

Museological translations of Migration

DISCUSSION FORUM

Interpreting migration through the language of the city museum

PARTNERS

ICOM-CITIES and FEMS, with the support of ICOM France

**Wednesday
14 October
2026**

**Paul Éluard
Museum
of Art and
History,
Saint-Denis**

As venues for the production and dissemination of research, centred around tangible and intangible heritage, city museums are also spaces for sensory experience, engaging the emotions and imaginations of their visitors. This distinctive feature enables them to construct original, polyphonic, multidisciplinary and nuanced narratives that are essential at a time when public debates in France and across Europe are highly polarised. Through their scale, their proximity to local residents and their capacity for experimentation, they can address the issue of migration free from clichés, in all its complexity, by exploring the real, imagined and dreamt-of ties that migrants maintain with their countries of origin, and the influence of these different cultures on the transformation of the host society.

Saint-Denis, characterised by its multicultural reality, appears to provide a relevant testing ground for reflecting on how migration histories can be translated into the language of a city museum. The presence of people from immigrant backgrounds there is indeed long-standing and still highly visible, whether in terms of local shops and forms of grassroots economy, bonds of diaspora and cultural solidarity, or forms of activism linked to anti-racist and postcolonial issues. The Paul Eluard Museum of Art and History aims to explore this new theme by drawing on shared experiences from museums across France and Europe.

This workshop, supported by ICOM-CITIES and FEMS, will provide an opportunity to take stock of the place of migration issues within our institutions and our strategies for enriching our collections, to assess the contribution of researchers and artists, and to gauge the impact of our narratives on our audiences.

Designed as a forum for collective reflection and interdisciplinary dialogue, this study day aims to examine the role of city museums in producing, transmitting and facilitating debate on migration narratives. At a time when migration occupies a central place in public debates in France and Europe, debates often characterised by significant political and media polarisation, museums emerge as institutions capable of developing critical, contextualised approaches grounded in research findings. Their local roots, their proximity to local communities and their capacity to experiment with new forms of public participation make them key players in the construction of inclusive and diverse narratives.

The day will be structured around several complementary sessions:

- ✦ a historiographical overview of city museums that have incorporated migration into their permanent displays, temporary exhibitions or collection policies;
- ✦ an urban tour of Saint-Denis offering an interpretation of the area through its historical, heritage and migration dynamics;
- ✦ French and international case studies enabling a comparison of different museological approaches to migration;
- ✦ round-table discussions bringing together researchers and museum professionals to discuss the scientific, heritage, ethical and museological issues related to the representation of migration;
- ✦ participatory workshops focusing on collaborative methodologies, outreach initiatives and practices for co-constructing narratives;
- ✦ a closing reception, encouraging exchanges between participants.

Programme

- 09:00** Reception and registration of participants
- 09:30** **Urban walking tour in Saint-Denis**
Organised by **AMULOP** (Association for the History of Migration and Social Housing)
- 11:00** **Opening remarks**
by **Sofia Boutrih**, elected representative of Saint-Denis
- 11:15** **Introduction: How can migration be presented in a museum?**
Andréa Delaplace, PhD, University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne,
ICOM-CITIES

11:45 Museum interpretations of migration (10–15 minutes each)

French and international city museums present their approaches to collecting, interpreting and narrating migration.

Speakers:

- ✦ **Marieke Vangheluwe** (heritage project coordination, STAM Ghent) – *The 'km²' projects as a tool for exploring migration.*
- ✦ **Muriel Cohen** (AMULOP) – *Presentation of the association's project for a museum of social housing.*
- ✦ **Annemarie de Wildt** (Emeritus curator, Amsterdam Museum, ICOM-CITIES) – *Neighbourhood shops as a lens through which to tell the story of migration.*
- ✦ **Olivier Cogne** (Director of the Musée Dauphinois) – *Exhibiting migration: the example of the Musée Dauphinois.*

13:15 Lunch

14:00 Reflection workshop: translating research into museum exhibitions

- ✦ **Hédia Yelles Chaouche** (specialist in intangible cultural heritage, National Museum of the History of Immigration) – *Collection drives in migrant worker hostels. From the collaborative ideal to the act of donating: roles and statuses of donors.*
- ✦ **Sanja Simic** (curator at the Lëtzebuerg City Museum) – *Collecting migration: challenges and practices at the Lëtzebuerg City Museum.*
- ✦ **Aurélie Schneider** (scientific assistant, Musée Alsacien, Strasbourg) – *Presentation of an ethnographic study focusing on Alsatian communities with Turkish immigrant backgrounds.*
- ✦ **Christine Bellavoine** (sociologist Mairie de Saint-Denis)/ **Valérie Perlèse** (director Musée d'art et d'histoire Paul Éluard) – *Saint-Denis, the informal economy: a subject for the museum?*

15:30 Participatory workshops in small groups

Possible themes :

- ✦ **Inside and outside the museum: urban tours and exhibitions in public spaces**
- ✦ **Collecting migration stories**
- ✦ **Working with artists**
- ✦ **Translating research into museum language**

- 16:30 Guided tour of the exhibition**
'Believe and Heal. And Deliver Us from Evil'
- 17:15 Closing Reception** at the museum

To take part in the study day, please contact the museum reception by email at musee.accueil@saintdenis.fr or by telephone on **01 83 72 24 57**. Registration is obligatory as places are limited.

