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## **Between Here and There: Surveying the Global Work of Diaspora, Migration, and Mobility-Engaged Museums**

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# BETWEEN THERE AND HERE:

SURVEYING THE GLOBAL WORK OF DIASPORA,  
MIGRATION, AND MOBILITY-ENGAGED MUSEUMS



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# INTRODUCTION

In 2023, contemporary artist Soheila Esfahani's *Cultured Pallets* was installed alongside historic Islamic art and artifacts at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Ontario. Comprised of two rows of stacked wooden shipping pallets and numbering over one hundred pallets in total, this installation utilizes these mundane objects as metaphors for the global circulation of culture. Stacked high above viewers' heads, the rows of pallets sit perpendicular to each other evoking walls that subsume the museum's visitors. Esfahani transformed the pallets from their unadorned state with a laser-etched geometric motif, which she then hand-painted. Touring the galleries, visitors can see that the pattern is inspired by a nearby work from the museum's permanent collection, an intricately carved double wooden door from Iran that dates to the fifteenth century.

Pointing to global routes and connections, Esfahani's installation addresses identity and belonging amidst ongoing human mobility. The pallets, the artist explains, "represent 'in-betweenness' by being in a permanent state of transit" (Esfahani 2023). Thus, the installation speaks to complex narratives of migration, calling on viewers to consider a diversity of experiences. Following the display of the installation, the artist will deconstruct the stacks, put the decorated pallets back into circulation as shipping pallets, and track their continuing global journeys.



Soheila Esfahani, *Cultured Pallets*: Aga Khan Museum, 2023. Wooden shipping pallets, laser etched and painted with acrylic. Photograph by Aly Manji.

*Cultured Pallets* raises key ideas of migration and cultural engagement that lie at the core of our research on diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums. These institutions, which are dedicated to the representation of migrant stories, are part of a fast-growing sector in the museum world that is as complex, diverse, and plural as the communities they represent. While there is a great deal of migration globally, including amongst the Global South, these museums are largely concentrated in the Global North (North America, Europe, and Australia). Notably, these museums play a significant social role in shaping understandings of migration and representing diasporic identities, cultures, and experiences. Through their work, they also play an increasingly diplomatic role in fostering mutual understanding amongst various groups and communities. At a time when migration is so contested, the work of these institutions has never been more pressing.

Between 2022 and 2023 our research team undertook a qualitative study of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums. Taking shape as a global survey, our study focused on understanding the sector, including the range and scope of institutions and their approaches, as well as their social and diplomatic impacts. This study was conceived and undertaken in collaboration with practitioners from the North American museum sector and included institutional partnerships with the Aga Khan Museum (Toronto, Canada) and the Idaho Museum of International Diaspora (Boise, United States). Representatives from both museums actively participated in

Engaging with migration helps us stay relevant. It allows us not just to be a museum about past immigration. It allows us to remind and educate the public that immigration and migration are still very much a modern thing that's constantly happening and going on.

— Phoebe Yates, Curator, Swedish American Museum, Chicago, United States

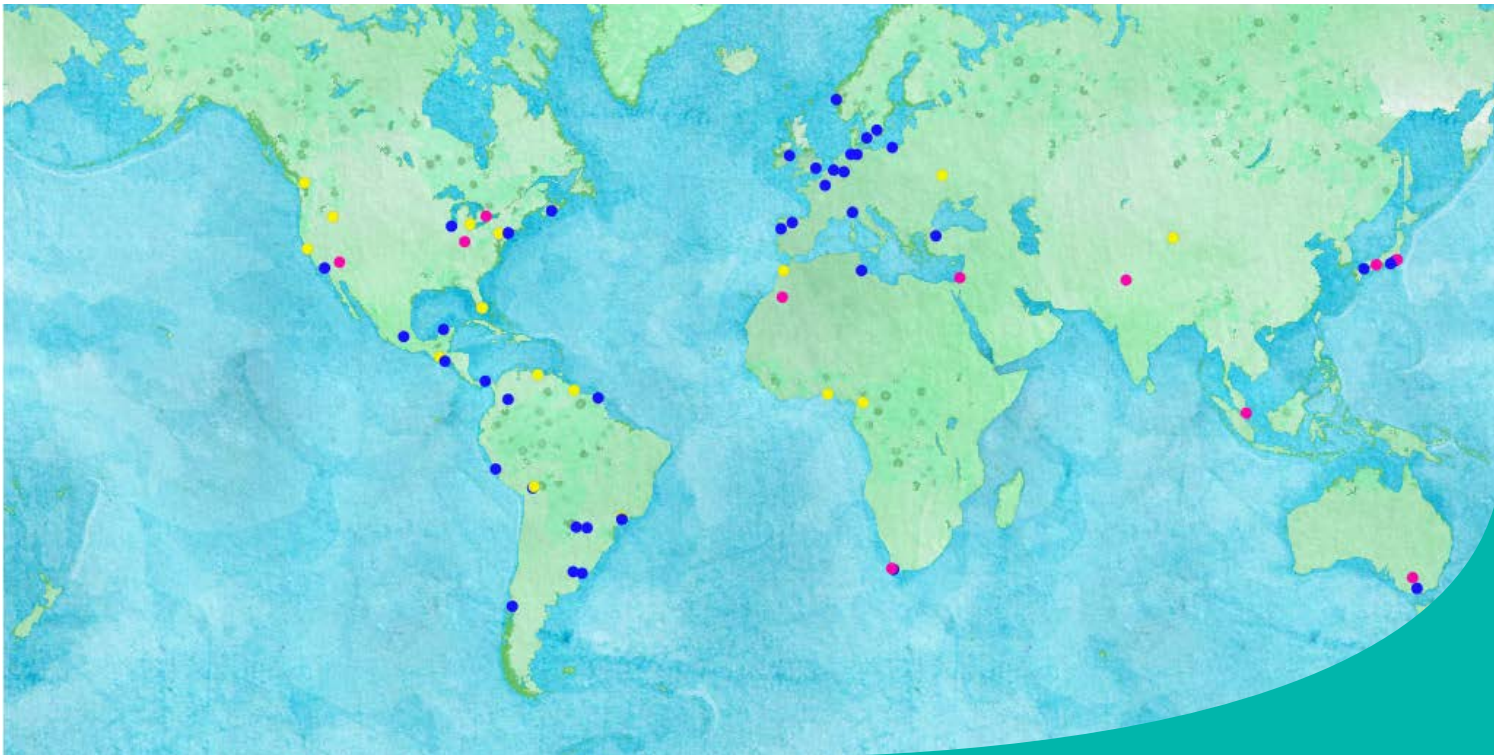
shaping the research questions that structured this study and the institutions served as sites for research, including interviews with staff. Through this collaboration we designed our project to address the concerns and interests of academics and practitioners. Our team undertook a literature review, case study research, a mapping exercise, and semi-structured interviews with practitioners in the field. Throughout this report you will see key quotations from our conversations with museum practitioners that reveal the diplomatic impacts of the cultural work of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums. This report shares our findings, which include an assessment of how diaspora and migration are defined in the sector, a typology of museums, a discussion of their representational strategies, and an analysis of the cultural diplomacy work of these museums.

Our findings emphasize the significance of the sector, while also revealing a variety of practices. Notably, we find museums represent migration as a deeply local as well as global issue. Echoing Esfahani's installation, our research underscores the geographical and temporal complexity of migration narratives; what museum practitioner Dr. Orit Shaham Gover (ANU – Museum of the Jewish People) explains as the dialogue of diaspora communities: "this meeting between *there* and *here*."

Soheila Esfahani, *Cultured Pallets: Aga Khan Museum*, 2023. Wooden shipping pallets, laser etched and painted with acrylic. Photograph by Aly Manji.



# MAPPING A GROWING GLOBAL SECTOR



Underpinning this research is a desire to understand the cultural work of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums and assess their broader diplomatic implications. In investigating these museums, the research team seeks to generate new understandings of museum diplomacy and offer new insights into the changing social and global roles of these institutions in the twenty-first century. Utilizing qualitative methods including archival research, document analysis, and interviews with museum practitioners working at museums around the world we explored several issues:

*Global Routes: A Map of Diaspora, Migration, and Mobility-Engaged Museums*  
<https://westernu.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/851937ed934c482fb9a132644f3a9a88>

- 1 How museums define and understand diaspora and migration;
- 2 How museum practitioners engage with and represent diaspora communities and migration experiences; and
- 3 How museum practitioners at diaspora, migration and mobility-engaged museums perceive their involvement in cultural relations work.

Ultimately, the case studies examined in this project reveal the growing role of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums as cultural diplomacy actors that productively advance diverse networks and contribute to local-global relationships.





To assess these museums as a group we mapped their locations, along with key information about their histories and approaches, creating an ArcGIS map that functions as a publicly accessible database of the growing sector of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums.<sup>1</sup> The map allows users to explore individual institutions and to visualize various points of comparison between museums in order to understand the geographic and temporal development of these institutions. The map is an ongoing initiative that additional institutions can be added to, rather than a closed research output. We hope that this map can contribute to sectoral efforts to build a global network of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums.<sup>2</sup>

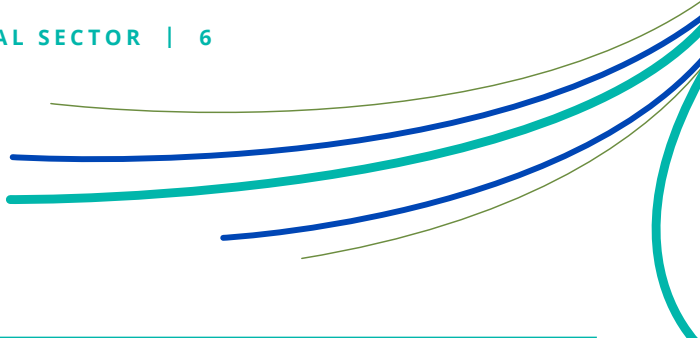
Our survey of the field identified 74 museums around the world that are currently in operation and dedicated to topics of diaspora and/or migration. Among these institutions, the majority 40 (54%) address immigration, migration, and emigration; 27 (36%) are diaspora museums; and 7 (9%) are what we have termed “mobility-engaged museums,” institu-

tions whose primary focus is not migration or diaspora but who nevertheless undertake deep and sustained work on these topics. This third category is a notably smaller portion of the sector, but nevertheless the work of these institutions contributes to the larger field and should be accounted for.

<sup>1</sup> ArcGIS is a server and online geographic information system (GIS) software. The map *Global Routes: A Map of Diaspora, Migration, and Mobility-Engaged Museums* can be accessed at the following link: <https://westernu.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/851937ed934c482fb9a132644f3a9a88>

<sup>2</sup> Many museums surveyed in this project are part of the growing global network of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, which is dedicated to transforming places that preserve the past into spaces that promote civic action. The network includes over 350 members in more than 65 countries, which are all united by their common commitment to use the lessons of the past to find innovative solutions to related social justice issues today. For more see, International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, “About Us,” <https://www.sitesofconscience.org/about-us/about-us-2/>.

A detailed examination of these three institutional types reveals key commonalities and differences within the global sector of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums.



**TABLE 1 A TYPOLOGY OF MIGRATION MUSEUMS.**

TYPE	DEFINITION
<p><b>Migration Museums</b></p>	<p>Institutions that make the topic of immigration their primary focus. These institutions may identify this focus in their mission statements and/or through the inclusion of the term(s) immigration, migration, or emigration in their titles, as well as through their activities.</p>
<p><b>Diaspora Museums</b></p>	<p>Institutions that make the topic of diaspora their focus. These institutions may identify this focus in their mission statements and/or through the inclusion of the term diaspora in their titles or through reference to a specific diasporic community, as well as through their activities.</p>
<p><b>Mobility-Engaged Museums</b></p>	<p>Institutions that have a secondary focus on human movement, migration, and diaspora communities, undertaking substantial and sustained engagement with these topics. These institutions have another primary focus (e.g., history, archaeology, Islamic art).</p>



Photo by *Ian Dooley* on Unsplash

For instance, over half of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums are located in historic sites, specifically, buildings like customs houses and station piers that were historically used as formal points of entry and departure. Similarly, these museums are predominantly located in the Global North, especially in countries with histories of movement and migration, including Canada, the United States, Australia, and in Europe. While migration museums are largely state institutions, founded and operated by local, provincial, and federal governments, diaspora museums are mostly operated by independent entities, such as individuals and local community groups.

The history of the development of the global sector of diaspora and migration museums can be traced to three general periods. The first period in the 1970s and 1980s witnessed the rise of multiculturalism discourse in the West. In a context that celebrated migration history as a “national strength,” museums developed exhibitions focused on the topics of diaspora and migration and the first museums dedicated specifically to the subject began to appear (McShane 2001; Peressut & Possi 2012; Henrich 2013). The second phase took place in the 1990s. Accelerated human movement and globalization initiated by the rise of telecommunication technologies and advances in transportation and travel created a renewed interest within the museum sector in addressing historical and contemporary matters related to migration. It was during this period that the number of migration and diaspora museums around the world grew rapidly. The third period of development came in the 2000s. Societal and political events such as the Syrian and Afghan wars, the rise of conservative politics, climate change, and grow-

ing interconnectivity and exchange increased migration and moved diaspora to the core of contemporary museum practice once again.

While many museums engage with topics of diaspora and migration through exhibitions, programming, and collections (amongst other activities), the growing sector of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums can largely be grouped into three categories. The first and largest group is made up of institutions dedicated to the theme of migration (e.g., immigration, migration, and emigration museums). Predominantly owned and operated by state governments, migration museums first emerged in the context of the rise of multiculturalism discourse in the 1970s and 1980s in countries with histories of settler colonialism and large immigrant populations, such as Canada, Australia, and the United States. More recently, migration museums have spread to European countries and the rest of the world. A well established example of this type of museum is the Museo de la Inmigración (Museum of Immigration) located in Buenos Aires, Argentina, which was established in 1974 in a former immigration hotel to explore the various impacts of migration to Argentina from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.

The second group refers to institutions dedicated to the representation of diaspora identities and experiences. As a fairly new and growing category, diaspora museums first emerged in the 1980s. In contrast to state-run migration museums, diaspora museums often appear organically and are founded, operated, and led by local groups, communities, and organizations (i.e., diaspora communities themselves). As such, diaspora museums often represent a locally grounded, bottom-up

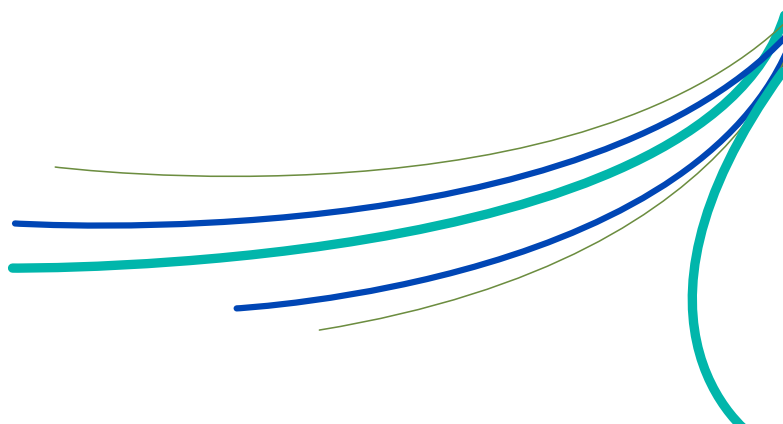
**TABLE 2 EXAMPLES OF DIASPORA, MIGRATION, AND MOBILITY-ENGAGED MUSEUMS.**

TYPE	NAME	LOCATION	MOBILITY WORK
<b>Migration Museum</b>	Museo de la Inmigración (Museum of Immigration)	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Explores the social, economic, and cultural importance of the various waves of immigration arriving in Buenos Aires from the end of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century to the present.
<b>Diaspora Museum</b>	Museum of Chinese in America	New York, United States	Focuses on the living history, heritage, culture, and diverse experiences of the Chinese American community.
<b>Mobility-Engaged Museum</b>	Aga Khan Museum	Toronto, Canada	A museum dedicated to Islamic Art and Muslim culture, which actively engages the topics of diaspora and migration in its temporary exhibits, as well as social and educational programs.

perspective. One of the earliest examples of this is the Museum of Chinese in America (New York, United States), founded in 1980 in Manhattan’s Chinatown by historian John Kuo Wei Tchen and community resident and activist Charles Lai to promote the Chinese American experience and preserve the memories of older generations of Chinese Americans living in the neighbourhood.

Our research also identifies a third group of institutions that we are calling mobility-engaged museums, which encompasses a broad and diverse range of establishments. These institutions do not explicitly identify a relationship to migration or diaspora; however they evidence sustained and deep engagement with topics of human movement, migration, and diasporas. As such, we argue that mobility-engaged museums are engaged in “mobility work,” through their efforts to

address historical and contemporary facets of migration, as well as the promotion of increasingly plural and diverse identities in their spaces. An example of a mobility-engaged institution is the Aga Khan Museum, established in 2014. Describing the museum’s commitment to mobility work, Dr. Sascha Priewe (Aga Khan Museum) explains: “The two terms immigration and diaspora are very dear to our daily practice as a museum... what we do [at the museum] is to create long-standing and on-going practices in engaging with both topics.”





# REPRESENTATIONAL STRATEGIES

Our survey reveals four common representational and curatorial strategies utilized by diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums around the world: national representation, biographical representation, cross-cultural representation, and artistic representation. Each representational and curatorial strategy emerges at a specific moment, offers a specific focus, expresses different topics, and is characterized by distinct items, exhibitions, and materials. While we have identified the time period in which these strategies emerged and were prominent, we also acknowledge that these approaches are still used in the contemporary era and are not limited to the time frames identified.

National representation promotes a “nation of immigrants” narrative and explores the role of migration in the development of nation-states, highlighting the contributions of diasporas to the nation. First gaining popularity in the context of multiculturalism discourse in the West in the 1970s and 1980s, national representation emphasizes migrants’ journeys, which include their routes alongside their departure from their homeland and arrival to the host country. Current examples include the exhibition *The Canadian Immigration Story* at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 (Halifax, Canada), which highlights “the vast contributions immigrants have made

“We try not to be constantly telling the stories. That’s what it used to be, museums telling stories. It’s really now about enabling [and] facilitating those diverse perspectives through first-person voices.”

— Dr. Moya McFadzean, Senior Curator of Migration & Cultural Diversity, Immigration Museum – Museums Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

to Canada” (Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 n.d.) and The Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration’s (New York, United States) interactive exhibit which “brings [immigrant] voyages to life... and sheds light on the immigration process, and allows visitors to gain an appreciation for the nuances of the American melting pot” (The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation, Inc. n.d).

Biographical representations encompass personal stories, experiences, oral histories, and belongings that present the “personal side” of migration. Often traced to the 1990s,

**TABLE 3 REPRESENTATIONAL STRATEGIES OF DIASPORA, MIGRATION, AND MOBILITY-ENGAGED MUSEUMS.**

STRATEGY	YEAR	KEY THEME	TOPICS	ITEMS, EXHIBITIONS, AND MATERIALS
<b>National Representation</b>	1970s–1980s	The role of diaspora and migration in the creation of specific nation-states	Movement Arrival Departure Integration	Suitcases Interactive exhibits “Living history” displays
<b>Biographical Representation</b>	1990s	The personal side of migration	Personal Stories Personal Experiences	Oral histories Archival materials Photographs Mementos
<b>Cross-cultural Representation</b>	2000s–present	The “shared humanity” of individuals and cross-cultural interactions	Love Food Identity Belonging Planting	Personal elements Collections Artworks Multimedia
<b>Artistic Representation</b>	2000s–present	Artworks as physical manifestations of immigrant experiences	Artistic diversity Creativity Identity Experience	Artworks Artists Cultural and artistic products

biographical representations emphasize personal experiences of migration through the display of objects like letters, mementos, and photographs, and through oral histories. This approach continues to be employed today. The recently opened Chinese Canadian Museum (Vancouver, Canada), for example, has a community-sourced exhibition entitled *The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act*, which features hundreds of certificates of identity documents (C.I. certificates) used to track Chinese Canadians during the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 (Chinese Canadian Museum n.d.).

More recently, cross-cultural representations

have become increasingly popular in the global sector of diaspora, migration and mobility-engaged museums. These representations focus on themes like identity, belonging, love, and movement, and emphasize individual stories of migration to highlight the diversity, plurality, and intersectionality of diasporic identities. Drawing attention to the increasing importance of cross-cultural themes, Dr. Moya McFadzean (Immigration Museum – Museums Victoria) says that since the 2010s, the Immigration Museum (Melbourne, Australia) has started to shift its representations and themes “from the migration narrative as being the only frame towards the lens for thinking about who we are.”

The Melbourne Immigration Museum's current focus on cross-cultural themes is evident in its permanent and temporary exhibitions. For instance, in 2011 the museum developed the permanent exhibition *Identity, Yours and Mine* to explore the links between cultural heritage and identity, and in 2018-2019 it staged a temporary exhibition, *Love*, which explored all forms of loving connection between humans.

The fourth strategy uses art as a medium to explore diasporic identities and expressions. In this approach, works of art, often by artists who have hybrid and plural identities and lived cross-cultural realities, become catalysts for engaging visitors with complex and hybrid diasporic experiences and identities. This approach is widely used across all three museum types. For example, the Aga Khan Museum features Soheila Esfahani's aforementioned installation *Cultured Pallets* highlighting hybrid identities and the cross-cultural realities of our contemporary society. The Red Star Line Museum (Antwerp, Belgium) hosted a temporary exhibition *Homesickness: Between Comfort and Pride* (2023), comprised of nine contemporary artworks addressing the theme of "homesickness" to engage visitors with migrant experiences and reveal what "makes coming home so emotional" (Red Star Line Museum n.d.) Similarly, ANU – Museum of the Jewish People (Tel Aviv, Israel) currently hosts the temporary exhibition of historic art *Odesa – Tel Aviv: Hebrew Literature and Universal Art* (2023) exploring the lives and works of Jewish artists who worked in Odesa during the first three decades of the 20th century (ANU – Museum of the Jewish People n.d.).



Photo by Sandy Ching on Unsplash

# CULTURAL DIPLOMACY & CULTURAL RELATIONS

“You call it cultural relations, but I keep going back to the notion that this museum work is actually a form of diplomacy. That it is a localized form of diplomacy in which a museum creates conditions to form dialogue and decrease prejudice, and decrease boundaries between groups.”

— Dr. Sascha Priewe, Director of Collections & Public Programs, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada

Cultural diplomacy is conventionally understood as an instrumental practice through which governments use “ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their people to foster mutual understanding” (Cummings 2003, n.p.). The last two decades have witnessed, however, the emergence of a new body of works within the diplomacy literature that question the traditional understanding of diplomacy as a state-centred activity and seeks to open it up to new and more critical perspectives. Often referred to as the “new cultural diplomacy framework,” this idea is characterized by criticism of the state’s primacy in diplomacy and by recognition of the involvement of an increasing array of actors and activities in diplomatic practice (Clarke 2014; Ang, Isar & Mar 2015). Its proponents endorse a cultural relations approach to cultural diplomacy to harness critical perspectives and propose an expansive and critical practice driven by social and global concerns and performed by a broad set of actors, including museums. In this view, cultural diplomacy is a culturally driven practice embedded in people-to-people relationships and mutual understanding (Rose 2019; Brison & Jessup 2021) and driven by a desire to create “culturally aware and culturally shaped responses” (Rose 2019, 6) to contemporary challenges.

Photo by Ian Dooley on Unsplash





Our research reveals important links between the cultural work of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums and the cultural relations approach to cultural diplomacy. Embedded in diverse local and global webs of movement and relations, these museums demonstrate important diplomatic potential to unsettle the traditional view of culture and identity as bounded, singular, and homogeneous entities and to foster narratives that bridge local and global connections.

Diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums perform a unique form of localized cultural diplomacy, which is deeply embedded in local concerns, relations, and engagements. These initiatives are purposefully developed by diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums to promote cultural vitality and social cohesion in their neighborhoods, regions, and cities, build new local-global networks, and create locally and culturally driven responses to global challenges.

One of the most prominent examples of local museum diplomacy are garden initiatives. Our survey has revealed a growing trend in diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums around the world to build new connections between local residents, groups, and organizations, and to address local-global manifestations of contemporary issues through gardens. For example, in 2019, the Immigration Museum in Melbourne developed a joint initiative entitled *Market Gardeners* to create a community garden in its backyard with the residents of the Port Authority building next door. Since 2019, this garden has functioned as a lively shared community space where the residents of the building get together to plant and grow local food and meet museum

visitors. Another example is *Al-Hadiqa: AANM Heritage Garden*, which was developed by the Arab American National Museum (Dearborn, United States) in June 2023. This rooftop garden was created with donations of seeds and cuttings from Dearborn's Arab American and Middle Eastern communities. The museum's community historian, Shatha Najim, explains the importance of ...highlighting the local practices... of Dearborn's Arab American community and draws attention to the significance of herbs and gardening practices in promoting shared humanity of individuals: "It is very much in our genes and ourselves to plant and grow our food and garden and be surrounded by beautiful nature as it is in the Middle East" (Arshad 2023).

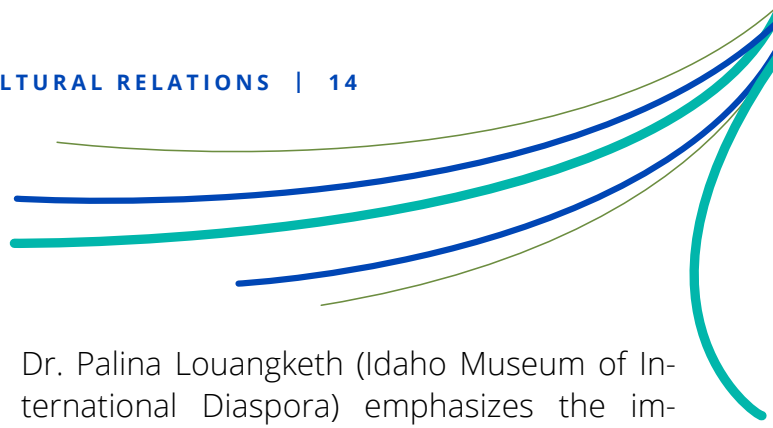
### Diplomatic Outcomes

Our research finds that the cultural work of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums demonstrate several diplomatic outcomes:

## 1 CREATE LOCAL-GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

First, they foster local-global connections by connecting local groups, people, schools, and communities around local and global manifestations of contemporary issues.

For instance, the Immigration Museum's *Market Gardeners* initiative (2019) engages local residents and groups with the (global) importance of locally produced food and the diversity of food cultures worldwide. By featuring locally produced food in its backyard, the museum highlights diverse food cultures and forms links between local food practices and



global issues of food insecurity and sustainability. In showcasing local herbs and plants, the museum also engages a global audience with the importance of locally produced food for a more sustainable and less dependent future. Similarly, Karen Moeskops (Red Star Line Museum) emphasizes the importance of telling local stories to build connections with the global and contemporary dimensions of migration. She explains that the Red Star Line Museum focuses on the local and historical “story about migration from Antwerp to Ellis Island,” and in so doing, it “tell[s] a universal story about migration, and we want, by this historical story to open the conversation about migration today.” Marianne Fenton (Aga Khan Museum) also emphasizes that “what happens locally expands globally in many ways.” She adds: “We seek to form connections with local communities located in different [Toronto] neighborhoods such as the Flemingdon Park and Thorncliffe Park to connect cultures both locally and globally.” This, as she further explains, allows the museum to “work within the space of cultural diplomacy, where we can.”

Dr. Palina Louangketh (Idaho Museum of International Diaspora) emphasizes the importance of community building and relationships, which play a pivotal role in the institutional activities of the museum. She states: “I want to connect with my community members in a way that [conveys that] you are me and I am you, and we are part of the community.” She adds: “How do we celebrate each other’s cultures and where we are at in the journey of our human experience?” Dr. Moya McFadzean (Immigration Museum – Museums Victoria) similarly draws attention to the museum’s role in bringing together people of ... similarly draws attention

**“I think the highest objective of people that work in museums is to connect, to help people connect.”**

— Dr. Shaham Gover, Chief Curator,  
ANU - Museum of the Jewish People, Tel Aviv, Israel

## **2 FOSTER PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE RELATIONSHIPS**

Second, these initiatives make important contributions to people-to-people relationships, intercultural understanding, and mutuality, thereby promoting “culturally-aware responses” (Rose 2019, 6) to contemporary issues. Diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums connect audiences with the lived experiences of diaspora and migrant communities to build bridges across cultures and foster empathy among individuals.

to the museum’s role in bringing together different people who would not otherwise connect. She explains that the Immigration Museum functions as a social hub for individuals with diverse and complex experiences to “get together, interact and have opportunities for interactions with people they don’t know” or do not engage with in life. “Connecting people with different lifestyles, identities, and perspectives,” she says, “is a really import-

ant role the museum plays.” A similar institutional desire to foster people-to-people relationships is also evident in the Aga Khan Museum’s mandate and activities. Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis (Aga Khan Museum) emphasizes the museum’s desire to foster connections between people and across cultures, stating, “In the context of increasing societal frictions and xenophobia in Canada today, our mandate empowers us to use our museum and our collections to contribute positively to bridging cultures and communities through the arts” (Palamarchuk 2021). Yet another example of museums fostering people-to-people relationships is the Tisch Center for Jewish Dialogue at ANU – Museum of the Jewish People, which has an explicit mandate to advance productive interchange.

### 3 UNSETTLE METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM

Third, diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums offer unique insights into contemporary cultural diplomacy that go beyond methodological nationalism to capture the deeply intertwined nature of the local-global. The cultural work of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums sit, just like the diaspora and migratory communities they represent and have emerged from, outside of the traditional boundaries of the nation-state. Thus, they offer new approaches to diaspora and migrant communities that look beyond the lens of methodological nationalism to capture the diversity, intersectionality, and hybridity of diasporic identities and expand our understanding of cultural diplomacy. The global cultural work of these museums is an import-

ant asset for cultural diplomacy informed by cultural relations and social concerns, which seeks to engage with the local-global dimensions of contemporary issues.

Diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums draw attention to the complex identities and cross-cultural realities of immigrant groups, which transcend the borders of nation-states and challenge singular notions of identity, belonging, and citizenship. Herb Tam (Museum of Chinese in America) explains that “there’s a much more complex relationship with new immigrants and this idea of where’s home. A lot of people come here for a specific reason. Many of them go back, many stay and build a life here. But they may have very close ties to their homeland and there’s a lot of transnationalism, there’s a lot of going back and forth. It’s not a very fixed experience, people don’t only move here and stay here and build life here once they become Americans.”

Dr. Orit Shaham Gover (ANU – Museum of the Jewish People) describes the importance of small, focused stories of migration as distinct from larger hegemonic narratives about diaspora. For Shaham Gover, as noted earlier, diaspora communities are always part of a dialogue: “this meeting between *there* and *here*.” This dialogue, she explains, takes place both across geographic locations and amongst generations. “There is always *there* that goes *here*, that comes *there*. And they have a dialogue. And this dialogue is going to the second and third and fourth generation. It’s a family and cultural story that has a wider angle to it. So, this is how we connect the smaller stories with the bigger story.”

## 4 BUILD SECTORAL NETWORKS

These institutions are embedded in various local, regional, and global networks. Many engage in long-term relationships and collaborations. Many diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums surveyed for this project are active members of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a global network of historic sites, museums, and memory sites dedicated to “connect[ing] past struggles to today’s movements for human rights” (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience n.d.). These institutions are engaging in regional collaborations and global projects, bringing their resources together to remember past struggles for justice and to address their contemporary legacies.

## 5 ADVANCE SOCIAL JUSTICE

Finally, diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums advance cross-cultural connections and a shared humanity. They play an important diplomatic role in drawing attention to historic and contemporary manifestations of migration and promoting the rights and freedoms of diasporic and migrant communities, which have long been violated and neglected. As such, these museums have a growing social role to play in challenging exclusive and discriminatory narratives of migration. While some institutions in our survey explicitly disavow political action, others embrace it, such as the Haitian American Museum of Chicago (Chicago, United States), which is a part of the larger Legal Protection Fund (LPF) Community Navigators Program, providing outreach and education on immigration services (Haitian American Museum of Chicago n.d.).



# CONCLUSIONS

Seeking to draw attention to diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums as a global sector, as well as their historic and geographic development, our research reveals the significant social impact of these museums. Our primary findings can be summarized in five key points:

## **1** **DIASPORA, MIGRATION, AND MOBILITY-ENGAGED MUSEUMS ARE PART OF A GROWING, DIVERSE, AND VIBRANT MUSEUM SECTOR.**

Diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums are part of a diverse and vibrant sector that includes museums of different sizes, histories, structures, and mandates. The bulk of the institutions were founded since the 1980s. Of the 74 institutions identified in this study, 6 (8%) were established in the last 5 years and 21 (28%) in the last decade. Notably, the sector also goes beyond the general categorization of “diaspora” and “migration” and includes mobility-engaged museums, which actively connect with and shape ideas and understandings about diaspora and migration.

## **2** **THE CULTURAL WORK OF DIASPORA, MIGRATION, AND MOBILITY-ENGAGED MUSEUMS IS GAINING SIGNIFICANCE AMIDST INCREASED SOCIAL FRICTION AND CONSERVATISM.**

Intensifying mobility in the contemporary era and the politicization of migration have resulted in often negative hegemonic narratives about diaspora and migrant communities. Diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums are seeking to challenge these singular representations and combat prejudices. They also work to present the universality of migration to visitors. The cultural work of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums is gaining even further significance in foster-

ing people-to-people relationships and mutual understanding, situating these museums in a key diplomatic position within their localities and the global sector.

### **3 THESE INSTITUTIONS CONTRIBUTE TO NUANCED AND COMPLICATED UNDERSTANDINGS OF MIGRATION, WHICH CHALLENGE TRADITIONAL STATE-CENTRIC NARRATIVES.**

As opposed to a traditional one-directional narrative of arrival and departure, which homogenizes diaspora experiences and identities and promotes a “nation-of-immigrants” narrative, diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums today emphasize cross-cultural themes of identity, belonging, love, and food, which create a more nuanced narrative of migration beyond the state-centric.

### **4 DIASPORA, MIGRATION, AND MOBILITY-ENGAGED MUSEUMS PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN ADVANCING LOCAL-GLOBAL NETWORKS.**

Diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums are continually developing new initiatives to gather local communities, groups, schools, and organizations, as well as global audiences, around historical and contemporary matters of migration, creating locally and culturally driven responses to global challenges.

### **5 DIASPORA, MIGRATION, AND MOBILITY-ENGAGED MUSEUMS OFFER USEFUL INSIGHTS INTO “LOCALIZED” DIPLOMATIC PRACTICES.**

Diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums offer new insights into the diplomatic potential of museums by revealing how diplomatic engagements are not strictly limited to international and state-centred activities (e.g., object exchanges, satellite museums, and international exhibitions). The local engagements of diaspora, migration, and mobility-engaged museums reveal that the more local areas of museum work, such as neighbourhood projects, community initiatives, and educational programs, can also become important assets for diplomatic engagement and make vital contributions to people-to-people relationships and contemporary issues.

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