

Making Differences to Doing Diversity in Museums and Heritage. An Afterword

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This book has presented a diverse range of attempts to make differences – and to engage more diversity – in museums and heritage. Our focus is on Berlin but similar developments and initiatives are underway elsewhere in Germany and beyond. Not only representing greater social and cultural diversity in museum and heritage contents but also engaging a greater range of participants in the doing of museums and heritage themselves are hallmarks of processes that are ongoing in many parts of the world.

The forms that diversity and diversification take, however, themselves vary and the direction of travel is not simply towards more of both. Which differences and which ways of doing diversity are given prominence may differ not only from one heritage organization to the next but also between countries, and newer emphases – such as on global South and North disparities – may displace ones that were given more attention previously, such as class. Moreover, museums and heritage continue to be used as powerful tools for performing homogeneous, usually national, narratives, and there are even retroactive moves to reinforce this, as well as instances of attempts to wipe out heritage that speaks to other histories and experiences, as Russia is perpetrating in Ukraine.

Evident in our Berlin ethnography – *Making Differences* – is that the drive towards increasing diversity in museums and heritage comes from a wide range of actors. In the case of Berlin, the State – in the form both of the national and city-level governments – has espoused the expansion of diversity as a goal and supported it through certain funding streams. In setting up their own diversity initiatives, civil institutions, such as museums and heritage sites, may respond to and make use of these but the impetus is certainly not only from the State and is usually multiple. It is often driven by particular members of staff, such as directors or curators, but these do not operate alone but are inspired (or deterred) by what they see happening elsewhere, including internationally. Freelance staff, who are not so embedded in existing structures, are sometimes especially able to make significant differences. All are likely to be influenced too by other players, such as specific interest groups and activists that mobilise around heritage, as well as by wider discourse and commentary, of which academic contributions are part. Yet, as our wide range of cases is able to show, not all heritage developments are channelled through

established heritage organizations. The push to do heritage differently – as we see, for example, in the case of street-renaming and Pride marches – can and does also come directly from those who feel personally moved, usually by their specific subject-positions but also through forms of solidarity across difference, to make change. Engaging ethnographically with such a range of cases as we have done in the *Making Differences* project and in this book makes this multiplicity of impulse evident, as well as the fact that actors may occupy multiple positions and that they and their ideas may flow between organizations. Acknowledging this is itself important as it means that difference-making is likely to be more effective if it engages with a broader range of actors. That effective diversification works best with a diversity of participants might sound self-evident but that is certainly not what always happens in practice. As such, it is worth stating explicitly as one ingredient for doing diversity not just more but better.

Another consequence of the multiple, mixed and entangled impulses involved in doing diversity is that their politics are not necessarily clear-cut. The same development might be equally motivated by a sense of social justice or cynical opportunism, and, equally, it might lead to multiple and even contradictory results. Highlighting such ambivalences and complexities – and the specificities and context-dependencies of practice – is what ethnography typically does, and is sometimes accused of *only* doing. Chapters here look in detail at specific cases and they often highlight complexities – and this is important not least because what goes on ‘in real life’ is generally more mixed-up and multiple than in abstracted and theoretical accounts. But in doing so, ethnographers – including those writing in this volume – also seek to show where generalizations and simplifications are inadequate, how existing theorizations or concepts need nuancing, and where process does not lead straightforwardly to expected outcomes. Ethnography contributes an attuning sensibility – a highlighting of more usually taken-for-granted assumptions and ways of thinking or doing, and thus of possible pitfalls and potholes along the road to making differences.

Ethnography propels its practitioners into contexts that exceed their research design – even where the ethnographer plays a major role in shaping the initiative that they are studying (as is the case in several chapters here). In the *Making Differences* project this meant into contexts in which the questions and concepts with which we were working and grappling, were being worked with and through or even against by those who we sought to understand. We were, therefore, also being attuned by our encounters and interlocutors. As such, those reflections and ideas that we might call our own were indelibly shaped not just by analysis of what those in our field took for granted but by an extraordinarily rich and self-reflective field of debate and practice. The fact that there is so much great thought and action out there – sometimes in unexpected places – underlines how worthwhile it is to expand the range of those involved in any diversity initiatives, which means going beyond those who already see themselves as diversity experts.

At the risk of overlooking richness and complexity and/or of stating the obvious, two lists follow: the first is of some of the problems or hurdles involved in doing diversity in museums and heritage that can be found in the preceding chapters; and the second is of some of the ways in which these can be addressed. Rather than spell out in which chapters and in relation to which particular examples or details they occur, the statements are here presented baldly. While this may make them seem cruder than they would oth-

erwise be, hopefully this strategy can help enlist the reader – you – in thinking back or, indeed, going on to search through further, perhaps in finding contradictions as well as substantiation. As the lists are far from exhaustive, they should also be regarded as open-ended – for you to add to as you wish and not only with examples from this book.

Challenges for doing diversity in museums and heritage

1. Terms and concepts – certain words offend or mobilise and they can carry inflections that are not evident to all who encounter them. Their effects – especially deleterious ones – may only start showing up as processes develop. Classifications can constrain more than participants realise. Translations are often especially tricky.
2. Categories and assumptions from the past are easily carried forward invisibly and by stealth. This can happen within infrastructures such as databases and/or through organizational structures, images and language.
3. What ‘diversity’ means – and the models of diversity in operation – vary, with participants easily being unaware of this or of the assumptions that certain models carry (e.g. that cultures are neatly distinct, or that there is a fixed set of differences).
4. Polarization and binarization are ever-present tendencies, especially in debates about contentious heritage (and perhaps especially in Germany). This can overlook connections and reduce positions in ways that hinder productive debate and developments.
5. Reflecting on problematic categories and processes can face a risk of reproducing the language or terms used (in chapters here referred to as the ‘diversity double-bind’ and the ‘double presence of difference’).
6. Undertaking diversity work in an ‘additive mode’ – ‘more diversity please!’ – without addressing how diversity is being conceptualised may lead to implicit hierarchies or unintended equivalences being instated or to a depoliticization of difference.
7. Practice is never just the implementation of conscious decision-making – it also involves accidents, emotions, obstinate objects, obstinate people, media affordances, time-constraints and much more. The devil – where different outcomes to those wanted result – is often in the detail.

What can be done

1. Increase the diversity of participants, including beyond usual suspects and categories. Mix things and people up. Embrace expertises but don’t let them silence other inputs.
2. Develop formats that allow people to come together in open-ended ways, with enough time for addressing premisses, changing parameters and reshaping directions.
3. Pay attention to language and categories, drawing among other things on existing studies and guides.

4. Co-critically examine which notions and models of diversity and difference – and structuring of questions and debates – are being mobilised, and consider whether to do otherwise.
5. Explicitly address what might need to be unlearned – especially established and taken-for-granted ways of doing things.
6. Draw on as many sources as possible – including from other cases and informal discussion (especially of where things have not worked out) – to become attuned to potential obstinacies and devils.
7. Harness the insights of ethnographers – including those in this book.