Workshop series on
Collaborative Digitization Projects:
Takeaways and recommendations

The **Working Group *International Cooperation*** of the Network Colonial Contexts invited to a workshop series dedicated to presenting and discussing collaborative digitization projects with regard to cultural heritage from colonial contexts. In three sessions we had the privilege to listen to and learn from the following ongoing projects:

Friday, September 17, 2021
Connect - Comprehend - Communicate. The „Amazonas future lab"
https://uclab.fh-potsdam.de/projects/amazonia-future-lab
Speakers: Speakers: Andrea Scholz (Ethnologisches Museum Berlin); Thiago da Costa Oliveira (Ethnologisches Museum Berlin)

Friday, October 1, 2021
The Global Database of Kenyan Objects of the International Inventories Programme (IIP)
https://www.inventoriesprogramme.org
Speakers: Juma Ondeng (Principal Curator at the regional museum in western Kenya, Kitale Museum - National Museums of Kenya, founding member of the IIP); Jim Chuchu (Director of The Nest Collective, member of the IIP)

Friday, October 29, 2021
Repatriation in Australia: the lessons learned, the work yet to be done
Speakers for the Return, Reconcile, Renew research network: Michael Pickering (National Museum of Australia); Lyndon Ormond-Parker (Cultural Heritage Expert with Alyawarra decent, a.o. Honorary Senior Lecturer at Australian National University); Paul Turnbull (University of Tasmania)
https://returnreconcilerenew.info
Speakers for the project on the German Ethnographic Expeditions to the Kimberley: Leah Umbagai (Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporation); Kim Doohan (independent consultant anthropologist); Martin Porr (University of Western Australia); Richard Kuba (Frobenius Institute)
https://www.frobenius-institut.de/en/research/laufende-projekte/724

Friday, November 11, 2021
In a **fourth and final session** we invited all projects to participate in a **round table** to wrap up our discussions.

In the following, we list our most important takeaways as claims and recommendations to be considered when planning and conducting *Collaborative Digitization Project*s:

1) guarantee accessibility

One of the themes that came up in all three workshops was the issue of poor internet capacity and user technical infrastructure in regions where internet connectivity or even electricity is not stable, and equipment is not always up to date. Give out versions with low data volume for initial access by users with only smartphone access and limited resources. Find ways to provide necessary hardware. Make sure that software is used that continues to function without regular updates that might even incur repeated costs.
Create local subsets of databases as offline versions, make sure all information is locally available. You might even consider hard copy versions as outcomes. In this way communities have information locally available and have the option to annotate information, that can (later) be added to the database.

2) consultancy beforehand

Consultation about the status of presented material regarding its sensitivity, secrecy, sacredness, or possible restrictions in terms of access should ideally happen prior to going online. From the beginning, be prepared to adjust permission, restriction systems and categories.

3) anticipate consequences I

The experience of encountering colonial archives can cause distress or be traumatizing. Therefore, any such website or database should start with a disclaimer addressing this possibility and giving a rough idea of what people will encounter while using the website or database. The project should also offer a strategy of how to deal with distress caused by engaging with the website or database. Make sure nobody is confronted with material unprepared and that users are not left alone with what they might experience.

4) anticipate consequences II

It is not sufficient to only bring archives online. Digitizing and publishing information will lead to reactions like requests, project proposals and further collaborations. Make sure to anticipate these results from the project and that there will be capacities and resources to deal with these. It is also important that the website easily offers a way of contacting relevant and knowledgeable persons in case of questions etc., also in the future.

5) transparency of sources

The project will most probably bring together knowledge and information from different people, different times, and different places. Make sure that information is given together with relevant sources (who said what, when and where) and that this is covered by the data protection policies and existing agreements.

6) work with a long term perspective and guarantee sustainability

Establishing networks and collaborative arrangements is a long-term process. Invest time to build trust and confidence, both prerequisites for strong collaborations. Allow time to figure out working processes and project outcomes collaboratively.

7) be personal and offline, too

We face a very strong imperative to digitize. This helps us in many situations. However, digital formats are a poor substitute for face-to-face collaboration. Rather, personal relationships enable trust to allow digital formats and solutions to be found together. Keep in mind that personal encounters and direct exchanges are a vital part of the human experience that should ideally complement all our digital efforts and experiments.

8) find individual solutions

Every community has different questions and needs. Establish a dialogue getting to know what information is needed and to evaluate what the significance of the material really is in the local context. Subsequently, each project will encounter individual challenges that will result in customised technical solutions. Flexibility has to be maintained to respond to the ongoing needs of "translations" of e.g. cultural contexts, legal frameworks, and reflections, and so on.

9) avoid reproducing colonial narratives and structures

We need to find strategies that help us to acknowledge coloniality in institutions/collections/data and to question, interrogate, and understand the narrative about the colonial in order to avoid colonial reproduction.
Some strategies explored and implemented by the projects presented in the series:

Broaden access to own cultural heritage. Try not to be elitist, use social networks and art and community talks. Work against epistemic and ontological hierarchies: build semantic structures to make knowledge accessible and meaningful to Indigenous collaborators. Implement access restrictions and acceptance of authority over Indigenous knowledge. Make knowledge useful for communities today. Seek permission before publishing.

10) decolonize decision making structures

The most challenging but crucial point is to decolonize data policies. Who holds rights to knowledge, data, and digital products? Who allows access, who controls data governance? Who sets the conditions to negotiate these questions, and who has the right to decide the answers?

The Working Group *International Cooperation* of the Network Colonial Contexts, June 2022

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More informations: https://www.evifa.de/de/ueber-uns/fid-projekte/netzwerk-koloniale-kontexte

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