touched by the narrative? Here the employees wanted to find methods of dissemination which would lead the visitors to immersing themselves as much as possible in the contributors' experiences. The museum consequently chose to design the male and female characters in the form of presentation boards with room for short excerpts of the participants' contributions. The exhibition thus showed 30 "people" who symbolized one participant each. Every female participant was presented by means of a female figure, every male participant by means of a male figure. If a contributor wanted to include a self-made painting or to be presented via a video recording, these elements were placed in close contact with the figure. The texts connected to the figures functioned as introductions to the participants' - most often extensive contributions -, and they had to be short and chosen with care: Every participant must be presented in a truthful way seen from the participants' standpoint, and in an interesting way from the viewpoint of the audience. If the introduction ignited interest and the audience wanted to see more of the participant, the whole of the participant's contribution was made available, e.g. on touch-screens. If the introduction did not ignite interest, the visitors might choose to have a closer look at the contribution made by another participant who seemed more interesting. Thus the visitors got a form of personal direction of the exhibition. Such a way of presentation challenges the public to make continuous choices: Who does one want to be better acquainted with? Which history is the most interesting? Is one willing to get acquainted with a person who has a totally different faith from oneself?

It was a conscious choice to leave more and more of the responsibility for what people wanted to read or learn more about to the visitors. The way up to such an exhibition model had after all reduced the employees' freedom of choice. The curator who had interviewed three contributors, and who had helped finding the right methods of dissemination also for the others, finally concluded:

*We [...] must admit that we in the end became much more of an “uncritical transmitter” for both informants and the university than we had thought at the start. My argument that this was all right after all in this exhibition, implied that it was now up to the viewers/ exhibition guests to ask possibly critical questions regarding what they could read/ hear in the exhibition.*

## **Reactions from the Contributors, the Public and the Press**

Six weeks after the opening, a questionnaire with ca. 20 open questions was sent to the individuals who had participated in the exhibition. Close to two thirds of the 30 participants answered, and almost all of them were satisfied with both the working process and the method of dissemination. The guides, who received the audience in the fortress, noted that the exhibition was experienced as something “one needed time to consume”, and which it was impossible to pass through in half an hour. Many of the visitors gave positive responses about the design and the content of the exhibition, but some remarked that the exhibition was heavy with texts. The words “religion” and “faith” seemed to be associated with a lot of prejudices among potential visitors and visitors. Some people turned around on the doorstep when they came to know that the exhibition was about religion and expressed that they assumed this must be a pro-religion exhibition which uncritically spoke up for a God they did not believe in. Others said straightforwardly that they were very surprised when they were persuaded to visit the exhibition. They were of the firm belief that the exhibition would be critical towards religion and were therefore not inclined to come. Four theme evenings were arranged to take up topics which had turned out to be appropriate for the individuals, and all four proved that such arrangements were important forums for visitors to tell about their own experiences and reflections and have a dialogue with like-minded people.

## **The Press**

The exhibition was advertised as the museum’s “largest exhibition project ever” and the local newspaper and TV followed up several cases, both beforehand, during, and after the opening.<sup>175</sup> It was obvious that the participants and their personal contributions were especially interesting, and first and foremost the contributions which told of bad experiences. The museum was on several occasions asked to invite selected contributors when the press had signalled their presence. In such cases we chose the contributors I thought could turn up without feeling exposed. These were without exception participants who had gone public with picture or video recording in the exhibition, and who had a history I considered suitable for our purpose if it reached a wider public.

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<sup>175</sup> Here a.o. *Fædrelandsvennen* 15.01.2010, 23.04.2010, 10.02.2011, 03.03.2011, 12.03.2011, 21.03.2011, and 14.04.2011, *Dagen* 26.05.2011, *Fædrelandsvennen* 14.06.2011, NRK 10.03.2011, *Tæft* 2011/ 1: 38-39 and *Ferieavis* *Kristiansand* 30.06.2011.



The exhibition received solely positive media coverage. A debate was not incited in the local community, neither because of the exhibition, nor because of the press coverage. This did not surprise me: What was there to discuss? The exhibition mainly presented personal opinions which did not offend other persons or religious communities. The exhibition texts were based on research results which had been published before and which very few people could argue against. The fact that individuals were challenged to make critical reflections over their own kinds of prejudices and possibly change some attitudes, seems on the contrary probable, judging from some of the responses we have received. To investigate this further, we would have needed to conduct another extensive public inquiry.

# 4

## Four Central Moral Challenges

What challenges do museum directors, project managers, and project employees meet when they cooperate with external consultants about sensitive themes? If one sees the study of the exhibitions in the previous chapter as a whole it becomes fairly clear that all of them met with four distinct moral challenges - regardless of country. One might face it in one's work at the museum, or it appeared in the work on the exhibition themes; in either way, there was a balancing between:

- 1) the individual's needs versus the needs of the society
- 2) the individual's subjective truth versus the museum employee's needs to convey a more objective truth
- 3) own skills versus external - i.e. the expert consultants - competence
- 4) personal judgment versus established guidelines.

All these challenges are easy to spot in at least six of the seven exhibitions. None of the informants have mentioned these kinds of balancing or literally used the categories I have listed here, but the similarities are striking. Not least case studies in national and international publications, show that my findings are in accordance with the experiences and reflections made by museum employees and researchers all over the world.

All the four moral challenges are connected to an act of weighing the needs of various partners. Some of the most central ones have already been mentioned; the external participants who contribute with their subjective narratives, the expert consultants who contribute with their professional knowledge, and the audience who contribute with their participation and responses. In sum, this is about many people with different backgrounds, individual experiences and feelings, and a corresponding number of needs. Since an audience basically is an unknown quantity, the normal thing is to relate to it as a rather abstract entity when one works on an exhibition, especially if the audience is and ought to be a factor which has a bearing on the outcome. In addition, the museum employees must be observant of demands, expectations, and wishes from the institution one is connected to; the same applies to those who work upwards in the system of the institution, the museum director or the board. Not least the museum employees themselves have needs which should be attended to. There are several parties, and the needs will always vary from institution to institution, from place to place, and from theme to theme. If one observes this from a superior viewpoint, one may conclude that it is, in the last analysis, the needs of the parties involved which lie at the bottom of all moral challenges.

The museum employees will therefore continuously land in situations where they must balance two or more possible alternatives against each other, and it will be “the discretionary balancing of [...] the norms - or the considerations they point to - which might tell us what is right, everything [...] considered”.<sup>176</sup> Such an act of balancing may lead to moral challenges, if the considerations which can be taken are so different that showing consideration for something or somebody, excludes the consideration for others.

A *challenge* is hereafter understood as a situation where the individual museum employee must assess and take a stand in relation to different alternatives for action which point in different directions. A *moral challenge* is present in any situation where the employee must assess and balance several moral norms against each other, and where all outcomes demand different alternatives for action.<sup>177</sup> Moral norms indicate here, as mentioned, something which may contribute to “the good” in society, in the lives of others and in one’s own.

This may give rise to problems and lead into dilemmas and conflicts. According to Greek rhetoric, a *dilemma* is understood as any situation where one is “forced to accept one of two equally unpleasant possibilities”,<sup>178</sup> i.e. one must choose between two evils. A *moral dilemma* will therefore be present if one must choose between two alternatives for action which both run counter to a moral norm.

Such situations can lead to *moral stress* for those involved. The hallmark of moral stress is among other things feelings of frustration, fear or anger because we for different reasons are incapable of implementing the action we think should be carried through. One reason for this may be that our own moral understanding is not compatible with that of the institution or the museum leaders or because time runs short to meet all the enquiries in the way that we wish. But first and foremost it might happen in relation to the moral challenges which the museum employees are faced with: Which of the many considerations related to different partners should be given priority?

This must also be seen in connection with the museum employee’s everyday life which initially may be stressing. The American political scientist Michael Lipsky describes in his book *Street-level Bureaucracy* the challenge which the individual professional faces in a busy work day where he all the time must make rapid decisions.<sup>179</sup> Most of Lipsky’s premises also apply to museum employees, especially in the working process with exhibitions on sensitive topics and the direct contact with vulnerable individuals. Of the five criteria he lists to describe the working conditions of a *street-level bureaucrat*, four of them fit the

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176 Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 129.

177 See also Henriksen & Vetlesen 2006: 159.

178 Tjønnerud 2009. See also Stark 2011: 32-33.

179 Lipsky 2010.

everyday work of a museum employee; to have insufficient resources with respect to time and personnel, to witness a growing need for the service, having to cope with contradictory goals in the work, and difficulties connected to evaluating the achievement of goals. The fifth criterion, that the clients usually feel obliged to approach the professionals, does not fit, however, since the individuals contact the museum voluntarily and without any kind of pressure.

I am now going to describe the four challenges one by one. I shall start with a description of what the challenges actually imply before I follow up with an analysis of some of the challenges' most crucial aspects. Here I shall also mention some other examples than those which have appeared in my material. In that way I shall clarify what is truly the core of the challenge, and subsequently what is the reason why it is so difficult to handle. The analysis is partly based on ethical theory and theoretical approaches to the museum professions' work, and partly on experiences which are revealed in case studies from other museums. Ethical theories are mentioned very shortly, a more thorough review follows in the next chapter.

## **The Needs of Individuals versus the Needs of the Society**

How should one attend to the individuals - the individual participants contributing to the exhibitions -, in the best possible manner and simultaneously cover what one considers to be the needs of the society? This is always the crucial question when meeting individuals face to face - we observe their vulnerability and are touched by the emotions which appear in the conversation.

The individuals wanted respect and recognition, and this is what we, the museum employees, wanted to give them. Empathy and an understanding that they had been treated unfairly resulted in a wish to protect them and rectify former injustice by giving them a voice. The encounters were so touching and strong that they triggered a feeling of responsibility and a wish to stretch ourselves as far as possible to accommodate what we intuitively thought were the needs of the individual. Pictures we wanted to include were not taken in, methods of dissemination that we thought would touch the audience were rejected, and the wishes of individuals were largely granted, often at the expense of what the museum employee thought was necessary to ignite reactions. The more the museum employee experienced the individuals as resourceful and reflected when the personal narrative was in question, the weaker the feeling of responsibility became. This was for example evident in the exhibition about sexual abuse when the project employees felt safe that they could leave parts of the angling to the individual after several personal meetings, "because she was the kind of person we felt would fix it".

The challenge was now connected to the situation where the feeling of responsibility would also encompass the unknown audience who were going to be touched by the individuals' narratives. It was imperative to reach out to the maximum number of ordinary people and at the same time keep the dissemination of knowledge on a high level. A superior goal was all the time to arouse feelings in order to increase the effect of learning - but it must not happen at the expense of the individuals: "Here I really had to find the balance, both in my human relationship with my informants and in my dissemination of the problems."<sup>180</sup> We did not know who would visit the exhibition or what reactions it would trigger, and this led to a better-safe-than-sorry-approach. Both in the "Wehrmacht Exhibition and the exhibition about children in orphanages, the employees felt such a strong responsibility towards the people involved, more precisely the descendants of the Wehrmacht soldiers and the former children in orphanages that providing a follow-up for all the external enquiries became a matter of course.

We also wanted to comply with the political guidelines, and we agreed that the museums must take on a new role in contemporary social debates. There was a great deal of agreement that the museums must dare become critical towards the society, they ought to risk more, and try out new ways of dissemination to bring forth a higher degree of reflection and understanding in a diversified society. One should venture more, address tabooed themes, let minorities speak, and initiate discussions in the society. Especially in Norwegian museums there was a need for a specification of how to proceed to make this come true: "So I start to get a bit shaky, what is this really about? Then you cry out into the wilderness and get no answer."<sup>181</sup>

### **The Key-Word Is Recognition**

The project managers regarded it as their duty to contribute with new knowledge about the contemporary society through lifting up minorities, forgotten groups, individuals, or new research results. Without having used the term directly, most museum employees have expressed that showing recognition and giving redress was the driving force behind the work: Recognition of groups or people who have been treated unfairly, forgotten or not been heard, and recognition of people's need of and right to correct and comprehensive knowledge. Roger Simon emphasizes that the individual employee in addition is personally motivated to contribute to a positive development of the society,<sup>182</sup> something also the interviews and my study confirmed. The research and the exhibition about children in orphanages had as their goal to recognize the injustice the children had been exposed to, and subsequently to support the fight to have an official apology and compensation from the Danish state. The project

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180 Quotation from the project manager, *Du skal ikke tenke på din Far og Mor* Svendborg Museum.

181 Quotation from a former director, the Quisling Exhibition.

182 Simon 2011a: 206. In another article he points to the importance of meeting interview partners without prejudice or too much pity, cf. Simon 2013: 131-135.

manager was very enthusiastic and later supported the involved parties' struggle for financial compensation. The Wehrmacht Exhibition contributed to igniting a public debate and prompted re-writing of the history books, which the project manager thought was "the highest goal" one could achieve. In *Familiehemmeligheter* the intention was among other things to help all those who were exposed to abuse and were not able to talk about it. The idea behind *Våre hellige rom* was to emphasize equality among all religions and people, and to contribute to a more harmonious society. The body exhibition and "Himmelen over Sørlandet" were supposed to give all those who wanted it a voice, in order to recognize all those who felt a need to be heard or seen.

The recognition theory of the German philosopher Axel Honneth will be introduced thoroughly in chapter five, and is only explained superficially here with a view to seeing the parallels to what my informants have related. According to Honneth the recognition of individuals is fundamentally important for a functioning society. Only when you relate to the diversity which is found in any culture and society and lift up the hidden or forgotten people and voices, peaceful co-existence and development can become possible. When political guidelines call on the museums to respond to this diversity and lift up the minorities, and the museum employees choose to give individuals, who are not otherwise heard, a voice, this is in accordance with Honneth's theories. I interpret my empirical material in such a way that also my informants had a corresponding approach: All members in a society have a right to receive extensive, knowledge-based information to be able to piece together their own picture of socially related conditions, founded in their own interpretation. All groups in the society and all individuals should be treated equally.

The recognition also implies that individuals must feel secure that the museum relates to valid guidelines of anonymity, the obligation to observe confidentiality, the right to express how their own narrative should be presented, and the conviction that their personal wishes are taken into account. An offence might happen if the museum employee cannot or will not relate to such guidelines, independently of the them being founded on external or the institution's internal demands for an orderly working process.

To be recognized implies being seen and heard. When you experience that a museum takes interest in your history and chooses to retell it in an exhibition visited by many, you are lifted up as an individual. If you simultaneously experience that your own history becomes part of a larger entity showing a diversity of experiences, you might in addition to your own recognition feel that you contribute to a common social benefit. Visitors would be able to recognize themselves in what is presented, which in turn would make fewer people feel

excluded or ignored.<sup>183</sup> To let individuals tell about their own personal experiences which others may recognize as their own, can therefore lead to a situation where both the individual contributor and the visitor become able to see themselves in what is told, and get a feeling of being an important part of the diversity. Here it is taken for granted that the narrative refers to values which are considered good and important for the community and the development of the society.<sup>184</sup>

It is not without exception that everybody should have a voice and the right to express their own thoughts. There are obvious limits when it comes to ideologies or viewpoints which do not front values that the society considers good and important. It is for example not obvious that museum employees should report and thereby lift up messages from people with national-socialist attitudes.<sup>185</sup> How strongly a local community may react to this, became obvious at the opening of the Quisling Exhibition. When the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Bering Breivik near the end of 2011 wanted to donate the uniform he had worn at the massacre at Utøya to Hjemmefrontmuseet (literally: “The Home Front Museum”), the museum management rejected this flatly as a “bizarre request” which “misses grossly what is relevant”.<sup>186</sup> Honneth theorizes thoroughly on this: When the values upheld by one individual deviate too much from the common values, it is no longer possible to recognize these.<sup>187</sup>

Honneth considers offence as absence of recognition: When you are not recognized as an individual, a fellow inhabitant, or a citizen, your rights - here understood as “an anonymized sign of social respect” - and yourself are offended. The project managers have not applied the term *recognition*, but written about this as a phenomenon both directly and indirectly. It was a different case with “offence” and “respect”; these were applied both as terms and phenomena in the descriptions. All the Norwegian museum employees I interviewed have been clear that they did not want to offend anybody. In connection with the Quisling Exhibition, the first director declared that the museums shall enlighten and inform, but “of course not offend”. In the “body”-exhibition, and especially in *Himmelen over Sørlandet*, the project manager was so afraid of offending the participants or the visitors that she weighed every word and action more thoroughly than she would have done if she had been working with another theme than religion. She did this because she felt that the theme was very sensitive and personal to many people. The fear of offending was far less pronounced with the two foreign project managers: Verifiable knowledge must no matter the consequences, be displayed and tolerated.

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183 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 130-139.

184 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 138-139. For further reference, cf. Eriksen 1995b.

185 Eriksen 1995b.

186 Carlsen & Moland 2011.

187 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 138.

The fear of offending was always connected to moral challenges. Not offending seems to be an important moral norm which promotes “the quest for the good” for individuals and groups in the society.<sup>188</sup> But *how* one might promote reflection and debate without offending, was a question subject to a considerable uncertainty. This indicates that one did not realize that “not offending” is not compatible with challenging an unknown audience. Again Honneth’s recognition theory is worth studying. It calls for an understanding that it is not possible to follow “the moral perspective”<sup>189</sup> which would have given all parties involved an equal portion of recognition. People’s needs are too different and therefore not compatible with each other, which implies that an act of recognition may always lead to somebody feeling offended: Any formulation or action may in certain circumstances be construed as a lack of recognition of one’s feelings, and in that way experienced as offending. But as Honneth also emphasizes, the recognition that somebody feels offended, does not automatically imply that an offence has taken place.<sup>190</sup> Because an offense is related to a feeling which is not predictable, it is neither possible not to offend, nor a human right not to be offended.<sup>191</sup>

The fact that the fear of offending was so marked among the Norwegian museum employees I interviewed, I would in the main ascribe to uncertainty connected to the new societal role: It was not clear how the societal remit should be fulfilled specifically and therefore they did not want to make any mistakes. That is why the *BRUDD*-sessions became important forums for discussions, and in those sessions the concept of offence has probably been discussed on numerous occasions. At the same time, the discussion has not lead to the awareness that offence not always can, or must, be avoided.

## Paternalism?

We could also ask ourselves if an account of personal narratives about tabooed or sensitive themes in museal exhibitions may be interpreted as an act of paternalism towards an unknown audience who are nearly forced to relate to the theme. Paternalism is usually understood as a limitation of a person’s autonomy.<sup>192</sup> It is connected to the power of one person and used to achieve the best results for the other part, even though this person does

188 Cf. Johansen & Vetlesen 1996: 196.

189 Honneth 2009: 171.

190 Honneth 1995: 131; Honneth 2009: 168; Lysaker 2010: 25-31; Hansteen 2010.

191 This was also underscored in the debate about an amateurish Muhammad-critical film in the autumn of 2012 which among other things led to violent reactions among some extreme Islamists. The editor of the culture- and debate section in *Aftenposten* supported in a comment a Danish colleague, who had emphasized the impossibility of not offending: It is not logical that “the offended” should have “preference to interpret incidents. Every single individual among 1.5 million Muslims have a choice to become or not become “personally” offended by offenses”, see Åmås 2012. Here is also emphasized the importance of society always reacting: If a person carries out an illegal action and explains this by referring to a feeling of having been offended, it is clear that one needs a kind of penal reaction to support the legally established right of expression.

192 Nortvedt 2008: 252. Nortvedt here refers to Dworkin.



not necessarily agree to the first person's assessments.<sup>193</sup> Especially the goals behind the Norwegian exhibitions can be interpreted in a way that points to a determination to present difficult themes at any cost. The audience shall be enlightened and understand the message, whether they are willing or not. *Familiehemmeligheter* was for instance an exhibition which probably represented a strain on everybody who had been exposed to sexual abuse or other forms of abuse. School pupils were not allowed to leave the exhibition, and the contributors' narratives were so strong and intrusive that also the employees, who were working on the exhibition, were deeply touched. In connection with the Wehrmacht Exhibition, a "*conflict between repression and disclosure as a symptom in an entire society*" was referred to in a publication, and consequently maintained that many people would rather suppress a difficult truth than have to relate to it.<sup>194</sup> International studies also confirm that the audience may react strongly to the choice of theme and dissemination method, something which I shall return to.

In Honneth's theoretical deliberation on recognition, we find a legitimization of "forcing" the audience to relate to sensitive or tabooed themes, especially if the exhibition is based upon the voices of individuals: All members of society need recognition, and the act of relating to and recognizing voices which trigger dislike, is a basic condition for a positive development of society.<sup>195</sup> Those who feel that they have been treated unjustly and experience that they are not heard, will in any case, sooner or later, present their viewpoints to gain recognition from the other members of the society. In this there is embedded an appeal to bring forth sensitive or tabooed themes since it, in the long run, might contribute to a better handling of social-critical aspects for everybody. In this way, the museums push forward a positive development which any way will take place sooner or later.

### **"A Kind of Rehabilitation"**

The fact that a museum took interest in the narrative and lifted up individuals was experienced as "a pat on the shoulder" and "a kind of redress".<sup>196</sup> The high number of enquiries and reports to the newly established special interest organization for Danish children in orphanages, showed what a wide-ranging importance the sharing of experiences had for their own lives and for their relations to fellow human beings and the society. The individual in *Familiehemmeligheter*, underscored how important it is that the shame of what one has experienced can be shared with others and be lifted up by an institution which enjoys respect in the society. It was interpreted as recognition, fellowship, and redress when a museum "received" traumatic narratives and the shame connected to them. In the "body"-exhibition, several participants mentioned that they no longer would be ashamed of their body

193 Slettebø & Nortvedt 2006a: 209-212. The authors refer to the philosopher John Ladd.

194 Boll 1999: 161.

195 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 104.

196 Statement made by an individual in the exhibition on children from orphanages.

which so long had been a target for bullying. By showing themselves off at the exhibition and describing themselves as “fine”, they wanted to take back the power of definition as to how their own body looked. In *Himmelen over Sørlandet* some of the contributors used their participation consciously to work through traumatic incidents from their childhood, for example the woman who told of an upbringing in a strict, religious sect.<sup>197</sup> It is all the same somewhat unclear whether the positive effects were only connected to the experience of being seen and heard by a museum employee, or whether it was so important that the history was also disseminated at the exhibition.

Psychologists underscore the importance of being seen and heard, especially when one has experienced a situation as shameful or traumatic. Finn Skårderud, the earlier mentioned psychiatrist, emphasizes for instance how such experiences can lead to low self-esteem and illness, but he also underlines, for example, how the feeling of being met can result in rehabilitation and better health.<sup>198</sup> Sven-Åke Christianson, a Swedish professor of psychology, has investigated how traumatic changes can be processed in the best possible way and he underlines that it is important for human beings to be able to talk about these in order to make possible the sorting out of the feelings connected to the memory anew. Thereby it would be possible to find new and better solutions to how earlier incidents can be handled in their present situation in life.<sup>199</sup>

My informants have told of the same experience: Even though individuals did not want the museum employee to act as a psychologist, they found it crucial to be able to speak out about a difficult situation. Being seen and heard by an institution employee with considerable credibility in society, has in all probability contributed positively to the individual's process of handling the changes. Kavanagh underlines in one of her publications that museum employees at times can feel like social workers and that the responsibility they carry in many ways corresponds to this in practice. They may do well, but also cause damage if they do not act with a great deal of moral integrity.<sup>200</sup> Kavanagh makes it clear in a later book that not all individuals benefit from speaking out: It depends on the personality of an individual if it is good for your own life to talk about traumatic experiences.<sup>201</sup> I also find this aspect in my own empirical material. One of the individuals in the exhibition about children in orphanages clearly expressed that “it felt good to open up, but you should not stay in it in the future”. For her part, this meant that she would not talk so much about it in times to come.

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197 This is also related by museum employees who are working with people's «everyday lives»: Individuals who get a voice at the museum, feel “uplifted” and heard, see Carnegie 2006: 70-71.

198 Skårderud et al. 2010; Schibbye 2009; Martinsen 2012.

199 Christianson 1997: 263-268.

200 Kavanagh 2000:7. Here she refers mainly to the work with *oral history* in general, but in my mind this applies even more if it is about difficult memories or narratives which have been collected.

201 Kavanagh 2002: 115-116.

Some of the individuals have mentioned in the interviews and in informal conversations that helping others is an important motivation for sharing one's history. In *Familiehemmeligheter*, the individual reported of extensive responses from the audience and pupils after the exhibitions at Maihaugen and Vest-Agder Museum. In the Danish exhibition about children in orphanages, two out of three of the contributors expressed that they hoped that others would have a better life when they heard of other people's experiences, and in that way understand that they were not alone, and that there were others in the same situation and that one could get help to handle the bad experiences. The participants in the "body"-exhibition and *Himmelen over Sørlandet* expressed that they wanted to stand up to show other people that they were not alone. The gratitude they received afterwards from strangers became a motivation to continue sharing their own, painful history. Some of them continued giving lectures and joined the process of establishing a special interest organization.<sup>202</sup> Several visitors expressed to the employees after the opening of the exhibition that the exhibition had contributed to making people feel like a part of a greater group instead of remaining on the outside of the society. This was exactly what the contributors had hoped to achieve. International studies in the museum field confirm that visitors may be very strongly affected if they discover a personal contribution in exhibitions and recognize themselves in the experience.<sup>203</sup>

## **The Significance of the Personal Encounter**

"I changed my attitude as I met the informants" - the content of this quotation was repeated in statements from the museum employees who met the contributors face to face. But who are the people who actually approach the museum? My analysis shows that in all cases they were adults who were conscious of what they wanted to talk about. In some cases they had also formed an idea of how they wanted to have their history disseminated, while most of them still wanted impulses and advice from the museum employees. The majority approached the museums because they saw them as expert institutions with a high degree of professionalism. All of them had considered carefully what it would imply to talk to a stranger about their own private experiences and there was for that matter none who spoke for the first time about these experiences. In several exhibitions it became evident that the contributors would not make contact with the press to tell their histories; it was the museum's professionalism and its societal integrity that brought the museum as an institution to being found worthy of administering the personal narratives. In that way the expectations were strongly tied to the possibility to disseminate their view of former incidents and not to meeting a conversation partner to discuss personal challenges.

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202 Cf. Michelsen 2013. Here she describes in a general way the challenges connected to talking about difficult experiences with mentally ill parents, something which she experiences as tabooed in contemporary society. She also maintains that it would help many people if people talked more openly about mental illnesses.

203 Carnegie 2006: 71.

The participants' expectations were first and foremost connected to being met with respect and trust by the museum as an institution and the museum employees who represented the institution. Honneth emphasizes the connection between respect and recognition: The demand for respect constitutes an important aspect of the demand for recognition.<sup>204</sup> The traumatic experiences which the individuals were willing to share were based upon experiences they had interpreted as deeply offensive and which in all cases were connected to maltreatment or abuse and consequently violations of the law. In the light of Honneth's recognition theory, this may be seen as a violation of the human rights, most often triggered by an experience which was characterized by unjust treatment.<sup>205</sup> Because individuals now were now willing tell about an earlier offensive situation, there was a need for recognition on several levels in order to avoid that a feeling of being offended anew should occur. Offense as a consequence of not being recognized was always present when the term *respect* was used.<sup>206</sup> In this connection, recognition implied also that the museum employees dared relate to traumatic narratives: "If the rejection is embedded in one's own fear, it is not all right, it then becomes an offense, nearly a repetition of the history."<sup>207</sup> To gain respect or recognition from the museum employees, implied that the employees did not question the narrative and that they directly or indirectly expressed that they understood that it cost a great deal to share a traumatic experience: "You treat my information with the same respect and honesty which prevailed when it was confided."

The fact that some of the participants in the "body"-exhibition wished to pose naked on large posters in an exhibition area, presupposed trust in the museum employees' character and competence, something which also meant that they were treated with respect. In this case we clearly see that the demand for respect was a wish and a part of the demand for recognition. It was also evident that the individuals have shown a great deal of trust in the museum employees and that this trust was given early in the process of establishing contact. It also became clear that in advance, it had been carefully discussed if one should approach a museum at all and that after the decision had been taken, it all proceeded confidently with an unknown employee. The trust was in addition continuously assessed during the period of cooperation. Schibbye and Skårderud describe how "The professional Other" is continuously assessed while one tells about an incident which has been personally very emotionally charged. The assessment is done in relation to the general behaviour, the body language, the way of listening and the response given, but also on the basis of personal sympathy. The more the employee's reactions and behaviour correspond with the individual's expectations,

204 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 128.

205 Honneth 1995: 131; Lysaker 2010: 25-31; Hansteen 2010.

206 My informants were very afraid to offend individuals, and therefore tried to impart safety and respect in the direct contact. I shall return to this in detail later.

207 Quotation from an individual in *Familiehemmeligheter*.

and the more one opens up, the better the contact becomes.<sup>208</sup> The same was the case when individuals chose to share their histories with the museum employees: The person in question was continuously assessed in relation to being a good listener, the person's ability to act as professionally as expected, and if he or she deserved the trust bestowed upon them. Meeting a historian was here placed on an equal footing with meeting a professional who was "neutral"<sup>209</sup> and connected to an academic institution. Considering the close connections which seemed to exist in the public between terms like *university* and *science* or *academia* and *the quest for truth*, this is probably used to express that one, when one is convinced that one knows the truth, very much would like to speak with a professional who is also preoccupied with bringing the truth into the light.

The conversations between the contributors and the museum employees were charged with feelings, and represented a difficult situation for all parties involved. The situation was often marked with such strong memories and feelings that both started crying. The project manager of the "Wehrmacht Exhibition reported of telephone conversations with weeping relatives of the soldiers she was telling about, and in *Familiehemmeligheter*, the majority of the employees at the two museums were deeply touched, in spite of the fact that the individual himself was telling his history in a calm and controlled way. Shame which was often connected to traumatic experiences seemed to be a feeling which made it difficult to speak out and where an "appropriate" response from the conversation partner was essential. Also the museum employees, who worked on difficult memories, have brought forth clear reminders to tread carefully when you are dealing with memories and reminiscences: It is possible to do a good job, but it is also easy to make evil worse.<sup>210</sup> My informants have seemingly been very conscious of this: They have approached the traumatic, difficult experiences with even greater respect and caution.

The personal meeting has obviously had considerable consequences for the employee's choice of action. The employee reacted with an increased sense of responsibility faced with the trust they got from the individuals: The narratives had to be handled carefully. Some of the informants who came from the ranks of the employees mentioned the need to protect the informants and all of them told of moral considerations which fell in favour of the individual. Possible expectations held by the public in relation to the design and content of the exhibition, were similarly given less priority at the advantage of the needs of the individual. The change took place due to a situational assessment of the options for action, in which the consequences of the action were indispensable for deciding whether an action was considered morally right.<sup>211</sup>

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208 See also Schibye 2009: 19-56; 243-280.

209 Quotation from the project manager of the exhibition about children in orphanages.

210 Kavanagh 2002: 119.

211 Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 141-143. I shall return to this in detail.

## How to Meet an Unknown Audience

“This is about existential questions for human beings”, said one of the informants, and similar statements were made by the others, too. It is not only difficult to speak of sensitive themes; it is also demanding having to relate to the theme as visitors at an exhibition. The museum employees have taken as their starting point the assumption that the audience consists of conscious consumers with different needs and expectations. The project manager at the Wehrmacht Exhibition referred to visitors as conscious consumers who must be given the opportunity to reflect individually and the possibility to react at their own discretion. This view of the visitors is also supported by Norwegian, Swedish, and English professional literature, when the visitors among other things are referred to as partners in cooperation with clear expectations and specific demands.<sup>212</sup> *Transparency* at all levels has become a core value - in addition to openness as to where the knowledge presented in the museums comes from. When our knowledge is limited, the competent visitor has a right to a specification of the information which is rendered: What is it reasonable to say on the background of facts and what is a result of the museum staff’s interpretation?<sup>213</sup>

The audience’s reactions were usually unpredictable. In spite of the fact that the museum professionals in advance had tried to consider all possible reactions to planned methods of dissemination, some reactions were unexpected.<sup>214</sup> What the visitors experienced as difficult or controversial, could be related to the theme and the choice of dissemination method. The reactions could be directed towards the fact that it was demanding to take to one’s heart new knowledge, but could also be an expression of disagreement to the way the knowledge was presented. This agrees with findings which Roger Simon describes in an article on difficult exhibitions, where he and the co-author make a distinction between reactions due to the fact that the themes of the exhibition are difficult to take to one’s heart and reactions to the presentation of the exhibition.<sup>215</sup> My informants have, as mentioned, told of many unexpected reactions connected with both aspects.

In the exhibition about children from orphanages, it was surprising that the former children from the orphanages had a need to share their experiences via a newly established web site and that they felt a need to make contact with a special interest organization; even so, it was

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212 The pattern that exhibitions are being planned to meet intelligent visitors who are to be introduced to new thoughts of a high academic standard, is also mentioned in Hemstad 2000: 139. Kavanagh considers the visitors as the museum’s cooperation partners who expect respect, organized dissemination of knowledge, and the feeling of being welcomed, see Kavanagh 1995: 125-127. For further reference, cf. Silvéen & Bjørklund 2006: 13-15.

213 Marstine 2013: 4-6. Here it is also referred to the right to have access to correct information, a human right which has found its way into several law texts.

214 It was noted already after the implementation of the first BRUDD-projects in 2006 that it was impossible to predict the audience’s or the public reaction to an exhibition, see Holmesland a.o. 2006. This is also confirmed in studies from Great Britain, cf. e.g. Murray & Jacobs 2010: 163-166; Dodd, Jones, Jolly and Sandell 2010.

215 Bonnell & Simon 2007: 66-67. See also Simon 2011b: 432-434.

not clear how many visited the web site regularly.<sup>216</sup> The employees only became aware of the last aspect when they picked up the story from a little girl who asked for help. Both the readers of the web site and the media reacted quite strongly to enquiries from vulnerable groups in the population who received no follow-up, something which resulted in the museum having to apologize in public. Neither in the exhibition about children in orphanages, nor in the Wehrmacht Exhibition, were the employees prepared for the hundreds of enquiries which showed how much the themes affected the individual families and the relations between the family members.<sup>217</sup> The project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition interpreted the reactions as a sign of the audience's laborious attempt to coordinate subjective truths with historical facts, something which also appeared in a publication evaluating the audience's reactions:

*The exhibition has uncovered the conflict between repression and clarification as a symptom of a whole society. The controversy which arose around it is in reality about three generations' demanding attempt to coordinate subjective reminiscences [...] with historical facts. Both have existed side by side for half a century without influencing each other: The soldiers' subjective experiences were not a theme for most historians, and the veterans did not need to compare their own experiences with the historians' picture of the war.*<sup>218</sup>

In this case, the visitors have tried themselves to coordinate two different kinds of truth, and it has not functioned. Both project managers noticed that the second generation reacted much more strongly than the first generation and even more so in the Wehrmacht Exhibition than in the exhibition about children in orphanages, where the goal of the exhibition was to support former children in orphanages, and not to show their participation in cruel acts. The project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition experienced in this way an even clearer difference between the generations, and could also explain it:

*The discrepancy between the positive binding to one's own father [...] and the picture showing the same father as perpetrator [...], these pictures, they do not fit together [...] here this ardour comes forth [...]. Germans of the second generation do not talk of what happened in battle xy, they talk about their father.*

This was more thoroughly investigated and discussed in several articles, both in some where the visitors were divided into categories like “the thoughtful” or “the disappointed”<sup>219</sup> and articles which discussed how the everyday life in the families for decades had been marked

<sup>216</sup> Karkov 2006: 64-71.

<sup>217</sup> See also Eriksen 1995b: 30.

<sup>218</sup> Boll 1999: 161. Author's translation.

<sup>219</sup> Boll 1999: 161, 165.

by repression or concealment of what had happened in the war years.<sup>220</sup> Honneth mentions that in situations where opinions are in conflict with each other, we usually give priority to the opinions of those who are closest to us.<sup>221</sup> This is also confirmed by the findings in my empirical material, which indicate that the reactions become stronger the more the new information threatens the foundation for one's understanding of own identity. This may explain the strong reactions from the soldiers' children when they were confronted with the information which indicated that the narrative of a person they were closely connected to had to be reassessed: Factual information which was disclosed in the exhibition might for example rule out the alternative that the father's stories could be true. Anne Eriksen points out something similar in an article about the museums' work with unpleasant themes: The visitors' reactions vary from anger and fury to reflection, sadness and gratitude, everything in accordance with the way the information was interpreted and adapted to their own situation in life.<sup>222</sup>

### **Identity under Threat?**

Simon explains the strong, personal reactions at exhibitions with difficult themes as a kind of identification with the victims, but also with the perpetrators, which arouses strong feelings.<sup>223</sup> He concludes that what triggers strong reactions, is in the last analysis that the individual reaches his own emotional limits and does not manage to make use of the new knowledge because it too much disturbs the picture of own understanding of one's identity: "Difficulty happens when one's conceptual frameworks, emotional attachments, and conscious and unconscious desires delimit one's ability to settle the meaning of past events."<sup>224</sup> When people become conscious that one has had a totally different picture of specific incidents or periods of time than others, and that these now express feelings connected to these incidents which are shocking and sway their own understanding, emotional chaos occurs, marked with a partial - but not total - understanding and recognition of the other person's feelings or situation.<sup>225</sup> The same thing may happen when people look at photographs or objects which suddenly trigger "a shock to thought", i.e. completely new thoughts which must be coordinated with your own, former thoughts and feelings round a theme.<sup>226</sup> In another article, Simon specifies even more how the core of the reaction is found in the recognition that one is not able to acquire new knowledge which contradicts one's former understanding

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220 Rosenthal 1999. To what degree the war history and the father's or the grand-father's participation in the war still mark the family's following two generations, was also disclosed in Oftestad 2013.

221 Deranty 2009: 353-365.

222 Eriksen 1995b: 30.

223 Bonnell & Simon 2007: 66-67.

224 Simon 2011b: 434.

225 Ibid.

226 Simon 2011b: 439-443. On the topic of ethical and legal challenges connected to the use of pictures in exhibitions in general, see also Bjorli 2006: 88-93. In Kavanagh 2000, the connection between objects and memories is emphasized in several places, and also how objects may provoke memories. See e.g. p. 7, 19-20 and 98-116.



of what is real because one is forced to revise the concepts on which one's own identity is founded, something which everybody consciously and unconsciously try to avoid.<sup>227</sup> This understanding arises when one hears others tell of opposite feelings connected to the same incidents or periods of time as one has emotional ties to. This is often the reason why exhibitions based on personal narratives may awaken stronger reactions than those based on facts.<sup>228</sup>

In this connection it is also interesting to have a closer look at when in the course of time the reaction comes. My empirical material indicates that there is a distinct pattern of time: The strongest reactions were connected to exhibitions which dealt with themes or an incident which went back in time and where the consequences of the incidents had affected one or more generations. The further back in time and the more specific memories which were important for one's own identity, the stronger was the reaction when it also swayed one's own pre-established conception of truth. This indicates that there are greater differences between exhibitions like the Wehrmacht Exhibition or the exhibition about children in orphanages which deal with incidents going back decades and for example the "body"-exhibition or *Våre hellige rom* which indeed touched upon the concept of identity, but not an identity based upon memories. The time aspect seemed in addition to have its importance on another level: Often one has a need for time before the parties involved manage to relate themselves to information which is threatening to their identity and here the duration of the show period of the exhibition is also significant. Some of the individuals connected to the exhibition about children in orphanages had a newspaper article about the exhibition stored in a drawer for several months before they dared make contact. If exhibitions are only temporary, such a time-process effect will disappear and the relevance of the exhibition may be misinterpreted.

The project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition explained in addition the unpredictability of the reactions with the particular auto-dynamics which the exhibition developed in interaction with the unknown audience.

In this case she referred to the fact that methods of dissemination are made with a view to future interactions between the product (the exhibition) and the consumers (the visitors). The exhibition triggers specific reactions within the visitors which are dependent upon several, unpredictable factors. These reactions trigger in their turn new reactions in other visitors or members of society which are even less predictable. Thereby a chain reaction without control is released. Lucas explains the lack of control by saying that it is impossible to predict both individual reactions and the current status of the society. The actions of individuals are based upon many unknown factors and their reciprocal interaction. The actions affect

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227 Simon 2011b: 434.

228 Simon 2011a: 195-196. See also Rosenzweig & Thelen 1998; Hylland Eriksen 2004: 11-19.

in turn other societal actors who also act unpredictably. In this way a society in constant change is created.<sup>229</sup> In this connection one can also recall the importance of the theme. As mentioned, it is difficult to predict what themes are understood as sensitive - by individuals, groups, or society. What was experienced as tabooed by our grand-parents or parents was not necessarily tabooed for the next generation. This is in accordance with Lucas' statement, "Today's world is not yesterday's."<sup>230</sup>

## **Possible and Impossible Dissemination Moves**

An attempt to summarize and interpret the unexpected reactions which appeared in my empirical material shows certain patterns, at the same time as the reactions seem to have such a complex basis that it is impossible to predict all of them. Concerning the patterns, one could for example mention that strong and apt headlines provoke reactions first and foremost when individuals or groups are depicted as opposites of what is usual in society. Examples of this may be perpetrators who are described as victims or heroes who are described as perpetrators.<sup>231</sup> Such headlines seem to function as planned if one supports the victims without accusing individuals too much, as for example in the exhibition about children in orphanages. In contrast to the exhibition about children in orphanages, one noticed both in the Wehrmacht- and the Quisling Exhibition that by using apt and emotional wording in the headlines, one provoked reactions.<sup>232</sup> The first Wehrmacht Exhibition was, as mentioned, taken down, because headlines like "Crimes committed by the Wehrmacht" or "The war of annihilation" were interpreted as leading and oversimplified, and not least since the picture material was used without knowing enough of the taking and what was actually shown.<sup>233</sup> In this instance one may observe a distinct difference between an exhibition which intends to lift up the children's, i.e. the victims' viewpoints, which had not been brought forth before, and an exhibition which criticized a composite group of soldiers which so far had received mainly a positive comment. Rekdal also mentions this, referring to the museum employees' belief that visitors, without explanation, could accept a shift in focus from victim to perpetrator, or that it was enough to refer to an exhibition catalogue where the visitors could find more nuanced and supplementary information in order to tone down critical voices. This belief is misleading. Shifting focus is a demanding process and only a fraction of the visitors buy the exhibition catalogue or books on the topic, for that matter. It is therefore important that the

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229 Lucas 2000. Chris Lucas works as research director for the CALResCo group, an international non-profit organization.

230 Ibid.

231 This seems to valid for presentations which go against the opinions held by most people in relation to what are considered to be good values and should be promoted in society, cf. e.g. Eriksen 1995a: 26-31.

232 On headlines in the exhibition about children in orphanages For further reference, cf. Hansen 2004: 32-41

233 The use of photographs in the Wehrmacht Exhibition was also criticized by Simon in an article about "difficult exhibitions", see Simon 2011b: 442-443. The degree of interpretation which lies behind the use of pictures, also appears in the study of war-related photos in five Greek museums, see Stylianou-Lambert & Bounia 2012: 193. On ethical and legal challenges connected to the use of photographs in the museums, cf. Bjorli 2006: 85-93.

exhibition gives a correct and comprehensive picture of the intended message and at the same time shows clearly why this particular focus has been chosen.<sup>234</sup>

Both in the “body”-exhibition and *Himmelen over Sørlandet* it became evident that one could not use the individual narratives alone as a starting point for critical questions about a subject the museums wish the visitors to reflect upon. The visitors seem to be more rapidly willing to accept the individuals’ narratives as individual expressions of opinion, when being presented only individual narratives, and this leaves no room for further reflection about the subject as such. How can one for example, criticize another person’s own body image or experiences the person concerned has understood as difficult in his or her childhood?

Further, it seems that the number of possibilities for interpretation played a certain role. It appeared that the visitors reacted strongly at the picture material which had a neutral, accompanying text if they got the opportunity to interpret their own experiences into this material. Such a reaction seemed primarily to be a result of an instance of recognition in their register of feelings of other persons’ displayed feelings, and a fresh interpretation of new or unknown knowledge. If the interpretation through other persons became too prominent, for example by way of apt wording of headlines, the visitors might also react strongly, but in this case more directly aimed at those who had made the interpretation. One sees this very clearly in the reactions to the Wehrmacht Exhibition, where the project managers had received criticism for formulations which indicated that what really was a presumption, or possible interpretation, was true beyond all doubt. Consequently, the criticism was not directed against the content, but against the fact that others already had interpreted the material so massively that there remained little room for an alternative interpretation. This may be understood in the manner that the visitors wanted to make the interpretation themselves, on the basis of a sound, correct frame of reference. If the individual visitor gets the impression that others too eagerly try to lead the attention in one distinct direction - and this direction leads them to a theme or field which in some way is sensitive to the person in question - the reaction may be directed against what is possibly seen as soft paternalism. Richard Sandell is, as mentioned at the beginning, among those who have done a lot of research on the museums’ societal role in Great Britain and the challenges which follow if the museums occupy the role as active societal actors with a moral message.<sup>235</sup> He underscores that the particular methods of dissemination are important as to how the visitors understand and interpret the message of the exhibition, and that it is easy to become moralizing or show a too one-sided picture of a case which the museum thinks must be lifted into the public. Here the visitors can react to

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234 Rekdal 2006: 22-26.

235 Sandell 2011.

the feeling of being treated paternalistically, in addition to being pushed to take a standpoint which is not necessarily what one would have chosen if more or another type of information had been available.<sup>236</sup>

In several of the exhibitions I have studied, it became apparent how much power is embedded in pictures and photographic material, compared to texts: The research results on the atrocities committed by the Wehrmacht were already to be found in scores of publications, but now they were presented for the first time in an exhibition and by means of photographic material.<sup>237</sup> The public inquiries confirmed that the photographs triggered stronger feelings than the texts:<sup>238</sup> A visual perception of pictures leads to one's own experiences being connected to what one sees, while a text to a larger degree is a reproduction of another person's interpretation of something. In the "body"-exhibition and *Himmelen over Sørlandet* it was confirmed that this does not only apply to picture- and film material, but also to voice recordings. Visitors expressed that hearing another human being narrate was experienced as stronger than reading a text with this narrative. But this does not seem to be the case with aptly worded headlines or captions which were another person's interpretation. The more a visitor was touched by a theme, the more he or she seemed to react to the information in question being interpreted differently from what the visitor would have done.

Several studies have investigated how the text and its different forms in exhibitions affect the visitors.<sup>239</sup> It becomes quite obvious how important every single part of the exhibition is for the perception: The exhibition's contextual framework, specific formulations, wording, the length of sentences and the design of the exhibition texts influence each other and constitute an entity which makes the foundation for the visitors' individual process of interpretation. Especially if the theme is a sensitive one, the visitors are interested in the entity being arranged so as to facilitate their own interpretation based on what they perceive as correct and with enough scope.<sup>240</sup>

In an interview with the newspaper *Die Zeit*, where a well-known German historian asked the project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition and the chairman of the Institute's board about their reflections on the "intensity" which the first Wehrmacht Exhibition had ignited, they both mentioned that the exhibition headlines and the use of photographic material

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236 Sandell 2011: 138-143. From a Danish exhibition on rape, the reports tell of positive experiences by using video-recordings and faces in the dissemination of personal narratives. In this exhibition it was considered important that the presentation and the wording let the visitors draw their own conclusions; cf. Tinning 2013: 73-75.

237 Rosenthal 1999: 116.

238 Rosenthal 1999: 116. This is also underlined in national and international studies in history on how the use of pictures can contribute to historical consciousness; cf. e.g. Lund 2011.

239 Ravelli 2006: 149-159.

240 Bonnell & Simon 2007: 66-67. In Great Britain, the USA, and Australia one has since the end of the 1980s studied the reactions with visitors at exhibitions, and has among other things made recommendations in relation to exhibition texts, comprehensive design, and artistic effects. Cf. e.g. Ham 2004; Ekarv 2004; Coxall 2004; Bennett 2004b.

was experienced as a strong “provocation” and that it was this that made people react.<sup>241</sup> Both summed up the experiences from the two Wehrmacht Exhibitions, saying that it was necessary with “dramatization” and “generalization” to move people: “Consensus always brings less interest.”<sup>242</sup> The more scientifically and neutrally one presents the topic, the fewer reactions one gets, even though the content and the main message are unchanged. The Norwegian researcher Joar Tranøy also experienced this when he in the early 1990s published a series of research results on the use of lobotomy in Norway. He made use of untraditional, provocative headlines and emotional language to support his research results. This led to a major discussion within his professional circles and among other things, also to a thorough report produced by an interdisciplinary committee.<sup>243</sup> This also supports the results of the press’ evaluation of its own practise: To create debate and reactions, you need fearless journalists who dare put things bluntly.<sup>244</sup>

The use of objects plays an important role for some, but not for all the informants. Objects may be used to visualize an important point, but also to activate emotions. To what degree objects can support personal narratives and strengthen the impressions and the emotions created in the visitors, has been investigated and reported in many contexts.<sup>245</sup> This also became clear in the exhibition about children in orphanages when the project manager told of the importance of the cell doors or the memory books to elucidate the loneliness of those children. This was also brought forth in the Quisling Exhibition, when one used the rocking horse Quisling had as a child to emphasize that he had had the same kind of childhood as most people. In most cases the value of the dissemination was decisive. It was specifically mentioned by the project manager of the Quisling Exhibition, who also told of long discussions about the photograph which reportedly showed the dead Quisling.

In the last analysis, several English studies show that it is important to make allowances for the visitors’ need for “emotional comfort”,<sup>246</sup> i.e. that the visitors feel well during their visit to the exhibition, despite the fact that the theme is emotionally demanding.<sup>247</sup> If the goal of the exhibition is a learning process, strengthened by feelings which touch upon the perception of

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241 *Die Zeit* 2004a.

242 *Die Zeit* 2004a.

243 Alver & Øyen 1997: 66-67.

244 Brurås 2012: 319.

245 Cf. e.g. Albano 2007; Silvén & Bjørklund 2006.

246 Tyson 2008: 246.

247 Here several techniques are described, which the museum employees may put to use to comply with this need. In some museums guides and employees make sure that the visitors are directed through the whole exhibition without leaving the area too soon, and at the same time finish the tour with a joint conversation, in the presence of a psychologist, so that the visitors are given the chance to speak about eventual negative feelings. In other museums, one tries to adjust each tour to the spontaneous reactions from the visitors. The latter often results in the employees, who are showing the visitors around, avoiding to dwell too long on unpleasant aspects, both to make the visitors feel more comfortable, but also to let the employees be spared from relating to demanding reactions from the visitors. Cf. Tyson 2008: 257-258; Smith 2010: 208-210.

identity or arouses empathy, there is a need for effective ways to help the visitors handle these difficult and negative feelings which appear. Otherwise, there is a risk that the visitors refuse to leave their comfort zone, i.e. that they reject new knowledge because the price they have to pay to accept it, is too disagreeable.<sup>248</sup>

## Subjective Truth versus Historical Truth

The second challenge is about the balancing of subjective truth and objective truth, which I have chosen to call historical truth. Academically, the starting point lies in the presumption that the past has been interpreted and that the processes of selection as to what is going to be told, and by whom, contribute to new frames of interpretation. The use of the term *historical truth* reflects a form of truth in which different sources are used to attain a picture of the past which is as comprehensive and objective as possible. Through the use of different sources and extensive criticism of the sources, one may reach historical facts, i.e. proof that specific incidents have taken place at a certain point in time. This is most often the case with the frames surrounding the incidents, as for example when a war started and ended, when an orphanage was opened, when an important speech was delivered, or when a person was born. Additional information, in cases with little material from various sources, gives a more uncertain foundation and becomes to a large extent the object of the researcher's interpretation.

How can museum employees make use of personal, subjective narratives in their work on exhibitions where the dissemination of knowledge on an advanced professional level demands reliable sources and dependable research findings? Is it conceivable that the very use of external contributors, and here especially individuals and their personal narratives, is related to the museum employees' wish to present truth which is as correct and extensive as possible? If the starting point is that "truth is [...] less about objectivity than about genuineness, a concept which is closely connected to authenticity",<sup>249</sup> the subjective truths which appear in the individual narratives, will be well suited to supply a theme with more depth or shed light on it from a new angle, precisely because of the content, the individual feelings, points-of-view, or emotions which appear. Personal narratives are, however, seldom verifiable. It will prove even more demanding to "certify the quality" of incidents which have taken place in private rooms or under circumstances which cannot be reconstructed, especially when they are about traumatic memories or reminiscences.

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<sup>248</sup> Smith 2010: 209.

<sup>249</sup> Amundsen & Brenna 2003: 21.

An attempt to verify, or exercise any kind of control may be understood as lack of trust, something which can be interpreted as new and additional abuse of people who have already been offended. The challenges connected to procedure are - when it comes to verification of personal narratives - absolutely contrary to what one is used to and has been educated to apply: To sustain the museums' credibility in society, one usually strives after dissemination of facts on the highest possible level. This implies a critical approach to the sources and an attempt to assure the quality of the information on several levels. The challenges are therefore to a large degree connected to the concept of truth and the museums' approach to historical truth.

In my study it became apparent that the situation of not being able to use ordinary methods and procedures leads to lack of control and thereby uncertainty, as to how such truths should be handled and disseminated. Intuitively, the choice was not to allow other individuals mentioned by the informants, to be referred to in the third person with name if those persons had not been legally convicted. There was also a clear, intuitive attempt to try to defend people who were not able to defend themselves.

The core of the challenge was found in the fact that one was aware that visitors expected a frame of reference which was correct and trustworthy. The dissemination of knowledge must be kept at a high academic level and it must be comprehensive and neutral enough for the audience to form their own picture of historical events. It was made sufficiently clear in the first Wehrmacht Exhibition how important it was to be accurate with facts and not present a subjective interpretation as historical truth: The fact that the organizers had chosen to display photographs, knowing when and approximately where these had been taken, but without being able to identify all the persons in the picture, was strongly criticized among professional colleagues.

At the same time one recognized the value the narratives had as contributions to a large historical picture: "these narratives have [...] an authenticity which goes far beyond [...] professional knowledge; this is about history as real-life experience, specifically about experienced traumatic history". It was the very description of a personal event, "the view these people have of their own lives", which was important and "which [...] has a value in itself, a value which is not about the reconstruction of certain facts."

## **The Concept of Truth**

The concept of subjectivity comprises everything that "belongs to or is relevant to the subject; marked by personal, individual comprehension".<sup>250</sup> When something is subjective,

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250 Henriksen & Eriksen 2005: 783, vol. 13.

it cannot be explained objectively, i.e. “fairly, impersonally, impartially, universally”.<sup>251</sup> The concept *subjective truth* therefore refers to personal narratives which neither shall nor can be verified. My research material consists of individuals who have transformed who have transformed bits and pieces of their own lives into a narrative, in retrospect and based upon their own individual frames of interpretation. This implies that they can contribute to reconstructing the past, but only up to a certain limit. Memories and narratives can be “raw material” in drawing a picture of the past, and they can contribute with details, adding to the large historical lines. However, as memories are based upon personal experiences and may be regarded as subjective truths, history as academic subject is subject to the necessity of verification with recognized methods within different professional disciplines.<sup>252</sup> If subjective narratives are about traumatic incidents, the memory processes will to an even larger degree become affected by complex psychological mechanisms which change the memories and the reproduction of them.<sup>253</sup>

In museum-related professional fields one uses as a starting point the awareness that all past life has been interpreted and that processes of selection concerning what is to be told and by whom contribute to new frames of interpretation.<sup>254</sup> There are, however, specific procedures and methods within the social sciences which prepare for an approach which pursues a more objective picture of the past. Objectivity is tied to what exists outside subjective understanding,<sup>255</sup> and through the use of various sources and extensive criticism of sources, one may arrive at historical facts, i.e. proof that specific incidents have taken place at a certain time.<sup>256</sup> Even though scientific methods are in use when material is collected and analysed, the researcher must be precise as to what theories and methods are applied in the process of interpretation.<sup>257</sup> Moreover, in the last decades a more pronounced awareness has arisen as to how oral sources can be collected in a more scientific way, and how the researcher may show more respect for the factors which affect the interview situation and the memory.<sup>258</sup>

I have chosen to call *historical truth* the attempt to get as close as possible to the objective truth. Subjective narratives can to a certain degree contribute to drawing wider and more

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251 Nyeng 1999: 181. For further reference, cf. Henriksen & Eriksen 2005: 453, vol. 11.

252 Cf e.g. Conway 1992; Stugu 2008: 24-34; Vestheim 1994.

253 Cf. e.g. Conway 1999; Conway 1997; Campell & Conway 1995; Antze & Lambek 1996.

254 There is a general understanding that a picture is created by the past and is based upon a subjective selection of possible, countless aspects of the past and present time. Scientific work thereby creates a picture of reality which is a kind of subjective interpretation in itself, and this entails a great responsibility for researchers, among other things in relation to the transparency of interpretation processes and the limits of knowledge. Cf. i.a. Selberg 2000: 120-121; Reeve 1996; Dean 1997: 220-224; Brenna et al.1994; Engelstad 1999; Jensen 2010: 59-100; Jensen 2012: 18-19; Eriksen 1995a:32-34; Johnsen & Pabst 2011; Seland 2012.

255 Henriksen & Eriksen 2005: 454, vol. 11. Objectivism takes its starting point in the assumption that one can produce knowledge about the reality which exists outside human interpretation. For further reference, cf. Korsnes 2008: 215-216.

256 Jensen 2010: 48-52.

257 Ohman Nielsen 2004: 214-226; Edson 1997e: 75-80; Jensen 2010: 43-58; Rosenzweig & Thelen 1998.

258 Cf. e.g. Kavanagh 2000: 15-20; Stugu 2008: 24-34.



diversified historical lines. Andrea Witcomb, an Australian Professor of Museology, underscores that history can never be sufficiently enlightened: “History can only ever be a set of fragments about the past. The result is a multitude of small narratives, which do not come together to make one large meta-narrative.”<sup>259</sup> Such fragments, or the individual pieces which make up the large picture, can be both subjective narratives and facts.

### **“This Is about History as Traumatic Experience”**

All contributions from individuals have in common that they are narratives molded by the individuals themselves, in retrospect and on the basis of their own, individual frame of interpretation. They are seldom verifiable, but at the same time important in order to reconstruct a historical picture of individual occurrences or specific and overarching social aspects.<sup>260</sup> An incorporation of subjective truths into a more objective, historical truth is always subject to major moral challenges.

In the exhibition about children in orphanages, one of the project manager’s home-made guidelines stated that one should never doubt what is being told, but at the same time never take a stand in the matter. She referred first and foremost to narratives which deal with incidents between two or more people, where you only hear one of the parties. The fact that my informants, the museum employees, would not say whether the incidents had taken place, was also disclosed via more general statements with the effect that one could never mention the name of third persons who were mentioned, and who themselves could not or would not comment on the issue. In *Familiehemmeligheter* the individual mentioned that she was abused by her father over several years, but since she disseminated this herself through pictures and lectures also outside the museum, it was not problematized by the employees. In the Quisling Exhibition it was discussed whether and to what extent one should let individuals who supported Quisling’s views, be allowed to speak out. In the minds of the museum employees it was as important to report such supportive declarations as the voices of the people who disapproved of Quisling, mainly to show the diversity in what the former director had called “still a brown county”. However, the most obvious manifestation of how the employees made a distinction between subjective and historical truth occurred when the project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition stated that “these narratives have, independent of the question of what they contain of historically useful material, an authenticity which lies beyond all factual knowledge; here it is about experienced history, and specifically about experienced traumatic history.” It is “the keen eye these people have on their own life” which has a “value that is not about the reconstruction of [...] facts”, which is important to her; and it is this situation

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259 Witcomb 2003: 161.

260 Eriksen 1999: 70-74; Stugu 2008: 24-34; Vestheim 1994.

which in folkloristic literature is referred to as the environment's influence on the individual interpretation and reiteration of personal experiences.<sup>261</sup>

Being in need of an effective tool in order to be able to use subjective truths to draw a large picture of interpretive strategies, a diverse past, and specific incidents as individual elements in this, the project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition introduced yet a third kind of truth: Her "own narrative". The project manager's narrative was the result of an interpretive process where she used her professional knowledge and her own personal experience to put the subjective narratives into a large historical picture.

The content of the narratives made it especially difficult to decide to what extent the incidents had happened in the same way they had been reported. Especially in the exhibitions about children in orphanages, *Familiehemmeligheter*, the "body"-exhibition, and *Himmelen over Sørlandet*, individuals in emotional interviews told about sensitive incidents which had marked their lives thereafter. The immediate accept of the content of the narratives must probably also be seen as a reaction to the experience of having been confided traumatic memories, and of having seen how decisive the content of the narratives was for the individuals. Some of the informants have expressed that they were afraid of how individuals would react during and after the interview. Some have told that they consulted a psychologist to be able to meet individuals or visitors in the best possible manner. There are numerous indications that there was a great deal of awareness among my informants that the personal meeting or the visit to the museum might trigger stress reactions which were both strong and unpredictable for the individuals. In such cases it was to an even less degree possible to assess the truth content of the narratives.

### **The Frame of Reference Must Be Appropriate and Reasonably Extensive**

"One can formulate understanding only up to a certain point", one of the project managers remarked, having in mind that most often one does not know the whole picture of a situation or the course of events. It was challenging for most people to answer the question how one can be open about this and at the same time disseminate reliable knowledge in such a way that visitors may form their own picture. The project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition pointed out that it is vital that the exhibition mirrors a correct "frame of reference" or "frame of interpretation" for the visitors' own interpretation. According to her, the individual visitor took his starting point in the presumption that the totality of information which is presented in exhibitions is true, and in that way formed a personal picture of the past. This is confirmed by English studies: "A conceptual framework" is of decisive importance to make the visitors able

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261 Jensen & Swensen 2007: 40-47; Hodne 1999: 21.

to take in the new information and relate it to their own, original knowledge.<sup>262</sup> According to these studies, the information must be correct, limited, and disseminated in proportion to the expectations. “[A]dequacy and accuracy of an exhibit’s narrative strategies and interpretative frame”,<sup>263</sup> are always assessed by the visitors. In the case that too much or too advanced new information is presented in an unusual or unexpected manner, the visitor will not be able to adapt the information to his own frame of reference.<sup>264</sup>

Here there are both possibilities and pitfalls for the museum employees. My empirical material indicates a large presence of awareness that one needs a suitable amount of factual knowledge and that this must be disseminated in effective ways so that the visitor actually gets the possibility to learn, reflect, and thereby carry on with his or her education - but that there also exists a great deal of uncertainty as to how such an optimal frame of reference can be made, what and how much it should contain. It may be a challenge that there is often a lack of important information. Another challenge can be that one as a museum employee must make a choice as to what is going to be presented as a part of history and what is left out, and that this power brings with it a responsibility which one experiences as demanding.<sup>265</sup>

To avoid pretending that the exhibition showed the whole picture, the project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition decided in cases of doubt “to document our voids, our voids of knowledge”. Here she was referring to the act of disseminating clearly in the exhibition what they did not know, to ward off the criticism received in connection with the earlier exhibition. Then her colleague had chosen to display, among other things, pictures which one knew a lot about, but not everything. This was understood, both with the audience and among professionals, as incorrect and faulty information, something which led to relatively strong reactions and an extensive discussion about the professionally correct use of photographic material.

Other museum employees told that they could have filled some of the voids, but that they for various reasons chose not to do so. In the exhibition about children in orphanages, certain photographs could have been used to support the allegations of sexual abuse of children in several institutions. The project manager chose to omit the use of the pictures, because the possible perpetrators had not been convicted. Also the exhibition *Våre hellige rom* could be connected to “voids”, where religious communities were mainly presented through *one* congregation. Possible disagreements between congregations which belonged to the same

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262 Ham 2004: 165; Bonnell & Simon 2007: 66.

263 Bonnell & Simon 2007: 66.

264 Ham 2004: 170. Norsk etnologisk granskning («Norwegian Ethnological Research») - abbreviated NEG - under the auspices of Norsk Folkemuseum, in 2004 carried through an inquiry among visitors as to how they experienced their visit to the museum. It appeared that the visitors wanted that all the information presented, should be true, cf. *Norsk Folkemuseum* 2013.

265 See i.a. Carnegie 2006: 73-79.

wider community about topics which were approached in the exhibition were not emphasized. In *Himmelen over Sørlandet* I chose to show considerable concern in favour of an individual's wish to keep her contact with the dead secret, with the consequence that nothing was mentioned in the exhibition because I refrained from giving general information about the findings. I stated the reason for this by referring to the priority of an individual's needs rather than those of the general public, which in turn brought me to abstaining from giving information about something I thought should have been made public.

In feature articles in newspapers it becomes evident how diverse approaches may be concerning how much information is necessary. In March 2013, yet another discussion was restarted on the topic of whether the names of NS-members (i.e. members of the Norwegian pro-Nazi party) should be made public, and if the descendants should be given the opportunity to influence and correct the forthcoming information<sup>266</sup>. In the debate several important moral challenges inherent in the work on sensitive material, which may affect individuals directly, were mentioned: Is it always right and necessary to publish the name of the convicted person? To what extent have the researchers a possibility and a duty to correct or complete information which has been published, when it later becomes apparent that the available source material was incomplete? In this connection one may ask whether deliberate omission of information can be regarded as misleading or fraudulent. Repstad writes that excessive considerations with regard to the individual's wishes may lead to a "sentimental over-identification and in the worst case, a cover-up of unpleasant facts".<sup>267</sup> But where is the dividing line between the moral considerations of an individual's wishes and "cover-up of unpleasant facts"? And one may ask unpleasant facts for whom?

During the working process with *Himmelen over Sørlandet*, it became clear that there is a certain limit concerning how much information is needed as a minimum to make the exhibition seem trustworthy: If too little is said or the information is presented in a wrong context, it may result in a faulty picture of something which at the starting point was correct or true. One of the two external expert consultants gave words to this by mentioning how she responded when she discovered how the press had used her research results earlier: The material is "clipped and cut and woven into patterns where you feel without bearings and where meanings have been shifted". This seems to be a widespread view - also mentioned by other researchers: It is difficult to relate to enquires from journalists who tend to be preoccupied with sensational headlines and single aspects which do not take into account the research as a whole.<sup>268</sup> Interpretative processes, both with those who make the selection and those who use the selection afterwards, are consequently built upon a shaky foundation.

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<sup>266</sup> See Sørbo 2013; Oftestad 2013.

<sup>267</sup> Repstad 2000: 123.

<sup>268</sup> Selberg 2000; Repstad 2000; Alver & Øyen 1997: 166-167.

Exhibitions must necessarily show frames of reference which are both correct and wide-ranging enough to give the visitors an opportunity to form a correct picture. It will often be a question of interpretation how important single aspects are in relation to a theme, which cannot be presented too extensively if the audience is going to have a chance to use their own frame of reference to the full. But some aspects are more crucial than others, and here it is important to see the meaning of each of them and assess them thoroughly in relation to a comprehensive frame of reference. The assessment will often depend on the person involved, something which the two Wehrmacht Exhibitions made clear: The audience's and the press' reactions after the first Wehrmacht Exhibition resulted in the management choosing to dismantle the exhibition in order to assure the quality and go through the volume of information. The new project manager, who was given the responsibility of exhibition no. two, had a different view of how the frame of reference should look like, what kind of information should be brought forward, and how it should be presented. Researchers may disagree as to how research results can be interpreted, something one also observed in *Himmelen over Sørlandet* where the museum was made aware that professionals with a competence similar to that of the expert consultants, did not all agree to the interpretation of the research results which were introduced in the exhibition. Here, it also depends on to what degree and in what way a researcher owns or feels entitled to own the research results he or she has arrived at. At this stage, it is convenient to pass on to the third moral challenge.

## **Own Skills versus External Competence**

This third challenge arises when one wants to disseminate a theme which is not a product of one's own research or within the field of one's own personal expertise. While one's own research on a theme promotes assurance and self-confidence to present the material in a way one feels is best, the lack of own professional knowledge leads to a situation where one leaves many vital decisions to external experts. This again leads to one's operational latitude being reduced in an unfortunate manner. How can one apply the best suitable methods of dissemination to reach a broad audience in the best possible way, when the professional consultant wants a larger or more neutral frame of reference than what is implied in the methods of dissemination?

Behind the challenge lies the wish to sustain the social trust and credibility of the museum in the society. As mentioned, this requires that visitors get enough, correct, and adapted information to be able to form their own picture of a historical incident or epoch. It is therefore natural to involve expert consultants with special competence to deal with societally relevant themes, if one lacked this competence.

The special competence of the external experts was in some cases considered to be so important that one did not dare to question the professional consultant's demand as to how their material should be used, even though one otherwise was assured of one's own competence in presentation- and dissemination methods.

Some challenges were connected to the questions of how one could push a theme to the extreme and angle it in such a way that it might trigger reactions in the society. The museum employees often wanted a tougher approach than the external expert thought was sound, even after the demand for a neutral background had been taken into consideration. Without internal competence on the theme, the expert's objections could not be assessed, and to avoid criticism of the exhibition's professional basis, one went further than planned to accommodate the external expert's proposal.

Here, there are obvious parallels to the individuals with unique, empirical knowledge of the theme. Because one lacked such knowledge, one went as far as possible to comply with the supplier of knowledge, the individuals. The same was done with the external experts, who had the professional knowledge one lacked. As a result, the museum professional could lose the feeling of ownership of the project and be left with the impression of having functioned as a passive transmitter at the service of the external participants.

### **Cooperation with External Expert Consultants**

"The greatest challenge is to find a good balance" - once more the quotation from the project manager of the exhibition about children in orphanages is illustrating for what was also pointed at by other informants. Explaining the reasons for approaching the expert consultants, most of my informants stated that as director or project manager one was responsible for keeping the exhibition at a high academic level. Through their own education they had come to know well the demands of scientific research and academic freedom, and external expert consultants were regarded as specialists in the field the museum wanted to present. A high expert level in the exhibition was viewed as a very central part of the societal remit which gave the museums the responsibility to disseminate reliable information and factual knowledge. External competence was meant to satisfy external demands and thereby "save one's bacon".<sup>269</sup> In addition, one would get access to a relevant network which the researcher was likely to have. The section leader at IKM mentions that the expert consultant employed at *Våre hellige rom* had good and extensive contact with the different congregations which represented the religions one wanted to present at the Museum. In *Himmelen over Sørlandet*, external consultants were used not only to contribute with factual knowledge, but also to

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<sup>269</sup> Contextually adapted wording of quotation from the new director at the Quisling Exhibition. The original quotation is in the first person singular: "to save my bacon", cf. p. 81 supra. (Translator's note)

verify the subjective narratives up to a certain degree. As examples, one may mention the contribution which dealt with the experience of a participant who warded off demons who came at night and the contribution about life in a closed sect which still existed in the region. The project manager could not assess if the narratives might be connected to religious practices which were or had been common at Sørlandet, and therefore asked the consultants to make a statement whether the narratives could be regarded as theoretically possible in certain religious districts. Consequently, the employees were not wholly neutral when they received the narratives, but tried to verify the subjective narratives up to a certain degree.

The need to assure the exhibition's professional basis in the best possible manner, and the trust in the expert consultants having relevant competence and networks, contributed to making the museum employees willing to transfer a lot of power to the external consultants. Some of the informants have reported that they were willing to transfer important decisions to the professional consultants, even though they did not agree to the expert consultant's choice. The less relevant knowledge one possessed, the greater was the willingness to downscale personal wishes in relation to dissemination method and angling of theme. This was particularly obvious in *Våre hellige rom*, when the project manager mentioned that she had wanted to concentrate more on individuals' narratives than general statements from representatives of the congregations: "To a large extent, this was all about his arguments [...], I was then the weak party compared to him. [...] The fact that a person who had so much to say about the subject matter did not want to join in, [...] I actually felt incapable of carrying it out". The same thing was seen in *Himmelen over Sørlandet* in the discussion between the museum employees and the external expert consultants whether one should use provocative headlines, and how they in that case should be worded. Though this was also connected to different opinions regarding what was considered challenging or controversial, the project manager chose to prioritize the expert consultant's assessments.

After the exhibition, some of my informants judged the large degree of power transfer to external expert consultants as difficult to defend. They referred both to their own competence and assessment, which they thought had been unduly neglected. This was among other things mentioned by the project managers of the Quisling Exhibition, *Våre hellige rom*, and *Himmelen over Sørlandet*, who based their view on the impression that they had accepted the expert consultants' opinions too uncritically. In *Himmelen over Sørlandet* a project employee underscored that the museum "must have the possibility to use [...] research results [...] in a more critical way. The museum ought to be allowed to [...] collect and present research results which are critical or which point to other conclusions than the academic establishment [...] does". Yet again this refers to the question of who owns the research results and how they can be used by others. Also, the direct contact between a museum employee and an expert consultant plays a vital role here: Direct contact requires considerations drawn from

proximity ethics which are not necessary when one puts to use research results without cooperating directly with the researcher.

This problem as such was non-existent with the two foreign project managers, as they had themselves conducted research in the topics they presented. Both felt assured that they could make their own assessments of new material. Here one sees clearly, that the less expert knowledge the museum employees had, the more power was entrusted to the external consultants in view of deciding the exhibition's content and method of dissemination. The lacking expert knowledge of the museum employee therefore stood in a direct asymmetrical relation to the expert consultants' power and influence: The less own expert knowledge available, the more power was given to the external expert. The more relevant knowledge the museum employees had, and the more cleared up the frames of cooperation were agreed on beforehand, the more symmetrical did the relation to the expert consultants become.<sup>270</sup>

As early as the mid-1990s, Kavanagh discussed the prerequisites for good types of cooperation between museums and other parties. Without approaching the cooperation between disseminators and researchers, or museums and universities, she specifies that any form of cooperation presupposes a will to make compromises and necessarily share responsibilities. Expectations and division of labour must be clarified, explicitly stated and preferably presented in written form. The partners in cooperation must know their individual limits as to what is professionally accepted, and even though one must accept that the other party has a different theoretical and professional approach, one should hold on to the principles which are vital to one's own profession.<sup>271</sup>

My starting point is that there are significant differences among the external consultants connected to the individual ownership of the research and the dissemination of it, simultaneously with what in several connections is reported about challenges in the cooperation between "professional disseminators and researchers"<sup>272</sup> - especially when it comes to sensitive themes which require that allowances are made for different parties.<sup>273</sup> The researcher has a need to present his research so that the main results and the overall conclusions are brought forth, but this may collide with specific goals which others have

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270 For further reference, cf. Nortvedt & Grimen 2004: 113-121.

271 Kavanagh 1995: 132-133. Arne Bugge Amundsen, Professor of Cultural History at the University of Oslo, maintained at the end of the 1990s that it would be wrong of the museums to expect that the universities are at their disposal with research results which the museums may use; the cooperation must give both institutions something. While the museums in several connections may benefit from research in the universities, the universities on their side may benefit from the channels of dissemination which the museums have at their disposal. Here, as in other contributions, the starting point is that the museums already have a historical material in their collections, but also material connected to contemporary documentation, which may be relevant as a basis for cooperation and useful for researchers at the universities, cf. Amundsen 1998: 55-57. For further reference, cf. the answer from Swensen 1998.

272 Selberg 2000: 116.

273 Selberg 2000: 120-121.



in relation to the dissemination of the material.<sup>274</sup> As mentioned, there seems to be clear parallels between external consultants, individual contributors - and museum employees who have done research in the field. It is always a question whether one also has a need to receive recognition for the experience or research effort one has put down and the competence it is based upon, and whether it may be construed as an offense that the other makes little allowance for one's assessment and ideas.

Project managers who have not made research in the theme experienced it as morally very challenging to balance external expert knowledge about the topic of the exhibition and their own professional knowledge about museal possibilities of dissemination. There was a need for both expert competence about the topic and competence connected to efficient methods of dissemination of the exhibition one was working on, but what should be prioritized if conflicting sentiments arose? It was a case of norms connected to loyalty to different parties coming into conflict with each other. A strong desire to remain loyal to partners from a professional environment similar to one's own was challenged by the norm that one ought to use one's own, critical ability to judge one's professional work to be able to pass on the most reliable and the most successfully organized knowledge to the audience. The focus was in other words shifted to different recipients.

## **Personal Judgement versus Guidelines**

The fourth and final challenge is connected to the museum employees' leeway and the question if this is really too big. Many wear themselves down in the attempt to do "the right thing", without knowing what it implies or how it can be achieved. It has also become apparent that not everybody knew the actual regulations well enough and that the political guidelines allow a great deal of interpretation, which all too often leads to uncertainty. One should not forget that the profession has its own interest in the employees following guidelines which lead to less use of personal judgement and thereby assure professional conduct. Through my empirical material, it became apparent that some wanted to challenge more than others and that it varied how far one would go to provoke a reaction.

Initially, it is of decisive importance that the employee has the possibility to react spontaneously and on the basis of his own knowledge, experience, and "gut feeling". No situations are alike, and it is both the knowledge about vital connections and the little nuances

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<sup>274</sup> Repstad 2000; Selberg 2000.

which decide what action is correct there and then - especially in meeting individuals. This implies that one needs significant leeway in order to make exactly those decisions which one considers best in the actual situation.

On the other hand, such a possibility brings with it significant demands to make the right choice. One's sense of responsibility weighs heavily in relation to those who will be affected by one's decisions. What aspect of a theme should be targeted, how should it be illuminated, and what role should the personal narratives play? Without training to receive persons who in part have had traumatic experiences, the museum employees based their actions solely on their personal compassion and whether the narrative they heard was something others also might sympathize with. Balancing between different considerations without knowing the consequences of the choices made, was experienced as very demanding. In the exhibitions where the museum employees lacked professional competence, this problem was aggravated. Consequently, one worked far longer hours than planned, often at the expense of one's own health, and one worked diligently on personal guidelines which were meant to help making decisions without too much strain.

### **Individual Judgement, Personal Conduct and Integrity**

Personal judgement can be defined as a person's power or authority to choose between two or more legitimate alternatives of action. The concept power usually includes "the possibility to realize one's goals in relation to other persons",<sup>275</sup> adequate influence, and "the ability to make others do something they otherwise would not have done".<sup>276</sup> Several of the frames the museum employees must relate to in their work on societal and sensitive themes were neither specific, nor comprehensive enough. The societal remit is only generally worded, and a specific professional morality, applicable for the museum field, is neither formalized, nor particularly well known. This gives a great deal of leeway for individual personal judgement within the institutions - and for every single employee. The practice of individual personal judgement can be challenging seen in the light of external expectations which are connected to it.

Personal judgement is related to the understanding of a specific situation. What elements are understood as morally important in a specific situation and therefore prioritized at the expense of other elements is, according to some ethicists, dependent upon several factors.<sup>277</sup> Most of these factors may be summarized as individual experiences in private and professionally related connections through participation in a social community, from the moment of birth

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<sup>275</sup> Engelstad 2014. Cf. the definition which is ascribed to German sociologist Max Weber.

<sup>276</sup> Engelstad 2014. Cf. the definition which is ascribed to the writings of American political scientist Robert Allan Dahl.

<sup>277</sup> Cf. e.g. Lipsky 2010: 31; Aristoteles 1999; Henriksen 1997: 16, 292-297; Vetlesen & Henriksen 2003: 142-146 and Taylor 1989.

and up to the situation when a moral weighing must be done.<sup>278</sup> In addition there are specific traits of character carried by the individual employee, i.e. the personality of the person who is about to exercise personal judgement. In studies of professions the employee is usually regarded as “raw material”,<sup>279</sup> a person who carries out his work independent of his own upbringing, socialization, and work-related experiences, but who can be molded according to the norms and values which apply in a specific job.

I see clearly in my empirical material that the content and design of the exhibition to a large extent is dependent upon the individual employee’s experiences and personality. In both the Wehrmacht Exhibition and the Quisling Exhibition, a change in management took place, which had consequences for the result. In the Wehrmacht Exhibition a project manager, who wanted to trigger debate by means of stirring headlines, was replaced by a person who focused more on an extensive collection of facts. In the Quisling Exhibition one of the directors took the project a long way towards fulfilment and wished all public debates welcome, while the succeeding director was, also due to the new job she had taken up, more concerned with satisfying as many needs as possible. In the majority of the exhibitions, the following was brought forward: If the project manager was prepared and willing to endure adversity, the angling of the theme became different compared to exhibitions where the project manager wanted to tread cautiously.

### **The Important “Gut Feeling”**

It was important for the project managers to abide with the choices they had made, something which presupposed making the choice according to one’s own moral conception: It was “one’s own ethical conviction that has been decisive”,<sup>280</sup> “in the last analysis [...] a very personal, very intuitive, emotional decision”.<sup>281</sup> This self-evaluation was not confirmed when the informants elaborated on the reasons for making specific decisions: Nobody has made a spontaneous decision only based on “the gut-feeling”.

All informants, that is the interviewed museum employees, have first tried to gather as much information and knowledge as possible within the given time frames about all alternatives for action and their consequences. All the project managers who used external professional consultants collected information from them before important decisions were made. All the informants have also, as mentioned, told of formal and informal conversations with colleagues to try to find as many pros- and cons as possible to prepare for the moral weighing.

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278 On the importance of experiences, cf.also Leer-Salvesen 2011.

279 Svensson 2008: 136.

280 Statement from an employee connected to the Quisling Exhibition.

281 Statement from the project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition.

Prior to the Quisling Exhibition, an interdisciplinary ethical group was established to discuss moral challenges. In the exhibition *Familiehemmeligheter* at Maihaugen, one became more certain about the procedure after having become acquainted with the individual who was to front the major part of the theme. In the “body”-exhibition, one implemented an extensive pilot project in order to reach optimal framework conditions. *Himmelen over Sørlandet* was a study project in itself to gather more knowledge as to how the museums could work. I interpret this course of action not only as a wish to carry out the job in the best possible manner, but also as a wish to learn as much as possible about possible consequences. This was the case when one, as preparation for the “body”-exhibition and *Familiehemmeligheter*, contacted specialists who were supposed to give advice as to how the themes ought to be fronted to secure minimum possible reactions with the visitors after their visit to the exhibition. The employees thought for example of the possibility that youngsters would be confronted with pictures or texts which reminded them of something they had experienced, or that the exhibition made them aware that something which had happened to them, were criminal acts that must be stopped.

What action that in the last analysis was chosen, after having assessed the alternatives, was to a large degree dependent on the experience of the involved person, personality and access to knowledge.

### **Situational Assessments**

The work load required spontaneous decisions, and often there was neither time nor opportunity to confer with colleagues or to collect additional information.<sup>282</sup> Lipsky underlines this observation on a more general level: It is a structural challenge for professionals that they must show consideration towards different parties with different needs and this challenge is not met only by adding further resources like time, money and personnel.<sup>283</sup> First, this is so because a better and more varied offer will lead to greater interest and demand; second, one will always be in a position to improve the offer and thereby reach more people in a better way. The potential for improvement is necessarily an infinite quantity in a society which is constantly in a process of change and consequently one must search for solutions on another level than simply on the spot where the resources are found. Stark indicates that in the last analysis, it is only experience which will help the employee weigh the different actions against each other in morally challenging situations. In spite of good theoretical approaches, it will always be necessary to make decisions on the basis of individual situations which cannot be predicted.<sup>284</sup>

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282 Lipsky 2010: 13-16; 29-30.

283 Lipsky 2010: 33-39.

284 Stark 2011.

The actual situation was always of vital significance to my informants. After having studied exhibition projects and the handling of memories in British museums, Kavanagh too, emphasizes the need for leeway for the employees, who must be willing to immerse themselves in every single contribution and situation: “There is no formula here, no simple diagram or procedure to follow. Instead, there has to be awareness of the dynamics of memory in different stages and willingness to learn from the life stories of others.”<sup>285</sup> Lucas gives reasons for the incertitude by pointing to the world which is in constant change and by ascertaining that every single subjective action leads to new actions which thereby become difficult to predict.<sup>286</sup> Per Rekdal underscores that this is especially the case with the involvement in *BRUDD*-projects, and he warns against unpredictable reactions from parties who are involved in the work or who have the work directed towards them.<sup>287</sup>

There is a need for a great deal of leeway when one is about to choose between different alternatives of action on the background of varying framework conditions. A project employee in *Familiehemmeligheter* emphasized this in connection with the issue of cooperating with individuals:

*It is simply about daring and realizing that you are not always in command, or that you not always have rules for everything [...]. A meeting of people cannot be predicted or directed in such a way that there are never surprises or unexpected incidents.*

Several of the museum professionals understood this intellectually, but the interviews, all the same, showed that uncertainty was difficult to handle. Some of them asked themselves over and over again whether they should have acted differently in a specific situation, whether that would have led to a different result - and whether they actually should have been less afraid and thereby probably have created a more challenging exhibition.

## **Guidelines as Self-Initiated Measure**

The uncertainty as to how one should act in specific situations, the workload, and a stressing time pressure had personal consequences for some of my informants. Moral stress, notifications of illness after the opening of exhibitions and the feeling of having worked too hard and too long, popped up repeatedly. The feeling of having been without a confidant who was available to discuss moral challenges, was added to the constant time pressure and a strong wish to carry out the job as well as possible in accordance with the demands made by the different partners.

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285 Kavanagh 2002: 118.

286 Lucas 2000.

287 Rekdal 2006.

That professionals in such squeezed situations all the same refuse to reduce the work load, Lipsky explains by referring to *street level bureaucrats* and the individual employee's devotion for the job. The desire to help others is here an important motivating factor. If one does not succeed in keeping a certain distance to the job, it becomes easy to go too far and work too much, especially if there is not a clear assignment.<sup>288</sup> The experience of working under constant time pressure combined with the desire to do one's best, often leads to the individual employee developing his own guidelines to get away from making the same assessments over and over again.<sup>289</sup> These private guidelines are developed on the basis of own experiences and assessments, and are followed prior to the institution's implemented guidelines.

It became clear in my material too, that professionals working under heavy work pressure have an increased need for "patterns of practice". Some of my informants took action and developed their own, informal guidelines to be able to work more efficiently and in accordance with the self-imposed demands. These own developed guidelines were a direct consequence of the realization that the workload and the time pressure did not allow them to work in the way they actually wanted to - with more attention to the involved parties' expectations - and the practical need for more rapid decisions in a hectic working day.<sup>290</sup> This was especially remarked in connection with the Danish exhibition about children in orphanages and the German Wehrmacht Exhibition where the project managers reported that they had made their own sets of rules to be able to cope with the heavy workload. All enquiries after the opening of the exhibition were to be answered, but it was only possible and necessary in a limited degree to go into details with every single enquiry. The Danish project manager had in addition learnt that she should not pretend to be a therapist, only a historian, and also that experience made it easier for her to meet the individuals afterwards. It was a goal in *Våre hellige rom* that as many as possible of the people involved should be heard, and the project manager tried actively to find compromises which made it possible to make allowances for the wishes of a maximum number of parties at the same time. In the "body"-exhibition and *Himmelen over Sørlandet* one tried to compensate for the lack of general guidelines by constructing a safety net of their own: Even though it was not always required, comprehensive declarations of consent were written, taking away the employee's responsibility for fields she did not want responsibility for. Lipsky gives an explanation for this: If the number of clients gets too high and the employees at the same time want to maintain responsibility for all contact, one is forced to limit the contact or to repeat a pattern

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288 Lipsky 2010: xiv-xv; 75-80.

289 Lipsky 2010: 83.

290 The fact that time pressure not only affects moral decisions, but also the quality of scientific work in general, is e.g. mentioned by Pimble 1995: 3-9.

of reaction.<sup>291</sup> What such guidelines look like will always depend upon the employee who prepares them: He or she takes the starting point in their own experiences and not in possible demands from the management.<sup>292</sup>

But the guidelines did not necessarily function only as measures of relief. Many factors indicate that the museum employees have made such strict demands for themselves and their professionalism that the self-imposed guidelines took their starting point in what one regarded as the optimal handling of specific situations - without taking into consideration that the work load initially made such a handling impossible. In that way they had to invest more energy than usual to comply with their own guidelines. By and by this was adjusted as one down-scaled the self-imposed demands to be able to handle the work load.

To conclude, one may say that the self-imposed guidelines did not deprive my informants of the possibility to assess each situation separately. In the direct encounter with the individual one had the opportunity to react spontaneously and from one's gut feeling to comply with the individual's needs. The self-imposed guidelines were consequently only planned as relief in situations with similar frame conditions: One reserved the right to discard them, if spontaneous and situational assessments required it.

## **What Choices Does One Make in Morally Challenging Situations?**

In short, three factors are crucial when one decides how to act in in a morally challenging situation:

- a) The knowledge which is at one's disposal in the very situation when a decision must be made, as well as the situation's frame conditions. The knowledge comprises all relevant theoretical and practical skills and all prior experience, in both general and professional connections.
- b) A moral analysis of the consequences of the different courses of action for all parties involved. Here one chooses one party as the most relevant or considers certain consequences as better than others. Usually, one shows most consideration for the party who was thought to be the weakest or least protected.
- c) The individual employee's character and handling of feelings.

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291 Lipsky 2010: 99-104.

292 Though none of the informants in my material tell of distinct demands from the employer, several statements can be interpreted in such a manner that own experiences and moral understanding are emphasized, something which I have touched upon earlier in this chapter and which is related to the inquiry in Vest-Agder Museum's own *BRUDD*-group.

All three factors are to a great extent marked by *feelings*, both one's own and the ability to immerse oneself in other people's feelings. Since every assessment of situation and following action leads to new experiences which change thought patterns and future actions in similar situations, the importance of feelings cannot be overestimated. The feelings of the participants, the audience and the employees characterize all courses of action and thereby all work on and repercussions from the exhibition.

## The Importance of Feelings

Feelings make up an important component of what the informants called *the gut feeling*. As explained earlier, several informants explained that it was "a personal ethical conviction that had been decisive",<sup>293</sup> "in the last analysis [...] a very personal, very intuitive, emotional decision".<sup>294</sup> The amount of feelings involved in the working processes was confirmed in situations where the employees started crying during the interviews with the individuals, when they tried not to offend people, and when they wanted to recognize people who had made difficult or traumatic experiences. First and foremost, it was their empathy which became decisive: One sympathized with the individuals' situation and recognized the difficult feelings these persons had passed on.<sup>295</sup> Consequently, my informants have gone further than one could expect to fulfill individuals' needs and wishes. Also without specific guidelines, the informants have appeared as moral actors. Without referring to ethics, ethical theory or a particular ethicist, they have all chosen courses of action which are in line with proximity ethics. My interpretation is that the personal meeting has brought about the experience of The Other as so meaningful that one has wished to approach him or her in the best possible manner by recognizing, respecting and protecting them.

The project managers of the exhibition about children in orphanages and the Wehrmacht Exhibition had to realize that there was a need for self-imposed guidelines in order to handle the many enquiries after the opening of the exhibition, but none of the informants reported that they had limited their attention for the individuals they saw in the personal meetings. This is confirmed by the proximity ethics which I shall return to in the following chapter: people react spontaneously with for instance compassion, charity and mercy when they meet

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293 Statement made by a new employee connected to the Quisling Exhibition.

294 Statement made by the project manager of the Wehrmacht Exhibition.

295 Here one can see parallels to the results of a study of visitors to a church yard, conducted by Anders Gustavson, Professor emeritus in ethnology at the University of Oslo. He states that as a researcher one becomes more and more involved, the more one recognizes the feelings behind the narrative one hears from the interview partner. Anders Gustavson emphasizes how easily the researcher can become emotionally involved in a meeting with grieving people, and through text and pictures on headstones. The more personal the grieving person's narrative was and the more personal the design of the headstone was, the stronger the researcher was emotionally involved. Finally, he concluded that there are sensitive and private areas also in the public space, and that any approach to these private areas necessarily must be founded on the involved parties' interests and wishes. Cf. Gustavson 2001.



other people who tell about difficult experiences and recognizable feelings<sup>296</sup> The individuals who showed trust and exposed themselves to a certain degree, expected in return to be met in a specific way.<sup>297</sup> But the specific expectations were neither spoken, nor directly passed on, and therefore it was easy for the museum employee to take a wrong step. How big the consequences might be when you are not welcomed as expected is clearly demonstrated in my material. In the “body”-exhibition a participant expected for instance to have almost the last word as to how the personal narrative should be presented. The project manager was not willing to grant this and at the same time the project manager’s own expectations about respect for professional competence were not met. At this stage the cooperation was terminated.

Further, my material shows that not one employee has reacted immediately, but has on the contrary always used her experience, competence and own moral understanding to decide on an action which one thought would be best for the better part of the parties involved.<sup>298</sup> In this perspective, feelings were seen as a supplier of terms in the decision process as to what was to be given priority when moral actions were to be chosen.

### **The Importance of the Visitors’ Feelings**

Kavanagh specifies in one of her publications on the work on memories that both informants’ and visitors’ feelings are important. She considers the visitors’ feelings to be unpredictable and connected to a combination of design of the exhibition, the museum employee’s behaviour, personal experiences, earlier reflections, and their actual life situation.<sup>299</sup> These feelings must be respected, even though it is impossible to predict or provoke them. All my informants agreed that the visitors should “move”<sup>300</sup> during the visit to the exhibition, they should be touched and thereby get impulses which led to new reflections. As earlier mentioned, sensitivity and empathy may lead to seeing familiar aspects from several new angles and one may thereby develop new viewpoints and new knowledge about interaction between people and the society in general.<sup>301</sup> Both directly and indirectly several of the informants have taken their starting point in the fact that it is the individuals’ narratives which make the exhibition more personal and thereby lead to new viewpoints and new knowledge - this is so because the visitors may recognize the feelings which lie behind the reported experience, even though they have not experienced the same situation.

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296 Løgstrup 1993: 17-23. For further reference, cf. Christoffersen 1999: 22-26; Levinas 1996: 195-213; Vetlesen 2007: 104-105.

297 Løgstrup 2000: 29-42.

298 Vetlesen & Nortvedt 1996b: 15-17.

299 Kavanagh 2000: 153.

300 Statement from the section leader at IKM.

301 Vetlesen & Nortvedt 1996b: 62-77; Nortvedt 2006: 38-48.

In my material I have found two levels where strong feelings were triggered and strong reactions took place: On the one level the audience seemed to have reacted strongly to the recognition of the individual's feelings which appeared in the exhibition, on the other level it seemed as though the triggering mechanism was directed towards the theme itself and the angling of it. Especially the feeling of being offended has triggered strong reactions, and this observation is confirmed by foreign museum studies<sup>302</sup> and several philosophers' approach to feelings, in addition to parts of Honneth's recognition theory.

Findings on the first level can theoretically be explained by perspectives drawn from proximity ethics, which underline that it is the encounter with another human being which leads to the recognition of one's own feelings via what is being disseminated. This presupposes that the visitor recognizes his role as addressee,<sup>303</sup> and that the feelings connected to the direct contact between two human beings can be transferred to an exhibition situation without direct contact between participant and visitor. Technological devices cannot usually compensate for the direct contact between two human beings: Without the interaction between participant and visitor the power of empathy and thereby the feelings are reduced.<sup>304</sup> In several exhibitions it was a conscious process to find effects which transferred some of the feelings one had got in the personal meeting into the exhibition and thereby to the visitors - but in a more muted form. This happened because the employees were scared of what too strong feelings might lead to in the form of reactions, but also because they wanted to protect the individuals.

On the second level it was the theme and its angling which might trigger strong reactions. Findings in foreign museum studies showed that reactions become stronger, the more the visitors are forced to revise their own self-image or the frames of their own conception of identity.<sup>305</sup> When an exhibition rocks one or more of the central aspects which are part of a person's building of own identity, for instance family, friends, cultural trivialities or birthplace, one reacts with strong feelings to any forced relocation. As mentioned, this was obvious in the Wehrmacht Exhibition, connected to the children of principals in the exhibition about children in orphanages or in the Quisling Exhibition.

## A Little Comment

In connection with *street-level bureaucrats*, Lipsky makes it clear that the specific courses of action which the employee chooses in preference to other courses, are not only of vital relevance for the parties involved, but also for the entire profession. Since the profession

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302 Cf. e.g. Bonnell & Simon 2007: 66-67.

303 Vetlesen & Nortvedt 1996c: 184.

304 Jonas 1999: 57-58; Jonas 1979: 26-28.

305 Simon 2011b: 433; Carnegie 2006: 70; Kavanagh 2000: 153.

works on the basis of a political mission, the individual's actions may be regarded as political: It is the individual's choice of action which in the end defines the profession from within and thereby becomes part of the formation of the profession's reaction to the political mission.<sup>306</sup> The job routines which are developed by those who experience situations themselves and directly, become in the long run the profession's mode of work and thought, which in turn may define the political mission.<sup>307</sup>

The vital driving force behind the profession's further development is the uncertainty as to how one can and should handle the moral challenges and the subsequent test processes.<sup>308</sup> When tested working methods no longer function, for example because the political remit has changed, the professions and the professionals are in imbalance. One has no longer the tools needed to fulfill the demands made by others or which are self-imposed in regard to own professionalism. Thereby a process is launched in which new working methods must be tested to regain balance in order to become secure in handling the tasks set by the political mission. Here the central driving force is made up of the individual employees and their individual experiences, and this may yet again lead to an adaptation of some of the profession's framework conditions.<sup>309</sup>

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306 Lipsky 2010: 84. A Norwegian study confirms this: It is the employees' practical working day which decides how political guidelines are implemented. The study comprises four employees who had worked for a long period at the same museum, cf. Husabø 2012: 7-9, 24-29.

307 Lipsky 2010: xiii.

308 See Abbott 1988: 215; Lipsky 2010: xiii.

309 Abbott 1998: 215. Abbott describes the transformation process in detail by help of three specific examples, cf. Abbott 1988: 215-314.

# 5

## What Theories Can Help Us Choose Correctly when Decisions Have to Be Made?

A number of ethical theories can help us make the right decisions. The Austrian philosopher, Karl R. Popper, once described theory as “the net we cast to catch the ‘world’ - to rationalize it, explain it, dominate it. We strive to reduce the size of the mesh more and more”.<sup>310</sup> So, theories are there to help us look up and understand connections which are not spontaneously visible, particularly when we are in the midst of challenging situations. Here it can be useful to have in mind what is the reason for the challenges and how it can be sorted out from a theoretical point of view. In this chapter follows a sequence of three theoretical perspectives which can help us make the right choices when different needs have to be considered and important decisions are to be made: professional ethics, recognition theory and proximity ethics. The importance of emotions is of course fundamental and will be addressed in several sections.

The theories have been chosen with a view to facilitating the approach to controversial or sensitive issues and paving the way for the process itself. Normally, the contact starts with an invitation from the museum to individuals asking them to join in and take part in a project. In order to motivate people to come forward and contribute with personal narratives and have talks with an unknown member of the museum staff, trust is indispensable - trust in the museum as a professional institution and to its staff as professionals who can communicate with people and handle their narratives in a predictable manner. To be able to take a closer look at the reasons why the museums want to receive personal narratives as contributions and the importance of such cooperation for individual citizens and for the society, I shall mainly use Axel Honeth's theory of recognition. The reason for this is that he also makes it clear how the absence of recognition results in offence. As mentioned in my previous chapter, recognition as well as offence are crucial concepts here. To be able to analyse further what happens in an encounter between staff members and individuals who have contacted the museum, I shall further apply some viewpoints taken from proximity ethics. The latter can help me look more closely at what happens on a practical level in the interaction between the museum and external contributors. As a consequence of this interaction repercussions will occur, but the starting point is the direct encounter - face to face- between two human beings. The museum staff member is both a professional and a fellow human being in an encounter of this kind. These roles may require incompatible responses, and both proximity ethics and the superior category of professional ethics are applicable when this interplay is subjected to investigation.

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310 Popper 1976: 5.

## Professional Ethics

There are innumerable books on morals, moral philosophy, ethics and ethical theories. In such contexts it is common practice to define ‘ethics’ as ‘theoretical reflection over morals’, and ‘morals’ as “perceptions of right and wrong, good and evil which exist within a society, a group or an individual”.<sup>311</sup> Professional ethics is a description of “norms and values which govern the conduct and organization of professionals”.<sup>312</sup> These norms may affect the interplay between the professionals and indicate how they are supposed to behave as members of a fellowship in order to increase the level of trust their profession enjoys in the society. The norms may also give guidance to the professional member involved in morally challenging situations which may occur in his encounters with individual users.<sup>313</sup> Professional ethics can be *explicit*, i.e. expressed in a direct and distinct manner, or *implicit*, i.e. tacitly understood and indirect.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, ICOM *Code of Ethics* is normative when it comes to what values museum professionals ought to protect, and, in consequence, what norms should prevail in their daily activity. Thus the operational freedom of the museum professional is circumscribed, and the frames defining when and how it is necessary to heed the requirements from assigning agencies and the employing institution, the museum as such, are specified.<sup>314</sup> Grimen stresses that professional ethics include “norms and values which define the conditions for cooperation between professionals who work together in a collegially joint enterprise and who possibly establish standards of conduct to apply to themselves when dealing with others in their complementary role as clients”.<sup>315</sup> According to Grimen’s definition, professional ethics focus first and foremost on the cooperation between the professionals, which in turn will be of importance for the professionals’ external target groups.<sup>316</sup>

But the members of a profession are never exclusively professionals: they are professionals as well as fellow human beings at the same time. Exhibitions devoted to sensitive topics where individuals are involved as partners require a number of moral choices and observations from the museum employees. These observations will be made on the basis of norms and values which may be related to private life or professional life. People’s attitude to relations and institutions is rooted in their culture and in the era to which they belong, but is also a fruit of competence acquired in the course of their lives and in the different forums where they have

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311 Johansen og Vetlesen 2009: 108.

312 Grimen 2008b: 144.

313 Eide, Grelland, Kristiansen, Sævereid & Aasland 2003: 20-23.

314 For further reference, cf. Christoffersen 2005, Christoffersen & Wyller 2005: 7-16.

315 Grimen 2008b: 145.

316 Grimen 2008b: 149-152.

been active. This competence is directly related to the ability people have to communicate with others, to behave socially by means of the right codes, to be able to learn, to change perspectives or modify their conduct and understand some aspects of the inner world other people possess.

Here sense and sensibility, reason and emotion, are crucial. Over the last decades a number of moral philosophers have theorized about the relationship between reason and emotion and pondered upon how the two connect and complement each other.<sup>317</sup> In moral philosophy the standard view is that it is reason and not emotion which decides what it means to behave properly and which governs the acts of man. However, well-known philosophers, like for instance the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, emphasize that reason and emotion cannot be separated. On the contrary, they complement each other in such a way that emotions are considered to prepare the ground for a subsequent wholehearted use of reason.<sup>318</sup>

Arne Johan Vetlesen argues that emotion is among the most important qualities which transform/convert human beings into moral actors provided their emotions are cultivated, i.e. governed by reason.<sup>319</sup> If reason is applied, it is possible to learn how to distinguish between spontaneous, often self-centred feelings and feelings which will contribute to something good for others or for the society as a whole. Vetlesen calls feelings of the latter category “cultivated emotions” and moral acts based on these are likely to contribute to the reinforcement of moral attitudes in society. What the museum professionals have referred to as “gut feeling” turned out to be a mixture of relevant experience, knowledge and cultivated emotions. All have used reason, intellectual and moral virtues to identify those acts which were considered to be the most appropriate choices. Among the feelings directed towards other people, the capacity for empathy is of particular importance. To have empathy for others, to enter into The Other’s situation without thinking of one’s own advantage emerges as moral behaviour - and that is what is required when members of the museum profession are confronted with moral challenges.<sup>320</sup>

### **Professional Ethics versus Public Morality**

As members of the society in which they have grown up and live, museum professionals relate to public morality. Public morality encompasses moral standards, values and virtues which most people respect and observe within a specific culture at a specific period of time.<sup>321</sup> Even though not all perceive the same acts as morally right or wrong in specific situations, public morality is a reflection of the society’s general ideas about how one ought to act in

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317 Vetlesen & Nordtvedt 1996b: 11-35.

318 Nussbaum 1999.

319 Vetlesen & Nordtvedt 1996b: 15-17. For further reference cf. Vetlesen 1994: 154-163.

320 For further reference, cf. Vetlesen & Nordtvedt 1996b: 62-77.

321 Tranøy 1998: 101.

ordinary situations of everyday occurrence.<sup>322</sup> Moreover, museum employees are moral subjects in situations related to their professional activity, and here they have to comply with moral standards and values of professional or institutional nature.<sup>323</sup> But what is now to be prioritized if one has to choose - if professional ethics and public morality happen to require different actions?

In 2005/2006 there was a long academic debate about the basis for professional ethics and whether public morality should have pre-eminence. The debate was chiefly an exchange of views between Harald Grimen and Per Nortvedt, with inputs from Dag Aasland among others.<sup>324</sup>

Grimen has outlined three areas where professions are distinct from other job categories. One of these areas, - the political legitimacy -, is in his opinion the basis for professional ethics. Since the legitimacy of a profession is connected to a political assignment, it is the norms and values of the assigning agency which are fundamental, and not the standards of public morality.<sup>325</sup> Grimen underscores the fact that the relationship between public morality and professional ethics may be conflictual: Professionals may end up in a situation where their acts require moral observance of professional character, but where these are not in accordance with universal standards, in spite of the fact that political assignments tend to have aspects of public morality as their background. Nevertheless, the standards of professional ethics must prevail: Professionals operate with entrusted legitimacy and are obliged to act in accordance with what the assigner considers to be valid standards of professional ethics and not with their own personal opinions. Grimen justifies this with the argument that the receivers of the professional's service, the members of the society, have to be certain that the professional, who interprets and fulfills the societal remit, always acts to the best of his abilities and never abuses his power.<sup>326</sup>

As opposed to Grimen, Per Nortvedt, as Grimen Professor at the Norwegian Senter for profesjonsstudier (literally: "The Centre for Professional Studies") in Oslo, thinks that the loyalty towards a fellow human being and a common public morality based on "a sensibility which joins people together in mutual respect and courtesy",<sup>327</sup> should always be stronger

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322 Tranøy 1998: 132-135.

323 Cf. Grimen 2008b: 146. Grimen emphasizes here in a footnote how Tranøy and Taylor define the difference between norms and values and sets down his own definition close to that of Taylor. Grimen understands the connection between values and norms in contexts with one individual in the following way: "An individual can be the addressee of values and not only of norms. He is the addressee of a value if the normative ideal expressed by that value is relevant for the identity he will have as a person, or for the good execution of the activity in which he is involved."

324 Senter for profesjonsstudier 2012. In Eide 2008, Tranøy is drawn into the discussion when the question debated is whether the professional ethics of trained social workers and welfare officers is based on universal ethical standards.

325 Grimen 2008b: 144-147. Cf. further Grimen 2006: 39-40.

326 Grimen 2008b: 148-149.

327 Nortvedt 205.

than the loyalty towards a societal remit.<sup>328</sup> Nortvedt accepts that professional ethics first and foremost should be for the benefit of the citizens. In consequence there is a need for professional standards as well as superior guidelines as to how the societal remit must be fulfilled in order to be fair to all. But just as important is the significance of the personal encounter between a professional and a client or user, and this is where public morality intervenes: To bring about a situation where a professional can meet his client under the best possible conditions for the client himself (seen from the client's point of view), the professional has to bring in values and standards of public morality, personal virtues and good taste. Thus, Nortvedt underlines that professions are in "a field of tension between social and political obligations [...] and the specific [...] subject of vulnerability", and that the individual member of a profession therefore has "a double commitment, both to the society and to the individual client".<sup>329</sup> If one of these commitments is going to prevail in a specific dilemma, this will necessarily have to be the moral commitment the professional has to his client. Such priority is the only means which can ensure that professions and professional ethics do not end up as tools for the currently predominant political ideologies and their correlated values and norms as posited by the assigner. As further support for his contention, Nortvedt refers to research showing that most of those who are in a vulnerable situation and need help will always give most weight to the professional's personal character and whether they feel they are treated as a subject and not as an object.

Dag Aasland, Professor of Economics at the University of Agder, adds a new element to the discussion as he points out that the two commitments Nortvedt refers to always ought to succeed each other: First, one meets another person, and the standard reaction is empathy and compassion. Afterwards one must return to the third, fourth and fifth person who can be affected by the decisions which are made as a consequence of this first encounter with The Other.<sup>330</sup> Here Aasland is referring to the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas: A return to the society, where social demands to the public or specific obligations to employer and assigner are decisive for the possibility to adapt the singular needs of The Other to our social economic, political and institutional reality. The encounter with The Other, this particular fellow human being, has to be the motive force for improving the standards of professional ethics so they become fairer and duly adapted to the different spheres of reality.

How is actually the situation at museums, and what expectations do external participants have when they approach a museum? Are the predominant factors how they are treated and looked after during the personal contact with the employee, and, in consequence, what personal

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328 Senter for profesjonsstudier 2012. Loyalty can here be understood as "law-abidingness, integrity, devotion to duty", cf. Henriksen & Eriksen 2005: 616, Volume 9, but not as obedience, something I shall come back to more extensively.

329 Senter for profesjonsstudier 2012.

330 Ibid.



qualities the employee seems to have, as argued by Nortvedt? Or is it more important for them to be certain that the employees follow professional rules which will guarantee predictable responses independent of personal sympathy or antipathy? And what expectations will prevail when the society happens to have other needs than individuals? If the museum professional for example assumes that the playback of forceful recordings of sound and image with controversial statements from individuals will provoke a major debate in the society and so contribute to elucidating a tabooed topic from different points of view - which may correspond to the expectations of the assigning agency - is it then morally defensible to expose the individuals involved to the severity such a public debate may risk inflicting on them?

With reference to my empirical material it is possible to argue that public morality, for various reasons, is always prioritized at the expense of professional ethics. Professional ethics seems in general to be relatively unknown, and ICOM *Code of Ethics* is perceived as rather vague, imprecise and of little use with regard to the new challenges. Nor does it seem to be common knowledge that professional ethics may differ from public morality: Whereas the norms and standards clearly emphasize the individual member's responsibility towards the profession, there are all the same reservations saying that public morality has to be observed.<sup>331</sup> The majority of my informants have greatly emphasized that it is one's own moral understanding which has to form the basis when moral assessments have to be made, in addition to a personal interpretation of the museums' societal remit. The latter will probably be coloured by indirect discussions about morals and ethics within one's own institution, while a lack of clarity in the profession's understanding leaves a lot of leeway for one's own interpretation. One's own moral understanding will to a considerable extent be based on public morality, since the latter according to what the informants say is a fruit of one's upbringing and personal experience. None of my informants have mentioned limitations in the form of professional rules and regulations, but all have mentioned moral limitations related to their own understanding of morality. None of the informants have told about things they have done in spite of the fact that they knew these were not in accordance with public morality. On the contrary, a number of informants have explained that they could not actively take part in a project where the procedures did not correspond to their own moral understanding, an issue to which I shall return at length. This is of particular relevance when individuals are influenced

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331 All employees have "the right to protest against working routines which may be detrimental to a museum, to the museum profession or to museum ethical standards", cf. ICOMs museumsetiske regelverk 2011: 29, pt. 8.2. Furthermore, it is emphasized that the loyalty to colleagues and to the employing institution "must be based on allegiance to fundamental ethical principles applicable to the profession as a whole. These principles should comply with the terms of the ICOM *Code of Ethics* and be aware of any other codes or policies relevant to museum work", cf. ICOMs museumsetiske regelverk 2011: 29, pt. 8.3. How much of the public morality which indirectly is embedded in the concept of museum ethics, is in my view a question of interpretation, and the interpretation as such will necessarily depend on an individual understanding of what public morality encompasses.

by moral decisions: Here the needs of the individual will prevail over the societal remit, another issue which will be extensively discussed later. Aasland's approach is also confirmed by my empirical material, among other things by a reoccurring reference to hectic working days: First the needs of the individual are considered, afterwards the fact that these needs have to be adapted to a busy working day, and the fact that others too have similar needs which must be satisfied.<sup>332</sup>

## **Institutional Morals**

Institutional morals refer to informal norms characterizing an institution as well as expectations regarding norms and values which the employer has to the individual employees. These expectations will most often correspond to the expectations the profession has to the individual member, and the professional ethics are normally fundamental for the institutional morals.<sup>333</sup> But the latter can also be even more specific and adapted to the internal rules and routines of one single institution. Inside the institution it will be necessary to comply with managerial directives, the institution's specific purpose and academic standards, or official plans of operation, and the employer can for various reasons want to give prominence to certain norms and values which are not embedded in the rules and regulations of the profession.<sup>334</sup> Moreover, institutions have economic concerns they have to consider, and it is conceivable that such concerns could even be embedded in the standards of institutional morals. So, different institutions may have different institutional standards, even though they are based on the same professional norms. The institutional standards could potentially influence the internal culture of the organization, which comes to the surface among other things in basic conceptions, in communications and relations between the employees themselves or between the employees and the management and in the attitude to the world outside.<sup>335</sup> In spite of the fact that the moral standards of the institution are equally important for all the work done there, they are normally based on tacit knowledge and are likewise not clearly expressed or set down in writing.<sup>336</sup>

Grimen defines institutions as "a stable, permanent pattern of cooperation between several societal actors. Often, the operators have different, complementary roles in this pattern of cooperation [...]. The contention that the institutions are stable implies that they often survive the specific actors who cooperate inside them".<sup>337</sup> As I see it, museums do unquestionably

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332 Senter for profesjonsstudier 2012.

333 As emphasized in i.a. American Alliance of Museums 2012:7, the museum profession's norms and regulations must form the basis for all the internal regulations of an institution.

334 Cf. e.g. Landry 1997: 228-230.

335 Eide & Skorstad 2005: 191-197. Here the concept of 'institutional morals' is not applied, but the concept of 'culture' understood as 'a set of i.a. norms and values shared by the members of a group'. As I see it, such internal culture can be influenced by institutional morals.

336 For tacit or indexed knowledge, cf. Nortvedt & Grimen 2004: 165-194.

337 Grimen 2004: 127.

fall under the scope of this definition. According to Grimen it is not obvious how the understanding of the concept of 'institution' could go beyond this, or exactly where the line of distinction between the concepts of 'institution' and 'organization' actually goes. He focuses first and foremost on 'profession' as a form of organization, not as a set of institutions where professionals have their working place.<sup>338</sup> As mentioned, the professional ethics regulate the cooperation between "operators who collaborate in a collegial form of organization",<sup>339</sup> but without any accurate specification of where the cooperation actually takes place. The professional ethics have political legitimacy which is inherent in the mandate the profession has got from the society. This mandate tends to come from specific institutions, here the individual museums.

That there may be differences between the institutional morals and the professional standards the museum employees must observe is expressed in the eighth principle of ICOM *Code of Ethics*. In pt. 8.2 it is clearly stated that "members of the museum profession have an obligation to follow the policies and procedures of their employing institution". This presupposes that institutional moral standards actually exist. Loyalty to colleagues and to the management is expected, though with two notable exceptions: The individual employee has "the right to object to practices that are perceived to be damaging to a museum, to the profession, and matters of professional ethics", and his loyalty must be based on "allegiance to fundamental ethical principles applicable to the profession as a whole".<sup>340</sup> Here the phrase "to a museum or to the museum profession" refers to a distinction between institution and profession. Moreover, it is implied that the individual employee has a moral understanding of his own which may deviate from institutional morals as well as professional ethics.

In Edson's book, *Museum Ethics*, the reason why museums as institutions ought to establish their own ethical guidelines is clearly stated and argued: "Like an individual, a museum is constantly called upon to make choices, take actions, and, in so doing, measure its values - its ethics - against reality. None of its activities escapes this preoccupation."<sup>341</sup> Ethics mark all the fields of a museum's activity, from the reception of visitors via marketing and pedagogical projects to cooperation with different enterprises - and here the institutions function as an important actor.

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338 Furthermore, he gives leeway for distinguishing between professional ethics and institutional morals, e.g. when he defines a profession as an association of equivalent partners who constitute a fellowship of argumentation. Grimen 2008b: 145. In an institution like the one I here refer to, there will necessarily have to be a leader, the employer, who does not only have the employer's liability to his employees, but also a particular responsibility as to how the museum as an institution appears to the public.

339 Grimen 2008b: 145.

340 ICOM's museumsetiske regelverk 2011, pt. 8.2. and 8.3.

341 Landry 1997: 228.

Basically, museum employees must observe three distinct sets of moral principles: 1) As moral subjects and members of a culture which also characterizes them in a number of ways they must pay attention to public morality, 2) as members of a profession they have to give heed to professional ethics, and 3) as employees of an institution they are obliged to respect institutional morals. In most cases the three sets of moral principles will be reasonably coincident since they are based on each other and consistently refer to each other.

## **Museum Professionals' Freedom of Action**

In their work devoted to sensitive topics most museum professionals normally enjoy considerable leeway in their field of operations, with substantial possibilities for personal judgement. Such possibilities are particularly important in a society undergoing constant change, which makes it difficult to foresee the consequences of individual acts. Chris Lucas points out that the world is often perceived as something static where the ambition is to control or evaluate isolated acts by means of specific rules. Among other things he mentions jurisprudence as an attempt to distinguish between right and wrong with reference to acts. However, in spite of the fact that such a static approach can be both necessary and important, it does not produce a realistic picture. "Today's world is not yesterday's".<sup>342</sup> The world is subject to continuous change and any individual act which is a result of subjective experience as well as an adaptation to other people and the society, leads to new acts which influence the surroundings. There is a corresponding major challenge inherent in the fact that it is very difficult to calculate and foresee the consequences a given act may entail. The volume of influence which inspires an act, or the interpretations of this act, is too large. In order to still be able to execute those acts which will satisfy a maximum number of people, it is necessary to be aware of as many options as possible. Broad knowledge and experience are required to be able to predict all possible consequences before a decision is made. It is necessary to try to see things from the highest conceivable number of different viewpoints, and the reflective process which precedes the specific act must be as comprehensive as can be imagined. In the cooperation with external partners on sensitive topics, there is a need for supplementary personal judgement in order to be able to evaluate the available options with reference to a specific period of time, a specific place, and the given surroundings.

## **The Theory of Recognition**

In his major work *Kampf um Anerkennung* from 1992 the German philosopher Axel Honneth constructs a social theory where all normative discussions to a considerable extent are based

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<sup>342</sup> Lucas 2000.

upon empirical studies.<sup>343</sup> His starting point is that any change in social life is generated through the interaction between individuals on three different levels; a perspective he shares with a number of philosophers, sociologists and social philosophers.<sup>344</sup> Empiricism is here understood as generalizing studies of individual experiences, and the concept of ‘empirical data’ presupposes a critical scrutiny of a maximum of available knowledge and information about a specific context.

On the basis of empirical studies Honneth argues that a human being will acquire a positive relation to himself as soon as he is recognized by others. Recognition can here be defined as a fundamental, intersubjective and indispensable need common to all mankind. It is obtained through a mutual, social and symmetrical relation between two or more co-acting individuals and is important as confirmation or motivation.<sup>345</sup> From this definition Honneth draws distinct lines of connection to a psychoanalytical tradition. The identity of individuals is closely connected to the degree of recognition they get in their interaction with other human beings and with the society. Here he distinguishes between three different categories of recognition: “the emotional affection we know from relations of love and friendship, lawful recognition and attachment of solidarity”.<sup>346</sup> In other words: recognition as love, recognition as inalienable right, and recognition as solidarity.<sup>347</sup> If we cannot have the recognition we expect, need, or demand, there is an obvious risk that we will feel humiliated and react with fighting spirit in order to obtain recognition. According to Honneth, the struggle for recognition from or of groups, individuals or institutions is a logical consequence of a pluralistic and diversified society and should therefore be referred to as a normal condition.<sup>348</sup> Moreover, Honneth emphasizes that all struggle for recognition is a “morally motivated social conflict”.<sup>349</sup> Recognition is based on morally valid acts, offense on morally invalid acts.<sup>350</sup>

Here one can observe points of resemblance with proximity ethics, to which I shall soon return: Not only is The Other treated in a way one wishes to be treated personally, but adapting one’s understanding of what is morally right or wrong to the feelings one has for other people is even a basic human propensity: The stronger and more positive the feelings are the more willingness there is to prioritize the needs of The Other at the expense of those of a third or of one’s own.<sup>351</sup>

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343 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 101. Cf. further Lysaker 2010: 93-136.

344 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 101-103.

345 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 73-148; Lysaker 2010: 93-100.

346 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 103.

347 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 101-139; Deranty 2009: 271-308; Lysaker 2010: 102-113.

348 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 101.

349 Lysaker 2010: 4.

350 Honneth 2009; Lysaker 2010: 101.

351 Deranty 2009: 362. Deranty here refers to Honneth, 2007. As mentioned, Honneth underlines that theoretical assumptions can be substantiated by means of empirical data. Here too he is distinct from Habermas, whose argument is more extensively based on theoretical perspectives.

Honneth's starting point is that all change and development in society is generated through the individual's need for getting recognition or giving recognition. He calls this a "dynamic imperative" which functions "as a normative compulsion, which drives the subjects to successively extend the purport of their mutual recognition, since that is the only way towards giving social expression to the ever growing demands of subjectivity".<sup>352</sup> In this manner he also underscores that *the society*, represented by individuals and groups, has to pay attention to the narratives of individuals, whether the society likes it or not. It is only through such a variety of opinions coming from different voices that the necessary social development can take place. If we transpose Honneth's social theory from a macro-perspective to a meso- or micro-perspective, we will further, with certain modifications, be able to apply the theory of recognition to the field of museums as well. Admittedly, this depends upon how a museum and its employees contribute to the recognition of social groups and individuals.

### **Recognition as Love, Right and Solidarity**

The first category of recognition, recognition as love, refers to a condition where all people acquire self-confidence through the love they receive from other people in close relations. According to Honneth this category encompasses "all primary relations made up of strong emotional bonds between a small number of persons in accordance with patterns such as erotic relations between partners living as a couple, as friendship, and as relations between children and parents".<sup>353</sup> Honneth's main interest is the first months, and he refers to several psychoanalysts when he describes the process of how a child learns to identify itself as subject in its relation to others.<sup>354</sup> The further development of self-confidence is based on the amount of love one receives from the people to whom one has close relations. In this way love provides "the psychological basis in every human being for being able to trust the impulses generated by its own needs".<sup>355</sup>

The second category of recognition, recognition as inalienable right, lifts the perspective one level up. Its target is the citizen whose elementary rights have been secured by the democratic state in which he or she lives.<sup>356</sup> 'Rights' can here be understood as "anonymized indices of social esteem".<sup>357</sup> Therefore, the desire to be recognized is also a desire to be recognized in a manner perceived as righteous. Righteousness is in other words a fundamental value which is always connected to something positive, and which is crucial in all the relations individuals have to other individuals, to groups or to the society.<sup>358</sup> To be treated righteously

352 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 101.

353 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 104.

354 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 104-116; Deranty 2009: 287-293.

355 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 128.

356 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 116-130; Deranty 2009: 294-299.

357 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 128.

358 Halsaa & Hellum 2010.

or unrighteously is an essential kind of experience all human beings are familiar with, i.e. out of their own individual understanding of what righteousness actually stands for in a given situation and in contact with other people. In such a perspective righteousness is directly linked to proximity ethics and to equality and is therefore a prominent element in all the three recognition categories of Honneth's.

The third, and last, category of recognition, recognition as solidarity, refers to individual human beings as members of a civil society where individuals have "qualities and skills which distinguish the members from each other".<sup>359</sup> This civil society is a democratic and cultural community where each individual is valued through his adherence to this community.<sup>360</sup> Here solidarity is understood as "one variety of a relation of interaction where the subjects take part in each other's life cycles because they respect each other symmetrically".<sup>361</sup> In consequence, the community is based upon people sharing the same values in a manner which differs from what is the case in other groups. In several of his written works Honneth emphasizes how important it is for individuals to belong to a group.<sup>362</sup>

### **Offence as Absence of Recognition**

Only a very small minority of moral subjects have a deliberate intention to offend others, and so is obviously the case for museum employees as well. But what exactly is 'offence' seen from a theoretical point of view? Within the professions dealing with public health, 'offence' is most often understood as 'being treated as an object', not as a subject with personal desires or needs.<sup>363</sup> However, it is also pointed out that what one person experiences as offending can be totally inoffensive to another. Still, all human beings have had the feeling of being offended, i.e. that "we recognize the nature of offence, even though its manifestations may vary".<sup>364</sup>

Axel Honneth understands offence as the absence of recognition: Offence means not being recognized as a private person, citizen or member of a community. All people depend on recognition, and all are therefore vulnerable and liable to be offended. To be offended is an experience which entails a feeling of what is right or wrong, and of how one would like to be treated. However, Honneth emphasizes that it is not exclusively up to the individual to register that he or she has been offended:

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359 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 134.

360 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 130-139; Deranty 2009: 300-308.

361 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 137.

362 Cf. e.g. Honneth 2010.

363 Samuelsen 2012: 144-150.

364 Samuelsen 2012: 146.

Even if one may accept the individual's experience of having been offended, there is a need for others to acknowledge that an offending act has actually been committed before it is legitimate to call it 'offence'.<sup>365</sup>

Honneth explains at length what he calls *the moral perspective*, "that set of attitudes we have to adopt in order to protect living human beings against offence".<sup>366</sup> It implies recognition at the three levels mentioned above: recognition of the individual's need for care and love, moral respect for one person's equality with other persons in the society, and recognition of the rights of an individual. Moral challenges occurring in the work devoted to sensitive topics are a consequence of the incompatibility of all the three categories of recognition: On the practical level one will inevitably have to prioritize one category of recognition at the expense of another, and which of them that eventually will prevail is to the highest extent dependent on the situation.<sup>367</sup>

Offence as a consequence of the absence of recognition as love will require an extension of Honneth's definition of love as it is posited in *Kampf um Anerkennung*. Honneth himself has later extended the purport of the concept by emphasizing that love can encompass various practices and relations between two people: "Practical identity, i.e. our moral identity as well, is constructed [...] through personal relations we live in and personal projects we work for".<sup>368</sup> As we can see, Honneth here distinguishes between personal relations and personal projects people are involved in - where both contribute to the development of their identity. It is possible to have personal relations to people one loves, to family members or friends<sup>369</sup> - and under the latter category are also relations based on "nützlich-pragmatische Beziehungen" (literally: "beneficially oriented pragmatic relations")<sup>370</sup>, i.e. relations which are characterized by pragmatism and which are directed towards something specific one wants to achieve. Such relations can be of short as well as long duration where trust and mutual utility are so crucial that they have to be under continuous evaluation.<sup>371</sup> The purpose of such relations

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365 Honneth 1995: 131; Honneth 2009: 167-171; Lysaker 2010: 25-31; Hansteen 2010. In Honneth 2009: 170 three varieties of offence are specified: a) physical maltreatment b) contempt for a human being's moral sanity e.g. through fraud, deception or judicial discrimination and c) neglect of a human being's social significance, e.g. by ignoring or stigmatizing it. A similar approach can be found in the ethics of the press and linked to the discussion of the freedom of expression versus offence. In connection with the Danish caricature drawings of the Prophet Muhammad in 2006 the Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet brought up this issue for discussion, concluding that the distinction between the freedom of expression and offence seems to be unclear to many. The journalist emphasized that "Free utterances can never have a consensual course. Freedom implies that utterances can take a thousand courses, some of them untrue, discriminating offending or hurtful. That is the price of the freedom of expression", cf. Egeland 2006. All human beings have the right to speak their mind, but have to endure that afterwards their utterance will be met with a wide range of reactions, from support to ridicule or hateful response. The discussion went on for several months, cf. e.g. Åmås 2007.

366 Honneth 2009: 171.

367 Honneth 2009: 174-176.

368 Honneth & Rössler 2008: 10.

369 Honneth & Rössler 2008.

370 Honneth & Rössler 2008: 143.

371 Vetlesen 2008.



is furthermore to benefit from the other's competence in order to improve one's own life. Here the similarities to the relation between employer and employee in my own material are obvious.

Offence as a consequence of the absence of recognition as inalienable right will presuppose that the rights of individuals have been ignored. Museum employees must respect laws and guidelines designed to protect the rights of individuals, which here for example could be the right to remain anonymous and to exercise a certain amount of control over how one's own history is being presented. Offence will for instance take place if the museum employee does not pay heed to the regulations in force, regardless of whether this is done deliberately or happens out of ignorance of their existence.

Offence as a consequence of the absence of recognition as solidarity will, in a museal context, potentially occur if all individuals are not treated as equals. Here museum personnel have a responsibility both towards individuals and towards the society to create an exhibition rich in nuances where as many different voices as possible can be heard. In general, Honneth is clear when he points out that this applies only "when reflected in values which imply that other skills and qualities can emerge as significantly valuable for the common practice".<sup>372</sup> This will entail that for example the representation of a perpetrator's motives will be less significant than the representation of the motives of a hero.

## Proximity Ethics

Proximity ethics is based upon the assumption that every human being has a moral responsibility which he must pay heed to in every encounter with another human being, and that no professional rules or other demands addressed to a person can overrule this responsibility. The starting point for such reasoning is that there are spontaneous reactions inherent in people's encounter which are not governed by thorough considerations.<sup>373</sup> The contact between a museum professional and a single individual is based upon such a meeting, and this meeting determines what follows. The question is therefore how the direct encounter influences the moral considerations a museum employee makes in his subsequent acts and the consequences of the latter.

The Danish philosopher and theologian, Knud Ejler Løgstrup, is a prominent representative of proximity ethics who emphasizes the significance of trust and responsibility in the encounter between two people.<sup>374</sup> Here it is convenient to also refer to the French philosopher Emmanuel

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372 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 138.

373 Henriksen & Vetlesen 2006: 200-213.

374 Løgstrup 2000.

Levinas. Whereas Løgstrup underlines people's fundamental desire to meet fellow human beings with trust and contends that they basically have the welfare of others at heart, Levinas focuses on *Den Andres ansikt*, (literally: "The Other's face" or "The Other's countenance"), and accentuates the significance of a direct encounter prompting the ensuing recognition of a fellow human being. The only possibility to create a productive dialogue lies in this direct contact.<sup>375</sup> Both Løgstrup and Levinas take as their starting point that any relation between humans is dominated by fundamental and insurmountable asymmetry. Seen from this point of view, all human beings have a commitment to others which cannot be deliberately ignored.

In his books Løgstrup outlines a number of important theories, first and foremost relevant for what he refers to as "the ethical challenge" and "the spontaneous expressions of life". The essence of Løgstrup's most important work, *Den etiske fordring*, (literally: "The Ethical Demand"), is a vigorous criticism of the idea that people can live self-determined lives in mutual independence, specifying that in each and every encounter between human beings, one is holding a part of the other's life in one's hands.<sup>376</sup>

To Løgstrup all relations between humans are connected with trust, and consequentially, with power and responsibility: Trust gives power and requires responsibility. In any encounter between two people there is initially a relation of trust, and it is expected that this trust is received and treated with respect. The responsibility for this rests with the receiver. However, this expectation, or ethical demand, is unspoken and may even be in conflict with clearly expressed demands or desires from another person.<sup>377</sup> Showing another person trust always implies giving oneself away, which is intertwined with vulnerability and strong emotions. If the other does not respond as instinctively expected, a feeling of being let down will emerge and a reaction of distrust and moral resentment will follow. This is what Løgstrup considers to be the crucial dilemma in every human life and in all relations between people: From the beginning everyone meets the other with trust and expects a response which corresponds to one's own reaction to a demonstration of trust. But firstly however, the demand is tacit and unspoken, and secondly, all people have different ways of reacting and therefore different expectations to the response of the other. This implies that the other will react in accordance with how he or she would want to be met, although this does not have to coincide with one's own expectations.

Whereas Løgstrup in *Den etiske fordring* asserts that the dilemma outlined is so comprehensive that the ethical demand cannot be satisfied, he later expands his understanding of the foundation of ethics. In *Norm og spontanitet* (literally: "Norm and Spontaneity") he

375 Løgstrup 200; Levinas 1993.

376 Løgstrup 2000: 37. For further reference, cf. Svein Aage Christoffersens preface in Løgstrup 2000: 12; Christoffersen 1999: 28-29.

377 Løgstrup 2000: 29-42.

introduces “spontane livsytringer” (literally: “spontaneous expressions of life”) such as trust, mercy, charity, compassion, or “*talens åpenhet*” (literally: “the openness of speech”) as impulsive utterances in any encounter with an unknown human being.<sup>378</sup> These utterances are sovereign in the sense that it will take a lot of pondering and concentration to change them. As an example Løgstrup mentions the open speech, which can also be interesting in conjunction with the concept of truth: When having a conversation, people’s preference is to speak out uncontrolledly and spontaneously. In Løgstrup’s view, what is said in such open speech must therefore be true in relation to every individual’s personal perception of reality. From the moment when we start thinking about the consequences of our open speech, we will tend to withhold words or change the content in order to be able to control the consequences.<sup>379</sup>

Løgstrup is very clear when he argues that the specific ethical experience cannot be generalized, i.e. that the spontaneous reactions depend on a number of uncontrollable factors. This implies that rules will only have limited practical value. Admittedly, moral norms and rules are important in the sense that they give people frames for interacting with each other, but prior to these moral norms there is a personal responsibility which every human being has towards The Other, and which is actually generated at the very moment two people get into contact with each other.<sup>380</sup> Spontaneous expressions of life are given with an expectation as to how they ought to be met, and it is the receiver who decides how he or she reacts and therefore has the responsibility to act in such a manner as will be to the best of the giver.<sup>381</sup> To be able to evaluate what response will be to the best of the giver, the receiver will need latitude.<sup>382</sup> The personal judgement which the receiver makes in this instance is a reflection of his surrounding culture with all its social and ethical norms and rules, which to some extent regulate his options for response.<sup>383</sup> Transposed to my study of moral challenges museum employees experience, the individuals contributing with their personal narratives are givers and the museum employees receivers of trust. If one takes a closer look at the question whether there is a need for more guidelines to regulate the contact with the individuals, the answer inherent in Løgstrup’s approach is that this should neither be necessary, nor can it be sufficient. The reason why it is not necessary is because the commitment to The Other takes precedence over any rule. The reason why it is not sufficient is that there is a need for leeway in order to cope with the responsibility in the best possible way, which presupposes that there is a possibility for evaluating the complexity of any situation wherever and whenever it occurs.<sup>384</sup>

378 Løgstrup 1993:17-23. For further reference, cf. Christoffersen 1999: 22-26.

379 Løgstrup 1993: 17-18.

380 Christoffersen 1999: 11-12. For further reference, cf. Christoffersen 1994: 102-103.

381 For further reference, cf. Christoffersen 1994: 101-102.

382 For further reference, cf. Mathisen & Kristiansen 2005: 226.

383 For further reference, cf. Christoffersen 1994: 102-103.

384 For further reference, cf. Slettebø 2012: 148 Christoffersen 1994: 102-103.

Løgstrup's starting point is in several ways coincident with Levinas' approach to the encounter with The Other. To Levinas it is the other's countenance which provokes such strong reactions.<sup>385</sup> He refers to being face to face with another human being as an ethical relationship which to the highest possible degree is a reflection of authenticity, and which reminds everyone that we are part of something bigger, a universe where all individuals are subjects of the same standing. The nakedness of the face of The Other reminds us that we are dependent on The Other - both as far as power and duty are concerned, and also submission.<sup>386</sup> Here The Other represents not only himself but also a third, fourth or fifth person, in other words the entire society as such: One sees "the presence of the entire human race in those eyes",<sup>387</sup> and this reminds us all about our fellowship with others and our responsibility for the welfare of all.

## **Responsibility and Trust in Professional Ethics**

'Responsibility' and 'trust' are prominent concepts in professional ethics. Grimen and Nortvedt emphasize that trust is always connected with a certain variety of power which is conferred by the person who shows trust on the one to whom trust is shown. The giver of trust expects something from the receiver, and is therefore willing to give away some of his power when it comes to making decisions, even though this will have consequences for the giver. Therefore, trust is situational, i.e. that the degree of trust which is shown depends on how one person assesses another person in a given situation.<sup>388</sup> The amount of power increases as a function of the asymmetry of the relationship; i.e. the more person A can control of what is of interest to person B, without person B's being able to control an equal amount of what is important to person A.<sup>389</sup>

Grimen and Nortvedt outline three models to explain how trust and power are interrelated. In the first place, power can inspire trust, for example through legitimate authority and concurrent possibilities which the giver of trust does not possess. Second, the degree of power is dependent on "the initial conditions for trust".<sup>390</sup> If person A has real possibilities for demanding something from person B when the transfer of power takes place, and, moreover, ultimately may abandon the relation, the power of person B is restricted. The third model explains how power can be based on trust which is given in order to regain possession of an asset which one cannot retrieve without the help of the other. Here it is of particular interest to

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385 Levinas 1996: 195-213; Vetlesen 2007: 104-105.

386 Levinas 1996: 210.

387 Levinas 1996: 210.

388 Nortvedt & Grimen 2004: 100-101.

389 Nortvedt & Grimen 2004: 113-121.

390 Nortvedt & Grimen 2004: 117.

take a closer look at the relationship and see if it is symmetrical; i.e. that the two parties have the same amount of power, or asymmetrical, which implies that one party has more power than the other.

Important perspectives on “trust” as a phenomenon can also be found in other works of Grimen’s. He outlines five domains of interest when he examines what givers of trust do and what trust can bring about in relations between individuals. These are to a large extent congruous with Abbott’s macro-, meso-, and micro-levels.<sup>391</sup> According to Grimen the absence of reservation is the predominant distinctive feature of trust, and in accordance with Løgstrup he refers to the power transferred to the receiver of trust in such instances.<sup>392</sup>

However, in certain central areas Grimen’s approach to the concept of trust diverges from Løgstrup’s. To Løgstrup, trust is an utterance of life which is given spontaneously and is sovereign; the offer is immediate, unconscious and without a purpose.<sup>393</sup> Trust is here inextricably attached to some part of the innermost core of a human being: “to show trust means to expose oneself”.<sup>394</sup> Grimen has a more schematic approach to trust when he starts from the assumption that showing trust is a deliberate act: one chooses to give trust to another person while weighing advantages and disadvantages against each other.<sup>395</sup> He demonstrates this by means of a model which summarizes how the responsibility of taking care of X is transferred from A to B. When A hands X over to B, A is confident that B will not harm A’s interests and that B can take care of X as far as competence and access to appropriate means are concerned. Even though A does not express reservations as to whether B may be liable to abuse X, there is a deliberate assessment behind A’s act of transfer: Shall or shall not hand over X to B?<sup>396</sup>

## **Ethics of Duty and Ethics of Consequence**

Two general approaches can give further help when moral decisions have to be made: the ethics of duty and the ethics of consequence. Both say something about what moral norms and values ought to prevail, but their starting points are different.

*Pliktetikken* (literally: “the ethics of duty, or duty-based ethics”), a deontological variety of ethics, asks for answers to what is morally right to do in a given situation, independent of the consequences. What is crucial is the justification of an act, not the consequences it may entail. Some acts are necessary, even if they do not bring about morally attractive objectives

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391 Grimen 2008c; Abbott 1988.

392 Grimen & Molander 2008: 179-196.

393 Løgstrup 1993: 17-23.

394 Løgstrup 2000: 30.

395 Grimen 2008c: 197-198. For further reference, cf. Vetlesen 2010: 326-327.

396 Grimen 2008c: 197.

like welfare, happiness or pleasure, and these can for example be prescribed by law.<sup>397</sup> Kant, who is one of the most influential, representatives of deontological ethics, demands that one acts not only in response to moral norms based on duty, but moreover, driven by a personal desire to do the right things. By letting moral norms be weighed against each other under the auspices of reason, one may hit upon *det kategoriske imperativ* (literally: “the categorical imperative”), “You shall ...!”, which is an absolute formulation of how one should act.<sup>398</sup> Kant also specifically states that a human being must never be used as a means to achieve another purpose, but always as a purpose in itself.<sup>399</sup>

*Konsekvensetikken*, (literally: “the ethics of consequence”), also referred to as ‘ethics of utility’ or ‘utilitarianism’ takes as its starting point the consequences - or utility effects - of a moral act. The act to be prioritized is the one which leads to at least equally good or better consequences for a maximum number of those involved. The consequences should here have a value of their own as improved welfare for one or several human beings, and the evaluation must start with an overall assessment of how all those involved will be influenced by the different options for action.<sup>400</sup> Utilitarianism argues that an act is morally right when it entails equivalent or better consequences than any alternative act. The objective must be to promote positive values and welfare for a maximum number of the parties involved.<sup>401</sup> The motivation of the actors may vary and is important for deciding whether an actor deserves trust from other actors, but it is of subordinate significance for the overall goal of utilitarianism: Whatever the motivation, it is the purpose and consequences of the act which decide whether it is morally right to do it.

Here it is once more possible to distinguish between individual acts and rules which are supposed to apply to several acts, i.e. act-based utilitarianism and rule-based utilitarianism. Whereas act-based utilitarianism aims at specific situations and requires that the actor has to procure maximum knowledge about the circumstances of the affair as well as the consequences for all the parties involved,<sup>402</sup> the followers of rule-based utilitarianism argue that no single individual can satisfy such a demand. Human beings are not able to assess all aspects of importance in a given instance and will therefore need rules which can help them make the right decisions in certain situations.<sup>403</sup> Act-oriented utilitarianism and rule-oriented utilitarianism would overlap if individual acts were always equally right in equal situations.

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397 Sagdahl 214.

398 Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 159-164.

399 Kant 1785/2002:45; Wood 2008: 87. For further reference cf. Fredwall 2014: 133-135.

400 Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 141-147. Rawls, among others, has criticized utilitarianism for a one-sided concern for the overall utility effect, and for not taking into account the distribution between the different parties involved.

401 Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 141-143.

402 Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 144.

403 Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 145-146.

My empirical data clearly show that as far as the handling of moral challenges is concerned, assessments made with ethics of consequence as basis are stronger than those based on ethics of duty. But in the light of the personal encounter's crucial importance for the choice of action, there is clearly a need for specifying that in the end it is the assessments rooted in proximity ethics which have most consistently dominated the individual professional's choice of action. Since it is now the individual employees who through their individual assessments and choices of action put their marks on the profession from the inside, the implication is that considerations rooted in proximity ethics dominate the development of the profession and of its ethics to a degree which clearly exceeds the contribution of the ethics of consequence.

## **A Short Summary**

The pivot for the choice of theoretical perspectives has been museum employees in their capacity as members of the museum profession. The profession has a societal remit and the interaction with its surroundings, individuals, or the society as such, includes a number of moral dimensions which the museum professionals have to address. All the theoretical perspectives that have been chosen contribute to shedding light on different parts of the patterns of action and the operational latitude of the employees, though without dealing with them directly. The targeting oscillates between a rather general focus on the profession and a direct focus on the professionals as moral actors. Still, the points of contact are multiple and diverse. Grimen, and Nortvedt to some extent, contribute with descriptions of the structures and bases of professions, and moreover, of the relation between professionals and their profession, as well as the starting point and the significance of professional ethics. This includes analytical models devoted to the connection between trust and power in symmetrical and asymmetrical relations.

Honneth and Løgstrup contribute to the understanding of the individual professional as a moral actor. Both say something about what happens in the direct encounter between human beings, and what repercussions the chosen alternatives for action may have; for the individual or for the society as a whole. Løgstrup's approach to trust and Honneth's approach to recognition have a number of similarities. Both approaches are generated in a relation of reciprocity, and both are tightly interwoven with expectations to one party and reactions from the other. Moreover, both theories overlap in their observations of righteousness and of the importance of feelings and emotions in this direct encounter: Recognition and offence are to a considerable extent related to emotions, the interaction between two people is related to emotions, and professionals respond emotionally to their own experience and to the emotions of others. Vetlesen offers deepening information about how emotions affect actions.

Thus, Honneth as well as Løgstrup contribute to drawing a more complete picture of the individual employee's operational latitude; not from external structures, which are at the core of Grimen's focus, but out of the interaction between human beings. The operational latitude is connected to the possibility for assessment and is of importance for several reasons. Here Lucas and Walker enter the stage with further specifications drawn from contextual ethics, signalling that, as well as indicating how, both external and internal conditions are subject to the vicissitudes of continuous change.

Honneth's theory of recognition can be directly related to the museums' societal remit, which is fundamental to the profession. It is also rooted in the museums' code of ethics and has importance for the acts of the individual employee. All three categories of recognition are here relevant for the museums' conduct as societal agencies and for the museum employees' conduct as moral actors, either for one of them or for both. Honneth's dynamic imperative implies that there is a need for receiving and giving recognition, which will result in social development - and social development is truly the supreme objective museums have.

Løgstrup's exposition of proximity ethics gives a deeper understanding of the individual professional's operational latitude, which to a considerable extent is subject to expectations, actions and relations between humans. Where Grimen restricts himself to structures and superior considerations of general character, Løgstrup enters into details. He sheds light on the core of the interaction between two people and explains why this interaction influences the operational options. Professional ethics and public morality are inextricably intertwined, which he illustrates by referring to among others ethically charged concepts like trust, 'responsibility' and 'power'.



# 6

## How to Solve Ethical Dilemmas

In other words, what action should we take, and what is it advisable to avoid? These are some of the questions I shall try to answer in this chapter, leaning upon my own study, other significant studies, and ethical theory. A simple guide which tells us what is right and what is wrong in any situation does not exist, cannot exist and should not exist - the situations are too different and our own gut feeling too important for such reductionism. However, there are some general DOs & DON'Ts, and these are where this last chapter will start. And for all who once more would like to know what is the basis for each of the points, this chapter has a final section where a more systematic survey of the four moral challenges will follow, along with advice as to what kind of action can be right or wrong with respect to these.

The following ten points are the gist of what I have read, learnt from my informants and other museum professionals, and tested out through my studies. Each of the points can be elaborated, and there are obviously other tips which could have been included. But these are absolutely fundamental, and if we pay heed to them, we will already have covered a good deal of ground.

### Ten Pieces of Advice for Enhanced Professionalism and Reduced Personal Strain

1. Study all relevant material covering judicial and ethical framework conditions. ICOM *Code of Ethics* is subordinate to other rules and laws, and as such only a supplement.
2. Take care to demonstrate professional conduct when dealing with all individuals. Do not assume the role of a therapist, lawyer, or friend; otherwise your personal latitude may be curtailed. You are the one who have the overall view and the responsibility for making sure that important laws and regulations are respected, even though you are also a fellow human being in the personal encounter.
3. Be aware that there are certain topics and angles which people may perceive as threatening to their identity. Here, the involvement of the local population or individuals with inside or expert knowledge will help create a better starting point for the handling of the topic. Do always try to get hold of as much information as possible in advance.

4. Be aware that what is perceived as challenging or offending is not objectively factual, but depends on the person involved. When working with colleagues or external expert consultants there will always be a need for sorting out how each participant interprets the content and meaning of central concepts.
5. All outward communication must be extremely precise and tidy, both as far as the use of individual narratives is concerned and with regard to the involvement of external experts consultants. When working with external consultants it is advisable to set up a formal agreement specifying who does what, who is responsible for what, and who has the authority to make decisions in cases of doubt.
6. Make thorough analyses of possible consequences both before a project is initiated and while it is in progress, preferably in an interdisciplinary group focusing on moral challenges. It is of importance to provide well-founded reasons for the specific choices you make with regard to the methods of dissemination chosen.
7. Be aware of the fact that dealing with sensitive topics is in several respects a demanding enterprise for you, both in your capacity as professional, and as a private person. Make sure a substantial amount of time is available and accept that neither the vicissitudes of the working process, nor the final outcome is predictable. If necessary, consult a psychologist to sort out your own feelings.
8. Admit to yourself you can never get a complete overview of all relevant factors, and be confident that what is really needed is your professional competence, your experience, and your intuition in the specific situation where decisions have to be made. The situation will always be so complex, in particular if a spontaneous overall assessment is required, that there will be a need for your personal judgement in order to find the most appropriate measures.
9. Do not forget that as a member of a profession you are responsible for discussing your challenges and sharing your experience with your colleagues. It is the joint experience of museum professionals like yourself that contributes to the progress of your profession.
10. If you act as leader, you have a particular responsibility to arrange for a working environment where the employees can get theoretical instruction in how to handle moral challenges and the possibility to make their own practical experiences.

## How to Handle the Four Moral Challenges

The ten points mentioned are fundamental and apply whatever the specific moral challenges one has to handle. But how is it now advisable to handle the four moral challenges which seem to be difficult to so many? How can they be dealt with and what is the reason why one particular act should have the priority rather than another in a given situation? This is what I intend to answer now, for each of the four moral challenges described in chapter 4. My answer is to some extent a summarized and compressed version of the preceding chapters, rather theoretically justified.

### The Needs of Individuals versus the Needs of the Society

In connection with the question as to how this challenge should be met, the needs of two parties are of particular importance: Those of the individuals contributing with a personal narrative and those of the public which in turn is composed of a number of individuals. My empirical material has shown that the focus gradually shifted during the process leading up to the exhibition, from the public to the individual contributors. The more one learnt to know of an individual, the stronger was the inclination to let the needs of the latter have priority. Psychologists emphasize the importance of being seen and heard,<sup>404</sup> which is confirmed by the individuals I have interviewed, the experience my informants have had, and the experience of employees at museums whose focus is the everyday life of the common man. Individuals who are given a voice at the museum tend to feel they are seen, heard, and lifted.<sup>405</sup> This presupposes a careful approach where the focus is directed towards the needs of the individual. If there was not enough mindfulness, there would be a risk that individuals not only would drop out of the project, but also be exposed to new forms of trauma and offence.<sup>406</sup> After having studied several museum exhibitions in Great Britain where the traumatic recollections of individuals were presented, Kavanagh, among others, sends out an insistent warning against underestimating how sensitive traumatic memories are for the individuals and how decisive it is to adopt a careful approach to all parties involved.<sup>407</sup> “The process” is here to be understood as the cooperation with individuals during the period leading up to the opening of the exhibition, and as something which must be given priority at the cost of “the product,” here understood as the accomplished exhibition as presented to the visitors.<sup>408</sup>

Behind the intent to give priority to the needs of the individual are first and foremost concerns embedded in proximity ethics. Based on their “gut feeling” and considerations drawn from

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404 Skårderud et al. 2010; Schibbye 2009; Martinsen 2012.

405 Cf. e.g. Kavanagh 2002; Carnegie 206: 70-71.

406 Skårderud et al. 2010: 32, 181, 189, 207, 382. Here the references are exclusively to trained health personnel. For further reference, cf. Hansen & Lange 2013.

407 Cf. among others Kavanagh 2002: 119.

408 Kavanagh 2002: 119-121, Kavanagh 2000: 79-80.

public morality, my informants chose to let the needs of the individuals prevail over the general needs all the parties involved felt they had, this because he or she was perceived as the weaker party - the one that needed more protection. In view of the museums' societal role and their political assignment, the question is whether this is a correct procedure, or if the interests of the majority of the visitors more consistently should be given priority. If we start from the fact that museums are institutions whose mission is to disseminate new and important knowledge for the benefit of the society, and assume that the narratives of the individuals can be used to provoke feelings among the visitors, feelings which support and intensify the dissemination of knowledge, it is an open question whether museum professionals to a lesser extent should protect individuals and rather choose dissemination strategies aiming at a more straightforward exposition of individuals and their feelings.

Considerations drawn from ethics of duty may here be required in view of the museums' political assignment or the rules and regulations of the profession. The new societal role of the museums with its focus on emotional and intellectual challenges, even when delicate, tabooed or controversial topics are involved, is part of the museums' supreme political vocation.<sup>409</sup> But as I have pointed out in my introduction, there are no practical guidelines as to how the museums are supposed to fill their role as societal actors; this is subject to the principle of being "at arm's length" from the assigner. ICOM *Code of Ethics* gives no specific advice for this issue but refers to other relevant sources of laws and regulations. Here there is support for the assessments the museum employees have made from a basis of proximity ethics, for instance in the ethical guidelines for research which call for particular vigilance in all projects involving vulnerable individuals. Grimen argues that public morality must yield to professional ethics if the two are in conflict<sup>410</sup> - which is not the case here, however. On the contrary, the professional ethics of museums refer to public morality, for instance when the eight principle of ICOM *Code of Ethics* states that museum professionals are expected to follow generally accepted standards and laws and "object to practices that are perceived to be damaging".<sup>411</sup> In other words, public morality is the basis for professional ethics. This is what Nortvedt asserts, and also what is pointed out in Løgstrup. The ethics of consequence posit that the act which results in at least equally good or better consequences for a maximum number of those involved should be given priority.<sup>412</sup> If it could be established that there was a direct link between a more candid presentation of individuals and their feelings in exhibitions and enhanced learning for the visitors as a consequence of vigorous emotional reactions, assessments rooted in the ethics of consequence might indicate that individuals' need for protection ought to be toned down.

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409 For further reference, cf. Holmesland 2013.

410 Grimen 2008b: 144-147.

411 ICOMs musemsetiske regelverk 2011: 31.

412 Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 141-147.

Several articles devoted to museum exhibitions where personal narratives were used confirm the assumption that hearing another human being tell about feelings attached to specific events leads to stronger reactions than information given without the listener being emotionally affected.<sup>413</sup> The effect of the personal narratives is reinforced: 1) the more personal, private and “intimate” a narrative seems to be, 2) the more obvious it is that the individual narrates something which he or she has experienced as difficult or traumatic, and 3) the easier it is for the visitors to enter into the spirit of the situation portrayed in the narrative.<sup>414</sup> Processes like that may have a positive and beneficial effect on many people, even if there is no question of learning, but on the contrary, of being recognized and having the possibility to reproduce difficult memories in safe surroundings, exactly what a concrete, clearly defined exhibition area may represent.<sup>415</sup> Such processes can also be positive, even if the visitors originally have no intention of learning something about a particular topic. Here it is possible to argue in favour of a soft variety of paternalism to put a touch of pressure on the visitors, so that they may be able to see new aspects of the society, aspects they do not want to see, but for different reasons *ought to see*. Honneth legitimates the use of soft paternalism arguing that all the members of the society have a need for recognition and that being coaxed into a situation where one is expected to recognize others, even voices which provoke discomfort or anger, will instigate a positive social development.<sup>416</sup>

However, when the exhibition’s objective is to disseminate knowledge, a strong emotional reaction to the narratives of individuals may in actual fact preclude learning. Roger Simon defines the core of the reaction as an acknowledgement of the fact that people are not able to absorb new knowledge which contradicts a previously established conception of reality. If we absorb and adopt such knowledge, we put ourselves in a situation where we shall have to revise the basis on which our own identity is founded, and such revision is something our innermost feelings consciously or unconsciously always try to avoid.<sup>417</sup> When we hear other people tell about events or historical periods with feelings opposite to those we ourselves have for the same events or periods and intuitively understand that if we accept the new knowledge as a fact we shall have to revise the basis for our own identity, we try to forestall

413 Cf. i. a. Bonnell & Simon 2007:66; Kavanagh 2002; Eriksen 1995b; Kidd 2011:245-246; Tinning 2013.

414 Cf. i. a. Simon 2011a:195-196; Bonnell & Simon 2007. Tinning 2013 discusses how the theme of rape was presented in a Danish exhibition. Here the author refers to the positive experiences museum employees had when they used personal narratives and faces to achieve learning among the visitors and enhance their feeling of responsibility.

415 As an example, Kavanagh mentions war veterans here: what is required is what she calls *dream spaces*, locations where other people’s narratives or original physical objects recall the memories of an event or a period of one’s life which it is beneficial to talk about, but not in locations other than such a peaceful place, cf. Kavanagh 2002: 117-118.

416 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 104. For further reference, cf. Smith 2010: 209.

417 Simon 2011b: 434. For further reference, cf. Simon 2005.

that acknowledgement by means of dismissive or negative reactions.<sup>418</sup> In the worst of cases, there will be no learning whatsoever, and the visitor concerned will be left with a feeling of having been offended.<sup>419</sup>

Research devoted to the intricate connections between emotions and learning is so far only in its inception, and here it may be possible to find new answers to the question of how far it is possible and advisable to go when feelings are being stirred up in an attempt to produce positive learning. Up till now, the studies which have been designed to take a closer look at the pedagogical value of specific dissemination tactics have concluded that there are certain significant aspects which ought to be kept in mind when exhibitions are about to be created. Predicting who will react and when and how this may occur, is a complicated business. The most efficient way to prepare for the jumble of possible reactions is to be extremely perspicacious when the dissemination is being designed.<sup>420</sup>

As a summary, it is possible to say that the museum employees of my study, who made assessments based on proximity ethics and so took care to tone down the exposition of individuals, were both exemplary in their approach and morally right in their conclusions.<sup>421</sup> The needs of individuals should be given priority rather than a more theoretical need for knowledge in the society. Not least, a human being should always be treated as a purpose in itself and never as a means to achieving some other purpose, which is essentially what Kant points out.<sup>422</sup> There is no evidence that the stirring up of feelings among the visitors will always entail better learning and therefore result in enhanced dissemination of knowledge. There are several indications that certain dissemination tactics will support the pedagogical effect and that the feelings of the visitors are pivotal. If so be the case it is essential to handle these feelings with care. Løgstrup's approach to the concept of 'trust' suggests that trust gives power and requires responsibility,<sup>423</sup> and implies that this double effect can be transposed, not only to a face-to-face encounter between a museum professional and an individual, but also, indirectly, to the trust the visitors show to museum personnel in their capacity as professionals. When visitors come to a museum they are confident that the museum

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418 Simon 2011a: 195-196.

419 According to Honneth an unconditional recognition of the needs of one single individual is incompatible with the recognition of the complete needs of other people, which will automatically imply that some people will always be susceptible to feeling offended by the disclosed information. It is impossible not to offend someone, nor is it a human right not to be offended. Honneth 1995: 131; Honneth 2009: 168; Lysaker 2010: 25-31; Hansteen 2010. Moreover, the recognition of someone feeling offended does not automatically imply that offence has taken place, cf. Åmås 2012.

420 Feelings are attached to the omnipresent subjective interpretation of one's own reality, and in consequence an individual experience of what is sensitive, offending, challenging, controversial or provocative. Visitors may among other things react to the method of dissemination, the angling of a theme, something they perceive as incomplete, or to a reference frame they find incorrect, or to the feeling of being deprived of the possibility to interpret the exhibited material on terms which to a certain extent are their own. Cf. e.g. Bonnell & Simon 2007: 66-67, Simon 2011: 194-195.

421 Cf. Henriksen & Vetlesen 2006: 200-213.

422 Kant 1785/2002: 45. For further reference, cf. Wood 2008: 87.

423 Løgstrup 2000: 29-42.

employees take steps to make sure their visit will elicit learning, which includes being taken care of in a morally responsible manner. Any dissemination strategy which affects the visitors emotionally has to be assessed with a particular view to ensuring that it is for the benefit of the visitors. In the following, I shall go deeper into the importance of the dissemination.

## **Subjective Truth versus Historical Truth**

Balancing subjective truth against historical truth is first and foremost a question of how subjective narratives can be incorporated into what I have chosen to call 'historical truth'; how they can be used to complement the picture of the past. Here, my informants have suggested that subjective narratives, out of concern for individuals, should not be subject to verification, and argued that in most cases verification is not possible. Other case studies also seem to indicate that quite a few people attempt to find compromises as to how the subjective narratives can be incorporated into a superior historical perspective.<sup>424</sup> Viewed in the light of Honneth's recognition theory, the first category of recognition, recognition as love - here understood as respect for the subjective narratives of individuals - is just as important as the second category of recognition, recognition as right or privilege. However, the categories of recognition are basically not compatible, which implies that it is always necessary to seek compromises relative to the circumstances of the given situation.<sup>425</sup> Subjective narratives are an important component of the frame of reference already mentioned, but the question of how to handle them must be carefully examined. A general challenge is here embedded in the acknowledgement of historical truth as an incomplete and therefore interpretable phenomenon.

A powerful norm of professional ethics indicates that museum employees ought to use their own ability of critical assessment as an instrument in their professional activity. This is another of those norms whose purpose is to protect values like academic integrity, honesty, professional handling and respect for the public's need for factual knowledge. This will include some form of control insofar as one verifies if the information inherent in the personal narratives is correct or at least potentially correct. In the light of my own findings, there is reason to ask whether this norm is given the priority it deserves or if the consequence of the respect for the individual is that it is excessively toned down.

Visitors have specific legitimate expectations to a correct and neutral frame of interpretation, which implies that the employees must have a scrupulous attitude towards the aspect of truth.<sup>426</sup> In order to be able to make neutral assessments as to whether there is a need for other

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424 For further reference, cf. among others Edson 1997e: 81; Kavanagh 2000; Dean 1997. Hamran and Lange operate a distinction between past and present truth and apply "the aspect of credibility" as an important key in their analysis of the varieties of understanding and positions within the museum", cf. Hamran & Lange 2013: 56.

425 Honneth 209: 171-176.

426 Edson 1997e.

sources to support a subjective narrative or put it into a wider perspective, the employee has to adopt a certain distance to The Other and identify what role he had when the material was collected and so make sure there is no compromise with individuals which could limit the use of the material in the light of academic assessments made at greater distance.<sup>427</sup> Even though proximity ethics prescribe assessments made in the direct encounter with individuals, there are certain guidelines as to the handling of information given in the follow-up process, guidelines whose purpose is to secure that the most important norms of the profession are respected and retain a high academic standard.<sup>428</sup>

So in all work devoted to subjective narratives assessments have to be made as to whether there are particular aspects which can be confirmed by means of other sources. If such resources are available, they can be included in the frame of reference and so contribute to making the subjective truth more credible. If such resources are unavailable or if it appeared that the subjective narrative contains elements drawn from other sources which can be dismissed as incorrect, the individual's contribution may be categorized as a subjective interpretation of a personal experience. By clearly sorting out and defining a personal narrative's role in the presentation of a theme, a more solid basis for further considerations can be laid. It is then easier to decide what supplementary information is needed in order to construct an extended frame of reference which will prove more reliable.

Experience which have been made at museums in other countries indicate that - provided it is appropriate in view of the topic, and possible according to the availability of other contributors - it should always be considered to let one subjective narrative be mirrored in the light of other subjective narratives. If the narratives demonstrate that the individuals' experiences are very different, it may be possible to use them as support for a more diversified presentation of the topic. On the other hand, if they support each other they may potentially confirm each other. In either case the visitors will experience the picture drawn as richer and the potential for making interpretations of their own as more abundant. After having studied the local population's reactions to personal narratives drawn from everyday life in their own region as presented by two different museums, Elizabeth Carnegie, a former employee at the Glasgow Museums, here referred to as an example, concludes that an enlarged involvement of the local population may contribute to disseminating a frame of reference which a larger number of people consider to be appropriate. By virtue of giving a voice to a number of people who tell about the same or similar events from a given place and time, it will be possible to incorporate individuals' narratives into a more comprehensive context

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427 For further reference, cf. Grung & Nagell 2003: 87-88. Here it is emphasized that the researcher should never put himself in a relation of dependence to his informant, since this among other things might restrict his possibility to observe the mandatory duty to forestall future infringements of the law.

428 For further reference, cf. Edson 1997e.



which more people will recognize as theirs - which in turn will have a positive influence on their reactions.<sup>429</sup> Sandell is here one out of several who suggest instigating a dialogue with different parties early in the process leading up to an exhibition.<sup>430</sup> The local population can be invited to meetings and be introduced to the plans of the museums, and the number of people turning up and the strength of their reactions may contribute to a provisional mapping of how sensitive the topic actually is. At the same time, several case studies point out that there are challenges in the cooperation with the local population, particularly when the plans provide for a very open form of cooperation.<sup>431</sup>

As an alternative it can prove advantageous to think of an integral frame of reference already when the subjective narratives are being collected. Here, Gaynor Kavanagh proposes several tactical moves designed to incorporate subjective narratives into a more objective representation of History. If the material is collected by means of interviews, it is possible to apply various techniques to help the informants remember as correctly as possible, for example by confirming chronological data like years in the interview, and by helping the informants date specific events by means of follow-up questions. The collection of traumatic memories will here require particular concern and a very careful approach.<sup>432</sup>

As a summary it is possible to say that anything mentioned in subjective narratives which can be confirmed by virtue of other sources, should be confirmed by other sources. The museum ought to be explicit when stating that the exhibition represents a frame of reference which should be seen as a new narrative, the narrative of the project group. Researchers and individuals contribute with narratives which are incorporated into the new one. If it is made clear to the audience that the new narrative too may be subjective and incomplete, the visitors will have an even better basis for making their own assessment of the informative value of the disseminated knowledge.<sup>433</sup> In this context, it ought to be transparent why the frame of reference was composed the way it was. Here, the ethical platform from which the individual employee operates plays a crucial role, since making this known to the public will help them

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429 Carnegie 2006: 73-79.

430 Sandell 2011: 138-140.

431 Cf. e.g. Meijer-van Mensch 2013: 43-44; Marstine 2013: 20 or Brown 2013: 51-56. Here clearly communicated institutional morals can contribute to orienting the process in the wanted direction. For further reference cf. Marstine 2011: 15-18.

432 Cf. Kavanagh 1996b: 11-13 and Kavanagh 2002: 110-120.

433 Simon 2011a: 206-208. For further reference, cf. Dean 1997: 218-221 who among other things suggests a kind of "posting" where notice boards give information to the visitors about who has created the exhibition and whose narratives are being presented. Like others Dean suggests that the presentation explicitly accounts for what the members of the project group didn't know or were uncertain about.

approach the new knowledge in an even better informed manner.<sup>434</sup> Once again, this calls for attention to the institutional morals of a museum.

## Own Skills versus External Competence

I have not found other studies which have examined challenges inherent in the cooperation with academic expert consultants in exhibition projects devoted to sensitive topics. Still, I shall try to answer how a museum's own competence in the field of dissemination should be weighed against external competence as far as academic standard and intellectual content is concerned. This is because there are some relevant studies of the significance of the frame of reference, and because I think that the use of expert consultants can be directly connected to this. Moreover, there are numerous indications suggesting that there is a general challenge inherent in the cooperation between museum employees and external consultants which is relevant for other projects than those primarily devoted to sensitive topics.

Those of my informants who did not have specific academic competence within the field from which the topic of the exhibition they were working on had been taken, said they had stretched themselves far to satisfy what they perceived as wishes and demands from the expert consultants. Their concern was above all directed towards the public whom they felt were entitled to exhibitions of high academic standard as far as content was concerned, but was also driven by sympathy for the researchers' - the expert consultants' - feeling of ownership to their own material. In consequence my informants tended to see themselves primarily as disseminators and adaptors of other people's knowledge, and here the merits of their own competence were toned down to the benefit of external competence.<sup>435</sup>

The norm observed here implies that all kinds of dissemination primarily should be based on facts and verifiable information, and pay tribute to values such as academic integrity, honesty, professionalism and respect for the public's need for fact-based knowledge.<sup>436</sup> The norm is furthermore protected by ICOM *Code of Ethics* where pts. 4.2 & 4.6 specify that all information given in exhibitions or in other media "should be well-founded, accurate and give responsible consideration to the academic disciplines".<sup>437</sup> The priorities given by my informants show that this norm has exceptional authority and is stronger than the norm

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434 This is a reference to openness as a crucial value for the museum profession. Here, Marstine introduces the term *radical transparency* and defines it as "a liberatory antidote to the assumed alignments and readability of knowledge; radical transparency not only describes but also analyses behavior and considers its significance" in order to emphasize that openness also must include a critical look at one's own activity. Cf. Marstine 2013: 3. Here she refers to Marstine 2011a: 14-17.

435 The consequence of this was that my informants to a great extent accepted the expert consultant's assessments of the scope and angling of the subject, even if they disagreed with what he proposed. Examples from journalism and other professions substantiate that this can be a fairly common outcome when researchers and disseminators work together. Cf. Alver & Øyen 1997: 165-184.

436 For further reference, cf. Edson 1997g: 110-111.

437 ICOMs museumsetiske regelverk 2011: 21.

which prescribes that the public should experience their visit to the exhibition as fascinating and thought-inspiring. The consequence analysis which was carried out was based on the assumption that the negative value of disseminating incorrect or incomplete information exceeds the positive value of inventive dissemination.<sup>438</sup> Several studies devoted to museums indicate that this is consistent with setting the priorities right: As already mentioned, the reactions of the public are not only connected with feelings, but also, to a considerable extent, a response to the frame of reference, i.e. the whole range of knowledge disseminated in the exhibition. This frame of reference must be academically correct and in addition extensive enough to give the visitors an opportunity to develop their own picture of what has happened.

The theory of professional ethics supports this view: the society has a legitimate right to demand factual knowledge. The employees try to respond to this by opening a project of cooperation with expert consultants who are specialists within their academic disciplines and are employed at institutions of excellence. Nortvedt's and Grimen's models of how trust and power are interconnected can be used to illustrate that expert consultants have power originating from their competence, which inspires trust in the population. Løgstrup's approach to the concept of trust is another important starting point for understanding the visitors' expectations when they come to a museum. For further reference it is reasonable to mention Honneth's theory of recognition in this context: His second category of recognition, recognition as inalienable right, is directed towards securing the civil rights of the citizen.<sup>439</sup> The concepts of 'justice' and 'respect' are essential here, and viewed in the light of the museums' societal remit the recognition implies that the citizens are entitled to making their own decisions by virtue of the best possible basis of information. That museum employees, who lack sufficient competence in a chosen topic, seek assistance from external experts is therefore not only correct but absolutely necessary. What can be questioned, however, is whether the academic competence within a certain topic should overrule the professional competence in dissemination tactics.

Among other things, the study of the *Wehrmachtausstellung* has shown how crucial it is to take into consideration how the information is disseminated. There is a great number of publications from Great Britain, the USA and Australia which deal with the reactions of the visitors to different varieties of dissemination in the museums. What concerns should prevail when photographic material is displayed or didactic texts are being written and what significance the overall design and the technological devices may have is well documented.<sup>440</sup> As mentioned, Richard Sandell has closely examined the importance of tactical moves in the

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438 Nortvedt & Grimen 2004: 117.

439 Honneth & Holm-Hansen 2008: 104-116.

440 Cf. e.g. Ham 2004; Ekarv 2004; Coxall 2004; Bennett 2004b; Dean 1997 or Landry 1997.

field of dissemination when the museums operate as societal actors with a moral message,<sup>441</sup> and he confirms the experience from the Wehrmacht Exhibition: The frame of reference must be correct in its content but also appropriate in its presentation of the content.<sup>442</sup> The most important aspects featured in studies related to museums are a correct and appropriate frame of reference and considerate measures of dissemination, which in their totality give the visitors the opportunity to make their own interpretations according to their own interests and level of knowledge.<sup>443</sup> It is also important that the visitors feel they are being taken care of and are physically comfortable during their visit. Here it can be an advantage that at least parts of the dissemination are done by guides who can instantly respond to reactions, or that some discussion evenings are included in the programme so that different shades of opinion can be lifted and debated in a plenary session.

This is even more important when it comes to “curating difficult knowledge”, where the need for concern about the feelings of all parties involved is imperative, as already mentioned. In a book with the same title, edited by Lehrer among others, this is brought to full attention when ten different authors tell about their experiences from different museums worldwide.<sup>444</sup> These case studies show how important the dissemination strategy actually is, which supports the idea that museum employees should not only enhance their knowledge about reactions to specific moves of dissemination, but also consider the material they receive from the expert consultants in a different manner: That material is just one out of several elements which constitute a greater whole.<sup>445</sup>

It is the museum employees who have the overall responsibility for the exhibition and its consequences, and this overall responsibility includes a professional as well as a moral dimension at several levels. In their capacity as professionals the museum employees have the unique competence required for coordinating the numerous elements of which an exhibition is constituted. They have also a responsibility for living up to the trust which the society and the visitors have granted them and make sure their competence is utilized for the benefit of the society. Museum employees can by virtue of their education display their own competence as researchers so that they, in actual fact, to some extent can evaluate the work invested by the expert consultants and the procedures which have produced their results. In addition they have knowledge of efficient dissemination measures used in museum exhibitions. Even if they get into situations where they cannot find support in their own research, nor enjoy the comfort

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441 Sandell 2011.

442 Cf. Sandell 2011: 138-143.

443 Cf. Dean 1997: 218-219; Simon 2011a: 196-200, or Rand 2000/2012: 315-316.

444 Cf. Lehrer 2011. For further reference, cf. Landry 1997.

445 How important it is to deal appropriately with feelings, is also underscored by Kavanagh when she refers to case studies of museums which have recalled memories of both individuals and visitors without being properly prepared for the reactions, cf. Kavanagh 2002.

of corresponding security when it comes to having a full view of the relevance the research results may have for specific aspects of the exhibition, they have a professional capacity for assessment on which they can rely. Several studies of professional ethics shed light on how the employer makes sure the employees have the competence required in order to carry out their work in the best possible way, with regard to education, experience as well as social competence.<sup>446</sup> The different components of knowledge cover a spectrum adapted to the profession's demands to its members, and the profession itself secures, by virtue of courses and authorizations, that the work carried out has a high academic standard.

In the light of the importance of feelings and the outlined relation between reaction and dissemination strategy, the overall responsibility furthermore implies a superior degree of moral responsibility required to respond to the needs of several parties, not only intellectually but also emotionally. In what way morally charged concepts like for instance 'trust', 'loyalty', 'power', 'recognition' and 'offence' are relevant for the interaction with the environment, and what concern for the parties involved each of them requires, must be assessed for every single exhibition project with respect to the specific frame of reference involved. This overall responsibility can only be taken care of by the museum staff member who has a maximum of knowledge about the different components which have to be incorporated and the many concerns which must be observed. This responsibility is normally assigned to the project manager of the exhibition, and, in extension, to the director of the institution.

In conclusion it seems appropriate to say that cooperation with researchers is required when the museum itself lacks the competence needed for the academic content of the exhibition. However, the museums themselves as institutions should always have a clarified relation to the contribution of the researchers. The relationship between an employee and an expert consultant should also be more balanced than what my study has shown, so that the employee with self-confidence and to a greater extent could rely on his or her own competence and both parties experience their relation as symmetrical.<sup>447</sup> Questions like 'who does what?' and 'who is responsible for what?' should be thoroughly discussed and sorted out at an early stage, so that the cooperation does not rely on incorrect or misunderstood assumptions.<sup>448</sup> Gaynor Kavanagh has studied how museums cooperate with different parties, and in her conclusion she explains how important it is to enter into all kinds of cooperation with an open mind and a will to make compromises. But here too she emphasizes that it is imperative that the museums in advance have discussed and drawn conclusions as to how far they are

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446 Cf. e.g. Svenson 2008: 132-133 or Grimen 2008a: 82-85.

447 Nortvedt & Grimen 2004: 113-121. Here there is a reference to the connection between trust and the transfer of power, on a general level.

448 Cf. e.g. Repstad 2000: 112-125; Selberg 2000: 116-121. There are several other professions which have similar challenges, above all journalism, and it might be useful to have a closer look at how one has attempted to solve the issue here.

willing to go, i.e. the ratio between the weighting of internal versus external competence has to be established from the outset.<sup>449</sup> This applies not only to each particular project, but as a principle on a superior level. Here the focus is on the museums as institutions, and not on the museum employees as independent moral actors.

### **Personal judgement versus Guidelines**

My findings tie in with studies which indicate that decisions made in a specific situation are made on the basis of a total review of all the knowledge and information available there and then.<sup>450</sup> In order to be able to use his complex and vital “gut feeling” to its full potential, the individual employee will need a lot of latitude and feel free to use his power of judgement. The uncertainty my informants felt about what options for action were to be given priority has triggered in-depth assessments drawn from proximity ethics, which have ultimately been to the benefit of individuals. Concurrently, the same uncertainty has been so onerous that it has provoked illness and moral stress among the employees. My informants have told about severe psychological tension during the process. This was to a considerable extent related to continuous pressure from having to deal with moral challenges alone, often without a clear indication as to what would be the appropriate choice of action. As mentioned, several other case studies from museum projects point out that work devoted to sensitive topics is experienced as burdensome. Nevertheless, no specific attention is paid to the consequences for the health of the individual. If this is viewed in the light of the many publications which ask for more instruction and advice about how to deal with the plethora of moral challenges pervading a museum’s everyday life, it is not difficult to see an urgent need for supplementary, more comprehensive or more specific guidelines which can contribute to reducing this uncertainty.<sup>451</sup>

In that case, everything depends on what kind of guidelines will be most helpful and how extensive such guidelines ought to be, i.e. how detailed the regulation of the individual employee’s activities should be in order to reduce the uncertainty to an acceptable level without prejudice to the invaluable operational latitude. And after all, are guidelines whatsoever an appropriate measure? Here there are both advantages and disadvantages.

The advantage of having more guidelines will be that these to a certain degree can make sure the desired procedures are followed, and open for a possible follow-up control. Guidelines can provide a basis for how the work on sensitive topics should be done in practice and so protect the employee, the employer and in fact the entire museum profession against the negative

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449 Kavanagh 1995: 132-133. For further reference, cf. Marstine 2013: 15-18.

450 Cf. e.g. Lipsky 210: 229-230; Honneth 2009: 174-176. For further reference, cf. Stark 2011.

451 Cf. ICOMs museumsetiske regelverk 2011, and among others Stark 2011: 37; Marstine 2011a: 20-21; Hein 2011: 112-113.

consequences which might follow from the unprofessional conduct of one single individual. According to Grimen it must be possible to somehow control that the societal remit with which the museum professionals have been entrusted is being fulfilled in accordance with its purpose. This should be done on the basis of rules and regulations whose purpose is to protect the society against an individual professional's abuse of power.<sup>452</sup>

Moreover, it may be in the interest of the museums' political assigner to observe that the work is delivered according to standards which procure high academic quality - and be assured that these standards can somehow be controlled. On a general level, Lipsky points out that our democracy is dependent on the trust that the political assignment is fulfilled in conformity with the given directives. It is therefore important that the activities of the individual employee - which may have great significance for the members of the democratic society - can be controlled one way or another.<sup>453</sup> As I have mentioned in my introduction, the principle of "at arm's length" is still influential and the control as to whether the museums respond to their political assignment in accordance with the directives they have received is meagre. Here, more guidelines could help the assigner control whether the guidelines were followed.

On the other hand, there are several arguments against guidelines which will reduce the operational latitude of the individual employee. Løgstrup's theoretical perspective is derived from the assumption that prior to all norms and rules there is a personal responsibility which every human being has towards another human being, and that this responsibility can be handled in the best possible way only if there is sufficient leeway for weighing the different alternatives for action against each other.<sup>454</sup> Often, the job consists of situations which are so complex that they cannot be schematized. Feelings play an important part in the decision-making, and among other things make sure that the individual behaves as a moral actor towards all parties involved. This requires assessments derived from proximity ethics, which must be within the confines of the operational latitude. Contextual ethics advocate that one should always pay heed to the overall picture available for the specific situation in which the choice of action is going to be made. Since the world is in a process of constant change, and since any act can generate new acts and so produce changes, the potential consequences of the different options for action are not easy to predict. Correspondingly, one is always obliged to make decisions based on a contextually conditioned assessment drawn from the knowledge available there and then.<sup>455</sup> Therefore, too detailed guidelines, which describe how the individual should act in specific situations, will be of little avail - they can necessarily not take heed of enough variables.

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452 Cf. Grimen 2008b and Christoffersen & Wyller 2005: 12-13.

453 Lipsky 210: 159-162.

454 For further reference, cf. Slettebø 2012: 148; Christoffersen 1994: 102-103.

455 For further reference, cf. Lucas 2000; Eide 2008: 46-51.

There is still another argument for not excessively restraining the individual's operational latitude: the operational latitude is the motive force behind the profession's development. The experiences and operational choices made by the individual employee in specific situations - situations which require leeway to make the experiences possible - will produce an understanding of what kind of knowledge is lacking with a view to achieving the important tasks assigned.<sup>456</sup> The development of the museum profession is here at several levels directly related to the development of the society. Changes in the society generate new political directives and areas of focus for the museums, while the museums themselves try to influence the society through their projects directed towards different groups of the population. In this context, it is the individual employee who is the direct link between museum and population, and that is why the need for enhanced knowledge first materializes here. When the directives or the expectations of the society are subject to change, a profession with a politically driven social assignment will have to adapt. Abbott underscores the employee's role in processes like these: When traditional procedures are no longer seen as sufficient in order to operate professionally with respect to a slightly modified political assignment, the professionals will end up in a state of imbalance.<sup>457</sup> In order to regain equilibrium they will try to test out new procedures, and this is what is reflected in the different case studies from museums which have started to work in earnest on sensitive topics. In this context, Lipsky mentions that it is above all the profession itself which has the capacity to evaluate and improve. This is something which reoccurs in studies related to museums.<sup>458</sup> Since there are no concrete objectives liable to be controlled, only those who convert the political assignment from theory to practice will be able to recognize the insufficiencies of their self-developed strategies of transfer. Even therefore is it important that professionals have as much leeway as they have. Only by virtue of having that much operational latitude can they become aware of how many options for action there are and recognize that the number of options necessitates a clear-sighted mapping out of what is best.

The solution apt to relieve without restricting too much may reside in the already mentioned question of what kind of guidelines should be brought up for discussion. Guidelines can be written down or communicated orally, and they may be interpreted differently in response to different concerns, which clearly distinguish them from rules whose binding is mandatory.<sup>459</sup> I shall in the following first and foremost refer to guidelines set down in writing, and I

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456 Marstine 2011a: 8-9; Stark 2011: 37; Hein 2011: 114-115.

457 Abbott 1988: 215.

458 Lipsky 2010: 201. For further reference, cf. Grimen 2008b: 144-154. Boyd 1991/2012 brings up ethical and general rules and regulations for American museums. Here, there are several points of resemblance with rules regulating Norwegian museums, and Boyd, as well, concludes that it is the professionals themselves who take the initiative to make guidelines, but that additionally there is a need for control possibilities, so that the State can be sure the political assignment is being followed up.

459 Johansen og Vetlesen 2009: 129-130.



shall argue that these can be elaborated by the employer as well as the museum profession, the latter represented by ICOM. These two actors will have different objectives with their guidelines, which therefore will therefore be more or less detailed respectively.

In both of these cases it is act-based utilitarianism and not rule-based utilitarianism I consider to be relevant. By virtue of their professionalism, museum employees will always have to collect all important information and construct the best possible and most comprehensive picture of a situation and of the potential consequences inherent in the relevant options for action - but they will subsequently be in a situation where it may be beneficial to have guidelines which can lead them on and help them tackle assessment challenges and eventually sort out what issues should be given priority.<sup>460</sup> Rule-based utilitarianism will always recommend identical acts in situations resembling each other.<sup>461</sup> In view of the complexity of the situations, the interaction between the different parties, the many feelings and reactions which depend upon each singular choice of action, it will not be possible to lay down concrete rules of universal validity.

## **A Long and Winding Road: Some clues that can help us find our way**

Three factors were decisive for the course of action taken: The knowledge available in the specific situation where a decision had to be made, the other conditions defining that situation, an analysis of the consequences inherent in the possible courses of action with regard to all the parties involved, and the individual participant's personality and ability to handle feelings.

If steps are taken to enhance the theoretical knowledge about a field of operations confined by morals, ethics and feelings, the result will be that an increased number of people - employers, employees, members of the board - will act with more trust when they deal with controversial or sensitive topics in their capacity as professionals. This is of particular significance if the measures taken are directed first and foremost towards the employers and the employees themselves. The employer has a particular responsibility for creating the right conditions for a local and social environment where the health of the employees is a precious asset, as well as a responsibility for giving appropriate training and education so that the job can be done in accordance with current legislation and relevant guidelines. Moreover, the museum as institution is an entity of its own to which the public feels related. Here, the American institute dealing with museum ethics, The Institute of Museum Ethics, a department of Seton Hall University, New Jersey, emphasizes how important it is that not only the individual

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<sup>460</sup> Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 144. For further reference, cf. Edson 1997a: 63-64.

<sup>461</sup> Johansen & Vetlesen 2009: 145-146.

employee, but also the museum as such and its directors, emerge as societal actors with clear and distinct moral awareness. “Whether in day-to-day decision-making or forging an overarching mission, museum ethics are about an institution’s relationship with people - individuals and groups in the communities a museum serves as well as its staff and board members.”<sup>462</sup> Here it becomes obvious that the museum can be perceived as an entity of its own and as an actor that is in contact with its internal representatives and with the society outside. Norwegian ICOM and Norsk kulturråd have a superior role and will take, and to some extent be responsible for, measures making sure that superior guidelines or directives are followed internally in the organizations. Norges museumsforbund, (literally: “The Association of Norway’s Museums”), as professional body for Norwegian museums and their personnel has a function which is of relevance here. Among other things, its purpose is to initiate cooperation between the museums and “improve the museums’ ability to carry out their duties by strengthening the competence of their employees”.<sup>463</sup>

The individual museum employee has made experiences and seen the need for more knowledge, training, and education, of theoretical as well as practical quality. The ensuing pedagogical task can best be handled by one or more of the other actors, among other things because learning, in view of the superior significance of the professional ethics, ought to be an equal opportunity for all museum employees, and not be restricted to one institution.

The most important measures which can be taken locally, at the individual museum, is to lift the level of knowledge among the employees, to work resolutely for the implementation of common and uncontroverted institutional morals and see to it that the standards are lived up to in all projects devoted to sensitive topics. By instigating an increased focus on ethical awareness and implementing this more systematically in the daily activities at the institution, it will be possible for an employer to enhance the degree of professionalism of its staff members, who are in direct contact with the visitors and represent the museum outwards. Concurrently, the museum as institution can build up its credibility among the population.

This implies an effort to lift the level of *knowledge about the importance of feelings*. Maybe the most fundamental aspect, which directly or indirectly had a bearing on all four of the essential moral challenges, was the *emotions* of the parties involved. The cooperation with individual contributors and the visitors’ reactions to dissemination measures or the choice of topic were always related to feelings, and so were the assessments the museum employees had to make when they were up against a moral challenge. To be prompted to deal with one’s own feelings as well as the feelings of others, may elicit moral stress with the individual staff member for whom the institution has employer’s responsibility. The feelings among the

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462 Institute of Museum Ethics 2014.

463 Norges museumsforbund 2014.

visitors may provoke reactions which will often be targeting a specific museum, and so it is in the interest of the institution that the employees have a maximum of knowledge about the connections between the choice of topic, the subtle moves of dissemination tactics, and the emotional reactions these may spark off.

To be able to identify an ethical challenge, to understand the significance of the feelings it can trigger, and by extension be aware of one's prospects of getting on socially with all parties involved, are indispensable assets for museum employees who fall short of feeling secure in their work and want to improve their condition. It is of equal importance for the employees that they get more theoretical knowledge of how feelings and memories originate and practical knowledge of how they can best handle the feelings of individual contributors and visitors. By extension, this also includes the question of the aspect of truth in relation to memories.

Feelings are closely connected with reactions and, as mentioned, there are several studies devoted to the relationship between dissemination tactics and the reactions of the public. Even though the individual employee can improve his insight by reading books about these topics, a survey of this field of study ought to be included in the institution's pedagogical training programme. Only if they look into possible patterns of reaction and consider how each of these is likely to influence the participants' willingness and ability to absorb new knowledge can the museum employees manage to take their professional responsibility more seriously.<sup>464</sup>

Afterwards, it is important to enhance *the knowledge of ethical theory*. Ethical theory is essential in all work on exhibitions devoted to sensitive topics. It may contribute to exploring and defining the principles on which the practical approach to moral dilemmas is founded. It may help a museum justify why a particular topic has been chosen and is angled the way it is. Last but not least, it may generate a more professional and respectful conduct towards individuals and visitors.<sup>465</sup> According to Stark, all three aspects are related to each other and likely to influence each other.<sup>466</sup> If the employees are familiar with relevant ethical theories, they may be able to more easily identify moral challenges, and deal with them, not only by virtue of their "gut feeling" but also according to a relatively neutral and theoretically based justification. By extension, a justification of this type will also contribute to a better understanding and more open-minded attitude to the choice of topic and the handling of moral challenges with the local population. In turn, this may have a positive impact on the reactions.<sup>467</sup> Simon as well emphasizes the importance of a well-founded professional justification of why a museum chooses a particular topic and disseminates it with carefully

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464 Simon 2011a: 197.

465 Cf. Edson 1997d: 20; Meijer-van Mensch 2013: 40, Marstine 2013: 3-4.

466 Stark 2011.

467 Marstine 2013: 20.

prepared tactical moves.<sup>468</sup> This justification may be of utmost importance in view of defending the choices against negative reactions coming from the outside, but will also contribute to inspiring confidence among the members of the project team and make them feel that their work is important and meaningful.<sup>469</sup>

Discussing moral challenges in the light of ethical theory implies sorting out moral standards and values and giving priority to those which most deserve it. Edson mentions values which are essential when cooperating with colleagues or the environment; among others *loyalty, fairness, integrity, accountability, promise keeping* or *caring*, and sorts them out according to specific principles laid down in ICOM *Code of Ethics*.<sup>470</sup> Moral challenges imply weighing against each other the norms which protect these different values, and the questions concerning the rank and priority of each norm can be accounted for by means of ethical theory.

What ethical theories are most important for the work being done at one's own institution, ought to be discussed with the employees in connection with the institutional morals, a subject to which I shall come back shortly. Whether there are ethical theories of particular significance for the work devoted to sensitive topics in Norway, is a question which ought to be discussed in a major professional forum. This is essential in order to secure a solid foothold for the internal norms of the local institution and of the profession, and bring forth a strong sense of ownership to them.<sup>471</sup> Here, Norwegian ICOM will be an appropriate actor for initiating such a process of evaluation within the profession.

In any event, there is a need for basic competence as to how one charts and assesses the possible *consequences of the different courses of action*. This sounds more complicated than it actually is, but is still an important point. The uncertainty embedded in assessments which are based on the "gut feeling" of one employee is of considerable magnitude. Therefore, it is crucial to think thoroughly through one's plans for the working process and the possible outcomes of the different steps and actions one could take. Is the procedure planned the right one? Are there aspects which must always be included in the assessment, and if so, what aspects? Similar questions are raised with regard to "how?", and subsequently "based on what?", which announces that there is a need for operational procedures and tools which can help establish a more professional framework around the whole preparatory process of an exhibition.<sup>472</sup>

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468 Simon 2011a: 198-208. For further reference, cf. Cossons 1994.

469 Besides, this is required also in view of the ethical standards of research, cf. e.g. Borge 2003: 103-105 and Ruyter 2003: 30-32.

470 Edson 1997g: 110-111.

471 Cf. e.g. American Alliance of Museums 2012; Grimen 2006: 8.

472 That the need for practical training is considerable is no secret. Cf. among others Cossons 1994; Woolard 2006: 218; Simon 2011a.

Consequence analyses carried out in a large group where different opinions are given leeway and can be heard seem to be an appropriate implement here. Their starting point ought to be an assessment as to whether the planned procedure is in conformity with existing laws and regulations, including the norms and standards of public morality and the ethics of research.<sup>473</sup> My empirical material indicates that not all employees are equally familiar with this. As mentioned, ICOM *Code of Ethics* emphasizes that its standards are subordinate to other rules and laws and is therefore only a supplement which has to be measured against superior laws of universal validity.<sup>474</sup>

Finally, I shall do battle for institutions actively engaged in finding *their own ethical platform*, some sort of “institutional morals”. Ethical platforms of such calibre, intended to serve as frames of reference for Norwegian museums attached to ICOM, should be based on common professional ethics and thereby refer to ICOM *Code of Ethics*.<sup>475</sup> Every principle protects specific values which are essential for all professional activity and therefore, with some sense of urgency, ought to be implemented, specified and deeply rooted within the walls of the institution and the everyday business of each employee.

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) is a subgroup of The International Council of Museums and has defined the *Institutional Code of Ethics*, which is a description of values which are vital for all institutional activity, inwards as well as outwards. This seminal document explains how these values affect the policies of a museum, the cooperation with external parties, and the local activity going on within the different working fields of the profession, as well as the employees’ conduct in external matters related to questions of political nature which are of relevance to museums.<sup>476</sup>

Such a document ought to focus on the needs of the society rather than those of the institution. It should be based on all relevant laws and regulations and be written down. Concurrently, it had better give the environment insight into how an employee is supposed to operate as member of an institution and why a given job must be done exactly as described.<sup>477</sup> In this way *transparency*, i.e. openness and clarity will still be pervasive. Transparency refers to all varieties of communication and flow of information, internally within the confines of the museum, and outwards between the museum and the society.<sup>478</sup>

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473 Hellandsjø 2012: 17. For further reference, cf. Hauan 2006: 12-13.

474 For further reference, cf. Pouw 1997: 161.

475 Cf. e.g. ICOMs museumsetiske regelverk 2011: 5-6; Edson 1997g: 110-111.

476 American Alliance of Museums 2012. For a comparison of The American Alliance of Museums, AAM, and ICOM, cf. e.g. Folåsen 2008; Phelan 2006/2012 or Boyd 1991-2012.

477 American Alliance of Museums 2012: 1-2, 7.

478 Marstine 2013: 5-6.

The quest for openness should pervade all levels in the activities of a museum, and glitter, not only in its governing directives or contracts of cooperation, but also in its justifications of why projects of dissemination or exhibition are brought off the way they are. Its policies should be accessible to all who are genuinely interested. In the complex world of today, the society's needs and demands for transparency are increasing, so that people can make up their own idea of how the work done at important institutions is carried out and how the frame of reference which museums put on display is constructed. Moreover, this also requires openness around the ethical platform from which museums operate, and therefore it is essential that the institutions not only in their internal deliberations come to grips with and specify what values are considered pivotal and what moral norms they intend to strive for, but also that all this is set down in writing, implemented inwards, and communicated outwards.<sup>479</sup> This will also be to the benefit of the museums themselves, which by virtue of formulating their own guidelines will be able to take control of how their activities are going to be accomplished.<sup>480</sup>

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479 Marstine 2013: 15. This can be seen as a direct outcome of the museums' role as dynamic societal actors, and concepts like *social inclusion* or consumer participation. Cf. e.g. Hein 2011: 114-116.

480 Among other things, Edson mentions here that internal institutional guidelines of this type may deviate from the moral understanding of an individual human being, cf. Edson 1997d: 23-24. If so be the case, there is a need for assessment of several aspects in order to reach a conclusion as to which moral understanding should be given priority. Important cues in this connection are loyalty, to whom the loyalty is dedicated, and whether the loyalty is necessary with regard to professional ethics or proximity ethics.

## EPILOGUE

Many things have happened since my thesis was approved towards the end of 2014 and the Norwegian version of this book was released in 2016. Even more has happened since the spring of 2016 and until today - February 2019 -, but as I have mentioned shortly in the introduction, this will not be a subject here. This volume will itself bear witness of my state of knowledge and information when this book was written initially, leaving the exciting development in this working field since then to be the subject of books and articles in years to come.

From the end of 2014 and until the spring of 2016 more and more exhibitions devoted to sensitive, controversial topics are being referred to at seminars and conferences, and new publications are regularly popping up, both at home and abroad. Interestingly enough, among the seminars there are also some whose principal focus is on feelings and their significance, such as the one in Sweden in February, 2016. In our country, Norsk museumsforbund devoted its annual meeting of 2015 to “Ethics”. This was followed up in 2016 with the theme of “Freedom”, which was elucidated in a series of lectures, workshops and a conference on the societal role of museums under the auspices of Norsk kulturråd. However, The Arts Council has disbanded the *BRUDD*-group whose focus was on controversial, tabooed themes, but has now established a new programme devoted to the societal role of museums. This programme supports eighteen projects converging on “man” as a common denominator. These are projects which include, give information about the forgotten sides of society, and develop methods and strategies aiming at participating in and exerting more influence on public debates. Forty-three projects have applied for funding, which implies that more and more museums will now give priority to topics of social relevance.

Norwegian ICOM has initiated work on a publication about museum professionals as dynamic and relevant societal actors. The objective of this project is to collect information about experiences made at a small number of selected museums where the activity has deliberately been directed towards national minorities, groups of immigrants, sensitive topics in general or archives whose material is delicate to people living in the vicinity today. One article in that publication, which according to what has been planned is due to appear in the summer of 2016, will also review the results of a questionnaire targeting museum directors and museum employees in Norway. This questionnaire was issued in the autumn of 2015 and has been answered by the staffs of almost thirty different institutions, museums of cultural history as well as art museums. It is expected to give a good picture of the current status for work devoted to issues of social relevance and sensitive topics in Norway.

Museet Eidsvoll 1814, (literally: “The Eidsvoll 1814 Museum”), has taken the initiative to establish a new network for democracy and human rights. The official opening took place in March, 2016, in the presence of more than fifty museum employees. This notable interest indicates that work on this kind of topics is liable to increase significantly over the next few years, in response to the challenges our society is up against. The concurrent seminar was opened by David Fleming, Director of The National Museums of Liverpool, and the link to Britain as a leading nation in the work devoted to *social justice* and *human rights* is more than welcome.

As I wrote in my introduction, being a dynamic societal actor who contributes to a more equitable society where a multitude of different voices can be heard is what I see as a crucial task for the museums of today. This role is undergoing development in conformity with the changes taking place in the society. By assuming such a role, the museums can have an impact on the social development and help lay the foundations for a better tomorrow. It is probable that the growing number of projects, seminars and publications will contribute to a more propitious situation where the work devoted to sensitive topics little by little will grow and eventually become an integral part of the museums’ life, on a footing comparable to what the management of collections has today. This will be significant, legitimate and in complete accordance with the moral and political demands to which museums as institutions and museum employees as professionals are subjected today. The museums have a unique role when it comes to interpreting and exploiting the remnants of the past. Embedded in this role are opportunities, power and responsibilities which have been invested there for the purpose of bringing forth a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Following the development of this role and the synergetic effects it is likely to spark off in years to come is going to be an exciting adventure, both seen from the inside as museum employee and from the outside, in the more distant perspective of a professional ethicist.



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