



## New accessions – Migration stories in Berlin Collections<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Exhibition

The exhibition *New Accessions – Migration Stories in Berlin Collections* took place from January to March 2011 in the district museum of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg (*FHXB Museum*).<sup>2</sup> The district of Kreuzberg in Berlin is known to be a deprived area, where many immigrants live.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly the museum in Kreuzberg has already addressed the issue of migration in a lot of exhibitions. Likewise, participatory approaches have been tried for more than ten years by the curators of the museum.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the Kreuzberg museum meets the expectations of a modern conception that also takes up social problems. However the exhibition *New Accessions – Migration Stories in Berlin Collections* even exceeds that and breaks new ground in two ways. That is why it also carries the title of a ‘laboratory exhibition’: 1. As to content the focus of this exhibition and of the permanent exhibition still to come is to be broadened and

Pictures of the museum can be found here:  
<http://www.fhxb-museum.de/index.php?id=82>  
and here:  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bezirkmuseum\\_Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bezirkmuseum_Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg.JPG)

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kreuzbergmuseum.de/index.php?id=230> (18.08.2013).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kreuzbergmuseum.de/> (18.08.2013).

<sup>3</sup> Düspohl M., Miera F., Bluche L. (2012) ‘Partizipation im Berliner Kreuzberg Museum Erfahrungen und Perspektiven’ in Susanne Gesser et al. (ed) *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 156-63, here 157.

<sup>4</sup> Düspohl M., Miera F., Bluche L. (2012) ‘Partizipation im Berliner Kreuzberg Museum Erfahrungen und Perspektiven’, in Susanne Gesser et al. (ed) *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 156-8.

the history of migration is not any longer to be perceived as the mere story of different groups of origin, who currently live or used to live in Kreuzberg. It was rather about taking into account the district in its entirety. “Therefore the present and the historical interaction between people of different origin is in the centre of attention, including in each case the native population.”<sup>5</sup>



1: Visitor in the exhibiton New Accessions © FHXB Museum, photo Ellen Röhner

2. Regarding the selection of objects the museum goes the same ways as does the EMEE project. It was not the new accessions that were supposed to be focused on in the exhibition, but it was the aim to analyze and reappraise existing collections by means of changed leading questions (COP 1, Re-Interpretation, Toolkit 1). ‘Before expanding existing stocks by active collecting it is crucial to reflect upon viewing, perceiving and systematizing habits.’<sup>6</sup> The goal of the curators was to proceed in such a way as to make accessible new meanings of these already provided museum objects. This approach was put into practice by the method of ‘revisiting collections’, according to which groups, being composed of different people, (experts, lay people with immigrant background, people of higher and lower education, old and young people) judged museum stocks from their personal point of view, reappraised them and exchanged views on them (COP 2, Toolkit 2 und 3).<sup>7</sup> A complex access of multi-perspectivity to single objects was developed in this manner, which integrates various groups of the district and often allows new, broadened attributions of meaning.

Altogether five institutions and museums cooperated in the project in Berlin. Besides the Kreuzberg museum the trust *Stadtmuseum Berlin*, the *Museum of Islamic Art of the state museums of Berlin*, the *Werkbundarchiv - A museum of things* and the research project *exhibition experiment museology* of the *Berlin Institute of Technology* took part.

<sup>5</sup> Düspohl M., Miera F., Bluche L. (2012) ‘Partizipation im Berliner Kreuzberg Museum Erfahrungen und Perspektiven’, in Susanne Gesser et al. (ed) *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 159.

<sup>6</sup> Düspohl M., Miera F., Bluche L. (2012) ‘Partizipation im Berliner Kreuzberg Museum Erfahrungen und Perspektiven’, in Susanne Gesser et al. (ed) *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 160.

<sup>7</sup> Gerbich C. (2012) “‘NeuZugänge – Migrationsgeschichten in Berliner Sammlungen’ Eine Laborausstellung im Bezirksmuseum Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg’, in Susanne Gesser et al. (ed) *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 262-5, here 264.

Citation: Popp, S. (2014), *Mapping Process. New accessions – Migration stories in Berlin Collections*, published within the EMEE project: *EuroVision – Museums Exhibiting Europe*, [http://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EMEE-Mapping-Process\\_P1\\_New-accessions-Migration-stories.pdf](http://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EMEE-Mapping-Process_P1_New-accessions-Migration-stories.pdf).

## 2. Exhibition concept

With regard to the exhibition it is especially the basic reflections beforehand, which are interesting for the EMEE project, referring to broadening of the participatory approach (revisiting collections) described above. Altogether four differently composed groups worked on the concept of the exhibition and thus became curators in this sense. Besides the museum staff (a) there were the Berlin laypeople (b), who differed in terms of their social background, origin, age, gender and education (so-called focus groups), people with immigration background (c) as well as visitors (d), who got the chance to participate during the exhibition period. The four groups were assigned with different tasks. The museum staff chose two objects from each museum and provided relevant fact-sheets. The focus groups discussed the selected objects, replied to leading questions and added their views on the objects. Moreover the small groups (two persons) with immigration background, who had been selected by the museum staff, were assigned to complement the exhibition with objects that seemed important from their point of view. Accordingly they told the story of the objects in an added film and explained why they chose these objects. Although the focus had remained on already existing stocks at first, the exhibition could thus use the newly chosen objects to point to aspects that were not represented by the provided collection stocks. Finally the visitors could make their own statements in the exhibition and even complement objects.<sup>8</sup>

Picture of the exhibition and of one object given to the exhibition by an immigrant:  
<http://www.fhxb-museum.de/index.php?id=230>

The array of objects collected in this way was wide, yet frequently it was only the explanation presented in the film that created a context with the topic of migration (e.g. the gnocchi grater presented in the exhibition<sup>9</sup>). It was particularly everyday objects that were displayed such as gnocchi grater, an old tea pot, a Polish book of poems, a knitted bag from Turkey, an Arabic calligraphy, a cigarette tin by the company *Muratti*, an alarm clock in the shape of a mosque, a historical water bowl from Iran or a page from the Persian Koran.

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<sup>8</sup> Gerbich C. (2012) “‘NeuZugänge – Migrationsgeschichten in Berliner Sammlungen’ Eine Laborausstellung im Bezirksmuseum Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg”, in Susanne Gesser et al. (ed) *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 263.

<sup>9</sup> ‘We’re having hand-made gnocchi on the 29th of each month’, says Isabel Alvarez from Uruguay, who has been living in Berlin for many years. At the end of the month, when she was running out of money, she used to make budget-friendly gnocchi with the help of a grater. Compare: [http://www.migazin.de/2011/02/24/neuzugange-migrationsgeschichten-in-berliner-sammlungen/\(19.08.2013\)](http://www.migazin.de/2011/02/24/neuzugange-migrationsgeschichten-in-berliner-sammlungen/(19.08.2013)).



2: Alarm clock in form of a mosque © FHXB Museum, photo EllenRöhner



3: Ottoman cigarette box © FHXB Museum, photo Ellen Röhner

### 3. Conclusion

The exhibition project is of great relevance for the EMEE project, as it links questions of the reinterpretation of objects with participatory approaches. It becomes obvious by way of example how objects can be reinterpreted through new topics and posing of questions and how different groups of population can be integrated into this process (even from social classes in whose experience realm museums are rather marginal). Likewise the project tries to find a solution to how possible gaps in the collection stocks can be overcome and filled: The array of objects is meaningfully widened, in that curators do not only rely on reinterpretation, but integrate additional objects suggested by migrants.

However reflecting the project Christine Gerbich also reveals problems related to putting this concept of an exhibition into practice.<sup>10</sup> As an example, the attempt to engender a focus group with different levels of education apparently failed (as it was mostly participants of higher education). Gerbich also claims that the amount of work involved in the project was enormous.

*Citation: Popp, S. (2014), Mapping Process. New accessions – Migration stories in Berlin Collections, published within the EMEE project: EuroVision – Museums Exhibiting Europe, [http://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EMEE-Mapping-Process\\_P1\\_New-accessions-Migration-stories.pdf](http://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EMEE-Mapping-Process_P1_New-accessions-Migration-stories.pdf).*

Her conclusion is 'that participatory processes can hardly be created successfully and enduringly [...] without sufficient temporal, financial, personal and spatial resources'.<sup>11</sup> For the creators of the EMEE project it is revealing to get to know that there were also problems occurring in the exhibition as for how to present adequately the ambivalence of the objects, elaborated upon in the focus groups, and the different appraisals emerging. This is one of the basic problems the EMEE project has to deal with. The question is how the multi-perspectivity and ambivalence of objects can be displayed without having to convey an abundance of information by means of texts (cop 1, toolkit 4). In this respect the projects aims to develop some fundamental ideas, even if these ideas can only give thought-provoking impulses.

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<sup>10</sup> Gerbich C. (2012) '„NeuZugänge – Migrationsgeschichten in Berliner Sammlungen“ ' Eine Laborausstellung im Bezirksmuseum Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg', in Susanne Gesser et al. (ed) *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 264-5.

<sup>11</sup> Gerbich C. (2012) '„NeuZugänge – Migrationsgeschichten in Berliner Sammlungen“ ' Eine Laborausstellung im Bezirksmuseum Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg', in Susanne Gesser et al. (ed) *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 265.

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Gerbich C. (2012) "NeuZugänge – Migrationsgeschichten in Berliner Sammlungen" Eine Laborausstellung im Bezirksmuseum Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg', in Susanne Gesser et al. (ed) *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 262-5.

*Citation: Popp, S. (2014), Mapping Process. New accessions – Migration stories in Berlin Collections, published within the EMEE project: EuroVision – Museums Exhibiting Europe, [http://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EMEE-Mapping-Process\\_P1\\_New-accessions-Migration-stories.pdf](http://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EMEE-Mapping-Process_P1_New-accessions-Migration-stories.pdf).*