

Imaginação Cinemuseológica: um formato de filme participativo

Erica Abreu¹

Cinemuseological imagination: a participatory film format

Introduction

Arts and culture are essential for us, as human beings, to overcome the challenges of coexistence on this planet. This belief was central to my decision to embark on an academic journey eleven years ago. One question resonated in my mind: how can we address issues ranging from intolerance to different groups, which leads to various forms of violence, to the widespread precariousness of our existence? Many people struggle against these conditions, and it's towards them many more seem to be heading, especially in a global system marked by growing inequalities.

As elucidated by Primo & Moutinho (2021), we live in a world where contemporary realities pervaded by colonialism still create hierarchies among people. Powerful nations and media conglomerates control knowledge, subjectivities, and intersubjectivities, leaving little room for people to question them. Moreover, economic ideologies like neoliberalism dictate production, distribution, consumption, and exploitation based on financial accumulation. These combined forces create social groups with power over narratives and their dissemination, making it increasingly challenging to create change. Museology has nevertheless crossed my path, bringing along new possibilities to study and act toward tackling these pressing internal and external demands. Having contact with Sociomuseology and Brazilian museological experiences allowed me to find some answers to my concerns and directions for my purpose, primarily through understanding the social role of museums and concepts such as empowerment. It also enabled me to bring these inspirations and carry out projects in other countries, in Germany for instance, while benefiting from my previous training in movie production.

With the opportunity to work at the Historical Museum Frankfurt (HMF), I found the empirical object to apply and analyze theories through action-research processes. As a participant observer and with interviews, it was possible to understand and describe practices, reflect on them, identify hypotheses, draw conclusions related to applying Sociomuseology principles and tools, and integrate cinema into participation at the German institution.

¹ Erica Abreu has a PhD in Museology from the Universidade Lusófona, a Master's degree in Cultural and Social History from the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines and a degree in Administration from the State University of Santa Catarina. He currently lives between Hamburg and Florianópolis and carries out autonomous interdisciplinary research in his areas of training. erica.abreug@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8817-7288>

Leveraging resources and assistance from colleagues, along with insights gained from the *Stadtlabor* (Citylab) – a participatory format developed by the HMF that will be introduced with greater detail later in this text – and considering the preexisting demands of the institution for my contribution, a new idea emerged that helped to build my study object. The *Stadtlabor Film* project involved producing movies where participants took on the primary creative responsibilities, receiving support from the museum and film experts. In addition, two subsequent processes unfolded, also involving participation and cinema. They served to test the previous concept and to analyze other factors with diverse characteristics. Throughout these three projects, the transformative potential of artistic methods in the reimagining of museums as a places to foster expression and empowerment became evident through a collaborative musealization approach named ‘cinemuseological imagination’. All these elements constituted my doctoral journey, some of which I present in this article.

Sociomuseology and Empowerment

Since its inception, Sociomuseology has developed as a multidisciplinary, dynamic, and adaptable approach to museums, continually refining and elaborating on concepts in response to societal contexts (Moutinho, 2007). According to Moutinho (1996), such institutions have transcended their traditional focus on objects to prioritize people and ideas. In this light, museology embraces greater “vitality, creativity, and commitment” while the museum becomes increasingly inadequate to correlate only to its traditional concept (Primo, 1999, translated).

In this sense, museums are to progressively address the ‘collection of problems’ faced by contemporary societies (Chagas, 2000), responding to the ‘unmet needs’ of people arising from an increasingly unequal world. Establishing itself as a School of Thought, Sociomuseology advocates for a set of ‘shared values’ capable of challenging the dominating ideologies perpetuating such injustices. Drawing from one of its main theoretical basis, Paulo Freire, the approach evokes participation and empowerment, by which museums become spaces capable of promoting ‘critical literacy’, intrinsically linked to ‘reading the world’ to understand and act upon realities. (Primo & Moutinho, 2020). It is, therefore, based on a non-neutral stance, as Freire (1996/2011, p.100, translated) expressed: “I cannot be neutral; my practice demands a definition, a position”.

The ideas behind Freire’s Methodologies of Education and Democratic Participation, present in his extensive work and significantly expressed in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), constitute a transforming educational process. Freire’s methods primarily aimed to teach peasants and workers basic literacy skills while simultaneously facilitating overcoming their conditions of domination. His actions and studies laid the groundwork for theories and practices of participation and social emancipation, bringing about the notion of ‘critical consciousness’, an expression favored by Freire over the term ‘empowerment’, which already existed². The concept advanced in the social sciences framework and contexts of black, feminist, and LGBT movements’ fight for their civil rights. It encompasses a diverse range of strategies and interpretations, essentially aimed at activating or enhancing an individual’s creative

² The term ‘Empowerment’ originated from ‘verbing’ the noun ‘power.’ It can be traced back to the Protestant Reformation, when people were empowered through the translation of religious texts, granting them the freedom to interpret and use these texts independently.

potential. This empowerment can be self-driven or facilitated by others, enabling individuals to overcome previous disempowerment and progress towards empowerment in relation to their inner growth, or in interactions with external individuals or groups.

Identifying its fundamental aspects favors the comprehension of empowerment. Regarding intrapersonal and behavioral variables, it depends on the knowledge and control over one's strengths or capabilities to generate improvements in one's life. It is based on psychological factors like self-esteem and temperament, acting upon interpersonal interactions. At an institutional level, it influences the capacity for structuring and mobilizing opportunities and means to promote change. On a community level, it concerns the unity and participation of individuals towards common goals, fostering political and social transformations. It is relevant when it comes to citizenship in defense of specific claims and in the ability to influence the actions of public powers. In this sense, individuals mobilize their *agency*, using *resources* and seeking *results*. Empowerment presents four main dimensions. In simple terms, the *cognitive* relates to critical thinking, the *psychological* to self-esteem, the *political* to awareness, organization, and mobilization, and the *economic* to financial autonomy. Despite its positive aspects, there have been critiques on empowerment for potentially isolating individuals from broader sociopolitical contexts of solidarity, perpetuating existing systems of domination, and reinforcing paternalistic attitudes. However, appropriate and ethical support can lead to a continuous, positive process benefiting individuals, facilitators, collectives, and communities. (Baquero, 2012; Sardenberg, 2012)

Influenced by Freire's theories, Berth (2018) expanded on empowerment beyond traditional social class categories, incorporating intersectional aspects like race, gender, and sexuality. She advocates that it's not only necessary to invert the oppressions, but they need to be overcome completely, favoring an "equalizing of all existences". This approach is largely resonant in Brazil, a country dealing with the legacies of colonization, slavery, and ongoing challenges faced by marginalized groups. In this sense, Berth brings examples of how Black Feminism redefines empowerment as she illustrates how women defy stereotypes and hierarchies, strive for representation, independence, recognition of silenced, erased, or concealed knowledge, and foster mutual support through affective networks, but stressing the necessary vigilance for possible vulnerabilities.

This approach appears in strategies used in several examples of Brazilian Social Museology, such as the MUF (Museum of Favela) and the Muquifu (Museum of Quilombos and Urban Favelas), both of which I had the opportunity to study and visit and highly encourage others to discover. In these cases, empowerment serves as a political tool. It becomes evident in bringing awareness to the issues and systemic problems that affect individuals and communities, inspiring them to fight domination, craft new narratives that redefine traditionally excluding and stereotyped images, promote financial autonomy through job creation, training, and other economic alternatives, and develop solidarity with the formation of networks. Museums have the potential to serve as platforms for mobilization and advocacy, amplifying the voices and demands of diverse groups. They symbolize collective empowerment and embrace decolonial practices, inspiring evolution within museological traditions. This perspective marks the next step in my journey.

Participation and Relevance at the Historical Museum Frankfurt

In Germany, at the Historical Museum Frankfurt, I had my first opportunity for museological work that would also constitute the case study of my doctoral research. I arrived in a context when participation had become a new driving force for the institution's latest relevant turn, among others that had taken place throughout its history.

The museum was officially founded in 1878 in what can be considered a citizen-driven resistance action. Initially functioning as a 'cabinet of curiosities' with various collections related to old traditions, it began as an initiative of the wealthy bourgeoisie's interest to preserve local history after Frankfurt lost its free imperial city status in 1866 (Jannelli & Thiel, 2014). Following World War II, the museum underwent a transformation, focusing on education and aiming to engage all population segments, a shift summarized in the slogan '*Lernort kontra Museumtempe!*' (Learning place versus museum temple). It adopted innovative approaches in exhibiting its collections, emphasizing social and historical context and employing theatrical displays for easier public understanding. The new direction, while risking propagandistic interpretations, moved away from traditional sterilized aesthetics. It also began considering participatory approaches to address collection gaps, among other actions. The renewal marked a significant turning point that gained recognition but also received accusations of defying the conventional notion of the European museum, as stated in the media at the time. (Hoffman, 1978)

Around the same time, in the 1960s and 1970s, participation emerged as a methodological model within the New Museology movement, with experiences such as ecomuseums and neighborhood museums and among events and debates that discussed new angles to the practice and studies of museums worldwide. These mainly featured the evolving dynamics between communities and professionals, emphasizing such institutions' social role in utilizing heritage for local development (Varine, 2018). In the last decades, it resurfaced as a new trend in Museology, summoning that museums should be more than just inclusive, involving, and responsive; they should be actively participatory. These practices involve largely the work of museum staff and their interaction with the public, blending professionalism with amateurism. It comprises varying levels of control and ownership regarding collection, purposes, and other decisions. The role of practitioners becomes essential in facilitating, moderating, and mediating, underscoring the importance of transparency. (Mensch & Meijer-van Mensch, 2011)

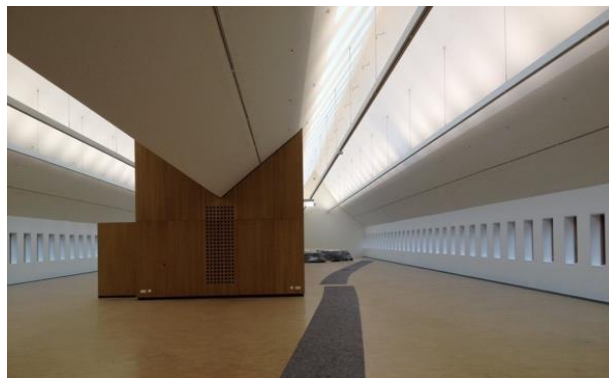
Aiming for social relevance, the HMF adopted a new orientation focused on participation in 2005 with the arrival of a new director. Such engaging co-curatorial processes intended to study the city's present, to include the segments of the population often considered marginalized, and to develop individual competencies in participants. (Gerchow et al., 2012). This shift continued into 2007, accompanied by the initiative of the city to replace the post-war brutalist building with a new high-end construction (Gerchow, 2013).

Beginning in 2010, a dedicated team led these efforts and developed the *Stadtlabor Unterwegs* (City Lab on the Move). Expecting the inauguration of the new building, the museum reached beyond its spatial limits. With participants, it explored and occupied various sites across the city with its yearly processes that resulted in temporary exhibitions approaching multiple

topics ranging from transitioning districts, public pools, parks, migration, housing, gardening, fashion, democracy, and Nazism, to name just a few.³

Now most commonly going by *Stadtlabor*, the format involves collaboration with individuals or groups, known as *Stadtlaborant*innen*, who engage in contributing to the theme of each project. The process spans several months during the preparatory phase, featuring workshops conducted by the museum to shape and refine the contributions, along with specialized consultations provided by curators and professionals such as exhibition designers. In essence, the focus usually is on producing an exhibition. Still, it has developed to encompass other activities like summer tours, digital contributions, and even film, the emphasis of my projects. In the initial years, the outcomes were set up in various parts of the city. Currently, they have a house in a specially designated area in the attic of the building inaugurated in 2017, which you can visualize below.

Figure 1 - The Stadtlabor space before the installation of its permanent elements and carrying out participatory projects.



Source: Private archive, original photo, 2017

Between May 2016 and October 2017 working as part of the team responsible for this orientation - *Frankfurt Jetzt!* (Frankfurt Now!) - and through interviews held in 2020 with two other curators from the group, I gained valuable insights into participation in the HMF. The job is fundamentally a learn-by-doing experience marked by uncertainty and emotional investment. Recruiting participants, predicting the success of collaborations, and ensuring contributions can be difficult. Besides, the intimate nature of participatory projects, with close and constant contact with people, often blurs the boundaries between the curators' professional and personal lives. Establishing mutual trust is recognized as a crucial element. While the challenges and diversity of each project are rewarding and positive, working with participation proves to be highly demanding, particularly when faced with staff shortages and a lack of specific training.

As a seasoned curator at the museum since 2010 who was designated to be my mentor during the fellowship, a colleague explains how the concept of scaffolding (Simon, 2010) is instrumental in guiding the participation process. This method involves meticulously outlining each step with defined activities and outcomes, creating a structure that empowers people to

³ Further details about previous exhibitions are available in the project archive at the Historical Museum Frankfurt's official website: <https://historisches-museum-frankfurt.de/de/stadtlabor-archiv>. Accessed on December 5th, 2023.

contribute to the projects confidently. A lack of clear direction can lead to disorientation and frustration, especially when it clashes with people's usual expectations.

The curators have also identified various characteristics of the *Stadtlaborant*innen*. In general, these are residents who choose to engage in the projects. They range from *Stadtlabor* enthusiasts, who participate regularly, to individuals who contribute on a one-time basis. Their involvement varies, with some offering biographical approaches or discussing their experiences with specific themes in the city, while others use the opportunity to share their work as artists or activists.

In this sense, an essential aspect of the work with participation noted in the HMF is balancing the level of freedom and restrictions for each contribution. In their interviews, the curators stated that participants have the final say. However, the museum establishes guidelines from the start. It is responsible for the space and platform, and it ensures that discriminatory or violent contributions are prohibited. The museum exercises its authority only to safeguard its role as an educational institution.

There's also a question as to whether the museum's participatory approach qualifies as social work. Reflecting on this matter, the more experienced curator clearly states that their intention corresponds to activism, utilizing their tools and resources to support specific groups or causes. An example is the participatory exhibition on migration, which formed the backdrop of the 2020 interview. Through the interviewee's insight, it became evident that the institution employed museological strategies to convey a crucial message: people with a migration background and migrants are continuously shaping German history. They are an integral part of the country and must have their voices heard and represented within a municipal institution central to Frankfurt's culture. In this regard, the reflective involvement of the curators demonstrates their commitment to a museum oriented to social justice.

This aspect is significant due to the reflexive nature of museology, which emphasizes the importance of museum practitioners' examination of their work as the foundation of museological theories. Cury (2020) suggests that when engaging in participatory musealization processes involving communities, a significant self-awareness is necessary to recognize potential biases. This approach also involves a deep understanding of the individuals and groups involved in these processes. It implicates actively identifying and challenging dominating and exclusionary ideologies that historically influence museum practices.

Based on the understanding of Mensch & Meijer-van Mensch (2011), the interactions between museum practitioners and the public generate different types of communities. The *Stadtlabor* establishes a practical and heritage community between the museum and the inhabitants, exchanging knowledge and enabling them to collaboratively create the narratives presented in the museum, ultimately contributing to forming an origin community that also shares preservation goals linked to the history of Frankfurt. Participatory co-creation, involving contributions and collaboration, comes from both sides. As mentioned before, the museum and participants make decisions together.

With the *Stadtlabor* format, the HMF achieves relevance to the public by providing a way in which, beyond merely attending events, people are interested in responding to questions, taking part in discussions, and collaborating in activities that unite the public and museum staff, as Simon (2010) highlighted. Nevertheless, Mensch & Meijer-van Mensch (2011)

critique that such actions are often concentrated at the interface between museums and their audiences, disregarding backstage roles such as collecting, preserving, and researching. This neglect raises questions, mainly concerning the ownership of objects and the responsibility for studying and creating narratives about significant groups of people often excluded from decision-making. Regarding the *Stadtlabor* format, it fosters co-curating practices but is primarily limited to exhibitions. The level of involvement in other roles remains thus limited, although studying the city through a laboratory analogy is at its core.⁴

Singer (2021) made another valuable critique of participation. She identified how museums may engage in predatory appropriation by using such activities merely to validate their actions without genuinely paying attention to what communities have to contribute. Other criticism points to the authority typically attributed to museums that can reinforce paternalistic and oppressive views. When institutions claim they can 'give a voice' to individuals and groups, they can incur in limiting how these groups might contribute to and benefit from such practices since they inherently already have their voices. Lastly, it's also crucial to evaluate whether so-called participatory activities truly engage people or merely numb them in contrast to the awareness these places should foster⁵.

When reflecting on the previous aspects, it's possible to perceive that the HMF wields its authority responsibly while avoiding an authoritarian stance. It doesn't exploit participation for self-serving purposes. Instead, it fosters an environment that allows for identifying and addressing the city's current issues, not particularly pointing to activities that could potentially numb the public. The museum seeks to become a more and more relevant place for Frankfurt and its inhabitants and accomplishes this through its established participatory approach, especially as an activism instrument.

'Cinemuseological imaginations' about the city, gender and migration

With all the tools in hand, I had to move forward with coordinating my projects. This section will describe these, but first, I will clarify the expression I crafted to simplify its understanding. The 'cinemuseological imagination' occurred to me after grasping how museums can focus not only on objects but also on people and ideas and encountering notions that connect museology, museums, and cinema. To break it down, 'cine' derives from cinema. 'Museological' is an adjective referring to research in museology and the processes and theories it embodies. 'Imagination' is based on conceptions that helped me recognize that the connection between movies and museums could go beyond their most common uses in exhibitions, installations, and documentation purposes.

Cinema emerged at the dawn of the 20th century as a technology to capture and display moving images that later acquired diverse uses related to communication, arts, and research. However, it rapidly became a powerful mass entertainment format. According to Benjamin

⁴ In other projects, such as the Bibliothek Der Generationen (Library of Generations), the museum curates an open archive of the city, enriching its collection with diverse perspectives. Another initiative is the Sammlungscheck (Collections Check), which sought to acquire objects missing from the museum's collection, specifically focusing on the theme of migration.

⁵ These last two critical aspects of participation were respectively highlighted by Marcelo Cunha in 2015 during doctoral seminars, and Judite Primo during advisory meetings in 2017.

(1955/1996), likewise encompassing its predecessors - photography and sound recording - cinema was part of a revolution sparked by Reproducible Arts that started even before, with the invention of the press. The possibility of massively replicate art changed how it was created and consumed. It emancipated it from the ritual, leaning then towards the power of mass exhibition. It ultimately impacted society regarding democratizing access but also entailed high manipulation risks, which could be observed, for instance, in the appropriation of cinema by authoritarian regimes with propagandistic purposes.

In this sense, Malraux (1947/1996) contributed to expanding the idea of museums, connecting it to cinema. He developed the concept of the 'Imaginary Museum' after examining aspects of European art, indicating the place they found in the museum and the transformations they brought upon such institutions. He identified how art pieces that were fictional creations of their time, for example, tapestries, paintings, and sculptures, came to inhabit museums as artistic cannons after a crucial change in the 18th century with their institutionalization. A question also emerged about the impressions of the world that museums would group in their collections. Paradoxically, they would contemplate the highest idea of the human being without being able to reach the totality of the knowledge already available. By traditional selections in physical museums, objects, artifacts, and artistic creations are generally brought together on-site. But just as certain museums have so many masterpieces, there will always be a lack of others. Cathedrals cannot be transported, but photographs of them and the details of their stained-glass windows or statues can be put together in albums. And the ultimate imaginary museum would be a film.

The 'Imaginary Museum' enlarges thus the idea of museums when connecting it to the Reproductive Arts, making it possible to combine photos, texts, and audio in compilations that create new associations and ways of understanding such arrangements and democratize them through mass reproducibility. Consequently, cinema favors this idea, for it relies on its ability to condense and approximate various references into an abstract creation that only materializes when reproduced.

Other notions related to museums connect them to the expansion driven by the imaginative feature of cinema but also evoke the sociomuseological notion that museums can focus more than just objects; also on people and ideas. The 'Museological Fact', developed by Rússio (1981/2010), constitutes the field's object of study and evokes the relationship of humans with objects. Rússio drew inspiration from museologists from Eastern Europe such as Anna Gregorová, who identified an intrinsic human 'museal attitude' represented in museological actions towards objects, manifested in collecting and preserving, rooted in appreciating and attributing natural and cultural values to them. In the same direction, with the idea of 'Museal Imagination' (2003), Mário Chagas proposed that it is also a human trait and a capacity to articulate the 'poetic of things' based on expertise and life experiences, in other words, all of us create connections to objects and organize them based on our memories and subjectivity.

In summary, we all relate and elaborate significant objects, concrete or abstract, that we value and organize, constituting our imaginary museums. These ideas combined entail the potential to create movies and introduce diverse perspectives and voices to museums. Cinema appeared as an accessible artistic tool. Through participation, by stimulating the agency of individuals and groups, using scaffolding techniques, and providing resources, the possibility of

creating spaces for creativity, reflection and transformation in the Historical Museum Frankfurt appeared.

The museum frequently seeks external funding to expand its activities. The possibility of hiring an international fellow for a junior curator position sparked interest in new approaches from various countries, particularly Brazil. In this sense, it allowed me to join the HMF in 2016. Due to the upcoming inauguration of the new building in 2017, the traditional yearly *Stadtlabor* process and exhibition were not to occur. A film project was among the plans for the new space to accompany a participatory city model – one of the permanent objects that would occupy the area dedicated to the present and participation. I then found my opportunity to integrate cinema with Sociomuseology.

After discussions and learning experiences with the *Frankfurt Jetzt!* Team, the idea to merge the *Stadtlabor* format with film production appeared, resulting in what was later named *Stadtlabor Film*. Following that, I could further explore this blend of cinema and participation in a project related to gender issues with the central question: ‘What do women’s rights have to do with us today?’. Finally, a minor unfinished activity called ‘Brazilian Subjectivity’ was later concluded, incorporating a film.

To conceive all these processes, I envisioned an environment open to dialog, avoiding a condescending attitude towards participants and providing support for them to create their contributions. Learning new artistic and expressive techniques in a participatory format within a museological activity aimed to ignite different levels of empowerment. According to each theme and participant, the possibility of discussing contemporary issues would target its cognitive dimension related to ‘critical literacy’. Creating representative images of certain groups could fall into the psychological aspect of self-esteem. The collective element, which included working in groups and holding regular meetings, intended to connect people, forming networks and affective connections, and possibly lead to mobilizations for specific causes. The training and educational components sought to inspire participants in their professional and personal pursuits, potentially enhancing their autonomy or career advancements.

Since the first meeting, an assistant for direction and production and an experienced filmmaker who had previously directed feature films and held workshops to teach cinema joined the museum staff and participants. These professionals were crucial in guiding the process, providing creative insights, motivating, and contributing to a welcoming environment. The focus was to promote the participants’ roles as directors and producers of their films, reinforcing the potential to realize their unique visions and ideas around the proposed topics about the city: society, economy, ecology, mobility, housing, and buildings.

The idea behind the *Stadtlabor Film* entailed bringing perspectives about the city to the new permanent exhibition in films projected alongside statistics. Inspired by the *Stadtlabor* format, four workshops and two consulting sessions were designed to integrate the process. The individuals involved in this project constituted a diverse group, comprising those who responded to a broad call, previous participants known as *Stadtlaborant*innen* reached through the newsletter and museum programs, and others who were invited due to their proximity to the team and myself.

Each topic was to inspire the production of one film, but an additional movie was approved to integrate the category ‘society’. Due to technical and formal aspects, elements

established the initial guidelines and limitations: only one day of filming, a duration of one minute, no audio, and a circular format, all to fit the specifications set by the museum and the exhibition designers. Together with the activities proposed for each workshop and consulting session, these requirements helped optimize the process and gave the participants clear directions and creative challenges. They also highlighted the points where interactions among the individuals and groups, film experts, and the museum team would be crucial for accomplishing each contribution, underlining the scaffolding technique. According to interviews with participants and a film expert who acted as an assistant, these strict parameters were generally helpful and sometimes made the job easier. However, one curator expressed concern about how these restrictions could be limiting, potentially restraining what the films could have achieved.



Source: Private archive, original photos, 2017 (left), 2020 (right).

In the Frankfurt *Jetzt!* Team, we planned the whole process, and every event was held accordingly, with only minor changes. All six meetings served specific objectives: to welcome people, receive and discuss the proposals with the large group using moderating techniques such as a World Café,⁶ consolidate film ideas in a shot list, assist with pre-production aspects such as defining locations, protagonists and organizing the filming days, help with elaborating the scenes, angles, and perspectives as well as handling the camera, provide structure to film around the city with a rented car and equipment and organization of permits, present and discuss the recorded footage based on the selection made by the film expert, develop editing concepts with stills printed in small cards, and with the support by the cinema expert, to edit the final film, using his computer and specialized software.

According to the themes and participants, each film gained its own identity. For the society films, the one titled '*Bunt im Grün*' (Colorful in green) aimed to display people and their interactions with art in the park, showcasing the work of the three participants. In the same category, two ladies explored the diversity of places and people linked to music in '*Klang der Stadt*' (Sound of the City). In their film about mobility, *Panta Rhei: Alles fließt* (*Panta Rhei: Everything flows*), a couple documented life around the Main River, which they were also used to experience. In the realm of the economy, '*Hoch die Häusjer!*' (Toast to the Little Houses!)

⁶ The moderating technique consists of people sitting at small groups to discuss predetermined topics, typically involving a facilitator and sharing the outcomes with the whole group at the end.

presented an enthusiast's perspective on the life around the *Wasserhäuschen* - historic kiosks that once served as water sources and now function as microcosms of social and economic exchanges. With the ecology-themed film, *'Wo die Grüne Soße wohnt'* (Where the Green Sauce Lives), a participant connected to urban gardening aimed to show how this traditional local dish is produced, cooked, and enjoyed sustainably in the city. The movie about buildings, *'Break on Through (to the Other Side)'*, showcased various doors and their unique character around Frankfurt, chosen by the group's two members. In the only fictional film, *'Liebe Nachbarn'* (Dear Neighbor), the three-person group approached the housing theme, illustrating unexpected relations between neighbors through the views from their windows, uncovering the life concealed behind assumptions, particularly about sexual orientation.

Subsequently, two smaller projects are also worth to be mentioned. One involved discussing the topic of gender and creating a movie while testing the ideas of the *Stadtlabor Film*. Aiming to include the final production in a temporary exhibition about the 100th anniversary of the women's right to vote in Germany organized at the Historical Museum Frankfurt, the initial idea was a documentary about prominent female political figures in the city. But to explore participation again, the film *'Come Over and Use Me!'* was created with a small group of women and one man.

During a single workshop, the group developed an idea and later organized it in the square of the HMF during the *'Night of the Museums'*, a yearly nationwide promotion event. Profiting from the increased audience, it consisted of a pop-up interactive installation that would be documented by the same film director responsible for the *Stadtlabor film* project, who also undertook the editing task but ended up assigning it to a colleague. The action involved a game where people would have to randomly choose and interact with objects related to gender issues previously selected by participants. The final movie, which was around five minutes, was composed of three parts: documenting the preparatory dynamics during the filming day, the activity itself, and each participant presenting their object in slow motion. The result showed how people can use their museal imagination to reflect and talk about objects that deal with contemporary themes.



Sources: Private archive, original photo, 2018 (left). Short film *'Come over and use me!'*, 2018, cinematography by Julian Vogel (right).

Another project, which started upon my arrival at the HMF, could only be completed some months after leaving my formal employment contract. Around a dozen Brazilians had

answered a call and gathered in one workshop to discuss their special places and Frankfurt. After the event, I invited the group to walk around the city to present such locations. The journey



Sources: Private archive, photo by Stephanie Kösling, 2016 (left). Short film 'Café, bolo e Frankfurt', 2018, cinematography by Julian Vogel (right).

would be documented again by the same filmmaker. Finally, another workshop took place to present the footage and make decisions about assembling the film in the editing process, which would be my responsibility. The experience gave me unique insights into migration, mainly through the perspectives of the participants with whom I shared essential aspects of identity.

In interviews conducted with participants from the three projects, it became evident that their involvement was crucial for the activities and to draw insightful conclusions for the study. Through this analysis, it was possible to highlight specific elements and outcomes related to the research object that connects participation and empowerment and their impacts on the people involved.

Overall, the learning environment established in these processes contributed to gaining competence in introductory aspects of filmmaking and project management. The extent of involvement in cinema roles such as director, producer, editor, and actor varied among participants. While some reported being extremely satisfied with their role in the film, others expressed disappointment in being limited to acting and not participating in editing or directing. However, ultimately, everyone reported gaining something positive from the process.

All the projects showed the potential to discuss contemporary topics. To point out a few examples, it stood out approaching problems like homelessness under the bridges around the Main River, urban sustainable practices, valuing green areas in the city, and showcasing diversity. It also manifested in the struggle against misogyny, gathering in a cohesive group that fostered confidence while constituting an informative pop-up installation and film later to be included in a traditional exhibition about gender. Or even talking to fellow Brazilians who showed meaningful places in Frankfurt while realizing how they, as migrants, are vital to the city and to build the country. How they are part of its history and should have a place in their museums.

Although close contacts appeared within the groups, the projects could have proved more effective regarding collective empowerment, creating networks, and establishing affective bonds. However, it became clear that the museum has the potential to be an integration tool, especially for often marginalized groups such as migrants. Through statements, the Brazilian project revealed itself as a means to integrate someone who had recently arrived, for example.

The processes also gave other perspectives to some participants who reported finding different ways to see themselves and new motivations for their own lives. Psychological empowerment appeared in statements such as: “I can do it! Yes! I have done a film! It’s great! In my life, when I write my *Lebenslauf* (biography), I can tell I’ve made a film.” Or “I’m so shy, and I’m never going to be able to do something like that, and in the end, I had the feeling that I did it! And I had fun doing it, and I was really participating.”; or “Being a part of this. It contributes to growth, right? It adds to my life, to my story, in a very positive way”.

Finally, seeing myself in the projects was one of the most relevant aspects. By knowing that one of the movies presented a homosexual kiss and would be exhibited in the museum, I felt represented as a lesbian, and I imagine many like me will probably feel the same. It equally appeared pertinent to spread debates around gender and feminism, which are so significant to me. I observed it likewise in the movie created with Brazilians when hearing it could contribute to the feeling of existing in the city’s history as a migrant. It evokes what the HMF had proposed to do in terms of performing an activist role with its participatory exhibitions. In this sense, by being part of these projects that provided a platform in the museum to co-create films with people, I also felt empowered.

Final Remarks

Throughout the doctoral process in museology, I faced many challenges that, more than bringing me closer to my eagerness to find solutions to social problems, helped me to understand them. More than thinking about how to help people with the democratization of arts and culture, I realized that facilitating people’s agency is the most appropriate path. Through empowerment, although the term often attracts criticism due to its meritocratic, individualistic, and sometimes paternalistic character, I understood that we all must seek the power to transform our lives. The museum, in turn, has emerged as a consolidated instrument to provide assistance and resources to express, understand, connect with others, and find our voice, whether it is through cinema or any other artistic or creative way.

References

- Abreu, E. (2023). Sociomuseologia no Museu Histórico de Frankfurt: Cinema, Participação e Empoderamento. [Tese de doutorado]. Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias.
- Baquero, R. V. A. (2012). Empoderamento: Instrumento de Emancipação Social? - Uma Discussão Conceitual. *Revista Debates*, 6(1), 173–187.
<https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-5269.26722>
- Benjamin, W. (1987). A Obra de Arte na era da sua Reprodutibilidade Técnica. Em *Magia e técnica, Arte e Política: Ensaio sobre Literatura e História da Cultura* (p. 165–196). Brasiliense.
- Berth, J. (2018). O que é Empoderamento? Editora Letramento.
- Chagas, M. (2000). Memória e Poder: Contribuição para a Teoria e a Prática nos Ecomuseus. *Anais do II Encontro Internacional de Ecomuseus / IX Encontro Anual do Subcomitê Regional do ICOFOM para a América Latina e o Caribe - ICOFOM LAM.*, 12–18.

- Chagas, M. (2003). *Imaginação Museal: Museu, Memória e Poder em Gustavo Barroso, Gilberto Freyre e Darcy Ribeiro* [Tese de doutorado]. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.
- Cury, M. X. (2020). *Metamuseologia: Reflexividade sobre a Tríade Musealia, Musealidade e Musealização, Museus Etnográficos e Participação Indígena*. *Museologia & Interdisciplinaridade*, 9(17), 129–146.
<https://doi.org/10.26512/museologia.v9i17.29480>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (17a ed). Paz e Terra.
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes necessários para a Prática Educativa*. Paz e terra.
- Gerchow, J. (2013). *Historisches Museum Frankfurt, Germany*. Em *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the framework* (Vol. 2). Politecnico di Milano.
- Gerchow, J., Gesser, S., & Jannelli, A. (2012). *Einführung*. Em S. Gesser, A. Jannelli, S. Lichtensteiger, & M. Handschin (Orgs.), *Das partizipative Museum: Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content ; neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen* (p. 20–32). <https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839417263>
- Hoffmann, D. (1978). *Problèmes d’une conception didactique du musée*. Em *Vagues: Une anthologie de la nouvelle museologie* (Vol. 1, p. 387–404). W M.N.E.S.
- Jannelli, A., & Thiel, S. (2014). *The Stadtlabor (City Lab): A Participative Research Tool for the Investigation of the Many Senses of Place*. Em F. Lanz & E. Montanari (Orgs.), *Advancing museum practices*. Umberto Allemandi & C.
- Malraux, A. (1996). *Le Musée imaginaire*. Gallimard.
- Mensch, P. van, & Meijer-van Mensch, L. (2011). *New Trends in Museology*. *Muzej novejšje zgodovine*.
- Moutinho, M. (1993). *Sobre o conceito de Museologia Social*. *Cadernos de Sociomuseologia*, 1.
- Moutinho, M. (1996). *Museologia Informal*. *Boletim da Associação Portuguesa de Museologia*, 3, 1–5.
- Moutinho, M. (2007). *Definição evolutiva de Sociomuseologia*. *Cadernos de Sociomuseologia*, 28(28).
- Primo, J. (Org.). (1999). *Museologia e Património: Documentos fundamentais* (15o ed, Vol. 15). Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias.
<https://revistas.ulusofona.pt/index.php/cadernosociomuseologia/issue/view/32>
- Primo, J., & Moutinho, M. (2020). *Referências teóricas da Sociomuseologia*. Em M. Moutinho & J. Primo (Orgs.), *Introdução à Sociomuseologia* (p. 17–34). ULHT.
- Primo, J., & Moutinho, M. (2021). *Sociomuseologia e Decolonialidade: Contexto e desafios para uma releitura do Mundo*. Em M. Moutinho & J. Primo (Orgs.), *Teoria e prática da Sociomuseologia* (p. 19–38). ULHT.
- Rússio, W. (1981). *A Interdisciplinaridade em Museologia*. Em C. Bruno (Org.), *Waldisa Rússio Camargo Guarnieri—Textos e contextos de uma trajetória profissional*

(Vol. 1). Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo; Secretaria de Estado da Cultura; Comitê brasileiro do ICOM.

Sardenberg, C. M. B. (2012). Conceituando “Empoderamento” na Perspectiva Feminista. I Seminário Internacional: Trilhas do Empoderamento de Mulheres – Projeto TEMPO’, Salvador. <https://repositorio.ufba.br/handle/ri/6848>

Simon, N. (2010). The Participatory Museum. Museum 2.0. <https://participatorymuseum.org/read/>

Singer, I. (2021, novembro 29). Museums as Predators. American Perceptualism. <https://itsallhowyourememberit.wordpress.com/2021/11/29/museums-are-predators/>

Varine, H. de. (2018). Émergence de la participation dans les musées. Em A. Delarge (Org.), Le Musée participatif: L’ambition des écomusées (p. 72–86). la Documentation française, Kindle Edition.