

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) – *Exhibiting Migration in a Museum of Working-Class Housing: Feedback and New Challenges.*
- ✦ **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) – *Studying and Representing Contemporary Societies in the Museum: The Case of Alsatian Communities of Turkish Origin.*
- ✦ **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?*

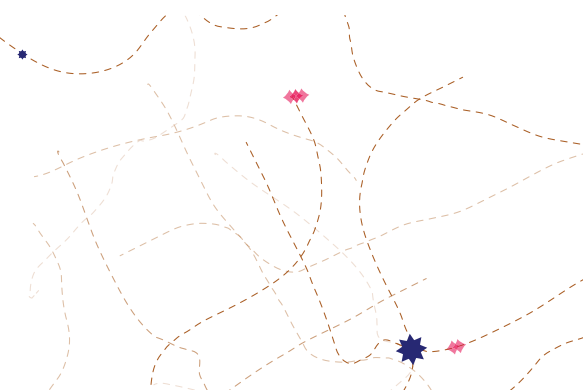
15:30 Participatory workshops in small groups

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.



Speakers' Abstracts

CHRISTINE BELLAVOINE
Sociologist Mairie de Saint-Denis

VALÉRIE PERLÈS
director Musée d'art et d'histoire Paul Éluard

Saint-Denis, the informal economy: a subject for the museum?

Initially intended to valorise the material traces of a world in the process of disappearing, museums of society have gradually turned their attention to lived territories, both past and present. As places where research is produced and disseminated, museums are also spaces of embodied experience, engaging emotions and imaginaries. They can thus enter into the everyday lives of visitors and engage with the apparent banality of the world, while reintroducing the necessary distance for questioning to emerge through original and nuanced narratives.

With regard to migration, the museum in Saint-Denis seeks to explore the affective, cultural, symbolic, economic, political, and other forms of connection that populations with a migration background maintain with their countries of origin or diasporic communities, and the influence of these connections on the processes of transformation of the territory. Here, we will focus on the theme of the popular economy, which has been extensively studied by the *Direction des études locales*, in order to understand what it reveals locally—beyond an economy of subsistence or a logic of supply—about identities that assert themselves, dissolve, confront one another, become hybridised, invent origins for themselves, or deliberately distance themselves from them.

Existing studies thus provide reliable data on the socio-demographic evolution of the population and help define the context, particularly the migratory context, in which this popular economy operates, as well as its contours, the ways in which it shapes the city, and the place it occupies in public debate. Our contribution proposes to reflect concretely on how this existing, rich, and complex body of scientific knowledge might be updated and translated into a museum language.

ANDRÉA CRISTINA DELAPLACE

PhD, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Associate
Researcher, CELAT-UQAM

How can migration be presented in a museum? From the Memorialisation of Migration to Its Inscription in Urban History

This presentation examines the ways in which migration can be brought into museums, taking as its starting point the heritage-making of migration experiences and their gradual incorporation into institutional narratives. It explores how migration, long considered a specific heritage object and often associated with dedicated museums or exhibitions, can be integrated into the narratives produced by city museums. By shifting the focus from the representation of migrant populations alone to the social, cultural, and territorial transformations to which migration contributes, this reflection questions how city museums can make migration a constitutive component of urban history. Through the analysis of different museum experiences, the presentation highlights the tensions between visibility and othering, between narratives of integration and the recognition of the complexity of migrant trajectories, while exploring the possibilities offered by a transversal approach to migration in collections, exhibitions, and urban narratives. Ultimately, the aim is to understand how moving from the heritage-making of migration towards its inscription within urban heritage can contribute to renewing the ways in which cities are narrated and understood.

OLIVIER COGNE

Director of the Musée Dauphinois

Exhibiting Migration: The Example of the Musée dauphinois

As a place dedicated to transmitting the heritage and history of the Alpine region, the Musée dauphinois is also a space for reflecting on cultural diversity. In this capacity, it has long sought to represent the diversity of the region's population and its multiple origins through a series of exhibitions initiated in the 1980s and developed over several decades.

This approach aims to deconstruct established representations and to highlight the many contributions resulting from this diversity.

ANNEMARIE DE WILDT

Emeritus curator, Amsterdam Museum, ICOM-CITIES

Neighbourhood Shops and Migration

Around 2010, after a series of exhibitions devoted to different ethnic groups, the Amsterdam Museum adopted a different approach: exploring urban transformations through themes in which migration was one dimension among others, rather than the sole focus. A project on the transformation of

neighbourhood shops since 1900 brought together migration history, the history of retail and food, and changing urban social relations.

Shop assortments, façades, signage, and the stories of shopkeepers revealed successive waves of migration, from Jewish shopkeepers in the interwar period to Moroccan, Turkish, and Surinamese shopkeepers after the Second World War, and more recent migrant entrepreneurs. Between 2009 and 2011, the museum worked with students and volunteers to create pop-up exhibitions in different neighbourhoods, collecting hundreds of stories and objects from residents and shopkeepers.

Annemarie de Wildt will discuss this approach to co-creation with residents and shopkeepers, the museum value of everyday objects, and how this model could be useful to other city museums seeking to represent migration as an integral part of broader processes of urban transformation.

MURIEL COHEN AMULOP

Exhibiting Migration in a Museum of Working-Class Housing: Feedback and New Challenges

The project to create a museum of working-class housing aims to recount the history of working-class suburbs through the lives and journeys of their residents, viewed through the lens of housing. Since 2020, the collective's exhibitions have addressed the migration experience through residential trajectories, as well as administrative hurdles and issues of discrimination, alongside more intimate matters such as religious practice and ties to one's culture of origin. How can these issues, which can create friction with partners, be approached? How can the voices of those who agree to share their personal stories be accurately honored and preserved?

AURÉLIE SCHNEIDER

Scientific assistant, Musée Alsacien, Strasbourg

Presenting an Ethnographic Study of Alsatian Communities of Turkish Migration Background

Concerned with better reflecting the cultural transformations taking place across the Alsace region, the Musée Alsacien renewed its scientific and cultural project in 2023, reaffirming its role as a museum of society. This approach has led to the development of new research activities and an acquisition policy attentive to contemporary social issues, intangible cultural heritage, and the diversity of trajectories and cultural affiliations that shape Alsatian society today.

Within this framework, the museum undertook an ethnographic study focusing on Alsatian communities of Turkish migration background. The research was conducted in two phases. The first, carried out between 2023 and 2025, consisted of an investigation documenting memories of migration, life trajectories, and cultural practices resulting from cultural mixing, particularly in relation to seasonal and calendar-based celebrations. Following this study, the Musée Alsacien launched a collecting phase in 2025, which is still ongoing, to enrich its collections with objects, testimonies, and documents reflecting these contemporary trajectories and cultural practices.

The presentation will provide an overview of the research and collecting process, its methods, partners, and main findings, as well as the prospects for interpretation and display, particularly in the context of the redevelopment of the museum's permanent exhibition. It will also address the participatory approach being developed around these new acquisitions, with the aim of involving the people concerned and communities of origin in discussions about how the collected objects and narratives should be presented.

SANJA SIMIC

Curator at the Lëtzebuerg City Museum

Collecting Migration: Challenges and Practices at the Lëtzebuerg City Museum

From October 2027 to July 2028, the Lëtzebuerg City Museum will present a temporary exhibition dedicated to migration in the city of Luxembourg, from the Middle Ages to the present day. It will feature both historical objects from the museum's collections and recent objects acquired specifically for the project.

A public call was launched in March 2026 to invite contributions in the form of donations or loans. This initiative aims to enrich the museum's collections with testimonies that document contemporary migration experiences. The objective is to document and illustrate the dynamics and realities of intercultural living together in an urban context, in a capital where approximately 70% of the population is non-Luxembourgish.

The presentation will highlight the ongoing activities carried out as part of this collecting campaign, as well as the partnerships developed with local organisations and community stakeholders.

MARIEKE VANGHELUWE

Heritage project coordination, STAM Ghent

De vierkante kilometer (The Square Kilometre): Starting from the Neighbourhood to Tell Stories of Migration

Between 2019 and 2025, STAM – Ghent City Museum worked with several neighbourhoods across the city as part of the De vierkante kilometer (“The Square Kilometre”) project. At the scale of a neighbourhood, or more precisely a square kilometre, the project brought together residents, local associations, and researchers to collectively explore its history. The results were then shared with other residents of the city through a small exhibition at the museum.

One of the strengths of this approach is that it does not begin with migration as a subject. Instead, it starts with a place and the people who live there. Migration then becomes one of several possible perspectives through which to tell the history of a neighbourhood. This makes it possible to construct a more plural narrative, avoiding both the reduction of a neighbourhood to a single story and the limitation of the project to migration alone.

The project followed several stages. Working with historian Tina De Gendt, a group of residents began with participatory research, drawing in particular on the method of “sharing authority”. The first step was to collectively define the questions the group wanted to explore. A shared narrative was then developed through the research. On this basis, Tina De Gendt and the museum developed storytelling formats and videos. Only at this stage did the museum begin looking for photographs and objects that could illustrate the narrative and, where relevant, become part of the museum’s collections or those of other partners.

The project also prompted reflection on dominant representations of these neighbourhoods. Public perceptions are often strongly associated with decline and the departure of residents during the 1960s and 1970s. Stories of migration, solidarity, entrepreneurship, community life, culture, and youth from this period onwards reveal a much more diverse reality.

Drawing on this experience, the presentation will reflect on how starting with a neighbourhood and its inhabitants can help museums tell more diverse and nuanced stories about migration and the city.

HÉDIA YELLES CHAOUCHE

Intangible Cultural Heritage Officer, 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.**

An initial heritage collecting initiative led by the MNHI (*Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration*), focusing on the history of the 1983 March for Equality and Against Racism, provided an opportunity to interrogate participatory approaches and the museum's ability to adopt a more horizontal framework. A second collecting initiative enabled a more proactive implementation of this approach through engagement with a wide range of stakeholders (community organizations, institutions, and donors). The fieldwork led to the development of a new methodology—still being tested—that actively involves the various participants in the project.

This work prompts a reconsideration of the role and agency of donors, as well as the degree of freedom they have to shape their own narratives and define their contributions, despite an imposed institutional framework that remains difficult to fully circumvent.

**SCIENTIFIC AND ORGANISING COMMITTEE OF THE
WORKSHOP:**

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