AAL
The focus will know be on how users in many ways have been part of the development of Aarhus Story, and how experiences from other projects at Den Gamle By has been directly useful, and how some of them were not.

AAL
This talk will be about, how we actually involve people in projects.
In this regard, they can have different roles, such as users, participants, experts, informants, co-creators and so on.
Here, we will refer to them as users.

Firstly, we will go through examples from Den Gamle By and tell about our experiences.
What have we done?
What did we learn?
Which methods could we use in Aarhus Story?
Secondly, we will sum up, and suggest a few key learnings from practice.

Experiences with user involvement in Den Gamle By

LSK

In our museum we have worked with user involvement on many different levels and stages in the projects.
The experiences we are going to talk about are
Developing the concept
Building the exhibitions
Showing diverse voices and views
Collecting
Curating
Testing ideas and content
Visitor participation in the exhibition

We have found some of the methods, but certainly not all, relevant for the Aarhus Story exhibition.

LSK

In Den Gamle By we have a 100 year long tradition for extensive user involvement and participation.

It has been a part of our DNA since Peter Holm founded the Museum I 1914.

Especially exhibitions of workshops.

Handicrafts and trades, both individual professionals and organizations, have been deeply engaged in planning, funding, collecting, documenting and exhibiting their own history.

Two hatters helping the museum to display correctly in 1930.

Peter Holm said himself:

"…It is the people of the crafts, who help the museum to tell the truthful story about the old crafts"

 and further:

"…the craftsmen have been extremely engaged in contributing with their skills.

To them it meant the honor of their craft, and they felt, that we here together with them would make an effort to preserve and show their history.

So without user involvement, there would not be any Den Gamle By at all.

Building exhibitions

LSK
And that approach is still the underlying basis for user involvement today.
The radical methods of user involvements, like in the days of our founding father, have been used until the present.
Also in the 1974 part.
20 experts from the whole country came and helped building the Radio shop from 1974 and curated all the content.
Helped us make it far more authentic and historical correct, than we could have done ourselves.

AAL

Even when working with communicating life of today, our methods are radical, as this example shows:

Six Danish-Somali women from Aarhus contacted the museum, presenting an idea of an exhibition showing their home of today in DGB. Their goal was to nuance the harsh debate in Denmark concerning immigrants, giving visitors at the museum the opportunity to make direct comparisons between homes. The project was realized through an extensive collaboration. The women and the museum staff worked as equals during the process were we learned a lot about our approach in sharing authority.

AAL

Yet another radical project is from 2012, and has a similar approach: A homeless man from Aarhus contacted the museum wanting to exhibit his dwelling at museum grounds. His goal was to show the public and visitors what homelessness is really about. He built the dwelling himself at the museum, lived there for three months as homeless and was a guide to the museum visitors during opening hours. We learned a lot about the power of the museum being a safe space, and museum visitors being open and curious to a person, that they normally would not approach outside "in the real world".

AAL
These two examples of telling stories of minorities in Aarhus, or Denmark just as well, made us realize, that we somehow should make sure that we showed a balanced view on present Aarhus by showing a story about the lesser privileged. We chose homelessness. We invited a former homeless who taught us how to make an overnight camp in connection to the container in the exhibition. However, the museum staff built it, because of lack of time. It <u>has</u> been approved though.

AAL
Our approach to user involvement has not been at all as extensive in developing the concept of Aarhus Story.

However, we were keen on learning from the citizens of Aarhus, their thoughts of their town, likes and dislikes.
Early in the process when everything was still open, we took the time to get into dialogues with the citizens, being open-minded and learning from their thoughts and likings.
The local library became the scene; a large map of the municipality of Aarhus became the setting.
The city architect visited the venue, finding it very interesting, that we had this conversation with people about their town.

AAL

It was fun, and educating in many ways.

We had high hopes, that the setup would give us answers in developing several elements in the part of the exhibition that should communicate Aarhus from the 1950'es and onward. The learning was important, but more implicitly though. Nevertheless, one thing became very clear, that a city map is extremely engaging and makes almost any person curious about the place they live. An experience that has been transferred into the exhibition of Aarhus.

LSK

The exhibition Aarhus rocks! was a pre-project for Aarhus Story about rock- and pop music from Aarhus.

In that we wanted to test as many methods for user involvement as possible.

An example is the use of Social media:

Facebook was used extensively to gather informants, collect objects/photos, curate content – for instance which songs and bands should be on display.

An example is the songs in a record studio, where people could record Aarhus hits.

The exhibition was also used for testing activity elements in practise – and the record studio turned out to be a success and was copied into Aarhus Story.

LSK

Another Aarhus rocks experiment was Instagram:

In collaboration with three music festivals we wanted the festival participants to document their own festival experience on Instagram using a specific hashtag.

We thought the users could do this better than we could, so we asked them to do, what they would do anyway – and the material was huge.

Thousands of festival pictures were shown on screens in the exhibition.

But in the final installation many irrelevant photos came up.

The hashtag was also used by others, for Instance an Australian beach event, and technically it was impossible to sort them.

So this method was not found useful in Aarhus Story.

LSK

Jokes about people of Aarhus became very popular in the 1970s – not so much in Aarhus as in the rest of the country.

We wanted this phenomena to be part of Aarhus Story.

But we wanted to test which of them are still funny today – because a lot of them were definitely outdated.

We had visitors helping to curate the jokes.

They are now told in the telephone box in Aarhus Story.

AAL
Another method was used, when we wanted to collect stories from citizens and grassroots' protest movements. It became a chain reaction. After talking to the first "protesters", they advised us on which movement they thought important as well, and so on to the next one. This is the result. Now, because we experience that local protests engage visitors, make them comment, and suggesting new protests movements, this element will undergo a continuous updating. Moreover, for sure – there will be more protest to come.

LSK

The Kaospilots is a creative education for enterprising and leadershipbased in Aarhus, an alternative to the established educations in the city.

We wanted their story told in Aarhus Story as one of 10 selected phenomena, that are Made in Aarhus.

We thought, they knew best how to tell their story themselves, so we asked them to contribute.

A group of Kaospilot students conceptualized the content, and students and staff from the Kaospilots collected all the objects.

The display was made by our own museum staff to ensure the overall appearance of the whole Made in Aarhus-installation.

AAL

In regarding collecting objects to Aarhus Story, the starting point was often finding and zooming in on the precise story, which should be told.

About this, we talked to the expert users to narrow it down, and secondly finding the right objects.

Collecting items regarding the story of the local football club AGF was particularly interesting.

The story of AGF is full of ups and downs, highs and lows. We wanted to capture exactly that in our exhibition.

Former players from the time, was willing to help us with objects, so we managed to collect exactly two iconic items that could represent defeat and victory.

It took a lot of legwork but paid off in the end allowing us to tell the story we think represent AGF the best and not just any GF-story.

More details, you need to see for yourself.

LSK

The texts for each chronological section of Aarhus Story were considered very important for the whole exhibition.

It might be the only texts in the exhibition to be read by many of the future visitors.

Therefore we tested different versions of the texts on a representative group of users.

LSK
After developing the ideas for each part of the exhibition and choosing the physical design,
we wanted to test some of them by visitors to find out if people understood the meaning and what kind of instruction they might need.
For a photo opportunity activity in relation to the story of sailing sport in Aarhus, we made this test set up and asked some random visitors to test it.

LSK

We have also worked with visitor contribution in exhibitions.

In the Aarhus rocks!-exhibition we had an analogue element about the visitors favorite live music experience in Aarhus.

The visitors could write it on notes and hang them on the red pillar.

And a digital quick poll about favorite Aarhus bands through the last 6 decades.

We found out, that the digital one was better mainly for practical reasons.

The notes from the pillar were often spread all over the exhibition.

And people wrote a lot of completely irrelevant comments.

On the contrary the digital one was very easy to use and extremely engaging.

AAL

These experiments made us choose the digital quick poll-concept in Aarhus Story:

The choice of band works know just as well in Aarhus Story as it did in Aarhus Rock's.

Visitors that poll about good and bad architecture is another quick poll. In addition we have noticed, that visitors sometimes start talking about, what good and bad architecture actually means – a great side effect.

The visitors can poll about Aarhus slogans.

Moreover, we have **two** polls about AGF, our legendary football club.

In due time, they all will be refined or changed to new polls.

And the key learnings from the experiences at out museum

LSK

Firstly: Always have a plan for the implementation of user contribution. There must be a real request – user involvement for its own purpose does not make sense. It has to improve the final result. And the staff has to be dedicated and have the time for it.

Secondly: It has to be possible in practice – This meant a lot of opting out of the more radical user involving methods in Aarhus Story. Why was that?

Mainly because we lacked both the time and physical space to implement the output of more radical user involvement. For instance letting participants build parts of the exhibition.

The process of building the exhibition was under a lot of time pressure, because of the building of the underground construction.

The amount of content was overwhelming and the space for it was sparse - 1200 years of history in 800 square meters.

Everything had to be designed strictly in coordination with the totality AND taking the adopted principles into account.

That made a very compressed process and a lot of practical limitations for involving users in the process.

Moreover some of the desires for visitor involvement **in** the exhibition turned out to be too complicated technically.

Purposes

- Experts
  Making a better and more authentic result than we could do ourselves

- Ownership
  People outside the museum being recognized and becoming part of history

- Visitor friendly
  Testing our own ideas

- Voices and views
  Making content more diverse

Den Gamle By

AAL
Even though –
In the development of Aarhus Story, user involvement became quite natural part of the work in different ways:

In the sense of realizing, that we are not the experts on everything – and with an obvious aim of authenticity, the dialogues with the different users were fulfilling.

And we have experienced ownership – being part of the process and the exhibition makes people feel recognized and part of history – and by the way, they become fantastic ambassadors.

Testing our own ideas involving users made sure we were not taking the path, making the exhibition solely for our selves.

And finally –
Being aware in the process, that voices and views differ, hopefully have made content more diverse, so visitors can find themselves and their interests somewhere in the exhibition of Aarhus.