

What Audiences Feel? Exhibitions as Agents of Empathy and Resilience: a Qualitative Evaluation-based Perspective

Most of the assumptions on the motivation to visit museums are based on the idea of museums and/or exhibitions as learning spaces. The evaluation of audience experiences concerning the Identity on the line exhibitions, dealing with seven different migration processes that took place over the last hundred years in Europe, goes beyond learning and cognitive aspects of audience research and, in line with the affective turn in museums, addresses the feelings evoked by the exhibition. The results of the evaluation show the potential exhibitions have as agents of empathy and resilience.

In order to identify the interpretive strategies facilitating affective curatorship, the author applies the affective niche construction theory. Contrary to cognitive niche construction, which consists in developing and using environmental resources to aid remembering, problem solving, reasoning, and other forms of thinking, affective niche construction consists in manipulating resources to influence the way we feel the letter implying curating and presenting personal narratives and narrative-related artefacts.

Key words: affective curatorship, affective niche construction theory, audience development, migration, museum exhibition

“Under the surface of our societies, there are thousands and thousands of stories that add shades and details to the black and white picture of historical events. Many of these stories are too

personal or too traumatic to share. Feelings like despair, shame, or guilt might be associated and one could be afraid of the reactions of others if exposing them.”¹

‘Identity on the Line’ is a Creative Europe funded project between six cultural history museums and one University working together to explore the long-term consequences of different migration processes which took place in Europe over the course of the last hundred years. Each partner worked on a local migration process presented through seven local exhibitions. A semi-structured interview guide was carefully designed to be able to compare the results of all the seven research processes and build a joint travelling exhibition afterwards.

“Not only did we want to know what had happened and how the events had affected the migrants themselves, their children and grandchildren, but we also wanted to find out more about how the relationships between the generations were affected. Which striking behaviours and feelings would each generation report about, transferred behaviours and feelings that one would relate directly to the migration process? Last but not least, it was important for us to empower our informants. That meant ending the interviews with questions about the ultimately positive outcomes of the struggles, including increased strength, resilience, and a better life.” (Pabst 2022)

One of the central ideas driving the research was the transgenerational trauma transfer and its impact on today’s society. How all these migration experiences have shaped the life of contemporary Europeans and what there is to learn in order to build greater empathy and resilience. Unfortunately, during the research process the war in Ukraine started and our research and exhibition became even more relevant because we were once again confronted with trauma and displacement.

The semi-structured interview, applied by all the seven partners, included general questions on childhood memories, the most important people in the interviewee’s life, memories about the migration process and the level of impact on everyday life and interpersonal relations within the family and/or broader social context. Some questions varied depending on the generation (being him/herself a migrant, being second or third generation descendant), but the connecting questions were the ones addressing identity-related feelings. Interviewees were asked to express their feeling of identity, what *home* meant for them and whether there were objects or stories/songs connecting them with their migration experience.

With this set of questions and shared values on how to approach the informants, the research in all the seven countries was conducted during the challenging COVID times.

Vest Agder Museum in Norway researched the consequences of the German occupation between 1940 and 1945.² The Knud Rasmussens Hus explored the shared Greenlandic–Danish

1 To learn more about the project visit <https://i-on.museum/>

2 *Throughout the five years of occupation, the German troops approached Norwegian society in a number of different ways; they recruited political sympathisers, and they punished their adversaries brutally. In 1945, when the occupation was over, the Germans departed. But they left their traces, and more than 75 years later there are still many who struggle with the long-term consequences of what happened during the war. The condemnation of those who had collaborated with the Germans was extreme, both from the Norwegian authorities and from the local society. Many women who had an affair with a German soldier had their hair cut off publicly and were rejected by their families and the people around them. Many of the children whose father was a German soldier were branded as “German bastards”, and some even hidden away in earmarked institutions. At the same time, other kinds of relations between Norwegians and the occupiers were suppressed in the public debate, such as the large number of profiteering companies and individuals who worked for the Germans and supplied them with the goods and materials they needed (Pabst 2022).*

history which almost exclusively involved an unequal balance of power, still today reflected in prejudices, misunderstanding and racism.³ The Ethnographic Museum of Istria worked on the topic of the displacement of Italian Istrians after WWII and the consequences of that displacement which are still noticeable today. This so-called “Istrian exodus” is most clearly reflected in today’s relationship between people and their descendants who left Istria and the ones who stayed behind (Moscarda and Nikolić Đerić 2022). The Ajtte – principal museum of Sami culture focused on a land-loss story that happened a hundred years ago, causing conflict between the North Sami and the South Sami group,⁴ while the research project conducted by the Faculty of Communication of Vilnius University dealt with how the traumatic experiences, wounded past and unspoken memories of women who survived the Holocaust were communicated (Latvyte 2022). The Museum of Central Pomerania in Słupsk with its research contribution *Post-War Settlement in Słupsk*, showed not only that the settling processes of Poles on previously German lands were highly complex and challenging, but also how the coexistence of the people who migrated here took shape (Ciecholewska Hanowska 2022) Finally, the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia, conducted a participatory research, aiming to shed light on the personal narratives of people who migrated to Slovenia from the other Yugoslav republics between 1945 and 1990 and who with the nationalisation processes during the 1990’s experienced hardships because of their ethnicity.⁵

Based on these heterogeneous themes and the experiences collected, a travelling joint exhibition was designed and presented in all the partnering countries. Conceptually, it was built upon five opposing emotions evidenced through the analysis of research results.⁶ The results showed that our informants could all be placed somewhere in between this oppositions:

1. (Feeling) home and away, resilience and vulnerability, silence and openness, injustice and reconciliation

“Where exactly do I belong? Where is my home? What part of our new Sámi settlements can we call ours? Do I have the right to mourn for a place that has never been mine? Others that I talked to say similar things, like I feel at home on the periphery of this land, in places where I know nobody else longs to be. I don’t feel really attached to the place where I live. I can’t say I’m unhappy here, but I lack a deep connection.” Elin Anna Labba, age 40, Sweden. Elin Anna is the granddaughter of a Northern Sàmi who was forced to relocate to Vájsáluokta.

3 The research, conducted among fifteen Greenlanders, focused on their sense of identity, the migration between the two countries, and the ways in which the fusion of the Greenlandic and Danish cultures affected their lives (cf. La Cour Jensen and Birthe Foget Olsvig 2022).

4 *Due to border politics, we lost our traditional grazing sites by the Atlantic Ocean. The land was supposed to be used by Norwegian farmers instead. Sweden relocated families and reindeers to areas on the Swedish side of the border to deal with the problem. But other reindeer herders already lived on those areas. They wanted to keep their traditional land, but had to make room for the newcomers. The conflicts that arose then still have an impact today. The grazing land is decreasing as we speak* (Nygård 2022).

5 *Discriminatory treatment, ethnic prejudice, and stereotypes had an undeniable impact on these communities, culminating in the affair of the “Erased”, when 25,671 people of non-Slovenian origin were erased from the permanent residence record, losing all the rights they had hitherto enjoyed* (Brenko and Purg 2022)

6 <https://www.identityontheline.eu/home-away>

2. Belonging and alienation

“When I was growing up, I always felt different. [...] At school, every time the teacher mentioned ‘Us, Slovenians...’ in history class... I felt ‘That’s not me’ and felt kind of rejected. One time my father came to visit me in kindergarten, I said, ‘Dad, please speak Slovenian.’ Today, I don’t see this as a problem anymore, but as something that enriches me. Because of this, I can get along with different people in different environments. With migration and unconditional support, my parents gave me a broader perspective.” Lidija Jularić, age 25, Slovenia. Her parents moved from Bosnia to Slovenia, where she was born.

3. Resilience and vulnerability

“The front drew close, and they decided to move us to another labour camp. They marched us through the cities where people saw how we were dressed. [...] They gave us normal clothes. [...] added a headscarf [...] which was dark blue with white pea-size dots. Over time the white dots began to disappear, and, in those places, holes appeared. I decided to fix the headscarf. Why did I need to do this in the dark forest where no one can see me? I only now understand that this was a symbolic way of not giving up. The headscarf was very dear to me, and after the liberation I kept it as a keepsake. I have to say this scarf was sort of a symbol of a young girl’s struggle to survive.” Yehudit (Dita) Sperling-Zupovitz, age 99, Lithuania. Survivor of the Kaunas ghetto and the Stutthof Concentration Camp.

4. Silence and openness

From my early childhood I was instructed not to tell anyone that I came from Germany. In the aftermath [of the war], I understood that these cover stories were good for me. I had friends who didn’t have such cover stories, and who ended their lives as adults, shooting themselves because they couldn’t cope with it anymore.” Bjørn, age 77, Norway. Son of a German soldier.

5. Injustice and reconciliation

“It was unthinkable that they would get married. Marriage is a sign of good relationships between peoples. But couples have started getting married now, you can see that.” Mikael Urheim, Sweden. Mikael talks about the new reality that took hold when the forced relocation took place.

Besides personal narratives, the exhibition showcased photographs of objects that were indicated by the informants as symbols of their stories and the connected emotions.

“This book is almost as old as I am. My mother took it with her in 1975 when she came to Slovenia carrying me and one suitcase. [...] I think that for my mother it represents a link to her home, because at that time women went ... in search of a way to earn their daily bread ... my mother went alone and settled down here. [...]. This was a link to her home. [...] What I remember most about those days is the smell of home cooked food: chicken soup, wild cherry strudel... the smell of home, the smell of a time that has passed and will never come back.” Dragana Marošević, age 50, Slovenia. Dragana came to Slovenia with her mother as a little girl and lives there with her family.

The evaluation concept followed the objective of the exhibition, thus aiming at understanding whether and how exhibitions with their interpretive strategies can impact their audience on an emotional level, leading to more empathic behaviour of the general public and resilience for the ones affected by a similar trauma.

By audience are understood not only visitors of the exhibitions, but also the informants who co-created them in close collaboration with museum's curators.⁷

All of these groups are laden with cultural preconceptions, which in the case of the informants and the curators influence the narrative proposed, and in the case of the visitors "shape their visit and affect their responses to it." (Macdonald 1992:401) Macdonald argues that this is a much bigger issue, than one of individual and specific 'naive conceptions':⁸ "The kinds of social and cultural conceptions which people may hold are often difficult to detect because far from being 'naive' they are embedded in everyday life and make a good deal of sense within it." (ibid.) Naive conceptions are actually misconceptions about the physical world, easily challenged and corrected through empirical evidence. On the other hand, cultural preconceptions are biases which cannot be easily changed, as these reflect a complex set of values interacting with each other and informing attitudes towards new encounters and experiences. Here we are dealing with affect. Thus, mostly historical and anthropological museums are embracing the affective turn in museums, as they deal with fluid social and cultural categories which cannot, as in natural science museums, be empirically evidenced. Affect is in this context approached as 'embodied meaning-making' (Wetherell 2012:4 in Golding 2013:83) not learning. It is by evoking feelings that the affective curatorship fulfils its mission closely related to the social role museums play in 21st century.

"Whilst museums have long been sites of affective engagement, what is new and noteworthy in the current 'affective turn' is the purposefulness with which affect and emotions are being leveraged in museums. (...) As a curatorial, theoretical and analytical perspective, affect offers crucial insights into the new roles that museums can play in increasingly emotionally demanding times." (Varutti 2023: 61-62)

Golding expands on the value of poetics as agent for opening disciplines and spaces up to voices that have been historically excluded, specifically through shared feminist and Black women's voices, curatorial authority that affect audiences and promote reflexivity. (Golding 2013:81) The same applies to migrants' voices excluded from the mainstream national discourses in both their countries of origin and the hosting countries.

"We didn't even know how to live, how to behave, and they looked down on us terribly in many places, both in Tortona and in Tirrenia, but not in Trieste. I remember more in Tuscany, precisely in Calambrone, Tirrenia, the Italians used to say to their children 'Be good, because otherwise

7 In line with the social role of museums and the growing decennial trend of participatory heritage management, audience, including both the informants and the visitors, are *envisioned as active interpreters who selectively construct meaning based on their personal experiences, associations, biases, and a sense of identity*. However, it is argued that *such visualisation underestimates power issues while romanticising the power of audience activity, thereby ignoring issues of responsibility*. (Lambert 2010:141) These pitfalls were taken into consideration during the Identity on the line project exactly through the evaluation processes done throughout the project among the partners and among the interviewees, as well as the visitors from different backgrounds who expressed their impressions on the exhibition through focus-group discussions or individual interviews. By this, they were given the opportunity also to criticise the research and interpretation strategies for which the only responsibility was that of the curators and project partners.

8 The naive conceptions were introduced in museum practice by Minda Borun through her research at the Franklin Institute Science Museum in Philadelphia. *The research and application project tended to uncover widespread misconceptions about the concept of gravity held by museum visitors and to test the efficacy of hands-on exhibits in altering these naive notions. Exhibits were designed to counter typical and persistent misconceptions and enable visitors to shift from the naive knowledge of the "novice" to the more sophisticated understanding of the science "expert."* (Borun, Massey and Lutter, 1993:201)

I'll let the refugees eat you.' Here you can understand that for our parents, seeing us treated in this way... What could we do?... Nothing." Luigi Donorà, age 86, Croatia-Italy. After leaving Istria, Croatia, the Donorà family lived in different refugee camps throughout Italy for years before settling and adapting to their new home in Turin, Italy.

Affective curatorship is thus seen as a methodology suitable for reaching the aims of the Identity on the line project; sensitising wider public on trans-generational traumatic migrant experiences in order to influence specific preconceptions characterised, as evidenced also within the project, by "stigmatisation of individuals and groups with an immigration background, resurfacing in Slovenia and other European countries, contributing to a climate of exclusion and scapegoating." (Brenko and Purg 2022)

To better understand what constitutes affective curatorship in the specific case of Identity on the line, the process and the exhibition itself were analysed through the lens of affective niche construction.

As previously stated, for the purpose of this paper, affect is understood as feelings-led, embodied meaning-making, thus in contrary to the cognitive niche construction⁹ "consisting in developing and using environmental resources to aid remembering, problem solving, reasoning, and other forms of thinking." (Saarinen 2021:545).¹⁰ Identity on the line worked on manipulating resources to influence the way audience feel and hence applying the affective niche construction. This resource manipulation refers to curatorial strategies applied; personal narratives and objects highlighting powerful and for most people sensitive and troubling experiences.

In his work on applying affective niche construction in art museums, Saarinen argues that humans create and employ uniquely sophisticated socio-cultural and epistemic niches that likewise impact on the course of evolution. To address what this entails in relation to (art) museums and affective experience, he proposes four theoretical specifications.

- To start, niches can be composed of a wide array of environmental resources. Material resources encompass inanimate things— including natural objects and human artefacts, instruments, and tools—and both natural and manufactured spaces and places, such as wildlife sanctuaries, private living rooms and public libraries. Social resources, in turn, consist of the people we interact with, irrespective of whether they are individuals, groups, or larger collectives.
- Next, we may distinguish between niches in terms of their primary domains of influence— that is, according to the kinds of mental processes and experiences that they

9 In biology, a "niche" is sometimes defined as "the role an organism occupies in an ecosystem." The cognitive niche is a loose extension of this concept, based on the idea that in any ecosystem, the possibility exists for an organism to overtake other organisms' fixed defences by cause-and-effect reasoning and cooperative action (...). In his work, Pinker (2010) specifically focuses on multilevel co-operation and use of language as a cognitive niche constructed by humans in order to survive and prosper.

10 Both cognitive and affective niche construction theories fall within the broader idea of cultural niche construction. Niche construction theory derives from biology, indicating activities by which organisms modify their environments influencing future generations. As opposed to ecological inheritance, we find that cultural inheritance including human innovation and technology, which has had an enormous impact on the environment, plays a critical role in human evolution (ex. different agricultural practices). Laland, Olding-Smeets and Felman (2001) argue that because cultural processes typically operate faster than natural selection, cultural niche construction probably has more profound consequences than gene-based niche construction.

are perceived to impact on (Krueger 2014; Maiese 2016; Sutton 2016; Saarinen 2020b). Cognitive niche construction vs. affective niche.

- In addition, the functioning of niches can be examined on various timescales (Griffiths and Scarantino 2009; Colombetti and Krueger 2015; Sutton 2016; Saarinen 2020b). Viewed from a synchronic perspective, niches are exploited at particular points in time to influence concurrent mental states and processes, while analysed from a diachronic point of view, niches can be seen to evolve cumulatively and to function over longer periods of time.¹¹
- Lastly, niches vary along the dimension of individuality–collectivity (Sterelny 2010; Colombetti and Krueger 2015; Saarinen 2020b). In this context, the terms ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ designate variation in both (a) the construction, transmittal, and exploitation of niches, and (b) the scope of their effects. (Saarinen 2021:544-546)

Drawing from Saarinen’s conceptual framework, this paper aims to analyse how the joint and local *Identity on the line* exhibitions incorporated environmental resources (artefacts, personal narratives) to trigger the affective domain (the visitors’ feelings) in a synchronic (specific point of time related to the availability of temporary exhibitions), collectively (joint exhibition authorship) operated niche. If Saarinen refers to ‘aesthetic affective experience’ (ibid.: 546), meaning those feelings, emotions, and moods that are induced by the artworks on display, this paper refers to ‘narrative affective experiences’ meaning those feelings and emotions evoked by sensitive personal narratives and personal objects.

These strategies were evaluated to detect whether this approach reflects the aims of affective curatorship in first place and further, whether affective curatorship has the potential to make people more empathetic and resilient.

The evaluation of *Identity on the line* exhibitions was based on the summative method¹² as it happened once the exhibitions were opened. The questions were co-designed through a participative process on project level agreeing on the four basic pieces of information we want to ask our audience:

- What touched you the most/ most positive and most negative impressions?
- Do you sympathise/ connect on a personal level with any of the stories?
- Did the exhibition (design and content) meet your expectations? Is there anything missing or anything you would change?
- Did the exhibition make you change your point of view on past or contemporary migration?

11 Saarinen uses the example put forwards by Colombetti and Kruger (2015: 1171-1172) of religious spaces ‘designed to induce a variety of feelings, such as faith, hope, awe, love, compassion, and guilt, with the aid of disparate material objects and practice’. These niches typically operate trans-generationally and, owing to this, ‘lead to culturally and socially different affective experiences and modalities of conduct’ (ibid.). Historically focused analyses of niche construction thus disclose the ways in which niches are culturally created and non-genetically transmitted from one generation to the next via institutions, shared traditions and norms, accumulated expertise, and so on (Saarinen 2021:545).

12 Summative evaluation consists of questions which are asked after a project has been completed. It involves trying to find out at the end of a project whether it met its original objectives, and if not, why not. This is the most common form of evaluation. However, it is often too late to do anything about the problems. Examples include asking pupils what they thought about a workshop they participated in, asking visitors to fill in a questionnaire after their visit or observing what visitors do in an exhibition. (A. James, 2007. *Understanding Audiences: Skills Development and Mentoring Programme for Museums; Museum of London*)

Moreover, the project evaluator, being also the author of this paper, proposed three methods to conduct the evaluation; using interactive strategies where audience are invited to put a specific sign (with previously assigned and explained meaning) in front of the stories they sympathise with¹³, using QR codes leading to online questionnaires and finally, organising focus groups with approximately ten participants who could, through dialogue, express their impressions. The letter was recommended as the most efficient for the type of information we were aiming to collect.

Depending on the possibilities, which in some cases were constrained also because of the COVID-19 pandemic, in others by the impossibility to contact random visitors and get them onboard for a more intimate focus group¹⁴, the evaluation was conducted as online questionnaire in Denmark and Slovenia, focus group in Croatia, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden and Slovenia and individual semi-structured interviews in Norway.

The profile of the audience was in most cases ideal for this exercise; motivated and eloquent visitors ranging from a group of psychologists, university students, curators and community members identifying with the stories presented. There were others as well; high school students and contemporary migrants, but their answers were rather scarce and not specific even though they were supportive of the project and methods used.

The collected reflections strongly support the benefits of affective curatorship as a method that fosters more meaningful museum visits resulting in greater empathy and resilience.

When asked about the feelings evoked by the exhibition and the most positive and negative impact, all the visitors expressed some level of affect. There was no one saying that the exhibition didn't touch them on some emotional level. When articulated, the emotions ranged from being sad, empowered, feeling pain or helpless on a broader societal level.

"I think it's just enough and it really awakens emotions and important thoughts." (Sweden)

"I feel sad after seeing the exhibition. We haven't come any further. Many people have carried such heavy burdens as no human should do. We tend to think that it is better to forget than to tell." (Norway)

"It was painful to see how many negative attitudes towards migration and how stereotyped attitudes we still have in the 20th and 21st centuries in the "developed world." (Slovenia)

"It is possible to survive! With all these consequences, it is possible to survive, that's what I managed to understand from the exhibition and that family support and a close circle of people you grow up with can help you survive that trauma and move on." (Croatia)

"I was most moved by these topics about intimate relationships and sexual violence, not only in Norway, but also in other contexts. The part where there is silence is the hardest for me. Somehow, when they talk about violence in the camps and other types of violence, they are more open about resettlement, change of state and so on, then it's easier to talk, but these are the biggest traumas." (Croatia)

What is especially important is the personal connection the visitors felt with the presented stories.

"This exhibition is very emotional for me because it concerns me personally. Of all that I have

13 This strategy was used only by the Ajtte Museums in addition to the focus group method, as they felt this kind of interaction culturally sensitive to their exhibition environment.

14 Colleagues in Denmark presented the joint exhibition in Aarhus during a festival, which resulted in numerous visits, but it was too far away from them to conduct focus group evaluation.

read here, I was actually most touched by the stories of the Bosnians in Slovenia, because this is very close to me, as I myself have this identity problem, having spent most of my life in Yugoslavia, so I identified with being a stranger in my own country and I hardly speak about that identity. I was shaken to see that in other places, like other people, I simply keep silent about my problems.” (Croatia)

Even though the exhibition presented different migration stories from seven different states and time periods, including both men and women, as well as different age groups, still, there was room for criticism. Focus-group evaluation, based on dialogue in small groups, helped in detecting some missed opportunities when dealing with personal connection with the presented stories.

“The exhibition is very good and well done, but a bit one-sided. I am looking for the stories that I could relate to, but there is not even a single word about the LGBTQI+ people. Like they don't exist! Have you ever checked how many of them were forced and still are to leave their countries and look for shelter, being threatened because of their identity? Why is there silence about them?” (Lithuania)

In addition, it enabled broadening the idea of exhibitions connecting different sensitive groups. One visitor stated that because its venue is in open public space, it allows for greater accessibility and hence it enables reaching people who usually do not visit museums. This was another strategy that supports the affective niche construction theory and the possibilities offered to make an impact on people through thoughtfully curated content.

“The exhibition is out there (in open space) and that's a great opportunity for other people to identify themselves 'oh look how many people in all the areas of Europe have the same trauma, I'm not alone in this, I can also survive. In any case, the fact that it's out there, there's an opportunity for people to question themselves, that's really good for me.” (Croatia)

Following to the venue as a critical element of affective curatorship, three other basic elements can be traced; primarily the importance of presenting personal stories and sensitive heritage giving voice to its bearers, to people who experienced these stories and traumas and in doing so provide a first-person narrative.

“A great job has been done here with the documentation of important stories. The exhibition shows that it is important to process trauma. It helps to talk about it!” (Norway)

“I like the simple way of presenting a difficult past and giving voice to our history/ heritage.” (Sweden)

“I paid attention to the exhibition first of all because of the design. Secondly, the topic that was presented kept me for a longer time because it is about the unpolished side of migration. As usually when we touch this topic, we have great expectations of the happy ending in the new country with a happy life. Unfortunately, it is not always so... I appreciate honest and true way of the dialogue with the visitors of the exhibition.” (Lithuania)

“A very interesting exhibition and all those stories directly from the lips of those who experienced abuse. And in Lithuanian. My parents had to experience Soviet Gulag. They both survived, thanks God, but they hardly talked about it... And here, people are talking... Respect for their courage to do this after such painful experiences.” (Lithuania)

Secondly, to be able to impact visitors in a way to evoke empathy and resilience, as is the case with Identity on the line, it is beneficial to use different material such as text and objects, but with sensitivity, meaning that the connection between the text and the object have to have a

deeper meaning for the informants in order to send a powerful message to the visitors.

“I really needed it, for example that scarf that woman was mending, that scarf with dots impressed me so much, that object told me so much; so that this conception of objects and statements, yes.” (Croatia)

Finally, the third element is the role of curators in mediating stories in a highly professional way. Professionalism being understood as a deep understanding of the context where and how the stories have taken place and a connection with the informants. These relationships can be felt through the exhibition text and not only through direct dialogue throughout the co-creation process.

“At first I was stuck by that metal construction, but then it became unimportant to me when I started reading and saw the level of quality of that text and how ethnologists are psychologists, how much terms from psychology are actually used here and how overwhelming and fluent it is and that the specialisation of our profession (psychology) in some narrow areas is irrelevant when you look at this anthropological approach, I was really honoured by the quality of that text, I find the text phenomenal.” (Croatia)

I wouldn't change it; it was very close to my heart. (Slovenia)

Finally, one of the basic aims of the exhibition was to influence mindset change and have a more positive attitude toward migrants and their descendants. The exhibition along with its interpretive strategies proved to be a mindset changer at some extent. “Yes, it made me change my mind. Greater understanding and sympathy for all involved.” (Slovenia)

“It made me think about prejudices, especially towards the rich, some people who have now arrived as refugees. How differently we look at people who come from similar situations, but based on some external appearance, we categorise them differently and sympathise to a greater or lesser extent. That is why constant reflection is needed to slowly change perspectives.” (Croatia)

Where there was already a positive attitude, the exhibition still had a positive impact in broadening the field of empathy and encouraging more meaningful encounters.

“It encouraged me because now we will meet again with Ukrainian refugees and it encouraged me to approach them with an open mind because we have no idea what happened to them, the exhibition is very supportive in that sense.” (Croatia)

“No, but it has broadened my knowledge-bank and deepened my emotional connection to this part of my history and the history of these regions.” (Sweden)

In conclusion, the exhibition shows a great potential in articulating the affective curatorship method and the affective niche construction in museum environment, targeting qualitative audience development, in this specific case concerning migration issues. Feelings such as pain, sadness and resilience, were articulated along with an increased feeling of empathy. Irrespective of the fact that most of the focus-group participants were already sensitised towards migration topics, many expressed that the personal stories in local languages, as well as the objects connected with difficult experiences, had a strong impact on them, giving ground to believe these interpretive strategies could be applied in other contexts, with people with opposing attitudes. Based on insights of focus-group participants, it is possible to deduce that such an approach contributes to audience development on one hand and fostering empathy and resilience on the other. Hence, affective curatorship has an important place within the broader museums' social role, especially as a potential to influence future generations working, in specific cases, on emotions rather than cognition.

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