

Press release**Technische Universität Berlin****Stefanie Terp**

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<http://idw-online.de/en/news777567>Cooperation agreements, Research projects
Art / design, Cultural sciences, History / archaeology, Social studies
transregional, national**TU Berlin: Museums as Social Places – joint project started in Berlin****The joint project "Museums and Society – Mapping the Social" examines the role museums play in current political and social debates**

Can museums contribute to shaping social relationships? Why do 114 million people visit one of the approximately 6700 museums in Germany alone every year? Are museums simply places for knowledge transfer and the preservation of cultural heritage? To explore such social aspects and the perspectives offered by museums, the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) is funding the three-year interdisciplinary project "Museums and Society – Mapping the Social" with 1.2 million euros through its Social Cohesion Grand Challenge initiative for the Excellence Strategy. The project is a joint initiative of researchers from Technische Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, the Museum of Natural History, and the Institute for Museum Research at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

"Debates regarding the social relevance and responsibility of museums are pervasive. One such current example is the recently opened Humboldt Forum in Berlin, which is at the center of activist protests, demands for restitution, and controversial academic and political commentaries," explains Dr. Pegah Byroum-Wand, who is responsible for science communication within the project. She aims to develop participation formats pursuing perspectives critical of discrimination and power. "We are planning an interactive exchange platform and a 'critical advisory board,' to bring together activists from social movements and civil society initiatives."

Who is included or excluded? Who is heard? Who is discriminated against?

In four closely related cases studies, each closely linked to one of the participating institutions, the project researchers are examining a range of questions, including how museums as spaces and institutions influence social life, who is included or excluded in knowledge production, which voices are marginalized and ignored, which thinkers, theories, and methodologies dominate, and how collections and knowledge can remain sustainable in the long term. In addition to comprehensive discussions regarding how to treat colonial artifacts and stolen art, the project will also focus on economic, material, socio-cultural, and political dimensions.

Close collaboration between universities and museums – including participation from students

The project team comprises a number of principal investigators as well as postdoc researchers and a science communication coordinator. The principal investigators include Professor Dr. Bénédicte Savoy, head of the TU Berlin Chair of Modern Art History and recently featured as one of TIME magazine's 100 most influential people in 2021, Professor Dr. Meike Hopp, junior professor of digital provenance research, and Dr. Andrea Meyer, whose research focuses on examining how museums' collection and staging practices are changing. Meyer is also actively committed to the concept of research-oriented teaching, a special feature of the master's degree program offered by the academic chair. Examples of this include involving students in curating exhibitions and publishing catalogs and monographs. The other principal investigators in the project are science historian Dr. Ina Heuman from the Museum of Natural History and science sociologist Professor Dr. Tahani Nadim, from the Museum of Natural History and Humboldt Universität zu

Berlin. Both women are co-directors of the Humanities of Nature center at the Museum of Natural History. The final principal investigators are cultural scientist Dr. Mareike Vennen (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), Dr. Patricia Rahempour, director of the Institute of Museum Research and her deputy Kathrin Grotz.

Four case studies examine the roles and responsibilities of museums

"Museums as experiments and laboratories" investigates museums as places of scientific and social experimentation. In her project, Roos Hopman focuses on future designs of data collections and digitization practices that can be observed in and around the Berlin Museum for Natural History in particular.

"Museums as places of experience and affect" examines the role emotions and affects play in museums. Ranjamrittika Bhowmik will be combining her findings from emotion research with the history of emotions and investigations of material culture.

"Museums and their environments": Beginning January 2022, postdoctoral researcher Dr. Mareike Vennen will be exploring how "nature" is collected, researched, and presented in museums. Her primary focus is on the interrelation between biological and social spheres. However, she will also be examining how different types of exhibitions of natural objects communicate or establish certain knowledge orders regarding race, class, gender, and domain.

"Dissolution of museum boundaries through digitalization": Dr. Lukas Fuchsguber, a postdoctoral researcher, is working closely together with software developers to examine the digital visual worlds which arise around museums and the social aspects of such interfaces.

Based on the research results and the findings of the participation formats, the scientists want to understand museums not only as places of wonder and aesthetic experience, but also as places where conflicts are respectfully addressed and uncomfortable questions asked. "Museums are not only archives of humankind's heritage, but also places of debate regarding the cultural interpretation of this heritage, as well as inclusion, exclusion, participation, and digital dissolution of boundaries," says Bénédicte Savoy.

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