



Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie
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Press Release

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International conference "Museums as Social Institutions - Trust and Communities" focuses on museum work

Mainz. On 30 November and 1 December, at the 3rd international conference of the Leibniz Centre of Competence for Education in Museums (BiM), museum experts, educational researchers and psychologists from over 20 countries met at the Leibniz Centre for Archaeology (LEIZA) in Mainz to discuss current research questions on trust in museums and on collaborating with various target groups. It became clear that trust is the foundation and the key to successful relationships and sustainable educational processes in museums. Amongst other things, the concept of neutrality and the question whether museums can be neutral were discussed. In their exchange, the participants pleaded for more self-reflection and a rethinking of traditional concepts.

The first day of the hybrid conference focussed on the topic of "trust". The speakers shed light on the high level of trust in museums, as demonstrated by several studies. They discussed both on-site and online what measures museums can actively take to continue to be perceived as trustworthy institutions in the future. It became clear that transparency, openness and dialogue-oriented scientific communication as well as empathy in outreach work and inclusive accessibility are all decisive factors. They can help strengthen society's trust in museums and their authenticity in the long term.

In her keynote speech, educational researcher Dr Bernadette Lynch (University College London) emphasised that museums too, are severely affected by the current global polycrisis, consisting of wars and climate change, among other things. Against this backdrop, she called on museums to adopt a radical, solidarity-based pedagogy. In doing so, museums should support young people in particular and show them that they are not powerless, but are in a position to take active action. As a basis for this, museums should do what is "right", even if this is not always "easy". The museum expert defined what is "right" as a willingness to engage in dialogue and show solidarity through content and activities aimed at realising participatory democracy.

Lynch also emphasised that trust must go both ways and that museums should learn to involve visitors as active and trustworthy actors. She urged museums to invite and actively listen to previously unheard voices in particular.

In her presentation, Canadian speaker Caroline Loewen (Alberta Museum, Edmonton), who has many years of museum experience, called for the concept of the "museum" to be rethought in the context of social change, particularly in order to achieve diversity within the audience. In order to fulfil public expectations and needs, existing barriers need to be removed. She identified the question of how museums are perceived by newly emerging immigrant communities as an important research desideratum.

Kathrin Grotz and Patricia Rahemipour from the Institute for Museum Research in Berlin presented the interim results of their research into public trust in German museums. They see the declining trust in the sciences as a problematic development for museums. In an outlook, they presented a planned representative study on the topic, in which different types of museums are to be compared with each other and non-visitors are to be included. The results of the study are expected to be available in February 2024.

Psychologist Friederike Hendricks (Institute of Educational Psychology/Technische Universität Braunschweig) presented the results of her research on trust in science and trust in museums: "Trust is not blind", but is based on expectations. The reasons why people trust or distrust museums are similar to the reasons why people trust science. Another parallel between museums and science is their epistemic core. Museums fulfil both a symbolic and an instrumental function for conveying information.

Social psychologist Marlene Altenmüller (Department Psychology/Ludwig-Maximilians Universität Munich) described how trust in scientists is made up of the mutually influencing factors of expertise (competence-related trust) and personal approachability (warmth-related trust). In her studies, she observed that the more scientists reveal personal details about themselves, the lower the expertise attributed to them. However, this negative correlation could not be found in the museum context. It is also good to know that museums addressing uncertainties or correcting mistakes does not have a negative impact on the trust placed in them. Above all, it is important to tailor science communication to the respective target audience, to closely involve visitors and to recognise and value the knowledge and attitudes they bring with them.

Museums make a substantial contribution to the democratisation of our society

On the second day, the conference focussed specifically on underrepresented visitor groups in museums and possible ways of involving them more closely in museum work. Impressive participatory project examples showed that museums play an active role in the participation and empowerment of various population groups and thus make a substantial contribution to the democratisation of our society.

Constanze Hampp, Head of the Communication Department at the Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde Karlsruhe, spoke about the inclusive exhibition project "Von Sinnen" ("(Un)Common Sense"), which involved working with an advisory board of

people with various disabilities. Multi-sensory experiences based on the two-senses principle enabled visitors with and without disabilities to change their perspective and encouraged them to experience and reflect on their own senses. The members of the advisory board also made a significant contribution to the visibility and acceptance of the exhibition by announcing it in their communities. The museum also plans to focus more strongly on inclusion and accessibility in future exhibition projects.

Albanian museologist Inesa Sulaj (MuZEH Lab) added a completely different perspective to the conference: according to Sulaj, Albanian museums face major structural and financial challenges. As a result, state museums in Albania are exclusively dedicated to school classes and tourists and do not address local communities as a target group. However, as co-founder of the non-profit organisation MuZEH Lab, she shows that even with a small budget it is possible to realise great community projects and provide a space for a wide variety of people and their ideas. Her initiatives create accessibility, trust and loyalty.

Cultural researcher Mark Schep (Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage; KIEN) from the Netherlands presented a participatory project with a museum and 17 young people from different socio-cultural contexts within the same city district. For a successful collaboration, it is essential to define common goals, create a safe space, reflect tirelessly, show openness and be willing to learn from each other as equals. The museum now employs a handful of interested young people for a few hours a week in order to maintain a long-term dialogue and collaboration.

At the end of the second day of the conference, an analogue and digital World Café served as a platform for sharing experiences. Together with experts participants were able to discuss various questions and topics related to the conference theme. In addition to exchanging perspectives and experiences, the World Café promoted the advancement of target group-appropriate approaches.

The three speakers of the Leibniz Competence Centre for Education in Museums summarise

Univ.-Prof. Dr Alexandra W. Busch, Director General of the Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie LEIZA:

"Unpacking the complex issue of trust with museum professionals and educational researchers from different parts of the world brought new insights and reaffirmed an urgency to act. As museum professionals, we want to continue to earn our (potential) visitors' trust, live up to their ever-changing expectations and needs, and contribute to educational justice by promoting co-creation and providing varied learning opportunities for all. This takes effort and a willingness to change."

Dr Lorenz Kampschulte, Head of the Education Department at the Deutsches Museum:

"The interdisciplinary collaboration between educational researchers and museum experts in the Leibniz Centre of Excellence for Museum Education allows us to analyse and understand educational processes in depth and learn for museum mediation practice. The research contributions and, above all, the many practical references during the conference demonstrated this impressively. What stood out to

me during this conference were the many inspiring examples of co-creation. Museums can benefit greatly from successful collaboration with diverse communities. By moving towards a more participatory practice, we can not only reach new audiences, but also become more accessible and inclusive, gain and share new perspectives and truly become advocates for social change in our own communities."

Prof Dr Olaf Köller, Managing Scientific Director at the IPN Leibniz Institute for Science and Mathematics Education:

"This conference has clearly demonstrated the strength of our Centre of Excellence: linking theory and practice and the promoting a fruitful exchange between educational researchers and museum professionals on highly relevant topics. This is an important step in our joint effort to advance visitor research and educational research in museums and to focus our attention on current issues."

Further links:

Website Leibniz Competence Centre for Education in Museums:

<https://leibniz-bim.de/>

Press release 2022 on Agenda 2030 and Competence Centre:

<https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/ueber-uns/neues/presse/pressemitteilungen/pressemitteilungen-single/newsdetails/leibniz-forschungsmuseen-auf-dem-weg-in-die-zukunft>

Competence Centre Education in Museums

In the Centre of Excellence for Museum Education, the eight research museums of the Leibniz Association have joined forces with four educational research institutes from the Leibniz Education Research Network as well as the Technical University of Munich, the DASA Arbeitswelt Ausstellung and the Institute for Museum Research with the aim of jointly advancing visitor research and empirical educational research on museums as informal places of learning. The focus is on linking theory and practice: through close cooperation, research findings can be directly implemented in educational practice in museums, evaluated there and the results can in turn influence research. The close cooperation within the competence centre is aimed at addressing overarching research questions as well as integrating different disciplines in the development of central questions in visitor research.

Centre of Excellence for Museum Education aim to develop and establish common research approaches and thus contribute to greater standardisation and comparability of visitor research in Germany in the long term. In doing so, the Centre of Excellence also acts as a national contact point for visitor research in museums and specifically promotes exchange between stakeholders. <https://leibniz-bim.de/>

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