

# Roots 2 Share

## From archive photographs to digital heritage forum

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*Roots 2 Share* is an innovative project initiated by two Dutch and two Greenlandic museums. 'Multivoicedness' is the key term in this international cooperation which will require the active participation of people both in Greenland and in the Netherlands. To launch the project, people in both countries were introduced to the photo collections of former Dutch curator Gerti Nooter and his wife Noortje Nooter. Their impressive collections of more than 10,000 images are the result of long periods of enthusiastic fieldwork in Greenland in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. All four museums are joining hands in sharing the Nooter collections with the (source) communities in Greenland. Various exhibitions and related public activities will be launched in the Netherlands and Greenland, including an experimental digital heritage forum - [www.roots2share.gl](http://www.roots2share.gl) - dedicated to 'digital storytelling' and debate.

Roots2Share



Mikkel Larsen was in the 1960's and 70's one of the best storytellers in the small settlement of Diilerilaaq. Before his death he told his son Otto: "Tell my stories after i'm gone, so that these stories will be preserved". This inspirational quote touches the heart of the Roots 2 Share project. The full story of Otto Larsen, recorded and edited by the photographer Jeroen Toirkens in 2009, can be found on [www.roots2share.nl](http://www.roots2share.nl). Photo by Gerti Nooter, 1967, Museon.

## SUMMARY

For people all over the world, ( the repatriation of ) heritage items can be an emotional issue. Objects, stories or photographs may be part of the very fabric of their cultural identity. It is this fact that has inspired the two Dutch and two Greenlandic museums to develop the Roots 2 Share project.

Main element of the Roots 2 Share project is a website where people are able to place archive photographs in context, enriching them with interesting facts or personal experiences. Information can be entered about any photo and everyone will be able to comment on other people's contributions.

The Roots 2 Share project is intended to give public, museums and source communities opportunities for discovery, discussion and mutual learning. This inspired by the concept of 'multivoicedness'.

Internet can be seen as a threat to traditional culture but, simultaneously, it provides the opportunity to record the process of change and continuity for future generations.

## GREENLAND

Greenland, a former colony of Denmark, is the largest island in the world and is famous for its 3 km thick ice cap, and magnificent nature with lots of glaciers and ice bergs drifting in cool blue water. Most of the land is situated north of the polar circle. Greenland can be seen as an empty land – in the eyes of westerners - since the land houses only 56.000 people. For the native inhabitants, the Inuit population, Greenland is their homeland, the place where they live since the first Inuit-like migrants appeared 4000 years ago. The capital city of Nuuk is a modern, growing town with urban facilities and counts 16.000 inhabitants. Here Greenland's government is seated and plans are made for the exploitation of oil, gas and mineral resources like zinc, copper and nickel. The smaller settlements and regional towns, the focus of this article, vary from only 100 to 2000 inhabitants. Here part of the people still live a traditional life of fishing and hunting, combined with tourism.

## CAPTURING CULTURAL CHANGE

In June 1967, Gerti and Noortje Nooter moved with their three young sons to Diilerilaaq (Tiniteqilaaq), an Inuit village in East Greenland, for a one-year stay. Gerti was a curator at the Museum in The Hague and wanted to see and investigate how Greenland was changing. The Nooters spent over a year with the Inuit. They learned the East-Greenlandic language, went out hunting and fishing with the Inuit, and shared many aspects of the local life. Nooter's main activity was doing research on the material culture of the Inuit. In this context, Gerti took black-and-white photos and Noortje made colour slides recording the changes happening in the traditional way of life in Greenland. The images and objects collected by Gerti were an important addition to the Inuit collection of the Museum, a collection founded in 1932-33 by Nooter's predecessor, Nobel Prize winner Niko Tinbergen.



In the 1960's, more and more of the villagers in Diilerilaaq were using rifles rather than harpoons, motorboats instead of kayaks, and guitars replaced the traditional drums.

Photo by Noortje Nooter, 1968. National Museum of Ethnology.



Tradition and modernization covered in one image. A recently shot hooded seal laying on the kitchen floor, while Dina Jonathansen is grinding coffee with a brand new Western coffee mill. Photo by Gerti Nooter, 1967, Museon.

Later, as a curator at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, which holds an important collection from the late 19th century, Gerti Nooter returned to Greenland many times. During his fieldwork in the 1970s and 80s, he was always keenly aware of the profound changes taking place. The Danish government's concentration policy for the Greenland Inuit was improving their access to health services and higher education, but this had many adverse effects as well. In a sense, tradition and modernisation were at war with each other. Nooter became highly interested in this process of rapid change in the lives of so many Greenlanders due to western influence. It became the inspiration for his research and collecting activities – and for his (and his wife's) constant photography. Since 1990, the work of Gerti Nooter has been continued by Cunera Buijs, Curator at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, who did PhD research in the same small village in East Greenland (Buijs 2004). After all, life in Greenland keeps changing.

### ROOTS 2 SHARE

In the Netherlands, the National Museum of Ethnology and the Museon are both bringing these changes to public attention via publications and exhibitions. It turned out that a photograph exhibition made in 2001 in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, was the overture for the later Roots 2 Share project. This exhibition with photographs from East Greenland dating from 1932-34 traveled to Greenland to be exhibited in the national and local museums. It never stopped doing so, due to the enormous popularity of these photographs among Greenlanders themselves. For us, this was the first sign that a project like Roots 2 Share might be successful (Buijs 2010: 19; see also Johnson 2010: 53 ff.).

In 2007, after many years of informal relationships, the directors of the Dutch National Museum of Ethnology and the National Museum of Greenland signed a declaration of intent concerning future cooperation. In 2008, the Ammassalik Museum and the Museon added their weight to this initiative. It was clear to all concerned that visual repatriation of the Nooter photo-collection would create opportunities for cooperation and this conviction prompted a successful grant application to the Mondrian Foundation in 2010 (Veerman 2010). The Roots 2 Share project was born.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE REPATRIATION

In recent decades, the repatriation of cultural heritage has become an ever-hotter issue. Non-Western countries, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities have made increasing efforts to obtain the repatriation of their cultural heritage (Rosing Jacobsen 2010; Thorleifsen 2010). Thanks to international conventions<sup>1</sup> and the growing capacity of their own institutions, source communities have been increasingly successful in this respect. For source communities, the repatriation of heritage items is an emotional issue. They demand that the artifacts and knowledge their ancestors shared with researchers, are made accessible to them. Objects, stories or photographs may be part of the very fabric of their cultural identity (see Brown and Peers 2006; Broekhoven and Buijs 2010). Currently, the Inuit have almost no photographic material of their own depicting the period between 1960 and 1980, although researchers in the past did return some of the photographs they made. The Roots 2 Share project will give them access to estimated 6000 images in total, an impressive selection out of the 1500 photographs of the Museon, 8500 of the National Museum of Ethnology, and a yet unidentified number of photographs from the Greenland museum partners in Nuuk and Tasiilaq.

Photographs stimulate dialogue about the past and present. Therefore we continued our work, together with source communities to enrich the images with additional information and so gradually to rediscover the past. Greenlanders reflect on part of their personal history and by doing so they create a 'communal memory'. (See also Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983; Jenkins 1996: 104 ff.) The Inuit can engage as individuals, as cultural investigators and as curators, with a share in the representation of their own lives. This shift of control over the images, has also an impact on the total collection. Stories told in the first person tend to bring a subject closer to the viewer because they can hold a more authentic truth. (Wilder 2009: 35, see also Thisted 2002: 39) Obtaining such information from the Inuit community is now a matter of unprecedented urgency. The advanced age of some of its members

1 The UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995) en de UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (CSICH) (2005).

means that much traditional knowledge and experience may soon be lost. Thirty or forty years ago, many of these elderly Inuit were the Nooters' hosts. Together, they built kayaks, went on seal hunts and celebrated New Year. The Roots 2 Share project aims to capture and share this authentic and unique information before it is too late.



Boas Jonathansen (86) shares a story from the past with the authors of this article. This with old photographs on the wall as a starting point. The oldest inhabitant of Diilerilaaq is still active as organ player in the local church. Photo by Diederik Veerman, May 2011.

## DIGITAL HERITAGE FORUM

The two participating museums in the Netherlands that are involved want to share their photographic collections with the people shown in them. Since May 2011, the people of Greenland are able to visit the new website [www.roots2share.gl](http://www.roots2share.gl), to examine the pictures taken by Gerti and Noortje Nooter. This provides present and former residents of East Greenland the opportunity to see photographs of their villages, their grandparents or parents, or even themselves. The images take them back in time and offer them a 'digital history book'. People will be able to travel back in time to Christmas 1967, or remember that wonderful seal catch in the spring of 1974. Such memories, triggered by viewing archive photographs, will be the cornerstones of the Roots 2 Share website. Visitors are invited to tag the photographs with personal input in their own language (East Greenlandic, West Greenlandic, Danish or English). They are able to place images in context, enriching them with interesting facts, reflections or personal experiences. Information can be entered about each photograph and everyone is able to comment on other people's contributions. Since photographs are such a wonderful way to get people talking to each other about the past and present, the Roots 2 Share website has the potential to evolve into a digital heritage forum: a place of interactive discovery and learning.

The screenshot shows the 'Roots 2 Share' website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the site name 'Roots 2 Share' in a blue circle, followed by '(Roots2Share) piddungu', 'Atsid', and 'Oqaluttuat'. On the right, there are options for 'Oraatsid: Dunumiisud' and 'Allatsigit' with a user profile icon. The main content area features a large photograph of two people in traditional Greenlandic clothing, with a dashed box indicating a zoomed-in view. Below the photo is a section titled 'Atser oraaserdaleriia' with a text input field and a button labeled 'Kiaana? Tsumiina? Kisiina?'. To the right of the photo, there is a text block in Greenlandic titled 'Enos Korniliusen Mikkel Kristiansenilu mitaartut.' followed by a paragraph of text. Below this is another section titled 'Oralidduatsardaleriiaa uppaliinnii apeqqulerardiid atser piddungu' with a text input field and a button. At the bottom, there is a comment section with a user profile for 'Thorning' and a comment: 'uuhhhh... milaardu joorunarpianngeraa kisia alisangeraa'. The interface is designed to be multilingual and interactive, allowing users to share and discuss historical photographs.

Screenshot of the 'digital heritage forum' of Roots 2 Share, available in four different languages. This multilingual concept is interesting for pilot project research, but raises quite some challenges in practice. On the other hand, it is great to realize that this website is the first one in the East-Greenlandic language. As the source community, the Tunumiut (the people from East-Greenland) are now able to write down traditional knowledge and personal stories in their own language. The website is constructed in close cooperation with the lectorate Crossmedia Business of the Hogeschool Utrecht.

## CONNECTING (DIGITAL) COLLECTIONS TO THE SOURCE COMMUNITY

We were aware that connecting a small local (source) community of hunters and fishermen to an advanced website, which houses part of their cultural heritage, is not an easy task. Especially since there are only very limited internet possibilities in the small towns in Greenland, the places where our photographs came from. Yet, the digital landscape will evolve. Therefore the process was prepared carefully and has to be guided for a considerable time. To make the project Roots 2 Share a success in Greenland and in the Netherlands, we are developing other activities.<sup>2</sup>

## NATIVE CONSULTATIONS

In November 2010 a group of five Tunumiit 3 (East Greenlanders) were invited to travel to the Netherlands to study the Tunumiit collections in Leiden and in The Hague. It was inspiring to see how they applied their memories and knowledge to the Greenlandic collections. In the exhibition rooms and the storage areas of the museums they found their cultural heritage, kept there since the 1900s up till the present day. Åge Kristiansen, one of the Tunumiit consultants, found a toy in the Museon collection, a small tin boat he had made himself for his younger brother Isak in 1967. He remembered the way he made the boat and told in front of the camera how his 10 year old brother pulled the toy through the water all day, while he made the sound of a motor boat he definitely would like to have later when he would be a grown up. The reactions on seeing the photographs were even more emotional and many copies have been sent to the people later on request.

We discussed the Roots 2 Share project with our local representatives. They were partners in decision making on issues like the choice of the languages to be used and the first selections of photographs for the website and for the Leiden exhibition (to be opened in December 2011). The selection of images



On October 13th 2011, the Dutch Crown Prince H.R.H. Willem-Alexander opened the permanent exhibition of Roots 2 Share in the Museon. This by being the first to add a personal comment by one of the photos in this interactive exhibition. Based on the fact that images trigger stories and knowledge, we organized an event for Dutch students on the same day: 'Roots 2 Share: the future'. With the old photographs of Nooter as a starting point, the youngsters brainstormed and debated about the future of Greenland. Focusing on different themes with a multidisciplinary approach they were informed and inspired by scientists as well as the Crown Prince. Photo by Sonny Lensen.

<sup>2</sup> Permanent exhibition in the Museon, travelling exhibitions and community consultations in Greenland, native consultations in The Netherlands, etc. For an overview of these events, please take a look at the general information website at [www.roots2share.nl](http://www.roots2share.nl) (Dutch and English).

<sup>3</sup> Our five Tunumiit guests were Thomasine Tarkissimat, Thomasine Umerineq, Åge Kristiansen, Paulus Larsen and Gideon Qeqe.

has been made by Greenlanders themselves, since the aim is to return to the source community. There, in the local villages, it will trigger new stories. Possibly, these stories will appear on the Internet at the website of Roots 2 Share, so at the end they will be opened up to the world. And, we are looking forward to the visit of seven Greenlandic schoolchildren from Kulusuk (East Greenland) and two of their teachers, in January 2012.<sup>4</sup> These activities will be a next step in the museum cooperation project.



Native consultations in practice: Åge Kristiansen and Cunera Buijs talk (in East-Greenlandic language) about the small tin boat he made for his younger brother in 1967.

Photo by Diederik Veerman, November 2010.

<sup>4</sup> An initiative of Anne Mette Holm, teacher at the school of Kulusuk and Cunera Buijs. The pupils created new objects inspired by their cultural heritage, which they will grand to the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden.

## INTRODUCTION OF THE WEBSITE IN THE SOURCE COMMUNITIES

In May 2011, we introduced the website in the source communities of East Greenland. We had meetings with youngsters and their teachers at the local schools, where Diederik Veerman organized photo-workshops. The director of the Ammassalik Museum, Carl-Erik Holm, arranged an introduction in the museum with coffee, tea and lots of biscuits and sweets (based on



Workshop with the schoolchildren of Diilerilaaq.  
Photo by Cunera Buijs, May 2011.

national tradition of kaffeemik). There were community meetings in the kaatersortapik, the community house, in the local village of Diiderilaaq. With a laptop and beamer we instructed a stand-alone version of the website and we showed 900 photographs. We registered on film the reactions of the audience for research. Afterwards we visited some of the families at home and gathered additional information and stories about the photographs, with local assistance of Kaaleeraq Larsen, a young hunter of 22 with a facebook-account; tradition and modernization united! The stories can be read (in

East Greenlandic language) on the website. The reactions from the local community were very positive and during one of the meetings, Paulus Larsen, a local coordinator and previously our guest in The Netherlands, took the lead. The result was that many of the older visitors came to the fore to tell their story to their own people, gradually taking ownership in the project. (See also Buijs 2010: 34). One of the project's laptops remained in the local village. This with the practical issue of a unreliable and expensive internet connection as a challenge that hopefully improves in the future. As you can read in our blog (see frame), written during our fieldwork in May 2011, the launch of the Roots 2 Share project was important as well as emotional for the source community.

## BLOG: ROOTS 2 SHARE UNITES GENERATIONS OF GREENLANDERS

Tasiilaq, 17 May 2011

Last Sunday, we landed in East Greenland. Since then we have made a start on what we've been looking forward to for so long: sharing the archive photographs with the Inuit of the region. For them, the photos that Gerti and Noortje Nooter took in the 1960s, '70s and '80s are especially significant. This is often the first time that the Inuit have seen photos of themselves as children and the photos remind them of events of the past, like that wonderful Christmas party of 1968. Via Roots 2 Share, such memories can eventually be shared online with other people. The official launch of the specially developed digital heritage forum is to take place tomorrow on the premises of our project partner, the Ammassalik Museum.



Following a successful preparatory week in West Greenland, during which the project was presented to an audience including the Dutch Crown Prince Willem-Alexander and attracted wide coverage on Greenland radio stations, the real work is now getting under way. Initial results are promising. At a kitchen table here in East Greenland, Susani is helping her grandmother Thomasine Umerineq to type out an account of the traditional way of flensing a seal. Meanwhile, photos in hand, Aage Kristiansen is recounting lively tales of his childhood in Diilerilaaq (the little village of 138 people where Gerti, Noortje and their three little boys spent just over a year in 1967-68)...

Susani Umerineq helps her grandma Thomasine to type a story for the Roots 2 Share website.

Photo by Diederik Veerman, May 2011.





...We have also paid inspiring visits to the school at Tasillaq – the biggest village in East Greenland, with a population of 1850. Since last Monday we have been working on Roots 2 Share with the top class (kids aged 15-16). Some of them are amazed by the pictures (“Did they really still butcher seals right there in the living room?”); for others, the sight of the photos produces unexpected emotional experiences. One girl told us how her mother had pointed to a classroom photo the night before and said, “Look, that boy sitting there on the left, that’s your biological father.” It was the first time the girl had ever seen a childhood photo of her father. He died when she was only five, but this photo revived the memory of him. It is only here, among the people and their memories, that we are discovering the true value of Roots 2 Share.

Diederik Veerman (Museon) and Cunera Buijs (National Museum of Ethnology)

“Look, that boy sitting there on the left, that’s your biological father.”  
Photo by Gerti Nooter, 1967.

## MULTIVOICEDNESS

The National Museum of Ethnology and the Museon have also photograph-collections from many other parts of the world; from Surinam to Eastern Siberia and from Indonesia to South Africa. Like the pictures from Greenland, many of them focus on local people and their culture. We, the Museon, the Museum of Ethnology and other museums will consider which additional photo collections can be shared with related source communities. Like the Inuit, these people will be invited to share their personal histories with each other and with us.

At the heart of the overall Roots 2 Share project is the concept of ‘multiple vocality’ or ‘multivoicedness’ (see Buijs and Broekoven 2010: 8). The heritage is no longer be tied exclusively to just ‘one voice and one truth’. It will be available for countless people to experience and enrich from all their

different points of view. Roots 2 Share aims to act as a worldwide platform for interaction about the cultural heritage. By sharing knowledge, stories and personal experiences, we can work together to create an inspiring platform for mutual learning.

We will organize expert meetings and an international conference to discuss the lessons learned both with other parties involved in the project and with other museums and universities. The experimental nature of the digital heritage forum will make it a starting point for debate on practical, philosophical and ethical issues: How can we achieve the repatriation of cultural heritage in this increasingly globalised world? Is the worldwide sharing of cultural heritage via the internet the right way? What is the difference between material and non-material heritage-repatriation? How

do different generations within the 'source community' respond to such initiatives (and to each other)? How can the repatriation of cultural heritage help to bridge the gaps between different generations and different cultures?



“Can the delicate balance between men and nature be preserved in modern Greenland?” The personal comment of the Dutch Crown Prince added to this photo during the opening of the permanent Roots 2 Share exhibition.

Photo by Gerti Nooter, 1967, Museon.

## DISCOVERY, DISCUSSION AND MUTUAL LEARNING

Greenlandic society is now facing difficult dilemmas as a result of climate change, globalisation and modernisation. Internet can be seen as a threat to its culture but, on the contrary, it provides the opportunity to record the process of change and continuity for future generations. If the process of knowledge preservation and enrichment based on archive photographs is successful, the results will be valuable not only to the source communities and to the museums involved, but also to society at large.

The Roots 2 Share project is intended to give the museums and source communities involved in it a host of opportunities for discovery, discussion and mutual learning. The native consultations, exhibitions, digital heritage forum and debate will bring about rapprochements of many kinds: between the past and present, between young and old, and between Greenland and the Netherlands.

## TIMETABLE

December 2010

Native consultations  
National Museum of Ethnology – Leiden, The Netherlands  
Museum – The Hague, The Netherlands

May 2011 – October 2011

Pilot phase of digital heritage forum  
East Greenland

13 October 2011

Official opening of permanent exhibition  
(till 2015)  
Museum, The Netherlands

December 2011

Première of touring exhibition  
National Museum of Ethnology – Leiden, The Netherlands

Summer 2012 – Spring 2014

Touring exhibition  
Ammassalik Museum – Tasiilaq, East Greenland  
National Museum of Greenland – Nuuk, West Greenland.  
Other museums and community centres in Greenland and  
Denmark

2013

International conference  
National Museum of Ethnology – Leiden, The Netherlands

2014

Scientific publication.<sup>5</sup>

Roots 2 Share is a collaborative venture by:  
The National Museum of Greenland, Nuuk (Greenland)  
contact: Aviâja Jakobsen (curator), [avi@natmus.gl](mailto:avi@natmus.gl)

Ammassalik Museum, Tasiilaq (Greenland)  
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The National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (The Netherlands)  
contact: Cunera Buijs (curator), [cunera.buijs@volkenkunde.nl](mailto:cunera.buijs@volkenkunde.nl)

Museum, The Hague (The Netherlands)  
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5 Besides this monograph on the entire project, we will report in detail on aspects of it  
in other future publications.

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