

# Collecting with(in) the city

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# Collecting with(in) the city

**CAMOC & COMCOL  
Conference  
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# Practices of (co)curating

## Voices in the city: Case studies from London Transport Museum's contemporary collecting programme

Zeynep Kussan & Ellie Miles

### Biography

Zeynep Kussan is Documentary Curator at London Transport Museum. Zeynep worked at the London Museum (previously Museum of London) on exhibitions, including *The Crime Museum Uncovered*, *Fire! Fire!*, *Tunnel: The Archaeology of Crossrail*, *Roman Dead: Death and Burial in Roman London* and the award-winning display *Harry Kane: I Want to Play Football*. Her documentary work has been to record contemporary London, including two major programmes within London Museum: the Documentary Curator Programme and *Curating London*. Zeynep was awarded the Museums Association's Museums Change Lives Radical Changemaker Award in 2023.

Dr Ellie Miles is a curator of contemporary collecting at London Transport Museum. Ellie also worked in interpretation at the British Museum and as a curator at the London Museum (previously Museum of London). She previously designed and led MA modules at the University of Westminster. Ellie is on the acting committee of the UK-based Contemporary Collecting Network, and recently co-edited a book about the ethics of contemporary collecting (Routledge, 2024).

### Introduction

This paper introduces the London Transport Museum, outlining its history and evolving approach to contemporary collecting, particularly through the Documentary Curator projects. We will also explore learnings from specific projects, highlighting how we consider and understand the impacts of intersectionality as a museum, to document and capture contemporary London, its people and places on the transport network through co-curating, commissions and collaborations.

### Introduction to London Transport Museum

London Transport Museum opened to the public in 1980, in London's Covent Garden. There is also a collections storage facility, the Acton Depot, which is open several times a year to visitors, as well as a programme of tours that operate under the 'Hidden London' brand, which allow visitors to explore disused underground stations.

London Transport Museum is more tightly focused than some city museums, as its remit is around the story of public transport and its history in London. There is a lot to explore by understanding a city through the mobilities that occur within it, as well as the ways it is connected to other places. Through this approach the museum reflects London's growth, economy and social history. (See Figure 1)



Figure 1: General view of the interior of London Transport Museum (c) London Transport Museum

The museum was formed from part of the British Transport collection and inherited a substantial amount of material from there and from London's transit authority. These collections have been actively added to and developed ever since. There is a large collection of vehicles, as well as posters, maps, printed ephemera, signage, models, photographs, uniforms and other working and social history materials.

The museum receives offers of materials from transport enthusiasts who know about the existing collection, as well as from parts of the transit authority directly. The contemporary work that we will focus on here is the more proactive kind, where we seek new objects, stories and connections to make the collections more reflective and representative of the city itself.

Today, London's transport authority, Transport for London (TfL), has a workforce of almost 30,000 people. This workforce keeps London moving by carrying out a large scope of work: driving rolling stock; maintaining traffic signals; working on cyber security; working with smart data; providing training, communications, visual services, customer services; design services; maintaining rail networks and other infrastructure; cleaning; urban planning; managing road tunnels; working in procurement and hundreds of other roles. It contains a huge variety of work, with a diversity of people doing it. This is, of course, before you even consider the passengers, and the nearly 3.6 billion public transport journeys that they take every year.

The museum has been working on contemporary collecting activity for many, many years – in fact the collection began over a century ago, when many of our oldest vehicles were not long out of service. It has always been a museum of working history, which has aspired to collect this history in different ways over its own time. In the last twenty years the museum has benefited from a series of contemporary collecting curatorial roles, where individuals have been able to focus time and knowledge on gathering contemporary stories, to enrich the museum's collections and document stories that are representative of the city itself.

### The role of the Documentary Curator programme

Arts Council England (ACE), have been funding the Documentary Curator programme since 2018. The programme funds one full-time Documentary Curator position, who delivers three collecting projects a year. The Documentary Curator is part of a team of curators at London Transport Museum, some of whom specialise in vehicles, some in collections management and others in parts of the collection. Many of these colleagues will undertake contemporary collecting too – regularly acquiring new posters from Transport for London, for example, or acquiring one-off objects on an ad-hoc basis. This is a huge advantage for us working today because within the curatorial and collections team there is a supportive environment and experienced team who have a good understanding of what contemporary collecting can do for the museum.

What the Documentary Curator programme provides, and what this paper will now focus on, is the scope to work out new ways to collect and document, which do not depend on collecting more through our existing approaches. The Documentary Curator projects we have delivered and continue to develop have all been, and will continue to be, very different.

Each collecting project asks different questions, some of which are based on:

- Which topic is being addressed?
- Who is participating in the collecting project?
- How does the museum preserve people's experiences?

Therefore, we redesign each of the Documentary Curator projects, learning from each. To do so we draw on a body of knowledge.



Figure 2: The rainbow crossing on display, with the My Journey To Pride video on display alongside it (c) London Transport Museum

As the numbers of workers and passengers suggest, our subject matter feels huge. With a city so large, and a population with so many different personalities, backgrounds, connections and priorities, it is not obvious how to approach our work. Initially we developed our list of projects from desk research: by reviewing the transit authority's business plan, the Mayor's Transport Strategy, and the museum's forward plan. From this research, we sought to identify three collecting projects: to include a museum-output project, an infrastructure-focused project, and a community-participation project. As readers will have realised, this categorisation couldn't work to plan projects and was almost immediately set aside. For story-led collecting you need to listen to people, not corporate documents. We changed our approach to starting different conversations and seeing what would emerge from those. (See Figure 2)

So, having introduced the context of Documentary Curating at London Transport Museum, we will now talk about some recently completed projects and what we learned from them, before looking at work that's underway now, and our aspirations for the future.

**'My Journey To Pride' collecting project**

A key example of contemporary collecting is the acquisition of London's first rainbow crossing in 2015, which served as a catalyst for exploring the intersection of London's transport and LGBTQ+ experiences. Rainbow crossings are pedestrian crossings set out in Pride rainbow colours. They were used in Taiwan in 2008, on a university campus, and soon the idea of rainbow crossings for pride was adopted internationally across cities such as Sydney and Hollywood, and in 2014, London.

London's first rainbow crossing was proposed by LGBTQ+ transport staff. It was a temporary crossing with the six-colour rainbow and was first used at Pall Mall in London in 2014, next to the route of London's Pride Parade that year. It went on to be used twice more in the city, outside Arsenal station and at Trafalgar Square.

Rainbow crossings are an example of a global local object. One that shows how London is part of a network of global cities, where ideas circulate and are shared. It can also be read as a hyperlocal story which talks about the specifics of the streetscape at different times: about how roads are used for protests and parades, as well as for everyday mobility. It's a six metre long crossing. Its size and physical vulnerability meant that it took a while to figure out how to display it, but it did go on display in 2021.

Examples of corporate pride materials have an interesting role in the LGBTQ+ movement, and a contested presence in Pride events. Objects such as these celebrate representation, and are of course, part of a story, but on their own don't tell you much about what it's like to be at Pride, and what that means for an LGBTQ+ person moving around London on public transport. We sought to revisit this question and extend this area of collecting, to think again about how we could collect people's experiences of Pride events as a transport story, and how we might do that through new means. It was in 2019 that museum freelancer Sasha Coward came to us with an idea. Coward suggested working on a project which explored people's journeys to and from Pride using both video diaries and social media. We benefited from having the flexibility in our planning and the support of other teams in the museum to try a new method with Coward. The resulting film, which documents the journeys people made to and from Pride in London and UK Black Pride events in 2019, is a collections object (London Transport Museum 2019). The video diary format means that it can bring together multiple perspectives and experiences into the exhibit, with people speaking to camera on their own terms about their experiences on the day, and how it was different from other days.

The following year the museum undertook a similar model of collecting – again very much working with people's self-representation and presenting material beyond traditional forms of museum objects.

**Windrush Writing collecting project**

Windrush Day is an annual commemoration in the UK, honouring the huge contributions that post-war migrants from the Caribbean gave to the UK. The HMT Empire Windrush was a passenger ship that became a symbol of post-war migration to Britain, and the 'Windrush generation' refers to the group of people who were born in the Caribbean and settled in the UK between 1948 and 1971. The UK has not always celebrated this contribution. The Windrush Scandal, during which the UK Home Office wrongly deported, detained, refused entry and denied the rights of citizens who had arrived in the UK from the Commonwealth before 1973, including many Windrush Generation members. An estimated 57,000 Commonwealth migrants were affected, in ways which also included being denied benefits, denied medical care, losing homes and losing jobs due to the wrongful actions of the UK Home Office.

In 2020 the Raising Awareness of Culture and Ethnicity colleague network group at TfL organized an exhibition to mark Windrush Day. The exhibition was crowdsourced from group members, and existed on the TfL staff intranet. The timing was significant, because the exhibition launched on Windrush Day (22 June) 2020, soon after the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the USA, and during a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. It was also during the first wave of the Covid pandemic in the UK, when there were disproportionate deaths of people of colour, and transport workers were badly exposed to the first wave of the pandemic (Office for National Statistics, 2023). The colleague network group curated an intranet exhibition which included photographs, musical performance, recordings of interviews with elders, and pieces of poetry and prose writing, reflecting on the significance of Windrush Day at that point in time.

The Documentary Curator could then work with the group, its leaders, and the exhibition contributors (some of whom were not members of the colleague network group). Through a series of conversations, we found ways for the museum to support the writers in sharing their writing and promoting their work more widely. Firstly, with permission, the museum made preservation copies of the poems and writing, both in text and audio form, with the writers reading their work. Then we put a piece about the exhibition on the museum's website, for the public to read the work. Sadly this couldn't replicate the original exhibition fully: there were issues around the musical performance rights, and tracing interviewees and their families for permissions during the pandemic for the recorded interviews.

The conversations continued beyond this initial phase of publishing work online, and led to the idea of a video installation of the poems, using readings of the words by the writers, and using kinetic typography to focus on the writing. These animations were reviewed throughout the design process by the writers, who shaped the look and feel of the animation of their words and made changes where they wished in rounds of reviews and comments. The resulting videos were installed in a dedicated space in the main visitor route through the museum, and were launched at the museum for Windrush Day 2021.

The videos can also be watched online (London Transport Museum 2021). The discussions and collection of poems also led to the development of a temporary exhibition about the legacies of the direct recruitment campaign that London Transport undertook in the Caribbean. The collecting also led to the formation of an advisory board to shape and inform the exhibition, including its content, marketing, design and surrounding programming. (See figure 3)

These two completed projects were very different in character, approach and delivery but both focused on getting the museum's perspective out of the way, so that people could tell their own stories and histories. They also relied on cooperating with other people – working with people to talk about their experiences or their family history, working with freelancers and group committees. In work like this, the role of the curator is to listen, then to take what they know about how collections are developed and figure out how to make that process work for the people telling the story. We will now turn our focus to projects in progress.



Figure 3: A section of the exhibition about the legacies of Caribbean recruitment, which followed the Windrush Stories collecting project (c) London Transport Museum

### 'My Story, Your Story, Our Story', documenting people stories

My Story, Your Story, Our Story is a contemporary collecting project, which aims to document individual stories from across Transport for London's workforce, past and present. It will document stories of migration, diaspora, identity and belonging to preserve cultural and employee legacies for future generations. The medium in which participants choose to express their story has been left open, examples include oral histories, voice audio that can be recorded in multiple languages in addition to English, film, paintings, drawings, poetry, textiles, music, photography or a mixture of the above.



Figure 4: Taking the museum outside into the city, during the My Story, Your Story, Our Story project (c) London Transport Museum

The Documentary Curator will support each participant, making sure all tools and materials are available to them as well as supporting them with family research methods and gaining access to archives. Personal stories can involve a lot of emotion and a duty of care as well as trauma-informed practice will be implemented throughout the project. Where necessary, we will always apply a people-first approach, for team members and participants. This project is an example of working closely with participants, for them to be able to tell their authentic story with full support of the curatorial and collections processes. It also allows the museum to showcase the existing creative talents of the workforce.

The project is currently in its first quarter of launch and has already begun working with 60 participants. There is a real sense of excitement of leaving an authentic legacy behind for future generations to access. This will allow a look back to a specific moment in time, to the people of Transport for London in 2025 - to the people behind the network and the people that keep London moving. (See figure 4)

### 'Accessible Routes', documenting people stories

Accessible Routes is a project in collaboration with an artist with lived experience of disability and London Transport Museum to record oral histories from the Campaign for Accessible Transport (CAT), and the Disabled People's Direct-Action Network (DAN).

This project is currently capturing the story of early disabled campaigners who fought for full access to the transport network and accessible routes for all, drawing attention to the wider issues of exclusion and discrimination of disabled passengers. In the early 1990s the protesters, mainly wheelchair users, handcuffed themselves to buses that at the time were not accessible for wheelchair users. Supported by both the Documentary Curator and a professional Videographer, a series of recorded oral history interviews with campaigners are being produced along with painted portraits of the participants by the commissioned artist.

The project will also include oral histories from Transport for London's own Disability Colleague Network Group to draw attention to internal action for inclusion. This is an important documentary project to highlight the work and commitment of early campaigners and the sacrifices they made for wider inclusion that has led to a lot of the changes in transport accessibility we see today. (See figure 5)



Figure 5: Recording interviews and oral histories for the Accessible Routes project (c) London Transport Museum

Other projects currently in progress include Transport for London's Sporting Heritage, which will look at TfL's sports and social clubs which impressively spans over 100 years; Transport for London and Popular Culture, which will include how the iconic roundel and station locations are used in film, letting spectators instantly recognise London as the city location; and finally working closely with a community center that is part of a large residential estate in the city, to capture passenger stories from families and residents. This aims at creating a situation where the museum is taken outside, which includes gaining access to the collections on display at London Transport Museum and museum's stored collections at its Acton Depot site, with behind the scenes initiatives.

### To conclude

Turning to the future, we will continue to adapt and evolve to capture and document collaborative work, in order to bring truly authentic stories into the collection. We will do so by combining the expertise of all people and their insights, with the skills within the collections and curatorial teams in the museum. We are working towards and using current methods in contemporary collecting to create an experience which is supportive, caring and accommodates emotion. This is with and for participants, community groups, collaborators and internal teams within the museum, to safeguard and maintain capacity to be supportive to others and continue our people-first led work. In return, we are making our collections accessible and relatable so that audiences can utilise the museum and its collections as a public resource - one that is representative of the cultural and public life of the city. The ongoing work is to continue to develop ways to balance the effort of contemporary collecting; rather than having the museum take control, we are working together equally to form and enrich a collection within the museum, which is truly representative of the past, the present and continues into the future.

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# Practices of (co)curating

## Beyond Objects: Creating community at the Kalamaja Museum, Tallinn City museum, Kalamaja museum

Kristi Paatsi

### Biography

Kristi Paatsi has been working in the museum world for over 15 years. She holds an MA in Estonian History from Tartu University. Her experience includes the Head of Educational Departments at both the Estonian History Museum and Tallinn City Museum.

Kristi is actively involved in professional organizations, serving on the board of the Estonian Museum Association and as a member of ICOM (ICOM-CAMOC). Her contributions to the field have been recognized with multiple awards, including the prestigious Silletto Prize for Kalamaja museum for Community Participation and Engagement at the European Museum Forum (EMYA) in 2024.

### Introduction

Imagine stepping into a space where every artifact tells a story, and every story is a thread in the vibrant tapestry of a community. This is the Kalamaja Museum, a cozy gathering place that opened in September 2021, welcoming both locals and visitors to explore the rich history and culture of the Kalamaja neighbourhood in Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia. The idea to create a community museum in Kalamaja was initiated by the Tallinn City Museum. As a branch of the City Museum, a building already existed in Kalamaja, and they were looking for a new and distinctive purpose for it. It was decided to hand over the decision-making process to the local community, allowing people to choose whether they wanted a museum in the area at all, what kind of museum it should be, and what content it should reflect — a very bold step taken by the Tallinn City Museum Kalamaja, translating to ‘Fish House,’ history dates back to the medieval era. The majority of its mostly wooden buildings were constructed in the first decades of the 20th century, as earlier structures were lost to wars and fires. Historically, Kalamaja was a working-class area with scanty conditions, where, until the early 2000s, many residents desired to relocate. However, a shift occurred, and the neighborhood became a sought-after residence for many. The Kalamaja Museum addresses this colorful past through its exhibitions, public programs, and diverse community projects. Welcoming both locals and visitors, it allows for exploration of the local history, present, and future. The museum encapsulates a fragment of the area’s vivid essence, having been created from the outset in collaboration with the people of the Kalamaja neighbourhood.

This method of establishing a museum is unique across Estonia. The museum’s inception in spring 2018 began with a survey among the locals, followed by brainstorming sessions and meeting nights where community members’ opinions and suggestions for creating the museum were gathered at every stage. Many former and current residents of Kalamaja have participated in creating the permanent exhibition by donating items and sharing memories of life in the Kalamaja district. This community museum allows people to actively participate in its daily operations through cooking nights, community-led tours, exhibitions, and more. The creation of the museum was an engaging journey, but as a community museum, we recreate ourselves every day — there is no final moment of completion.

By extensively involving community members, offering them opportunities, and working together, we have become the best community museum in Europe by 2024 - the Kalamaja Museum won the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA) Silletto Prize for community engagement. I will delve deeper into some of the museum’s activities where the community has been involved.

### Stories and Artifacts: The Backbone of the Kalamaja Museum

In early 2019, we began interviewing Kalamaja residents and collecting photos and objects (See figure 1). As the same questionnaire was administered to people born in both 1992 and 1932, it was general, but additional questions were added according to age. It was heartwarming to see how older residents' attitudes toward their memories changed. Initially, some elderly individuals questioned the value of discussing their lives, but after several meetings and explanations of the importance of their knowledge and life experience, their self-awareness and confidence grew. Many stories are tied to life in Kalamaja, with many older people's memories revolving around past lifestyles, vanished places, and memories. Many questions were also linked to local flavours, smells, and sounds characteristic of the area. Thus, we have collected information and thoughts on the intangible story of the region, resulting in various projects and exhibitions. In addition to the museum's exhibition, locals donated items significant to them and their stories. The museum did not specify which items to donate; people brought what was important to them, and these items now tell the community's story in the museum. We fully handed over the power to the locals and waited to see which items would be donated and then collaborated with the community to compose the museum. This process was unprecedented in Estonia and very innovative for creating a museum whose result and content were unpredictable.



Figure 1: Kalamaja Museum interviewing the local art community. Meeli Küttim. Tallinn City Museum

### The Museum with You Every Day

In creating the Kalamaja Museum and even today, we strive to quickly return the entrusted materials to people and share them more broadly with interested parties. Based on community information, we have created several outdoor exhibitions in urban spaces closest to the people. Alongside outdoor exhibitions, we have also organized city tours and excursions to introduce the collected material and spread the word about the Kalamaja Museum. It has been important for us that information coming from people goes back to their community in the urban space, where everyone has access to it without buying a ticket or visiting the museum.

The most extensive involvement of Kalamaja residents came in creating the 2021 outdoor exhibition "Kalamaja's Lost Fragments: Snapshots from Family Albums." Photo stands featuring memories from interviews and photos from local residents' family albums were placed in front of houses where the photos were originally taken. Securing permission from apartment associations to install photo stands brought many new friends and enthusiasts who have become repeat visitors to the museum. Residents were proud that their building was chosen, and some neighbours became interested in their own building's history. As part of the outdoor exhibition, walk-along interviews were conducted. Mati (born 1938) and Heda Ursula (born 1938), who moved from Kalamaja to Mustamäe, a Soviet-era district known for its panel buildings, came to their old neighbourhood to see photo stands related to their family stories. Walking along their childhood paths and answering thematic questions reminded them of moments that would have remained unreachable if they had been sitting at a table indoors.

### Kalamaja Ears

Sometimes a well-phrased question can reveal an entire world. One such question was, "What sounds are characteristic of Kalamaja?" For Helle (born 1947) and many others, the soundscape of Kalamaja is marked by audibility: the wooden houses of Kalamaja and their thin walls inevitably make residents part of their neighbors' lives. This motif led to the exhibition "Kalamaja Ears." To spark interest, inventive participation opportunities were devised. One of Estonia's most well-known contemporary artists, Flo Kasearu, took plaster casts of Kalamaja residents' ears during the collection campaign and later mounted them on the museum walls. The unique call resulted in about 40 ears from people aged 3 to 82. In the empty museum building, segments of memories from Kalamaja people and sounds characteristic of the area's urban space were also played. Visitors could draw and write on the museum walls about interesting things heard through the walls. The exhibition lives on in Wikipedia, and the ears and memory segments are part of today's permanent exhibition at the Kalamaja Museum, "A Village in the City: Stories of Kalamaja." This project was an excellent example of how to blend tangible and intangible history and engage the community in a very surprising way.

### Local Main Street Created with the Community

In the autumn of 2023, the renovated Old Kalamaja Street, which connects the Old Town, passes through Kalamaja, and reaches the sea, was opened. Before the new street was introduced, a lengthy process took place during which the street was completely dug up, and the entire communication network on the street was updated. In addition, archaeological excavations were conducted on the street. We were able to immediately display the archaeological finds in the museum following the excavations, thanks to the cooperative archaeologists who were so accommodating that even the cleaning of the finds was done in the museum for the locals to see right after the items were discovered. Interest in the exhibition was high, and locals were keen to learn about the archaeological finds discovered in front of their houses.



Figure 2: Opening of the phone booth exhibition with stories from local people. Tallinn City Museum Meeli Küttim.

The architectural firm KavaKava Architects, which designed the renovation of Old Kalamaja Street, involved the community in the renovation process from the very beginning. Together with the architects and community member Andres, we preserved the historical sewer covers on the street. Additionally, the museum created an 18th-century suburban citizen's garden in one of the street-side planter boxes, which we maintain together with the basic school next to the museum. In the winter of 2024, we prepared and opened a telephone booth audio exhibition in Kalamaja in front of Tallinn's oldest sauna, the Kalma Sauna, in the spring (See figure 2). Jokingly, it can be said that the telephone booth is Estonia's smallest museum branch. From the old payphone, you can hear stories about Kalamaja and Old Kalamaja Street, narrated by

community members themselves. Once again, we involved some community members who had already participated with us and some completely new ones who joined in this project. The museum brought people together, and with the help of the architects who designed the Old Kalamaja Street renovation project, a telephone booth was installed in the street space. In this way—open 24 hours a day—the telephone booth is part of the historical layer of the street and is present in the urban space through the stories of the local people.

### Kalamaja Flavours, Uniting the Community Through Food

The Kalamaja Museum was designed with an open kitchen from the outset, as food and cooking unite every community and make it stronger. One of the most successful event series has been “Kalamaja Flavours,” which welcomes all who are interested to cook timeless recipes under the guidance of former and current local residents, to spend time together comfortably, and to taste the fruits of their labour. “Kalamaja Flavours” has included dishes from traditional cold tables to Brazilian and Mexican delicacies. It has been a pleasure to see that the event has become popular among both long-time Kalamaja residents and those who have moved to the area more recently from other parts of Estonia and abroad, as well as a diverse age group of participants. We are always delighted to welcome visitors from near and far who want to experience Kalamaja life by getting their hands floury. Inspired by the cooking evenings, from February to April 2023, the Kalamaja Museum, together with local people, organized an outdoor exhibition at Balti Jaam Market called “How Does Kalamaja Taste?” where visitors could explore recipes collected from Kalamaja residents printed on nostalgic calico aprons and take them home from the apron pockets to try out. This exhibition eventually led to the idea of compiling a local cookbook, which captures a slice of Kalamaja's flavour (See figure 3).



See figure 3: Opening of the exhibition at the local market. Vahur Lõhmus. Tallinn City Museum.

In late 2024, a cookbook was published containing 27 recipes from 17 different people and groups. These recipes are remembered even by those whose lives have taken them away from Kalamaja, and their flavours still bring back warm childhood memories, such as Grandma Bertha Marie's peppermint cookies and pickled eel. There are dishes that have been made in Kalamaja for several generations and are still being prepared today, like Napoleon cake and spinach soup. There are also brand-new recipes, like fully plant-based cheese pancakes with apples and salted caramel sauce, and recipes that have been brought to Kalamaja from further afield—like oatmeal porridge from Võrumaa in South Estonia, chilaquiles from Mexico, and borsch from Ukraine—and that have now become part of the Kalamaja flavour, like barley porridge. All recipes were written by the people themselves, and uniquely, locals opened their home doors to the museum for the cookbook illustrations. We mostly photographed in people's homes, some of which are still in Kalamaja, and others further away, where Kalamaja-inspired dishes still create coziness. Some photos also feature family tableware that has been used to set tables for decades. Other photos were taken in the Kalamaja Museum: in the summer garden, the living room, and of course, the kitchen. The book begins with a historical overview that opens the broader history of the area's food culture and serves as an excellent introduction to the recipes shared by the residents, helping to understand their context and background.

The Kalamaja Museum was created together with the community and operates daily with the community. At the museum, people can participate in various ways every day, and as a museum, we continually think about how to further involve people in the museum's daily operations and activities. How to collect tangible and intangible history, place it in a museum, an exhibition, or some other project that speaks to the community, preserves identity, and carries forward our cultural heritage.

# Practices of (co)curating

## Participatory curatorship for social impact: Amplifying marginalised voices in museums

Elif Çiğdem Artan

### Biography

Elif Çiğdem Artan is a researcher, curator and sociologist with a professional and scholarly background in museology, urban studies, digital culture, migration, and gender. She received her Ph.D. at TU Berlin as a DFG-doctoral fellow of IGK – Center for Metropolitan Studies Berlin-New York-Toronto. In her doctoral research project, *The Future of the Present: Autonomous Archiving of Activist Videos*, she examined the born-digital materials remaining from the Occupy movements in New York and Istanbul by applying grounded theory and ethnographic research methodologies. Artan has been globally active in her research domains, conducting workshops, giving lectures, and publishing papers. In addition to her research projects, she is the coordinator and curator of the Federal German Migrant Women's Association's (Bundesverband der Migrantinnen e.V.) archival box in the Historical Museum Frankfurt. This participatory museum project encourages German migrant women to be the authors of their HERstory and, hence, curators of their own collective voice.

### Introduction

Contemporary museums are shifting from passive repositories of artifacts to active spaces for social engagement and community collaboration. This shift reflects a growing emphasis on inclusivity, participation, and relevance, as seen in the work of Jacob (1995), who foregrounds socially engaged curatorial practices, and Bennett (1995), who critiques the museum's historical role in shaping public culture. Simon (2010) advocates for participatory design that invites community co-creation, while Bishop (2012) critically examines the politics of participation in art institutions. In 2022, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) enshrined this vision in its new museum definition, describing a museum as 'a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society' that is 'open to the public, accessible and inclusive,' and operates 'with the participation of communities' (ICOM, 2022). This shift reflects a broader paradigm change in museology from the museum as a 'temple' of elite knowledge to a 'public fairground' for dialogue and civic engagement. In particular, participatory approaches to curation have emerged as a powerful strategy for museums to increase their engagement with marginalized communities, namely ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, workers, feminist and LGBTQ communities. In other words, by actively involving community members in collecting, narrating and exhibiting unspoken cultural heritage, museums started to foster diversity and inclusivity, along with decolonizing cultural narratives.

Against this backdrop, this study focuses on a community-driven memory project, developed within the framework of the Bibliothek der Generationen at the Historical Museum Frankfurt, and carried out in collaboration with women who immigrated from various regions of Turkey to Germany. It explores how participatory curation can empower marginalized voices and create lasting social impact. As a sociologist with a scholarly and professional background in museology, urban studies, digital culture, migration, and gender, and as the coordinator and curator of this archival box, the author brings an insider perspective to this analysis. GKB — the Federal Germany Migrant Women's Association's museum collaboration — offers a compelling example for theoretical discussions on participatory museology. It also highlights the institutional barriers to meaningfully including marginalized perspectives in contemporary museum practices. It simultaneously illustrates both the opportunities and the challenges such efforts entail.

In this paper, I draw from my personal experiences. First, I will briefly discuss the theoretical background of participatory curatorship, focusing on archiving, intersectional feminism, and feminist pedagogy. Then, I will review the *Migrant Women's Memory Box* project by analyzing its conceptual framework, empowering workshops, participatory exhibitions, and original publications. Finally, I will reflect on the key learnings and challenges I encountered throughout this journey. I will also offer recommendations aimed at promoting equal rights for all, especially in relation to the tension between commodification and volunteerism, and the precarious working conditions faced by freelance museum professionals.

### Museums, participation and social impact

Under the influence of postmodernity and neoliberal capitalism, museums in the twenty-first century have increasingly been seen as forums that facilitate dialogue, learning, and social impact, in addition to their new tasks in audience development, marketing and communication. Today, globalization dominates all artistic milieus worldwide. In this new era, it is evident that the idea of museums has radically diverged from the old Greek definition as the ‘house of muses.’ The traditional understanding of a museum was shaped by the unification of state ideologies, which laid the foundation for creating a national memory. This process often involved the deliberate inclusion of certain historical narratives that align with the image of the “model citizen,” while marginalizing or excluding events and experiences that challenge dominant ideologies (Artan, 201). Contemporary museology now challenges institutional and structural discrimination while the current interdisciplinary cultural projects have revitalized museum spaces, attracting more visitors with various backgrounds and expectations (Artan, 2011).

Under these circumstances, following the global rise of social movements in the 2010s – particularly the #Occupy movements, which extensively utilized social media platforms – civil society, namely, protestors, began establishing their own archives to ensure their struggles remain unforgettable. Naturally, these counter-archives challenge the dominant narratives of national histories as represented in museums (Artan, 2021). In this manner, as Schwartz and Cook (2002: 13) assert, ‘archives have the power to privilege and to marginalize. They can be a tool of hegemony; they can be a tool of resistance.’ Hence, it is worth asking: Whose memories do we encounter in archives? Who keeps the records of marginalized groups, such as ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, workers, and feminist and LGBTQ movements? More importantly, ‘who owns their history?’ (Jimerson, 2006: 31). That is, who has the authority to record, preserve, interpret, and represent these histories – especially when they diverge from official narratives? In this section, I examine how participation in museums can broaden history-writing collaborations by discussing the crucial roles of feminist pedagogy and intersectional feminism in participatory curatorship methodologies.

Participation in the decision-making process is the key strategy for fulfilling democracy – ensuring equal representation for all in museums and archives. However, Michel Foucault (1972) clearly states that an archive determines both the spoken and the unspoken. In other words, it dictates what is and is not recorded as a historical incident. Similar to Foucault, Binark sought to highlight the archive’s role in shaping social values and opinions through the analogy of archaeology. ‘It is known that proper knowledge of history depends on firsthand original documents, namely archival documents. Without documents, there can be no history writing and no clarification as to what happened in history (İsmet Binark, 1994, quoted in Ahıska, 2006: 14).

While archives traditionally rely on official documents as the foundation of history writing, participatory projects offer a powerful tool for collecting the lived experiences and narratives of ordinary people, particularly those of unrecognized citizens who are often excluded from

institutional records. Building on this approach, participatory museology emerged in the 2000s to move beyond top-down content production and open museum doors to visitors and community members, enabling them to become collaborators—as contributors, co-creators, or advisors in the development of exhibitions and public programs:

*Participatory museology is examined within the framework of participation policies and the concept of democratization, which are being reshaped by our societal conditions. It also explores the extent and manner in which technology and media influence these processes while encompassing transformation efforts that result from co-production with visitors—or more broadly, museum audiences (Artan, 2015: 20).<sup>1</sup>*

Indeed, the concept of the audience forms the focal point of participatory museology studies. Generally, the term ‘audience’ is more commonly used in media studies than in museology. However, in research analyzing how museums are being transformed through participatory projects, the use of ‘audience’ instead of ‘visitor’ is intentional. While ‘audience’ refers to individuals who continuously receive messages directed at them, in participatory museology projects, it also highlights the dynamic and interactive nature of museum communication strategies. Usually, visitors enter a museum and leave without leaving any trace – unless explicitly asked for feedback through guestbooks, surveys, evaluation forms or similar means. However, the contemporary museology, based on democracy and equality, demonstrates how the concept of ‘audience,’ borrowed from media studies, reflects the evolving role of individuals in contributing to exhibitions, collections, and public programs.

Moreover, in *The Participatory Museum* (2010; 2015), Nina Simon examines how cultural institutions can use participatory methods. She explores how visitors can express themselves and how institutions can create more meaningful and engaging experiences for all. Whether the goal is fostering dialogue or developing creative forms of expression (e.g. an exhibition or a publication), Simon argues that the key lies in design techniques. According to her, the main difference between traditional and participatory design processes is the direction of information flow between institutions and audience. In conventional design, institutions produce information for visitors to consume, focusing on maintaining high-quality textual and visual content. In contrast, participatory projects encourage multi-directional information production. In this context, institutions act as platforms, opening the stage for participants and assigning them collaborator roles, such as content creators, distributors, consumers, and critics. Rather than just inviting visitors to their museums to consume what is on display, these institutions create spaces enabling opportunities for various experiences to emerge through collective production.

Therefore, the contemporary museum’s mission is to be representative and inclusive, ensuring that no group or individual is excluded or marginalized as ‘unwanted’ by neither society nor state. Accordingly, the ICOM museum definition (2022) explicitly calls on museums to offer experiences for ‘education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing’ through ethical and

professional work ‘with the participation of communities.’ However, I argue that participatory museology has often overlooked the intersectional identities of museum audiences, particularly marginalized communities whose inclusion in national memory has been shaped by state ideologies. Accordingly, cultural institutions and museums engaged in urban research should present city histories based on participatory curatorship and amplify the institutionally and structurally marginalised voices.

Therefore, I believe that participatory curatorship can offer effective methodologies implementing a feminist pedagogy from an intersectional perspective while engaging with marginalized communities in the arts and culture milieu, which embraces diversity and inclusivity, such as in education-, gender- and language-related issues. For instance, communities at the intersection of migration and gender have specific needs when engaging in museum collaborations. Migrant women, for example, require safe spaces to prevent retraumatization when sharing experiences of gender-based and racial discrimination and violence. They also need translation services to overcome communication barriers and trained staff working with vulnerabilities.

Consequently, intersectional feminist pedagogy can be a practical approach in participatory museum projects, fostering a mutual learning model where everyone has equal speaking rights, no one is judged, and individuals are accepted as they are. Thus, participatory museum projects refer to an educational and methodological approach that centers on the diverse and intersecting identities of participants – such as gender, race, class, and sexuality – when co-creating narratives about the past. Moreover, it challenges dominant historical accounts by incorporating marginalized voices in collective information production and emphasizing power dynamics in memory work. This pedagogy actively shapes communities’ histories, ensuring inclusivity, reflexivity, and social justice within participatory archival, curatorial, or digital memory initiatives.

To summarize, in this section I discussed the theoretical background of participatory curatorship within the concept of (counter-)archiving, by offering intersectional feminist pedagogy in participatory methodologies for collecting individual stories excluded from the state’s social memory. Moreover, it argued that participatory curatorship is essential to achieve a comprehensive, non-linear, and non-authoritarian approach to community history-writing. However, Flinn argues that defining and establishing a common understanding of the terms employed in participation is essential yet challenging (Flinn, 2007), as metrics are not necessarily clear or fixed within the heterogeneous cultures of communities. Analyzing the Migrant Women’s Memory Box case study, the next section exposes the journey of a community-driven participatory project conducted within intersectional feminist pedagogy methodologies.

### **Migrant women’s memory box in Germany #ParticipatoryCuratorship**

The Federal Germany Migrant Women’s Association (Bundesverband der Migrantinnen e.V. – GKB) was founded in 2005 in Frankfurt am Main by immigrant women from various regions in Turkey with diverse ethnic and religious identities and experiences in Germany. The Association emerged to seek social justice, notably after discovering that social housing infrastructure in Ginnheim-Frankfurt was causing cancer. Migrant women mobilized for a neighborhood campaign requesting renovation or relocation, asserting their urban rights.

This community activism led to the formation of the Association, recognizing the need for a nationwide network of migrant women in Germany, who immigrated from different geographies around the world. Expanding through personal mobilities and transcity connections, the Association operates in over 20 cities today, collaborating with various organizations at local, regional, national and international levels, advocating for women’s rights. The women mostly speak Turkish, along with some small talks in Kurdish, and present mixed German- and education-levels. They primarily work blue-collar jobs and in social services. There are also journalists, lawyers, therapists, educators and translators among others.

Their first collaboration with the Historical Museum Frankfurt was in 2013 through the *Stadtlabor Project*, which invites locals to shape participatory exhibitions following on-site research, and, thus, leaving museum walls. The project was in Ginnheim that year, leading to the association’s involvement. This connection later provided me with the opportunity to coordinate and curate the *Migrant Women’s Memory Box* for the *Bibliothek der Generationen*. This artistic memory project documents urban history through contributions from individuals and organizations. Today, the library contains works of more than 200 authors and will remain at the museum until 2105.

In the framework of my journey in the participatory museum project as a freelance museum professional originally from Istanbul and immigrated to Germany, I’ll explore coordinating and curating a memory box, from conceptualization to workshops, participatory exhibitions, and publications. I’ll discuss how I implemented the intersectional feminist pedagogy methodologies during the project. Hence, this case study will provide a short review of community-driven information production in various media with different memorization purposes.

#### 01. Conceptualization of the Archival Materials

Globally, migration exhibitions often rely on the image of a suitcase -- symbolizing nostalgia, poverty, and hope. This romanticized portrayal oversimplifies migrant experiences, focusing on early struggles like housing and employment while neglecting their historical achievements in civil society. For instance, migration narratives in German museums have shifted. The first workers from Turkey arrived as temporary, called ‘guest workers.’ But many stayed, forming families and permanent communities. Over time, ‘migrants’ evolved into ‘people with migration backgrounds,’ reflecting the social impact on language and institution (Artan, 2017).

To fill the gap in migrant women's history in Germany, the Migrant Women's Association decided to create a memory box displaying the (her)story of Turkey-origin women living in Germany beyond stigmatized stories. Eventually, we (me and the workshop participants) listed the original materials to be produced in working groups and migrant women signed up according to their personal interest in contribution:

1. Short story-book
2. 10th anniversary book
3. 10th anniversary documentary
4. Chore-book
5. Chore-recording
6. 1-year activities documentation book
7. Friendship-book

Meeting every Sunday for workshops, held in Turkish, in rotation of different working groups on handicraft arts, film screenings, and creative writing was encouraging migrant women to be the author of their own stories. Moreover, we decided to collect all audiovisual recordings and printed materials from past events and create an inventory, to select related materials for the 10th anniversary documentary and book of the association. Furthermore, to provide a detailed overview of the association's efforts and the demands of migrant women over a year, all events held between March 8, 2014, and March 8, 2015, were documented for the 1-year activities book.

### 02. Participatory Workshops for Migrant Women

From the first day, the role of the participatory curatorship was clear to me: facilitating the participants' decision-making process. Throughout the workshops, I consistently emphasized that while I coordinated the project and curated the materials, the participants—as collaborators—had the final say in shaping the project's outcome. Moreover, I deliberately excluded digital tools from workshops, applying an intersectional feminist pedagogy that acknowledged participants' diverse backgrounds and technological access. Furthermore, as the curator of a participatory museum project, my primary goal was to ensure the shared awareness that I held no authoritative role. To foster engagement, I prepared handwritten, hand-illustrated, and photocopied worksheets, encouraging participants to interact more actively with the materials. This approach proved highly effective. Within a few weeks, the women began arriving at sessions eagerly asking, 'Elif, what do you have for us today?' Over time, we formed friendships beyond the workshops.

We started with short story workshops, structured in two parts. The first part focused on the theoretical aspects of writing, introducing definitions of key storytelling elements such as character, narrator, and setting through a worksheet. In the second part, participants practiced writing short essays based on prompts – sometimes an object, an incident, or a photograph. In the final stage of each workshop, they read their texts aloud, and together, we selected one to

publish on the project blog. In early sessions, women hesitated, asking, 'Am I doing this right?' But as confidence grew, they eagerly anticipated new tasks. Discussions remained flexible, and I occasionally shared personal stories to break hierarchical barriers. Meanwhile, in addition to documentation and outreach, the project blog was an empowering tool, while the women's short essays gained recognition on social media by receiving likes and comments from family and friends. Unfortunately, we couldn't maintain the blog for the long term.

### 03. 10th Anniversary Exhibition

In the late summer of 2015, the association's executive board invited me to curate the 10th anniversary exhibition. Their past exhibits relied on photos, flyers, and posters, so I proposed a participatory project: co-writing a dictionary. Inspired by the 29 letters of the Turkish alphabet, the dictionary aimed to showcase the struggles of migrant women from A to Z. More than 200 women from 11 cities participated in defining words, concepts, objects, emotions, and even colors related to migration and womanhood. Each entry was collaboratively developed through regional workshops. The pop-up exhibition, *the ABC of the Migrant Women's Association: A Female Dictionary*, debuted in Cologne in November 2015 and traveled to Frankfurt (2016), Istanbul (2016), and Berlin (2017).

The first workshop for the exhibition preparation was held in May in Frankfurt, bringing together more than 20 migrant women from nearby cities. During this workshop, participants compiled a list of words they wanted to feature in the dictionary. Subsequent workshops were organized in various regions, creating a shared pool of words. The exhibition advisory board selected the words to be included and distributed them among the participating regional organizations. Each organization came together to discuss the various aspects of the chosen entries, drafted a short text, and proposed a visual representation.

The dictionary was carefully prepared to reflect both the work carried out by the Frankfurt Migrant Women's Association (GKB) and women's everyday lives. It is difficult to single out any particular word as more significant than others – terms such as discrimination, gender, magazine, housework, trust, soft G (*the letter Ğ*), racism, solidarity, laughter, struggle, honor, *off*, trousers, lipstick, silence, violence, hope, production, poverty, and time all appear. Each of these words highlights different aspects of women's struggles and offers, first, a direct critique of the life imposed on women within the patriarchal system, and second, the stigmatization of migrant women from an intersectional perspective.

Moreover, soft G (*the letter Ğ*) holds a special place for me. Since no word in Turkish begins with this letter, it was initially debated whether to exclude it from the dictionary during the first workshop. However, I encouraged women to think in alternative narratives: 'What does Ğ mean to you in the context of your struggles?' Then the women from Nuremberg came up with the idea of a puzzle – missing one piece. Even though no Turkish word starts with soft G, excluding it from the language is impossible. (Artan, 2019a)

The pop-up exhibition design was my initial goal, since it enables easy transportation and installation in or out of museum spaces. After finalizing the images and texts, we printed exhibition entries on canvas, including welcoming texts. As the curator of this participatory exhibition, my role was to create a common language for textual and visual materials crafted in different cities in different hands. However, the final visuals did not satisfy even exhibition contributors. When we met for the first time in Cologne, at the festival venue, after long phone calls, I received some reactions from women saying, ‘but Elif, this is not the same image that we sent.’ At that point, I realized another challenge of participatory projects: the gaps in communication for spreading the news. After completing the final edit of the textual and visual materials, I had another round of revisions before the production. But I was always in contact on the phone with one person from each city. My contact person, probably, did not always share our conversations with others. Relying solely on regional representatives mirrored the association’s own communication structure limited mutuality. In retrospect, I would have created a broadcast channel to directly share updates with everyone involved. Because group chats are often misused or overwhelming with long text exchanges. But a broadcast tool would have offered a direct line of communication for those interested, while still leaving room for individual follow-ups.

Ultimately, the exhibition reconfigured the language marginalizing women by patriarchal dominance in political, economic, and socio-cultural milieus. The dictionary, published also as booklets in Turkish, German and English, gathered the visual and textual interpretations of the key concepts shaping the agenda of the Migrant Women’s Associations against gender-based, institutional and structural discrimination and violence.

#### 04. Berlin Exhibition

Inspired by the dictionary project, the IG-Metall Trade Union invited the Berlin Migrant Women’s Organization to an exhibition in 2017. With an ample gallery space, we expanded the display to showcase the association’s 12-year archive – this included photos, brochures, banners, and artifacts. The exhibition team was composed of GKB Berlin (The Migrant Women’s Association Berlin) volunteers alongside a professional team, including an architect, graphic designer, and translator – individuals who are experts in their fields and friends of GKB with personal connections to the organization. As the participatory exhibition curator, my role was to gather ideas and feedback from the volunteers, facilitate discussions, and convey the initial plan to the design team. Essentially, I acted as a bridge between two distinct groups, each operating within different conceptual and linguistic frameworks concerning design processes.

Unlike the pop-up format of the first exhibition, this one required structured spatial design. The primary challenge distinguishing the volunteer group from the professional team was visualization. While the volunteers had experience organizing exhibitions for their fairs, they found conceptualizing a space larger than 100 m<sup>2</sup> difficult. This gap necessitated visualizing

the gallery space in different sections, displaying different exhibition materials with different purposes. Hence, the exhibition area was divided into five sections:

- *ABC of Migrant Women’s Association: A Female Dictionary* – Texts and images reflecting migrant women’s experiences.
- *A Room of One’s Own* – Bilingual magazine covers capturing women’s struggles and solidarity.
- *Photo Album* – Archival images documenting migrant women’s political, social and cultural engagement.
- *reMake—reLive* – Handmade objects reflecting economic and political engagement.
- *The Chest* – Protest materials showcasing visibility of migrant women’s rights in public spaces.

The vernissage of the exhibition, *World from a Female Perspective!*, on 13 July 2017, hosted more than one hundred guests, including members, supporters, collaborators, and all allies. The opening speeches were followed by an open buffet and a chore-performance. Among all display materials, in my opinion, the Chest section holds a significant place in the exhibition room, not only due to its position in the space, but also its significance in Anatolian patriarchal society:

In Turkey, a young woman ready to get married starts establishing a chest composed of hand-made fabric materials and household items. Traditionally, the bridal chest is displayed to the family members and friends before the marriage ceremony. Regarding this tradition, we installed the association’s ‘household equipment’ in the exhibition room, and it presents the essential interrogation of the difference between participatory curatorship and classical approach to exhibition space design. As the flags and banners were sent from various cities in Germany, it was not possible to foresee any exhibition design regarding the displayed objects. Among the sent materials, the women selected the objects to be exhibited (Artan, 2019b: 37).

As curator, I balanced volunteer input with professional design, ensuring clarity while respecting the participatory process. One challenge arose when contributors wanted a female figure in the exhibition, which the architect vehemently opposed. Rather than imposing the architect’s decision, I facilitated discussions, and ultimately, the women chose to omit it, understanding the reasoning. This reinforced the participatory approach, avoiding top-down authority.

#### 05. Delivery of the Box

After nearly a decade, in May 2023, we finally delivered the *Migrant Women’s Memory Box* to the museum. Delays stemmed from my relocation to Berlin for doctoral studies, funding gaps, and my responsibilities at my full-time job after graduation.

Now preserved in the *Bibliothek der Generationen* at the Frankfurt Historical Museum, the materials in the box serve to celebrate migrant women's struggles in the past, achievements in the present, and ongoing fights for equality. Moreover, this participatory project moved beyond symbolic objects like suitcases, offering a more prosperous, multi-dimensional perspective on migrant women's experiences in Germany by containing archival materials initially produced by migrant women:

- *A Story-Book*: Empowering to become the authors of HERstory
- *A Chore-Book and -Recording*: Oral history for preserving intangible cultural heritage
- *A One-Year Activities Documentation Book*: Enhancing community archiving practices
- *A Friendship Book*: Documenting the story of women unification

However, we couldn't complete all the targeted materials. For instance, we (I mean, association volunteers and project collaborators) couldn't even start working on the 10th anniversary documentary and book properly. The foundation of an inventory was only achieved for 1-year activities between 2014 and 2015. But still, we (the association) handed over a sizeable audiovisual archive accumulated in hard disks over the years. They will be accessible both within the memory box and the *mediathek* section of the library for further research and studies.

In conclusion, my journey at the Migrant Women Association's museum collaboration exposed the importance of participatory curatorship from the intersectional feminist pedagogy methodologies in museums to achieve a comprehensive diversity and inclusion, empowering marginalized communities. In addition to the methodological exploration, the project provided me with more insights in practice concerning civil society, equality, and the role of museums in social impact. Drawing from my experiences, I will elaborate on the opportunities and challenges of working with marginalized communities as a freelance museum professional in the next section.

### Funding, labor and institutional gaps

Reflecting on this project, I often think not about what we accomplished but what we couldn't do, not as a complaint, but as a way to understand the reality of curating a participatory project as a freelance museum professional. Ultimately, the most significant challenges weren't about curation but coordination, specifically, financial constraints. This section will explore key challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations for more equitable collaborations with marginalized communities.

The museum's invitation to contribute to the *Library of Generations* came with no dedicated budget. Aside from covering the initial conceptualization workshops and a one-time curator honorarium, all other expenses had to be self-fundraised by the association. Fortunately, the

Migrant Women's Association had experience securing donations, which made it possible to fund production costs. Even so, we had to raise eight times the amount the art gallery provided. Despite this, we could only offer small honorariums to the graphic designer and architect — far from what their professional work deserved. Most significantly, none of the hundreds of women involved in local workshops, advisory groups, or exhibitions received compensation. The project, including much of my own professional labor in finalizing the archival materials, relied almost entirely on voluntary work. I could only manage to finalize the project voluntary-working since I had other primary incomes, such as fellowship and regular salary. But it brings me to an institutional and structural economic discrimination issue—the precarious position of freelance museum professionals representing marginalized communities:

*Civil society, namely, archives, museums, and NGOs, invites local communities to collaborate—but only for their unpaid contributions. Civil society actors listen to marginalized voices, create various content from publications to TV programs or exhibitions, and secure funding from multiple sources for their collaboration projects 'as a result of' their contribution to diversity and inclusive society (Artan, 2024).*

Working with local groups requires regular visits, workshops, and personal engagement to build community trust. Due to the museum's busy schedule, full-time museum staff often overlook this trust-building process, or fail to accomplish it entirely. Therefore, assigning a professional who can facilitate the communication between the community and the museum may be beneficial. Yet, the role of a facilitator in participatory projects is often left to community members without any budget foreseen.

Hence, the case study of the Migrant Women's Memory Box exposes the commodification of working with marginalized communities in voluntary- and project-based museum collaborations. Moreover, it raises questions about the effectiveness and necessity of specialized disciplines in museum studies. If there is to be a distinguishing feature of city museums from community archives, it should be the professionalization of this collaborative work. Consequently, in the next and final section, I'll summarize the findings of the case study analysis, along with my final remarks on enhancing museum social impact in collaboration with marginalized communities.

### Conclusion: Amplifying marginalised voices in museums

By stating, '[a]rchives are not neutral or objective,' Jimerson (2006: 22) highlights the political nature of archivists, precisely due to their decisive role of deciding what to *include* and what to *exclude*. In this manner, participatory museology challenges authorities by fostering diversity and inclusion, ensuring that information production is acknowledged in multi-directional, horizontal, not hierarchical communication. However, the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities, namely ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, workers, feminist and LGBTQ communities, have often been overlooked by institutions in the democratization of museums'

historical narratives. In this context, intersectional feminist pedagogy offers efficient methodological tools centering participants' diverse and intersecting identities, such as gender, race, class and sexuality.

Accordingly, drawing personal experiences, this study explored the role of participatory curatorship in amplifying marginalised voices in museums. The case study analysis of the Migrant Women's Memory Box project—a community-driven participatory museum project conducted with women immigrated from various regions of Turkey to Germany hosted at the *Bibliothek der Generationen* housed at the Historical Museum Frankfurt – examined the journey of a participatory curatorship implemented intersectional feminist pedagogy. The Federal Germany Migrant Women's Association's museum collaboration, coordinated and curated by the author, provided a multilayered source to elaborate on theoretical concepts, opportunities, and challenges in practice.

First, I briefly discussed the theoretical background of participatory curatorship within the concept of archiving, intersectional feminism and feminist pedagogy; then, I reviewed the Migrant Women's Memory Box project by analyzing the conceptualization, empowering workshops, participatory exhibitions and original publications; and finally, I elaborated on my key learnings and pain points in this journey, along with my recommendations to ensure equal rights for all in the face of commodification vs. volunteerism case and precarity of freelance museum professionals.

As a result, the project overview revealed the lack of continuous engagement between the museum and the community. The migrant women rarely visited the museum unless invited for a guided tour or an event. The multidimensional engagement for more intensive collaborations was hindered by first language barriers of the women, then the symbolic distance to the arts and culture milieu in general. Moreover, in this project, I realized that the role of a participatory curator is not to speak on behalf of the communities but to provide a platform for their voices to be heard. However, I have also witnessed how voluntary-based museum collaborations often commodify the struggles of marginalized groups, reducing them to mere museum objects. While participation is celebrated, financial resources remain insufficient to ensure equal involvement. One of the most concerning realities for freelance museum professionals is that compensation often comes in public visibility – an unspoken promise that an unpaid project may lead to future employment. This creates an exploitative cycle, where professionals are expected to accept low or no-budget opportunities to strengthen their Curriculum Vitae.

In this context, discussions about the social impact of museums fall short when they focus solely on increasing visibility for marginalized groups. True social impact demands structural changes that ensure all participants are afforded equal rights, recognition, and financial compensation.

Overall, the *Migrant Women's Memory Box* thus offers a multifaceted reflection on the possibilities and limitations of participatory curatorship with marginalized communities. Against this backdrop, I argue that museum studies must move beyond the principle of volunteerism toward equitable compensation. Meaningful collaboration with local communities requires comprehensive funding covering every participation aspect: workshops, curatorship, travel, translation, design, and production. Without this, such projects risk reinforcing systems where only the privileged can afford to take part. The chronic lack of financial support for marginalized communities forces us to confront a fundamental question about the social impact of museums: Whose stories are indeed being told? And what does it mean when only those able to secure external funding are granted the space to share their narratives within museum institutions?

Therefore, we must demand structural change to ensure that museums become spaces of genuine inclusion and equity.

#DecolonizeMuseums

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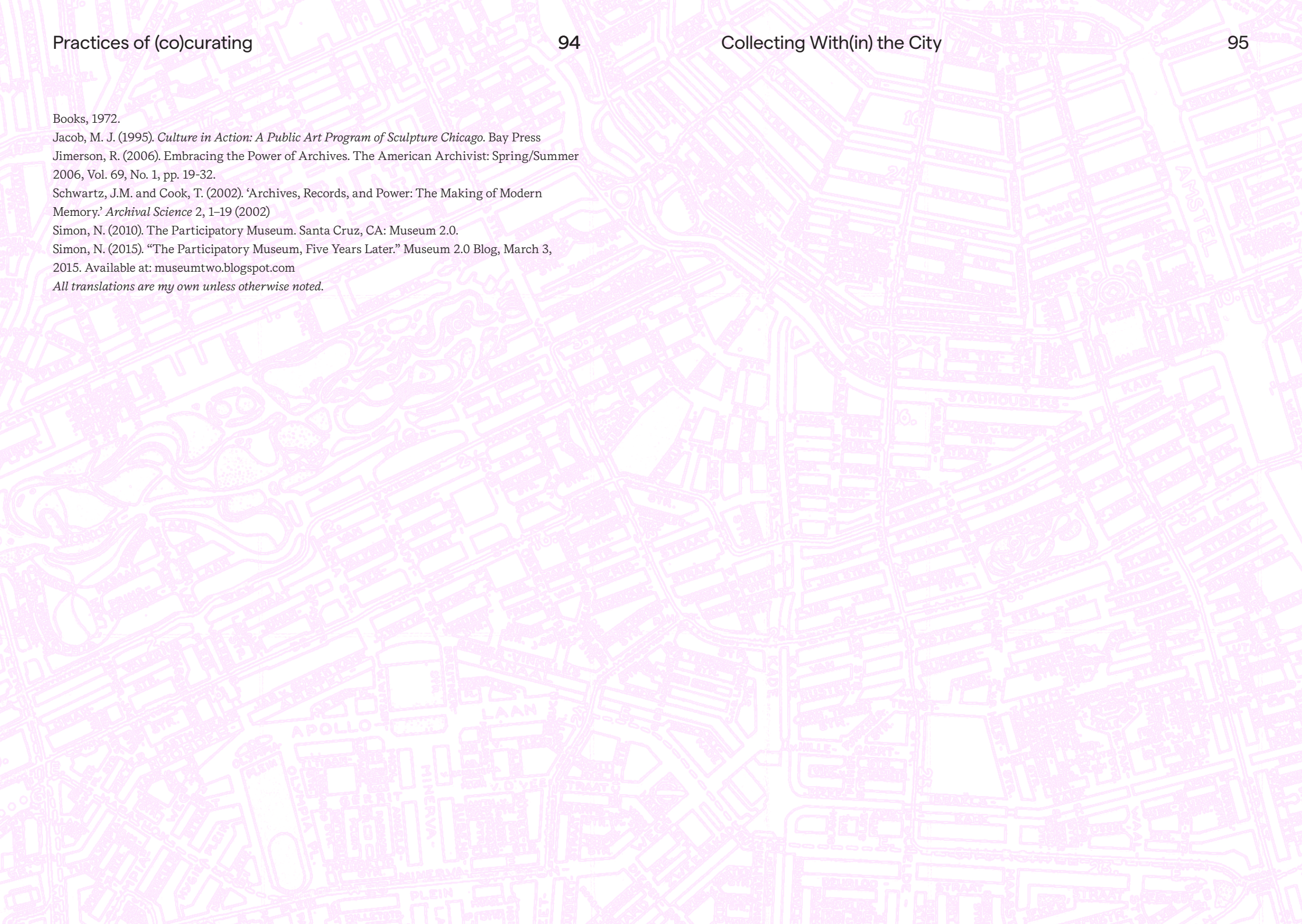
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*All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.*



# Practices of (co)curating

## New Neighborhood Heritage: The Wijkcollectie Foundation's Vision for Community Engagement

Nicole van Dijk

### Biography

Nicole van Dijk is director of the 'Wijkcollectie' Foundation. After her studies, she supported changes in society in various ways with stories. Starting as an anthropological researcher, through a career as an independent designer to curator in a city museum, she now leads a foundation that she set up to safeguard the stories of Rotterdammers. To preserve this as contemporary heritage of the city and to make the voices of residents sound even more powerful.

### Roots in the City

The Wijkcollectie Foundation was established four and a half years ago, growing out of community-based heritage projects initiated by Nicole van Dijk during her time at Museum Rotterdam. The most influential of these was *Echt Rotterdams Erfgoed* (Authentic Rotterdam Heritage), a program that honored individuals, groups and initiatives for their meaningful contributions to the city. It was not only a recognition program but also a way to add these people and initiatives to the museum's collection as living heritage. By applying this methodology, the museum invited residents to help shape and co-own the city's heritage. In doing so, it emphasized that the museum's collection is, in fact, the collection of the people of Rotterdam.

After municipal funding cuts in 2020, Van Dijk transferred this approach to the newly formed independent Wijkcollectie Foundation. The term *Wijkcollectie* translates loosely as "Neighborhood Collection" – a concept that highlights the idea that the stories and actions of residents together form the living heritage of a neighborhood. The foundation is supported by multi-year grants from public and private funds.

### A Living Definition of Heritage

From the beginning, the foundation has built on one core belief: stories are heritage, especially when they reflect how people take action to improve their neighborhoods. This vision places the everyday actions of residents at the heart of what defines a city's living identity.

Inspired by political philosopher Hannah Arendt, who described human action as the capacity to initiate something new among others, Wijkcollectie focuses not on theory but on the everyday. The central question is: how can recognizing stories of action help build stronger, more connected neighborhoods?

### From Story to Action

Wijkcollectie's projects bring neighborhood stories to life in visible and tangible ways. Museum bicycles carry local stories through the streets, with colorful bags that feature QR codes linking to personal testimonies. Neighborhood films, made together with residents, are screened in public spaces such as parks, inviting the broader community to reflect and respond. Visual materials like neighborhood drawings are printed on tablecloths, tea towels or bags, making abstract issues like poverty, isolation or local pride more visible and shareable. Interactive installations such as the Learning Circus bring together local makers, artists and residents to co-create new expressions of neighborhood identity.

In Lombardijen, the story of Edsel became a central element in the Learning Circus. Edsel can walk, but he chooses to use his neighbors' mobility scooter to do groceries for them. A large-scale painting shows Edsel in motion, surrounded by everyday street scenes. The image celebrates small gestures of care that often go unnoticed but can move an entire neighborhood.



Figure 1: Photo: Nicole van Dijk, 2024. proposition for mural in Lombardijen, Rotterdam Text in painting: Edsel can walk but uses his neighbor's mobility scooter to get shopping supplies for them.



Figure 2: Photo: Marijke Gips, The Learning Circus in Hoek van Holland 2024

The painting is now being considered for reproduction as a mural and already holds a prominent place (as an enlarged linoprint) in the Learning Circus installation. It illustrates how quiet, everyday actions carry meaning and power when we choose to see them. Each of these projects is designed not only to share stories, but to invite people to see the neighborhood and their role in it differently. (See figure 1–2)

**What Has Changed?**

To understand what these projects actually do, Wijkcollectie developed its own Theory of Change. This model, created together with an external researcher, forms the basis for ongoing impact measurement. Through structured surveys, interviews and observations, the foundation monitors how participation in storytelling and public interventions affects residents' sense of belonging, visibility, social networks and empowerment.

The results are clear: many participants feel more connected to others in the neighborhood after taking part in a Wijkcollectie activity. People often report that they now recognize more faces in the street, have met new people they otherwise would not have spoken to, and have started looking at their surroundings with more appreciation. This is especially meaningful in neighborhoods where social cohesion was initially low.

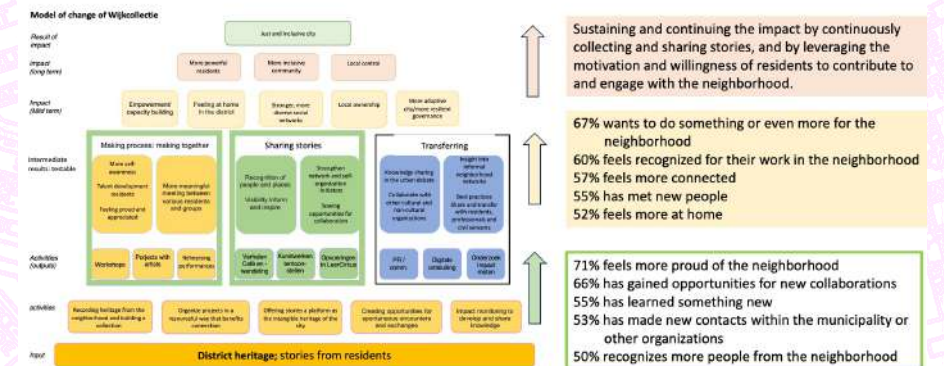


Figure 3: Image: Theory of Change and results of impact research by Wijkcollectie. 2024

In some neighborhoods, like Oosterflank, residents described how the projects helped break through feelings of isolation. In others, such as the Oude Noorden, people said that the activities reinforced a strong existing sense of identity and pride. Across all areas, many participants expressed a desire to contribute something to the neighborhood themselves, whether by volunteering, starting an activity, or supporting others informally.

Artists and storytellers involved in the projects also experienced meaningful change. Many gained new contacts and visibility for their work, discovered new collaboration opportunities, and felt more acknowledged for the role they play in their communities. Several mentioned how the public recognition of their stories gave them renewed energy and confidence.

In short, Wijkcollectie's approach does more than collect stories. It sparks social movement, strengthens relationships, and activates a sense of shared ownership and local pride. (See Figure 3)

### Challenges Ahead

Despite these promising developments, several challenges remain. Wijkcollectie works in neighborhoods where trust in institutions can be low and social dynamics are complex. Not all residents immediately recognize their own stories as heritage, and participation often depends on personal motivation, timing and informal networks. Ensuring a truly inclusive approach means continuing to reach out beyond the usual circles, especially to residents who are less visible or confident.

Another challenge lies in maintaining long-term engagement. While temporary installations and activities can generate momentum, sustaining that energy over time requires consistent presence, resources, and collaboration with local partners. There is also a constant tension between flexibility and structure: the organization must remain open to bottom-up initiatives while still offering a clear framework and continuity.

Lastly, as the foundation grows, there is the ongoing task of balancing scale with depth. Each neighborhood requires its own rhythm, relationships and sensitivity. Expanding the reach of Wijkcollectie must not come at the expense of the intimate, tailored nature of its work; a challenge that calls for careful stewardship, listening, and continuous learning.

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge of all is to bring a different vision of culture and heritage to the forefront, one that sees them not as separate from everyday life, but as deeply woven into it. It is this form of culture, grounded in lived experience and collective action, that has the power to truly move people in neighborhoods: to take part, to create, and to feel that they belong.

# Practices of (co)curating

## From the Page to the Public Space: a creative mediation project, an invitation, a call to action

Antonis Douroudis

### Biography

Antonis Douroudis is an architect, cultural worker and museum scholar. His creative practice aims at the reappropriation of human-made environments, both cultural and built, and at the accessibility and democratization of knowledge, in which he takes an interdisciplinary approach that includes design, research and artistic projects. He is exploring ways that the built environment, and the dynamics that shape it, can be culturally mediated in a museum or exhibition setting. After completing an integrated Master's diploma in architectural engineering at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), he started a Masters in "Arts, Museology and Curatorship" (AMaC) at the University of Bologna (UNIBO), during which he completed an internship in "Museo Spazio Pubblico". At this time, Douroudis developed the project, "From the Page to the Public Space". Since the summer of 2024, he has been working at the Siena Art Institute (SART), actively participating in cultural and educational activities, as well as coordinating design projects.

### Museal background of the project

Museo Spazio Pubblico (Public Space Museum) is an independent not-for-profit project based in Bologna, Italy, investigating the complexity of public space culture through a transdisciplinary practice.<sup>1</sup> This practice includes activities such as workshops, public art exhibitions, research and artist residences, training and educational activities in partnership with universities and other public or private institutions and organizations. Founded and curated by Dr. Luisa Bravo, the Public Space Museum is based in the renovated space of an old supermarket, on the ground floor of a residential building in the Porta-Saragozza suburban neighborhood of Bologna. The Museum highlights the intention to engage not only the visiting population of the more touristic city center, but with local citizens of Bologna. Unlike most museums, the Public Space Museum does not have a traditional collection, since its object of study is not something collectable, but rather a fundamental component of the city itself. Putting forward as the Museum's subject matter the concept of public space, its importance, its design, its multiple meanings and the politics surrounding it, this requires new mediating practices and methodologies. In this case, cultural mediation in the Museum - meaning both the act of bringing together and reducing the distance between the object of study and the public. Furthermore, the hermeneutical bridging between the subject matter and the knowledge related to it (Desvallées & Mairesse 2010: 46-48), which cannot be restricted to conventional practices such as exhibition panels.

### Defining & curating the collection

Alongside the temporary and recurring activities that were mentioned previously, the Museum also hosts a permanent cultural and educational offering – the Public Space Library – an open resource of books on urban design, architecture, arts and sociology which address themes related to public space and the city. The international, interdisciplinary and thematically focussed library makes it a unique resource for the city, especially to the large international university community that often faces language barriers while visiting other locally based libraries. Anticipating the Public Space Library's opening in May 2024, the Museum turned into a laboratory where the books were being considered as a collection to be curated, after the thorough cataloguing that preceded. What emerged was an experimental cultural mediation project, entitled "From the Page to the Public Space," that was exhibited alongside the museum's new library display which made some of the resources available to the local public for the first time.

### Shaping a vision & setting a goal

As a cultural mediation project, the general objective of the Museum is to connect the public with the Public Space library collection. "From the Page to the Public Space" aims to share and communicate to the Museum's diverse audience the library's literary content, to unravel meanings and knowledge it carries, and ultimately to spark a public dialogue. The vision behind this project is that themes concerning public space should not be discussed only by experts, scholars and university students, but should instead keep evolving with the participation of diverse communities in the city. Aligning with the stance taken by several museums in recent years to become more inclusive in their curatorial practices, the project's goal was to mediate the

knowledge surrounding public space from book materials, in order to reach the widest possible audience. In this regard, the target audience included people that may not be familiar with academic texts or were not necessarily interested in reading books on urban design practices and policies. This is an audience that the Museum wanted to reach, since the concepts discussed related to the broader public. Overall, this allows the Library to provide greater accessibility for local citizens to academic resources, and consequently, encourages a sense of agency and a more empowered relationship with the city.

### Translating the textual into visual

The Public Space Museum began a process in which the content, themes, key ideas and arguments of several academic books from the collection were translated into diagrams. For the Museum's general audience base, this allowed the book collections to be more approachable and welcoming. The book titles were selected based on their themes and messages, which included the transformative power of play (Mews 2022), directions on how to design more age-inclusive public spaces, belonging and elasticity (Hauderowicz & Serena 2020), and ways to reimagine our cities focusing on local initiatives towards resilience (Sant 2022). New visual compositions in the form of mind maps were created as summaries of the books' content, focusing on messages of empowerment and emancipation of people in and through public space. These interpretative diagrams were included in specially designed posters. In turn, these posters formed a small exhibition, which highlighted the selected books' main messages and acted as an entry point to overarching themes of the museum library collection for the broadest possible audience to access. The exhibition was inaugurated alongside the museum's library and stayed on display for several months.

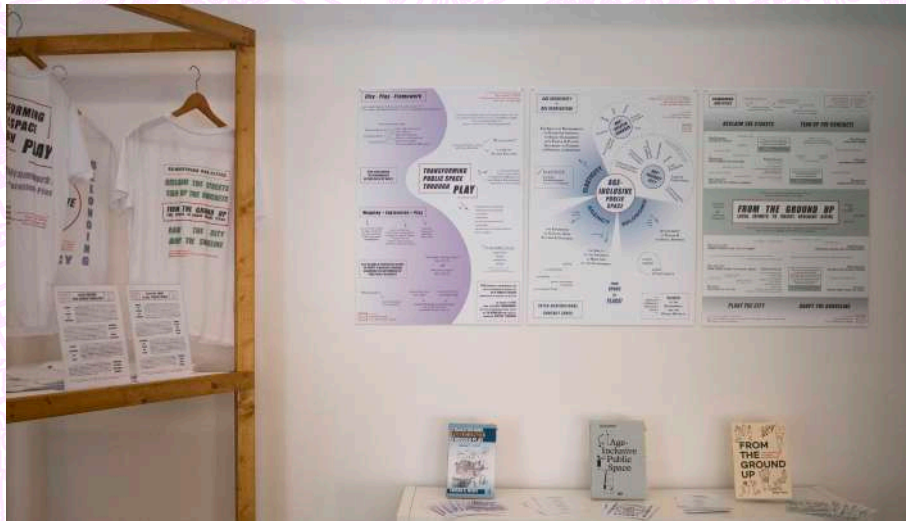


Figure 1: Exhibition display of the project at Museo Spazio Pubblico. Photograph by Antonis Douroudis (2024).

### Spreading public space culture

Since the Public Space Museum wants to promote messages of empowerment and agency to contribute to the cultivation of public space culture in Bologna and beyond, it would not be enough for these book collection images to stay inside the walls of the museum. Instead, the Museum wanted to spread these visual aspects of the collection to related public spaces, in order to reach a larger audience and form a direct relationship between the library and city context. For that reason, the images have been inscribed on t-shirts, to be able to circulate on streets, squares and parks, public transit, schools and universities, festivals and markets, public celebrations and protests. In short, in public spaces - with all their materiality and sociality. The idea is that these t-shirts, which were available for purchase at the Museum's inauguration event, acted as a bridge between people that randomly encounter them on the streets and the content of the specific book on which they focus. These t-shirts act as an invitation to further explore ideas related to public space and the city, as well as a conversation starter surrounding the related themes. In this way, the temporal and spatial characteristics of the exhibition change drastically, since the public now has the opportunity to get involved in the project by having the power to re-enact the exhibition when carrying around a reproducible part of its display. At the same time, the messages on the t-shirts can also function as a call to action, promoting a more active citizenship and involvement in wider city processes.



Figure 2: Spreading empowering and inclusive messages in and through public space in Bologna, Italy. Photograph by Antonis Douroudis (2024).



Figure 4: Spreading empowering and inclusive messages in and through public space in Bologna, Italy. Photograph by Antonis Douroudis (2024).



Figure 3: Spreading empowering and inclusive messages in and through public space in Bologna, Italy. Photograph by Antonis Douroudis (2024).

### Discussing the project & forming further ideas

The project was shared at the CAMOC-COMCOL 2024 Conference as a poster presentation, where various conversations with other participants offered valuable insights and constructive feedback. Some of these conversations were centered around the concept of intangible heritage, such as local customs, knowledge and cultural practices that pass from one generation to the next without being connected to specific artifacts, but being carried and transmitted instead by people themselves. This brought to light innovative ways that the applied methodology - meaning both the mind maps and their inscription on t-shirts as a portable display - could potentially be used in that cultural field, as well as in other museum and library heritage content. In addition, intersections and connections between literary content and intangible heritage practices were also discussed, opening up the possibility of exchange in cultural mediation and related methodological tools between the two fields. Other conversations were focused on the exhibition's material moving beyond the museum walls and exploring further ideas and potential ways that this could take place, such as with street posters. Furthermore, the conference was an opportunity to introduce both the developed methodology and the Public Space Museum to the international museum community and, consequently, open up the possibility for future projects and collaborations.

### Notes

- 1 For more information on the museum's statement, you can visit <https://www.museospaziopubblico.it/>

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# Practices of (co)curating

## Harry Kane: I want to play football, the power of temporary display spaces

Zeynep Kussan

### Biography

Zeynep Kussan is currently Documentary Curator at London Transport Museum. Zeynep worked at the London Museum (previously Museum of London) on exhibitions including: The Crime Museum Uncovered, Fire! Fire!, Tunnel: The Archaeology of Crossrail and Roman Dead: Death and Burial in Roman London and the award-winning display Harry Kane: I Want to Play Football. Her documenting work has been to record contemporary London, including two major programmes within London museums, the Documentary Curator Programme and Curating London. Zeynep was also the New Museum Production Officer on the London Museum move to West Smithfield. Zeynep was awarded the Museums Association, Museums Change Lives Radical Changemaker award in 2023, for the display Harry Kane: I want to play football.

### Introduction

*On the evening of Sunday 11 July 2021, the England men's national football team walked down the tunnel onto the pitch at Wembley Stadium, led by their captain. The Three Lions were playing their first ever final in a European Championship, their first international final for 55 years since the 1966 World Cup.*

*This was no ordinary UEFA European Football Championship, having been postponed due to the global pandemic, it was being played a year later, in the midst of Covid-19 restrictions with social distancing rules still in place. The tournament offered a sense of change, yet familiarity and hope - even if only for 90 minutes - to focus on something else. A unifying moment of togetherness.*

*This is a different England team; one building a new relationship with a next generation of football fans. This is a different England captain, who had risen through London's grassroots football with sheer determination and self-belief. The boy from Ridgeway Rovers had grown to become the man that would captain England.*

This was the introduction panel that greeted visitors as they entered the Harry Kane: I Want to Play Football temporary display at the then Museum of London (now London Museum). In spring 2021, I reached out to Harry Kane's management team to discuss the possibility of an exhibit telling his story, to celebrate his journey so far from London's grassroots football to England captain using objects from his personal collection, that have never been on public display before.



Figure 1: Harry Kane: I want to play football exhibition, 2022. Introduction and youth career section of display. Photograph © London Museum.

As the caption read, the tournament offered a sense of change yet familiarity and hope - the global pandemic has affected people across the world, in many different ways, we are living the effects of it and will continue to do so. With the struggles being faced, I wanted to capture a moment that gave people hope. Spring 2022 saw the temporary exhibit open to celebrate one of the city's sporting heroes in a World Cup year. It charted Harry Kane's own journey from grassroots football to the biggest sporting stage in the world, curated in collaboration with Harry Kane and his family, it was designed to inspire the next generation to never give up on their dreams, no matter how hard it seems to achieve them.

### Context of the display

Harry's own story is one of a small boy that knew he wanted to play football from a very young age. His journey was not an easy one, he encountered setbacks and was told he was not good enough, not built like an athlete, not fast enough, and that he did not look like a striker. The display charted his youth, having played for local club Ridgeway Rovers and being rejected by Arsenal football club only after a year, at 8 years old and eventually signing for Tottenham Hotspur. Signing for Tottenham did not guarantee him first team football, Harry had to prove he was good enough to play in the Premier League over already established players. He was sent out on loan to gain experience at Leyton Orient, Millwall, Norwich City and Leicester City. It was on loan at Leicester City that Harry struggled and began to doubt himself, if he couldn't play in the Championship how would he be able to play in the Premier League?



Figure 2: Harry Kane: I want to play football exhibition, 2022. Central wall and senior career section of display. Photograph © London Museum.

This was an important story to tell, and we wanted to do so for our family audiences. The pandemic was difficult for young children and their families, whom had to explain lockdown to a child, why they were not allowed outside, why they couldn't see their friends and, at its worst losing family members and not understanding why they couldn't say their goodbyes.

Mental health is at an all-time high and there is so much support needed going forward. One of the outputs of the display was to support mental health awareness, so we asked ourselves: how we could give back to our communities at a time when it is needed the most? Working in the heritage sector, we are told many times that we cannot change lives, however I believe that even small acts of kindness go a long way, they cause a ripple effect that you don't need to see to understand the lasting change they make.

The Harry Kane Foundation launched on Monday 10 October 2022 on World Mental Health Day with a long-term goal to help transform a generation's thinking about mental wellbeing. Harry has supported the Premier League on the creation of free resources available via the Premier League Primary Stars Education Programme. The activities are designed to encourage 7- to 11-year-olds to recover from setbacks and deal with difficult challenges. This foundation is also the start of Harry's own journey to learn more about mental health and to work with chosen charities and partners to implement lasting change.



Figure 3: Harry Kane: I want to play football exhibition, 2022. International career section of display. Photograph © London Museum.

Football and sport in general can be used as educational tools, the exhibition space allowed for themes to be pulled out for discussion with young people. With the England women's team European Championship success at the time, we were able to highlight why that win was so important and how the Football Association had banned women from playing football on their grounds in 1921, a ban not lifted until 1971. We dedicated a showcase to the men's UEFA European Football Championship 2020 (played in 2021) so that young people could engage with a display focused on an event from their living memory. We were able to educate on the effects of discrimination and racism in the sport, and how desperately immediate change is needed, with more work to be done on equity.

The display itself was not static and updates were made in real time. With the changing of football shirts during the new football season and the digital recording of goals and assists scored by Harry on match days. This meant the display was never out of date during its run leading up to the Qatar World Cup 2022. The display was designed with a changing room of Harry's shirts where visitors could listen to his pre-match playlist on headphones and try on his football boots. Throughout the exhibition, Harry's voice could be heard through speakers documenting his career and sharing his inspirations, across three sections in the space, Youth, Senior and International career.

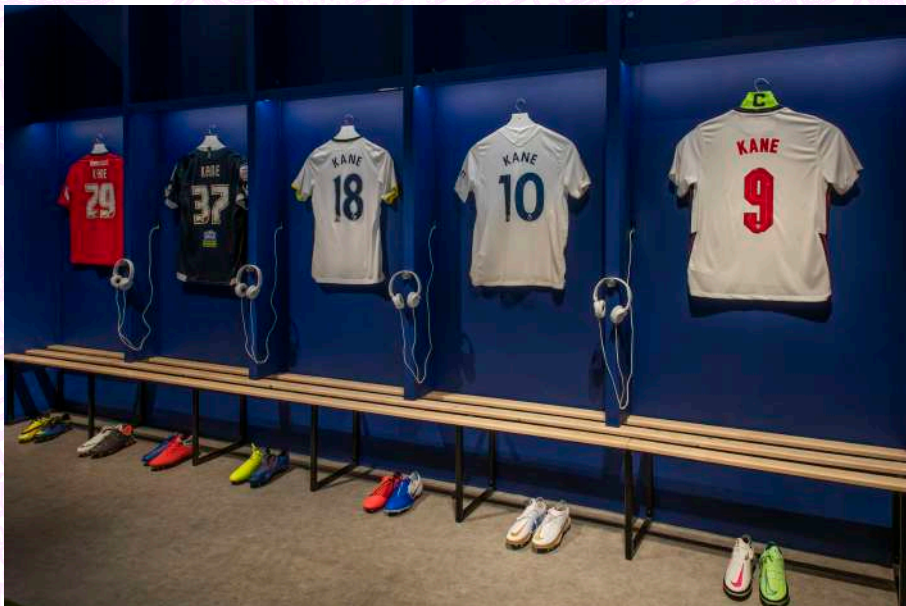


Figure 4: Harry Kane: I want to play football exhibition, 2022. Changing room section of display. Photograph © London Museum.

### Impact of the display

The display brought in new audiences to the museum, within two months of opening there was an increase of 20 per cent in first time visitors. With an enormous spike in 'kids-first families' - parents visiting to entertain their children. There was an increase of visitors from all over the UK who came specifically to see the free display. Children and adults were visiting the museum wearing their football shirts, proudly showing their colours of their team of choice from all over the world. There was audience growth across all social media channels with the increase of selfies of visitors in the exhibition space sharing their experiences. Harry Kane himself shared videos of the exhibition, as did Tottenham Hotspur, The FA, football fans and football social media influencers. Media coverage included non-traditional museum media, moving into mainstream sports coverage, such as live interviews on Sky Sports Breakfast with the curator and ex-professional footballers, beIN SPORTS and radio shows including talkSPORT.

The display was a happy, lively space, where strangers talked to each other, and discussions started around memories of a football match and being there for that important goal. A visitor to the display did not need to be interested in football, or be a football fan to understand the display, the theme throughout was one of not giving up on your dreams and self-belief.

As museums, we always talk about statistics and data collection, and how many visitors we can get through the door, however those traditional methods of capture may not work with displays or inform of its impact. People disregard anecdotal information. To truly understand the impacts of the display, you needed to go beyond surveys or evaluation forms, and be in the space with visitors. To be in the present moment to experience first hand the real day to day impacts, it was having.

What we were seeing was children inspired and excited by the display, understanding it is okay to talk about how they are feeling, or how they can cope with rejection. We saw teenagers making the trip after school in their school uniforms enjoying the space, we also saw adults that enjoy football as part of their social life, week-in, week-out activity that was taken away by the pandemic. Time spent in the museum space increased, with families spending up to five hours in the museum with repeat visits also increasing. How do we continue to capture all the above information, as this is not data acquired with the use of evaluation forms at the museum exit, but by being present in the space, and more importantly, how do we continue to engage with our visitors in a way that we can make a difference when it is needed the most? The answers are in authentic communication, intent and being present, not only in museum spaces, but within your city, truly understanding people, what motivates people, what drives people, what we are passionate about, understanding and celebrating our differences and what brings us together.

During this exhibition, I incorporated time throughout my working day, to be in the display space, engaging and talking with visitors, this provided the additional data along with that from the usual form filling. I did this with this exhibition because I knew it was attracting first time museum visitors and I wanted to make people feel comfortable and welcome.

The display allows for contemporary stories to be told without acquiring, collecting objects, or owning the copyright to someone's lived experience. With a lot of contemporary collecting work, museums acquire a person's story into their permanent collections and then that story becomes the property of the museum, what this can lead to in the future, is that it then can be potentially chopped and changed and be used in a way that was not initially what it was acquired or intended for. This is the power of temporary display spaces; they can be utilised in a way to keep telling stories authentically and working in collaboration with individuals and groups without taking ownership of stories or objects that are rightfully their own.



Figure 5: Harry Kane: I want to play football exhibition, 2022. Middle floor section of display. Photograph © London Museum.

### To conclude

The main challenge of the temporary display interestingly came from within the museum sector and from museum workers themselves. The theme of football in a mainstream museum that was not a sports museum brought about push back and many negative comments, it was not deemed appropriate that it belong in a city museum or a non-sport museum. The display spoke for itself upon opening and the comments became mere mumbblings. This leads me back to a question that is asked frequently, who is making the decision on content and what stories are museum worthy, or what belongs in a museum and how it is or was acquired? Until museum's truly look inwardly, to reflect and understand it is time for progression, and evaluate their own motivations for upholding out-dated methods, the road to diversity of thought and authentic inclusivity is still a long one.

*The Harry Kane: I want to play football* display ran from 21 May 2022 to 4 December 2022. The Museum of London also closed its doors on 4 December 2022, after 46 years of welcoming over 21.5 million people to its address at 150 London Wall. The Museum of London is currently transforming into the London Museum and is relocating to West Smithfield in London. On its last weekend, the museum for the first time in its history remained open for 24 hours, allowing visitors a last chance to see its galleries and collections, this weekend included the most visitors in one day as well as the greatest number of visitors over a weekend in its history.

There is huge power in the use of temporary display spaces, we can use them to tell stories of the past and the present. We can use them to engage with new visitors by creating a story telling museum space, that contrasts with the existing permanent galleries. It gives space to be able to experiment, explore and take risks by stepping outside of traditional and out-dated museum themes and creating compelling programming with distinctive content about London and its people. The hope is that displays such as this can continue to make a lasting positive impact on people and how we engage with London through content and most importantly the power of giving back to our local communities without always looking to take something in return.

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