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# **Urban Museum**

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# Design Project

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**The Urban Museum is looking at the current situation in the fields of interior architecture and museology. The aim is to open up a new way to interact with the public for a more democratic approach by strengthening social interactions outside the museum walls. This project is also challenging the hierarchy of curatorial practices through collaboration.**

# Learning Outcomes

I define placemaking in my project as both creating new collaborative narratives and designing a physical space in a public place. These two elements together make an Urban Museum. In order to put it into context, I have to have a bigger understanding of both the concepts of the urban space and the museology.

Jan Gehl is dividing outdoor activities in public space into three categories, each of which places very different demands on the physical environment: necessary activities, optional activities, and social activities. Optional activities are something that you can decide to partake in and it does not require anybody else to be involved, e.g. sitting on a park bench and enjoying life. Social activities are something that depends on other people being around in the public spaces, e.g. children playing in the park (Gehl, J. *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*. 1971). In my project, I focus mostly on the optional and social activities category that will enrich our sense of belonging in cities.

The modernist idea of exhibition space is a generic white cube, where the things make space happen instead of being a space where the things happen. The spectator is invited into space only to perceive and not to be part of it (O'Doherty, B. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. 1986). What I am suggesting is actually the opposite of the white cube concept where the spectator changes its role from a viewer to a participant. There is a difference between gallery space and museums, but they are both part of the lifelong learning environments. O'Doherty also explains how the white box is conceived as a place free of context, but it is a historical construct where the hierarchy is always present. I am aiming to create inclusive collaborative practice, where the actions are beneficial to all the participants.

As the project developed, I defined my part as a designer. My role as a facilitator is to provide a structure of the art program and the face of urban furniture. Throughout sketching, I learned that it is useful to create a modular system that can be applied in different urban environments based on the size of the free area.

The project's framework is based heavily on my objectives. One of them is breaking through the walls of museums and the other one is the hierarchy of curatorial practices. I am using designerly tools such as storytelling and illustrations to create scenarios that reflect upon the chosen criteria. This is a part of the presentation of the design project. Another great learning tool for me has been a sketchbook that has shown me the thinking process. I tried to balance my time doing research, coming up with conclusions and implementing the outcomes to the final design. I have been going back and forth many times and during that, I have learned that the project is everchanging. As a designer, it is important to be open-minded and critical towards new ideas at the same time. Making final decisions is not my biggest strength personally, but this is something that I have to improve in order to finish the work in a timely manner.

The novelty of the project lies in the collaborative practice that is created by using social interaction as a tool between diverse groups of people and the museums.

# Aims & Intentions

Briefly, the act of sharing knowledge in museums happens through various exhibitions. They use exhibiting as a tool to curate and tell a continuous story. What we often do not think about is that there is more behind the museum walls that we do not see nor think about. The importance of the museum as a learning environment is to collect, preserve, interpret, and display objects that hold significance for the education of the public. It can either have an artistic, cultural, or scientific value. What all the museums have in common is the collection that has to be preserved in suitable conditions. Museums have a responsibility to add relevant new objects to the collection and have all documentation in place. Besides all that, they are actively seeking and gaining new insights in their respective fields by researching. As a cultural institution, they also have a role in the education of future generations that can be achieved through exhibiting.

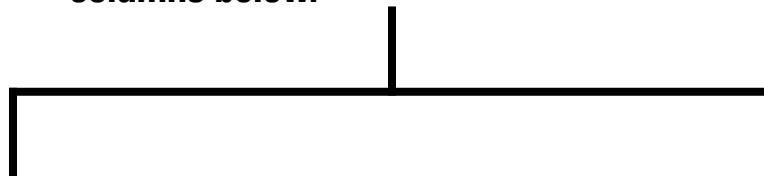
In the typical museum, there is a hierarchical organisational model that is led by different departments. One of their missions is to interact with the public and I propose that they will gain further knowledge by flattening their power structure and using more collaborative practices. Through doing that will generate new democratic views that are serving both the public and the museums.

My aim is to broaden the idea of future museum concepts in the urban environment. What I am missing are the social interactions happening between the public and cultural institutions. These days museums are focusing on digital platforms by making their online presence stronger and reaching out to visitors. Another way of breaking through the walls of traditional museums is by having a satellite program in various locations in the city. In the Urban Museum project, I foster the satellite concept further by engaging a diverse group of people in collaborative practices. The fact how COVID-19 has affected our current situation has enhanced the importance of the Urban Museum project. It is a placemaking project that takes place on the grounds of Oslo.

One of my intentions is to create a physical framework of breaking through the walls of museums in order to promote a collaborative design solution where citizens are invited to be part of the education in urban environments by sharing their individual stories. I believe that everyone should have access to be part of creating the city as an active member of the community. These days most of the museums are supported by the government, but the entrance fee is not affordable to everyone which means that not everyone is welcome. That is why it is important to develop accessible environments that are formed by a democratic approach and are open to optional activities outside the white cube.

# Objectives

**As a designer, it is important for me to be able to address the issues that museums are facing already today and will continue to face in the post-pandemic world. Their communication strategies are influenced heavily by our digital culture, but it is not the only way to diversify the visitors and activities. The project Urban Museum is exploring creative social and physical narratives in an urban space. It is a concept that is based on the following values that are reflected upon in the columns below.**



## **Breaking through the walls of museums**

My idea is to bring the museums closer to the people in a public space. The virtual exhibitions are unfortunately not as engaging as having a museum experience and while the museums are closed for one reason or another, there could be an alternative environment outside the museum building.

The information is meant to be shared and accessible for everyone, even without entering the museum building. The exhibition topics are creating a contemporary dialogue with the museums and are building a connection to the surroundings. This project is strengthening the sense of belonging by constructing new narratives by the visitors themselves in the city landscape.

## **Challenging hierarchy of curatorial practices**

The visitor's experience is mostly curated by the museums. They can improve their knowledge by opening up existing hierarchies. A way of doing it is to consider new channels to collaborate with the public that will also widen the museum's views.

Traditionally, there is one-way communication happening and I am challenging that by creating an art program surrounded by urban furniture that is accessible for all the citizens. The citizens themselves can be in the participatory system and experience the collaborative curatorial practice by sharing individual stories.

# Synopsis

I am dividing my process into three parts that have been valuable for the project.

## **Researching about the wider topic of museums and the digital culture**

I started this project by looking into the tasks of museums. Traditionally museums have a role as a learning environment and these days museums are also seen as meeting places.

## **Doing the case studies on three art museums in Oslo**

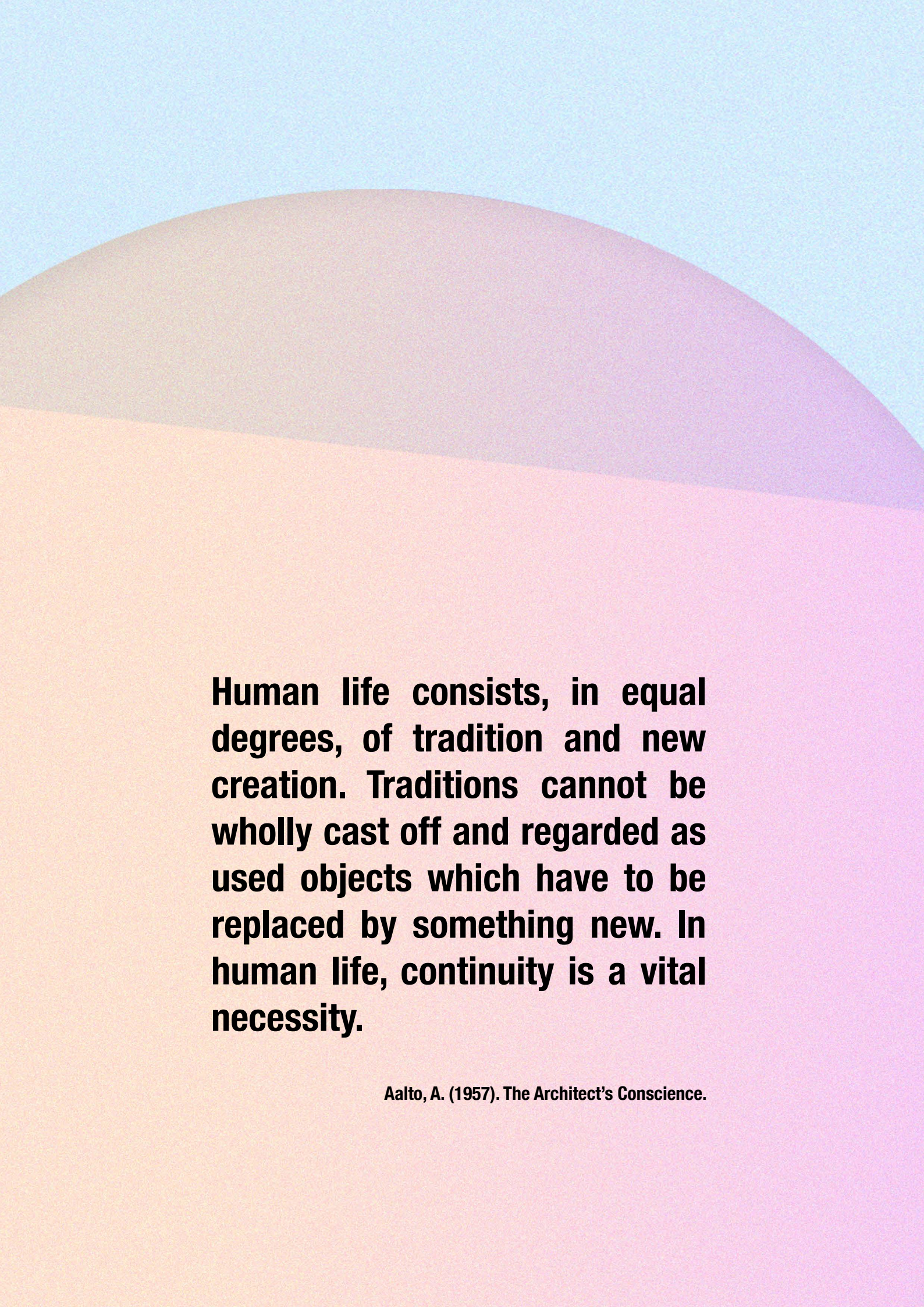
Within this segment, I was also interviewing an art technician at the Munch Museum that gave me an insight into working at the museum. I have not worked in a museum myself and therefore needed an understanding of what happens inside the museum from someone else.

## **Conducting a pilot project at KHiO vitrine gallery**

Doing the pilot project has helped me to understand and set my own criteria for the project.

Under the visual material, there are sketches, visuals and models. In order to think spatially, I made some models on a scale of 1:10 using foam board. I assembled a material board that will show the materials that are used for the urban furniture. I ended up making a modular system that can be applied in various environments for a number of activities. It can be used as an exhibition space, a playground, a performance area, a meeting place, a viewpoint and an outdoor seating area. All the possibilities are also visualised on the Urban Museum activity poster. In order to explain the visitors' journey and the participatory system, I used the tools such as storytelling, illustrations and mind maps. My sketchbook has helped me throughout my journey. It is necessary for me to think through the pen and write down the keywords that help to ideate, draw and reflect.





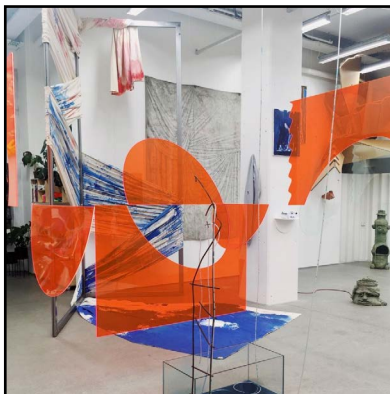
**Human life consists, in equal degrees, of tradition and new creation. Traditions cannot be wholly cast off and regarded as used objects which have to be replaced by something new. In human life, continuity is a vital necessity.**

**Aalto, A. (1957). The Architect's Conscience.**

# Why museums matter?

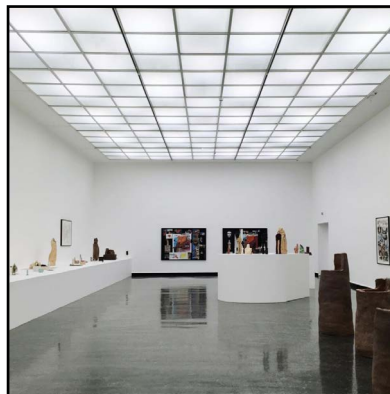
## The social reasons

There are many aspects of the museums. They are valuable cultural institutions and learning environments that have tasks such as collecting, preserving, interpreting, and displaying the objects. Besides all that sharing the information and generating the knowledge. Museums are also considered social spaces. Traditionally the museums were like classrooms or places for education, but these days they are more seen as a meeting place.



**A place for creativity, knowledge, history, and life-long learning**

Museums always offer a versatile program such as education programs, art tours, film screenings, artist talks, and even late-night gatherings.



**A place for encouraging individuals to think beyond their own personal experiences**

Museums have mastered the ability to interact with diverse groups, both culturally and demographically.



**A place for creating a mutual understanding of the human experience**

Museums also provide a platform for understanding a variety of topics. They transport us to different places and help us experience different cultures and times.

# How do we interact in museums?

## Museums communicate to the users

- Showing the collection both in virtual and in physical space
- Self-guided audio tours
- Written information about the collection
- Sharing the stories about behind the scenes moments
- Creating events such as artist talks and film screenings
- Strict museum etiquette rules

## Museums interact with the users

- Both indoor and outdoor guided tours
- Asking questions and reaching out on social media
- Creating experiences for the membership owners
- Surveys and possibility to give feedback
- Quizzes and adventure games while visiting the museum
- Hosting Q&A events

## Users connect with the objects in the collection

- Engaging with the objects in true 1:1 scale
- Looking up the information about the current exhibition
- Finding the objects on digital collection
- Reading the provided information and beyond that
- Broadening the knowledge about the topic
- Buying merch from the museum shop or online shop

## Users engage with other users

- Participating in the workshops and discussion groups
- Co-creation project space or museum lab
- Outdoor activities and tours
- Membership benefits
- Sharing photos on social media

**A digital culture is a concept that describes how technology and the internet are shaping the way that we interact as humans. It's the way that we behave, think and communicate within society.**

**d'Arnault, C. (2015). What is Digital Culture?**

# The selected history of digital culture and how did we get here where we are today?

## **early 1990s / WWW and GSM**

World Wide Web or the internet as we know it today and the first generation analogue cellular network.

## **2001 / Wikipedia**

Wikipedia is an open-collaborative online encyclopedia created and maintained by a community of volunteer contributors. During that time the digitalization began also in other areas, such as collections in museums.

## **2004 / Social Networks**

Skype, Facebook, MySpace, Instagram and Youtube became important channels of social networks and communication.

## **2011 / Google Arts & Culture**

This is an online platform where the public can view high-resolution images and videos of artworks and cultural artefacts from partner cultural organizations.

## **2018 / Mori Building Digital Art Museum**

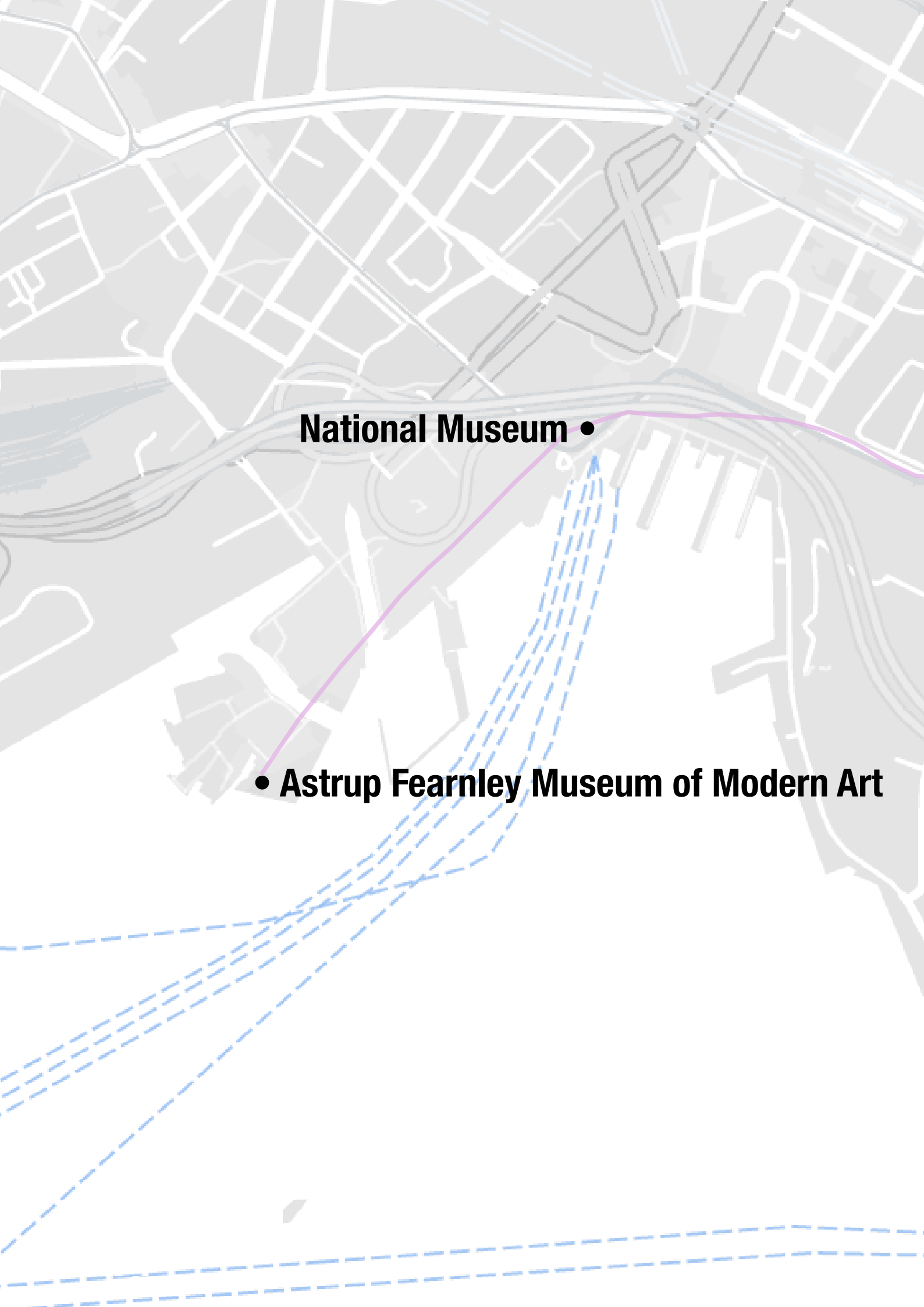
TeamLab Borderless is the world's first digital art museum in physical space was set up in Tokyo.

## **2020 / Significant Rise of Online Exhibitions**

Museums are using virtual platforms to reach out to their visitors during the pandemic.

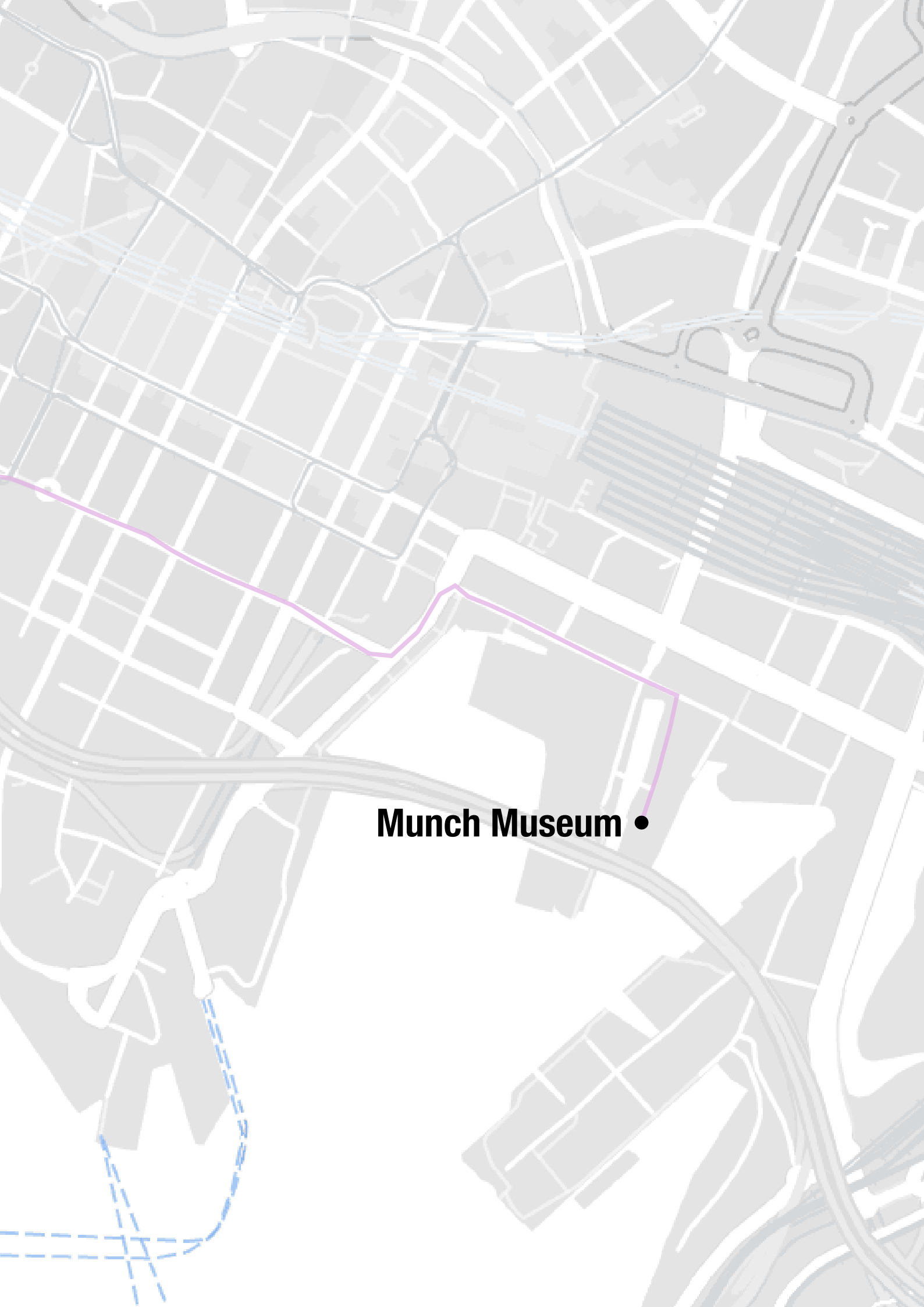
## **From the digital to the physical space**

Nowadays we see a lot of museums interacting with the public through various digital platforms, but what can be done in a physical space?



**National Museum •**

**• Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art**



**Munch Museum •**

# Case studies: Exploring the current formats

## The observations based on the case studies

We can see that the online exhibitions have been in focus especially during the last years, but it never offers the same experience as going to the museums usually does. When the first digitalization of the museums started, then people were worried that museums will disappear, but that is not happening. In my interview with the art technician Enrique Roura Perez, he said that the Munch Museum has been improving its online presence and virtual strategy within time. When the pandemic hit, they started live-streaming the painting called *Scream*, which didn't make sense since the painting wasn't a moving object, to begin with. The outtakes of the interview are in the Appendix section.

### Case Study 1: Digital collection

- + Accessible and free for everybody
- + Open at all times
- Lack of understanding of the scale and the materiality of the artworks

### Case Study 2: Moving Munch

- + Inviting visitors to see behind the scenes of museum work
- + Satellite programs both in Oslo and Bergen
- + Innovative approach
- + Reaching to the public through an audiovisual method
- Not reaching out to the wider audience

### Case Study 3: Tjuvholmen sculpture park

- + An outdoor activity
- + Accessible and free for everybody
- + Open at all times
- Lack of interest in the sculptures by the visitors
- No program around the artworks

### Conclusion:

Where are engaging art programs that are actively serving the community? How about a participatory system and a shared curatorial practice?

How to reach out to the local diversified visitors instead of a very small targeted group?

It is valuable to see artworks in a spatial context when it comes to understanding the scale and the size of the object. Also, it is important to engage with the surroundings.



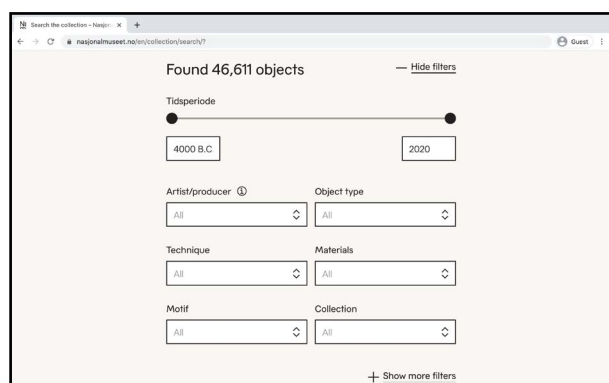
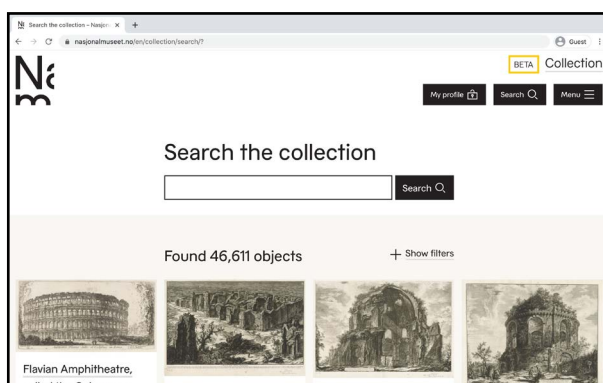
# The National Museum

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## Case Study 1: Digital collection

The National Museum has the biggest digital collection in the whole of Norway. Currently, it consists of 46 611 objects. They are planning to open in 2022 when they will finish the new building. Visitor can find their favourites and make their own collections in order to share with friends and family.

The digital collection is easy to access and use. You can use the filters in order to look for a specific artist, technique, material, object type, collection motif or time period. It has become quite a traditional part of the museums already and it is not considered a new format anymore. It does work in a way that the online visitor gets to see the image in a high resolution, but the visitor doesn't have access to see them in space. That means quite often that the visitor can zoom in and out on artwork, but doesn't know about the size or a scale in a spatial context.

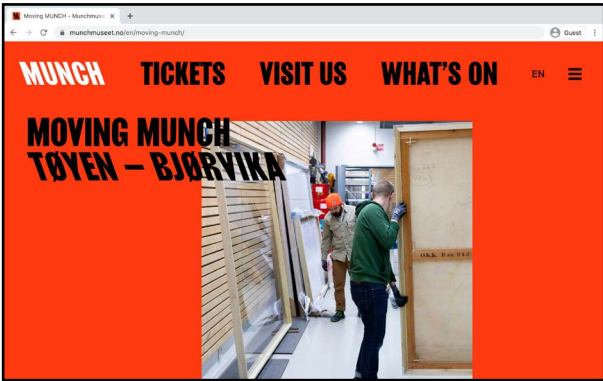
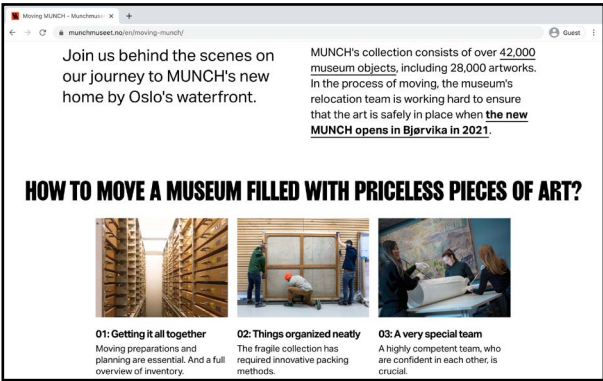


# The Munch Museum

## Case Study 2: Moving Munch

The Munch Museum is showing us three short episodes of behind the scenes on their journey from their old location in Tøyen into their new location Bjørvika. They have a huge collection from Edvard Munch's original artworks to his personal items such as paint tubes and his sister's wicker chair.

Although they have been moving for some years now, they never closed completely down for the public. The Munch museum created a series of satellite programs, so you could follow the exhibitions around Oslo and Bergen. By doing that, they give a visitor an unlike look into their world of Munch. They are planning to open the new building to the public in the summer of 2021, but it is still unclear if they are able to do it fully.

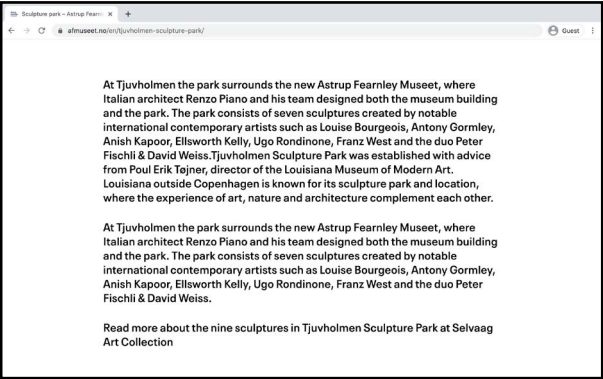
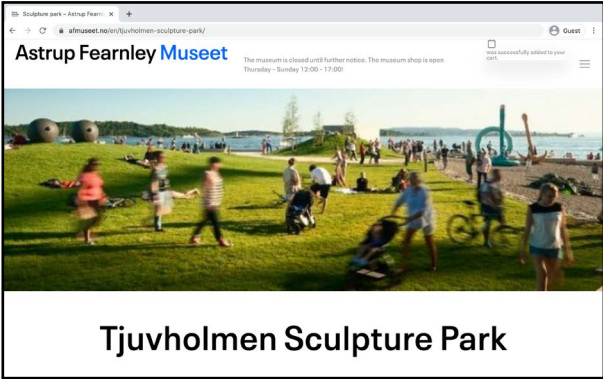


# The Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art

### Case Study 3: Tjuvholmen sculpture park

Both the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art and the Tjuvholmen Sculpture Park were designed by Renzo Piano and his team. It was established with advice from Poul Erik Tøjner, director of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. Louisiana is known for its sculpture park and location, where the experience of art, nature and architecture complement each other.

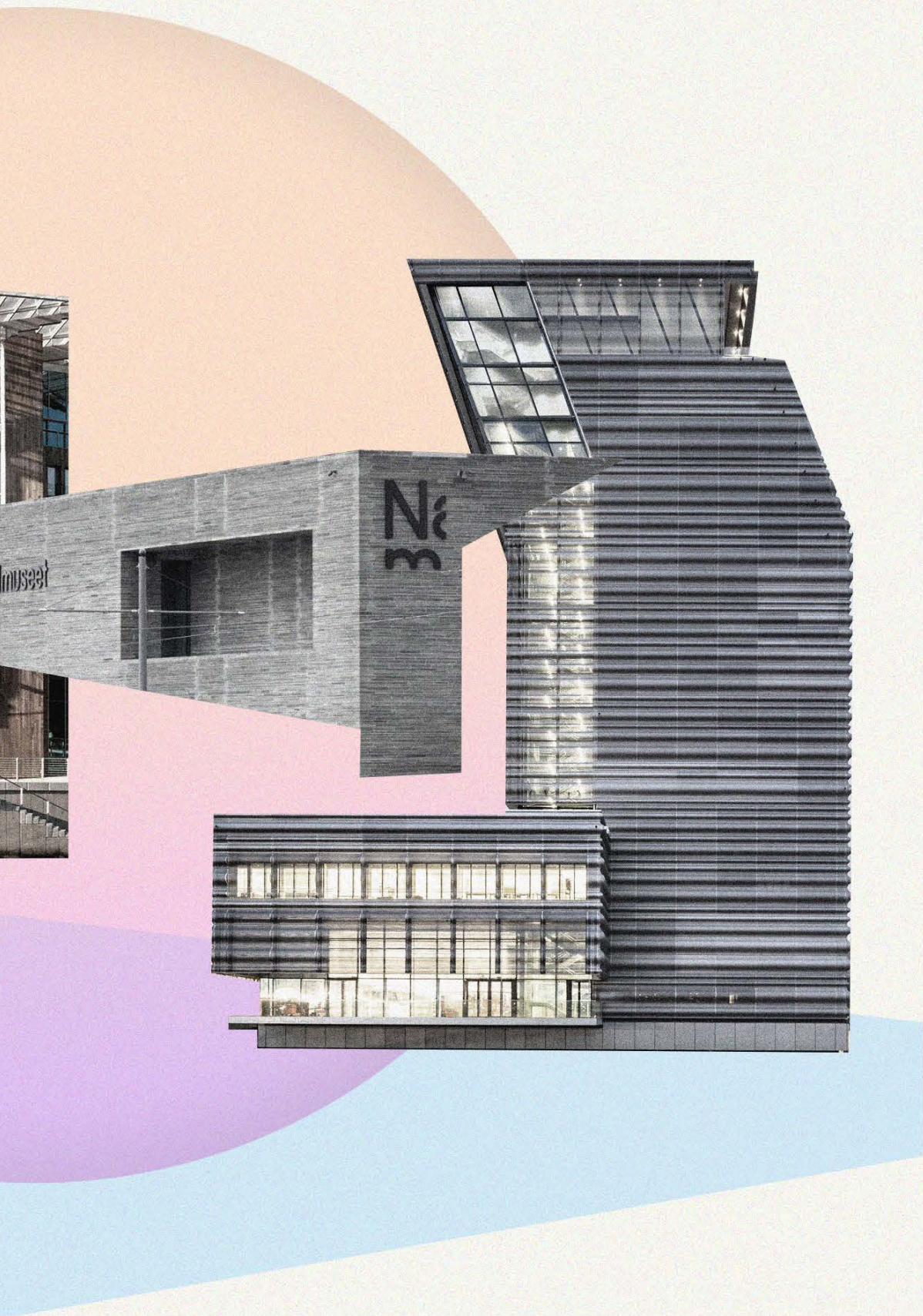
Visitors can visit the sculpture park at any time. It is considered an outdoor park, where people gather to go for a walk or for a swim, enjoy the sunset or have a picnic on the grass. It is questionable if the visitors are paying attention to the artworks in the sculpture park. In a way, this is an attraction that invites people that are not the usual museumgoers to be part of a different kind of museum experience.





Astrup Fearnley  
Museet

Nasjonal

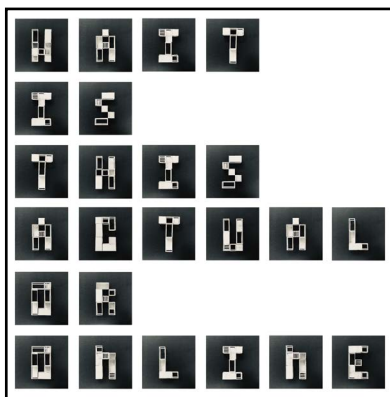


# The pilot project

## The criteria of the experiment

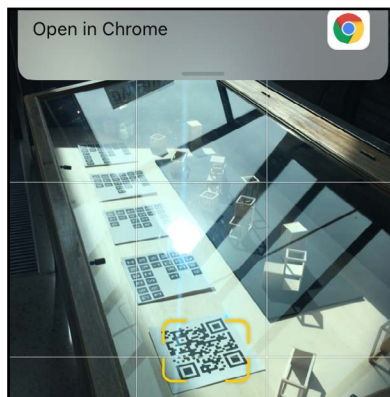
I conducted a pilot project where I presented my work at the KHiO library vitrine gallery in April 2021. The exhibition topic explores the life between the digital and material. The object itself is a communication tool for creativity, either to interact through a visual form or through text. The type is created by the physical objects. It can be used as 1:1 or one can imagine it to be on a city scale.

KHiO library vitrine showcases both works of the students and also books from the library itself. It is a combination of creating a sense of belonging to the community and sharing knowledge at the same time. Vitrine gallery benefits by generating multidisciplinary knowledge in a visual form between the visitors outside the walls of the library. I, as a person exhibiting, am receiving a platform and gaining new connections. For my final project, I want to follow the same guidelines. This is a very practical example of something that I am creating with the Urban Museum, but it has helped me to find the criteria for the project. I can say that exhibiting and playing it out in a real-life environment has also helped me to come to some conclusions that I have listed below.



**The experiment at a traditional exhibition space**

Not many people could visit the vitrine gallery due to the restrictions, but the interaction with the user happened on a digital platform. The display was open to the people who already had an access to the school, but not for the usual library visitors.



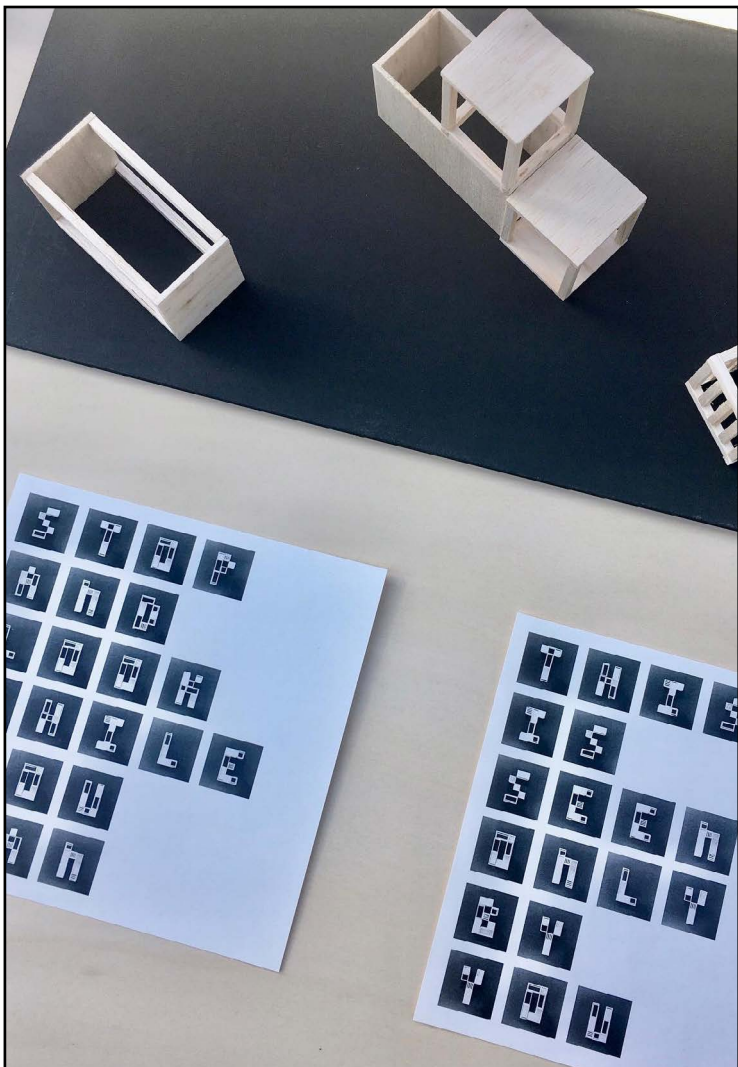
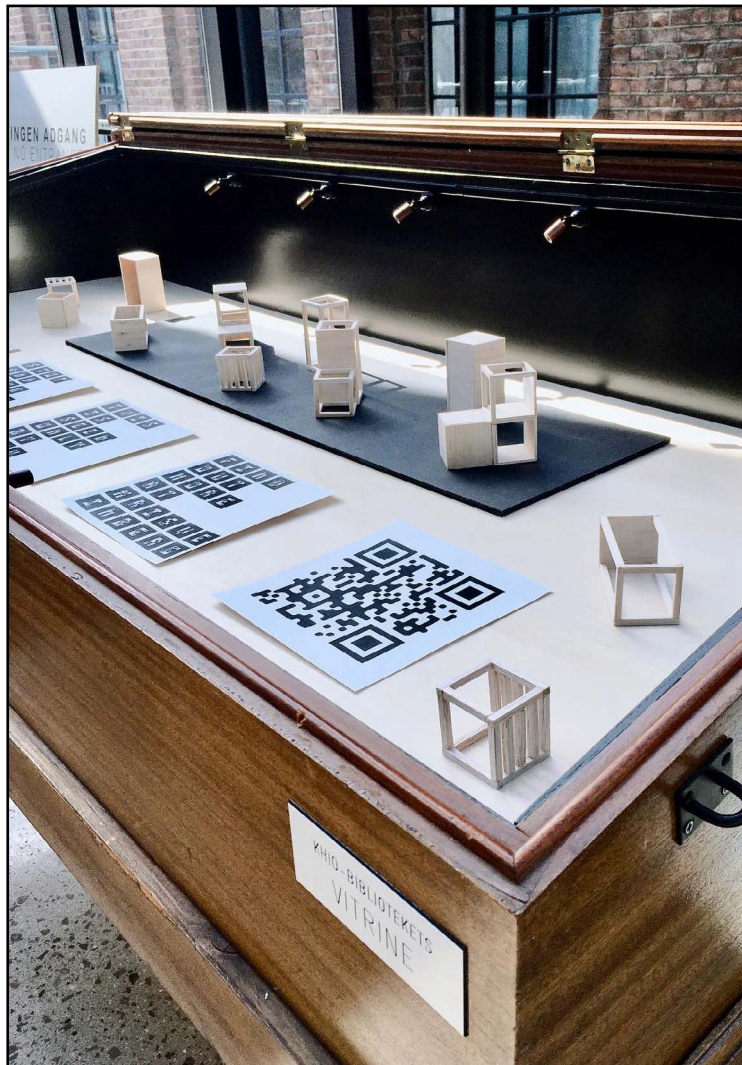
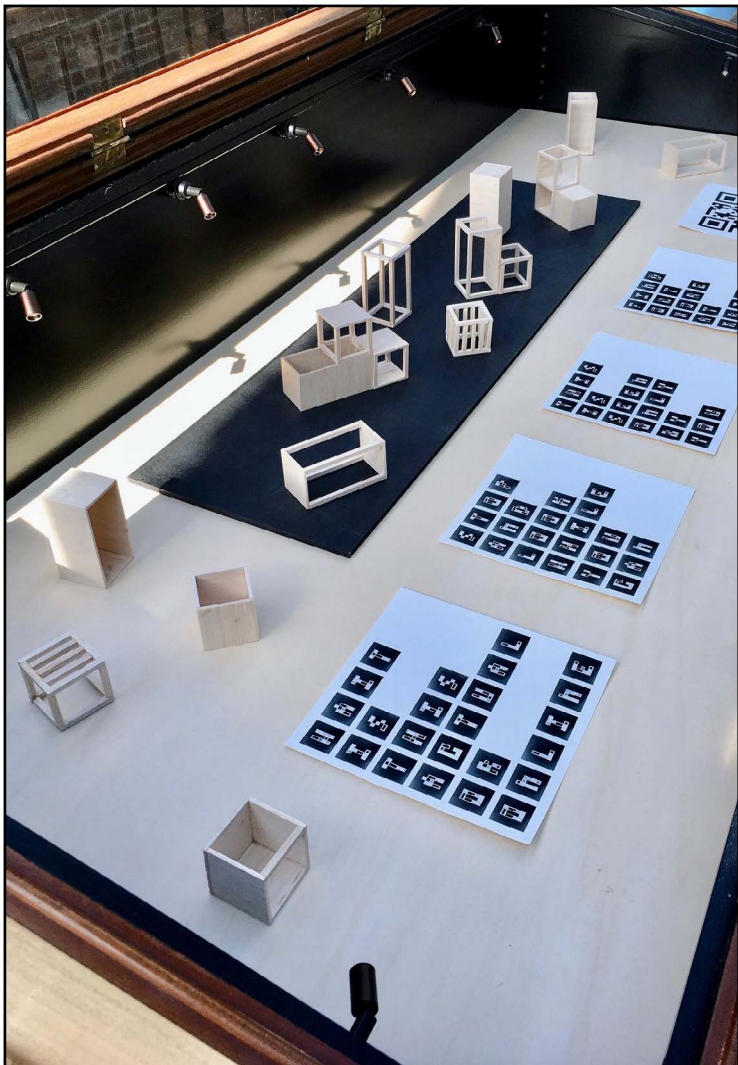
**The QR code as an extension of the visitors' journey**

The QR code system was originally invented in 1994 in Japan and its purpose was to track vehicles during manufacturing. These days it is commercially used a lot in mobile tagging that allows you to open up a website. We often see QR codes also in the museums, but what if it is integrated into the artwork itself?

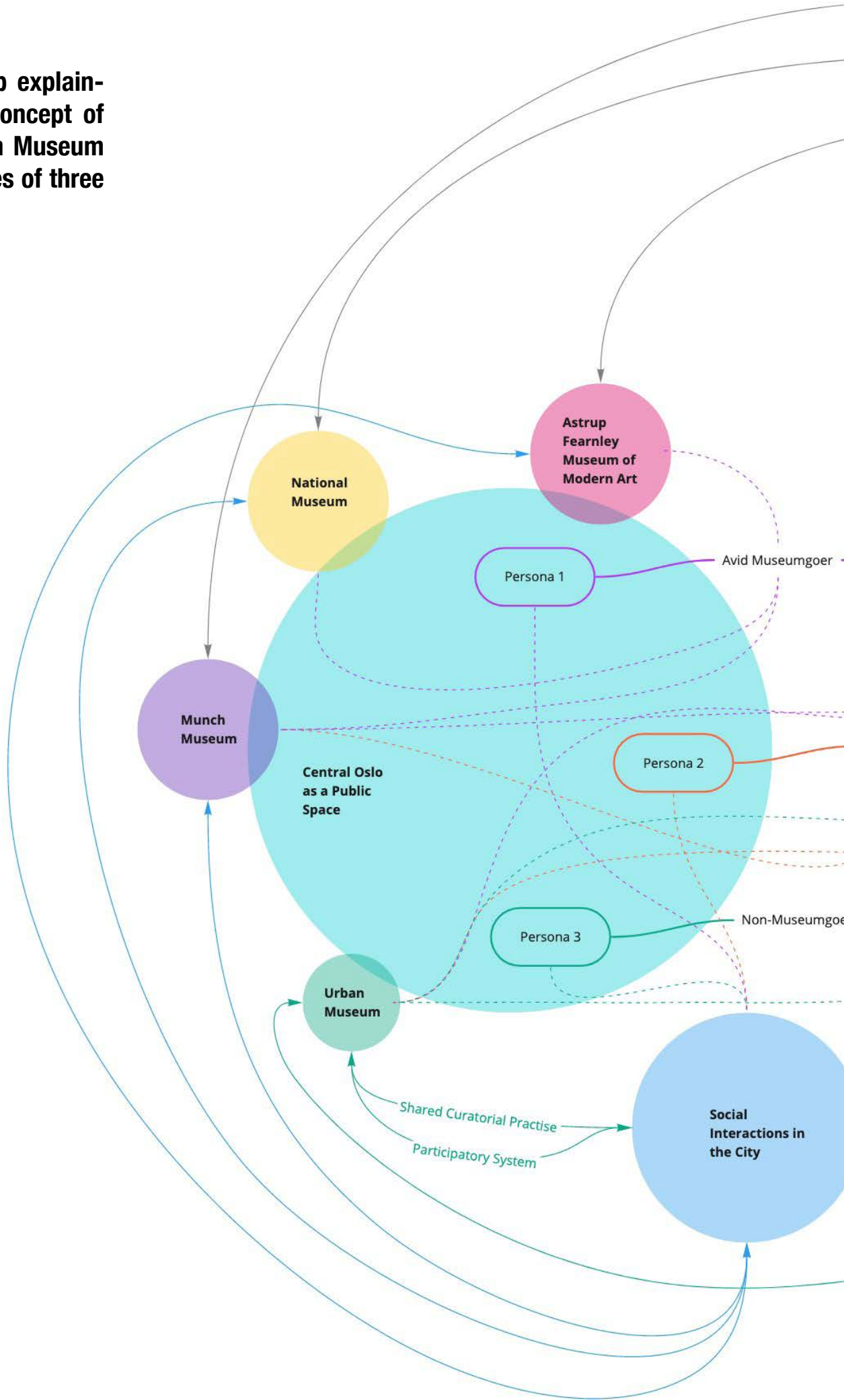


**The physical space is static, the virtual space is dynamic**

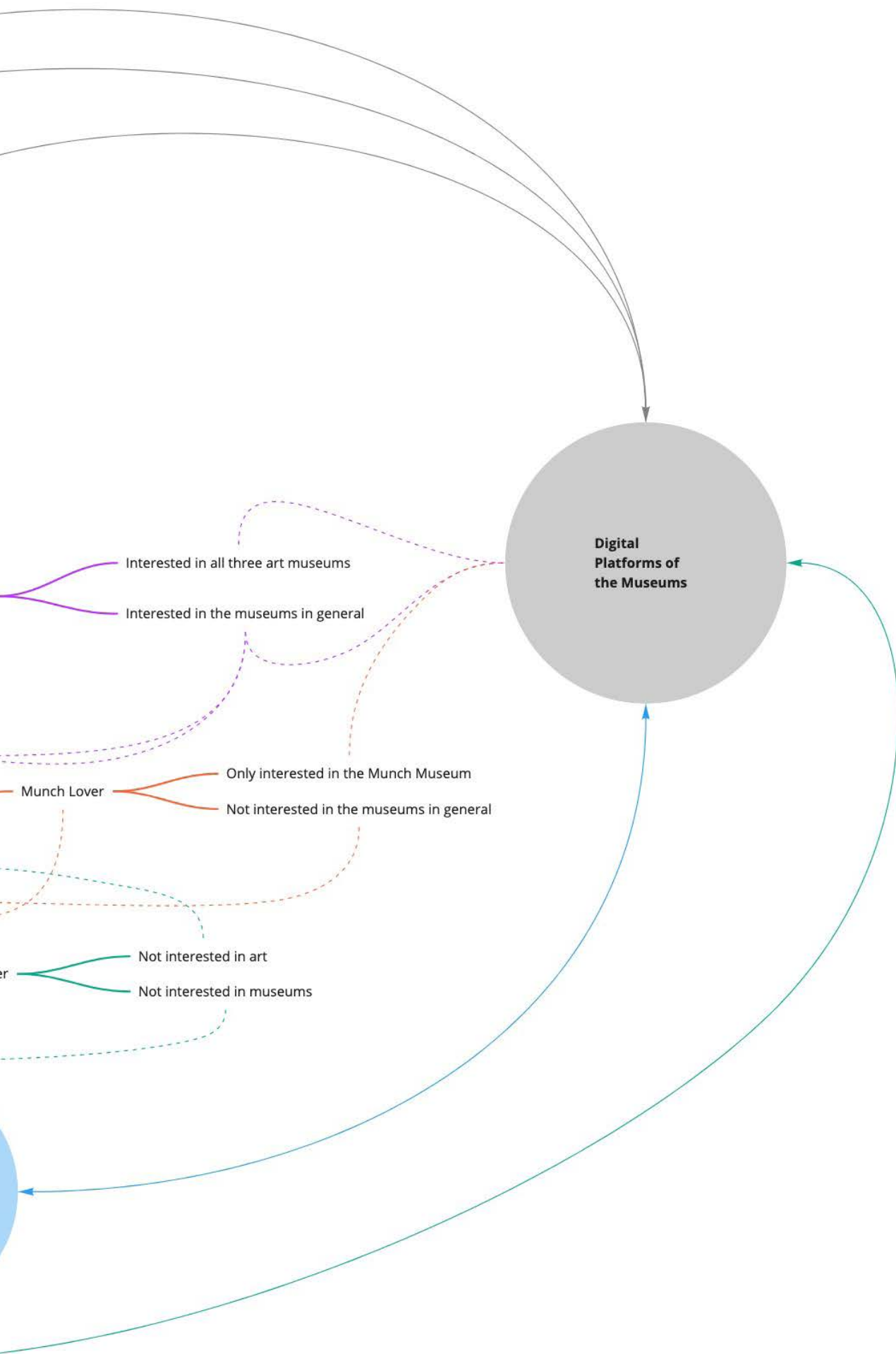
By opening the QR code you will enter a website that has an ever-changing interface. Although the code stays the same, the website can change its owners and content on a daily basis. That allows keeping the information updated at all times. There is always a dilemma of reaching to your phone or staying present.



**Mind map explaining the concept of the Urban Museum in the eyes of three personas**

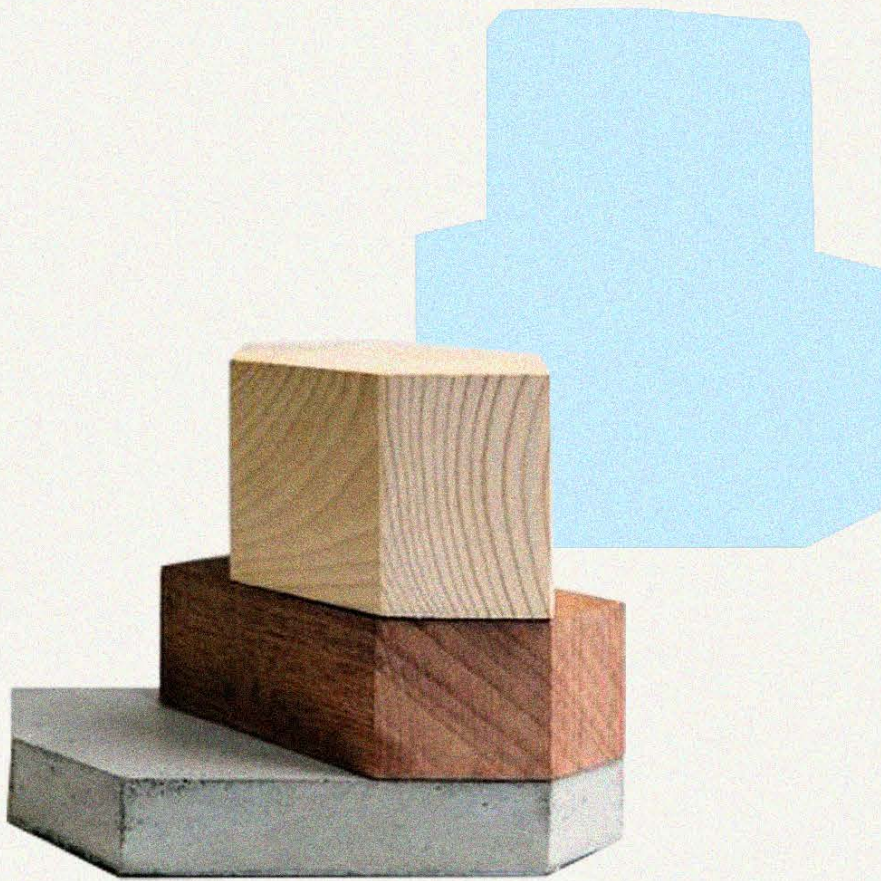




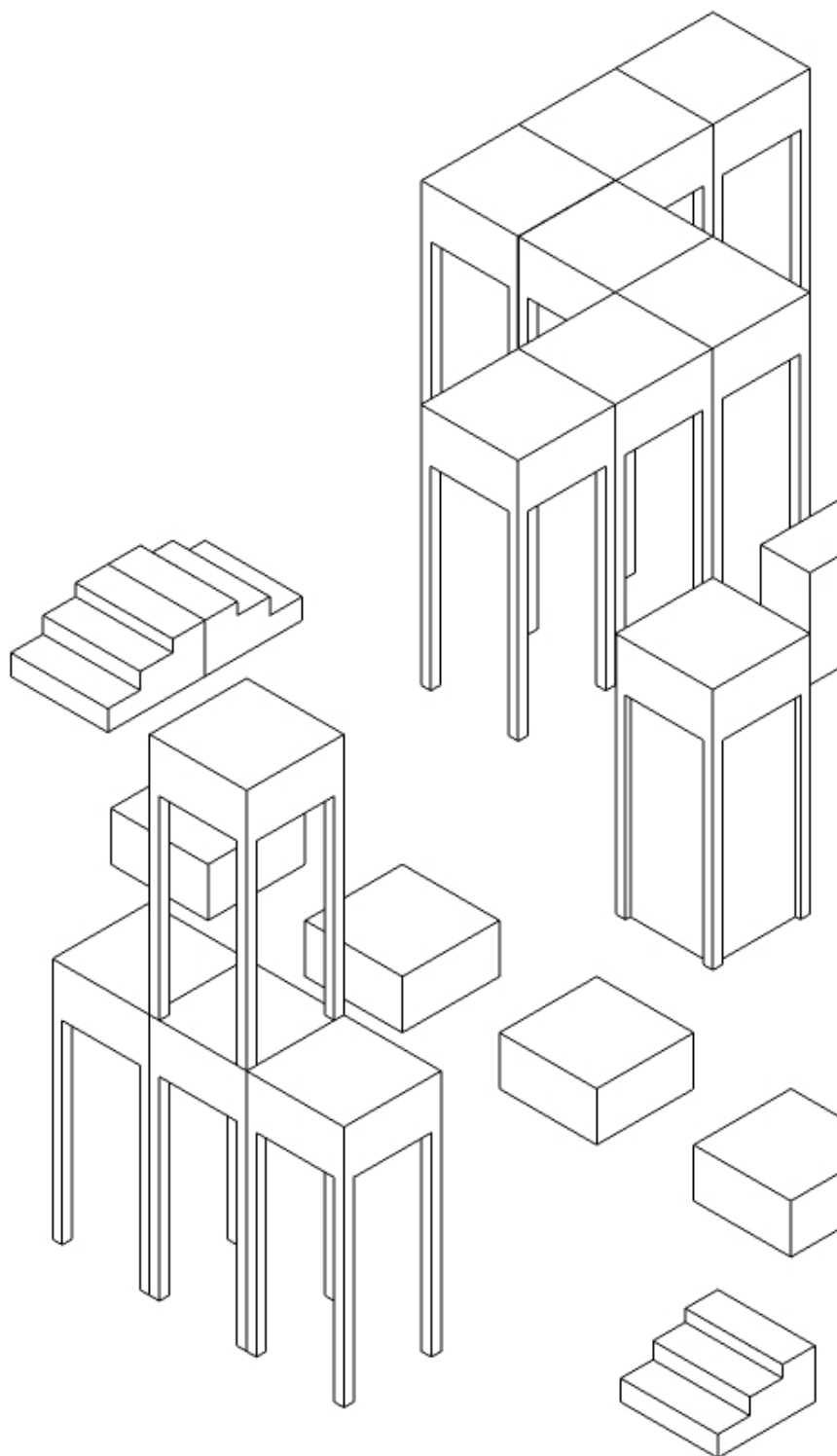
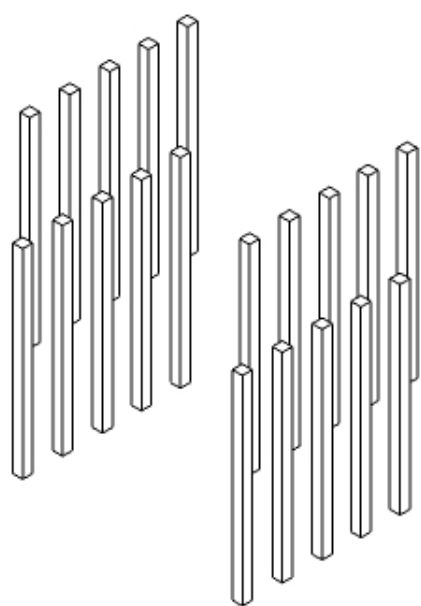


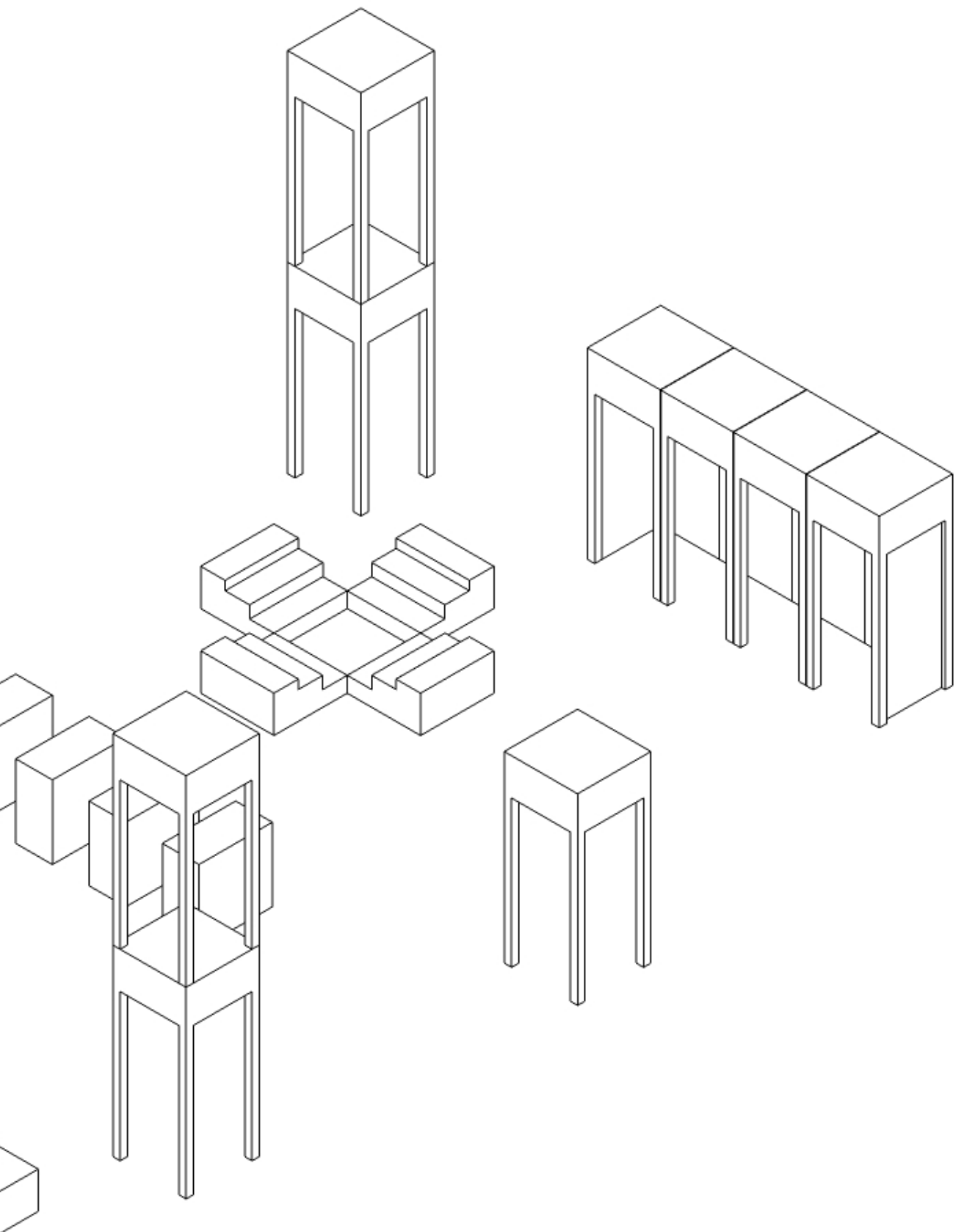


**Visual Material**



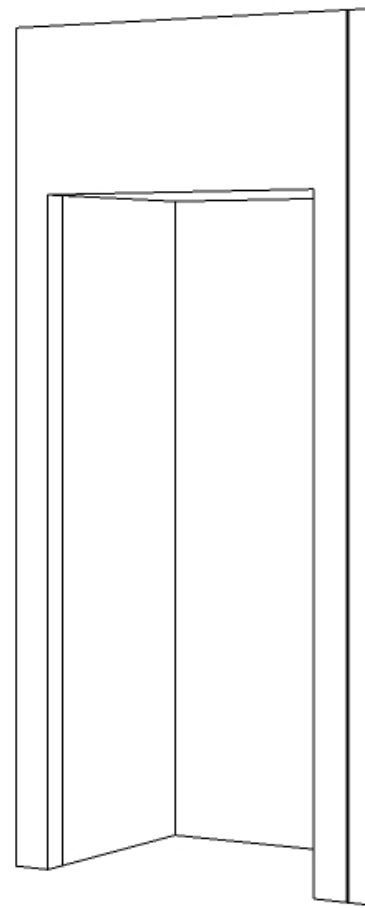
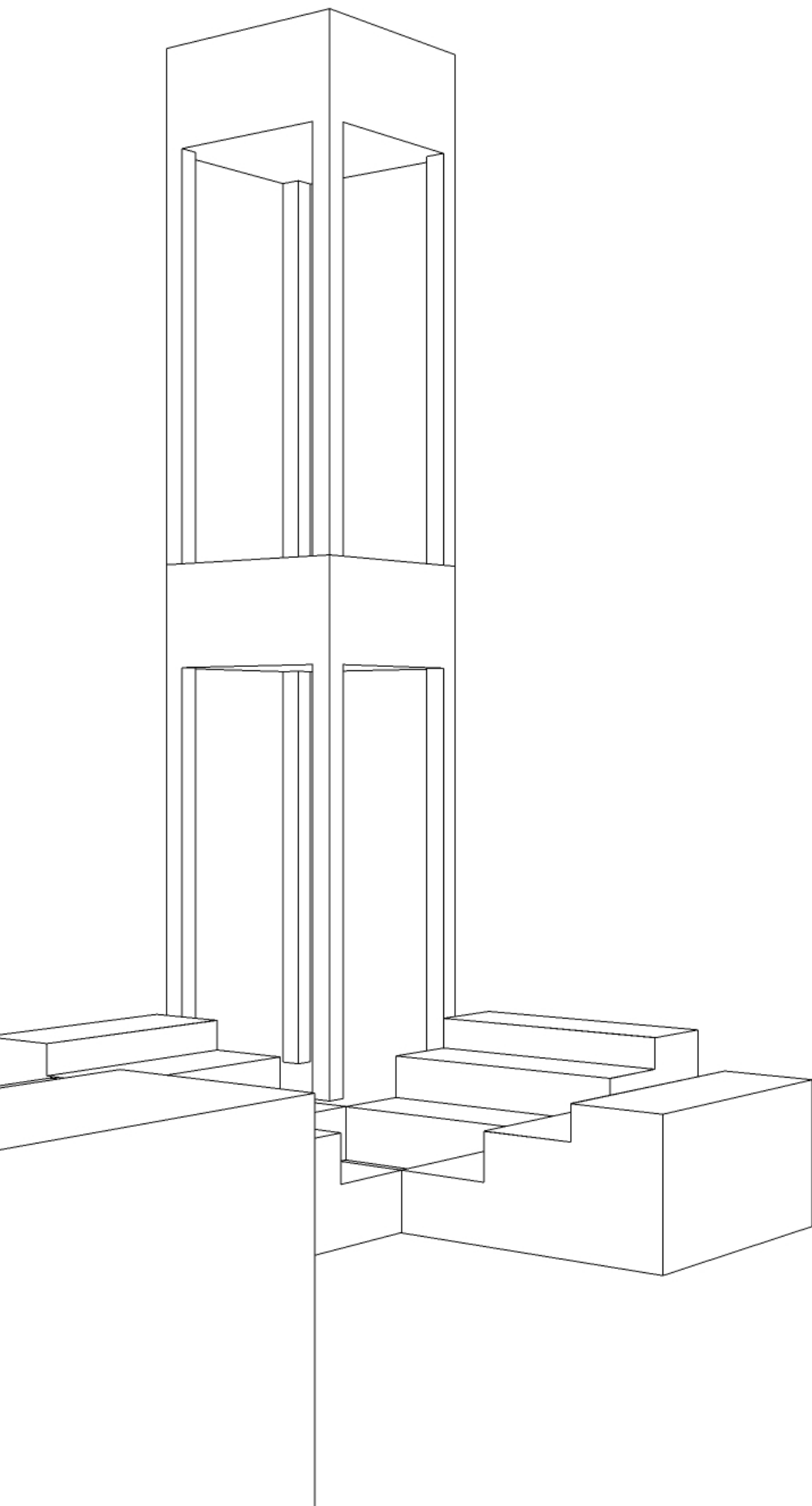
**A modular system  
that can be used in  
order to create dif-  
ferent solutions for  
the urban furniture**



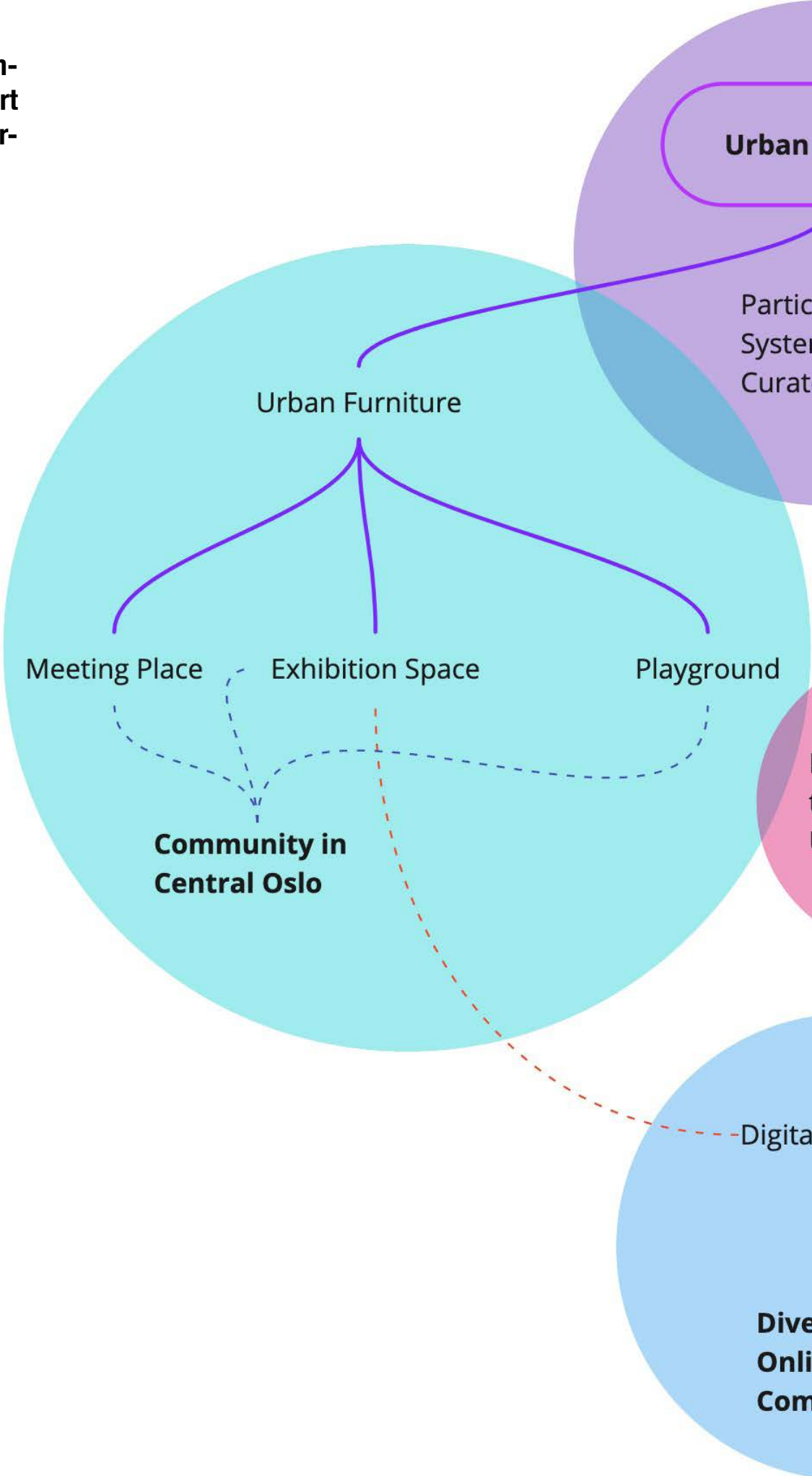


**Close-up**

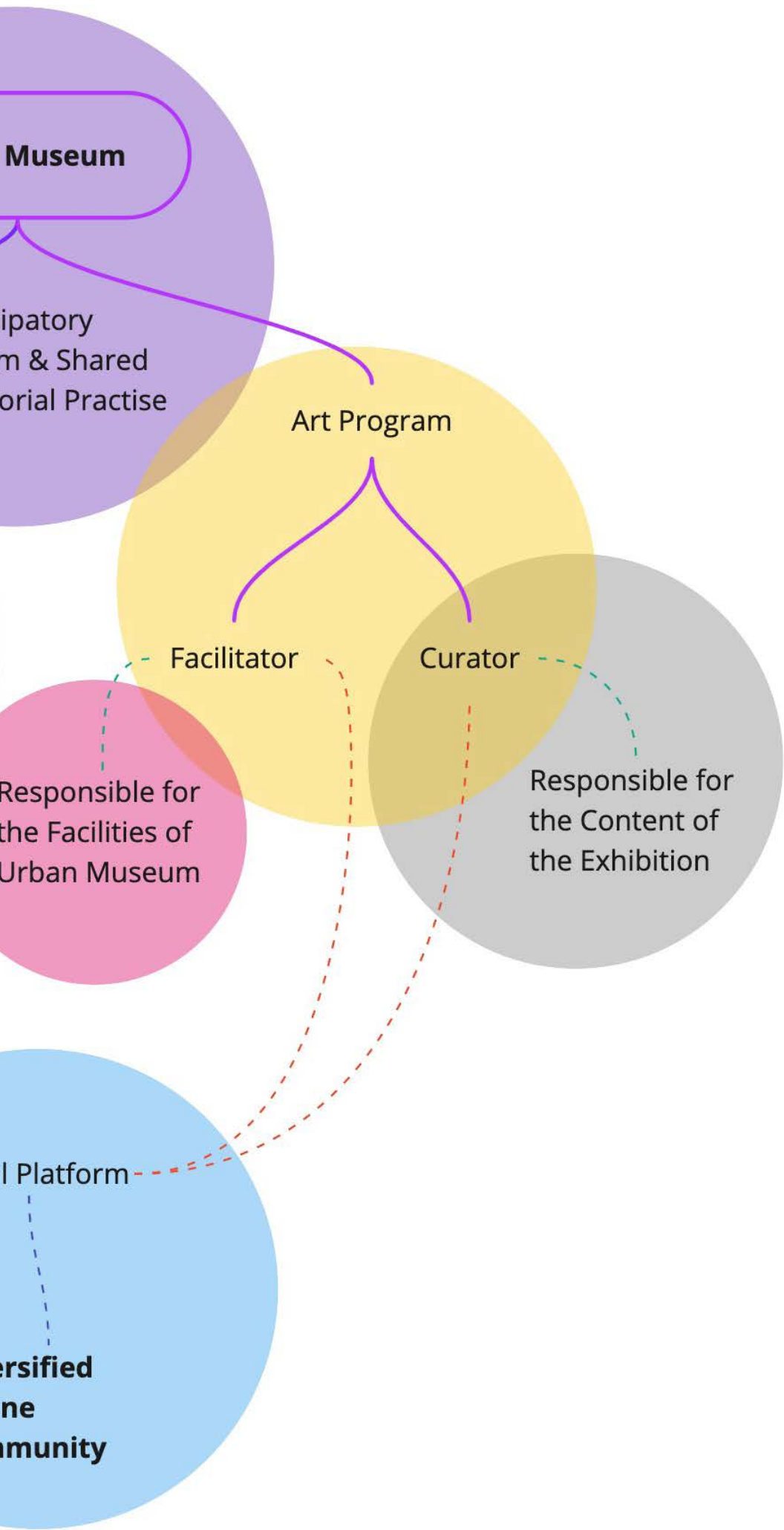


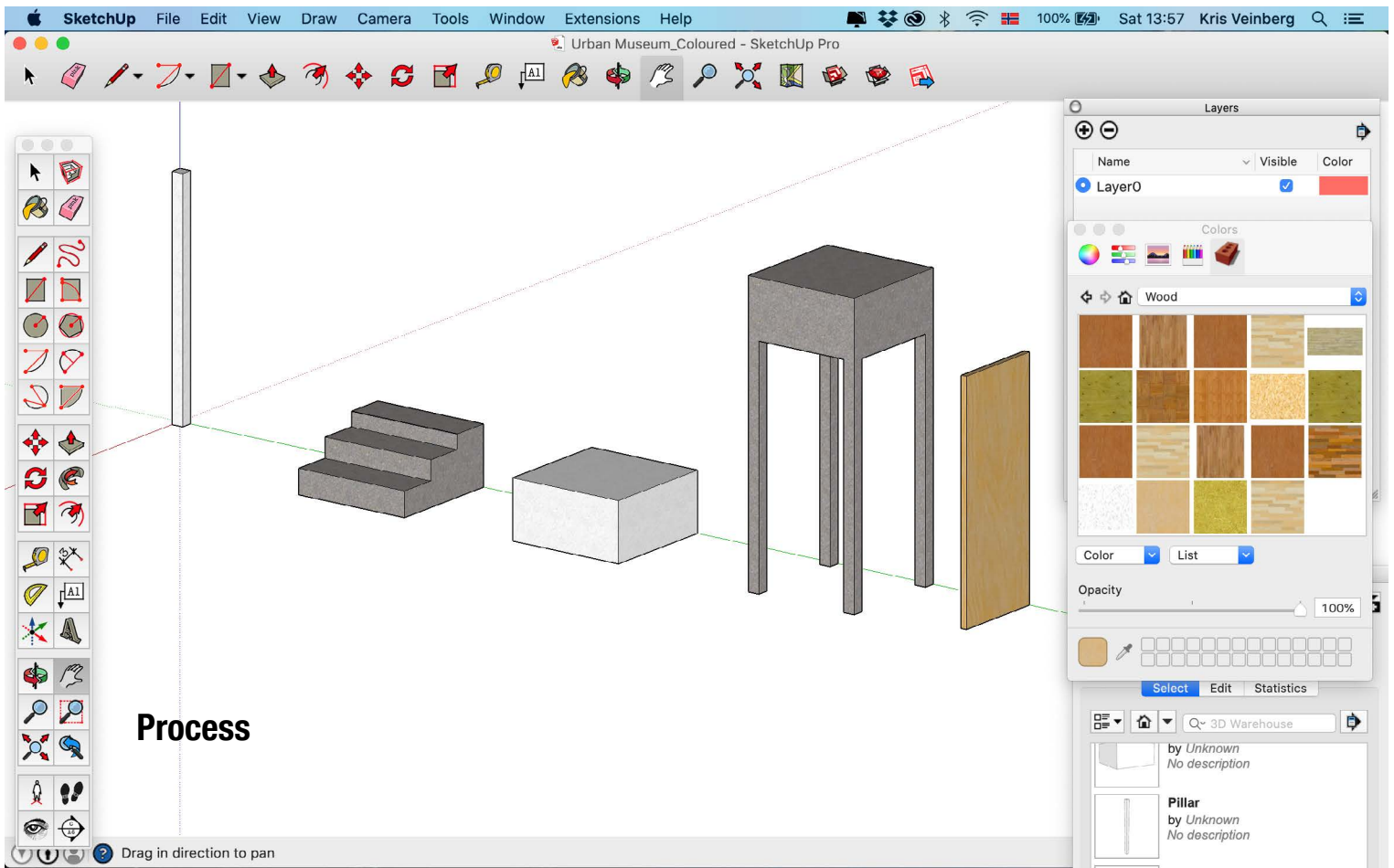


**Mind map explaining the two-part concept of the Urban Museum**









**Material Board**



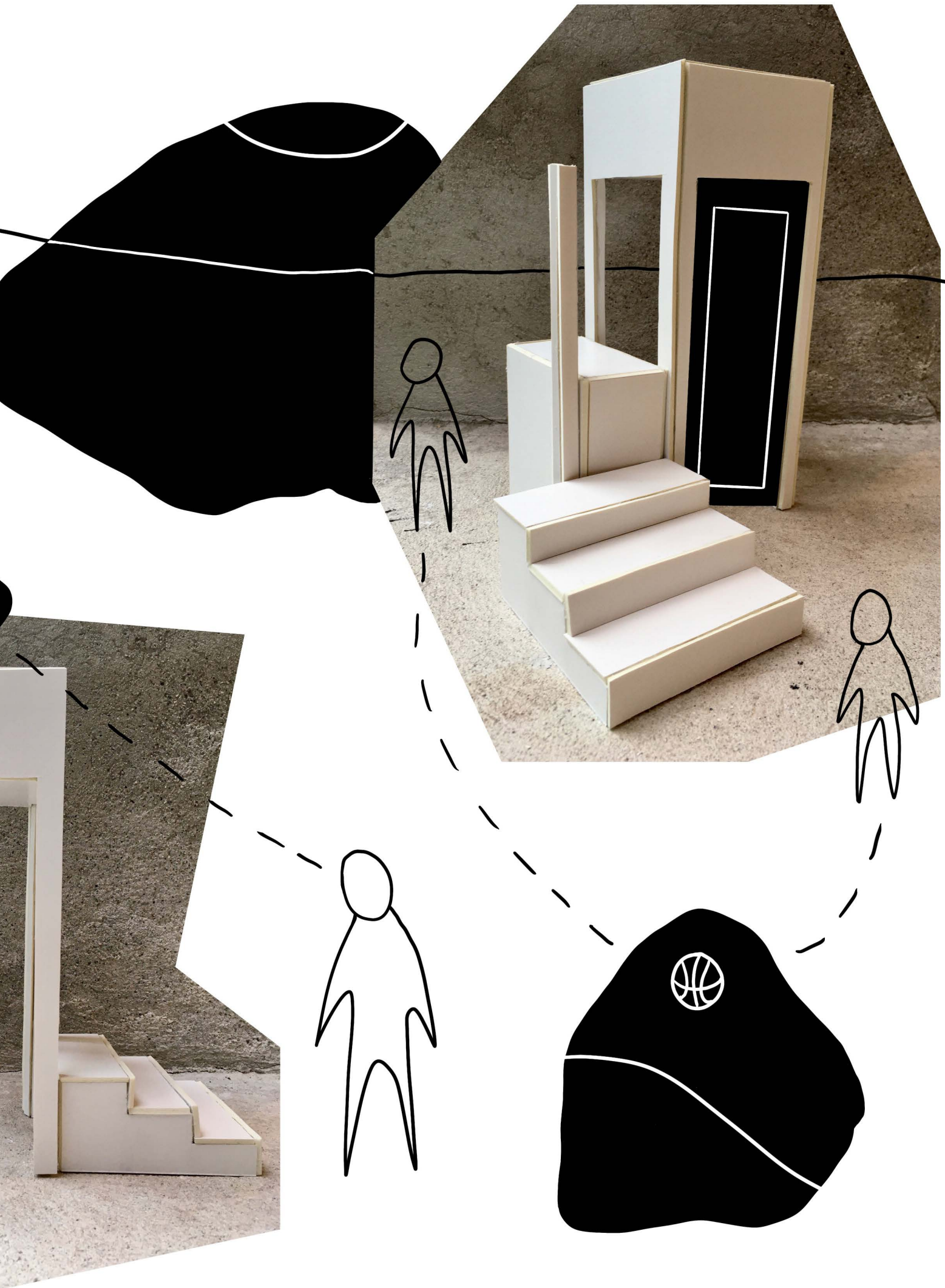


**Model 1:10**



**A meeting place,  
an exhibition space  
and a playground**





# UM activity map



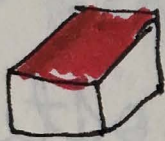
gallery



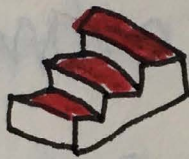
gallery



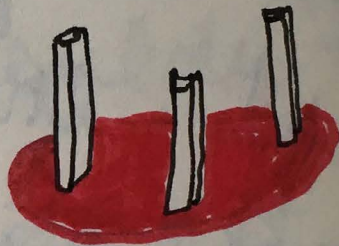
gallery



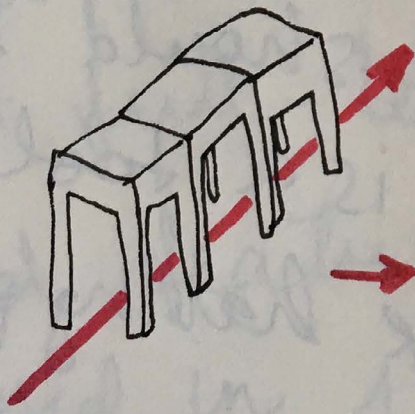
chair



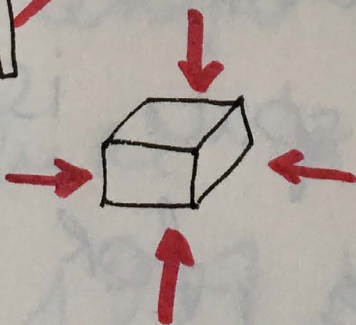
stairs



play



passage way



meeting place



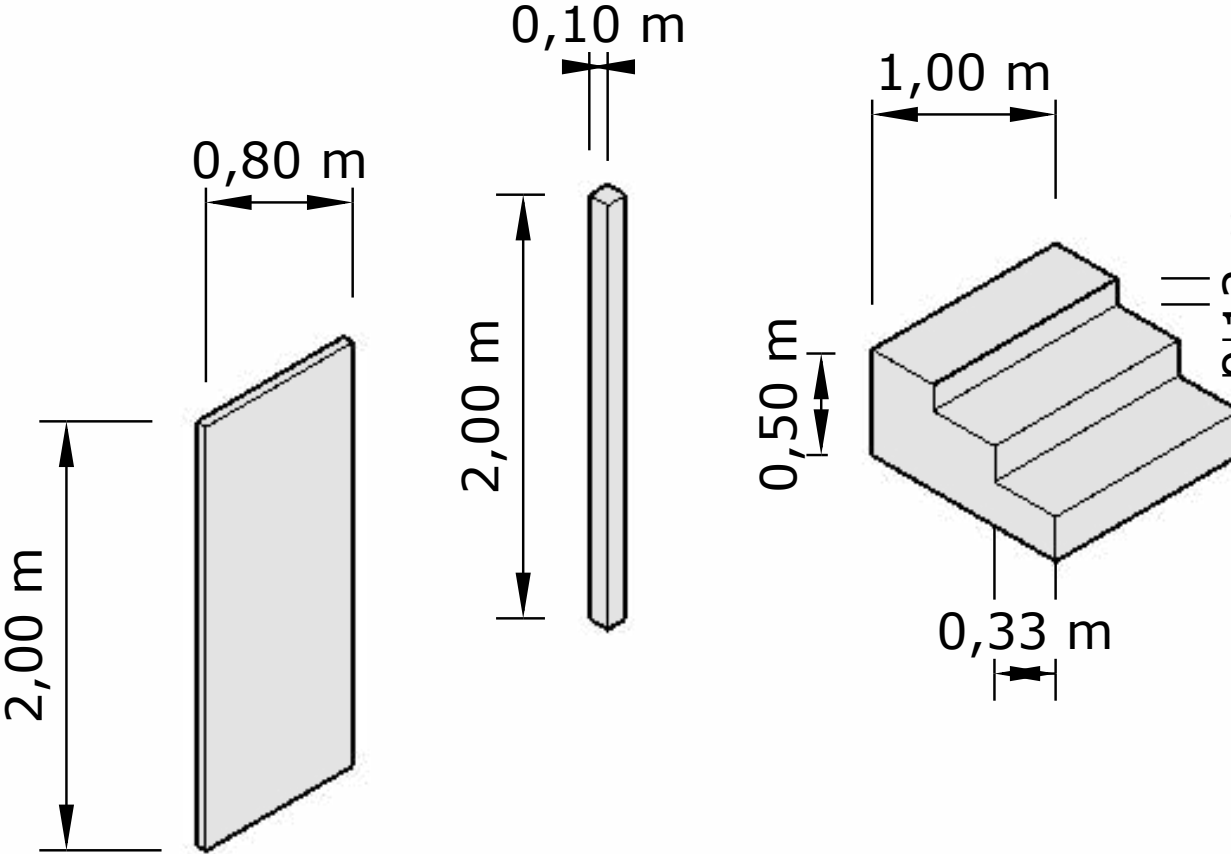
viewpoint



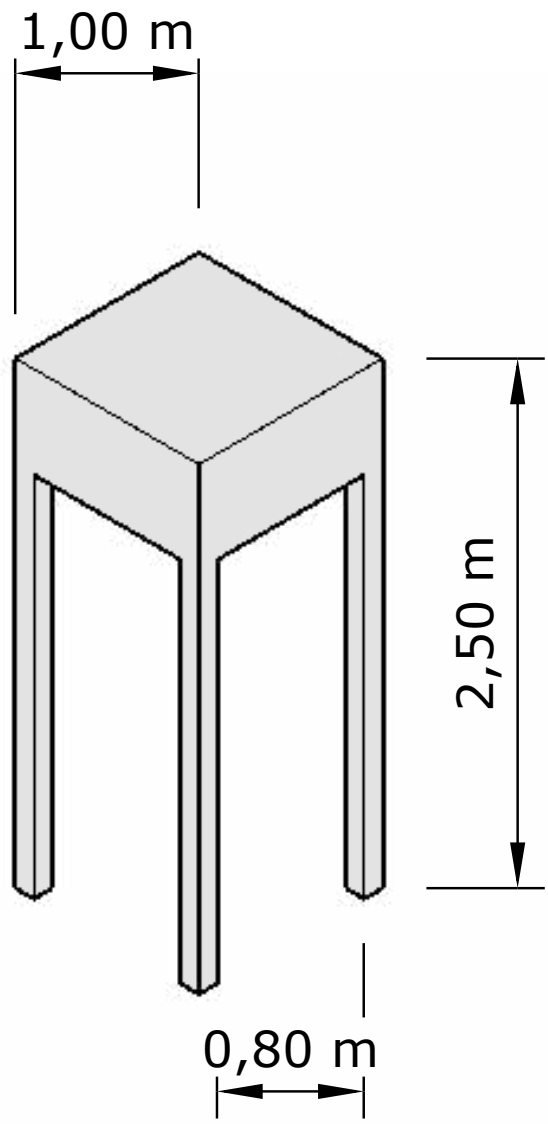
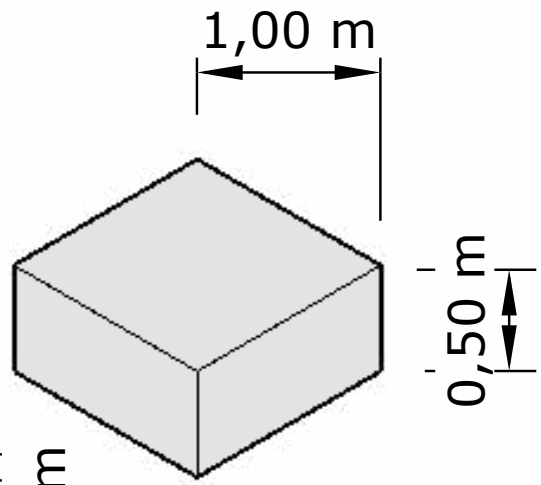
"Spaces exist in the mind as well as on land and sea. They cannot be seen, OR traversed by ship OR on foot, not even with seven-league boots. For they are abstract spaces OR styles of thinking"

(Boden, 2009)

Measurements

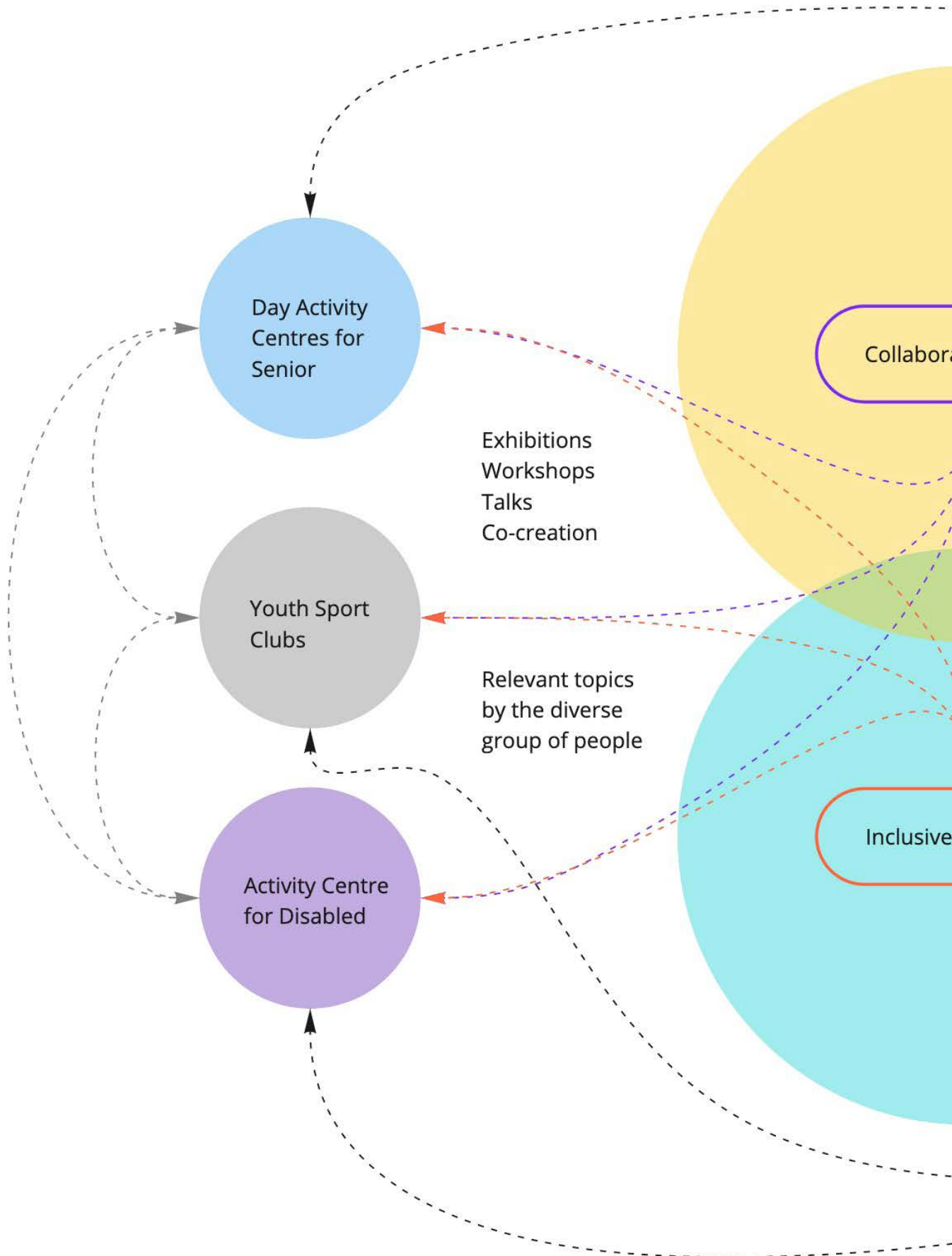


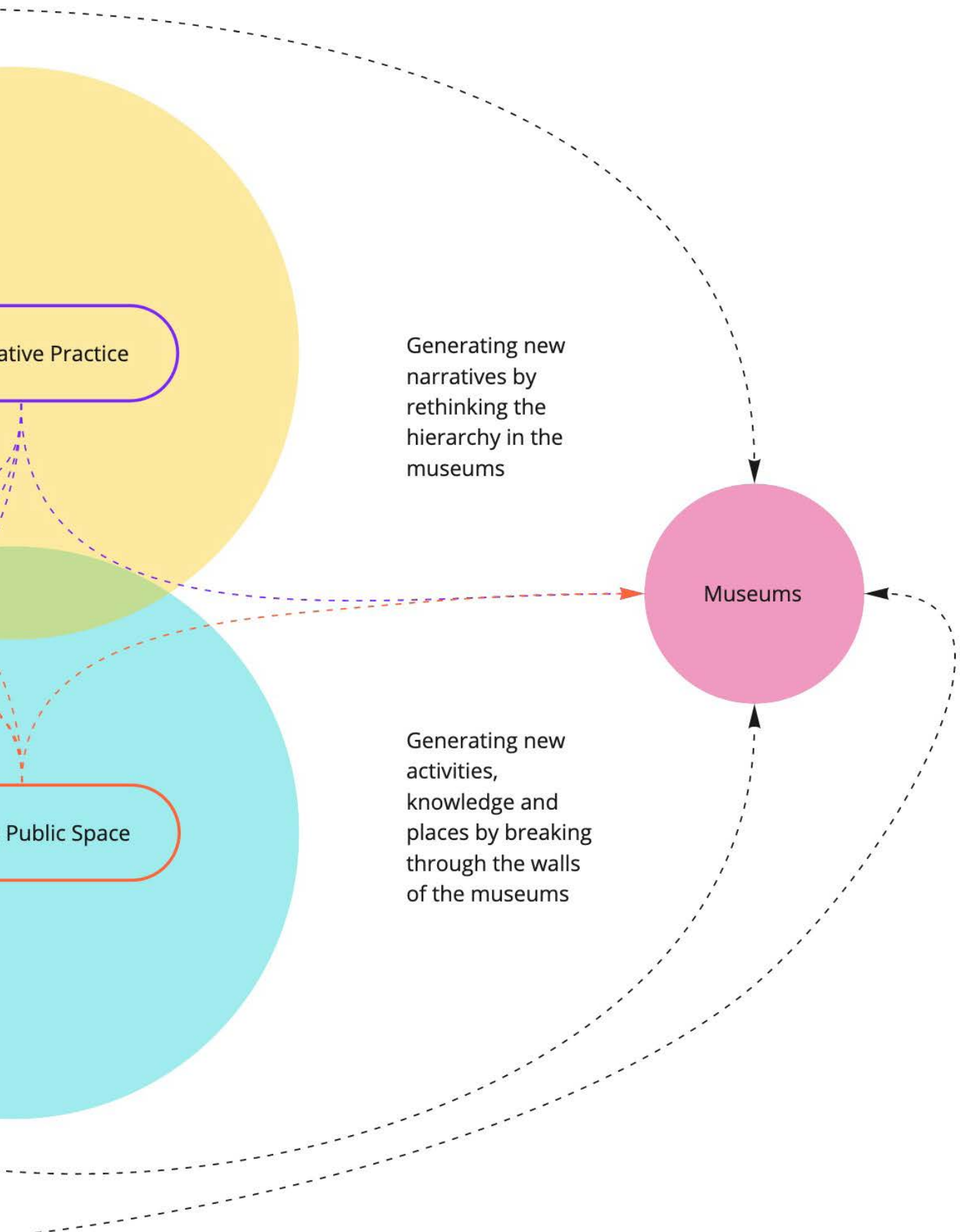
0,12 m  
0,17 m  
0,21 m

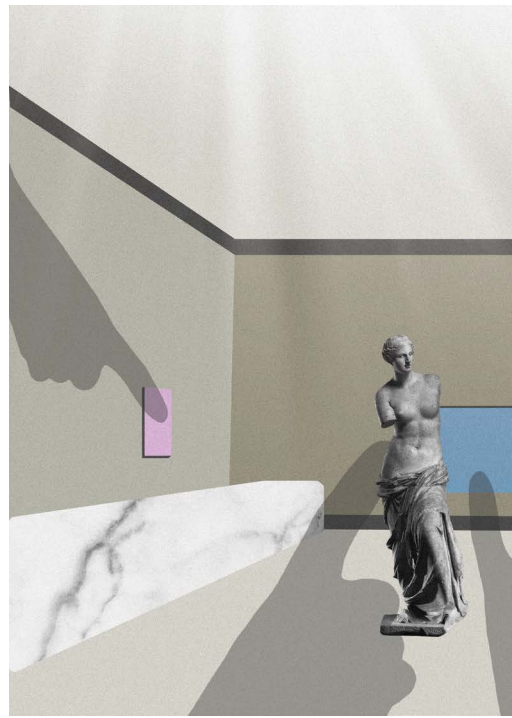
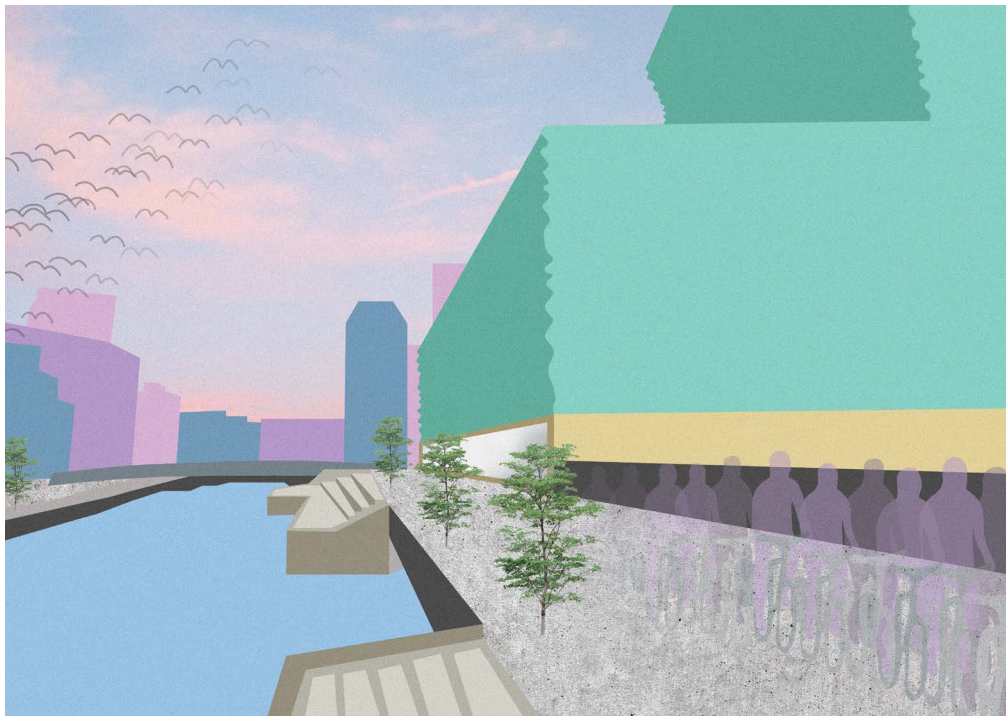


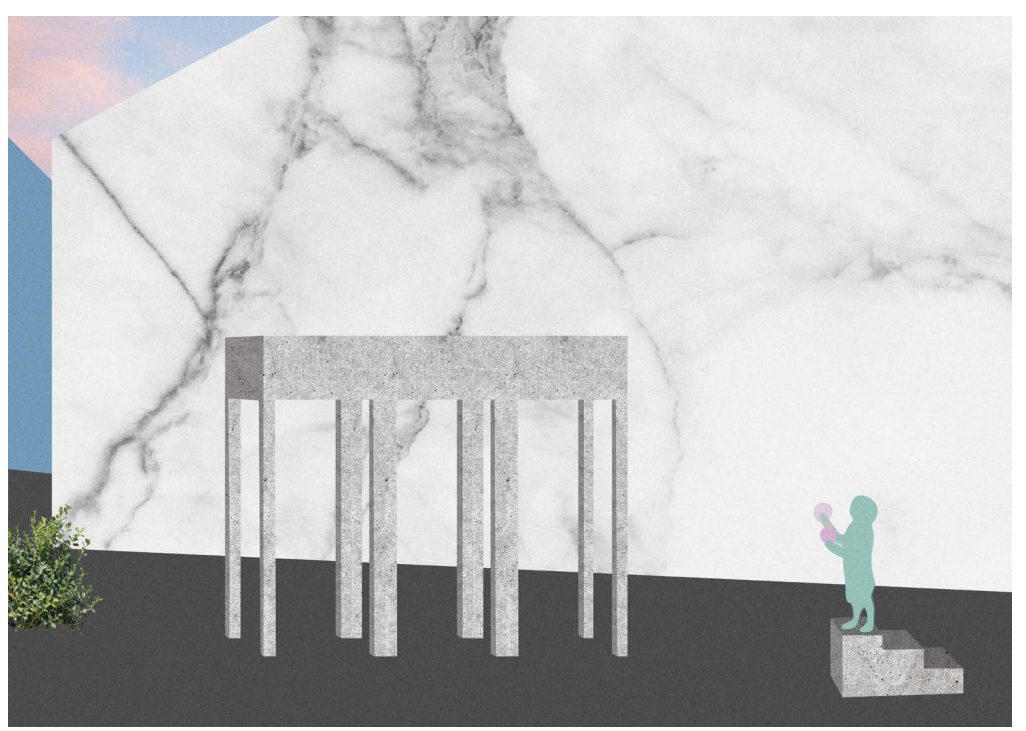
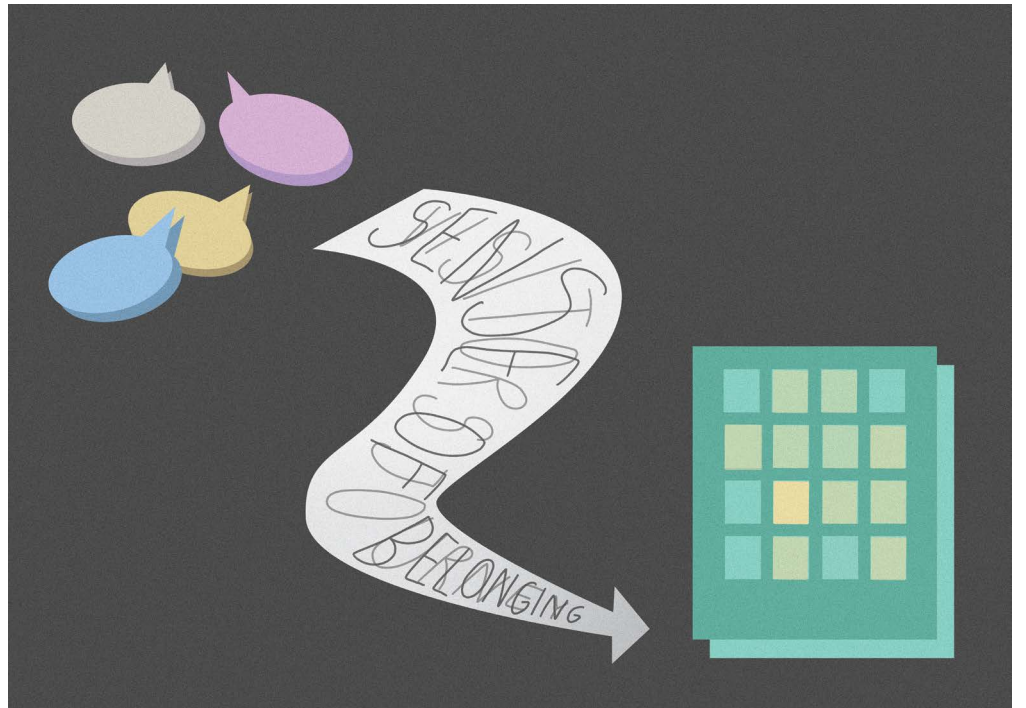
**Mind map explaining how the inclu-**

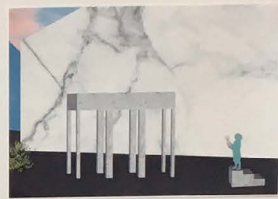
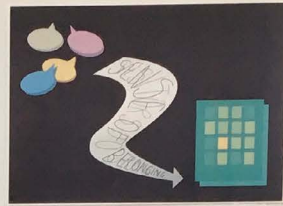
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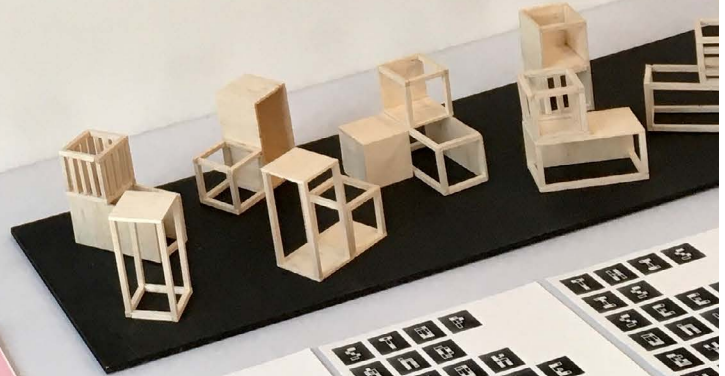




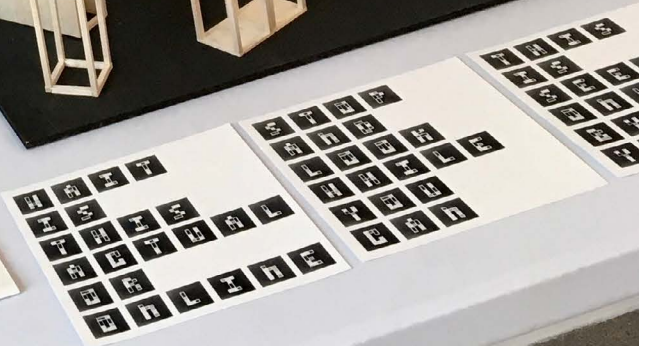








Handwritten notes on a piece of paper, possibly describing a project or design process.



# Appendix

## **Outtakes from the interview with an art technician at the Munch Museum: Enrique Roura Perez**

**Duration of the full interview: 57 min**

K: Let's start by saying what's your name and who you are.

E: So my name is Enrique Eduardo Roura Perez, that's the full name. I'm an artist from Mexico and I have also studied architecture, so I work with the meeting point of art and architecture. I have been living in Norway since 2014 when I came to make my master in the art academy in Trondheim. Since then I have been working and doing some exhibitions. In order to be in this country, since I'm from the outside of the European Union, I need to have a job at least 80% that is specific to my field of study. The other option is to work as a self-employed and I did also that at some point.

/.../

E: I came to Oslo to work at the National Museum as an art technician for packing the collection and for the moving. And then I got exactly the same job at the Munch Museum.

K: And how long have you worked at the Munch Museum?

E: I started in December 2019.

/.../

K: I saw some video clips of "Moving Munch" that shows the moving process and allows the visitor to come behind the scene. This is an unusual part of the museum experience for the user. That's was a nice move.

E: All the images and clips from our "Flyttestprosjekt Munch" is actually a one hour film explaining it all.

K: Oh, where can you see that? I only say three very short clips on Munch Museum's website.

E: It's on Youtube, I can share the link with you. The short clips are made by the media department. The film was made for the Forum for Art Handling 2020 in Sweden, which was an online event this year.

/.../

K: I have always seen museums as social spaces. There are parts of collection and education, but it is also a meeting place for people to come together. These days the museums have been closed for a long time and museums are trying to make it up by creating virtual exhibitions. To some degree, it works, but I'm still missing the social interaction.

E: As the whole society is on hold.

K: Right?

E: It's been strange times.

/.../

K: For example, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art has an outdoor Tjuvholmen Sculpture Park, which is open at all times and considered a COVID-friendly activity. Might that be one of the solutions?

E: Well, it was wintertime and being outside wasn't that easy, but now there will be

more life in outdoor spaces as it gets warmer. Oslobiennalen has been doing some outdoor events as well.

/.../

K: Have you been taking part in any online cultural events? How do you feel about consuming it online?

E: Not the best consumer of this type of format. There is so much happening on Instagram and Facebook.

/.../

E: Munch has been improving within time. First, they had a 24h live streaming of the painting "Scream", but they have changed their strategy. They have made videos like short films showing both the artworks and the gallery space.

K: That sounds like a great solution! The National Gallery has a virtual collection that consists of high-resolution photos of the paintings or objects, but you don't have an understanding of the scale. When it is shown in a space, then you have a better understanding what is the size of the object.

E: What I work with is a part of the digitalization of the collection. This is through the process of packing.

/.../

K: How big is your team?

E: Around 12 people.

/.../

K: The last thing that I saw from Munch Museum was CADS, which is a contemporary exhibition series from different authors. That is quite a different approach since Munch Museum is mostly considered traditional, but they are including contemporary artists in the programme.

E: Yes, they are changing the programme a bit.

K: There are three parts and the first one was released in March, the second one in April and the third one in May. That's a smart way to invite the younger audience to be interested in what Munch is doing as an institution.

/.../

K: What do you think when we can start going to the museums like we used to?

E: They have an exhibition waiting to be open in Tøyen at the moment. It is mounted and all.

/.../

K: Around Oslo, I have also seen window exhibitions done by Low Standards for example. They had a walking tour last year that you could visit different window exhibitions in Oslo.

E: I also have a friend in Trondheim, who is doing that and they are using temporary spaces for exhibitions. The group is called Slå På Kunst. A year ago, when all the stores were closed, they used their windows for example.

K: Perhaps that is an alternative to online exhibitions, so you can still be off-screen and be present. The last exhibition that I had was presented in a glass container at Vaterlandsparken. You could only stand outside and look inside.

/.../

E: The merging of smaller institutions into bigger ones is happening everywhere. Art schools, hospitals, museums and so on. The good examples are the National Museum in Oslo or the Art University in Bergen.

/.../

E: I have done installations with paper, steam, natural light and very diverse materials. What I'm interested in is something that comes from the architectural perspective of how the body understands the surroundings. How the language of architecture speaks through the volumes, scales, tactility, smells and spaces.

K: These are important elements of how we sense the world around us.

E: I'm also interested in more specifically the site.

/.../

