

Insa Müller

THE LOCAL MUSEUM IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

Rethinking Ideas, Functions,
and Practices of Local History Museums
in Rapidly Changing Diverse Communities

[transcript] → Museum

Insa Müller
The Local Museum in the Global Village

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Contents

Preface	7
Summary	9
1. Introduction: Local history museums in changing communities	11
1.1. The islands of Hitra and Frøya	13
1.2. Museum representations of local history on Hitra and Frøya	15
1.3. Lines of investigation	17
1.4. Research position – theory and practice in museum studies	19
1.5. Outline of chapters	22

Rethinking the local history museum

2. Inspiration from museum and memory studies	29
2.1. Ideas of the museum	29
2.2. Museums and communities	36
2.3. Museums and memory	43
3. The Norwegian context	59
3.1. From identity-affirmative folk museums to spaces for polylocal history	60
3.2. Ideas of the museum as expressed in Norwegian Museum policy documents (1971-2009)	68
3.3. Museum professionals' views on the museum as a 'dialogue institution'	87
3.4. Norwegian museums: relevant through dialogue?	90

Historical consciousness among Hitra and Frøya's population and the local museum

4. Memory and history, historical culture, historical consciousness and the local museum	95
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4.1. Memory and history.....	95
4.2. Historical culture	98
4.3. Historical consciousness	101
4.4. Historical consciousness in research on museums	106
5. Historical consciousness among Hitra's and Frøya's population	109
5.1. Oral history theory and methodology	109
5.2. Oral history inspires museum practice	114
5.3. Methodology.....	118
5.4. Manifold ways of relating to the (local) past: Historical consciousness among local residents in Frøya and Hitra.....	126
5.5. Three ideal types of historical consciousness	155
5.6. Three examples: Liv, Anna and Kornelius	163
5.7. Talk about museums	184
5.8. Museum practice with a focus on different types of historical consciousness: Implications for local history museums	191

An experiment in contemporary documentation

6. Documentation of labour immigrants' experiences and views of the local past and present	199
6.1. Contemporary collecting and documentation	200
6.2. Interviews in contemporary documentation	204
6.3. Dialogic interviews as a way to engage with individuals and local history during documentation processes	224
7. Concluding remarks: The local museum as facilitator of and partner in negotiations of local history, identity and belonging	229
7.1. Rethinking the idea of the local history museum.....	229
7.2. Rethinking functions of the local history museum – starting with the local community	231
7.3. Practices – dialogic documentation interviews	234
Bibliography	237

Preface

This book is based on my doctoral thesis which was defended at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in September 2018. The work on the thesis has been a long and tortuous path, and it would never have come to an end without the support and encouragement of a number of people and institutions.

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Through thick and thin, this is for you, Thomas.

Insa Müller,
Trondheim August 2020

Summary

Based on the observation that existing local history museums struggle to relate to rapidly changing, diverse local communities, this book proposes recasting these museums as institutions that actively engage with and in 'communicative memory' (Assmann), that is, unstructured but shared memories that are mainly conveyed through communication between members of local communities. It argues that a museum that documents, safeguards and conveys history through the lens of communicative memory is able to include diverse audiences and to engage members of diverse demographic communities with local history in a way that both long-time residents and newcomers to the region experience as relevant and meaningful.

The book is informed by both theoretical and empirical research. The problem definition and central terms, such as 'communicative' and 'functional' memory or 'historical consciousness', are taken from museum and memory studies and history didactics. Oral history theory and methodology has inspired the research.

The Norwegian context is introduced through an analysis of Norwegian museum policies between 1970 and 2010. In these documents, the idea of the museum's social role is promoted, and the museum is often presented as a 'dialogue institution'. A secondary analysis of museum practitioners' experiences of implementing dialogue in their daily work reveals uncertainty over how to operationalize the 'dialogue institution' in real-world museum practice.

The original empirical research consists of oral history interviews with 23 informants and a museum experiment using interviews in a contemporary documentation project. Both the oral history interviews and the experiment were conducted on the Norwegian islands of Frøya and Hitra, whose local communities have undergone fast and profound change since the early 2000s, when a booming aquaculture industry led to an influx of labour immigrants from mainly Eastern European countries. In this period, the share of non-Norwegians on the islands went from three percent to almost one quarter of the population.

The interviews reveal that residents of Hitra and Frøya today relate to the local history of the area in manifold ways. These ways of relating to local history can be conceptualized as three ideal types of historical consciousness. The extremes are either a high degree of 'continuity' (type 1) between historical events, personal

and collective memories and present-day views on the past or 'detachment' (type 3) from history (be it the local history of Frøya and Hitra or of another place), ignorance of local historical events, distancing from shared memories and general lack of interest in local history. The middle between these extreme positions marks an ideal type of relating to the local past that is called 'beginnings' (type 2). Representatives of this type are beginning to access local shared communicative and cultural memory whilst maintaining personal and family memories from another place outside Hitra or Frøya. Based on these types, the book proposes a local history museum practice that orients itself towards the second type as a means of re-connecting to its dynamic surrounding communities.

The study concludes with a summary of findings and a description of implications for practical museum work. To reach the audiences encountered in the empirical work and to support practitioners entering into dialogue with their communities, local history museums would be well served to focus on recent history; they should redefine their role as part of a 'constituent community' (van Mensch), which potentially includes all members of a local community, and they should actively engage in negotiations about history, for example by inviting previously neglected groups to become part of contemporary documentation projects.

1. Introduction: Local history museums in changing communities

Increasing mobility and migration change societies rapidly. They challenge and transform the identities of local communities, understandings of local history and the appeal and functions of local history museums. Traditional narratives of local history as the history of the place and its inhabitants no longer resonate with local community members' individual biographies or their present lives. Existing narratives of the local past offer little scope for identification for newcomers, who do not find themselves represented in the stories told about the past. For long-time residents likewise, traditional narratives of the local past offer little orientation towards a present and future they experience as changing rapidly and in unprecedented ways.

Demographic developments and changed views on local history furthermore challenge existing concepts of the local museum. Established ideas about local museums of history are closely linked to questions of group and individual identities. These museums are regarded as a resource for "knowing who you are"¹. In demographically diverse communities, museums of local history no longer offer answers to these questions, and museums thus find themselves in a situation in which "links to their community"² are dissolving. This is a serious matter, as Elisabeth Crooke

1 Macdonald, Sharon, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today* (London: Routledge 2013), 224.

2 Drawing on the major research project *Investigating the impact of small museums in their local communities* (funded by the University of Technology, Sydney; the Australian Museum; Arts NSW; and Museums Galleries NSW), Lynda Kelly draws the following conclusion concerning the value of small museums: "Generally the qualitative findings suggested that the value of local museums were the links back to community; opportunities for people to visit, including attending events; the work opportunities (both paid & unpaid) that were available; the wealth that the museum creates in the local community leading to generate money to go back to the community. Broader outcomes were also identified, such as developing an appreciation of place and culture, community pride, museums preserving heritage, and opportunities for learning across all age levels." Kelly, Lynda, "Measuring the Impact of Museums on Their Communities: The Role of the 21st Century Museum," in INTERCOM conference. Taipei, Taiwan, 2006, 3.

points out that “if a local museum is not connected with its community the rationale for the museum may come into question.”³

In sum, these observations raise questions ranging from the idea, the roles or functions of local history and museums of local history in such rapidly changing communities in general to more concrete questions concerning the practice, that is, the methods such museums apply when they work *for* and – as a growing demand for participatory⁴ museum practice implies – *with* their new diverse audiences.

To reconnect local history museums with their transformed communities, the study at hand proposes recasting these museums as institutions that actively engage *with* and *in* ‘communicative memory’ (Assmann). ‘Communicative memory’ stands for unstructured but shared memories that are mainly conveyed through communication between members of local communities. The study at hand argues that a museum that looks at its role as local history museum through the lens of communicative memory can engage members of diverse demographic communities with local history in a way that both long-time residents and newcomers to the region experience as meaningful and relevant.

Based on the idea of the local history museum as both an institution linked to communicative memory and an agent in processes of communicative memory formation, the study investigates empirically the role of local museums’ subject matter, that is the local past or local history, and the place of the local museum in the local community. Vivianne Gosselin found that in the museum field “little is known about the way museum visitor’s conception of history influences how they engage with exhibitions or historic sites.”⁵ Addressing this lacuna, I draw on the theory of historical consciousness and methodology taken from the discipline

3 Crooke, Elizabeth, “The Politics of Community Heritage: Motivations, Authority and Control,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 17.

4 Participation is an umbrella term for a variety of museum theories and practices that in sum advocate the involvement of individuals or groups from outside the museum in different levels of decision making and museum activities. Participatory strategies can include contributory, collaborative, co-creative and hosted forms of participation and inform collecting, conservation, research, programming and exhibition preparation alike. Simon, Nina, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Museum 2.0, 2010). Participatory museum practice has been critically evaluated and discussed by Bernadette Lynch. Lynch, Bernadette, *Whose Cake Is It Anyway? A Collaborative Investigation into Engagement and Participation in 12 Museums and Galleries in the UK*, Summary Report (London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2011). For a presentation and discussion of the now manifold terms used to describe the diverse ways museums work or interact with individuals and groups from outside the museum, see Bunning, Katy, Jen Kavanagh, Katey MacSweeney, and Richard Sandell, “Embedding Plurality: Exploring Participatory Practice in the Development of a New Permanent Gallery,” *Science Museum Group Journal* Spring 2015, no. 3 (2015).

5 Gosselin, Viviane, “Open to Interpretation: Mobilizing Historical Thinking in the Museum” (PhD diss., The University of British Columbia, 2011), 1.

of oral history to study the relations between individual community members and (local) history at Frøya and Hitra through qualitative interviews with long-time residents and newcomers to the islands.

Interviews with residents to the Norwegian islands of Hitra and Frøya reveal that today, members of the local communities on the islands relate to local history of the area in manifold ways. These ways of relating to local history can be conceptualized as three types of historical consciousness. The extremes are either a high degree of 'continuity' between historical events, collective and personal memories and present-day views on the past on the one hand or 'detachment' from history (be it the local history of Hitra or Frøya or of another place), ignorance of events in the local past, distancing from shared memories and general lack of interest in local history. The middle between these extreme positions marks an ideal type of relating to the local past that I call 'beginnings'. Representatives of this type are beginning to access local shared communicative and cultural memory whilst maintaining personal and family memories from another place outside Hitra or Frøya.

1.1. The islands of Hitra and Frøya

The islands of Hitra and Frøya in the region of Trøndelag in Middle Norway are perfect examples of formerly homogeneous small communities that have experienced dramatic changes in a short period of time. The face of the islands has changed from a self-sufficient fisher-farmer community to a growing highly industrialized area in which salmon farming and processing provide for jobs and prosperity.

Already during the 19th century, first attempts were made to harvest fish in Norway. However, the pioneering phase of Norwegian aquaculture was between 1945 and 1973. Hitra and Frøya hold a special position in this history, notably in terms of harvesting Atlantic salmon. From a national perspective, the most important contribution to the development of aquaculture was the development of swimming fish tanks by the Grøntvedt brothers from Hitra, which moved production from land to the sea and became characteristic of Norwegian aquaculture. Salmon harvesting commenced simultaneously on Hitra and Frøya, partly in close cooperation between individuals on both islands. To begin with, during the 1960s, fish corrals were small, and often they served as collateral income that locals continued to combine with small-scale farming. Many early fish plants were established close to their owners' homes and were operated with the help of family members. This meant that people could stay on the islands, draw on their professional expertise as fishermen and continue to earn their income locally. The emergence of aquaculture, hence, was both a continuation of cultural patterns and – as would become clear in retrospect – an industrial revolution affecting all areas of the small local communities. At that time, there were no regulations, nor was aquaculture regu-

lated through licenses. The industry grew fast, despite setbacks resulting mainly from fish disease and lack of experience. In 1978, the *Fiskeoppdretternes Salgslag AL*, FOS (Norwegian Fish Farmers Sales Association) was established with the authority to regulate marked prices for salmon in Norway. Nevertheless, during the 1980s it was still uncertain whether all the effort invested in the development of salmon harvesting would pay off. The international market collapsed in the wake of the 1980s financial crisis, and as a consequence, the 1990s were characterized by overproduction and falling prices. Despite all this, many companies survived the crisis without remarkable losses by literally putting fish on ice and selling it later. Concession acts were passed (1999) that led to radical structural changes in the line of business and increased production rates significantly, leading to overproduction once more. Overproduction, in addition to diseases among farmed fish, remains a key challenge for the industry. During the 1990s many of the original small family companies were incorporated into bigger companies that control the whole value chain. Today, Hitra and Frøya stand for a quarter of the overall concession volume of Atlantic salmon in Norway. In his description and analysis of the islands' development, Reidar Almås drew a picture of a local Frøya community with its back to the wall that, through daring innovation, managed to change the course of its history. In their history of the Hitra municipality, Sivertsen and Sæther similarly describe Hitra proudly as the cradle of "the largest technological revolution in the past century".⁶

Today, each of the islands has roughly 5000 inhabitants. In 2000, immigrants presented only 1,9 percent of the population on Hitra and 2.9 percent on Frøya. Until 2007, numbers grew slowly to 3.8 percent on Hitra and 4.0 percent on Frøya respectively. Only three years later, the percentage of immigrants had risen to over 10 percent on each of the islands. At the time the data for this study were collected, in 2013 and 2015, the number of those born in other countries or with parents who were born outside Norway⁷ grew to 18.5 percent on Hitra and 19.9 percent on Frøya. The trend persisted, in 2019, numbers were 20.75 percent for Hitra and 26.1 for Frøya.

In everyday life on Hitra and Frøya, the distinction between newcomers and long-time residents is well established and expressed in the categories of "Hitterværing" (people of Hitra) and "Frøyværing" (people of Frøya) on one side and the collective name "Eastern European labour migrants" on the other.

6 Sivertsen, Svein Inge, and Svein Bertil Sæther, *Endring. Hitra Kommune – 1964-2014* (Hitra: Forlaget Vindfang, 2014), 236. For an overview over the history of Norwegian aquaculture see: Hovland, Edgar, et al. (eds.) *Norges fiskeri- og kysthistorie Bind V: Over den leiken ville han rå. Norsk havbruksnæringens historie* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2014).

7 *Statistics Norway (Statistisk sentralbyrå)* defines immigrants as "persons born abroad of two foreign-born parents and four foreign-born grandparents" (<https://www.ssb.no/en/innvbf>; retrieved 02 February 2018).

The speed and extent of the ongoing demographic change is quite unique. The islands have changed from homogeneous to multicultural communities within a short period of time, and therefore, old community constellations – and with them ideas about the local past, local history and the role of museums of local history – have not slowly evolved and adapted to the situation, but are challenged by shifting demographics rather abruptly during the period under study. As such, the cases offer a picture rich in contrast of the encounter between well-established, traditional understandings of local history, local museums and the challenges that result from radical and ongoing change.

1.2. Museum representations of local history on Hitra and Frøya

The *Kystmuseet* (Coastal Museum of Sør-Trøndelag) is located in Fillan on the island of Hitra. The museum is a member of the museum organization *Museene i Sør-Trøndelag (MiST)* (Museums in Sør-Trøndelag)⁸ and a member of the *Norges Museumsforbund* (Norwegian Museum Association) and hence subject to national and regional museum policy.

The subject of the *Coastal Museum* is coastal culture, the recent past and contemporary documentation, and its motto is “Vi forteller historien”⁹ (“We tell the story” or “We tell history”). Even though it is a local museum covering the region of Hitra, Frøya and Snillfjord, the museum also bears national responsibility for documentation and the collection of items related to the growth and development of modern Norwegian aquaculture. The museum was given this responsibility by *Fiskeri- og Havbruksnæringens landsforening, FHL* (Norwegian Seafood Federation), *Fiskeridirektoratet* (Directorate of Fisheries) and *Fiskeri- og Kystdepartementet* (Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs).¹⁰

The museum is relatively young: it was established in 1981, moved to its current location in 1995 and opened its first exhibition in 1997. The permanent exhibition *Folket i Flatvika* (The people of Flatvika) opened in 2001, depicting life in the coastal region around 1920 with the help of dioramas staging scenes from everyday family life at Hitra. In 2003, an archaeological exhibition was opened, but closed 13 years later to make space for a new exhibition. *The Russian shipwreck* about the Russian

8 I base my description of the *Coastal museum* on Sæther, Svein Bertil, and Lene Strøm, “Kystmuseet i Sør-Trøndelag,” in *En smuk fremtid! Trøndelag Folkemuseum Sverresborg 100 År*, edited by Hanna Mellemsether, Elsa Reiersen and Petter I. Søholt (Trondheim: tapir akademisk forlag, 2009), 223-32.

9 In Norwegian, the word ‘historie’ means both ‘story’ and ‘history’. Hence, the slogan can be read as a play with words, stating that the museum tells a story and disseminates history at the same time. The double meaning is lost in the English translation.

10 Sæther and Strøm, “Kystmuseet i Sør-Trøndelag”, 227.

War ship *Jedinorog* that shipwrecked at Hitra in 1760 opened in the autumn of 2016. Besides exhibitions the museum has a modern theatre with 106 seats. The room is used for movie screenings and can be used by local volunteer groups for free. The museum also houses shifting art exhibitions in its foyer and contains the tourist information bureau for Hitra and, to a certain extent, Frøya. Besides the museum building itself, the museum also owns an open-air area at *Dolm Prestegård* (Dolm rectory). Dolm church, built during the 1400s is the only medieval building in the region, on request the *Coastal Museum* offers guided tours at Dolm rectory. Every second year, in co-operation with local volunteers, the museum stages the historical play *Maren dømt til døden* (Maren, sentenced to death), which is popular among local residents.

In 2014, the *Coastal Museum* opened a second location in a new building at the speed-boat terminal in Sandstad. Here, an exhibition on the history of aquaculture is on display. In addition, visitors can join guided group visits to a fish farm. In 2015 the *Coastal Museum* participated in the EEA-grant project *Open Heritage*¹¹ with the project *Change*, which resulted in a co-produced exhibition in Hitra and the *Astra museum* in Sibiu, Romania. As one part of the project, the development department of MiST and the *Coastal Museum of South Trøndelag* on Hitra worked together on contemporary documentation and an exhibition project focused on how working immigration has changed the island of Hitra. The perspective given precedence in the exhibition was that of newcomers to the island.

The *Coastal Museum* on Hitra is the cultural history museum for the whole region, and even has a national mandate when it comes to the history of aquaculture. There is *no* professional museum on Frøya today. This was not always the case: Frøya used to have a collection of buildings, objects, and some archives for clubs and associations (700 holdings in total, including several boats). An exhibition was created and opened to the public in 1998. Titled *Frøya gjennom tidene* (Frøya over the course of time), the exhibition spanned the time from the earliest settlements on Frøya to the time around 1980. Mainly due to a financial shortfall that resulted from the restructuring of the administrative level responsible for local museums, the museum on Frøya was gradually phased out. Today, the exhibition is languishing in the basement of the town hall in the municipality centre Sistranda.¹²

The newly established *Frøya Kultur- og kompetansesenter* (Frøya culture and competency centre), which opened in 2015, and houses among other functions a cinema

11 Open Heritage. Increased Public Accessibility to multi-ethnic heritage values in Astra Museum: <https://eeagrants.org/project-portal/project/RO12-0001> (retrieved 26 February 2018).

12 For an overview of the history of the museum on Frøya, see: Foss, Johan G., "Museum," in *Frøya Kommune 50 år (1964-2014)*. *Stolt fortid - lys framtid*, edited by Hans U. Hammer, Jorun Skarsvåg, Øyvind E. Johansen and Jan Otto Fredagsvik (Hitra: Vindfang AS, 2014) 157-62.

and a library, contains a number of depictions of local history. On screens in the entrance space, visitors to the centre can watch short clips taken from interviews with citizens of the islands sharing personal memories and information about historical events on the island, as well as digital stories about traditional food, lighthouses, nature and names of places or dialects on Frøya.

1.3. Lines of investigation

Against the background of migration, cultural diversity and the new heterogeneity in formerly homogeneous local communities like Hitra and Frøya, I ask the following overarching questions: *What is the idea of the local history museum in today's diverse communities? Which roles can small museums play in this context? In terms of practice, which methods can smaller museums of local history develop to strengthen their links to their communities again?* To answer these questions, I find it necessary to turn to the case and ask a number of subquestions: *What are the roles ascribed to the museum by official Norwegian museum policy? Which role does local history play in the lives of the people on Hitra and Frøya? And what are the implications of this for museum practice?*

The basic assumption that museums need to be aware of the local context they are part of informs my approach. The islands of Hitra and Frøya serve as a case study through which to learn more about the roles of local history and the potential roles of local museums in a given community. I consider shifting demographics, guiding ideas expressed in cultural policies and local residents' relations to local history and the past to be the most salient factors affecting small museums of local history and of high importance when it comes to rethinking the museum.

Within the context of my research, I define 'small museums of local history' as those museums that are rooted in a local or regional area and collect, preserve, and communicate predominantly the history of the region or local area. These museums are small in the sense that they are defined by limited economic resources and staff. They are, however, professionally driven as they are members both of the *International Council of Museums (ICOM)* and are part of the Norwegian museum field organized in the *Norsk Museumsforbund* (Norwegian Museum Association). As such they are partly state funded. The challenge to museums in this category is hence that they have to respond to a defined programme as expressed in public policy documents, but have to do this with all the limitations the real world entails.¹³

13 I first pointed out this challenge in the conference paper "Enaging with Members of Migrant Communities through Interviews," Paper presented at the *ICOM 24th general conference Museums and Cultural Landscapes*, CECA activities beyond the museum walls. Proceedings, edited by Cinzia Angelini, 2017, 49-53.

Even though this type of museum represents the most common type of museum in Norway, it is often ignored by museum researchers.¹⁴

In line with their larger counterparts, small regional museums need a nuanced theoretical but at the same time empirically grounded understanding of their position, role, and function in the contemporary context of history, heritage, and memory if they are to develop their self-understanding and the ways in which they work in accordance with the shifting terrain they are a part of. For this reason, I will investigate the topic from different angles that complement each other: museum studies, cultural theory and national museum politics form one angle, local residents' individual relations to the past and local history a second. Through building upon findings from these lines of investigation, I am able to examine the relations that unfold between local history, an increasingly diverse community and the museum. This multiperspectivity comes with the risk of inhibiting depth of analysis in some areas; I acknowledge this and hope this disadvantage is made up for by the variety of perspectives, which lead to innovative ways of looking at small museums of local history.

In the first line of investigation, I address the question of the idea of the museum in a rapidly changing community by taking a step back and investigating existing theory. Museum studies literature offers a number of redefinitions of the museum. I will explore four of them (the 'post-museum', the museum as 'contact zone', the idea of the museum as 'third space', and the 'active museum') for their relevance for the local history museum in a diverse community. In a second step, I will revisit theory on cultural memory and ask what this theory can tell us about the position of contemporary museums in fast-changing diverse communities. Drawing on theories of collective and cultural memory, I will identify the place of the museum as localized within the sphere of 'communicative' or 'functional memory'. Such a definition of museums of local and regional history emphasizes the recent past and present, constantly ongoing re-negotiations of history and the past, and the (potential) participation of all members of a given community.

Moving to the Norwegian context, I study Norwegian museum policy documents, employing the method of close reading to enquire which idea of the museum these documents represent. The rationale behind this choice is that even small museums are part of a national museum field and have to define and fill their role in accordance with national museum politics. Whilst the idea of the 'social role' of museums has gained recognition internationally,¹⁵ national and local

14 Gosselin and Livingstone make the same observation for the international context. Gosselin, Viviane, and Phaedra Livingstone, "Introduction: Perspectives on Museums and Historical Consciousness in Canada," in *Museums and the Past. Constructing Historical Consciousness*, edited by Viviane Gosselin and Phaedra Livingstone (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), 3-17, 4.

15 The ICOM definition of museum can serve as an indication. Since 2007, "in the service of society and its development" marks an important defining moment for museums among mu-

understandings of how to implement such a role remain. The chapter focuses on how the museum's social role is described in Norway, particularly in Norwegian cultural and museum policy documents. As I will show, the notion of the museum as a 'dialogue institution' is central to this context, but remains vague. Adding to the picture, a secondary analysis of museum professionals' answers to a survey conducted by *ICOM Norway* and *Vest-Agder Museum* reveals how Norwegian museum professionals interpret the official demand for museums as dialogue institutions. Taken together, the theoretical deliberations and these analyses offer some first answers to the question of how to rethink small local museums in changing communities.

Based on the idea of the local history museum as both an institution linked to communicative memory and an agent in processes of communicative memory, the second line of study is to investigate empirically the role local history plays for long-time residents and newcomers to the islands, and to ask about the idea, functions and practices of the local museum in this context.

1.4. Research position – theory and practice in museum studies

Although the main focus of this book is a Norwegian case, international literature will be consulted. The project builds on the idea of the socially inclusive and engaged museum¹⁶ and is inspired by work carried out by *Leicester University: Research Centre for Museums and Galleries* on the idea of the museum as a social agent. In the Scandinavian context, similar ideas on museums and heritage are advocated by *NCK – Nordisk Centrum för Kulturarvspedagogik* (The Nordic Centre of Heritage Learning and Creativity) in Östersund, Sweden.¹⁷

In Norway, questions concerning the social role of the museum have played a role in museum politics since the 1990s, and *Kulturrådet* (Arts Council Norway) established three large projects that addressed the issue by concentrating on different main points. The project *BRUDD* focused on difficult and marginalized her-

seum professionals internationally. (<http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/> retrieved 10 March 2017). During the Extraordinary General Assembly on 7 September 2019 a new museum definition was discussed, but the vote was postponed and a new Standing Committee on Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (MDPP2) was appointed for the term 2020-2022. For the time being, the current definition remains.

16 Sandell, Richard, *Museums, Society, Inequality* (London: Routledge, 2002). More recently: Sandell, Richard, and Eithne Nightingale, *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* (London, Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

17 *The Nordic Centre of Heritage Learning and Creativity* AB (Nordisk Centrum för Kulturarvspedagogikk NCK); <http://nckkultur.org/english/> (retrieved 2 February 2018).

itage and history.¹⁸ In the social role program (*samfunnsrolleprogrammet*), museum projects were undertaken during the period 2015-2017 (2018). In 2018, a new program has been initiated, dedicated to museum development projects addressing museums' social role and issues of power and responsibility.¹⁹ The social role of the museum was addressed in the annual professionals' development course *Det relevante museum* (The relevant museum) 2013-2016, a collaboration between Arts Council Norway and Museum Association Norway. Recently, ICOM Norway published a collection of articles on the issue. Furthermore, a website *Museumogsamfunn*²⁰ (museumandsociety, previously *museumsetikk* (museumethics)) collects Norwegian projects and publications on the topic. Academic literature on the subject continues to be scarce in Norway, and Kathrin Pabst's *Museumsetikk i praksis* (2016) and Bettum, Anders, Kaisa Maliniemi, and Thomas Michael Walle (eds.) *Et inkluderende museum. Kulturelt mangfold i praksis* stand out.²¹ The present study contributes to the Norwegian discussion on the social role of the museum; in addition, it is indebted to the ongoing international discourse on 'new museum ethics'.

The idea of 'new museum ethics' is based upon the conviction that museums have moral agency²² and thus can and should contribute to a more just society. 'New museum ethics' do not represent a professional code of ethics, but are a wider-reaching "dynamic social practice".²³ Janet Marstine has identified three strands

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- 18 ABM utvikling, *Brudd: Om Det Ubehagelige, Tabubelagte, Marginale, Usynlige, Kontroversielle*. Abm-Skrift 26 (Oslo: ABM-utvikling, 2006); Ramskjær, Liv, "Break! On the Unpleasant, the Marginal, the Taboos, and the Invisible or Controversial in Norwegian Museum Exhibitions," *Open Arts Journal* 3 (2014).
- 19 <http://www.kulturradet.no/museum/museumsprogrammene/vis-program/-/fakta-museumsprogram-samfunnsrolle-2018-2020> (retrieved 14 March 2018).
- 20 <http://museumogsamfunn.no/index.php/front-page-in-english/> (retrieved 14 March 2018).
- 21 Bettum, Anders, Kaisa Maliniemi, and Thomas Michael Walle (eds.), *Et inkluderende Museum. Kulturelt Mangfold i Praksis* (Trondheim: Museumsforlaget 2018).
- 22 Hilde Hein argues that museums have an 'institutional morality' and 'moral agency' and hence have both capacity and responsibility to contribute to social change. Hein, Hilde, *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 102/103. More recently, Richard Sandell and Jocelyn Dodd have argued for a view of museums as sites of 'moral activism'. Sandell, Richard, and Jocelyn Dodd, "Activist Practice," in *Re-Presenting Disability: Activism and Agency in the Museum*, edited by Richard Sandell, Jocelyn Dodd and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (London and New York: Routledge, 2010). Sandell has further studied the museum within a human rights framework in Sandell, Richard, "Museums and the Human Rights Frame," in *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*, edited by Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale (London and New York: Routledge, 2012) and Sandell, Richard, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).
- 23 Marstine, Janet, "The Contingent Nature of New Museum Ethics," in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics. Redefining Museum Ethics for the Twenty-First Century Museum*, edited by Janet Marstine (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 20.

in which ‘new museum ethics’ are practiced: ‘social responsibility’, ‘radical transparency’ and ‘ethics of guardianship’. Social responsibility relies on the attempt to develop museum practice that allows for more democratic participation and a sharing of authority and power. Radical transparency is best understood as a way of communicating with audiences that is “declarative” and “self-reflexive” as opposed to authority based.²⁴ Finally, ‘ethics of guardianship’ are particularly relevant. Marstine describes them as “a means towards respecting the dynamic, experiential and contingent quality of heritage and towards sharing in new ways the rights and responsibilities to this heritage.”²⁵ Considering the local museum as an institution commissioned with the task of (safe)guarding local history, the questions raised in my research are at their heart questions of ‘ethics of guardianship’ within the broader discussion of ‘new museum ethics’.

In addition to museum studies, I also draw on theory from disciplines that are not primarily concerned with museums. I do so to establish a research position that enables me to interrogate and extend museological perspectives. The theoretical approach is only a first step as my research interest lies in the intersection between theory and practice: what happens when theory informs and is transformed into practice in a real-world museum setting? And vice versa, how does theory help us to understand the practices unfolding in real-world museum settings? In this endeavour, I follow Rhiannon Mason, who argues that when it comes to museum studies, research that is grounded in both theory and practice is “best suited to the complexity of museums as cultural phenomena.”²⁶ Mason continues: “recognition of the importance of research to practice and vice versa will only enrich both academics’ and practitioners’ understanding of museums”.²⁷ Similar thoughts have been expressed by Sharon Macdonald, who calls for expanded museum studies which “reconnect the critical study of the museum with some of those ‘how to’ concerns that the ‘new museology’ saw itself as having superseded.”²⁸ While the breadth of the argument makes it difficult to disagree with, translating it into an understanding of the interrelatedness of theory and practice in particular research projects – and, based on such, a research design – is more problematic. I chose a problem-oriented approach, and selected theory and research methods that effectively explained the phenomenon under study.

24 Ibid., 15.

25 Ibid., 17.

26 Mason, Rhiannon, “Cultural Theory and Museum Studies,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, edited by Sharon Macdonald (Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 29.

27 Ibid., 30.

28 Macdonald, Sharon, “Expanding Museum Studies: An Introduction,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, edited by Sharon Macdonald (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 8.

The term ‘museum practice’ requires further clarification. In the present research, it refers to a comparatively broad understanding of practice. Thus museum practice does not refer to an established working method formally described for certain museum professions; instead, the understanding of museum practice underpinning the research at hand is, in Conal McCarthy’s words, that of “a messy process of modeling, planning, failures, compromises and solutions [...]”²⁹. Museum practice is also the perspective that guides the last part of the research, where I focus on the things people – that is museum employees and members of the local community – do. Brita Brenna argues the benefit of such a processual perspective, writing: “Criticism is often about analysis of finished products, seen from the outside and afterwards. A process-perspective can, in its best moments at least, seize the particular and the complex in more interesting and more pursuable ways.”³⁰ I apply a process-perspective after having conducted a theoretical and empirical investigation of the broader context. Findings from my investigation of the theoretical place of local museums in shifting communities and results from studying the historical consciousness of residents of Hitra and Frøya can be reconciled and offer a new lens through which to examine the well-established museum practice of interviews during contemporary documentation.

1.5. Outline of chapters

On the most basic level this book is organized into three parts. After the introduction, the first part (chapter 2 and 3) is about rethinking the small local history museum on a theoretical level, the second part (chapter 4 and 5) comprises an empirical study and the third part (chapter 6) presents results from an experiment in museum practice. The book ends with a conclusion that combines threads from all parts.

After the introductory chapter, chapter 2 aims at developing a theoretically inspired understanding of the particular place filled by small museums of regional and local history in the context of rapidly changing local communities. Questions

29 McCarthy, Conal, “Introduction. Grounding Museum Studies: Introducing Practice,” in *Museum Practice*, edited by Ibid., The International Handbooks of Museum Studies (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), xlv.

30 All translations from Norwegian, Danish, Swedish and German are made by the author, unless otherwise noted. Quotes in the original language are presented in footnotes. “Kritikk handler ofte om analyse av ferdige produkter, sett utenfra og i ettertid. Prosessperspektiver kan, i alle fall i sine beste stunder, gripe det partikulære og det komplekse på mer interessante og handlingsrettede måter.” Brenna, Brita, “Gjort er gjort. Universitetsmuseene post factum,” in *Universitetsmuseenes gjøren. Museologi på norsk*, edited by Marita Maurstad and Anne Marit Hauan (Trondheim: Akademika forlag, 2012), 233.

of what characterizes museums and their relations to surrounding society in general or communities in particular have occupied museum researchers for a number of years and have increasingly affected established museums since the 1990s, especially following the breakthrough of 'new museology'. I explore different contemporary positions on the idea of the museum, namely the 'post-museum', the museum as 'contact zone', the idea of the museum as a 'third space', and the 'active museum', to enrich the understanding of the institution in the present context. While the chapter does not offer a general discussion, even less a comparison of all notions, its perspective enquires into what these concepts have to offer for small local history museums in shifting communities.

In addition, the chapter provides a short overview of the way that different ideas of what constitutes museum communities have evolved and shaped the understanding of the relations between museums and communities. The chapter also presents the definition of community that guides the research at hand, that is community as "an open-ended system of communication about belonging".³¹

The chapter concludes by turning to memory studies. Here, I ask what the place of a museum of local history is in the sphere of cultural memory. I will argue that conceptualizing the museum as part of 'communicative' or 'functional memory' as elaborated by Jan and Aleida Assmann respectively calls attention to how the functions and roles of small museums change in order to adapt to constantly changing communities. The chapter ends with a presentation of what I identify as the implications that such a re-definition has for museum practice.

The third chapter starts by outlining the historical background in which ideas about museums have evolved in Norway. Based on the assumption that rethinking an institution demands an awareness of the emergence and development of the same institution, the chapter focuses on how the idea of the Scandinavian folk museum has shaped – and still shapes – peoples' expectations towards small local museums of cultural history. While these expectations rely on conformity between who is represented and who visits the museum, this relation no longer corresponds to today's multicultural communities.

The second point of interest in this chapter is local history in Norway. I make the point that local history has a strong standing and high level of academic recognition in Norway. Nevertheless, it is tied to the aim of identity stabilization and has a blind spot concerning the recent past. Both traits have contributed to local history's difficulties in acknowledging diverse communities.

The real-world context museums act within is defined by a number of fields. One of them is cultural and museum politics. Even smaller museums are part of the Norwegian museum landscape and respond to current cultural politics, which

31 Delanty, Gerard, *Community*, Key Ideas (London: Routledge, 2003), 187.

assign a 'social role' to museums. State and public institutions call upon museums to play an active role in public life and contribute positively to social justice as well as address social needs. Worldwide museums are ascribed important roles in terms of social inclusion³² and intercultural learning and dialogue.³³ In Norway, these demands are summarized in the idea of 'the social role' of the museum often presented as the idea of museums as 'dialogue institutions'. The original official document introducing the notion of the museum as dialogue institution states: "The idea of the museum as dialogue institution incorporates something basic to museums as institutions. They are actors *on behalf of* and *for the benefit of* society."³⁴ Chapter 3 offers a close reading of Norwegian policy documents for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of which idea of the museum institution is expressed in national museum politics. The notion of the 'dialogue institution' is central to this understanding and will therefore be scrutinized in detail.

Theory from museum studies and cultural studies offers renewed conceptual understandings of the position of museums in dynamic diverse communities. However, in order to render these deliberations applicable to and useful for the real-world case at hand, a better understanding of how members of the community relate to their local museums' subject matters – that is, the local past and cultural heritage without the intervention of the museum – is necessary. The fourth chapter therefore introduces the theory of historical consciousness, which will serve as the theoretical background for the interview study presenting my original research in chapter five.

Qualitative interviews with local residents in Hitra and Frøya reveal which roles the past, (local) history and museums play in the lives of individuals, both long-term residents and newcomers to the area. Insight into different types of relation to local history offers museums a more appropriate understanding of community members' dispositions concerning the museum's subject matter than predefined categories reliant on national, social or other parameters. I therefore develop a model of three types of historical consciousness to systematize my findings and to further illustrate differences between various ways of relating to local history.

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- 32 Sandell, Richard, "Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 17, no. 4 (1998); Sandell, Richard, "Museums and the Combating of Social Inequality. Roles, Responsibilities, Resistance," in *Museums, Society, Inequality* edited by Richard Sandell (London: Routledge, 2002); Sandell, Richard, "Social Inclusion, the Museum and the Dynamics of Sectoral Change," *Museum and Society* 1, no. 1 (2003).
- 33 Bodo, Simona, Kirsten Gibbs, and Margherita Sani, eds., *Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue: Selected Practices from Europe* (MAP for ID, 2009); Bodo, Simona, "Museums as Intercultural Spaces," in *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*, edited by Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).
- 34 Norwegian Official Report (1996: 7) *Museum. Diversity, Memory, Meeting Place*, Oslo: Ministry of Culture, 40. (Italics in original).

Having gained a more nuanced understanding of the complex relations between residents and local history, I turn to the museum and ask what informants say about museums, what their experiences, attitudes, ideas and wishes concerning museums are.

The final section of the chapter combines findings from the interview analysis and suggests implications for small local history museums in dynamic communities. In my presentation of findings, I devote much space to original quotes from the interviews; this is a deliberate choice that stems from my goal to give a voice to those individuals who have seldom been heard within the museum studies conversation about the contents, purposes and roles of museums.

Based on the findings from the previous chapters, chapter 6 turns to real-world museum practice. Here, I present my analysis of an experimental approach to conducting interviews for the purpose of contemporary documentation. Building on my analysis of the interviews with labour immigrants that were conducted as part of the *Change* project, I argue that if slight modifications are made to how museum professionals conduct interviews for documentation purposes, these encounters can allow communication about local history to take place. As a consequence, interviews have potential to facilitate communication about history, identity and belonging in line with the theoretical idea of the museum as a place and actor in communicative memory.