

Change التغير Wandel

By Senya Khudyakov

When I visited the Berlin Global exhibition at the Humboldt Forum with SAWA, I was constantly pushed to make decisions. Moving from one exhibition hall to another, I always had to choose between two passages. Each passage represented two opposing statements, revolving around topics like security and openness, collectivity and individuality, pleasure and responsibility. And every time before entering another exhibit, I would pause and ask myself which statement I felt closer to the most. Among many others, there was one specific pair of signs that particularly stood out to me, as the statements resonated with me both personally and professionally. The two signs positioned above the passages read: "I'm ready for change" and "I protect what we have".

My personal choice was quick and clear. I am ready and striving for change. Being open to change itself is, in my point of view, an integral aspect of constructive self-reflection, where established practices are carried out consciously rather than out of mere habit. There are few things I dislike more than the argument "We do it because we've always done it like that." In my opinion, one should never fall into the vicious circle where unquestioned routines remain unchallenged, as it only strengthens the false impression that everything is going just fine. Such a path leads directly to stagnation and incompetence.

However, I acknowledge that change also entails significant risks. It is a leap into the unknown, where failure could prevent one from returning to the starting point. Sometimes we fear losing what we have without certainty about what awaits us on the other side. It is this fear of the unknown that holds many of us back from embracing change.

Reflecting on the two phrases, I was also thinking extensively about the passage I would choose as a decision maker in a museum. Somehow, it feels natural that museums would choose the second passage. Upon entering an exhibition, one immediately feels like they are in an old treasury: protected showcases, dim lighting, enforced silence everywhere, only occasionally interrupted by the security alarm when someone gets too close to the precious objects. After all, object conservation is essentially the embodiment of the motto "I protect what we have". The same applies to other areas: museums research the same topics, address the same audience, and create inaccessible and often very specialized if not outright boring exhibitions because "we've always done it like that".

For this reason, I strongly believe that museums should consider embracing the passage of change. Change is an inevitable fact of life. The world is constantly changing, people are changing, and their struggles are changing as well. In my opinion, the resistance to change that is often seen in a conservative mindset is merely an illusion, a battle against time that has been lost from the very beginning. To remain relevant, museums cannot stay the same, but must adapt and change accordingly.

Through SAWA, my university studies and work experience, I have encountered many young museum professionals who are willing to question old patterns and seek new approaches. However, I am also well aware of the rigidity within the top hierarchy in many museums. Their hesitancy to take risks and implement positive changes has a negative impact on professionals throughout the organization. This leads to a cycle where individuals who are enthusiastic about driving change, but lack the necessary resources or authority, feel discouraged from expressing their initiative. As a result, they must either fit into the existing system and suppress their ambitions, or leave the frustrating environment for a more open-minded and reflective one. Consequently, the museum loses a significant driving force for self-reflection and successful change, as well as its opportunity to remain

relevant to the society. Therefore, museums need first to transform themselves internally and structurally, as well as question their processes and hierarchies so they can embrace change not only in terms of public content but throughout their entire work.

There is a saying that goes, "When the winds of change blow, some people build walls, others build windmills." On the day I visited the exhibition, I chose the "I'm ready for change" passage, as did many other visitors, including SAWA participants. Change and the people who are ready for it are already here. My hope is that museums, which already have enough walls around them, will focus on building windmills and leading change instead of constantly trying to catch up with it.