Collection Concept

Stiftung
Haus der Geschichte
der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

Collecting for the Future

A museum's core tasks not only include the activities around exhibitions, but also the work of expanding and conserving the collections. The objects in the collections connect us to the past and constitute a crucial part of our cultural memory. Here, the questions may rightly be asked: What is and ought to be collected in museums? How is memory structured by these traces of material heritage? Museums, in particular those publicly funded and supported, are not only called on to present their holdings to the public, but should also actively encourage discussion on the objectives of their collection. The foundation for this debate is provided by a museum's Collection Concept, which needs to be regularly developed and updated.

The concrete collection mandate of the Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Foundation House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany) was defined by Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl in his official government policy statement on 13 October 1982. He stated that the objective was to establish "a collection on German history since 1945". In this way, for the first time in Germany, a museum was entrusted with the task of directly collecting and documenting contemporary history. This mandate represented a special challenge since at this time there was no international or national experience in this area to draw on. Moreover, against this background, it was necessary from the outset to develop new collection methods and strategies.

In late 2014 in a final step, after extensive discussion with specialists and the Foundation committees and on the basis of the experience gathered since 1986, the Foundation presented its comprehensive Collection Concept. Since then, this paper has been available on the Foundation's website.

The Collection Concept traces a trajectory from the political mandate and legal basis to the leading academic disciplines, the infrastructure of the collections and the effective organisation of workflows. The Foundation's collections take the classic material genres as one point of reference, together with the principal thematic topics in its exhibitions as well as current issues of concern. Over the recent years, "objects" in the digital world have also become increasingly important. Digitisation has revolutionised the methods for indexing objects and making them accessible for users both inside and outside the Foundation.

Taking the general Collection Concept as a basis, the Foundation's research and academic staff developed historically sound, in-depth papers on the individual collection areas. These papers also have to be constantly updated.

Collection Concepts should serve to delineate a clear collection profile and define a set of practical and viable conditions for both collectors and users. The Collection Concept of the Foundation House of History provides the fundament for developing the collection and forms the present and future basis for expanding and updating, systematically and appropriately, the cultural memory of the nation.

In this way, thanks to their authentic objects and documents and a wide range of digitised materials, museum collections open the way to remember the past and to present history.

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I Introduction

Museum collections are part of cultural heritage, connecting the past, present and future of a society. In an increasingly complex and differentiated world, they can promote civic trust, serve to affirm social identity, and define positions. As a museum for contemporary German history, the Foundation House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany collects at all its locations in Bonn, Berlin and Leipzig.

Publicly-funded museum collections require a rationale and justification, and this can be provided, among other things, by a regularly updated Collection Concept.

This Collection Concept begins by defining Foundation's concrete mandate as well as the statutory basis for establishing a collection on German contemporary history. In a further step, the principal importance of collections in the work of museums is elucidated. After an overview of the previous Collection Concepts in the context of delineating the Foundation from other cultural heritage organisations, the key academic disciplines for the collections are addressed. These provide the basis for concrete considerations on the collection structure and collecting methods.

Finally, the link between the object and informational content is discussed. The chapter on Collecting and the Digital World focusses on the significance of the internet and increasing digitisation as challenges for cultural institutions.

In conclusion, the Collection Concept examines the concrete workflow and infrastructure necessary for expanding, conserving and indexing the collections and making them accessible to the public.

II Mandate and Principles

1 Political Mandate and Legal Basis

The initiative to establish the Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland was introduced by Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl in his first official government policy statement on 13 October 1982: "We intend to work towards establishing in the Federal capital of Bonn, as soon as possible, a collection on German history since 1945 dedicated to the history of our country and the divided nation."[1]

This initiative gained a concrete form in the decree of 1 March 1986 setting up the Foundation and the Act of Foundation on 28 February 1990 transforming it into an independent body. Here, the Foundation's purpose is defined as "presenting in an exhibition, documentation and information centre the history of the Federal Republic of Germany including the history of the German Democratic Republic as well as antecedents and formation history and disseminating such knowledge."[2] This purpose is explained in the statement of reasons for the act to establish the Foundation where, evincing the incomplete nature of the permanent collection, the mandate is explicitly defined as "carefully following contemporary events, appraising the inclusion of more recent historical events in the exhibition and collecting possible objects for exhibitions."[3] This mandate was adopted in the Foundation's statutes.

In 1983, the Federal Government appointed an independent commission of experts. As early as July 1984, the commission's draft "Thoughts on and Suggestions for the Establishment of a Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn" was calling for "promptly starting with the first acquisitions of objects relating to material culture."[4]

The Foundation's mandate to build up a collection is derived from the government policy statement, the law on establishing the Foundation, the legal intent of the Act establishing the Foundation, and its prehistory. The legislator hence recognises the importance of a museum collection for the culture of memory of contemporary history and, by establishing the Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, closes the previous gap in the area of collecting material culture on a national level. Thus, the Foundation acts on the Federal level for the sphere of collecting contemporary history together with the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (German National Library) and the Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives).

On 27 May 1992, the Unabhängige Föderalismuskommission (Independent Federalism Commission) proposed founding an Archive of German Unity in Leipzig. In January 1993, the Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der

1 Kohl, Helmut: Government Policy Statement, 13 October 1982; Stenographic Record of 121st Session of the German Bundestag, Minutes of Plenary Proceedings 9/121, p. 7227 (C).

2 Section 2, Law to Establish a "Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland", 28 February 1990, BGBl. I, p. 294; last amended by Article 15 Para. 60 of the Act from 5 February 2009, BGBl. I, p. 260.

3 Statement of Reasons for the Act to Establish the "Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland", Bundestagsdrucksache (German parliament publications) 11/2583, p. 9. The remit is also expressed in a similar form in the Foundation Statutes (Section 1, Para. 3, p. 3): "The Foundation therefore also has the mandate of carefully following contemporary events, appraising the inclusion of more recent historical events in the exhibition, and establishing and developing a collection of historical objects on the themes of the exhibitions".

4 Gall, L., Hildebrand, K., Löber, U., Möller, H.: Überlegungen und Vorschläge zur Errichtung eines "Hauses der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn", Bonn 1984, p. 29.

Bundesrepublik Deutschland then presented a framework plan for this proposal. The plan envisaged the institution to be founded as "more than an archive, more than a memorial site, more than a discussion forum. Its comprehensive objective can best be defined as an 'exhibition, documentation and information centre'". The objective is described in the words: "An institution on German Unity – whether as archive, commemorative or memorial site, documentation centre, forum, or museum – is to be understood as a place where the events are remembered which led to […] German reunification. The institution's primary task must be to become, through the judicious collecting, cataloguing and utilisation of documents, a 'place of living memory'. […] In the sphere of GDR daily culture in particular, the task of collecting and documenting seems essential."[5] The framework plan continues: "Mementos, documents, recordings and interviews with contemporary witnesses are to be collected, indexed and made accessible to visitors in an information centre."[6] In a series of resolutions since October 1993, the Foundation's official bodies have played their part in supporting the establishment of the new institution and justifying its development. The Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig (Leipzig Forum of Contemporary History) was opened on 9 October 1999.

In the meeting of the Foundation's Board of Trustees on 7 December 2004, Chairman Dr. Knut Nevermann, Ministerial Head of Department, advised that the Foundation would take over the Industrial Design Collection with the task of conserving and indexing it. In this way, the Foundation ensured that this extensive collection of around 160,000 objects remains together and is professionally managed, and will thus also be available to future generations.[7] The collection was taken into the Foundation House of History on 1 July 2005.

Under their policy mandate, all four of the Foundation's museums in the cities of Bonn, Leipzig and Berlin are designed as exhibition, information and documentation centres. In this way, the responsible authority has shown an innovative approach to building up a collection by linking classic museum collecting to the modern components of "indexing documentation" and "providing public access to information". In the meantime, this has become a model for other contemporary history museums and institutions in Germany and abroad.

5 Rahmenkonzept: Überlegungen zur Errichtung eines "Ausstellungs-, Dokumentations- und Informationszentrums zur deutschen Einheit (Leipzig)", January 1993.

6 Ibid.

7 See Instruction by the Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media. "Fortschreibung der Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes: 'Verantwortung wahrnehmen, Aufarbeitung verstärken, Gedenken vertiefen'", 19 June 2008, Bundestagsdrucksache (German parliament publications) 16/9875, pp. 9–10.

2 Subject-Specific Orientation

The policy mandate is given a concrete form in the Foundation's practical work. In fulfilling its collection tasks, the Foundation derives the theoretical basis and orientation of its methodological approach from the corresponding academic disciplines.

2.1 Museum and Collections

In principle, collections are a constitutive element of a museum. The Deutscher Museumsbund (German Museums Association) has defined a museum as "a publicly or privately funded collection comprising cultural and natural history objects worthy of preservation which, at least in part, is regularly accessible to the public as an exhibition, serves non-profit purposes and has neither a commercial structure nor function."[8] According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM), a museum is an institution that "acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment."[9]

2.2 Previous Collection Concept

Every museum collection should rest on a strong Collection Concept rooted in the specific mandate. It serves to define a collection's purpose and aim as well as the individual collection areas. The first thoughts on the Foundation's Collection Concept already appeared in writing in 1987. Since then the conceptual ideas have been regularly evolved, with the Collection Concept last updated in 2005.[10] In addition, the overall concept is constantly updated in collection development plans for the individual collection areas.

2.3 Delineation of Tasks

With its museums for contemporary history, the Foundation House of History delineates its tasks as distinct from those in archives, libraries and media libraries. The Federal Archives' statutory task is to collect "paper files, single written papers, maps, plans as well as data, pictures, film, and sound carriers and other recordings", which "Federal constitutional bodies, agencies and courts, Federal corporations, public institutions and foundations under public law as well as other Federal agencies […] no longer need for fulfilling their public duties including the safeguarding of the security of the Federal Republic of Germany or one of its States."[11] The Foundation is not entrusted with a collecting mandate in these fields.

8 Deutscher Museumsbund definition in: Deutscher Museumsbund (ed.): Museumskunde 3 (1978).

9 ICOM definition, 2006: URL: https://icom.museum/en/faq/what-is-icoms-definition-of-a-museum

10 Preißler, Dietmar: "Museumsobjekt und kulturelles Gedächtnis. Anspruch und Wirklichkeit beim Aufbau einer zeithistorischen Sammlung", in: Museumskunde 70 (2005), pp. 47–53.

11 See Sections 1 and 2 of the Law on the Preservation and Use of Federal Archival Documents (Federal Archives Act – BArchG) of 6 January 1988 (BGBl. I p. 62), last amended by the Third Law on Amending the Federal Archives Act, 27 June 2013 (BGBl. I p.1888). URL: https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/de/de141en.pdf

However, since archives cannot collect all important paper objects relating to contemporary history, photo albums, non-state archival and printed materials, leaflets, posters, and other products of commercial art form a distinct museal collection area.

Moreover, the work of the Foundation does not affect the collection area of the German National Library, whose task is defined as collecting "the media works published in Germany from 1913 [i. e., representations in written form, image and audio] and […] German-language media works published abroad from 1913, as well as translations of German-language media works into other languages and foreign-language media works on Germany in original."[12]

12 See Section 2 of the Law on the German National Library (DNBG) 22 June 2006 (BGBl. I p. 1338), amended by Article 15 Para. 62 of the law from 5 February 2009 (BGBl. I p. 160).

For the Foundation House of History collection, items outside the German National Library's statutory mandate are important, such as books with dedications or dust jackets with a special visualisation quality, as well as library matter with a special visual value – e. g. illustrated books on contemporary history, book jackets, comics, catalogues of goods, etc.

On a Federal level, the Foundation House of History is thus set alongside the Federal Archives and the German National Library, and supplements their collection mandates. However, in distinction to these archives and libraries with collections following the principles of provenance and completeness, the aim of a contemporary history museum must be to develop a selective collection strategy (see Chapter II.2.4 Leading Academic Disciplines and III.2 Collection Strategy).

In other genre-specific collecting areas as well, the museum for contemporary history is also facing other institutions with a similar focus – for instance, in the areas of art and photography.

The Foundation collects art with motifs in contemporary history and art objects on issues and themes in this area. Hence, its remit is distinct from such institutions as, for example, the Contemporary Art Collection of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Art Collection of the German Bundestag. Similarly clear lines are drawn between the Foundation's photography collection and the large collections of, for instance, the Federal Archives or the Photo Department of the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government. The lines delineating the Foundation's mandate are to be maintained through the specific collection development plans for the individual collecting areas. This applies equally to the delineation to other major collections, such as the German Architecture Museum, the German Museum in the area science and technology, and so on.

Such boundary lines are also in place in relation to other historical museums. The Foundation's collection policy is directed to a different period from the German Historical Museum in Berlin, while in comparison to other Houses of History, it also has a different, clearly defined historical and geographical focus.

2.4 Leading Academic Disciplines

Museum collections represent an independent form of collecting, a particularity arising from the selective approach and quality of the items collected. The criteria for selecting objects can be derived from the alignment with leading academic disciplines in the field, above all, with contemporary history, material culture research and visual history.

Contemporary History

For the Foundation's collection, the major leading academic discipline is contemporary history research. Above all, the collection's main priorities in content emerge through the topics in the permanent and temporary exhibitions, developed in a constant process of dialogue with the Foundation's official bodies. This close relationship between exhibiting and collecting resolves the – apparent – contradiction between "depositing" and "exhibiting" museums often evinced in museum theory.[13]

13 See Korff, Gottfried: Museumsdinge deponieren – exponieren, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2002.

Collecting contemporary history is a particular challenge for two reasons. First, contemporary history is, in principle, open-ended and, second, (post-)modern societies are characterised by their high rate of "accruing relics".[14] A Neckermann catalogue from the 1970s already contained over 25,000 objects from 1,000 genres. In the context of this flood of material items, the Foundation is required particularly to face the challenge involved in the selection of objects. In building up a museum collection, the Foundation has a unique distinguishing feature in the contemporary history field setting it off from other institutions taking academic, journalistic or other approaches to contemporary history.

14 Lübbe, Hermann: Der Fortschritt und das Museum. Über den Grund unseres Vergnügens an historischen Gegenständen, London 1982, p. 18; see also Rosa, Hartmut: Beschleunigung und Entfremdung. Entwurf einer kritischen Theorie spätmoderner Zeitlichkeit, Berlin 2013.

Material Culture Research

In particular, empirical cultural studies have critically explored the topics of collecting the history of everyday life as well as the museumification of the present. In the process, they have looked especially at the meaning of everyday culture,[15] and argue for a view of material culture as a "fundamental sphere of the social life-world".[16] Hence, for example, an initiative funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research is dedicated to "The Language of Objects. Material Culture in the Context of Societal Development".[17] Contemporary history museums are similarly increasingly placing their object expertise on a theoretical foundation and consolidating their status as a place for reflecting on the world of things.[18] In the style of object theories in Anglo-American debate, their considerations also focus on the "story" of the object.

Visual History

Objects in a museum essentially have a visual quality. Over the last years, the emergence of visual history has established a research field that conceives of images and other objects "both as sources as well as independent artefacts of historiographical research and, at the same time, addresses the visuality of history and the historicity of the visual."[19] In this way, photographs, posters and stamps as well as three-dimensional objects are acknowledged as visual sources and researched accordingly. The moving image gains a similar significance, one also recognised in research in contemporary history.[20]

Since images in this sense can serve as both a repository of knowledge as well as an instrument for communication and information, a museum for contemporary history is called on, in a particular way, to anticipate the increasingly confirmed "hegemony of the visual".[21] In its temporary exhibitions, the Foundation House of History has addressed exactly this issue several times (e. g. "Bilder, die lügen", 1998/99; "Bilder und Macht im 20. Jahrhundert", 2004; "Bilder im Kopf. Ikonen der Zeitgeschichte", 2009). Hence, the methods advanced in visual history research also serve as a tool to evaluate object acquisition and the selective expansion of the holdings.

15 See Elpers, S., Palm, A. (eds.): Die Musealisierung der Gegenwart. Von Grenzen und Chancen des Sammelns in kulturhistorischen Museen, Bielefeld 2014.

16 Hahn, Hans Peter: Materielle Kultur. Eine Einführung, Berlin 2005, p. 7.

17 See "The Language of Objects. Material Culture in the Context of Societal Development", an initiative funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

18 For contemporary history, the ideas discussed by the Contemporary Collecting Working Group of the International Committee for Collecting (COMCOL) are relevant. URL: http://network.icom.museum/comcol/who-we-are/working-groups (last accessed May 2014). See also Ortlepp, A., and Ribbat, C. (eds.): Mit den Dingen leben. Zur Geschichte der Alltagsgegenstände, Stuttgart 2010.

19 Paul, Gerhard: Visual History. Ein Studienbuch, Göttingen 2006.

20 On this, also see "Visual History. Institutions and Media of Visual Memory", a joint project by the Center for Contemporary Research Potsdam, the Herder Institute, Marburg, the Georg Eckert Institute – Leibniz Institute for International Textbook Research, Braunschweig, and the German Museum in Munich.

21 See Schaffer, Johanna: Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit. Über die visuellen Strukturen der Anerkennung, Bielefeld 2008, p. 44.

3 **Quality of Objects**

First and foremost, the leading academic disciplines provide a theoretical and substantive orientation for acquiring objects. In addition, objects have to meet other specific criteria for museums. In assessing whether items are suitable for museum collections, the key focus is on how an object in its role as a museum exhibit is connected to new contexts and its educational quality.

For a historical museum, "story-telling objects"[22] which, through the "story" inscribed in them, can relate history as a narrative are of central importance. In this way, they become public bearers of memory.[23] The "histories" inscribed in these objects are, on the one hand, a key factor in justifying their acquisition and, on the other, ought to form the essence of the "abstract" field of documentation (see Chapter III.3 Object and Information).

As part of cultural memory, objects take over functions where they reveal their "histories". As ambassadors of the past, they have a specific "appealing quality" (Anmutungsqualität).[24] Krzysztof Pomian describes things replete with meaning as "semiophores", bearers of an invisible meaning.[25] As representatives of a particular age, culture and past, they often have an emotional quality as well. In this way, the collection becomes a site of communication with the invisible. For example, writing implements may initially seem just common mass-produced everyday objects, yet if they were used to sign the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany in the wake of the Parliamentary Council negotiations, they become semiophores.

According to Walter Benjamin, objects gain a "historical testimony" and hence develop a specific aura.[26] For example, the kitbag Elvis Presley took with him in 1958 at the start of his military service in West Germany evinces, among other things, the influence and importance of America's entertainment industry as well as the Cold War. Objects with such an aura emanate a specific attraction. "Seeing the aura of the original" heads the list of reasons why visitors come to the House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany. The findings of a study in 1997, based on a telephone survey of over 1,000 respondents, conducted by the museum of contemporary history and the Social Science Methods and Statistics section at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum. Among respondents who had already visited the museum, this motivation was even stronger than among those who had yet to view the exhibition. Harris Shettel, an American sociologist

22 See Moore, Kevin: Museums and Popular Culture, Leicester 1997, p. 52: "Objects are only dumb if we do not know how to 'let them speak'". For a topical view on the significance of the "story" of the object, see Reinders, S., Rooijakkers, G., Verreyke, H.: "From display cabinets to engine rooms. An essay about collecting present day culture in the city museum", in: Elpers, S. and Palm, A. (eds.): Die Musealisierung der Gegenwart. Von Grenzen und Chancen des Sammelns in kulturhistorischen Museen, Bielefeld 2014, pp. 51–61. Also see Sharon Macdonald: Memorylands. Heritage and Identity in Europe Today, London/New York 2013, p. 149: "While the characterization of certain objects as gifts or inalienable possessions understands them primarily in relation to exchange […] that of biographical objects especially emphasizes their role in storying persons and social relations."

23 See Francois, E., Schulze, H. (eds.): Deutsche Erinnerungsorte, 3 Vols, München 2001.

24 See Thiemeyer, Thomas: Die Sprache der Dinge. Museumsobjekte zwischen Zeichen und Erscheinung, Tübingen 2011.

25 Pomian, Krzysztof: Der Ursprung des Museums. Vom Sammeln, revised edition, Berlin 1998.

26 Benjamin, Walter: "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (third revision), in: Illuminations: Essays and Reflections, Hannah Arendt (ed.), (trans. Harry Zohn), Schocken Books, 1969, New York, pp. 166–195, p. 171.

specialised in museum studies, distinguishes between the "attracting power", "holding power" and "communication power" of exhibits and the way they are presented.[27] Here, we have come full circle to exhibition didactics which calls for special objects with precisely these qualities. For the acquisition of objects, the object or visualisation quality is an important criterion.

The concrete history of use designates objects as bearers of traces of an individual history. This category includes, for instance, the door of a Bundeswehr armoured vehicle damaged by enemy fire during overseas deployment in Afghanistan.

Objects produced in series visualise, as representatives, particular social developments in an era. A portable record player from the 1960s evokes, for instance, the new ways young people could spend their leisure and also, not least, a desire for freedom outside the classic family unit. Images, in turn, illustrate a particular historical perspective and, in this way, can become iconic, inscribed in collective memory. This would apply, by way of example, to Rainer Fetting's painting "Mann am Fenster", showing Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt at a window in the Erfurter Hof hotel on 19 March 1970 during his visit to East Germany.

One special feature of contemporary history collections in museums also lies in securing series of one category of object as well as ensembles of different object groups. An example of a series could be IDs and other proofs of identity making it possible to trace a person's life. An ensemble, for instance, could use interior furniture and decorations to create a coherent unit presenting a young person's room in the 1960s. This would then also include posters and records as well as the record player and textile items. Objects in such an ensemble contextualise each other and develop their meaning, first and foremost, in their totality. Collecting mixed sets of this kind is a specific feature of the activities of a museum.

27 See Shettel, Harris: Strategies for Determining Exhibit Effectiveness, Pittsburgh 1968.

4 **Collecting, Researching, Exhibiting, Educating**

An object first gains its museal quality through its ascription to the requisite academic context. The decision to take an object into the collection must always have a scholarly or academic justification. Moreover, the items in the collection are subject to a constant process of research, appraisal and review. A museum is a place of research,[28] with research into the collection not just a cornerstone of a museum's work, but also an essential activity. Through the work of researchers and documentation staff, academic standards are applied to the processes of indexing, describing and making the objects publicly accessible in a database (see Chapter III.3 Objects and Information). In addition, the results of critically evaluating, appraising and reviewing the objects also create the basis for exhibition concepts.

In that sense, research in museums is located at the interface of collecting, exhibiting and education. It is, moreover, this nexus which constitutes the difference between university and museum research. Through its strong link to exhibiting and education, museum research directly addresses the public sphere and, in this respect, has a practical reference to specific target groups. Furthermore, the close reference to the object produces insights unable to be achieved in this form by university research.

Critically engaging with the objects always integrates the current state of research. Independent fundamental research only belongs to the original remit of a museum to a certain extent. The Foundation House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany is active in research in various fields.[29]

On the basis of contemporary history research, material culture studies and visual history, objects are academically described and indexed and located in their historical contexts. During this process, the "stories" inscribed in the objects are revealed and prepared for possible presentation in exhibitions. The conceptual planning for each exhibition is also developed on the basis of academic research. In each case, the current state of research is taken as the foundation for object research, selection and presentation. Contemporary witness projects serving to secure individual memories are additionally integrated to supplement exhibitions and, as an independent resource, are then also available for external research work. Furthermore, the Foundation regularly evaluates exhibitions as a whole as well as the significance of the individual objects.

28 See e. g. the "Research in Museums" initiative funded by the Volkswagen Foundation: URL: https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en/funding/our-funding-portfolio-at-a-glance/research-in-museums. See also Te Heesen, Anke: "Objekte der Wissenschaft. Eine wissenschaftshistorische Perspektive auf das Museum", in: Baur, Joachim (ed.): Museumsanalyse. Methoden und Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfeldes, Bielefeld 2010, pp. 213–230, p. 217: "Museums and collections represent a further setting for scholarship and science. As the object of historical analysis and as a contemporary site of generating knowledge, they exist as co-equals with the laboratory and lecture halls […]".

29 See Hütter, Hans Walter: "Forschung in Geschichtsmuseen, Wozu eigentlich?" Lecture by Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Prof. Monika Grütters, Member of the German Parliament, at the House of History on 16 September 2014 for the conference Kultur und Medien: Mit der Forschung im Gespräch (Culture and the Media: In Discussion with Research).

The evaluation findings flow into the design of educational material, creating a direct link here between collecting and research on the one hand and education on the other. Just as in the case of research, education similarly has a direct reference to the object. It promotes a critical dialogue with material culture and aims to inspire reflections on the past, present and future. The content is designed to appeal to very diverse groups of visitors, and customised to individual target groups. The didactic presentation encourages individual learning in the museum, overcoming the initial reserve to engage with the objects.

In this way, the didactic presentation plays a decisive role in the museum as a "site of communication": "Pedagogical work in the museum shapes the dialogue between visitors, objects and content in museums and exhibitions."[30] The Foundation integrates educationalists into the conceptual design of exhibitions at an early stage. Their insights also flow into the research and selection of objects, as well as the object labels. In selecting the objects, the specialists looking after the collection are always requested to take into account the objects' inherent pedagogical potential.

30 See Deutscher Museumsbund (ed): Qualitätskriterien für Museen: Bildungs- und Vermittlungsarbeit, Berlin 2008, p. 8. URL: http://www.museumsbund.de/fileadmin/geschaefts/dokumente/Leitfaeden und_anderes/Qualitaetskriterien_Museen_2008.pdf.

III Collection Structure

1 Collection Classification

Given the flood of possible objects, a collection of material culture needs to be systematically structured and organised. Rather than the Foundation House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany organising its collection around content categories, it applies a collection classification based on specific genres. The Foundation's classification system has 13 main groups, divided into 67 sub-groups. It includes also library materials (see Chapter II.2.3 Delineation of tasks) – books, brochures, journals, newspapers, and audio-visual media.

The collection classification based on specific genres provides the basis for collection development plans for individual collection areas, e. g. photography, caricature, posters, textiles, technical appliances. Detailed development plans are to be drafted at least for the large collection areas. Here, the photography collection development plan is presented as exemplary.

The photographic holdings contain professional as well as private photographs. In addition, the collection area includes photographic genres such as art, industrial, still life, portrait, architecture, press, documentary, and event photography. However, the Foundation is not seeking to develop comprehensive holdings comparable to an image or press agency. As a rule, it also deliberately avoids acquiring a photographer's entire lifetime oeuvre. Five categories offer a clear insight into the photography collection's broad spectrum.

The collection categories include, for instance, the area of documentary photography/photojournalism. In this category, the holdings contain informative and important portfolios or bundles of photos on topics such as the "Parliamentary Council 1948/49" (Erna Wagner-Hehmke), "17 June 1953" (Richard Perlia) and "Student Unrest in Berlin, 1967–1969" (Ludwig Binder). Other object categories in this area deal with such topics as "Constructing the Berlin Wall", "The Berlin Wall", "Life in the GDR", "Fall of the Wall", "Right-wing Radicalism", "Xenophobia" and "Jewish Life in Germany".

The photographs in the iconic images area meet the criteria of being high-profile, renowned works and significant for the subjects depicted. The outstanding works here include, for instance, "Raising the Soviet Flag over the Reichstag Ruins, 1945" (Yevgeny Khaldei), "Rudi Dutschke at the Lectern, 1967" (Michael Ruetz, Ludwig Binder) or "Che Guevara" (Alberto Korda).

1. Media
Films
Sound recordings
Newspapers
Magazines
Multimedia
Museal library holdings
Digital media

2. Photography

3. Archive materials
Printed matter
Deeds and files
Picture postcards
Leaflets
Maps
Philatelic documents
Stickers

4. Visual Arts
Amateur art
Sculptures
Paintings
Prints
New art forms
Hand drawings

5. Everyday design
Advertising media
Signages
Packaging
Covers

6. Insignia
Awards
Badges
Commemorative medals
Trophies
National symbols
Plaques

7. Architecture and Interior Design
Parts of buildings
Interior furnishings
Architectural drafts

8. Textiles
Clothing
Workwear
Uniforms
Home textiles
Flags
Banners
Textile accessories
Textile drafts

9. Ways of life
Household objects
Sports equipment
Toys
Games
Musical instruments

10. Technical appliances
Capital goods
Vehicles
Military gear
Work equipment
Household appliances
Optical appliances
Entertainment electronics
Coin-operated machines
Technical drafts

11. Payment Systems
Legal tender
Money tokens
Tokens
Securities
Means of cashless payment
Fake money
Items relating to payments

12. Caricature

13. Commercial Art
Cut-out sheets
Posters
Display panel exhibitions
Wall newspapers
Graphic drafts

The art photography category signals a break with broadly accepted everyday visual culture. This area includes such works as "Turkish Apartment, 1982" (Olaf Metzel) and "First Social-Liberal Cabinet, 1970–1972" (Charles Wilp).

The portrait category collects works with a meaning going beyond the sheer representation of the person portrayed to reference superordinate social processes. The collection contains, for instance, "Adenauer" (Will McBride), "Günter Grass" (Udo Hesse) as well as the series "Traces of Power" and "Jewish Portraits" (Herlinde Koelbl).

The private/amateur photography category offers a close-up view of everyday history. Private photos are collected, above all, in connection with the preparation of special exhibition topics or together with portfolios or bundles of photographs. The Foundation now also owns around 300 photo albums, above all on the topics of "war captivity" and "holidays". The Bernett Collection comprises around 30,000 slides, a medium typical of that age, documenting the history of a German family between 1938 and 2004.

This development plan clearly shows how distinct formal, material and content-related criteria are to be established for the selection of objects.

Every researcher working for the Foundation is assigned collection areas and is responsible for them comprehensively and at all the Foundation's sites. This not only requires a knowledge of contemporary history, but also more detailed knowledge of the individual collection areas. In modern museum literature, the necessary skills for the specialists managing collections can be described as involving the steps of "analysing, researching, comparing, understanding, and summarising".[31]

2 Collection Strategies

A museum collection is the result of a constant,[32] active process of selection aligned with specific criteria, evaluations, interests and requirements.[33] Aside from a Collection Concept, a meaningful selection of objects also requires the requisite collection strategy with a long-term perspective. Not only should this include regular monitoring to ensure it still reflects the current situation and needs, but also, where necessary, be adapted to meet long-term goals.[34]

For the Foundation House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany, new acquisitions have to meet precisely defined conditions in the sense of "anticipatory archiving".[35] In principle, the Foundation pursues three complementary strategies to safeguard the development of a contemporary history collection.

31 Russel, R., Winkworth, K.: Significance 2.0. A Guide to Assessing the Significance of Collections, Rundle Mall (Australia) 2009, p. 10.

32 The Deutscher Museumsbund has concretised a museum's collection strategy as follows: "Collecting is a constant task for the future of the holdings". See Deutscher Museumsbund/ICOM Deutschland: Standards für Museen, Kassel/Berlin 2006, p. 15.

33 See Muchitsch, Wolfgang: "Was sammeln? Zur Bedeutung von Sammlungskonzepten", in: Neues Museum. Die österreichische Museumszeitschrift 9 (2013), pp. 34–38, p. 36.

34 See Hütter, Hans Walter: "Nicht alle brauchen alles! Sammeln im Geschichtsmuseum", in: Museumskunde 2 (2013), pp. 29–32, p. 29.

35 Weschenfelder, Klaus: "Museale Gegenwartsdokumentation – Vorauseilende Archivierung", in Zacharias, Wolfgang (ed.): Zeitphänomen Musealisierung. Das Verschwinden der Gegenwart und die Konstruktion der Erinnerung, Essen 1990, pp. 180–188.

2.1 Exhibition Dimension

First, objects are collected in line with the topics of the permanent and temporary exhibitions. Acquisitions in connection with temporary exhibitions then lead to further core themes in the collection. This is the case, for example, with the Susanne Erichsen "Miss Germany" mixed lot acquired in the run-up to the associated temporary exhibition. At the same time, the content for the permanent exhibition is also constantly updated as, for example, in the "Right-wing extremism" collecting area.

2.2 Genre-Specific Dimension

Second, collection areas are systematically expanded and supplemented in accordance with the genre-specific collection development plans (see Chapter III.1 Collection Classification). For instance, when designer Eva Gronbach released a fashion collection taking Germany's "national symbols" as a motif, the Textile collecting area acquired various items as they represent an important addition to the holdings.

2.3 Present Dimension

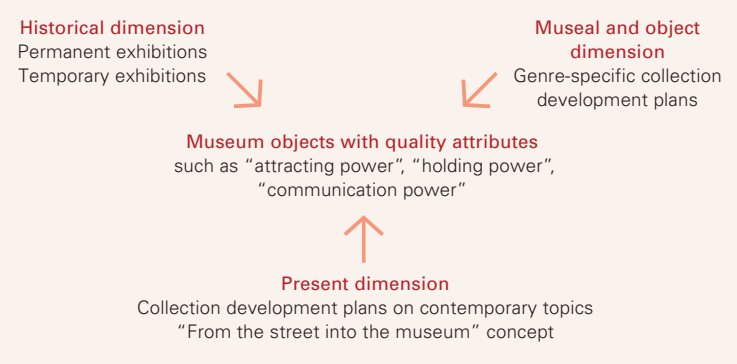
Third, the Foundation collects on current themes and events. In this way, objects can evidence and document relevant political and social events. Here, on the one hand, through collection development plans prepared with the corresponding content, "larger" current issues can be covered, i. e., updating the material in the permanent exhibition relating to, for instance, Afghanistan or the topic of the "banking crisis". On the other hand, with its "from the street into the museum" strategy, the Foundation pursues the goal of being able to react directly to current situations and secure the requisite objects used at political demonstrations (e. g., major events such as "Erdogan in Cologne") or at commemorative events.

This approach includes "participatory models" designed to involve community members and visitors in the development of exhibitions and collections. This collection model, originally emerging in the USA,[36] is now also being used in Europe and Germany.[37] Under clearly defined conditions, such considerations on collection practices can also be fruitful in the Foundation's activities. For example, the House of History also asked soldiers involved in operations in Afghanistan to assist in researching photo material. In the Foundation's work, participatory models should only be one option for acquiring objects and used in the form of defined calls on specific issues with a clear thematic focus.

36 See Simon, Nina: The Participatory Museum, Santa Cruz 2010.

37 Here, for example, the europeana1989.eu project is exemplary. The project calls for personal stories, photos and memorabilia from citizens in every country affected to create a public digital archive on all aspects of the era when the Iron Curtain fell. In Germany, the Deutsche Kinemathek is the project partner.

Overview of Collection Strategies



In addition, the Collection Strategy's present dimension is also supported methodologically by the SAMDOK model developed in Sweden in 1977. Through this project, Swedish cultural history museums have been able to comprehensively document contemporary everyday life in the country. The collecting activities of the museums involved are centrally coordinated and conducted following common guidelines. For example, over the first ten years the project focused on documenting the contemporary world of work in Sweden. SAMDOK also defined a set of priorities to structure the process of collecting and documentation (contemporary over historical; ordinary over odd; representative over remarkable; active over extinct). In the Foundation, such considerations are to be taken into account in particular in the collecting areas of "household objects", "technical appliances" and "interior furnishings".[38]

38 On this project, most recently Axelsson, Bodil: "Samdok – Documenting and Networking the Nation as it Evolves", in: Frediksson, Martin (ed.): Current Issues in European Cultural Studies, Linköping 2011, pp. 175–182.

3 Object and Information

A contemporary history collection's significance first becomes evident when the object and its related information are connected.[39] This is the task of object documentation which, in keeping with the times, uses digital information technologies to link object and information.[40] Object documentation utilises the information provided by collection specialists and researchers to record the object's significance, context and history and so ensures this information is accessible to all future users. In this way, the documentation process plays a decisive role in an object's museality.

Following information and documentation science guidelines, the objects in a contemporary history museum are indexed and contextualised in around 150 fields in data sets in the Integrated Museum Management System (IMS). Here, to generate all the relevant data, it is important to ensure the skills of those involved in the data capture process are regularly updated.

Aside from contemporary history indexing through texts, tagging or academic descriptions based on the latest research, the object entry must also include the following: a visual description (at least pre-iconographic, iconographic, possibly iconological), technical, provenance, acquisition, legal, restoration/conservation and logistical data, as well as data relevant for exhibiting, data on digitising and all the data on the images.[41]

In the museum context, aside from textual information, image data is of pivotal importance, and so the objects are also documented visually. Such images need to be available in various qualities for a range of purposes, from previews and thumbnails to working photos, images for reproduction or elaborate object presentations, or even 3-D images.

Using the requisite mapping models, the database fields must be transferable to other databases. In terms of sustainability, methods are to be developed for linking data in future with other databases such as, for example, the German National Library (DNB) integrated authority file.

Such functions are now already largely realised or applied in the Foundation's Integrated Museum Management System (IMS). After extensive modernisation the IMS will be able to provide each future user with all the necessary information about their field of work. Moreover, the new IMS will address internet users with its new "abstract" text field and offer, above all, through the first use of the automatic Lingo indexing software in a museum, an optimised retrieval function. The IMS module "exhibition/designer" is a museum pilot project, enabling designers to directly access

39 "Many objects in a museum initially have no 'museality', and only the accompanying documentation turns them into musealia, since their significance in cultural history or for research is only revealed through the documented contexts of origin and use." See nestor – the network of expertise on long-term storage of digital resources (ed.): Digitalisierung und Erhalt von Digitalisaten in deutschen Museen, 2004.

40 On this see also Schweibenz, Werner: Vom traditionellen zum virtuellen Museum. Die Erweiterung des Museums in den digitalen Raum des Internets, Saarbrücken 2008.

41 On this see the nestor project – the network of expertise on long-term storage of digital resources. URL: https://www.langzeitarchivierung.de/Subsites/nestor/EN/Header/AboutUs/ueberuns_node.html

the data they need. In this way, all the data on all exhibition objects, media and texts can be permanently accessed at any location. Future generations can then benefit from using this store of knowledge related to exhibitions.

The intention is to further develop the IMS to create a comprehensive information system for museum researchers. On their computers, they can then access the entire range of data, in an optimally-prepared form, relevant to their work and for realising exhibitions, e. g. all object data with images, relevant audio-visual media, all exhibition texts, all the available library items in the Information Centre on the topic, key links, and so on.

4 Collecting and the Digital World

Documenting and indexing objects in databases also allows the objects and related information to be provided in a virtual form. The possibilities provided by the digital world should, first and foremost, be regarded as an instrument to increase the value of the originals. Digitisation does not aim to and cannot replace the original object's specific quality, but rather seeks to prepare the ground for understanding and appreciating the original.

In principle, virtual databases facilitate the establishment of inter-museum collections. When databases include the holdings of several museums, it becomes feasible for the museum landscape as a whole to increasingly establish links on the basis of the content of themed areas "to create overarching digital museum collections and hence bring together exhibits previously impossible to view together."[42]

The "europeana" project, with the associated German contribution of a "Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek" (German Digital Library), is exemplary for such linked virtual databases. Both these projects emerge from the political mandate of making the object databases of heritage organisations publicly accessible.[43] As part of the Foundation's database, the online project SINT (Sammlungen im Internet (Collections Online)) makes object data available digitally and can transfer technical data to the "europeana" or the German Digital Library.

The stipulated preparation of digital content – not only of metadata, but also digitised documents and objects – leaves heritage organisations with contemporary objects facing a fundament dilemma "since images of modern museal cultural goods made accessible for the general public are nearly always subject to copyright restrictions."[44] In many cases, the present version of Germany's copyright law only allows heritage organisations to provide textual information for those objects subject to copyright. For this reason, it is imperative to reform German copyright law to enable publicly-funded or non-commercial museums to include visual images of their cultural goods in the requisite databases without having to pay licence fees for doing so.[45] In principle, the visual preparation of a museum's holdings should not be regarded as "use requiring consent", but – "comparable to the quotation" – use justified by its "documentary function".[46]

Considerations are to be given to whether, through commentaries, etc., users can also potentially contribute to contextualising objects (social tagging).

However, digitisation in many areas of communication and life also presents collection practices with new challenges. Objects are increasingly available in digital form, placing different demands on their appraisal, documentation and conservation. Here, it is necessary to differentiate between digitised objects and "born-digital objects". While the former have physical counterparts and are transformed into a digital form, the latter only exist exclusively in a digital mode. This applies, for example, to items in various collection areas, such as photography, images and films. The Foundation is also able to catalogue and archive these objects digitally and make them publicly accessible. With the present infrastructure, the Foundation is not in a position to preserve complex new forms of media (e. g. digital games or art objects).

Moreover, online content ("non-physical online publications") has created a new category within born-digital objects, and preserving this content presents new challenges for heritage organisations. In a similar way to other object genres, a selective collection method also needs to be developed here. This supplements the statutorily regulated collection practices of the German National Library ("harvesting" from specifically defined domains, e-book archiving) and the Federal Archives (securing digital materials from official authorities). Hence, the Foundation is called on to develop a concept for the future indexing, safeguarding and use of this group of objects so the "digital heritage" in the collection holdings can also be passed to the coming generations. The first steps in this process have already been initiated.

42 See Reinboth, Christian: Sieben Thesen zum Museum 2.0 (30 June 2010), URL: http://scienceblogs.de/frischer-wind/2010/06/30/sieben-thesen-zum-museum-20/

43 See European Parliament resolution "i2010: Towards a European Digital Library" adopted on 27.9.2007 and the European Council conclusions of 20.11.2008 on "europeana". Also see: "Common Framework by the Federal Government, Länder and Local Authorities on establishing a 'German Digital Library (DDB)'" – final version from 2.12.2009 – under the resolution passed by the Conference of Minister-Presidents on 26.3.2009 and at the annual conference from 28.–30.10.2009, as well as the Federal Government Cabinet resolution of 2.12.2009.

44 Preißler, Dietmar: Kulturelles Erbe im Internet sichtbar machen. Museumsobjekte und Urheberrecht. Ein Positionspapier des Vorstandes des Deutschen Museumsbundes und der Fachgruppe Dokumentation, Berlin 2012.

45 See ibid.

46 See ibid.

5 Collecting and the Public Sphere

Today, collections in a museum with a modern orientation should no longer solely be aligned with the interests of the curators, specialists and researchers. Instead, in the spirit of open cultural heritage, they should be open for all interested circles in society. Museum visitors, scholars, journalists, students and teachers constitute clear target groups. In the following, the growing interest in museum objects in education is taken as exemplary. In 2014, for instance, the Praxis Geschichte journal dedicated an entire issue to "Contemporary History Objects in Lessons".[47]

All classic and modern possibilities are leveraged to reach these groups. Highlights from the collections, for example, are presented in the Zeitgeschichte(n) series, and the Foundation's publications include images of collection items. Since the mid-1990s, the new digital world offers a revolutionary and enlarged spectrum of possibilities.

In principle, the provision of online data allows museums to present themselves using these new techniques. Growing numbers of publicly-funded museums are making their collections, in part or in whole, available online for an interested general public. Along with exhibitions and publications, the internet thus represents a new platform where collections can be displayed.

In the Foundation, public access to the collections is increasingly through the SINT (Collections Online) object database which allows selected collection holdings to be researched online. In October 2019, the database had about 80,000 items. This database offers the chance to make the objects and collections visible for all. Moreover, beyond exhibitions and publications, it provides multiple points of access to the collections. Through this database, an otherwise less engaged museum audience can be encouraged to visit the museum and its exhibitions.

The Foundation is called on to develop future criteria for the SINT database to provide the rationale for deciding which objects, with which information, are to be made accessible online. In the sense of the new museology, such databases are also new "contact zones" on the virtual level.[48] The current version of the "Living Museum Online" (LeMO) German-language portal is to be linked with the Foundation's database of objects. Against the background of the discussions on Open Data, Open Access, Creative Commons Licences and the EU guidelines on the utilisation of information, the legislator needs to provide the pertinent regulations on presenting objects in a digital form.

47 See Praxis Geschichte 4 (2014): Gegenstandsquellen zur deutschen Geschichte 1945 bis 1961. Gegenstände „erzählen" Geschichte(n).

48 See Clifford, James: Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century, Cambridge/Mass. 1997, p. 192.

Objects and collections are pushing into the public sphere. They are the new open "memory store"[49] in our society.

The Foundation's online exhibition "Observations – The Parliamentary Council 1948/49. Photographs by Erna Wagner-Hehmke"[50] is a prime example of how photographic holdings are researched using contemporary history methods and digitised. In this way, museum practices focus not just on displays and presentation, but increasingly on research, indexing and technical preparation as well.

49 See Assmann, Aleida: "Funktionsgedächtnis und Speichergedächtnis – Zwei Modi der Erinnerung", in: Platt, K., Dabag, M. (eds.): Generation und Gedächtnis. Erinnerungen und kollektive Identitäten, Opladen 1995, pp. 169–185.

50 www.parlamentarischerrat.de

IV Infrastructure and Work Processes

1 Work Processes

All working processes relevant for the objects and the collection are defined and centrally regulated by standards applicable across the Foundation. For some areas, these have already been drafted and for other areas are in preparation:

1. Acquisition of objects
2. Object accession
3. Indexing and documenting objects/clarifying rights
4. Logistics/transporting collection items
5. Intra-foundation loans
6. Storage conditions/technical equipment
7. Restoration and object security
8. Damage prevention/risk management
9. Insurance
10. Reproductions
11. Evaluating objects/expert opinion
12. Controlling and inventory
13. Collections use/access/image management
14. External loans
15. Claims procedures
16. Loss management
17. Deaccession
18. Information manuals

2 Spatial Infrastructure

To do justice to the continuing collection mandate, conservational standards and storage technologies must be optimised in the existing storage areas and facilities. In the context of an overall property development plan, provisions are to be made for necessary additional areas.

3 Financial Resources

The requisite financial resources are necessary to meet all the tasks such a collection entails. The funds not only serve to acquire objects, but also to maintain the collections, support documentation projects, digitisation, etc. Here, the aim is to check, in principle, on the possible use of third-party funds, especially those resources facilitating an academic review and appraisal of object holdings.

V Outlook

The basic perspectives, concretisation and infrastructural framework conditions described in this Collection Concept are to be viewed in relation to each other as an entirety. In this sense, the Collection Concept is the basis for all the Foundation's decisions relevant for the collections. This Collection Concept is designed for the medium-term and is to be constantly further developed, especially against the background of new approaches in contemporary history, advances in technology, and new insights in museum theory.

In the near future, staff responsibilities are to be centralised across the organisation and aligned to follow the updated object classification scheme. The cost structure for collection management, storage surfaces, indexing and licensing is to be evaluated. This may produce changed spatial conditions beyond the concrete connections of the collecting areas to the particular Foundation sites. The collection criteria for content are and remain the top priority.

In future, the collection will continue to be managed by all research and academic staff who are involved in the Foundation's exhibitions. This approach ensures the dovetailing of collections and exhibitions.

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