

The Regenerated Role of Museums in Addressing Migration: A Focus on Turkish Museums

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Citation: Güneröz, C., & Yanar, A. (2024). The Regenerated Role of Museums in Addressing Migration: A Focus on Turkish Museums. *Herança*, 7(3), 40-52. <https://doi.org/10.52152/heranca.v7i3.1036>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 17 Jul 2024

Accepted: 27 Oct 2024

ABSTRACT

The latest definition of museum holds museums responsibility for carrying out museology with ethical and professional understanding, taking into account the participation of the society through sustainability. Sustainability focuses on practices such as being active in environmental action, preventing social isolation, developing inclusive policies and practices, and maintaining mental health. Museums frequently choose difficult subjects in order to fulfill the condition of creating meaning by using the concepts of identity, race, multiculturalism, inclusion, participation, migration and diversity. The immigrant-refugee debate is discussed together with ecological, economic and political deadlocks under the title of sustainability as the primary challenge of our time. The global dynamics of migration, and ethnic conflicts have led migration museums to place this phenomenon at the center of social life in multicultural countries of Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, etc. Migration is the subject of many museums; however, the purpose of migration museums is to focus on this phenomenon from different perspectives at the center. The migration museum aims to present a greater understanding of how migration shapes societies. It works closely with diverse communities to ensure and present their stories and contributions and aims to highlight the encouraging contributions of migrants, challenge misconceptions and stereotypes, and promote a more informed conversation about this phenomenon. This study questions the ways of using exhibitions and activities to discuss the differences and prejudices in the handling of the migration, through the concepts addressed in the new museum definition, based on the latest examples of migration museums in Türkiye.

Keywords: Museology; Inclusivity; Participation; Sustainability; Migration Museum.

INTRODUCTION

New Museum Definition and Difficult Issues

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) changed considerably the museum definition at the 26th General Conference of ICOM organized in Prague in August 2022 with more than 500 museum representatives for the first time in its history. To make a common ground for the world museums, the terms “inclusivity”, “accessibility”, “sustainability” and “ethics” have been place in the definition of museum (ICOM, 2022a; Seymour, 2022). The mentioned full definition of museum construes as:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing (ICOM, 2022a).

According to Alberto Garlandi, the president of ICOM, this definition forms a common ground for all museums around the world. With this new definition, great changes in the function of museums and current issues came into the agenda and were adapted to the definition. Museums are aware that they have to change and

this decision can ensure significant progress in terms of their function (Villa, 2022). The executive board of ICOM proposed to change the museum definition to formalize the renewed functions of museums at the 139th session in Paris on July 21 – 22, 2019, proposing a new alternative museum definition instead of the existing one. This definition caused several disturbances and discussions. The proposed text for the museum definition was found to be too ideological, leading to an identity crisis and causing the resignation of the ICOM delegation. The definition that was rejected by 70% of ICOM delegates is a 99-word statement defining museums as democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialog about the past and the future. It highlights museums as participatory and transparent that work with and for different communities in active partnership, aiming to contribute to human dignity, social justice, global equality, and the well-being of the planet (Noce, 2020).

Many national ICOM committee teams took the new definition as a collection of vague sentences consisting of a political and fashionable stance. They also expressed concerns about the neglect of the emphasis on education and collection, which they believed to be the most necessary for a museum's mission. Another criticism of the proposed definition is that it is not a text, but rather focuses solely on the contemporary functions of museums. The definition suggested and rejected in 2019 is as follows:

Museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialog about the past and the future. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artifacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, conserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing (ICOM, 2019).

When both definitions are examined and compared, they strongly emphasize the traditional functions of museums (research, collecting, conserving, exhibiting) as well as their contemporary functions (interpreting, serving the community, being accessible, being inclusive) (Table 1). The definition proposed in 2019 appears to have excluded diverse museums and different types of museums by emphasizing the works and cultural examples. The final and ultimate definition emphasizes the intangible cultural heritage and promotes diversity and sustainability in the museum structure. However, both definitions highlight the concepts of inclusivity and participation. Being public-oriented and inclusive are obligatory aspects of contemporary museums. Museum projects and works that respond to this obligation have been frequently discussed in the literature in recent years (Knudsen, 2016). Among these works are to allow audiences and partners to participate in creating collections, exhibitions, events, etc. (Mygind, Hällman, & Bentsen, 2015) and to make potential audience members who normally do not come to museums to get onto them (Stuedahl & Smørdal, 2011).

Table 1. Similarities and Differences among the Museum Definitions Proposed and Approved by ICOM (ICOM 2022a)

Concepts Included in the 2019 Definition Proposal	Concepts Included in the 2022 Definition Proposal
Dialog	Intangible heritage
Democratizing	Permanence
Inclusive	Inclusive
Polyphonic	Accessible
Conflict and challenge	Diversity
Participant	Sustainable
Transparency	Ethical
Social justice	Different communities
Equality	Engagement
Different communities	Experience

Karadeniz and Özdemir (2018), in their study where they examined the themes identified by ICOM for International Museum Day which is traditionally celebrated on May 18th every year, found that the concepts of intangible cultural heritage, diversity and sustainability emerged as themes in different periods. The theme of the International Museum Day on May 18, 2022, is "Sustainability and Well-being" (ICOM, 2022b). ICOM states that museums, which it defines as reliable institutions and important networks in our social texture, have a unique place in the social texture to create a step-by-step impact to promote positive change. There are many ways in which museums can contribute to achieving sustainable development goals. These can include supporting climate action, one of the most important phenomena of the period, promoting inclusivity, combating social isolation and improving mental health. The concepts such as participation, transparency, equality, social justice and inclusivity emphasized in the new definition were also made themes by ICOM to prompt all member museums to prepare activities. Therefore, museums have been adopting difficult issues or concepts that are the subject of the new

theme for many years by approaching them in line with their contemporary functions. Participation is the most important notion of the new definition. The participatory museum includes content creation and active feedback processes along with visitors as well as updated participation policies depending on social conditions and democratization approaches. Museum participation began with the definition of the action of participation as citizen power defined by Sherry Arnstein in 1969 and has become widespread with theories developed and implemented by Clifford (1997), Simon (2010), Mygind et al. (2015), and Hegenbart (2016) (Table 2).

Table 2. Participation Theories and Museum Participation

Participation Theory	Year	Content
A model defining the “ladder of participation” for community participation was developed by Sherry Arnstein, an American academic, almost half a century ago (Knudsen, 2016).	1969	In participation processes, the citizen power is at the top of the ladder of participation. This approach was explained with concepts like collaboration, personal development and therapy. In this approach, the participants played a role actually affecting the museum studies.
Clifford (1997) proposed the “points-of-contact” approach to facilitate and improve participation in museums.	1997	The points of contact approach advocate for symmetric dialogs, exchanges, and negotiations between museums and external partners, rather than the likelihood of external partners gaining autonomous power in museums.
Simon (2010), an American museum theorist and writer, introduced a participation model by distinguishing the four participatory practice types in museums.	2010	Simon argues that the outcomes of participation should guide the evaluation of the participatory process in the museum. Simon’s model is less influenced by democratic obligations, suggesting that the audience must have a role in creating museum content.
Mygind et al. (2015) added the concepts of reconciliation, representation and consultation to Arnstein’s ladder of participation to increase engagement in the museum.	2015	The ladder of participation model was supported by reconciliation, representation and consultation studies. This model places the concept of agreement at the top of the ladder.
Hegenbart (2016) discussed the participation policies of art museums and tried to incorporate participation as an image of social consensus in art.	2016	There is a need for active and participatory viewers rather than passive ones who simply observe artworks so that participatory art museums can exist.

Today’s museums that keep inclusivity in their agendas have sometimes played a complicit role in the establishment of physical and cultural hierarchies that formed the basis of racist thought until the 20th century. Although this is deemed as a clear contrast to the inclusive role that many strive to fulfill today, it can also be considered one of the indicators of the sharp change in museum approaches and practices. According to Anderson and Mileham (2020), museums are more than just collections, exhibitions and programs. They are about and for people too. The conceptual understanding of museums as points-of-contact has been reflected in museum literature and studies, and beyond it (Schorch, 2013a). Based on these changes, museums are expected to play significant roles in promoting social change with regard to racism, diversity and identity (Gurian, 2006; Janes, 2007). With a new approach to museum work, Sandell (2003) emphasized that museums can create social change through courageous and ambitious exhibitions that reframe differences and reform prejudices. Sub-disciplines such as critical museum pedagogy, in particular, cultural studies and diversity studies contain numerous studies that question the relationship between museums, identity and race, in addition to the ongoing bias related to these concepts (Crowley & Matthews, 2006; Crang and Tolia-Kelly, 2010).

For example, the National Museum Wales developed a new vision that encapsulates the commitment to diversity and inclusion for visitor participation. While generating the projects museum inspires people through other Wales museums and collections to find a sense of well-being and identity, to discover, enjoy and learn bilingually, and to understand Wales’ place in the wider world.’ Seven different participant museums of Wales attended this participatory project. The participants chose every element of it to represent their stories. This was then used as a talking point to spark discussion between the participants and others engaging with the exhibition. Black Country Living Museum also opened a participatory exhibition project ‘Sorry! No Coloureds, No Irish, No Dogs’. 300 people attended, encouraged by the community steering group and contacted local networks. The audience included Museum senior managers and board members. Cardiff Story Museum seeks to create a collection for and from the diverse Cardiff community and most of the collection has been donated. The museum opened a storytelling workshop to collect diverse and participatory content and the museum wanted communities to shape the Museum (Aldridge, Larsen, & Jarvis, 2021).

The aim of “Museum with its Regenerated Definition and Functions in the Tackling of Migration Through the

Projection of Migration in Turkish Museums” is to determine the current state of immigration-themed museums in Türkiye, considering the changes in the philosophy and exhibition practices of immigration museums worldwide, led by the evolving definition of museums. Additionally, it seeks to discuss the role of museums in addressing the issue of migrant integration faced by Türkiye. The study is limited to certain museums that focus on the theme of immigration worldwide and are considered good examples, as well as immigration museums and city museums in Türkiye that address the theme of immigration. The study is designed as qualitative research and planned using a survey model. A questionnaire was sent regarding the exhibition contents, visitor engagement approaches, and activities of immigration-themed museums in Türkiye, and the responses were analyzed and results were listed in a table.

Museums and Migration in the Background of Difficult Issues

Schorch (2013b; 2015) suggests that museums select particularly difficult topics to create meaning by using concepts such as identity, race, multiculturalism, inclusivity, participation, diversity and colonialism and to allow visitors to experience the museum as a hermeneutic foundation, noting that museums frequently turn the difficult subject of migration into exhibitions and events. As papers submitted for the 45th symposium organized by ICOFOM under the general theme “taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory”, to be held in Prague and Brno (Czechia) between 22 – 27 August 2022 defined and M. Elizabeth Weiser, Marion Bertin and Anna Leshchenko edited them as a book titled *Taboos in Museology: Difficult issues for museum theory; the taboos or difficult issues as gender issues, colonialism, exhibition war, LGBT issues, taboo of activism, politics, digital advancement and migration should be held by the museums* (Bertin, 2022).

Migration is fundamentally a human action, movement and process. It can show unique characteristics depending on time, space, geography and the reflections of cultural, economic, or social practices of the migrating groups. Therefore, it affects many aspects of the social sphere, particularly culture, economy, lifestyle and social development. One of these aspects is the transfer of culture, tradition, manners and customs, beliefs, and ideologies from one geography to another through migrations (Alarçin, 2019; Bartram, Poros, & Monforte, 2017). Since the twentieth century, most of the developed and developing countries have quickly become centres of change, multicultural, and accommodating heterogeneous communities. Similar changes bind museums to become more intrigued in preserving the cultural heritage of communities which are fast changing or disappearing due to the impacts of globalisation. By prioritising the economy, governments had increased divisions and exclusions of many who could not cope (Gurria, 2019; Pugno, 2022, Vella, 2023).

The transfer of cultures brings along the reality and practices of multiculturalism. The crisis of multiculturalism generally appears in countries that receive international migration due to heavy migration and emerging problems. Cultural heritage managers (in museums, civil society organizations, political organizations, etc.) have some responsibilities in the multiculturalism crisis. Among these are to increase the participation of the people in the development of local heritage and to support immigrants in their cultures in order to provide intercultural competencies in society. Migrations mostly show a tendency from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. Wars, lack of economic opportunities and climate change are among the driving forces that trigger current migrations. There is an increase in concerns about migration flows in the European Union and host countries due to identity crises caused by migrations; refugee and immigrant influxes are met with concern by European peoples and are defined as a “siege” (Babić, 2018; Bevelander & Johansson, 2017). Geddes (2016) analyzes the phenomenon of migration to Europe from different perspectives and emphasizes that migration is more on the agenda than ever before. Peressut and Pozzi (2012) also define our time as the “age of migration”. According to the authors, although migrations have always been, they increasingly become different in terms of quantity, speed and complexity today, with increasing prejudice and xenophobia (Carbone, 2019; Klug, 2012).

The effects of international migration and mobility on the museum sector cannot be denied. To keep up with the times and address issues related to all citizens inclusively, the museum sector needs to address problems that cross national borders. It is possible to explore both the past and the present of museums on issues such as migration, mobility, transnational connections and human rights and to make positive changes in people’s relations with each other. Thus, it ultimately contributes to diversity and sustainable development by emphasizing inclusivity (Bevelander & Johansson, 2017). Recognizing and conserving diversity is crucial. Tolerance, dialog and mutual understanding are important values in the spread of culture as a result of multiculturalism that comes with migration. Therefore, cultural institutions play a key role in promoting intercultural competencies. Cultural policies must take into account the demands and needs of both migrants and host communities. Museums can become supporters of this approach, intercultural dialog and cultural cooperation. It is important not to separate the problems of migrants from those of host communities in decision-making processes (Vertovec, 2007; Carbone, 2019).

Migration is a difficult topic to address, but it has become a phenomenon that is frequently included in

museum practices by both museum professionals and academics. Museums that tell the history of migration can highly be found in Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, and diaspora or genocide-related American museums. These museums define new strategies for museums in a context characterized by migration. The concept of migration addressed by these museums includes representatives and examples of cultures (such as intangible cultures and heritage); things (objects, relics, artworks, contemporary exhibitions), knowledge and information (messages, ideas, people). Networks between museums, online museums or exhibitions, digital archives and databases are within the scope of the subject. The research areas of these museums are as follows:

1. Museums and identities in history and today.
2. Cultural memory, migrating modernity and museum practices.
3. Networks established by museums, libraries and public cultural institutions.
4. Curatorial and artistic research.
5. Focusing on migration in exhibition design, representation technology and experimental actions.
6. Predicting the contents and strategies of the 21st-century museums (Onur, 2014).

Migration museums in the UK, Australia, and the USA play a critical role in preserving, interpreting, and showcasing the history and stories of immigration, highlighting the experiences of diverse immigrant communities. Each country's migration museums reflect their unique immigration histories, but they share common themes such as inclusion, identity, and the complex social, economic, and cultural impacts of immigration. For example, Migration Museum (London), dedicated solely to the topic of migration, showcases the lives, contributions, and challenges faced by immigrants who have shaped Britain. It highlights different waves of migration, from early settlers to post-colonial immigrants, and more recent refugees. The Museum of London Docklands explores the history of London's port and its role in trade, colonization, and migration. Exhibits delve into the Atlantic slave trade, London's historic role as a hub for immigrants, and the diverse communities that built the city. Australian National Maritime Museum focuses on maritime history; this museum has significant exhibits on immigration due to the centrality of seafaring to Australia's migration story. The museum's permanent exhibition "Passengers" examines the journeys of people who migrated to Australia by ship. Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration located on the former immigration processing station, tells the story of the millions of immigrants who arrived in the U.S. through Ellis Island in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The museum also covers broader immigration history, reflecting America's role as a "nation of immigrants." Angel Island Immigration Station often referred to as the "Ellis Island of the West," Angel Island was the primary entry point for immigrants from Asia, particularly China, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Unlike Ellis Island, it also served as a detention center due to the restrictive Chinese Exclusion Act.

According to Szekeres (2007), for example, migration museums in Australia are the first examples of this phenomenon being discussed within democratic frameworks. The migration museums established in Adelaide and Melbourne aim to collect, conserve and present evidence of Australia's migration history. Museums also intend to create awareness about cultural traditions that conserve and enrich a country's cultural diversity. In this context, Australian migration museums have defined multiculturalism to include not only ethnicity but also other elements of identity such as class, race, gender, age and religion in an inclusive manner (McKernan, 2020). Heinrich (2013), while tracing the history of migration-themed exhibitions in Australia, links their foundation to three stages:

1. Migration-themed museums and exhibitions aimed to integrate minority immigrant experiences into a pluralistic national narrative in the mid-1980s.
2. These museums democratized the second stage of the migration narrative as of the mid-1990s, and in the last decade, they have begun to focus on transnational networks and personal identity.
3. As of the millennium, the history of migration has been reconstructed in museums as a substantially apolitical and celebratory evolution.

THE APPROACH TO MIGRATION THEMES IN MUSEUMS IN TÜRKİYE WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE NEW MUSEUM DEFINITION

The migration phenomenon in Türkiye, as a primary theme, is addressed under the title of “exchange” by exchange museums such as Alaçam, Çatalca, Buca, Tuzla, Subaşı, etc. and there are thematic examples examining the different dimensions and types of migration, as in the case of Bursa. Migration, as a phenomenon, is also addressed by city museums (for example, Edirne City Museum, Samsun City Museum, Çanakkale City Museum, Diyarbakır City Museum, Eti City and Migration Museum etc.). Baksı Museum is a centre of migration in the city of Bayburt. People depart Bayburt, build new lives and travel to cities of Türkiye previously unknown to them, joining the battle for existence elsewhere and the aim of the museum is to prevent internal migration from this city to other cities and to help produce together with the public, for the public. Kenan Yavuz Ethnography Museum is also situated in Bayburt and has won Silletto Award for 2021, although young in age, has managed to find effective ways to advocate the conscious return to local roots and heritage. It is successful in engaging its local community and is equally forceful in demonstrating how cultural projects, which build on the richness of village heritage, can regenerate rural social and economic life. In 2024, Keşan City Museum also opened in Edirne to create a social memory space by combining the founding story of Keşan, a district of Edirne, with its migration history and urban history. The museum collected the objects with the local residents and prepared participatory museum exhibitions.

Keskin (2017), states that one of the main problems faced in the establishment of city museums is the issue of addressing the migration phenomenon, emphasizing that the reason for the establishment of these museums is the effort of incessantly expanding cities, growing with migration and/or population increase, and thus facing more identity and root problems by remembering/creating their past to overcome these problems. These examples prepare activities corresponding to the functions included in the ICOM’s new museum definition (Table 3).

Table 3. The Approach to the Migration Theme in Turkish Museums in Line with the New Museum Definition

Museum		Content	Exhibitions and Events Corresponding to the Definition
Baksı (Bayburt)	Museum	Contemporary art exhibitions and events developed to establish a dialog with the geography of Baksı (Bayraktar Village), be open to interactions, and bring together tradition and modernity.	Dialog and the local geography Participation of the local community and visitors Meeting of traditional art and contemporary art
Kenan Ethnography (Bayburt)	Yavuz Museum	Exhibitions and events including a “living museum” concept prepared to emphasize the disappearing local beauties, the destructed social life, the fragmented families, and the decreasing population due to the migrations from Bayburt to other cities and abroad since the 1950s and prevent the intergenerational disengagement.	Dialog Participation of the local community and visitors Inclusivity of the local community Social science studies
Bursa (Bursa)	Museum of History	Exhibitions and events consisting of enlightenment on the historical process from the migration of Turks to Anatolia and the conquest of Bursa by the Ottomans to the settlement of Ottomans to the Balkans, as well as vivification and objects related to the reconstruction of the migration process from the Balkans, the Caucasus, Crimea and surrounding areas back to Anatolia.	Dialog Visitors’ participation through museum training
Subaşı Migration (Yalova)	Primary School Museum	Exhibitions and events prepared with materials related to the migration starting from Bulgaria-Madrova in 1935 and the experiences during this journey, the foundation of the village, developments in agriculture and business, all kinds of ethnographic materials, agricultural tools, copper buckets, water jugs, traditional wear, and customs brought during migration.	Dialog Participation of the local community and visitors Inclusivity of the local community
Çatalca Museum (Istanbul)	Exchange	Exhibitions prepared to conserve the culture and transfer it to future generations through ethnographic pieces such as daily items, documents, and photographs of the people who	Dialog Participation of the local community and visitors Inclusivity of the local community

Museum	Content	Exhibitions and Events Corresponding to the Definition
	settled in Çatalca with the population exchange between Türkiye and Greece.	
Alaçam Exchange Museum (Samsun)	Exhibitions and events prepared to conserve the culture and transfer it to future generations through ethnographic pieces such as daily items, documents, and photographs of the people who settled in Samsun with the population exchange between Türkiye and Greece.	Dialog Participation of the local community and visitors Inclusivity of the local community
Edirne City Museum (Hafızağa Mansion, Edirne)	Exhibitions and events prepared through various visuals and documents at the museum show the difficult period that Edirne, which has received 11 migrations in total from Greece, Bulgaria, and Macedonia throughout history, particularly during the Balkan Wars.	Dialog Visitors' participation through museum training Inclusivity of the local community
Tuzla City and Exchange Museum (Istanbul)	Exhibitions and events prepared to conserve the culture and transfer it to future generations through ethnographic pieces such as daily items, documents, and photographs related to the history of the people migrating from Greece with the population exchange and the local families of Tuzla in 1923.	Dialog Participation of the local community and visitors Inclusivity of the local community
Buca Migration and Exchange Memory House (Izmir)	Exhibitions and events prepared to conserve and transfer cultural elements, conserved until today, belonging to the immigrants' and their relatives' lives who experienced the Turkish-Greek population exchange in a historical house in Buca, where restoration has been completed.	Dialog Participation of the local community and visitors Inclusivity of the local community
Keşan City Museum (Edirne)	The aim is to create a social memory space by combining the founding story of Keşan, a district of Edirne, with its migration history and urban history.	Participation of the local community and visitors Inclusivity of the local community
Eti City and Migration Museum (Eskişehir)	Under construction	Under construction

The researchers asked these museums in which exhibition, activity or philosophical context the issue of "migration" would be discussed in the 2023–2024 strategies of the migration-themed museums in [Table 3](#), with a structured questionnaire.

One of the issues that should be overemphasized in the process of addressing the phenomenon of migration in museums in Türkiye is the situation of refugees. It is worth noting that there are examples that focus on population exchange, which is an important issue in Turkish history, and that include both tangible and intangible elements related to this topic. However, there are also examples that ethnographically address how cities were founded through migration, in which periods of history they received heavy migration and how they were shaped by it. As of 2023, Türkiye hosts the largest number of refugees in the world, with around 3.6 to 3.7 million Syrian refugees under temporary protection, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In addition to Syrians, Türkiye also hosts over 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers from other countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and various African nations. This brings the total refugee population in Türkiye to approximately 4 million. Türkiye's geographic location has made it a major destination and transit point for people fleeing conflict and persecution, particularly from neighboring regions. The country has implemented various policies and initiatives to manage and support this large population, but the social, economic, and political impacts remain significant. These ongoing migrations, the duration and extent of which are unpredictable, cause many social, economic, and political problems both in Syria and in the neighboring countries (Sezik & Ağır, 2015). As for this date, Türkiye announced that it would apply an "open door policy" for Syrians, stating that 100,000 people were a critical threshold, but the migration wave from Syria has gone far beyond expectations. Despite the extension of the duration and the dramatic increase in the number, Türkiye has continued to accept Syrians. The growing number of Syrian refugees is having an impact on Turkish society's economy, social structure and politics. Due to its strong historical, cultural, and neighborhood ties with Syria, Türkiye has adopted an open-door policy towards Syrian citizens, which has resulted in a 44% acceptance rate within four years. As a result, Türkiye has become the country hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees

among neighboring countries. Initially, the Syrian refugees coming to Türkiye were only accommodated in border provinces and camps. With the civil war dragging on, the number of camps became insufficient and both the Syrian refugees and other refugees in Türkiye chose to live with their relatives or in rented houses in neighboring cities or districts. The number and mobility of refugees in various cities of Türkiye, particularly major cities such as Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara, are high besides camps especially prepared for refugees (Keser & Meral, 2016).

The number of uninsured, unregistered and insecure Syrian workers in Türkiye has increased since 2015. These groups face problems such as occupational health and safety, and the inability to receive full and timely payments. Refugees can also bring legal, social and cultural problems along with financial burdens. Studies indicate that the tendency towards crime increases due to the psychosocial problems of Syrians in Türkiye. Research also emphasizes that the number of Syrian prisoners has increased among foreigners in prisons. In September 2015, the rate of Syrian involvement in crime among other foreigners in prisons was 40%. In light of all these evaluations, the return of Syrian refugees does not seem possible in the short term. According to research, Turkish society does not want them to stay permanently (Erdoğan, 2017; Sever, 2020; Khalaf & Ilgar, 2017; Akdeniz, 2018; Tunç, 2015).

Practical solutions that can touch the lives of refugees experiencing a cultural identity crisis need to be developed rather than theoretically planned activities in order to solve this problem both to conserve their own culture and adapt to Turkish culture. In this regard, museums have important roles. It is important that refugee students can continue their education for the social adaptation of refugees and their social acceptance. In addition to the museums mentioned above, museum education activities have been held since 2018 to accelerate museum projects that can ensure the cultural adaptation of refugees to Türkiye. The “A Day in the Museum” project, initiated by UNICEF Türkiye in 2018, aims to use museums to provide psycho-social development and welfare for immigrant and refugee children during their adaptation process. The projects aimed to increase bonding between Turkish and Syrian children through art and hundreds of children participated in it at the CerModern Art Museum in Ankara. Another project initiated by various civil society organizations in museums was the “Aynı Toprakta Yetişen Fidanlar” project implemented by the Support to Life association. The aim of the project initiated to ensure the integration of Turkish and Syrian children is also to ensure the development of their hand-motor skills, contribution to breaking language barriers and support their socialization through joint work. Within the scope of this project, the children took part in kite-making and storytelling activities at the Kite Museum and Story Museum in Üsküdar, Istanbul. The Safranbolu Chocolate Museum also drew the heavy attention of refugee children.

The museum visits and educational activities were organized at archaeological museums in Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep and Hatay provinces in Türkiye by Provincial Immigration Directorates and contributions were regularly made to improving the socialization and adaptation skills of children in refugee camps through museums. Syrian children aged 4–15 years who lost their parents due to the civil war in Syria participated in educational activities at the Kahramanmaraş Archaeology Museum. The Hatay Archaeology Museum opened its doors to immigrant and refugee children aged 6–12 years and prepared educational activities based on worldwide known mosaics before the nationwide earthquakes in 2023 in Turkey. Guided museum tours and workshops were organized for Ankara Toy Museum and Istanbul Toy Museum within the scope of rehabilitation and psychological support projects. Educational activities were organized for Iraqi Turkmen refugee children in the Universal Values Children’s Museum in Ankara. The importance of the rehabilitation of children and young people through museums has been ascertained by various studies (Chatterjee & Camic, 2015; Ander et al., 2013; Chatterjee & Noble, 2013). “Museums are increasingly playing a role in improving health and well-being (Dodd & Jones, 2014) and evidence shows that engaging with museums provides positive social experiences, leading to reduced social isolation; opportunities for learning and acquiring new skills; calming experiences, leading to decreased anxiety; increased positive emotions, such as optimism, hope and enjoyment; increased self-esteem and sense of identity; increased inspiration and opportunities for meaning making; positive distraction from clinical environments, including hospitals and care homes; and increased communication among families, caregivers and health professional” (Chatterjee & Noble, 2013). Events and activities that serve the well-being of disadvantaged groups should be organized in Turkish museums in a way that highlights the healing power of museums. Among the disadvantaged groups are the earthquake victims living in 11 cities affected by the earthquake centered in Kahramanmaraş province in 2023. The destruction caused by the earthquake in public spaces and social house-dwellings forced a large population to migrate to safer cities, making it necessary for earthquake victims to receive social and psychological support. In this sense, a process has begun for museums located in cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir and Antalya to prepare exhibitions and activities considering the internal migration caused by the earthquake.

Rethinking the roles, representations, collections and collaborations of museums can contribute to the development of museum/heritage theory and practice. The ICOM’s new museum definition provides us reasons to

rethink how we understand the roles and functions of museums in contemporary society from a more global perspective. When we focus on how museum collections are created and organized today, multidimensional interpretations stand out; conflicting and difficult issues are boldly addressed; museum examples that embrace diversity are presented to audiences; and there are efforts to create global values. Migration and immigration, which are among the most challenging issues of our age, have become the primary focus of museums established in this sense. In this regard, the agenda is occupied by the stories of immigrants and refugees through more effective and operational work. The following are the points that museums should consider to continue their more effective and operational work for immigrants and refugees:

1. Museums should tell the stories of refugees to as many viewers as possible.
2. Museums should emphasize with examples that migration is a phenomenon that any society may experience.
3. When telling stories, museums should focus on themes and collaborations as much as on communities.
4. Museums should go beyond their walls to work with immigrants and refugees.
5. Museums should plan events that bring refugees and their neighbors together.

The report titled “Museums & Society 2034: Trends and Potential Futures” prepared by McGhie (2019) and the American Association of Museums (2008) emphasizes that museums’ functions in shaping the future are much more important. The results of the report provide results that overlap with the new museum definition accepted by ICOM. According to the report, education is the primary function of museums. Museums will serve as significant catalysts by giving more space to projects contributing to education in disadvantaged communities. Museum means equal opportunities. Museums should speed up their efforts to provide equal opportunities for families, mothers and girls with low socio-economic status. They should imitate roles from schools in family education. They should exert more effort to better understand different communities. It is necessary to develop collaboration networks to achieve these goals. Museums, to become important public spaces for civil dialog, will maintain to be the most reliable source of information for society by bringing together people from different sectors. The use of technology is also among the issues that should not be ignored by museums while constructing the future. Museums increase people’s interest in real objects and their curiosity about the past. Objects of museums are authentic. Museums can play an important role in increasing interest in authentic objects and in achieving meaningful integration of the real and the digital. This integration is also necessary for the dissemination of digital cultural heritage studies.

The most important headings of the report that overlap with the ICOM’s new definition of the museum are accessibility, sustainability and diversity. These concepts work well in migration museums. Accessibility can be ensured through elements such as accomplishing a universal and interesting design even in the smallest museums, increased accessibility of viewers with disabilities, children, elderly, etc. to the museum, and diversification of the Internet and social media accounts of the museum. Sustainability will be the most important agenda of museums. This heading includes achieving energy efficiency, combating expensive energy, eliminating carbon emissions and threats, and having the ability to cope with issues such as climate change and the rapidly increasing population. Transitioning to green architecture and minimizing energy consumption in museums fall within this scope. Diversity, however, means handling the museum as an open space and point of contact for everyone. These conclusions should be deemed an indispensable guide for museums that are committed to working on difficult issues and are brave enough to do so.

DISCUSSION

The immigrant problem in Türkiye is a complex and multifaceted issue. Türkiye stands out as one of the leading countries hosting refugees seeking international protection and has become a host to immigrants who have to leave their countries for different reasons. Faced with similar problems, multinational countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and France have accepted the history of migration as an issue that museums should also address and have opened many European Union-supported migration, history of migration museums, and society museums. In addition to that city museums or community museums have prepared permanent and temporary exhibitions in migration culture.

Museums that deal with the phenomenon of immigration in Türkiye exhibit history, culture, experience and human stories related to immigration. These museums aim to explain how migration has been shaped throughout history, the difficulties and successes of immigrants, the integration processes of immigrants into new societies, and the effects of immigration on societies. When migration-themed museums abroad and in Türkiye are examined, it is observed that they offer visitors the opportunity to get to know the life and experience of

immigrants more closely with documentary photographs, personal belongings, video interviews, documents, maps and interactive exhibitions. Example museums from Türkiye also include historical events, policies and social changes related to immigration, and generally emphasize the phenomenon of exchange, which came to the fore after World War I. When the collections and contents of immigration museums in Türkiye are viewed, it can be said that these museums aim to raise awareness about immigrants in Turkish society, to enable people to understand the immigration experience more deeply, and to raise awareness about the diversity and inclusiveness of societies. However, there is also a need for an exhibition approach and narrative that brings to the fore the population structure of Türkiye, which has diversified in recent years, especially with immigration, and emphasizes the immigrant problem. The museum, which presents a migration narrative in this context, may aim to preserve, share and promote migration-related heritage.

The museum can explain immigration by sharing stories and experiences in a way that helps the visitor develop empathy. Personal materials such as photographs, letters, diaries and audio recordings can give visitors a closer look at the hardships and joys experienced by immigrants. By using interactive exhibits and digital media, the museum can allow visitors to experience immigrant issues in a more interactive way. Technological tools such as virtual reality, touch screens, and interactive games can provide visitors with an interactive platform to explore immigration-related topics. It can tell the lives and experiences of immigrants to a wider audience using immigration-related documentaries, films, videos and interviews. Immigrant issues can be supported with educational programs and seminars at the museum. Speeches, workshops and interactive learning events can provide visitors with insight and help them understand immigration issues more deeply. Immigrant issues can encourage social interaction and dialogue in the museum, providing visitors with the opportunity to understand and evaluate different perspectives.

This study underscores the transformative role of museums in addressing migration, a pressing issue in contemporary society. By exploring the evolving definition and functions of museums as proposed by ICOM, it becomes evident that inclusivity, participation, and sustainability are not only guiding principles but also necessary frameworks for engaging with complex phenomena such as migration. Museums are increasingly expected to serve as platforms for dialog, empathy, and social cohesion, making them pivotal in fostering a deeper understanding of migration's multifaceted impacts on individuals and communities.

The findings reveal that migration museums in Türkiye and abroad not only document historical narratives but also create spaces for intercultural exchange and personal reflection. For instance, examples from the UK and Australia highlight how participatory projects allow migrant communities to co-curate exhibitions, thus ensuring representation and authenticity. Such practices align with Simon's participatory museum model, which emphasizes audience engagement in content creation. However, in the Turkish context, the study identifies gaps in the narrative of contemporary migration, particularly the challenges faced by refugees and their integration into society. While museums like the Bursa Museum of Migration History and Kenan Yavuz Ethnography Museum address historical migrations effectively, there is a pressing need to expand these narratives to reflect current realities, including the experiences of Syrian refugees and internal migration caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes.

The study also highlights the potential of museums to act as agents of social change. By presenting migration narratives through interactive exhibits, personal stories, and educational programs, museums can challenge stereotypes, foster empathy, and promote inclusivity. This aligns with the growing body of research emphasizing the role of cultural institutions in addressing social isolation and mental health challenges among marginalized groups. Initiatives such as "A Day in the Museum" and etc demonstrate how museums can bridge cultural divides and provide therapeutic benefits to refugee children. However, several challenges still remain. The study notes that many migration museums struggle with balancing their traditional roles as preservers of tangible heritage with their contemporary functions as facilitators of dialog and inclusion. Additionally, the reliance on participatory methods raises questions about power dynamics and the extent to which migrant communities truly influence museum narratives. Addressing these challenges requires museums to adopt more inclusive decision-making processes and to invest in capacity-building initiatives that empower marginalized voices.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing discourse on the role of museums in tackling difficult issues such as migration. By integrating sustainability, inclusivity, and participation into their practices, museums can serve as vital platforms for social transformation. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of participatory museum practices on both migrant communities and the broader public, as well as investigate the use of emerging technologies in enhancing accessibility and engagement in migration-themed exhibitions.

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ETHICAL DECLARATION

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. **Financing:** This study received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. **Peer review:** Double anonymous peer review.