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Illusionary equality? Museum politics, practice and immigrant heritage

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ABSTRACT

Increased migration has prompted discussions regarding most of the prime functions of museums as societal institutions. When the population and potential users of museums become more heterogeneous and diverse, the idea of a shared common national history becomes contested. Immigrant cultures have an important function in history writing and in heritage production. Many museum officials are currently concerned about developing new means to enable museums to face the challenges arising from increased migration. Such societal changes effect both the larger, long established national institutions, and the smaller regional or local museums. Although their means and methods vary significantly, the degree of inventiveness, engagement and resourcefulness is not necessarily proportional to the institution's age or size. In this article, we ask what are the means and approaches that Norwegian museums currently use to involve migrants in museum work and how do they include stories and experiences from modern migrants in their collections.

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Introduction

Increased cultural diversity has changed the Norwegian society greatly in recent decades, including the museum profession. Global migration, enabled by increased communication technology and easier transport and mobility around the world, is profoundly altering how people act in and perceive their society. Although Scandinavian countries are relatively 'young' in terms of their modern immigrant history, the flows of emigration and immigration through Scandinavia are interwoven with the long-term history of the region's interaction with Europe and the rest of the world. It is frequently claimed that the most significant approaches in museum displays and history dissemination within nation-states have been the 'ones that stress stability, roots, boundaries and belonging' (Bender 2001, 5). Nonetheless, people on the move (diaspora, trans-culturalism)—immigrant cultures—have an important function both in history writing and dissemination and in heritage production.

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When the population and potential users of museums become more heterogeneous and diverse, the idea of a shared common national history becomes contested. During the last three decades, there have been intermittent discussions regarding how these problems influence heritage and museum practices (Levin 2015; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Poehls 2011). However, these discussions have become more critical, as groups of second-generation migrants have gained a stronger foothold and are voicing their opinions. When these changes lead to new strategies concerning museum policies and allocations of funding to heritage and museums, they are likely to be mirrored in National White Papers. Specifically, they will be included in the analysis depending on the extent to which they are referred to in interviews and surveys. Therefore, we raise the following questions: What means and approaches do Norwegian museums currently use to involve immigrants in museum work? How do they include stories and experiences from immigrants in their collections?

In recent years, there has been a debate among museum professionals and other researchers in Norway concerning the reactions of museums to the challenges of migration (Bettum, Maliniemi, and Michael 2018; Goodnow and Akman 2008; Midtbøen 2017; Naguib 2015; Ramskjær 2014). It has been argued that both the strong focus from national level on the importance of museums' societal role and their role in identity building are undermining the importance of museums in knowledge building (Eriksen 2009). In this context, knowledge building refers to long-term strategies for carrying out museum-related research. The demands put on museums have multiplied, relating to for instance relevancy, digitalisation, wider user groups etc., and it has been claimed that it is time to consider the risk of overloading. More specialisation and a clearer work division have been suggested as a means of counteracting these stress symptoms (Hylland 2017). Close examination of a selection of exhibitions revealed that contemporary exhibitions still lag behind, with a somewhat out-dated notion of nation building, and stereotypes concerning 'us' and 'the others' are still included in the exhibitions (Lien and Wallem 2016). Such viewpoints are not necessarily in accordance with how museum professionals themselves assess the situation, as will be illustrated throughout this article. Many share the perspective that a major shift has taken place in museum work (Pabst, Johansen, and Ipsen 2016), and these counter-arguments offer a perfect starting point for this article.

The remainder of this paper is organised into five parts. The purpose of the research framework is to highlight some of the challenges encountered by professional curators working with migration and museums. A short summary of the main framework of migration to Norway after the 1950s is also provided. In the methodology section, the methods and main sources used to conduct the study are introduced, including critical comments relating to the limitations related to the use of museum surveys. In the findings section, the exhibition profiles of the three museums in the study are compared and supplemented by data from the museum survey. In the discussion, we return to the research questions and take a closer look at the various ways in which the societal role of museums is interpreted in light of migration. The conclusion summarises the important lessons to be learned from this line of curatorial work.

Research framework

We start by pinpointing some of the arguments that have been put forward by heritage and museum scholars within the broad field of migration studies. We use them as an

introduction to the results of the three case studies and the survey. One major strand of argumentation is anchored in post-colonial discourse (Thomas 2010). Transnational migration has changed the national context of the former colonial powers substantially. Indeed, McDonald (2013) even refers to a 'transnational heritage' (2013, 162), and modern-day visitors to museums have other expectations regarding the narratives that the museums currently present.

The politics of recognition

Laurajane Smith refers to such larger changes as part of 'the politics of recognition' (Smith 2017, 69). Museum professionals are inclined to engage in work seeking to broaden the understanding of processes that have resulted in exclusion versus inclusion, and they have problematised such themes from various perspectives. It has been argued that museums need to take a stand and articulate their societal role strongly. In other words, they must have relevance. This is imperative, and doing so requires both new ideas and thorough reflection (Eriksen 2009, 222). As local communities become more diverse, the idea of museums 'serving their community has become increasingly important' (Sutherland 2014, 129). Lanz (2016) describes this as the emergence of a new type of museum. Migration has become coupled with the broader discussions within museology into 'The new museology' (Vergo 1997), 'Museums of the twenty-first Century' (Black 2011) and the understanding of museums as a 'Contact zone' (Clifford 1997). Museum curators are assigned an important role. However, Smith (2017) directs attention to museum visitors and their role as interpreters:

The taken for granted definitions of heritage used by museum and heritage professionals, however, helps to obscure the ways in which individuals and communities of interests develop their own understandings of the past and the present, often without reference to curatorial or professional aspirations, and the roles such institutions are put to by their visitors. (Smith 2017, 70)

Narrative practices

The narrative practices in museums are vital (Coffee 2008). Both cultural identity and cultural diversity are being constituted and communicated in museum exhibitions (Sandell 2007). Therefore, they are relevant subjects when critically analysing the narratives that they mediate and whether they continue to make representations in a stereotypical matrix of 'us' and 'the others' (Lien and Wallem 2016). In a Norwegian study of museums, Lien and Wallem (2016) asked how Norwegian historic cultural museums relate to identity and differences, that is, what stories do they narrate and how? According to their findings, these Norwegian museums hardly relate to the post-colonial discourse in which many of the other international museums partake (Lien and Wallem 2016, 17); this statement was later questioned heavily (Wæhle 2017). They maintain that attention has primarily been paid to three problem fields. Museum history and their collections are the first two, while the third is related to the exhibitions, which is the focal point in their study (based on the examination of seven exhibitions). Their main argument is that parts of the history that would be difficult or challenging for the current society have been silenced and many exhibitions continue to present a rather stereotypical

picture alongside the dichotomy of 'them' and 'us'. Nonetheless, these findings have met counter-arguments (Wæhle 2017) based on curatorial insight into a series of comprehensive changes that museums in Norway have undergone in recent years, concerning how they define their societal role (Wæhle 2017, 135). Wæhle's arguments are supported by the findings in this study.

As new specialised museums and temporary exhibitions appear on the scene, they invite closer comparisons. Lanz (2016) selected a group of established emigration museums and compared them with more recent immigration museums and exhibitions. However, instead of analysing the mediated messages, she looked more closely at the exhibition design. Although influences had occurred, she found that there was more variation, a freer and more flexible form of expression and less use of a standardised matrix for the symbols used in immigration museums.

The societal role of museums

The on-going critical heritage and museum discourse moves in different directions. Some scholars have put special weight on profiling and questioning the role of museums as institutions that represent the ruling societal powers (Golding 2009; Shelton 2006). Others have directed more attention to the way in which museums partake in continuous societal changes and adapt their line of actions accordingly (Black 2011; Witcomb 2015). Because many studies tend to simplify the complexity of museums, Witcomb reproves scholars who primarily 'depict museums as hegemonic institutions' (Witcomb 2015, 132). Her argumentation is based on her own practical experiences of museums as continuously changing institutions in interaction with the society of which they are a part. Gnecco (2015) has been concerned with how the introduction of the term 'multicultural' into the heritage discourse has affected the larger context. He argues that the term functions as a kind of 'umbrella heritage' that blurs the problems connected to power relations. According to Gnecco, most nations today are applying 'a global multicultural rhetoric' (Gnecco 2015, 246). Social differences and injustice have been de-emphasised as a side effect of the conscious efforts to exclude and erase stigmatising categories from the official discourse and replace them with references to multiculturalism. As we interpret Gnecco's argument, he considers the introduction of the term as a sort of strategy to under-communicate differences and injustice, or as he puts it, an effort to 'downplay inequalities' (Gnecco 2015, 269).

The materiality of immigrant heritage

The EU-funded MeLa project ('European Museums in an Age of Migrations', 2011–2015) and the CoHERE research project (Critical Heritages (CoHERE): Performing and Representing Identities in Europe, 2016–2019) are among the recent projects in which a variety of perspectives have been used to examine immigrant memories and heritage in museums (see Whitehead et al. 2015; CoHERE 2017). MeLa is focused on the role of European museums in defining place, identity and belonging for a diverse and migratory culture. The migrant (journey) experience, and thereby how migration is represented in European museums and exhibitions, is vividly elaborated. Commemorations and displays of immigrant heritage convey a symbolic content that is associated with the transitional cultures or transnational memory at work in societies (as exemplified by Guttormsen

2018). This means that the relationship between ‘roots’ and ‘routes’—including being in transit and travel to a new homeland, the experience of being on the move—has become a key factor in disseminating immigrant heritage. In this mode of memories at work, *objects* from immigration represent perspective other than traditional, ethnic or national heritage. Previous studies have shown that the heritage that becomes objects for immigrant memory production takes the form of collections of personal belongings (photos, amulets, suitcases and other items). These are brought by immigrants, as with forced refugees, from their home country or acquired in their new homeland (Juul and Buciek 2008, 121; Hamilakis 2018). Contemporary migration ‘provides us with a unique opportunity to redefine and renew our cultural heritage’ and our cultural commons (Scarre, Holtorf, and Pantazatos 2019, 9). Indeed, migration defines a materiality that goes ‘beyond the reach of formal heritage management’ (Harrison, Appelgren, and Bohlin 2018, 211). This leaves us with an urgent question: What strategies should be used for considering migration in a museum? It is also important to ask what should be collected and displayed (see Sitch 2017 with response from Whitehead 2018) in a Norwegian museum context.

Immigrants to Norway

The immigrant population in Norway is 17.3% of the total population (1 January 2018; Statistics Norway 2018; Sandnes 2017). In addition to people from other Scandinavian countries, the Jewish population is one of the oldest immigrant groups in Norway. Today, the Jews, the Romani people, the Gypsies, the Kvens and the Forest Finns are the five official National Minority Groups in Norway (Stortingsmelding 15 2000–2001).¹ These minority groups are given special cultural protection and receive grants for cultural protection work. The twenty largest groups of newer Norwegian immigrants from outside Scandinavia come from Poland (98,212), Lithuania (38,371), Somalia (28,754), Syria (27,392), Germany (24,445), Iraq (23,118), Eritrea (21,747), Philippines (21,383), Pakistan (20,372), Thailand (19,507), Iran (17,728), Russia (17,480), Afghanistan (16,782), the United Kingdom (14,261), Romania (14,206) and Vietnam (13,973).² Historically, Norway has received labour immigrants (e.g., from Pakistan, India and Turkey from the 1960s, from Eastern Europe since 2004 due to the enlargement of the European Union) and political immigrants/refugees (e.g., Hungarians after the riots against the Soviet regime in 1950, Czechs after the Soviet invasion in 1968, Chileans forced into exile after the takeover of the Pinochet military Junta dictatorship in 1973, Vietnamese after the Vietnam War ended in 1975, war refugees from the Balkans and from Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan in the 1990s and Syrian refugees today) (Sandnes 2017, 9–10). It would be interesting to examine how the two themes—labour immigration and political refugees—together with the more tradition-based immigration themes (e.g., WWII refugees) have gained a foothold in the political landscape of the Norwegian museum.

Methods and sources

This study used a mixed-method approach. The two main data sources included three telephone interviews with museum curators and a museum survey.³ Additional information was sought in relevant white papers and reports.

Three museums were selected to illustrate museums that prioritise the inclusion of cultural diversity. The informants were asked to partake in the study via e-mail, and they received a copy of the interview guide a few days in advance. The guide was an edited version of the survey, but the interviews were carried out as informal conversations that left room for discussions and additional information. The interviews were recorded and supplemented by handwritten notes. The qualitative interviewing method, also known as narrative inquiry, was meant to provide insight into another person's knowledge, experiences, viewpoints and interpretations connected with particular subjects and events; it provides insight into some problems that are otherwise unlikely to be illuminated (Chase 2005; Flyvbjerg 2006). Information from the interviewees was later supplemented with information from the literature and museum documents referred to during the interview. The information from these interviews is summarised in Tables 1–3. Each table has five columns. The first column deals with the museum's profile and management background. It includes information about when it was established, its classification and when the first initiative concerning modern immigration was implemented. The second column, 'Instigating factors', is a presentation of some of the main arguments that the informants put forward concerning their engagement in profiling diversity in a museum context. The third column, 'Activities', lists the main types of activities that the museums have been involved in related to cultural diversity. The heading 'Success factors' gives special attention to the questions involving the type

Table 1. Profiling diversity in a museum context – the case of Ryfylke.

Profiling diversity in a museum context: The case of Ryfylkemuseet				
Profile and management background	Instigating factors	Activities	View on success factors	Opinions conc. influence on national museum policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A former traditional open air folk museum (from 1936) that fused with smaller neighbouring museums • Status as regional museum in 1980 • Influenced by Eco-museum thinking • The general manager is the curator as well as a local political activist • He became engaged in diversity questions when the first camp for asylum seekers from the Bosnian war was established in the locality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions proposed in Green paper 1996: 'Museums, diversity, memory, meeting place' (The Ministry of Culture), including: • Museums are institutions of social relevance • Museums are independent institutions • Museums have an important role as a meeting place – independent of cultural background and beliefs • International partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A series of projects with external funding: • 'The long road' • 'The Multicultural Parish' • 'Islam in the land of free churches' • 'The children in the local community' • International Café 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succeeded in creating long-lasting networks in which a core of museums participate • Practising the philosophy of museums as dialogue institutions • The museum has gained status as a meeting place in the local community – despite potential language barriers • There is a core of museums that are included in the diversity network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The important relationship between national directives and local initiatives has been elucidated • The museum illustrates the positive effect of combining local initiatives, sources for external funding and national museum policy goals • There is, however, more central control of museums than before, and museums feel they need to prioritise more

Table 2. Profiling diversity in a museum context – the case of The Norwegian Folk Museum.

Profiling diversity in a museum context – The case of The Norwegian Folk Museum				
Profile and management background	Instigating factors	Activities	View on success factors	Opinions conc. influence on national museum policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum of cultural history in Norway from 1537 to the present, founded in 1894 • Today the museum includes six different museum departments • In 1987, the museum changed its objective from 'documenting Norwegian culture' to 'documenting life modes and living conditions in Norway' • A change that placed the Sámi and other minorities on the same footing as ethnic Norwegians in Norway • Several curators have specialised in minority and immigration issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of Norway as a homogeneous society changed • First, the impact of immigration on the way of living in Norway, and then the refugee problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot project 'Norwegian – yesterday, today, tomorrow?' Financed by the Art Council of Norway (2002) • The project 'My voice – our history', a pilot project in cooperation with Intercultural Museum (funded ABM-utvikling) • Reconstruction of a townhouse with flats from different periods – the flat from 2000 was furnished in close cooperation with the Pakistani family that rented it • Exhibition: 'Norway – the land of opportunities?' About the immigration history to Norway from 1500 and forward. • Exhibition: 'Norway – a country for me' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recognition of the significance of the theme must be shared by the full organisation • Continuously raising the question: What are we exhibiting? What does it mediate? • Provide an exhibition practise that shows the diversity of the Norwegian society • A continual process during the museum's history to include more groups • Inclusion of new offers has widened the visitor group, and these visitors use the museum in different ways • It is important that there is at minimum one curator at the museum who specialises in this knowledge field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the 2000s, paying attention to diversity and inclusion were under-lined as prerequisites for museum funding

of activities that they consider of particular importance, whether specific regional or local factors have played a role and whether they have succeeded in reaching new use groups. The last theme concerns the views on the relationship between profiling cultural diversity in museums and national museum policy. It relates both to an overall evaluation of the changes that the national museum policy has undergone and whether the increase in activities related to profiling diversity in a museum context have had a lasting effect.

The museum survey took place during autumn 2018. It was distributed to 276 e-mail addresses from the Norwegian Museum Association's list. There were 23 responses, which was a somewhat lower percentage than expected. SurveyMonkey provided the software, and the survey was based on a mix of yes/no and open questions in which the informant was requested to comment (see Table 4 in Appendix). An introductory paragraph presented the intention behind the survey and the researchers involved. Although the past decade has seen a tremendous increase in internet use and computer-mediated communication (Dillman 2007; Wright 2005), many researchers in different disciplines may

Table 3. Profiling diversity in a museum context – the case of Intercultural Museum.

Profiling diversity in a museum context – The case of Intercultural Museum				
Profile and management background	Instigating factors	Activities	View on success factors	Opinions conc. influence on national museum policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established in 1990 by a political activist and idealist, Bente Møller Located in the inner city of Oslo, with a large population of immigrants Started as an independent cultural centre, without museum status (International Cultural Centre and Museum, IKM) Was included as part of Oslo Museum in 2006 Professionals with immigrant background were included on the staff from the start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was established as an answer to changes that took place due to increased immigration to Norway It prioritises collecting, preserving and mediating the history of new minorities in Norway A report published in 1999 by Norsk Museums-utvikling, an advisory agency for public authorities (later ABM-utvikling) The report's primary focus was on how museums mediated cultural diversity resulting from immigration since the 1970s The report from ABM-utvikling 'Break' (2006) made a difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked for a long period within an informal network Active in a series of venues, pilot studies as well as temporary exhibitions and art events Problematised the fact that the museum profession primarily mirrored the majority population Instigated a 3-year programme to recruit museum professionals with minority backgrounds (2008–2010) The aim was to build professional competence among people who could bring new perspectives to the museum sector 'Governing Diversity' was another programme instigated to assure that people with minority backgrounds were elected to important positions on administrative boards etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To strengthen the capacity to turn around and look ahead: Ignoring the Norwegian culture as it is today would result in neglecting important museum tasks Possibilities to gain extra funding play an essential role for many museums White Papers, official programmes and funding options have played an important role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of professionals have been important for this work However, the perspective has been hard to anchor and integrate fully in the museum sector Certain Green & White papers relating to museum policy have been important However, many museums still consider collecting artefacts and magazines as their prime concern Diversity and minority questions have to be anchored equally well in the museum curators' thinking

be unaware of the advantages and disadvantages associated with it (Wright 2005). Among its advantages, Wright (2005) lists access to people and institutions in distant locations, the possibility of reaching many respondents in a short amount of time and its time saving aspects, as it allows researchers to collect data while they work on other tasks. Among the disadvantages of online survey research, Wright includes uncertainty over the validity of the data, as there is a tendency of some individuals to respond to an invitation to participate in an online survey while others ignore it. In the field of diversity in culture, museums and heritage politics, several official white paper reports and policy statements have been launched since 2000. To the extent to which they have been referred to by interviewees, they can be viewed as historic documents of relevance for the research theme in question. In this study, they play a secondary role as source material and have not undergone a thorough critical review.

Table 4. Listen – we also have a voice.

<p>What is exclusion – and how can we combat it? In one of the halls in the exhibition titled 'Typical Norwegian' in the Intercultural Museum (IKM) you can hear young people talk about their own experiences about exclusion and inclusion.</p>	 <p>A group of young men discussing how they will present their views. Photo: Trung Ton That, TTT Recordings.</p>
 <p>The exhibition logo. Photo: Trung Ton That, TTT Recordings.</p>	<p>IKM has had a central partner in this exhibition, SID. The intention behind 'Cooperation for inclusive dialogue' (SID) is to create dialogue and build bridges that allow young people's voices to be heard. The objective is to reduce the social exclusion and marginalisation of young people. An important principle is to talk to each other, not about each other. Through positive dialogue it is possible to counteract hate rhetoric and create trust among different groups.</p>
<p>Here young people will share their thoughts about how it is possible to combat exclusion in society. What do they think is required for young people to feel included?</p>	 <p>One of the still photos from the film that is being shown as part of the exhibition. Photo: Trung Ton That, TTT Recordings</p>

How to profile diversity in a museum context

Diversity matters – presentation of pilot projects initiated in three museums

'The Long Road' at Ryfylkemuseet

'The Long Road' (1998) was the first immigration-related project instigated by Ryfylkemuseet. Most of the refugees from Bosnia–Hercegovina came to Norway in 1993 and 1994; some of them settled in a parish in Ryfylke named Suldal. Several factors motivated the decision to problematise how the refugees' encounter with a rural part of Norway took place and was experienced. There was a personal push: The curator was a politically

conscientious museum professional with experience as a local politician. He had been inspired by friendship bonds established a few years earlier with the Down County Museum in Downpatrick in Northern Ireland. Inspiration was found in the work in which the museum was involved: building bridges between people of different political and religious convictions. Their idea was to develop the museum as a 'Common Ground' (I: 1). There was also a professional push: These ideas corresponded well with discussions that were launched on national level about the societal role of the museum (see NOU 1996; Rekdal 1999). Weight was put on museums as a dialogue institution. Part of this new profile was to include new groups in the museum work. Documentation of the contemporary society was a well-established activity in much museum work at this stage, which had started in the 1980s. Now, the focus turned towards the societal relevance of the museum. A series of national documents related to culture and museum work appeared. Problematising the immigrants' encounter with a rural parish was now anchored in a larger national museum strategy (I: 1). A museum festival in Stavanger, with the theme 'Friends and Enemies', secured the initial funding for the exhibition and booklet.

A basic key question that became central in the museums' work with diversity was related to identity issues (Høibo 2016, 59–60). One of the central challenges of refugees is the conflict that exists between self-defined experienced and ascribed identity. While their personalities differ according to their upbringing, values, religious and life-philosophy, belonging and interests, they were ascribed a new and particular identity as 'refugee' in the encounter with their new home country (Høibo 2016, 59–60). The curator had no reservations discussing the issues that had to be solved through cooperation regarding the exhibitions. He refers to himself and his museum colleagues as 'naïve and without knowledge' when they started, without restraints. He lists a series of practical as well as more fundamental problems that occurred, basically grounded in conflicting points of view. Nonetheless, he admits that the fact that many of the conflicting issues that arose regularly made him realise that he was working with a theme that had a deeper interest for the society outside the museum itself. The main aim had been to contribute to the integration process; from a larger perspective, this should overshadow other perspectives where they felt they had less success.

'The Long Road' became the museum's pilot project in a long string of projects that evolved around immigration. The museum initiated the next project, 'The Multicultural Parish' (2000), when it was officially decided that a refugee asylum was to be established in the region. This presented methodological challenges, such as how to reach people who have experienced numerous surveys and inquiries from their first encounter with the Norwegian immigration bureaucracy. The title of the next project, 'Islam in the Land of Free Churches' (2004), referred to immigration to the museum region. In a Norwegian context, this area is frequently identified as a district where religious values are still highly appreciated, with a relatively high proportion of Christians leaning towards conservative Lutheranism. This contribution was inspired by the fact that the political debate regarding immigration had turned more confrontational. The museum curators involved in the study made interesting findings based on interviews with 37 immigrants from the county of Rogaland. Much of an immigrant's everyday life concerns settling into his or her new homeland. A commonly shared misconception holds that religious conviction, faith and belief play a major role in the lives of immigrants. While this may be the case for

some, as many of the religious rituals take place in the private sphere at home, it only has a minimal effect on dealings in public (Høibo 2016, 74).

The latest initiative concerns a highly emotional and ethically complicated issue: understanding how immigrant children experience growing up in Norway. The driving force behind it has been the fact that Norwegian Child Welfare Authorities involve themselves rather frequently in immigrant parenting. The curator emphasises that the museum has to partake in the public debate and that the museum intends to contribute with knowledge that is important to ensuring integration, with the aim of creating better ways to welcome immigrants.

With more than twenty years of experience, Rylkemuseet has built a solid foundation on which to approach relevant diversity issues. The projects include a wide range of initiatives (documentation, exhibitions and arrangements involving immigrant trainees, including immigrants in their museum staff and running an 'International Café' for 10 years) (see Table 1). Diversity is now an inclusive part of managing Ryfylkemuseet.

Creative museum cooperation to make the immigrants' voices heard

The 'Norwegian Yesterday – Today – Tomorrow?' project paved the path for numerous initiatives that occurred later in Norwegian museums; the Norsk Folkemuseum and Intercultural Museum (IKM) were the institutions behind these initiatives (see Tables 2 and 3). It was a truly cooperative initiative and, at least partially because of their different profiles, both parties benefitted the project and each other in different ways. IKM was founded in 1990 as an independent institution with a clearly expressed intention to function as a cultural centre in close contact with immigrants in Oslo. Immigrants were included both in the institution's reference group and among the regular staff. Since 1994, it has been centrally located in Grønland, one of the most diverse neighbourhoods in Oslo. As a cultural centre, it could act more freely and spontaneously than a museum institution, which could be interpreted both as a pro and a con (I: 2). IKM soon became an important factor in the network building that took place among museums and is currently responsible for coordinating the Museum Diversity Network (I: 2).

When the project started, the Norsk Folkemuseum already had long and solid museum experience to build upon. Documenting and mediating indigenous culture had been integrated into the museum's work since 1950, when it received a large Sámi collection from the Ethnographic Museum (now The Norwegian Cultural History Museum). The curator employed to work solely with the Sámi perspectives in the museum was met with approval when he suggested that the museum mission statement should be rephrased to accommodate a more diverse population. The 1983 statement that the mission was to document and mediate 'the Norwegian way of living' was changed to include variations in ways of living, experiences, identity and belonging among the people living in Norway. This has affected the way the museum professionals reflect on what and how the museum should collect and mediate knowledge and on who the relevant users are (I: 3).

The main objective of the 'Norwegian Yesterday – Today – Tomorrow?' project was to provide knowledge and insight on the multiple ways in which the diverse immigrant population was living so that their voices could be included as a part of the collections and archives of Norwegian museums. The intention was to form a national archive of

contemporary multicultural Norway, located and administered by the Norsk Folkemuseum, where oral documentation, photos, artefacts and films would be included. It functioned as a superstructure for a series of sub-projects dealing with various themes. Even though it was defined purely as a documentation project, the need to make the results from the effort visible became more urgent as the work progressed. A series of initiatives followed, including permanent exhibitions, temporary exhibitions, themed arrangements and publications (Boe and Gaukstad 2005, 5). In addition to the initial funding from the Norwegian Arts Council, many of these initiatives were time-consuming activities that required additional funding (Boe and Gaukstad 2005, 6). Through cooperation with professionals at the History Department of the University of Oslo, several doctoral candidates made use of parts of the collected material. Museums have much to gain as knowledge building institutions by establishing cooperation with research institutions that have immediate plans to use the collected data (Boe and Gaukstad 2005, 9).

These perspectives necessitated the introduction of different approaches and led to the development of new methods. A large degree of immigrant involvement occurred through cooperation with individuals, organisations and various institutions. The main approach was to make the individual the focal point: 'By making visible who the immigrant is, the museums can contribute to enlarge the image portrayed by media and hereby affect people's conceptions' (Boe and Gaukstad 2005, 5). Individual contacts sometimes functioned as a 'door opener' and enabled cooperation with special groups of immigrants. One such example was an employee at IKM who was a Bosnian refugee, who helped to promote contact with other refugees (Boe and Gaukstad 2005, 9). Continuous reflections took place regarding the methods that were used. Interviewing can present challenges, as it is time consuming to carry out a large series of interviews. It is difficult to find people willing to participate and takes considerable time to make the appointments. A successful solution that was tested during the project was to train people in interviewing and hereby enable them to carry out interviews within their groups (Boe and Gaukstad 2005, 7). The degree of individual involvement in data collection was also mirrored in the results: to a large extent, it was the voices of individuals who were portrayed. This was a conscious effort from the professionals involved; a deliberate choice to avoid the pitfall of presenting an image of 'Them and Us' (Boe and Gaukstad 2005, 34).

The knowledge accumulated through the project 'Norwegian Yesterday – Today – Tomorrow?' influenced the two museums significantly in the coming years. The curators in NF, who had been involved in the project, continued specialising in the field, while a social anthropologist was employed to ensure that new engagements with relevant perspectives were introduced (I: 3). IKM had realised for quite a while that, as long as museums were domineered by the majority group, projects focusing on diversity would continue to be short-lived. Recruitment had to be put on the agenda. In 2008, IKM initiated a plan to ensure that diversity was given a natural and obvious place in the Norwegian museum landscape (note: with economic funding from the Arts Council of Norway). It included a programme that trained immigrants as museum curators. This opened the door for immigrant trainees, and, although few recruits ended up in permanent positions, 19 were employed during the three-year project period (I: 2). Including immigrants on the museum's permanent staff can ensure that topics of current interest to the museum's user groups are put on the agenda (see Table 4).

The museum survey 2018: Diversity work in the Norwegian museum landscape

The museum survey was executed during the autumn in 2018. It was forwarded to 276 email addresses collected from the register presented on the web site of Norges Museumsforbund (the Norwegian Museum Association). Of the respondents, 112 opened the questionnaire, 53 went through the whole questionnaire and 23, covering all parts of Norway, answered all questions (see [Table 5](#)). A key question in the survey was whether the museums related to the Year of Cultural Diversity in 2008, which constituted the Norwegian Government's commitment to future cultural life in Norway to reflect cultural diversity more than today. The Norwegian Governmental commitment was based on the ratification of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted by UNESCO in 2001.

Of the museums, 74% (17 of 23) had arrangements or tasks related to immigrants in connection with the Year of Cultural Diversity in 2008. However, approximately 26% of the museums had arrangements relate to immigrant heritage before that year, in comparison to 31.6% who had arrangements in the aftermath of that year. Among others, the initiatives covered the Sami and the Romani people, Norwegian emigration by boat, poverty and new immigration, asylum centres, immigrant food and national celebrations of various immigrant groups. Of the activities, 33% were carried out by permanent exhibitions, 52% by temporary exhibitions, 43% by seminars and lectures and 67% were carried out by special arrangements, such as festivals, concerts and markets. Approximately 61% of the museum initiatives were arranged to target specific immigrant issues in local communities (e.g., when asylum centres are established, when specific immigrant groups such as Syrian immigrants are affecting the local community, or trends in society towards increased xenophobia and radicalism influence local opinion making) (See [Table 6](#)).

Interestingly, 45.5% of the respondents think that the focus on cultural diversity in museum practices is not reaching more or other user groups beyond those who have previously visited the museum. This may indicate that, to a large extent, the dissemination of immigrant heritage reaches regular museum visitors rather than new museum users.

Table 5. The Museum Survey 2018 about cultural diversity.

The Museum Survey 2018 about cultural diversity

1. Please provide some basic facts about the museum.
 2. When did the museum first start to get involved in this topic?
 3. What kind of work, including events have the museum been involved in since The National Year of Diversity 2008?
 4. Was The National Year of Diversity 2008 the year that opened up for this engagement – or have other political or cultural factors been more decisive? Please exemplify.
 5. Please exemplify the kind of work, including events the museum has contributed concerning diversity (for instance as part of permanent exhibitions; special events, festivals, concerts, markets, or other engagements).
 6. Are there special local conditions that contribute to give the theme of cultural diversity particular relevance for your museum?
 7. Has the emphasis put on cultural diversity led to a situation in which the museum reaches more and other user groups than before?
 8. Do you consider the museum's work on the topic cultural diversity contributes to influence the culture- and museum policy?
 9. Can you mention examples of work within this field that you consider particularly successful concerning promoting cultural diversity in museums?
 10. Do you know whether there have been carried out surveys directed towards museum audience related to giving priority to cultural diversity work in museums?
 11. Can you mention some museums, activities, publications etc. that you think would be useful for us in this study?
 12. 12. Would you volunteer for a telephone interview?
-

Table 6. The diverse Hedmark.

'The diverse Hedmark' was a temporary exhibition made by Glomdalsmuseet, Anno Museum in Elverum in County Hedmark in 2012. It presented nine personal narratives that were supplemented by a selection of artefacts that each person had chosen to portray their home countries. The five home counties were Bosnia-Herzegovina, Germany, Iran, Norway, Vietnam, Somalia and Chile. The group included two representatives from national minorities in Norway, the Romani and the South Sámi.



The photo illustrates how the exhibition was organised. Photo: Glomdalsmuseet, Anno Museum.



A centre piece in the exhibition is the open house that is inspired by vernacular building traditions in the Østerdalen region of Hedmark. Photo: Glomdalsmuseet, Anno Museum.

The intention behind the exhibition was to show that Hedmark has been diverse and multi-cultural for a long time (see Kulbrandstad 2002). Immigration to Norway is influenced by a series of factors. These include nature catastrophes, such as droughts or flooding, as well as wars and religious prosecution. Both political refugees and work migrants were among the participants in the exhibition.

The logo was five flower motives found in different craft traditions hereby connecting different parts of the world by illustrating similarities (Figure 6).

Each of the narratives was supplemented by a card that the visitors could bring home. Beside a portrait of the narrator were printed some words of wisdom that meant much to her or him, and she or he had also chosen a receipt that typified her or his home country (Figure 7).

Some words of wisdom from the exhibition:

'I cannot change others, but I can change myself'
(Mir Jamal, Iran)

'Today a have both legs planted on earth and I know who I am' (Neslihana, Bosnia-Herzegovina)

'When a window gets closed, a door gets opened'
(Stephanie, Germany)

The exhibition is a result of the documentation and knowledge building that take place at the Centre for Cultural Diversity at Glomdalsmuseet, Anno Museum (Flerkulturelt kunnskaps- og kompetansesenter). This centre became a permanent measure in 2006 and is working according to County Hedmark's plan of action to promote a multi-cultural Hedmark.



The exhibition's logo includes flower motives from various folk cultures, among others lily from Vietnam and a rose from Norway. Photo: Glomdalsmuseet, Anno Museum.



Burek is a national recipe from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Photo: Glomdalsmuseet, Anno Museum.

Almost 62% of the museums covered in the analysis have the opinion that their enterprise is the result of cultural political and museum political guidelines (e.g., on cultural diversity, integration and community building). Likewise, 62% believe that the museum's work on cultural diversity has little influence on the development of renewed cultural politics and museum politics. It was also pointed out that this line of work was not followed up with enough funds to support the museum's cultural diversity efforts (such as exhibitions and other activities, education of museum staff, research, etc.).

Whereas many museums believe that the fields of culture politics and museum politics do not utilise the experience of museums to develop and follow up on the policies, the survey indicates that there is a distinction between practice and policy. Nonetheless, the museums believe that they are good at following up on the political guidelines.

Discussion

This article set out to answer the following two questions: By what means and approaches do Norwegian museums currently involve migrants in museum work, and how do they include stories and experiences from modern migrants in their collections?

So far, we have presented detailed pilot cases to examine how museums have related to diversity issues in the Norwegian museum landscape. One striking finding is that several of the museum administrators in the study realised the relevance of integrating such topics at approximately the same time (mid-1990s) and that it can be seen as a rather immediate response to debates that were raised by professionals in central museum institutions (Arts Council of Norway; Norwegian Museum Association). There is a direct connection between the general call for strengthening the museums' societal role and the concern for including broader sections of the population as museums users.⁴

Some of the explanations behind this swift reaction may be based on the fact that Norwegian museums, as part of cooperative efforts among some Scandinavian museums, had experiences documenting societal aspects both in the present and in the recent past (SAMDOK). We maintain that the relating of museum work to diversity questions was politically, ethically and professionally based. When many of the regional and national cultural history museums expanded in the 1970–80s, they recruited professional curators mainly from ethnology, a discipline in which museology was integrated at the time. Ethnology was then described as a comparative study of European cultures and included analysis of both indigenous people and marginalised cultures. Another reason for the positive response is that diversity now had become a current topic on the international museum agenda. There has long existed a close connection among museum professionals on an international level. Contacts and information related to current topics of relevance have been mediated between members of the Norwegian Museum Association and international museum associations and discussed at annual meetings and conferences. Concurrently with the increased focus within museology on the museum's changed societal role, the Norwegian population became more culturally diverse. A series of works were published that problematised how museums could reach new user groups (Black 2011; Watson 2007) as well as development within methodology to promote collaboration and community engagement (Golding and Modest 2013). Many of these works were based on comparative studies (Juul and Buciek 2008; Goodnow and Akman 2008; Thomas 2010; Whitehead 2015). In her introduction to the recent published anthology

Global Mobilities, Amy Levin (2017) depicts a map of the growing number of international studies focusing on museums' relationships with ethnic and racial minorities. There are clear parallels between the tendencies we have found in Norwegian museums and what has happened in other European countries, although on a smaller scale. Harrison, Appelgren, and Bohlin (2018) provide a concise but comprehensive review of research on the relationship between immigration and cultural heritage, which began to accelerate in the 2000s and continues today (for an overview, see Scarre, Holtorf, and Pantazatos 2019). However, the research field is still treated sparingly in museum studies and practices, not least in Scandinavian countries such as Sweden (Harrison, Appelgren, and Bohlin 2018: 213).

A third reason behind the quick response was related to funding. Several of the informants (I: 2; 1: 3) and survey respondents pointed this out (see also Brekke 2018). This was coupled with the fact that the yearly grant that museum institutions receive includes specifications of themes and tasks that the museums should follow (I: 3). Diversity has been among these directives in some years. To supplement this yearly funding, it was possible for museums to apply for additional project-focused grants within fields that could bring important knowledge to the museum sector. Until very recently, diversity issues have had a central position in the directives for receiving yearly grants (1:3).⁵ Hence, it is relatively surprising that the majority of the respondents in the survey did not see a correlation between practice and policy (i.e., that more focus on diversity in museum work is mirrored in national museum strategy work). One possible explanation for this could be that some museums have found that the possibilities for extra funding have become limited in recent years (I: 3).

Concerning the means and approaches Norwegian museums currently use to involve immigrants in museum work, the presentations from the pilot museums demonstrate that they have developed special methods to handle the challenges that museum professionals experience regarding language barriers. Personal networks play an important role in the initial stages of such project work (ref. IKM-NF Cooperation), and they are used both to gain trust and to involve members of various immigrant groups. Museum professionals also place emphasis on using such projects as a means in wider knowledge building, and cooperation has been established between museum professionals and university researchers (ref. IKM-NF Cooperation). Concerning the question of how museums include stories and experiences from modern migrants in their collections, two of these museums have also become central community-based institutions, with a much wider approach to museum work than just museum exhibitions (such as venues for celebrations of important festivals for various immigrants, IKM/Oslo Museum and the International Café in Ryfylkemuseet). We also wanted more insight into how the museums include stories and experiences from immigrants in their collections. The large documentation project 'Norwegian Yesterday – Today – Tomorrow?' had a clause that all materials should be stored in a special archive and be made accessible for researchers on certain conditions. Documentation is generally considered a standard procedure in museum institutions, and, in that respect, these projects adhere to long-established methods within museum work. The majority of the respondents in the survey found that the user groups of museums had not changed much. As recruiting more museum professionals with migrant backgrounds turned out to be rather difficult, there may be some institutional barriers that prevent these institutions from seeing new possibilities in reaching other user groups. According to one of the informants, the museums are generally 'purely white' (I: 2). A lack of resources

is a common explanation as is the 'risk of overloading', which some museums experience (Hylland 2017). Before initiating the survey, we raised a provisional question as to whether it would be possible to find a relationship between active museum policies promoting diversity and the degree of immigration in the municipality. However, the response to the survey was too weak to form an opinion on this issue. Nonetheless, some of the museums that are engaged in such work are situated in localities where minority, plurality and migration are rooted in the regional history (Sør-Varanger Museum, Perspektivet, Tromsø, Ryfylkemuseum, Østfoldmuseene, Kongsberg Museum, Vest-Agder museet). It is likely that the interest in engaging in diversity issues is primarily based on the political, ethical and social awareness of museum professionals, or as Sutherland (2014) puts it, based in a need to serving their community (see also Witcomb 2015).

One concern of museum employees that emerged from the survey was that the dissemination of immigrant heritage at the museums did not reach new groups beyond the regular visitors. This assumption could provide increased knowledge about museums' audiences through a more comprehensive survey of museum visitors. Nonetheless, the statements also highlight a central challenge in the museums' practices, which has to do with how the dissemination is socially relevant, creating dialogue and debate about a shared and diverse heritage.

Conclusion

A series of means and strategies were introduced on the national level in Norway to enable museums to relate to important demographic changes caused by increasing immigration since the 1970s. The museum landscape in Norway is multifaceted, and this study has not intended to confirm or invalidate whether diversity has become a mandatory objective for museums in general. The findings from the study alone cannot verify that the museums' narratives mediating the national histories have changed fundamentally. However, it can tell us something about the close relationship that exists between national initiatives, economic resources and professional motives. Long-established claims that museums have a societal role to play are now rooted in many of the activities that take place within the walls of museums. Because more attention has been paid to diversity in the public discourse in general, events and temporary arrangements also include diversity themes. Despite the limitations of the survey, it is interesting that the majority of the local museums that responded had targeted needs that they observed among immigrant groups in their own local communities.

Questions have been raised within the museum profession regarding whether the strong emphasis on museums' role in identity building, relevance and filling a societal role has undermined their role in knowledge building (i.e., building knowledge through research rather than fragmented inputs through popular science) (Eriksen 2009; see also Hylland 2017). Several of the museum projects presented here had a strategy that included the involvement of research institutions and resulted in stronger expertise in the institution within this line of research. This may indicate that the emphasis on relevance has inspired new methods and approaches rather than confining museum work.

Funding plays an important role in most cultural institutions, particularly in museums. Much of the funding within this sector is project based, and projects are confined by strategic objectives and deadlines. This makes it appropriate to ask whether the emphasis on

social relevance has functioned primarily as a ‘money spinner’ (resource for additional funding) or whether it has filled the need of museum professionals for museums to ‘make a difference’ (be a voice that matters). During the last decade, museums have emphasised diversity and inclusion, and this tendency was evident long before the Year of Cultural Diversity 2008. In covering a wide spectrum of themes and arrangements, activities are museums’ solution to bringing more and alternative perspectives into the rather loaded political migration debate. Several of the larger projects that were initiated have nuanced some simplified images of everyday realities for first- and second-hand migrants in Norway today. The findings from the survey and the interviews indicate that museum professionals find the official signals and recommendations regarding diversity pivotal and unpredictable. Currently (2018/2019), this is just one of a set of topics that museums must deal with, and it has not received special attention in the form of extra funding during the last few years (I:3). The call for more attention to professional museum training for immigrants does not seem to have been answered either (I:2). Although the number of immigrants to Norway has decreased in the last few years, this is not necessarily the reason behind less focus nationally on museums and diversity recently. The setback is more likely a consequence of the right-wing cultural policy of the Conservative Government.

As Gnecco (2015) illuminated, focusing on multiculturalism and diversity can function as a diversion and blur larger and more fundamental political, economic and social inequalities. However, not focusing on diversity can be interpreted as evasion. Our answer to the rather rhetorical question about illusionary equality raised in the title of this article is that a considerable number of museum professionals in Norway have taken a stand and agree that museum practice related to immigrant heritage makes a difference (i.e., that the policy is not illusionary). Although the changes they experience may not be striking and immediate, through their practice, museum professionals add new bits of cultural knowledge that slowly contribute to nuance and redefine the national history.

Notes

1. According to the government’s definition, immigrants are people who have immigrated to Norway and whose parents were both born abroad. The immigrant population is defined as consisting of ‘persons with two foreign-born parents, both those who have immigrated to Norway (immigrants) and those born in Norway of two foreign-born parents (descendants)’. The Sami People are regarded as an indigenous people in Norway, not as a national minority.
2. For an extended list, see *Statistics Norway*, Table 1 Population by Immigrant Category and Country Background, updated 5 March 2018, <https://www.ssb.no/en/innvbf>
3. See the appendix for questions in the museum survey.
4. An introductory web search early spring 2018 for ‘Norwegian museums and immigration’ resulted in seven pages with approximately 10 entries per page (carried out 19. February 2018). Some reflected current discussions and presented interviews with authors of recently published books and book reviews. The majority however announced various planned arrangements and gives a glimpse into the variety of activities that are taking place in Norwegian museums: lectures, conferences, exhibitions and documentation projects. Museums and institutions that figured in this search were Glomdalsmuseet Elverum; Hadeland Folkemuseum Gran, IKM Oslo; Kulturhistorisk Museum Oslo; Norsk Bergverksmuseum Kongsberg; Norsk Folkemuseum Oslo; Norsk Lokalhistorisk Institutt in cooperation with Landslaget for lokal - og privatarkiv, Landslaget for lokalhistorie, Norsk folkeminnelag and the first multi-cultural newspaper ‘Utop’; Perspektivet Museum Tromsø and Teknisk Museum Oslo.

5. In 2017, the fund managed by the Bank Association supported a project instigated by the Norwegian Museum Association. Seventeen museums were included in the work (2018–2019) and the project is called 'Inclusive Museums – Cultural Knowledge and Work as a Catalyst for Well-Functioning Inclusion'; <https://museumsforbundet.no/nyheter/norges-museumsforbundet-mottar-3-millioner-fra-sparebankstiftelsen/> (accessed 18 December 2018).

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