



A museum that asks questions

The Museum der Kulturen Basel is introducing a new communication format with the “Kultur-Dialog / Dialog-Kultur” (Culture dialogue / dialogue culture) project. Specially trained culture mediators converse with visitors. During this conversation, they not only answer questions but pose some too. This enables guests to engage in deeper cultural discussions about the museum and individual exhibition themes. The museum will also benefit from this exchange.

In its efforts to offer space for cultural encounters, the Museum der Kulturen Basel is exploring a new path and is introducing an innovative form of conversation culture under the title “Kultur-Dialog / Dialog-Kultur” (Culture dialogue / dialogue culture). Trained culture mediators actively approach visitors to the exhibitions. They ask questions, provide answers, and enter into cultural discussions with guests. Anna Schmid, the museum’s director, is confident that the exchange is suited to visitors in large numbers, to promote lasting insights into the far-reaching cultural change in our world and the presentation of this world in a museum. “Our museum is a place of encounters and inspiration. Being a dynamic institution, we want to stimulate discussion”, says Anna Schmid. The Mercator Foundation Switzerland is facilitating this new form of knowledge exchange by funding the trial.

Discussions with visitors

Discussions about ethnologic and socially relevant questions introduce new points of view about the museum and the content of the exhibitions to guests. They will be encouraged to reflect on and discuss their perceptions of culture. “In doing so, they will broaden their knowledge and deepen their understanding of their own culture and other cultural backgrounds”, explains Nadine Felix, managing director of Mercator Foundation Switzerland. The museum and the Foundation are expecting a content-rich exchange of ideas between visitors and the museum, a place of reflection and knowledge transfer, from this new culture of dialogue. The culture mediators want to inspire a new, young audience to visit the museum with their simple and inviting mode of discussion. At the same time, the Museum der Kulturen has the opportunity to get to know the points of view of its visitors. “A mutual exchange such as this one is important for establishing the museum as a discussion platform for a broad section of the public”, says Anna Schmid.

Professional training

Twelve specialists – primarily students of ethnology and cultural studies – took part in a twelve-day workshop to prepare for their duties as culture mediators. Communications specialist Dan Wiener designed a special concept for this. This enables the culture mediators to invite willing visitors to engage in discussions and embark upon an intellectual cultural expedition with them. In addition, the

workshop participants benefited in their education from various cultural and museum-specific inputs from professor Walter Leimgruber and the museum's director, Anna Schmid.

In the new communication format's introductory phase, the culture mediators will be available every Thursday from 2 p.m. and on Saturdays and Sundays. In the longer term, the Museum der Kulturen plans to extend this to cover all opening hours.

About the Foundation

The Mercator Foundation Switzerland promotes and initiates projects in three areas – science, children and young people, and people and the environment. It is committed to a society which is willing to learn and open to the world, and which deals responsibly with the environment. Its projects within higher education are helping the Foundation to strengthen Switzerland as a research base. The Foundation advocates better educational opportunities within and outside schools to give children and young people the ability to develop their personalities, improve their involvement in society and make the most of the opportunities available to them. In addition, the Foundation aims to contribute to the scientific assimilation of knowledge for the conservation of natural resources, and to sensitize society to environmental issues.

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