Migrant Life Stories
as Digital Heritage

By

Malin Thor Tureby & Jesper Johansson

Abstract

Following the ambitions of international and national policy makers to digitalize the cultural heritage sector, a growing research field that deals with digitalization and cultural heritage has emerged. However, it has been argued that too much focus has been placed on technology and information policy issues and that research on how to achieve administrative effectiveness and preservation has taken precedence over studies of different actors' engagement, participation and access to cultural heritage. Previous studies have also tended to problematize the "hows" rather than the "whys" of processes associated with digital heritage and digitalization. In addition, research has shown that collections documenting minorities and marginalized groups have been excluded from national strategies concerning the digitalization of cultural heritage. Therefore, the aim of this article is to investigate why and under what conditions digital heritage about and with migrants has been initiated, created and curated. We study the motives and the roles of different stakeholders in the digitization and patrimonialization processes of one collection containing life stories from migrants. Furthermore, in the article we understand stakeholders not only as decision makers, owners or managers, but also as any person or organization that feels affected by whatever happens to the object or piece defined as heritage. Consequently, a central element in the methodology of this research was the interviews conducted with crucial actors in relation to their engagements with the studied collection. During the interviews, we paid specific attention to the different motives of the involved stakeholders and why it was important to them that the collection was created and digitized.

Keywords: migrants, digitization, oral history, patrimonialization, digital heritage, participation, co-creation, life stories, cultural heritage, digitalization, migration

Introduction

During the last decades, international and national policy makers have become more ambitious in their efforts to digitalize the cultural heritage sector. The main argument for policies on digitalization is that digital heritage will increase public and citizen engagement with cultural heritage (Prop. 2016/17:116; UNESCO 2016; Council of Europe 2017). Following these policy developments, a research field has emerged that raises critical questions about how technological advancements can be made (Stalder 2018; Audunson *et. al* 2020). However, it has also been argued that this research field focuses too much on how to achieve administrative effectiveness and preservation rather than on explorations of different actors' engagement, participation and access to cultural heritage (Prescott & Hughes 2018; Thylstrup 2019; Henningsen & Larsen 2020). As underlined by Henningsen and Larsen, previous studies on digitalization and cultural heritage have tended to problematize the "hows" rather than the "whys" of processes associated with digital heritage and digitalization (Henningsen & Larsen 2020:16). Previous research has also demonstrated that collections documenting minorities, migrants and other so-called marginalized groups have been excluded from national strategies for both archivization and digitalization of cultural heritage (Caswell, Harter & Jules 2017).

As a consequence, this article specifically aims to investigate why and under what conditions a digital heritage project about and with migrants has been initiated, created and curated. We study both the roles and engagements of different actors and stakeholders in the creation, digitization and patrimonialization processes of one collection containing life stories from migrants. Thus, we will pay specific attention to the "whys" in the processes and the roles and participation of different actors. Moreover, we focus on one marginalized group: migrants, as asked for by the above-mentioned research. By asking "why", we are not implying that the true intentions of the stakeholders can be revealed, but rather that their reasoning after the fact can contribute to our understanding of how actors think about their own roles in patrimonialization and digitization processes. In this article, we will present one case study, MIGTalks, to exemplify who initiates, creates and engages with a collection and why they decide to do so. We do this by using the analytical concept of patrimonialization. We argue that a careful investigation of one case study can produce new knowledge regarding why different actors participate and engage in processes associated with digitization and cultural heritage that are highly relevant to other institutional, national and international contexts. Furthermore, we will use MIGTalks as an empirical example to challenge claims about the universality and democratizing abilities of digital heritage. We argue that even though digital heritage maintains the *potential* to increase participation and co-creation, and thereby democratization, it might equally reinforce prevailing power and authority structures in the cultural heritage sector.

MIGTalks was launched as a communications project by the Swedish Migration Agency in 2015. The project was executed throughout 2016 and 2017. Initially, MIGTalks had several interrelated aims, which were presented on the project's website: to promote knowledge about migration to Sweden, to make visible the people behind the migration statistics, to contribute to a nuanced and inclusive public conversation, to disseminate interview stories and a thematic series of conversations between new residents and various societal actors, and to contribute with comprehensive dissemination of information to promote knowledge about different forms of migration to Sweden. The final aim was based on an increased demand for information on migrant experiences among the staff of the Swedish Migration Agency, who believed that there was too much focus on asylum and refugee issues in Swedish media discourse (MIGTalks 2019).

MIGTalks was implemented through the interviewing of 100 individuals who had immigrated to Sweden between 2010 and 2015. The interviewees were defined and selected in relation to different entry categories (asylum seekers, labour migrants, family migrants, students, EU/ESS migrants, return migrants). Moreover, 13 institutions from the public sector and from civil society supported the initiative. MIGTalks was thus coming to life and mediated through a public thematic series of conversations between the migrants and representatives of the cooperating partners. The collected written interview transcriptions from the 100 life story interviews and news from different public events were published on the project's website and were highlighted through other social media channels, such as Facebook (MIGTalks 2019). After the communications project was finished in 2017, the website of the project was closed, and the Swedish Migration Agency decided to donate all the materials from MIGTalks (digital and non-digital) to the archive of Nordiska Museet in Stockholm. (Interview with MIGTalks' project manager, 22/2 2019).

Patrimonalization as Transformation: Theoretical and Methodological Implications of a Concept

Patrimonialization is an important concept that has become more prevalent within studies of cultural heritage in later years (cf. Vaccaro & Beltran 2009; 2010; Frigolé 2010; Sansone 2013). Other than emphasizing the contractedness of heritage, it is also a conceptual tool that can be used to identify both the spatio-temporal contexts within which heritage is made and the individuals, organizations and institutions that actively work to construct heritage. In this section, we will discuss some of the central theoretical underpinnings of patrimonialization and explain how these have affected the methods used in our study. According to migration studies scholar Alessandra Sciurba, the concept of patrimonialization, when related to issues of cultural heritage, describes "the processes through which

intangible or tangible cultural assets are transformed into a defined heritage" (Sciurba 2015: 460). Furthermore, social anthropologist Joan Frigolé (2010) uses the concept of patrimonialization when emphasizing a perspective on heritage as production, which is both material and symbolic. Patrimonial changes thus refer to processes of de-contextualization and re-contextualization of an artefact, building or landscape. As Frigolé defines the concept:

> Patrimonialization entails the existence of a space which is differentiated by objects and other patrimonial elements, usually a museum, a natural park, or a similar space, and if that is not possible, differentiated times. The exhibition function usually blocks out other functions and makes it clear that we are dealing with heritage, it is made visible and visitable (Frigolé 2010:14).

Although patrimonialization refers to a process through which culture *becomes* or is *transformed* into heritage, it also implies that there are active parties that drive this process forward. For instance, Frigolé emphasizes the importance of recognizing the role of social actors within patrimonialization processes in selecting, protecting and exhibiting "elements from the past which they designate heritage" (Frigolé 2010: 19). Similarly, environmental heritage scholar Katia Hueso Kortekaas argues that understanding patrimonialization processes requires an appropriate identification of stakeholders. According to Hueso Kortekaas, stakeholders are not only decision makers, owners or managers of cultural heritage, but also any person or organization that feels affected by whatever happens to that which is defined as heritage (Kortekaas 2017: 320). In a similar way, Frigolé argues that various global, national and local actors make up a hierarchical network within the patrimonialization process, defining models of heritage, supervising them and channelling economic resources. Moreover, on a national level, the state has a key function in mobilizing "institutions, laws, decrees, knowledge and practice and resources" (Frigolé 2010: 19).

These ideas and definitions presented by both Hueso Kortekaas and Frigolé also have implications for how we understand democratic processes in relation to heritage making. While many policy makers still define the democratization of heritage as accessibility through digitalization, researchers of cultural heritage pay attention to those who are allowed to actually participate in what becomes heritage. We thus argue that political and institutional contexts as well as specific spatio-temporal contexts are important when discussing the inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms of cultural heritage production.

As suggested by both Frigolé and Hueso Kortekaas, the study of patrimonialization processes require the identification of relevant "social actors" or

"stakeholders" (cf. Kortekaas 2017). Consequently, a central element in the method of this research became interviews with the actors that we identified in relation to their engagements with MIGTalks. The main institutional participants identified were The Swedish Migration Agency and Nordiska Museet. Quite early in the research process, it became evident that within the Swedish Migration Agency one individual person was the key actor for making MIGTalks happen: the former project manager.[1] The project manager indicated another important person for the project: her superior in charge of communication at the Swedish Migration Agency at the time. According to the project manager, her superior supported her ideas and provided her with initial funding and infrastructural support for implementing the project. Our interviews with the manager of communication and the project manager were made as conversations, where the interviewer primarily asked about how and why they initiated the MIGTalks and why it ended up at Nordiska Museet. To understand why the cultural heritage institution Nordiska Museet was engaged in MIGTalks, how the project was introduced at the museum specifically, and why and how the MIGTalks collection ended up in the museum's digital and analogue archive, we interviewed the manager of the archive and the director of digital interaction at the museum. The interviews were quite informal, with discussions centring on both the museum's strategies and perspectives on digitalization in general. We also enquired about their understandings of how and why MIGTalks was obtained and how it is related to the museum's previous analogue and digital collections, as well as the museum's strategies for digitalization.

During our research process, the book *87 Voices on Migration* was published as a joint project between the Swedish Migration Agency and Nordiska Museet. MIGTalks' former project manager and the manager of the archive at the museum co-edited the publication, with both contributing a chapter individually. We have used this book as a complement to our interviews.

In addition to representatives from these institutional stakeholders, we interviewed individuals who contributed their life stories to MIGTalks. In total, 100 individuals were asked to contribute to the Swedish Migration Agency's communication campaign, of which we selected 12 individuals among the heterogeneous group of migrants whose life stories were collected. Our interviews were semi-structured. Amongst other things, the interviewees were asked about the following: why they contributed their life story to the MIGTalks, what they think about their life stories now being a part of Nordiska Museet's archive and available on its digital platform, if they agreed with how their stories were presented, and/or if they ever had asked for revisions of the stories on display. Questions about digital spaces, accessibility to and participation in cultural heritage creation in general were also posed. For example, we asked if they had

contributed to or interacted with other digital platforms at museums or similar institutions. What is more, we enquired about the interviewees' understandings of and relations to the concept of cultural heritage.

We have anonymized all the interviewees' names and use professional titles or fictitious names in accordance with the guidelines of the ethical review board on how to protect the integrity of persons participating in research projects and the interviewees informed consent to participate in our study.[2] The choice to anonymise was not an obvious decision, as anonymization also entails certain ethical considerations related to power, voice and inclusion, which has been discussed by us and other oral historians elsewhere (see for example Le Roux 2016; Moore 2012; Thor Tureby 2019; Thor Tureby & Johansson 2020; Thor Tureby & Wagrell 2020).

This article proceeds as follows: First, we give a brief overview of Swedish policies regarding digitalization in the cultural heritage sector. Second, we investigate, in three different sections, through analysing the interviews, that is, the why and how the creation, archivization and patrimonalization process was initiated, motivated and understood by the different actors involved.

Swedish Policies on Digitalization

It has been argued that digitalization has been constituted as an obligatory and unquestionable objective within cultural policy discourse and that digitalization's ascendancy into a policy imperative can be viewed as a process of imitation. Imitation of policies from other countries or international organizations, such as the EU or the UNESCO, shapes individual countries' digitalization policies (Henningsen & Larsen 2019:3). We can identify the same tendencies regarding policies about digitalization in Sweden. For example, in the 2017 Council of Europe's recommendations to member states on the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century, governments are recommended to do the following: promote the public's involvement in cultural heritage, make cultural heritage more accessible, promote re-use of cultural heritage, and use and take advantage of innovations and new technology (Council of Europe 2017). Furthermore, in UNESCO's 2015 recommendations about museums and collections, the importance of digitalization as a prerequisite to museum progress is underscored (UNESCO 2016). In a Swedish 2017 government bill about cultural heritage policies, the importance of digitalization is emphasized:

> For the common cultural heritage to become a concern for all and for the promotion of co-creation and involvement, the state cultural heritage institutions should make even greater use of the possibilities of digitalization than hitherto. (Prop. 2016/17:116: 182–183, authors' translation).

Moreover, the Swedish government calls on cultural heritage institutions to continue the operations of digitalization at "a high rate", thereby aiming for digital cultural heritage information to be "accessible and allow co-creation." Thus, the government believes that cultural heritage institutions create "conditions for making cultural heritage a concern for everyone and also have a lot to gain from it, by providing new information and the opportunity for rationalized work processes" (Prop. 2016/17:116: 184). In the bill, the Swedish government confirms and reconstructs a discourse about digitalization, framing it as an important means to democratize access to and broaden the use of cultural heritage, promote social cohesion and increase the quality and efficiency of various activities. In the government's bill, there is silence about possible risks surrounding an extensive digitalization of cultural heritage institutions' activities and especially in relation to the ambitious policy aims about everyone's participation in cultural heritage. For instance, nothing is mentioned regarding how unequal digital access among different social groups in society also impacts peoples' opportunities to be involved in a digitized cultural heritage.

This silence in the government's bill is contested by other sources – sources that present a more complex picture about the risks of extensive digitalized cultural heritage. Both international research studies and a report from the Swedish National Digitalization Council illustrate how social inequality based on class, gender, ethnicity, age and disabilities tends to be reproduced and becomes an excluding mechanism concerning issues of participation and access to digital tools, heritage contexts and infrastructure (Robinson *et. al* 2015; Lenstra 2017; Spotts & Copeland 2017; Swedish National Digitalization Council 2018). However, such contradictory trends and mechanisms are hardly mentioned at all in the current government bill.

The transition to digital technology since the 1990s and the conditions for different cultural heritage institutions and their activities have changed significantly. For archives, libraries and museums, digital technology has meant opportunities to digitize existing source material and acquire new types of source material through digital collection methods. On the one hand, digitization has entailed new and expanded opportunities to preserve and make information available and to interact with visitors and other collaborators. On the other hand, the cultural heritage institutions have dealt with challenging questions regarding digitization, for example, the economic costs of digitization, skills enhancement needed to digitize, copyright and individual integrity considerations due to the availability of digital documents, and the handling of different technical solutions and short life span formats from a preservation perspective (Prop. 2016/17:116: 50–51). We return to a number of these challenges when we discuss the digital strategies of Nordiska Museet in relation to the empirical case: MIGTalks.

MIGTalks was not initiated as a digital heritage project, but as a communication project by a state authority: the Swedish Migration Agency. In the following section, we will explore the original aims and motives of the Swedish Migration Agency with MIGTalks, and why and how the idea to transform it to a cultural heritage collection developed.

The Migration Agency and MIGTalks

As mentioned above, two individuals were central in the creation of MIGTalks at the Swedish Migration Agency: the project manager and the manager of communication. When asked how they came up with the idea of MIGTalks, the manager of communication explained that he, at the time (the beginning of 2015), was extremely tired of how migrants were represented in the Swedish media discourse – in general, migrants were represented as refugees, and as vulnerable, poor and weak. He added that he and the project manager had long discussions concerning the possibility of changing the ubiquitous story of "the poor refugee" in the media (Interview with manager of communication 12/2 2019).

Both in interviews and in an authored text about MIGTalks, the project manager confirms her former superior's account. She further communicates that her initial idea with MIGTalks was "to contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive public conversation about migration to Sweden" and to give the immigrants a voice, as it was important for her "to make visible the reasons and the forces that drive voluntary and forced migration, and to make room for new residents' perspectives on the migration debate and their own thoughts about the future (…)" (Söderlindh 2019: 214-215). She also explains that in Swedish the name of the project (MIGTalks) corresponds both to the word "me" (*mig* in Swedish) and migration, thus underlining that 'we would not speak *about* or *to* but *with* each other' (Söderlindh 2019: 215). With such utterances, the project manager is expressing ideals similar to what is often articulated within the field of oral history as "giving voice to" or co-creating a space/place for conversations together with those who have not yet been heard (Olsson 2015).

There are several reasons why MIGTalks was transformed from a communication project at the Swedish Migration Agency to an analogue and digital cultural heritage collection at Nordiska Museet. According to the manager of communication, Nordiska Museet was approached quite late in the process and asked if it was interested in archiving the materials from MIGTalks (Interview with the manager of communication 12/9 2019). He explains the reason for contacting Nordiska Museet thusly:

> […] we had material that we thought was very good. The project began
> to come to an end. We thought that here we have something that is worth

preserving […]. I mean, if we were only presenting this on the web or through some publication at the Swedish Migration Agency, it would have disappeared quite quickly. We felt that this should be perpetuated in another way. (Interview with the manager of communication 12/2 2019)

Further, he underscores that his initial ideas regarding the purpose of MIGTalks were not to create a collection that would be preserved for the future. Rather, his engagement stemmed from his personal frustration with his day-to-day work, where he constantly had to deal with the media's stereotypical representations of migrants as poor, non-agential and vulnerable refugees. He never thought about MIGTalks as a piece of cultural heritage or as a cultural heritage collection. Instead, it felt good that the materials would be preserved for the future, considering all the work that had been put into the project.

In contrast, the project manager states that she did not contact Nordiska Museet, but that the museum had approached her, having read of MIGTalks in a newsletter and thus wanting to be part of the project – as it was planning to focus more on migration as a theme (Interview with MIGTalks' project manager 22/9 2019). She saw cooperation as a good idea as Nordiska Museet was an official institution and an important actor in terms of curating digital heritage. Although she thought that the museum's preservation of the material would guarantee it would be available for the public and researchers to use in perpetuity, she initially did not consider the materials as cultural heritage, seeing the digitization of the material as more important than its transformation into cultural heritage. For her, it was important that the life stories and voices of the migrants were available and visible in a digital space. Similarly, the manager of communication argues for the presence of the materials in the digital space as it makes it possible for the materials to be reused and revisited in different times and contexts (Interview with manager of communication 12/2 2019).

To summarize, the idea of curating a cultural heritage collection of the collected interviews was not part of the MIGTalks' initial objectives. Rather, it became a reality at the end of the campaign due to the cooperation between the Swedish Migration Agency and Nordiska Museet, and the project manager's idea to make use of the museum's expertise about conservation, protection and curation. A conclusion that we can draw from our interviews with the key actors at the Swedish Migration Agency is that they initially did not intend to create a collection to preserve for the future. Rather, they wanted to create a room and a place for alternative stories about "the refugee" and "the migrant" to be heard. The idea of transforming the collected interviews within the framework of MIGTalks into a digital cultural heritage collection was thus born during the process and in

the encounters with representatives from Nordiska Museet. The two key actors at the Swedish Migration Agency hardly saw themselves as initiators or co-creators of a digital cultural heritage, but rather as initiators of a digital room that would enable several different voices about migration to be heard. However, why did Nordiska Museet deem MIGTalks an important collection to be acquired?

Nordiska Museet and MIGTalks

To understand why Nordiska Museet engaged in MIGTalks, how the project was initiated at the museum specifically, and why and how the MIGTalks collection culminated in the museum's digital and analogue archive, we have analysed documents about the museum's digitalization strategies and interviewed both the manager of the archive and the director of digital interaction.

In the national strategy from 2011 on how to digitize, digitally preserve and digitally make available cultural heritage material and heritage information during the years 2012–2015, it was stated that the strategy was to "increase cultural activities, collections and archives to a greater extent digitally and made available electronically for the future." Moreover, all "state institutions that collect, preserve and make available cultural heritage material and heritage information must have a plan for digitization and accessibility" (Ministry of Culture 2011: 4).

Nordiska Museet is not only a foundation but also a recipient of considerable annual government funding, and it works to meet the objectives of the national strategy. In a strategy document, the museum describes how it will organize the work over the next ten years to achieve the government's objective that its collections and archives should be "digitally preserved and made available electronically to the public." Further, it is emphasized that activities on both digital platforms and in the physical museum buildings should be guided by "interaction, communication and co-creation" (Nordiska Museet 2016: 4). Furthermore, it is stated that "dialogue" and "storytelling" will be at the focus; and in accordance with the Swedish national cultural policy objectives, the museum wants to broaden its participation so that several groups "can contribute with knowledge and perspectives to enrich the collections from a diversity perspective" (Nordiska Museet 2016: 4–7). Moreover, "contemporary documentation" is given a special priority, and the goal is that "everyone should be able to share their stories, their thoughts and reflections on what it is like to live in Sweden today" (Nordiska Museet 2016: 4).

The aims and strategies highlighted in Nordiska Museet's digitization strategy largely follow explicit visions and discourses from the Ministry of Culture's national strategy on digital cultural heritage. This fact is not surprising since the museum's development of the strategy was thus a government assignment. An affirming and

positive narrative thus characterizes the approach regarding the assignment to work towards digitally oriented cultural heritage, which was demonstrated by the quoted excerpts from the strategy above. The following quote also exemplifies a constructed nexus between increased digitization and participation: "Collections that are digitized and digitally available increase the possibility of participation and involvement in the conservation and use of the cultural heritage" (Nordiska Museet 2016: 7). In the following, we will, by drawing on interviews conducted with two key professionals employed at the museum about the acquisition of the MIGTalks, more closely investigate the conditions of digitalization at Nordiska Museet. In what ways do the manager of the archive and the director of digital interaction argue for why MIGTalks was considered an important acquisition by Nordiska Museet?

In the interviews, the arguments concerning how and why the MIGTalks ended up at Nordiska Museet differ between the director of digital interaction and the manager of the archive. According to the former, it was the project manager of MIGTalks who contacted Nordiska Museet and invited the museum to become a cooperation partner. The museum, among other institutional actors, was offered to host public seminars related to MIGTalks. In addition, it was asked to acquire the 100 collected life stories from MIGTalks for its archive and to ensure that the life stories would be preserved when MIGTalks as a communication project at the Swedish Migration Agency had ended. He underlined the unique situation that the museum usually decides what and when to document and that it seeks collaboration with different actors from civil society: "This was a reverse relationship – they came to us because they needed to have an institution, an organization, that could take a long-term responsibility to save and preserve [the materials]" (Interview with the director of digital interaction 28/2 2019).

Furthermore, he explained that the museum in the autumn of 2015 was asked a similar question about acquisitions by the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* concerning another collecting project called @Refugees Sweden: "It was very hot then with the whole migration issue. There were many such discussions with different institutions" (Interview with director of digital interaction 28/2 2019). When referring to the acquisition of MIGTalks, the director of digital interaction thus talked about MIGTalks as a migration collection, rather than presenting it as a digital collection.

The archive manager of the museum underscored that the museum was not engaged in MIGTalks from the beginning; rather, it became involved after the collecting of life stories had already ended. Similar to all other interviewees, he highlighted the project manager as an "important engine" of the project and the reason why the museum found the MIGTalks project so exciting. Her enthusiasm, commitment and hard work convinced the museum to engage in the project.

Moreover, he explains that the museum became involved in MIGTalks because it wanted to become an actor in cultural heritage sector issues on refugees and migration:

> In parallel, we did our own documentation of the refugee reception at Stockholm's central station during the autumn of 2015. […] It has opened a field for us which I think has been very important to open, which has been quite closed by Nordiska Museet. Therefore, this also became an opportunity for me to help pick it up, and open that door a little more. […] Not necessarily primarily to get a voice in relation to the media, but to make us [the museum] visible. We are and want to be and must be an actor in these issues. We cannot back down from that. (Interview with the archive manager 27/2 2019)

Moreover, according to the archive manager, an important contextual circumstance to the initialization of MIGTalks was that new initiatives surrounding migration and migrant stories were being launched by local, regional and national government agencies at this time. He thus states that these state actors:

> […] are now trying to justify their role and become actors in the public arena, also towards the media. […] For the Swedish Migration Agency, it has been a driving force and motivation during perhaps the most critical and most vibrant situation regarding refugees, refugee reception and that type of migration. That they also needed to find a channel in the public to be able to say what they think was important to say. (Interview with the archive manager 27/2 2019)

In his opinion, this strategy reflected the agency's willingness to influence and impact public discourse on migration. To emphasize his point further, he added:

> Taking up the fight with the media [sector] to set the agenda, I honestly think it is manipulative! […] It was obvious that Nordiska Museet's experiences were not so interesting in this context. Thus, it was like a struggle to define the problem, agenda setting. (Interview with archive manager 27/2 2019)

Further, he highlighted that he was not critical of MIGTalks as such. Rather, he was critical of the context and motives that generated this type of communications project by a state agency, which was used to influence the public through media discourse; something, which he thought, should not be the task of government agencies.

Notwithstanding this critical attitude, the archive manager did not express any reservations about incorporating MIGTalks into Nordiska Museet's archive and collections. Nor does it seem that he has advocated the incorporation of MIGTalks as an example of a contemporary state-initiated communication campaign on migration, but as a collection of migration stories.

This understanding of the MIGTalks campaign as a regular migrant collection is also present in the archive manager's contribution to *87 Voices About Migration*. When arguing for why Nordiska Museet engaged in MIGTalks, he emphasized that one of its reasons for participating was "to contribute to migrants' opportunities to make their voices heard in arenas where people actually are listening" (Engman 2019: 221). He thus positions the MIGTalks' seminar arranged at Nordiska Museet as a platform, in contrast to traditional media – where individuals are rarely given the opportunity to speak – and social media – where everyone can speak but few listens.

The acquisition of MIGTalks to the archive of the museum and the incorporation and digital curation of the stories on the website Minnen (2020) was an important prerequisite for making these stories, understood as migrant stories, accessible for present and future research and genealogy (Interview with archive manager 27/2 2019; Interview with director of digital interaction 28/2 2019). Thus, MIGTalks was not explicitly acquired as "the communication campaign MIGTalks," or as an example of how migration was debated in the 2010s or how state authorities like the Swedish Migration Agency operated in the 2010s. Instead, MIGTalks was acquired and understood by the staff at the museum as a collection of life stories from migrants. The incorporation of the life stories with other stories digitally preserved on the website recontextualised and decontextualized the materials and transformed them into life stories of the kind that are usually collected and preserved at the museum. On the website Minnen (2020), one can read that Nordiska Museet has a long tradition of collecting personal narratives and that anyone is welcome to contribute with their story: "The narratives will be saved for the future in a communal memory bank." Further, it adds that it is a new tool for collecting, curating and making intangible cultural heritage accessible (Minnen 2020). The materials are thus referred to as intangible cultural heritage, but not as digital heritage. One question that will not be answered in this text, but that needs to be further investigated in the future, is whether the staff at Nordiska Museet and other cultural heritage institutions in Sweden have functioning methods and knowledge regarding how to curate and to protect digital heritage.

As stated above, neither the archive manager nor the director of digital interaction referred to or problematized the acquired materials as digital heritage during the interviews. Rather, they opted to define the material as migrant stories and examples of intangible heritage. The former also used the authenticity of the

stories as individual memories of migration experiences as an argument for why the museum should preserve them as heritage, but not as digital heritage explicitly. He underlines their authenticity and originality, as well as the stories' material and symbolic function as temporal documents materializing and symbolizing an age of changes in Sweden, thereby affecting both individuals and welfare society (Engman 2019: 221, Interview with archive manager 27/2 2019). To give something the status of heritage, it needs to be protected and curated. As Frigolé asserts, "protection demarcates that which is considered to be heritage" (2010: 24). If the stories of MIGTalks had not been curated or protected, they would not be considered heritage – something that the officials representing Nordiska Museet seemed fully aware of. However, although it is stated on the digital platform Minnen (2020) that the stories are defined as intangible cultural heritage, there is no information about how the museum will protect them as such. Professor of International Law Sabine von Schorlemer points out the important role of memory institutions in building the necessary deep infrastructure "capable of supporting a distributed system of digital archives." This means that they must be "capable of keeping materials alive for the long term, which includes ensuring their integrity and authenticity, taking technical measures in time, and observing rights and restrictions on access" (von Schorlemer 2020: 50). Furthermore, von Schorlemer argues that training programs for staff will be crucial in avoiding expensive mistakes (von Schorlemer 2020: 50). Consequently, the acquisition of MIGTalks by the museum was made in a similar way to how acquisitions were made in the pre-digital era, when museums acquired "classical" (analogue) materials without any special considerations regarding how to protect and curate it as digital heritage. In the case of MIGTalks, stories that have already been digitized by the Swedish Migration Agency were transferred. The original story, the interview, which was documented via notes, has thus already been edited and therefor lost. What is mediated by Nordiska Museet are already processed digital narratives. The authentic story, the original form of the migrant story, has thus already disappeared. With the transfer of MIGTalks to Minnen (2020), the authenticity and integrity of the digitized story was also lost as part of a communication campaign. The patrimonialization process led to the disappearance of the authentic MIGTalks campaign. During the interviews, the staff at the museum certainly discussed the difficulties with the long-term preservation of digital material, but they did not reflect on the recontextualization of the MIGTalks' campaign or the digitized stories as part of the digital platform Minnen (2020).

The interviewed representatives from the museum are thus explaining the museum's engagement in MIGTalks by focusing on its objective to become more involved in collecting, documenting, and preserving stories of migration and representing migrants. To a lesser extent, they are problematizing and reflecting on the acquisition of digital heritage and the complexities of curating

and protecting material in a digital space. However, that they talked about the collection in question as a topical collection does not necessarily mean that the questions of protection and curation of digital material are not seen as important at the museum. Nevertheless, what motivated the individuals to contribute their life stories to MIGTalks? Why did they want to be part of the project, and what do they think about that their life stories now are defined as digital or intangible cultural heritage and preserved at Nordiska Museet for the future?

The Migrants and MIGTalks

In total, 100 individuals were asked to contribute to the Swedish Migration Agency's communication campaign, 12 of whom we interviewed. Our analysis of the interviewees' answers in relation to the question of why they chose to participate in MIGTalks shows both coincidental and diverse motives about their choice to participate in MIGTalks. In the following section, we especially highlight the most common motives presented by the interviewees.

Several of the interviewees claimed that they chose to participate in MIGTalks because they saw it as an interesting project. Evidently, many were introduced to the project by a close relative, friend or colleague who already had been interviewed by MIGTalks and who spoke positively about the project and its aims.

During our interview with Katarina, she related that her experiences and mixed feelings about migration and belonging, having lived in different countries, partly contributed to her decision to participate in MIGTalks. In essence, she wanted to share her lived experiences and knowledge of migration with others, an explanation shared by several other interviewees (See for example Interview with Anton 20/5 2019).

Accordingly, interviewees saw the telling and sharing of their life stories and experiences not only as an act of appreciation and joy, but also a way to help and support other migrants with coping with different challenges related to re-establishment in Swedish society. Several added that they sympathized with the project's aim to promote knowledge about migration to Sweden and to make the people behind the migration statistics visible:

> I told my story. Why I came here, where I ended up in Sweden, if I like it or not, how I look upon my future. Therefore, it is about telling my story, but also to show others in society that it is not just about numbers, we are not just numbers. (Interview with Oscar 21/5 2019)

Oscar, quoted above, explicitly states he wanted to tell his story to demonstrate to the Swedish public that he and other migrants living in Sweden and elsewhere

represent ordinary human beings rather than just numbers in the migration statistics. He and the other interviewees shared the ideas behind MIGTalks. They had incorporated MIGTalks' aspiration to broaden the representation of voices in the migration debate and include migrants' voices and perspectives in society. However, what did the interviewees think about the patrimonialization of the campaign and that their life stories now are defined as cultural heritage? In general, the interviewees perceived the patrimonialization of MIGTalks and the definition of their life stories as pieces of cultural heritage preserved in Nordiska Museet's archive in an ambivalent way.

With few exceptions, the participants gave their informed consent to transfer the MIGTalks' campaign to the archive of the museum (NMA, MIGTalks, consent forms), and thereby transforming it to a cultural heritage collection on the museum's digital platform, Minnen (2020). However, not all of the interviewees perceived their life stories as pieces of cultural heritage: "I have never thought about it, and I totally forgot about it, so it is strange in some sense (laughs)" (Interview with Andrew 9/5 2019; See also interview with Carina 13/6 2019 for a similar reply). Andrew and Carina had not reflected much over Nordiska Museet's curation and conservation of their life stories after having consented to this transfer and transformation. Others were more affirmative on the matter:

> However, I think that...still it was pretty...interesting to be a part of this project. Because somehow, it's in the archives of Nordiska Museet, and […] I think that's quite cool. […] Yeah. I mean, if we end up staying here for years and you know, like generations and then later on our kids and grandkids will be like 'Oh, our parents lived here and that was... you know, Matilda's story in like 2019. Wow, gosh, that was long ago.' (laughs) […] So I think that's kind of cool. I never thought about it at the time because I think I didn't quite understand that it would actually be in an archive. I just knew it was a project that was being a part of Nordiska Museet. I didn't quite think about the implications in that way. (Interview with Matilda 17/5 2019)

Maria expressed similar thoughts:

> I actually feel like a part of it [the cultural heritage] (laughs). Before, I have not been in this country's, history or culture. Now I am in it. Therefore, yes, I am part of it. (Interview with Maria 23/5 2019)

The interviewees' ambivalent perceptions of the patrimonialization of MIGTalks and the definition of their life stories as cultural heritage are also reasonable,

considering their various experiences of contacts and knowledge about Nordiska Museet. Some had visited the museum and had a rather good knowledge of its activities. These interviewees more often perceived and defined their life stories as part of Swedish cultural heritage. Jörgen's description exemplifies such a position:

> Yes, but it is clear. That is the purpose of this. For the future, it should be documented what people felt and thought during this period of migration, which has been so extensive. Therefore, for the research, it is a valuable contribution. (Interview with Jörgen 7/5 2019).

Others, especially those not living in or visiting the Stockholm area very often, had limited knowledge about Nordiska Museet's aims and strategies, either in general or in relation to digital heritage and the specific archived material. They did not interact with the museum's collections, physically at the museum building, or digitally, through its digital platform, Minnen (2020), or other social media platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram. In general, the interviewees had a very loose relationship with or knowledge about Nordiska Museet as a cultural heritage institution. Further, they were not involved when the communication campaign was transformed to the digital heritage platform Minnen (2020). For example, none requested additions or edits to their life stories. Moreover, few have visited the platform or interacted with their own or others' stories. A case in point is Matilda, who, during the interview, was asked about her family's and close friends' reactions to her story being published on the platform. She explained that she had not informed them, primarily because it was in Swedish, which neither she nor her relatives speak very much:

> I mean, of course, I showed my husband. I think I sent a link to my mum, but...she doesn't understand… (laughs) ...what was written there. (…) And also, I think like… I don't know… For my friends who live here, my friends in Stockholm. […] I guess I'd never really think of it as...like...this is my immigration story. So, in a way, it's not really, it's not exactly something that I identify with, you know. (Interview with Matilda 17/5 2019)

One aim of this article is to use the collection of MIGTalks as an empirical example to challenge claims about the universality and democratizing abilities of digital heritage. As already debated in fields like oral history, while digital technology enables people and communities to create, access and connect with heritage, the practices of representation and "giving voice" continue to be problematic since they serve to promote sociocultural inclusion. Prevailing structures are challenged,

negotiated and even changed when voices and perspectives from marginalized individuals and groups are emphasized in digital heritage. Yet, "giving voice" to those who have not yet been heard might equally reinforce cultural stereotypes and preserve sociocultural structures of power that separate those who have a voice and those who have had their voice given to them (Olsson 2015; Abrams 2016, Thor Tureby & Johansson 2020). Thus, we argue that even though digital heritage maintains the *potential* to increase participation and co-creation, and thereby democratization, it might equally reinforce prevailing power and authority structures within the patrimonialization process. This was the case with MIGTalks. Although it has been argued that heritage can be considered as an engagement process, rather than a condition (Smith 2006), it is difficult to contend that the migrants were invited into the patrimonialization process. The already digitized life stories from MIGTalks were incorporated by Nordiska Museet onto the platform Minnen (2020), featuring life stories submitted independently by different members of the public. Although the migrants' stories have been tagged as MIGTalks, visitors to the website would have little reason to investigate what this term might entail. Visitors will be virtually unable to realize that the words used in the MIGTalks are in fact purposeful re-presentations of the words the migrants spoke during their interviews with representatives of a government agency during a communication campaign. This is because on Nordiska Museet's website the digital stories perform as authentic digital representations of the migrants, rather than as partial records of a complex cultural occurrence underpinned by structures of unequal power relations between a governmental agency, a heritage institution and the virtually voiceless migrants. Consequently, although included in the national digital heritage on Minnen (2020), this case study illustrates that the migrants are included in the digital heritage, but that they are still excluded from the patrimonialization and digitization processes and how the national heritage is narrated.

Conclusion

This study confirms the results of previous studies from the Nordic countries on how digitalization has become a governing discourse and a policy imperative in the cultural heritage sector (cf. Valtysson 2017; Henningsen & Larsen 2020). The analysis of the MIGTalks case and the importance of individuals' drive and actions contribute with new and important knowledge to the field of digital cultural heritage. The results of the study show that the involvement of individual actors is of great importance for how collecting projects of stories, regardless of the theme, are initiated, implemented, digitized and ultimately made into cultural heritage, though the different actors might have miscellaneous motives. In our

case study, each of the participants had different motives for participating in the MIGTalks project. The aim of the Migration Agency was to create an arena to give voice to alternative stories of migration in order to influence the public debate on migration. The idea of recreating the collected migrant stories from the information campaign into a collection of digital cultural heritage was born later during meetings and conversations with representatives from Nordiska Museet.

The museum's representatives explain their commitment to MIGTalks primarily with reference to the museum's intention to become more involved in issues of collecting, preserving and representing stories of migration. Further, national and institutional digitalization strategies in combination with economy played a crucial role in the decision to incorporate the digital collection MIGTalks into the archives of the museum. The external acquisition of an already digitized collection of stories from migrants was an economically advantageous option for Nordiska Museet, compared to initiating, collecting and curating stories in a similar project.

Most of the migrants motivated their participation in MIGTalks through sympathizing with the project's idea to contribute to a more nuanced public debate about migration by giving migrants an opportunity to be heard and to tell their individual life stories. However, many expressed an ambivalent perception of the patrimonialization of MIGTalks and whether their stories were to be regarded as a digital cultural heritage. During the interviews, several related that they did not perceive their life stories as digital cultural heritage, while others were more positive to such a conceptual framing of their stories on the digital collection platform, Minnen (2020). Most of the migrants motivated their participation not as a willingness to be part of or to co-create a digital cultural heritage; rather, they desired to be seen and heard as human beings – as persons – beyond the migration statistics.

Today the MIGTalks is presented at Minnen (2020) as a collection of migration stories similar to previous analogue collections on migration that the museum already curates. It is not presented as a preservation of a state-initiated and implemented communication initiative with migrants that reflects the public debate around migration in the mid-2010s in Sweden. The migrant life stories are presented as stories of migration. The original migration stories – in the form of interview notes – disappeared as early as the digitization of the MIGTalks campaign when the interviews were transformed by the Swedish Migration Agency into coherent shorter stories to fit a digital communications context. This study again shows how migrants, and other marginalized groups, might be included in a national cultural heritage, but that they, at the same time, remain excluded in the processes of heritage creation, as we have argued in a previous study on migration stories as cultural heritage (cf. Thor Tureby & Johansson 2020). Although

digital heritage might have the potential to increase people's participation and co-creation, as argued in national policy documents, we argue that the process of patrimonialization in the creation of digital cultural heritage can also preserve and even strengthen the current power structures in the creation, preservation and use of cultural heritage. As this study shows, digitalization of the cultural heritage sector does not automatically democratize the culture heritage-creating process, that is, migrants are still not included or fully co-defining on issues of what the national cultural heritage should contain and how it should be told and conveyed.

Acknowledgements

References

Abrams, Lynn (2016): *Oral History Theory*, London: Routledge.

Audunson, Ragnar, Andresen, Herbjørn, Andresen, Eagerlid, Cicilie, Henningsen, Erik, Hobohm, Hans-Christoph, Jochumsen, Henrik, Larsen, Håkon & Vold, Torje (2020): *Libraries, Archives, and Museums as Democratic Spaces in a Digital Age*, Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter.

Caswell, Michelle, Harter, Christopher & Jules, Bergis (2017): "Diversifying the Digital Historical Record: Integrating Community Archives in National Strategies for Access to Digital Cultural Heritage", *D-Lib Magazine*, 23, 5-6, https://doi.org/10.1045/may2017-caswell.

Council of Europe (2017): Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century, 22 February 2017.

Engman, Jonas (2019): "Migration – Voices in Movement", Jonas Engman & Lisa Söderlindh (eds), *87 Voices on Migration*, Stockholm, Nordiska Museets förlag, 220–224.

Frigolé, Joan (2010): "Patrimonialization and Mercantilization of the Authentic. Two Fundamental Strategies in a Tertiary Economy", Xavier Roigé, & Joan Frigole (eds.): *Constructing Cultural and Natural Heritage: Parks, Museums and*

Rural Heritage, Girona: Documenta Universitaria, 13–24.

Henningsen, Erik & Larsen, Håkon, (2020): "The Mystification of Digital Technology in Norwegian Policies on Archives, Libraries and Museums: Digitalization as Policy Imperative", *Culture Unbound - Journal of Current Cultural Research*,12:2: 1–19.

Kortekaas, Katia, Hueso (2017): "Is there a Model for Successful Patrimonialization Processes? A Tale of Three Cites, *Oppidum*, 13, 317–341.

Lenstra, Noah, (2017): "Social Inequalities in the Shaping of Cultural Heritage Infrastructure, in Henriette Roued-Cuncliffe & Andrea Copeland (eds.): *Participatory Heritage*, London: Facet Publishing, 97–104.

Le Roux, C (2016): "Oral History Research Ethics: Should Anonymity and Confidentiality Issues Be Dealt with on Their Own Merit?", *Africa Education Review*, 12:4, 552–566.

MIG Talks (2019): www.migtalks.se, [Accessed 15/2 2019].

Ministry of Culture (2011): *Digit@lt kulturarv – Nationell strategi för arbetet med att digitalisera, digitalt bevara och digitalt tillgängliggöra kulturarvsmaterial och kulturarvsinformation 2012–2015*.

Minnen (2020): Minnen en källa till personliga berättelser.https://www.nordiskamuseet.se/minnen [Accessed 22/2 2020].

Moore, Niamh (2012): "The Politics and Ethics of Naming: Questioning Anonymisation in (Archival) Research", *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 15:4, 331–340.

Nordiska Museet (2016): *Digit@lt kulturarv. Stiftelsen Nordiska museets strategi och plan för digitalisering och tillgänglighet.* Regeringsuppdrag Ku2011/1968/KA 2016-02-08, Dnr A15-547/11.

Nordiska Museet's Archive (NMA): MIGTalks, Consent Forms from Interviewed Migrants.

Olsson, Annika (2015): "Från att ge röst till att ge plats. Oral history, retorik och intersektionalitet", Malin, Thor Tureby & Lars. Hansson (eds.): *Muntlig historia – i teori och praktik*, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 41–57.

Prescott, Andrew & Hughes, Lorna (2018): "Why do we Digitize? The Case for Slow Digitization", *Archive Journal* Available at: http://www.archivejournal.net/essays/why-do-we-digitize-the-case-for-slow-digitization/

Proposition 2016/17:116: *Kulturarvspolitik*, Stockholm: Kulturdepartementet.

Robinson, Laura, Cotten, Shelia R., Ono, Hiroshi, Quan-Haase, Anabel, Mensch, Gustavo, Chen, Wenhong, Schultz, Jeremy, Timothy M. Hale, Timothy M. & Stern, Michael J., "Digital Inequalities and Why They Matter" (2015): *Information, Communication & Society*, 18:5, 569–582.

Sciurba, Allesandra. (2015): "Moving Beyond the Collateral Effects of the Patrimonialisation: The Faro Convention and the 'Commonification' of Cultural

Heritage", Lauso Zagato, & Marilena Vecco (eds.): *Citizens of Europe. Culture e Diritti*, Venezia: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina, 457–478.

Smith, Laurajane, (2006): *Uses of Heritage*, London, New York: Routledge.

Spotts, Lydia & Copeland, Andrea, (2017): "Issues with Archiving Community Data", Henriette Roued-Cuncliffe & Andrea Copeland (eds.), *Participatory Heritage*, London: Facet Publishing, 129–140.

Stalder, Felix (2018): *The Digital Condition*, Newark: Polity Press.

Swedish National Digitalization Council (2018): En lägesbild av digital kompetens (A situational picture of digital competence). May 2018. Dnr:18-5698. https://digitaliseringsradet.se/media/1213/lagesbild_digitalkompetens_slutversion_utanappendix.pdf [Accessed 2019-03-19].

Söderlindh, Lisa Monique (2019): "Migration – the Great Narrative of our Time", Jonas Engman & Lisa Söderlindh (eds), *87 Voices on Migration*, Stockholm: Nordiska Museets förlag, 214–219.

Thor Tureby, Malin (2019): "Makten över kunskapsproduktionen. Den institutionaliserade etikprövningen och humanistisk och kulturvetenskaplig forskning", *Kulturella Perspektiv. Svensk Etnologisk Tidskrift*, 28: 1–2, 17–29.

Thor Tureby, Malin & Johansson, Jesper (2020): *Migration och kulturarv. Insamlingsprocesser och berättelser om och med de invandrade 1970–2019*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press.

Thor Tureby, Malin & Wagrell, Kristin (2020): "Digitization, Vulnerability, and Holocaust Collections", *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 2: 6, 87–118.

Thylstrup, Nanna Bonde (2019): *The Politics of Mass Digitization*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

UNESCO (2016): Rekommendation om skydd för och främjande av museer och samlingar, deras mångfald samt roll i samhället. Antagen av Unsecos Generalkonferens den 17 november 2015. Svenska Unescorådet.

Vaccaro, Ismael, & Beltran, Oriol (2009): "Livestock Versus 'Wild Beasts': Contradictions in the Natural Patrimonialization of the Pyrenees", *The Geographical Review*, 99: 4, 499–516.

Vaccaro, Ismael & Beltran, Oriol (2010): "Turning Nature into Collective Heritage: The Social Framework of the Process of Patrimonialization of Nature", Xavier Roigé, & Joan Frigole (eds.): *Constructing Cultural and Natural Heritage: Parks, Museums and Rural Heritage*, Girona: Documenta Universitaria, 63–74.

Valtysson, Bjarki (2017): "From Policy to Platform: The Digitization of Danish Cultural Heritage", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23: 5, 545–561.

von Schorlemer, Sabine (2020): "UNESCO and the Challenge of Preserving the Digital Cultural Heritage", *Santander Art and Culture Law Review*, 6: 2, 33–64.

---

[1] When the PL Malin Thor Tureby, contacted the Swedish Migration Agency and asked for persons to interview about the MIGTalks project, she was immediately refereed to the previous project manager. See: Notes from phone call between author and project manager 5/2 2019.

[2] This research was approved by Regionala Etikprövingsnämnden i Linköping 2018/450-31.