



# Decolonising Ethnographic Databases

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# Decolonising ethnographic databases: a pilot project of data migration from the Swedish National Museum of World Culture's Carlotta to the open-source software Tainacan

## **Abstract**

The report discusses the historical process of building the database currently used by the Swedish National Museums of World Culture (SMVK) in Sweden, called Carlotta. It examines its trajectory and the current problems these museums have been facing to carry out new types of work of documentation and decolonisation of the database. The report then brings focus to the process of extracting and migrating data from Carlotta to a free open-source software called Tainacan, concentrating on a pilot project on the collections of the Amazonian Indigenous group Wai Wai deposited at the SMVK. The results point to new possibilities of use and reuse of information and new possibilities to develop strategies of shared curatorship with the Wai Wai themselves. The report ends by discussing the first results obtained with this initial experiment and raises research questions that need to be deepened in further and more structured stages of the project.

## **Keywords**

Wai Wai, Swedish National Museums of World Culture, Carlotta, Tainacan, decolonising databases.

## Introduction

The Swedish National Museums of World Culture (SMVK)<sup>1</sup> was created by a government act in 1996 and started its activities in 1999. In this new organisation, four different museums were merged: the Museum of East Asia, the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities and the Ethnographic Museum, all three in Stockholm, as well as the Museum of Ethnography in Gothenburg, now known as the Museum of World Culture and the main subject of this article. Each of these museums was conceived differently and devised their own ways of registering and cataloguing their objects: the Museum of East Asia framed its collections as art, the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities as classic archaeology, while both ethnographic museums, in Stockholm and Gothenburg, were concerned mostly with non-European cultures.

While the creation of the SMVK the four museums came under the same organisation, until today, the management of their collections has been problematic, especially with regards to the different ways through which the collections have been defined. The disciplinary divisions between art, ethnography, archaeology and classic archaeology are still strong in the organisation of these four national museums. Despite being under the same institutional roof, the combined collections of these museums (aggregating in total around 400,000 objects) are registered within four separate databases using the same collection management system, called 'Carlotta'.<sup>2</sup> Carlotta was initially conceived in the 1990s to be used by only one museum, the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm. Later, in 2008, it was adopted by the other three museums under the SMVK authority, each using its own classification system and metadata structure. One of the many paradoxes of Carlotta is that it is difficult to create one single database aggregating all the information of the four museums, just because they are organised differently.

Beyond the SMVK, Carlotta has also been used by several other museums in Sweden, including Kulturen in Lund, Helsingborg's Museum, the Malmö's Museum, the Gothenburg City Museum, the Väner Museum in Lidköping, the Swedish Sami Museum, Norrbotten's Museum, and Åjtte's Museum. A starting point for Carlotta was the guidelines of the International Committee for Documentation of the International Council of Museums (CIDOC/ICOM). CIDOC's international standards for naming metadata fields were adapted for the Swedish museum context through the creation of SWETERM (Swedish Classification System). Since 2010, it has been possible for museums that use Carlotta to deliver data to 'K-samsök'<sup>3</sup>, which means that the information will also be searchable in the National Heritage Board's aggregator called 'Kringla'.

The Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg (the main subject of this report), was created in 1862 as a city museum with a department where so-called ethnographic objects were deposited. Eventually, different parts of the collection were dismembered

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<sup>1</sup> Acronym in Swedish for *Statens museer för världskultur* (SMVK).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/collections/search-the-collections/>

<sup>3</sup> K-samsök is a search service on the web that was opened in beta version in 2009, and as a sharp version in 2011. The purpose of K-samsök is to make the cultural heritage easier to use in various applications.

and transferred to other museums across the city, while the department of ethnography gave rise to the Museum of Ethnography of Gothenburg (GEM)<sup>4</sup>. The idea of what ethnography means has changed since that time (Muñoz 2012), and with it, the way objects have been classified. In the early days of the GEM, having an ethnographic museum provided a cosmopolitan feel to the city. Later, in the aftermath of WWI, ethnography (and the objects collected as ethnographic) became associated with the lower classes and with people excluded from the national state project.

During the interwar period, and up until the end of WWII, the museum staff devoted their time to making a comprehensive registration of all the objects in the collection in paper cards, using different approaches but especially Murdoch's system of culture classification (Murdock 1954, 1969). In a way, this system of classification remained almost unchallenged until the 1980s, when the museum went through a period of deep crisis and the management of the collections was overlooked.

In the 1990s, the Swedish government invested a lot of resources in the digitisation of the collections, and Carlotta started being developed in Stockholm. In Gothenburg, during the same period, the collections were being registered on Filemaker (1993)<sup>5</sup> as an interim and internal database to manage the relocation of objects, which were being physically moved from the storerooms in Ostindiska huset<sup>6</sup> to Gårda<sup>7</sup>. In addition, a research project called "Schreiter Collection" (1997), led by Per Stenborg and Adriana Muñoz, was also using Filemaker to register a specific archaeology collection from northwestern Argentina with the aim of handling and analysing research data (Stenborg and Muñoz 1999). At the time, the leadership of the GEM saw the opportunity to use Filemaker as an inexpensive and easy-to-use alternative to Carlotta that, in contrast, required a lot of training and computer skills. Yet, the problem of inputting data into Filemaker without questioning the old categories and the information itself remained unaddressed by the museum.

In 1999 the GEM became part of the SMVK, and the Ethnographic Museum in Gothenburg became the Museum of World Culture (MWC). When Carlotta was finally adopted by the MWC, the information was transferred from Filemaker, initially conceived for internal use only. The full content of the MWC's collections became available online, replicating and making widely accessible the old information which can bring problems of inaccurate or problematic categorisation and the traces of racist belief.

Before adopting Carlotta, the MWC commissioned Darren Peacock (2006) to lead an inquiry on the state of the art of databases and write a tender to create a new one. Peacock had previously worked for the National Museum of Australia, where indigenous (aboriginal) peoples from different groups were consulted in the process of creating

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<sup>4</sup> Acronym for *Göteborgs etnografiska museet* (GEM).

<sup>5</sup> FileMaker is a software used to create custom apps and databases that work seamlessly across iPad, iPhone, Windows, Mac, and the web. In 1993 was a powerful tool to create databases.

<sup>6</sup> The former Museum of Ethnography of Gothenburg (MEG) was housed in a building owned and used by the Swedish East India Company.

<sup>7</sup> Gårda is a neighbourhood of Gothenburg where the MEG was temporarily based, in a building now called Brewhouse.

their collections' database. Based on this experience, he proposed that technology (databases) should help museums to be rethought, reshaped and reimagined (Peacock 2008:342). Peacock pointed out that one of the key problems to overcome was that databases were initially created for the natural sciences, and that its structures and metaphors were still used in the social sciences (Peacock 2008:336). He also suggested that the new database for the MWC should include at least three different areas: collection management, exhibition management and knowledge management. Despite Peacock's inquiry and recommendations to follow a decolonising approach, SMVK opted for a more conservative line of action. Carlotta continued to be used and to perpetuate outdated museum categories.<sup>8</sup>

## The museum and its Carlotta database

Over the last decades, there have been many discussions focused on reshaping ethnographic museums (Shelton 1992; Weil 2002; Witcomb 2003). Many former ethnographic museums in Europe are now called museums of 'World Culture' (Fiskesjö 2007; Hannerz 1990; Lechner and Boli 2005; Muñoz 2012). However, the management of collections and databases in Sweden has not made significant progress from the old disciplinary concepts of ethnography and archaeology, excluding from history a large part of the world population (Wolf 1982). Furthermore, management is an inert area; using arguments from conservation and archival sciences to prevent and avert change. Museums tend to resist any proposal to revise and reorder the collections for fear of losing control (Sandahl 2002, 2005, 2007). Over the last years, discussions about de-colonising the museum's databases have been revived at SMVK. However, it remains on a discursive level, rather than a pragmatic change. Knowledge management has seldom been discussed, and all the problems discussed here are mirrored in the Carlotta database.

One of the biggest problems with Carlotta, and with databases more generally, is that they should find universal solutions to particular issues. Fabian suggests that ethnographic discourse, "rests upon personal, prolonged interaction with the other" but ethnographic knowledge "construes the other in terms of distance, spatial and temporal" so that "the other's empirical presence turns into his theoretical absence" (Fabian 1983:xi). Fabian's argument can be extended to studies of indigenous knowledge that seek to produce catalogues and databases. His concept of distancing helps uncover some of the assumptions underpinning the use of a conceptual-classificatory, tabular space in which to locate and fix indigenous knowledge. It usefully illuminates the political consequences of "scientizing" indigenous knowledge (Agrawal 2002:293). A database depends for its efficacy on the homogenisation of elements that constitute them (Agrawal 2002:292), and through that discriminates against all forms of indigenous knowledge. The question of power, of who has control and how it is exercised, remains a central question to be addressed. Indigenous peoples and their knowledge have not been allowed to influence how their material and immaterial culture is stored, managed and represented in museum databases. They

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<sup>8</sup> Adopting Carlotta was a complicate political process where no tender was announced

have remained in marginalised positions, mainly exerting localised resistance to the dominant scientific knowledge, here including the builders of databases' architecture, the cataloguers and authors of best practice manuals. In this sense, it is important to mark the distinction between different forms of knowledge and how they manifest in (or are omitted from) particular institutional inscriptions (Agrawal 2002:294).

Being developed in the 1990s, Carlotta is outdated in its design and way of cataloguing information. The information from the inter-wars catalogue paper cards, which is now online, has seldom been revised or re-evaluated. In this sense, SMVK presents to the world a view of knowledge and classification of the last century. In sum, here are some of the key factors we identified as problems in the current database:

- The universal solution vs the particular problem
- The logic of the database: there is a belief in stable "data", however, museums' categories are not stable, they change and need to adapt to new paradigms. The same is valid for the data or content in a database.
- Old-fashioned system and design
- It was an internal tool that became online
- Using categories that create otherness
- Excluding from history the people who made the objects
- Wrong and enough information about the collections
- Working and giving information only in Swedish
- Eurocentrism

## **Changing knowledge management**

Implementing a decolonial approach means to lose control over the way of cataloguing the objects. In previous projects we showed that it is possible to allow ourselves to accept changing the rules. We have had some projects financed externally testing other ways of working, in each project we have been learning the spectrum of possibilities (Joselovsky 2009, 2013; Loza and Alvarez Quispe 2009; Muñoz 2009, 2016).

Nevertheless, changing the ways of working with the database, so it can reflect what is going on with the production of knowledge, has been complicated. First because of language barriers but also because it is impossible for outsiders to include, change or manage information in the database. At MWC, 75% of the collections are from Latin America, the question of language and accessibility is a complicated and urgent matter. More recently, new experiments have been tested with another type of information management system for museums, the Tainacan, which will be presented in the next section.



## Tainacan: an open source digital repository platform for WordPress

Tainacan<sup>9</sup> is developed by the Network Intelligence Laboratory of the University of Brasília, with support of the Brazilian Institute of Museums. Tainacan is a technological solution for the creation of digital collections on the internet. Designed to meet the reality of cultural institutions that do not have professionals specialised in IT, it is a free software that allows the management and publication of digital collections in an easy and intuitive way for people who have no IT training. It can be used to develop repositories and digital libraries, as well as communication, exhibitions, and digital collection dissemination actions.

Tainacan is a WordPress plugin and theme. This means that to be able to use Tainacan, an active WordPress installation is needed. WordPress has an administrative panel that allows the user to manage and publish his collection. It is through the panel that different user profiles can be created, with different levels of access to the collections, as well as different web pages for the communication of the collections.

As described on the website, the main features of Tainacan for this project are:

- *“Metadata and Filters”*: Use a metadata standard or choose whatever set of metadata you want to describe the items in your collections. Also, choose which metadata will be used as a filter when browsing collections.
- *“Faceted Search”*. Browse your collection (and let the public browse it) using a faceted search interface with the filters you have chosen.
- *“Manage Taxonomies”*: Manage vocabularies that can be used across all your collections.
- *“Themes”*: The Tainacan plugin has its own default theme, which helps you to showcase your collections in a beautiful and effective manner. But it can also work with any WordPress theme, so interface developers can easily add Tainacan specific features to an existing theme.
- *“API and Interoperability”*: Tainacan implements a RESTful API (read and write) to allow other applications to interact with your repository. That way, you can expose your collection in different formats, such as JSON, JsonLD, OAI-PMH and others. If your collection has a specific set of metadata, you can map this metadata to match the patterns you want to use.
- *“Gutenberg blocks”*: Tell stories with your collections. Tainacan offers you several Gutenberg blocks so you can present your collections to the public in many different ways.

Tainacan has been used in several projects, mainly with ethnographic collections as well as with other types of museums in Latin America, for projects that aim to migrate

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<sup>9</sup> See: <https://WordPress.org/plugins/tainacan/>

traditional databases to a more open and flexible solution. It is worth highlighting some cases already documented in international scientific literature.

Levinho, Oliveira and Couto (Levinho et al. 2021), focusing on a journey that began in 1996, discuss the various strategies used by the Museu do Índio in Rio de Janeiro to offer adequate services to the Brazilian indigenous peoples, including them in the process of organisation, display, description, and management of their heritage, and using this same heritage to enforce the protection of their fundamental rights inside the Brazilian state. The main argument defended is that the sustainability of documentation and management actions for ethnographic collections is more effective when digital management resources dialogue with the social universe from which the cultural assets originated. The article reports the process of migrating the documentation of the ethnographic collections that were produced in a software called 'PHL to Tainacan', whose final result is online at: <http://tainacan.museudoindio.gov.br/>.

Cândido, Martins and Vial (Cândido et al. 2021) - in an article called *Digital strategies for widening the scope of dissemination of indigenous cultures: the Presença Karajá Project and the Tainacan Platform* published by ICOM/ICOFOM in a series named "Decolonizing Museology" - have been mapping collections of Karajá ceramic dolls (known as 'ritxoko') across museums in Brazil and worldwide, having already listed 77 institutions in 16 countries; the oldest collections found date back to the mid-nineteenth century. While mapping collections, and collaborating to improve their documentation, they research their formation, which involves processes of material and symbolic exchange between indigenous and non-indigenous people which mostly emerged from processes of colonial exploitation. Working on processes of identification, systematisation and dissemination of heritage references of the Karajá culture, the project takes part in the complex thread of strategies to represent indigenous people in a museological context. Additionally, while deploying digital strategies of collections management and dissemination they intend to promote 'digital restitution' to indigenous people, allowing access to their collections, which are usually geographically scattered. Furthermore, it also feeds back the ceramists' inspiration and craftsmanship. Working in progress here: <https://presencakaraja.tainacan.org/>.

Velasco Reyes et al (2021) describes the implementation process of the Object ID standard using Tainacan, which included four museological institutions from Brazil and Mexico as a comparative case study. They considered the hypothesis that the two countries share similarities related to cultural contexts and material heritage. They expected to achieve similar results, such as the observed benefits of using documentation software and a metadata scheme. In this case study, they present the results of this investigation, but as will be seen, much remains to be done. As a prospect for the future, the experiment will expand to other standards, such as the Lightweight Information Describing Objects (LIDO) standard.

As can be seen from the references above, Tainacan has been used in experiments and research aimed at exploring its adaptability and flexibility to different documentation models, information organisation strategies and approaches to collection dissemination. Its technical possibilities, which include ease of use by people without IT training, allow the development and exploration of innovative curatorial processes, including digital repatriation and shared curation with indigenous groups. Considering these characteristics, the software proved to be a very interesting option for the pilot

project of decolonisation of an ethnographic collection of the SMVK, which will be presented in the following section.

## Pilot project: the migration of the documentation of the Wai Wai indigenous group from Carlotta to Tainacan

The SMVK has in its collection 350 objects that are attributed to the Wai Wai indigenous group. Currently, the objects are accessible to the museum's external public through Carlotta's web interface, available in Figure 1. Some of the issues raised in previous sessions of this work can already be seen on the landing page of the website (managed by SMVK). The interface is presented only in Swedish, it is not possible to explore the collections using filters or facets; it is necessary to search the text field to reach any result. As mentioned before, the possibility of carrying out a work of decolonising the database from these conditions becomes quite limited.

OVERVIEW ABOUT CARLOTTA THE MUSEUM

VÄRLDSKULTUR MUSEERNA VÄRLDSKULTUR CARLOTTA Databasen för museisamlingar

Free search →

Easy search Advanced search Search tips Overview

Statens museer för världskultur  
**Världskulturmuseet**

Världskulturmuseet har cirka 100 000 föremål, fördelade på cirka 2 500 samlingar från hela världen, de flesta från områden utanför Europa. Alla dessa är tillgängliga genom Carlotta. Utöver dessa kan du titta på cirka 30 000 fotografier.

The database currently contains...

- Föremål (Objekt) 103 171.
- Föremålssamlingar 2 624.
- Fotografier 36 717.
- Utställningar 143.
- Digitala bilder 294 885.
- Mest visade föremål **väv: Göteborgssamlingen; bemålad poncho; avfört; repatrierat**; Starkt skadad poncho. Försedd med lång vävd frans. Såväl denna som mittparti...
- Mest visade fotografi **Miniatyr-baba, sten-babas**; I mitten en miniatyr-baba, troligen från Ordos området. På båda sidor: sten-babas från Talas dalen, Turkestan...
- Senast registrerade föremål **textil**; Knytbatik upplaget "paket" ansvindigtfärgat 29/1 85/11 och upplaget! Inköpt Afro Art, febr 82 (150-)
- Senast registrerade fotografi **föremålsbild**; Dokumentation av föremål.
- Senast avbildade föremål **fingerborg**; Fingerborg av mässing.
- Senast digitaliserade fotografi **utställning**; Föremål skjortor i utställningen Tillsammans på VKM. I denna del av utställningen byttes skjortorna ut någon gång 2021 eller ...
- Senast digitaliserade namn **konsul**; Heinrich Rudolph Wahlen, född 1873 i Tyskland, död 1970, konsul och företagare, ägde flera av de västra öarna i Bismarckarkipeleage...

Månadens föremål

**sköld**; Sköld. Damaskerat stål med guldnäggningar. Bak till klädd med röd sammat. Diam: 35cm. Hist avd. neg: B5692. \*\* gammalt br. 2124. Gäva Skölden torde vara identisk med en tidigare som no 1567 in-katalogiserad. I så fall har den kommit till museet med den Geger...

Veckans föremål

**lur**; Lur eller ropare af trä. Gäva Längd: 52,5 cm.

Kort om Carlotta

Carlotta är ett informationssystem som utvecklas för museer och deras museisamlingar. Grundidén är att tillhandahålla ett flexibelt system som kan användas och anpassas till alla sorters museisamlingar. [Read more...](#)

Copyright ©2022 Världskulturmuseet • «Guest access» • [Log in...](#) Version: 3.8.7 • [Client](#) • [carlotta@varldskulturmuseet.se](mailto:carlotta@varldskulturmuseet.se)

Figure 1. Carlotta web version home page.

When performing a search for the expression "Wai Wai" in the search field, 260 objects are obtained as a result, as can be seen in Figure 2. Not all 350 objects can be found by direct search due to issues related to the documentation of the items, and the way they were catalogued. In other words, even retrieving the complete collection through the web interface is not a simple task. All objects can only be retrieved when the curators, who already know the database in depth, carry out complementary searches with new combinations of keywords.

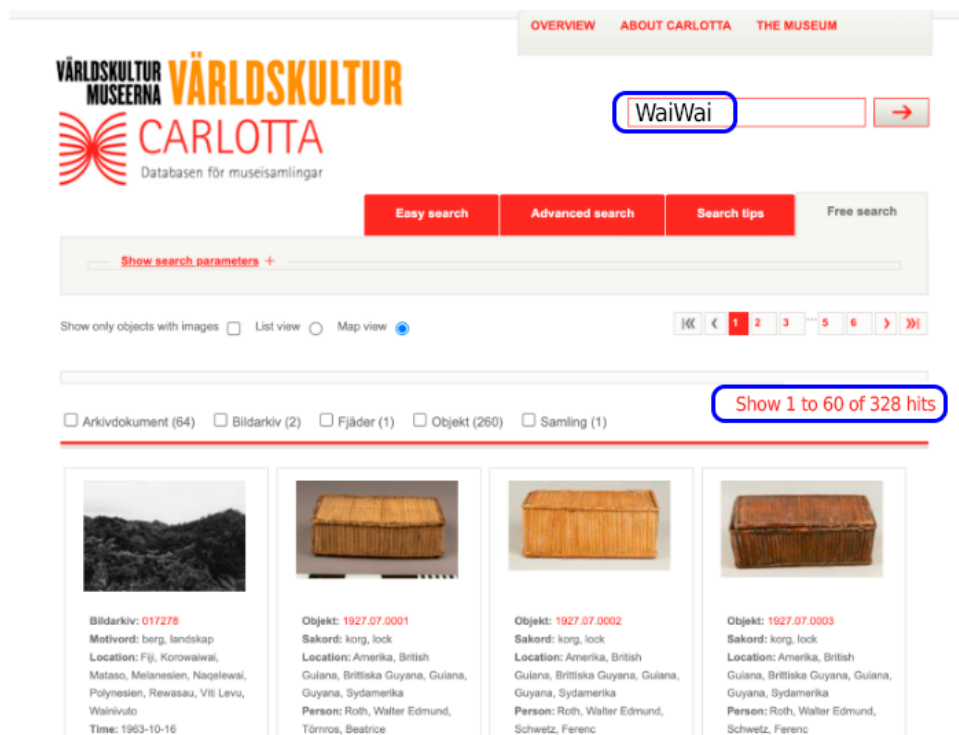


Figure 2. Search result for the expression "Wai Wai" in Carlotta web version.

In addition to the limitations already mentioned, it is complex for the museum team to have the autonomy to modify the categories by which the collection is indexed and to propose changes in the names of the metadata and their possible semantic meaning. All these changes need to be approved by IT staff beforehand. These are highly sensitive places where the cultural understanding of the documentation is expressed. Therefore, the teams that deal with curatorial work need greater autonomy to adapt expressions, translate terms, propose new forms of classification, indexing and even new ways of organising information. It is in this freedom that decolonial work will find space to develop and open possibilities for dialogue and participation, both in the documentation and in the curatorial processes alongside the indigenous groups that it is intended to engage.

The objective of the pilot project was to develop a work process in which it is possible to involve participants of the Wai Wai indigenous group in the documentation and experimentation of curatorial processes of cultural objects. For this to be possible, it is essential to have an information system that allows a greater degree of freedom for the

museum staff to build information management arrangements that reflect their work needs. It is fundamental, at the same time, to maintain correspondence with established standards, such as EDM, for future data collection and interoperability. Taking these questions into consideration, the work team proposed the framework shown in Figure 3.

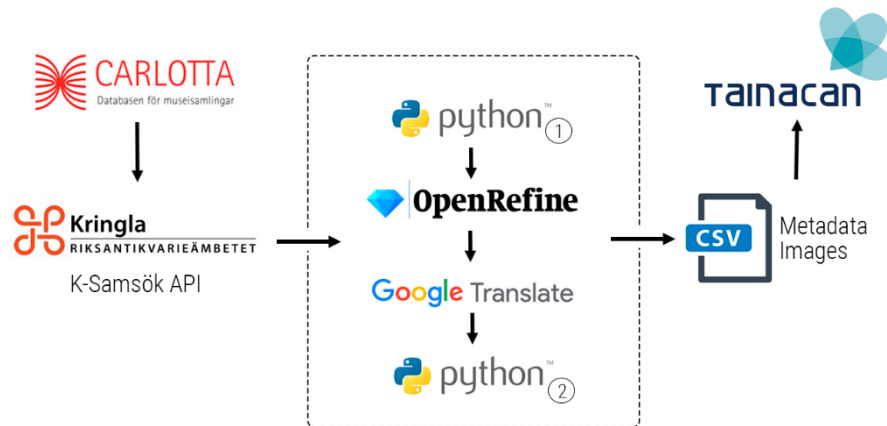


Figure 3. Workflow for migrating "Wai Wai" documentation

As Carlotta does not have an API or any other open interface for data collection, it was necessary to collect the data from Kringla (<https://www.kringla.nu/kringla/>), the Swedish aggregator of cultural objects. Kringla is built on software called K-Samsok and has an API.<sup>10</sup> Through this API, it was possible to build, with the support of the museum's technical team, an information search and retrieval strategy. The technical data migration process will be detailed in the following steps:

- Data access for all 350 Wai Wai objects:
  - In contact with the museum team, it was possible to understand that the 350 objects related to the Wai Wai were found within the same collection related to the name of their collector, Walter Edmund Roth. In this way, it was possible to build an API call to a list of the 350 related objects:

<https://kulturarvsdata.se/ksamsok/api?method=getRelations&relation=all&objectId=SMVK-VKM/samling/2389&maxCount=10000>

- Access to the documentation metadata of each of the objects:
  - Once the list of 350 objects was obtained, it was possible to access the metadata and the web address of their related images through a JSON query to the API for each of the codes obtained in the previous step. The metadata call of one of the items, for example, is:

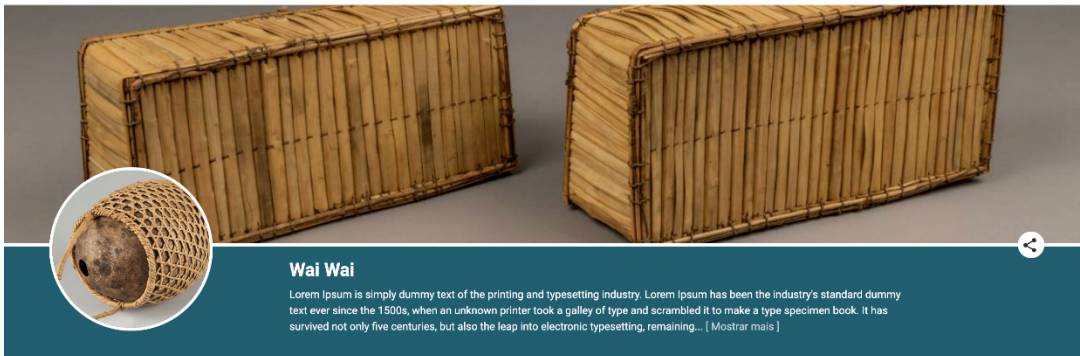
<https://kulturarvsdata.se/SMVK-VKM/objekt/jsonId/37379>

<sup>10</sup> This is documented at: <https://www.raa.se/in-english/digital-services/about-soch/api-in-english/>.

- Extraction of metadata and images:
  - For the effective extraction of metadata and images, a Python script was developed by the technical team to retrieve all the metadata and save the images on disk. The script is available here: <https://github.com/tainacan/Projeto-Gotemburgo/blob/main/extraiMetadadosColecao.ipynb>. The raw data extracted from K-samsök is available here: <https://github.com/tainacan/Projeto-Gotemburgo/blob/main/ExtracaoKso mSok.xlsx>.
- Treatment, cleaning and normalization of metadata:
  - As the data were analysed, several problems of normalisation and treatment in terms were identified, from miswritten terms to variations of the same term. OpenRefine software was used to perform this task.
- Translation of the metadata into Portuguese:
  - Once the data was processed and retrieved, the Google Translator API was used to translate the metadata into Portuguese. The processed and translated metadata are available at: <https://github.com/tainacan/Projeto-Gotemburgo/blob/main/MetadadosTraduzidos.xlsx>. A thorough revision of the translation is needed to correct mistakes and ensure accuracy.
- Correlation between object codes and object image file codes:
  - In order to relate the images obtained to the codes of the objects in the museum's database, a new script was built to read the names of the files and search for correlations with the codes: <https://github.com/tainacan/Projeto-Gotemburgo/blob/main/cruzaNomesKsomSok.ipynb>.
- Importing data into Tainacan:
  - The final data format for uploading to Tainacan is available here: <https://github.com/tainacan/Projeto-Gotemburgo/blob/main/TainacanCSV.csv>.

The final result of this process can be seen in figures 4 to 7 presented below. The final migration link is available at: <https://gothenburg.tainacan.org/>. Figure 4, shows the home page of the Wai Wai collection. On the left, are the filters and facets that were created to facilitate the exploration of the objects in the collection. They can be sorted by different criteria based on their metadata available for consultation.





Busca  Busca avançada

Ordenar [v] por Data de criação Visualização: Masonry Slides Ver como...

**Filtros**

Recoher todos

Palavras-chave

- : Ara araruna (1)
- : Selenidera culik (1)
- ("normal") Psittacidae: Ara ... (2)
- Aashaug (9)

Ver todos

País

- Guiana (350)

Local

- Alto rio Demerara, fr. Guiana (1)
- Arakaka, Rio Barema, fr. Gu... (2)
- Arakaka, Rio Barima, fr. Gul... (1)
- Br. Guiana (10)

Ver todos

Fotógrafo

- Anderzen, Hannes (38)
- Bela Adornecida, Beatriz (41)
- Faltam informações sob... (152)
- Huhtén, Martin (1)

Ver todos

chicote

pulseira

Makuari-chicote.

Engrenagem.

enfeite de quadril

cesta

Engrenagem.

cesta

cesta

cesta

cesta

cesta

Exibindo itens 1 a 12 de 350.

Itens por Página: 12

Ir para página: 1

1 2 ... 30

Figure 4. Entry page in the Wai Wai collection on the Tainacan - <https://gotemburgo.tainacan.org/wai-wai/>

Figure 5, shows the page of a specific item in the collection. On the page, the user can already see the metadata - meaning the metadata that were transformed into a controlled vocabulary and became links to group other related objects. Additionally, there are links that invite users to share the items on social media, an important feature to stimulate the dissemination of the collection and, again, an option not available at Carlotta.

Decolonising ethnographic dabases

15

mandioca-vista

Voltar

maio 14, 2022 por dalton

Documento



1927.7.19

Miniatura



Compartilhar



Denominação

mandioca-vista

Descrição

Termo de mandioca

Grupo étnico

Karapayana, Uaiuais, Hixaryana, Wai wai, Wai-wai, Wai-Wai, Mawayana

Nome geográfico

Guiana Britânica

Local

Br:Guiana

País

Guiana

Origem

América do Sul Guiana

Coletado por

Walter Roth

Largura

43 cm

Palavras-chave

Etnografia | ferramentas

Fotógrafo

Faltam informações sobre o autor

Número de inventário

1927.07.0019

Link para o Museu das Culturas do Mundo de Gotemburgo

<https://collections.snmk.se/carlotte-ukm/web/object/37385>

Wikidata

Waiwai - <http://www.wikidata.org/entity/Q1853257>

Continue navegando

◀ mandioca-vista cesta ▶

☰ Voltar para a página de itens

Figure 5. Page of a specific object in the collection - <https://gotemburgo.tainacan.org/wai-wai/mandioca-vista-3/>

Figures 6 and 7 show one of the most interesting interconnection resources between WordPress and Tainacan. Because WordPress is a tool for building websites, Tainacan was built to facilitate the retrieval of digital objects from a digital repository from which to build web pages. This feature facilitates the retrieval of structured information from Tainacan for the construction of pages with less structure that allows space for other forms of narrative to be created, such as through the combination of videos, images,



texts, and podcasts among other elements. The advantage of this strategy is that the information or metadata can be kept in a structured format, following cataloguing rules and controlled vocabularies in Tainacan, while using other WordPress resources to build more dynamic, interactive pages that are easy to make, taking into consideration especially the participation of indigenous groups in a shared curatorial process.

Figure 6 shows the test homepage for the project. It is already possible to observe the use of external video and graphic elements, calling for more open possibilities of curated sections (to be further developed in the future). A first curatorial exercise was carried out on "cassava" and will be discussed below). The 'word cloud' is one example of how the blocks between WordPress and the elements of the digital repository in Tainacan can be connected. This 'word cloud' is dynamically assembled and it is possible to choose which metadata of the digital repository will be the source of information for it. The 'work cloud' consists in an alternative and dynamic form of visualisation of the collection and invites the user to explore the data in different ways. At the end of the webpage, there is also a mosaic of images with some objects from the collection. This is another block that allows the interconnection between WordPress pages and Tainacan. This block can be dynamically created, and the user can choose the items from the digital repository that will compose the mosaic, without the need to upload a new image. In addition, by clicking on the images, the user is sent directly to the item's page in the digital repository.



## Museu das Culturas do Mundo – projeto Wai Wai

Apresentação do projeto

🌐



There are many variations of passages of Lorem Ipsum available, but the majority have suffered alteration in some form, by injected humour, or randomised words which don't look even slightly believable. If you are going to use a passage of Lorem Ipsum, you need to be sure there isn't anything embarrassing hidden in the middle of text. All the Lorem Ipsum generators on the Internet tend to repeat predefined chunks as necessary, making this the first true generator on the Internet.

Decolonizando o acervo Wai Wai do Museu das Culturas do Mundo



## Curadorias em destaque



## Explore o acervo por palavras-chave

- Ara arazana (1) Selenidera culik (1) "normal" Pittacidiae: Ara macao (2) **Aashaug (9)** Acima / abaixo da goma (1)
- alidae espetáculo (1) amarelos (1) amarelo (1) amarelo fofo/ porta azul/ Pittacidiae: Ara macao (1)
- amarelo fofo/ Ramphastidae: Ramphastos tucanus / vitellinus (4)**
- amarelo fofo/ Ramphastidae: Ramphastos vitellinustucanus (1) amarelo normal/ Pittacidiae: Ara arazana (1) arame (1)
- Arame de fibra vegetal (1) **Ardeidae: Casmerodius albus / Egretta thula (4)** **armas (10)**
- armazenamento (55)** Armazenamento e transporte (1) **arqueologia (30)** Asa inferior. (1)
- asas inferiores./penas do corpo (4) Azul cobalto (1) Anil-rosa + turquesa/ Monotidae: Monotus moneta (1) balco (2)
- bambu (1) Bamburê (2) barbante de algodão (3) **bastão de madeira (7)** Bico superior (1) bijuteria (1)

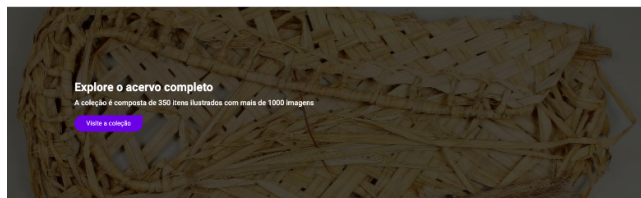


Figure 6. Home page - <https://gotemburgo.tainacan.org/>

Figure 7 shows the first curatorial test carried out in the project. A web page was created to thematically talk about "mandioca", one of the most important staple foods for the Wai Wai. This page brings together videos collected from Youtube, historical field photographs deposited at the National Museum of Denmark, and a video produced at the MWC for the experiment in which Wai Wai participants present some objects from the collection used in the harvesting and production process of manic flour, a still image from this video and, in the end, a block that lists the digital objects catalogued in Tainacan that have a direct relationship with manioc.

The creation of the webpage resulted from a curatorial exercise of selecting objects from the collection, in collaboration with Wai Wai representatives, where they were allowed to tell their stories and give contextualised access to the objects that are already catalogued. It is in this space, in the construction of these web pages, that the process of decolonising the database begins to take place, and where indigenous peoples can have greater potential for participation in the choice of objects to be displayed, in the stories that will be told about them, in the format of the page, and in the elements chosen to compose their narratives. Furthermore, it is technically a much simpler and more imaginative tool than entering data into a formal database.



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Mandioca



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— Lorem text

There are many variations of passages of Lorem Ipsum available, but the majority have suffered alteration in some form, by injected humour, or randomised words which don't look even highly believable. There are many variations of passages of Lorem Ipsum available, but the majority have suffered alteration in some form, by injected humour, or randomised words which don't look even slightly believable.

— Lorem text



Conheça o acervo de itens relacionados à mandioca



Figure 7. First curation experiment together with the Wai Wai - <https://gotemburgo.tainacan.org/mandioca/>.

Considering this first experiment and its possibilities of working with information in other ways, besides the traditional database, the project proposes an initial information architecture model for interconnecting the WordPress web pages with the digital objects catalogued in the digital repository of Tainacan. This model also covers the possibility of relating these curated pages with the items themselves, in order to facilitate the search and retrieval of the curated content and of individual items in the collection. These web pages are where the effort to decolonise the database can take place in the most open and dynamic way possible. However, maintaining the relationship between these curated pages and the related objects is fundamental to enable the user to identify not only the objects but the stories that revolve around them. This proposed architecture can be seen in Figure 8.



Figure 8. Information architecture between digital repository and decolonial curated web pages

In general, what is initially observed in Figure 8 is the migration of information from Carlotta to a digital collection within a repository in Tainacan. Once the information is structured in Tainacan, and by default in WordPress, it becomes possible to use the building blocks of pages to retrieve objects, metadata terms, and sets of objects, among others, directly from Tainacan to compose webpages or even a blog post in WordPress. These pages can be created in various possible ways, using layout variations, themes, and more. However, as tens or hundreds of web pages can be created, it will be essential to build a digital repository of these pages and establish a relationship between the objects in the initial collection and the curated webpages on which these

objects appear. This is critical to facilitate the search and retrieval of these curated content, thereby enriching the available information on the objects in the collection..

For example, a new user arriving at the digital repository can search for an object in the collection. Upon finding this object, they can see all the curated web pages where this object appears. In this way, the user will have the opportunity to visit these pages and discover further information about the object and other ways of contextualising these objects. The aim here is to propose an expanded exercise of museological documentation, composing the database with free as well as structured information, and building new forms of interconnecting them.

## **Discussion**

The present pilot project is the first experiment in the direction of a methodological process, and it is expected that it will evolve with time, especially taking into consideration the development of new methodological approaches for the decolonisation of the database. The first results obtained show that it is possible to migrate data from a traditional database system and build an infrastructure from which other types of narratives can unfold.

By migrating data from Carlotta to Tainacan, new possibilities arise for documenting and curating cultural objects. Exploring these possibilities is what is imagined as a methodological route for experimenting with new processes of decolonisation of databases. Working on the construction of new types of metadata, new controlled vocabularies and new ways of telling the story and contextualising cultural objects is what is imagined as a potential development for this work.

The experiment demonstrates a significant gain in terms of opening the information. Not only that but a gain in the empowerment of the museum's technical team and indigenous peoples in the possibility of making conceptual and cultural decisions about the documentation of its collections. This model allows greater freedom of expression and greater possibilities for dialogue and co-production of knowledge around the cultural meanings of objects.

What do these new possibilities for opening up information say about museological work? How do they impact the traditional chain of museological technical and conceptual processes? How can developments be thought of for new designs of distributed databases in order to preserve specificities and guarantee interoperability conditions based on the elements discussed in this experience? How could other museum collections undergo the same experiment and be aggregated in different ways in order to enable different ways of exploring cultural objects? How to create pedagogical processes of engagement of traditional peoples in curatorial processes? These and other questions are part of what is expected to be developed in the next stages of this project.

The expansion of the partnership between the SMVK, the University of Gothenburg and the University of Brasília is envisaged as a future path in order to expand these initial exploratory results as a more structured research project and develop a systematic investigation of the issues raised above, and so many others that this research may unravel.

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