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Participatory museum projects with refugee-background young people

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ABSTRACT




Museums in the Global North have turned to participatory practices with traditionally marginalized groups in response to social and political pressures to become more inclusive and relevant and to confront their colonial pasts. One group which museums are increasingly seeking to engage is refugee-background young people, located at the intersection of two groups traditionally excluded from contributing to museological practice. However, while a wide range of participatory projects with refugee-background young people are being delivered with museums, there is limited published research and evaluation of these projects. This constrains opportunities for knowledge sharing about and across the sector. Responding to this situation, this article reviews the existing literature, focusing on key opportunities and challenges it identifies for refugee-background young people, museums, and audiences. Additionally, it attends to the limits of this literature, calling for wider critical engagement with such projects to support ethical and effective practice across the museum sector.

KEYWORDS

Refugee-background young people; youth; museums; participatory practice; social inclusion; co-production

Introduction

In recent decades, museums in the Global North have increasingly sought to engage traditionally marginalized and excluded groups in participatory projects and exhibitions. This has formed part of a wider shift in the heritage sector toward social inclusivity and decolonization emerging from critiques of the role of museums as “tools of empire” and ivory towers of accumulation and elitism, and the desire of museums to be more relevant to, and engaged with, the communities they serve (Giblin et al., 2019; McCall & Gray, 2014). Among those increasingly targeted for such initiatives are young people from refugee backgrounds (Khalikova & Sinitsyna, 2020). Located at the intersection of two groups whose perspectives have historically been excluded in and beyond museums, refugee-background young people have much to contribute and gain from such initiatives.

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Moreover, they are often viewed as well placed to act as intermediaries between their communities and public institutions (Domsic, 2021; Makhoul et al., 2012; McMichael et al., 2017)

However, as is widely addressed in the literature on participation in museums (Lynch, 2017; Morse, 2022) and on participatory work with refugee-background young people more broadly (Askins & Pain, 2011; Nunn, 2022), it is critical that this work is done with care, to ensure that it genuinely addresses – and does not replicate – historical and contemporary hierarchies of knowledge and power and supports and centers the needs and interests of youth participants. This is particularly critical given the rise of populist nationalism and the escalation of exclusionary discourses and policies in relation to migrants and refugees (Thorleifsson, 2021), and in light of the negative effects of the intersecting crises – including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate crisis – currently facing young people (Moore et al., 2021).

In this context, the aims of this article are twofold. First, we provide a scoping review of academic and gray literature examining participatory projects involving refugee-background young people to draw out their combined contribution to our understanding of the opportunities and challenges of such projects for their stakeholders: refugee-background young people, museums, and audiences. Second, we seek to identify the gaps in existing literature and to highlight the need for more widespread practices of research and evaluation of these projects in Global North museums. We argue that increased critical attention to participatory projects with refugee-background young people – including how they are experienced by participants and communities – can support ethical and effective practice by enabling learnings to be shared across the museum sector.

The turn toward social inclusivity, decolonization, and participatory design in museums

Over recent decades there has been a shift in museum practice, often associated with “new museology,” which has driven policies of social inclusivity, participation, and decolonization in the museum sector (McCall & Gray, 2014). This has emerged from a convergence of two separate, but related, concerns that have seen a societal reckoning on the museum sector: their legacy as both tools and products of empire and questions regarding their relevance and purpose in the contemporary era (De Angelis et al., 2016; Lynch 2020; Lynch & Alberti, 2010). Many museums in the Global North – particularly ethnographic museums – are built upon a foundation of the ideals of empire, sustaining and perpetuating these values to become conclaves of elitism (Giblin et al., 2019). As museums have sought to address this legacy, there has been an accompanying acknowledgement that museums have not “been providing adequately for the needs of culturally diverse communities” (Simpson, 2012, p. 1), some of whom are intimately entwined with museological histories of extraction and (mis)representation. This has galvanized museums to present voices, perspectives, histories, and identities that have been traditionally marginalized and excluded from museum narratives in order to address historical wrongs and enhance societal relevance and impact (Sandell & Nightingale, 2012). Whilst reckoning with this legacy of social exclusion and colonialism, museums have also recognized their capacity to “foster cultures of caring,” acting as sites of reconciliation, support,

social bonding, and social care (Morse, 2022; Silverman, 2009). Together, these discussions raise the future possibilities of museums as socially inclusive sites of diverse cultural celebration, education, and care.

Efforts to address social exclusion and colonial legacy have taken different formats and approaches depending on the ethos, resources, and management of museums (Henrich, 2011; Lannes & Rhodes, 2019). A popular route of engaging traditionally marginalized populations is participatory projects (Simon, 2010). These approaches are celebrated for the opportunities they provide for highlighting and addressing unequal power dynamics within partnerships, valuing community members as experts of their own experience, and providing platforms for groups to challenge dominant representations (Tzibazi, 2013). There is a breadth of literature that has explored the use of these techniques across different institutions and exhibitions (Mygind et al., 2015) and there have been several interpretations and definitions of what participatory practice is within a museum context, which have been explored and analyzed elsewhere (Domsic, 2021; Simon, 2010). For the purposes of this article, which reviews projects with diverse interpretations and applications of participatory practice, we define “participation” as involvement in, or contribution to, any aspect of producing a museum display by non-museum groups or individuals. This can include collaborative, co-produced, or participatory work.

Despite their potentially positive, inclusive, and equitable outcomes, participatory practice within museums has not been without critique. Scholars have critically theorized participatory practices between museums and communities as “contact zones” of unequal power and influence that continue to perpetuate inequitable hierarchies (Boast, 2011). In such cases, partnerships can result in the development of uneven relationships in which the agency of community partners is eroded or coerced and participatory practices are, at best, “empowerment-lite” (Lynch, 2016). Social inclusivity through participatory practices has also been critiqued for perpetuating a culture of contribution from marginalized communities (Morse, 2022), perpetuating relations of extraction and appropriation. This occurs when projects are conceived and led by museums and the participation of a partner, individual, or group is framed as the contribution of a story, experience, or object that fits with the museum’s broader agenda. In these contexts, participation is skewed toward the needs of the museum and its funders, and collaborators are seen as contributors, not partners. The critiques highlighted above note both the possibilities and the pitfalls of participatory work within museum contexts and show the necessity of reviewing and evaluating such practices through museum and academic research and evaluation.

Including refugee-background young people in museum projects and exhibitions

Refugee-background young people have been of particular interest to socially inclusive museums, as they sit at the intersection of two groups with which these institutions *want* to connect, but which they have historically struggled to meaningfully engage: refugee and youth audiences (Brasseur, 2018; Fleming, 2012). However, including refugee-background young people in participatory projects requires attention to, and engagement with, the complexities of their lived experiences, as this can mediate the nature and extent of their participation (Couch, 2007; Nunn, 2022).

Youth, understood here to encompass individuals aged 15–24 (United Nations, 2023), is a critical age of emerging adulthood and identity formation, associated with exploration and a sense of possibility (Arnett, 2007). At this age, refugee-background young people are likely to be grappling with similar experiences to their peers, such as expectations, responsibilities, and hopes for their future. However, they will also be navigating additional complexities of overlapping identities, ethnicities, and positionalities between cultures, nations, and ways of life. Young people's decision-making at this juncture has critical outcomes later in life (Morrice et al., 2020). This is, therefore, a key moment of intervention, as within this life stage substantial transitions are taking place. At such a critical stage of identity formation, heritage and heritage activities can provide a forum for refugee-background young people as they negotiate "shifting identities," giving attention to – and unpicking – narratives of belonging and becoming, as well as legacies of racism and colonialism (Dellios & Henrich, 2020; Naidoo, 2011; Sergi, 2021).

Refugee young people are shaped by pre-, trans-, and post-migration factors. Many refugee-background young people will have experienced deeply traumatic and unsettling experiences of conflict, violence, loss, and flight. Most will have experienced transitory and precarious periods in refugee camps or urban settings and/or negotiated perilous migratory crossings before settling in their new country (Edge et al., 2014). Once settled in new countries, they will be negotiating their individual and ethnic identities while orienting themselves in their home and culture (Qin et al., 2015). Many will attain local language literacy more quickly than their parents, and therefore take on responsibilities or act as interpreters for their families. Some will also have significant care responsibilities, as well as expectations to contribute to family income (Cassity & Gow, 2005).

Other young people may be completely disconnected from any family ties or support in their new country, having arrived as unaccompanied minors. Alongside family and cultural expectations and roles, young people will be negotiating a new bureaucratic identity of being a "refugee" and coming to terms with some of the administrative and legal complications and barriers this brings with it. Some will be experiencing an ongoing precarity related to their uncertain legal status and continued contact with the state (Chase, 2013). Additionally, many refugee communities are settled in areas that are spatially, socially, and economically marginalized, affecting refugee-background young people's connection to their wider environment, as well as their access to support and opportunities (Phillimore & Goodson, 2006).

Education for refugee youth is often interrupted, suspended, and fragmented, even when settled in a new country (Block et al., 2013). This creates barriers to integration, language development, and further education and training. Access and opportunities for tertiary education are particularly scarce (Cassity & Gow, 2005; Morrice et al., 2020). In places of education, and within wider host communities, refugee young people often encounter racism, harassment, marginalization, and othering due to their ethnic, linguistic, and migration background (Edge et al., 2014; Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018). As a result of their lack of social networks, interrupted schooling, and language skills, they are typically underemployed or engaged in insecure work.

While it is critical that we attend to the complex lives of refugee-background young people, as we have above, it is equally important that we resist defining them through narratives of suffering and pathos (Lynch, 2016). Refugee-background young people frequently demonstrate a wide range of capabilities including resilience, adaptability, and hope, and carry with them diverse knowledge and experiences that have the potential

to make a valuable contribution to their settlement country and communities (Nunn et al., 2017; Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018). Despite – or perhaps because of – the complex obstacles and challenges they face, researchers and practitioners have found that refugee-background young people continually seek opportunities to share ideas, build and contribute to communities, have fun, and develop networks, skills, education, and employment opportunities for themselves and others (Ramirez & Matthews, 2008). Moreover, when given the opportunity, refugee-background young people have the capacity to interpret, represent, and amplify their ideas and experiences with their own voices (Nunn, 2022).

As museums seek to be more engaged, socially inclusive institutions of education, culture, and knowledge, it is evident that they are uniquely placed to support refugee-background young people as they navigate post-migration challenges, particularly in the post-Brexit, anti-immigration, hostile environment in the UK. As the literature discussed below explores, museums can provide a forum for young people to share their diverse histories and perspectives, building social capital and soft skills. Museums also have much to gain from the skills, capacities, knowledge, and experience that refugee background young people offer. Involvement of refugee-background young people in museums at this life stage could be instrumental to creating lifelong involvement and interest in heritage and in cultural appreciation and exchange, and to reimagining museums as relevant, vibrant, and inclusive spaces (Gibson & Kondon, 2013).

Scoping study approach

To survey existing knowledge, we conducted a scoping review of academic and gray literature (2). Following Arksey and O'Malley (2005), our review followed a four-stage process: (i) searching databases and scanning of existing publications and literature; (ii) refining inclusion/exclusion criteria; (iii) charting the data; and (iv) collating, summarising, and reporting the findings. The review was underpinned by the following research question: "how has the museum sector engaged in participatory practice with refugee-background young people?" Single and combined search terms used: "participant*" "migrant," "refugee," "museum," "heritage," "co-production," "youth," and "young people." The term "heritage" was later removed from searches for two reasons: the decision was made to focus solely on museum engagement rather than the heritage sector more broadly; the term is often used to refer to the histories and backgrounds of migrants and refugees, therefore further complicating searches. The searches yielded a gross sample of 61 publications, which constituted the broad basis for further selection. Once we refined the criteria to include only those publications focused on participatory work with refugee-background young people in museum contexts, we were left with seven publications to review. One of these publications was excluded, as it focused primarily on arts practices within an arts museum (Chayder, 2019). However, as many of its findings were insightful and relevant, it is drawn on in the below discussion. The remaining six publications were written between 2011 and 2021. The review was limited to English language texts, though five national contexts are addressed. While it included online searches outside of academic databases to identify gray literature, it did not capture museum reports and evaluations that are not publicly searchable. Thus, while it is clear that there is a wider body of ongoing work with refugee-background young people in museums (for example, see Glucksman, 2018; Rodenhurst, 2007), detailed accounts of these projects are not always available.

There are tranches of related research that are relevant and complimentary to this scoping review, including research on participatory museum projects with young people who are not of refugee background (Dawson, 2018; Domsic, 2021; Morse et al., 2013; Tzibazi, 2013) and with refugee communities more broadly (Bhambri, 2020; Eckersley et al., 2020; Gabriel, 2008; Henrich, 2011). There is also academic literature that highlights work with refugee-background young people in museums, but whose focus is on the therapeutic or cultural affordances that museums offer, rather than an examination of participatory processes and opportunities in creating displays (Feen-Calligan et al., 2023; Whyte, 2017). While this work is drawn on where relevant in the discussion below, it is clear that the unique positionality of refugee-background young people at the intersection of life stage and migration experience plays a critical role in the museum projects they participate in, and thus warrants a more focused inquiry.

Overview of reviewed publications

Of the relevant publications, four were peer-reviewed articles. This included Gibson and Kindon's (2013) exploration of "the mixing room: stories from young refugees in New Zealand" presented in the Community Gallery at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa; Mouliou's (2019) account of the co-creation of a museum with refugee-background young people in an Athens refugee camp; Naidoo's (2011) reflections on the role of museums in supporting refugees in Australia; and Marselis's (2017) observations of refugee-background young people creating an exhibition at the Marienfelde Refugee Museum in Berlin. In addition, a report by Mina and Sergi (2020) discusses "Boat 195: A creative exploration of the Mediterranean History of Migration," presented at the World Gallery at the Horniman Museum in London. Finally, Sergi's (2021) book *Museums, Refugees and Communities* also addresses this exhibition, together with a range of other projects that engage with refugee-background communities across life stages.

Five of the publications reported on specific participatory projects with refugee background young people. At least one author from each of these publications was also involved in implementing these projects, with the exception of Marselis (2017), who was an outside observer to museum activities (p. 667).

The six identified publications (summarized in Table 1) were based on work conducted in industrialized, western nation states which have hosted or resettled significant numbers of refugees: the United Kingdom, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, and New Zealand. The age range of participants is not defined beyond being "youth," except in Gibson and Kindon (2013), in which young people were aged 12–29 years. In most cases, young people came from a range of ethnic and national backgrounds, though Mouliou (2018) worked specifically with Syrian and Kurdish young people, and Naidoo (2011) focuses on those from African backgrounds. The project hosts/partners were primarily museums, with the exception of Mouliou's work, which involved creating a museum in a refugee camp.

Findings from the scoping review

Museums as a site of social inclusion

Most of the reviewed works centered the role of the museum, emphasizing the various functions it played – or could play – in the lives of refugee-background young people.

Table 1. Table of publications

Publication	Country	Institution	Project participants
Gibson, S. & Kindon, S. (2013). "The Mixing Room Project at Te Papa: Co-creating the museum with refugee background youth in Aotearoa/ New Zealand."	New Zealand	Community Gallery at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington	Approx. 100 young people (ages 12–29 years) from a diverse range of refugee backgrounds.
Mina, D. & Sergi, D. (2020). "Boat 195: A creative exploration of the Mediterranean History of Migration."	United Kingdom	World Gallery at the Horniman Museum in London.	Refugee-background young people from a range of cultural organizations.
Mouliou, M. (2018). "The museums of our discoveries: Empowering young refugees in an urban context."	Greece	Skaramagkas Refugee Camp	15 teenagers living in refugee camps in Athens from Iraq, Syria, and Kurdistan.
Naidoo, L. (2011). "The Refugee Action Support programme: A case study report of best practice."	Australia	Refugee Action Support programme, Greater Western Sydney	African refugee-background high school students.
Sergi, D. (2021). <i>Museums, refugees and communities.</i>	United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands	Work with refugee background young people occurred in the Migration Museum. Other museums and programs discussed include Sainsburys Centre for the Visual Arts, Horniman, Pitt Rivers Museum, The Documentation Centre & Museum of Migration (Germany), and Humanity House (Netherlands).	Young people from cultural and arts programs.
Marselis, R. (2020). "Bridge the Gap: Multidirectional Memory in Photography Projects for Refugee Youths."	Germany	Society for Humanistic Photography working with the Marienfelde Refugee Centre Museum, Berlin	11 refugee background young people from Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria, and Chechnya

Projects were typically driven by social justice issues, including a desire to create more inclusive institutions, to influence audience perceptions of migration, to support refugee-background young people, and to bridge the gap between refugee communities and wider society. All the publications acknowledged the vital role of museums, either in practice or in potential, as a location of social inclusion, highlighting possibilities for museums as nation-building institutions to enact new, more inclusive forms of nationhood.

However, as Lynch (2017) has warned, a museum's intentions to be inclusive or act democratically does not immediately undo all other vestiges of institutional discrimination. To achieve a social justice agenda and create socially inclusive spaces, the engagement "of all parts" of the museum is required, particularly at governance and leadership levels (Fleming, 2012; Gibson & Kindon, 2013; Lynch, 2016; Taylor, 2017). It was evident among the profiled literature that the socially inclusive aims of participatory and collaborative projects need to be incorporated into the broader ethos of the museum as an institution to build meaningful collaboration with refugee-background young people (See also: Sandell & Nightingale, 2012). A broader, institution- and governance-led social inclusion ethos would enable refugee-background young people to feel not only included and welcomed in museums but would also indicate an institutional commitment to democratize and share power.

Relational processes

Working alongside refugee-background young people was described as an affective experience, and much of the literature highlighted the connectivity and relationships that emerged between museum staff and young people and the importance of this in achieving social inclusion.

Gibson and Kindon (2013) and Sergi (2021) reflected on the ways in which they, as individuals, alongside wider museum staff, became enmeshed in young people's lives. For example, Sergei found that young people used proximity and relationship with researchers and museum staff as an opportunity to ask for advice about everyday life in their new countries (p 84). Mouliou (2018) discussed how she worked in close contact with people, sharing food and community and maintaining contact with young people over phone and social media long after her project had concluded. These relationships were framed as natural and important aspects of participatory projects, which emerged over time while working toward a joint goal. Young people's ongoing contact with museums (and presence within them) often meant that relationships developed at multiple scales of the museum workforce.

Museum staff and project coordinators may in some cases be among the few adults that refugee-background young people have contact with outside of institutional and familial contexts. These relationships will inevitably be imbued with power dynamics but can also support young people's socialization and personal development (Wells, 2011). Because of the relational element of such projects, some studies emphasized the importance of museum staff receiving training or awareness of the complex experiences that refugee-background young people (Gibson & Kindon, 2013; Mina & Sergi, 2020) Staff need to be equipped and supported to navigate compassionate and considerate responses toward young people's experiences and to celebrate young people's contributions and skills within the museum, while being mindful of their own personal boundaries.

The ethics of engaging with traumatic histories

Across the reported projects, there was an acute acknowledgment of the sensitivities of working with refugee-background young people and the ethical considerations in engaging young people with potentially traumatic histories. As most projects sought to draw on young people's experiences and reflections of forced migration, there were concerns about re-traumatizing young people, and project staff were reflective and responsive when this occurred. For example, Marselis (2017) observed how project facilitators quickly amended a well-intentioned, but unsettling, visual activity on *Bridge the Gap II* project which troubled participants who did not want to engage with recent and traumatic images of conflict.

Gibson and Kindon's (2013) work acknowledged concerns related to trauma and ethics as they engaged young people in exploring their refugee histories. Their proposed solution, to ensure deeper psycho-social protection of participants, was to approach young people through community leaders, or parents. This provided a means of monitoring young people's mental health and resilience before engaging them in projects of this

nature. It also allowed for avenues of referral if concerns were raised about young people's mental health during the project.

Mina and Sergi (2020) mirrored this approach in their own work, where they worked alongside a refugee youth charity who referred young people to their project. Their project used a boat that had smuggled migrants across the Mediterranean, an object which would have important personal resonance with many participants. They expressed a deep concern about the potentially traumatic nature of the discussions that would arise during the project and mitigated this by only approaching young people who they felt had the emotional maturity and resilience to work on the project. Additionally, trusted team members from their partner organization were present, which assisted in difficult moments during the project (p 143). These reflections indicate the emotional value that participatory projects can have for refugee-background young people as spaces of cathartic reflection, that is, if projects are conceived within a "culture of care" rather than a "culture of contribution" (Morse, 2022). These approaches reflect wider research practice with refugee-background young people, which advocate methodologies that protect marginalized young people whilst building their autonomy (Block et al., 2013).

Relinquishing curatorial control: working inside and outside of cultural institutions

A key aspect to museum participatory projects is sharing curatorial authority, which can be challenging for cultural institutions to practice (Simon, 2010). Whilst participatory activities with refugee-background young people can bring their interests and concerns to the fore, these can be at odds with what the museum would like to achieve and showcase, and there can be curatorial concerns over content and framing (Gibson & Kindon, 2013; Morse et al., 2013; Tzibazi, 2013; Vermeulen et al., 2019). Including refugee-background young people in the creative development of programs, while museum staff step back to take on a "facilitator" role, can be demanding, messy, and time consuming (Gibson & Kindon, 2013; Lynch & Alberti, 2010) and requires museums to relinquish and share power. This is crucial to building more democratic and socially inclusive institutions and, in addition, can build young people's autonomy and positions them as knowledge holders (see more below).

Despite many positive reflections on their project, Gibson and Kindon (2013) detailed institutional struggles to relinquish curatorial authority to young people, noting that within such a large museum with "diverse staff members and stakeholders with divergent views" it is "almost impossible ... to relinquish control to its communities" (69). This led to some dissatisfaction and frustration with aspects of the project from both young people and facilitators, although the authors are ultimately positive about the participatory outcomes of the project. In contrast, Mouliou's (2018) work details young people working outside of an institutional context, where together they decided their museum's purpose, structure, and content. In this experimental and participatory design, Mouliou demonstrates some of the creative and narrative possibilities of working outside of institutional heritage frameworks. This tension between curatorial control and participatory practice questions the extent to which museums can reimagine themselves through participatory practices.

Refugee-background young people producing and controlling their own narratives

Participation is not only about having a “voice” within a project but about the right and ability to advocate on one’s own behalf, to have some measure of control, and to be involved in decision-making processes and interventions (Couch & Francis, 2006). The projects profiled in surveyed literature demonstrate the importance of creative, participatory spaces for refugee-background young people not only to challenge negative societal portrayals of refugees but also to express themselves and control their own narratives. Mina and Sergi (2020) framed their project as empowering young refugees and providing them with an opportunity to creatively interpret the theme of the Mediterranean and of migration from their own perspectives, in as much or as little personal detail as they wanted. This framing allowed young people to control their participation and engagement with different themes in a way that was comfortable to them and ensured that the curators did not “misrepresent refugee experiences” and reduce participants to “disempowered victim status” (144).

Mouliou (2018, p 126) noted the importance of her project in providing space for refugee participants to explore and express a “reality different from that of their current situation – their identity as refugees.” Refugee-background young people involved in the project described the importance of having a space (in the museum) to which they could bring friends and others from their community to see their work, which would enable bridging opportunities between refugee-background communities and the museum, positioning the young people as authorities on the exhibition and its subject matter.

Impact on audiences, stakeholders and communities

Assessing the impact of museum exhibitions and displays on audiences can be challenging to capture (Sergi, 2021). However, some of the profiled literature provides insights into how such projects, and their resulting outcomes, impacts audiences and project stakeholders and indicates how such projects might have a wider societal effect.

Naidoo (2011) postulates that museum projects with refugee-background young people have the potential to change societal relations and perceptions, as well as create and establish links between refugee-background young people, their communities, and cultural and heritage institutions. Exhibition evaluations discussed by Gibson and Kindon (2013, p. 28) showed positive engagement with audiences and “indicated that most visitors to the exhibition considered what it meant to be a refugee and appreciated the strengths and optimism of refugee background youth.” In her project in Athens, Mouliou (2018, p 131) describes how, over the course of the project, connections were gradually stimulated between local and refugee communities, creating a “fluid, democratic space.” However, she also emphasizes that this was for “a short while,” raising questions about the long-term impact of such interventions.

Working alongside community organizations and educational institutions (as well as museums) also provided further opportunities to assess the societal impacts of such projects. In some of the profiled projects, changes in attitudes toward refugee-background young people from partner-organization staff were captured. Teachers, museum staff,

and practitioners reported how their perspectives changed when observing the different skills young people developed and showcased through creative and participatory museum practices and through evolving relationships that were built with young people. For example, Gibson and Kindon (2013) found that their project transformed museum staff's ideas and approaches to participatory work. Similar impacts on workers have been reported in relation to participatory projects in other cultural spaces (Chayder, 2019). Such accounts demonstrate the potential for greater understanding and appreciation of the experiences and histories of these young people, and their capacity to thrive when granted more agency and creativity.

Meaningful engagement through longitudinal practice

Giglietto et al. (2022) have observed that there are fast-paced trends centered on engaging refugee communities in heritage institutions. However, Gibson and Kindon (2013) argue that projects with refugee-background young people should not be conceived as quick fixes or gestures to serve the profile of a museum. Projects with these groups should be considered, longitudinal, and dialogical practices wherever possible. According to Sergi (2021), when such an approach is used – and includes all institutional scales of the museum from trustees to guides – it allows museums to see young people as genuine partners and co-contributors, creating a more inclusive environment and creating institutional change that transcends individual projects.

The commitment to longevity was instrumental to building meaningful and consequential partnerships between museums and refugee-background young people. Gibson and Kindon (2013) found that young people needed space and time to develop artistic skills and practices, to engage in the museum and with the wider project. Rushing this aspect of the project led to frustrations from museum staff, arts practitioners, and young people who felt they were not given the time to develop the skills needed to do projects well or to reflect on the wider process. Mina and Sergi (2020) found that the longevity of the project “Boat 195” was “key to its success,” stating that young people were struck by the museum’s investment in the project, which led to positive perceptions that the project was not merely “tokenistic” but a genuine effort to engage refugee-background young people. Rushed, or fast paced, work risks undermining the potential of museum projects with marginalized communities and the impact of this work on both groups (Lynch, 2016).

The value of artistic and creative approaches in building participation

The projects highlighted within the reviewed literature worked with young people whose commonality was their refugee background or status. This meant that the projects typically drew from a heterogenous group, representing varied ages, ethnicities, and cultures. Within such groups, there were differences in cultural background, language, and skills, all of which needed to be considered when working together on a project or exhibition. To benefit from these differences and to create inclusive environments, active, hands on, artistic, and collaborative methods were found to be largely successful (see also Vermeulen et al., 2019). Use of visual, practical, and non-verbal approaches were popular, as these resonated with young people, addressed language barriers, and allowed for cross-cultural

expression. Not only were such techniques successful in addressing cultural and language differences, they also attended to differences in age and gender (Chayder, 2019; Gibson & Kindon, 2013; Mouliou, 2018; Sergi, 2021). While young peoples' "refugee identity" is what included them in such projects, using participatory artistic and expressive techniques afforded young people the space and time to explore and express different aspects of their identity (Mouliou, 2018; Nunn, 2022), as well as an opportunity to move away from ascribed and bureaucratic labels that they navigated in their everyday lives.

Developing language, soft skills and social capital

Although projects were often designed to accommodate differences in languages spoken, or take advantage of fluency in shared languages, most of the literature found that involvement in such projects provided, or had the potential to provide, a forum for improving young peoples' language skills and confidence. However, differences in language ability can also mean that some refugee background young people are unable to fully express themselves and therefore might find project experiences frustrating or confusing. This was highlighted by Marselis (2017), where museum staff reflected that the lack of funding for translators meant that some young people found it challenging to express themselves, and that the lack of a shared language placed additional pressure on those refugee-background young people who did speak German, to act as group translators. She concludes that language aspects of cultural encounters need to be seriously attended to, otherwise they can "re-create, rather than challenge, asymmetrical power relationships" (p. 675). In addition to objectives of supporting language development, many of the projects provided occasions to establish soft skills that could aid future employment opportunities. Involvement in these programs also provided opportunities to build inter- and intra-cultural relationships and friendships with other young people and with cultural, heritage, and museum workers, supporting the development of social networks, confidence, and knowledge.

Integrating projects into broader processes of support

Even when young people are no longer refugees, they often continue to be highly mobile. Refugee communities can be uprooted and moved to different parts of the country, be deported, or move to seek better opportunities elsewhere. This continual flux presents challenges for projects working with these groups. For example, Mouliou (2018) highlighted how her project held great promise of building intra- and inter-cultural bridges among young people and their new communities. However, macrostructural forces, such as legislative or regional changes to refugee policies, led to a dismantling of these connections in their infancy (see also Chayder, 2019). When projects are developed alongside other social, cultural and educational institutions that have a consistent presence in refugee-background young people's lives, they have a greater chance of success. For example, Chayder (2019) and Naidoo (2011) demonstrate how working alongside young people's educational institutions provides another aspect of connectivity to projects, which can help address the challenges of transitory settlement and insecure legal status during such projects. Mouliou (2018, p 129) echoes this, finding that the termination of the supporting educational institution in her project resulted in the loss of the "thread"

of connection between herself and participants. By developing projects alongside other institutions, which can also include national or global refugee organizations, programs appear to have a better chance at longevity, relevance, support, and impact. Furthermore, the involvement of, or partnership with, secondary institutions and organizations could ensure that refugee-background young people continue to be involved in heritage institutions and cultural activities beyond the duration of such projects, which would enable further opportunities for young people to build social capital. Involving institutions in such projects can also enable instructors and service providers to better recognize the strengths and capabilities of refugee-background young people.

Limitations

As demonstrated above, the literature on refugee-background young people and participatory museum projects addresses a range of critical issues for theory and practice. However, the small and emergent nature of this literature means that there are a number of important opportunities and challenges that are not addressed. Some of the most urgent of these are outlined below.

Lack of engagement with youth participation literature and related research projects

While the work surveyed in this article contributes to the growing literature on the social inclusivity of museums, the reviewed publications are not always critically engaged with the wider literature. Few of the publications discussed previous research or co-created exhibitions within their contextual literature or research design, despite several of the works including similar findings and recommendations. While it is evident that the projects addressed in these publications are driven by participatory principals, with the exception of Gibson and Kindon (2013) there is little engagement with the extensive literature on co-production and participatory design/practice. Placing this literature on refugee-background young people in dialogue with the wider field offers an important opportunity to support knowledge sharing across the sector and strengthen participatory practice with refugee-background young people.

Foregrounding refugee-background young people's evaluations of museum projects

While reflection on participatory practice is addressed from a museum perspective in the profiled literature, the perspectives of young people themselves are notably absent. There is a striking lack of direct input and "voice" from young people regarding the impact of these projects. Evaluatory follow-up with young people, although indicated within the literature, was often not emphasized, referenced, or explored in detail, with the exception of Gibson and Kindon (2013) and Mina and Sergi (2020), which included some data from young people. Undoubtedly, the social value of participatory museum projects on marginalized groups, such as refugee-background young people, can be challenging to capture (Vermeulen et al., 2019). As discussed above, refugee-background young people are often a mobile and transient population, and therefore tracking the longer-term outcomes and

impacts of such projects can be difficult to assess. Furthermore, some impacts will be intangible gains that emerge over longer periods of time (Giglietto et al., 2022). Lastly, because of power asymmetries, refugee-background young people may be reticent to criticize such projects or include negative reflections because of their social positions (Brasseur, 2018; Gibson & Kindon, 2013). However, this gap in knowledge makes it difficult to assess whether these projects were successful in bringing about change in the lives of the young people they engaged with.

The projects and exhibitions explored in the literature evidently have potential for democratizing the museum, providing access and a degree of agency to a cohort historically marginalized by the heritage sector. However, young people, migrants, and refugees can also be “coerced” or “disempowered” by well-meaning participatory practices in museums (Boast, 2011; Lynch, 2016; Lynch & Alberti, 2010). Without the inclusion of these reflections, opportunities to learn from refugee-background young people themselves about best practices and effective projects are lost. Moreover, it leads to the exclusion of their voices from accounts of these projects, undermining the participatory ethos of the work, thereby further compounding the issues that these projects are seeking to address.

Capturing impact on museum audiences and refugee-background communities

Whilst some of the publications included reflections on societal impact, the scope of the literature reviewed did not extend to the potential impact on refugee-background communities more generally. Research has shown that social ties and opportunities to build social capital in their new countries has a demonstrable positive impact on refugee communities (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Morrice, 2007). Public institutions may lack effective avenues and opportunities of reaching these communities, but refugee-background young people are well placed to act as a bridge between these groups (Domsic, 2021; Makhoul et al., 2012; McMichael et al., 2017). A question therefore raised by these studies, but not addressed by them, is the extent to which participatory museum projects might support this bridging role between refugee-background communities and wider society, and also between these communities and heritage institutions.

The absence of data evidencing audience responses also limits our understanding of the broader impact of such projects on wider society. As Sergi (2021) argues, it is almost impossible to discern if such exhibitions have affected or changed the perspectives of museum visitors or had a wider impact on society. However, capturing the impact of projects on the lives of refugee-background young people, either during or immediately following these projects (as longitudinal follow-up is challenging), can provide some insight into the effectiveness of such initiatives.

Conclusion

This review has profiled rich, interesting, and inclusive work that is being conducted with refugee-background young people in different contexts and institutions. It has presented opportunities and challenges of this work, synthesizing insights about working effectively and ethically on participatory museum projects with refugee-background young people, exploring how this group can both contribute to and benefit from such initiatives.

As with all participatory work, these efforts are not without challenge or critique. Reviewing museum projects orientated toward human rights and social justice issues, (Sandell, 2012) argues that there is often a lack of critical engagement and academic reflection on such projects and activities. He emphasized the necessity of examining and analyzing the social consequences of commissions that seek to engage marginalized communities. This article echoes his call for more analysis and evaluation of these projects and their impact on museums, participants, and communities. We recognize that projects are frequently occurring in museum settings with these groups. However, there is a need to critically assess the evidence that is generated from these projects in academic publications and for knowledge to be shared across the museum sector in accessible and practical ways for museum practitioners. The literature explored above demonstrates the potential for, and necessity of, further academic engagement, rigorous evaluation, and the sharing of knowledge and practice across the museum sector to draw together and build on the innovative work taking place in and beyond museums across the world. Foregrounding the voices and experiences of youth participants in this work and attending to the wider community-orientated objectives of museums will further ensure that the capacities and contributions of refugee-background young people are fostered and supported, and that the benefits of such projects extend beyond individual museums and initiatives to shape the development of a more inclusive sector.

1. In this article, we wish to make a distinction between the use of the terms: “refugee” and “refugee-background young people.” In the UK, and elsewhere, “refugee” is a term that describes people who have sought, and been granted, asylum by the government. It is also a descriptive and bureaucratic label that can homogenize diverse groups and define people based on one aspect of their experience. To be a refugee is a transitional process, not a static identity (Crawford, 2017). Therefore, in this article we describe young people as having a “refugee-background” rather than labeling them as a “refugee” (see also Kumsa, 2006).
2. This scoping review was initially conducted in the summer of 2021 and was updated in the summer of 2022 and in June of 2023.

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