4. Processes of Empowerment

In a roundtable discussion at Humboldt Universität in 2018, different scholars were brought together to talk about archives of refuge. In their discussions on how to preserve stories of forced migrants, they pointed to participatory museum work with this 'community'.[1] An audience member intervened to contribute an argument that is highly relevant for the consideration and further application of these practices, asking: "Have you ever considered that perhaps recently arrived migrants do not want to participate, but they do not know how to say 'no'? When you are being welcomed into a country and you are offered something, how can you say you would rather not be involved?" This comment revealed a great deal about the inequality in 'offering' the opportunity of partaking in an exhibition or project, which in museum studies has been addressed as the problematic notion of the "gift-giving institution" (Lynch 2017b; Mauss 1990). This chapter outlines the processes that follow the phase in which participants are invited to be involved in a project (discussed in the previous chapter), looking at the implied power relations, as well as experiences of empowerment and ways of fostering this process.

Participatory practices are seen as ways of empowering people to contribute to, take part in, or control their own discourse (Kreps, 2008; Simon, 2010). These ideas are rarely informed by a thorough investigation of the power relations in place, such as the power held by the museum (Lynch 2017a), nor do they commonly explore the efforts required to achieve the empowerment of a group of individuals. The aforementioned paper by

1 The roundtable discussion "Archives of Refuge" took place on 30 October 2018 as part of the institute's colloquium *Ethnographies of the Contemporary – Perspectives and Positions on an Anthropology of the Political*. Arjun Appadurai (New York University), Regina Römhild (IfEE, HU Berlin), Mohammad Sarhangi (HKW, Berlin), Marcia C. Schenck (FU Berlin) and Nadiye Ünsal (Labor Migration Berlin) were invited to discuss the potential of archiving objects and stories from forced migrants and other migrants.

Boast describes collaboration as "an important feature of the empowerment of communities whose patrimony museums hold" (2011, 67). Despite the difficulties of navigating an ethical 'contact zone', collaborative work is necessary in order to be able to recast the power asymmetries that define the museum (Boast 2011, 67). Despite a contributory logic (Morse 2021) being prominent in museum work, museum practitioners continue to understand and frame participation as a process of empowerment. Yet, in what ways can museums empower people who are being marginalised? To what extent did participants actually feel empowered, and which processes facilitated this feeling? Departing from these questions, this chapter addresses possibilities for including participants in decision-making processes. It considers the asymmetrical power relations at play in participatory museum work, especially with regards to forced migrants, and evaluates instances of 'empowerment' through shared, transparent decision-making processes, recognition and practices of appraisal.

4.1 Shifting power relations

A shift towards more horizontal power relations is crucial for a truly participatory process (Graham 2017). Sherry Arnstein's "ladder of participation" (1969) proposes that "maximalist participation" (Carpentier 2011) is achieved by the equal sharing of power, rendering the full redistribution of power as the main objective of participation. This conception aligns with the idea of having different scales of participation that are hierarchically ordered, with full participation suggesting a better process (Carpentier 2011). This hierarchy was described by Robert Adams as a false interpretation of processes of empowerment, as it suggests a "value judgement about higher positions being preferable" (2003, 39). Concurring with this position, Morse acknowledges empowerment as an important part of the museum's practices, but points out that control over decision-making processes is often falsely understood to be a measure of success for participatory work (2021, 42). It is not about *who* makes the decisions – whether it is participants themselves or the facilitators – but about *how* these decisions are made (Morse 2021, 116; further discussed in section 4.2.1 on decision-making processes).

The ladder, however, also suggests that some forms of participation amount to tokenism rather than to "citizen control" (Arnstein 1969). It implies

that work that is less 'participatory' is not intended for the participants but is rather a form of tokenistic participation; inviting participants to merely demonstrate that a specific 'community' is involved in the process. Bernadette Lynch also applies this idea to museum work, taking aim at the museum's powerful position and the tokenistic inclusion of participants. She suggests that the museum should address power relations and their effects in order to shift these relations between museum practitioners and participants in the future. In her study on participatory work with migrants, she underlines how museums "keep the migrant in the role of the passive beneficiary – perpetually needy – thereby undermining their self-empowerment" (Lynch 2017a, 234). In relation to the participants, the museum positions itself as the "gift-giving institution" (Lynch 2014).

Describing the museum as a 'gift-giving institution' – providing the gift of access and engagement –, Lynch connects these novel practices to the theory of the gift as evidence of altruism and solidarity as conceptualised by Marcel Mauss (Lynch 2017b, 12). In Marcel Mauss's understanding, gift-giving comes with the expectations of receiving something in return (1990). Through their practices, museums claim to 'give voice' to so-called marginalised groups, but in return, they expect a contribution to an exhibition or to their collection. This problematic perception of 'giving' is supported by an earlier concern of Clifford in relation to ethnographic fieldwork, in which he further problematises the authoritative stance of "giving voice" (1983, 140). The gift of 'empowerment' reinstates inequality and assumes the recipient (or participant) needs the museum in order to become empowered. This paternalist dynamic often remains present in participatory processes, for example by applying a pedagogical model (Lynch 2017b).

Such a model was criticised by the project facilitator of the *daHEIM* project, who stated the project was in no way pedagogical, but rather a very open artistic process (MEK-D03). However, the ways in which this process – and the participatory processes within the other projects – aimed to 'empower' the participants, and how this ties in with the different roles of the curators, facilitators and participants involved in the various participatory projects requires further exploration. This section evaluates the museums' ambitions to empower, as well as the different project roles played by practitioners and participants, and how these roles were experienced by others. Rather than mapping out the relations and responsibilities based on written output or internal documents, I asked the practitioners and participants to consider their role in the process, even if these roles were not

formally acknowledged. It addresses how these roles were shoehorned into the specific museum departments and their responsibility for participatory work. In doing so, this section reflects on the ways in which empowerment was made possible by the roles in place and vice versa.

4.1.1 Aiming to empower

The goal of empowering 'communities' is one of the few goals outlined by museums that is focused on how its practice might benefit the participants. Lynch proposes that this goal goes hand-in-hand with a process of re-evaluating power relations within the museum, suggesting the museum needs to let go of power in order for participants to become empowered (2017a, 234). Additionally, "perceptions of where power *lies* has implications for understanding the role and impact of personal and professional values" (Hollows 2019, 86). However, processes of empowerment are much more complex, and it is not so much a matter of who has power to begin with, but rather of how that power is exercised (Morse 2021; Adams 2003). In a book on empowerment as part of social work, Adams describes process of empowerment as:

> the means by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others maximise the quality of their lives. (2003, 8)

Practices of empowerment should help people to take control, which is especially relevant for the participants of the projects in this study. Forced migrants face issues of "social inequality, prejudice, conflict, exclusion, and economic and political powerlessness" (Lynch 2017a, 234), and museums have (some of) the means to support them in tackling these issues. However, the possibility of empowering people through participation is dependent on the museum's approach to providing participants with the means to take control. The potential of the museum's role in this process is not merely shaped by its infrastructure and the practitioners, but is also reliant on their ability to meet the participants' diverse needs. Something that is empowering for one person might be disempowering for another (Adams 2003, 16). Many of the museums' project descriptions, as well as museum practitioners interviewed for this study mentioned the concept of 'empowerment' as a project goal; a

goal that was, for some of the participants, achieved through the participatory process.

Participant empowerment was a primary objective for the *daHEIM* project at the MEK. According to the museum's director, this process could be the result of simply acknowledging the participants as human beings. They said:

> This exhibition was really a form of empowerment for the people who made it […] That they were taken seriously, that was important to us. The number of visitors didn't play a role, or they played a subordinate role, whether there were many or fewer visitors. But it was important for us to say to the refugees: "We see you. We see you, you are human beings and we are trying to give you an opportunity to represent that". (MEK-D01)

The process of empowerment here means a process of humanisation, which is most likely a response to the dominant media discourse on forced migration.[2] The potential of empowerment relies partially on the discourse developed through a participatory project (discussed in Chapter 6), but is also dependent on the collaborative process, and on the extent to which participants felt taken seriously and seen as human beings, as equal to the people working in the museum. The project outline referred to workshops organised by the museum as a way for participants to achieve empowerment (*daHEIM* project document). The project facilitator, however, referred to 'empowerment' as "one of these sociological concepts" which they did not want to associate with their artistic practice (MEK-D03). They did not want to formulate any goals, yet they were facilitating the process that the museum anticipated as being empowering for the project participants.

The project in Leicester, however, only enabled small interventions in the museum space but did involve the participants from beginning to end. Within this format, the workshop facilitator stated that 'empowering' the participants was one of their expectations for the project. "I think to some degree, this happened," they added, "to feel empowered, you know, mentally, but also to feel comfortable going to the museum" (LM-MT04). The workshop facilitator describes empowerment as a mental shift towards feeling able to take control. But they also mention that this process ties in with feeling more comfortable

2 In media coverage on forced migration, the incoming migrants were (and still are) often referred to as 'flows', 'floods' or 'waves' of people; this dehumanising language seemed to imply an 'invasion', rather than indicating individual reasons for, and experiences of, migration (Ramsay 2022, 40; Faist 2017).

inside the museum, regarding it as their 'own'. One participant mentioned that they felt they were provided with a "great opportunity to take part in the project to take over the museum". They said:

> it was really great, something to do and it really felt empowering. We are taking part of something, we cannot work, we can't do anything. So when we are involved in something like that, it gave us use [or purpose], a satisfaction of mind, like: 'I am doing something, I am taking part in something' (LM-MT06).

This was shared by participants from other projects (T-A04, D05 and MEK-D08), who were happy to just have something to occupy their time, to work on and towards something together with others.

4.1.2 The roles of the curators/educators/facilitators

According to Viv Golding, "the term curator holds a range of meanings (custodian, steward, keeper, superintendent, guardian), which in a positive sense emphasize care while negatively foregrounding hierarchical lines of power and a rigidity of processes" (2013, 20). The changing role of the curator is central to many recent studies on museum work (Macdonald and Morgan 2019; Onciul 2019; Schorch 2017; Lynch 2017b; McCall and Gray 2014). Schorch refers to Clifford (2010) to suggest that "contemporary curatorship – with its varied roles, skills, practices and audiences – is well placed to 'decenter' the predominant association of science with Western ways of thinking and being and 'open up' to Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies" (2017, 35). He suggests that this shift in practice has changed what is now part of the curator's role in the museum: the curator becomes a facilitator, an intermediary or an activist (Schorch 2017, 35). Some research suggests the curator comes to facilitate the communities' interaction with the museum objects, rather than functioning as an expert on the objects themselves (Macdonald and Morgan 2019; Schorch 2017); meaning that participatory projects are seen as a threat to the curator's authority as an expert (Black 2021, 45). This view limits the social role of the curator that is necessary for participatory work. Morse underlines this aspect of the curator's role as she moved from her study of care in community engagement work to seeing how care had become part of curatorial work too. Morse refers to the work of Christina Kreps (2003) and Andrea Witcomb (2003) to address the fact that "today, curatorial work […] is also defined by relationships to visitors and

by relationships to the communities represented in collections" (Morse 2021, 159). According to McCall and Gray, this shift more practically means the curator's role rather entails managerial and administrative activities (2014, 30).

Although the shifts in the role of the curator are evident in these projects, interviews with practitioners confirmed that the view of the curator as an authoritative figure in the process continues to be prominent. Based in different museums, most curators mentioned a sense of authority in describing their roles. One interviewee referred to "my authority as a curator" (MF-S01), and this was emphasised by another interviewee who said "not all our exhibitions are participatory, because we also have something to say, the curators" (MEK-D01). They elaborated that the importance of the museum and the museum curator should not be underestimated (MEK-D01). In their view, participation would not work without input from the museum; the curatorial aspects of making an exhibition require more than what participants themselves can do. "It is always said: 'ah yes, the participants made the exhibition'. And yes they did, but all of the organisational work was up to us" (MEK-D01). Despite their interest in framing a project as participatory, there is a clear tension between sharing authority and receiving credit for the work put into a project (further discussed in sub-chapter 4.2).

Though curatorial roles have shifted to include more collaborative work and directly engaging communities for particular projects, they are still defined as distinct from community engagement work (Bayer and Terkessidis 2017, 57). In most of the projects studied here, external facilitators, community engagement officers or museum educators were involved to lead the participatory process. Some of the practitioners criticised the separation of these roles, and it is clear that the different roles continue to be negotiated, as do the hierarchies implied between curators and community-focused roles (McCall and Gray 2014, 25). According to Morse, this differentiation translates to different scales and sites of participatory work (2021, 79). According to one practitioner I spoke to, community engagement or participatory work was often understood as a secondary, less important aspect of museum work (LM-MT02). Another museum practitioner stated that participatory work was not considered very relevant in preparation for the exhibition; curators and other museum staff were, according to the museum educator, too far removed from the reality of what happens in practice on site, and not flexible enough to move beyond 'common' museum practices (T-A03). The exhibitions manager of the Tropenmuseum pointed out that the different roles within the museum invite

a variety of approaches, yet it is much more about the person in these roles and their individual views and ideas (T-A06). The format, practice and ethics of a participatory approach are largely determined by the individual.

The exhibitions manager elaborated by stating that "an exhibition is always a three-person job: a project manager who manages time and money, and then you have the exhibition-maker and the curator, the knowledge and the transfer […] and often the education and so on are added as well" (T-A06). They stated that usually it would be up to the curators or conservators to decide whether they need input from people outside of the museum (T-A06). In the case of the *Aleppo* exhibition, a White external curator was hired to develop the exhibition. The museum marketer was critical of this step, as it was not in line with the museum's mission to highlight people's individual perspectives and experiences (T-A02). The education officer agreed this was strange, and in a meeting with the project team, said: "it is a bit crazy we would be doing this and would actually not ask any of the people [from Aleppo] that now live in Amsterdam to be part of this" (T-A01). With that comment, the education team initiated the participatory process. The team of three described by the exhibitions manager was not responsible for the participatory aspect of this project, nor did they get involved in this afterwards; it was up to the education officer to organise the process, and to link it up with the (nearly) completed exhibition.

Similarly, the community engagement officer facilitated the project in Leicester and the museum educator the one in Friedland. *So sehe ich das…* was set up by a curator and the museum educator, who worked together to develop their museum's first participatory project (MF-S02). They had slightly different roles but had equal input when it came to the preparation (the organisational aspect) and the process of inviting the participants and speaking to them about their photographs (the relational aspect). It was only the finalisation of the exhibition content, including the pictures and the quotes from the participants, that was done solely by the curator (MF-S01). A slightly different approach shaped *Museum Takeover* in Leicester. The project facilitator was not a member of the museum staff, so the museum's community engagement officer took the lead on negotiations between the project team and the museum, and on introducing the participants to the museum. The community engagement officer explained that the project facilitator and workshop facilitator took the lead when it came to "the actual work after I'd done that initial tour. I mean, I did go along to the session, I'd sit with them, and I helped if I could with getting things written. […] But I

wasn't actually leading it" (LM-MT02). The three practitioners involved in the process – none of whom were curators at the museum – all focused on the relational aspect of this work and spent time with the participants to support them in creating a label they were proud of.

At the MEK, an external facilitator led the project that took place in the museum. "You always have to have an intermediary, a facilitator, someone who introduces you to the other group", said the museum director (MEK-D01). The project facilitator actually mentioned that they often describe their role in the process as being like a long-term performance (MEK-D03). Further discussing how their role may have changed, they mentioned their central position in the project: "without me, there wouldn't have been an exhibition. […] It [the project] needed, I believe, someone who continues when the others have crashed, and simply, in certain areas also makes a decision" (MEK-D03). According to the interpretations from some participants on the facilitator's role, this is a mild description, as in their eyes, the facilitator made most decisions *for* them (MEK-D04; MEK-D06; MEK-D08). Their role was vital in developing the project, but may have been too dominant, leaving little room for the open process the museum had envisioned. The museum curator had a different role. They described their role as two-fold: firstly, they were responsible for the communication between the participants and the facilitator within the museum's public spaces and with the museum staff in the offices; and secondly, they were responsible for curating (part of) the project, writing texts for the exhibition, introducing the historical examples and producing content for the catalogue (MEK-D02). The museum's decision to contribute a historical narrative to the jointly created exhibition (discussed in more detail in Chapter 6) allowed the curator to take on a more traditional curatorial role. In this role, they controlled part of the discourse, while the project facilitator led the other part, which focused on recent experiences of migration.

In delivering the project, people took on a range of different roles, including facilitating, supporting, leading and curating. The latter was interpreted differently for each project, depending on the involvement of external facilitators, and often included a form of authority on the output of the process, whether this was an exhibition, a section thereof, or a set of labels. In most cases, the curators also took on relational aspects, though in some cases (such as the project at the Tropenmuseum), this was left to the education department entirely.

4.1.3 The roles of the participants

For many of the case studies, limited information is available on the roles of the participants. Participants were simply expected to contribute something within the project's set framework. At Museum Friedland, the participants were photographers, at the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, they were authors, at the Tropenmuseum, they were guides, and at the MEK, they were artists. Roles come with specific expectations, and in some cases, different roles for the participants led to a sense of shared responsibility for the project output. This can be empowering, but if the practitioners do not take this role seriously, it may just as easily be disempowering.

In case of the Tropenmuseum, the participants initially all worked as guides, but one participant's role did change a little during the project. Only at the start of the project did the guides also engage in aspects of curatorial work, though this was not an intended part of the participatory process. After these first few internal sessions, the project took on its intended, public-facing aspect through the group's role in the tours. Up until six months into the project, one of the museum educators was present each Sunday to coordinate the arrival of the participants – who at that point were hired as guides – and get the tour started (T-A01). Because the project ran much longer than initially expected, this staff member needed support, as they could not continue to work every Sunday. They asked "one of the most experienced guides" (T-A01) to help with the coordination. Their responsibility for this part of the museum's programme changed their role, but that of the other participants remained the same.

For the *daHEIM* project, several participants took on a role that required a greater level of responsibility. One of the participants was eventually credited as a co-curator of the project. They led the project together with the project facilitator and another co-curator, neither of whom were themselves forced migrants. However, when asking the participant co-curator about their role, they suggested it was not as straightforward as their title might imply (MEK-D04). Despite their interest in being part of the organisational team, they had no intention of becoming the 'spokesperson' for the forced migrants involved in the project, yet they often had to make decisions on behalf of the participants. As "the only person who had this experience of asylum seekers in the team", they were tokenised, they explained (MEK-D04). The participant mentioned that they did not feel entirely comfortable in this position, and they would have not chosen this role for themselves if they had known this

beforehand (MEK-D04). However, the role did help them acquire valuable work experience in Germany, as they had hoped (MEK-D04), providing a stepping stone in their professional development.

Another participant was designated technical manager for the co-creative process; they were happy to take on this role and supported the different participants with some of the more technical aspects of their work (MEK-D08). In their role, they did not feel they were working with the museum as much as they were working in the museum's spaces for KUNSTASYL. Their role granted them no access to meetings that were held as part of an effort to formalise the foundation of KUNSTASYL, for example, nor were they involved in any other big decisions (MEK-D08). This was something they were quite happy about, as they also realised being part of this came with extra responsibilities that they did not want or need at that point (MEK-D08). They also mentioned that they were not sure about their role in the performance at the end of the project, saying: "I'm really still wondering and asking myself if that was necessary, or if even my participation was necessary to me and to them" (MEK-D08). In this sense, the performance in particular may have had a negative impact on the participant's perceived role and their self-worth; potentially as a result of the lack of involvement in decision-making processes (further discussed in the following sub-chapter).

Assigning different roles to participants, especially when it is based on their interests and skillsets, can increase the feeling of shared responsibility for the project, possibly contributing to feelings of empowerment. When roles are misinterpreted, or when they turn out to mean something different to what participants had expected, this can have the opposite effect. In the *daHEIM* project in particular, the lines were blurry, and while the project strove to institute transparent processes, the roles and responsibilities assigned at the start of the project did not necessarily translate into the participants having a say in related decisions. The dynamics of this project show how the understanding of a role and its meaning within the process might shift based on the participant's position within in society; both of the participants mentioned came to reflect on the project rather negatively after several years in Germany (MEK-D04 and MEK-D08). However, these and other roles also ultimately supported the participants' ensuing careers and opportunities, an aspect that can be very empowering indeed. These and other aspects of empowerment and disempowerment are unpacked further in the second part of this chapter.

4.2 Aspects of (dis)empowerment

The potential outcomes of participatory work continue to be questioned, and as the previous sections show, the goal of 'empowerment' is particularly contentious. Despite the ongoing discussion about the need to 'hand over' authority, maximalist participation (Carpentier 2011) did not define any of the projects discussed, and yet participants described feeling empowered. Previous research (Morse 2021; Lynch 2017a; Gourievidis 2014) has revealed that facilitating empowerment relies on expectations, decision-making processes and (formal) recognition. These aspects might seem unrelated, as they find expression in the projects in many different ways. However, participants and practitioners highlighted exactly these elements in their reflections on their roles and the projects at large. Building off this understanding of what impacts empowerment, I further entangle the relations between empowerment and expectations, decision-making and recognition in this sub-chapter.

The first section looks at the management of expectations and its relation to decision-making processes. Based on the goals for the project, its institutional and practical frameworks and potential outcomes, museum practitioners limit the possibilities of the participatory process. Morse stated that: "when the contributions do not fit with the museum's expectations, lines are drawn" (2021, 106). By managing expectations, practitioners provide a transparent framework for the 'how' of decision-making processes. Rather than identifying who made the decisions in the different projects, this next section evaluates how these decisions were made. The second aspect is that of recognition and appraisal, highlighted by Laurence Gourievidis (2014) and Adams (2003) as relevant for processes of empowerment. In particular, I focus on forms of formal recognition, such as paying participants for their roles in participatory processes. In the projects studied, these aspects empowered some of the participants, yet at the same time, they proved to be especially complicated in projects with forced migrants.

4.2.1 The 'how' of decision-making

As pointed out at the start of this chapter, the process of empowerment is tied to power relations between the museum and the participants. In the projects studied, the museum practitioners ultimately made most decisions; participants did not obtain authority over the full process or outputs, yet

some participants still mentioned feeling empowered as a result. Rather than determining the success of a project based on the participants gaining control over decisions, this section looks at *how* decisions were made, how this process was 'managed', and *for* whom.

"Choices presented to participants are rarely about themselves, more often they are about the museum, or what is possible to do within the museum" (Morse 2021, 52). As Morse points out here, it is important to understand who is served by certain decisions – for example, funders, governments, museums – and how museum practitioners frame these processes. Decisions regarding control over the process are often based on imagined expectations. Even before the project starts, museum practitioners discuss the possible expectations of the participants and how to they might manage them (Morse 2021, 113). While this process offers transparency about the museum's ambitions and limitations, it provides no room for input from the participants about their expectations and ideas for the project. This section looks at the potential for decision-making in the different projects, and outlines the (limited) roles of the participants in these processes, as well as how these decisions may have supported the participants directly.

The projects that form the basis of this study are participatory in very different ways, meaning that the responsibilities and the forms of inclusion in decision-making processes varied widely. The participants were to some extent involved in a single or in several parts of a particular project, with their roles and the outputs often clear-cut and well thought out in advance. The curator of the project in Friedland said it was important to leave room for people to come up with their own ideas and produce something creatively through the medium of photography and associated stories, stating:

> What I always find important in such situations is not to give fixed templates, so that's my experience, that as soon as you give one, just one or two suggestions, people who don't know exactly what they want to do take this template as a guide and then the result looks exactly like the suggestion. And it doesn't matter whether it's about pictures or text or, actually, it's more about finding out in conversation: Where are the people themselves individually? And what could one tease out? (MF-S01)

The project curator did not want to present the participants with a "blank canvas", which might be perceived as disempowering (Morse 2021, 52), but they also did not want to influence the participants' decisions about what they could choose to photograph. The project curator asked the participants

to consider what they thought of when thinking about the transit camp, as well as if there was a place where they spend a lot of their time (MF-S01). The participants were provided with these guiding questions and clear instructions for using their cameras, after which they went around Friedland to capture the camp in as many images as they wanted. On the following day of the workshop, they were asked to pick five images to include in the exhibition, and invited to talk about these images during one-on-one interviews. The project curator remarked that at this stage, it was their perspectives that were most important, stating: "it was clear that we would exhibit the pictures that the people had chosen and not sit down and say: 'ah, in my view, this picture is much better or much more exciting'" (MF-S01). Despite, or perhaps because of, this clear framework, the participants were able to take control over how they portrayed their perspective on the camp. They were not involved in developing the exhibition based on the photographs and interview fragments, but they had been in charge of the content that ended up on display in the Nissenhütte. The decisions made in the process predominantly served the museum – the images would appear in an exhibition and in a catalogue – but the process that facilitated the participants' choices involved a shared moment of reflection, during which participants were able to discuss their ideas, perceptions and doubts. The decision-making process allowed for conversation about the participants' experiences and struggles, which they shared with the museum educator, who themselves had arrived in Friedland a long time ago, which allowed them to relate to the participants' stories and provide support or comfort in response (MF-S02).

The process was similar for the participants of the project in Leicester. Within a set framework, participants were invited to contribute any story or text in response to a museum object. By providing a clear activity for the participants, the facilitators 'managed' the participants' expectations; they knew what the project would look like and what their role would be. The process follows an implicit contributory logic (see Morse 2021) by not being focused on the participants' needs or ambitions, but at the same time, it took an activity the participants already engaged in, and inserted it into the museum space (as described in Chapter 3). The participants were very excited to work in the museum and display their labels here, despite their limited control over the process and the long-term outcomes. They were able to make decisions about how they wanted to be represented through their contributions, but their empowerment, as was described by a participant in section 4.1.1, was not necessarily the result of their role in decision-making

processes. Instead, they rather seemed empowered by the opportunity to be represented in the museum (addressed in more detail in section 5.1.2) and were not disempowered in the process.

The project at the MEK was described as a very open process by the facilitator (MEK-D03), which, according to the curator, involved collaborative decision-making throughout (MEK-D02). "They [the museum practitioners] gave us 99.99% freedom […].. There were only a few moments where they said 'no'", the project co-curator confirmed (MEK-D05). Participants were invited to create artworks within empty spaces in the museum, providing them with a nearly 'blank canvas', framed by the theme and focus defined by the project facilitator. Due to the format of this "friendly occupation" (MEK-D03) of the exhibition spaces, the museum divested itself of any responsibility for the process or project outcomes. The project facilitator controlled the process, providing an open framework with rather 'blurry' guidelines. The participants were aware of this framing going into the project, yet they were confronted with a change in decision-making processes later on. The project co-curator described how the process became less transparent about a month before the exhibition opening. Suddenly, the historical stories of forced migration had to be integrated into the exhibition, something that the participants had known nothing about before the curator came in to decide where these should go (MEK-D05). The process was experienced as disempowering due to the sudden shift in management, which led to the participants no longer having a clear idea about their possible contribution and the limitations of the project.

In the *Aleppo* project, however, the limitations of the participatory process were clearly outlined from the outset. The exhibitions manager of the Tropenmuseum described the process of managing expectations, pointing out that the museum had the final say, but that care was taken to communicate this to the participants beforehand so as not to evoke unrealistic expectations (T-A06). This final say applied to the selection of the personal objects the participants brought in, but the exhibition manager recalled that: "I think we explained this very well to everyone, and also at the start, that we would be selecting, and that everyone was free to contribute something, but that we held the right to make a decision about it, also because we had limited space" (T-A06). The participants were left out of this process completely, as was described by one of the participants, who explained that they brought in their objects during the second session, and found out which ones would be exhibited during the third session (T-A04).

Overall, the way the museum managed the expectations of the participants narrowed down the outcomes of the exhibition. The practice of 'managing expectations' limited the process to conforming to assumptions made by museum practitioners before the project began. However, the museum adapted relatively flexibly to the more participatory approach initiated by the educational team. The participant recounted that they based the story they contributed as part of the tour on the materials already selected by the museum, because, they said: "unfortunately, we had no – how do you say it – influence, to choose those pictures or choose those materials from the whole project, it was already chosen" (T-A04). This process did not reflect their expectations, even though they had been made aware in advance of their limited authority in the project. The participant expressed disappointment about the lack of possibilities to provide input or change the exhibition's tone or narrative to reflect their own and other participants' perspectives.

The participants were most directly confronted with the limitations of their authority when they were presented with the photographs of Aleppo selected by the curator. During an initial session with the curator and the participants, the former inhabitants of Aleppo were shown the photographs from the exhibition for the first time, and this led to angry responses (T-A01). The education officer, who was in charge of the participatory aspect of the project, recounted that many of the photographs showed the ruins of the city and the city at war, but the participants wanted to focus on the beauty of the city from before the war. "They wanted to show the picture of the touristic Aleppo", they elaborated (T-A01). One participant referred to this discussion about the exhibition, explaining:

> we went to see everything, and that was quite clear, and then there was also a bit of disappointment from other people, not just me, so other people wanted to show something nicer, but it was already too late for that, so we just had to make our stories based on that […] there were a lot of images where you can just see the objects within the ruins, so instead of talking about the ruins we started talking about objects and how we used these objects in our daily lives, and we did things like that to try and make the violent image a bit more cheerful. (T-A04)

Similar to what was proposed by the curator, the participants could use the tours to share an aspect of Aleppo that was not part of the exhibition (T-A05). Besides the lack of beauty presented, the participants were also confronted with portraits of female fighters. They agreed that this was not a truthful

representation of 'their Aleppo'. The curator of the exhibition considered it an important part of the story, even if the images showed an aspect of the city the former inhabitants were unfamiliar with, or preferred not to be identified with (T-A05). However, the museum team listened to the participants and removed one of the images from the exhibition (T-A01). Thus, it is clear that the participants' contributions were primarily seen as an addition to the museum's exhibition, and their input on the curatorial aspects was not expected nor deemed sufficiently relevant. Instead, the participants were 'given' the tour through the exhibition as a platform to add their narrative to the one created for, and displayed in, the museum.

The different projects reveal a variety of ways in which museums intended for decision-making processes to contribute to the empowerment of the participants. In Friedland, a clear framework limited the participant contribution to photographs, but involving conversations in the selection process provided an opportunity to reflect and discuss experiences or concerns. *Museum Takeover* clearly defined new museum labels as an output, leaving only the content up to the participants. Whilst the *daHEIM* project started with a 'blank canvas', the approach shifted, leaving participants unsure about their role in, and control over, the process. In the example of the Tropenmuseum, the exhibition was already fully mapped out, yet the practitioners acknowledged the value of the participants' responses, and altered the exhibition slightly. This decision was made exclusively in the interest of the participants. When museum practitioners start out from a position of managing expectations, this "becomes the main way in which the idea of community engagement is operationalised in the museum" (Morse 2021, 114). Based on Arnstein's ladder, such a process might be described as non-democratic, especially because the supposed expectations are 'managed' before participants have had the opportunity to discuss them with museum practitioners. The case studies reveal that outlining expectations is a necessary step, and perhaps even more empowering than providing a 'blank canvas', though this too could be part of the collaborative process, and expectations about control and decision-making can be continuously renegotiated.

4.2.2 Recognition through remuneration

According to Gourievidis, recognition is a process of validation by the museum, through which the institution acknowledges and incorporates a

'community' into its discourse (2014). The process implies that marginalised groups are in some way dependent on the museum, highlighting the underlying power relations and amplifying the authority of the museum (Gourievidis 2014, 13). This makes the museum a "recognising authority" (Stevens 2007), and in this role, it can compound or disrupt marginalisation and exploitation (Fraser 2001). Based on an example of a participatory project, Mary Stevens identifies the process of recognition as being empowering: on the one hand, because it provides an opportunity to publicly share personal experiences within the museum (further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6); and on the other hand, due to staff openly valuing the process as exceptionally productive and enjoyable (2007, 36). Though Stevens does not highlight these differences, recognition seems to be relevant for potential empowerment on two levels. On a macro level, the relevance of the museum's recognition relies on the participants' understanding of the museum as an authority (described in section 5.1.2). In this section though, I would like to focus on how recognition works on a micro level, looking at how it is applied 'on the ground', by looking at remuneration as a formal method of recognition, and identifying the potential of appraisal as a form of informal recognition and appreciation.

Though the question of payment may seem a very arbitrary or practical concern, it is a recognised means of remunerating a person's valuable contribution. This brings with it ethical concerns about free labour in museums, as well as questions about the way museums can perpetuate systemic inequalities (Sergi 2021, 54). These inequalities have been discussed in relation to epistemic exploitation in modern processes of extraction[3] (Demart 2020); more generally, the epistemic exploitation described by Sarah Demart translates to unpaid and unrecognised labour in practice (Kassim 2017; Berenstain 2016). Sergi points to the possibility of museums helping "to exacerbate forms of exploitation experienced by asylum seekers and refugees from other sectors of society, at the very moment that they are seeking

3 Demart describes extraction as the dispossession or "expropriation of natural resources, lands, as well as labour force, and bodies" (2020, 145). Discussing the museum context, she identifies temporary inclusion – such as enabled by participatory projects – as a "device of extraction" due to the exploitation or (partial) silencing of individuals (165). Extraction is also used to describe the appropriation of cultural artefacts, often in relation to discussions around the restitution of objects or artworks stolen during colonisation.

to address representational justice" (Sergi 2021, 54). Increasingly, museum projects are reaching out to forced migrants for more long-term participatory commitments, for which museums arrange payment. However, as Sergi points out, the possibilities available to museums to pay the participants for their efforts are restricted by domestic asylum policies (2021, 54). For the museum to ensure a fair and ethical collaboration with the participants, they often must jump through additional hoops.

The ethical considerations and practical challenges of payment were especially prominent at the Tropenmuseum and the MEK. At these two museums, the participants became involved extensively, and their contribution was considered as time-consuming and valuable as existing paid roles within the museums. The other two projects – at the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery and Museum Friedland – expected less commitment from the participants, and viewed the workshops as an opportunity for them. The projects offered participants the chance to engage with an 'area of curiosity', and only took up a day or two of their time. These are valid considerations when deciding on whether to pay participants or to ask them to join without the possibility of remuneration, which immediately bring up another ethical question. At the start of this chapter, I cited a woman who stated that it might be difficult to say 'no' to something upon arrival to a new country. This dilemma might be greater if the participant is offered payment for their contribution, because it leaves little room for choice and plays into a potential *need* to participate. On the other hand, for some, payment might be necessary in order to make their participation possible. In this respect, the voluntary nature of participation becomes even more questionable.

The tour in the Tropenmuseum was a ticketed event, for which visitors had to pay. This meant that the participants could be paid the same wage as the museum guides of 'regular' museum tours. However, it was not easy to pay the participants for their work, due to the aforementioned restrictions on paying people who receive benefits from the government. For those participants receiving benefits at the time, any income would be deducted from the money received from the state; meaning that the participants would not really gain anything for their work on the tours. The project organiser insisted on organising a form of payment for the participants, and worked together with Refugee Start Force to set up contracts that circumvented any possible issues. Most people received a volunteer contribution based on a volunteer agreement, which allowed them to receive a small amount of money on top of their benefits, and their travel expenses were also reimbursed (T-A01). Only

two of the guides were able to receive the wage that the museum usually gives guides in the museum, because their status as students allowed them to receive an unlimited amount of remuneration (T-A01). Another museum employee took care of organising the contracts internally and pointed out that this proved difficult for the museum's HR department. For the education team, it was especially tedious to work with this department, as they seemed unable to draw up contracts that deviated from the usual contracts the museum worked with. "But it was a very exceptional group of people of course, so that should then – well, there was little adaptability" (T-A03). The educational assistant pointed out that payment was not only made difficult by the national labour laws, but also by the museum infrastructure and inflexible attitude of the staff (T-A03).

One of the participants of the *Aleppo* project at the Tropenmuseum described being paid for their work as a 'win-win' situation (T-A04). "Money was really not my goal, but of course it is nice to make a little money on the side" (T-A04). It was not only about the financial benefits, but they described the small income as a positive aspect of the project. They explained:

> not to say that money is a stimulus, but it stimulates you to take with you, or to consider, what can be done better, and what else can be done, you know? Because then you feel responsible for your work, and it really *becomes your work*. So I quite liked that. (T-A04, italics was originally spoken in English)

This sense of responsibility and a sense of ownership over the project contributed to a feeling of empowerment for this participant. Their contributions are recognised as important through remuneration, but this also supports their perception of the work as a job, for which they carry a responsibility. Payment, as the participant described, comes with certain expectations from the museum, yet these expectations make the participants feel trusted and in control of their position in their role and within the broader museum.

For the *daHEIM* project at the MEK, the KUNSTASYL foundation was contracted to carry out the participatory work, the co-hosted events, and the development of the exhibition. The sum agreed upon in the contract was to include these activities, but it was up to KUNSTASYL to pay the participants for their contributions. In a meeting with the museum staff and the project leaders (facilitator, co-curator and participant co-curator), the budget was discussed, and it was agreed that the co-curator and participant co-curator would receive additional fees, due to their more expansive responsibilities,

and the participants would instead be compensated for travel to/from the museum, and food and drink would be provided. The budget for the participants' expenses was agreed to be managed by the project facilitator.[4] The MEK reimbursed KUNSTASYL for these expenses, and trusted them to pay the participants. The curator explained that there were fixed amounts for the leading team members, and some money that was paid to KUNSTASYL. "And of course, we paid for things like water, coffee supplies, buying bread, fruit, whatever was necessary during the creation process" (MEK-D02). Unfortunately, some of the participants stated that they were not reimbursed for their expenses. One participant mentioned that their costs to travel to and from the museum in Dahlem added up to €139 a month, but were not reimbursed (MEK-D06). In their willingness to participate in the project, the participant actually paid money to contribute to the exhibition, and eventually also to the museum's collection. Upon asking the project facilitator about reimbursement, the participant received a total of €200 for their involvement of three to four months, both in the refugee shelter and the museum (MEK-D06). The participant explained that they felt used, elaborating that they would not do any further projects with the foundation because "[the project facilitator] only wants my work, and then – done" (MEK-D06).

Their disempowerment was not only due to the lack of reimbursement, but also due to the unequal relations between the participants and the leadership team. The same participant said they had asked the participant co-curator about payment, who had replied that they did receive money for their role, while the participant did not (MEK-D06). The participant co-curator brought this up in the interview, as they felt that this was a problematic aspect of the project, but it was something they were not in the position to change (MEK-D04). Another participant mentioned the lack of transparency about payment, saying: "I didn't know who is getting paid or not from our team" (MEK-D08). This lack of transparency led to most people feeling disempowered, and created a division between those who had been adjudged to be deserving of remuneration, and those who were not (see Salma, cited in Sergi 2021, 55). In choosing not to openly discuss the possibilities of payment – regardless of whether they could not or did not wish to pay participants in roles with less responsibility the same money – the participants felt lost, and unsure about how their situation related to those of the others.

4 This was outlined in the minutes from a meeting about the project held on 20 January 2016.

One participant's distrust grew when the performers joined the project towards the end of the exhibition. They described being confused about the organisation of the performance, especially as they learned that other people were paid for their time while they were not. In particular, this highlighted the unequal relations between the forced migrants and the local performers and dancers who joined the process later on. "I never complained about it, but now with you, I'd say so [that it felt unfair]" (MEK-D08). Especially, they continued, because "we were 'older', like, we were volunteering one year before [they were involved]" (MEK-D08). The museum curator said that this was not up to them, stating: "The only thing that had to be negotiated was how much money was available, so that everyone could get a small fee. So […] that at least a symbolic amount for everyone comes out of it. That they don't work like this for nothing, as you cannot expect that" (MEK-D02). Yet a number of participants ended up working without receiving a fee for their input, and this was perceived as being disempowering, due to a lack of recognition for their work, as well as the hierarchies it developed between the participants.

Museums might not always be able to offer remuneration for participation in a project, but they could use appraisal (see Adams 2003) or evaluation as a way of recognising the work put in by the participants, or to provide room for feedback from the participants during the process. Such methods are based on relationships built throughout the project, and reliant on a transparent and open participatory process that views the participants as equals. This can lead to participants feeling empowered, such as was the case with *Museum Takeover*. In this project, the participants were supported in their work throughout the process, and the project was so clearly framed that they felt great freedom in developing ideas within the framework provided by the museum.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter outlined essential aspects in the complex circumstances involved in processes of empowerment and disempowerment in participatory museum work. Museums must seek to facilitate empowerment, but even more important is the way the different roles within a participatory project are understood and enacted. As the curatorial role remains foregrounded as an authority in museum work, other roles – such as those with a focus on community engagement – continue to be seen as secondary. If the relevance of participatory practices is not acknowledged within the hierarchies of

organisational structures, how can participants expect be recognised and appreciated as equals?

The aspects of (dis-)empowerment described here are dependent on the adaptability of curators or project facilitators, even if a project is already completed from their perspective. The exhibition at the Tropenmuseum, for example, was clearly framed, yet it remained open to feedback and input from participants. Rather than providing a 'blank canvas', museum practitioners can start from a conversation with the participants, and enquire about their expectations and goals for the project, while also defining the possibilities within the spaces, timeframe and resources available. These resources may also include paying the participants, which can be perceived as a form of recognition. In the projects studied here, the 'methods of recognition' discussed created feelings of empowerment for some of the participants, yet at the same time, they proved to be especially complicated in projects with forced migrants. Remuneration is made possible or limited by institutional infrastructures and government policies, but ultimately, it is dependent on how relevant the leading practitioner deems the input from participants. The *daHEIM* project revealed that this process can also be very disempowering, as participants felt cheated and unsure about their relations with the other members of the group. It points out that these processes should be transparent if museums intend for projects to be empowering and democratic; something that can be achieved by evaluating processes throughout, and by providing a 'safe space' for participants. The latter is the focus of the next chapter.