

How can Active Hope be the central axis for social and environmental change within museum digital policy?

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Introduction

- This research contributes to Dr Nicôle Meehan's funded project, Encode Muse.
- It assessed current understandings of the environmental cost of digital activity in the museum and heritage sector, helping to inform recommendations for future activity.

Methodology

- Transcript analysis. Identified key themes and barriers facing museums' digital practice.
- Findings presented at the Strategic Meeting, May 2024.
- Project outcomes informed by interview and questionnaire data from participating museums.
- Extensive critical reading of primary reports and secondary sources to compile a comprehensive and informed bibliography of over 96 sources.

This research explores how museums can reduce their environmental impact by transforming their digital, and wider, practices – evaluating why they are digitising, how they digitise and for whom?

Why Museums?

- Museums and heritage institutions can heal the relationship between the human and non-human world by envisioning regeneration.¹
- Co-production allows museums to consider what stories need to be heard, created, and shared.
- These stories shape the value, knowledge, and capacities of people to respond to the global climate crisis.
- Opportunity for museums to rethink the value they bring; retaining their fundamental role whilst enriching and expanding their relevance to a wider audience.

Why Digital?

- Digitised heritage collections are increasing and vaunted as driving accessibility and sustainability.
- Current practices, however, cause extreme environmental damage and impose a new form of 'techno' colonialism on the Minority World.²
- **1-2%** of global electricity is consumed by data centres,³ generating **4%** of total global greenhouse gas emissions.⁴
- **88%+** stored data is 'Dark Data',⁵ a product of inherently wasteful digital behaviours fed by a lack of awareness and risk-averse mindset.
- Digitisation risks perpetuating profound inequality – excluding lower economic groups, women, older and disabled members of our communities and indigenous populations.⁶

Why Active Hope?

- The philosophy of Active Hope⁷ offers a means for transformation and possibility.
- Active Hope inspires collective agency that can move us beyond our despair, uncertainty, and grief.
- It inspires the stories we tell about our collective histories that define what we can and will do in the face of climate collapse.⁸

Future steps

As this Research is the first step on a journey of implementing sustainable change within digitisation policies, I cannot write a polished outcome and conclusion - rather I am holding the door open and make space for collaborative, hopeful action.

References

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- ⁴ Hodgkinson, Ian and Jackson, Tom. 'Dark Data is killing the planet – we need digital decarbonisation.'
- ⁵ Hodgkinson, Ian and Jackson, Tom. 'Is There a Role for Knowledge Management in Saving the Planet from Too Much Data?' *Knowledge Management Research & Practice* 21, no. 3 (4 May 2023): pp.428-29.
- ⁶ ITU. 'Digital Technologies to Achieve the UN SDGs'. ITU, December 2021.
- ⁷ As understood in Macy, Joanna, and Chris Johnstone. *Active hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy*. New World Library, 2012
- ⁸ Solnit, Rebecca. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016, pp.xviii.

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