

How can museums and archives find sustainable ways to work with photography collections in the age of social media? How should the roles, motivations and methods in documentation practices change to better accommodate the networked, fluid, ephemeral and communicative social digital photograph? What kind of transforming potential does social digital photography offer for the photographic archive? These important questions were addressed by the Nordic project, *Collecting Social Photo* (2017-2021) through eleven case studies where social media photography and the social and visual practices it is part of have been documented and collected in collaboration with the producers of the images. Most heritage institutions working with photography collections have obtained experience on how to collect and preserve born-digital photography, but almost none have developed methods on how to collect social digital photography. The Collecting Social Photo project has addressed this challenge through empirical case studies and analysis based on multidisciplinary methods and theories.

The project recognizes the complexity of digital photographs in social media. A major difference from analogue photography is the massive increase in participation, and the number of images shared (Van House, 2016). Understanding the networked social digital photograph as a complex object reliant on its context and as an assemblage constantly in change (Gómez Cruz, 2016), is highly relevant to archives and museums aiming at collecting this kind of photography.

Through the work on the case studies, a multitude of social media practices have been identified. Today, many social, cultural and political movements express themselves through social photography, making it highly relevant for institutions with a mission to document contemporary society and culture. Results from the case studies have stressed that memory institutions have to work actively with community groups and individuals as well as being prepared for rapid action in sudden viral events.

This paper will discuss how collecting social media photography can be a way for archives and museums to diversify their collections and be more relevant for new audiences. In order to achieve this, they have to work in contemporary mode, be quick, agile and relevant in their work methods. It calls for co-curation, and co-operation as methodological and practical solutions. Based on the experiences and analysis of the case studies the project argues that social digital photography and new, participatory methods have the potential to democratize the collecting process of contemporary heritage institutions and diversify our photographic archives.

References

Gómez Cruz, E. (2016). "Photo-genic assemblages: Photography as a connective interface." In E. Gómez Cruz & A. Lehmuskallio (eds.). *Digital Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices*. London: Routledge, 228-42.

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Project blog: <http://collectingsocialphoto.nordiskamuseet.se>