



Urban Diversity &

A Working Meeting in Antwerp

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Red Star Line Museum and MAS - Museum aan de Stroom hosted an international workshop on 'Urban Diversity and City Museums' on 29 and 30 September 2014. Fifty museum professionals and heritage workers from Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium participated in this event.

Several city museums have given much thought to the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of their city's demographic composition. Super-diversity has for surly had a serious impact on the contemporary urban landscape and culture, where the local and the global interconnect. At the same time this diversity presented new challenges and opportunities. As one of the key roles of city museums consists of acting as a 'platform' for all citizens, these city museums need to take into consideration this increasing diversity and complexity. Hence, the following questions have an urgency to be addressed adequately and timely. What is the social and cultural background of the citizens and how does this background intersect with other markers of super-diversity?



City Museums

How are citizens represented in the museum and how do they experience the museum space? Is a separate museum necessary and plausible in order to highlight the super-diversity of a city and/or should super-diversity be an integral part of the display and discourse of a general city museum? How to balance between conflict and conviviality in a super-diverse urban setting? In other words, how should city museums deal with social and cultural diversity and how should they engage all the citizens of the city?

- *Photo left page: Suitcases are an almost self-evident image and object in displays on migration. A suitcase, particularly a closed suitcase, has a meaning in itself, but also holds the promise of still other objects and meanings. Melbourne Immigration Museum. © Max Anderson*
- *Photos right page (clockwise): The border metaphor is strengthened by the reconstruction of the office table of a border control agent at the centre of the presentation. The 'border' narrative allows highlighting the role of state policies in relation to migration. Pier 21 in Halifax. © Jen Kim / A second cliché in exhibitions on migration is the metaphor of the journey. Examples are the displays of ships. Not only ships but also trains and other ways of transport are often central to displays on migration. Deutsches Auswandererhaus Bremerhaven. © Christian Tombrägel / Ellis Island © Sue Waters/ Deutsches Auswandererhaus.*

Migration, New Urban Landscape and City Museums - Ching Lin Pang

Migration and the New Urban Landscape

The mobility of people, goods, information and ideas - the hallmark of globalization from the late seventies and eighties onwards - has shaped and transformed the demographic structure, the urban landscape and the very identity of the city itself beyond recognition. These changes do not evolve in a vacuum but they represent the latest development of the modernization continuum starting from the second half of the 19th century (Zukin 1998).¹

From modernity (1880-1945) to late modernity (1945-1975) to postmodernity (1975-present) the city has continually received waves of migration, first internally, then followed by transnational migrants. Migration into the city presents a great challenge to the material fabric and symbolic representation of the city. As a matter of fact the inflow of newcomers has given rise to different types of marginalities: gender, immigrant, ethnic and socio-economic. Thus not same-ness or commonality but rather difference constitutes the hallmark of the city. The arrival of large numbers of non-European migrants in European cities, especially after the migration stop in the mid-1970s, marked the onset of restrictive immigration policies in most European countries. This has altered the urban landscape in an irreversible way. Along with other visible subaltern subjectivities like gay and lesbian immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities have made 'alternative' lifestyles more visible and acceptable, while having a significant impact on defining 'urban' cultures. This new development goes hand in hand with the shift of the city from a landscape of production to a landscape of consumption. To be more precise, consumption of culture, i.e. art, food, fashion, music, tourism and museums. This shift generates from the liberalization of capital and the emergence of a new creed of gentrifiers, consisting of professionals, including baby boomers and subsequent generations with impressive disposable income to spend on high-quality goods and high-end services. As they have financial means and the right connections with city officials and other powerful decision makers and the tastemakers in the cultural industry, they determine to a high degree new cultural consumption goods and services, including museum visits (Zukin 2011).²

In recent times, since the 1990s the complexity and scope of migrations have witnessed unprecedented forms in most Western societies and increasingly in the metropolises in emerging countries across the globe. When the first non-European, visible migrants emerged in Antwerp starting in the 1960s, few people will then have envisaged and imagined the contemporary makeup of a super diverse society. The British social anthropologist Steven Vertovec coined the concept 'super-diversity' in 2006 to denote the new demographic condition of London. Nationalities from across the globe are living in London. In the meantime the term has become a commonplace in the noisy arena of the public discourse on migration and people with a migration background. 'Super-

diversity' underlines a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has experienced in the past. This shows that migration has not only increased over the years and decades but it has become immensely more complex. It is characterized by a dynamic interplay of variables, including: country of origin, migration channel and legal status. The variable of country of origin includes a variety of possible subset traits such as ethnicity, language[s], religious tradition, regional and local identities, cultural values and practices. Migration channel is generally linked to highly gendered flows, specific social networks and particular labour market niches, while legal status refers to a wide range of categories determining a hierarchy of entitlements and restrictions. These variables have an impact on integration outcomes along with factors such as migrants' human capital (particularly educational background), access to employment locality (related particularly to material conditions, but also to other immigrant and ethnic minority presence), and the responses by local authorities and service providers.

In Antwerp the number of non-EU foreign nationals made up 21,9 % of the total population in 2008. This figure does not include the so called 'new' Belgians with an immigration background. So diversity abounds even more, and thus also the challenges of diversity. In 2014 168 different nationalities are counted among non-EU nationals.³ Super-diversity has become the foremost urban condition.

The Museum as Contact Zone

What are the role and the position of museums in the new urban consumption landscape? In 1992 Mary Louise Pratt⁴ introduced the concept of 'contact zones': a social space, where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination. In 1997 James Clifford⁵ re-appropriated the concept and applied it in the museological context. A museum can act as a contact zone, a site of contentious and collaborative relations and interactions. There is a rich literature on the idea of the museum functioning as complex, multi-layered spaces where a wide range of issues need to be questioned, discussed and performed. The marriage between anthropologists and museologists seems promising. The postmodern concerns of anthropologists with ethnographic authority and representation seem to chime in with the vision of new museology. To cite Hugues de Varine⁶: "A museum is or rather should be one of the most perfected tools that society has available to prepare and accompany its own transformation". Museums should co-operate closely with the multi-ethnic social groups, which they should represent and support.⁷

Moreover both anthropologists and museologists⁸ share an interest in going behind the scene, to make clear how the front stage and backstage relate to one another. It is also the ambition of new museology that visitors actively and criti-

cally become involved in the deconstruction of the museum and thus become more informed cultural consumers. In other words, the lived experiences and the museum experiences of the represented communities are taken into account. The inclusion of the framed communities both during the designing stage of the exhibition but also when visiting a museum, is vital. It makes an exhibition 'authentic' in the sense of representative, as historical and cultural museums aim to capture the changing structures, processes and practices in contemporary cities.

In the representation of super-diversity in the museum space and other sites one needs to balance between the representation of conflicts and harmonious civic integration practices. Indeed racism, discrimination and exclusion are part and parcel of multi-ethnic societies. This reality is being represented, visualized and performed in the public media in recurrent ways. On the other hand people do live together in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, generating many good practices in the area of civic integration. Multi-ethnic neighbourhoods are often identified as highly creative and trendy neighbourhoods in the new urban landscape of consumption in the vast literature on the potential of mixed neighborhoods among urban theorists. However, we are

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often warned about the danger of celebrating diversity by looking myopically at the so-called good things of migration and thus being trapped by 'boutique multiculturalism' (Fish 1997).⁹ In boutique multiculturalism according to Stanley Fish people recognize the significance and legitimacy of other cultures, but only insofar as it does not interfere with the very nature of the culture to which they belong. In the area of lifestyle there is a widespread acceptance of 'exotic' food but one is less likely to accept a Muslim woman to wear a niqab or burka. To what extent 'boutique multiculturalism' relates to 'the third space', a charming concept introduced by urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg, "The great good place: cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons and other hangouts at the heart of a community" is food for further ►

■ Another strategy, place, is more involved with the settlement context of migrants. A good example is the Lower East Side Tenement Museum connecting the display of migration history with a history of living and working conditions. Tenement Museum. © Shawn Hoke



discussion and reflection. In other words we are warned against a one-sided view with a penchant for what unites us (what works, instead of what separates us) and for conflicts, exclusion, mutual suspicion within the contact zone called museum. Indeed how to balance between conflict and conviviality warrants deep scrutiny and reflection.

Conclusion

Museum experts have made major efforts in handling diversity with care and creativity. Many good practices abound such as the practice of including marginal voices from a bottom-up perspective with an open mindset. Yet, how to transform new citizens with a migration background into active cultural consumers requires major rethinking of how we construct and view the new urban condition of diversity, mobility and multiple belongings. As a conclusion, curating diversity in city museums remains a challenging and tortuous undertaking with varying outcomes. There is ample room for improvement and creative interventions. It is an enduring learning process, in tune with rapid and deep changes in the urban tissue.

Thoughts by Paul van de Laar

Luc Verheyen, director of Red Star Line Museum, summarised the key elements of what city museums or museums of migrations are trying to do: "Present simple narratives for complex matters." As Ching Lin Pang made perfectly clear, the believers are convinced that migration may lead to a better society. But they are facing a majority of non-believers focusing on the difficulties of cities of migration. Following the arguments of Steven Vertovec's (2007) pioneering work on super-diversity and its implications, museums are facing new challenges. In our super diverse, hybrid society, the

role of the museum has become more complex. Simple narratives do not fit into this new context. International post-war migration patterns and transnational connections of a new globalised world have reshaped the urban socio-cultural stratification, its public self-awareness and means of urban representation. Urban curators working in these cities cannot deny the impact that super-diversity is having on the role of museums. They need to change their attitude towards the classical heritage paradigm based on authenticity and accept a new role with regards to a super diverse public. Museum space, then, represents a forum, a contact zone of difference, where people from different backgrounds and cultures come together sharing common experiences and remembrances.

Critical observers, academics working in the field of super-diversity and representatives of diverse communities, stressed, and they will continue to do so, that most museums have not developed into critical agencies. The best practices show that museums still operate in a world in which public funding and trustees want successful stories showing how successful migrants are integrated into dominant cultures. But super-diversity cannot do without tensions.

The classical city museums can learn a lot from the community grass root experiences as demonstrated by the FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum, a part of Berlin, totally interwoven with its migration history. This museum was honoured for being an agent of social change, based on a democratic movement. However, there is always a danger that a successful movement may conflict with the core values museums embrace.

City museums are museums of the future because they are willing to turn into a social and cultural public space offering super diverse urban communities ample room for reinterpreting our canonised city stories. These super diverse reflections on our urban past may help to generate a new form of urban human and cultural capital.

Exhibiting Diversity. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display in an Age of Migration - Joachim Bauer

The title of the talk refers to a groundbreaking book for new museology: *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine in 1991, which established critical museum studies by unraveling issues of race, class, gender and conflict in museum representations.

Now, some 25 years later, Bauer uses the title with the addition 'in an Age of Migration'. The addition is a literal reference to the European research project 'MeLa*, European museums in an age of migration'¹⁰: its main objectives consist in advancing knowledge in the field and supporting museum communities, practitioners, experts and policymakers in developing new missions and forms of museums in 'an age of migrations'.

However, 'in an age of migrations' is also a strong way of positioning ourselves and interpreting our time. Migration

is anything but a recent phenomenon; it has a long history pretty much everywhere around the globe and is part of the "human condition".¹¹ The difference is, of course, that now more and more societies (or for that matter cities and museums) acknowledge – not without resistance – that they have been largely shaped by migration.

Immigration Museums and the conundrum of 'inclusion'

A main point in Bauer's analysis of immigration museums, the oldest ones being the Migration Museum in Adelaide (1986), the Ellis Island Museum in New York (1990) and the Tenement Museum in New York (1992), was the observation that they work at establishing an all-encompassing, inclusive national master narrative of migration. In the name of 'social cohesion', immigration is presented as the one shared

and uniting experience. Such a narrative, to be sure, is explicitly directed against older forms of imagining the nation, against visions of cultural homogeneity or (Anglo-) conformity. The diversity of individuals and groups is openly acknowledged and underlined. The focus, however, is very much on cultural diversity with other forms of societal difference, be it in terms of class, race¹² or political agenda, social or gender inequality, disappearing from our view or thus being framed and contained. The possibility of de-centering and de-stabilizing the concept of nation inherent in the transnational phenomenon of migration is turned into its opposite and made useful for the regeneration and revitalization of nation-state thinking.

In the case of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, for instance, a form of at least passive resistance against the subsumption and silencing of the very different migration heritage of African Americans, i.e. the slave trade, under a national master narrative of immigration at a site coded dominantly white and European can be detected in the very reluctant responses from African Americans to the repeated call to lend or donate objects to the museum. In trying to counterbalance the meagre result and nevertheless tell a broadly inclusive story, the museum curators had no choice but to scatter the few objects relating to non-Europeans within the exhibitions ►

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■ A next motif that is often used in migration museums or exhibitions is the ‘cornucopia’ of goods which the immigrants brought with them. Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration. © Jean-Pierre Dalbéra





■ A “gipsy family from Serbia” appears together with many others as part of the diverse family of immigrants in the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. From the records of the immigration commissioner, however, we know that the whole group was denied access to the country and sent back to Europe. Photographer: Sherman, Augustus F. (Augustus Francis), 1865-1925 Collection: New York Public Library.

in order to achieve a maximum of visible diversity. This practice can be identified in an exhibition called ‘Family Album’ which shows many photographs of immigrants. When one visitor wrote to the museum asking why the pictures of a Caribbean father and his daughter weren’t presented together, but on opposite sides of the hall, the project manager scribbled an illuminating internal note: “I don’t know the specific photograph, but would not find it hard to believe that Meta-Form [the external curators, J.B.] may have stretched things a bit for the purpose of being inclusive rather than exclusive.”¹³

“For the purpose of being inclusive” the museum even presents people deported from Ellis Island as immigrants. In a gallery with Ellis Island-pictures by Lewis Hine and immigration officer Augustus Sherman, a “gipsy family from Serbia” appears together with many others as part of the diverse family of immigrants. From the records of the immigration commissioner, however, we know that the whole group was denied access to the country on racist grounds and sent back to Europe. The curators must have known this – why they still show the pictures (without additional information) is open to speculation.

Five typical approaches in narrative and display

Further, the observation of concrete exhibition practices in immigration museums allowed Bauer to decipher five typical approaches in narrative and display.

BORDER

The Ellis Island Immigration Museum, which is literally situated in a former border control station, is a typical case. The Canadian Pier 21 museum, which is also in the former Immigration Station, is a similar case. Here, the ‘border’ metaphor is strengthened by the reconstruction of the office table of a border control agent at the centre of the presentation. Displaying passports and official papers is also part of this trend in migration museums. The ‘border’ narrative allows highlighting the role of state policies in relation to migration. However, a drawback of the ‘border’ image is the tendency to over-represent the nation as a clearly limited and controlled bastion, and migration as an immediate shift of identity.

JOURNEY

A second cliché in exhibitions on migration is the metaphor of the journey. Prominent examples are the displays of ships in, amongst others, the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, and the Emigration House Bremerhaven. Both 'ships' are accessible for museum visitors and show the life on board. Not only 'ships' also 'trains' and other ways of transport are often central to displays on migration.

The advantage of the journey metaphor is that the link between migration and other forms of mobility, first of all tourism, can be presented and that social differences between migrants (passengers) can easily be accounted for. The 'journey' image however tends to coin migration as a one-way transformation or 'rite de passage', while migration is often a practice of travelling back and forth and of less linear identity shifts.

SUITCASE

Suitcases are a third, almost self-evident image and object in displays on migration. The suitcase is an ambivalent motif, which is closely related to the 'journey', but less one-directional in its meaning. It connects departure and arrival and plays with the dialectic between the visible and the invisible. A suitcase, particularly a closed suitcase, has a meaning in itself, but also holds the promise of still other objects and meanings.

CORNUCOPIA

A fourth motif that is often used in migration museums or exhibitions is the 'cornucopia' of goods which the immigrants brought with them. Characteristic of these displays is the image of exotic diversity. This risk of this type of display is that migration history is staged as simply a narrative of 'cultural enrichment'. By the label "enrichment narrative" Ian McShane criticizes expressions of a culinary multiculturalism celebrating the history of migration along the lines of colourful cultural contributions of immigrants (frequently focusing on food, music and crafts).¹⁴

PLACE/S

A fifth strategy 'place' is more involved with the settlement context of migrants. A good example is the Lower East Side Tenement Museum connecting the display of migration history with a history of living and working conditions. The advantage of this perspective is the immediate framing of issues of migration as larger societal issues, which allows to move beyond the stereotypical 'us', being the locals and 'them', being the migrants. Dealing with 'place' is obvious for city museums, but it is promising in relation to migration.¹⁵

Thoughts by Anja Dauschek

On the second day of the conference we moved from the Karp/Levine definition of museums as contested terrain regarding race, class and gender as put forward by Joachim Bauer. Three major topics were central in the meeting: the role of objects, the issue of place and the question of time.

The role of objects is being challenged and defined newly as was shown by the Amsterdam project 'Kabra ancestor mask'. This brought up the issue of objects and collecting. Generally objects of

migration history are – if they are available at all – not usually eye-catchers. They carry personal memories that are not accessible to all visitors. Sometimes migration objects can or need to be used in ceremonies and can possibly provide cultural healing (as was shown with the Kabra mask).

Joachim Bauer introduced 'place' as a promising starting point for research and presentation. Dealing with place is a natural topic for city museums because it is their traditional focus. A number of the examples presented showed how recreating the historical and social complexities of a defined place can result in meaningful presentations. Place-related projects can take place inside or outside the museum walls.

A third topic was moving beyond migration history into the present. How do we approach communities – as official institutions or rather via volunteer 'trace seekers' like the MAS project showed. How do we, as museums, deal with difficult issues in migration history and with conflicts today?

Since those two keynotes, eight cases and two conclusions we have all returned to the vicissitudes of daily work routine in city museums and academia. However many ideas, reflections and experiences were exchanged formally and informally during the two-day conference. Perhaps the real aim of such conferences is meeting like-minded colleagues coming from different cities. This event begs for a follow-up, perhaps in two years' time, perhaps in Germany?



In this report the keynote of Ching Lin Pang, Associate Professor at the University of Antwerp & KU Leuven, is partially rendered, followed by thoughts of Paul Van de Laar, director of Museum Rotterdam. Then Dr. Joachim Bauer, historian and curator at Die Exponenten in Berlin talks about 'Exhibiting Diversity', with thoughts by Anja Dauschek, director of Stadtmuseum Stuttgart. Lieve Willekens, Coordinator Heritage and Diversity and Leen Beyers, staff member of the MAS Museum Antwerp, merged the different parts to this article.

1. S. Zukin, *Urban Lifestyles: Diversity and Standardisation in Spaces of Consumption*. Urban Studies, 1998. 35:825. DOI: 10.1080/0042098984574
2. S. Zukin, *The Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.
3. Statistics of the city of Antwerp.
4. M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London, Routledge, 1992.
5. J. Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late 20th Century*. Cambridge & London, Harvard University Press, 1997.
6. H. De Varine, 'Notes en forme d'avant-propos', in: A. Nicolas (ed), *Nouvelles Muséologies*. Marseille, Muséologie nouvelle et experimentation sociale, 1985, pp. 3-4.
7. D. Stam, *The Informed Muse: the Implications of the 'New Museology' for Museum Practice*, in: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 12(1993)3, pp. 267-283.
8. S. MacDonald, *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum*. Oxford, Berg, 2002.
9. S. Fish, *Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech*, in: *Critical Inquiry*, 23(1997)2, pp. 378-395.
10. www.mela-project.eu
11. As German migration historian Klaus Bade has reminded us over and over again.
12. For a sharp distinction between ethnicity/cultural diversity and race see Forest 2002 REFERENCE? Stratton und Ang (1998) argue that race – which the displays tend to displace by ethnicity – constitutes the inherent 'sign of fracture' that forecloses the construction of harmonious national identities in settler societies by reference to colonial violence and trauma.
13. Gary Roth to Diana Pardue, 16.8.1991, Ellis Island Archives, Cadwallader/Roth court Hearings, Box 3.
14. I. McShane, 'Challenging or Conventional? Migration History in Australian Museums', in: D. McIntyre and K. Wehner (Hg.), *National Museums. Negotiating Histories*. Canberra, National Museum of Australia, pp. 122-133, pp. 128-129.
15. As has been recently argued by C. Whitehead, S. Eckersley and R. Mason (eds.), *Placing migration in European museums*. Theoretical, Contextual and Methodological Foundations, 2012, p. 15.