

Migrant knowledge and environmental migration – an exhibition project

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ABSTRACT

Today, environmental migration is an increasingly pressing issue. But also historically, environmental crises such as volcanic eruptions, reactor catastrophes, and resource-based conflicts have triggered large-scale migrations, leading to long-lasting societal changes.

This is the subject of an exhibition project which is part of the larger democracy-promotion program Museology and Education in Times of Non-Factual Thinking at the German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven in which participatory evaluation methods will be implemented to analyze which strategies of democratic engagement resonate most effectively with museum visitors.

The exhibit about Environmental Migration explores how migrant and non-migrant communities in the Germany experience(d) and adapt(ed) to environmental change, while also contributing to democratic education and critical reflection on migration.

One part of the project is the concept of migrant knowledge: the experiences and strategies migrants bring with them from regions affected by environmental shifts. Focusing on intergenerational knowledge transfer, the project documents how adaptation strategies are passed down within migrant families and shared across community networks. Through community-based research and participatory workshops, we collect narratives from migrants and the generation of their children or grandchildren about environmental challenges faced both in the regions of origin and in Germany.

The project also focuses on historical case studies of environmental migration—including mass displacements following natural disasters like volcanic eruptions as well as man-made catastrophes such as nuclear accidents. These historical perspectives are interwoven with contemporary experiences to highlight that generations before us already had to find solutions to deal with environmental crises, e. g. by migrating.

CV

Marie Grünter is a historian of Eastern and Central Europe and a curator at the German Emigration Center since 2018. During the last years, she has worked both on the reconstruction of the permanent exhibition of the GEC as well as on several special exhibitions.