

Virtual Museum of Migration and Mobilities

CASE STUDY



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INTRODUCTION

Whether virtual or bricks and mortar, from the Virtual Museum of Russian Migration to Luxembourg or the Immigration Museum in Brazil, migration museums centre the history of migration through a national lens. This nation-state focus often narrates stories of mobility through control, securitization and experiences within set national boundaries. In turn, it excludes the broader economic, political and social processes that shape human mobility, regardless of nationality.

Building on research and interventions from the MIDEQ Hub, the Virtual Museum of Migration and Mobilities (VM³) aims to centre narratives of mobility away from individual nations towards an understanding of migration as a normal, human experience. It seeks to present a global perspective of migration, highlighting migration journeys from diverse historical and geographical contexts. Doing so creates an inclusive online space of knowledge exchange across borders which connects students, civil society, policymakers, educators, and academics to the experiences of people on the move.

The project is hosted by the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development ([INURED](#)) and draws on work from MIDEQ member institutions based in Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Nepal, South Africa, and the UK. It aims to create a platform to produce and exchange knowledge regarding historic and contemporary migration flows from migrants themselves. The virtual museum seeks to humanise migrant stories and experiences at a time when nationalist and xenophobic narratives on migration are on the rise.

EXHIBITION CURATION

Digital artefacts collected for VM³ explore intersecting themes related to migration. For example, historic and contemporary labour migration will be explored through its links to colonialism. It connects human mobility to the creation of nation-states, and arbitrary borders as well as unmet local labour demands. Other digital artefacts will examine forced migration including the removal and relocation of indigenous populations, slavery and indentured servitude. Issues around climate change will also serve as a lens to understanding migration patterns as drought, food insecurity and natural disasters force communities to leave their homelands.

The museum will also host a permanent collection on themes such as:

- Migration, memory and the arts
- Migration governmentality: acknowledgement of the structures that foster and hinder human migration

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- Food and migration
- Climate migration
- War, refugees and displacement
- Involuntary migration
- Migration and health

Special exhibitions will showcase contemporary events and issues in migration and mobilities. Featuring various artistic works, the special exhibitions provide an opportunity to not only explore the links between migration and inequalities but also partner with local organisations and migrant communities tackling these issues at the grassroots level. In addition, VM³ will host a quarterly virtual and in-person lecture series, bringing together scholars, educators, civil society and people on the move. The lecture series will serve as a platform to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including migrant children and education (SDG 4); migration and gender (in) equality (SDG 4); and the relationships between migration and inequality (SDG 10).

Educational programming is a key component of VM³ to be featured in both permanent and special exhibitions. Initial materials will be interactive, allowing museum visitors to access data on migration across the world through maps, visualisations, quizzes, curricula and other modalities. The museum will also host an online, open access archive that includes research reports, white papers and didactic materials created during the MIDEQ project. Resources will be available in English, French, Brazilian Portuguese and Arabic. In addition, other academic work on human mobility and migration will be available via the research archives.

Currently, the team is in the process of finalising commissioned works for the museum with artists and researchers in Haiti, Brazil, Mexico and Ethiopia. For example, the team is working with Michèle Voltaire, a Haitian poet and actress who is creating a video poem based on her work “Migrant Heart”. In Brazil, the team is working with a Brazilian-Haitian artist to develop a short film on migration and governmentality called “Spiral”, while partners in Mexico are supporting the collection of videos and music with migration themes. Working in Ethiopia, MIDEQ Haiti and Ethiopia are identifying existing materials for the museum’s exhibitions while also exploring potential opportunities to work with local communities affected by the mobility of people from returnees to internally displaced people.

BUILDING NETWORKS

Central to VM³ is its commitment to cross-border collaborations not only with MIDEQ Hub members but also museums, artists, NGOs and international organisations in both the Global North and Global South. VM³ will have a rotating

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appointment of curators from different geographical regions. Curators will collaborate with artists from the Global South, in particular, to commission work that will be featured in the virtual museum.

Other partners involved in the creation of VM³ include the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami and consortiums led by MIDEQ teams in Ethiopia and Haiti. The consortiums in Addis Ababa and Port au Prince comprise a mix of university and museum partners who specialise in migration research. Continuing partnerships from the MIDEQ Hub, INURED will also collaborate with animators at PositiveNegatives and practitioners at international organisations such as the International Organization for Migration. To expand its network, the virtual museum will also be a member of the International Committee for University Museums and Collections and the Museum Research Network. Both networks provide platforms for VM³ to interact with potential future partners interested in the role of museums, creating inclusive spaces and best practices for museum curation. It presents an opportunity to connect with institutions and professionals in the field while also accessing resources for future exhibitions.

The museum is a product of MIDEQ project, continuing its ethos to decentre knowledge production through co-creation and collaboration. It draws on the research findings from the MIDEQ project to highlight the connection between migration and inequalities through creative outputs. VM³ also continues MIDEQ's work of changing migration narratives from control and securitization to a more nuanced understanding of why people move. The museum, and curated artefacts, humanise migrants, their families and communities in the Global South by centring their experiences. With insights and inputs from a broad range of partners, VM³ is uniquely placed to continue the legacy of MIDEQ and its work.



Cover Image

Photo of globe. Photo by Kyle Glenn via Unsplash .

Funding

This work has been funded by the UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) [Grant Reference: ES/S007415/1]. The GCRF is a five-year £1.5 billion fund aimed at addressing the problems faced by developing countries.

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