Challenge 15 Visualizing Collections & Enabling Collaborations



Challenge 15

Visualizing Collections & Enabling Collaborations

Author: A.Hertzog – Zurich Ethnographic Museum

Problem: Museum collections inaccessible
Need: A creative solution to open them up

Dream Team: editor, historian, graphic designer, anthropologists, provenance researchers, digital humanity folk, art historians, curator-mediator, climate physicist, museum folk, data consultant, librarian, physical anthropologist





















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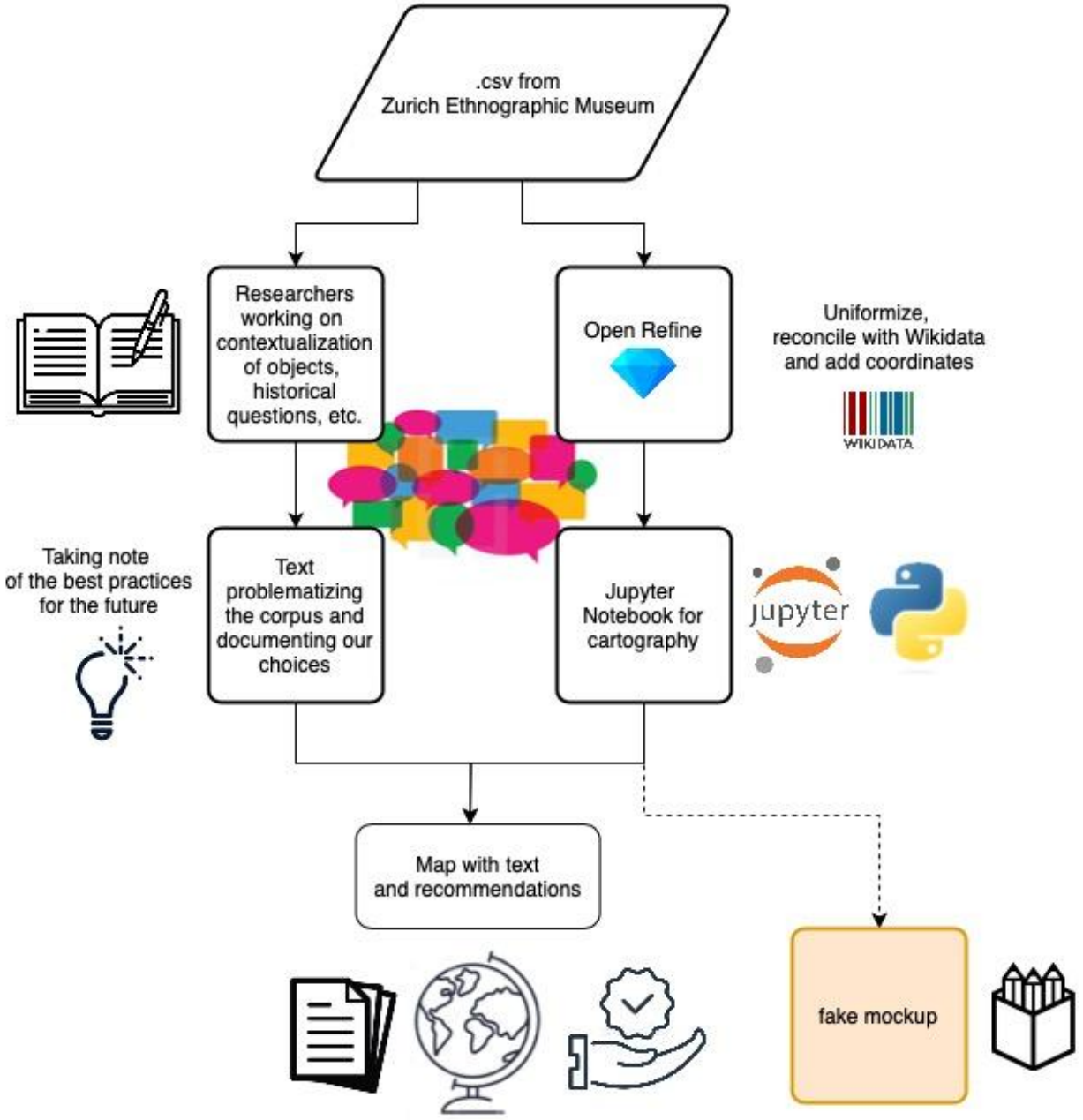
Dataset: Excel export of museum file-maker database all entries but restricted fields (57’417 objects)

Selection: “Figur” from 1941-1963 (442 objects)

App Tools: Python, Jupyter Notebook, Pandas, Folium, Mapboxgl, VS Codium, Vanilla JS, Chat GPT, Diagrams, Affinity Designer

Dataset Tools: Openrefine, LibreOffice Calc, PenPot, DeepL

Presentation Tools: MS Powerpoint, MEG Library,



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Problem Framing



Data Set, Terminology and Accessibility

The CARE principles for Indigenous Data Governance and Sovereignty have been vocal in pointing out the erasure of Indigenous terminology by colonial systems of knowledge production. This is referred to as *epistemicide*.[1] […] This has had critical consequences for ethnographic museums today. There are currently vast knowledge gaps in collection documentation. Inventory entries are largely incomplete and unreliable tools to work with.

***Figur* - a troublesome category**

With the aim of enabling future collaborations with concerned communities, we have sought to visualize collections in the Zurich Ethnographic Museum over a selected time period. We have therefore chosen a data set illustrating the recurrence of generic terms used in labels. This provides an example of how we can engage with troublesome object categories. […]

[1] Sarah-Jane Paine et al., Kaupapa Māori-informed approaches to support data rights and self-determination, in *Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Policy*, Maggie Walter et al. (Ed.), New York, 2021, p. 188

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About Data

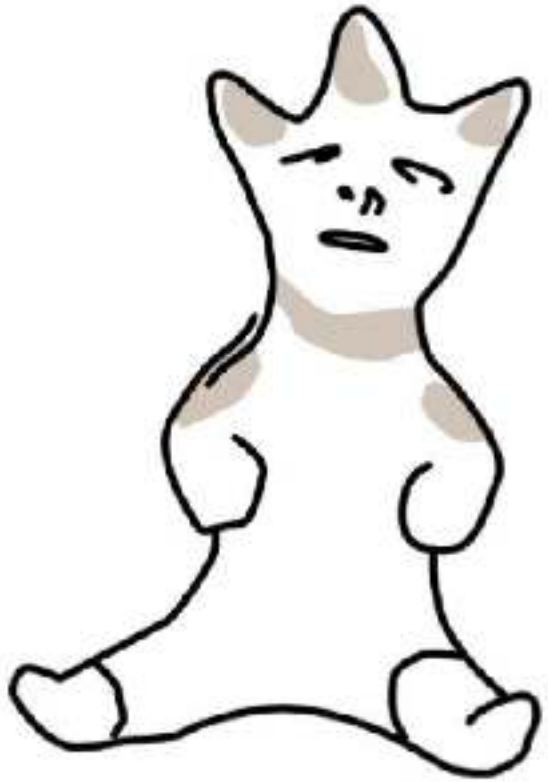


1941 1943 1963

GLAM HACK



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Data Set, Terminology and Accessibility

The CARE principles for Indigenous Data Governance and Sovereignty have been vocal in pointing out the erasure of Indigenous terminology by colonial systems of knowledge production. This is referred to as epistemicide. Based upon positivist methodologies, colonial regimes promoted the assumption of a singular possible truth. Considered inferior, indigenous knowledge was largely understood as incorrect or irrelevant. This devaluation was by no means accidental. Rather, it emerged as a central colonial instrument: Indigenous Peoples stood as objects to be studied for the purpose of ruling, and not as participating subjects to knowledge production. This has had critical consequences for ethnographic museums today. There are currently vast knowledge gaps in collection documentation. Inventory entries are largely incomplete and unreliable tools to work with.

Figur - a troublesome category

With the aim of enabling future collaborations with concerned communities, we have sought to visualize collections in the Zurich Ethnographic Museum over a selected time period. We have therefore chosen a data set illustrating the recurrence of generic terms used in labels. This provides an example of how we can engage with troublesome object categories.

The sample we selected contains all new inventory entries between the years 1941-1963 with their label enclosing the German term Figur. From the total 3850 entries labelled as "Figur", 442 pieces entered the collection during this period. The variety of objects represented is large and reveals how little precisely they are documented in ethnographic collections. We wanted to take a moment to reflect on the experience of Indigenous Peoples and concerned communities seeking to reconnect with their displaced heritage in online museum collections. For example, the lack of vernacular or Indigenous terminology in labels combined with vague or unreliable geographical data certainly renders access difficult.

Visualizing Collections & Enabling Collaborations

Challenge 15 is based on a very practical problem: the Zurich Ethnographic Museum wants to develop collaborative provenance research projects with concerned communities - but the collections at the Ethnographic Museum in Zurich are currently not accessible online.

The museum is currently addressing this and has decided to make its database accessible online. But it is early days, in the meantime they would like to have a quick and creative solution that communicates to the general public and concerned communities where our collections come from and during which period they arrived in the museum.

The intention is that making this data available in a user-friendly format could foster further collaborations between concerned communities and the museum. This would fill an important gap whilst the collection is still off-line.



Inventory number
12211a
vernacular name
Mbëlëkët - also known in different variations under the names a-Tshol / Ñach / Ëlëk / Mrim or Berimé
inventory name
Vogelfigur
Collected by
Storrer, Emil
Acquired by
Storrer, Emil
Date of acquisition
1957
Continent
Afrika
Country
Guinea
Material(s)
Wood
Condition
No information
Interventions on the object
Vogel wurde von Herrn Burri geflickt, gegen Wurm behandelt

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Outlook

Next week:
Board of Directors Meeting: Topic Online Data

Next six months:
Rallying Support
Fundraising
Backing Federal Office of Culture

Next few years:
Building team
Cleaning & validating data
Migrating systems
Testing
Then … see you online!



