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Artistic research on two galleries in periphery

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on examining art activities on two small sites in Estonia. The purpose is to identify in which matters art world would be useful for local communities. Towns called Paldiski and Haapsalu have different histories but in both are existing local art institutions. In Paldiski is locating Amandus Adamson' Studio Museum Gallery and in Haapsalu is Haapsalu City Gallery and was Jaani Gallery. While Haapsalu is a bit bigger town than Paldiski, then Haapsalu City Gallery tends to be more in center of attention than A. Adamson' Studio Museum Gallery. It is because Haapsalu City Gallery is a space where have been happened numerous artist activities in long time whereas in A. Adamson' Studio Museum has been presented only few summer activities. On this paper will be reflected artist experience in both towns. Three art projects that were made lately in these institutions are showing boundaries between artists initiatives and people from small town everyday activities. The aim is to find out whether the concept, one works on to communicate local community do affect locals? Research would be applicable especially for attending local problematics such as not fine living space or people worry because of prioritized industry in town.

Why some artistic strategies would fit better to small sites

In describing two small sites in Estonia, my aim is to understand, why some artists activities have more effect on the peripheral site and are more appreciated by local community than the other ones. In each of the towns, in Paldiski and in Haapsalu are locating art galleries. I made in 2015 with Triin Tarv in Haapsalu Jaani Gallery an exhibition with the title "Our World's Future" and also made in 2016 my personal exhibition in another gallery namely Haapsalu City Gallery with title "Swerve like the refugee!". In Paldiski I made in 2014 my personal exhibition in Amandus Adamson' Studio Museum with title "Peace in Paldiski". In Paldiski example I describe also curatorial strategy which I was using by working recently in Amandus Adamson' Studio Museum as a project manager.

Historical explanations by introducing local community problematics and situation tends to be more sympathetic to the average gallery visitor, who lives in a small town and who has relatively less connections and experience in visiting art galleries that are in some bigger

town. These people from the small town like Paldiski or Haapsalu usually attend less different kinds of exhibitions and do not be aware of the purposes and matters on which artists are working because these may carry for them certain symbolic meaning. They may rarely go in professional gallery in some bigger town than is for example their home town such as Paldiski or Haapsalu.

These two galleries in peripheral towns allowed next question to be asked: What would be taken as a priority in small site to make an exhibition, according to purely selfish interests, to have simply a working project to be done? This research presents a line of thought that emerges as an answer to this question. Finding out some reasons to make ones own exhibition may be seen as well unselfish but wish centered thinking. It is laying on practitioner hope that while doing creative work in some other place than it is usual, then it gives some opportunity to get in touch with the place and the people who are living there. In focusing on communication abilities for practicing certain social art strategy, I presupposed they were environments, non protective spaces in which a lot of things could happen. My main interest in doing my exhibitions in Amandus Adamson' Studio Museum Gallery and in Haapsalu Jaani Gallery is lays on my willingness to understand main characteristics of these sites, for considering with the help of some example descriptions, how artists may affect local people everyday lives.

Exhibitions, I made in these galleries, I was concerning on various topics such as news about crisis abroad, dreams of the individuals and integration problematics in Estonia. I focused on those issues and was making several paintings, photographic images and some installations. It allows in current artistic research me as an artist to consider in which matter one as an author is able to develop ones individual artistic approach having better understanding of people lives in small town. Exhibitions exposed the unspoken conditions, we face in making art in the small site such as Paldiski or Haapsalu. To make a research that possibly involves art practice, one has to be aware of some features that art making in small town may be insisting as some sort of customs. Firstly, exploration of the new territory may become as a naive understanding of the locals everyday life and troubles. Explorer in such case may be also as a guest artist visiting the town, wonders in the first moment how surprising is to explore new and not well known place. Locals everyday life may seem to be hidden but clear to be said some simple explanation. But because one has to look deeper in some sense awkward situation in its complexity consisted of small but important details. Secondly, information that one may be able to describe is site specific that could not be easily generalized. It needs some effort and time to write it down or announce a concept that not only describes the situation but gives some meaning to the practice that would be used as an artistic research. Otherwise one cannot say much about the exact case at hand in comparison with other such kind of cases in other contexts and situations.

“Not everyone can enter, and not everyone who enters can proceed. These are no transparent checks and balances on how decisions over the transmission of knowledge and skills are made. Moreover, the community is potentially hermetic and in no transparent way accountable to anything outside itself.” (Hannula, Suoranta, Vadén, 2014)

Making any decision of the methodological purpose for handling some situation in order to communicate experience of facing it, is making it possible to build up certain knowledge for moving forward with the ideas to put them into practice. To communicate with the public,

artist would send out some signals. Visual imagery, if carefully modified and addressed, these may educate also those people, who are not fully informed about the background of exposed art pieces or do not know much about general context of the art world. I suppose that such imagery as visual information, as it has traditional qualities that involve common ways for communicating. It would allow a viewer from peripheral site to get some educative experience for making decisions about certain cultural meaning and its implications. Knowledge on that educative manner includes basic ideas, based on hints, how to read visual images, to build up generalizations and understanding of the cultural forms as Edmund Husserl sees it (Husserl, 1962). It would be a purpose to affect viewer so that takes into use ones own ability to reflect on which one is able to understand and experience. Main idea for cultivating such practices insists at least active artistic attitude to make further decisions according to objectifying reflection. These understandings may give possibilities to have good consequences for serving local community needs to adopt artists site specific activities. The attitude of sociology toward rational choice has been ambivalent. If one has to choose between joining with some social activities or making ones life in other ways interesting in not attending any event or in not visiting any exhibition, it may create temporal difficulties in making rational decision. Even in small site possible choices are sometimes few enough that it may be big worry. The problem with corrections and adaptations of rational choice is that they create new problems. So if there is only one or two possibilities for planning ones day, then it is even not the freedom for choosing but letting things to be in a fantasy and ones creativity may become more in focus as well. In that way people who live in town, but there something happens, may seem to be not interesting that pushes the one to come out from the safe and sound home. This way of thinking may give some relaxation moments for using ones creativity in just fantasizing on matter. There is two examples which are showing how artist as an author of the exhibition and gallery visitor may meet in some relatively small site as equal partners to resolve each troubles together.

Paldiski and Amandus Adamson' Studio Museum

Before Estonian independence time Pakri Peninsula was used as a soviet military zone. It was closed area for ordinary citizens and a Red Army base was located in Paldiski town. Paldiski has a port with enough deep bottom of the sea for military ships and ocean ships to come in to port.

While the whole peninsula was used by military only, there is now a quite green zone. After soviet time collapse the nature protection was created. But in soviet time when it was closed for everyone else but the military, sadly the ground was polluted by militants. Many efforts are made by Estonian government to clean up the ground: oil, chemicals and waste are collected over time so that now the whole environment is much more green and saved.

While Paldiski was closed military base in Soviet time, there is no any culture tradition here or culture institution from that time. But Paldiski was hometown for famous Estonian artist Amandus Adamson and his wooden studio house is still existing, there is at least one museum today.

In Paldiski locates Amandus Adamson' Studio Museum in which I have worked one and half year as a project manager. Amandus Adamson was one of the first Estonian native

professional and was famous especially in countries that are governed by Russian tzars. Issues of cultural identity was a crucial turning point in Paldiski that makes the towns to be interesting for most of the Estonian people.

His studio museum became a subsidiary of the Harju County Museum – the Amandus Adamson' Studio Museum. The house that has been renovated with the support of the European Union, is welcoming guests as a museum as of 13 November 2010. In Paldiski Amandus Adamson' Studio Museum I worked as project manager approximately one and half year.

One of the museum buildings is made to be a gallery space. This building is not heated, so that there is possible to run exhibition period only during summer time. There has been tradition to give for some artists opportunity to have exhibitions during the three months time period: from June until August. In time, I was working in that museum, I was started exhibition period even before. Exhibition period is beginning in April and closing the session was in the end of October. Each exhibition duration was one whole month. There were 7 exhibitions altogether in the year 2015. I thought about each artist and how they wanted each work to be put in relation to the audience. Exhibitions announced to be happen in non well heated gallery space. It was not actually official gallery because the gallery building is locating on Studio Museum territory and therefore it is part of the museum actually. For artists gallery space has no rent for making exhibition but since the gallery space is part of museum, visitors may enter to the gallery only with museum ticket. This is sad because Paldiski is only a small town with the few population. Such a gallery may not be under attention at least in Paldiski since regular museum ticket applied to visit the gallery exhibition. Only few people are wanting to visit exhibition with the museum ticket because usually galleries in Estonia are with the free entrance.

Exhibitions in year 2015 with their various topics were mostly made in using gallery room with its limestone walls and floor. Some of the artists, for example Kadri Toom or Kristino Rav together with Juha Hiplas made site-specific art, in keeping in mind Paldiski as a town with it's intriguing history. Artist took Paldiski as their exhibition main interest while planning the artworks if they had their own will to do so. While all the expenses that artists needed to make an exhibitions had to be covered themselves and find support to projects, than in my view, it was not possible to apply anything mandatory to my curatorial vision. Therefore, I left conditions to be open, so that artist had possibility to choose between to make an exhibition that would be based on ones own artistic production or to take Paldiski town site specific problematics into account, while they prepared for the exhibitions.

Haapsalu Jaani Gallery

Haapsalu Jaani Gallery has been a pop-up gallery which was grounded by local community namely "Creative Center" in an empty old wooden house in the Haapsalu old down. The house was given into use by city council to the self-organizing creative community in 2011. Lot of work has been done by Creative Center members in the house by emptying house from trash and preparing it for the public use. There has been done in 5 years summer activities as artists exhibitions and artist workshops. But in 2016 suddenly Haapsalu City council decided to investigate and to renovate the house and giving rooms to Haapsalu Art School. Creative

Center community which purpose is to develop local artists activities in town, as well as Haapsalu Art School, are supported by Haapsalu City council. City council decided to take the house away from creativity organization without sharing information before the decision was made. In my opinion this case is one of those examples in which politics in power took advantage from artists and volunteers as some sort of precariacy (Standing, 2011). In Haapsalu town has been dominated by liberals for long time and that has been changing the whole atmosphere in town. Artistic activities have never been taken as a priority of the Haapsalu towns future visions and support for artists activities have gradually cut down year by year.

The Jaani Gallery closed in year 2016 and local creative community organization lost its rooms that they needed for developing or planning their activities. Haapsalu town has also one professional gallery called Haapsalu City Gallery that has its annual program opened to all kinds of artistic and curatorial projects.

It may mean that Haapsalu is relatively small town enough to support one gallery and art school but not any more artistic activities could not be as the interests of local organizations. Haapsalu City Gallery has long tradition and it is well known professional gallery that is switched into Estonian Galleries general network. Its purpose is to serve all kinds of artists activities that come from Estonia and from other countries. Art scene in larger scale is truly getting to be international at least in cases that include professional collaborative moments.

Conclusion

Research has concerned about the possibilities in small sites that is emerging as the new cultural events and changes everyday reality as such. Presenting different views that are shared in the local community may exhibit relational characteristics for showing its social interaction and movements. By examining the past and present of the town, artists are not fully aware of the problematics in which local people are interested in the most. Artists concepts and talk is perceived as the new thinking that would change peoples mind. If artistic concept is spoken with feel of the sympathy, it may cause some gallery visitors to listen to different kind on interpretations and start to analyze what is happening in culture generally. I claim that gallery visitor have possibility to be part of different contexts of the contemporary world even though the town in which one lives may be mono functional type.

Because Haapsalu is in one way touristic town, more advertisement is spread among people from outside of the town. It makes Haapsalu to be more attractive than in Paldiski that has troubles to resolve even on basic communal level. Whole town situation makes all issues that might be raised up by artists to be non complex type or perhaps have even taken as raw because Paldiski town for example is simply a kind of low quality living space for people who live there. Comparing Paldiski with Haapsalu may be said that Paldiski even it is three times smaller town, needs more culturally active artists who purely on their own interest are making it possible to share some knowledge about the situation in town. Contrary Haapsalu has enough population that makes it possible to keep under attention even one professional gallery but where is not enough those activities that would live up culture oriented activity groups who keep such activities to become professional in the longer time period. While Paldiski has a museum namely A. Adamson' Studio Museum which is only one culture

institution in town, it may be possibly well situation enough for individual artists to enhance their visions and ideas about the concept how live on some small site. But there should be clearly distinguishing between a tool and the user of the tool, between instrument and agent. This may be good analysis to be taken into consideration while organizing art events and educating locals to understand contemporary art better.

References

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