

# Experience تجربة Erlebnis

By Mohamed Amine Serhane

The word "Experience" in the context of museums reflects a shift in how we think about museums today—not just as collections of objects but as places where visitors connect with history, art, and culture on a sensory and emotional level. In Arabic, the title could be translated as "تجربة" , emphasizing the notion of "experience" as a journey or immersive encounter. In German, "Erlebnis"; suggesting an "experience" that is memorable and engaging, implying the transformative role for the museum in visitors' lives.

While working on my term project, it occurred to me how often we call many spaces "museums" when they are merely exhibitions. This brings us to ask an eternal question: what makes a museum? The notion of a museum has evolved over the years, from the "cabinet of curiosity" to institutions dedicated to education, preservation, and the transmission of heritage—and now to spaces offering transformative experiences. This evolution has largely been driven by these institutions adapting to rapid changes in people's needs and the advancement of technology.

During my visits to museums in Berlin and other cities, I realized that what makes a good museum isn't just the value of its collection or the architecture of the building, but the overall experience it offers. A thoughtfully designed visit stays with you, sparking emotions and conversations long after you've left. Today, exhibition design is less about the number of objects or their historical significance and more about crafting a sensory experience: storytelling, thoughtful design, accessibility (from language accommodations to provisions for disabilities), and interactivity all play crucial roles. In today's world, amenities like free Wi-Fi,

Instagram-friendly spaces, and even phone charging stations are becoming necessities.

To illustrate this, I'm comparing museums from three different places that I had the chance to visit during the SAWA program. Starting with the Berlin Global exhibition, which cleverly uses technology to appeal to a broad audience while maintaining a narrative that's accessible with or without digital enhancements. It engages multiple senses, triggering emotions through interaction. This approach ensures that visitors don't want to skip any part of the exhibition, keeping them engaged. By contrast, the Futurium relies heavily on technology but lacks the emotional depth needed to engage all age groups meaningfully, leaving an impression that feels somewhat shallow. Lastly, the Schoneberg Youth Museum, without relying on technology, provides an unexpectedly immersive experience. Its simplicity allows visitors to focus more intensely, creating an atmosphere of curiosity and engagement.

While German museums often leverage technology to enhance accessibility and engagement, Moroccan museums typically rely on cultural mediation, which becomes key to turning exhibitions into interactive journeys. It's essential to guide visitors, many of whom may be visiting museums for the first time, to ensure they connect with the exhibits and avoid a dull experience.

Sharjah also offered a wide range of experiences, from the immersive Rain Room and the interactive displays of the Sharjah Archaeology Museum to the more classical approach of displays in a house-turned-museum like Bait Al Naboodah. Where there was a lack of interactivity or mediation tools, guided visits compensated, emphasizing the importance of human connection. This shows the different ways a good museum experience can be achieved.

## **"People forget things; they remember emotions."**

**– Michael Neill**

It's essential to remember that the most important element here is human connection. We design for humans, and each visit should be meticulously tailored to fit the right audience. For example, children can enjoy abstract paintings as much as adults if given the right tools. The success of a museum lies in its ability to create lasting emotional connections, whether through technology or not, encouraging visitors to become advocates for the arts rather than just spectators.

I try to explore the concept of “experience” in museums and the role it plays to make dynamic, sensory-rich environments that foster deep emotional and intellectual connections. Through examples from Berlin, Sharjah, and Morocco, highlighting how museums today go beyond showcasing collections by focusing on engagement, accessibility, and narrative.

It's essential to remember that the most important element here is human connection. We design for humans, and each visit should be meticulously tailored to fit the right audience.