Meaning Making During A Pandemic

A new course on Digital Storytelling

Episode 3:

The digested read by
Azam Masoumzadeh

Accessibility

This online program is hosted by:

Andrea Geipel

Abhay Adhikari

Guest speaker
Alastair Somerville

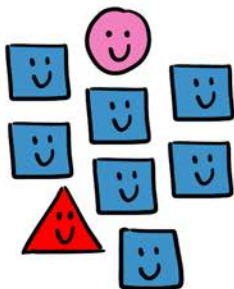Our digital producer is
Jenni Mueller

In episode 3, Abhay talked about accessibility

I'm interested in how we enable minority communities to access culture. That's one of the topics we are going to discuss today

I often work with teams who are trying really hard to engage the so-called - hard to reach - communities
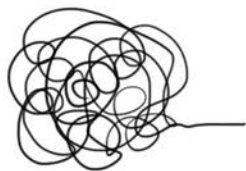
But at the same time, I find there is often a lack of diversity within cultural institutions. It's a challenge that we have to address!

So our first discussion of the session was, what do our participants think of "**hard to reach communities**" Are they:

A myth?

A problem?

An opportunity?

And as always we received some interesting responses

Markus

"I personally have a problem with the phrase "hard to reach" because it seems that it's their problem. Whereas, it is our problem. We don't know how to reach them

Andrea

Lack of diversity is indeed an issue. A lot of our visitors fall into one demographic. For example, in our VR lab, we designed a questionnaire that was answered by our visitors and I just remember that almost everyone graduated from university!

Abhay

If we are expanding our definition of hard to reach communities, can we include young people? Is it fair to say, some of them are bored to death of museums?

Continuing the theme of accessibility, our next question was on the rules of engagement. So we asked our participants:

What does it mean to learn the **rules of engagement** of a community they haven't engaged with previously?

Are they:

Starting a movement

Building a bridge

Giving a voice

Andrea: I think it's giving the community a voice. And in the process you get new ideas and inspiration from the people you are hearing from

Azam: Giving the community a voice can be a powerful step. Why should we always be the narrator?

Andrea: "We ran an experiment inside the museum once, where we asked our colleagues to write a blog post on our behalf. It was very interesting to see their highlights

Abhay: What if we extend that idea further. Maybe we can also reference other voices instead of always speaking from an institutional perspective

Azam: Yes, why don't we join existing movements and giving them a platform? We don't have to start from scratch when we can

Our guest speaker for this episode was **Alastair Somerville**

I believe in accessibility for all – making places and information comprehensible by people, whatever their physical or cognitive capacities are

Museums can be complex spaces for disabled visitors as everything has many layers of meaning attached to it

Making museums accessible for disabled visitors is all about finding the balance between giving information but at the time, not abusing the narrative by overloading it

Let's consider a painting

I can't undrestand anything

The starry night vincent van Gogh

If we offer the bare minimum – the name of the artist and the title – what would an unsighted person get from that? Well, nothing

This painting

Now let's say, we describe everything in the painting. All the elements as well as the concept

Then we prevent the disabled person from having a sensory experience that is unique to them. We are telling them what to think

The thing is, information is everywhere, what we need is meaningful content

I wish we were more meaningfull

Me too
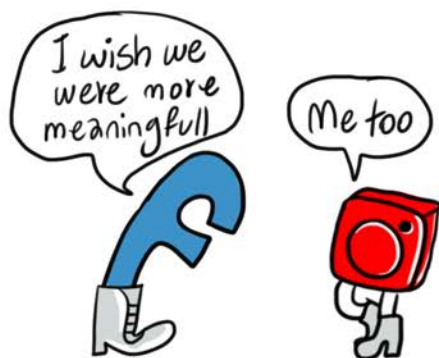
And information is not meaning!

So, an audio description to explain the piece does not necessarily allow the visitor to have a human experience of the work

We need to offer them the space to create their own meaning

Thank you to everyone who participated in
Episode 3 of Season 1
of Meaning Making During a Pandemic

Thank
you

Illustrated by: Azam Masoumzadeh