

Recap: Sharing Stories on Contested Histories (2018)

How do you tell the stories of shared cultural heritage? What should be the role of museums in facilitating a dialogical and polyphonic approach towards disputed histories? And how can that be achieved? For the first time, an international training on approaching and presenting contested heritage was organised in the Netherlands last year.

The first edition of the *Sharing Stories on Contested Histories* training programme, which took place from the 2nd of December until the 14th of December 2018, focussed on storytelling and communicating heritage through a multi-perspective and inclusive approach. The group of 18 participants, selected from the 10 partner countries of the Shared Cultural Heritage Programme of the Netherlands, consisted of young heritage professionals and academics in museum and heritage studies.

The goal of the training is to exchange approaches with the partner countries on how to create an environment for multiperspectivity in relation to the presentation and the handling of shared heritage. By looking at several examples of shared cultural heritage that could be considered as contested, the participants research how heritage professionals can accommodate different perspectives on heritage.

In the first edition of the training, the Amsterdam Museum functioned as 'client'. In this role, the museum offered several rooms within its exhibition space to be reconsidered by the trainees. Working side by side with curators of the museum, the participants critically reflected on the presentation and representation in the exhibition rooms and evaluated the attention for multiperspectivity, biased narratives, and inclusivity. Annemarie de Wildt, curator of the Amsterdam Museum, shared her experiences as 'client' in her [blog](#).

Mentioned by the participants as highlights of the training were the multilateral learning environment which increased the awareness of biases and stereotypes and the need for a multi-perspective and inclusive approach. The theoretical lectures and site visits added to the development of skills to create open spaces for discussion. The open and curious attitudes of the participants and the museums and heritage institutes involved enabled everybody to engage in fruitful discussions about the content and the future of exhibitions concerning shared cultural heritage.

Participating in this training programme has resulted in new partnerships between trainees and the partner institutes. They continue to work together and exchange expertise within our international alumni network. The organisers of the training, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands and the Reinwardt Academy, consider it very important that the training keeps resonating with the participants and that the network remains an active platform to exchange knowledge and expertise on how to share stories on contested histories.

In December 2019, we hope to welcome a new group of participants to Amsterdam to further investigate the complexity of presenting contested heritage. For more information about *Sharing Stories on Contested Histories*, please contact Arjen Kok (Cultural Heritage Agency), Project Leader of the training programme: a.kok@cultureelerfgoed.nl.

I liked having the opportunity to explore Dutch heritage sites alongside Dutch people and place my own work in conversation with new practices, concerns, and approaches.
– Participant

I would like to apply the experience I have gained at this workshop to adjust my team's conceptual discussion and decision making framework since the results of our work should provide a medium facilitating the expression of different voices and perspectives.
– Participant