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

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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

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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

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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/stor y/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

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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.