

Re-Visiting the Contact Zone: Museums, Theory, Practice

17-21 July 2011  
Linköping, Sweden

## **Spaces that involve. Art museums for social inclusion in Poland**

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Art museums are not 'islands' or 'fortresses' in cityscapes. Except their function of collecting, exhibiting and explaining the artworks they also involve audiences in their activities. Museums indeed play active role in social regeneration of degraded areas as well as contribute to cultural flourishing of regions deprived of a cultural centre.

Two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the time of museum boom in the field of contemporary art in Poland. Only now gaps in cultural infrastructure caused by half a century of communism are being supplemented (museums and centres of contemporary art are founded and built but also created historical museums, opera houses, theatres, libraries). It is a common practice that contemporary art museums adopt patterns of functioning from Western countries, especially in the field of museum education and popularisation of art. Educative mission of art museums has special dimension in Poland due to lack of cultural education in society regarding contemporary art and contemporary culture in general. Museums open up to audiences on various levels, they involve communities, stimulate cultural and social life, and largely contribute to civil society building.

In a paper I will discuss art museums in Poland as spaces that involve and as contact zones at the example of Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (opened in temporary location in 2008, proper building to be opened no sooner than in 2016), Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow – MOCAR (opened in 2010), Museum of Art in Łódź in its second location – ms<sup>2</sup> (opened in 2008), and Institute of Art WYSPA in Gdańsk (opened in 2004). I will emphasize neuralgic location of museums (next to socialist Palace of Culture and Science – the tallest building of Warsaw, former Oskar Schindler factory in Krakow, former textile factory, now a shopping and entertainment mall in Łódź, Gdańsk shipyard where Solidarność movement was born), specifics of local problems and ways of establishing a museum forum.