Filled Containers, Felt Communities: Facts and Constructivism in Regional Museums

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The metaphor "container" belongs to the criticism that regional cultural studies misjudge topographies as the exact space of a culture, a homogeneous ethnic group. The "archipelagos of cultures" is a comparable metaphor; the waterway between the islands indicates the idea of good selectivity. Migration history underpins this criticism. Diachronic population studies clearly show that European towns only persisted by immigration: During the 14th and 15th centuries, 80 percent of all known surnames of inhabitants of Périgueux—a town in southwestern France—vanished within less than fifty years, most of them within less than twenty years (Poussou, 1994, p. 30). A thousand surnames were registered between 1550 and 1720 in the town Weißenburg (Franconia, Germany); only twenty of them existed during the whole period (Blendinger, 1940). This method cannot account for matrilinear relationships, but nevertheless, the results are obvious.

Refugees, exiles, expelled and displaced persons were elements for an organised re-filling of emptied "containers". Origin and destination could be classified as "homogeneous" or "multicultural containers"; the results oscillate between a multicultural "remix"—e. g. the Polish and German population of Silesia—and an enforced homogeneity—e. g. Crete as an island with Greek inhabitants only. Refugees out of Iraq arrived in Europe and outside of traditional "containers", they discovered themselves as Assyrians.

Immigration is crossed by social stratigraphy, as Moritz Csáky (2000, p. 32–34) explained with Vienna and Budapest around 1900: Less than 40 percent of the population was born there but individuals on the same social level shared more cultural characteristics than persons with the same origin. The "container" becomes ambiguous, either by combining local sectors of more extended groups or as the fine outline of a stack of clearly locking containers.

Contemporarily to the "container" criticism, the humanities reorganised their field within the last decades. "Space" lost its topographical connotation, remodelled to "social spaces" with "transnational connections". "Hybridity" became the most important concept for understanding cultures; the focus shifted from "essentialism" (cultural phenomena are practised by all members of exactly one culture) to "transculturality" (cultures integrate elements of other cultures).

Constructivism replaced the ideal of uniform national cultures of individuals adopting meanings out of a pre-formulated set. Relevant paradigms changed. The identification of "master narratives" in history was followed by the recognition of "polyvocality" and "multiperspectivity". Ethnology lost its subject or reconstructed it to the self-description of individuals with an "ethnicity"; cultural anthropology shifted its methodological ideal "field work" from long-time stay in the everyday life of the researched culture to the imperative "follow the moving target" (Welz, 1998). The academic research and classification of cultural phenomena ("writing culture") was reduced to the observation of people "doing culture".

Museology withdrew from "tradition" and the "material witness" welcoming "heritage". French heritage discourse established the perspective of the actual members of society on their heritage and their practices of it as "patrimoniality" (Watremez, 2008, p. 13); David Crouch (2010, p. 69) proposed the difference of institutionalised heritage and the permanent performance of individual "heritaging". *Heritage* includes a problematic selectivity of what is desired as heritage and what is not. Different political systems showed the tendency to accept some historic phenomena as their heritage and to refuse anything else. I proposed the description of "posthumous legacy-hunting"; David Lowenthal stressed an absolutely fictional "heritage fabrication" (1998, pp. XVII, 121).

This battery of changed paradigms could be interpreted as the rise of individualism as the meta-paradigm of post-modernism. If individualists wish to be part of a group, they dislike prescriptions like *nation* or *ethnic group* and prefer to choose or found their own community—and leave it if it no longer fits. *Community* is a key word in contemporary museology as well as in the current debate concerning the re-formulation of the ICOM museum definition. The meta-paradigm *individualism* replaced the defined, intergenerational relationship transmitting material witnesses by a felt kinship selecting its favourite documents.

The "container" seems to be reduced to a topographic spot containing nothing but stones and broken pieces, historical buildings and fragments of former life. Two popular metaphors for immigration countries call them "melting pot" or "salad bowl" with a delicate inversion: Whereas the "container" only represents the cultural border, the "salad bowl" is the persistent phenomenon; however, the vegetables might change. Obviously, two "bowls" serve the preparation of the "salad" (of human beings) and its "dressing" (with material culture), much as Andrzej Brencz (2003) described processes of cultural adoption in Western Poland, till 1945 part of Germany. The new settlers met material culture left by the expelled Germans and they expressed acceptance (use) or rejection (destruction), mirrored by using or throwing away those assets brought from their former home. Antique dealers and the tourism of descendants of the expelled Germans consolidated identification with the adopted cultural assets.

But the "salad bowls" for people can be rediscovered. "Containers" are explicitly present in widely accepted double terms like "German Turks". The "Bio-Germans"—to use an incorrect colloquial term—were quite surprised to have seen

a Turkish immigration and later demonstrations of Kurdish people in Germany. The partial emigration of the Turkish intelligentsia during the Erdoğan era led to another contrast, because in the newer emigrants' eyes, the "German Turks" were Turkish in a very conservative or outdated way.

Museums gathered comparable experiences. Collaboration with communities presupposes the visibility of a community, but external and internal views can differ. Collaboration might include essentialist misinterpretations, either in a traditionalistic way—Turks need tea glasses and prayer mats—or with a fashionable touch—the Near East smokes shisha pipes. Collaboration with communities does not shelter the museum from the criticism of other people who feel themselves to be part of the same community. The German museum history of the 19th and 20th century showed that volunteers responsible for museum work were not at all a representative cross section of the population but people with an interest in preserving and interpreting cultural assets that included the proclamation of individual convictions. It would be interesting if currently collaborating communities have comparable attitudes.

After 1945, the museum objects of Central Europe got two separate "bowls", a "factual" and an "imagined" one: Museums survived at their topographical spot; new regional and local museums were created on current German territory, based either on those parts of older museum collections evacuated into any "Western" countryside or on new collections initiated by expelled Germans.

The balance of power seems to be less interesting today than it has been for the '68 generation, but it influenced and continues to influence the heritage sector with conservative ideas of "containers": For Nazi-Germany, exhibitions of Slavonic or antique Roman findings were undesirable. In a neo-liberal system, it is inevitable to exhibit spectacular Celtic objects, although the existence of a Celtic culture is very controversial in prehistory. In today's Poland, it seems difficult to get state funding for non-Slavonic excavations.

Two lessons can be learnt. First the metaphor of two "salad bowls": Cultures can use a physical, virtual, or social space; material culture definitely has a physical place, be it as a social "dressing" or a separate "salad bowl" for objects. The German historian Harm Klueting invented the neologism "backwardity of locality" ("Rückwärtigkeit des Örtlichen") to describe an attitude of hobbyists as local historians: They tend to present phenomena because of their relation to the topography of a current village or region without any interest in the phenomenon itself and its historical contexts (Klueting, 1991, p. 76). For Klueting, this is unprofessional. He overlooked the possibility that this might provide a chance of survival to documents even if a connection to the local identity is missing.

The second aspect concerns a super-selectivity of Simon Knell's "identity making museums" (2004, p. 23) provided that they avoid "backwardity". Identity needs any "other", but this binary "we" and "not us" restricts the variety of characteristics. Klaus Lösch's term "transdifference" indicates further differences—unclear, not decidable, contradictory differences; oppositions suppressed by the majority

but not vanished completely; differences within a culture as the result of multiple memberships of some individuals (Lösch, 2005). A transfer of this point of view to museum work and the collecting of cultural assets is still missing.

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