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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 Ahiska, 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).¹

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 m² 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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All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

