

Connecting and Collecting:



Developing participatory methods
to collect social digital photography
in Nordic archives and museums

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Developing participatory methods to collect social digital photography in Nordic archives and museums

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Introduction

This publication is the final report of the Connect to Collect Project “Connecting and Collecting: Developing participatory methods to collect social digital photography in Nordic archives and museums” (2024-2026). It presents the results of five different community collecting initiatives by five different institutions in three Nordic countries, and introduces a digital photo collecting platform that was developed and used during the project. In the end, the results and findings are discussed from the perspectives of technology, community work, and collecting.

The report was written in collaboration by the project members from the participating institutions. Writing this was a way for us to summarize and assess the process and its results, but we also hope the project descriptions, questions and conclusions will inspire and benefit other institutions that may be considering digital photo collecting projects with community engagement and co-curating.

We want to thank all the collaborating institutions, individuals and communities for their contribution, and VMAR for the technical support and development. We are grateful for the funding provided by the Nordisk Kulturfond. And finally, our special thanks go to Bente Jensen for long-term collaboration and friendship.

**NORDISK
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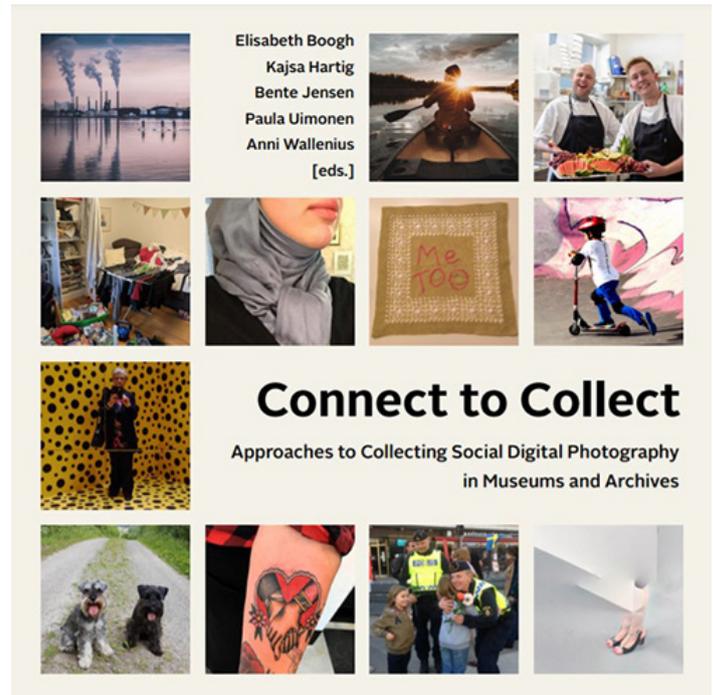
Background

The project group was formed in a previous project, The Collecting Social Photo (CoSoPho) project (2017-2021). It was implemented by museums and archives in collaboration with academia. Four institutions from the Nordic countries were involved: Nordiska museet (Sweden), Stockholm County Museum (Stockholms läns museum, Sweden), The Finnish Museum of Photography (Finland) and Aalborg City Archives (Denmark). The institutions have collaborated in various ways in the past decades around issues concerning photography collections, thus bringing years of experience of photographic heritage collections into the project. In addition to the project team there was a reference group, and cooperation with the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University. Also, doctoral researcher Arran Rees from the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds collaborated closely with the project.

CoSoPho was an internationally groundbreaking project because of its focus on the actual methods for collecting and recording digital material from social media. The main goal was to develop new work practices for collecting and disseminating the ephemeral everyday pictures in heritage institutions, and to respond to the concerns of museums and archives about how social media as a phenomenon of visual culture can be preserved.

The project resulted in an anthology and an online collecting platform, which was to be called Connect to Collect platform. The participating museums saw the need for an easy online digital tool for collecting photographs shared on social media platforms, but

also other digital-born photographs. The anthology *Connect to Collect: Approaches to Collecting Social Digital Photography in Museums and Archives* was published in 2020.



The first users of the Connect to Collect platform were the original CoSoPho project partner museums and archives. Over the years, more Nordic museums and archives have joined, some only as short-term users. In the recent years, eleven organisations have been using the platform: Architecture and Design Museum (Finland), Finnish Museum of Photography (Finland), Gothenburg Botanic Garden (Sweden), Gothenburg Natural History Museum (Sweden), Helsinki City Museum (Finland), Jammerbugtens Nutidsarkiv (Denmark), Slagelse Arkiverne (Denmark), Stockholm County Museum (Sweden),

Sundsvalls Museum (Sweden), Vapriikki Museum Center (Finland) and Västernorrlands Museum (Sweden).

The original project group has continued to develop the app together with the Swedish IT company VMAR. The group meets every couple of months to discuss any bugs that may have been found, new ideas, and technical development needs. The intention is to further develop the group so that it includes newer users of the platform.

The Connecting and Collecting project

Some of the members of the Connect to Collect network had been part of the first development of the technical tool, and as more museums joined, more conversations about the use of the platform arose. Could it actually be used for more than just collecting digital photographs? Could it be used in creating a more sustainable society and a sense of community?

Five of the museums and archives started talking about wanting to develop use cases for the platform, with inclusion, community and collaborative collecting as a focus. We then decided to apply for funding from the Nordisk Kulturfond, since we had already gotten funding from them, Opstart-money, to meet and develop this project, a pre-project so to speak.

One question posed was for example: can we, via the Connect to Collect platform, develop participatory methods for engaging citizens and organizations with social digital photography to facilitate dialogue

and knowledge sharing, around contemporary issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, consumerism, segregation, and group identity. Through five case studies we wanted to connect with communities around contemporary topics. The project was looking to facilitate spaces for co-curating contemporary photography collections. The long term effect would be to enhance the sense of belonging to a place within local communities and developing the role of heritage building sustainable societies.



*Project meeting in Stockholm, October 2024.
Photo: Kajsa Hartig*

We got half of the money we had applied for, and had to limit the original scope of the project, but we kept the core of it intact. The project plan included:

- technical developments of the tool that we knew beforehand that we needed.
- 5 case studies, one for each institution.
- technical developments of things that arose during the case studies.

Since we were five very different institutions, we tailored our case studies to our specific goals, conditions, and limitations. The core, however, was the same for all case studies. We aimed to document the stories of people and places in ways that support sustainable societies and future generations. Together with local communities, we sought to co-create a contemporary photography collection, explore models for co-curating limited online access to these collections through the Connect to Collect app, and further develop and test inclusive methods for participation. A central objective was also to advance the Connect to Collect app itself as a tool for co-curating collections and enabling online exhibitions and access.

The methods and the progress of the project have been shared through ongoing communication on a project blog, on social media and via the participants' websites. The final output of the project is this report and the launch webinar in March 2026.

The collecting platform and technical developments

The Connect to Collect collecting portal is technical as well as structural and aims to support and encourage museums and archives in taking a step towards collecting social digital photography, and to open up for the public to contribute to our common photographic heritage.

The digital collecting tool was created after the project Collecting Social Photo identified the need for a submission portal to gather material. Most museums and archives have collections management

systems, but no tools for online collecting. The first prototype web app was developed in collaboration with Micah Walter Studio in New York and then by the Swedish IT company VMAR who took over the project with the small budget available (see Hartig 2020, in the Connect to Collect anthology).

The reason for building a completely new prototype tool for collecting was to allow the project team – from four different institutions and three countries – to start examining the process of collecting, in the context of a collecting tool, together and from scratch.

Further impacting the production of the prototype web app was the growing trend in museums and archives to integrate inclusive and participatory methods in their work. In a wider context, this is done for several reasons, such as to enhance learning by participation, to increase participation by marginalised groups and to balance power relations. Throughout the years, the founding institutions have continuously collaborated on the tool's further development. Together they identified improvements, which VMAR subsequently implemented. The associated costs were covered either directly by the institutions or through project-based funding.

Connect to Collect is a system for gathering contemporary digital cultural heritage in the form of images, memories, and stories. It enables museums and archives to quickly create their own thematic collection campaigns, which can be displayed in real time in exhibitions or online. The system is built in accordance with the Spectrum 5.0 standard and ensures secure handling of personal data. All collected material is exported to the institution's own

collection management system. Images are delivered in a zip file, accompanied by metadata in an Excel document.

A contributor registers as a user and provides a set of personal details, some mandatory and others optional. They can then choose which collection they want to contribute to and upload images and text documents together with information about the material. Once submitted, the image becomes visible to the public immediately.

Connect to Collect compares well with other major collecting portals such as Minnen.se and Samtidsbild. Its main advantages are the low annual cost (currently 15,000 SEK), the display carousel feature, the fact that member institutions can collectively decide how the system should function and evolve, and the option to create closed collections for invited contributors.

The drawbacks are that images and metadata cannot be transferred directly into our collection databases, that any system change affects all users, and that the platform is not yet as user-friendly as it could be.



Front page of the Connect to Collect portal with the currently involved institutions.

The Finnish Museum of Photography: The Mixed Archive

Sofia Lahti & Leena Sipponen

Project Overview

The Finnish Museum of Photography collaborated with the Helsinki-based Mixed Finns community to diversify its collections with vernacular photographs from Finns (or people living in Finland) with mixed cultural backgrounds. The initiative aimed to foster inclusion, representation, and decolonisation in the collections through co-curation and participatory workshops. It also aimed to establish a long-term collaborative connection between the museum and the community that would be useful for both parties. In three workshops planned and organized together, the participants discussed issues of representation and collections and donated altogether 27 digital photographs through the Connect to Collect platform.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to increase diversity and relevance of museum collections for Finns of mixed cultural backgrounds and empower participants to define their own representation in the collections, build trust and sustainable collaboration between the museum and the community, and explore contemporary photo collecting as a tool for social cohesion. The initiative was based on the observation that Finns with mixed or BIPOC backgrounds were poorly represented in the museum's collections of

vernacular or family photography, although there was some representation in art and press photography collections.



One of the participants having a strawberry birthday cake in 2011. Photo: Valo Vaeltaja. "This photo shows my Finnish everyday life." -Pilvi (donor nickname). The Mixed Archive / The Finnish Museum of Photography

Approach

After three planning meetings with representatives of the Mixed Finns community, three workshops around collections and mixed representation were co-designed and co-organized. The museum's aim was to offer interested participants an opportunity to learn about the museum's collections and collection policies and make a difference by donating images through the web app; the collecting initiative was also discussed and planned together with the community representatives. For the community, the aim was simultaneously to create peer support

sessions around photographs. The approach brought new experience to both parties: a peer support based event was new to the museum, whereas the museum as an institution and photography and collections as topics of discussion were new to the community.

The call for participants was published in the museum's and the community's social media channels simultaneously, but the signing up was organised by the Mixed Finns community. The museum provided the meeting space and refreshments. The three Mixed Finns board members that planned and organised the workshops with the museum received a monetary compensation.

The first workshop was an introduction to collections and project aims. The museum curators explained what the museum's collection consists of, how it has been accumulating and what are our aims with the project. The participants were divided in smaller groups to discuss their views on museums, whiteness and diversity, and how they would like to improve the situation. Some participants expressed a mistrust towards museums, based on Western museums' colonial collection and exhibition policies, but also on their own experience of seldom encountering images or material in Finnish museums that they could feel represented them.

The curators presented the case of the museum collections' relative whiteness, which means they are not thoroughly representative of contemporary Finnish cultural diversity. This was illustrated with a slideshow of the vernacular photography collections, which was also aimed to give visual cues of photos that could be donated during this project. The participants were invited to make a

difference through donating vernacular photography, to express how they wished to be represented and how they wished their photographs to be used. The idea of donating personal photos to a museum was new to the participants, and the meaning of using that specifically to make a difference needed to be discussed.

The second workshop was planned as a hands-on photo donating session where the participants could upload their photos to the Connect to Collect platform and get help in case there were technical problems. The app is built to facilitate co-curating by requiring the donors to insert the essential descriptive information and searchwords for their images. Therefore it was also essential to discuss the importance of words and metadata with the participants. In case there was more interest, the workshop could have focused more on this theme, but the participants preferred to focus on processing the thoughts and feelings related to donating one's photographs to a museum.



The second workshop at the Finnish Museum of Photography in May 2025. Photo: Virve Laustela / The Finnish Museum Photography

A third workshop meeting had not initially been planned, but the participants and the organisers concluded together that it would be a good idea. The session was built around viewing the donated images together and continued peer-support discussions.

Outcomes

The quantity of donated photos was less essential as an outcome than the initiation of a collaborative connection between the museum and the community. Another priority was rich contextual information provided by the donors. The quantitative result of the collecting initiative was that the museum received 27 photos from 6 participants.

The app would allow donors to go through the entire process online on their own, and this capacity has been useful in other collecting initiatives. In this project, however, it was essential to spend time together for the participants to discuss the photographs, learn about the collections and the project, and bring up their doubts about donating personal pictures, before finding motivation to contribute.

It turned out many participants had brought analogue photographic prints, which needed to be digitized before uploading. The museum had not prepared for this, so it was not possible to digitize them instantly; instead, the photos were borrowed by the museum, digitized, and returned to their owners, who then uploaded the new digital images.

The participants had the opportunity to donate more images online afterwards, which was appreciated

in principle, as this would give them more time to consider which ones to choose and to consult the family members that were visible in the photos. Unfortunately, due to technical problems, only few participants managed to donate images outside the workshops. The collection was also open for other members of the community who had not participated in the workshops, but they did not contribute.

Concerning the topics discussed during the workshops, the museum curators had assumed that the participants might be interested in discussing and perhaps getting involved in developing the terminology used in collections databases concerning diversity, decolonization, and people with mixed cultural backgrounds. At the same time, the museum had somewhat underestimated the amount of time needed for getting to know each other and for the discussions around issues such as representation, identity, trust or mistrust of institutions, worries about having one's family photos published online, and the memories and emotions related to the photos themselves. One session of two hours had been allotted for those discussions, but there was an obvious need to continue them during the following sessions. Only after having had sufficient time for these topics, the participants might have been open to dwelling on terminological questions. In three sessions of two hours each, this was not possible.

One of the central topics for discussion was how the participants wished to be represented in the museum collections and how they imagined their photos being used. They underlined that it was important to be represented among other Finnish family photos - not as exoticised exceptions. The collection was named "Mixed-arkisto" (the Mixed Archive). The museum's

collections management system allows for the Mixed Finns images to be found as a unit, but also for individual images from it to be found separately, based on descriptions and searchwords among any other collection images. In future projects, the Mixed Archive will hopefully grow and be a way for the community to reflect its own history.

In co-organising the sessions, the expertise of the Mixed Finns' representatives was essential for making the events approachable to the members of the community, creating a safe space for dialogue and facilitating mutual learning.

Mixed Finns collected anonymous feedback from the participants after the sessions, and the replies were overall positive. However, some participants expressed discomfort about the presence of the non-Mixed museum curators during the discussions on personal experiences of racism, for instance. This indicates the centrality of peer support and safe space for the participants.

After the workshops, the museum and the community have expressed a mutual wish for continued collaboration and planning new projects together. Since then, the community members have been invited by the museum to participate in a guided exhibition tour, the museum's podcast, and a seminar on decolonization efforts in Finnish museums.

Here we want to extend our special thanks to the project intern Ruusu Farghaly for her valuable help in organising the workshops.

Challenges

The main challenges in the project were related to technical and ethical questions, but also lack of time. The technical delays were related to problems in the app and the unexpected need for digitization of physical prints. A very relevant issue was the participants' understandable hesitancy to publish family photos online due to privacy and minority concerns.

We considered it essential to dedicate one of the workshop sessions on guidance and support for using the CTC app in the workshops, as we knew the app was not entirely intuitive to use. The collecting initiative was planned to take place through the app, as we assumed the participants would be donating digital-born images. Instead, many participants had brought physical photo prints that needed to be digitized and sent back to them before they could upload them. This meant that some of them had to complete the process on their own, instead of doing it in the workshop as planned, and they did encounter some problems.

The app was undergoing some development during the project, and this resulted in problems during account creation and some of the questions not being visible. Due to this, some of the participants had to start over the process of inserting their photos and information. Even when the app was functional, the users did not find it easy. They wished it had been possible to stop the process and continue later from where one had left off. They also said additional pop-up instructions for each data field would be good, as well as explicit information about data privacy. Despite these limitations, the app was useful

in taking care of the licensing and metadata for the images.

For many participants, the decision to donate personal family photos to an institution and thereby make them widely accessible required thorough emotional processing and consideration. They recognised risks related to racism in the current political situation. The museum was seen as a relatively trustworthy institution, but the thought of the photos being visible at first in the CTC web app and later possibly published by the museum on other platforms or exhibitions was a source of concern. The family members in the photos needed to be consulted as well. Some participants felt it was easier just donating images of themselves, while others chose images of their parents or relatives with their consent. The questions and concerns related to this would have required more time than what had been planned. The planned discussions on the political implications of vocabulary and metadata were experienced as secondary, and there was not enough time for those.

Key Learnings

Making and having the community's own museum collection can be a form of peer support. This was one of the conclusions reached together during the workshop discussions - a new dimension both for the museum and for the Mixed Finns community. Building trust and co-planning with communities is essential. The museum is not necessarily a trusted or relevant partner for individuals or communities, and getting to know each other requires time. Even if shared objectives are recognized, it may take time to

find the approach that best benefits both parties. Even when working with an online digital collecting tool, face-to-face engagement yields better context and stronger relationships. At the same time, museum professionals must be mindful of the power structures arising from the different positions or roles: the curators were present in their professional roles, while the participants were in a more vulnerable position, processing the topics from a deeply personal perspective.

Careful planning is important, but there should be room for flexibility. In this project, responding to the participants' wishes and adding a third workshop improved engagement.

Future Recommendations

- Consider pre-project polls or questionnaires to guide expectations.
- Offer clear frameworks for photo selection and representation: What is co-curating? How can the participants make a difference in the collections? What are the museum's wishes and intentions? What is the meaning of rich metadata?
- Reserve sufficient time for discussions about museums, collecting, and the collection theme, but also the technical and ethical implications for donating images.
- Use the app for licensing and metadata but prioritize live engagement for sensitive projects.

- Provide digitization stations during workshops to also accommodate analogue photo formats.
- Make the information and questions in the app as clear as possible and provide live guidance for users during workshops.



“Helena and Helena”. Photo: Anonymous, 1996. “A photo of my great-grandmother holding me when I was a baby.” -Sonya (donor nickname). The Mixed Archive / The Finnish Museum of Photography.

Museum of Västernorrland: Värden längs vägen

Felicia Sjölin

Case Study Overview

This case study examines methods for engaging younger audiences and local communities in contemporary photographic collecting within a museum and archival context. The work was carried out as part of the Interreg project Värden längs Vägen, and aimed to identify and include local values and perspectives among teenagers and kids. A focus was aimed towards young people, a group that had proven difficult to reach through the museum's established modes of engagement, such as community meetings, courses, and structured outreach.

Within the Interreg project Värden längs Vägen, we wanted to find stories and value points from the village of Lugnvik, an old sawmill community in Kramfors municipality. During meetings and community outreach, we found that the average age of the participants was high. Many people were retirees and were talking about their childhood and youth. While this was very interesting and valuable, it got us wondering about the experiences of youth and kids today. We heard many times how the population was getting younger, with many families wanting to move to Lugnvik and how the preschools were at maximum capacity. But where were these kids? What were they up to? How could we find them?

This quickly became a valuable perspective that resulted in this pilot. Within the framework of the Connect to Collect project, we sought to experiment with participatory collecting practices. As a result, we hoped that the results could both broaden the museum's collections and strengthen local relationships. Based on observations when entering and visiting Lugnvik, we found that the local supermarket of Handlarn was a central meet up point for many. This is where many teenagers would take their car to purchase ice cream or energy drinks, where their parents would pick up parcels and it is just next to the local community sports center. It had become a natural meetup point, where people of all ages came. We were also talking to a local photography community, Lugnviks bilder, that had been collecting photos from the area from as early as the 19th century. This community, like the engagement in the project, had a high average age with most of its participants being in their 80s. The competition was organised in collaboration with Handlarn and Lugnviks bilder, allowing the project to build on existing community structures rather than relying solely on institutional channels. This initiative also served as a testing ground for digital participation and co-curation, primarily through the use of the Connect to Collect application.

Aims and Objectives

The overarching objective of the project was to include young voices and their underrepresented perspectives in museum collections, specifically within the field of contemporary photography. By inviting young people to contribute their own visual representations of their local environment, the project

aimed to challenge traditional collecting practices and to capture everyday experiences. We framed the competition in such a way that anybody under the age of 20 could not only participate in a low threshold way, but also contribute with as many photos as they wanted. All they had to do was to upload a photo that they had taken themselves, describe what the photo was depicting and describe



*"I took this photo when I was playing football"
-Arthur Apelqvist Eriksson, 11 years old. Photo taken
in Norrland, Lugnvik. Västernorrlands Museum*

what they came to think about when hearing "Lugnvik". The initiative sought to encourage pride in local identity and cultural heritage by validating participants' perspectives as worthy of preservation. Digital participation tools were tested as a means of lowering thresholds for engagement and enabling forms of co-curation, while also exploring how such tools are perceived by users outside the museum sector.

Method and Implementation

The primary activity consisted of a month-long photo competition directed at young people in Lugnvik. Participation was encouraged through tangible incentives in the form of gift cards for sweets and snacks, provided through collaboration with the local supermarket. These modest but concrete rewards were chosen very intentionally, to be appealing and accessible, rather than relying on institutional recognition or future visibility as motivating factors. To be remembered and archived in a historical institution might not excite a teenager, but the possibility of getting any sweets and snacks you like, might be more interesting.

Participants were asked to submit photographs along with short descriptive texts. These texts were intended to provide context, clarify the participants' intentions, and support future archival use by linking images to personal narratives and local meanings. All submissions were then presented in an online exhibition, where both images and accompanying texts were displayed. The exhibition allowed participants to see their contributions framed within a curated environment.



"I took this photo of my friend Engla, standing by my car outside Handlarn"
-Alma Liljedahl Nordlund, 17 years old. Photo taken in front of Handlarn, Lugnvik. Västernorrlands Museum

The Connect to Collect app was used as the primary digital tool for submission and collection. As the app requires an account for upload and our target audience was younger people, we had an internal discussion on inclusion and privacy. The solution that we came up with was that we encouraged the youngest participants to ask their parents to set up an account that they could use. We also included both an email and phone number to to the museum

curator, if any questions or concerns were raised, to provide a safe space for both kids and their family. This resulted in a wider range of ages being able to participate, from the youngest being 4 years old and the oldest being 17.

Outcomes and Results

The initial competition resulted in six participants submitting photographs. While the number of contributors was relatively low, all participants completed the process and received prizes, ensuring a positive and complete experience for those involved. The submitted photographs were accessioned into both the museum's collection and the archive of the local photographic organisation, thereby creating shared custodianship and reinforcing local ownership of the material. We were also able to engage with a completely new crowd in Lugnvik, enriching local relationships and orienting new places and stories. While the older generation was constantly referring to the old sawmill that shut down in the early 2000s, the younger inhabitants were finding more kinship in their cars or local swimming spots.

Key Learnings

One of the most significant insights from the project was the importance of time investment. Building trust, explaining institutional intentions, and ensuring mutual understanding required considerably more time than initially anticipated. Short-term projects with limited preparatory phases risk underestimating the relational work needed to support meaningful participation.

The project also demonstrated that motivation plays a crucial role in engagement. Tangible rewards proved more effective in encouraging participation than appeals to institutional prestige or long-term historical value. This highlights the need for museums to align incentives with participants' everyday motivations, particularly when working with communities that we struggle to get in contact with.

Another lesson learned concerned the importance of context and trust in digital participation. Several potential participants expressed hesitation about uploading material to an unfamiliar platform, citing concerns about privacy, misinterpretation, and loss of control over their contributions. Many, especially kids and teenagers, take photos and videos daily. Through Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok, a large amount of content is produced. However, outside of its internet context, some suggested that it is easy to misinterpret what is produced and why. It can even be considered to be private, something that is only supposed to be seen and used by the community itself. An option that was discussed was to create closed groups within the Connect to Collect app, where only selected people (for example young people from a certain village) are able to upload and view the collection. This gives them the autonomy to communicate in a language that makes sense to them, while also providing a safe space for young people and the museum to co-create collections and collecting.

Finally, the project reinforced the continued importance of face-to-face interaction. Even in digitally oriented initiatives, physical presence and informal conversations were crucial for establishing

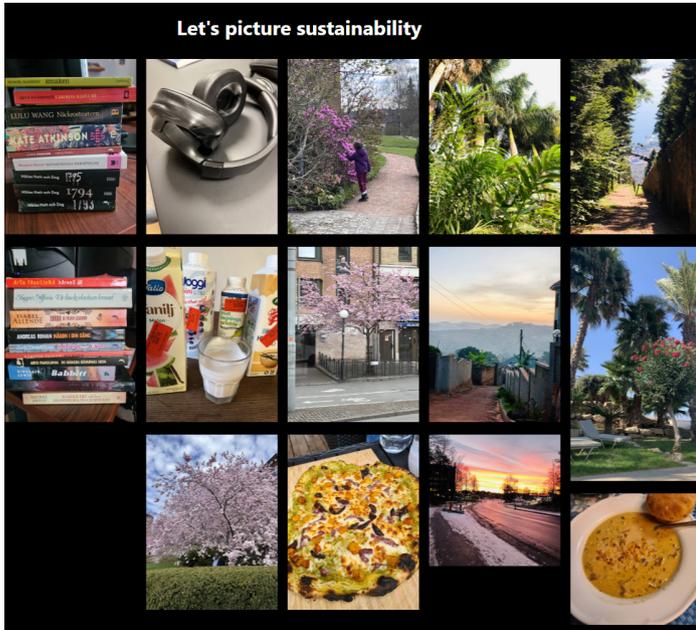
credibility and encouraging participation. Without Handlarn who not only knew these kids, but who also continuously encouraged the kids to participate, we do not know how we would have gotten in touch with these kids.



***“A calm puppy who is enjoying life”
-Isak Björk Thörnfeldt, 9 years old. Photo taken in
Balsjön, Skog. Västernorrlands Museum***

Gothenburg Natural History Museum: Let's Picture the Sustainability

Renée Göthberg



This case study at Gothenburg Natural History Museum explored how photo collecting could foster dialogue on sustainability and strengthen community relationships. The project aimed to engage individuals who do not typically visit museums, using photography as a tool for reflection on sustainable living and social cohesion.

Objectives

This case study wanted to test photo collecting as a method for community engagement and sustainability awareness. Often when we talk about sustainability (ecological, economic, and social) the concepts seem vague and abstract. In this case study the participants, together with the museum, discussed the concepts and explored what sustainability actually means for people in their everyday lives, and how we can all live more sustainably. The participants were encouraged to reflect on everyday sustainable practices, and upload their photos of it. Photographing sustainable practices is a way of both visualizing it for oneself, but also encourage others to do it.

The Gothenburg Natural History Museum's mission is to spread awareness and foster knowledge about biodiversity, environmental issues, climate, and sustainability. As a part of that mission the museum is tasked with outreach activities, and finding new target groups. One part of this case study was to explore how to build relationships with new audiences beyond traditional museum visitors.

Approach

In the very early days of the project, the museum had a meeting with representatives from associations doing work in the suburbs of Gothenburg, and took the opportunity to present the idea for the case study. A woman interested in sustainable fashion became very interested and helped the museum form a new group (not pre-existing). She became the key participant who recruited others, and helped

with communication within the group. This person received a monetary compensation for her work.

The group had an initial meeting at the museum, where we got to know each other a bit. We presented the case study and the Connect to Collect app, and the group also talked about what the three dimensions of sustainability mean. Going forward the group decided to use WhatsApp for communication. Some members of the group were quick to upload photos illustrating sustainability in daily life, accompanied by reflective descriptions. Others needed more time, and more support in using the app.

Quite early in the process, the representative from the museum was suffered severe back problems, and worked from home for a long while. This meant no physical meetings with the group, and it became apparent that it's quite difficult to build a new relationship without face-to-face meetings. The group had a few digital meetings, but the engagement of the group soon dwindled. Then came summer, and many of the participants went abroad to visit family and on vacation.

After summer a small part of the group met again, and found some new inspiration going forward. One member was a bit worried that his uploaded photos didn't depict sustainability. How could he be sure? We discussed it and came to the conclusion that the description could be a text that problematized the content of the photo. Just having the discussion is a big step towards knowledge and a more sustainable practice. The group also started planning some public activities and workshops. But the public activity was carried out as planned during Tillsammansfestivalen

(The together-festival), an intergenerational and intercultural festival arranged by the City of Gothenburg. A museum representative and three group members had a table at one of the festival arenas where we talked about the project and the app. The project was also presented on stage. Many people were interested, and we were busy conversing with people about sustainability, mostly social and environmental, for over 2 hours straight.



*Resa till staden "Madaba". Photo: Elias Rafidi.
Gothenburg Natural History Museum*



Tillsammansfestivalen. Gothenburg Natural History Museum

Outcomes

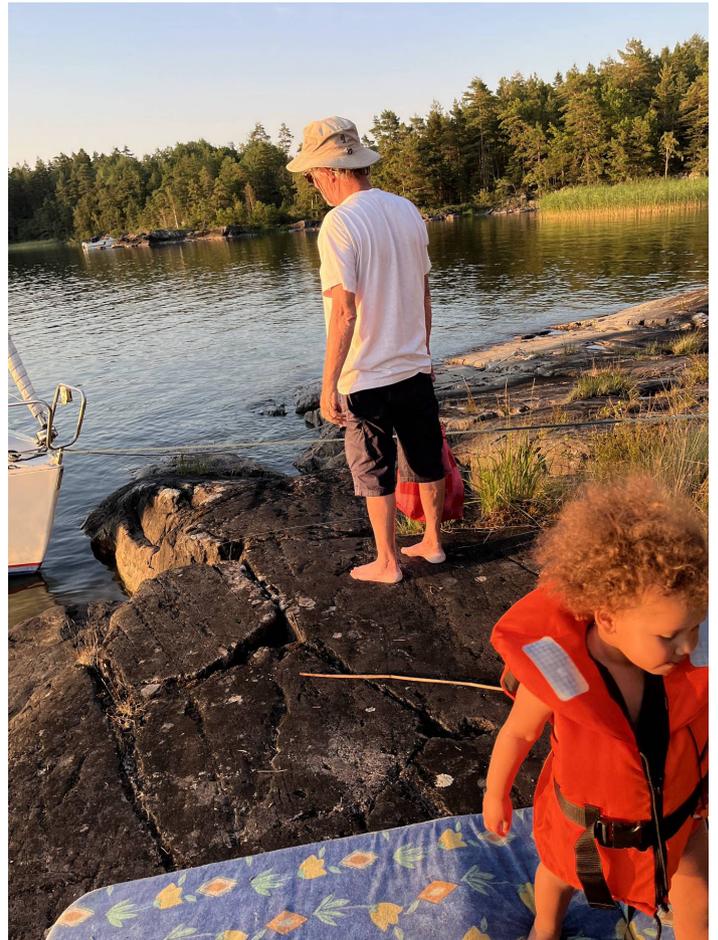
We wanted to create an active group that could also become ambassadors for the museum in their own networks. As a natural history museum we need to show people that we are relevant also in current affairs, and that people can use the museum when seeking knowledge and meeting places. Some participants were very active, but others had to drop out due to time constraints and other difficult life situations.

The project participants expressed a growing interest in sustainability and requested further learning opportunities. The museum wanted the group members to come up with ideas for activities. What did they want to learn more about, to live more sustainably? The group decided on sustainable consumption, specifically clothes. The museum contacted a workshop facilitator, who is a seamstress and an environmental consultant to hold a lecture and workshop. This was deemed extra relevant at the time since there is a new law (January 1st 2025) in Sweden regarding old textiles and textile waste. Unfortunately this activity had to be cancelled due to the autumn colds and other life issues, and we couldn't find a new date that worked for both the group and our workshop facilitator.

It proved very difficult to keep a new, artificially formed, group intact and engaged. It takes a lot of time and a lot of effort, and unfortunately that was not something the museum could provide at this point. One often underestimates the time and effort needed, and only having one museum employee working in the project made the situation very vulnerable. But we learnt a lot about outreach work and this type of project.



**Win Win Situation. Photo: Diane Kaze Grim.
Gothenburg Natural History Museum**

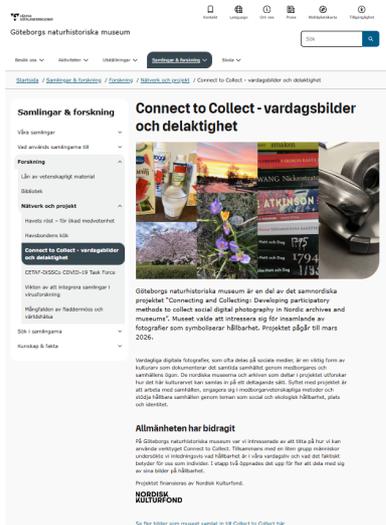


**Runt om i Göteborg. Photo: Diane Kaze Grim.
Gothenburg Natural History Museum**



Connection 1.0. Photo: Freedom Jabang. Gothenburg Natural History Museum

The collection now includes a bit more than 30 photos with descriptions showing or questioning sustainability in everyday contexts. The museum’s employee Renée Göthberg started the collection by uploading photos to exemplify and inspire the group members.



Even though we didn’t perform all the activities the museum had hoped for, the project has been very rewarding. The scope of the project was to explore different methods of working with the questions posed, and explore we certainly did. The project also influenced museum strategy, and community outreach is now included in the employees’ activity plan for 2026. Hopefully the participants will become regular visitors of the museum, as they received annual passes as a compensation for their contributions.

Key Learnings

People want to learn and engage when invited; open questions spark meaningful dialogue. It is not enough for museums to just exist and communicate with the people already interested or already visiting the museum. The museum needs to understand what issues are relevant for other groups, and how we can be relevant in their lives. Most children in Gothenburg visit the museum with the school, but not all, and if you haven’t spent your childhood here, you might not even know that the museum exists.

Building trust and cohesion takes significant time, especially with new groups. The museum needs to work on how to make the museum building feel welcoming and inclusive, but we also need to visit other places, and show our museum faces where our wanted target groups are. A relationship is built on trust, and the effort put into it.

Digital tools alone are insufficient—physical meetings and informal communication (in this case WhatsApp) are crucial.

Museums must adapt to participants' schedules and contexts, not expect them to fit institutional norms. This was a challenge, since the museum is mostly open when the group members are at work or school, and the one night a week that the museum is open late, the museum representative also had other engagements with the public programming. There is a lack of open meeting spaces that aren't cafés or restaurants that cost money.

Challenges

The challenges this case study faced were the things we learnt most from. Time constraints, both regarding the museum and the group members, became apparent very early on. The museum had insufficient resources for sustained engagement and follow-up. Had we worked with an already existing group or association, the group members would probably already have had certain dates and times for their usual meet ups, that we could've used. But when forming a new group the schedules might, and did, clash a lot.

Single-person dependency in a project makes it very vulnerable. When the museum employee faced health issues, no one else could continue the work. This also meant that the project had limited museum integration. It was more personal than institutional, which in turn reduced resilience.

We also saw some technical barriers. While the Connect to Collect app was helpful it's not fully user-friendly, and it required repeated guidance. Here the lack of physical meetings became apparent. In many cases you really need to sit down with app

users, registering accounts, uploading photos and editing contributions together, until the users feel comfortable with it.

Future Recommendations

- Embed projects within institutional structures to ensure continuity and shared responsibility.
- Allocate dedicated time and staff for relationship-building and technical support.
- Combine digital tools with physical meetups and informal communication channels.
- Improve app usability and plan for group upload sessions for less tech-savvy participants.
- Make museum spaces accessible for community meetings or explore hybrid engagement models.
- Further development regarding user friendliness of the Connect to Collect app is required.

The Stockholm County Museum: Contemporary Sami Life in Stockholm

Karolina Hedström

Project Overview

The case study from the Stockholm County Museum explored contemporary Sami life in the county by inviting community members to contribute their own photographs. The initiative placed social sustainability at its core, involving the Sami organization from the earliest planning stages to ensure genuine agency, shared decision-making, and co-curation. Although the relationship-building process was strong and trust-oriented, the volume of collected photographs remained limited. This outcome underscores persistent challenges in fostering meaningful digital participation and highlights key challenges in digital engagement.

Objectives

The case study set out to explore how social sustainability can be woven into contemporary collecting by giving communities real influence. To support that aim, the project structure, language, and outreach were co-created together with the Stockholm County Sami organization.

Another goal was to gather photographs that reflect contemporary Sami life for inclusion in the museum's collection. The project also tested how digital participation might work in practice by using a collecting portal (Samtidbild, similar to Connect to Collect) as the main platform for contributions.



Sami National Day in Stockholm at City Hall, organized by the Sámi Association in Stockholm. Flag raising, national anthem, speeches, and joik. In the photo: Elin Kåve, a joik artist from the Norwegian side of Sápmi, performing joik and drumming. The drum in the picture is not a ceremonial nåjd drum, which is why it can be used together with joik. #samisksamtid Photo: Inge Frisk, 2025. The Stockholm County Museum

Approach

We began by meeting with the board of the Sami organization to explore whether they wanted to co-create the collecting project with us. Together, we shaped the project name, key texts, and the overall outreach strategy. To support relationship-building, we invited the board to lunch meetings—covering the cost as a gesture of respect and reciprocity—to create space for trust and open dialogue.

For outreach, we used newsletters and social media as our main digital channels and asked the Sami organization to share the call as well. We also complemented the digital efforts with in-person engagement, including a visit to a handicraft evening where we handed out flyers.

Outcomes

The Sami organization expressed appreciation for being involved from the very beginning and for the respectful way the collaboration was handled. They noted that institutions often approach them with fully pre-determined projects and simply expect them to provide material, so the co-creative process was a welcome change. Their feedback on the project as a whole was very positive.

Despite this, participation remained low: only two images were uploaded during the project period, with four additional contributions arriving after the deadline. This limited response highlights the ongoing challenges of encouraging digital contributions, even when relationships and intentions are strong.

Even with the low number of contributions, the project helped lay a foundation for ongoing collaboration beyond its formal timeline. The relationship built during the process has already led to new points of contact—for instance, the Sami organization has since invited us to their National Sami Day celebration—showing that the trust established during the project continues to grow.



Sami Craft evening. Photo: Elin Heppling-Larsson, 2025. The Stockholm County Museum

Key learnings

The insights shared by the Sami organization about how they have been approached by museums in the past were invaluable. They emphasized that the trustbuilding and co-creation at the heart of this project felt genuinely different and deeply appreciated.

A major lesson was that early enthusiasm does not automatically translate into active participation. At the start, the strong positive feedback gave us a false sense of momentum. As contributions failed to materialize, we heard a range of reasons: people weren't sure their images were relevant, didn't have time, or didn't want to register on the platform. In hindsight, our outreach should have been stronger, more sustained, and more proactive. More face-to-face meetings could have helped us understand these obstacles earlier and support potential contributors directly.

Some participants also mentioned that they didn't know what kinds of images would be of interest. This suggests that open-ended themes—such as “contemporary life”—can be confusing, and that clearer guidance or concrete examples may help people feel more confident about contributing.

We also saw that digital participation comes with real barriers. Registration requirements, privacy concerns, and the sense that the platform resembled social media all reduced trust. Meeting people in person could have eased some of these concerns, and having a few initial contributions in the collection might have helped others feel more comfortable joining in.

Challenges

As the project unfolded, it became clear that building trust and establishing a genuine bond needed its own dedicated phase. This relational work took time, and the six-month project period proved too short for both meaningful engagement and for contributions to come in at a natural pace. The summer months also

slowed progress, as the organization was less active during that period.

We also realized that we had relied too heavily on digital outreach. The early positive feedback made us believe that online communication would be enough, but it wasn't. In hindsight, we should have organized workshops and more face-to-face meetings to create stronger momentum and support potential contributors more directly.



Kåta (lavvu) at home in the garden, Ingarö. My son preparing the fire for dinner in the Kåta. It was build 1995 on Ingarö. #samisksamtid Photo: Eva Helgesson, 2025. The Stockholm County Museum

Future Recommendations

- Extend project timelines to allow space for trust-building, relationship work, and iterative engagement.
- Plan workshops and in-person meetings from the start, using participation budgets for hospitality and small incentives that support meaningful interaction.

- Offer concrete examples or subthemes to guide contributions while still keeping the project open and flexible.
- Ensure digital tools feel clearly distinct from social media and visibly connected to the museum, using trust-building signals such as clear branding or institutional assurances.
- Consider features that allow contributors to share images privately at first, before anything becomes public.
- Continue addressing broader critiques of digital collecting, including questions of inclusivity, the balance between quality and quantity, and the structural barriers that shape who participates.

Aalborg City Archives: Grandparents' Climate Action

Aalborg City Archives worked together with Bedsteforældrenes Klimaaktion (BKA, Grandparents' Climate Action), a grassroots and activist group that was founded in 2018. The group wants to put an end to climate change and biodiversity loss, and they work to put pressure on politicians, but also inspire others to make the necessary behavioural changes.

The case study was an intergenerational climate project with this local branch of a national organisation. Since the group already existed and had a well functioning structure, it was easy and quick to start the collection. The group saw the Connect to Collect app as a useful tool for spreading their message, and documenting their work.

Together the archive and the group worked through what it means to co-archive, and the archive's representative facilitated photo uploading sessions, so that everyone could feel comfortable with the technical aspects.

The case study was a process of encouraging people to think about the importance of documenting their activities rather than just undertaking activism, and it resulted in mutual learning from each other.

National archives are now interested in the national organisation, Klimabevægelsen, so there is some work to do to understand what should be archived at a national and local level – both for the organisation and for the archive.

During this case study around 50 images were collected. It also entailed testing the app. Giving guidance around descriptions and selection has been needed. It's obvious the user experience needs to be further developed. GDPR has been an important point of discussion too, especially when it comes to documenting activism and protests. There are many faces in the images and discussions were held about how to work through permissions.

Unfortunately Aalborg City Archives had to leave the project before we reached the finish line, but we are happy to have had them in the project together with the rest of us.



Researcher collaboration

Arran Rees

Having participated in the original CoSoPho project and been a part of how the project team modelled a range of ways of collecting social digital photography to inform the development of a collecting app, I was keen to continue my collaborations throughout the Connect to Collect project. As a researcher in contemporary and digital collecting practices in museums, and as someone who works with collections data, the desire to work with the project team to iterate, develop and refine the processes that emerged during the CoSoPho project, as well as experiment with new digitally-enabled features, spoke to my core interests.

As with CoSoPho, I did not take on my own case study but worked with the rest of the project team to facilitate reflection and draw out common threads that tied the individual case studies together. At times this involved facilitated conversation on cohering common goals and overarching research questions, other times the contributions were one-to-one, conducting semi-structured interviews to support evaluative processes. Throughout my participation, I was keen to bring in action research methods, using project meetings to help draw out learning points to be followed up in further case study experiments.

The semi-structured interviews, conducted throughout October and November proved particularly effective at identifying the emergent findings of the project. They were undertaken via Microsoft Teams and transcriptions were produced. These were further analysed and the challenges and successes were clustered to help inform the

recommendations of the project. We were unable to conduct a final interview with Aalborg City Archives, but the process of meeting documentation has meant the case study undertaken there has also been able to feed into the findings.

Cross-country collaborations like this are vitally important for developing useful research outcomes that pay attention to the differing contexts of museums and cultural heritage landscapes, even amongst the closely aligned Nordic countries. Where there are common threads in the challenges and successes of Connect to Collect, there are also slightly different cultural contexts that add strength to the findings of the project, and help ground the case studies in the reality of everyday practice, making them more replicable for other museums and archives in the future.



Project meeting in Stockholm, October 2024. Photo: Kajsa Hartig

Summary of the report

This report presents the outcomes of Connecting and Collecting: Developing participatory methods to collect social digital photography in Nordic archives and museums (2024–2026), a cross-Nordic collaboration exploring how digital tools and community-centered methods can support contemporary collecting. Five institutions in Sweden, Finland, and Denmark carried out case studies using the Connect to Collect platform, each working with different communities to co-create photographic collections that reflect lived experiences, local identities, and contemporary social and environmental issues.



Project meeting in Helsinki, September 2025. Photo: Arran Rees

Across the project, the partners tested how digital collecting can be combined with participatory practices, co-curation, and community dialogue. The case studies ranged from diversifying vernacular photography collections with the Mixed

Finns community in Helsinki, to engaging young people in Lugnvik, exploring sustainability in Gothenburg, documenting contemporary Sámi life in Stockholm, and supporting climate activism with Bedsteforældrenes Klimaaktion in Aalborg. While the contexts differed, the institutions encountered many shared challenges and insights.

A central finding is that trust-building, relationship work, and face-to-face engagement are indispensable, even in projects centred on digital tools. Communities often needed time to discuss representation, identity, privacy, and the emotional implications of donating personal photographs. Many participants were hesitant to upload material due to concerns about visibility, data protection, or misinterpretation.

The project also revealed that motivation and accessibility shape participation. Tangible incentives could sometimes work better than institutional appeals; clear guidance and concrete examples were more effective than open-ended themes; and digital tools alone were insufficient without personal support. Technical issues in the app, limited institutional resources, and short project timelines further constrained participation.

Despite these challenges, the project demonstrated that community-created collections can foster belonging, peer support, and new forms of shared custodianship. The Connect to Collect platform proved valuable for licensing and metadata, though it requires further development to improve usability, clarity, and flexibility.

The report concludes with recommendations for future work: allocate more time for relationship-building; embed projects within institutional structures; combine digital tools with physical meetings; provide clear frameworks for co-curation; improve app usability; offer digitization support; and ensure that collecting environments feel safe, trustworthy, and community-controlled. The findings highlight the importance of long-term collaboration, humility, and adaptability when working with communities on contemporary collecting.

Together, the case studies show that participatory digital collecting is both promising and complex. When institutions share authority, listen deeply, and meet communities on their own terms, new forms of heritage can emerge—more inclusive, more representative, and more rooted in everyday life across the Nordic region.



Project meeting in Helsinki, September 2025. Photo: Virve Laustela / Finnish Museum of Photography

Summary of Future Recommendations

This document outlines a set of practical recommendations for strengthening future community-based digital collecting projects. It emphasizes the need for early expectation-setting, suggesting pre-project polls or questionnaires and providing clear frameworks for what co-curation means, how participants can influence collections, and why metadata matters.

A recurring theme is the importance of time, trust, and live engagement. The report stresses that projects should reserve ample time for discussions about museums, collecting practices, and the ethical and technical implications of donating images. It also recommends embedding projects within institutional structures, allocating dedicated staff for relationship-building, and extending timelines to support iterative engagement.

Digital tools should be used strategically: the app can handle licensing and metadata, but sensitive work requires in-person interaction. Usability improvements are needed, including clearer instructions, digitization stations for analogue photos, and group upload sessions for less tech-savvy participants. The document also encourages making museum spaces accessible for community meetings or exploring hybrid models.

To support participation, the recommendations highlight the value of hospitality, small incentives, and concrete examples or sub-themes that guide contributions without limiting creativity. Digital platforms must feel trustworthy and distinct from social media, with clear institutional branding and

options for private sharing before contributions become public.

Finally, the document calls for continued attention to broader structural issues in digital collecting—such as inclusivity, accessibility, and the balance between quality and quantity—to ensure that participation is meaningful and equitable.



Project meeting in Gothenburg, January 2026. Photo: Karolina Hedström

What's next

The project concludes with a webinar for museums and archives in March 2026. The collected images from the case studies are presented as an online exhibition on the project website.

Following the webinar, the report will be published on the participating institutions' websites, accompanied by coordinated communication efforts to ensure broad awareness and accessibility.

New projects and technical development collaboration will be planned with the other institutions using the Connect to Collect app.

The participating institutions continue to organise digital meetings to discuss ongoing developments in digital collecting and the further evolution of the Connect to Collect portal.

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