Digital cultural sovereignty

navigating the digital landscape of European Cultural Heritage Institutions with a decolonial lens

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18.   Digital Cultural Sovereignty: Navigating the Digital Landscape of European Cultural Heritage Institutions with a Decolonial Lens

Susannah Montgomery and Ben Wagner

1.   Introduction

Cultural heritage is a central part of the narration of states and peoples. While the artefacts hidden in archives might not always seem societally relevant, their central role in collective storytelling is often underestimated. This becomes particularly poignant in the context of growing decolonial movements, where marginalised communities increasingly advocate for reclaiming their cultural narratives and histories, both in tangible and digital forms.[1] This shifting landscape places Cultural Heritage Institutions (CHIs) in a unique intermediary position as nonstate actors navigating the complex terrain of cultural sovereignty in the digital age. They are increasingly tasked with rethinking their role as custodians of culture, and ensuring their practices uphold principles of legitimacy, justice, dignity, and human rights.[2]

Through international institutions such as UNESCO, a growing body of international experts have been calling for greater cultural sovereignty for peoples–not states–since the 1960s, arguing that "world peace and the peaceful coexistence of peoples were directly related to the principle of the cultural and political sovereignty of peoples."[3] This discourse has intensified in the digital age, where digital sovereignty[4] – the control over digital realms including AI, internet protocols, and cloud computing – plays a pivotal role. Scholars have raised concerns about digital technologies threatening cultural sovereignty, especially in the European audio-visual sector.[5] Yet, these technologies also offer unprecedented opportunities, enabling communities to assert control over their cultural and data assets beyond geographic boundaries, democratising cultural authority in ways previously unimagined.[6]

Over recent decades, Cultural Heritage Institutions (CHIs) have embarked on a transformative journey into the digital age. On the surface, digital transformation often looks like innovative technological shifts such as using AI and big data mining to generate vast digital archives or creating immersive experiences via AR/VR technology. However, beneath these technological strides, CHIs are undertaking a profound cultural shift permeating all facets of

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[1] McAuliffe, Padraig. "Complicity or Decolonization? Restitution of Heritage from 'Global' Ethnographic Museums." International Journal of Transitional Justice 15, no. 3 (November 1, 2021): 678–89. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijab028.

[2] Amineddoleh, Leila. "The Politicizing of Cultural Heritage." North Carolina Journal of International Law 45, no. 2 (April 1, 2020): 333.

[3] UNESCO. UNESCO's contribution to peace and its tasks with respect to the promotion of human rights and the elimination of colonialism and racialism, 28th September 1978, UNESDOC 20 C/14 +ADD. & CORR.

[4] Floridi, Luciano. "The Fight for Digital Sovereignty: What It Is, and Why It Matters, Especially for the EU." Philosophy & Technology 33, no. 3 (September 1, 2020): 369–78. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-020-00423-6.

[5] Brown, Allan. "Sweden: The Digital Threat to Cultural Sovereignty." In Digital Terrestrial Television in Europe, edited by Robert G. Picard and Allan Brown. Routledge, 2004.

[6] Caranto Morford, Ashley, and Jeffrey Ansloos. "Indigenous Sovereignty in Digital Territory: A Qualitative Study on Land-Based Relations with #NativeTwitter." AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples 17, no. 2 (June 1, 2021): 293–305. https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801211019097.

their operations. As the International Council of Museums (ICOM) observes, CHIs are recalibrating the visitor-institution dynamic with stakeholders by seeking more collaborative, inclusive, and interactive forms of engagement.[7] In other words, CHIs are emerging as pivotal players in shaping public discourse—whether on identity, representation, ownership, accessibility, inclusivity, or equity—challenging the traditional view of cultural institutions as neutral, unbiased entities.

This chapter delves into the intricate overlaps of cultural and digital sovereignty within the digitisation practices of European CHIs. Utilising a decolonial lens, we aim to provide European CHIs with a comprehensive understanding of **digital cultural sovereignty**– or the control and agency of cultural groups, communities, or nations over their cultural heritage, expressions, and identity in a digitised form–and its importance in shaping more inclusive and relevant digital transformation strategies. We begin by briefly mapping the digital landscape of European CHIs and their digital practices. Afterwards, we elaborate on decoloniality as a lens for understanding the European CHIs in this digital landscape. Next, we introduce cultural sovereignty and digital sovereignty in the context of the European cultural heritage digital landscape. Finally, we define and explore digital cultural sovereignty by sharing examples of cross-cultural collaborations, and shed light on the challenges and opportunities of emphasising digital cultural sovereignty within European CHI digitisation practices. In doing so, we aim to empower European CHIs to be responsible custodians of culture in the digital age and to help shape a more resilient socio-technical ecosystem for European CHIs and their stakeholders, both locally and globally.

1. *Understanding the European Cultural Heritage Digital Landscape*

Cultural heritage can be understood as traces and expressions from the past that attribute values and are used in contemporary society.[8] While cultural heritage has traditionally focused on tangible objects, a comprehensive understanding now includes intangible elements such as dances, customs, and natural heritage, as well as born-digital heritage like computer games and websites.[9] Digital cultural heritage involves technologies that preserve, research, and communicate cultural heritage, encompassing digitally created materials and resources that embody human knowledge and expression.[10]

In the cultural heritage landscape, digitisation has traditionally focused on the preparation of an object's digital images and metadata. As the cost of digital technology decreases, artificial intelligence, particularly machine learning, is being increasingly leveraged for innovation.[11] These technologies are enabling a range of research and development areas in cultural heritage, including image analysis, object recognition, translation, transcription, and more, thereby propelling the sector into a future of enriched accessibility and engagement.[12] One significant challenge that remains is the integration of datasets across collections and institutions to achieve full contextual

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[7] Bernhardt, Johannes, and Elena Villaespesa. "Digital Collections: A New Level of Engagement." ICOM, 2020. https://comcol.mini.icom.museum/special-projects/2020-we-are-museums/.

[8] UNESCO. *Draft Medium Term Plan 1990–1995*; UNESCO: London, UK, 1989

[9] UNESCO. *Concept of Digital Heritage*; UNESCO: London, UK, 2018.

[10] Georgopoulos, Andreas. "CIPA's Perspectives on Cultural Heritage." In Digital Research and Education in Architectural Heritage, edited by Sander Münster, Kristina Friedrichs, Florian Niebling, and Agnieszka Seidel-Grzesińska, 215–45. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76992-9_13.

[11] Caramiaux, Baptiste, Fabien Lotte, Joost Geurts, Giuseppe Amato, Malte Behrmann, Frédéric Bimbot, Fabrizio Falchi, et al. "AI in the Media and Creative Industries." HAL Open Science, New European Media, May 10, 2019.

[12] Münster, Sander, Ferdinand Maiwald, Isabella di Lenardo, Juha Henriksson, Antoine Isaac, Manuela Milica Graf, Clemens Beck, and Johan Oomen. "Artificial Intelligence for Digital Heritage Innovation: Setting up a R&D Agenda for Europe." Heritage 7, no. 2 (February 2024): 794–816. https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage7020038.

information accessibility for both users and computational systems.[13] The effect of having greater accessibility to collections via digital media is starting to become apparent yet data on this topic is scarce.[14]

CHI digitisation practices extend beyond the digital preparation of their collections and can also encompass the use of digitisation in managing stakeholder relationships, enhancing visitor engagement, and optimising internal digital systems for employees. In particular, a recent study[15] by the European Commission (EC) highlights three areas as being particularly susceptible for AI innovation:

- Enhanced Archival, Cataloguing, and Information Management: AI can improve the research and categorisation of digital collections in museums, archives, libraries, and cultural heritage institutions.
- AI-Assisted Audience Engagement: AI can facilitate better communication and interaction with audiences, enhancing the appeal of interactive exhibitions.
- Visitor Experience Management: AI applications can aid in managing museums and cultural heritage venues, allowing for the tracking of visitor numbers, attendance forecasting, and sentiment analysis of visitor feedback.

In addition to enhancing the information infrastructure supporting internal collection management and exhibit consumption, another challenge lies in accurately estimating the spill-over effects of investment in digitisation to foster connectivity among regions and diverse cultural stakeholders.[16] Digital cultural heritage can be defined as a commons, given that its digitisation has predominantly been financed by the public sector and is accessible to all via the internet.[17] This perspective aligns with Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, affirming the right of all individuals to freely engage in the cultural activities of their communities.[18]

In order to promote cooperation and connection among EU member states, Europeana plays a pivotal role on behalf of the EU to digitise the cultural sector and promote shared digital competencies. Launched in 2008, its goal is to create a digital collection of European CH accessible to all.[19] In 2022, Europeana, in tandem with the Common European Dataspace for Cultural Heritage, announced the launch of the EC's initiative for a Cultural Heritage Cloud: a digital infrastructure that will connect CHIs and professionals across the EU.[20] Alongside Europeana, membership organisations such as Culture Action Europe and the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) emphasise the importance of digital technologies in preserving and promoting cultural heritage, while advocating for broadened definitions of heritage that include tangible and intangible forms.[21]

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[13] Navarrete, Trilce. "Digitisation in Museums." In Teaching Cultural Economics, edited by Trine Bille, Anna Mignosa, and Ruth Towse. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788970747.00038.

[14] Münster, "Artificial Intelligence for Digital Heritage Innovation," 794–816.

[15] Izsak, Kincsö, Apolline Terrier, Stephan Kreutzer, Thorben Strähle, Conor Roche, Marta Moretto, Stig Yding Sorensen, et al. Opportunities and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence Technologies for the Cultural and Creative Sectors. Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology. European Commission, 2022. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2759/144212.

[16] Navarrete, "Digitization in Museums," 212.

[17] Lehmann, Jörg. "Digital Commons as a Model for Digital Sovereignty: The Case of Cultural Heritage," 2023. https://doi.org/10.34669/WI.CP/4.15.

[18] United Nations. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations. United Nations, December 10, 1948. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

[19] Europeana. "Our Mission." Europeana PRO, February 7, 2024. https://pro.europeana.eu/about-us/mission.

[20] European Commission. "The Cultural Heritage Cloud," March 21, 2023. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/social-sciences-and-humanities/cultural-heritage-and-cultural-and-creative-industries-ccis/cultural-heritage-cloud_en.

[21] Pagel, Julia, Kelly Donahue, and Deutscher Museumsbund, eds. Museums in the Digital Age: Museums and the Development of Active Citizenship; NEMO 21st Annual Conference Documentation, Bucharest, Romania, November 2013. Bucharest:

As curator Adriana Muñoz described, the last decades have seen European CHIs in a 'digitisation frenzy,' akin to CHIs' historical 'collection frenzy' of the late 19th and early 20th century.[22] As a result, CHIs grapple not merely with the question of "if" to digitise, but more pressingly, "how." Further, present-day digitisation practices incorporated into CHIs are often fragmented in their approach, piecemealed together in response to rapid technological and societal shifts. Amplifying these challenges is the sheer volume of cultural heritage artefacts. With hundreds of millions of artefacts digitised and even more awaiting attention, manual interventions are becoming increasingly impractical.[23] AI and crowdsourcing are possible solutions being pursued, but these too come with their own set of challenges—chief among them, ensuring that algorithms do not perpetuate biases against marginalised communities.

Researchers, practitioners, and community stakeholders are increasingly emphasising the need to understand the social, societal, and cultural implications of digital technologies, particularly within the heritage sector.[24] As more collections and archives become digitised and accessible to the public, the digital landscape can both exclude certain groups and allow for broader participation and polyvocality.[25] In museums, polyvocality represents the incorporation of diverse voices and discourses, serving as an effective means to challenge and disrupt the conventional, singular Western narrative that often dominates museum authority.[26] Digital platforms play a vital role as channels for expressing viewpoints and mobilising activism within the realm of heritage.[27] Key governmental white papers and declarations underscore the critical importance of heritage for promoting social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and cultural diversity, in line with global initiatives advocating for greater diversity and representation in heritage.[28] Consequently, there is growing support for adopting more humanistic and critical approaches in developing the digital tools and strategies adopted by CHIs.[29] The digital space offers boundless possibilities for the dissemination, engagement, and reinterpretation of cultural heritage, but these digital spaces must be used conscientiously to ensure they support, rather than undermine these core European values.

Network of European Museum Organisations, 2014.

[22] Montgomery, Susannah, and Adriana Muñoz. "Critical Design for Cultural Heritage: Embracing Decoloniality in the Digital Age." University of Gothenburg, September 19, 2023. https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/2023-09/Seminar%20flyer%20with%20bios%20etc.pdf.

[23] Machidon, Octavian-Mihai, Aleš Tavčar, Matjaž Gams, and Mihai Duguleană. "CulturalERICA: A Conversational Agent Improving the Exploration of European Cultural Heritage." Journal of Cultural Heritage 41 (January 1, 2020): 152–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2019.07.010.

[24] Hornecker, Eva, and Luigina Ciolfi. Human-Computer Interactions in Museums. Synthesis Lectures on Human-Centred Informatics 42. San Rafael: Morgan & Claypool Publishers, 2019.

[25] Schofield, Tom, Daniel Foster Smith, Gönül Bozoglu, and Christopher Whitehead. "Design and Plural Heritages: Composing Critical Futures." In Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 1–15. CHI '19. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1145/3290605.3300236.

[26] Anila, Swarupa. "Inclusion Requires Fracturing." Journal of Museum Education 42, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 108–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2017.1306996.

[27] Black, Graham, ed. Museums and the Challenge of Change: Old Institutions in a New World. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021.

[28] European Commission. "Mapping of Cultural Heritage Actions in European Union Policies, Programmes and Activities," August 2017. https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/library/reports/2014-heritage-mapping_en.pdf; UNESCO. Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001). https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/unesco-universal-declaration-cultural-diversity.

[29] Giglitto, Danilo, Luigina Ciolfi, Eleanor Lockley, and Eirini Kaldeli. "Introduction." In Digital Approaches to Inclusion and Participation in Cultural Heritage: Insights from Research and Practice in Europe. Taylor & Francis, 2023.

As we navigate the role of digital cultural sovereignty in the cultural heritage landscape, our focus will lay largely on the effects and choices of individual cultural heritage institutions. As nongovernmental actors, these institutions face a delicate balance between following broader digital transformation trends and agendas and maintaining responsible custodianship of tangible and intangible history. CHIs should engage with digital sovereignty thoughtfully, ensuring that their digital practices are ethical, inclusive, and equitable. As these institutions develop their digitisation strategies, they have the opportunity to shape a radically more inclusive and empowering future for cultural heritage.

2. *(De)coloniality as a Lens for Navigating the Cultural Heritage Digital Landscape*

The ongoing quest for decoloniality finds resonance in the evolving concept of digital cultural sovereignty, both emphasising the crucial task of reclaiming cultural narratives and histories. To delve deep into this, one must first understand the nuances between decoloniality and decolonisation.

Decoloniality—a term coined by sociologist Anibal Quijano—represents a multifaceted perspective. Quijano posits that coloniality's strength is rooted in its dominance over the following four pillars of society: authority, economy, gender and sexuality, and knowledge and identity.[30] In contrast, decolonisation refers to the tangible, political shift of power: when colonised peoples either overthrow an occupying power or negotiate their way to independence. In other words, coloniality is not a concept exclusive to indigenous people or the relationships between colonising and colonised nations.[31] Coloniality perpetuates hierarchies of race, gender, and geopolitics, entrenched as tools of colonial control, while decoloniality is the commitment to dismantle these enduring colonial vestiges, asserting sovereignty over narratives and practices within societal institutions, including CHIs. [32]

The imperative to decolonise cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) transcends mere restitution of objects; it is a profound challenge to uproot entrenched colonial narratives and to illuminate the obscured narratives of those marginalised or commodified by history. This process is not confined to institutions directly linked to colonial pasts; it is relevant to all CHIs, whether with deep historical roots or recently founded.[33] The endeavour of decoloniality involves a reevaluation of the institutional role in perpetuating colonial viewpoints and reshaping cultural narratives. It necessitates a shift from an authoritative codification of knowledge prevalent in traditional archival practices to a decolonial model that fosters collaborative knowledge creation, as highlighted by Cushman's concept of decolonial archives where dialogue between storytellers and audience is central.[34]

In the realm of cultural heritage, the digital spaces and practices employed by Cultural Heritage Institutions (CHIs) must be crafted with an acute awareness of the diversity inherent in global knowledge systems. Mignolo characterises decolonial efforts as a rich tapestry of 'diversities of decolonials,' reflecting the vast array of cultures

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[30] Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." International sociology 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-232.

[31] Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. 2nd ed. London; New York: Routledge, 2006.

[32] Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept." Cultural Studies 21, no. 2–3 (March 2007): 240–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548; Mignolo, Walter D., and Catherine E. Walsh. On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis. Duke University Press, 2018.

[33] Ariese, Csilla, and Magdalena Wróblewska. Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide with Global Examples. Amsterdam University Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463726962.

[34] Cushman, Ellen. "Wampum, Sequoyan, and Story: Decolonizing the Digital Archive." College English 76, no. 2 (2013): 115–35.

and peoples.[35] It is essential, therefore, that CHIs meticulously design their digital environments to embrace and showcase this multiplicity. Failing to do so risks perpetuating a colonial collection paradigm that inadvertently undermines the sovereignty of cultural content, disconnecting it from its origins and making it vulnerable to appropriation.[36]

In an era increasingly defined by digital interconnectivity, scholars of decoloniality are becoming more critical of the role of digital technologies in shaping power dynamics.[37] Coloniality influences not only human-to-human power dynamics but also increasingly impacts the relationship between humans and machines, or more specifically, the data powering those machines.[38] These technologies, when dissected through a decolonial lens, reveal a duality: they have the potential to both enforce and dismantle colonial structures. For example, digital technologies have been optimistically heralded as tools for enabling decoloniality within cultural heritage institutions through practices such as digitising archives[39] and enhancing access through 3D imaging technologies.[40]

On the other hand, as digital technologies convert human interactions into data, they can perpetuate a form of data colonialism, exemplified by practices in both liberal- and state-led market societies, such as the US and China respectively.[41] This extraction of knowledge and resources can extend beyond market practices into many areas of social life and has the potential to violently foreclose alternative ways of thinking and being.[42] As a result, data-driven technologies can perpetuate established forms of colonial dominance over the creation and curation of knowledge,[43] leading to a kind of forced agreement with established knowledge.[44] This is evident in the case of Google's Arts and Culture platform, which has been critiqued for its role in digital cultural imperialism and for amplifying Western-centric art narratives under the guise of accessibility and philanthropy.[45] This continuation of

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[35] Mignolo, Walter D. "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom." Theory, Culture & Society 26, no. 7–8 (December 2009): 159–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275.

[36] Christen, Kimberly. "Relationships, Not Records: Digital Heritage and the Ethics of Sharing Indigenous Knowledge Online." In The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities. Routledge, 2018.

[37] Lehuedé, Sebastián. "An Alternative Planetary Future? Digital Sovereignty Frameworks and the Decolonial Option." Big Data & Society 11, no. 1 (March 2024): 20539517231221778. https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231221778.

[38] Couldry, Nick, and Ulises Ali Mejias. The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism. Culture and Economic Life. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019.

[39] Cushman, Wampum, Sequoyan, and story, 199–220.

[40] Magnani, Matthew, Anni Guttorm, and Natalia Magnani. "Three-Dimensional, Community-Based Heritage Management of Indigenous Museum Collections: Archaeological Ethnography, Revitalization and Repatriation at the Sámi Museum Siida." Journal of Cultural Heritage 31 (May 2018): 162–69. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2017.12.001.

[41] Couldry, *The Costs of Connection,* xx.

[42] Ricaurte, Paola. "Data Epistemologies, The Coloniality of Power, and Resistance." Television & New Media 20, no. 4 (May 1, 2019): 350–65. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419831640; Ricaurte, Paola. "Ethics for the Majority World: AI and the Question of Violence at Scale." Media, Culture & Society 44, no. 4 (May 1, 2022): 726–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221099612.

[43] Quijano, "Coloniality of power," 215–232.

[44] Lehuedé, Sebastián. "The Coloniality of Collaboration: Sources of Epistemic Obedience in Data-Intensive Astronomy in Chile." Information, Communication & Society 26, no. 2 (January 25, 2023): 425–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1954229.

[45] Kizhner, Inna, Melissa Terras, Maxim Rumyantsev, Valentina Khokhlova, Elisaveta Demeshkova, Ivan Rudov, and Julia Afanasieva. "Digital Cultural Colonialism: Measuring Bias in Aggregated Digitized Content Held in Google Arts and Culture." Digital Scholarship in the Humanities 36, no. 3 (October 26, 2021): 607–40. https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/fqaa055.

colonial influence is partly attributed to the superficial adoption by CHIs of these digital solutions without adequate adaptation to the specific needs of their stakeholders and the contexts of their collections.

Decoloniality in the digital landscape of cultural heritage transcends the conventional scope of diversity and inclusion. It demands a transformative approach to digital governance that addresses power imbalances and integrates diverse lived experiences, empowering historically marginalised communities to shape their socio-technical futures with dignity and autonomy. Such an approach not only reaffirms sovereignty but also challenges and redefines the historically dominant Western-centric paradigms. The ideas and perspectives discussed in this section establish a foundation for applying a decolonial lens in subsequent sections, where we delve into the intersections of cultural and digital sovereignty within European Cultural Heritage Institutions.

3. *Cultural Sovereignty in the Cultural Heritage Digital Landscape*

In order to sufficiently explore the concept of digital cultural sovereignty in the landscape of cultural heritage institutions (CHIs), it is crucial to understand the interplay of cultural sovereignty in shaping the digital future of cultural heritage. Cultural sovereignty refers to the right and capability of a group or nation to preserve, protect, and promote its culture, language, and heritage.[46] It encompasses the authority to govern cultural expressions, traditions, and artefacts, ensuring they are utilised and developed in accordance with the group's values and interests. This concept is often invoked in the context of indigenous peoples and post-colonial states seeking to reclaim their cultural practices and artefacts from historical colonial powers.

Cultural sovereignty is not a modern academic invention, but rather a term with origins in the political activities of the twentieth century, often invoked to turn "culture" into a foundational pillar for broader claims to participation, recognition, and representation. Newly independent nations, once passive in global communication dynamics, began to assert their cultural sovereignty through UNESCO in the 1960s, culminating in a 1977 "Symposium on Cultural Pluralism and National Identity," organised by UNESCO in Canada in June 1977, where international experts argued that international cooperation and world peace hinge on recognising the cultural and political sovereignty of peoples.[47]

In the 1970s, representatives of North American Indigenous groups emphasised tribal and cultural sovereignty, using it to reinforce their cultural identity and advocate for the recognition of their land rights. They also sought to protect sacred sites, oral traditions, wisdom teachings, and languages, viewing these as vital components of their community's healing and self-recovery.[48] Legal scholars Wallace Coffey and Rebecca Tsosie[49] argue that:

> "inherent sovereignty should embody cultural sovereignty: that is, the effort of Indian nations and Indian people to exercise their own norms and values in structuring their collective futures. Inherent sovereignty is not dependent upon any grant, gift, or acknowledgement by the federal government. It preexists the arrival of the European people and the formation of the United States. Cultural sovereignty is inherent in every sense of that word, and it is up to Indian people today to define, assert, protect, and insist upon respect for that right."

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[46] Hodder, Ian. "Cultural Heritage Rights: From Ownership and Descent to Justice and Well-Being." Anthropological Quarterly 83, no. 4 (2010): 861–82.

[47] UNESCO. UNESCO's contribution to peace.

[48] Withey, Kimberly Christen. "Sovereignty, Repatriation, and the Archival Imagination: Indigenous Curation and Display Practices." Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals 11, no. 2 (June 2015): 115–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/155019061501100204.

[49] Coffey, Wallace, and Rebecca Tsosie. "Rethinking the Tribal Sovereignty Doctrine: Cultural Sovereignty and the Collective Future of Indian Nations." Stanford Law & Policy Review 12 (2001): 191; Cobb, Amanda. "The National Museum of the American Indian as Cultural Sovereignty." American Quarterly 57 (June 1, 2005): 485–506. https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2005.0021.

Legal scholar Wenona Singel,[50] builds upon this argument by proposing that maintaining the focus on Western notions and legal doctrines of sovereignty only results in further entrenching the very framework that has worked against indigenous communities.

One of the key areas in which cultural sovereignty has been imagined, enacted, and practiced in Europe has been in archives and museums. Calls for the return of culturally significant artefacts taken during colonial times often align with the principles of cultural sovereignty without explicitly citing the term. For example, during decolonisation movements in the mid 20th century, Congolese leader Mobutu Sese Seko aimed to reclaim cultural sovereignty following colonialism's end by initiating a policy of 'authenticité' and demanding the repatriation of cultural treasures taken by the colonial powers to Belgium.[51]

The restitution debate surrounding indigenous cultural objects housed in Europe has gained significant momentum over the past two decades, presenting a challenging reckoning for many European art and ethnographic museums. These institutions are grappling with the often troubling provenance of their 'colonial' collections, which encompass a wide array of items including ethnographic and artistic works, archaeological materials, human remains, and various natural history specimens like rocks, plants, and animal species. The term 'colonial' here pertains to the origins of these collections: items forcibly taken or acquired under the oppressive conditions of colonialism and colonial rule. The term 'collection' in this context is indicative of diverse, often violent, methods of acquisition involving a wide array of actors including soldiers, government officials or representatives, missionaries, scientists, bureaucrats, as well as tourists and traders. The motivations behind these acquisitions varied significantly, ranging from personal gain to military, political, financial, scientific, or religious reasons, and were often executed with force or coercion. While European debates predominantly centre on artefacts in former colonial powers' museums, obtained from formerly colonised regions, the spectrum of colonial collections also encompasses a range of imperialistic appropriations.

A prominent example is the ongoing controversy surrounding the Elgin Marbles. These ancient Greek sculptures, taken from the Parthenon by Lord Elgin in the 19th century, have been the subject of a prolonged debate between Greece and the British Museum.[52] Greece has long sought their return, arguing they were taken under duress during a time of Ottoman rule. The British Museum, where the marbles are currently housed, maintains that Elgin obtained legal permission from the Ottoman authorities to remove the sculptures. Despite ongoing negotiations and international discussions, legal and diplomatic hurdles continue to impede the marbles' repatriation to Greece. These historical contexts not only highlight the complex layers of 'cultural imperialism' exerted by nations and international entities but also shed light on the deep-seated legacy of European and Western imperialism. Such analysis invites a robust postcolonial critique, challenging us to reconsider the narratives and power dynamics that have shaped our understanding of these collections.

Communities dispossessed of their cultural heritage are actively reshaping how their narratives are managed and displayed in collecting institutions, positioning these spaces at the forefront of asserting cultural sovereignty. They are addressing power imbalances in archival management by embracing co-curation of exhibits, transforming display practices to align with ethical considerations, and redefining institutional guidelines. This movement, initially centred around physical artefacts and oral traditions, is increasingly mirrored in the digital domain. This shift highlights a critical question: How can CHIs harness digital tools to both preserve cultural heritage and respect the cultural sovereignty of the communities they represent?

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[50] Singel, Wenona. "Cultural Sovereignty and Transplanted Law: Tensions in Indigenous Self Rule," Kansas Journal of Law and Public Policy, 15 (2006): 357–268.

[51] Beurden, Sarah Van. "THE ART OF (RE)POSSESSION: HERITAGE AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF CONGO'S DECOLONIZATION." The Journal of African History 56, no. 1 (March 2015): 143–64. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853714000681.

[52] MacMillan, Fiona. Western Dualism and the Regulation of Cultural Production. BRILL, 2021.

4. *Digital Sovereignty in the Cultural Heritage Digital Landscape*

Digital sovereignty is, in simple terms, the control of data and the digital. Utilising the definition developed by Luciano Floridi, digital sovereignty may be the control of software (e.g. AI), standards and protocols (e.g. 5G, domain names), processes (e.g. cloud computing), hardware (e.g. mobile phones), services (e.g. social media, e-commerce), and infrastructures (e.g. cables, satellites, smart cities).[53] Floridi further defines "control" as the ability to influence something (e.g. its occurrence, creation, or destruction) and its dynamics (e.g. its behaviour, development, operations, interactions), including the ability to check and correct for any deviation from such influence. Digital sovereignty is often conceived and discussed in terms of its most visible clashes between companies and states. However, digital sovereignty extends beyond national or institutional oversight, encompassing the community's and individual's control over their data and identity.

The digital era, marked by concerns over privacy, confidentiality, and data security, sees Europe at the forefront in addressing these challenges through robust legislation. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), enacted in May 2018, sets a comprehensive framework for data privacy, emphasising individual control over personal information.[54] Meanwhile, the Digital Services Act (DSA), enacted in August 2023, aims to regulate online platforms, ensuring transparency and accountability in digital content management.[55] Additionally, the Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act), set to be finalised in 2024, represents a pioneering legislative effort to define ethical standards and guidelines for AI usage.[56] These regulatory frameworks collectively underscore the European Union's commitment to upholding data privacy, ensuring responsible digital practices, and fostering ethical AI development. They are particularly significant in sectors like cultural heritage, where these regulations play a critical role in balancing technological advancement with the safeguarding of fundamental rights and cultural integrity.

This commitment is echoed by key European cultural heritage networks and their growing commitment to ensuring responsible digital practices including in the cultural heritage sector. Representative European organisations, including Culture Action Europe, the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO), Virtual Multimodal Museum (ViMM), and Michael Culture Association, expressed their perspectives on digitisation in the cultural heritage sector in a joint statement issued in 2020.[57] They highlighted the essential role of digital technologies in preserving and promoting cultural heritage, emphasising the need for a broadened definition of cultural heritage to encompass both tangible and intangible forms. They pointed out the challenges posed by potentially biased algorithms and the implications for cultural diversity. A significant focus was on the urgency for universal standards, guidelines, and methodologies, especially concerning intellectual property rights, ethical issues, and the need for rich metadata in digital content.

Digital sovereignty affects not just the relationship between states and companies but also individual cultural heritage institutions and their stakeholders. For specific groups, especially marginalised or indigenous communities, it is about having authority over their digital narratives, the preservation and dissemination of their cultural assets, and choices regarding what gets digitised. Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS), a concept gaining

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[53] Floridi, "The Fight for Digital Sovereignty," 369–378.

[54] Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) (Text with EEA relevance) (2016). http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/2016-05-04/eng.

[55] Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance), 277 OJ L § (2022). http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj/eng.

[56] Parliament, European. "Artificial Intelligence Act | Legislative Train Schedule." European Parliament, March 20, 2024. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-europe-fit-for-the-digital-age/file-regulation-on-artificial-intelligence.

[57] Culture Action Europe. "Open Letter: Consultation on Opportunities Offered by Digital Technologies for Heritage." Culture Action Europe, September 2020. https://cultureactioneurope.org/advocacy/open-letter-consultation-on-opportunities-offered-by-digital-technologies-for-the-culture-heritage-sector/.

traction since its first major discussion in 2016,[58] epitomises the intersection of both digital and cultural sovereignty. It asserts the rights of Indigenous Peoples to own, control, access and possess data that derive from them, and which pertain to their members, knowledge systems, customs or territories.[59] This sovereignty mandates that data management aligns with the cultural practices of the Indigenous communities it represents, transforming them from subjects to partners in the research process.

However, historical colonial practices have often viewed Indigenous data as a resource to be extracted. This exploitative perspective has manifested in various forms, from the desecration of sacred sites and theft of cultural artefacts to the disturbing collection of Indigenous human remains in museums and private collections worldwide.[60] Indigenous Data Sovereignty is not just a matter of respecting privacy. The unchecked digitisation of Indigenous cultural heritage risks further dispossession of these communities from their cultural identity. This historical context underscores the urgent need for digital cultural sovereignty, a concept that is rapidly gaining importance as a means to address power imbalances and ensure that communities dispossessed of their cultural heritage can reclaim and govern their digital narratives and cultural assets. Emphasising the sovereignty of data and digital narratives, especially for marginalised and indigenous communities, is crucial in redefining the future landscape of cultural heritage, ensuring it is inclusive, respectful, and representative of the diverse cultures it aims to preserve and showcase.

5. *Conceptualising Digital Cultural Sovereignty in the Cultural Heritage Digital Landscape*

The intersection of digital sovereignty and cultural sovereignty has gained new force in the digital age. According to Patricia Goff, early Western notions of digital cultural sovereignty focus on shielding domestic cultural industries from United States competition, fearing it will threaten their commercial viability and, in turn, their contribution to national identity. Since the early 2000s, media management scholars in Europe have also warned of the "digital threat to cultural sovereignty"[61] within the European audio-visual sector. This involves efforts to safeguard national cultural sovereignty by reclaiming regulatory authority over television programming targeted at national audiences via public service channels.[62] As a result, EU countries, such as France and Sweden, are starting to draft policies to protect and reclaim cultural sovereignty amidst a media landscape dominated by online platforms.[63]

The early notions of digital cultural sovereignty were predominantly concerned with the relationship between digital cultural sovereignty and existing nation-states. Within the realm of cultural heritage, there is a growing recognition of the need to shift the focus towards the agency of cultural communities and individuals, especially those who may be stateless or otherwise marginalised. European CHIs—and CHIs in the global north more broadly—are also increasingly recognising how digital technologies can be both instruments of dispossession

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[58] Kukutai, Tahu, and John Taylor, eds. Indigenous Data Sovereignty. 1st ed. ANU Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.22459/CAEPR38.11.2016.

[59] First Nations Information Governance Centre (Fnigc). "Pathways to First Nations' Data and Information Sovereignty." In Indigenous Data Sovereignty, edited by Tahu Kukutai and John Taylor, 38:139–56. Toward an Agenda. ANU Press, 2016. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1q1crgf.15.

[60] Fine-Dare, Kathleen S. Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA. University of Nebraska Press, 2002.

[61] Brown, "Sweden: The Digital Threat,"189.

[62] Ohlsson, Jonas, and Helle Sjøvaag. "Protectionism vs. Non-Interventionism: Two Approaches to Media Diversity in Commercial Terrestrial Television Regulation." Javnost - The Public 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 70–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1467177.

[63] Vlassis, Antonios. "The Review of Audiovisual Policy in Europe : Between Cultural Sovereignty and Digital Globalisation (Global Watch on Culture and Digital Trade, N°1)," February 18, 2020.

and spaces for negotiating sovereignty.[64] This broader perspective emphasises the importance of empowering all cultural stakeholders to assert control over their cultural heritage, expressions, and identity in the digital landscape, regardless of geopolitical boundaries or state affiliations.

We define **digital cultural sovereignty** as the control and agency of cultural groups, communities, or nations over their cultural heritage, expressions, and identity in a digitised form. It encompasses the rights to manage, represent, and communicate cultural content digitally as well as the infrastructure it is embedded in, ensuring that such content is accessible, accurately represented, and used in ways that respect their culture's values and traditions.

This definition builds upon the foundational principles of cultural sovereignty to assert the right and capability of a group or nation to preserve, protect, and promote its culture, language, and heritage within the realm of digital sovereignty, which entails the control of one's data digital representation, and use digital infrastructure. Unlike earlier definitions that forefront a western-centric viewpoint, this definition expands beyond limited euro-centric, western-centric or state-centric perspectives to develop a broader understanding of what cultural sovereignty could be in a digitised world. Digital cultural sovereignty provides an empowering pathway to redress the power imbalances in knowledge conservation and sharing.

Navigating the digital transformation of cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) with a decolonial lens, it becomes evident that CHIs are a critical space where digital cultural sovereignty can be reclaimed and expressed. Decoloniality in this context involves re-envisioning and re-articulating cultural narratives through digitisation, ensuring they reflect the authentic voices and perspectives of historically marginalised communities. It also entails a critical assessment and adaptation of digital tools to prevent the perpetuation of colonial power structures. As CHIs continue to digitise collections, the principles of cultural sovereignty demand that these processes not only make cultural artefacts more accessible but also foster genuine participation and representation. This calls for a reimagined digital strategy that is inclusive, participatory, and reflective of a decolonial ethos, ensuring that the digital future of cultural heritage is shaped by diverse narratives and shared equitably among all stakeholders.

As such, CHIs must invest in infrastructure, properly described interoperable data, and the resolution of copyright issues to utilise AI effectively. Equally important is the cultivation of skills among cultural heritage professionals to navigate this nuanced landscape, ensuring that digital transformation aligns with the principles of cultural integrity and sovereignty. For CHIs to truly serve a relevant role in society, a holistic approach to digitisation is imperative.

A prime example of this intersection between decoloniality and digital sovereignty is the collaborative project, "Decolonising ethnographic databases" between the National Museums of World Culture of Sweden (SMVK), the University of Gothenburg, University of Brasilia, and the Amazonian Indigenous group Wai Wai. This project spotlights the 'Carlotta' database, which houses digital representations of artefacts from indigenous communities, including the Wai Wai.[65] By integrating the open-source tool 'Tainacan', developed with the University of Brasilia, the initiative offers fresh dialogue avenues on knowledge production. Tainacan enables co-curation, reclassification of cultural heritage, and crowd-sourcing, epitomising proactive steps towards integrating decoloniality in the digital sovereignty realm. 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. This partnership illustrates the profound effects of involving marginalised communities in a CHI's digital strategy, reshaping digital museological processes far beyond commonly followed pathways. It raises pivotal questions about re-envisioning distributed databases to maintain uniqueness while ensuring interoperability, and about the broader implications of these newfound avenues for museum practices.

Opportunities & Challenges

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[64] Geismar, Haidy. *Museum Object Lessons for the Digital Age*. London: UCL Press, 2018.

[65] Adriana Muñoz et al., "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," version 1.0, published on Europeana PRO, 25 August 2022, URL: https://pro.europeana.eu/page/europeana-research-collaborations-the-national-museum-of-world-culture-sweden.

The Decolonising Ethnographic Databases project highlights both practical and conceptual challenges in advancing digital cultural sovereignty. Practically, although AI and advanced digitisation tools *can* boost cross-sector and cross-border collaboration and enhance citizen engagement, individual CHIs often need to significantly build up their capabilities to effectively employ such technologies. Moreover, local populations might face barriers like limited technology access or the necessity for additional language translations, which could limit the collaborative potential of these digital tools. This situation raises pertinent questions about the willingness and ability of these communities to participate in digital processes for regaining cultural sovereignty, and the extent of local technical capability needed for them to exert meaningful control over their digitised cultural heritage.

Conceptually, the Decolonising Ethnographic Databases project signifies a departure from the binary debate on physical repatriation, steering towards a more complex, relational approach. The focus is on how, if navigated with equity and care, digital pathways might open new avenues for asserting sovereignty and recontextualising cultural artefacts. This approach urges a critical assessment of whether digitisation can authentically redress the power imbalances and cultural dominance stemming from the retention of physical artefacts in colonial CHIs, or if it merely acts as a superficial fix, circumventing the in-depth discussions and actions required for genuine decolonisation.

This section will focus on three critical areas that present both opportunities and challenges for cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) to engage with digital cultural sovereignty. Drawing on James Clifford's adaptation of Mary Louise Pratt's concept of museums as contact zones, we conceptualise both the physical and digital landscape of CHIs as a space where multiple communities are brought together within unequal power relations, around collections, transforming the museum into a dynamic environment where different cultures intersect, sometimes in conflict, fostering competing dialogues and replacing one-way transmission and translation with reciprocity.[66] Each theme will be examined to understand how CHIs can navigate the delicate balance of honouring cultural sovereignty while embracing digital transformation.

Digital Colonisation: With digital platforms shaping the access to and narratives of cultural heritage, we begin with the challenge and the risk of repeating colonial mindsets. Concepts like Patricia Hill Collins' matrix of domination reveal how the digitisation tools and strategies used by CHIs might be skewed towards maintaining power structures.[67] The introduction of "counterdata" is a vital step to counteract these biases and empower marginalised populations.[68] However, just providing data points alone is insufficient; a meaningful process of digital cultural sovereignty involves building a relationship with key actors and stakeholders.

Moreover, algorithmic oppression extends the unjust subordination of one social group and the privileging of another—maintained by a "complex network of social restrictions" ranging from social norms, laws, institutional rules, implicit biases and stereotypes through automated, data-driven and predictive systems.[69] They should also resist the temptation of dominant narratives and embrace a pluralistic data representation approach. Just as many CHIs are no longer defining themselves as neutral institutions,[70] it is important that they acknowledge that it is a misconception that data too can be neutral or "raw." All data carries with it the weight of its origin, influenced by cultural, political, and historical contexts. Recognising this is pivotal for CHIs to offer richer, more nuanced digital representations that engage with key stakeholders who can legitimately lay claim to the data and the items the data describes.

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[66] Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

[67] Hill Collins, Patricia. "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination." In Black Feminist Thought, 0 ed., 221–38. Routledge, 2002. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203900055.

[68] D'Ignazio, Catherine, and Lauren F. Klein. *Data Feminism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The MIT Press, 2020.

[69] Taylor, Elanor. "Groups and Oppression." Hypatia 31, no. 3 (2016): 520–36. https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12252.

[70] Autry, La Tanya, and Mike Murawski. "Museums Are Not Neutral: We Are Stronger Together." *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2019). https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.2277.

Narratives and Representation: Digital cultural sovereignty opens doors for more direct collaborations between CHIs and indigenous or marginalised communities. These partnerships enable communities disposed of their cultural heritage to control and present their cultural items and narratives on global platforms, ensuring their autonomy and representation regardless of the items' physical location. Through these collaborations, marginalised narratives can be amplified, ensuring histories and cultures are depicted accurately and authentically. The onus is on CHIs to ensure these narratives are deeply representative and not superficial or tokenistic. Furthermore, the digital realm's capacity for networking, hyperlinking, and multisensory experiences offers unprecedented opportunities for multiperspectivity and interoperability in cultural heritage management.[71] However, this potential is often underutilised, with digital projects frequently mirroring the singular narratives and perspectives entrenched in historical museum practices. The advanced capabilities of metadata embedding and relational databases must be harnessed to support multiple layers of knowledge and diverse pathways of exploration within digital collections. CHIs must navigate digitisation processes with care, ensuring that classifications and digital representations are co-developed with and validated by the communities they depict. It is crucial to collaboratively define not only the identity of items but also their categorisation, acknowledging the act of inclusion and exclusion that comes with classification.[72] This collaborative approach is essential for fostering a truly inclusive digital cultural landscape.

Repatriation and Digitisation: As the archival landscape evolves, there is a discernible expansion in the archival imagination, informed by the principles of sovereignty and repatriation movements, and facilitated by digital technologies.[73] It is imperative for CHIs to respect the rights of indigenous communities over data linked to their cultural heritage. By giving these communities greater agency on what is digitised, how it is portrayed, and who has access to it, CHIs can improve the quality and legitimacy of their digital representation of items. Digital platforms offer CHIs a way to virtually portray and provide access to items. This enhances accessibility and bridges cultural gaps. However, it is essential to understand that while digital versions can serve as bridges, they cannot replace the profound significance of original items.

In conclusion, recognising CHIs as contact zones for digital cultural sovereignty enriches the decoloniality discourse, creating a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding within these institutions. By providing greater access and agency to communities with legitimate claims to artefacts, it can help reshape the relationship between heritage curators and the communities who lay claim to the artefact. This is particularly the case for the numerous items hidden away in archives of CHIs which are not accessible or known to the general public, let alone to the groups who can legitimately lay claim to the items. At the same time, digital cultural sovereignty cannot and should not be seen as an alternative to the restitution of cultural heritage. Instead, striving for digital cultural sovereignty could become the start of a conversation from a different perspective, allowing marginalised actors who would not normally have agency and authority in this process to gain greater access to their own cultural heritage. In this sense, digital cultural sovereignty can be a valuable part of a relationship which supports the regaining of cultural sovereignty more broadly as part of a broader process of restitution whose end is unclear.

6. Conclusion

The exploration of digital cultural sovereignty within European Cultural Heritage Institutions (CHIs) in this chapter underscores a significant shift in the digital age. As CHIs embark on transformative institutional journeys, they are not merely adopting new technologies but are also undergoing a profound cultural shift. This shift is characterised by a move towards more collaborative, inclusive, and interactive engagements, as highlighted by the International Council of Museums (ICOM)[74]. CHIs in Europe are increasingly recognised as pivotal in shaping public discourse, creating important spaces for diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives to come together to

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[71] Geismar, *Museum Object Lessons,* 76.

[72] D'Ignazio, *Data Feminism*.

[73] Withey, "Sovereignty, Repatriation, and the Archival Imagination," 115–38.

[74] Bernhardt, "Digital Collections."

enrich and deepen our understanding of fundamental European values such as human dignity, freedom, equality, and human rights.[75]

Central to this transformation is the concept of digital cultural sovereignty. It represents a paradigm shift in how cultural narratives are controlled, owned, and disseminated in the digital era. This concept is particularly vital in addressing the historical disenfranchisement of certain groups from their cultural heritage. By embracing digital cultural sovereignty, CHIs are not only preserving and disseminating heritage but also ensuring that the narratives, data, and ownership are rightfully aligned with those who hold cultural authority. This alignment is crucial in rectifying past injustices and empowering communities that have been historically marginalised in the narration of their own heritage.

In the quest for CHIs to remain meaningful in an evolving society, we want to draw from a powerful metaphor of doors, locks, and keys crafted by Nina Simon to articulate the concept of relevance as CHIs shift from a static, object-oriented museum to a participatory space that integrates community at its core.[76] In her words, relevance is the "key that unlocks meaning." She paints a vivid picture of a locked room that holds a treasure trove of experiences, emotions, and values. Without the key of relevance, this room remains inaccessible, but with it, individuals can unlock profound experiences that resonate deeply. This chapter emphasises the need for CHIs to ensure their digital transformation strategies are not only technologically sound but also culturally relevant and empowering. The integration of AI and other digital tools offers immense opportunities for enhanced accessibility and engagement. However, it also demands a critical engagement with issues of representation, consent, and data stewardship.

In short, the journey towards digital cultural sovereignty for European CHIs is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a call to action for these institutions to reimagine their roles in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. By doing so, they can ensure that they remain not just relevant, but also act as catalysts for cultural resurgence and empowerment. This holistic approach to digitisation is imperative for CHIs to truly serve a relevant role in society, paving the way for a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient socio-technical ecosystem for cultural heritage, both in Europe and globally.

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[75] European Union. "Aims and Values." Accessed February 26, 2024. https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/principles-and-values/aims-and-values_en.

[76] Simon, Nina. *The Art of Relevance*. Santa Cruz, California: Museum 2.0, 2016.