
ARTYKUŁY

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Participatory Museums in Practice. A Case Study of the National Museum in Szczecin – The Dialogue Centre Upheavals

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At the beginning there was dialogue: The importance of “upheavals” in building identity

The idea of creating the Upheavals for Dialogue (CDP), proposed in 2005 by Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz, was conceived shortly before the nationwide celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the founding of Solidarity. Szczecin, which was the second largest and most important focal point of strikes after Gdańsk, was practically non-existent in public awareness outside the region. The inhabitants of the city themselves were beginning to forget the history of the Szczecin “upheavals,” and the lack of regional education in the core curriculum for schools only deepened this gap. It became clear that the people of Szczecin had to take care of their own history. Community participation began even before the museum was

created when the need for its establishment arose.¹ From the very beginning of building the museum's idea, the creators of the CDP established relationships with the residents, trying to overcome the difficult history of a city whose population was almost entirely replaced after World War II. The post-migration community of the Western and Northern Territories is unique in terms of building local identity. The contemporary border between Poland and Germany runs through areas that have never before been borderlands.²

The idea of the "Museum of Upheavals" very quickly gained widespread social support. The goal of the new institution was clear – to create an exhibition that would tell the story of the greatest upheavals in the city's history, starting from the outbreak of war, through the events of December 1970, August 1980, December 1981 and August 1988, and ending with the first, partially free elections and the fall of the old system.

The key to the operation of the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue, as its originator pointed out, lies in the very heart of its name, where every element is of equal importance. The word "Centre" symbolises not only a meeting place but also a starting point for exploring other historical spaces depicted in the exhibition on display. "Dialogue," on the other hand, emphasises the importance of creating situations in which conversation, the presentation of diverse perspectives, and the exchange of views prevail over one-sided opinions. It promotes openness to other positions and fosters partnership on many levels. It is also about accepting diverse relationships and encouraging discussion while respecting every opinion. The term "Upheavals" indicates that the permanent exhibition focuses not only on general history but also on breakthrough socio-political moments—milestones that had a significant impact on the identity of the inhabitants of these areas. From the very beginning, the project had a social character, and the creators assumed wide participation from the residents of Szczecin in shaping it. For years, consultations and debates were held on the "Museum of Upheavals." The Upheavals Centre for Dialogue has been a participatory project from the start.

¹ For more on the idea of participation as a driver for the creation of a museum, see Katarzyna Jagodzińska, "Partycypacja publiczności w polskich muzeach," *Muzealnictwo* 62 (2021): 177.

² Andrzej Sakson, "Problem pogranicza w kontekście Ziem Zachodnich – zarys zagadnienia," in: *Ziemie Zachodnie – historia i perspektywy*, eds. Wojciech Kucharski, Grzegorz Strauchold (Wrocław: Ośrodek Pamięć i Przyszłość, 2011), 35–37. See also Katarzyna Uczkiewicz-Styś, "Ziemie Zachodnie jako semiosfera," in: *Ziemie Zachodnie*, 41–46.

Nina Simon's Theory: Create, connect, share

Participatory museums are the next step, after Peter Vergo's New Museology revolution, to work closely with museum audiences.³ Emerging at the end of the 20th century, the concept is a transformation of the outdated, closed museum model into an open social institution with an educational character. Nina Simon, creator of the participatory museum concept, envisages many levels of interaction with visitors in the various activities of the institution. The museum should become a place where visitors not only consume content, but also actively participate in creating, sharing and connecting—enabling them to interact with each other—around that content, which can lead to a more engaging and interactive cultural experience.⁴

Creating in a museum means not only observing the exhibits, but also actively involving visitors by contributing their own ideas and objects and using their creativity within the institution and interacting with others. **Sharing**, on the other hand, is a process, in which people discuss, take home, process, and pass on both what they have seen and what they themselves have created during their visit to the museum. **Connecting** is another aspect where visitors interact not only with the exhibits, but also with museum staff and other visitors who share their interests. This creates a richer and more interactive visiting experience that encourages deeper reflection and a better understanding of the exhibits on display.

Before the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue was created as a participatory museum, it was preceded by several slogans that marked the stages of the idea's evolution over more than ten years. The project was first put forward under the slogan "Let's bring back memory."⁵ After 1989, people in West Pomerania, especially Szczecin, discovered the German history of the area, which had been "forbidden" in the Communist era. Pre-war Stettin, a picturesque "garden city", contrasted with the grey, communist Szczecin. Post-war events, considered uninteresting,

³ Peter Vergo's *New Museology*, promulgated in 1989, is a critical analysis of traditional museum methods, emphasising the need to redefine the role of museums in society through a greater emphasis on interaction with the public, contextualising exhibits, and reflecting on the social and political aspects of museology.

⁴ Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Museum 2.0, Santa Cruz, California, 2010), 3, accessed 10 May 2024, <https://books.google.pl/books?id=qun060HUcOcC&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁵ Ewa Podgajna, "Muzeum, gdzie razem z Bierutem obejrzysz film," *Gazeta Wyborcza Szczecin*, 17.12.2008, accessed 10 May 2024, <https://szczecin.wyborcza.pl/szczecin/7,34939,6077265,muzeum-gdzie-razem-z-bierutem-obejrzysz-film.html>.

were forgotten, which made it necessary to restore this memory. The next slogan, “CDP—Let’s Build It Together,” started the involvement of local people in the process of creating the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue, whose details were shaped during numerous public consultations, during which the main threads of the exhibition were identified. After preparing a plan for the exhibition, the document was again subject to wide public consultations, involving various communities and experts from different fields. A social campaign under the slogan “History—pass it on” accompanied the collection of donations to the museum’s collection. By collecting mementos from home archives, intergenerational interactions and the building of relationships between different communities, including veterans, were promoted. Prior to the opening of the permanent exhibition, the institution had collected memorabilia from 160 donors, and after a year, this number had increased by another 100 or so, making many people from all over Poland feel like committed co-creators of the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue.⁶

As Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz recalls, “Slowly, as the idea of the Centre materialised, it became obvious that people whose memories/mementos would appear in the museum as part of the exhibition, or those who would come as viewers, would be more engaged in the museum. The idea of cooperating with a historical witness/viewer assumed partnership: from consultations related to the emerging permanent exhibition and suggestions for themes, through constructive criticism of the efforts of the curator, the company tasked with the arrangement, and the artistic team, to being a co-creator of museum events; from educational and civic projects to temporary exhibitions.”⁷ The idea of the Centre as a participatory museum proved to be a hit. Already in its first year of operation (2015–2016), the permanent exhibition received the national Sybill award for the Museum Event of the Year in the category for historical and archaeological exhibitions.⁸ The museum organised or co-organised ten temporary exhibitions, presented in every available exhibition space: the conference room, the education room, and Solidarity Square. In 2017 alone, more than 40,000 visitors from home and abroad visited the museum.⁹

⁶ Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz, *Zamach na sacrum? W stronę muzeum partycypacyjnego – Centrum Dialogu Przełomy oddział Muzeum Narodowego w Szczecinie. Zarys problematyki* (Warszawa, 2017), 18–19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸ Winners of the XXXVII Edition of the 2016 Sybil Museum Event of the Year Competition, accessed 14 May 2024, <https://konkurssybylla.nimoz.pl/LAUREACI2016>.

⁹ Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz, “Centrum Dialogu Przełomy – w stronę publiczności muzealnej,” *Materiały Zachodniopomorskie, Nowa Seria* 14 (2018): 437.

2024 marks the eighth anniversary of the opening of the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue at the National Museum in Szczecin. This provides an excellent opportunity to assess the practical implementation of the participatory museum concept according to Nina Simon's theory and to analyse the effectiveness of strategies for engaging the local community and introducing interactive elements into the presentation of the region's history and culture.

Museum co-created: Permanent exhibition MNS-CDP

The involvement of the people of Szczecin in the development of the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue was not limited to the design phase. After the partial opening of the Centre on 17 December 2015, the process of working together on the exhibition continued. Within a month of opening, the exhibition, which is still being created, was visited by more than 5,500 people, whose comments were carefully noted, and some of which were implemented. A similar situation occurred a year later, during the Centre's birthday celebrations. The debate "How did the upheavals change Szczecin?" included a discussion on what the audience thought was still missing from the exhibition. Wherever possible, without compromising the aesthetics and coherence of the overall work, the display continues to be adapted and new elements are added.¹⁰

The permanent exhibition tells the story from the perspective of ordinary people who were both observers and participants in the events presented. The narrative, based on the accounts of witnesses to history, allows visitors to understand the impact of major events on everyday life. The exhibits, collected through the generosity of almost 400 donors, bring history to life, creating a multidimensional picture of events in these lands, including the fate of national minorities. The Centre offers an interactive experience in which art plays a key role, allowing for free interpretation and engaging a wide audience. The museum not only conveys history but also allows visitors to feel it, provoking reflection on the past. However, it must be acknowledged that the permanent exhibition is an area where the limits of participation are most visible. The MNS-CDP exhibition reflects an imposed scenario that offers freedom of choice, but within the museum's established framework—even if this framework is the result of public debates and consultations.

¹⁰ Kuchcińska-Kurcz, *Zamach*, 19.

Broader public participation is possible with the creation of temporary exhibitions. At MNS-CDP, exhibitions have been presented multiple times with the involvement of residents, artists, and local collectors. Examples include two exhibitions related to Independence Day in 2016, thanks to cooperation with the Piłsudski Association of the Republic of Poland, Szczecin Branch. The exhibition “Following the Traces of the Marshal and the First Cadre” featured mainly the collections of Jerzy Rozpondek and Bohdan Walknowski, with archival photographs from the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejówkę. The second presented 20 portraits of legionnaires by Wincenty Wodzinowski from the collection of Bohdan Walknowski, showing what happened to them after leaving the Legions – from important functions in the Second Republic to being active in Communist Poland.¹¹ In 2022, Szczecin resident Tomasz Gliński presented his collection at the exhibition “Polish Eagles.”¹² The inspiration for the exhibition was the 104th anniversary of Poland’s independence. In turn, on the 105th anniversary, the exhibition “Final Centenary—Deposits of Remembrance” featured the collections of Tomasz Gliński, Zuzanna Gonera, Cezary Jankowski, and Andrzej Wincza, as well as the collections of the MNS-CDP.¹³ On the 8th anniversary of the opening of the Centre, the exhibition “Memento mori – motif of death in the MNS-CDP collection” was created in cooperation with and using the collection of Jacek Stasiak.¹⁴ Such cooperation is bearing fruit in the form of expanding the network of consultants and experts in various fields, as well as broadening the audience to include people connected with both collectors and organisations presenting their collections at the Centre. In line with the principles of museum participation, in some cases, participants act as consultants, while in others they collaborate with staff in the design and implementation of activities, looking more like employees. A key element of effective collaboration is mutual trust,

¹¹ “Biało-czerwona niepodległość w dwóch odsłonach,” MNS-CDP temporary exhibition, accessed 5 May 2024, <https://przelomy.muzeum.szczecin.pl/wystawy/czasowe/998-bialo-czerwona-niepodleglosc-w-dwoch-odslonach.html>.

¹² “Polskie orły,” MNS-CDP temporary exhibition, accessed 5 May 2024, <https://przelomy.muzeum.szczecin.pl/wystawy/czasowe/1281-wystawa-czasowa-polskie-orly-symbole-narodowe-z-kolekcji-tomasza-glinskiego.html>.

¹³ “Finał stulecia – depozyty pamięci,” MNS-CDP temporary exhibition, accessed 5 May 2024, <https://przelomy.muzeum.szczecin.pl/wystawy/czasowe/1329-final-stulecia-depozyty-pamieci.html>.

¹⁴ “Memento mori – motyw śmierci w zbiorach MNS-CDP,” MNS-CDP temporary exhibition, accessed 5 May 2024, <https://przelomy.muzeum.szczecin.pl/wystawy/czasowe/1340-memento-mori-motyw-smieci-w-zbiorach-mns-cdp.html>.

a common understanding of project objectives, and a clear definition of the roles of participants.¹⁵

An open museum: Experiences for every visitor

The democratisation of museums also means that their educational offerings are tailored to every age group, from pre-schoolers to schoolchildren, and include workshops for senior citizens. Workshops for the youngest museum visitors are an example of participatory activities, engaging children in various creative and exploratory tasks.

A wide range of museum lessons conducted in the permanent exhibition forms the basis of MNS-CDP's participatory activities. The educational offer was designed after consultations with teachers and pupils, taking into account local history and historical anniversaries. The Centre regularly organises Oxford debates with students and high school pupils, involving them in active participation. One such debate, in the form of a court hearing, concerned responsibility for the tragedy of December 1970 and generated widespread interest in Szczecin's historical and political circles.¹⁶ Museum lessons take place in various forms, not only within the building. Meetings are often held at historical sites or other places of remembrance. In cooperation with various organisations, MNS-CDP organises field trips with history lessons to, for example, the former synthetic petrol factory in Police, the prison in Wierzychów, Ravensbrück concentration camp, Potsdam, Berlin, Peenemünde and Sachsenhausen. At the request of the Centre, high school students presented a multimedia presentation in 2014 in Sachsenhausen, entitled "Grot through the eyes of young people," before the symposium on General Stefan Grot-Rowecki. The presentation was designed by high school students and came as a big surprise to the historians gathered at the symposium.¹⁷

MNS-CDP's educational projects are co-created by history enthusiasts and witnesses of historical events, leading to exciting historical spectacles. Scenarios

¹⁵ Simon, *The Participatory*, 232.

¹⁶ Aneta Popławska, "Młodzież osądziła sprawców Grudnia '70 w Szczecinie!," (13 December 2013), accessed 14 May 2024, <https://www.przelomy.muzeum.szczecin.pl/aktualnosci/51-aktualnosci/883-2013-12-17-13-25-07.html>.

¹⁷ Kuchcińska-Kurcz, *Zamach*, 21. See also: Jacek Lepiarz, "W KL Sachsenhausen odsłonięto pomnik ku czci gen. Roweckiego," (14 July 2016), accessed 14 May 2024, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/w-kl-sachsenhausen-odslonieto-pomnik-ku-czci-gen-roweckiego>.

are created by re-enactment groups, schools and witnesses to history. For example, in 2010, the December revolt (the workers' revolt of December 1970) was re-enacted in the performance "The Battle for Dubois Street," involving former shipyard workers, members of the 1980s opposition, police and reenactors. In 2011, during the reenactment of the pacification of the A. Warski Szczecin Shipyard after martial law was imposed (1981), some of the props and costumes were prepared by the participants. Another performance, depicting the arrival of transports of displaced persons and former camp prisoners in Western Pomerania in 1946, was entirely prepared by the community of Siberian deportees and students of the "Sybiraki" middle school (2011). PKP PLK became involved in the project, which published information about the reenactment on platforms, attracting many travellers. A touching moment occurred when the Voivodeship Governor symbolically welcomed the newcomers by sharing a huge loaf of bread with them.¹⁸ The reenactments were costly, requiring the involvement of many people and actors, but they brought many people together and generated great excitement.¹⁹ As part of the cooperation and competitions organised by the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue, pupils made films with witnesses to history, created museum games, as well as comics on historical topics.

A new addition to the MNS-CDP's offer is workshops for seniors, which are a response to comments from visitors to involve this group more in the active life of the museum. The "Maps of Memory" workshop is very popular. Participants show great creativity by sharing their own stories and memories, which will be honoured through an exhibition of works created during the workshop.

Inclusive museum: A platform for public dialogue

Based on the concept of a participatory museum, the National Museum in Szczecin – Upheavals Centre for Dialogue actively involves its community by organising various open events. The conference room/dialogue space regularly hosts debates, expert talks, meetings, and book promotions, encouraging all interested parties to

¹⁸ Kuchcińska-Kurcz, *Zamach*, 21. See also: "65. rocznica przybycia Sybiraków i Kresowiaków na Pomorze Zachodnie," accessed 14 May 2024, <https://wszczecin.pl/wydarzenie/65-rocznica-przybycia-sybirakow-i-kresowiakow-na-pomorze-zachodnie/2613>.

¹⁹ Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz, "Centrum Dialogu Przełomy – ewolucja idei," in: *Miasto sprzeciwu – miasto protestu* (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2015), 22–24.

actively participate. These events not only broaden knowledge of history and culture but also foster the exchange of ideas, discussions, and the building of social bonds. The museum also hosts film screenings to explore a variety of historical and heritage topics. Szczecin residents enjoy regular screenings of historical films, such as Leslie Woodhead's *Three Days in Szczecin*, as well as screenings of contemporary films, including documentaries. In this way, the Centre has become not only a place to discover the past but also a venue for active participation in contemporary cultural discourse. Most meetings are streamed live via the MNS-CDP Facebook account, where both in-person and online visitors have the opportunity to ask questions.

Many diverse events have taken place at MNS-CDP. For example, in June 2023, there was a fashion show recalling the life and work of Danuta Szyksznian, codename "Sarenka," a Vilnius liaison of the Home Army, prepared by Szczecin artist Olga Dąbkiewicz. The January concert and performance by schoolchildren for donors on the 8th anniversary of the opening of the MNS-CDP was an expression of gratitude and an opportunity to promote the talents of the local community. Also worth mentioning is an exhibition opened in October 2022 of works by acclaimed photographer Cezary Dubiel, who captures the essence of modernity in his photographic collages. A special event was the opening of the exhibition "Guide to Szczecin" by Paweł Bołtowicz, a student at the Academy of Art in Szczecin, in July 2023, combined with the defence of his bachelor's degree. The centre contributes to the development of young talent and the popularisation of local art. Accompanying the opening of the "Memento-mori" exhibition, the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue co-organised the second Dead Cafe in Szczecin, which involved meetings with the public and conversations about death, moderated by Katarzyna Górewicz. The aim of the initiative was to discuss life and death openly and directly, engaging the community in reflection on essential aspects of existence.

The space for dialogue is open to speakers who suit the narrative of the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue, which fosters a diversity of perspectives. "Everything is allowed in the museum," as the title of a high-profile exhibition prepared by children at the National Museum in Warsaw in 2016 proclaimed, as long as it does not violate its mission, of course. Freedom of content does not exclude its selection in line with criteria defined by the institution's staff. In this way, the tenets of participatory museum theory are put into practice, where the community has an active role in shaping and presenting the content, while at the same time the institution retains control to maintain consistency and compliance with the museum's mission.

The Upheavals Centre for Dialogue also publishes a popular science series. The books relate to the temporary exhibitions and, in addition to the historical section, are accompanied by photographs and descriptions of the Centre's collections. The publications are free and can be ordered from the museum bookshop.²⁰ The free distribution of publications makes them widely accessible, regardless of internet access or reading preferences. In this way, the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue pursues its mission of spreading knowledge and culture, reaching a diverse audience. However, the lack of academic studies results in claims that the Centre does not exist in the academic space of the city and region.²¹ Guided by the principles of inclusivity, the Centre is committed to creating content that is accessible and understandable to everyone.

An inclusive museum

As part of the concept of social inclusion, which involves integrating excluded groups into museum activities, the Centre has already hosted people who are blind, visually impaired, or have varying degrees of impairment. Although guided tours have been adapted to their needs, projects involving their active participation are still lacking. There have even been discussions with the West Pomeranian University of Technology about preparing 3D-printed copies of the exhibits to be accessible to people with sight problems.

The National Museum in Szczecin—Upheavals Centrum for Dialogue holds history lessons for young people from educational and treatment centres. These initiatives aim not only to support the personal development of participants, but also to promote social integration. These classes are always well-received, and the youth eagerly participate and return for subsequent meetings.

Unfortunately, not all the participatory projects that were attempted in MNS-CDP were successful. A few years ago, there was an idea to involve homeless people in MNS-CDP activities. During an organised visit from one of Szczecin's

²⁰ For more about the books, see MNS Bookshop website, accessed 14 May 2024, <https://sklep.muzeum.szczecin.pl/autor/red-agnieszka-kuchcinska-kurcz.html>, and also <https://muzeum.szczecin.pl/116-aktualnosci/1791-promocja-ksiazki-historia-w-kopercie.html>.

²¹ Eryk Krasucki, "Żłudny blask świetlika? O przydatności terminu «przełom» dla zrozumienia rzeczywistości Pomorza Zachodniego w latach 1945–1989," in: *Kultura – tożsamość – rozwój: 75-lecie polskiego Pomorza Zachodniego*, eds. Marek Tałasiewicz, Kazimierz Kozłowski (Szczecin: Książnica Pomorska im. Stanisława Staszica w Szczecinie, 2020), 121.

night shelters, it was discovered that the group included several witnesses to the history of December '70 and August '80. These individuals had interesting memories that could enrich history lessons, so it was proposed that they conduct such classes. Additionally, they could tell young people about their path to homelessness, showing how easy it is to fall into social isolation. Unfortunately, the proposal went unanswered for years.²² Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, MNS-CDP organised a workshop for pre-school and early primary school children from Ukraine. The first meeting took place in April 2022. The workshops were designed so that children could participate in six stations with different tasks, and the introduction to the classes was a short instructional video in Ukrainian, played on a loop. Unfortunately, attendance at the workshop was low, resulting in the continuation being abandoned after some time. Nevertheless, the MNS-CDP initiative highlights its commitment to creating an inclusive space for diverse communities.²³ Creating participatory projects in cultural management presupposes that mistakes will be made, and they will be corrected, taking into account possible costs and negative perceptions. The aftermath of the pandemic was a period of change, when a golden mean between respecting public funds and implementing projects was sought.²⁴

Online museum

Internet activity is not only about the museum's social media activity, but also about efforts to make the institution present and visible online. Important anniversaries are regularly recalled, and coverage of events is shown. Social media posts and reels featuring museum visitors are published. As part of the 18th European Night of Museums, a role-playing activity was organised with museum-goers responding to the question: how do they think national holidays should be celebrated? Their answers inspired the programme for this year's Independence Day celebrations.

Facebook is used to create both in-person and online events, with live coverage available on the museum's Facebook page. Social media also showcases the museum's daily life and publishes photos of donors with their gifts, helping

²² Kuchcińska-Kurcz, *Zamach*, 31.

²³ "The Upheavals Centre for Dialogue organises workshops for children from Ukraine/ Забави для дітей молодшого віку," (11 April 2022), accessed 14 May 2024, <https://infoledek.pl/ukraina/centrum-dialogu-przelomy-organizuje-warsztaty-dla-dzieci-z-ukrainy-zabawy-dla-dzieci-molodsho/>.

²⁴ Piotr Majewski, "Muzeum... i co dalej?" *Muzealnictwo* 61 (2020): 107.

to build connections with the online community. As a result, the social media activities of the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue serve to promote the principles of the participatory museum by actively engaging the community, fostering dialogue, and co-creating museum content. Social media is a tool for co-creating content with the museum's audience. By encouraging the sharing of photographs, family stories, and memories related to exhibitions or collections, the museum enriches its narrative with the diverse perspectives and experiences of the community. However, due to the anonymity of the internet, people often choose to express negative opinions about the museum. These comments bring up specific allegations that can be addressed and shortcomings that can be corrected or supplemented.

Adaptable museum

Participation is not only the idea of a multi-level collaboration with the viewer, but also overcoming any barriers that might stand in the way of visitors. A participatory museum must be adaptable. The innovative design of the Centre's building generated a lot of excitement right from the start. The futuristic building, recognised as the best cultural building in the world,²⁵ features an underground exhibition area and was designed by the Katowice-based architect Robert Konieczny. The form of the elevated square is a compromise between the pre-war buildings and the post-war free space that became the arena for the dramatic events of December '70. The residents accepted the compromise, but there was still the problem of the location of the Centre. The families of the victims of December '70 and the injured initially opposed construction at the site of the tragedy, considering it a violation of their "blood-honoured" space. Through three years of weekly meetings, discussions, and joint projects, such as lessons taught by historical witnesses and recordings of notes, the dispute was defused, and acceptance gained. The Angel of Freedom monument on the square, designed by Czesław Dźwigaj and erected without a competition by Szczecin Mayor Marian Jurczyk, no longer attracted young people, which made the December families realise that the official narrative

²⁵ At the World Architecture Festival, Berlin 2016, the MNS-CDP building won first place in the 'Culture' category and its highest accolade—the title of *World Building of the Year*.

of the past was fading.²⁶ In 2016, the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue won the competition for the best public space in Europe.²⁷ Solidarity Square has become the centre of Szczecin's social life, a venue for protests, concerts and a meeting place for residents.²⁸

The museum headquarters is an example of accessible architecture, without architectural barriers. You enter the museum's lobby directly from Solidarity Square. The building is equipped with a lift, and the floor area is flat. Although the exhibition is kept in semi-darkness, visitors orient themselves through the exhibition by an illuminated timeline that guides them through the spaces. The descriptions on the exhibition and the materials in the infokiosks are prepared in three languages: Polish, English, and German. The multi-level narrative is understandable to both tourists and members of the local community. Thanks to the rich content of the infokiosks and multimedia table, visitors can find detailed source material. Multimedia in the permanent exhibition is a key tool to enable viewers to interact with the museum exhibits, contributing to the dynamic and multi-voiced nature of the exhibition hall, creating a highly responsive community space.²⁹

The museum during the pandemic

The epidemic was a challenging time of survival, particularly for public institutions. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) described the cultural sector's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic as a "cultural shock," indicating that museums and other cultural institutions, closed due to enforced distancing and sanitary restrictions, had to suddenly switch

²⁶ Kuchcińska-Kurcz, *Zamach*, 6.

²⁷ *Przełomy z placem Solidarności najlepszą przestrzenią publiczną w Europie*, szczecin.wyborcza.pl, accessed 29 May 2024, https://szczecin.wyborcza.pl/szczecin/7,34939,20350713,przełomy-z-placem-solidarnosci-najlepsza-przestrzenia-publiczna.html#S.embed_link-K.C-B.1-L.1.zw.

²⁸ See *Najlepsza przestrzeń publiczna w Europie to teraz wspinała górka do zjeżdżania na sankach*, szczecin.wyborcza.pl, accessed 03 June 2024, <https://szczecin.wyborcza.pl/szczecin/7,34939,26699601,jeszcze-jedna-rola-placu-solidarnosci-teraz-to-wspaniala-gorka.html>. See Michał Kaczmarek, "To tak jakby ślizgać się na grobach." *Przewodniczący Solidarności ostro o zabawie na dachu 'Przełomów'*," wSzczecinie.pl, accessed 03 June 2024, <https://wszczecinie.pl/to-tak-jakby-slizgac-sie-na-grobach-przewodniczacy-solidarnosci-ostro-o-zabawie-na-dachu-przelomow/46676>.

²⁹ Simon, *The Participatory*, 5.

to online activities to continue their mission of making collections accessible to the public.³⁰ Due to the closure of the permanent exhibition, the museum went beyond its walls to meet its audience. Adapting the museum to the principles of a participatory museum emphasised the importance of active community engagement through organising outdoor exhibitions, allowing the public to view them in the open air, and showing exhibitions online to maintain contact with the audience without exposing them to the risk of infection. Educational lessons were organised in schools and kindergartens. As part of the “Museum on the Move” campaign, using a 3D presentation, pupils took virtual tours of the permanent exhibition spaces and filled out provided worksheets. To interest the audience, MNS-CDP employees recorded several promotional videos about the work of museum professionals and how they accept and process collections. Social media was used to connect with the public. Through this, the museum provided family quizzes and, on the occasion of Museum Night, an online home workshop with a war theme. Exhibitions jointly organised with partners were held on Solidarity Square, telling stories about the post-war history of territories annexed to Poland after 1945, recalling the Greeks’ struggle for freedom, and the³¹ current struggles of Belarusians with Alexander Lukashenko’s regime.³² On the occasion of the 5th anniversary of MNS-CDP’s activity, an outdoor exhibition “City within a City: 5 years of MNS-CDP” was also organised.

The time after the epidemic can be compared to a period of learning to walk after a long period of restrictions. Although the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic should be considered a thing of the past and no longer has an impact on the day-to-day operations of museums in Poland, the partial closure of the MNS-CDP until September 2023 meant that audience confidence is still in a rebuilding phase.³³ These efforts are key to fully restoring past attendance and interest in

³⁰ Mateusz Bieczynski, “‘Szok kulturowy’ – działalność muzeów w czasie pandemii,” *Muzealnictwo* 62 (2021): 23–24.

³¹ The Greek minority in Police settled after the Second World War, being part of a group of 14,525 refugees from Greece and Macedonia who arrived in Poland between 1948 and 1951 after the defeat of the Communists in the Greek Civil War. This community consisted mainly of people from the poor regions of northern Greece. See more: Bartosz Sitarz, “Społeczność grecka i macedońska w Policach po drugiej wojnie światowej,” *Szczecińskie Studia Archiwalno-Historyczne* 3 (2019): 93–154.

³² Agnieszka Kuchcińska-Kurcz, “Pięć lat Muzeum Narodowego w Szczecinie – Centrum Dialogu Przełomy,” *Materiały Zachodniopomorskie, Nowa Seria* 18 (2022): 418–419.

³³ Piotr Majewski, “Report on Polish museums in 2023,” in: *How are museums doing in Europe? The European Museum Academy Reports on The Museum Temperature by the end of 2023* (2024),

cultural initiatives. Therefore, rebuilding trust and returning to normality requires time and effort from both the community and institutions such as museums, which must continue their efforts to restore full activity and social engagement.

Breaking new ground: The first successful participatory museum in the region

The National Museum in Szczecin – Upheavals Centre for Dialogue is decidedly a successful experiment in participatory museum practices within Polish legal and socially acceptable realities. But is “everything allowed in the museum”? The democratisation of the museum is not a utopian theory or an assault on the sacred, but merely an extension of the definition of the museum to include new possibilities.³⁴ Listening to one’s audience is the duty of museum staff, as even if museum activities focus on the conservation and protection of collections, the main purpose of the museum’s existence will still be to show what has survived to future generations.

Participation does not imply simplifying the museum’s mission into a mere tourist product designed for superficial consumption by mass audiences. In historical museums, especially those dealing with recent history, there can be no objective presentation of history without asking difficult questions and addressing uncomfortable topics.³⁵ Treating a museum as an unreflective leisure activity for mass audiences is no longer the Disneyfication of the institution, but simply pathological museology. Great museums often focus on maintaining social ties and reproducing collective identity. This institutional model, aimed at unlimited growth, was questioned during the epidemic.³⁶ On social media, blockbuster exhibitions are all the rage, and consequently, museums become money-making

63, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://europeanmuseumacademy.eu/how-were-museums-doing-in-europe-in-2023-ema-national-reports/>.

³⁴ Robert Traba, “Epoka muzeów? Muzeum jako medium, muzeum jako mediator,” In: *I Kongres Muzealników Polskich*, ed. Michał Wysocki (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2015), 51.

³⁵ Janusz Trupinda, “Polska – Niemcy – Krzyżacy. Tak zwane trudne tematy w polityce wystawieniczej Muzeum Zamkowego w Malborku,” in: *Historia w Muzeum. Muzeum. Forma i środki prezentacji I*, eds. Michał F. Woźniak, Tomasz F. de Rosset, Wojciech Ślusarczyk (Bydgoszcz, 2013), 42.

³⁶ Krzysztof Pomian, *Muzeum. Historia światowa*, vol. 3: *Na podbój świata 1850–2020* (Gdańsk: słowo/ obraz terytoria, 2024), 8–9. See also: Majewski, *Muzeum*, 106.

machines, ceasing to be public utility institutions.³⁷ A museum is not a business that is judged by the profits generated by its capital. We must not confuse popularity with marketing.

A participatory museum, in Nina Simon's theory, is an institution that moves away from a unilaterally constructed message towards creating a space for the exchange of experiences and discussion of visitors' expectations. The author points to the multidirectional nature of new relationships between the institution and the audience. The participatory museum is not a marketing strategy within the cultural institutions sector. Cooperation with the recipient must not degenerate into manipulation. As creators of these activities, we need to keep this in mind. The National Museum in Szczecin – Upheavals Centre for Dialogue often takes on unpopular subjects, sometimes at odds with the current political climate, when creating its range of activities. In a space of dialogue, one is allowed to ask uncomfortable questions and seek answers. The National Museum in Szczecin – Upheavals Centre for Dialogue is a practical realisation of Nina Simon's theory, introducing the concept of the museum as a place of participation. It is a space where visitors not only view finished content, but also actively participate in its creation and co-creation. By interacting with each other and with the exhibition, they collectively create context and meaning. This approach allows visitors to personally engage with the content and share their own experiences and perspectives. In this way, the Upheavals Centre for Dialogue is a place where visitors not only view a narrative historical exhibition, but also participate in its creation and reinterpretation. This interactive approach allows for a more engaging and personal museum visit experience.

³⁷ Karol Sienkiewicz, "Patomuzealnictwo: turyści nie znają dzieł, które pokazują słynne muzea, ale świetnie znają ich nazwy," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3 May 2024, accessed 07 May 2024, https://wyborcza.pl/7,112588,30928676,patomuzealnictwo-turysci-nie-znaja-dziel-ktore-pokazuja-slynne.html?f-bclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAARlOpUsiTnTYeqjI_Tk6P9cHVXjmAS3IliMZAYt6yezPVqa-VvddgNF82hk8_aem_ATGW-421VbxyBuEKtfxAJixQGaBEQlEXbRkuQZLKpfm9bqO5rw0X-ebJG98xYfNmAEPk7oHkkQoSWbibQyFz8IWgF.

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Translated by Stuart Dowell

Abstract

The article analyses the idea and practical activities of the National Museum in Szczecin – Upheavals Centre for Dialogue (MNS-CDP) in the context of Nina Simon's concept of the participatory museum. It demonstrates that the Centre aligns with the principles

of a participatory museum by actively involving the local community in the process of creating and shaping exhibition content, while promoting dialogue and collaboration with the public. It also discusses the challenges associated with implementing the participatory museum concept and its significance within the cultural and social context.

Udany eksperyment.
Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie – Centrum Dialogu Przełomy
jako przykład muzeum partycypacyjnego

Abstrakt

Artykuł jest analizą idei oraz praktycznych działań Muzeum Narodowego w Szczecinie – Centrum Dialogu Przełomy (MNS, CDP) w kontekście koncepcji muzeum partycypacyjnego Niny Simon. Udowadnia, że CDP spełnia założenia muzeum partycypacyjnego poprzez aktywne angażowanie społeczności lokalnej w proces tworzenia i kształtowania treści wystawowych oraz promowanie dialogu i współpracy z publicznością. Przedstawia również wyzwania związane z wprowadzaniem koncepcji muzeum partycypacyjnego oraz jego znaczenie w kontekście kulturowym i społecznym.

Cytowanie

Kamila Krężel, „Participatory Museums in Practice. A Case Study of the National Museum in Szczecin – The Dialogue Centre Upheavals”, *Przegląd Zachodniopomorski* 39 (2024), 68: 329–347. DOI: 10.18276/pz.2024.39-12.