

# Round

# Table

27 March 2017  
Zentrum Karl der Grosse, Zürich

# Preface to the initiatives

Given that very many refugees are seeking refuge in Switzerland, many individuals and institutions also want to engage in the cultural sector and thus contribute to the strengthening of social cohesion. In particular, museums with their diverse and professional know-how in the visualization of complex relationships – can be ideal places to bring people with different backgrounds together. We want to use this potential to enable cultural participation and meaningful commitment. Numerous talks and a small survey among museum specialists have confirmed this need.

It seems that the collaboration between these two different worlds must be carefully planned to allow for an exchange on the same level. In the sense of a participatory process, we therefore planned, as a first step, a round table with representatives of the museum and migration worlds, with the aim of determining whether – or which needs for – a closer cooperation between museums and migrants exist.

In addition to promoting exchange and networking, the round table helped to concretize examples of practical experience as well as to formulate measures for presenting museums more and more as places of integration that assume social responsibility. In addition, first practical ideas were developed on how people with an immigration background can be facilitated access to museums at different levels. Further steps are planned for the development and financing of these ideas.

We would like to thank all participants of the round table most warmly for their active participation and their commitment to the round table and we look forward to further discussions and project ideas.

Bettina Riedrich and Tina Wodiunig

# Round Table Museums and Migrants

## Participants present (Integration and Museums)

Elisabeth Abgottspon (Verein Muse-Um-Zürich, Ortsmuseum Küsnacht), Remo Blumenthal (Integrationsförderung der Stadt Zürich), Björn Callensten (Caritas, Plattform Zürcher Flüchtlingstag), Gaby Fierz (mediator and curator), Maria Gstöhl (Fachbereich Soziale Integration Kanton Zürich), Chantico Ledesma (ExpoTransKultur, AusländerInnenbeirat der Stadt Zürich), Nicole Mayer (Verein Zürcher Museen), Irene Rodriguez (AOZ), David Vuillaume (ICOM Schweiz/Verband der Museen Schweiz) (21 persons)

## Praxis tandems

Stephan Koncz (klipp&klang), Beat Mazenauer (Musée Imaginaire des Migrations), Eva Roth-Kleiner («Toi – le musée – moi»), Navid Samadi («Toi – le musée – moi»), Prisca Senn (Leitung Bildung & Vermittlung Landesmuseum Zürich), Franco Supino (Autor Musée Imaginaire des Migrations), Udaya Tennakoon (klipp&klang), Christoph Tschanz (Museum Burg Zug), Liliane Wenger («Toi – le musée – moi»)

## Absences

Luzia Kurmann (Projektleiterin Migration/Integration Migros Kulturprozent), Mano Khalil (Filmemacher) und Heddemma Renske (Co-Präsidentin AusländerInnenbeirat)

## Organisation

Tina Wodiunig and Bettina Riedrich (initiators) and Kathleen Gallagher (translation and minutes)

## Financing

The Round Table was supported by Staatssekretariat für Migration SEM, Integrationsförderung des Kantons Zürich and Stadtentwicklung Zürich, Swiss Museums Association VMS and Swiss Association for Museum Studies [museologie.ch](http://museologie.ch).

# Welcome and programm

## Introduction

In a short introduction, the organizers focus on the background and aims of the round table: Networking and needs analysis. After that all participants introduced themselves and described the highlights of their project or their function in their branch.

## Introduction of participants

The participants of the round table were invited based on their role as multipliers in the field of integration or museums. The partners from the world of museum praxis were selected from the perspective of their intercultural experience as bi-national tandems.

## Toi – le musée – moi

*Focus: exchange, change of perspective*

In shared museum visits, tandems consisting of Swiss students and refugees share their experience of «foreignness» in the museum.

## Musée Imaginaire des Migrations (MIM)

*Focus: external representation*

The **Musée Imaginaire des Migrations** is a museum without walls. It provides a platform for migration histories, which are developed together with Swiss museums and published on the MIM website.

## klipp+klang: Vitamin B

*Focus: labour market, language*

**Vitamin B** is an education and work integration course for people who need to re-orient themselves professionally. The course participants explore the opportunities for education and work in Switzerland with radio journalistic techniques such as research and interview. In this way, they find windows of opportunity that correspond to their personal competences and resources and may open up long-term perspectives for them. Vitamin B is at the same time also an intensive language training.

## Mediation National Museum Zurich

*Focus: education&communication*

The travelling exhibition «**Flucht – Fuir**» was hosted by the National Museum Zurich. The program of mediation and events at the exhibition provided opportunities for exchanging and deepening the topic at various levels.

## Museum Burg Zug

*Focus: participation, exhibition*

At the **Museum Burg Zug**, a special exhibition on immigration is being developed together with immigrants and emigrants. In addition to a call from the museum for the collection of stories, migrants will also become co-curators of the exhibition.

# Conclusions of the World Café

Participants exchanged information and discussed issues of project organization, impact on participants / target groups and impact on the context of the projects presented. Notes and important issues were collected in writing by the participants as a preparation for ongoing discussion and for the conclusions presented here.

## Round 1: Project organisation

### Musée Imaginaire des Migrations (MIM)

It was and will continue to be important to anchor projects in the institution, to ensure sustainability. The problem of continuity was raised and discussed, it is very important to keep people mobilized, to deal with issues of financing, otherwise the effects of projects are short-lived and fleeting.

**«How can such a project be financed in the long term?»**

**«One could develop an audio guide together with refugees or train refugees as guides!»**

### klipp+klang: Vitamin B

The praxis tandem declared it was motivated, because of today's discussions, to create an audio guide which will promote dialogue between tandems who visit the museum. It will be important to ensure that visiting the museum is free. Perhaps a Refugees' day could be organized where immigrants are actively employed in conducting guided tours.

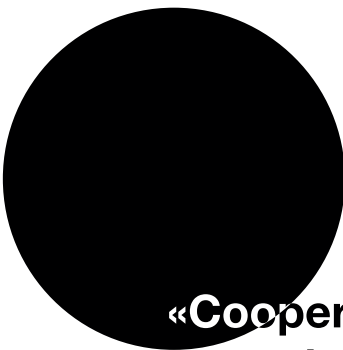
Idea: Develop exhibitions in dialogue with refugees and train refugees as guides.

## Toi – le musée – moi

Important issues mentioned were, the challenge of matching migrants and students with each other, the challenging of convincing migrants why museums are an appropriate setting for them, as well as the issues of the payment of entrance fees and of the employment and tasks of museum staff. In the preparation of the visit to the museum the inclusion of all groups was given special attention. It was particularly important to get feedback from all tandem partners to hear what pleased and/or irritated them. Immigrants were pleased to meet Swiss people of their own age, and Swiss students at the University of Teacher Education in Lausanne, many of whom had never had any contact to immigrants, were made aware of immigrant issues. A conclusion was that this could/should be intensified in the future.



**«We need to intensify such collaborative projects in the future.»**



**«Cooperation with external partners is time-consuming and requires a lot of resources - but it is very, very enriching.»**

## **Museum Burg Zug and Mediation National Museum Zurich**

Both museums had in common that they had positive experience with participants and partners from outside the field of museums; this was enriching, even though many resources were needed.

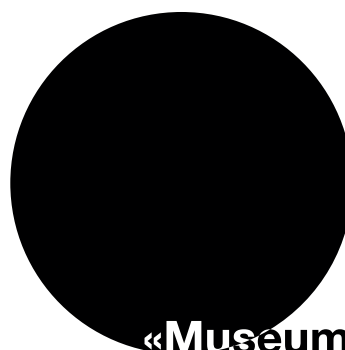
In the case of the Museum Burg Zug, the importance of local anchoring was emphasized (for example, through various accompanying programs). One major difference was that the National museum's exhibition «Flucht – Fuir» is conceived as a travelling exhibition, whilst that of Zug is firmly connected to its locality, in itself an important element for success.

## Round 2: Outcome | Impact on participants and target groups

### «Toi – le musée – moi»

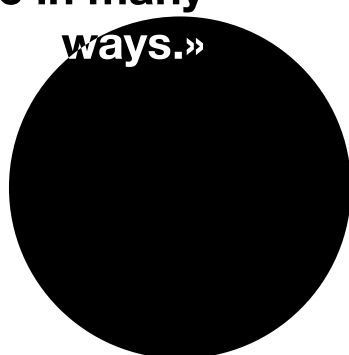
As already stated above, many immigrants have not had the chance to meet Swiss people of their own age group, and the tandem experience was helpful in breaking monotony and routine in a setting and context different from the one the immigrants and students were accustomed to.

The project was perceived by most immigrant participants as positive because the tandem experience and location were «neutral» and not beset with complexity. In addition, it was emphasized that such visits to museums are possible at any time.



**«Museums are places that are mostly unfamiliar to refugees but also to many Swiss students.»**

**«Transferring human experience from one to another language is problematic in many ways.»**



### Musée Imaginaire des Migrations (MIM)

The theme of the exhibition «Stories» acted as a door-opener. When stories come into museums, a place of «high culture», they achieved an additional value which they would otherwise not have had.

In terms of language, the translation presentation of stories is challenging: the dilemma of presenting a foreign language experience in another language (high German) is not to be overlooked. This was and could be overcome, by always having at least 3 minutes of the story presented in the storyteller's own language.

The issue of migration can also be used by museums as a door-opener for the inclusion of new groups of people.



**«An exhibition like  
FLUCHT - FUER  
generates a lot of  
emotions.»**

### **klipp+klang: Vitamin B**

The question of the impact of the radio plays described, on immigrants themselves was important in conveying new knowledge and changing attitudes. The audio as a tool was helpful, enabling Swiss people to hear about experiences of foreigners and was useful to initiate discussions and a sharing of experience.

### **Museum Burg Zug and Mediation National Museum Zurich**

Actors of all kinds learn how development takes place, how horizons are broadened. It is important to give people room to revise opinions and attitudes. Visitors to the museum in Zug discover that we are all migrants in one way or another, all Swiss emigrants were also immigrants somewhere!

A discussion took place about how emotions are awakened by such projects. This hopefully will lead to commitment to people from other fields, as museums are places which must serve others and not be self-serving, paternalistic institutions. Special mention was made of the ambivalent role of emotions in mediation work. These should never be seen to be self-serving, but should play a role in fostering knowledge.

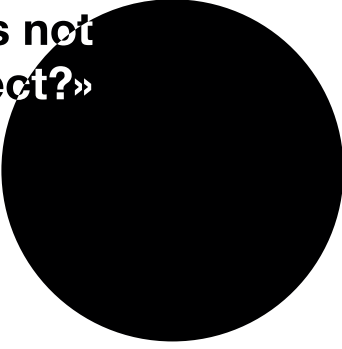
Museums should serve as places where people such as immigrants get opportunities they would not necessarily have.

Museum staff need also to be sensitized to actors in social fields beyond their own experience of the world.

Immigrants could also be involved in conducting tours, for example.

The issue of the role of finances in «museums for all» was discussed at length. The question of what is important for the activity of collecting, i.e. who determines what is important to collect. These are important museum issues which should be addressed generally.

**«Who defines what  
a museum collects  
and what it does not  
collect?»**





## Round 3: Impact on context


### «Toi – le musée – moi»

The project described made a huge impact on its participants, it has a simple format, which might also be suitable for the Long Night of the Museums or for more visibility on Facebook. An important conclusion was this experience should be extended to other people in other fields, not just immigrants, e.g. what can be done for people who do not like to go to museums alone?

### klipp+klang: Vitamin B

A key conclusion from this project is that it favoured «self-empowerment». Tandems help to build bridges, and exchange can be «low-key», not only of an «intellectual, knowledge-based» nature. Whilst exchanging with each other, people really need to feel well together.

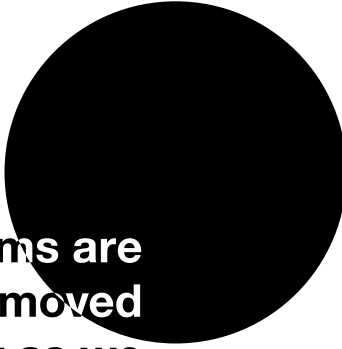
The museum is perceived as a «neutral» place. It provides space for different perspectives and can contribute to changing attitudes or to enabling the participation of refugees.



**«There is a movement that is going to take off, but how does it continue and gather momentum?»**

### Musée Imaginaire des Migrations (MIM)

A lot of work was done in this project to sensitize the public and the storytelling approach could be extended to include writers from other contexts. The development of expertise by all active participants is a side-effect of great value, to be maximized.



**«Wow, museums are not as far-removed from reality as we thought.»**

### Museum Burg Zug and Mediation National Museum Zurich

It was felt that a process had been initiated by these projects, new topics are coming into the world of museums, new actors, new contacts with people from other walks of life, which can only be positive. Openness to new topics and fields can only be positive.

However, the question arises as to how the newly established relationships can become sustainable, whether it is possible in the long term to change attitudes.

# Plenary Discussion

Many of the conclusions expressed above were shared and discussed in the group and the discussion was felt to have been very positive, the first step in the right direction.

## What can museums offer?

The museum as a «White Box» is an inspiring place where exchange of values and norms is possible and where sensitization can take place. Exchanges which happen in a «neutral» place promote empathy, which ultimately benefits social cohesion.

## For whom?

Is the museum a neutral place, which is addressed to all or does the museum reach only certain social groups with a more privileged educational background?

## The dimension of time?

For David Vuillaume, it is important to keep an eye on three different periods:

Today it is a question of exchanging inspiring ideas, e.g. on projects that allow for easy access (for example, audioguides). Tomorrow will be about looking for ways to institutionalize good examples, to define where resources for cultural projects come from (a project is «good», when it has an impact on the institution). And in the future, it will be about making the collections, which form the basis of museums socially relevant for future generations. The starting-point of such a process is frequently a voluntary one, but towards the end of the process do these become a necessity.

## Specific offers

The question whether there should be special offers for people with a migration background or for refugees was a controversial issue. Whilst those from museums pointed out the limited possibilities that would allow them to raise awareness, those from migration organisations emphasized the need to turn to people with migratory backgrounds and to involve them in museum work. Museums work with public funds and have the task of addressing all people. According to Remo Blumenthal, this is part of the DNA of every museum. Franco Supino said that the discussion about special offers was absurd. Irene Rodriguez mentioned that there are many successful offers for refugees (for example, sporting events are very popular), but it is difficult to get people to go to a museum as this place seems foreign and unknown to them.

## Role of museums?

How do the museums see themselves? How do they reflect upon their role? To what extent are they open to new processes? Who has the authority of interpretation? How are they viewed from outside? What is brought from outside to them? These questions were initiated by various parties. The museum side observes a change in attitude in the museums: New perspectives and new topics have emerged and are further developing because of exchange amongst partners.

# Needs and project ideas

## Radio Broadcast

Klipp + Klang wants to produce a radio broadcast about museum visits from and with immigrants.

## Audioguide

Audioguides in other languages, also migration languages, could be produced in order to facilitate migrants' access to museums and exhibitions and, on the other hand, to convey contextual knowledge about the function and importance of objects in a particular cultural and/or social context.

## Quotes

Migration stories can be produced in languages of origin or refugees/migrants can be used to produce these for exhibitions and/or for the homepage of the museum, for example, the MIM.

## Tandems

Long Night of the Museums: Set up a meeting platform for people wishing to visit the Long Night of Museums in tandem (for example, based on the model of the «Toi – le musée – moi» project).

## Museums Guides

«Museums through my eyes»: Migrants are trained as museum guides and used in mediation (for example, following the example of the city tours of the association «Hier Sein»).

## Meeting Point

The need for regular exchange (possibly in the form of a museum migration meeting point).

There is already an annual information and networking meeting of migration organizations and religious communities which are active in the city of Zurich (organized by the Integration Promotion and the Foreigners' Advisory Council of the City of Zurich). Could the museum associations and interested museums join there?

## Commitment


From the wealth of input and discussion, it was stated that great interest and commitment could be felt. This commitment needs to be encouraged and further developed.

# Ending the day

The initiators of the day's session were thanked by all for their competent organization and moderation of the day. The organisers thanked all participants for their active commitment to the round table.

In a final statement Navid Samadi offered a plea for the continued use of museums as places which can assist in the transfer of the heritage of mankind to future generations, in the development of exchange and mutual education, in the development of a new world view which is not the same as that of our grandparents.

A network aperitif was enjoyed by all at the end of a successful session.



**«Museum staff have noticed a change in attitude in their institutions. New paths, new perspectives and new topics are emerging and these will develop through even more exchange.»**

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