Susanne Boersma

THE AFTERMATHS OF PARTICIPATION

Outcomes and Consequences of Participatory Work with Forced Migrants in Museums

[transcript] → Museum

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Susanne Boersma, born in 1992, is a museum practitioner and researcher based in Berlin. Previously, she worked as a curator, editor, and educator across different cultural sectors in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany. Her research focuses on museums' responses to forced migration to Europe and considers the experiences of and outcomes for the participants in museum work. She puts her findings into practice as a curator of museum exhibitions and projects at the Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (SPK).

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Introduction

It has been seven years since the so-called refugee crisis in Europe, and warfare continues to force people to leave their homelands to settle elsewhere. As I am writing this, in April of 2022, Russian troops are tearing apart Ukraine and the lives of its people, forcing many people to flee their homes. Forced migration is not temporary phenomenon, and historical, ethnographic and city museums will – one way or another – continue to address it through their work. Museums are already increasingly taking migration as a focus, and in doing so, they help contextualise the experiences and lives of migrants who have moved to countries in the Global North. The refugee protection crisis of 2015 led to a large number of participatory projects in museums in which practitioners engaged forced migrants to contribute their experiences and heritage. These projects led to a lot of research into participatory work with forced migrants (Sergi 2021; Ünsal 2019; Vlachou 2019; Vlachou 2017) and to insights into museums and migration more generally (Porsché 2019; Labadi 2018; Johansson and Bevelander 2017; Whitehead et. al. 2015; Gourievidis 2014), yet very few of these studies took the perspectives and experiences of the participants into account. This observation shaped the premise of this project: through conversations with practitioners and former participants of museum projects, I sought to learn about the outcomes for the individuals as well as for the institution. Conversations and related literature introduced me to the possibility that in some ways, these projects may have had negative consequences as well as positive outcomes for the participants. With that in mind, I started this research as an evaluation process, with a focus on the different aspects of museum work that might need to be reconsidered.

During my research project, I was based at the Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Museum of European Cultures – Berlin State Museums, referred to hereafter as the MEK), which also provided one of my case studies. I undertook work as a curator, engaged in strategy

meetings and became part of the team, whilst critically assessing the museum and its work for this project. The museum became a site for participant observation, allowing me to also see and experience some of the very practical limitations faced by practitioners on a day-to-day basis. It also meant that this museum, as a site of one of my case studies, was most closely analysed. With access to all documents and photographs from the project, I gained a much more detailed overview than was possible for the other case studies. This framed my research and its scope, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Over the past few years, my perception of the museum and what it is capable of has drastically changed; but so has the broader perception of the museum's role in society and ideas about where change is most needed. At the start of this research project, I was convinced that the work museums were doing was contributing positively to the lives of forced migrants in Europe. I still think museums can have a positive impact, but practitioners will need to reconsider some of their practices for future projects.

Contextualisation

The refugee protection crisis – often referred to merely as the 'refugee crisis' – that developed upon the arrival of over a million refugees in European countries in 2015 sparked divergent responses from politicians, the media and civil society. Along with changing political decisions and media representation, the public discourse shifted from welcoming to anxiously rejecting these new arrivals, as the debate around difference, diversity, belonging and identity intensified. Prevalent in the discourse surrounding the situation was the word 'crisis', which may have contributed to the panic, and placed a sense of urgency on the refugees as cultural 'others' (Bock and Macdonald 2019).

The media discourse particularly affected shifts in the representation of the topic, as it suggested the related problems were caused by refugees themselves, rather than the lack of infrastructure to deal with the incoming migrants and the long-standing neglect of the situation in the countries migrants were (and still are) trying to leave behind. It contributed to a process of 'othering', by seeking to transfer the 'blame' for the situation and promoting the nation-state as an exclusive entity (Gourievidis 2014, 3–4). These developments were countered by various initiatives from civil society,

businesses and cultural institutions, which aimed to help overcome existing and newly built barriers between the local population and the new arrivals. "While the 'refugee crisis' was widely publicised in the media, many European museums, particularly ethnographic ones, were encouraged to reconsider their own role, mission, and exhibition and communication strategies during these unsettled times" (Račič and Čeplak Mencin 2019, 218–219). The situation led to an increased focus on migration within existing institutions, as well as in newly established ones that take migration as their main interest (Porsché 2018; Vlachou 2019). Museums were (and still are) expected to respond to these changing dynamics, seen as agents that could speed up the process of adapting to the multicultural nature of societies. Arguably, this has been one of the most pressing challenges for museums over recent decades. "Questions and arguments about the role of museums in addressing social problems, tensions and divisions are of course not new – in particular in relation to cultural diversity – but they are burning harder than ever now, and involve unprecedented complexities" (Whitehead and Lanz 2019, 23).

Before museums found themselves confronted with this urgency to represent those moving to European states, they were already seeking new approaches to engaging differently and more inclusively, through methods of 'community engagement' (Golding and Modest 2013; Meijer-van Mensch 2012). Following a shift from "new museology" (Vergo 1989) to the museum as a "contact zone" (Clifford 1997, following Pratt 1992) and then to the "participatory museum" (Simon 2010), the museum's focus has been moving from the objects in the collection to the people it represents. Museums too have to move away from the "myth of neutrality" to become active contributors to sociopolitical debates (Gesser et al. 2020; Janes and Sandell 2019; Vlachou 2019). However, the colonial history of the institution continues to construct power relations that define the relationship between Europe and the 'other' (Kockel 2015; Said 2007; Clifford 1997). These power structures also inform the ways in which museums have represented forced migrants in recent projects, which is especially evident in the approach towards forced migrants as a singular 'community'. Recently, museums have reserved this term largely for referring to Black people and other people of colour (BPoC) (Efe 2021; Jones 2021), but it indicates a group of people based on a set of limited characteristics (Waterton and Smith 2010). Museums impose a 'shared identity' on a group of people (Waterton and Smith 2010, 10) and, in doing so, they differentiate between the 'own' and 'other' culture (Van Zeijden and Elpers 2018). This process is key to the participatory, or community engagement

work of museums; a practice that has more recently been discussed as a way to make the museum more relevant to different audiences and participants (Morse 2021; Nielsen 2015; Simon 2013; Kreps 2008).

In their reconfigured role, museums might be able to challenge political shifts that threaten democracy and social cohesion (De Cesari and Kaya 2020; De Cesari 2017; Gourievidis 2014). In response to the refugee protection crisis, many museums across Europe worked with migrant groups to develop temporary exhibitions, events or talks, or to contribute to museum collections. Aware of the challenges that come with the representation of the 'other', museums have been exploring various approaches to participatory curatorial practice. Whilst these practices have been long evolving, the more recent projects with forced migrants grew out of an intention to include their personal and collective memories within the context of national or European culture (Porsché 2018). The participatory projects taking place within memory institutions today – such as those investigated in this study – aim to overcome the inherent biases that are so deeply rooted in colonial modes of thought in Europe. These practices, however, may alter the prominent perception and role of the museum as an institution, which cannot maintain a neutral position when addressing such politically urgent issues (Vlachou 2019). The presumed neutrality of the museum – despite its governmental ties, its dependence on funding and the inevitably subjective internal voices (of its employees) – has been questioned before, but these particular circumstances demand a clearer communication of the museum's stance. With this in mind, projects that are developed with the intention of benefitting forced migrants are challenging, as they confirm the pervasive inequality between the local population and forced migrants (Mörsch 2016, 69).

Participatory practices with migrants may confirm media discourses rather than transcend them if an understanding of participation and its necessity does not directly inform the approach taken by museums. At the same time, this approach "too often results in further undermining the self-esteem of migrant communities because it regards them *only* as passive, suffering victims and objects of pity, eroding their dignity, self-determination, and active agency" (Lynch 2017a, 233, emphasis in original). Through adopting participatory rather than authoritative practices, museums aim to incorporate multiple cultural memories into the ethnographic representations that constitute the museum discourse. As a result, the focus on migration and its intricacies has expanded the museum's tendency to employ participatory approaches, as well as the need to question such

practices and assess their true potential. The museum as a "contact zone" as proposed by James Clifford (1997) – based on the concept proposed by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and further explored by Robin Boast (2011) within a more contemporary context – employs collaborative practices, yet these are not necessarily beneficial to the participants. Boast addresses this issue when he points towards "the contact zone [as] an asymmetric space where the periphery comes to win some small, momentary, and strategic advantage, but where the center ultimately gains" (2011, 66). Placing the museum at the centre and the 'communities' it engages with on the periphery (Morse 2021, 41), it is the museum that most evidently gains from these practices, whilst participants gain little, if anything, at all, both during and after the process.

Participatory practices become relevant, and potentially more sustainable, if they provide positive outcomes for participants and museums alike (Weil 2007), following a "logic of care" (Morse 2021). Sustainability in practice refers to social impact and continuous social learning (Naguib 2013; Colvin 2018), creating a network (Graham 2017) and anchoring an event or debate in the museum through collections and exhibitions (Macdonald 2013). Relevant and sustainable participatory work should be ethical and consider the needs and interests of the participants (Morse 2021; Marstine 2011). These aspects are especially important, because sustainability might entail both positive outcomes and negative consequences (Koch and Lutz 2017). This study seeks to assess the sustainability of these projects by considering their expected and eventual outcomes. I apply the concept of sustainability as proposed by Gertraud Koch and Samantha Lutz, who return to the ecological meaning of the term, describing it as a "condition or state" in which elements are maintained at a constant level (2017, 71). Translating this understanding to museum work, my research seeks to define how participatory projects can have a lasting impact on the forced migrants involved, and on the museum and its practices.

Key concepts

As referred to in the title of this book and discussed in the previous section, this research focuses on projects with forced migrants. I refer to forced migrants rather than refugees for two main reasons: because the term 'forced migrant' is able to act as an all-encompassing term to describe all people who have been forced to flee their homelands, and also in response

to the negative connotations attached to the word 'refugee' since 2015. According to the Geneva Convention, the term 'refugee' applies to anyone with a "well-grounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (UN General Assembly 1951). The term is often used to refer to people who have been granted 'refugee status', and does not include asylum seekers (whose applications are still pending), undocumented migrants or internally displaced migrants (Engler and Schneider 2015). Additionally, in Germany, the concept has come to be connected to the notion of a 'crisis', which was worsened by the discursive shift from 'victim' to 'villain' in response to the attacks in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015–16.[1] These shifts reflect a repeating pattern of "hostility and suspicion towards refugees" (Vollmer and Karakayali 2017). In this study, I do not wish to repeat such patterns, nor do I want to suggest museums should not limit their work exclusively to people who have been granted refugee status by the state. This research project, as part of the EU's Horizon 2020 project POEM, was entitled 'Collaboration and incorporation of vulnerable groups in professional PMW [participatory memory work]'. However, this study does not reflect on forced migrants as vulnerable groups, as it challenges this particular perspective on forced migrants and scrutinises the museum's participatory practices that figure migrants as 'vulnerable' (see Lynch 2017a).

Derived from the original thesis title, this book focuses on participatory memory work, which can be defined as participatory work carried out within or by memory institutions, such as archives, libraries and museums. This excludes 'galleries' from the original combined acronym of 'GLAM', which in this case is less relevant for its role in memory work due to the absence of a collection or archive. This study focuses in particular on the participatory work in and by museums, yet it draws on several theories that apply to the wider field of memory institutions. This work can be participatory in many different ways, from contributions within the exhibition spaces to the co-creation of an exhibition or collaborative collecting practices (Piontek 2017;

1 On New Year's Eve of 2015–16, several women were victims of sexual assault and theft in and near the central train station in Cologne, Germany. Though the actual events "remain contentious" (Wigger et al. 2022), several young men were involved, a number of whom were of North African origin. Accounts and reports on the events quickly took on a life of their own, as negativity towards (forced) migrants spread in Germany and neighbouring countries (Wigger et al. 2022; Tolsma et al. 2021).

Simon 2010). In this study, however, I focus on participatory work that engaged with participants to contribute to, or create (parts of), an exhibition. Rather than focusing on the institutions themselves, I will outline the context of the institutions before addressing the work of museum practitioners directly. Museum practitioners are any staff members of the museum, such as collection managers, community engagement officers, conservators, curators, educators, marketers, museum directors and workshop facilitators. Museum practitioners shape the work of the institution; the way that projects are approached, carried out and evaluated is very much up to them.

This project studies these approaches and considers how they may have led to several of the project's sustainable outcomes. Sustainability has become a major focus for museums: first and foremost, in the sense that museums are expected to work in a more sustainable way (greener, less waste, more recycled materials), but secondly, in a way that it has become increasingly relevant to consider the long-term impact of museum work. The latter understanding of sustainability often implies that projects should produce tangible outputs, whether these are exhibits, objects/works for the museum's collection, or other products of collaborative practice. However, museum practices often produce intangible outcomes, both for the museum (learning processes about new practices and in-depth knowledge of specific topics, a shift in the museum's surroundings or how this is perceived), and for the participants (feeling empowered or gaining a sense of belonging, having learned a new skill, or making friendships or expanding professional networks). Though these intangible outcomes are most relevant to the impact of museum work more generally, they are rarely the focus of research or practice – especially due to the expectations of funding bodies –, and this is something I seek to redress by making them a central part of this study.

Aims, methods and scope

This research project evaluates recent participatory projects with forced migrants. The investigation considers projects that have taken place since 2015 and have already come to an end, so as to allow for a reflection on their outcomes and potential impact together with their participants. This approach therefore addresses the full process of these projects as outlined in social innovation theory, which points towards the stages of projects as: inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. It focuses on museum

projects in Western Europe, with case studies in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The parameters are defined by a clearly marked point in time – the start of the refugee protection crisis in 2015 – and this geographical area within the European Union that, at the time, were similarly affected by and had comparable responses to the so-called 'crisis'. Beyond the borders of these European countries, many museums in the EU and worldwide have engaged with forced migrants in recent years; these projects would likewise make interesting case studies, yet insufficient knowledge of their political contexts and insurmountable language barriers have excluded these from my qualitative study. The proliferation of the discussed projects, whether temporary or longer term, is relevant for the museum's practices going forward.

Beginning my research by looking at some of the goals that are often mentioned by museum practitioners or described in recent studies, I seek to evaluate how these particular goals translate to museum practices and impact on the museum and the participants. Despite visitors being a relevant stakeholder group to the museum, perspectives and reflections from visitors are left out in order to allow for a clear focus on the people that actively contributed to the projects prior to the realisation of their outputs. Through reflections from different (active) stakeholders in each of the studied projects, this investigation reflects on participatory processes and their respective outcomes to outline the potential for a more sustainable museum praxis. The studied participatory approaches, along with the relationships that are formed, the role of the museums, the discourses that are generated and the museum collections all contribute to what participants take with them and what remains in the museum. Throughout this study, I will ask what – but more importantly who – is prioritised through the different approaches. This book discusses the distinctive experiences of particular practices as well as their aftermaths, as these continue to affect the former participants long after a project has ended. Aiming to consider the consequences and outcomes of participatory museum work, I look beyond the projects' timelines and outside of the museums' physical spaces. As such, I address what happened in relation to what remains of the project today. Starting from a "logic of care" (Morse 2021), I propose a more *care-full* and social approach to participation, which puts the needs and objectives of the participants first, positioning the museum not at the centre but on the periphery of these practices. In doing so, I explore the extent to which museums should take on social responsibilities,

and consider the boundaries between participatory practices with forced migrants and social work.

Through an analysis of selected case studies, I set out to evaluate the museums' practices with forced migrants and their outcomes. Based at the MEK in Berlin, I gathered information for one of my case studies and the general workings of this institution on a daily basis. The materials and knowledge that inform this case study are much more comprehensive than the information that shaped the other case studies. This study is based on qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis framed by central aspects of impact assessment (following Tanner 2012). The semi-structured interviews with practitioners and research participants provide the key materials for this study, with the interviews being made up of personal reflections that cannot be generalised but are paramount for the study of the processes and outcomes relevant to different stakeholders.

The research focuses on the projects in hindsight, looking back at museum projects that took place several years ago. This meant that in all cases, it was difficult to reach the former participants, who have moved on with their lives and may not wish to or have time to reflect on a project that they took part in several years ago. Similar to participatory practices in museums, this research may not provide outcomes that are particularly relevant to the former participants today. Most interviews with the participants lasted one or two hours, providing in-depth material and deeply personal perspectives on the different case studies. Yet, of course, these can only serve as excerpts and should not be misunderstood as representing every participant's experiences of the respective project. The same goes for the reflections of the museum practitioners, who – as much as they work(ed) for the museum – embarked on these projects from their personal positionality as museum practitioners and as people. I analyse the interviews starting from commonly addressed themes or challenges, but have shaped the main body of this study according to the goals outlined for the project at the MEK. Research participants remain anonymous and upon request some contributions and the analysis thereof have been discussed in order to avoid misinterpretations or false contextualisation of the materials. In addition to these ethnographic methods, I apply discourse analysis (Whitehead 2016; Rose 2012; Hall 2018) to address the written and visual materials related to the participatory project outputs, including the exhibitions and, in some cases, additions to the museum collection. Through a study of the discourses developed as part of these projects, I identify the different ways in which the

museums attempted to challenge the dominant discourse on forced migration (as described above), as well as how this perpetuated unequal power relations. All methods combined allowed for a thorough study of the processes and outcomes of the selected projects.

Even though this study is predominantly shaped by the reflections of my research participants, the analysis and conclusions are a product of my own positionality and thinking as a researcher and museum practitioner. I include many citations to refrain from changing the intended meaning of certain reflections, yet these materials are framed by a structure that I felt was most relevant. Starting from a focus that mainly considered the museum and the relevance of participatory work for museums, I shifted my position as I learned about the experiences of the participants and found that these were commonly lacking in studies about participatory work. This shift meant that, as a White researcher, I asked BPoC participants about their experiences, and I tried to make them feel comfortable and heard. Despite my position of privilege, I hope I have presented their views in this book in an ethical and respectful way, and that the debates brought together in this book show how urgent it is for us to take these considerations seriously. Additionally, I would like to mention my position as a researcher based at the MEK. Whilst based at the museum, an ongoing conflict between a former participant, the project facilitator and the museum continued to unfold, providing me with otherwise private information; it would not surprise me if such discussions took place in other institutions as well, but this would generally be kept behind closed doors. As such, my position at the MEK shaped the study to the effect that contains in-depth examples from this particular museum, which could not always be balanced with examples from, or insights about, other projects.

The scope of this study, however, was significantly redrawn by the Black Lives Matter movement, which resulted in a shift in perspective and wider understanding of the continuous presence of racialisation and discrimination in modern-day Western European societies. This movement began in 2013 in response to excessive police violence towards Black people, particularly in the United States. On 25 May 2020, a police officer murdered George Floyd, which sparked a number of protests in countries around the world (McGonigle Leyh 2020). These protests did not limit themselves to addressing police brutality towards Black people but also took aim at much wider issues of discrimination against Black people locally and globally. These protests and the conversations I had as a result have also changed my perspective on, and heightened my awareness of, everyday racism, structural inequalities and

my own privileges as a White woman. The protests also sparked responses from museums, many of which drafted a statement to express solidarity with the movement, which were consequently critiqued for their hollow promises (Greenberger and Solomon 2020). Museums were, and still are, expected to re-evaluate their collections, staff and approaches as a means of decolonising the institution (Wajid and Minott 2019; Kassim 2017). The political and societal impact of the Black Lives Matter movement inevitably changed our expectations of museums; the societal role of museums and the ethics of their practices are central to this study.

Contributions to museum research and practice

In this introduction so far, I identified the role of museums within the context of the EU, and related this to the representation of the 'other'. The museum's 'new role' (as formally identified by ICOM in 2022) highlights the relevance of participatory practices, identifying their potential in struggles to break down persistent hierarchies. Providing further insight into common practices and the idea of 'empowering' 'migrant communities', I introduced certain difficulties with participatory memory work within culturally and politically embedded structures. Pointing to the short-lived nature of participatory projects (or museum projects in general), I outline their potential for sustainable outcomes. After identifying the gaps in existing research, I outlined my aims, methods and scope for this study. As such, I have identified my theoretical, practical and personal approach to the study of participatory work with forced migrants in museums and its relevance for the future of museum practice. This study sits between the well-established fields of museum studies, heritage studies, post-colonial studies, cultural anthropology, design anthropology, ethnology, participatory research and migration studies. In this book, I build on literature from these fields and my empirical materials to propose additional ways of extending projects' lives within the museological realm.

In response to the museum's shift towards exhibiting migration and working with migrants, many researchers have considered the work done by museums and the problems implicit in such work. Researchers have reflected on the ways in which museums represent migration (Porsché 2019; Ulz 2019; Gourievidis 2014; Meza Torres 2013; Baur 2009), on the museum as a political (non-neutral) institution (Gesser et al. 2020; Vlachou 2019; Whitehead et

al. 2015), on its transformation into an activist institution in the fight for social justice (Janes and Sandell 2020; Labadi 2018) or into a space of social care (Morse 2021), and on the power relations that defined the participatory processes in museums (Sergi 2021; Lynch 2017a; Lynch 2014). As Sergi points out, most of the publications in this field address "migration as an all-encompassing analytical category" (2021, 2), neglecting some of the more specific complexities surrounding the political and social circumstances of many forced migrants. This study proposes a different approach to reflecting on these practices and their potential role in the lives of the participants. It does not foreground the institutions nor does it generalise input from individuals to draw broad conclusions; instead, the interviews bring in personal perspectives that highlight the differences between participants in terms of their needs, experiences and takeaways from the projects, and between practitioners in their approaches, professional identities and roles, as well as their personal ideas and expectations. Drawing on the individual reflections on the different processes of the participatory projects several years later, this investigation underscores the notion that wisdom is hindsight. As such, it does not merely foreground the necessity of project evaluation, it also emphasises the quickly changing debates and sensitivities that need to be taken into account before engaging in participatory work as a museum.

In the aforementioned studies, notable researchers and practitioners bring up questions about the sustainability of participatory work, the need for organisational change, and about ethical practices. These have been critically considered but not yet answered in the work of my colleagues. A focus on the goals and outcomes of participatory memory work in the particular context of the refugee protection crisis is necessary in order to rethink such questions. Especially when reconsidering the museum's social or societal role (as per Janes and Sandell 2019; Golding and Walklate 2019; Morse 2021), it is important to assess the ethics of its institutional practices. Despite its relevance for recent publications (such as Morse 2021; Sergi 2021), the very practice of ethical museum work remains insufficiently dissected. With a focus on the potential longer-term outcomes of museum work, the ethical considerations need to be tailored to the sociopolitical framework of the future. This research studies the museum's position within current and future cultural, social and political contexts, and looks at the prospective development of participatory work as a more sustainable praxis.

On the structure of the book

In this introduction, I have presented the relevant literature and outlined the methodology applied for this research project. In the following two chapters, I build on this by positioning participatory memory work with forced migrants in its broader contexts and outlining the selected case studies. The first chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the research by contextualising participatory museum practices with forced migrants. It defines the relevance of the museum's infrastructure for how it is used by stakeholders inside and outside of the museum. Through studies on the continuing colonial legacy of the institution, this chapter also outlines the colonial frameworks and ethical complexities of museums today. Building on the outlined frameworks, the second chapter offers a detailed description of the four case studies. Each of the case studies is described by way of a project description, the projects' (pre-)defined goals and evaluation processes, a description of the hosting museums and potential partner organisations, and a review of the political context of these cases. The cases and their goals form the basis for the outline of the following section of this book, in which I analyse the experienced processes and their outcomes.

Guiding the reader through the different aspects of participatory work with forced migrants in museums, the evaluative chapters of this book each depart from a well-known or frequently proposed goal of these practices. These address established and criticised processes and outcomes through a selection of five goals: networking communities, empowering participants, creating or becoming a 'safe space', changing the discourse, and material and digital outputs. As participatory projects start with an invitation process, Chapter 3 addresses the development of a network of participants as an initial potential output of participatory museum work. The development of relationships with the participants starts with the invitation of so-called communities. This chapter highlights the ways in which these practices contribute to processes of 'othering', and looks at how assumptions about groups may spark conflict amongst the participants. Through an assessment of the related processes of building trust and forming friendships, I outline the museum's potential and limitations for creating a network with the group of participants. Following this, Chapter 4 addresses the frequently mentioned goal of 'empowering' marginalised communities. In this chapter, I describe the asymmetrical power relations at play in the participatory processes in museums, especially with regards to forced migrants. At the same time

though, I also point out that these power relations do not necessarily have to obstruct processes of empowerment. The chapter identifies the different roles people played during the projects, and how these informed the process, in particular underlining the well-preserved authority of the curator. With a discussion of the transparency and adaptability in decision-making and the potential for remuneration for participatory work as a form of recognition, I present a number of mechanisms for (dis-)empowerment. This aspect ties in with the focus of the next chapter on the potential of the museum coming to function as a 'safe space', for the duration of the participatory project and thereafter. As such, Chapter 5 addresses the breadth of museum thresholds and the role of the museum in society, in order to identify which aspects are getting in the way of museums becoming 'safe spaces'. It points to the roles of practitioners as paramount in developing and maintaining such welcoming, inclusive and safe spaces (Morse 2021). However, it also acknowledges the public role of the museum, and the ways in which this may compromise a 'safe space' during or after a participatory project. Through encounters with press and visitors, as well as encounters in digital spaces, the participant's perception of the space might change. The maintenance of these spaces as 'safe spaces' throughout, I argue, relies on the work of the museum staff.

This brings us to Chapters 6 and 7, which focus on the museum's discourse through its exhibitions and other materials, as well as the material and digital remnants of the project (the latter being an 'expected' outcome for the museum). In Chapter 6, I highlight the museum's role in the "authorised heritage discourse" (Smith 2006) and how participatory practices might feed into this. The chapter demonstrates how museums attempted to positively contribute to the political debate, and how in the process they unintentionally fed into stereotypes of migrants as cultural 'others'. It discusses different aspects that contributed to the discourse presented in the museum. Carrying on from this, Chapter 7 looks at what was physically and digitally left of the projects afterwards, and what was kept and preserved by the museums. It highlights how decisions were made for collecting the outputs as objects, and how this adds to the discourse presented by the museum. Similarly, I look at the online presence of the projects today – through online collections and dormant websites – and question how these continue to represent the projects and their outputs. I focus primarily on a goal that is set by the museum following a contributory logic, based on what participants might be able to add to the museum. However, in this final analytical chapter, I also look at

the ways in which the collection and an enduring online presence may be relevant for the participants or forced migrants arriving in Germany today.

In a discussion chapter (Chapter 8), I reflect on these findings by bringing them together in a further examination of their broader conclusions. After a short summary of the analytical chapters, I combine my findings into thematic sub-chapters on ethical practices within neo-colonial institutions, the museum's organisational infrastructures and role(s), and the incorporation of sustainable outcomes in practice. Finally, in Chapter 9, I return to the initial aims of this research and evaluate the main findings. I highlight the need to reflect on outcomes as part of museum practice, and propose that, especially in participatory work with people who are being marginalised, practitioners should take a more careful approach. This evaluation of the processes and the outputs for museums and participants serves as a starting point for shaping future approaches to collaborations with forced migrants. As such, this final chapter suggests potential first steps toward applying these findings in museum work, as well as providing a reflection on the limitations of this study and the need for further research. As a whole, the book brings together ideas about sustainable practice, ethics and processes of decolonisation, in order to propose the shifts required to develop a more socially responsive museum practice.

I. Participatory Museum Work with Forced Migrants

1. Contextualising Participation in Museums

Despite participation not being a new concept in museums, participatory practices are only slowly starting to develop within the rigid infrastructures that define these memory institutions. Though the urge to engage people through participatory approaches varies between the different types of museums, the themes of participation and migration have become relevant across most of them. The increased interest in participation as a part of museum work has become especially prominent in approaches to engaging with forced migrants. In response to what is often referred to as the 'summer of migration' or the 'refugee crisis' of 2015 (Bock and Macdonald 2019), museums often adopted participatory approaches with the aim of 'giving a voice' to these inadequately represented 'communities'. Participatory work with forced migrants (as well as with other migrants) has taken on different forms and functions. However, these projects rarely lead to sustainable outcomes for the museum and for the people engaged in this museum work. As pointed out in the introduction to this study, there has not yet been thorough discussion of these outcomes and their (potential) long-term relevance for both institution and participants. In practice, reflections on participatory work or evaluations of participatory practices and their outcomes are rarely considered an integral part of the work. Museum practitioners often take a formulaic approach to such participatory projects, putting the objectives of the museum – such as collecting objects or works, and taking part in pressing and highly mediatised debates – at the centre of their work. They apply a 'logic of contribution', a term proposed by Nuala Morse to underline the focus on the museum's motivations in community engagement work (2021).

Recent studies call for further development of these practices, applying notions of care (Morse 2021), activism (Janes and Sandell 2019) and anti-discrimination (Bayer et al. 2017), and considering the long-term outcomes

(or sustainability) of this work (Brighenti 2020; Tietmeyer 2016; Golding 2013). These prospects for the future of museums should not merely be envisioned, but also need to be actively pursued in practice. Many museum practitioners want and are trying to shift their practices towards caring, activist, anti-discriminatory and sustainable methodologies, yet their work is limited by funding (or the known objectives of funders), confined by the local and national political context, and by time constraints and the social, psychological and personal capacities of staff members (Munro 2014). Shaped by its history and the institution's infrastructures, including all stakeholders, participatory projects sit within tight, often inflexible frameworks. Changing participatory practices and their potential for sustainable outcomes is easier said than done.

In this chapter, I lay the foundations for this study through an introduction of infrastructure and actor-network theory in order to discuss the relevant forms of museum infrastructure and the ways in which these enable and shape participatory work. This infrastructural context in which participatory practices take place is studied in more detail with reference to museum stakeholders and the relations between them, with the infrastructural backdrop becoming visible through museum's organisational structures and their relations to funding bodies. The second sub-chapter references more specific studies on participatory work with forced migrants. It highlights broader participation-related questions about organisational infrastructure (as a potential restraint on participation) and the ethics of participatory work in general. In outlining these different aspects and their influence on participatory projects, this chapter sets the scene for the discussion of the case studies in the following chapter and for my analysis thereafter.

1.1 Museums and their (wider) infrastructures

As I have already addressed, museum practitioners and researchers have both signalled the need for institutional change. The museum as an institution, however, tends to be seen as unchangeable, rigid and inflexible (Wajid and Minott 2019; Cameron 2015; Janes 2007). Friederike Landau (2020) refers to a recent shift in the ICOM museum definition, with the new proposal from the ICOM conference in Kyoto (2019) not emphasising the museum's permanence for the first time in 75 years. The definition proposed at the time reads:

> Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing. (ICOM 2019)

Rather than reflecting a perception of museums as rigid and inflexible, it suggests they are continuously changing institutions. This aligns with what Fiona Cameron described in her plea for a 'liquid museum' (2015). Cameron proposes a more flexible institution, which can be understood as "nested in multiple networks and flows, as open-ended institutional structures that are light, liquid, mobile, horizontal (as opposed to hierarchical), relational, and adaptive" (2015, 354). This approach identifies a flexibility that is deemed necessary for museums' practices to change, in order to allow for more adaptable approaches. However, in order to understand exactly where this flexibility is required, and how this might be relevant for future museum work, the museum and its wider infrastructures need to be evaluated.

Infrastructure has been described as a useful subject of study, due to the insight it provides into the underlying systems that define relations between actors and practices, since infrastructure can be seen as a "complex social and technological process that enables – or disables – particular kinds of action" (Graham and McFarlane 2015, 1). Referring both to analogue and digital infrastructures, they are understood as sustainable structures which gain permanence but continue to be adaptable in response to technological or sociopolitical developments (see Star and Bowker 2006, 241). In her work on infrastructures, Gertraud Koch points towards the tension between sustainability and temporal relationships (2017, 86). Despite the fact that Koch's focus is on digital infrastructures, her analysis mirrors problems that define museum infrastructures, such as the different temporalities of "financing periods, staff availability, institutional contexts" (Koch 2017, 86). The infrastructures in, of and for museum work are similarly bound by different temporal frameworks; they are organised around specific funding periods and deadlines, are reliant on the availability of museum

practitioners or facilitators, and inflected by institutional histories and ties to other institutions. As this study focuses on the sustainable outcomes of participatory museum work, it is necessary to understand which types of infrastructures make these processes and their sustainability possible (or impossible).

In this sub-chapter, I further explore the relationship between infrastructures and the sustainability of (temporal) participatory museum projects. I define the infrastructures in and around museums to provide a more in-depth overview of the ongoing processes and their defining frameworks, and study the most clearly relevant infrastructures in more detail. The first section focuses on infrastructures in general and identifies the aspects that shape participatory museum practices. The second section addresses a dominant infrastructure which is often viewed as highly rigid, namely the organisational infrastructure of the museum. It outlines the significance of departmental structures for participatory work and points to the (in)visible hierarchies between departments and practitioners. The third section of this sub-chapter draws out the colonial infrastructures that continue to affect museum practice today. In doing so, I bring together research from STS (science and technology studies), museum studies and anthropology to describe these infrastructures and assess their impact on the capacity of participatory practices to achieve sustainable outcomes.

1.1.1 Museum infrastructures

To understand the museum and the broader infrastructures that determine and contextualise museum practices, we need to first take a closer look at the meaning of infrastructures and their relevance for museums. Gaining an understanding of the underlying infrastructures helps us to explore the ways in which they affect the work done in and by museums; the often-invisible structures that shape the practices that take place within the walls of the museum. In this section, I briefly address the notion of infrastructure in relation to actor-network theory (ANT), referring to structural contexts as well as the human and non-human actors that make up the contexts in which museum work takes shape. I outline different studies that sketch out the roles of various infrastructures in museum practice, and connect this to the potential outcomes of museum work, and of participatory museum projects in particular.

The definition of infrastructure is widely debated across various disciplines and does not hold a singular meaning or takes a single specific form. In anthropology, infrastructures that take a physical form, such as sewage systems (Hecht 2018; Harvey et al. 2017), and those less tangible, such as digital infrastructures for online practices (Koch 2017), are defined as socio-material processes (Larkin 2013) that are inherently connected. Infrastructures can be understood as relational entities that provide "the scaffolding for knowledgable human action" (Huvila 2019, 4), which become visible when they fail or obstruct certain actions (Star and Ruhleder 1996). Within institutions, infrastructure can be seen as the backdrop to social actions such as participatory practice (Harvey 2017, 3). These definitions suggest that infrastructures should not be understood as passive structures but ought to be addressed as active systems, and thus viewed as 'actors' when studying a particular process. The infrastructure as a process makes certain actions possible (and others impossible), reflecting relationships in everyday life. In keeping with this understanding, infrastructures perpetuate existing power relations and keep practices of exclusion in place (Graham and McFarlane 2015, 1). Further studies on infrastructure and the potential of "'infrastructuring" (Karasti 2014; Pipek and Wulf 2009) define it as a means of understanding social hierarchies and how these are performed by different actors (Rodgers and O'Neill 2012, 402). It is the performance of hierarchies within infrastructures that is deemed of particular relevance for participation, as museums tend to apply participatory practices to break down hierarchies between museums and participants, and the 'communities' they are considered to be a part of (Simon 2010). Through supporting marginalised people to develop autonomous infrastructures, Noah Lenstra argues, museums can address social inequalities (2017, 103). Lenstra's suggestion points towards a collaborative practice that requires participants to take on an active role in changing existing infrastructures, or in building separate infrastructures outside of the museum to allow for a more inclusive practice. Rather than further separating collaborative processes from what is understood as 'regular' museum work, this study looks at how these can actually be brought closer together. How museum infrastructures shape, limit or obstruct museum work and its outcomes is based on the activity of their stakeholders, their roles, and the way they perpetuate or disrupt the hierarchies in place.

This focus on the relationships that make up museums and museum practices is drawn from the increasingly common assemblage-based

approach to museum work, which understands the institution as a network of people, things and ideas (Morse 2021, 160). Central to this work, Morse explains, is "a view of museums as collectives (or 'meshworks') in which human and non-humans – staff, artefacts, funding bids, display cases and collections management software – are held together in provisional and contingent wholes" (2021, 160). A similar approach was suggested by Knudsen (2016), who pointed to ANT as a means of mapping different processes and tracing participation. Landau (2020) proposes a view of future museums as para-infrastructures, which allow for new connections to be drawn between practices and places for museum practices. She refers to the work of Shannon Mattern (2019) when defining museums as "network[s] of integrated, mutually reinforcing, evolving infrastructures – in particular, architectural, technological, social, epistemological and ethical infrastructures" (2020, 176). As such, she brings the concept of infrastructures closer to the 'actual work' done by museum practitioners. The approach suggested here underscores the relevance of the relationships between museum actors, narratives, values and collections (Landau 2020, 176); between human actors and non-human actors. At the same time, Landau singles out particular relevant infrastructures, describing the relevance of spatial, relational and contextual factors, the available digital infrastructures and the ethical framework of museum work. It is above all these infrastructures, and their role in participatory processes and their outcomes, that are central to this study. Following Knudsen, a mapping of the processes and roles of different stakeholders provides a framework for understanding participatory processes in relation to their products, or outcomes (2016, 197).

Further defining the contextual, epistemological and ethical infrastructures for museum work allows us to situate the museum within its broader framework, so as to avoid viewing the institution (and its work) as an island (Macdonald et al. 2018, 140). Rather than analysing the museum as an isolated institution, or projects as isolated aspects of museum work, the museums and projects studied are discussed against the backdrop of their respective sociopolitical and institutional contexts. Understanding the museum as a node within a network of people, things and ideas allows for a more distributed view of the rather peripheral role of the museum within this network (Morse 2021, 160). This broader contextualisation of the institution and its relations to human and non-human actors emphasises the relevance of further actors within this 'network', and can facilitate a practice of care (see Morse 2021, 160). This is reflected in Lenstra's approach

to infrastructures (2017), which outlines 'cultural heritage infrastructures' that exist outside of the institution but are inherent to the work done within it. The institution's links to other organisations, funding bodies and governments, as well as its connection to audiences (in the museum and online) are relevant for understanding decisions made 'on the ground'. At the same time, Macdonald et al. seek to "urge attention to non-connections and to the ways in which 'doing organizations' in practice can also limit collaboration and change" (2018, 140). This focus on the disconnect between stakeholders – or the exclusion of important stakeholders – allows for an assessment of the practical limitations of museum work.

As infrastructures – ranging from digital to underlying ethical structures – become visible through the ways in which they fail to support contemporary museum practice, it becomes clear that infrastructures themselves are actors in museum work. These do not need to be static and immutable, but might be more flexible and dynamic than often thought. Fiona Cameron has described museum structures as "organic, evolving with society or the organization they support, defining it as much as they are defined by it" (2005, 243). The potential dynamic aspect of infrastructures and their ability to adapt to changing contexts suggests that they are both inherent to, and the result of, processes of continuous social learning, hence facilitating a more sustainable practice. This adaptability is necessary right across the institution, as an element of all relevant infrastructures, in order to make a sustainable practice possible. A better understanding of how these infrastructures are used, navigated and challenged is needed to see how they might become as flexible as Cameron suggests. Through a study of the relevant infrastructures for museum work, these relational aspects and how they are performed through and by these infrastructures becomes evident. This supports the study of the different processes and their potential outcomes, which will reveal these infrastructures more clearly by addressing how they fall short.

1.1.2 Organisational structures and change

One central infrastructure of museums (and other organisations) is the organisational infrastructure, which constitutes the museum's departmental structure and staff roles, as well as the relational aspects of these structures that enable connections across the institution. This section sketches out these organisational infrastructures in order to provide insight into the workings of the institution and the relations and power structures that determine

museum practices. I will outline the foundations of participatory practice, and point to different aspects relevant to the processes studied in the following chapters.

Cameron's work cited above (2015) addresses the need for a certain institutional flexibility which requires a rethinking of organisational infrastructures. Hierarchies within organisational infrastructures define the dynamics between these different parties as well as the point in a process where they play a role. Macdonald et al. have referred to the organigram as a way to visualise these relations, yet this visualisation is unable to present how these relations take shape.

> Organigrams can tell us that a museum is part of a larger organization or that some of its functions – such as creating a new exhibition or undertaking educational outreach – may be distributed beyond its walls. What they don't tell us is how this works on the ground, and how these relationships are experienced in practice and with what effects. (Macdonald et al. 2018, 156)

The understanding of the roles of, and relations between, all stakeholders, as well as their objectives and experiences of the process and its outcomes is necessary if we are to consider the need for, and the perceived success of, a project. In *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon addresses the organisational structures within which participatory practices take shape. In her description of co-creation, such participatory practices are often limited to one museum department. "There are several museums where co-creation occurs in pockets, and these pockets tend to reside in education departments" (2010, chapter 8). Simon outlines how education staff is expected to have empathetic qualities that are not necessarily deemed relevant for work in other core departments of the museum. Due to the nature of education work being about engaging people in activities, it seems that participatory work, and co-creation in particular, fits into these practices. This means, however, that participatory work rarely becomes part of the work done by other departments, and education departments tend to become "participatory ghettos" (Simon 2010, chapter 8). Though this has shifted slightly, and curatorial staff and collection departments are more likely today to introduce participatory aspects to their work; much of the practices are still done "in silo" (Morse 2021, 88). According to Morse, these silos are "maintained by staff's perceptions of their roles and the roles of other teams" (2021, 88). The roles are not only defined by the organisational structure but also by the ways in which people

compartmentalise their work within this structure. These structures that shape this departmentalised work can be recognised as infrastructures.

The organisational infrastructures in museums constitute the different departments (the structure of the museum), the relationships between these departments, and between them and external stakeholders. Within this context, stakeholders and their roles define a project's format, focus and function: if a participatory project is created as a supplement to an exhibition by the education team, it will take on a format familiar to this department and will not often feed into curatorial processes. This pattern of departmentalisation defines the potential goals and outputs of a project before it even starts. As such, more wide-ranging outcomes require an opening up of the organisational infrastructures, and of how these are used for participatory processes across the institution. Organisational infrastructures exist on smaller and larger scales, but even without clearly defined or hierarchically structured roles, practitioners are likely to stick to what they know and focus on a certain aspect of the collection or become specialised in a particular practice. The potential for departmental separation increases with the size of the museum, yet it is most heavily determined by the practitioners who work with(in) these infrastructures. In a conversation with the project curator of the *So sehe ich das…* project at Museum Friedland (a museum and project that will be described in more detail in Chapter 2), they described the relevance of participation across the institution as follows:

> I believe that participation is an expansive field, depending on how one defines this concept, that can only be successful if everyone benefits from it. That is, if the museum benefits from it, if it serves the museum's purposes, but also if it brings gains for the participants. And for me that actually means that it has to be wanted throughout. So from the museum management to the finance department to the curatorial department to the education department, and it is not enough if only the education department says: "we're now doing a participatory project". Because otherwise I don't think you get the possibilities for the structure that you actually need to make it ethically or actually possible to participate. (MF-S01)[1]

1 I conducted a number of interviews for this study. The interviewees remain anonymous, but more information about their role in the project and the context of the interviews can be found in the bibliography

Here, the disconnect between the different departments becomes visible, as does the need to see the museum not as a single stakeholder, functioning as a unified front, but to extend the practices and purposes to the involved staff as individuals as well. This affects not only the processes of participatory projects within the institution, but also the possibilities to extend participatory practices across departments effectively. With reference to a quote from one of her interview partners, Morse described this as the "professional boundaries and professional understandings of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities" (2021, 110). The division between roles and departments can lead to tension and misunderstandings among museum staff. This also means that the outputs of participatory projects remain invisible, confined to the museum's educational or outreach work, and rarely providing sustainable outputs that are preserved within the institution, unless this was agreed upon by curatorial staff or the conservators beforehand. Additionally, the outcomes of the project do not often go beyond the goals set by the museum, even if the intention was to benefit the participants.

Goals that might benefit the museum often take the form of immediate outputs, such as an exhibition or a contribution to an ongoing public or political debate. However, as discussed by Sara Ahmed, working in an institution inevitably involves working on an institution (2012, 15). In response to this, Morse described how practitioners conduct a form of 'institutional work' through their (participatory) practice; addressing the organisational and other infrastructures and negotiating necessary shifts to enable their work (2021, 94). Tinkering with infrastructures is easier in some institutions than in others, as the flexibility is determined by the complexity of the organisational structure and heavily impacted by relationships between practitioners and departments. This could, however, lead to (necessary) organisational change, which provides the museum with an outcome: organisational development in response to the learnings generated by the input from participants. A rather long-term process, which Robert R. Janes describes as the "messy, paradoxical and non-linear reality of organizational change" (Janes 2013). The process is not straightforward nor immediate, yet at any point, the work could feed into the institution and its structures, benefitting the institution. The question remains, though, of what is relevant for the participants, considering how they might benefit from these changing infrastructures. This aspect was explored by Rachel C. Smith et al., who referred to the ongoing concern of "what participation is for whom and in which contexts" (2018, 5). "A concern which should not merely

focus on securing the 'quality and gain of participation' in the design process, but also its relevance to the longer-term impact of engagement in various environments" (Smith et al. 2018, 5). This aspect is central for this study, but outcomes for participants are likewise dependent on the organisational infrastructures, as will become clear in the following chapters.

Looking at participatory practices, museum infrastructures seem to limit the extent to which a project can become embedded in the institution, or the ways in which a project might inform future institutional practices or discourse. These underlying structures partially inform the work of museums and help us to understand the relations between different actors. The visible structures and actors will be outlined in the initial description of the cases, while their limitations or invisible elements sometimes only become apparent upon studying the various elements of the processes in more detail. The infrastructures, visible through the limitations they impose upon the work, help to explain the authority of human and non-human actors in a museum project.

1.1.3 Shaped by colonial frameworks

Having outlined the internal infrastructures and related processes that determine museum work, this section addresses the historical frameworks that form the foundations of these infrastructures, as well as their relationships to infrastructures outside of the museum. In her book *Museums and Racism*, Kylie Message discusses the "links between museums and the political and administrative structures, cultures, histories and doctrines within which they work" (2018, 110). These structures – which exist both inside and outside of the museum – are inherent to the colonial frameworks that inform institutional practices, as will be further explored in this section.

Though there might seem to be no direct link between museum practices with forced migrants and the institution's colonial legacies, museums are still defined by historical epistemological frameworks rooted in colonial ideologies. To better understand the institution's social and political roles in contemporary society, it is important to understand the institution's past role(s) and how practices might take shape from there. Philipp Schorch states that "museums have played an active role in imperial colonisation and its political decolonisation, scientific and anthropological knowledge production and its postcolonial critique, and contemporary cultural revitalisation and economic development" (2017, 31). This broad statement applies most directly

to ethnographic museums, yet many museums hold objects with colonial histories (Weber-Sinn and Ivanov 2020), perpetuate colonial perspectives (Von Oswald 2020) and present colonial relations as the 'norm', by differentiating between 'us' and 'others' (Meza Torres 2013). Historically, museological discourses and collections constructed 'otherness' through defining (national) identities (Macdonald 2003). Former colonial practices in museums emphasised the differences between local audiences and people from faraway countries, but current practices tend to perpetuate colonial relations between (European) institutions and cultural 'others' (Meza Torres 2013; El-Tayeb 2011). With a focus on migration, however, this 'othering' can take place much closer to home. Working with a 'community of forced migrants' presents similar complexities. Recent practices are in line with the long-standing interest in 'other' heritages, which emerged with the foundation of ethnographic collections and museums (Johansson Dahre 2019, 66), but have recently shifted from depicting life in faraway places to the lives of those who have migrated from these places to the Global North. This does not reflect the intentions of the museum practitioners who have addressed these urgent topics, but the discrepancy between these intentions and the outcomes does reflect the complexity of these colonial frameworks and related hierarchies.

This situation implies that the colonial framework of the museum remains intact, and continues to inform museological practices. "On the historical level, colonialism has neither been complete in the past nor completed in the present – it is not an event but a process" (Schorch et al. 2019, 11). Schorch et al. refer to the perpetuation of colonial relations and power dynamics that are not easily left behind, but rather need to be resolved over time. This connects with Robin Boast's analysis of the nature and historical context of museums as inevitable obstacles towards creating a project of mutual benefit, making it impossible for the museum to become a site of reciprocity. Boast refers to a collaborative project studied by Clifford in articulating his definition of the 'contact zone' (1997), reflecting on this work through a more contemporary lens. Clifford speaks about a project for which the collaborators had expected long-term outcomes, but in which the 'contact zone' had instead been temporary in nature (cited in Boast 2011, 63). He argues that museums "remain sites where Others come to perform for us, not with us" (2011, 63). In line with this, Boast describes museums as neo-colonial rather than post-colonial institutions; a designation I have adopted in this study to demonstrate the necessity of rethinking contemporary

museum work in relation to its enduring colonial frameworks. Rather than assuming that museums have reached the stage of being post-colonial, I would like to consider the complexity of decolonisation and all that this process necessitates. In agreement with Sumaya Kassim, I emphasise that "decoloniality is a complex set of ideas – it requires complex processes, space, money, and time, otherwise it runs the risk of becoming another buzzword, like 'diversity'" (2017).

Coloniality continues to frame museum practices, including the collection and the interpretation of previously and newly acquired objects and artworks. If we zoom in on a museum's practices, its collection, for example, is defined by infrastructures that represent colonial knowledge systems and categories (Von Oswald 2020), limiting the interpretation of materials to out-dated and unethical ideals. However, Larissa Förster and Friedrich Von Böse point out that one should also be careful when broadly recognising this framework. They highlight that the "sole emphasis on the colonial dimensions of collections reduces ethnological museums to 'witnesses of colonial violence', displaces other layers of meaning and tends to ignore the agentive powers of collections" (Förster and Von Böse 2019, 48). While acknowledging that museums currently reflect their colonial histories, they suggest that despite the colonial framing of museum databases, objects themselves can be understood as acting against these infrastructures (2019, 48). Importantly, however, museum practitioners need to act on this, and edit information in the databases to represent what is currently considered a more ethical practice.

Though these colonial frameworks are particularly visible in the museum's collection practices and the structure of its database (see Chapter 7), they affect other aspects of museum practice as well. As outlined by Boast, they continue to function as a site where the involvement of perceived 'others' in a public-facing endeavour is a demonstration of unequal power relations. The discourse developed through the outputs of participatory practice, conversations between participants and visitors, as well as interactions with the press and other external parties reflects these relations through the ethical considerations applied. The ethical considerations (further addressed in section 1.2.3) reveal the ongoing presence of underlying colonial frameworks. An example of these colonial legacies was revealed in the recent discussions about a 'decolonial' artistic intervention at the Grassi Museum in Leipzig, where a pedestal that used to hold the bust of an important ethnographer was demolished during an exhibition opening. The action was not appreciated by

all visitors, with some deeming it unethical. Despite the unethical practices of this ethnographer and the deeply colonial aspects of his work, this was not considered an appropriate way of deconstructing the frameworks he had built. What this example clearly shows, however, is that different ethical frameworks seem to be applied to different people. In a written commentary on the action, Anette Rein (2022) implies that the ethnographer's practice should be assessed within the ethical context of the time, yet looking back, it is clear that at the time, the practice was not considered ethical by all involved. The ethical framework that museums apply are designed and adapted based on the gradually increasing awareness among practitioners in the so-called Global North of structural inequalities. On a very basic level, these ethical considerations are neglected in the museum's act of prioritising its own goals in a project with marginalised people. The museum focusing on its own goals before considering how to work towards the goals of participants mirrors colonial relations. Justifying this model of prioritisation no longer suffices, as museums are expected to take on a more socially engaged role and for this to be reflected in their practice.

1.2 Making participation possible?

The changing role of the museum and its inclusion of migration as a key focal point suggest that museums are not merely displaying social issues but are actively taking part in larger political debates. The objectives have changed and so has the focus of the institution. In a recent chapter on the transformations of ethnographic museums, Ulf Johansson Dahre suggests that the current debate on the social role of ethnographic museums in multicultural societies is "not so much on how to interpret or discuss objects and collections, but to put the museums as such in a new political ideological context" (2019, 62). Within a new political and ideological context, the museum could move away from its original function as a pedagogical institution (Macdonald 2003; Bennett 1995) towards a more pro-active role serving society at large.

The described shift in the museum's role from being an 'object-based institution' to focusing on engagement and audiences requires an updated perspective of who might be involved. Morse claims that this transition has "led to the introduction of a range of new terminology in museum practice (communities, audiences, stakeholders, consumers, visitors, citizens, etc.),

each signifying different relationships between the museum and its public" (2021, 37). Applying these terms in practice, translates to museums building different types of relationships with different 'publics'; those close to the museum or perhaps directly involved in projects – the stakeholders, which the museum sometimes refers to as communities – and those visiting the museum or perhaps 'consuming' what is exhibited in, and produced by, the museum. Additionally, the museum relates to publics that might not yet engage with what goes on inside of the museum, but whom the museum aims to draw in through new thematic foci and through outreach projects that engage 'communities' outside of the institution. These different publics play a central role in the reception of a project, exerting a significant influence on museum practice. Through the development of participatory projects and the perception of their outputs, visitors, non-visitors and other 'users' of the institution are involved in museum practice. The public dimension of museum work frames the institution and anchors its role, but it does not mean this role cannot contain further social dimensions that ensure the inclusion of otherwise excluded people and narratives.

Museums are public institutions, but their role is taking on social aspects that require structures that enable a practice of care. Within a contemporary context, these structures are created by and within museums, and in response to the financial and political context that shapes them. By initiating collaborative work with forced migrants, museums engage in a practice with participants whose needs must be acknowledged and catered to. This sub-chapter outlines the increased interest in addressing migration in the museum, as well as the social and ethical frameworks that inform the related participatory work.

1.2.1 Participatory work with forced migrants

Engaging in participatory work with migrants in order to reflect upon and present stories of migration in museums is not a new phenomenon, but the interest in forced migration and stories of flight specifically is a more recent development (Golding and Walklate 2019; Whitehead et al. 2016; Morse 2021). In this section, I outline the range of projects and migration-related museums that have cropped up in recent years, especially since the refugee protection crisis of 2015. I look at the ways in which these themes are addressed within museums and how this relates to the 2019 museum definition by ICOM, which continues to be the subject of heated debate.

Experiences of migration and the social integration of migrants have formed the basis for a range of projects over the years, such as *Belonging: Voices of London's Refugees* (2006–2007) at the Museum of London, the exhibition *Telling Our Lives* (2001 and 2002) at the Manchester Museum, and the wide-ranging project *Multaka* (2016–present), which started at the Museum für Islamische Kunst (Museum for Islamic Art) in Berlin and has since been adopted by other museums. The case studies selected for this investigation – *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives* at the MEK in Berlin, *Museum Takeover* at Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, *So sehe ich das…* at Museum Friedland, and *Aleppo* at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam – only add to this list. More recently opened exhibitions include *Refugee: Forced to Flee* (2020–2021) at the Imperial War Museum in London, and *Museum auf der Flucht* (2019–present) at the Volkskundemuseum Wien. In addition to these examples, the increased interest in migration can be seen in the recent foundation of dedicated migration museums. Recently, the Migration Museum in London, the new wing of the German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven, the Documentation Centre for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation in Berlin (recognised as a project with a political agenda due to its direct governmental funding) and the Flugtmuseum as part of the Vardemuseerne in Denmark opened their doors. Other institutions that are yet to be completed are the Central Museum of Migration planned by DOMiD (Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland) in Cologne and the new museum building of Museum Friedland. In addition to these museums, the recently aborted projects of migration-related museums in Rotterdam and Malmö reveal a heightened concern with the museological framing of this topic. Despite the theme already gaining attention in museums, the political and social developments regarding forced migration have demonstrated the urgency of further public discussion and additional narratives; as migration remains an urgent topic in politics that continues to evoke unethical political responses.

In these museums and projects, instead of the initial narratives *about* 'other' cultures, people with a migrant perspective are invited into the museum to tell their own stories. Morse claims that "the first direction for community engagement in museums, then, has been a response to the challenges of representation and attempts to democratise the museum by including more voices – in particular those voices that had previously been systematically side-lined in the museum – in order to better reflect contemporary society and redress previous exclusions" (Morse 2021, 33). These and other museums and projects have addressed the topic of migration

and more recently forced migration by involving migrants, but might also explore how to include people in their practices based on further qualities, experiences or interests. According to Emily Miller, head of learning and partnerships at the Migration Museum in London, the inclusion of certain groups leads to the exclusion of others. Museum visitors themselves expressed that there was a lack of stories that reflected their personal experiences of migration, while also reporting being confronted with ones they could not identify with (Miller 2020).

The role of the museum as a "contact zone" (Clifford 1997) becomes especially important when addressing stories that are unfamiliar to the museum staff and not yet included in the museum discourse. In keeping with this concept of a contact zone, Dahre suggests that ethnographic museum projects are currently being reordered to become "multicultural social arenas" (Johansson Dahre 2019, 65). The reconfiguration of the museum's role, which was discussed within ICOM in the attempt to develop a new museum definition (ICOM 2022; ICOM 2019), includes a shift in approach that is increasingly dependent on the participation of so-called 'community groups'. This becomes evident in the 2019 version of the revised definition, which identifies inclusion and democratisation as necessary characteristics of the (future) museum, and suggests that participation could be a means to achieve these institutional goals. The more recent proposal that has been selected as the new definition no longer refers to democratisation, but does contain references to participatory museum work (ICOM 2022).[2] With the aim of making a meaningful contribution to current social debates, museums need to establish active partnerships with diverse groups, since a diverse set of perspectives is not usually represented within the museum team itself. The conviction that migration needs to be addressed using a participatory approach is widespread; most museums that have recently considered this theme within their museum walls have deemed it necessary to invite migrants

2 The new museum definition reads: "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing" (ICOM 2022b). The definition was put forward alongside another option on 9 May 2022 (ICOM 2022a). The final definition that aligns "with some of the major changes in the role of museums" (ICOM 2022b) was announced on 24 August 2022..

themselves to speak about their experiences. By defining *heimat* (home) through a "'bottom-up' process of formation" (Römhild 2018, 30), museums and migrants collaboratively negotiate shared spaces, such as those in the museum. Museums invite forced migrants to participate in, contribute to, and even directly create, the exhibits (Römhild 2018, 30). Katarzyna Puzon describes this approach as being highly relevant to "migration and the ways in which museums 'do belonging' in their participatory projects" (2019, 43). This recent shift in focus towards forced migration and the accompanying need for a participatory approach reflects changes in the museum's role. In this new role, the institution increasingly engages with sociopolitical issues, taking an 'activist' and subjective stance rather than attempting to remain neutral (Gesser et al. 2020; Janes and Sandell 2019; Vlachou 2019). With these developments comes an increased interest in relevant, effective and sustainable participatory approaches.

This shift can also be discerned in the academic work done and the practical guides recently developed in this specific field. An example is the guide by Acesso Cultura, Associação Cultural entitled *The Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees: The Role of Cultural Organisations* (2017). The guide includes two parts: the first part listing practical examples from the field, and the second part being a guide initially published by Museumsbund e.V. (the German museums association) and later translated and published by NEMO – Network of European Museum Organisations (Brehm et al. 2016). This collaborative publication states: "The experiences and needs of people with and without immigrant backgrounds should play a bigger role in museums and exhibitions in the future" (Brehm et al. 2016, 4). The guide stresses that museums should reflect the continuous societal transformations in their practices and output through "new points of view and new narratives" (Brehm et al. 2016, 5). This idea, of course, is not new, but what is also interesting here is that it reflects the short-term focus of museum projects, since it refers to practice and output rather than pointing to potential long-term outcomes of participatory work.

Maria Vlachou's publication of this guide discusses problematic practices and contexts using a set of examples drawn up by museum practitioners (Vlachou 2017). This publication – along with more recent ones, such as Sergi (2021) and Labadi (2018) – reveals a more thorough description of what it means to work in a participatory manner with this particular 'community'. The guide points to the need to adapt different practices to different 'groups' – a process that requires knowledge about the people that make up the

'group' (further discussed in relation to the invitation of 'communities' in Chapter 3). It also proposes that practices might take shape according to a selected theme or topic. The publication also demonstrates that museums have indeed focused excessively on this topic and related themes, possibly in order to provide an alternative to the prevailing discourse on (forced) migration (Vlachou 2017, 8). The projects that engage with the topic vary greatly in terms of their role within the institution, their wider position within society and the framework or method applied to engage this envisioned 'community'.

Though the number and variety of such projects is high, not many projects have maintained a virtual, physical or even an emotional presence in the museums in which they took place. The way in which their presence has materialised is manifested in the museum's structure and approach to participatory work more generally, but can also be found in assessing the outcomes and impact for the participants. The lack of integration of these projects or their approaches into the broader institution explains the recognised need for migration museums, as well as the increased wish for more sustainable participatory project outcomes. This sustainability is partially determined by the institutional, social and political contexts of museums, as discussed in the next section. The societal changes driving the described trends in museums affect our understanding of ethical practices and consequently shape the ways in which museums work with (or are expected to work with) these 'communities'.

1.2.2 Contextualising museum work

As seen in the previous sub-chapter, museum practice is defined by its infrastructures, and these include the organisational infrastructures and the colonial infrastructures that continue to inflect museum work (and staffing). In practice, this means that the work takes shape according the stakeholders' different priorities. These stakeholders may be internal (such as the staff members who are intrinsic to the organisational infrastructure), or external, including governments and (other) funding bodies, along with project participants and museum visitors. In this section, I consider which stakeholders make up the context of museum work, highlighting the role of funding bodies and governments in determining the museum's political context and dependency.

As described in a previous section of this chapter, organisational infrastructures are founded on the connections between different organisational structures and the people who inhabit them. However, these structures and the museums' objectives and practices depend on the financial infrastructures in place. This particular infrastructure automatically places the museum within a broader context. The political aspects of institutional contexts often influence the available funding, but this funding is equally often tied to requirements for museums to address socially relevant themes. As Vikki McCall and Clive Gray have pointed out, today's museums are faced with several (sometimes conflicting) policy-related expectations, which demand work from the museum that goes far beyond their 'traditional' object-based practices (2014, 22). The museum's dependency on national or local government funding shapes the stakeholder relations present within the museum, which in turn affect how the practitioners operate. Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell describe that in this situation, museums are often dependent on individuals or governments that are largely unaware of the practical challenges of museum work (2019, 7). With the funding in place, museums can act autonomously, while their costs are monitored or reviewed retrospectively. In spite of their ascribed social role museums run the risk of compromising future funding by assigning funds to costs not deemed relevant by the funder, or by proposing topics that are (deemed too) politically challenging.

This financial infrastructure is necessary for making exhibitions, preserving the collections and employing staff; but on top of long-term, core funding, temporary, project-specific funding often also contributes to structural costs which are required to keep the museum running. In an analysis of the financial management of museums, Katja Lindqvist has described how the complexity of this situation is influenced by both internal and external factors. She states the work is affected by:

> numerous objectives and schedule constraints, as well as by revenue streams that do not follow for-profit revenue models. In addition to these complex internal factors, there are complex external factors in the museum sector at work as well. These include the increased competition for funding due to an increase in the number of museums; a decrease in the public subsidy for heritage projects; changing political priorities, and the ongoing interest of donors and politicians in supporting the establishment of new museums

> rather than underwriting standard museum maintenance. (Lindqvist 2012, 10–11)

Museums in the era of 'new museology' (Vergo 1989) require more funding and have to meet additional, politically driven expectations (McCall and Gray 2014). In "service of government priorities historically as well as today" (Message 2018, 17), museums tend to function as "facilitators of cross-cultural exchange" or as "differencing machines" (Bennett 2005, 529). Initially used as instruments of government, museums have grown increasingly independent of political tendencies while still relying on funding from governments to enable their work. As government-funded institutions, political decisions and priorities support or limit museum work and the museum's potential to produce and assess long-term outcomes. In a chapter on measuring the social value of museum work, Carol Scott describes how museums have more recently begun to include outcomes as a component in their evaluation models: instead of only looking at input and output, there is an interest in assessing what this output leads to in practice. Scott argues that an assessment of long-term outcomes is difficult, as the work is "tied to the short-term inputs of the government of the day and, as such, is as much about government performance as institutional performance" (2007, 183).

Each of the cases studied in this book starts with funding, whether it is provided by a local or national government, distributed to the museums within a museum group, or contributed by another organisation. Funding bodies often work directly with the museums, but could also be providing funding to the person facilitating the project or series of projects. As such, their objectives or desired processes become integrated into the project via one of these routes. The extent to which these funding bodies exert an influence on the project varies broadly, and is highly dependent on longer-term relations between the funders and the institution receiving the support. These relations and roles are defined by power dynamics that are determined by institutional frameworks, as well as by the broader political and societal 'situatedness' of the museums. "In this process, the power of staff groups to manage how policies are to be interpreted and put into action, and how jobs are to be undertaken, provides them with a central role in managing the demands that are placed upon them" (McCall and Gray 2014, 29). This complex situation leads to a more individual practice within the institutions, in which practitioners push to meet the demands set by funding bodies and governing

bodies of the museum. It is within this context that participatory projects take shape.

Bearing in mind specific aims or missions set out by funding institutions or by the institutions themselves, project organisers develop a project for a group they would like to engage or collaborate with. These 'groups' range from local community groups to groups deemed representative of social and political debates, or partner organisations with related goals or interests. The people they address form the 'community' whose heritage will be presented in the museum. Despite the key role of participants in the participatory process – after all, without participants, it would not be participatory – their experiences and goals are rarely actively taken into account by museums, especially since funding applications are usually expected to list the objectives at the outset. As such, the goals of the project are typically decided on before people are invited to take part. In these processes, however, the museum often claims a central role, communicating with funders, audiences, project facilitators (if external to the museum) and the project participants. Returning to Morse, these relations reflect the common critique of community engagement work, which states that the museum is "the centre and the community at its periphery" (Morse 2021, 41). This dynamic often informs the participatory work of museums and has also informed the demand for participation to be moved from the margins to the core of the institution, while simultaneously moving away from temporary projects with exclusively immediate outputs (Morse 2021, 46). These envisioned shifts – placing the community at the heart of museum work and considering participation an integral part of museum practices – are seen as necessary for achieving a more sustainable museum practice. The museum's role, in response, should focus on serving its visitors and local populations, adopting a more *care-full* approach.

The goals of the different stakeholders informed some of the outcomes of the projects, and to understand these roles and goals, they need be outlined for each of the case studies. Understanding the outcomes as well as the infrastructures that informed them will help me to enquire into the meaning of the processes and encounters developed by and within the different museums selected for this study. This section forms the basis for mapping out the case studies and the different stakeholders that made them up, which is central to the next chapter of this study.

1.2.3 Museum ethics and practices of care

First, however, I outline the concept of ethics in museums and its application in practice, in order to review the potential for a more people-centred approach. I will outline recent theoretical discussions of museum ethics and build on these in later chapters to review the ethics of the participatory practices of the different case studies. This final section considers the structures of the museum that make the perpetuation of certain practices inevitable. It studies the ethics of museological practices to highlight the connection between ethics, ethical practices and colonial attitudes. The ethical framework provides the context in which to discuss larger issues mentioned by project participants, such as those of stereotyping and discrimination. These and other harmful practices take on a central position in this debate and in discussions of the role of museums.

"There is no part of the museum that is free of ethical implications" (Besterman 2007, 432). As Tristram Besterman points out, ethics in museum practices may refer to many different elements of the work done by museums. The term ethics refers to the moral guidelines that inform our activities and decisions, which, according to Bernice Murphy, include the acknowledgement that these morals are learned. She states: "it involves not only a commitment to good conduct itself, but also an accompanying recognition that good conduct is a learned activity, not naturally acquired through social training" (2016, 32). The ethical codes that have informed museological practices in the past were taught from a White perspective serving White priorities and values. They informed the colonial practices of museums and are still present in a range of ways, but sometimes form part of the invisible infrastructures of museums. The ethical guidelines and codes used or applied in practice today do, however, prescribe a shift away from predominantly considering and catering to the moral values of White people towards morals that apply to all people. Despite the increased awareness of discriminatory behaviours and of deeply embedded modes of exclusion, institutional change is only happening very slowly.

This change in perception and the emergence of a more global ethical understanding are not yet visible in the ethical codes written for museum practices by organisations such as ICOM and the American Association of Museums (AAM). The formal ethical considerations proposed by ICOM, for example, often address the use, display or disposal of collections, but can hardly serve as guidelines for the practical work that is done in and by

museums. The current ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (last revised in 2017) only refers to collaborations with source communities or "communities served" in order to promote cooperation with museums in different countries and to enhance collections. Despite pointing to the role of museums as serving certain communities, the code overtly describes ways in which these 'communities' might serve the museum, such as by contributing objects or information about them to the museum collection (ICOM 2017). Domenico Sergi underlines the importance of considering the ethics of museum projects in 'community engagement' (2021). However, throughout his book, Sergi neither critically nor practically addresses what such considerations might entail, and where ethics come into play or should be (re-)assessed. Opening up 'traditional' museological processes means reconciling the competing claims of the different stakeholders involved, and questioning the accountability of the museum as one of these stakeholders. Besterman suggests that "the ethics of accountability does not mean, however, that the museum should be confined to a role that is merely responsive to stakeholder needs and aspirations. Museums are also places of creative interaction, in which traditional values and orthodoxies can and should be challenged" (2007, 435–436). In their public role, however, museums should be held accountable for systematically dismissing the needs and aspirations of so many (potential) stakeholders.

Museums fulfil a specific and prescribed role in society, which ties into expectations from their different stakeholders, such as global organisations, funding bodies, museum practitioners and museum visitors. Their (future) expectations are highlighted by the ICOM museum definition, both in its previous form and its newly articulated conception (ICOM 2019; ICOM 2022b), which describes museums as places of exhibiting, collecting and preserving heritage. These roles, of course, do not have to apply to all projects; quite often museums set up separate projects to fill a specific gap in their collection, or they develop exhibitions and other projects without the ambition of collecting their outputs. As such, it cannot be assumed that the projects that I have assessed as case studies were initiated to contribute to one of these or any of the museum's other goals. Participatory projects might just be participatory for the sake of inviting in people who are being marginalised in order to contribute to the representation of diverse communities, without the intention of developing an exhibition or adding objects to the collection. Using Morse's notion of a "logic of contribution" as a starting point, this chapter addressed the ethics of museum work and its relation to participatory

practices and decision-making (2021). Morse omits the practice of ethics from her book, tying this concept to care without identifying the ethical frameworks in which museum work takes place. The museums that hosted or initiated the case studies discussed in this investigation all adhere to an unwritten or written code of ethics, which informs the way they work with people both inside and outside of the museum.

In her discussion of museum ethics, Janet Marstine refers to Hein's feminist perspective as a useful model for reimagining museum ethics, stating that "its focus on collaboration and inclusion leads to new understandings of the importance of social responsibility in the museum. Its emphasis on process over product points towards the centrality of transparency in museum policy and practice" (2011, 9). These considerations highlight elements that form the basis of participatory practices in museums, and as such should be central to these practices and their ethical considerations. Marstine describes this perspective as a break with the canonical work carried out by museums, allowing for "non-hierarchic approaches to staff organization, museum-community engagement and the sharing of heritage" (2011, 9). The intention to break with hierarchies, to enable a bottom-up approach, is central to participatory work and especially to projects with forced migrants (Lynch 2017a, 227). An ethical code generally includes practical guidelines on participatory or collaborative work, but these rarely address a specific group or context, such as people with experiences of migration. These ethical codes are therefore considered more or less 'universal' and are not necessarily questioned when they are reused in a different setting. This generalisation undermines the importance of ethical questions to inform good and moral practices, and at the same time, it emphasises the museums' lack of understanding of the privileges and prejudices at play.

Ethics "relates to the daily activities of every museum professional" (Edson 2016, 135). Departing from this understanding, it is only logical that the projects that are central to this study are ridden with ethical complexities. The complexity of ethics and the need for the revision of the ethical codes that inform museum practices was addressed by the American Association of Museums in 2000, and has since been revisited. The association stated that:

> ethical codes evolve in response to changing conditions, values, and ideas. A professional code of ethics must, therefore, be periodically updated. It must also rest upon widely shared values. Although the operating environment of

> museums grows more complex each year, the root value for museums, the tie that connects all of us together despite our diversity, is the commitment to serving people, both present and future generations. (AAM 2000)

These guidelines must reflect their social context and will therefore be constantly changing. However, they are also (or should be) geared towards future contexts and considerations. The inclination towards envisioning the future requires the ongoing transformation of ethics, which is reflected by the shifts in White people's empathetic understanding and broader world view more generally. A future-proof ethical framework ought to encompass what is deemed ethical by everyone involved. This might change over time, but the biggest changes to the framework to date have been in response to an increased awareness rather than the actual changes in how people wanted to be treated. In considering a sustainable practice and enabling outcomes that will remain relevant within the museum's future understanding of what is ethical, museum practitioners and other stakeholders need to think beyond the temporal scale of the exhibition or project and recognise potential long-term consequences or outcomes. Only what is considered ethical by all parties can be deemed ethical practice.

1.3 Conclusion

This preliminary framework, which is connected to the context of the case studies in Chapter 2, supports the study of the outcomes of the projects and their lasting impacts on institutional perspectives, practices and discourse. A thorough study of the infrastructures that constitute museums – including the organisational structures, the stakeholders and their roles within these structures, financial resources, the museum's ties to local and national governments, and the colonial and ethical contexts of museum work – outlined the complexity of these memory institutions. I discussed how, within these frameworks, participatory projects with forced migrants have started to take shape and how they are defined by goals set by funding bodies and museums, rather than goals outlined by the participants themselves. This practice is central to this study, which will become clearer in the following chapter.

Building on the framework identified here, the next chapter outlines the case studies and their museological and political contexts. It identifies the

institutions that hosted the participatory projects and describes the different stakeholders involved. I provide a detailed outline of the particular contexts and the projects themselves, in order to establish a foundation for the further discussion of the goals, processes and outcomes of the four case studies.

2. Participatory Projects with Forced Migrants

This book looks at four different case studies. These unique projects were organised by, or took place in, different institutions with their own infrastructures and sociopolitical contexts. The case studies represent a mere sample of the projects that have been initiated in museums in response to the refugee protection crisis. In order to study the sustainable outcomes of the great variety of projects that emerged after 2015, the case studies were selected to reflect a range in approach, goals and duration, as well as in the project's position within the institution. Rather than applying a multiple case study methodology (Stake 2005) to compare and contrast different perspectives, I introduce and analyse this variety of cases as a means of providing an insight into how the different projects were developed and experienced, and what was left of them afterwards. Looking at these projects retrospectively, I was able to reflect on the processes together with the practitioners and participants with an "interpretative distance" (Graham 2012, 568). Before going onto a further analysis of the selected cases and the different experiences of these projects, however, I first want to outline the projects and their sociopolitical contexts, the hosting museum and its organisational infrastructures, and the goals of the project and the museums more broadly. Each sub-chapter focuses on one case study, in order to provide a clear overview of the projects and their institutional and sociopolitical contexts.

My depiction of these participatory projects is based on project and institutional documents, along with quotations from interviews,[1] which together describe the project processes and outline the museums' structures, missions and visions. Carrying on from the framework and analytical lens

1 For this study, I conducted interviews in English, Dutch and German. I translated all non-English quotes referenced throughout the thesis.

proposed in the previous chapter, the following sections will describe the 'who', the 'what', the 'where', and the 'why' of each of the four selected participatory projects. Starting with a description of the project (the 'what'), I specify what was planned and communicated about the project. For each case study, I provide a thorough description of the process, the stakeholders involved, the time frame, the output(s) and the envisioned goals. As such, each first section on a project sets out to identify the 'what', the 'who' and the 'why'. Moving on to the 'where', I then address the context by discussing the museum. Museums are defined by their organisational infrastructures, their mission and vision, and the people within the institution. The political situation and relationships to funding bodies are also teased out in order to describe the project's broader context. The goals for these projects and the contexts in which they took shape form the basis for exploring the 'how' in the coming chapters.

2.1 *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives*

The 'presentation' *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives*[2] formed part of the 2016–17 programme at the MEK in Berlin. Organised by an artist and their foundation KUNSTASYL (an initiative founded in collaboration with forced migrants during their temporary stay in a refugee shelter in Berlin-Spandau), the project was framed as an artistic 'takeover' of the museum spaces. This takeover, which could be described as a collaborative process of exhibition-making, ran from 4 March until 2 July 2016, after which the exhibition opened to the public, remaining on display for a year. Though the project had started from an idea from the facilitating artist, the museum outlined its own goals to secure funding for the project, and set out a clear plan for the collaboration going forward.

The following section describes this project in more detail, outlining the process, exhibition and further elements of the project. I address the project's goals as outlined by the museum and how these were evaluated (or not). The aspects described were a product of their context within the museum and within Berlin and Germany, responding to the urgent political situation at

2 See: https://www.smb.museum/museen-einrichtungen/museum-europaeischer-kulturen/ausstellungen/detail/daheim-einsichten-in-fluechtige-leben/.

the time. The following sections provide a clear overview of the project and its museological and political context.

2.1.1 A collaborative process of exhibition-making

The conception of, and preparation for, *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives* began several months before the participants started working in the museum's exhibition spaces. The project was born out of the artist's desire to learn more about flight and what it means for the lives of the people who are forced to flee their homelands (MEK-D03). The word *daheim* means "feeling at home" (Eckersley 2017), which points to what the facilitator and museum hoped the project might achieve. The artist initiated this project at the refugee shelter in Berlin-Spandau, after which they started conversations about moving the process to the museum. The artist, who took on the role of project facilitator, had worked with the MEK before, and now provided a direct connection between the museum and the forced migrants who had become part of KUNSTASYL. Based on this pre-existing relationship with the artist, the collaboration provided the perfect opportunity for the museum to contribute to the newly sparked political debate on forced migration (MEK-D01). After initial sessions with museum practitioners and project participants (which took place both in the museum and in the temporary home of KUNSTASYL), the project moved to the exhibition spaces in March of 2016. With KUNSTASYL and its initiator as the project facilitator, the museum took on the role of facility manager, providing practical support and the spaces for the process, as well as the historical part of, and public 'stage' for, its output: an exhibition that presented the collaboratively articulated experiences and personal stories of forced migration through objects, artworks and installations. The works and stories were exhibited in the same spaces that the participants and facilitator had worked in for several months, in the western wing of the MEK. The exhibition opened in July of 2016 and ran for a year, accompanied by a programme of events, tours, conversations and performances, which were predominantly organised and developed by KUNSTASYL as well.

In the exhibition (which is documented online on *Google Arts & Culture*[3]), all parts of the museum spaces were used to present individual and shared stories. Drawings and paintings on the walls, a pair of shoes also attached to the walls, two large-scale portraits, and a number of artworks made out of discarded bunk beds from a refugee shelter in Berlin made up most of the exhibition. The works were accompanied by quotes about migration and experiences of flight scattered around the spaces on the floor and walls. Alongside the works created by the participants, the museum presented historical accounts of forced migration, with objects loaned from individuals and other museums as references to these stories. The museum had been reflecting on migration in its exhibitions and projects long before the sudden influx of forced migrants to Germany, so the thematisation of forced migration through this project was in keeping with the MEK's strategies and practices.

Before the project launch, the MEK defined quite a few of its goals, which are largely reflective of the goals that were investigated in this study. In a project document compiled by the curator who would be the contact person for this project, the following goals were listed: to provide the opportunity for participants to build networks and make friends; to create a space in which people feel self-assured; to empower the participants; to gain material outputs for the museum's collection; and to historicise the phenomenon of forced migration to make the current situation more understandable for the local population (MEK 2016). These goals propose what the project is envisioned to do, create and lead to, both for the museum and for the participants. The museum curator did not consult the participants before formulating these goals, yet they include ideas about what the project might mean to them. Neither the museum nor the project facilitator discussed these goals with the participants or evaluated whether or not they were reached. The museum director addressed the necessity of evaluation – despite this not having been part of the process – when they said: "You've just dismantled that [exhibition] and you're already onto the next one […] We didn't do an evaluation for this exhibition. We didn't sit down together again and say: 'so, how was this exhibition?'" (MEK-D01).The project facilitator confirmed that there was no

3 See: https://artsandculture.google.com/story/daheim-%E2%80%93-glances-into-fugitive-lives-museum-europaischer-kulturen-staatliche-museen-zu-berlin/2QWBbLGQzCazKA?hl=en, accessed 28.06.2022.

evaluation of the project afterwards, mainly because "there was never a real end to KUNSTASYL" (MEK-D03).

KUNSTASYL was founded in 2015 at the start of the project, and towards the end of the exhibition, the project facilitator invited its members and other performers to work on a performance entitled *Die Könige* (The Kings). The exhibition and project concluded with a seven-hour-long performance in July of 2017. This performance took place in the museum, but was organised and facilitated entirely by the artist and the members of KUNSTASYL, along with performers who were specifically invited for this output. While the initial project that led to the exhibition and the programme during the exhibition's runtime were funded through the museum's existing project funding and with the support of the 'Friends of the MEK', the performance was financed through external funding applied for by the project facilitator. Given that the performance marked the end of the project, there was little time left to reflect on the collaborative processes and the work completed for the exhibition beforehand (MEK-D03). After the performance, the exhibition was de-installed and some objects were accessioned into the MEK's collection (as per the goals listed above).

2.1.2 Museum Europäischer Kulturen

The MEK is a museum of everyday culture which has transformed over the past century, taking on its current outlook and approach in 1999. The MEK is based in Dahlem, an area on the outskirts of the city of Berlin, where the museum and offices are housed in buildings located approximately 750 metres apart. The museum's collection dates back to 1889, when the physician and Berlin politician Rudolf Virchow opened the Museum für deutsche Volkstrachten und Erzeugnisse des Hausgewerbes (Museum of German Traditional Dress and Handicrafts) in order to document "the memory of the lifeworlds of the lower and middle classes in Germany and neighbouring European regions" (Tietmeyer 2021, 10). Over the years, the museum has changed its name multiple times, was divided during the separation of East and West Berlin, before becoming the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in 1999 through the merger of the reunited Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde (Museum of German Folklore) and the European department of the Museum für Völkerkunde (Museum of Ethnology). The museum opened with its first semi-permanent exhibition *Faszinationsbild* (The Fascination of Images), which addressed cultural contacts between people and societies within

Europe. The theme of 'cultural contacts' is highlighted as a main concept in the museum's profile (or mission statement) on the website, where it states:

> The Museum Europäischer Kulturen is dedicated to collecting, researching, preserving, presenting, and raising awareness of artefacts of European everyday culture and human lived realities from the 18th century until today. As such, we transcend national and linguistic borders and facilitate encounters among different groups of people. Our work is characterised by the term 'cultural contact'.
>
> We continually seek to forge connections between our historical collection and current issues. An important aspect of this work is a close cooperation with respective interest groups, as well as facilitating an exchange with our visitors. The museum is also actively involved in international cultural projects and museum networks.[4]

Guided by this concept and its mission to find connections across its practices, participatory approaches have increasingly become part of the exhibitions and the collection of the museum. The focus on encounters and collaborations with interest groups has pushed the development of, and investment in, participatory processes and the possibility for these processes to provide insight into alternative perspectives which can (and should) inform the museum.

Since the conception of *daHEIM*, the museum has developed several exhibitions and created additional elements for the permanent exhibition in collaboration with different groups, people and organisations. These projects were never as radical in their form and approach as the idea and process of a takeover of the museum spaces by KUNSTASYL. However, the museum has been structurally adapting to different approaches and perspectives; it has been writing its collection strategy, reviewing its vision and mission, and it has hired curatorial staff interested in, and focused on, contemporary topics such as gender and sexuality, waste and climate change. The museum is slowly moving away from its original focal areas and structure; it is no longer specifically dedicated to the lifeworlds of lower- and middle-class citizens in Germany like its predecessor the Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde, nor is it dictated by the original geographical approach of (the European department

4 See: https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-europaeischer-kulturen/about-us/profile/, accessed 16.04.2021.

of) the Museum für Völkerkunde. These structural changes are reflected in the museum's collection strategy document, which outlines the thematic development of the collection according to three thematic focal points, namely: processes of identity formation; Europe within a global context; and sustainability and the new understanding of the correlation between culture and nature (MEK Sammlungskonzept, January 2022).[5]

Alongside this internal shift at the MEK, the museum is faced with a restructuring of the larger organisational network of which it is a part. The functionality of the umbrella organisation of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz (SPK) was called into question by the German Scientific Committee in 2020 (Wissenschaftsrat 2020),[6] which has led to a process of internal restructuring that includes the re-evaluation of the various departments, museums and other institutions. To date, the museum remains part of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin network, which in turn is part of the foundation Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, but its internal organisation might begin to look different in the following years. Plans for a revision of the hierarchical structures and of the role of the SPK for the museums continue to be negotiated in a slow and difficult process. The SPK is partially funded by the federal government and gains a small amount of its funding from the State of Berlin (Wissenschaftsrat 2020). The MEK, in turn, applies for funding from the SPK for its exhibitions and other projects. Rather than being directly affected by local or national politics, the museum and its practices are facilitated by (and perhaps slightly tailored to) the institutional politics of the umbrella organisation. However, as part of this enormous state-funded organisation that has over 2,000 employees based in Berlin, the MEK is defined by its role within structure of the SPK and within Germany (and within Europe, as one of the few Europe-focused museums), but also within Berlin and within Dahlem more locally.

When then-Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel decided to temporarily open the border to forced migrants in 2015 (Bock and Macdonald 2019; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018), many cities faced the implications of the arrival of large numbers of people in a country that was unprepared for these events (Bock and Macdonald 2019). The country's position towards migration has shifted in recent years, but Germany is still considered one of the more hospitable

5 The MEK's collection strategy document is available on the museum website.

6 For the full report (in German): https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/2020/8520-20.html, accessed 29.06.2022.

countries in Europe in terms of policy, though this does not necessarily reflect public opinion on migrants and migration in Germany. The Cologne attacks that took place on New Year's Eve of 2015–16 were widely reported on in the media and led to discursive shifts that framed migrants as 'evil-doers' (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 130–31). This did not only lead to more apprehension from inhabitants of Germany, but was also taken up by the German political parties that supported "the idea that refugees are to be seen as a potentially dangerous group of people" (Vollmer & Karakayali 2018, 131). This message, amplified by the press, transformed the discourse and general understanding of forced migrants from victims to dangerous individuals. This process provided the opportunity for right-wing parties across Europe adopt this discourse and attitude towards migrants and use it to their advantage (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 137). Under these circumstances, museums in Germany decided to respond to the refugee protection crisis, with to the intention of presenting different narratives to the prevailing discourse at the time. Navigating this predominantly negative discourse, museums provided forced migrants with a difficult context in which they had to 'prove otherwise'. This discursive context in which *daHEIM* was developed ultimately defined aspects of the process, the communication and the project outcomes. Since the project took place, this context has become increasingly urgent, as political opinions diverged and Russia's invasion of Ukraine under Putin led to large numbers of forced migrants arriving in Germany once more.

2.2 *Museum Takeover*

A very different project can be found in *Museum Takeover,* a re-labelling project in the permanent exhibition of Leicester Museum & Art Gallery that was led by an external curator. The project worked with forced migrants who were taking part in a creative writing workshop at the time, inviting the participants to write a museum label for one (or several) of the objects or artworks on display. The project facilitator joined the ongoing workshops hosted by Writing East Midlands[7] and facilitated the process with the assistance of the museum's community engagement officer and the facilitator of the writing workshop. The project led to two interventions, both of which took place during the summer of 2018.

7 See: https://writingeastmidlands.co.uk/, accessed 29.06.2022.

The participatory project was developed for the participants of the creative writing workshop outside of the museum, but its outputs were displayed alongside the labels written by the museum practitioners. The process was determined by the format of the workshop and by the possibilities of engaging with the museum and in the museum spaces in collaboration with the different stakeholders. Further development or integration of the project outcomes relied on the museum's infrastructures and strategy, as well as the political context in Leicester. These aspects are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

2.2.1 Written contributions within the permanent exhibition

Museum Takeover was a participatory project during which forced migrants wrote new (or rather, additional) labels for objects on display at the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery. The project took place at the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, which was made possible by the collaboration between the project facilitator and the museum's outreach officer. Both practitioners had attended several of the creative writing workshops, which were led by a facilitator who was not involved in museum work otherwise. The project facilitator organised two re-labelling projects, both of which were low-budget museum interventions. The first project was part of Refugee Week, a yearly, nation-wide week of events that celebrates the cultures of forced migrants in the UK. The Leicester Museum & Art Gallery has been taking part on a regular basis with a varied programme that often remained disconnected from the exhibitions on display in the museum. The second edition of the project was part of the Journeys Festival International, an annual festival that takes place in Leicester, Manchester and Portsmouth and is initiated by ArtReach in August. For this edition, a slightly larger budget was available, allowing for designed and professionally printed labels.

For the project, the participants were asked to choose a work or object in the museum to write about, with no particular objective in mind other than adding their perspectives or stories to what was exhibited in the museum. Most participants were interested in the works and objects in the World Arts Gallery, and chose to write a label in response to something they saw there. The participating forced migrants created 23 new labels for this gallery, providing new insights into, and interpretations of, the objects. The labels were stuck to the museum walls next to the original museum labels for just one month, after which they were removed from the walls before the start

of the next iteration of the project. The second set of labels was kept up for longer, but was ultimately taken down in preparation for the renovations of the museum's galleries.

A catalogue created by the project facilitator[8] still contains the labels with images of the objects or works to which they correspond. Apart from this catalogue produced and published online by the project facilitator, only limited information about this project can be found online and in the museum. The museum did not set particular goals for the project, but the project facilitator did outline the importance of taking into account the goals and ambitions of the participants. They pointed out that this is often missing from the agenda, suggesting: "you need your aim to be about the people and the trust and . . . I think that's something that a lot of museums are missing. There's a lot of: 'if we do a project with refugees it will look good'" (LM-MT01).[9] Rather than serving the museum with this project, the main idea was to contribute to the lives of the participants. The museum, as the host of the project, was only involved to a limited extent. To fully grasp the institutional context of the project, though, requires a look at the museum as well as the writing workshop developed by Writing East Midlands, and the roles of the individuals responsible for organising *Museum Takeover*.

2.2.2 Leicester Museum & Art Gallery

Leicester Museum & Art Gallery is a city museum with wide-ranging collections, including natural, historical and cultural objects, as well as artworks produced in the past 200 years. The museum hosts permanent and temporary exhibitions related to the city of Leicester and to the UK more broadly. Formerly known as New Walk Museum & Art Gallery (until 2020), the museum is situated on New Walk, a promenade that traverses the city of Leicester, running from the University of Leicester to the city centre. The museum is part of the Leicester Museums and Galleries group, which is made up of six different museums and historical buildings. The museum group

8 See: https://issuu.com/angelastienne/docs/museum_takeover_2018, accessed 29.06. 2022.

9 In the interviews and other references that I cite throughout this book, I make use of suspension points (. . .) to indicate pauses in speech. Omissions are indicated by ellipses in square brackets: […].

shares a website on which the vision – rather than the mission, which varies between the locations – is listed as consisting of three main points:

> Creating experiences to make Leicester special by involving and inspiring residents and visitors and sharing the city's significant collections. Celebrating the stories of Leicester's diverse communities and the unique places, art and heritage which shape the city's identity and showcasing these to the world. Engaging with every primary schoolchild in Leicester.[10]

Situated in a city with a university that has a specialised museum studies department, the museum has close ties to the university and is often the focus of criticism and proposals for novel approaches. Despite its connection with the School of Museum Studies, the museum perpetuates curatorial and collecting practices that could be considered rather traditional or formal. In the themes it addresses, however, the museum has continued to explore subjects that tie in with the city of Leicester, such as its exhibition *Fearless Foxes*,[11] which focused on Leicester City's Football Club after their victory in the 2016 Champions League. The city of Leicester is renowned for its increasingly diverse population, especially due to its large percentage of people with Indian heritage. This context has been central to the museum's projects for a long time, engaging artists and local groups in developing new exhibitions in different spaces of the museum.

The museum was involved in the first and second iteration of the project, the latter of which took place during the Journeys Festival International. *Museum Takeover* was not only shaped by the context of the museum but also by the institutional contexts of the organisations that supported or facilitated the project, such as ArtReach and Writing East Midlands. The creative writing workshops were part of the *Sanctuary* project initiated by Writing East Midlands, which led to a practical guide about working with forced migrants in creative writing sessions.[12] Both of these organisations focus on engaging with forced migrants, on a national and local level respectively, and therefore are guided by different ambitions and objectives, which have (or should have) the interests of their focus group in mind at all times. *Museum Takeover* is not

10 See: https://www.leicestermuseums.org/about/, accessed 29.06.2022.

11 The exhibition was announced on the football club's website: https://www.lcfc.com/news/433386, accessed 29.06.2022.

12 See: https://writingeastmidlands.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Refugee-toolkit-HR.pdf, accessed 03.07.2022.

the only artistic project they (co-)facilitated, but was the only collaboration between Leicester Museum & Art Gallery and these two organisations.

As aforementioned, the city of Leicester is characterised by a highly diverse population. This was reflected in the city's vote to remain in the EU during the Brexit referendum of June 2016; a referendum that has been described as being fuelled by rhetoric around immigration (Knell 2021) which promoted anti-immigrant sentiments (Vlachou 2017, 8). This political sentiment has, according to Vlachou, reminded us "how quickly nationalism (as opposed to patriotism) can become a dominant ideology, bringing about a radically negative transformation of the society – of certain citizens" (2017, 8). The public perspective on migration has since shifted even further towards hatred and exclusion, leading to the election of a Conservative government with policies that reflect the widespread populist, anti-immigrant mood (Knell 2021) (such as the government's recent plans to deport newly arrived migrants to Rwanda [Barry 2022]). After successfully separating from the EU, the government now has free rein when it comes to deciding on such policies and to closing its borders to limit immigration rates.

The ongoing debate is intensifying a process of polarisation when it comes to migration (Knell 2021). Within this political climate, the UK organisation City of Sanctuary, founded in Sheffield in 2007, has become increasingly important and encouraged organisations such as universities and museums to partake in processes of integration and welcoming migrants locally. The local organisation Leicester City of Sanctuary describes its mission as: "to welcome asylum seekers and refugees in and around Leicester, and support them to rebuild their lives, develop their skills and feel part of the community".[13] As the project emerged from the writing workshop that was part of the City of Sanctuary programme, it immediately formed part of this social effort and supported its political position about the benefits that are generated by migration. Additionally, *Museum Takeover* was one of the museum's initial attempts at engaging forced migrants and becoming a Museum of Sanctuary. Since then, the museum has increased its efforts to develop different projects and ongoing activities that would provide them this status. The shift in political position is by no means new but has been amplified in recent years; projects such as *Museum Takeover* that seek to raise awareness of migrants' stories and the empowerment of people who have

13 See: https://www.leicestermuseums.org/news/museumofsanctuary/, accessed 29.06.2022.

recently arrived in the country seemed necessary at the time, and continue to do so today.

2.3 *So sehe ich das...*

Initiated and hosted by Museum Friedland, *So sehe ich das...* (That's how I see it...)[14] was described as the museum's first participatory project. Museum Friedland was founded in 2016 to provide a historical overview of Friedland (a town near Göttingen in Germany) as a point of transit; a role that it still holds for the many forced migrants temporarily staying at this location. This history has informed the museum's main focus: the topic of migration and its function in shaping the town in which it is based. For this project, the museum educator and project curator invited participants to capture their experiences and impressions of Friedland. The two-day photography workshop was a first attempt to work with people staying in Friedland at the time.

The project was organised by two employees of the museum, but it sits within the much larger framework of the museum's planned extension and the history and contemporary relevance of its location. Before addressing this larger context, though, I will first describe the project in a little more detail, along with the various stakeholders and the project outputs, both as they were initially planned and ultimately delivered. By outlining these aspects, the next two sections should provide a clear overview of the project and its (potential) role within the institution.

2.3.1 Documenting the place of arrival

The project *So sehe ich das...* invited participants to take pictures of Friedland to capture how they experience the place, through which they could show what this historic site means to them today. The project consisted of two workshops hosted by the museum educator and project curator: one two-day workshop on 3 and 4 September 2016, and another one on 1 and 2 October of the same year. The project was initially intended as a way to collect pictures taken by recent migrants who were based in Friedland at the time, in order to feature them in the new museum catalogue for the permanent exhibition. During

14 See: https://www.museum-friedland.de/, accessed 29.06.2022.

the conception of the project, the project team additionally decided to create a temporary exhibition as a project output.

The workshop was roughly planned to include a section on photography and a section in which the participants contextualised their pictures through interviews. The first day started with instructions on using the cameras available for the workshop. After this formal part, the participants would take the cameras and start taking pictures in the town and their temporary home. On the second day, the curator, museum educator and an interpreter spoke with the participants individually about which photographs they would like to present in the exhibition. The rest of the day was reserved for individually editing the selected photographs on the computer, with a break during which the participants joined a tour of the museum. The temporary exhibition was made up of separate boards presenting each participant's photographs and their explanations. These texts, printed on the board alongside five pictures, drew on quotes from the conversations of day two. Though the project was conceived with the aim of obtaining images for the catalogue and in the hope that an exhibition could be developed from them afterwards, there were no expectations about what might be captured by the participants, or what the quality of the images might be. As the project was still inviting participants until the very morning of the first day of the workshop, there were many aspects that could not be planned in advance. As suggested by the project curator, "you simply did not know what might come out of it" (MF-S01).

In the process of developing such a project, museum practitioners or project organisers contemplate the potential outcomes or value for the envisioned participants; after all, they have to offer something that will be of interest to them. For Museum Friedland, this meant thinking about the role the museum could play for people within their first days and weeks after arriving in Germany. The project curator recognised the difficulties, and acknowledged that the museum might not be the first thing on people's minds:

> So, the situation of the people is simply – and I think it's really important to recognise this – so far removed from dealing with a museum in this way. They would have to gain a residence status, they would have to sort out where they can live, they would have to do language courses and qualification assessments and find work. (MF-S01)

These concerns are real and urgent for forced migrants after they have arrived in a new country, and a collaborative project with a museum simply cannot take priority.

The workshop facilitator from Museum Friedland spoke about the impact of the project and noted that the participants "worked on this individually and [then] they moved. They haven't seen the exhibition, they haven't read the book, they have no clue about what happened [with their contribution]" (MF-S02). The material outputs of the project were not for them, but the exhibition was envisioned as a tool that could be used to invite future inhabitants of the transit camp to come and see that they share some of their experiences with people who stayed in Friedland before them.

The boards were exhibited in the 'Nissenhütte',[15] which has since become the space for participatory activities, workshops and conversations with the people staying in the camp. Due to its location outside of the museum, the threshold to enter the space is reduced, and different types of relationships are created; the Nissenhütte as such provides a space in which people can come together to create, to dance and to get to know each other. The recognisable stories presented in the native languages of the participants were a starting point for conversations with people who had just stumbled upon this museum space.

2.3.2 Museum Friedland

Museum Friedland is located in the building of the former Friedland train station, with the Nissenhütte as a separate space dedicated to community engagement work. A planned extension to the museum is scheduled to open in 2023. The existing building will continue to present historical narratives on migration and Friedland as a point of transit, as in its current exhibition *Friedland – Perspectives of Migration: The Transit Camp from 1945 until Today*. The new building will present a contemporary history of migration through Friedland into Germany since 2015. This part of the museum is intended as a space for addressing "the continuously changing present and stimulating

15 The Nissenhütte is an outreach space which is separate to the museum itself. A less intimidating space, it is situated in the direct vicinity of the people the museum hopes to engage. Located within the transit camp, the green shed is used as a space for community engagement.

discussions about the future".[16] The museum's website provides an overview of the museum's structure, mission and vision. This is divided in sections on who they are, what they do, what they represent and what they hope to do in the future, describing its current role based on its exhibitions, collection and education or engagement programme:

> In its permanent exhibition *Fluchtpunkt Friedland*, the museum tells the story of the transit camp from 1945 to the present day from different perspectives, tracing life stories from many parts of the world. Multimedia installations, documents, photographs and a wide variety of objects, including numerous personal mementos from contemporary witnesses convey multi-layered and exciting stories that inspire reflection and discussion. Temporary exhibitions in the "Nissenhütte" on the premises of the transit camp complement the exhibition programme.
>
> In addition, Museum Friedland collects and preserves artefacts from the past and present of the transit camp. The collection is being continually expanded and investigated. Objects from the collection are used for exhibitions, the educational programme and research purposes, and can also be made available to other museums on loan.
>
> With its educational programmes, Museum Friedland encourages a broad public to engage with the history and present of the transit camp as well as with overarching sociopolitical issues. The guiding principles of the target-group-specific formats are visitor orientation, sustainability and participation.[17]

The project *So sehe ich das…* was one of the museum's initial steps toward integrating more recent memories of migration into the overall museum discourse. The recent founding of the museum is evidence of the increased need to address the history and relevance of the town, which serves as a temporary home for many incoming migrants. Acknowledging its historical and contemporary importance, the museum has been attempting to address more recent histories through its participatory work. Its position near a transit camp brings a number of challenges that are very particular to this

16 See: https://www.museum-friedland.de/erweiterung/museumskonzept/, accessed 29.06.2022.

17 See: https://www.museum-friedland.de/ueber-uns/leitbild/, accessed 03.07.2022.

museum. Despite the town being home to many forced migrants who have recently arrived to Germany, the camp is never a home to anyone for a very long time. The project curator described the short duration of their stay as one of the main barriers to developing a participatory project and to sparking interest in working with the museum.

> The challenge in Friedland, still today, is this very short stay. It means that you can't work with people over a longer period of time, but have to say ad hoc: 'Who is here today?' And then something is done for the people who feel like it in that moment. There is hardly a chance to plan it in advance, or to connect people to a project, because their stay may be five days or two weeks, and then in some individual cases, there are people who stay about two months. (F01 Interview)

The invitation process, the ideal of building a local network and the scale of the possible projects developed at Museum Friedland are heavily affected by these parameters.

Though quite remote, located in a small town south of Göttingen in the heart of Germany, the political landscape largely reflects the one described in the section on *daHEIM*. However, the previous section highlights that the historical context of the town presents a complex political history which is interwoven with its role within Germany today. This historical and contemporary role is addressed in the museum, but its focus on the current situation requires the museum to engage in participatory work. In the catalogue that was published to mark the opening of the permanent exhibition, the curators refer to the social discourse that perpetuates a 'fear of others', in reference to the aforementioned refugee protection crisis of 2015. They argue that ideally, the museum will help to counter this 'panic-mongering' with a "critical and nuanced view of the history and present of migration in the Federal Republic of Germany, based on the history of the Friedland border transit camp" (Baur and Bluche 2017, 17). This objective for the museum's current and future work highlights the complexity of the surrounding public and political discourse, which is characterised by the conflicting perceptions of migrants present within local populations. Through the museum's exhibitions and programme, they hope to challenge this discourse and to influence its development.

2.4 *Aleppo*

A more recent project was *Aleppo*,[18] an exhibition that was on display at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam from 20 April 2017 to 4 March 2018, and was accompanied by a weekly tour hosted by a small group of people originating from the Syrian metropolis. The exhibition focused on the city of Aleppo, which was home to many people who fled to the Netherlands in and after 2015. Not initially planned as a participatory project, the museum hired an external curator to put together a photography exhibition to accompany two objects that were (until then) housed in the museum. It was not until a later stage, when the education team became involved in the project, that the project gained a participatory element. The museum educator invited former inhabitants of Aleppo to join, and managed to put together a team of tour guides that would end up working at the museum for the duration of the exhibition.

This project, like the other case studies, was the result of a unique process and institutional context. After the late involvement of participants, the framework for the participatory process and its outputs were clearly delineated. Within the Tropenmuseum, which is part of a larger umbrella institution, the project was seen as a necessary response to the negative discourse in the media, but the participatory aspect was a result of input from individual stakeholders. The process and the different stakeholders are outlined in the next section. The project took shape as a contribution to the ongoing political debate, which will be described in what follows. As such, this sub-chapter provides the basis for the analysis of this case study in the following chapters of this book.

2.4.1 Personal accounts of life in Aleppo

The initial idea for the focus on Aleppo arose from de-installing the area-based displays that made up the permanent exhibition. For the reconfiguration of these spaces and objects, an object from the museum's collection (a scale model of the city of Aleppo) needed to be removed. This object was provided as the starting point for the external curator, who was invited to develop a photography exhibition within a short space of time. In collaboration with

18 See: https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/aleppo, accessed 29.06. 2022.

a specific team put together for the additional (internal) work, the external curator developed an exhibition including photographs, mainly showing the war and the related destruction of the city and museum artefacts.

The exhibition itself was not created using a participatory format, but the museum instead invited Syrian people to become tour guides in the exhibition, in order to make room for personal stories of flight and home. The project initiator – one of the museum educators – confirmed this, and referred to initial conversations within the project team, recounting: "I was the first one to say that it is a bit strange that we are doing this and we are not asking people who now live in Amsterdam to be part of it" (T-A01). The inclusion of the former inhabitants of Aleppo was introduced by the museum's education and outreach team, which meant that their stories were not immediately integrated into the exhibition itself but rather developed as a separate element or layer to the exhibition. This extra layer created by the involvement of the participants was, according to the exhibitions manager, a necessary part of the project that added an emotional, personal aspect to the exhibition. "Without it, it would have been much more superficial", they said (T-A06).

The participatory process started with the invitation of the participants via the museum's social media channels and with the help of Refugee Start Force, an organisation the museum collaborated with for this project. The participants were invited to contribute a personal story or passion in any creative way; based on the great variety of people's contributions, the tours constituted a series of several stations where visitors would learn about, or hear from, one of the participants. To prepare for the tours, the museum educator arranged three preparatory sessions: the first one to introduce the different (potential) contributions, a second one to practice and discuss potential problems during the tours, and a third one to introduce the themes of the exhibition. During these preparatory sessions, however, the museum educator learned about the many objects that people had brought over from Aleppo and saw the opportunity to include personal objects and stories in the exhibition display as well. The objects brought in by participants were featured in a separate display case in the room adjacent to the exhibition spaces. Their objects became a focal point of press and visitor responses, despite them being later contributions to the narrative developed by the museum and external curator.

In accordance with the exhibition's title, the project did not solely revolve around the refugee protection crisis but responded to the transformations

that the city and its inhabitants had been experiencing. In doing so, the museum contributed to a discourse that possibly moved away from centralising the experience of migration (see Chapter 6). Despite the goals for the project not being fully defined due to the quick preparation and development time, the participatory aspect of *Aleppo* focused on human stories, and highlighted the human experience of a city and its destruction.

2.4.2 The Tropenmuseum

Organised at the Tropenmuseum, an institution with an outstanding reputation when it comes to considering the representation of cultural 'others', this project is of particular interest due to its specific focus and the feedback it gathered from participants and visitors over the full year it was running. Known for its novel formats in engaging with 'other' cultures, the project fits well within the museum's broader approach. The hosting institution was founded in 1864 in Haarlem, the Netherlands. The Tropenmuseum – then still the Koloniaal Museum (Colonial Museum) – moved to its current location in Amsterdam in 1926. Due to cuts in state funding, the Tropenmuseum merged with other ethnographic museums to become the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures, NMW). Since 2014, its mission and collections have been shared with Museum Volkenkunde (Ethnographic Museum) in Leiden and the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal; and in 2017, they were joined by the Museum van Wereldculturen (Museum of World Cultures) in Rotterdam. Their joint mission statement[19] reads:

> People all over the world face the same questions about life. The answers they give to these questions differ, and are often culturally determined. What unites us are universal human emotions. The objects in our collection are an outstanding testimony to that. They each tell a human story. Stories about loving, mourning, celebrating, decorating or fighting. They spark curiosity about the enormous cultural diversity in the world. These authentic narrations open up a world in which everyone is connected to each other. By actively involving our audience and stakeholders in the collecting, interpreting and sharing of these testimonies, we increase the awareness

19 See: https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/nl/over-het-tropenmuseum/missie, accessed 01.07.2022.

> of this interconnectedness. In this way, we inspire an open-minded view of the world. And we foster global citizenship. That is our mission. At the Tropenmuseum, you will discover that, apart from the differences, we are all the same: we are human beings.[20]

This statement highlights the museum's interest in working together with different stakeholders to include narrations that reflect the interconnectedness of citizens right around the world. It points to its objects as representing human stories, despite the fact that their contested histories often bear connections with the inhumane colonial contexts in which the objects were acquired. This seems to mainly focus on the collection and the interpretation of the objects currently held by the Tropenmuseum. The collection strategy and future collecting practices are currently being reshaped, but do not bear a direct relation to the demands or wishes expressed by the Raad voor Cultuur (the funding committee of the national government). This museum group also includes the Research Centre for Material Culture (RCMC), which takes the lead on exploring the collection, its colonial origins and practices, and is fundamental in overseeing the evolution of the museums' strategies. The RCMC has also collaborated on restitution processes of artefacts obtained during the country's colonial era, leading to a report for restitution by the NMW in March 2020 and a political confirmation of the need for these restitution processes in October 2020. The Raad voor Cultuur stated that "Dutch museums should be prepared to unconditionally return cultural goods that were looted in formal colonies, upon request by the country of origin" (Raad voor Cultuur 2020). Attempting to move away from and challenge its colonial history, the museums are referred to as being first and foremost "museums about people". This scope is reflected in the thematic approaches of the museums, their engagement with local populations and their view on the importance of considering and challenging racism and the nation's history of, and current relationship to, slavery.

The museum is dependent on government funding, which means it needs to take into account the considerations of the Raad voor Cultuur and their

20 Though the museum offers a translation of their statement on their website, it is not a very accurate translation of the statement that was originally written in Dutch. It is a slightly shorter version of the mission statement, which does not include the introduction, which highlights the focus on humans and human emotions, but also addresses that there are differences in cultural understanding.

plans for the upcoming four-year funding period. In conversation with the staff about the project, they referred to the difficulties of being government-funded, due to the restrictions this brings with it (T-A01 and T-A06). For participatory work, for example, the museum (like other museums in this study) struggles to provide food and drinks for the participants, as the use of governmental funding is strictly monitored and such expenses are not considered vital for the organisation of museum projects. These financial infrastructures constitute limiting factors for participatory work, for which the museum – for the purposes of this project at least – was able to find alternatives.

As pointed out earlier, the *Aleppo* exhibition was not initially designed as a participatory project but as a photography exhibition featuring a select few objects about the city of Aleppo. However, while the project was being put together, the city of Aleppo was regularly mentioned in the news, as were the people leaving the city to find refuge elsewhere. The theme was broadly discussed in the media and the political sphere (see, for example, Sims 2016; Van den Dool 2016); and the incidents in Cologne sparked similar reactions in the Netherlands to those observed in Germany (Tolsma et al. 2021). The museum marketer who was responsible for the communications for the project at the Tropenmuseum referred to the start of the project, recalling newspaper coverage at the time bearing headlines like: "Testosterone bombs here to rape our women" (T-A02). They realised how much these and other phrases were affecting public opinion and provoking prejudice against the forced migrants arriving in the Netherlands at the time (T-A02). In their communication of the exhibition and the tours, they therefore aimed to challenge the prominent generalisations that characterised the media discourse at the time on the museum's behalf. However, the media and political discourses continue to emphasise a predominantly negative view of forced migrants. The Dutch term *vluchteling* (refugee) is no longer a neutral way to define people who have fled their countries, yet there is no alternative designation that is used consistently today. In the programmes of the Dutch political parties for the elections of March 2021, many addressed forced migration either in an effort to assist forced migrants, or to use them as a scapegoat. This evinces the continued relevance of the debate and the potential for the museum to intervene in the discourse (further discussed in Chapter 6).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the different case studies and addressed the context in which they were carried out and their project outlines. An overview of the projects and some of their key features is provided below (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Overview of the different projects and their key features.

Project	***daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives***	***Museum Takeover***	***So sehe ich das...***	***Aleppo***
Host institution	Museum Europäischer Kulturen	Leicester Museum & Art Gallery	Museum Friedland	Tropen-museum
Location	Berlin, Germany	Leicester, United Kingdom	Friedland, Germany	Amsterdam, the Netherlands
No. of participants	117	20	11	12
Timespan of collaboration	March 2016 - July 2017	June and August 2018	September and October 2016	February 2017 - March 2018
Type of project	Collaborative artistic project	Creative writing workshop	Photography workshop	Creative tour guide project
Output	Exhibition, events and performance	Additional labels for permanent exhibition	Exhibition and catalogue	Personal objects and weekly guided tours

The case studies took place between 2015 and 2018, providing a similar political climate across Western Europe. Their political contexts and the shifts in political and media discourse that intensified the need for these projects were very similar, but the way the museums and the project organisers approached the participatory work with forced migrants varied broadly. In each of the cases, the institutional infrastructures shaped and limited both the practices and the extent of participation as a 'valid' methodology

for contributing to the museological discourse. The institutions in which they took place differ in size, focus and location, though in case of the Tropenmuseum and the MEK, there is more overlap in approach and institutional infrastructure. As large-scale ethnographic museums based in the capital cities of their respective countries, and as part of a larger museum network, they share similar stakeholder relations and institutional structures. Despite these similarities and the comparable sociopolitical context, the museums took very different approaches to the theme, and engaged the participants at different stages of their projects. The projects in Friedland and Leicester were carried out on a much smaller scale, but dealt with similar structural limitations. Once again, though, their approaches were very different. Each of these projects took place over a specified period with limited scope for potential long-term outcomes for both institution and participants. The differences and similarities introduced in this chapter will become clearer throughout the discussion of the participatory processes in the respective museums.

The institutionally defined goals for these projects provide the outline for the analysis in the chapters that follow; they highlight the objectives defined by the museums, both those serving the museums' missions and those presumed helpful for the participants. Taking these goals as a point of departure, I explore the related practices and examine the extent to which these cultivate eventual outcomes (or negative consequences) for the participants themselves. The ensuing chapters are organised according to the goals set by museums. These are objectives regularly referred to in literature and practical guides on engaging with forced migration, and not all have been explicitly mentioned by museum practitioners during the interviews. However, in exploring the goals that museums often tie to such projects, I found that many of these are intended to serve the forced migrants or their integration. Museum practices often reflect these goals, even in cases where they did not explicitly outline them beforehand. The objectives are based on the museums' understandings of what people who have been forced to leave their home countries might need, and are often founded on assumptions rather than direct conversations with the participants. These goals form the basis for much of what museum practitioners do, as well as what they exclude from their practices. Despite motivations and goals often being clearly distinguished, they are not usually monitored together with the participants throughout the process.

Through the approach outlined here, this study seeks to provide the evaluation for the projects that was missing at the time. The analysis I carry out based on the reflections of practitioners and participants offers insights into the processes and limitations of the projects, many of which could have been addressed as part of the project. Discussing the projects outlined in this chapter, the following chapters will focus on the 'how'; addressing the processes in relation to defined goals and the projects' outcomes. This study serves as a basis for an in-depth analysis of these projects and their outputs and outcomes for all involved. As such, I assess the success of the projects in terms of their outcomes for the participants, as well as the negative consequences experienced as a result of the projects.

II. Outcomes or Consequences?

3. Networking 'Communities'

Through participation, museums seek to attract new audiences and further their outreach (Simon 2010). Museums often employ participatory methods to connect with 'communities' that do not (yet) visit the museum. Participatory work establishes a connection between the museum and individuals, but whether this work ties the participants to the institution in the long term has not yet been adequately investigated. What connects people to a museum? What aspects in the museum's approach form obstacles to developing long-term ties with 'communities'? How could the goal of networking 'communities' become a realistic one? And, most importantly for this study, how relevant is such a network for the participants themselves?

Starting from these questions, this chapter discusses the potential of a network as an outcome or consequence both for museums and for the communities involved. It discusses the types of relationships between participants (and between participants and practitioners) through a study of the museum's use of the concept of 'community' and through conflict and trust. The chapter points to the relational motivations and objectives of the participants and assesses some of the relationships built throughout the processes, whether formal or informal, positive or negative. It builds on the idea of the museum itself as a node in a network, relating to the 'communities' that they work with on equal footing, in keeping with Morse's logic of care (2021). A museum director involved in this research referred to this idea, stating that connecting the participants with the institution

> could have been a wish, but you have to be realistic. That is simply not the case with all this participation and [its] sustainability. It's important to . . .

> work in a participatory way again and again, but you don't always have to work with the same people (MEK-D01).[1]

Following Helen Graham, the sustainability of participatory work is defined by small-scale group work or community engagement. Graham suggests that participatory work would be less problematic if, rather than working with different 'communities' "successively (one group after another), it is seen as adding new nodes into a wider network" (2017, 84). Though museums often aim to create such a network, in which the participants and the museum remain in contact after the project, this is rarely an outcome in practice. To investigate the potential of a network as a valid outcome of a participatory museum project, this chapter evaluates the different aspects relevant to shaping relationships that stretch beyond the project's timeline.

One of these aspects is the concept of 'community' and the way this term is often applied to describe forced migrants as a group. This includes a reflection on the modus operandi of community engagement, for which I start with the process of recognising, addressing and inviting a 'group' to become involved in a project. Based on a theoretical discussion of 'communities', invitation processes and related expectations within the museological realm, this chapter outlines the ways in which four different participatory projects shape potential networks.

3.1 Inviting 'communities'

Museums are increasingly acknowledging the importance of inviting 'communities' to represent themselves; a practice that is largely based on the museum's ambition to move away from its colonial displays of 'others'. Participatory work claims to provide a stage for marginalised people, but it often starts from a contributory logic (Morse 2021). Preparing for a project, museum practitioners or project facilitators put a lot of work into developing the concept for the project, imagining the goals and possible outcomes of the project, and securing funding. This process most often includes outlining

1 This quotation is from an interview carried out with a museum director for this research. Throughout this chapter, quotes drawn from different interviews with participants and museum practitioners are included to provide insight into their personal experiences and perceptions of the projects. The interviews with the different stakeholders were conducted between May 2020 and June 2021.

goals for participants based on assumptions by practitioners, rather than on conversations with participants. A participatory project gains its participatory nature when the invitations are sent out, or when the people who already work with the museum or external facilitators are asked to join a particular project. For this invitation process, museums reach out to 'imagined communities'[2] based on assumed characteristics and connections (Waterton and Smith 2010) and with prescribed aims of what might come out of the project for the members of that 'community'.

Museums, as well as other cultural organisations and funding bodies, often refer to communities to suggest that they are targeting a specific 'group' (Meijer-van Mensch 2012); their work aims to address a representative group of people based on what they have in common. This approach to participatory practices means that museums are often unable to break with existing hierarchies, despite their underlying aim to share agency with the invited group. This principle is further explored by Anja Piontek (2017) through a study of the existing and perpetual power dynamics within participatory practices in museums. According to Piontek, it is not possible to develop a project that seeks to diminish power relations when the invitation to participate itself confirms existing dynamics (2017, 86); the involvement of the 'community' is dependent on the museum, at least in the sense that it must first be invited.

The following sections look at the use of 'community' in the invitation of forced migrants, and assess the potential to shape invitation processes around 'areas of curiosity' (Lindström and Ståhl 2016, 186) rather than extending an invitation to an invented or presumed 'community'. It problematises the use of 'community' in practice, and suggests what should change for participatory methods to successfully lead to the creation of a network connecting participants, the museum, and its practitioners in a way that might benefit the participants rather than (or in addition to) the museum.

2 This term was first used by Benedict Anderson (1983) to describe how people come to perceive themselves as part of a national community. Waterton and Smith (2010) use Anderson's term to underline that being a member of a community is not always a choice, as is clear from how it is applied in museum practice.

3.1.1 A 'community' of forced migrants

As a 'community', forced migrants are envisioned as a clear focus group for the museum. This 'grouping', as pointed out by Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith, is intrinsically shaped by existing hierarchies and therefore difficult for museums to navigate or challenge (2010). Emphasising the problematic nature of this practice, the concept has "been pushed onto class, racial or ethnic hierarchies" (Waterton and Smith 2010, 7). This was recently addressed during an online discussion organised by COMCOL on the term 'community' and how it is used by museums in their work.[3] One of the speakers, Idil Efe, who is a 'diversity agent' for the Stadtmuseum Berlin Foundation (city museum of Berlin), stated that museums often use the word 'community' to refer to an ethnic group, which constitutes a re-ethnicisation of people, simplifying them and essentialising their backgrounds whilst neglecting their hybrid identities (Efe 2021). In agreement with this statement, Natalie Beyer added that the term more often than not applies to migrants, which limits their perceived identity to one aspect of their lives. In doing so, they create a dichotomy between 'local' cultures and that of forced migrants.

In their role as participants, they become representatives of 'forced migrants' as a group, applying their individual experiences to a larger 'group'. Natalie Bayer and Mark Terkessidis point out that:

> The structure of representation seems increasingly inappropriate in this context, as the idea of representation bases the presentation and uniformity on the notion of a group that is reductionist, selective and limited. (2017, 70)

The institutional practices based on assumptions about a 'group' of people begins with the invitation to participate in a project. The assumptions that draw these so-called 'communities' together are based on generalisations and stereotypes about these 'groups' (Coffee 2008; Meijer-van Mensch 2012). This is most problematic when the exhibited element of their identity leads to

3 On 20 May 2021, COMCOL (ICOM's International Committee for Collecting) hosted an online discussion entitled "What's 'Community' Anyway? Uses, Misuses and Alternatives for the term 'Community' in Museum Work" as part of the series *Making Museums Matter*. The discussion with Jamie Keil (Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History), Jules Rijssen (Imagine IC, Amsterdam), Roman Singendonk (Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin) and Idil Efe (Stadtmuseum Berlin) was moderated by Alina Gromova (ICOM COMCOL) and Sandra Vacca (ICOM COMCOL).

discrimination (Wonisch 2012). This is very likely when the museum invites forced migrants to represent the topic of forced migration, for which they are separated from the local population in practice, as well as in the discourse that is generated by this practice (as described in introduction).

In invitation processes, the concept of 'community' is especially problematic, as it tends to identify forced migrants as a homogeneous group, of which the participants become representatives during the participatory project. Bayer described participatory practices as a confirmation of a separation between the participants and those organising the projects, as she states: "as a result [...] it becomes apparent that, time and again, participation in museum work creates a division that objectifies the called-for [invitees] as contributors and the callers [inviting museums] as conductors" (2017, 31). The museum practitioners choose a theme for the exhibition or project, and the invited participants merely come to symbolise this topic or debate, whilst at the same time demonstrating the museum's inclusivity. One participant noted that they would not have been invited if it were not for their experiences and their skin colour (MEK-D08). Through their invitation processes, museums decide which stories are worth telling (and which are not). Largely depending on the process of inviting forced migrants to participate in a museological process, they themselves and their artefacts become objects of study.

3.1.2 Invitation processes

The invitation processes are different for each participatory project, depending on its focus, as well as on the museum's access to, and the interest from, 'communities'. Two of the selected projects had already gathered a group of individuals to work with before they decided to take on a different setting and format appropriate to the museological realm. There was no clear moment of invitation for these projects, as they were dependent on relationships that had evolved over time, often through more formal structures. The invitation processes took place in different spaces: online spaces, museum spaces and spaces already familiar to the participants. The space, and people's familiarity with a space, impacted the processes, and will therefore be addressed in this chapter, before being elaborated on further in Chapter 5.

The *Aleppo* project at the Tropenmuseum was initiated through an online invitation (both on the museum's own channels and in other online spaces). The museum shared the invitation via its own social media channels

(predominantly through Facebook), and those of an organisation they collaborated with, the Amsterdam-based organisation Refugee Start Force. The latter organisation would help engage the 'community' that the museum envisioned for the project: former inhabitants of Aleppo. The museum educator who initiated the project said:

> They posted a call and we also posted a call ourselves on our website and through all social media channels. I sent it around to people I knew, and said that people could come by for an information session, that we were looking for guides, well, people who wanted to share their story and we asked specifically for people not having to speak, but it was also okay to do it through theatre, music, books, anything really. (T-A01)

The invitation on Facebook was posted alongside a picture of three people standing inside the museum looking out into the central hall, and comprised the following message:

> ALEPPO | We are looking for Syrian hosts for the exhibition *Aleppo* (31 March–10 September 2017). Did you live or work in Aleppo and would you like to share your memories or personal stories about the city with us? We are looking for people who speak English and/or Dutch and enjoy working with people. Are you a poet, musician, performer or artist? Then you can also share your story creatively.
>
> We provide training and financial compensation. The maximum time is 2 hours per week. Interested? Then send an email before 22 February 2017 to [email address]. (Tropenmuseum Facebook page, date posted: 15.02.2017)

With 207 shares and 242 comments, this Facebook post seemed to resonate with a great number of people. Additionally, many potential participants were tagged in the responses to the museum's call-out. Through this post and through the network of Refugee Start Force, the museum managed to generate a lot of interest in the project from the envisioned participants. As these call-outs do not usually bring in so many people, the museum educator was pleasantly surprised by the interest in the project. The museum's online engagement brought many people to the museum for the scheduled information session: approximately forty people out of about eighty that had signed up joined the session. The information session provided participants with the opportunity to ask questions about the project, and enabled the organisers to inquire about their potential expectations of the exhibition and

to ask which stories people were happy to share. This led to a selection process, for which the organisers applied criteria such as the variety of people's stories and their command of Dutch or English. The latter was due to the lack of funds to provide translators for the preparatory sessions and for the tours themselves. This meant that those who were not able to express themselves clearly could not take part. This aspect of the museum's invitation strategy was based on a practical decision, yet it highlights the exclusionary nature of the project: just like in most formal recruitment processes, the museum applied a selection procedure that included some people and excluded others. In this way, they decided on those who would represent the city of Aleppo, and forced migrants from Syria more generally. The Tropenmuseum selected a group of ten people to join the exhibition's programme for its run. The guides took part in two more preparatory sessions, and ran weekly tours every Sunday after the exhibition opened.

The museum team in Friedland applied a more personal and direct approach that focused on an 'area of curiosity' to invite participants. By promoting the project as a photography workshop, the organising team sought to draw people in and spark interest in the activity rather than presupposing the value of collaborating with the museum (MF-S01). "During their initial reception, it is not of immediate interest for refugees. There are many other necessities and the museum is pretty irrelevant, which is Friedland's biggest challenge for participation" (MF-S01). The project curator explained how, together with the museum educator, they invited people to join the project by striking up conversations during the week to invite them for the weekend workshop (MF-S01). The workshop took place on the weekend, offering a recreational activity at a time with limited other activities or obligations. "We simply went to the cafeteria every day of the week of the workshop, and promoted it somehow. Often we brought some flyers along, but it was rather about starting a conversation with the people, and sparking some kind of interest" (MF-S01). They continued to explain how they had to be quite persistent, going back to the cafeteria on the first day of the workshop to remind people about the workshop. Rather than inviting a supposed 'community' to come to the space of the museum, the museum practitioners built relationships with people in spaces already actively used by the 'community' of forced migrants.

Other museum staff members have since asked the museum educator for a guide or checklist for inviting people who are being temporarily housed at the transit camp, assuming that there is one method for inviting this

'community'. In an interview with this staff member from the education department, they responded with disbelief:

> They want a kind of checklist or a manual or a secret, a magic wand that they can use to invite people to participate. I don't know . . . I can't do it. Because what I did for four or five years is building a special rapport, talking to them, using certain jokes, trying to make them . . . actually, I want my face to be familiar to them, so just say "hi" or whatever, just to give them, let's say, a feeling that we are family, or that we know each other. So when I invite them to any activities, they will come. (MF-S02)

There is no magic involved in inviting people to join a process that should be voluntary and, above all, meaningful to them. The invitation process cannot be prescribed, nor can it be broken down into steps or checklists: the museum educator demonstrated that it is a matter of developing personal connections, often crossing the borders between work and private life, and of great time investment (MF-S02). At the same time, it is about listening to people, learning about their needs and interests and catering to that using the means available in the museum. As described by Sandra Vacca, cited by Sergi, "museums cannot expect to work with forced migrants without being enmeshed in their lives" (2021, 84). Reaching out to people was a time-consuming part of the project, but it allowed for a reciprocal connection. Following Clifford, reciprocity is culturally specific and its manifestation often depends on the power relationships in place (1997, 194). The process of building these relationships does not depend on addressing forced migrants as a 'community'. Instead, the process was based on individual relationships between the museum educator and the participants; an individual approach that was reinforced by the independent photography projects that came out of this project.

The facilitators of *Museum Takeover* employed a similar approach, but rather than simply finding spaces where the envisioned 'community' might be, the project facilitator reached out to a group whose members were already connected through an 'area of curiosity'. The project started from a creative writing workshop, organised by the Red Cross in collaboration with Writing East Midlands, which sought to support the social inclusion of forced migrants in the UK.[4] The participants were already taking part

4 For more information about the project and its objectives, see: https://writingeastmidlands.co.uk/projects/write-here-sanctuary/, accessed: 21/04/2022.

in these workshops, and the workshop facilitator joined them for several sessions before initiating the museum intervention (LM-MT01). As well as being united by shared experiences of migration, the participants shared an interest in creative writing. They would apply this interest within the museum by writing new labels with interpretations or personal stories for some of the objects on display. Rather than focusing on their trauma or stories of migration, the project tapped into their interest in writing; it started from an 'area of curiosity' that the practitioners already knew the participants were interested in. The perception of this group as a 'community' occurred both beforehand, in the invitation processes for the workshop, and afterwards, when the project was framed by the museum as a part of Refugee Week, and later as part of the Journeys Festival. Though stories of flight were not necessarily foregrounded, the participants (or at least the material they produced) were ultimately framed as being representative of forced migration within the museum context.

Similar to the two aforementioned projects, the invitation process for *daHEIM* also addressed a group of people that had already (been) gathered together, and it reached out to participants in in spaces completely separate from the museum. The project facilitator started collaborating with interested forced migrants in the *heim* (a government accommodation centre for forced migrants) in the Berlin district of Spandau before the project moved to the MEK several months later. The project facilitator 'reached in' by predominantly engaging with people within the spaces in which they were housed after their arrival to Berlin. The collaboration at the time started from the facilitator's interest in investigating "what flight actually means" (MEK-D03), but it was meant as a way for participants to engage in artistic practices. The participants were not from one specific country but instead were considered a 'community' based on their experiences of forced migration. The invitation was not directed at forced migrants per se, but participants were asked to speak about precisely this experience, thus essentialising this aspect of their identity.

For the performance planned to mark the end of the exhibition, the facilitator employed a different approach. First, they invited other artists to join the organising team, which now included friends of theirs who, in turn, invited other people through their personal networks (MEK-D07). At this point, the invitation process no longer focused on one 'community' but rather extended to a group with a shared interest in dance and performance. For the performance, some of the participants from the initial *daHEIM*

project were invited back to the museum. A participant who had already been involved in the *daHEIM* project mentioned they felt intimidated due to the involvement of approximately thirty to forty predominantly white, German-speaking artists, performers and dancers in the project. Their affinity with performance and their experiences working creatively within a German institution set them apart from most of the people who were initially part of the project. By inviting people through personal networks and based on an 'area of curiosity', the performance brought together these groups to address a topic that only reflected the experiences of the initial project participants. Despite the potential of inviting participants based on an 'area of curiosity', expanding beyond the scope of a single, supposed 'community', this process created two separate groups of 'performers' and 'forced migrants' to represent experience of forced migration.

The different projects in this study addressed the invitation process in a variety of ways, but all of them focused on refugees as a community; their focus was on forced migrants, and this was often evident in the theme at the centre of the exhibitions or projects (this aspect is discussed further in Chapter 6). The focus on this 'community' provided the museums with a means of securing a first-person perspective on a topic of sociopolitical relevance. Museum practitioners invited people with these perspectives by 'reaching into' spaces already used by this 'community', or through the thematic focus of the exhibition or project (or a combination of both). In addition to the focus on this 'community', many projects also found their participants by tapping into so-called 'areas of curiosity' (see Lindström and Ståhl 2016). These shared interests – such as photography, creative writing, artistic practice and performance – often dictated the form and material output of the project, yet they also brought together different people who might otherwise not have met.

3.1.3 Deconstructing assumed 'communities'

As scrutinised at the start of this chapter, museums often address an invited 'community' of forced migrants as a homogenous group, ignoring the (perhaps known) diversity within the group. This issue is also addressed by Nuala Morse, who discusses the "messy nature" of participatory work due to the dynamics within non-homogenous groups (2021, 42). For the sake of the project, museum practitioners apply the notion of 'community' to address a contemporary issue through the perspectives of those involved. In

his book, Sergi (2021) similarly reflects on the potential conflicts that may arise within the groups of participants. Such conflicts, or the 'messy nature' of participation, also defined the projects that were examined for this study. The potential for conflict is rarely considered by museum practitioners before the start of the project, nor does it affect their perception of the project's success (see Morse 2021). This success is often measured by achieving maximum participation (Carpentier 2011) in which full authority is handed over to participants. However, the impact of potential conflicts between participants as a result of bringing them together is rarely evaluated. In conversations with participants and practitioners, though, it became clear that conflicts between participants had prominently shaped the process and outcomes. It especially limited the possibilities of developing a network for future collaborative work, as envisioned by many museums.

A participant from *Museum Takeover* in Leicester recounted that no conflicts occurred during the process simply because the museum's community engagement officer never allowed any to arise (LM-MT06). Though there were no verbal or physical confrontations, this participant did refer to experiences of exclusionary practices during the workshop. In line with Sergi's observations from his ethnographic fieldwork during a participatory project, methods and experiences of exclusion commonly occur between people who are grouped together by the museum, even when the engaged 'community' shares a nationality or religious affiliations (2021, 85). The project studied by Sergi involved forced migrants with different nationalities who were "meticulously avoiding mixing with each other, arranging themselves according to country of origin" (2021, 83). The participant from *Museum Takeover* described a comparable experience in an interview. They mentioned that they had struggled to connect with other participants, as many of them were fluent in a different language than the participant's mother tongue. They said: "you know, there is like, country-based people, so they make a group, if you're Indian, or Kurdish, they make their group, already separate. And as a Bangladeshi-Bengali, I was alone there" (LM-MT06). Despite everyone writing their labels in English, the sessions allowed for people to discuss amongst themselves in a language they were more fluent in. The exclusion experienced was not based on nationality, ethnicity or religion but was the result of language barriers. The language-based separation, at the same time, provided limited opportunities for further conflicts to arise between participants.

The project at the Tropenmuseum brought together former residents of Aleppo, based on the assumption that they would operate as a coherent group. The 'community' was invited to add personal narratives to the exhibition about Aleppo. In an interview with one of the participants, I asked them whether the collaboration had run smoothly. The participant laughed and replied that they had expected this question to come up. They said: "we had conflicts, a lot of conflicts, and it was very hard" (T-A04). The main problem within the group was the result of divergent political opinions; despite most of the participants having fled the war in Syria, they were not necessarily 'on the same side' of this national conflict. "The problem was that everyone wanted to share their opinion, and they could, of course, but that is a very personal opinion" (T-A04). Participants often shared these opinions during the tour, interrupting other participants' stories and contributions to bring in their own perspectives. Each of the participants had their own reasons for fleeing Aleppo, and these different reasons sparked debate and conflict within the group. This created an uncomfortable atmosphere for the participants as well as for the visitors of the tour. On several occasions, participants were not able to continue the tour, or were forced to walk away from a discussion. To put a stop to these incidents, the educational team had to intervene. A solution that worked for all participants was found: they agreed that everyone should steer clear of political subjects, stick to their own contributions and stop interrupting each other, and the educational team arranged for some people not to be scheduled for a tour on the same day (T-A04). The *Aleppo* project revealed in particular how the political urgency of forced migration naturally brings up the participants' individual political perspectives, which might very well be at odds with one another. This aligns with Sergi's statement that "reasons for flight are often a source of conflict among refugee populations" (2021, 85). Museums might exacerbate conflict between these populations (Sergi 2021, 83) by applying the term 'community' to a selected and otherwise unrelated group of forced migrants, who are invited to represent their experiences within this complex political context.

Such experiences are not unique within similar projects; the *daHEIM* project also led to several conflicts between participants. One of the project facilitators of the *daHEIM* project referred to several conflicts between the participants, who, like in the *Museum Takeover* project, had come from many different countries and did not all share the same language (MEK-D05). They mentioned that topics such as war, nationality and religion were mostly avoided during the work in the museum space. The project facilitator referred

specifically to a conflict about the role of women, which caused friction amongst the participants. Some of the participants found it hard to adjust their perspectives on what women can and should do, yet they did not apply the same understanding of women to the project facilitator, whom they all admired (MEK-D05). This discrepancy between how the white, female facilitator of the project was perceived compared with other women points towards the hierarchies in place (addressed in more detail in Chapter 4); the male participants were in some ways dependent on the project facilitator for the duration of the project, which might have led them to treat her differently than they would other women.

These conflicts show that 'communities' cannot simply fulfil the role assigned to them by the museum. The methods of invitation and the focus of the projects limit the participants to exploring topics that are likely to cause conflict. Between these different projects, it is evident that the projects based on long-term collaboration were more likely to lead to conflicts between participants. *So sehe ich das…* and *Museum Takeover* were short-term projects that mostly worked with the participants individually, or involved the aforementioned practices of exclusion that divided the group. The *daHEIM* project and the *Aleppo* project, on the other hand, adopted a format that required interaction between participants over a longer period of time. Therefore, these projects serve as distinct examples of the 'messy nature' of participatory work described by Morse (2021, 42). The 'communities' that were invited to be part of these projects could not always 'act' as a homogenous group, leading to conflicts between the participants. In their assumption that the participants form a coherent group, museums might not be equipped to deal with the conflicts that occur. Despite the obvious relevance of these conflicts for the process and long-term outcomes, museum practitioners rarely discussed them at length during the interviews. However, their role in the process is vital, especially when it comes to building relationships that extend beyond the project. Therefore, museums should exercise increased caution in inviting forced migrants and addressing topics related to forced migration in order to avoid (exacerbating) conflicts.

3.2 Building relationships

For many of these projects, building relationships or networks was envisioned as a potential outcome. These relationships start from the invitation process, which moulded the initial bond formed between the museum practitioner and the supposed members of a 'community'. They continued to be shaped as the project developed, and changed through conflicts and friendships. At this stage, it is important to mention that the responses of the museum practitioners to conflicts mentioned above impacted the relationships built between practitioners and participants. However, this also ties in with the role of the museum more generally and its potential to function as a safe space (further discussed in Chapter 5). One of the aspects that museum practitioners often refer to as a necessary part of participatory work is building trust, yet this is not the only aspect relevant to the possibility of building relationships. In conversations with practitioners and participants, the different stakeholders referred to conflicts that arose over the course of the projects, as well as to friendships they formed. The potential of establishing networks depends on these aspects of the process, but their sustainability also relies on the museum practitioners having the resources to maintain these networks. This sub-chapter discusses these aspects to underline their relevance to the process of building long-term relationships.

3.2.1 Building trust

Trust has been addressed as a relevant aspect of participatory memory work in different ways: museums are perceived as trustworthy resources by their visitors (Janes and Sandell 2019, 6), and 'radical trust' is described as a necessity for a participatory practice in which museums truly hand over authority (Lynch and Alberti 2010, 16). The latter theoretical approach signifies one-directional trust on the institutional side in the participants, or in 'users' engaging with the museum in the online realm (Spadaccini and Chan 2007). This concept of 'radical trust' applied to the *daHEIM* project at the MEK, which the museum curator explained was characterised by trust from the museum's side. Though this concept is meaningful in addressing power relations in participatory work, it diminishes the need for trust from the participants' side. In order to create a space in which participants feel like they can voluntarily and freely contribute to the museum, they should fully trust the facilitator, their intentions and the museum as an institution

(MEK-D08). Corresponding to Morse's idea of care in community engagement work, the concept of trust is addressed frequently as a necessary means to working with 'communities'; she states that "[t]rust underpins care in a relational sense" (Morse 2021, 196). As such, trust is an indispensable component of participatory work in museums, especially for those who are being marginalised (Morse 2021).

During many of the interviews, both museum practitioners and participants referred to trust as one of the most important factors for making the projects possible and for facilitating positive outcomes. The museum director of the MEK pointed this out in an interview, suggesting that outreach work is necessary at the start of a project to build trust. They stated that "you can't do anything without it […] if there is no mutual trust, there is no point in taking the project further" (MEK-D01). Before the project moved to the museum spaces, museum staff visited the project participants in the refugee shelter and vice versa, in order to get to know each other. The museum curator described the process thus:

> And in autumn 2015, in late autumn, I think it was already December, we were invited to the shelter as a larger group. We drank coffee together and of course exchanged ideas. But we were also divided into small groups. For example, [a museum staff member] cooked with one of the women from the shelter. Some of us also went into the workshop, for example, I was in one of the participant's rooms. […] We simply tried to get to know each other through these different channels. So that we weren't working together anonymously, but somehow got to know each other personally. (MEK-D02)

This process of familiarisation helps to foster trust; the museum ceases to be an institution, instead consisting of several different people with good intentions. In line with this 'outreach' approach, Friedland's museum educator emphasised that the most important aspect of their work is building rapport. In their experience, this requires a lot of time and ongoing investment in the relationships with the people based at the transit camp (MF-S02). Their engagement with the people and their lives goes far beyond interaction regarding a museum project or related topic. The museum educator is involved in the day-to-day functioning of the transit camp, helps put out proverbial fires when necessary, and makes people feel heard (MF-S02). This is how they slowly build trust between them and the (potential) participants. It is mainly due to these relationships that the participants joined the project and that they felt comfortable sharing their perspectives

and experiences within this context. After the project ended, the outreach officer continued this unofficial aspect of their work using the project's output: for several months, the exhibition served as a means of starting a conversation with new arrivals at the transit camp. It played a significant role in building trust, as it introduced people to experiences of the camp and the town, and made them aware of the possibilities of creating something with, and exhibiting something in, the museum.

The project facilitator of *Museum Takeover* also addressed the necessity of trust, especially at the start of the project. "I definitely don't think that you can do these things without trust, and I think that that's the biggest job" (MF-S01). They acknowledged that the project could not have happened in the same way without the involvement of the community engagement officer and the workshop facilitator, both of whom were already familiar with the group of people that joined the project. Over time, they had built a relationship with the individuals who participated, which meant that the participants felt comfortable engaging in a new project with them later on. The project facilitator identified building trust as important groundwork for participatory projects, and as absolutely necessary where the project has a very short timeline (MF-S01). As trust is understood as imperative to the process and to forming relationships with the participants, museum practitioners have to put in the work to build up trust amongst people they want to work with. The museum's community engagement officer at the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery mentioned that communities often do not trust the museum's intentions in creating the project and handling the content they create, and rightly so (MF-S02). Even if people are familiar with the museum, they might not feel welcome inside or know much about the workings of the institution (for more on this, see the discussion in Chapter 5). Without preliminary relationship-building before the start of the project, the participants are unlikely to trust what the museum might do with the materials they will produce.

The project at the Tropenmuseum allowed less time for building trust before the project moved on to its public aspect: the tours through the exhibition. The participants were invited to the museum, and they got to know the staff members through a few meetings. This was partly related to the space in which these meetings took place (discussed in Chapter 5), but also due to the chosen narrative for the exhibition (discussed in Chapter 6) and worries about what would happen to the objects they loaned to the museum (see Chapter 7). The museum practitioners gained the participants' trust later

on, through their support during the tours (one of the museum educators was always present), their ongoing communication with the participants and their interventions in the event of conflicts and unpleasant encounters with visitors. One of the participants from *Museum Takeover* also mentioned the continuous involvement of museum staff as an important aspect of the project (LM-MT06). Describing the continuity of the community engagement officer's work with members of the community, they said: "they have got their involvement with us, so we don't feel excluded" (LM-MT06). The participant pointed out that feeling included is dependent on the sustainability of the relationship; practices of inclusion are not only about establishing a relationship and building trust, but also about showing a continued and genuine interest in people, and involving them in the life of the museum. They also referred to their friendship with the museum practitioner as one of the outcomes of the project. To them, this friendship means they are acknowledged as inhabitants of the UK. At the same time, this connection provides access to museums and other cultural institutions and debates from which they had previously felt excluded (LM-MT06).

The project facilitators and museum practitioners managed to build trust amongst the participants in different ways: by taking their concerns seriously, by assisting in the event of conflict, by acknowledging them and their work, and simply by slowly building relationships. Participants need to trust museum practitioners before they can fully commit themselves to the project, knowing that their input is valued by the museum and that their contribution will be handled respectfully.

3.2.2 Forming friendships

In her book, Morse identifies "networks of engagement" as a way of connecting museums and 'communities' (2021, 160). She states that "in considering networks of engagement, it is necessary to examine relations and events that are not directed towards the functioning of museums, but that might still be significant to others involved" (Morse 2021, 161). Tasks such as building trust and nurturing relationships do not seem directly related to museum work, yet they are recognised as important to the participatory processes that have become increasingly common. Rather than merely building temporary, practical relationships, several participants as well as project facilitators or museum practitioners described that they had formed friendships through the projects.

For some participants, friendships were a main motivator for taking part in the project. One of the participants from the *daHEIM* project expressed that, despite not being able to clearly define their needs or expectations immediately after arriving in Germany, they felt like they needed the project "to socialise or to meet people" (MEK-D08). The project created a space for this, they elaborated, as the museum became a place for warm, friendly interactions and a place to share their stories of migration (MEK-D08). Despite this not being an explicit goal for the museum or facilitator, friendships formed an important aspect of the project for the participants. Several participants mentioned that they were happy to have gotten to know the other participants through the collaborative work in the museum; they produced artworks together and people stepped in when someone needed a hand at any point during the day (MEK-D04; MEK-D06; MEK-D08). One participant, who took part in the performance only, referred to the shared movement of bodies in the museum space as a deeper way of connecting and creating friendships. Overall, the process was often harmonious and these friendships, the participant noted, felt very "real" (MEK-D07).

The workshop facilitator who was part of the project in Leicester described this as potentially the only way for a project to have lasting impact on the lives of those involved. They said: "I am friends with them now, and we've been through things together afterwards. […] If you do something and then you just disappear, it's okay, but it won't leave a lasting effect, you know, in their lives" (LM-MT01). During the interview, the workshop facilitator repeatedly referred to the participants as their friends (LM-MT04), a feeling that was shared by the participants interviewed for this study (LM-MT03; LM-MT05; LM-MT06). This does not mean that everyone remained friends afterwards (not all participants were interviewed), but it does demonstrate that friendships formed naturally throughout the process. Many people involved in the project kept in touch afterwards, not as part of a network created and maintained by the museum, but as friends. This extended beyond friendships with the workshop facilitator, as people also referred to being in touch with the project facilitator and the community engagement officer from the museum. One participant said: "Yeah, [they] are a good friend of us, you know […] so it was a great opportunity to have them in our lives" (LM-MT06). In the interview with the community engagement officer, they also described friendships that remained a part of their life, some of which were still active some three years after the project (at the time of the interview). In their role as community engagement officer, these relationships can be useful for

the conception and creation of future projects, but they understood these friendships as personal outcomes rather than professional gains (LM-MT02). These friendships are not one-sided leftovers from the participatory project; they are valued friendships through which the practitioners learned a lot (LM-MT01–L02).

Friendships were also described as an outcome by one of the participants from the *Aleppo* project. After the scheduled tours, the museum educators allocated some time for a more informal conversation between visitors and participants. During this time in the museum's café, the participant became friends with a visitor to the museum (T-A04). This was not a common outcome, but this rather informal time in the café did provide the opportunity for people to network, during which two musicians were invited to play elsewhere, and someone was invited to be part of a play (T-A01). One of the participants continues to be friends with some of the other participants and with the museum educators who ran the project. Upon inquiring about friendships with any other museum staff members, this participant replied that they were never really in touch with anyone else from the museum, whether during or after the project (T-A04). As such, these friendships also emphasise that museums do not merely function as rigid institutions but are equally defined by the people who work in them. Understanding the museum in this manner also reveals that friendships, though valuable, cannot constitute a continuous bond with participants in the long run, as museum practitioners retire or move on to other jobs (Onciul 2019).

In many ways, however, it is the people who make ongoing relationships possible – or impossible, if they do not see the value of such relationships or if the project does not provide ample opportunities to build them. Accordingly, not all projects led to lasting friendships as a long-term outcome. A participant from the *daHEIM* project recounted that they cut contact with all members of the group, because they do not like to be reminded of the project nor do they wish to be involved in any further work with the project facilitator (MEK-D06). The co-curator of the project said that during the process, it felt very much like they had built friendships, but afterwards they lost touch with people (MEK-D05). Another participant from the *daHEIM* project similarly described that many friendships faded after the project ended: "Once there is no funding, no money, no physical space, no this and that, then the ones responsible […] say 'no we can't do this anymore'" (MEK-D08). The *daHEIM* project had a natural ending for the museum and for the project organisers, but the end of the project was experienced as abrupt

for some of the participants; after spending a significant amount of time and energy on the project, they were left with "no language, no friends, no documents" (MEK-D08). This is different from the other projects, in which the friendships were not dependent on the availability of the museum's space or infrastructure, due to the relationships between equals formed during the process.

This reflects what Annemarie De Wildt noted on the potential of relationships or networks to constitute sustainable project outcomes. De Wildt stated that "personal contacts are important to sustain relations, but there is often no time to continue seeing all the contacts from previous projects" (2015, 231). Personal connections only hold up when they have become true friendships, moving beyond the museum practitioner's sense of responsibility towards a person or a 'group'. These friendships, though dependent on individuals within and outside of the institution, might constitute a network.

3.2.3 Creating a network

In bringing together people to build trust, friendships and networks, museums construct a "contact zone", a term first introduced by Mary Louise Pratt (1992), and applied to the museum by Clifford (1997). Pratt's definition concerns the interaction and continuing relations between two differently treated and perceived 'groups'. Clifford adds that the relationships are not equal – recognising the undeniable power relations at work – despite these processes perhaps consisting of "*mutual* exploitation and appropriation" (Clifford 1997, 194, emphasis in original). As such, the 'contact zone' inherently contains the ambition of developing long-term relationships. Ones that need to be two-sided if they are to continue beyond the timeline of the project. "As both a concept and a metaphor, the network presents a more compelling description of museum-community relationships that goes beyond a focus on linear relationships of contribution" (Morse 2021, 160). Morse refers to Schorch to describe how networks often give the impression that communities and museums are "co-constitutive" (Schorch 2017; Bennett 1998, 205). This co-constitutive relationship is necessary for making a network a possible outcome of a participatory project.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, many museum practitioners are united by an ambition to renew or establish contact with an envisioned 'group' and maintain this contact after the project's end. Yet, according

to Bryony Onciul, "long-term institutionalisation of community relations, beyond the friendships built between individuals, continues to be a challenge for museums" (2019, 167). The community engagement officer at the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery confirmed this, as they addressed forced migrants as a 'community' that the museum had failed to serve and lost touch with (LM-MT02). It seems that the lack of communication between practitioners and the 'community' has led to the deterioration of formerly existing relationships. The museum needs to rebuild these relationships should it wish to engage with the same people in the future (LM-MT02). Participatory work is understood as a means of creating a tightly knit network between museums and the 'communities' that make up the museum's local population (De Wildt 2015). These networks, however, require work beyond the project's timeline, which often outstrips both funding and staff's capacities. The project-based infrastructure does not support related work after the project has finished, nor do existing practices acknowledge the importance of personal relationships and trust developed over time.

The project curator at the Friedland Museum stated that the goal of creating a network was impossible, due to the temporal connection with the people they engage with through their work in Friedland: "it would also not make a lot of sense, as they [the participant groups] will be completely ripped apart again. They don't exactly form any sort of social community that goes beyond these two weeks [while they are based in Friedland]" (MF-S01). For the Friedland Museum – given these complexities – this ambition was rendered impossible from the get-go. The exhibition opening, which took place six months after the last workshop, already posed a challenge for the project team.

> We invited everyone to the exhibition opening using the different channels to contact the participants, but two *spätaussiedler*[5] and four of the refugees attended the opening day, which for us was actually seen as a very good average. As in, we thought it was very satisfactory as it is so incredibly hard to stay in touch (MF-S01).

5 *Spätaussiedler* are immigrants of German descent who moved to Germany from Eastern European countries, most of which were formerly part of the Soviet Union. The transit camp in Friedland serves as the first stop for most *spätaussiedler* entering Germany, where they stay for a few days before moving to another city or town.

The difficulties involved in continuing relationships after the project's end are particularly evident here, as people only stay in Friedland for a short time before moving away or being placed elsewhere. However, the museum educator stated that they do attempt to continue the conversation, both among the participants themselves and with the museum (MF-S02). As the former participants are no longer based near the museum in Friedland, the museum educator remains in contact using digital means such as WhatsApp (MF-S02). They acknowledged the difficulties of maintaining the 'network' this way:

> When we meet at Nissenhütte, I try to ask them to register their names and to give me their mobile number, so we can be together on WhatsApp. But you know when they come, they have either their Turkish number, or their Jordanian number, or the Egyptian – and some of them, they don't have mobiles, or – of course, I keep, I got these numbers and I try to keep them in the loop. […] Now, the WhatsApp group, I always invite them but when they change their number or change their mobiles, you know, technology [might get in the way]. (MF-S02)

Digital technologies provide a solution for remaining in touch with former participants, yet they go hand in hand with limitations in terms of accessibility (Kidd 2014, 13), and with the ethical considerations these commercial applications imply (Parry 2011, 321). Besides the technological complexities, the continuation of this connection also represents a burden on the museum educator, as it eats into personal time and moves such conversations into personal 'spaces'. Despite the ambition to remain in contact with participants, the museum allocated no resources or capacities to this aspect of community engagement work. In the interview, the museum educator recounted that they had to cancel the very first group they made on WhatsApp, as it simply required too much time and attention (MF-S02). Their involvement is essential to sustain a network, but the effort they need to put in is barely considered part of their role. In their role at the museum and beyond, the museum educator seeks to establish good relationships with the participants. The WhatsApp group that they created in May 2017 was still running at the time of the interview (November 2020) and remains a point of contact between the museum and those previously involved in a project or activity. Current members of the group were not part of *So sehe ich das…*, but were part of more recent projects initiated as part of the museum's programme.

Rather than this being project-based work, museums should acknowledge it as an ongoing task of museum staff, and integrate it into the day-to-day work of practitioners. One of the participants from the *daHEIM* project mentioned they noticed a difference between what the end of the project meant for the project facilitators and museum curators, and what it meant for the participants:

> What they do is, you know, being an artist and organising exhibitions and being productive. And of course, they have a next idea, a next state, a next thing, they will go and do something completely different. […] So I think it wasn't in their plans, or we were not in their plans and we are still not, so it's just like this. (MEK-D08)

Their experience of the project identifies something very central to museum work and the lack of sustainability of these projects: after the project has come to an end, museum practitioners and project facilitators move on, whilst the forced migrants who were involved do not have the luxury to return to anything in particular. This comes back to the situation that sets this 'community' apart from other marginalised people that museums work with.[6] The continuation of relationships naturally also depends on the ability and willingness of participants to remain connected with the museum and, perhaps, with each other. As museum practitioners often hope to develop a network with the individuals they worked with, they should question what the value of such a network might be to the (former) participants. Some of the participants interviewed expressed excitement to be involved in museum projects in the future, whilst others were not interested in maintaining this rather formal connection.

However, as the case of Museum Friedland likewise demonstrates, the continuation of a project is dependent both on staff capacities and on the structural integration of communication work into the roles within the museum. The museum director of the MEK proposed that in order for participation to become part of everyday museum work, relations with 'communities' need to exist on a structural level. Rather than connecting

6 While their asylum claims are being assessed (which in 2015–16 could take up to three years), forced migrants cannot do anything but wait. They might not be allowed to work until their application is processed, or getting a job or another source of income can mean a reduction in the benefits they receive to support themselves and family members.

with individuals, museums could develop connections with community organisations. They continued: "cooperation is important on a structural level. And then other people can join in. That's the thing, and that's sustainability, and not now with individual people or so, that doesn't matter" (MEK-D01). In the long-term, the director argues, the museum cannot work with the participants individually, as it is structurally impossible to maintain these relationships as part of museum practice (MEK-D01). Though these relationships might be difficult to maintain, some of the case studies show that friendships and other forms of personal relationships can persist, and continue to support the museum's work. For these relationships to function as a sustainable outcome of a project, the museum must not only have the requisite infrastructure to allow staff to remain in contact, it must also be willing to relinquish its position at the centre of these relationships, allowing networks of reciprocity to emerge.

3.3 Conclusion

Participatory work relies on relationships with participants, yet the ways in which these take shape are largely dependent on the museum. The invitation processes, the initial meetings, and opportunities for exchange all contribute towards the project and the relationships shaped throughout. The different case studies analysed here show that there is a need to carry on relationships and explore the opportunities for engaging with the established network on a long-term basis; they suggest that Morse's aforementioned 'networks of engagement' could be an outcome of participatory memory work. In these networks of engagement, museums are "just one point within a larger network of organisations, of people, things and ideas. There is no centre, and as such, no centrifugal move towards it" (2021, 160). It is not the museum but the people around it who become the focal point. Museums ought to look beyond organised groups and, instead, address and work with individuals who are excited to work with, and contribute to, the museum for their own reasons. Addressing a group of people who might not see themselves as a community makes room for the ambition of 'community-making'; bringing together a group of people who will remain a network after the project has ended. In this way, 'communities' are no longer based on a presumed identity or traits, but bind together people with similar interests to create "dynamic networks that become interpretively assembled,

disassembled and reassembled through the relations between individual actors, objects and curatorial practices" (Schorch 2017, 41). For these networks to emerge, however, the museum must structurally integrate relational work that goes beyond the museum's goals for a specific project.

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.

5. The Museum as a 'Safe Space'

Participatory projects are often intended as a way of creating a 'safe space' within the museum, or as a means of transforming the museum itself into a 'safe space'. As such, one of the goals of participatory projects is reflective of the museum's self-awareness of its nature as a site of exclusion, despite its role as a public institution. Elaine Heumann Gurian was the first to introduce the possibility of museums becoming "safe, neutral congregant spaces in our communities" (1995, 15). In this piece, Heumann Gurian proposes that the museum requires radical change for it to serve as such a space, highlighting the importance of the accessibility of the spaces, as well as the relationships between staff members (1995, 15). In recent years, this notion has gained prominence as museums have shifted their roles to become sites of activism and social justice (Chynoweth et al. 2021; Janes and Sandell 2019; Sternfeld 2018). Grounded in 'new museology' (see the introduction to this book), museums apply participatory practices to become democratic forums (Cameron 1971), social spaces (Benson and Cremin 2020) or 'contact zones' (Bayer et al. 2017; Boast 2011; Clifford 1997). In light of this, the role of the museum in society is crucial for its potential to serve as a 'safe space'. According to Morse, 'safe spaces' are "spaces where people can be themselves, spaces that are free from judgement and prejudice and where people can talk freely" (2021, 136). Creating 'safe spaces' for participatory museum work is necessary for developing a *care-full* practice (Zwart et al. 2021).

During our conversations about the projects, several practitioners mentioned the need for a 'safe space'. However, the participants were also asked to describe moments in which they had not felt safe. This was particularly prevalent when discussing their relationships with the museum practitioners, and their uncomfortable encounters with visitors and the press. As described by Lynch, the 'shared space' of museums is deeply political, especially when working with migrants on the topic of migration, and this

should be acknowledged from the start of the process (2017a, 228). Once participants enter the museum's spaces to work on a project about their own highly politicised experiences, they move into unknown territory and are likely to become part of ongoing political debates. Under these circumstances, institutional spaces might come to function as 'safe spaces', particularly through the facilitation, information and care provided by practitioners. They should, according to Morse, recognise that "outputs (so central to the logic of contribution) do not always matter in that moment" (2021, 138).

This chapter outlines the very first steps for the museum on the path to becoming an inclusive institution through its potential 'safe spaces'. I study the practices in, and experiences of, the museum's spaces, both on-site and online, during the participatory project. Drawing a connection between what took place inside the museum and what happened online will help review the differentiation between these 'spaces' and assess the potential for an online continuation of on-site work. This chapter focuses on the projects' 'internal' aspects (with the museum and the participants) as well as the public aspects (which include press, visitors and online users). As such, it also addresses the impact of the museum's public role on the potential safety of its spaces for project participants; looking at how both the encounters with practitioners and with people from outside the museum shaped participants' experiences of these spaces. 'Safe spaces' are necessary for ethical participatory work, and are integral to the museum's changed role.

5.1 Creating a 'safe space'

Museums are rarely part of the everyday lives of the participants they engage with through participatory work (Morse 2021, 134). In the case of recently arrived forced migrants, the museum is not likely to be the first place they visit upon arrival, especially because museums have relatively little to offer in response to more immediate needs. However, by becoming an institution that is attuned to the needs and interests of participants, it might gain a more relevant and urgent role. Morse describes three interconnected dimensions involved in museums becoming inclusive institutions, responsive to the needs and interests of participants; museums, according to Morse, should become welcoming, safe, and inclusive spaces (2021, 134). I will refer to the need for the museum to become a 'safe space', which does not only refer to the dimension of feeling safe inside a museum space, but also considers the dimensions

of the museum being welcoming (removing barriers to access) and inclusive (making people feel included and heard). The following sections will show how these dimensions are connected with one another.

However, before moving on, I would like to underline the potential outcome that can be generated when the museum comes to function as a 'safe space'. Once a participatory project comes to an end, "it is hoped that museums more generally are now places where they [the participants] feel welcome" (Morse 2021, 136). Morse discusses the time investment required for creating a 'safe space'. As Zetterstorm-Sharp and Wingfield (2019) point out, however, it is important that the practitioners' work is not solely focused on building relations and communicating with participants, but also includes action that responds to collaborative outcomes or findings. The extent to which museums are able to create 'safe spaces' that constitute more than "saying the right things while being able to do very little" (Zetterstorm-Sharp and Wingfield 2019, 17) is restricted by organisational structures and institutional practices embedded in the museum. For the museum, becoming a 'safe space' in itself could be a sustainable project outcome, yet only if practitioners manage to maintain this space beyond the project's timeline.

In creating and maintaining 'safe spaces', practitioners face various difficulties, as described by Morse (2021), but less is known about how the spaces are experienced by the participants. This sub-chapter will look into how these experiences were affected by the practices of the museum. It first outlines the museum's potential to become a welcoming space, discussing physical thresholds, such as the accessibility of the spaces and ticket prices for entering the museum; and emotional thresholds, such as feelings of insecurity about entering the museum due to uncertainties about how to behave and engage with the artefacts on display. The following section builds on ideas proposed in the previous chapter, highlighting the ways in which recognition can transform the museum into an inclusive space. This process requires a critical perspective, however, as the importance of being acknowledged by the museum as described by participants emphasises the museum's central societal position (as touched upon in Chapter 1). The third section discusses the relational aspect of creating a 'safe space'; addressing the relationships between practitioners and participants, and highlighting how conflicts contribute to the museum functioning as an 'unsafe space'. It does not yet look into the museum's public function, but rather outlines the nature of the practices before the projects 'went public'.

5.1.1 'This big white thing'

In her chapter on museums' mission-driven activism, Vlachou states that "museums define themselves as places of knowledge, encounter and dialogue" (2019, 47). In keeping with this, ICOM's proposed museum definition of 2019 described the museum as an institution that serves everyone (ICOM 2019). Yet not everyone feels welcome in a museum, or is even interested in visiting one. As Ahmed describes, institutional spaces can be experienced as exclusive, making the visitors feel like "space invaders" (Ahmed 2012, 13). She borrows the concept of 'space invaders' from Nirmal Puwar (2004), who discusses the ways in which people can be treated as such upon entering a space that is not meant for them. The perception of the museum as an exclusive space, the much-discussed museum thresholds and the behavioural rules for engagement within museum spaces are central to this section.

Some of the participants who took part in the projects may have been regular museum visitors, but many of the participants had never visited a museum before, often because they have no clear idea of what a museum has to offer. In the conversation with the workshop facilitator who assisted with *Museum Takeover*, they referred to the museum as "this big white thing" that people walked past all the time but did not recognise as a place they could visit or contribute to (LM-MT04). The museum community engagement officer at the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery acknowledged that for most people, "it was their first visit to the museum, because obviously they didn't know it was there, they didn't know it was free, they didn't know what would be expected if they went in" (LM-MT02). In outlining what may have kept the participants out of the museum before the start of the project, the community engagement officer described very important aspects that define the exclusive museum: its financial and social thresholds (Heumann Gurian 2005). Morse referred to this by describing "a shared sense that these cultural spaces are not for them, not welcoming of them" (2021, 134). This feeling was not shared by all participants across the studied projects, of course, as some of them had visited museums before, or were already familiar with the host institution.

The museum educator from Museum Friedland pointed out that few of the people based at the transit camp want to go to a museum. "When I tell them 'let's go to the museum', no one will come" (MF-S02). Rather than inviting people into the museum directly, the museum educator spends three afternoons a week having lunch in the transit camp and inviting people to the Nissenhütte. The Nissenhütte serves as a small exhibition space and

the project meeting point (MF-S02), about which the museum educator remarked:

> Of course, we don't call it the Nissenhütte as refugees. We call it 'The Green Hut'. Okay, because it looks green and for them it is a green hut. And sometimes they think that it is a shop or a store. When it is closed and they don't see what it is, they think that they can buy things from it, because it looks like, for them, actually even for me when I saw it for the first time, I thought 'what is this hut, what is it doing in the middle of this camp? (MF-S02)

The Nissenhütte is a more accessible space than the museum. The building is not at all intimidating, and with its green colour, it stands out from the other buildings in the camp; sparking curiosity, if anything. The outputs – the exhibition boards with the participants' photographs – gave the space an extra layer, but did not make it more intimidating. The project curator pointed out that it might have a lot more to offer in terms of inviting engagement than the permanent exhibition and the main museum building, which are more demanding and less accessible than the space and stories situated within the camp itself (MF-S01). The boards featured the stories and image descriptions in the respective languages of the former participants, meaning that new arrivals could come in and immediately find their own language on one of the boards. This became a starting point for conversations, and served as a tool for further engagement (MF-S02). The museum educator described that ideally the outcome of their engagement work would be that people from the camp felt comfortable going to the museum; that through their work in a more welcoming space, they contribute to the idea of the museum as a 'safe space' which participants would then happily visit after leaving Friedland as well.

The museum's barriers to access are not only a reflection of how the museum is perceived from the outside, but are also the product of the implied rules and behavioural expectations that apply to a museum visit. The visit to the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery as part of *Museum Takeover* led to amusing incidents, as discussed by the museum's community engagement officer. With sincere amusement, they described the visit as follows:

> There was a large group that came down to the museum, there must have been over twenty refugees and asylum seekers being taken around, so as people do, the line of people spread out and I was shimmying along people

> at the back to catch up with the people near the front [laughs] and I went into a gallery where we just got a little bit, a little corner of the gallery, some stuff with low barriers and we got two gorillas, actually out in the open, not caged, within that space, it was just a small temporary exhibition, went in to find one of the asylum seekers laying on the floor in front of the, inside the barrier, in front of the gorillas to, you know, hand-propped, propped up on his elbow, laying down on the floor for a photograph [laughs], so I had to encourage him out saying, "you're not supposed to go past the barriers", but you know, people hadn't been to the museum before. (LM-MT02)

These experiences underscore the difficulties of understanding the unwritten rules and guidelines that prescribe the permissible ways of engaging with the museum and the museum objects. If participants do not feel confident about how they are expected to behave, they might not feel comfortable going in by themselves. Seen in this way, the museum does not immediately seem to be a safe space at all.

However, for the participatory work in the museum, the institutions had to soften their rules. For the *daHEIM* project, for example, the project facilitator described that through their work, "the museum space would be treated in a completely un-museum-like way, lived by us; that is, I think, something that makes this project really, really special" (MEK-D03). The participants in this project took charge of the space, they inhabited the spaces and broke some inherent museum rules. The museum director of the MEK explained that there are rules about how to behave in a museum, such as: "that you are not allowed to walk barefoot, that you are not allowed to just make coffee in the exhibitions, even if you are installing them, and so on, that's all forbidden" (MEK-D01). These rules were immediately broken once the spaces were 'occupied' by the participants: the facilitator described how, once the project started, the smell of coffee was constantly present in the museum's spaces (MEK-D03), and a participant mentioned how they had set off an alarm whilst working in the museum (MEK-D04). The educational assistant from the Tropenmuseum also addressed the museum's rules, as they expressed frustration with the limitations these caused for facilitating participatory work. One of the rules is that no food or drinks can be consumed inside the museum, including in the workshop room in which the museum receives school groups and people they want to work with (T-A03). They did not break this rule, but the education team considered this a limitation on their work throughout the process.

If the museum allows for these rules to be broken for a participatory project, or comes up with a different set of rules, this immediately changes the nature of the space and how it is experienced by the participants. It becomes more like a 'home' (MEK-D03), or even a space that motivates participants to share stories and socialise (MEK-D08), and as such, it starts to feel like a 'safe space' for the participants, at least for the duration of the project.

5.1.2 Being included

Lois H. Silverman has described the museum as "a relatively safe, trustworthy, respected, and even esteemed environment in which people can come together" (2010, 145). In her description, she connects the status of a 'safe space' with the understanding of museums as respected institutions. The participants also felt this connection, pointing out that being included by the museum was important to them. This process of inclusion is the focus of this section, proposing different ways in which this takes shape in museums.

One of the participants in the project at the Tropenmuseum referred to the museum as a place they recognised from home and from visits to other countries (T-A04). Their experiences of visiting museums made the opportunity valuable in a different way, as they acknowledged a barrier, a discrepancy, between the museum's authority and their own potential to contribute. This notion, however, added value to their experience of the project, which they described as very special "because so many people really come to see your stuff and hear stories about your stuff" (T-A04). It gave them, they said, an extraordinary feeling (T-A04). For the participant, the museum functions as a stage for their culture to be shown, described and explained. The head of exhibitions at the Tropenmuseum confirmed that this sentiment was widely shared amongst the participants, observing that visitors were interested in the place and the people, which made it especially nice for the participants to 'have a stage' to share their culture. "That's the most ideal thing you want in an ethnographic museum, isn't it?" she continued (T-A06).

A participant in the project at the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery mentioned that the ability to contribute to "the big museum" made them very happy (LM-MT05). They found this so great because it gave them a chance to tell people about Kurdistan, which they described as their home country (LM-MT05). They added: "I saw many countries in the museum but I didn't see my culture. That's what I'm writing this for" (LM-MT05). Another participant described how they understood the project – for which the participants added

labels and corrected existing interpretations of objects in the permanent exhibition – as an opportunity for them to be part of the museum. They noted:

> all of my life, I thought it is the museum people's responsibility to decorate, and what will be where, they will think of everything. Not outsider people, you know? Not outside anyone can [be] involve[d] with that. But that thinking changed when we were involved [in the project]. (LM-MT06)

During the interview, they repeatedly stated that it was kind of the museum practitioners to involve them, and that they were grateful for the chance to be part of this project (LM-MT06). The workshop facilitator mentioned that some of the participants had needed a bit of encouragement, because they did not feel comfortable writing in English, and because they did not feel like it was their place to add to the museum exhibition (LM-MT04). Like the aforementioned participant in the project at the Tropenmuseum, the participants considered the opportunity to see their contribution presented in the museum an honour, which emphasises their understanding of the museum as a respected and slightly daunting institution, similar to Silverman's assessment (2010). They looked up to the museum and its authority, but this perspective changed because of the project. They felt they had become part of the institution in a way: "before, it was like an isolated something, but now I can [get] involved with something, I can make something there" (LM-MT06). The participatory project had changed their understanding of the museum as an intimidating institution.

The project curator at Museum Friedland described having seen that one of the participants had been very proud during the opening of the exhibition. The participant "was really impressed, and posted a lot of photos of themselves in the exhibition on Facebook afterwards, and wrote how great they thought it was" (MF-S01). They were one of the few participants who had come to the exhibition opening, but their response helped the project curator see the value of the project and its outputs (MF-S01). The lack of interest after the project was something the museum educator also spoke about (MF-S02). The photographs taken by the participants were part of the exhibition and appeared in the museum's catalogue, about which they said: "I thought they would be so happy, [but] it is for them *egal* [all the same]" (MF-S02). The museum educator addressed the assumption that people are keen to see their contributions presented in an institutional setting (MF-S02). Even though the participants were happy to take part in the project, they did not really care about the outcomes in (and for) the museum. The project started

from a logic of contribution, and, despite it tapping into a potential interest of the participants, its outputs would serve the museum rather than the participants. The museum educator clarified that despite their initial surprise towards this disinterest, speaking from their own experiences, they could say that the participants have other things to worry about (MF-S02). With these projects and those that followed, many museums attempted to create spaces that are more inclusive.

5.1.3 Safe interactions with practitioners

The previous sections already stressed that a 'safe space' is not just about the museum building itself, but that 'safe spaces' are dependent on the perception of the institution, which is partially shaped by their relationships with staff. The approach employed by practitioners is vital for creating a 'safe space' (Morse 2021; Silverman 2010). "Stated simply, if staff members care for each other, visitors believe that the staff will care for them. Safety and equity begin at home" (Heumann Gurian 1995, 15). Following Heumann Gurian, the relationships between staff members as well as those between staff and participants can make the museum feel safe (or unsafe). I discussed these relationships and their potential to lead to friendships or other networks back in Chapter 3; this section, however, explores the ways in which practitioners facilitated or hindered the creation of 'safe spaces'. According to Morse, "creating safe spaces is about the ordinary, everyday actions and attitudes towards participants" (2021, 137). Such actions and attitudes were described by practitioners – outlining how they attempted to make participants feel safe – and by participants, who also described when they did not feel particularly safe.

One way in which practitioners ensured the comfort of the participants was by offering support during the project in their native languages. Some museums, like the MEK and Museum Friedland, worked with interpreters for specific parts of the project. One of the co-curators of the project at the MEK, however, could also support with language if necessary. At the Tropenmuseum, one of the staff members spoke Arabic, but they were not able to join the project regularly. The *Aleppo* project and *Museum Takeover* relied on the participants' knowledge of the national language (Dutch and English respectively). *Museum Takeover* started from a creative writing workshop to help participants become more confident using the English language. However, the workshop facilitator explained that they did have assistance

from forced migrants who were able to help people with their writing process in their own languages. The assistant facilitators were not always present at the workshop sessions, but provided occasional help, speaking with the participants in their own language (LM-MT04). The practitioners tried to make sure that the participants in each of the projects could speak to at least one person in their mother tongue.

In line with this, a 'safe space' might be developed through shared experiences of forced migration. The *daHEIM* project was led by one participant co-curator with similar experiences, and a co-curator who had migrated to Germany several years before the project started. The latter mentioned that this had eased the connections with the participants. "I came to Germany ten years ago. And of course, they have more questions for me than for [the project facilitator], because I am already here, and I have got some experience in this country" (MEK-D05). The experience of arriving in a new country also informed the work of the museum educator at Museum Friedland. From an interest in how the people in the transit camp experience Friedland, the museum's educator aimed to focus on the idea of arrival as a process rather than a destination. In contrast to what the project curator described as being at the forefront of peoples' lives, they spoke about this process from their own experiences of arriving in Friedland:

> So most of my work is to let the refugees understand that this is a transit camp. This is like a honeymoon. In the honeymoon you will enjoy your time, you will relax, you will know now that this is a time to get information, to relax, to start the arrival and the new beginning. So this is my main concern, that's why most of my work focused on these things. (MF-S02)

The project, therefore, did not intend to address the urgent matters people were facing at the time in their everyday lives, but rather provided the time to acknowledge this process of arrival and to relax. The limited timeframe of the workshop provided the opportunity to engage with the museum in a fun way, and to learn a bit about photography in the meantime.

Yet the engagement between participants and practitioners was not all positive. In some cases, these interactions or the museum's choices disrupted the 'safe space', or prevented the museum from becoming a 'safe space' in the first place. The everyday actions and attitudes of the practitioners, as described by Morse (2021), did not facilitate a 'safe space' but made participants uncomfortable. In the project at the Tropenmuseum, this was the result of the photographs that were selected for the exhibition by the curator.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, many of the participants commented on certain photographs, which they felt were not representative of the Aleppo they had known (see section 4.2.1). The museum took one photograph out, but this was not sufficient for all of the participants. One participant expressed that they did not feel comfortable being confronted with the selected images on a weekly basis (T-A01). They were not the only one upset by the images; two or three people became very angry, the museum educator explained (T-A01). The practitioners did not want to cut further images from the exhibition, which ultimately led the aforementioned participant to quit the project (T-A01). Reflecting on the uncomfortable parts of the project, the museum educator quoted the former participant's response: "I don't want this, I don't want to walk through this" (T-A01). The images of war and destruction along with the museum's stand on the matter had made them uncomfortable enough to leave the project. Overall, participants had a positive experience of the project, however, the practitioners were not able to create a 'safe space' for everyone involved.

With the *daHEIM* project, these conflicts took shape over a longer period and continuously affected the participants' experiences of the project. One participant stated that most conflicts took place within the leadership team, between the project facilitator, the co-curator and the participant co-curator (MEK-D08). Much like what was outlined by Heumann Gurian (1995), the perceived hierarchies between the facilitators in this project revealed a carelessness to the participants. From the participant's description of this conflict, it becomes clear how it affected the process and the spaces in which participants felt safe. They said:

> You know, we are having a nice and lovely day during spring and it was sunny and everything. And we eat, we drink some beer, we work and we laugh. And then there were some conflicts or something happening which to me was, I was afraid of that actually, you know, communicating in a way or language that was really different than how we're supposed to work and communicate in this space. So I felt a bit like a child, that – I don't know what is happening there. Or does it have something to do with me, or with my work or what I'm doing, my existence there? (MEK-D08)

Participants often experienced these arguments without knowing exactly what was going on and what this meant for the project. Five years after the completion of the project, a conflict between the participant co-curator and the project facilitator remains unresolved despite ongoing

conversations (MEK-D04). The facilitator also mentioned these conflicts, stating: "unfortunately, we are going through a conflict at the moment that apparently we cannot easily resolve. That is, of course, really a very sad story" (MEK-D03). In conversation about the *daHEIM* project, the museum director addressed the conflict between the project facilitator and the participants as a reason for reconsidering the museum's role in the participatory process. The director stated:

> I think we should have had a larger role in it. And there were probably some problems between [project facilitator] and the participants, at least some of them. I don't know if we should have interfered or not. (MEK-D01)

Throughout the participatory process, the museum took a back seat while conflicts unfolded inside the museum building; in line with what was agreed on beforehand, the museum was not responsible for the participatory process. In hindsight, however, the director acknowledged that this may have been a mistake (MEK-D01). One of the participants remarked that both KUNSTASYL and the museum should be held responsible for the conflicts (MEK-D08). At least, the participant claimed, they should have been more aware of their role and of the changing relationships within the collaborative process (MEK-D08). The museum has now become involved in the process to resolve the ongoing conflict, possibly playing a role in finding a solution for those affected by it.

As this section has pointed out, 'safe spaces' are only partially hindered by the limitations of the museum. They are more likely to be compromised by uncomfortable processes between or with practitioners. Angela Jannelli notes that the museum should be a place of resonance that provides a mixture between being open and closed. Her understanding of a closed setting is described as "a group which is offered a protected setting" (Jannelli 2020, 59). Such a protected setting is dependent on the museum practitioners, and it might not be able to be maintained when the project 'opens up'. The different sections highlighted many ways in which practitioners can actively contribute to creating a space where participants feel welcome during the process, and perhaps continue to do so when the process gains a public aspect.

5.2 Maintaining a 'safe space'

Morse refers to several studies that reflect on the museum's potential to function as a 'safe space', describing museums as "nearly always non-stigmatising environments" (2021, 136). The first part of this chapter, however, underlined some of the stigmas present within museum spaces, and we have not yet looked at the potential stigmas that arise when projects 'open up' their processes or outputs to address the public. However, museums no longer solely exist in their physical spaces, but must also occupy and engage with 'online spaces' in order to present their projects and appeal to different audiences. The next steps in the participatory processes in the museum spaces were marked by encounters. As the projects gained a public aspect through an exhibition opening, public tours, or online engagement on social media, the museum space changed into a space that may no longer have been experienced as a 'safe space'.

This sub-chapter sheds light on the question of whether the museum can continue to offer a 'safe space' in its 'traditional', public role. In the following sections, I address the different encounters in the museum's 'open setting' by drawing on participant experiences. The first section focuses on encounters with visitors to the museum, as well as the post-colonial perception of such encounters. These are discussed through some of the participants' elaborate descriptions of the situations, and the way these affected their experiences of the museum space. Taking a similar approach, the second section describes what the encounters with the press meant for the participants; highlighting not only what went wrong in these encounters, but also suggesting how practitioners could have played a larger role in facilitating these encounters. The third section analyses encounters with marketing teams about public-facing products for social media spaces and the website. It also discusses the ways in which the participants engaged with these online spaces themselves, if at all, and how they experienced this aspect of the project.

5.2.1 Meeting museum visitors

The different forms of participatory work and presentation formats that came out of them – such as exhibitions, events, tours or object labels – naturally led to a range of different encounters with museum visitors. The museums created a space for encounter between museum visitors and the participants, sometimes through their voices being represented in objects or

texts, and sometimes through their physical presence and opportunities for dialogue. The latter was especially influential in affecting how the participants experienced the space.

One example of this was the format of a personal tour, such as the one organised by the Tropenmuseum, which led to particularly interesting moments of informal interaction after the tours themselves. Every person who was involved with the project on the days the tours took place – project organisers and participants alike – referred to the moment after the tour as a relevant part of the project. The tour always ended in the café of the museum, which then provided a moment for less formal interaction between guides and visitors. The museum educator stated that the moment of conversation after the tour resembled the experience of chatting "after a theatre show" (T-A01). This exchange was considered a welcome conclusion to the tour, but the museum educator added that it sometimes went on for too long, taking up a lot of everyone's time (T-A01). One of the participants described the dialogue as a way to share other stories and engage with visitors by asking them about their own experiences and stories (T-A04). The participant also reflected on these informal exchanges as a way to meet new people and make friends, by starting a conversation with the visitors (T-A04). Some of the participants were asked to join different projects during these conversations after the tour. As such, the job presented an ideal networking opportunity for the participants, who had recently arrived in the Netherlands (T-A01). During an interview with one of the participants, they explained how the museum became a site of encounters, as they accidentally ran into their neighbour from Aleppo, and they built friendships with visitors of the tour (T-A04).

According to this participant, these encounters were the most important part of the tour, and it was particularly interesting to allow for these encounters in the museum. But the participant also described a negative encounter with a visitor of the tour and exhibition. They explained that the tour was disrupted by a visitor who claimed that the stories about the Armenian genocide were untrue (T-A04). They described this encounter and explained how the woman had continued to claim that:

> It was just [part of] the World War [I], so, then I acted properly. I said "Madam, you can now consider my role, which implies it is my story to share. Do you want to share your story? Maybe you should just take on a project and you can share your own story there." And then she did indeed leave [laughs] and that's the only way I could indeed stop her and, because I find it . . . I told

> everything true to what really happened and what I at least also heard from my grandparents – they themselves had fled from the whole genocide, so it couldn't be that it wasn't true . . . but yes, that was actually the only thing that happened with guests that was annoying. (T-A04)

The participant explained the conflict as a rare occurrence, probably caused by the lack of political recognition of the genocide. They described that, until a few years ago, the Armenian genocide had not been acknowledged as a genocide by the Dutch government, due to its problematic implications for Turkish people in the Netherlands (T-A04).[1] Upon asking the museum educator, they stated that politics and religion formed difficult subjects that had led to uncomfortable situations over the course of the project. For example, one of the guides was wearing a headscarf, and visitors would occasionally ask her about her religion. Another question that regularly came up was about which political side the guides were on, whether they supported the government or the rebellion. The museum education team had prepared the guides for such questions; they had prepared answers, such as: 'I don't think that's a question for now as part of this tour', or: 'I'd rather not talk about that' (T-A01).

The exhibitions manager likewise referred to the project as a successful site of dialogue, describing some of the encounters with visitors during the project. They mentioned that the visitors were generally very interested in what had happened in Aleppo, and especially in hearing what it meant for the participants (T-A06). They continued: "it was less of a 'come and look', and more of an exchange and of very sincere interest in what is going on and what we can do for each other. I had the impression that from both sides that was an exchange of experiences and also of culture" (T-A06). The exhibitions manager referred to former practices to emphasise how these contemporary practices are different, not merely perpetuating colonial practices in a 'novel format', as they stated:

1 It was not until 22 January 2018 that the Dutch government acknowledged the murders in Turkey as the Armenian genocide. The vote states this also includes the Assyrians, the Pontic Greeks, and the Arameans, as they were also victims of the genocide (Vote no. 56, February 2018). The genocide was already addressed in 2004, but the official acknowledgement was put on hold due to negotiations with Turkey (Vote no. 270, December 2004).

> What was done in the past, in the '80s and '90s, in the Afrikamuseum, that for a period of time people from Africa or Ghana, for example, would come and do something or talk about their culture. And that really feels like putting people on a stage and saying: "come everyone, now is the chance [to learn about this foreign culture]". But this is also – the Syrian refugees felt like fellow citizens, you know, they are here and they, well, they might not be able to do anything different, but we have to move on together. So we as Dutch people have to offer a place, and consider how we will do this together. (T-A06)

They described museum practices that are not that old, and juxtaposed them with what happened in the *Aleppo* project. But what is unclear is whether the museum's practices have changed drastically, or if it is more a change in the visitors that leads to different types of encounters between the two 'groups', which are differentiated by their respective roles in the project.

The *daHEIM* project allowed for a very different set of encounters, as the visitors were able to have a look at the process that took place in the lead-up to the exhibition opening, which consisted of five months of collaboration in the museum spaces. Not unlike the tours – though perhaps in an even more complex way – these encounters could be understood as problematic due to their resemblance to the concept of 'human zoos'. One participant stated: "I didn't know it's a thing for people to consume, to come and consume and see and read and experience where we do all of this" (MEK-D08). This was reiterated by another participant in their description of the visitors who came to have a look during the participatory process. They noted that there were two types of visitors: "the people who are coming there […] to see how it is and what we look like. But also, of course, other people came to see the process, what we are working on and how we work" (MEK-D04). The participant mentioned that this created quite a complicated situation, in which they did not always feel comfortable. At the same time, this part of the process was important, as it made the practices transparent, providing the opportunity to come and look at what was going on at any time in the process. When I asked the participant if the safe space was affected by the continuous accessibility provided to visitors, they stated: "it wasn't like 'open', that everybody can come in, in the museum. Some people were just coming in and saying: 'ah, we see this is not an exhibition yet'" (MEK-D08). These participants felt particularly conflicted about how the project and the process were framed, but they also mentioned that it sometimes led to pleasant interactions.

In the different projects, museums created 'safe spaces', but they were not always able to maintain this sense of 'safety' when visitors entered these spaces. The *daHEIM* project showed that inviting people in while the participants are at work can complicate the relationships and make participants feel watched. Though this provided a certain transparency for the visitors, it was not necessarily best for the participants. This openness would have been more effective if the participants had been provided with the tools to engage with visitors in a way that ensured that they felt safe. Such tools were provided by the museum educators at the Tropenmuseum, and put to use when visitors confronted participants during the public programme. Museum practitioners should take the impact of 'opening up' the space into account, and take measures to ensure that participants continue to feel safe throughout. This is also essential when press engages with participants, as outlined in the next section.

5.2.2 Encounters with the press

Most of the museum projects evaluated for this study received a large amount of press attention. As described earlier, the projects served as a means of demonstrating the inclusivity of the institution. Even if the practices were not as participatory as imagined, a project of such political relevance would still gain sufficient media attention. Museums sent out press releases, which many journalists interpreted as an invitation to speak to the participants about their experiences. However, these encounters with the press often took place on-site in the museum, where the participants had now come to feel relatively safe. This section outlines the role of the media and press attention in transforming a 'safe space' into one that is perceived as unsafe. In particular, it addresses the role museums should play in these circumstances in order to maintain a 'safe space'.

Two of the case studies gained a lot of media attention in response to their participatory project and the focus of their exhibitions. Wanting to promote the exhibition or project, museums are naturally happy to receive such press attention, especially as it strengthens their image among the general public and funders alike. The Tropenmuseum and the MEK received significant attention for their work, and provided press with the opportunity to speak with the participants about these projects. The other two cases, in Leicester and Friedland, had a lower profile, and could not and did not introduce journalists to the participatory process. Though this may have

been the result of limited media interest in the projects, it also facilitated a process of 'safekeeping'. The ways in which these exchanges between press and participants were handled varies between the projects and press outlets, yet several participants I spoke with mentioned the interaction with the journalists and photographers when reflecting on the project. The experiences with the media were mostly negative, due to unpleasant encounters with journalists within the museum spaces, and due to the fact that their testimonies were edited for publication in a way that they felt misrepresented what they had said.

The *daHEIM* project, for example, led to an incredible media response, as was mentioned by the project facilitator. In an interview with them, while addressing the expectations and the response to the project, they recounted: "I will never forget that we had a 45-minute-long telephone interview with Radio Bogotá. As in, we are actually speaking about South America. The exhibition was going around the world, and with all the accompanying excitement, it actually seems a bit strange, as it was not really clear to me what was so extraordinary about it that it would happen like this" (MEK-D03). The significant press attention was also noticed by the project co-curator, who described the contact with the press as a big part of the work they did within the museum space. As such, the space really became part of the public sphere through the media attention that the project received. "We had much to do with the press during the work in the museum. Really a lot, a lot, a lot" (MEK-D05). They stated that the involvement of the press in the project was necessary to show what was going on inside the museum, and to demonstrate the goal and purpose of the project (MEK-D05).

A participant from the *Aleppo* project described feeling disillusioned after their encounter with the press (T-A04). They expressed disappointment and disbelief, because their words were twisted and cut, misrepresenting their intentions and opinions. They elaborated: "they cut and edited parts that eventually . . . it was like I was talking about something completely different, I said a couple of negative things about Syria, etcetera, but I wasn't actually, I was just answering their questions, but the way they edited everything, it was kind of weird" (T-A04). The engagement with the press thus led to a faulty representation of the views of the participants. At the same time, the press used these misrepresentations for further reporting, continuing to distort the stories once shared by the participants of this museum project. These statements often contained political opinions, as if the museum had become a place to speak with forced migrants in order to find out their position on

the war in Syria, or about whether they intended to return to Syria or stay in the Netherlands. The participant reflected that now they know how the press works, they have a different approach, and always ask to see any footage or writing before it is published (T-A04). "I'm happy to share my story, but only in my own way" (T-A04).

One of the participants of the *daHEIM* project in Berlin recounted having experienced something similar when discussing how the press labelled them, despite their explanations about how they would like to be represented (MEK-D04). The conversation, they said, was shaped by what the press had decided it wanted to hear (MEK-D04). By pressing certain lines of questioning, the participant eventually felt tricked into saying something, explaining: "so they actually, through this talking, they, let's say, they shaped the content of what I said . . . this is very terrible to be honest" (MEK-D04). The encounters with the press recounted by this participant reveal a gap in the work that the museum does and the framework it provides for the participants. It demonstrates that participants were not informed about their rights when speaking to the press and not supported during their conversations with journalists who showed an interest in the project. The participant referred to this as a lack of a 'safe space' during the collaborative process, stating:

> So even with the project we did, it was [considered] successful also through media, but reflecting on that also, for me as a Person of Colour, is a very, a very, very hard situation, because there were no safe spaces for none of us. This means, no safe space in the structures of the project of how we work, no safe space from the media, so the press, when they come, they do what they want. (MEK-D04)

The participant refers explicitly to the concept of a safe space, which is often one of the stated aims of museums in their participatory work. That the project did not ultimately offer such a protected setting becomes clear in the comments of another participant. This participant did feel that this safe space existed during the project, offering a place in which the participants could share stories about their home country and their journeys, and to connect with each other through these exchanges (MEK-D08). Their experience of this safe space was positive until the participant realised that they were being excluded from a large part of the conversations and processes behind the project. Though the shared space itself felt safe at the time, they were being excluded from the extent of the conversation that was going on, and were

therefore unaware of the need for a so-called 'safe space' to begin with. They questioned this situation, explaining:

> Because it is not about that, it's not about creating a safe space – for what do I need a safe space? Maybe if I know the kind of like, the reality, the reality of the society, of the institutions, of arts, of the difficulties and the challenges that immigrants and brown bodies are going through, or are facing . . . that's the reality actually, that's the fact. And they are there to create this – for a limited time to create this safe space, and for some specific people also, of course, this is not going very long actually. (MEK-D08)

The museum had felt like a place of sanctuary until it was opened up to the press, which made the participants aware of the ongoing debates their lives were part of. The concept of a safe space was used, but at the time, the participant was not aware of why they would require such a space, and what that space should mean or include. They referred to the shortcomings of the safe space in relation to the press, as access to this (formerly) safe space was provided to journalists who wanted to talk to the people involved. They would come into the space and "document and shoot and publish and do interviews with us" (MEK-D08). When I described these difficulties with the press to the aforementioned project co-curator, they stated:

> That some […] felt bothered or harassed by the press – I don't perceive it that way. I was there with everyone else. With or without a camera. Or, when it was only a newspaper or something. I found the questions justified, or, I thought how they formulated it was justified. We are there to answer those questions. And how we see it, how they mean it, that's up to them to decide. I really didn't find it bad. (MEK-D05)

Although this perspective is relevant, it is not up to the curator to decide whether participants should have been okay with the press attention. From both of these cases, and through conversations with practitioners, it is evident that museum practitioners approach these projects and engagement with the press from their own position. They are aware that the media freely interprets and cuts information to fit a particular narrative, but they did not share this knowledge with the participants before inviting journalists into the museum spaces. As with the process of 'opening up' the museum to visitors, museum practitioners need to provide the participants with the right tools and information to enable them to deal with the press in a manner that they feel most comfortable with, and that produces output that they wish to share.

5.2.3 Online encounters and (potential) engagement

Many of the projects studied were extended to include engagement with visitors and non-visitors in the online realm. The use of online spaces might compromise the creation of 'safe spaces' for participants, due to social media and online communication platforms "not necessarily [being] ready-made for outreach" (Kist 2022, 2). Digital forms of engagement were added to the projects ad hoc. It created further content for the exhibition and made it available to different audiences, but also remained the most visible and accessible aspect of the projects after they had come to an end. This section highlights how museums engaged the participants to contribute to these online spaces. It looks at the interactions that were part of the content creation, but also at the material produced by the museum's online marketing practices. These practices extended to the museum's online presence, but the participants did not necessarily consider these channels 'safe' extensions of the museum spaces.

The MEK invited an external company to handle the communication and PR of the project, which meant that this company was responsible for the concept and content of the social media communication during the project. Their initial presentation to the museum outlining their concept and approach suggests that the company planned to involve the participants by sharing portraits of them on Facebook and Instagram. The pictures of the forced migrants were to be accompanied by a poignant or provocative quote (MEK (External marketing-team) 2016). As such, the company intended to create additional content focusing on the personal aspect of the exhibition; which made sense, since it was a project involving many different people. Alongside the focus on the people behind the exhibition, the company proposed including objects that people had brought with them as they fled (such as those included in the display at the Tropenmuseum). They also wanted to dedicate several posts to the historical narrative of the exhibition (as addressed in the following chapter). Additionally, five different videos of the curators, co-curators and project facilitator would discuss various aspects of the exhibition. The external company proposed that they would use the social media platforms to invite forced migrants themselves to contribute a picture of an object they brought with them to Germany. These ideas reflect an understanding of social media as playing a supporting role for the museum's work inside its spaces. It offers an opportunity to develop new content to elaborate on the project, but this should only really provide further

background information to museum visitors. At the same time, however, the conversations on social media and the requests for input from forced migrants on these platforms initiate an interaction between what goes on online and what happens on-site.

The involvement of an external company further complicated the integration of these otherwise separate practices, and limited the museum's sense of responsibility for the processes of content creation. According to the company's plans, interaction with the participants was a necessary step in the process, but there were no guidelines on how to go about this. One of the participants described this encounter as uncomfortable, recounting:

> There was a company they hired, and this company was doing the advertisement for the exhibition, but this was – I was aware of that, but even that was, I'm sorry, but I feel very sorry that when I remember this . . . how even those individual persons filming me with the spotlight on me, because they actually brought me to – they made me say what they want to hear, for those advertisements. (MEK-D04)

It becomes evident that despite a desire to blur the lines between the physical spaces of the museum and its online presence, there was no intention to extend an ethical participatory process into these realms. The company that created the content for the online spaces did not seem to consider the participants as equals in their intention to have them pose for pictures or speak about the project on camera. A little more feedback was possible in the written posts that were shared on social media, as the same participant commented:

> With the Facebook posts, like, there were some [things] I would know about, some, like I even talked to the team, we changed them and so on, but it always took a long time, because they have to always communicate with the State Museums and then we can know what can be there and what not. (MEK-D04)

The external company, in this case, seemed to take on a more collaborative approach, while the museum and its complicated institutional infrastructure limited the possibilities of participation within these two 'museum spaces'. The infrastructural division between these spaces made the extension of the participatory process beyond the physical space nearly impossible. For the museum, the online and on-site spaces were occupied and utilised separately, and in different ways. These processes did not require feedback from the

participants, and the museum did not support them in preparation for these interactions.

At Museum Friedland and the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, online engagement did not make up a big part of the project, and it was only through limited social media posts that the organisers tried to draw attention to the process. For the project in Leicester, this communication was mostly done through the private channels of the project organisers. Museum Friedland did promote the project through their official social media channels, posting pictures of the workshop and the installation of the exhibition (on 1 February 2017 and 15 March, respectively). It is clear that in this case, social media was merely seen as a marketing tool. The posts did not involve the participants, nor did it foster communication about the content of the exhibition in the online space. Social media was deployed for promotion of the project and exhibition, in the lead-up to the opening. Afterwards, the project no longer actively appeared on the museum's social media channels. The engagement with the participants to create this content was minimal. The participants did not reflect on these components as part of their experiences of the project, nor did they feature in much of the museums' online content.

When it comes to the online spaces themselves, it is important to note that different rules apply here (Parry 2011, 321). The use of social media did not only impact the audiences and the ways they could engage with the topics addressed in either of the spaces, but also opened up the possibility for participants to take part in conversations from their personal social media accounts. This intersection between the museum's spaces and the personal spaces of the participants was particularly visible in the *Aleppo* project. The museum's in-house marketer managed the project's social media engagement. They had been able to get to know the participants through the preparatory sessions and during the tours at the museum (T-A02). Various participants were tagged in the museum's posts on Facebook, but the participant I spoke to did not mention this as a problem. As opposed to the encounters with the press, they were happy about how the content for social media was produced and felt in control over what was posted. They clarified that they did one interview in which they were asked about "their opinion of the exhibition and why they [took] part in the exhibition" (T-A04), and referred to the fact that this was still available online today. "That was really well done, of course" (T-A04).

The content on social media mostly received very positive responses. When I asked the museum's communications manager about this, they said

that it was very likely that they deleted any negative responses at the time (T-A02).

> Hurtful things or offensive language, if that's used, I immediately block it. I block it and delete it. If someone, you know, from a place of fear, expresses a view that is not my own but they are happy to talk about it, then I would always engage in a conversation. (T-A02)

It helped a lot that the communications manager is specialised in conveying inclusive narratives, and focuses on this in their role as a freelance communications manager today. Complex, political and sensitive content needs to be handled carefully, as they demonstrated through their approach and reflection (T-A02). The extension into online spaces complicated the potential of remaining a 'safe space' for participants, especially when participants were involved in ways they did not agree with.

5.3 Conclusion

Working across physical and virtual spaces increases the complexity of the potential for museums to become and maintain 'safe spaces'. Participants might not be familiar with museums and their work, and feel uncomfortable and intimidated by the institution. Those who were familiar with museums and museum work generally viewed the museum as a source of authority. Being included by the museum made participants feel appreciated and generated a sense of 'ownership' over the space; they felt like the museum was theirs, or at least felt at home at the museum. This was usually a result of the participants' relationships with the practitioners. These relationships can make or break the museum's role as a 'safe space' for participants.

Based on preliminary collaborative work, 'safe spaces' are commonly constructed as part of the internal phases of a project. When these projects gain a public role, leading to encounters with visitors, press, communications staff and social media users, the maintenance of these spaces became much more complex. However, what the projects studied here make clear is that the 'safety' of the spaces relied heavily on the museum practitioners; they must provide the right tools for the respective encounters and consider the participants' position in these encounters. If they achieve this, participants may continue to perceive this public institution as a 'safe space'.

6. Towards a Changed Discourse?

"Discourses are not closed systems. A discourse draws on elements in other discourses, binding them into its own network of meanings" (Hall 2018, 202). The museum discourse is intertwined with the media discourse, the political discourse and the public discourse; its linguistic mode (whether visual or textual) is affected by these discourses, but it affects these discourses in turn. According to Laurajane Smith, the term discourse refers to a social practice, in which

> social meanings, forms of knowledge and expertise, power relations and ideologies are embedded and reproduced via language. The discourses through which we frame certain concepts, issues or debates have an effect in so far as they constitute, construct, mediate and regulate understanding and debate (Smith 2006, 4).

Through museums' discursive practices on forced migration, the institutions propose a way of framing and understanding the ongoing debate.

As mentioned at the outset of this study, the refugee protection crisis was framed in the media and public discourse by way of a crisis narrative (Bock and Macdonald 2019, 2). Regardless of how the museum responds to this discourse, it necessarily relates to these dominant narratives by confirming or challenging them. The projects studied here constructed a discourse in the museum that responded to the ongoing discussion. Many of the museum directors and practitioners interviewed for this study emphasised that their projects and exhibitions sought to make a positive contribution to the public discourse. Applying a participatory approach, the museums hoped to put forward alternative narratives to those presented in the media, as well as offering a historical perspective on forced migration (Baur and Bluche 2017). As suggested by Katja Pelsmaekers and Tom van Hout, the museum discourses can be understood as a response to the ongoing debate, which

they describe as a "post-normalization or counter-discourse […] designed to generate empathy and positive attitudes to human mobility" (2020, 2). The exhibitions and other project outputs that were developed as a result of the collaborative work established a discourse intended to challenge the dominant understanding of forced migration.

In all of the cases discussed in this book, an exhibition was one of the project outputs; whether in the form of an addition to an existing exhibition or an exhibition created through the participatory process. These exhibitions (or the additions to pre-existing exhibitions) construct a discourse by means of language, juxtapositions, contextualisation and the relation to other (external) discourses. The narratives developed extended to the online realm, facilitating discussions with people who did not necessarily visit the museum (as discussed in Chapter 5). Museums intended for the projects' various discursive outputs to place forced migration within a broader contextual framework, and to contest labels and other negative depictions of forced migrants.

This chapter will look at the exhibitions through an analysis of the language they used and their semiotic approach to exhibiting forced migration. It will discuss the political urgency and challenges faced by these projects, consider the selected exhibition themes and the historical contextualisation of migration as a potential means of intervening in the public discourse. As this research did not include a visitor study, this chapter does not address whether or not the museums actually managed to change visitors' minds about welcoming forced migrants. Despite what can be learned from the conversations that took place online, it is hard to find direct connections between the museum's work and the potential to shift in people's perspectives.[1] Rather, it evaluates the narratives produced and their contribution to the understanding of the 'refugee' as the 'other'. According to Smith,

> heritage and the identities and understandings of both the past and the present it creates do not simply exist internally to the group or other collective that has created them – they do work, or have a consequence, in wider social, cultural, economic and political networks. They have a

1 Finding such connections would require in-depth visitor and user research, which goes beyond the scope of this study.

> consequence for, and in, the day-to-day lives of individuals beyond the provision of a sense of self or collective identity. (2006, 276)

In this chapter, I focus on the discourses developed with participants, in order to assess the consequences they might have for the participants during the project, and how they affected them afterwards. To this end, I examine the museums' attempts to contextualise forced migration, and analyse the museological representations of forced migrants following the different participatory projects.

6.1 Contextualising forced migration in the museum

The potential role of museums in making positive contributions to public discourse has been the subject of extensive discussion, especially concerning the discourse on migrants and migration (Porsché 2018; Bock and Macdonald 2019; Whitehead et al. 2015). Two of my interviewees referred to the importance of the museum in shaping public opinion, for which they pointed to the role of the institution in contributing to social justice (see Labadi 2018). Framed by the discourse of the museum and responses in the media, the museum's practices seem to promote the institution's inclusivity. But to what extent did they positively contribute to the ongoing debate?

In this sub-chapter, I outline how forced migration is contextualised through the museum's practices. Firstly, I focus on the museum's role in the political debate and discuss how this was communicated with the participants. In participatory projects, museums start constructing a discourse long before the participants become involved. This begins with the museum's decision to take part in the political debate, but extends to the framing of the project and the invitation processes used to involve forced migrants. The political implications of the museum were further emphasised by Yannik Porsché, who addressed how museum visitors most likely perceive this: "since a museum audience frequently understands a single exhibit as a prototypical example of a more general phenomenon or a political position, this, particularly in the case of immigration, implies political recognition" (2018, 28). The impact of this political recognition is not unequivocally positive.

Secondly, I interrogate the focus on forced migration and the potential outcome of actively placing the debate in a historical context. In the

aforementioned book by Whitehead et al., the idea of historicising migration is put forward as a way to counter xenophobic attitudes (2015, 55). I look at whether this contextualisation does indeed have a positive effect on how forced migration is represented, or whether there are certain obstacles to drawing these comparisons, and how these affect the experiences and consequences of these projects for forced migrants.

6.1.1 Taking part in a political debate

Public discourse on migration is political. The current debates regarding migration shape political decisions on border control and access, and political parties with explicitly anti-immigration policies have grown in popularity in recent years. With an increased interest in migration-related narratives in museums and the opening of several migration museums over the last few years (see Chapter 1), the political weight of this particular topic needs to be addressed. Despite museums often claiming to be neutral institutions (as addressed in the introduction), they are also seen as institutions with a social responsibility (Janes and Sandell 2019; Janes 2007). In this role, and with respect to their attempts to engage with the topic of migration, museums constitute part of the discourse that defines the political debate. This section evaluates the museum's role with respect to topical sociopolitical issues, as well as how the museum dealt with the urgency and personal relevance of the debate to the forced migrants who were part of the projects.

The various museums studied here sought to take part in the ongoing political debate. In conversation with several practitioners, this was emphasised as an important reason for carrying out their respective projects. The exhibitions manager at the Tropenmuseum, for example, mentioned the urgency of the topic as a motivation for the *Aleppo* exhibition. They said:

> Besides the fact that it really fit our mission to be doing something with Aleppo and Syria, right, it was a highly topical issue, even then. So that is one of the pillars at which we look: does it fit with our mission to provide the public, the museum public, with a wider view of society and make them better world citizens? So the topic of Syria and Aleppo is – we thought it was a very good fit. (T-A06)

In this statement, the exhibitions manager reflects on the museum's official mission statement, which promotes the idea of creating a global community. The focus on an urgent theme – such as the theme of Aleppo right after

many of the city's inhabitants had sought refuge in Europe – helps audiences engage with topics to which they would otherwise struggle to relate. Through the exhibition, the museum confronted its visitors with the war in Syria, possibly generating empathetic responses; while the additional contributions from the guides amplified this outcome. One participant in the *Aleppo* project was motivated to join because it presented an opportunity to portray a more positive view of the city to the proposed exhibition (T-A04). They felt their contribution was important to counter the images – which focused on the war – selected for the exhibition by the (external) project curator, who was contracted by the museum for this project (T-A04). The participant stated that the project was a way for them to help break the stereotype of Syrian people as immigrants who take money from the government and do nothing. They wanted to actively change this stereotype through meeting Dutch citizens and showing them "the good side of Syrian people" (T-A04). They were quite familiar with such projects and with these types of encounters, because they had also worked as a volunteer for the Dutch Council for Refugees. In this role, they visited schools and offices to provide a chance for encounters to occur, and to talk about forced migration with people who have never before met anyone with personal experience of forced migration (T-A04).

The museum director of the MEK pointed to a similar motivation when referring to the museum's urge to take part in this contemporary debate:

> When the so-called refugee crisis hit in 2015, we said: "we have to do something", even though we had already addressed the issue much earlier in our permanent exhibition *Cultural Contacts – Living in Europe*, which we opened in 2011. That was when we came up with the theme. What kind of Europe is it here? How do we see Europe? Are we able to create European living environments together? I'm not talking about the EU now, but about Europe in general, and we [the museum practitioners] don't give an answer to this question. We are only demonstrating […] the contradiction, [that] on the one hand, Europe is always criticised – a real case of Europe-bashing – and on the other hand, [Europeans] say: "no, we cannot take in others from outside, this is our Europe, 'Fortress Europe'". (MEK-D01)

The museum director identified the presence of two main political tendencies towards the idea of Europe, or rather, toward the EU. Though the EU is often criticised as a political body, European citizens are glad to see (relatively) unified EU policies that aim to keep people out. Political and public opinion

shape the debate on migration, which forms a motivation for museums to address this within the framework of their institution.

At the Leicester Art Museum & Gallery, the community engagement officer suggested museums were failing the forced migrants arriving in the country. Especially because of "the media and the, you know, the [negative] propaganda around it all" (LM-MT02). Though the staff member did not directly state that this should be part of the museum's mission, they did indicate that the museum has a strong position in addressing or challenging the narratives put forward in the media. Similarly, Museum Friedland intended to contribute to the political debate through its exhibitions and the accompanying catalogue. This was outlined in said catalogue featuring the photographs from the participatory project, which stated that the museum hoped to counter the panic-mongering in the media through contributing a critical and nuanced perspective on historical and contemporary migration (Baur and Bluche 2017, 17). However, the project curator mentioned that they were unsure what the participants would choose to photograph, and what their motivations and inspiration might be (MF-S01). The direction of the project – and whether or not it would indeed be able to challenge the dominant discourse in media and politics – remained unclear until after the workshops. If or how the participants of *So sehe ich das…* experienced the political aspects of the project is unclear; whilst for *Museum Takeover*, none of the participants mentioned their role in the political debate as a distinct part of the project.

As many practitioners described, the projects were born out of the ambition to challenge the predominantly negative discourses about forced migration and persistent stereotypes of forced migrants. One participant indicated this was an important part of the project for them too, as they wanted to help counter the stereotypes about forced migrants. About the *daHEIM* project, a participant pointed out that they were invited to be part of a debate that they knew nothing about prior to their arrival in Germany and their participation in the project (MEK-D08). They described how "the racism debate and the immigration debate and the policy of the museums" was something they were unaware of throughout the participatory project (MEK-D08). It is only now, several years later, that this participant and several others I spoke to came to realise that they had unknowingly taken part in this debate about their own fate. Though these are individual examples, they show that the participants could have used this project as a means of changing stereotypes themselves. This would have changed the dynamics

of the projects, but could have affected the participants' reflections on the project, which have shifted as a result of their experiences of stereotyping and discrimination in their everyday lives.

In the aforementioned chapter by Lynch, considering museums' potential role in processes of empowerment, she asks: "Why should migrants not similarly be engaged in the major issues and debates that we all face in this troubled world?" (2017a, 240). And with this question, she introduces one of the main problems of these projects, which is the lack of engagement of migrant voices in discussions that move beyond the focus on migration and actually discuss the way they are being perceived, as well as transparency about which debates the participants are part of because of their history. This section pointed to the role of museums in ongoing political debates, and to the need to inform participants about the debates they will be part of in the planned project. The next section will identify how history might play a role in contextualising this debate.

6.1.2 History repeats itself?

With a view to addressing the 'normality' of forced migration as a defining factor in shaping populations worldwide, recent exhibitions on this topic have often included historical perspectives. This aspect of the discourse is a direct response to the way that the media has framed the arrival of many forced migrants in Europe in 2015 as a new phenomenon; referring to 'waves' of people to describe the overwhelming, unexpected and unprecedented number of refugees (Ramsay 2022; Faist 2017). However, this phenomenon was in fact nothing new, and museums wanted to highlight this. Some of the projects studied here used this approach, often as a means to give shape to the museum's role in the participatory process, but predominantly in order to confront people with forced migration as a common experience that could affect anyone. Such a historicisation is a means of placing migration movements within a broader context and building empathetic connections (Rein 2019; Whitehead et al. 2015, 54). The director of the MEK outlined the museum's motivation for historicising the debate, claiming that it was:

> very important, because people looked directly at it and said: "oh yes, look here, that happened back then, it's not so different from what happened today". We also wanted to put the whole situation in perspective. That's incredibly important, to put it in perspective, and not to say that this now

> is exceptional, that this is something special. […] Because you can explain a lot with history. There were completely different refugee movements, right? So, from that point of view, it was a very important aspect, and that was our only condition for this exhibition, that we were involved in that [historical part]. (MEK-D01)

The ways in which this shared heritage – both historically and in contemporary political debates – contributes to the discourse on forced migration is discussed in this section.

Most of the projects studied tended to historicise forced migration, whether in the curated project outputs, additional narratives, or their communications on social media. Other projects did not draw these comparisons directly, like *So sehe ich das…* at Museum Friedland, though this museum is founded on the very principle of presenting the continuity of forced migration via the camp. The exhibition's introductory text does not refer to past experiences, but states that most photographs of the camp "reinforce established images of the transit camp in Friedland and the people it houses" (wall text, *So sehe ich das…*, Museum Friedland). It refers to the place as it has been represented throughout time, and notes that the images that are often used to show the camp in the press neglect the stories of individuals.

The exhibition *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives* at the MEK also contained a series of historical stories. The museum curator gathered these stories and added them to the exhibition as a separate, yet well-integrated narrative. In the exhibition's introductory text, this section is described as follows:

> A similar fate was suffered by people who had to flee within, to and from Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. Biographies from those times show that there has always been immigration due to flight – that people leave, flee, arrive, stay, master their lives. (Wall text, *daHEIM*, MEK, emphasis in original)

These biographies were introduced to emphasise parallels between current forced migration and a history of forced migration with which people in Germany are more familiar: the stories of forced migration and exile that resulted from WWII. It is clear that these stories were deployed to spark empathetic responses as suggested by Rein (2019), and they definitely achieved this through the museum's digital practices via its social media campaign.

The historical aspect informed the exhibition's most interactive post on the MEK's Facebook page. A single post addressed the parallels between past and present experiences of forced migration, and this post led to many comments and critical responses. The post included a picture of people waiting outside a train station, and the accompanying text read:

> During and after the Second World War, millions of Germans had to flee or were expelled. In their new homeland, amongst their own countrymen, they were not welcome: "Every plague, every offence was blamed on the expellees. They had brought vermin with them, they were suspected if something had been stolen. They were also blamed for the increase in venereal diseases and illegitimate births," writes Andreas Kossert in the book 'Kalte Heimat'.
>
> The dispossessed Germans after the war were not welcomed by their compatriots. (MEK Facebook post 2016, originally in English)[2]

The post goes beyond a simple acknowledgement of the phenomenon of forced migration repeating itself in different contexts. Instead, it points out that, similar to today, forced migrants who were forced to flee during WWII were not welcomed in their new home countries. The post posits a direct connection, and calls upon its readers to be understanding of the difficulties faced by forced migrants in Germany today. It was shared 186 times and received 181 comments. Though Facebook is typically used by museums as a mere marketing tool, in this instance, it functioned as a platform for discussion, in line with the platform's original function. Many of the comments did not proclaim an understanding of the current situation, but instead were expressions of anger about the comparison that was drawn. A comment reads: "Not another smart-ass…who wants to compare this with today's so-called refugees. He should inform himself a little better about history, then he'd realise that they have almost nothing in common." And another one: "They are trying to force Islam on us. Hopefully, they won't achieve it. We are living in the end times. We will see the real enemies hopefully destroyed."[3] In response to these comments, different Facebook

2 Facebook post by the MEK on 5 October 2016.

3 These comments were made by various Facebook users as a direct response to the aforementioned post. The posts are translated from German, retaining the original punctuation.

users respond to agree and others engage in the debate and contradict some of these statements. On only one occasion did the external PR firm respond to a comment to clarify the parallels being drawn and elaborate on the quote used in their post. The discussion ran its course, with many Islamophobic comments as well as criticisms of East German citizens, all of which are still visible on the museum's Facebook page. These parts of the exhibition remain accessible even after the project ended.

Without wanting to support these comments in any way, there is a valid question as to whether these historical and contemporary experiences can be compared. It is precisely the Islamophobic nature of these comments that points towards the difference between people's experiences of flight then and now. The forced migrants who arrived in Germany in 2015 were predominantly from Syria and Iran, and their experiences often include aggressive acts of racism and religion-based discrimination. The museum should not simplify or neglect these experiences in the discourse it represents. Though the historicisation supports the fact that forced migration has affected European countries (and countries elsewhere) for much longer, it neglects the complexity of the debate around forced migration in 2015.

6.2 The forced migrant as the 'other'

As pointed out in the previous sections of this chapter, the wide-ranging political debates about migration have helped to shape stereotypes of forced migrants and led to a form of segregation between new arrivals and local populations. In an article that focuses on the museum's political position, Simon Knell discusses the exploitation of different aspects of the border. He describes it as

> a form of defense that can be moralized, and a violent act of 'Othering' that deploys the dehumanizing and depersonalizing language of objectification and threat, in such words as 'migrant' and 'swarm' (BBC 2015), to render certain individuals beyond the compassion of the state (Knell 2021, 70).

All of the case studies intended to shift conceptions of forced migration as an unidentified incoming mass to seeing forced migration as individually distinct experiences. In light of the current war in Ukraine and the forced migration of civilians from that country, the differences in public perspectives on the migration of Black and People of Colour compared to views on White

migrants become all too clear. Discriminatory views about the "orientalised other' (see Said [1978] 2007) inform political decisions and public opinion, as is clear from the EU's commitment to hosting forced migrants from Ukraine.[4]

Following Teun van Dijk, discourse can be understood as the "main interface between the social and the cognitive dimensions of racism" (2012, 16). This has been reiterated by Porsché, who claims that "the act of representing involves more than merely describing differences. Instead, it (re)produces differences and thereby performs processes of inclusion and exclusion" (2018, 29–30). Porsché describes these processes as political consequences of representation through the constructed discourse (2018, 29). Ethnographic museums reproduce encounters with people perceived as 'others' through discourses that apply linguistic and stylistic strategies to create a greater distance between the cultures (Riegel, 1996, 88). In contemporary museums, these encounters take different forms, of which the case studies in this project are good examples.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the collections manager of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam referred to the colonial history of the museum to explain how the *Aleppo* project was different (T-A06). Rather than putting BIPoC on the spot to talk about their culture to Dutch museum visitors who would otherwise never learn from or about this heritage and history, this project allowed for a dialogue with people who are now fellow citizens. "I understood it as an exchange about experiences, and about culture, with recipes and what not being exchanged [between participants and visitors]" (T-A06). The discourses developed through these encounters will be discussed in more detail later, with particular attention being paid to the ways in which the museum's infrastructures rather continue to support the reproduction of stereotypes.

In this sub-chapter, the focus on forced migration is explored through a study of the selected exhibition themes and the narratives developed as part

4 On 24 February 2022, Ukraine was invaded and attacked by Russian forces led by Vladimir Putin. Following the outbreak of this war, the EU announced on 8 March 2022 that it would provide support to countries outside of the EU hosting refugees, in addition to hosting people within different EU countries. The political response in different countries has revealed the divergent treatment of refugees from Ukraine today when compared to the treatment of refugees from Middle-Eastern and African countries in and since 2015. The ruling party of the Netherlands, for example, tweeted that refugees currently in camps in the Netherlands should leave to make place for "real refugees" from Ukraine (VVD Twitter, 2022).

of these exhibitions, of the labels employed, and of the use or challenging of specific stereotypes. The first section focuses on the exhibition themes, which originated at the point of inviting 'communities' (discussed in Chapter 3) and inevitably led to projects that were bound to construct a discourse revolving around the 'migrant identity' of the participants. In the second section, I address how the projects attempted to counter labels and stereotypes of forced migrants through linguistic choices. The final section explores the separation between the different elements of the exhibition, and how these may or may not have contributed to a dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them'. Applying a critical lens to the discourse and the responses from participants and practitioners to the created content, the following sections point towards both positive and negative outcomes of the represented exhibition themes and stereotypes.

6.2.1 Exhibition themes

In the participatory projects analysed in this study and many others related to forced migration (such as those mentioned in Chapter 1), there was often a focus on flight as the main theme of the exhibition or project. Experiences of migration, the journey and arrival were often at the centre of the narrative. At the MEK, the project co-curator, who supported the facilitator for the participatory work, stated that this focus is important, as it helps visitors – or, the predominantly White museum audience (Den Oudsten 2020) – understand people's motivations for leaving their homelands, and to learn about their experiences of 'arrival'. In explaining the relevance of presenting these stories, they referred to questions visitors might have:

> What do they [the forced migrants] actually want? Why did they flee anyway? That is a very, very major thing for the others – because the visitors […] want to understand why someone is fleeing. Why did you actually flee, why didn't you stay at home and keep fighting or something? And that has to be explained. You have to show that. With the routes, with the paths you have taken. What does flight mean? What does it mean to live in another country, to start with no money? Being dependent on the state and so on. These are all simple things that we – or something I think I felt myself, that we have to show that. [That's] what we wanted to show with these people [the forced migrants involved in the project]. (MEK-D05)

These questions formed the motivations for the project facilitator to initiate the project, with the project co-curator suggesting that visitors need to know

the entire story in order to be able to empathise with forced migrants (MEK-D05). However, Ian McShane points out that "a focus on the journey can sometimes isolate that particular experience from the rest of the individual's life and diminish a sense of personal agency […] If the journey is given sole emphasis, migrants remain stubbornly migrants" (2001, 129). This idea was echoed by one of the participants of the *daHEIM* project, who noted that it was a shame that their personal experiences and knowledge should be limited to their experiences of flight (MEK-D04). The issue with many of these projects, they stated, is that they refer to stereotypes and reduce migrants to their biographies and their experiences of migration (MEK-D04). The focus on experiences of forced migration was manifested, for example, in the personal migration routes drawn on the wall. The exhibition brought up stereotypical representations of migration with its references to crossing the Mediterranean, a display of worn-out shoes, and the bunk beds commonly used in refugee shelters. This thematic focus was further symbolised by the introduction text to the exhibition, which mentioned "strenuous flight, dangerous sea, drowning people" (*daHEIM* wall text).[5] These symbols of the refugee protection crisis of 2015 were in line with the exhibition's theme, but they also essentialised this part of the participants' identity, disregarding other aspects of their lives. This calls to mind the previously addressed problem of understanding migrants as 'communities' (central to Chapter 3). Despite the fact that the experience of migration is just one aspect of the lives of forced migrants, this aspect is the only one that is formally and informally provided a stage within cultural institutions.

This example shows that it is important to consider the themes of a participatory project in which museums (aim to) engage forced migrants. It highlights stereotypical experiences of forced migration that generalise people's personal narratives. For example, one participant in the *Aleppo* project mentioned that "it is true that some people fled by boat, but my luck was that I went by plane" (T-A04). While the stories presented at the MEK would certainly evoke an empathetic response, they perpetuated a discourse of the forced migrants as 'victims' and as a 'group' with the same experiences. Sergi, whose work I cited earlier, proposes that museums should carefully include counter-narratives of "unconditional acts of hospitality emerging across the

5 This is taken from the introductory text to the exhibition *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives*, which was made available by the museum for this research project, but can also still be found inside the virtual exhibition on Google Arts & Culture.

continent" (2021, 148). Though he claims this might contribute to a shift from understanding forced migration as deeply cultural to understanding it as deeply human (Sergi 2021, 148), this thematic focus is likely to promote a 'white saviour complex' which presents forced migrants as 'victims' who need to be saved by White people. Instead of this, I propose that museums can build on this theme to address the larger political issues of ongoing colonial violence and structural inequalities experienced by forced migrants. Rather than referring to 'drowning people' as a phenomenon that forms a natural part of forced migration, practitioners should only describe such tragedies in relation to the EU's border control policies. Likewise, museums should acknowledge that forced migration does not begin at Europe's borders, nor do migrants only exist after crossing these borders (see Ramsay 2022, 46). In these ways, museums might actually help to shape the ongoing political debate.

The other projects did not foreground forced migration in their outputs. However, that does not mean the museums steered clear of stereotypical depictions or references that limited the potential contribution of the participants. *Museum Takeover*, for example, applied a completely different approach to the MEK, as it did not address one topic specifically but invited participants to make contributions on objects and artworks already on display. Despite forced migration not forming the focus of the project, the contribution was thematically framed by events such as Refugee Week (in June 2018) and the Journeys Festival International (for the project's second edition in August 2018). In line with this framing, the museum outlines this and other projects on the website within a section dedicated specifically to their work with forced migrants.[6] On the one hand, this shows the museum's dedication to an ongoing engagement with forced migrants, but on the other hand, it pigeonholes the participants as forced migrants and does not allow for engagement outside of this scope. The labels created as part of *Museum Takeover* supported this framing by describing the places people are from. This geographical reference pointed to the participants' 'otherness', but at the same time, it acknowledged the expertise of the participants about the particular objects. The participants' knowledge about some of the museum

6 The museum recently completely revamped its website, which now includes a separate section on 'Work with Refugees and Asylum Seekers', located within the 'Community Engagement' section: https://www.leicestermuseums.org/learning-engagement/community-engagement/work-with-refugees-and-asylum-seekers/

objects translated to a description of how the object is used based on first-hand experience.

Similar to the project in Leicester, the Tropenmuseum referenced forced migration indirectly rather than drawing a direct connection between the participants and the exhibition theme. The exhibition focused on the city of Aleppo rather than on stories of forced migration, and as such, it primarily addressed the war and its consequences for the city and its inhabitants. The museum practitioners had been inspired by an old scale model of the city, but the curator and exhibitions manager struggled to find photographs or objects depicting Aleppo before the war (T-A06). Displaying photographs of the city, the exhibition was to guide the visitor through the city's past, present and future (T-A06). Despite there being no intention to develop an exhibition that would focus mainly on the destruction of the city, most of the pictures showcased precisely this aspect. The exhibition contained several chapters in which other themes were brought in to provide a more nuanced perspective. These included, for example, references to the city's traditional soap production. This additional narrative proposed an alternative to the story of war. One of the participants remarked that the prominence of the images of the war disappointed them, as they would have liked to see a more positive perspective on the city. They said:

> I wanted fewer of those pictures, and more of . . . 'cause there were also a lot of videos, all about the terror, only violent images, women with weapons and that kind of thing. It is indeed part of Aleppo, but with a large title like *Aleppo* in a big museum, you'd expect to also see the nice and beautiful Aleppo. And not just war and weapons and those kinds of things. (T-A04)

This comment reveals that they had particular expectations of the exhibition that were not met by the museum. Their associations with the city were scarcely represented in this curated narrative on Aleppo. As discussed in the two former chapters, the museum practitioners were not willing or able to change this narrative.

At Museum Friedland, neither the participatory project nor the resulting exhibition directly addressed the topic of migration, instead taking the site of their arrival – Friedland – as a focal point. During the conversation about the photographs taken by the participants, their stories of migration were discussed, but this was not integrated as a central aspect of the exhibition. The project curator stated that the project "was about the transit camp, about how the people see and experience this place" (MF-S01). They added that the

focus on forced migration, which informs the museum and its permanent exhibition, is of no interest to forced migrants who have just arrived in Friedland (MF-S01). Though this is particularly true of Museum Friedland, whose closest potential visitors are in fact people staying in the transit camp, their idea can be extended to practices with forced migrants elsewhere. These exhibitions focusing on forced migration are *not* made for forced migrants, but rather cater to an audience that is intrigued by, or interested in, forced migration *from the outside*. Though this focus may spark empathy in visitors, it is unlikely that visitors who choose to go to such an exhibition were not already sympathetic to this issue before visiting the museum.

It is therefore important for the museum to consider how they might engage with the forced migrants to create an exhibition that is (also) meaningful to them. This is most relevant for museums like Museum Friedland, which has a focus on migration due to its position and its connection to its local histories. However, in considering the effects and consequences of this particular output – the discourse constructed through the participatory project – it is important to note that the discourse positively affected the lives of the locally based migrants. Following *So sehe ich das…*, the exhibition developed from the photographs taken by people temporarily housed at the transit camp became a tool for discussing experiences of Friedland with people who subsequently arrived there. The museum educator described the importance of the exhibition for their engagement and support work with people in Friedland:

> So later the exhibition itself gave me a rich environment, a rich learning environment. And people were really so happy to have it. And when they started with learning *Deutsch*, most of the young generation, they one day come to Nissenhütte and they read the first two sentences. Because the first two sentences are 'Ich bin…' 'Ich komme aus…' [I am; I come from], so they used it, and they were so happy. And also it was a good chance to explain the idea of *spätaussiedler*, because it was difficult for refugees [from] Somalia and from Syria and from Iraq [to understand] why these blonde, blue-eyed people are also refugees. So it was a good chance for me to give certain information before taking them to the museum. (MF-S02)

The narratives developed were perhaps not very meaningful for the people who moved away after the project, but the exhibition sparked conversation about the transit camp and the different migrants residing there. In this regard, the project's thematic focus on the experience of the transit camp

provides a highly sustainable outcome for the people the museum is hoping to engage. The case studies examined here show that the thematic focus on forced migration may be helpful for creating empathy among the broader public, but such a direct and stereotypical approach provides a limited perspective that is unhelpful to the participants, and neglects the underlying, more urgent issues that define forced migration. At the same time, as the next section will point out, it is difficult to find alternative ways of presenting forced migration, and to avoid common labels and associations.

6.2.2 (Un-)labelling 'refugees'

In many of the conversations, practitioners and project organisers referred to language as an important aspect of their work. "Museum cultural programmes can also present opportunities to subvert stereotypes around refugees [...] However, there is a risk that museums exacerbate structural inequalities imposed upon refugees from other sectors of society" (Sergi 2021, 55). That stereotypes were and still are prominent in public discourse is made evident by the response of forced migrants themselves to 'their' labels, and by the museums' intentions to avoid or challenge common labels and stereotypes. In the guide *Words Matter*, which looks at language used in ethnological museums, Guno Jones suggested that "perhaps a starting point, at least for museums, is to acknowledge how categories can reinforce notions of difference, and, together with the diverse groups, expand these categories to create new and more inclusive possibilities" (2021, 61). This section assesses the alternative labels and signifying language used to describe forced migrants. It describes ways in which the museums attempted to break with the stereotypes attached to the word 'refugee', and highlights the limitations of these attempts in practice.

Regardless of whether they were fully aware of the sociopolitical situation in their host country, many participants had soon become aware of the stigma attached to their 'label'. The participants – either during the interviews or in conversation with project facilitators – discussed their experiences of consistently being labelled 'refugees', and how this came with expectations to share their story of migration. Though not all participants considered the label problematic, acknowledging their experiences of being labelled a 'refugee' is important for understanding the consequences it had for them. The workshop facilitator from *Museum Takeover* recounted: "I have people who told me: 'I hate this word. I hate the word asylum seeker. I hate the word refugee.' And

I had people who told me: 'don't call us refugees', you know?" (LM-MT04). The need to consider words carefully was also described by Sergi, who stated that "museums have also a moral responsibility to question the language used and labels employed in their work with forced migrants" (2021, 56). Aware of the difficulties of the most commonly used label for people who have been forced to flee their homeland, those involved in the projects proposed various alternatives to describe (the role of) the participants.

In the communication for the *Aleppo* project at the Tropenmuseum, the museum team carefully considered its language use and avoided stereotypical labels. On the museum's website, social media pages, press releases and in the exhibition texts, the museum refers to the participants not as forced migrants or refugees but as former inhabitants of Aleppo. Rather than describing the participants by addressing their experience of flight, the museum's marketer explained that they would also mention people's passions or interests and their role in the project to describe them (T-A02). For example, one of the participants spoke about Syrian food on the tour through the exhibition and was described on social media as "[participant], who loves Syrian food and would like to tell you about this".[7] They said they attempted in their communication to move beyond a stereotypical representation of the participants as refugees, adding that: "in principle, they are refugees, of course, but certainly at that time there was such a strong cultural understanding that was very stereotypical, that was attached to that word [refugee]. There probably still is now" (T-A02). In line with this understanding, the aforementioned workshop facilitator from *Museum Takeover* suggested that

> it helps if they are not only seen as refugees, but they are seen as what they are, which is people, you know. And not only be labelled as refugees. You know, you kind of have someone who happened to be in the UK because something happened in his country or her country. And they are here, their English is limited. They don't know the culture, but they are people. And they want to learn, and they want to be integrated. And they want also to share their skills, because these people have talents, and they have skills. (LM-MT04)

7 Facebook post by the Tropenmuseum on 20 April 2017.

The words chosen to describe forced migrants within the museum might resonate with the ongoing political debate, amplifying a discourse that generalises and negatively portrays forced migrants. This directly affected the participants, as they had become familiar with the words used to describe them as a group, as well as with the negative connotations attached to the respective labels.

The label of 'refugee' also came up as something to avoid during the interview with the project facilitator of the *daHEIM* project. When I described *daHEIM* as a participatory project with refugees, the project facilitator commented that the project should not be described as such, because "it is a project with people who have fled, who have had to flee, who have left their country, it is not a project with refugees" (MEK-D03). They mentioned that such language influences our thinking, and that for this reason the term 'refugee' (in German *geflüchtete*, or *flüchtling*[8]) does not appear in any of the texts written for the exhibition. The exhibition proposed a focus on humans and human experiences, which is clear from the first sentence of the introductory text for the exhibition *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives*. It reads: "On 4/3/2016 *people* took over these rooms…" (*daHEIM* wall text, emphasis added). The focus aligns with the main vision of the Tropenmuseum, which brands itself as "a museum about people" (see Chapter 2). However, discourses are not constructed purely through language; in most ethnographic, cultural and historical museums, stories are told predominantly through the objects on display. The exhibition *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives* may have intended to tell the story of people, but as outlined in the previous section, the exhibition focused very much on their stories of migration. This echoes the view of Jones, who stated that when museums invite people with migrant experiences, the migrants are expected to reflect their 'migrant identity' in their work or contribution (2021, 60). By critically assessing this approach I do not intend to suggest that museums should not provide spaces for such conversations. Rather, I posit that this contributes to stereotypes, and

8 The German term *flüchtling* (refugee) is derived from the word *flucht* (flight, escape). The suffix –ling is used in many nominalisations in German, and while some of these are neutral or even positive (for example *liebling*, 'darling'), many are negative (for example *feigling*, coward). In an effort to counter these negative associations, the term *geflüchtete* has gained prominence in recent years. Derived from the past participle of *flüchten* (to flee), it translates literally to 'one who has fled', and is seen as less essentialising (while having the added advantage of being more gender-neutral).

confines forced migrants to this 'identity', one that they did not choose for themselves.

While aiming to avoid these labels, museums can still remain 'safe spaces' (as addressed in the previous chapter) where stories of migration can be shared by participants, audiences or curatorial staff. Some participants mentioned that it was quite therapeutic to share their stories with people who had gone through similar experiences; while other people said that they were happy to help local inhabitants understand why they had fled their home countries and explain the different ways one might flee. One specific example of a participant's interest in sharing their story can be found in one of the labels written for the *Museum Takeover* project. It reads: "When we left Eritrea, we went to Sudan on foot, we wish we had a horse like this one. But when we left Sudan to go to Libya, we crossed the Sahara Desert by car. That took us 10 days" (*Museum Takeover* catalogue 2018). This personal story originated in the participant's immediate association with the museum object. This object is not a direct representation of flight or migration – it is a small sculpture of a man on a horse – yet the participant saw it as an opportunity to talk about their journey. The two options – of creating a 'safe space' where people can share stories of their journey with others (as described in Chapter 5), and of moving away from a distinct focus on forced migration when involving forced migrants – are not mutually exclusive.

The project at the Tropenmuseum is an example of where these two elements came together. The museum refrained from labelling the former inhabitants of Aleppo 'refugees', and it provided a space where people could share any of their stories (or refrain from sharing highly personal reflections altogether). The discourse that emerged from this provided a broader notion of the city and its history, as well as pointing to the reasons for fleeing and the diversity of the people who decided to leave Aleppo. The education officer who had set up the participatory aspect of the project said they felt that this work changed people's conception of forced migrants, which was previously based on what they had seen in the media (T-A01). In their view, the project contributed to an un-labelling of refugees. Based on their observations during and after the tours, they speculated:

> I think the image people have of a 'refugee', at least during the tours with us, [was] I don't want to say invalidated, but you did get a broader spectrum of images presented to you, so to speak. From someone who completely fits in with the "oh yes I came on a boat and I had to leave my family behind

> and now, during the project, they came over to the Netherlands – they are now happily back together", to someone who left because of their sexual orientation, and who did not choose the Netherlands but was simply placed here, through to young boys who are the only ones in the family who have fled, or [a participant] who came with their whole family. You know, there are so many different ways of coming here, and different people from different levels of education. (T-A01)

As outlined by this practitioner, and addressed by many in preparation for the projects, museums have the potential to shift the ways in which people understand migration and forced migrants. However, there is a fine line between essentialising a person's migrant background and providing a space for them to share their story should they wish to do so.

Regardless of whether it labels people as migrants or not, a focus on forced migration will most likely contribute to a stereotypical representation of 'the migrant'. Despite the intentions of museum practitioners to challenge stereotypical views of migrants, the projects demonstrate that labels and language are not easily discarded, nor are new terms and descriptions immediately adopted by the public and the press. This is most problematic when the museum's discourse supports a dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them', enforcing the idea of the migrant as the 'other' (Meza Torres 2013; Jones 2021). The label 'migrant' does not only evoke ideas about their experience of migration but also, more often than not, elicits mistaken ideas about their country of origin or skin colour. This was pointed out by Jones, who suggested that "the figure of the migrant artist, like the category 'people of migrant descent,' is often a metonym (a euphemism) for **race**. In this use, 'migrant' is not primarily concerned with describing movement from one place to another, but with signifying a notion of 'elsewhere', including ideas about traditional culture or ethnicity" (2021, 59 [emphasis in original]).

This racialised view of the migrant constitutes a dominant aspect of the discourse on migration. One of the participants of *Museum Takeover*, who had moved to the United Kingdom from Zimbabwe, backed up this notion. They referred to conversations with locals who had asked questions about how they could have afforded a flight to the UK and whether people in their home country even had a television or access to the internet (LM-MT03). The participant found these conversations hurtful because they were not based on any knowledge about, or interest in, their home country, but rather departed from a stereotypical idea about African countries and a feeling of

superiority towards countries in the Global South (LM-MT03). In this example, these stereotypes were not included in the exhibition, yet the participant's experience points out the prominent presence of these stereotypes in public discourse.

A similarly racist stereotype appeared as part of the performance *Die Könige* that was organised by the project facilitator at the end of the *daHEIM* project. During the preparation phase and the performance itself, the participants were asked to perform 'riding camels' as a means of addressing these stereotypes, while at the same time reproducing them. The group of performers consisted of several participants from the *daHEIM* project, along with a number of White performers, and all participants were expected to perform 'camel riding' during a segment of the seven-hour long performance. The performance included many stereotypical references to migration, such as the use of emergency blankets and mattresses (MEK-D07), but this particular cliché of 'camel riding' racialised the understanding of the migrant conveyed through the project. One participant mentioned that they and other participants had objected to this performative representation (MEK-D04). Despite their objections and the conversations that followed, the cliché remained part of the public performance in which they took part (MEK-D04). In addressing this problematic use of stereotypes within a museum context, the participant felt that their objections were not taken on board, because the White dancers who facilitated the performance did not personally feel affected by it. According to this participant and two others involved in the performance, the facilitators had not been able to see the matter from the perspective of the participants, who felt pressured to comply and extremely uncomfortable in this situation (MEK-D04; MEK-D07; MEK-D08). The museum director defined the performance as a project that was "too artistic" for the museum to get actively involved in (MEK-D01); stating that they merely provided the spaces for the preparations and the performance itself, and did not learn about the use of stereotypes in the performance until evaluating the project with me during the interview.

Museums need to consider the ethical implications of participatory work with forced migrants, as well as the discourses they produce through these projects. On the surface, these projects may have contributed to the image of the museums as institutions that dared to 'respond to' the refugee protection crisis. But in a more substantial way, these projects have both helped and undermined the people who participated in them, and did more to fuel

the ongoing debate than to challenge it. Regarding the role of museums in challenging stereotypical representations of migrants, Jones elaborated:

> Admittedly, there is no easy solution for how to describe the complex biographies of diverse citizens. Indeed, the inclusive politics of naming has long struggled with the tension between ignoring difference and foregrounding essentialized identities. Yet, holding on to earlier categories without thinking of their contemporary, real life consequences may help perpetuate structural injustice and exclusion, creating hierarchies of citizens. (2021, 58)

Museums need to be aware of such differences and also reconsider how their actions can centralise assigned identities, such as that of the 'forced migrant'. Every aspect of museum practice contributes to the discourse and should be taken into account, not only because of the effects they might have today, but also due to the long-term consequences of these narratives for the participants and other forced migrants.

6.2.3 Additional narratives

For most of the projects, the discourse that emerged from the project was partly determined by the museum and partly evolved over the course of the participatory work. Given that museums continue to adopt an objective tone, presenting information in museum texts without acknowledging the authors (Gesser et al. 2020), these different aspects might not be recognisable within the exhibition. However, in some of the projects, the participatory outputs were separated from the museum's exhibition using other means. In this section, I discuss the ways in which additional narratives were integrated into the exhibition, and underline which aspects may have signified that these should be read as separate. This does not necessarily reflect what museum visitors picked up from the presented discourse, but it addresses the ways in which museums might present a separate or combined narrative, and in particular, how the participants understood this.

As described earlier, the exhibition at the Tropenmuseum was developed before the participants were integrated into the project. The narrative had already been established and there was little room for the participants to influence what would be communicated through the objects and accompanying texts that populated the space. In a conversation with a participant from the *Aleppo* project, they said that they were asked for

photographs and objects to contribute to the exhibition, to create a "personal corner" at the entrance to the exhibition space (T-A04). They referred to the personal objects as a separate part of the exhibition, after which the 'real' exhibition begins. The participant, as such, did not perceive the part of the exhibition with their personal objects as 'real', recognising the visual and contextual division between these two elements within the exhibition (T-A04). According to the museum's exhibition manager, the personal objects provided the exhibition with an additional layer, which contributed contemporary perspectives and connected the city's past and present (T-A06).

In addition to the objects loaned to the museum for the exhibition, the participants provided personal narratives through the guided tours they held on Sundays. Perhaps due to their temporary nature, or due to the fact that they were organised by the education team, these tours were seen as additional, or separate parts of the exhibition, and not as integral to the story that was being told. Upon asking the exhibitions manager whether these personal narratives were necessary for the impact of the exhibition or whether the exhibition could have worked without them, they stated: "I think it would have been a more superficial project, or more detached at least" (T-A06). The personal aspects – both in the objects and the tours provided by the participants – helped to establish a more intimate connection with the visitors of the exhibition. The exhibition curator discussed what this process looked like from their side, recounting the meeting with the participants in which they sought to bring together exhibition and tour (T-A05). The curator was asked to present the concept and narratives to the participants, clarifying that the exhibition was based on their interpretation of the city's history and present (T-A05). In a meeting in which they presented the concept of the exhibition, they addressed the participants, saying: "I'm not from that city, I've never been there, and it's your addition that makes it come alive, so take this story, as I present it here, and make your own story with that. You have to contextualise it yourself. This is the framework, and you tell your story within it" (T-A05). The task for the participants hence became clear; with their stories, they would provide the details, the footnotes, or put a personal touch on the exhibition. The use of tours as an additional narrative is common in museums, and it can form an interesting contribution to what is already on display. Yet in this case, while it seems that the participants' stories were intended to define the content of what was presented in the museum, as Sergi (2021) has described, the curatorial work and interpretation remained under

the control of museum staff (as discussed in an assessment of the curator's role in Chapter 4).

The exhibition that came out of the *daHEIM* project contained both a contemporary section (curated by the invited group of forced migrants), and a historical section (contributed by the museum curators). The curators are needed, according to Whitehead et al., to "do the historicizing" (2015, 53). They argue that the contribution of the curator allows for the representation of conflict and division, which might not be made visible in a collaboratively developed, poly-vocal rendering of this topic (2015, 53). The *daHEIM* project, however, shows that these aspects can complement one another. The exhibition as a whole cleverly combined the historical and contemporary stories: the texts were presented in a similar format, and there was no visual differentiation between these two narratives. What set apart these different parts of the exhibition was the use of objective and subjective language in the labels, which each focus on the life of a particular person. The labels about the participants' lives are written in the first person; they introduced a subjective narrative that is omitted from the introductory text of the exhibition. The texts that form part of the historical section of the exhibition adopted an objective, supposedly neutral voice. This difference suggests the active input of the participants; rather than there being texts speaking about them, the participants introduce themselves through these labels. Despite practical difficulties involved in bringing together the work done by the museum and the work done by the participants (MEK-D02), the historical and contemporary narratives were weaved into the exhibition to complement each other.

Though many participatory projects in museums ultimately lead to an exhibition, there are some that work towards different visual and conceptual outputs. *Museum Takeover* is an example of a project where the goal was not to develop an exhibition, nor was the focus of the project to address forced migration or a 'shared heritage'. Much like co-creative projects that are set up to enhance the museum collection, this project used the museum objects – those on display in the permanent exhibitions – as a starting point for further interpretation. Most of the objects selected by the participants were exhibited in the World Arts Gallery (LM-MT01). Selected due to their direct relation to the participant's heritage or former home, they immediately brought back memories that fed into the stories that appeared on the labels. Other labels, instead, addressed participants' connections to the city of Leicester, or more recent experiences (LM-MT06). The labels were displayed next to

the museum's own labels, providing an alternative narrative (LM-MT01). The *Museum Takeover* logo was featured at the top of each label, so as to distinguish these texts from the ones provided by the museum. The project facilitator pointed out that the museum's labels provided very limited initial information (LM-MT01), explaining:

> they [the participants] could see the labels that were written [by the museum], although at New Walk Museum the labels are very minimal, [...] so the labels at New Walk Museum were basically a few words, sort of like, "this is a pot", and where it comes from, if they had this information (LM-MT01).

This basic information provided by the museum was complemented by the interpretations and stories of the participants. Due to their different format and more extensive text, the labels set themselves apart from the texts provided by the museum, and could therefore easily be recognised by museum visitors as an additional narrative.

The project facilitator confirmed, however, that the intention was not to create competing narratives: "so the idea was that this wasn't going to be about which knowledge is right, and it wasn't going to be a competition in authority" (LM-MT01). Despite this not being the intention, there was some friction between the two narratives on exhibit, especially because of one of the labels contradicted the content of one of the museum labels. The project facilitator explained that after going back and forth between the object and their writing process, one of the participants said they really did not agree with the museum's interpretation (LM-MT01). In their eyes, the museum was wrong about the object, and the project facilitator suggested they could include this in their own text. The label reads:

> I don't agree with the interpretation. In Nigeria, we have North, West, South & East. This tunic or fabric is worn by the Housa, mostly Muslims. It is a traditional kind of tunic worn during special occasions, like marriages, tuban, when a king is [being] crowned. It is worn during festivals too. It is not only worn by the men from the North alone, it is also for women designed in a top and wrapper. The women wear it when selling traditional northern food called fura d'nono in a calabash on their head. It is a seed mixed with cow milk and sugar. (*Museum Takeover* catalogue 2018, 17)

The museum's original labels were not made available to me for my research, but it is clear that the participant considered their interpretation to be incorrect or inadequate. Their label elaborates on the many different uses of the garment, which are most likely omitted by the museum's interpretation. Additionally, the label refers to the relevance of the object for both men and women, due to a concern that this was not made clear in the museum's text about the object. These labels were not collected, nor was their content added into the database after the project was completed. This aspect of the project, however, is central to the next chapter of this book.

6.3 Conclusion

Many museums initiate projects with forced migrants as a way of constructing a discourse that challenges public and media discourses. Museums are keen to take part in the political debate surrounding forced migration, yet they are not fully prepared for the responsibilities towards the participants that go along with such an approach. Participants who have recently arrived in a new country cannot be aware of the ongoing debates there. This chapter confronted the complexities of the discourses presented through participatory projects with forced migrants.

As was revealed in several studies on recent representations of forced migrants in museums (Sergi 2021; Rein 2019; Whitehead et al. 2015), these projects rarely produce a discourse that breaks with stereotypes, but more often than not reproduces them. This chapter highlights how the focus on forced migration can promote the view of forced migrants as the 'other', especially within the context of an ethnographic museum. Despite attempts to eschew the label 'refugees' in an effort to avoid the negative stereotypes attached to this label, the museums essentialised the identities of the participants in other ways, through the thematic focus of the exhibitions and the use of stereotypical discursive elements. It is one thing to avoid stereotypes, but if they are not actively challenged, how can audiences gain a sense of the complexity of these labels? As suggested by Whitehead et al. (2015), historicising the phenomenon of migration – as done in the *daHEIM* project – can positively influence how contemporary narratives are perceived. In adding this historical perspective, museums should be careful not to sideline the participatory outputs in favour of their 'own' narrative. Moreover, in keeping with their quest to expand common narratives on

forced migration, museums could use their spaces as a platform for raising awareness about the role of Western European countries in creating the reasons for (forced) migration; rather than focusing on the journey or arrival of people here, these stories can be presented as part of a much larger political context.

7. Material Remnants and Digital Ruins

Museums have been and remain institutions for the preservation of cultural heritage. This central aspect of their role remains unchanged, even as the definition of the museum seems to continuously expand to include further social, political and emotional dimensions (ICOM 2019). These new dimensions sparked some of the approaches and outputs discussed in this study, yet the projects also produced material outputs that could potentially become part of the museum collections themselves. These material outputs – objects, artworks, labels, catalogues – and their digital counterparts are one way in which a project can viewed as sustainable for the museum, and potentially make a lasting contribution to the discourse. As such, these contributions serve the museum's core task of collecting and preserving heritage (as outlined in the introduction). The MEK incorporated some of the material outputs from the *daHEIM* project to its collection, which led Sharon Macdonald to describe this project as an example of participatory work with a sustainable outcome. Macdonald refers to the project as one that involved forced migrants in a substantial way, leading to the long-term outcomes that are now still present (for the museum and for the public through the museum's online database). "Although the exhibition was temporary, some of the objects from it have become part of the permanent collection" (Macdonald 2021, 323). Despite not explicitly arguing for projects to have a long-term presence in museums, she emphasises that accessions to the museum collection can be understood as a sustainable outcome. The director of the MEK, who addressed the relevance of the collected works (or objects) to the museum, agreed with this, saying:

> For us [at the museum] it did [have a lasting impact] because we have also received some objects or some works that have been created there. And – I mean, we are a cultural institution that manages cultural heritage, so to

> speak. And that is also part of cultural heritage, right? Particularly at this time. And it's important that we still know about it in a hundred years, and that's why we have the objects. We have a lot of photos and a lot of texts, of course, but how long are they – how long are they available for posterity, I can't say, but the objects are [available for posterity]. (MEK-D01)

The focus here is not only on the role of the institution as a preserver of cultural heritage, but also on the sustainability of the project, as the director considers this one of the central ways in which projects can have a long-term presence within the institution (and with that, perhaps, a continuous role in social and political debates). Building on the findings presented in the previous chapter, this chapter points out what is collected and how this remains visible within the museums' online databases, and it considers the work of tending to the project website and other online 'preservation' measures (or the lack thereof). As such, it discusses how objects and narratives can continue to be part of the museum discourse.

In this chapter, I consider the material and digital outputs of the projects studied. I discuss the accessions to the museum collections as a potential sustainable project outcome, and connect this to the difficulties of handling and collecting objects originating from cultural 'others' in a supposedly 'post-colonial' institution. Studying these outcomes through a lens of ethics and care and looking firstly at the goals of the museum and the extent of inclusion of the engaged 'community', this chapter scrutinises the museums' approaches to, and the possibilities for, moving from one realm of the museum (the exhibition) to another (the collection). The first section outlines the collecting infrastructures and discusses the decision-making processes about what to keep after a participatory project. In the following section, I look at what goes into the practice of collecting, paying particular attention to the preservation of artefacts as well as interpreting them so as to ensure that they are correctly labelled in the museum's database. In the third section, I describe the (potential) online availability of the collected objects as well as the digital ruins of completed projects. As such, this chapter highlights what remains after the project, with a particular focus on how these remnants are managed by museum practitioners, using the organisational and digital infrastructures in place. It teases out the role of ethics in these aspects of museum practice, which is a particularly important consideration for the museum when it comes to these project outcomes that remain accessible in the future.

7.1 Collecting material remnants

Collecting is one of the main activities of the museum. The preservation of memory through objects and works of art is deemed a core task that has been extensively discussed and evaluated by researchers and practitioners (Förster 2008; Appleton 2007; Macdonald 2003). It is, according to Ariella Azoulay, "not separate from other foundational practices, procedures, institutions, concepts, and categories operative in the field of art shaped through imperialism" (2019, 79). Some researchers have pointed out that the museum's focus has shifted towards a social role, making the collection, preservation and study of objects secondary (Golding 2013; Appleton 2007). However, the museum's focus on social concerns does not have to limit its practices as a collecting institution (Golding 2013, 25); the logic of contribution and the logic of care are not mutually exclusive (Morse 2021).

In some of the projects studied, a contributory logic led the museum to adhere to the activity of collecting as an envisioned aspect of the participatory work. In a document drafted by the MEK's curator in preparation for the *daHEIM* project, for example, the goal of collecting was mentioned in relation to the role of the museum. It read: "The MEK fulfils its task as an institution for preserving cultural heritage by documenting the current situation of refugees through the collection of objects and information for posterity."[1] The museum's objective to collect the project's outputs is not purely a result of its mission to preserve heritage for the future, but also indicates a desire to take part in a contemporary debate. In a museum of everyday culture, collecting the material outputs produced in a participatory process does not merely preserve the experiences and perceptions of forced migrants; the works play a double role, as they also serve as a memento of the participatory project hosted by the institution. The contributions that were collected become representations of the contemporary debate, while also reflecting and promoting the museum's practices.

The value for the museum is two-fold, but what is the value of collecting these outputs for the participants? On an abstract level, this value might be the result of a process of recognition (Stevens 2007; Gourievidis 2014), with the artefacts being recognised as important additions to the museum

1 This was taken from project outline for the *daHEIM* project, a document created in preparation for the project in 2016. The document was among the files made available to me to conduct this research.

discourse. The inclusion of objects from participants or artworks made by participants during a participatory project demonstrates their relevance to the museum and indicates that these should be incorporated into the "authorised heritage discourse" (Smith 2006). This recognition has been described as an important aspect of working with marginalised groups and individuals (Gourievidis 2014). Through an assessment of the museum's infrastructure for (participatory) collecting, decision-making processes and its handling of the artefacts, this section identifies the possibilities of collecting as a sustainable outcome that has relevance for all involved.

7.1.1 Infrastructures for (participatory) collecting

The museum's collection might not always be central to a participatory project, but it could be connected with a sustainable outcome that is mutually beneficial. When it comes to participatory work, collections are predominantly discussed with respect to object and collection research, often as a means of decolonising the institution, though sometimes merely as a way to gain additional information about, and perspectives on, objects that are already held by the museum (Förster et al. 2018; Morse 2021). This practice goes hand in hand with museums' ambitions for provenance research and comes in the wake of long periods of colonial collecting practices (Förster 2008), because of which many museums today hold objects that they know very little about.

In this section, I build on the existing literature in the field and present a number of collection strategies drafted and implemented by the museums, in order to contextualise the collecting practices that resulted from the participatory projects. Of the projects evaluated for this study, two worked with objects that were already part of the collection, and the two others gained works for the collection as a result of the work with participants. The possibilities of accessioning outputs into the collection are dependent on the infrastructure that is in place to support participatory collecting (which often entails extending the project across museum departments), as well as on collection strategies and the capacity of databases to allow for direct input from the participants.

Collecting has always been at the core of museum work, and the collection strategies that museums apply are continuously under review (Förster 2008). Museums' collection strategies define what is to be collected, as well as how to decide what not to collect, in an attempt to develop a "representative"

collection (Macdonald and Morgan 2019, 34). These questions need to be constantly deliberated by museum practitioners, which was why some of the strategy documents that informed this study were under revision at the time of assessment. The MEK started working on their collection strategy in 2018. The document, which sets out guidelines for how the museum decides what to collect (and what not to collect), was completed in 2021, but continues to be reconsidered while it is used by museum professionals when it comes to deciding what fits the museum's new direction and approach. The most important aspect of this direction is the museum's focus on thematic collecting, moving away from the commonly used differentiations based on geographical location and national borders (MEK Collection Strategy 2021). As a museum of everyday life, the MEK does not grapple with the same difficulties faced by ethnographic museums, but its database does reflect similar categorical approaches.

This is different for the Tropenmuseum, for which the embedded colonial history is an inherent part of the institution and its collection. Since its merger with two other Dutch ethnographic museums, the Tropenmuseum (as part of the Nationaal Museum voor Wereldculturen, NMVW) has been reworking its collecting policy. In 2020, the head of collection management at the NMVW shared a document with me outlining the museum's new thematic focal points for its programme. In the evaluation and fine-tuning of their collecting policy, these thematic strands should replace the former geographic focus of the collections held by the four different museums. The current strands are: *global icons*, which includes world religions, major civilisations, well-known cultural phenomena and pop culture; *the art of living*, which includes identity, spirituality, conviviality and creativity; and *a connected world*, which encompasses colonialism, globalisation, climate change, and the social construction of images through phenomena – such as racism, stereotyping and the influence of the media. These very broad strands are intended to guide the museums' programming, in which the collections play a crucial role. The outline does not specify, however, to what extent the different aspects of the programme are connected; the museum could collect through its exhibitions or develop an exhibition from a project intended to add to the collection. These strategy documents are only relevant when they inform what happens in the museum on a practical level.

Being a city museum, the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery has the widest range of objects amongst the museums studied here. Its collection strategy document for 2019–2024, like the documents drafted for the MEK and the

NMVW, contains a list of themes and priorities that are intended to inform future collecting practices. One key priority is to "celebrate the stories of Leicester's diverse communities" (Leicester Museums & Art Galleries 2019). The museum aims to meet this priority through collaboration with local 'communities', offering the following description of the work of collecting:

> We see collecting as a collaborative process and we want to better reflect life in contemporary Leicester and we will work with communities within the City to achieve this. Our active collecting will be people-focused and will include documenting people's stories and memories through related film, objects and oral histories (Leicester Museums & Art Galleries 2019).

Museum Takeover is an example of such a process, but its goal was not to collect but to intervene in the museum's permanent exhibition. In the project outline for *So sehe ich das…* at Museum Friedland, on the other hand, which was drafted before the project launch, reference was made to the expected outputs of the project as additions to the collection. One of the project's goals was to integrate the data and objects generated during the project into the collection. The project invited participants to take photographs that reflected their perspective of the town of Friedland and the transit camp; an activity tailored to the museum's mission to collect objects and documents of the present are outlined on their website. It reads: "Museum Friedland collects and preserves objects and documents that bear witness to the history, past and present of the Friedland transit camp. The collection is continuously being expanded, systematically catalogued and researched" (Museum Friedland website). This statement provides a framework for the museum's collection practices moving forward, however, much like the other examples, it does not propose that exhibitions and community outreach work are ways of enhancing the collection.

The collection strategy documents of the Tropenmuseum and the MEK also do not draw a connection between the participatory work carried out for exhibitions and the museums' collections. Though these practices do sometimes connect or overlap – through collaboratively created exhibitions or community outreach projects – few curators acknowledge these projects as a central means of extending the collection. Both the MEK and the Tropenmuseum have a department tasked with collecting objects and artworks; for the MEK it is the curatorial team, while for the Tropenmuseum these responsibilities lie with the museum's conservators, who form a collections management team. Upon asking the head of exhibitions at the

Tropenmuseum about the possibility of collecting some of the objects and stories after the *Aleppo* project, they replied that they were not sure, because this is a task central to another branch of the museum's work (T-A06). They referred to the change in the team of conservators and the new collecting policy as reasons to be hopeful that this still might happen in the future (T-A06). However, the connection between the departments is limited, as becomes clear from the exhibition manager's description of the separated practices that are *either* dedicated to the museum's public programme *or* enhance the museum's collection (but rarely both). The gap between the different departments is especially visible in the example of the *Aleppo* project.

The strategy documents and organisational structure of the museum only represent part of the infrastructure for participatory collecting practices. Upon adding artefacts to the collection, the museum initiates a process of categorisation and interpretation, after which the items are (carefully) stored. The collecting processes in museums are dependent on categories, orders and names that make up the infrastructure of the museum database. Margareta von Oswald points out how these categories and labels are part of colonial knowledge systems; they are discriminatory in the way they inscribe past conceptualisations of difference via the database's present structure (Von Oswald 2020, 115). The objects collected as part of the projects carried out by the museums automatically become part of a knowledge system that reflects the museum's ethical and cultural understanding, an understanding that might continue to be based on ideas of racialisation and unequal power relations (see also Turner 2020). It is through the interpretation of the artefacts collected in the wake of the participatory projects that the defining colonial structures of the museum are most clearly visible.

Whether done in collaboration with the participants or by the museum curator or conservator, the participants' objects or works are interpreted, categorised and made visible online within the existing infrastructures. In part, practitioners continue to redefine these infrastructures through their work on collection strategies and practical guides. However, some aspects of the infrastructures are deeply engrained in the institution and in the museum's practices, perpetuating colonial hierarchies in today's work. This includes the infrastructures at hand for digital access to the artefacts and their descriptions. In the following sections, I further scrutinise the impact of these forms of infrastructures and other relevant factors on the decision-making processes about what remains in the museum after a participatory project, and, perhaps more importantly, why.

7.1.2 What to keep?

Through a reflection on what was kept in the museum from the different projects and how it was handled and by whom, we can see how the material remnants of a project might serve as a sustainable outcome. Along with a number of complex issues, the decision-making processes are guided by the museum's ambition to participate in a political debate (as mentioned in section 6.1.1) as well as by their (dis)respect for participants' personal objects and artefacts created in the process. This section outlines the museum's considerations in deciding what to keep as a sustainable project outcome.

The different museum projects evaluated in this study have resulted in very different material outputs, some of which have then been added to the museums' collections. Henrietta Lidchi has stated that collected objects serve "as both cultural expressions and physical proof, [as] these provide insights into cultural phenomena of which they are taken to be the physical manifestation ('representation')" (1997, 172). In the aforementioned article by Boast, museums' collecting practices are criticised for their inability to be representative of all communities. "Curatorial staff, for example, have long appreciated that by selecting only some kinds of objects for acquisition, preservation, and public display museums recognize, represent, and affirm the identities of only some communities" (Boast 2011, 59). Boast points to the prominent role of curatorial staff in the selection process, which also demonstrates the influence of personal preferences and ideas. It is as much about the people involved as the structures that they (have to) work with. The decision-making processes about which objects and works were deemed representative of forced migrants and forced migration, or of the sociopolitical debate surrounding it, needs further investigation.

In the wake of both the *daHEIM* project and the project in Friedland, the materials produced through the projects were collected by the museum. In Friedland, this process included the accessioning of all the photographs taken by the participants into the collection as separate objects. The project curator of *So sehe ich das…* explained that all materials from the project were collected by the museum; the boards that made up the exhibition are currently kept in storage, but the separate elements of the project have been accessioned into the database (MF-S01). Given that expanding the collection was one of their aims, the project asked the participants to consent to their photographs becoming property of the museum. The consent form that was signed by the participants reiterated that all of the pictures taken during the workshop

along with the interviews that were recorded could be used by the museum for their own purposes (Museum Friedland 2016a).[2] Yet the project curator stated that "both the interview transcriptions and the audio recordings […] and also all the pictures – not only those that were selected, but the entire photo collection – has been adopted, though for those pictures permission for use has not been given" (MF-S01). For future use of these other photographs, the museum would have to reach out to the participants and request their permission. As the museum and its practitioners are no longer in contact with most of the participants, it is unlikely that they will follow up with such a request. As such, the pictures cannot be used for exhibitions, be made available for research into the collection, or even be made publicly available in a (potential future) online museum database. They are simply kept by the museum as a means of contextualising the materials that *can* be used in accordance with the signed consent form.

The MEK applied a different approach, collecting only a selection of works after the exhibition *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives* closed. According to the project facilitator, it was formally agreed at the start of the project that the museum would choose two objects to acquire for the collection at no extra cost (MEK-D03). The museum could have selected these works themselves, but the curator involved the project facilitator to go through the exhibition to discuss what should be kept by the museum. This process led to the collection of two large-scale works and several smaller pieces (MEK-D03). The museum curator pointed out: "these objects are manifold, they stand symbolically for processes. And the better they are documented, of course, the better this symbolism works" (MEK-D02). The curator may have been referring to the political or social processes, or to the participatory processes that took place in the museum, but it is clear that they did not consider the works as artworks in their own right. During the interview, the curator emphasised: "If you were to use the standards of an art museum, I would say, these are not works of high art. But we are a museum of European cultures, and not an art gallery. In this respect, we also collect other objects" (MEK-D02).

Like other artworks that are part of the MEK's collection, the works are described as objects due to their function within a specific (museum-defined) discourse. The works created in this process were kept to represent the refugee protection crisis and the museum's response to it. Just like historically

2 An unsigned version of the consent form was shared with me for the purposes of this research.

collected works and objects, they are always a reflection of the museum's practices and the ethical considerations underpinning these practices at the time. Though the project was participatory throughout the exhibition-making process, there was no collaborative approach to the collecting process. One participant mentioned that they helped de-install the exhibition, but they did not have a say in what was collected and what was not (MEK-D08). Another participant mentioned a work that they made as part of the project, stating that they had not known that it had been collected by the museum afterwards (MEK-D06). More generally, a participant described the collecting process as a continuation of colonial museum practices; rather than formally acquiring the artefacts, going through the formal processes of obtaining the different works, the museum simply took the works from the exhibition spaces and accessioned them into the database (MEK-D04). Staff and the project facilitator, however, mentioned that the participant co-curator had been part of this process as a representative of the 'group' (MEK-D03). Despite the practitioners and participants being in disagreement about the nature of the selection process, it is clear that in hindsight, some participants would have benefited from a collaborative and transparent decision-making process, and from the possibility to take back their work upon request.

To avoid such practices (and potential conflicts, such as those experienced at the MEK), the Tropenmuseum decided to return all personal objects to the participants after the exhibition closed. During the process, many of the participants had asked if the objects on loan for the exhibition would be given back at the end (T-A01). The objects were clearly of value to the participants, which meant that the museum did not feel comfortable collecting them. The museum educator added: "They are such personal objects, you know. These are things that people brought with them on sometimes very difficult journeys because it is so important to them. I wouldn't even want to ask [if the museum could keep them]" (T-A01). Instead, one of the material outputs of the *Aleppo* project was a photograph of one of the participants and their set of keys, which has become part of the Tropenmuseum's semi-permanent exhibition *Things That Matter*, which opened in 2018. The museum educator stated:

> the set of keys are now part of the permanent exhibition, so not as an object but the portrait of [the participant] and their story that they recorded about the set of keys. So it's a portrait of them with their set of keys attached to their belt, and then you can listen to their story (T-A01).

Neither the picture nor the set of keys were collected by the museum: the former because the museum is still working on its photography collection policies, the latter because it was a personal object that the participant wanted back after the end of the *Aleppo* exhibition. The photograph and recording of the participant's personal story serve as a stand-in for the real artefact; they could – if the museum ultimately decides to collect them – be an example of collecting 'the object-as-photograph' as proposed by Clifford, rather than taking things from their owners and out of their cultural context (1995, 100). Though several ethnographers who prefer a three-dimensional object (Förster 2008, 21) due to their aura of authenticity – drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin ([1935] 2008) – have dismissed this, the Tropenmuseum saw it as a practical solution that inevitably also represents the personal history of the object in the photograph.

The set of keys came to represent the exhibition and functioned as a symbol of forced migration. It was the story behind this set of keys that was mentioned during the official speech from the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs at the opening of the exhibition and subsequently picked up by the press, and it is this story that remained part of the museum discourse after the *Aleppo* project ended. All interviewees referred to this story during our conversation. A participant mentioned they had not been aware that something had been taken up by the museum as a result of the project (T-A04). It was during the interview that they learned about this process, which they had not been involved in. They said they were happy to hear that the story remained part of the museum through a picture of the keys, as it is "something that makes people think about Aleppo, in the first place, and secondly, to think about this story of flight" (T-A04). Had this participant been given a say in what would be collected by the museum, they would have also selected some photographs of the citadel in Aleppo, representing the stability and security they associate with the city rather than the war (T-A04). However, their input was not considered by the museum, and an exhibition that once had a much wider scope has now been reduced exclusively to a focus on forced migration. As in the other examples provided, the outputs of the projects were collected predominantly as a means to anchor this project and its sociopolitical context at the time.

7.1.3 What not to keep?

The previous section highlighted the decision-making processes about what should become part of the museum collection. However, there are many practical, strategic and personal reasons behind the decisions regarding additions to museum collections, including many reasons to decide against keeping certain outputs or artefacts, leading museum practitioners to return items to participants or dispose of them altogether. A lack of storage space and the dilemma of "profusion" (Macdonald and Morgan 2019) form the main reasons for disposal, yet participatory projects also reveal that collecting is dependent on what 'counts' as an object, and on how this is decided between departments. This section elaborates on these considerations, and looks at how they define the choices made in practice.

Contemporary museum practitioners are constantly confronted with the problem of "too-muchness" (Macdonald and Morgan 2019, 31). There is "a growing discourse within museums and museum organisations about questions of what to collect in the face of an apparent glut of choice, and about how to deal with expanding numbers of objects in sometimes already full storage spaces" (Macdonald and Morgan 2019, 31). The very practical problem of limited space also affected some of the projects studied in this investigation. After the *daHEIM* project, the selection process was informed by the available space in the museum's storage facilities. The project facilitator mentioned this issue, explaining: "It really pained us that we had to destroy some things, of course. But that was just hard, but [some of] these are such big works, you just can't keep them all. That's how it is" (MEK-D03). The Tropenmuseum faced similar limitations, as was mentioned by the head of exhibitions, who pointed out that the idea for the exhibition was sparked by the lack of storage space (T-A06). The object – a scale model of the city of Aleppo – that was formerly part of the museum's permanent exhibition on the Middle East had not been accessioned into the museum's collection. The removal of the object from its permanent display sparked a desire to use it for a temporary exhibition, which became *Aleppo*.

There was no intention to collect any of the objects that were included in the *Aleppo* exhibition. When I asked the exhibitions manager about whether the object had become part of the collection after its use in the exhibition, they said: "That's a good question. I think it might be lying around in a storage facility or something […] because yes, it would be really good to keep it" (T-A06). The whereabouts of the object, which has been in the museum

for many years, are currently unknown, as is its purpose or envisioned further use. Despite the object not yet being accessioned into the museum collection, the exhibitions manager mentioned this might change when the new conservators are hired (T-A06). This highlights – as Boast (2011) suggested – the impact of individual staff members on the collecting processes of objects kept in storage but not (yet) accessioned, and of the possibility for these practices to have an effect on other museum departments. One of the ideas proposed by this museum practitioner is to donate it to the 'community', mentioning: "And maybe we should ask a few Syrian people if there is some space with them, perhaps. I can also imagine that they, in their sort of community centre or a – yeah, that they would think 'oh we have room for that, so please give it to us'" (T-A06). But until that day, the object might remain in the museum's storage, without it being accessioned into the database for staff to find, or for people to access online.

At the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, the practitioners involved in *Museum Takeover* faced similar practical obstacles. The labels were not collected by the museum, nor was some of the very relevant information provided by the participants included in the museum's database or used to develop a new, more elaborate label. The community engagement officer noted that it was a shame the output of participatory projects was not deemed valuable enough to be accessioned. They stated: "I would like them to be [accessioned into the collection]. That's something that I could probably speak about… it's very difficult, they don't – I've done an awful lot of work […] and it will go on the website, but it's not being accessioned into our collection" (LM-MT02).

The project facilitator from *Museum Takeover* also proposed the collection as a potential way to ensure a sustainable outcome of the project. After asking what they would have done differently if they were to organise such a project again, they swiftly replied that they would want the project to have an afterlife. They elaborated:

> Right now the labels physically are back with the refugees, so the museum doesn't have anything. I would get the labels accessioned, that is what I would do. Even if they aren't on display, they are part of the collection, that is something I would change. I mean, there is still a potential to do it so I'm still hoping that it could happen. (LM-MT01)

Though the stakeholders I interviewed did not explicitly state this, it might be that the labels were not collected because they can simply not be considered 'museum objects'. As outlined in related studies, a museum

object is generally defined by its transition from their original context to the museum context (Macdonald 2006; Alpers 1991; Kopytoff 1986), yet in this example, the labels were created in and for the museum. The museum served as their original context, which means that the process of collecting would not involve a re-contextualisation. Rather than being objects in their own right, they constitute additional interpretations of the objects in the museum collection, and could be documented as such. To date, though, the labels and their content have not been accessioned in any form. Much like at the Tropenmuseum, the collection of the labels or the integration of the information into the database was simply not deemed urgent by the staff responsible for collection management (LM-MT02). The decision to not preserve the outputs was made by the collection department, whilst the department that actually managed the project did not have direct influence on the museum's collecting practices.

The different projects exemplify the many factors that keep objects out of museum collections. The organisational infrastructure of the museum separates project-specific and collection-related responsibilities. In some museums, the different departments are further apart than in others, but it is clear that these strict separations between departments do not support the connection of these processes. Practical considerations – such as storage space and capacity – along with the conceptual understanding of museum objects can lead to objects (or other outputs) not being collected by the museum. These aspects constitute the museum's limited collecting infrastructures, which often do not support making acquisitions that are based on participatory work done by the community engagement team.

7.2 Practicalities of collecting

Upon collecting objects or artworks after a participatory project, the items need to be handled with care, put on display or in storage, and logged in the database accordingly. In recent years, museums have changed their collecting practices as a result of an increased awareness of the colonial discourse surrounding the materials from formerly colonised countries, though less awareness has been shown about the fact that these practices have now shifted to representations of recent immigrants (Ulz 2019; Meza Torres 2013). In the previous chapter, I discussed how a museum's discourse can contribute to this process of 'othering'. The collected objects also constitute part of the museum

discourse; hence, it is important to investigate how the categorisation and interpretation of the objects contribute to the representation of the 'immigrant' as an 'other'.

This sub-chapter outlines the role these aspects played in the participatory processes, or how they informed the material outputs and their digital manifestations. In the first section, I focus on practices of care, looking at how museum practitioners care for objects, and how they care for people as part of participatory work. This section analyses how objects were handled after they had been accessioned, and how this corresponds with caring for 'others'. The second section of this sub-chapter looks into the interpretation of the materials and the acknowledgement of their creators or authors. Through a reflection on the ways the materials from the participants were handled, interpreted and assigned ownership, these sections underline the perpetuation of colonial relations and structures that continue to define participatory museum practices today.

7.2.1 Caring for (objects of) 'others'

Morse stresses that "care for objects is the very foundation of museum work" (2021, 1). The museum's role to collect objects and artworks for posterity should therefore also include practices of care. Morse reflects on care as a museum practice that is predominantly focused on objects, rather than people. Care for objects means that "objects are treasured and gently handled, displayed and carefully stored away" (Morse 2021, 1). This is confirmed by the collection strategy documents of the different museums studied in this investigation, which all refer to 'care' as a central aspect of museum work, though mostly in reference to the practice of preservation or conservation. In a chapter on the ethics of conservation, Stephanie De Roemer states that:

> the conservator responsible for the care of the object has to inform, collaborate, negotiate, plan, assess and converse with various decision-makers and stakeholders not only to administer appropriate treatment but also to advise, recommend and implement appropriate actions, conditions and environments beneficial to the long-term preservation and maintenance of the object within available resources and organisational structures. (2016, 259)

This practice of care extends to a careful practice of interpretation, categorisation and representation of the project outputs. Museum

practitioners need to recognise the value of an object for an individual, community or society, in order for them to handle this object with care (De Roemer 2016, 253). Careful practice is, therefore, like many other aspects of museum work, dependent on the museum practitioner and their relation to, and ability to empathise with, a group or person. This section underlines how care finds expression in the practice of any museum practitioner handling the objects of 'others'.

Despite care being a core task of museums, artefacts are not always handled with care in practice, though this often remains hidden and is rarely openly discussed. The museum director of the MEK, however, addressed this fact, and explained that the outputs of the *daHEIM* project were not dealt with appropriately due to internal changes in the curatorial team, stating:

> Yes, you know, the exhibition was finished when we said: 'now we'll get our objects', so to speak. And [the curator] was about to retire and quickly entered everything into the database, and that was the problem. But the main problem was actually rather that this only came up after a few years. And not immediately, because people didn't know that we had it in the database. So, that was kind of – as soon as a project like that is finished, you get careless. That would never have happened to us in the beginning. (MEK-D01)

The museum director refers to a change in the practitioners' behaviour towards the end of the project; the 'careless' practice, according to them, is tied in with the processes related to the final stage of a museum project. Despite care being present at the start of the project, it fades towards the project's end, especially when a new project or change of jobs is already occupying the practitioner's mind. This sense of carelessness is not often referred to in museum practices related to objects, nor is it often critically reflected on by museum practitioners.

In museum practice, while care for objects is usually foregrounded, care for people is often neglected (Brusius 2022; Morse 2021). However, there is a clear interconnection between these two 'areas of care' and the ways in which they are materialised in practice that needs to be addressed. The carelessness referred to by the director of the MEK was also mentioned by one of the participants. Despite not having been part of the collecting process, they knew that two works had been collected which seemed to be missing from the online database. Upon asking the museum about these works, it became clear that they were not included in the museum's internal

(more extensive) database either and could not easily be located. It was only after a thorough search of the storage and office spaces that the works were found, but indeed, they had not been accessioned into the collection and were not labelled as museum objects. The director discussed this incident openly and stated: "it is really bad. An exhibition should also be debriefed – not only de-installed, but also debriefed" (MEK-D01). Such an evaluation process, as well as the inclusion of the participants in the collecting processes of the museum, could have prevented the confrontation between the former participants and the museum staff and project facilitator. The other projects studied in this investigation did not include such an evaluation process either; their collection practices and the actual treatment of the materials, however, remain invisible to the public and the former participants.

Care, in the broadest sense of the word, may take on different forms depending on who or what is being cared for. This was reflected by the way in which the museum practitioners cared, consciously or subconsciously, for the artefacts during and after the collection process. The way in which museums care for artefacts collected as an outcome of a (participatory) process is hard to trace; these practices most often happen behind closed doors and, as Mirjam Brusius and Kavita Singh point out, for the artefacts they create, museum storage "becomes a desultory catch-all in which objects can decay quietly and out of sight" (2018, 12). The inability of the museum to actively care for all its collected objects does not mean that the collection can (continue to) be a collaborative effort. This would require an ongoing connection between the museum and the participants, and a willingness to engage with museum work for an even longer period (that is, as a job). In addition, it would require museum storage to become more accessible, changing into something more than a liminal space between the museum and the field (Brusius and Singh 2018). Current museum infrastructures do not support these shifts, but that does not make them unattainable if museums recognise them as being necessary for more ethical collecting and preservation practices.

In a chapter on care in museums, Markus Blankenhol and Wayne Modest describe care as political, as "a discursive practice that defines who and what is deserving of care, thereby drawing political boundaries between self and others" (2020, 182). Following these principles and the relational aspects of care laid out in Chapter 3, the museum's role is entangled in different practices of care, both for objects and people simultaneously. At the time of the interview, the MEK was involved in a discussion with the project facilitator about the authorship of the artworks the participants produced.

One of the participants said: "The ones who have their objects in the archive, they should also know. I mean, first the physical archive but also the digital archive, also the titling, everything […] People should be aware of how this happened" (MEK-D08). The work of care also includes clear communication with the participants about what is being collected, as well as about the processes of collecting and providing information about what will happen to the works afterwards. Speaking about this with the participants could serve as a reminder to the practitioners of the artefacts' value for the participants, therefore emphasising the importance of a careful practice. Such care also translates to the ways in which museum practitioners describe material outputs and acknowledge authorship. It draws the connection between the museum's care for objects and how this translates to a care for people.

7.2.2 Describing and valuing material outputs

"Museums do not simply issue objective descriptions or form logical assemblages; they generate representations and attribute value and meaning in line with certain perspectives or classificatory schemas which are historically specific" (Lidchi 1997, 160). Lidchi points out that the categories and interpretations assigned to objects are based on the perspective of the curator or conservator, and constructed according to the historically defined categories of the database. More recently, curators have begun seeking to include various interpretations of an artefact through personal stories that contextualise the object's role before it was collected, in order to complement the museum's collection (Macdonald and Morgan 2019). In this section, the interpretations and contextualisation of the collected objects are further evaluated, in an effort to underline the relevance of these practices for the participatory process and its long-term visibility within the neo-colonial museum context.

When it comes to documenting migration, museum practitioners need to be careful not to reproduce a narrative that represents migrants as 'others' (Meza Torres 2013; Brehm et al. 2016). The NEMO guide for museum work with migrants refers to the implicit tendency to reproduce the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' when documenting objects and artworks (2016). It states that museum practitioners can avoid perpetuating this dichotomy by reminding themselves of the "long-term continuity of transcultural and poly-local everyday lives" (Brehm et al. 2016, 6), which is not limited to the borders of Europe (Ramsay 2022, 46). The guide points out that this will support

the museum's aim "to narrate a history of migration and cultural diversity that is integrated into the history of society as a whole" (Brehm et al. 2016, 6). This is easier said than done, especially when museums generate the artefacts through participatory projects with forced migrants (a context that highlights this aspect of their identity, as was pointed out in Chapter 6), and then go on to document the collected artefacts in a database that perpetuates categories and labels based on colonial knowledge systems (Von Oswald 2020, 115). According to Brusius, "museum taxonomies are attempts at classifying objects and people, in this case dividing them into artificial categories", which can only be challenged by breaking with colonial legacies, applying a self-reflexive practice, and by drawing an active connection between objects and humanity (2021, 197–198).

One of the ways in which the museum database currently contributes to the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' is through "the category of 'geographical reference' [*geografischer Bezug*]", which facilitates "the continued use of anthropological concepts shaped by colonial modes of thinking" (2020, 112). Von Oswald specifically refers to ethnological museums, for which these geographical categories are the direct result of the circumstances under which the collection was acquired. Museums are increasingly attempting to challenge these categories (Von Oswald 2020), and many museums are tending to let go of this geographical reference in their renewed collection strategies and to extend this to further spaces in the museum, such as in the new semi-permanent exhibition *Things That Matter* at the Tropenmuseum. Von Oswald (2020) outlines that the sub-categories of 'country', 'region' and 'ethnic group' are meant to indicate specific territories (historical or current), yet these categories are rather ambiguous when it comes to objects and artworks intended to represent migration.

Of the case studies in this investigation, only two museums incorporated the outputs into the database, of which only one is publicly accessible online. The MEK collected several of the objects and artworks created in the process, though the collection process did not invite input from the participants. Where Museum Friedland fully based its interpretations of the photographs on interviews with the participants and their connection to Friedland as a place, the descriptions of the works made as part of *daHEIM* omitted the participants' perspectives, despite their direct involvement in the project. The curator of the MEK drafted the descriptions, which mainly outline the project but do not provide detailed information about the individual pieces.

One of the collected pieces was part of an installation that consisted of several items of clothing found in a refugee camp in Greece. Only one part of the installation was kept for the MEK's collection: a sports jacket, initially entitled Idomeni Jacket (*Idomeni-Jacke*) in the database. Alongside the title, the registered geographical reference proposed the place of use (*Gebrauchsort*) as "Iraq, Syria, among other places" (Museum database). One of the creators of the installation (it was a collaborative piece), mentioned the jacket was found in a camp, left behind by someone who was no longer there (MEK-D04). Nothing was known about the former place of use of this jacket; hence, the description was simply based on assumptions about where forced migrants may have come from in 2015. The participant mentioned this to the museum and the description was changed to refer to an entirely different location, Lampedusa, with the place of use enlisted as the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, stating that it had been found on a boat off the coast of Lampedusa (*Mittelmeerüberfahrt/Fundstück aus Boot an der Küste Lampedusas*). Yet again, this reference to a location is presumptive, based on the potential routes of forced migrants coming to Europe at the time. "In the context of contemporary forced displacement, this methodological approach [of formulating hypotheses about owners or users of objects] might reinforce, rather than contest stereotypes [of] refugees" (Sergi 2021, 74). From this object alone, it becomes clear that it was important that the museum collected objects that symbolised forced migration. The museum director stated that the participant rightfully criticised the object descriptions, as the museum should have made sure everything was entered into the database correctly (MEK-D01). The museum practitioners could have avoided these mistakes by expanding the participatory process to include the collection and interpretation of the works, especially because this outcome had been planned from the beginning of the project.

Despite the project being artistic in nature, the items produced are described as "objects" in the database. Part of the description reads: "The *object* was part of the art and exhibition project 'daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives' shown at the MEK on 550 square metres, from July 2016 until July 2017" (Museum database, emphasis added). As mentioned earlier, the works were collected to represent the so-called crisis as well as the museum's response to it. During the interviews, all of the participants I spoke to referred to their work as art, while the museum practitioners tended to speak of objects (MEK-D01 to MEK-D08). This reflects a contemporary version of a long-standing discussion that differentiates between objects and artworks, and the

related question of assigning authorship (Förster and Von Bose 2019, 49; Von Oswald 2020, 121). The recognition of authorship confirms artistic value and allows for a work to be valorised differently than if it were an ethnographic object. At the same time, this might promote the value of a work that is held by the museum, and from which the artists cannot profit, upholding the inequalities between Western institutions and 'others'. The works that were created as part of the *daHEIM* project do not mirror the exact circumstances described by Von Oswald (2020), but the implications for the participants and the benefits for the museum are comparable. Acquisition and interpretation happened within ongoing colonial frameworks, hence exacerbating systemic inequalities (Micossé-Aikins 2011, 428). The museum did not pay to acquire the works, as agreed with beforehand by the project facilitator, but for the participants who are currently pursuing artistic careers, the recognition of their authorship and of these outputs as works of art is important (MEK-D06; MEK-D04). This is only logical, as the "Western-dominated art field, despite the prevalence of deconstructionist approaches, still relies heavily on the idea of a pronounced authorship" (Kittner 2021, 392).

In an interview with one of the participants of *daHEIM*, they referred to a work that they collaboratively created for the exhibition. The work is a mosaic that the artist created to represent war and flight, something that is not addressed in the description of the work in the museum's database. Additionally, the artist is not mentioned, with the work only attributed to its 'collector', which in this case was the project facilitator. When I asked the artist why they had not claimed ownership of this artwork at the time, they stated:

> No, I couldn't say anything. My German was much worse than it is now. I had no one that could translate and I didn't know what I should do. But I did know that this situation was not a good situation [...] It was bad, the way [the project facilitator] related to me, but I didn't know how to complain about them. They could do anything they wanted and I could not. (MEK-D06)

This situation is clearly reflective of the power differential between the participants and the project facilitator, to the benefit of the facilitator, whose name is attached to many works in the database, describing them as the collector and naming KUNSTASYL (the collective founded by the facilitator) as the artist. In an article assessing the collection processes of objects related to migration, Alma-Elisa Kittner describes that found objects (like the jacket found in Idomeni) are decontextualised as the narrations connected to the

objects will not be part of the collection (2021, 390). Additionally, the objects are often accredited to the collectors or those who assembled them rather than the former owners (who remain unknown) (Kittner 2021, 391). For many of the works, the facilitator is connected to the work instead of assigning authorship to those who worked on it as part of the project, or acknowledging that the former owner is not known. In the case of the mosaic, however, the authors of the work are known, indeed they were part of the project, yet their name remains omitted from the museum's database, referring only to one artist (Museum database). The facilitator knows which artists were involved in the creation of the work – they are mentioned on the KUNSTASYL website – yet this information has not been shared with the museum. Participants can request to remain anonymous, but in this case, they were not asked about their preferences, and hence were not able to choose to remain connected to the work after it was accessioned into the museum database.

The MEK is just one example of how these processes often take shape, especially when collecting processes are approached as something separate from the participatory work. Museum databases tend to enforce the dichotomy that sets 'us' apart from 'them', and within this context, the objects or artworks collected serve as a memento of the sociopolitical debate across Europe. The potential meaning for the participants, or the importance of preserving this work in a way that is beneficial to them, is largely ignored; as such, these processes did not follow a logic of care (Morse 2021). The museum's current practices and infrastructures perpetuate 'othering' through labelling items as 'objects' or 'artworks', and diminishing the role of the artist in its records. The museum could include the significance of an object at the time, as well as allow for a revised contextualisation in the future. Graham proposes that a more horizontal process requires clear guidelines on "how to propose an object for collection by the museum" (2017, 85), but the involvement in decision-making should go far beyond this, and should actively challenge the structures for interpretation kept in place by the museum. In the process, the material outputs might gain a more sustainable presence in the museum's online spaces; that is, if these spaces are actively deployed by the museum during and after the participatory project. It is through the online database that the project outputs remain accessible for the participants.

7.3 Extending the projects into the digital realm

Alongside the material remnants of a project, each project leaves behind digital, intangible traces. Though these are usually not prioritised by museums over the physical, tangible artefacts, they are an important aspect of the project and its outcomes for museums, and potentially also for the participants. Digitally produced narratives remain visible, whether through formal digital remnants such as the online collection, catalogues and virtual exhibitions, or through informal traces, such as social media posts, comments and websites, whether well maintained by the museum or left dormant. In this sub-chapter, I discuss how the digital remnants of participatory work are cared for beyond the project's timeline. The following sections connect the participatory processes with the museum's online spaces as a means of identifying the limited infrastructures and use thereof, as well as the practices that extend a museum project into the digital realm. In looking at projects' digital ruins, I pinpoint what aspects of museum work remain neglected despite the continued presence of a project in the museum's digital spaces. These aspects highlight the lack of integration of participatory approaches across museum work, and point towards the missed opportunity of using digital infrastructures for more sustainable, representative, ethical and up-to-date project outcomes.

Next to the thematic shifts and new approaches outlined in new collection strategy documents, such as those addressed in the previous section, most museums identify digitising their collections as a main ambition. The digitisation of objects and their online presentation allow existing materials to be reused. This is widely understood as a necessary step towards the democratisation of the institution (Mucha 2022; Schmidt 2020; Cameron and Mengler 2009), making "more resources […] available to more people" (Sherratt 2020, 119). Digitised collections are accessible to online audiences (beyond the local reach of the museum), and as such, they offer additional possibilities for research and collaboration (Sanderhoff 2014; Hughes 2012). However, it is not only through the collection that museums can expand their accessibility and possibilities for input from different audiences; alongside its online collection, museums can engage with audiences and collaborators through social media (Kist 2022), and use the museum website and other platforms to bring the projects from the museum into the digital realm. Despite the museum's predominant use of social media as marketing tools (as touched upon in Chapter 5), these online spaces can also function

as an addition to the other digital and physical spaces deployed in the museum. Co-location – or occupying both a physical space and a virtual space – allows the museum to scale up their projects, expanding the scope of their offerings, increasing accessibility, and being 'open' 24/7 (Kidd 2014, 34). Online space(s) could serve different purposes, contribute content in other languages, or provide different modes of interaction, transcending the borders of physical space across time (Bautista and Balsamo 2011). Applying participatory practices with the aim of developing what Clifford (1997) described as a 'contact zone', the extension of projects into online spaces enhances the potential of interaction between people who have been geographically and historically separated.

The several different spaces available to museums today have significantly expanded their means of functioning as a 'contact zone'. Following Susana Bautista and Anne Balsamo, the museum's extension into the online realm transforms the museum into a primary node in a network that exists beyond the museum's physical space, whilst continuing to provide traditional and more contemporary services (2013). The distributed museum, as has been further unpacked by Ed Rodley, is a non-hierarchical space for conversations about collections (2020, 84). It should be noted, however, that many external platforms, such as social media platforms, adhere to different ethical guidelines (or none at all), so museum practitioners should tread carefully in these (unfamiliar) spaces (Parry 2011, 321). The possibilities for museums to engage in social interaction online as part of participatory projects has already been explored in earlier chapters, but the ways in which these formal and informal traces in the online realm constitute sustainable outcomes that are meaningful for the participants are just as important.

The extension of museum practices beyond its physical spaces and the project's timeline relies on the museum's infrastructures for facilitating more distributed practices, as well as the capacity for maintenance of, and care for, online spaces and the discourse generated in the digital realm. Museum projects continue to exist online through the museum website or a specific project website, and through the content that remains available on the museum's social media pages, as well as through the museum's database, in the event that project outputs were collected by the museum. These digital remnants and their potential role as a valuable outcome are discussed in the following sections.

7.3.1 Accessible online collections

Digitisation of museum collections is a central aspect of a museum's collection development strategies. Cameron and Mengler claim that "the increased visibility brought about by the 'networked object' and the resultant widening of the contextual frame of the collections led to an exponential increase in the volume of enquires and to a higher level of accountability for the content of collections information" (2009, 200). In line with their suggestion, providing access to online collections motivates museums to meticulously interpret and document the artefact. Yet, as Tim Sherratt points out, museum practitioners also shape these online collections, as they decide what becomes accessible and what does not (2020). Additionally, as addressed in the previous sections, most collections have inherited a skewed perception of the artefacts they hold – following a long history of colonial practices (Von Oswald 2020; Brusius and Singh 2018) – that remains visible in the information available online.

The online presence of museum objects is dependent, firstly, on the digitisation of the collection, and secondly, on the available digital infrastructures for providing access to the artefacts through an online platform. However, as these databases reflect the processes described in the previous sections, in the online realm, the objects continue to echo the stories and context inscribed by the museum (rather than the participants). The museum's practices of 'othering' – through the differentiation between artworks and objects, the recognition of a work's author(s) and the social context of the artefacts – are reiterated, or may be reframed within the museums' actively used and neglected digital spaces. This section assesses the digitisation of collected materials produced through the projects as an additional, sustainable project outcome. I highlight the ways in which the museums currently provide access to the collected artefacts, and suggest that digitisation can function as a means of making collecting practices transparent, and as a way of moving beyond the narrative constructed by the projects (and within the museum's colonial frameworks).

Though few of the museums collected material produced by the projects, several practitioners mentioned maintaining a digital presence as a project objective. Museum Friedland collected the outputs from the participatory project, with the photographs and interviews accessioned into the museum's database, but none of these materials remain visible online. Despite a number of objects from the collection being available on the website, the museum has not (yet) made their entire collection, including the photographs

from the workshop, accessible online. Whether Museum Friedland has the ambition to digitise its collection and make it available online remains unclear. The Leicester Museum & Art Gallery did not collect any of the material produced by the project, but the museum and facilitators do acknowledge the importance of its extension into digital spaces. Though the museum does not refer directly to digitising its collection, it does point towards the museum's central goal of developing its "digital presence to widen audiences and raise Leicester's profile" (Leicester Museums & Art Galleries 2019). This digital presence has so far been achieved through the new museum website as well as the available online collections. The museum offers online access to only a few of their collections through separate websites that can be reached via the main website: these fragments are the result of separate digitisation projects that focused on specific collections, such as the collection of German Expressionist art, and specific themes, such as knitting. In addition to these dedicated pages, the museum simultaneously presents an 'object of the month' on its own collections page and in the museum, connecting practices between its physical and online spaces.

The objects collected by the MEK as part of *daHEIM* can still be found in the online database of the museum's collection, which is hosted by the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. The works and selected information are made available online, as per the museum's goal to 'open up' its collection and make its existing data accessible for assessment and supplementation (MEK 2021). The museum's collection strategy outlines the importance of digitisation for the museum: "All interested parties should have digital access to the collection" (MEK 2021). Through the digitised versions of the works created as part of *daHEIM*, the museum provides access to the project's content and ideas, even though these only present the outputs and give limited insight into the processes that led to them. The works were collected after the project ended in 2017, and have since been accessible through the online database. The museum curator mentioned that the collected and digitised objects are now part of a discourse that persists online and is open to re-contextualisation, as well as possible repeat iterations of the project (MEK-D02). The curator stated that in addition to the (digitised) objects, the museum website contains further interviews and videos related to the project, which allow visitors to draw connections between the objects and the context of the exhibition (MEK-D02). Gaining an insight into the project through the combination of these digital platforms affords a detailed overview of the project for those who wish to look back. As suggested by the museum curator, the online content presents

a complete package, yet there is no room for interaction or engagement to add to this context. Being part of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the museum has limited options when it comes to changing the ways in which people can engage with, and navigate through, the objects. As such, the access provided is limited by the technical possibilities for engaging with the available materials and information (Sherratt 2020, 119).

Despite the limitations on engaging with this digitised content, the MEK's practitioners understand digitisation as a way to provide transparency on what is kept in the museum beyond the objects that are on display. This transparency also proved relevant for a former participant of the *daHEIM* project, who looked at the online database to gain insight into what was collected, as this process was not carried out in collaboration with the participants (as discussed in section 7.1.2). It was not until they looked at the online database long after the project had ended that they found out that some of the objects were missing (MEK-D04). As such, the online database served as proof for the participants that their work is indeed part of the collection. It provides the former participants with information about what happened to their contributions after the project, and confirms that their input continues to be relevant for the museum. The digitisation of the outputs reflects the end of the formal process of accessioning the works into the database (should the content be in line with the participants' perspectives) and suggest the material is being cared for by the museum. At the same time, the digitised outputs can be relevant for the participants as continuously accessible evidence of their work and contribution to the project. Particularly for those who pursued a career in the arts after the *daHEIM* project, the public recognition of their work (as outlined in Chapter 4) can have a significant impact for them and their careers, despite the colonial framework that structures the database. However, it is important to consider how the digitised collection might serve *all* former participants, for example through the narrative created through the online materials. The adaptability of online content, including the information accessible through the museum's database, lends itself to continuous approaches to challenging the discourse (as outlined in Chapter 6). The additional layers of the online realm should be considered in assessing the range of potential outcomes for participants, and are further discussed in the following section.

As mentioned earlier, many online databases provide insights into the objects held by the museum, but present only a part of the available information to the public, as museum practitioners select what should

be shared publicly, and what is classified 'internal information'. Leicester Museum & Art Gallery lists extending "access to collections information" as one of its goals for the collection. This does not necessarily refer to online access. Rather, the museum addresses its role in keeping and disseminating information beyond the scope of its exhibitions. The project facilitator of *Museum Takeover*, who had mentioned that the labels should have been collected by the museum, also proposed that the museum's website could be a way to preserve the project outputs (MEK-D01). In addressing the afterlife of the project, they pointed out that the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery did not have a website where these projects and their outputs could be stored and shared. Instead, the project facilitator uses their own website and social media accounts to share the work on a regular basis. They stated that "the problem with these temporary events is that they get forgotten. And it's not about the museum being remembered or my work, but actually these voices and the power they have" (LM-MT01). Through the digital means available to them, they continue to make the project outputs visible, in order to strengthen the participants' role in the ongoing discourse, as well as to amplify the value of projects that engage with marginalised groups and individuals. It is in these ways too that the online accessibility of the collected objects – ideally with clear references to the project – could be beneficial to the former project participants. As discussed in section 4.2.2 on recognition, the inclusion of these works in a publicly accessible online database contributes towards this 'group' enjoying a form of recognition. Even if this means that the participants are only recognised as part of this 'group'.

The examples I have discussed here show that limited access to the collected objects is provided today; the photographs collected for the Friedland exhibition are not available online, and the MEK provides limited information about the collected project outputs in their online database. Access to digitised outputs and the respective outcomes are dependent on the existing infrastructures, as well as how these are navigated by museum practitioners. Using online databases, practitioners have the opportunity to provide content and offer access in ways that move beyond the narratives presented as part of the project. As a digital product of the participatory work, they can continue to develop, challenge and extend the project outputs and their ever-changing context. The online content, however, is made up of more than what is made available in the museum's database; it is defined and framed by information connected to the projects on the museum website and in its social media archives.

7.3.2 Dormant websites and social media archives

Even without having any outputs included in museums' online databases, many of the projects can still be found online. However, not all museums look after their online content and social media archives; the formal outputs of participatory work, just like other museum projects, are moved down on the museum website to make space for new projects, or in some cases, they were never formally addressed on the museum website at all. This chapter refers to digital ruins to describe what is left of these online spaces after a project ends. Museums rarely have the infrastructures and staff to look after the online content of current projects, let alone past projects, meaning that these often remain a reiteration of the exhibition or project. The digital museum spaces could transform the museum into a distributed museum (Rodley 2020), providing the means for continuing the narratives beyond the timeline of the project and making the project more sustainable without taking up further space inside the physical museum. In this section, I highlight the ways in which the different projects remain visible online today, identifying the difficulties of maintaining an online presence, and proposing an alternative role for the museum's virtual spaces after a project.

In addition to the works that can be found in the online database (discussed in the previous section), the project at the MEK remains available on the museum website. The page dedicated to the exhibition still contains the information about the project and the videos made for the project's social media campaign (MEK-D02), and it can still be found in the website's exhibition archive. The staff of the MEK do not manage the museum website and major changes have to be made by a dedicated website team, which maintains the entire web presence of the branches of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. This means that there is limited staff capacity for managing this content, and the museum practitioners themselves are far removed from any potential engagement with the website. Alongside this usual online presence, the exhibition was digitised to be accessible via Google Arts and Culture. As the initial idea to make a three-dimensional rendering of the entire exhibition proved too laborious (MEK-D01), the museum made the exhibition available through Google as a rather simple, non-immersive online

version of the project.[3] Still accessible via a link on the website today, the current online representation offers a relatively flat overview of the works and stories represented in the exhibition. The content includes videos made for the museum website, which were not actually included in the exhibition but are integrated as if they were part of the original, physical exhibition. This online representation provides insight into the project, but it cannot draw in the visitor as it would have done in the museum's physical spaces. Despite the many limitations of this overview, it is one of the most comprehensive insights available online of the exhibitions analysed for this study.

This content is accompanied by the MEK's social media archive, some aspects of which I already mentioned while discussing the museum's efforts to historicise the phenomenon of forced migration (see section 6.1.2). Using Facebook predominantly as a marketing tool, the external company hired by the museum mainly made posts about the project during the collaborative process and during the exhibition. The content shared on social media did not mirror the exhibition, but brought up themes and presented videos (those now available on Google Arts & Culture) to provide further context. These posts and the discussions that followed are still available online, but further posts have not referred to the project or the project's outputs. The comments, which included statements by people who held anti-immigrant or Islamophobic views, were not moderated closely, and continue to be a visible part of these past dialogues today.

Similar to the MEK, the Tropenmuseum predominantly used Facebook as a tool for extending the conversation onto social media. During the interview with the museum's marketer, we scrolled through some of these posts together. There was no evidence of clashing opinions or anti-immigration claims in response to any of the museum's posts. Upon asking the museum's marketer about this, they said that they did not remember these, but if there were any negative comments, they would have removed them (T-A02). They also mentioned, however, that they used no hashtags in their posts, which meant that their reach did not go very far beyond the people who already followed the museum, and probably shared similar views to those conveyed by the project (T-A02). Whether tailored by the museum or not, the posts and

3 The exhibition was documented, and a fragmented version of the exhibition is still available on Google Arts and Culture today, at: https://artsandculture.google.com/story/2QWBbLGQzCazKA?hl=de.

the very positive responses remain online, providing a narrative that goes beyond people's stories of migration.

Museum Takeover in Leicester, on the other hand, solely existed in the physical museum spaces for the duration of the project, and was only presented online by the project curator after the project was completed. The project curator shared the catalogue featuring the labels via the online publishing platform ISSUU, but the catalogue or the labels themselves are not available on the museum website, nor is further information about this specific project. The museum's community engagement officer stated that this should soon be linked on the website, as the museum has been working on a new site that is slated be launched soon. They said:

> It's gonna be so wonderful when we've got our new website up. Because it will be divided into sections, there will be lots of different sections because I work with lots of different communities, so it's got a special section about the work with refugees and asylum seekers, and they also feature in the partnership working section as well. (LM-MT02)

As such, they acknowledge the need for a website in order to document projects and prolong their visibility. The new infrastructure of the since launched museum website[4] describes the participants as one 'community' (as discussed in Chapter 3), and also clearly separates the participatory work from the curatorial projects.

The project *So sehe ich das…* is perhaps even less visible, as it only remains accessible via a blog post on the website dating back to 11 September 2016. The post reports on the project, but other than this report by the museum educator, no formal recognition of the project or the exhibition exists. The post, however, provides an interesting example of a personal perspective on the project. In the post, the museum educator reports on the individual ideas and perspectives of the participants, which later become central to the format of the exhibition. They report on the different aspects of the project – the photographs, the selection process and the participants' interpretation of the photographs – which clearly outline the process and its difficulties. One of

4 The Leicester Museums & Galleries website contains information about several museums. The website refers to community engagement in a separate section within the 'Learning and Engagement' tab of the website: https://www.leicestermuseums.org/learning-engagement/community-engagement/.

the passages reveals how the photographs created for the project will prove to be relevant for people engaging with the pictures in the future. It reads:

> [Participant] from Syria chose a picture that shows his name plate on the wall of house 15. It's already been there for nine months. It represents the long wait, an experience that most people in the Friedland transit camp go through. Recently, [participant] finally received the okay to be transferred. His pregnant wife and him will leave the camp very soon – and move into a new home, where their first child will be born into this world. (Museum Friedland, blog post, 11 September 2016)

The post's content could still be relevant for people staying in Friedland today, or even for forced migrants waiting for formal decisions about their stay elsewhere, yet the post can scarcely be found on the museum's website. It is clear that the museum practitioners do not see this post or other online remnants of the project as relevant today; they served a purpose at the time, but are no longer important for the promotion or extension of the project. However, if cared for and maintained by museum staff, the content and its continuously changing context can remain relevant into the future, prolonging the potential impact of the participatory process.

As pointed out in Chapter 6, many aspects of the museum projects perpetuated the discourses promoted in the media and the political sphere. As such, the continuation of the project online similarly runs the risk of validating such narratives. However, the online spaces can also be used to do the opposite: rather than perpetuating stereotypes and forming a response to the discourse on immigration of 2015, the museum can use its online content to actively reflect on the changing context and address its own practices, the collaborative process and project outputs. Furthermore, the museum's digital spaces could be more actively deployed to record some of the long-term outcomes for the museum, as well as for the participants. These steps require a project timeline that goes beyond the project timelines that were originally envisioned for these projects. This would require – as becomes clear from the examples from the different projects – dedicated staff for the online content and the necessary digital infrastructures.

7.4 Conclusion

The material and digital outputs of a participatory project are the most tangible and visible aspects of what remains after the project is over. This does not mean that these outputs are the most sustainable ones: both material and digital remnants rely on the requisite museum infrastructures and the museum's capacity and willingness to apply a practice of care. Material outputs are more than the objects or artworks created in the process, as they are framed by the museum's database and the interpretation and further information attached to them. Within this context, artefacts are more likely to perpetuate the dichotomy of 'us' vs 'them'. Similarly, from the moment the project is concluded, the digital outputs are often left to become ruins; with care for the online content failing to extend beyond the project's timeline. Instead of exploring the potential for digital spaces to address related topics and shifting contexts, this approach allows the narrative that was constructed during the project to continue to define this digital content. The final part of the chapter not only underscored the relevance of these aspects for the sustainability of the project, but also pointed to the digital spaces as sites of immediate, uncensored care and self-reflection, which contribute to the long-term relevance of museums and their projects.

The extent to which the projects enjoyed an online presence before, during and after the process, especially in institutionally framed spaces, reveals the differences in how the projects and their outputs remain part of the discourse. The project curator of *Museum Takeover* referred to the digital realm as a significant means of preserving the project and continuing to provide a space for the participants' voices (LM-MT01). Instead of reiterating the discourse that was put forward as part of the project, the material and digital remnants can serve as impulses to rethink this discourse and engage in a process of critical self-reflection. As the practices outlined in this chapter reveal, museums require certain infrastructures to engage in a distributed practice, as well as the capacity for the maintenance of online spaces. The provision and use of more expansive formal infrastructures, together with a more *care-full* approach from museum practitioners towards both the participants and the project outputs can result in more sustainable material and digital outcomes, which will be able to retain their relevance well into the future.

III. Challenging Neo-Colonial Museum Practices

8. Developing Infrastructures and Sustainable Ethics

The previous chapters draw together reflections from participants and practitioners in order to consider the outcomes of a selection of four participatory projects. These projects exhibit a great variety in approaches, highlighting the many aspects that impact participatory practice, as well as the different ways in which these practices can lead to sustainable outcomes or consequences. In this chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to the theoretical framework and methodologies. I assessed the participatory projects *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives* at the MEK, *Museum Takeover* at the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, *So sehe ich das…* at Museum Friedland, and *Aleppo* at the Tropenmuseum by way of project documents and interviews with practitioners and participants. I defined the focus of my investigations according to the outcomes and consequences most prominently discussed by my interview partners. This approach recognises the fact that their considerations cannot be generalised into findings that apply to all participatory projects with forced migrants, or to all participants; instead, it provides insight into the observations from some of the people involved in the projects to show how different experiences tie in with potential project outcomes.

The analytical chapters are threaded together with a comparative analysis of the outcomes of participatory practices for the museum and of those that benefit the participants. I addressed the different goals and related outcomes of participatory museum work with forced migrants; a framing that highlighted the relevance of the social, organisational, spatial, discursive, material and digital dimensions of these practices. The chapters carefully examined the practices of inviting 'communities' to work with the museum and aspiring to create a network (Chapter 3), the difficulties of empowering participants (Chapter 4), the potential of creating and maintaining a 'safe

space' (Chapter 5), the museum's efforts to transform the discourse on forced migration (Chapter 6) and the preservation of material remnants as well as the online afterlives of projects (Chapter 7). These are outlined below in an overview of my findings, providing context for the discussion of their relevance for future approaches to working with forced migrants in museums.

After a summary of my findings, this chapter addresses three central aspects of participatory work that form common threads throughout the previous chapters of this study. These aspects – the sustainable outcomes and consequences of museum work; the changes in organisational infrastructure, in particular the aspects that facilitate participatory work; and the ethical questions that came up in relation to different parts of the participatory process – round out the project evaluation. By way of a more detailed assessment of these aspects, the next few sections consider how they relate to the relevant literature and the theoretical framework defined in the first part of this study.

8.1 Overview

Before returning to the aim of this study and further discussing a number of related problems, this sub-chapter summarises the findings thus far, outlining the focus and findings of the previous five chapters of the book, which analysed the outcomes of my four case studies.

In these chapters, I looked at how participatory projects start from an invitation, through which museums intend to reach out to a 'community' of forced migrants. Through a study of the museum's methods, I identified their use of an 'area of curiosity' (Lindström and Ståhl 2016) as a helpful way to steer clear of the assumption that forced migrants function as a uniform group. Rather than incorporating supposed communities into the museum's network, friendships and other informal relationships can result in a distributed network where the museum no longer sits at the centre of engagement. A revised approach to invitations and relations can support shared goals and redefine the museum's contribution towards them. I also found that empowerment is an important goal of participatory work, which is not necessarily dependent on power relations but rather on what these translate into in practice. Project roles, collaborative practices and methods of recognition are key for empowerment; however, they only function as such when the related processes are transparent. As outlined

by Heumann Gurian when discussing 'safe spaces' (1995), the relations and trust between participants and practitioners are very much affected by the relationships (and hierarchies) they see between practitioners. These relationships are paramount for the museum if it wishes to become a 'safe space'. Although breaking down barriers and presenting a more inclusive narrative are good first steps towards creating such a space, museums need to consider how to continue to maintain their 'safe spaces' when projects 'go public'. Should practitioners succeed, these become spaces to which participants want to return. Feeling included in the narrative, however, also depends on the museum's discourse and the ways in which the participatory project contributed to this discourse. In all of the projects, participants and practitioners collaborated to develop a narrative that was intended to challenge the dominant discourse on migration. With discursive outputs ranging from exhibition displays to marketing texts, the projects rarely managed to construct a discourse without stereotyping refugees and perpetuating practices of exclusion. Similar processes could be seen in the selection of project outputs for the museum's collection; with the museum failing to represent the history of the objects or the stories attached to these objects by the participants, instead framing them as representative of the refugee protection crisis and the museum's swift response. These aspects in particular – in addition to the careless approach to the contextualisation of the materials found online – perpetuate processes of 'othering' of forced migrants, and in particular of people who continue to experience structural discrimination due to their skin colour, ethnicity or religion.

These findings reveal the complexities of participatory work as well how fragile the sustainability of the outcomes of these practices can be. They suggest that the temporality of museum work may sometimes be a blessing, as suggested by Wonisch (2012); however, these case studies reveal that even temporary projects have long-term outcomes and consequences that need to be considered. Despite most of the outcomes serving potential goals of the participants, it is evident that none of these cases started by asking the participants about their goals. Instead, the goals were based on assumptions and often aligned with potential contributions that served the museum, and potentially a segment of society. Starting from a practical shift in the museum's role – one that is experienced and seen by the public and participants alike – the institution might be able to address three aspects most relevant for a practice of care: the potential to incorporate sustainable outcomes into museum practice; the development of

organisational infrastructures and an awareness of the role of the institution and its practitioners; and the practice of ethics within the neo-colonial 'contact zone'.

Through the ethical frameworks that defined the practices studied, the museum upholds the neo-colonial 'contact zone' as defined by Boast (2011). The ethics of collaborative work and collecting practices within this neo-colonial institution perpetuate an approach that no longer corresponds to the museum's revised role. Within the organisational infrastructure of the museum, practitioners are limited to certain approaches and restricted by their respective departments. Transforming and applying a more ethical practice, however, is dependent upon the practitioners who constitute the museum and define its outputs. A revision of these aspects of the institution provides the foundation for participatory processes that steer towards more sustainable outcomes. Through a discussion of these aspects, I will go beyond mere reflection on the processes and outcomes, allowing for an evaluation of the necessary changes to museums and their practices, as well as to the discussion and research surrounding participatory work with forced migrants.

8.2 Developing museum infrastructures to facilitate participation

Through this study of recent participatory museum practices, the limitations of museum infrastructures and their insufficient extension beyond museum spaces and allocated time frames become evident. In some cases, this has compromised the potential for more sustainable practices. The participatory work and the maintenance of its outcomes was moulded by the institutional frameworks, such as distinct divisions between different museum departments, as well as the restricted use of museum spaces, digital spaces, or limitations on human resources. The infrastructures underlying museum practices are fundamental to the way museum practitioners work, but also to the aspects that are neglected by the museum. While museum infrastructures are generally invisible, they were brought to the foreground by practitioners and participants in their accounts of the limitations encountered. Revealing these limitations or obstacles through practice underscores the developments these infrastructures require in order to adapt them to the task of facilitating participatory practices. It is these developments that are further teased out in this sub-chapter, as I bring

together the findings from my different chapters with the organisational developments that have occurred since.

In the case studies, it was evident that the practices and their potential outcomes were defined by the museum's organisational infrastructure, as well as the different roles and approaches of the people working within these structures. As identified in Chapter 1 (theoretical framework) and outlined for the different case studies in Chapter 2, many different stakeholders are involved in a participatory museum project; yet the process, as became clear from this study, is predominantly defined by the museum practitioners, project facilitators and (to an extent) the participants. These stakeholders interacted with, and relied on, the infrastructures in place, which, in some cases, turned out to limit the practices and the sustainable outcomes.

The participatory work at the Tropenmuseum and the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery was initiated by, and limited to, education and community engagement teams. *Museum Takeover* in Leicester was developed with external partners and it did not extend into other museum departments during or after the project. Since the project, the community engagement team has been expanded from one person – the person I interviewed about the project – to a team of four full-time and one part-time staff members, including a health and well-being officer, a young people's officer, and a community engagement manager (LM-MT02). These developments are enhanced by the museum's newly acquired status as a Museum of Sanctuary, which, as the community engagement officer explained, means that: "your [the museum's] commitment to engaging refugees and asylum seekers is written into your policies, your work plans, your future or your future planning" (LM-MT02). This has shifted the museum's focus and ensures participatory work with forced migrants will be a mainstay for the foreseeable future. The changes reveal, on the one hand, that community engagement or participatory work has become more embedded in the institution, yet on the other hand, it does not necessarily point to an increased integration of, or collaboration between, the different museum departments. As pointed out in Chapter 7 on the material and digital outcomes, the curatorial and collection management staff did not deem the project outputs relevant enough to be collected, which seemed to tie in with a hierarchical division between museum departments. These hierarchies, especially between curators and community-focused roles (McCall and Gray 2014) are embedded in museum infrastructures, and they continue to be negotiated within the museum.

A similar gap between different departments became apparent for the practitioners involved in the *Aleppo* project at the Tropenmuseum; the participatory aspect of this project was organised by one of the museum educators, who developed this separately from the exhibition. Due to the limited understanding about the project in other departments, administration processes felt more difficult than necessary (T-A03), and none of the objects (including those already owned by the museum) were accessioned into the collection afterwards (T-A06). The exhibitions manager pointed out that normally the curators or conservators decided whether to obtain input from outside the museum (following a contributory logic), but these practices are dependent on the individual staff members and their ambitions and ideas for working collaboratively (T-A06). Rather than merely identifying the infrastructures that support (or limit) participatory museum practices, it is important to emphasise the roles of the individuals involved, their willingness to navigate these infrastructures, and the position from which they do this. This also becomes clear from the disconnect between the exhibition team and the collection team at the Tropenmuseum, where participatory projects in one department rarely (if at all) stretch to the other departments, despite both curators and conservators doing participatory work. The gulf between these departments and their practices limits the possibilities for the museum to create a "network of engagement" as described by Morse (2021). A lack of communication across the museum's organisational infrastructure restricts its capacity to involve, widen and connect networks of (former) participants.

This brings me to the next aspect of this section, which addresses the potential of developing and maintaining networks (as discussed in Chapter 3). Despite a 'network of communities' being a common goal of participatory work, there are limited 'relational' infrastructures in place to support such networks or to maintain connections. None of the researched museums managed to maintain relationships with the participants, or at least, not through the available institutional infrastructures. The lack of a relational infrastructure became especially evident through one practitioner's attempt to maintain relationships through a privately used digital application. The practices of the museum educator at Museum Friedland revealed that a network can only be maintained in a sustainable way if it becomes an integrated part of museum work. Social media platforms provide the opportunity for continued personal contact, but they lack an institutional basis and eat into the practitioners' personal life. A participant from the

daHEIM project at the MEK also pointed to the need for a physical space to come together, particularly after the project ended. The lack of such a space meant that newly built relationships came to an end rather abruptly. These spatial infrastructures do exist and inform participatory practices, yet the access to museum spaces is limited to the project's duration. In the case of the MEK, the related use of the museum spaces did shift throughout the process: some of the museum's spaces were used as a studio space, and regulations were changed on a temporary basis to support a participatory process that was welcoming and made participants (initially) feel safe and secure. The project was an eye-opener for the museum practitioners, who learned about the potential obstacles of their spaces and the regulations that apply here. These lessons can feed into future participatory projects, and may remind the MEK to discuss the necessary adjustments to the space both during the preparation and delivery phases. A safe space remains in existence in the Nissenhütte, which is a separate building belonging to Museum Friedland. Workshops start and end here, and the project outputs were presented here to create a space with low barriers to participation and more flexibility.

Other infrastructures that were highlighted through the projects were those in place for (participatory) collecting and the organisation of the museum's database. The aforementioned examples of organisational infrastructure and their limitations also impacted the opportunity to collect outputs from the process, yet these do not apply to the processes that take place once the decision to collect certain artefacts has been made. Museum Friedland discussed the collecting process with the project participants, but the photographs were accessioned behind closed doors, and they are not accessible online today. The MEK did make the collected works available online, but this transparency pointed to another aspect that had been neglected: the participants were not involved in the selection process nor were they consulted about the meaning of the works they had created during the project. This resulted in limited and stereotypical representations of certain works and their (former) locations. In response to the unresolved conflict and aspects revealed through this research, the museum director pointed out that the collected outputs need to be revisited and expressed they were unsure how to go about this. I suggested that, in my capacity as a curator at the museum, I could reach out to the former participants to reassess the documentation of these works in the near future. This process identifies aspects that need to be integrated into the collection processes in the future, and therefore, slowly shift the ways in which the available infrastructures might be used.

Several previous studies have stressed the need to reinvent the museum (Labadi 2018) or called for organisational change in museums (Black 2021; Janes and Sandell 2019). As this section and the various examples mentioned throughout this study have made clear, changes are necessary if museums wish to expand their practices and outcomes so that they benefit participants and develop a more ethical practice in the long run. Most infrastructures, however, can be moulded and reconstructed to meet the needs of the practitioners and participants, and some of the projects already sparked small or large changes within the institutional infrastructures. Institutions are shaped by the people who work within them, and these people are key to changing common (unethical) approaches and finding ways to make projects worthwhile for participants. Museum practice is as reliant on the museum infrastructures as it is on the people who work within them, and their attitude towards participatory projects and the participants. An integrated participatory practice with more sustainable outcomes does not just rely on the work of community engagement officers or museum educators, but needs to be enacted by different practitioners across the institution.

8.3 Sustainable outcomes and consequences

As mentioned at the outset of this study, James Clifford referred to a collaborative project that he thought lacked long-term outcomes for the participants (cited in Boast 2011, 63), be it in the sense of ongoing relationships or other potential benefits of collaboration. Through the evaluation of the different projects and their outcomes for museum practitioners and project participants, I have found plenty of evidence to support Clifford's observation, as conveyed by Boast (2011). Boast points to a lack of long-term engagement and problematises the "conflict between two fundamentally different sets of assumptions about what the engagements were for" (2011, 63). Much like what is described by Boast, the projects at the centre of my study reveal the ways in which museums and participants engaged in the project with largely incompatible expectations. As such, museums failed to live up to the expectations of the participants, failing to engage in longer-term obligations towards the group they worked with. The projects demonstrate that shared expectations or goals are not the only path to positive outcomes for participants, and that many of the positive experiences reported were fostered through practices that facilitated dialogue and transparency, as well

as practices that made participants feel heard and valued. In this sub-chapter, I re-evaluate the notion of sustainable outcomes or consequences by way of examples drawn from the different case studies. Through this discussion, I identify the sustainability as an outcome in itself, and outline how this might serve the (former) project participants.

The study is organised around some of the common goals of participatory projects. These goals are set by museums, either for the participants (without consultation), such as creating a 'safe space' or facilitating empowerment; or for the museum, such as additions to the collection and developing a 'community' network. The chapter focusing on discourse addresses a goal that might serve both the participants (by developing a positive narrative on forced migrants) and the museum (by contributing to the contemporary debate to become more relevant). The ways in which the museum practitioners worked towards these goals differ from project to project, depending in part on their envisioned output. Outputs are direct, often material results of a project, whereas outcomes (and consequences) follow the process and are more often intangible. Not all outputs result in outcomes, but most projects are geared towards specific outputs, such as, for example, an exhibition. The case studies analysed in this investigation all worked towards a specific output: *Museum Takeover* developed additional labels for the permanent exhibition, *So sehe ich das…* resulted in photographs taken by forced migrants in Friedland, the *Aleppo* project added a personal narrative to a (nearly) finished exhibition, and *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives* led to a temporary exhibition at, and a publication edited by, the MEK. None of the projects allowed for a process that did not establish an output before engaging forced migrants; the museums defined what should come out of the projects, and did not provide much room for suggestions on what should be the result of the collaborative work. During some of the projects, however, further outputs were produced along the way. As the museum educator from Museum Friedland pointed out, there is not always a need for a tangible output (MF-S02). Rather than thinking about outputs when designing a new participatory project, museum practitioners could consider potential outcomes, ideally in consultation with the (envisioned) participants.

Participatory work with people who have been marginalised (but also participatory work more generally) should begin with a conversation with the envisioned participants to negotiate the anticipated outcomes and the projected sustainability or continuation of a project. Sustainability, then, is seen as an outcome in itself, or perhaps a tangible continuation of (some

of) the project outcomes. Together with participants, museum practitioners can identify the envisioned outcomes and discuss the steps necessary for achieving them within the scope of the project (or as part of the work of the museum). This is especially important *because* the participants invited to work in the museum are being marginalised; there are few structures and projects set up to prioritise *their* needs and benefit *their* well-being. The context of the participants is relevant in deciding how to frame (and sustain) a participatory project. One of the former participants I spoke to underlined the ways in which the temporality of the project was problematic for them, stating:

> We created and did a lot. We were the central focus of this, and now our stories, our pictures, our works have been the, kind of like the impact of the website of the project, and we have no access, no possibility to all of this. We are the ones who are being published and interviewed and written about, and this all goes again, for the – I don't know – Western white society and institutions and press and museums and artists. And we are just, again, who we are. We stay in this position, and nothing really systematically or in other ways changes about us or for us. (MEK-D08)

The participant identified an issue that is key to the premise of the present investigation; they emphasise that a participatory project can provide much needed structure or purpose, and could perhaps do so systematically. At the same time, the participant points out that they felt they contributed much to the museum without getting much in return. Their comment emphasises the problematic nature of practicing participation following a contributory logic (see Morse 2021). This logic was not necessarily very prominent in all of the case studies. At Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, the participants were invited to write labels that could be added to the existing displays in the museum; the project was not initiated from within the museum but framed as an intervention, serving as a means of supporting the participants' writing process first and as an addition to the museum second. This became especially clear through the framing of the intervention by the museum and the limited involvement from other museum practitioners in the project. However, as seen in the previous section, this also meant that the engagement with the participants remained far removed from other, 'central' museum practices such as exhibition-making and collecting; with the outcomes remaining limited in terms of potential contributions to the discourse. The connection to the museum was dependent on one practitioner and their dedication to collaborative work with forced migrants. Similar efforts were

seen by the museum educator at Museum Friedland, who supported the participants on a personal level and tried to remain in contact after the project ended. Despite the project's goal of developing an output for the museum's catalogue, both practitioners were dedicated to producing outcomes that were relevant for the participants as well. The fact that the museum educator had themselves arrived in Friedland after fleeing their home country some years earlier allowed for a more personal and empathetic approach to the project participants and their possible needs and interests, and especially a heightened awareness of what they do not need straight after arriving in Germany.

Through the evaluation process that shaped this study, it became clear that some of the envisioned goals did align with the some of the participants' goals; participants of the *daHEIM* project mentioned the importance of a 'safe space' and the project being a means of connecting with other people; a participant of the *Aleppo* project pointed to the exhibition as a way to share their story about their former home, contributing to the discourse; and a participant from *Museum Takeover* addressed the potential of breaking stereotypes, while other participants from the same project referred to the many friendships that formed during the project. This highlights that museums can often do both, and consider the outputs relevant for the institution, based on a process informed by the goals outlined by the participants. The problem underlying the processes studied here is that the projects did contribute to (some of) the participants' goals, but they failed to do so in the long run. The temporal solutions offered through the participatory project did not provide a sustainable answer; suggesting that sustainability does indeed constitute a relevant outcome in itself. This sustainability requires infrastructural shifts and the museum practitioner's dedication to the participants and their goals. These shifts themselves can be a result of another outcome that could be integrated sustainably: the lessons learned from a museum project and the ways in which these feed into future museum work. The sustainability of this outcome, as with that of the other outcomes, relies on the evaluation process and its connection to (further) practice.

It is of paramount importance that an evaluation, such as the one conducted for this study, forms an integral component of the process. Such an evaluation process provides the different stakeholders with the opportunity to outline (shared) goals, assess the progress made towards these goals, and evaluate the process and further steps towards the end of a project. This process might lead to participants expressing no interest in remaining in

contact, or in their work being collected by the museum, or it could result in a conversation about how the relationship could be maintained in a meaningful way for all involved. At the same time, it acts as a means to ensure that outcomes are not broken down before the end of the project is even reached, such as what was described by some of the participants of the *daHEIM* project in relation to the creation of a 'safe space' in the museum. The sustainability of the participatory project relies on these opportunities for shared feedback and reflection, as well as on an outcome-focused – rather than output-led – process. As I pointed out at the start of this book, a sustainable practice as I have framed it requires a careful and constant interrogation of ethics; it demands a future-proof approach that is the result of a non-hierarchical collaborative practice, which allows for input or changes even after the project has drawn to a close. This aspect is addressed in the following sub-chapter.

8.4 Ethics in neo-colonial museums

At the start of this investigation, I outlined the colonial framework that continues to define the museum today. Despite the practitioners' efforts to changing the institution (in part through participatory approaches), the inherent colonial nature of the museum, its infrastructures and spaces remains problematic (Wajid and Minott 2019; Kassim 2017). In assessing the practices of museums and their approach to forced migration, it has become evident that practitioners perpetuate the colonial practices that form the foundations of the museum. The colonial nature of the institution makes for a problematic environment to engage in participatory work with forced migrants, yet this work is important, and museums do have the opportunity to positively contribute to the lives of the participants. In order to transform these practices, museum practitioners need to reconsider their position in a participatory museum project, address the ethics of their practices and their focus on a so-called 'community', and make sure the outcomes of their practices will be considered ethical in the future, or can be adapted to align with future ethical frameworks.

Since their foundation, museums have been inherently colonial, and even today, the institutions' infrastructures and knowledge systems define what happens inside of the museum. Philipp Schorch and Conal McCarthy point out that colonialism is not a historical event; indeed, rather than being an event with a beginning and an ending, it is an ongoing process that

continues to inform museum work (2019, 11). As outlined by Boast, the nature and historical context of museums means that they can never be a site of reciprocity and mutual benefit. "They remain sites where Others come to perform for us, not with us" (2011, 63). Boast describes museums as neo-colonial rather than 'post-colonial' institutions, as their colonial frameworks and the inherent nature of their spaces and objectives are still very much present. I too use this description to describe the uncompleted process of 'decolonising' museums, and to highlight that in fact, the contributory logic that informed most of these projects bears similarities with a colonial approach. Informed by the ambitions of the museum rather than the needs of the participants, participatory projects that follow a logic of contribution extract information or input for goals that do not necessarily serve those involved. The case studies outlined in this study did not become 'contact zones' of reciprocity (Clifford 1997), however some aspects of the studied processes did have the potential to move the institution and its intentions away from its colonial past and present. In discussing ethics in museums, Macdonald refers to the potential of learning from history by accepting the museum's ownership of a negative history. I would like to extend this notion to the present, and suggest that in their work with forced migrants today, museums should acknowledge this negative history and how it continues to impact the lives of the people with whom they engage.

In order for museum work to positively contribute towards the lives of forced migrants, museum practitioners need to consider and address the ethical implications of such work, and be prepared to find themselves confronted with the museum's and their own colonial perspectives and discriminatory practices. Some of the participants made reference to stereotypical representations being used by the museum, not receiving credit for their work, not being paid fairly for their input, or not being included in important decisions about the project; these are all aspects that point towards discriminatory practices, even if they might not be intended as such. Bayer and Terkessidis point out that with a participatory process, "it is thus about the knowledge that, due to the marginalised perspective, can be expected to provide insight into the mechanics of objectification and racialisation" (2017, 62). As such, a participatory project – as suggested by Ahmed (2012) – is not merely about working in institutions, but also entails working *on* institutions. These practices themselves should be considered carefully, but also provide the institution with an opportunity to reflect on its infrastructures and related processes of discrimination or racialisation.

Despite the importance of this reflective practice and institutional learning, museum practitioners should also ensure that the evolution of the institution does not rely on the participants. This aligns with what Nora Berenstain suggested when describing epistemic exploitation as a process by which "privileged persons compel marginalized persons to produce an education or explanation about the nature of the oppression they face" (2016, 570). The process of self-reflection is, instead, the responsibility of the institution and its staff, who could benefit from an analysis "of the mechanisms by which power and authority are exerted *within* as well as beyond the museum" (Message 2018, 111, emphasis in original). The processes of decision-making, as discussed in Chapter 4, reflect these unequal power relations due to the lack of transparency and dialogue with the participants about decisions that affect them.

The complexity of the institution and its changing role require a clear ethical framework for future museum work. As pointed out by Marstine (see section 1.2.3), museum ethics rely on the idea that the institutions' ethics are based on a sense of "moral agency" (2011, 5). The case studies, however, underline that the practice of ethics tends to be dependent on the moral agency of the museum's practitioners. For participatory practices to become relevant to participants, practitioners should be able to apply an ethical framework that is understood as ethical by the participants themselves. In keeping with this, the collaborative process should be tailored to the participants, not based on ideas about a presumed 'community' but on a shared evaluation of the museum's supposedly ethical approaches and the position of the practitioners involved. At this stage in the process, all those who will engage with the work, communicate about the work and interact with the participants should be involved, in order to avoid future misconceptions or misguided practices (as was seen in the creation of the content for social media by an external company for the MEK). Additionally, as this study demonstrates, museum practitioners need to allow room for personal perspectives on ethical behaviours and be open to confrontations about experiences of discrimination. Participatory practices, as such, are intended as a means of eliminating a practice based on assumptions about personal or cultural truths.

The different studies assessed in this research were part of the museums' programmes several years before I conducted any interviews. This delayed evaluation process was important because since the project, many of the former participants have become more settled in their new country of

residence, enabling them to reflect differently on their situation from this new perspective. However, it proved especially interesting because the public discourse in countries in the Global North had shifted, leading to greater awareness about discrimination and structural racism. This became clear in the interviews with practitioners and some participants, who pointed out that they now saw the situation differently, or even displayed embarrassment about their own ignorance about the hierarchies that were part of the project at the time. This demonstrates that when considering an ethical framework museum practitioners need to allow for input to ensure a 'future-proof' ethical approach, and include a potential process of revision, in case future outputs or outcomes become outdated.

In moving towards bottom-up approaches, decision-making processes are only partially handed over, and potential ethical problems are dealt with during the process rather than predicted and confronted beforehand. Defined by the group that the museums have invited to participate, the projects cannot be treated like any other participatory project; the people the museum works with must be able to inform and draw out potential ethical concerns. This necessity to tailor project plans and processes according to the individuals involved (though this study only focuses on one so-called 'group') is most likely also applicable to participatory work with other 'communities'. In light of the processes and their consequences discussed in this study, ethical frameworks and their relevance for projects' future outcomes need to be reconsidered. In response to increased ambitions to decolonise the museum, a logic of care (as described by Morse 2021) would allow for an ethical practice that is not aimed at being for the museum's 'own good'. As neo-colonial institutions that aim to facilitate processes of 'decolonisation', museums have the ethical obligation towards forced migrants to consider and cater to some of their needs as part of a participatory project.

9. Towards Evaluation-based Participatory Museum Work

In this final chapter, I reflect on the findings of this research and their implications. I set these findings against the backdrop of existing knowledge and the conclusions drawn in recent studies, so as to underscore the contribution of this investigation and of the individual perspectives that shaped my argument throughout. The reflection on former projects and their outcomes for museums and participants aims to serve as a starting point for shaping future approaches to collaborations with forced migrants. At the same time, this concluding chapter draws on my work as a museum practitioner and proposes ways for these findings to realistically be put into practice.

As pointed out by Ahmed, "too much research in this field is premised on findings that institutions *want found:* from toolboxes to good practice" (2012, 10). Many museums initiate participatory work with forced migrants out of a desire to engage with the issue, but implicitly they hope to be acknowledged for their inclusive work, or even admired for their courage to tackle such a complex topic. By involving participants in this research, I broadened the possibilities of what might be uncovered, even if this evaluation did not support the institutions' goals. This also required a focus that went beyond the outcomes and consequences for the museum; through the reflections of participants and practitioners, the study addressed the extent to which the goals of participatory work envisioned by institutions were achieved, both for the participants and for the institutions themselves. This research analysed different anticipated outcomes for museums, starting from what museums want to get out of participatory work (informed by a contributory logic), and assessing how this actually affects the participants involved, and whether the museums enacted a logic of care (see Morse 2021). Though these projects might have a direct impact on museum visitors or an indirect one on the

wider community (especially through the discourse deployed, for example), this study limits itself to analysing the immediate ways in which the projects affected those involved as practitioners and as participants.

At the start of this book, I set out to understand the ways in which participatory museum projects with forced migrants generate sustainable outcomes for the participants and the museum. To this end, I looked at the goals and processes that were most prominently mentioned by my research participants, I outlined potential outcomes and how these were or could be made more sustainable, and I discussed the infrastructures in place to support participatory work that might serve the participants rather than the museum. These aspects formed central discussion points in the previous chapter, where I addressed my findings about the potential outcomes of museum work in relation to the framework introduced at the start of this investigation. Studying the longer-term outcomes of museum work, I considered the ethics of the case studies within the sociopolitical framework of the present moment (and a potential future), and the role of museums in sustainably facilitating participation.

To conclude this project, this chapter addresses the main findings of my research and points to two possible and indispensable dimensions for participatory museum work with forced migrants. The first dimension responds to the understanding that participatory practices already foster long-term outcomes, but current museum infrastructures do not allow for sustainable practices to be maintained, evaluated and interacted with after a project's end. It emphasises the different outcomes and their presence in the museum and for the participants today. The second dimension highlights the need for a people-centred approach. Assessing the hierarchies in museums and the perceived superior position of the museum (and its practitioners), this dimension builds on the colonial framework that continues to mould museum work today. In this section, I draw on Morse's proposed 'logic of care' as a means of developing projects focused on the participants rather than the museum's aims and objectives, and provide further practical tools for supportive and ethical practices. These findings bring together the literature and the empirical materials from my research to confront contemporary museum practices. Through these findings, I conduct an initial assessment of what is needed to improve these practices and to expand their sustainable outcomes, thereafter providing more concrete steps for museum practitioners who want to engage with forced migrants or other marginalised people in a meaningful way. Finally, I point towards the limitations of this study and

potential avenues for future research, as I believe this study is merely a small step in what I consider the right direction.

9.1 Main findings

At the start of this research project, I posed the question: In which ways do participatory museum projects with forced migrants generate sustainable outcomes for the participants and the museum? In response to this question, I focused on the processes that led to the outcomes of participatory projects with forced migrants. To organise the processes that made up the participatory projects studied, I structured my investigation around the most commonly discussed goals for participatory work. These focal points were generated by an explorative study of the empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews, my personal experiences and observations at the MEK, and relevant project documents obtained from the different institutions. The study's structure aligns with the objectives referred to in research on participatory work, yet these have not before been studied in this context and by way of interviews with practitioners and participants. Throughout the chapters, I singled out many different aspects of museum practices to highlight the ways in which these benefit participants or the museum or both. To do so, I analysed the experiences of the different stakeholders as personal yet equally valuable accounts of the project. My research revealed that all of the participatory projects had some sustainable outcomes, yet not each museum or practitioner was able to (or willing to) maintain these outcomes, especially those that were the most meaningful for the participants.

As pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the following sections discuss the necessary infrastructures, tools and planning that are required for maintaining a sustainable outcome, as well as the need to shift towards a people-centred approach that goes beyond setting goals that serve participants, but actually invites them to consider the (possibly shared) objectives of the project. Each of these dimensions point towards the importance of evaluation processes as part of participatory work, an aspect that will be further discussed thereafter.

9.1.1 Outcome-oriented museum work

Participatory practices already foster long-term outcomes, yet these might not be maintained or continued outside of the project, nor serve participants' (potentially very similar) goals. They are present in visible and invisible ways, but not sustainably. Outcomes, even if they continue to be present or engaged with, will not have the same impact in an ever-changing society, as became clear from the fact that some of the projects and practices seemed somewhat outdated just three years down the road. Sustainability, therefore, is not something that merely needs to be produced, it also needs to be enacted (or adapted) over time. A more sustainable practice, therefore, anticipates change and enables outputs and outcomes that might respond accordingly, as it focuses on the future as well as the present. A different approach, as addressed earlier, might require changes in the available infrastructures or how these are used, as well as an extended timespan for a museum project, which includes an evaluation process for the project and its outcomes. In this section, I conclude my study by outlining a new focus for a more sustainable museum practice. I draw connections between my findings and the practice of museum work, and consider how an outcome-oriented approach can be adopted by practitioners.

With the aim of considering the sustainability of these participatory practices, this investigation points to an outcome-focused approach as a potential step towards more sustainable praxis; it suggests that participatory projects should work towards outcomes that allow for sustainable, ongoing processes, in line with goals set by museum practitioners as well as by project participants. In keeping with the chapter structure of this book, it might seem that the goals reflected potential outcomes for both museums and practitioners. However, the project goals intended to support project participants were designed by museum practitioners, who anticipated that these and other outcomes would be relevant for participants, but they did not implement an evaluation process with participants to discuss these outcomes and their relevance for the people involved. The different chapters identified four related problems for participatory work and its capacity to generate sustainable outcomes: (1) museums' heavy focus on outputs, such as exhibitions or a museum catalogue; (2) the limitation of the participatory process to one aspect of a project and a set time line, precluding the possibility of engaging in collaborative work in the museum's spaces after a project; (3) a failure to evaluate processes and outcomes during or after the project, which

allowed for conflicts to grow and actively excluded participants from relevant conversations; and (4) a lack of resilience when it comes to the outcomes of participatory work, such as project websites or other discursive aspects, which are unlikely to stand the test of time. The temporal, spatial and financial limitations on projects are necessary, yet current praxis and infrastructures allow little room for extending a project even the slightest bit beyond its visible output. They actively obstruct ongoing benefits for participants and museums, as well as the possibility of enduring connections forming between the two. Participatory museum work needs to look beyond potential outputs and direct its attention towards potential outcomes of the processes.

An outcome-oriented approach first of all establishes the need to extend a project's timeline to include and continue outcomes (and consequences) of a project. As pointed out in the previous chapters, the institutional infrastructures – whether digital, organisational, spatial or financial – often place practical limitations on the projects, but they can be navigated and shaped by museum practitioners to facilitate participatory work and also (slowly) engender change within the institution. One of the main obstacles to a more sustainable practice is the limited financial support and the finite temporal frameworks for funded projects. However, setting goals is part of museum practice and is often required for funding applications, and these goals could transcend the outputs traditionally outlined by museums. Outcomes might encompass providing an ongoing benefit for the participants or the museum, such as additions to the museum's collection, expanding networks or creating job opportunities through a project, but also the emergence of friendships or contributing to a more positive discourse. It can also translate to ongoing processes, such as continuing to provide a space for participants to come together, maintained relationships between the museum and the participants, an ongoing digital presence, or the potential for continued online engagement. What is important is that the maintained outcomes are not based solely on the museum's goals, but consider long-term needs on the part of the participants as well. Some participants pointed to several aspects of the project that they had hoped would continue after the project's run-time. The aspects that were deemed especially relevant by the participants were least likely to be maintained as a result of a participatory process. This is partly due to the lack of related infrastructures, which do not suffice mainly because of the limited benefits of these aspects for the museum. So long as museums continue to rely on a contributory logic, their practices and infrastructures will not include work that is solely meant to

benefit the 'communities' they intend to serve; a more sustainable praxis requires frameworks that prioritise potential benefits for participants, and the shared understanding that these logics do not have to be mutually exclusive.

Secondly, an outcome-oriented approach requires an evaluation-based practice that engages participants in the assessment of a project and its outcomes. As has become clear from this research, participatory work with forced migrants is not straightforward, and outcome evaluations (or more broadly framed evaluations of impact) are not generally part of museum practice. This study demonstrated a clear lack of interest in, or a perceived unimportance of, evaluation processes as part of museum projects. Despite the importance of outcome-based evaluation having being addressed as far back as 2003 by scholars such as Stephen Weil, it has not yet become an integrated part of museum practices. None of the case studies included an evaluation with the participants as part of the project; the projects were initiated by the practitioners and did not involve a mechanism for inviting feedback from the participants throughout or after the collaborative process. Project time plans do not only fail to anticipate potential outcomes or ongoing processes, they also leave little time for a collaborative evaluation with practitioners and participants. Projects are limited to the time frame required to develop the envisioned output. However, in order to learn from previous projects, to develop participatory processes and improve museum work at large, museums need to seek ways to evaluate their processes and integrate the lessons learnt. However, what many practitioners and museums were lacking is a more streamlined evaluation practice and a guide or methodology on how to take on a collaborative evaluation process as part of a project with forced migrants. This requires an ethical approach and a 'safe space' – both central to the next section – and an evaluation method that is relevant for participants and practitioners alike.

9.1.2 A people-centred approach

In addition to the need for outcome-oriented museum work, this study outlined the relevance of understanding the individual and their role within a project, within an institution and within existing hierarchies. Grounded in the colonial framework of the institution, museum practices perpetuate colonial relations, and practitioners need to actively challenge the existing structures in order to effect change. Morse put forward her notion of a 'logic

of care' (2021) as a way to differently understand community engagement. According to this logic, rather than focusing on potential contributions to the institution, museums set out to fulfil objectives set by participants themselves. Building on this principle, I would like to propose a closer focus on the individuals involved, moving away from inviting 'communities' towards considering participants and practitioners as individuals. For museums to enhance their participatory practices and the sustainability of their work, they need to adopt a people-centred approach, much like the one I applied in this project. In this section, I explore the implications of such a people-centred approach, considering how processes can be more tailored and avoid assumptions about 'communities', applying a logic of care in practice, and outlining an ethical framework that starts from people's needs and supports the museum's potential to be and remain a 'safe space'.

Adopting a people-centred approach in this research, the study has been informed by a relatively small number of interviews, and an even smaller number of interviews with former project participants. Therefore, I cannot generalise their contributions to represent all experiences of participatory work with forced migrants, or even to represent the experiences of other participants from the same project. Rather than generalising my findings drawn from individual experiences, I build on these individual experiences and assess how these sit within the museum as an institution in order to propose meaningful (or necessary) steps forward. Through this approach, I highlight the importance of accepting the experiences of individuals as valid. Rather than dismissing different opinions, I take them as a measure of the diversity in perception and experiences between people. In line with this method, I have found it is vital for museums to recognise individual reflections as well, such as those that occur during the evaluation of the projects, but also much earlier in the process, when identifying the objectives and needs of the different stakeholders, including the individual participants and the museum practitioners. The people-centred approach I am proposing highlights the need for the museum to understand participants as individuals rather than communities, but also outlines that museums should not be seen as institutions that operate mechanically, or without personal influence, but rather as the people who make up the institution and define the museum's practices. This approach does not only enable a more ethical practice, it also diminishes the hierarchies between practitioners and participants, as their roles and personal reflections are considered equally valid.

To allow for such an approach, museums must move away from inviting 'communities', and especially from addressing forced migrants as a homogeneous community they can reach out to and represent. In this study, I addressed this concept as a means to gain insight into the potential of, and barriers to, creating a network with the participants. Networking seemed to be one of the most commonly shared goals. The museum views this potential outcome as a means of sparking and supporting future projects, though practitioners often apply the concept of 'community' here too, limiting the future possibilities of working with the former project participants, as was clear from the past and planned engagement with the participants who worked on the *Aleppo* project at the Tropenmuseum. For participants, however, a network is a means of remaining connected with the museum after having contributed so much of their time and effort, and it provides an avenue for keeping in touch with other participants (or potentially even connecting with participants from other projects). The related ambitions and the particular project outcomes should be tailored to the individuals involved, based on their ideas and needs, and not remain focused on a supposed 'community'. To do so, museums should review their invitation methods, finding ways to address people without stereotyping or pigeon-holing them as forced migrants (and nothing else). Using 'areas of curiosity' as a starting point, as discussed in this study, is one potential alternative approach that does not reduce people to their experiences but gathers people with a similar interest. Another way is to invite people that already function as a group, as seen in the example of *Museum Takeover*. Further ways of inviting and engaging participants on a more personal level need to be tested and researched (ideally, of course, in collaboration with potential participants).

In this and other aspects of museum work, the social responsibility of the museum as a public institution becomes more urgent, yet within this public role, the museum should still aim to remain a 'safe space', or to maintain a 'safe space' within its building. Ideally, it should offer a space in which the museum is conscious of its actions and their ethical implications, and is willing to collectively break down persistent hierarchies. Creating and sustaining this space and role requires the museum to move away from a 'one-fits-all-approach' when it comes to participatory work, as well as implementing thoroughgoing evaluation processes. I addressed the topic of evaluation earlier to highlight its relevance for an outcome-oriented practice, but it should also play an important role in ethical, people-focused work. Evaluation processes can and should be tailored to respond to the needs of

the participants, and reflect their goals as well as those set by the museum. The integration of evaluation processes into participatory practice provides the opportunity for practitioners to identify challenges and learn about the project's shortcomings, and for participants to reflect on the process so far and point out what they would like to do differently. In these evaluation processes, there could be room for individual feedback and group discussions, ideally led by a mediator who might also be involved in case of a conflict and who would be able to invite critical reflection. This could be someone from the museum who is otherwise not part of the project, or it could be an external mediator who comes in to facilitate discussion. These processes of evaluation within the museum's 'safe space' are central to the ethical framework that future participatory practices require.

This framework is based on existing guidelines for ethics in museums, but it goes beyond this, building on the findings of this study. Further outlined in the following section, this framework proposes a mode of practice that continuously demands that practitioners review and challenge their own perspectives, prejudice and privilege. It creates a space (a 'safe space', if you will) in which processes can be assessed and people can be challenged. This space should continue to exist after the project has come to an end, providing particular support to an ongoing reflection on the outputs and outcomes. In this sense, the success of participatory projects and their ethics is determined by their sustainability.

9.2 Implementing lessons

In this study, I have shed light on different processes in recent participatory projects working with forced migrants in museums. These projects revealed a number of larger issues, such as the limiting role of museum infrastructures when it comes to facilitating participatory and digital practices in the museum. Additionally, the case studies revealed that the hierarchies between practitioners determine the potential for participatory work to be understood and employed as a central approach, rather than being a mere add-on. In addressing my main findings, however, I teased out two key elements that are crucial for participatory projects with forced migrants, in the hope that they can become more beneficial for the participants in the future. I proposed a shift towards an outcome-based rather than an output-based practice, which requires a more sustainable participatory approach from museum

practitioners and allows for more relevant and ethical long-term outcomes for all involved (and for those engaging with the project at a later stage). I also emphasised the need for a people-centred approach in order to collaboratively develop and evaluate the processes and outcomes of museum work.

In essence, the central idea of participatory practice is that the work should not be isolated from people outside of the museum. However, being a museum practitioner myself, I am well aware of the limitations on both money and time for museum projects, whether these are participatory or not. However, one aspect of these limitations is exacerbated by practitioners themselves, as they underestimate the required budgets to initiate and maintain participation, and they often fail to integrate evaluation processes into their time plans (those outlined in the funding applications as well as their own time plans and the potential overlap with future projects). However, as addressed at the very start of this study, funding requirements do shift in response to museum practices, and vice versa. It has become clear that the provisions of funding bodies can be limiting, but many museum practitioners manage to find ways around these to make the envisioned work possible. Infrastructural limitations – such as the financial structures and the organisational divisions between different departments – can be overcome, but they also might be navigated and challenged by practitioners to make a people-centred and outcome-focused approach possible. The different reflections on each of the case studies point out that this requires practitioners to be flexible in their approach and to prioritise the needs and perspectives of the participants. But they also require the right tools to transform their practices or help them change the habits of the institution.

In the previous section, I suggested a revised ethical framework needed for achieving the necessary shifts in museum practice. A more informed ethical approach ought to draw on post-colonial studies and build on lessons from anti-racist practices and anti-discrimination training, enabling a process of continuous review of the practitioner's own perspectives, prejudice and privilege. It would invite participants into the process earlier on so that they can be part of this conversation, yet an ethical practice should not rely on participants speaking up about discriminatory practices and stereotypical representations. It demands a self-reflexive approach that, in turn, requires significant self-awareness and empathy from museum practitioners. Practitioners should create a 'safe space', much in the ways described in this study, which continues to be maintained once outputs 'go public'. The ethical framework indicates that this space can be sustained

as a publicly accessible space by preparing participants for encounters with press and audiences, and providing a space they can go to should they feel uncomfortable in a situation. As mentioned above, the process should involve someone who can mediate conflict if necessary, discuss critical reflections, and facilitate a shared evaluation. Most importantly, the framework has to be continuously revised and altered to ensure it supports an ethical practice with current and future participants of museum projects.

A more sustainable, outcome-oriented practice requires evaluation. As part of this study and the wider research framework, Cassandra Kist, Franziska Mucha, Inge Zwart and I developed a tool that can support such evaluation processes and assist with the planning of participatory projects.[1] The tool starts from a quote from a participant as a prompt for conversation about the needs, goals, interests and ideal circumstances for each of the individual participants and practitioners. Tools like this one provide a framework that goes beyond the museum's perspective and invites participants to put forward their own envisioned outcomes. Based on these perspectives, museum practitioners might not be able to make miracles happen, but at least the participants will be able to consider what role the museum could fulfil for them.

9.3 A proposal for future research

This study unpacks the potential sustainable outcomes of participatory work with forced migrants; it presents a careful analysis of personal experiences and institutional learnings that can support a more sustainable and ethical participatory praxis in the future. The study pointed to the need to integrate a post-colonial ethical framework in order to shift existing power structures within the neo-colonial institution that is the museum. For this project, I evaluated four case studies as exemplary participatory projects with forced migrants. Based on qualitative data gathered through interviews, official documents and museums' documentation of the different projects, I built an argument that carefully proposes alternative processes and outcomes that were shown to be meaningful to some of the participants. Throughout the

1 The tool 'Why (NOT) participate?!' is a set of cards that can be printed by practitioners and institutions. It can be found on the website of the POEM research project: https://www.poem-horizon.eu/why-not-participate

investigation, I applied a framework that, rather than focusing on the projects individually, analysed commonalities in different aspects of museum work. In taking these four examples, the research addressed a few general challenges and experiences based on many individual perspectives on the processes. In this final sub-chapter, I outline the limitations of this study, and identify the aspects that require further research and practical experimentation.

This study is one of the first to take into consideration the personal reflections of the participants on the participatory museum projects they were involved in. Rather than conducting an ethnographic study of the projects as they were happening, this research found value in the reflection on, and evaluation of, projects in conversation with those who took part. This methodological framing limited the study to personal reflections on, and recollections of, participatory work, which combined with the project descriptions and related documentation provided a suite of personal lenses rather than a seemingly objective study carried out by me as a researcher. This is at once a limitation and an asset; the research is dependent on the interviewees truthfully discussing the projects, while at the same time pointing out that the experiences and related memories of those involved are inevitably more truthful than anything I could discern or establish from a distance. These experiences and their lasting effects are central to this study. The chosen approach, however, also limited the number of research participants and made it especially difficult to include many former participants' perspectives in the process. For the research into the participants' perspectives, I had to rely on museum practitioners and project facilitators to put me in touch with former participants for an interview. This limited the scope to those who remained in contact with the institution or project facilitators, or even those put forward by practitioners, possibly because they anticipated their reflections would be helpful or reflect positively on the museum. This may provide a one-sided perspective regarding some aspects of the projects. It also means that the personal perspectives outlined from the interviews cannot be generalised, but rather should be understood as individual reflections that are shaped by the personal circumstances of the research participants interviewed for this study.

The broad focus of this study has allowed for a thorough investigation of many different dimensions of participatory museum work with forced migrants. It has discussed many aspects that have been addressed before, but that require further practice-based research as well as processes of trial and error. Despite most of the project outcomes being in some ways manifested

in visitors' experiences of, and perspectives on, the project (such as how the discourse is interpreted or understood by the people who visited the museum), this study limited itself to the active project collaborators. For the purposes of this study, which focused on the outcomes and consequences for those directly involved, the focus on practitioners and participants sufficed to understand their experiences. However, the perspectives of visitors would be interesting to unpack, and the impact of these projects on museum visitors requires further research. Further research may also entail visitors' online reflections on project outputs and the engagement with a project's 'digital ruins' over time, especially in order to consider the need for, and potential of, sustaining projects in this digital realm. The potential of building a network and sustaining relationships with participants, for example, is addressed in this study, but further research needs to explore the infrastructure that would be required for this practice to become an integrated part of museum work, or to review the necessity of personal relationships for building sustainable connections. This is just one example, but each of the chapters reflect on aspects that are new to museum studies (or museums in general) and require further assessment. But the most important proposal I make is for further research into the experiences of participants and people's individual goals as a means of understanding the (potential) value of participatory museum practices, and to consider ways of integrating these into museum practice in the near future. These changes would help to create sustainable practices, which serve participants, practitioners and museums alike, both during the course of the projects and thereafter.

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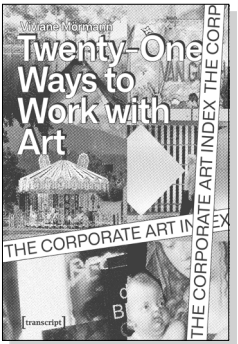

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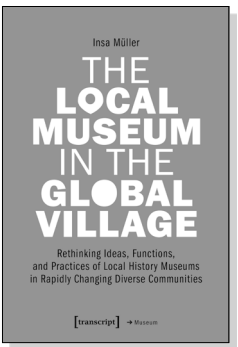

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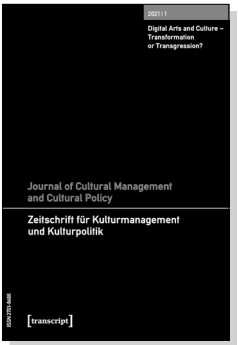

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