Michael Culture Association

accr
association
des Centres culturels
de rencontre

Heritage Sites and Digital Tools

The impact of technology on heritage professions

September 2026



Co-funded by
the European Union

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Introduction

Cultural Encounter Centres (or Centres Culturels de Rencontre / CCRs) represent unique institutional and cultural models within the European heritage landscape. Anchored in the heart of exceptionally built heritages, often former abbeys, industrial sites, or major architectural complexes located in rural or peri-urban areas, they function as true laboratories for social innovation, contemporary artistic creation, and intellectual research. The fundamental specificity of CCRs rests on the harmonious interaction between the materiality of a centuries-old built heritage, the hosting of artists in residence, and the development of a privileged relationship with local populations.

However, the advent and acceleration of the digital transition pose a conceptual and operational challenge to these cultural institutions. How can contemporary technological tools (whether digital mediation, administrative paperless processes, or global distribution platforms) be adopted without distorting the "spirit of place" (*genius loci*)? This spirit of place is sometimes intimately tied to silence, creative retreat, physical presence, the long timeframe of experimentation, and the authenticity of the sensory experience. Do CCRs risk losing their identity by bowing to the demands of permanent connectivity, increased creation of cultural content, and popular digital mediation (virtual tours, 360° videos, virtual reality, video mapping, geodesic mapping, audioguides, etc.)?

This study is directly part of the actions of Michael Culture Association (MCA), under the European network project TRANSFORM, supported by the Creative Europe programme. It is designed to support the coming together of professionals and institutions in the heritage and cultural sectors. In the framework of these activities, the Association des Centres Culturels de Rencontre (ACCR) is intended to connect MCA with the heritage sites of their membership. The shared objective is to establish an uncompromising diagnostic of digital maturity in heritage sites, operational practices, and the difficulties teams on the ground encounter.

At the EU level, cultural policies strongly encourage institutions to join and contribute to major initiatives such as the European Common Data Space for Cultural Heritage, the European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage, and Horizon Europe projects in various fields. Nevertheless, implementing these strategic directives within human-scale structures often reveals a striking gap in available skills, workloads, and financial resources. The ambition of this document is to provide factual evidence in order to align European public policies with the daily reality of professionals in the sector.
The question here is: what are CCRs' real needs in the face of digital technologies?

The report

- **The methodology**

To capture the full scope of uses and avoid the traps of a purely accounting or technophilic view, the study relied on a hybrid methodology combining rigorous quantitative analysis and in-depth qualitative interviews.

Quantitative study (questionnaire survey)

A structured form, combining closed-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, and behavioral rating scales (Likert scales), was distributed to the 48 member institutions of the ACCR network. The collection phase resulted in 13 complete, usable responses from decision-makers and technical managers (executive directors, heads of programming, mediation, communication, and conservation). The quantitative survey tool was designed to comprehensively explore six fundamental dimensions of the digital shift within Cultural Encounter Centres (CCRs):

1. **Uses of digital tools:** Precise identification of technologies mobilized daily (content management, heritage databases, immersive tools, 3D digitization) as well as the degree of experimentation or integration of emerging technologies (notably generative Artificial Intelligence).
2. **Rate of digital adoption:** Objective measurement of digital penetration across different core activities (conservation, artistic creation, mediation, administration) to evaluate whether usage remains marginal or structural.
3. **Impact on internal organization, work, and HR:** Evaluation of organisational changes, evolution of collaborative workflows, and direct impact on workload, occupational health (information overload, digital stress), and workforce dynamics.
4. **Impact on relation with audiences and audience "permeability":** Analysis of the transformation of cultural mediation, accessibility (notably for audiences with disabilities), and the capacity of virtual tools to generate genuine physical engagement of visitors on heritage sites.
5. **Economic impact and capacity-building needs:** Measurement of budget trade-offs allocated to digital technology (share allocated compared to overall artistic budget) and priority identification of technical, strategic, and shared training needs for teams.
6. **Consideration of data security issues:** Audit of practices regarding GDPR compliance, sustainable archiving, and implementation of cybersecurity policies in response to local infrastructure vulnerabilities.

Qualitative study: semi-structured interviews

In addition to the numerical data, a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews was conducted with key directors and managers of European CCRs. These qualitative exchanges helped contextualize statistical trends, analyze ethical and cultural tensions raised by virtualization, explore the reality of complex financial trade-offs, and gather direct testimony from field managers facing institutional modernization mandates.

- **The survey results**

Profile of respondents and self-assessment of digital maturity

All represented institutions in the final corpus are located in European territory (100%). Respondents show solid professional experience, with a marked predominance of the 46 to 64 age group (84.62%), followed by 30 to 45 years (15.38%). From a job role perspective, executive and artistic direction teams account for 46.15% of the sample, ensuring a cross-cutting and strategic vision of the issues. The rest of the corpus is shared among heads of programming (23.08%), communication and digital (15.38%), and visitor services/mediation (15.38%).

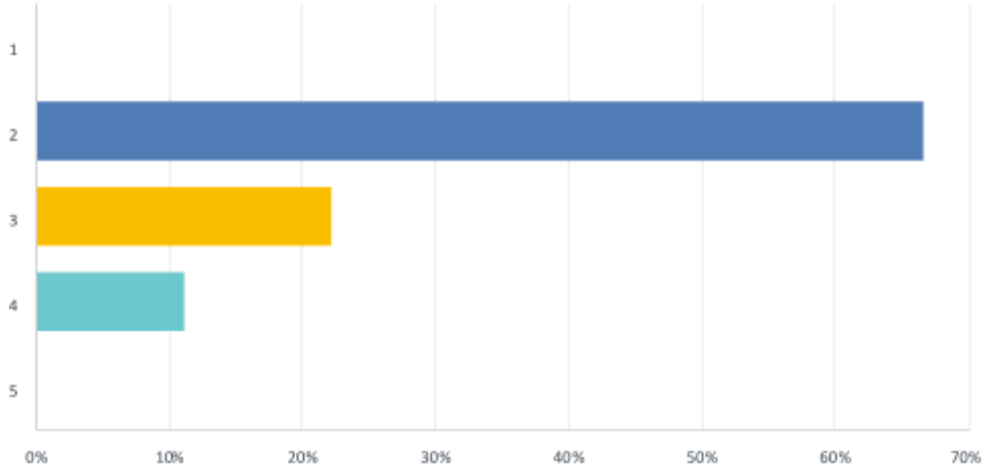


Chart 1: Self-Assessment of Digital Maturity Level by CCRs (Scale 1 to 5)

Source: MCA / ACCR Survey 2026

Analysis of these results shows high lucidity among actors: two-thirds of structures (66.67%) consider their digital maturity as "intermediate" (3/5), while 22.22% deem themselves "advanced" (4/5). No centre considers itself at the maximum level of expertise (5/5), reflecting an absence of triumphalism and awareness of remaining progress to be made, particularly in strategic integration and cost control.

State of Technological Uses: Between Conservation, Diffusion, and Hesitations

The mapping of digital uses within CCRs reveals a contrasted adoption across activity departments. For heritage preservation and research, 22.22% of structures use cutting-edge technologies such as 3D digitization, photogrammetry, and spatial modeling. Furthermore, 11.11% of centres use specialized databases for managing digitized archives. However, a significant proportion (44.44%) report not using digital tools dedicated to conservation, explaining that their core business lies mainly in live performance, contemporary creation, and hosting literary or musical artist residencies. Regarding channels for diffusion and visitor relations, the hegemony of mainstream tools is complete: social networks (44.44%) as well as institutional websites and blogs (44.44%) constitute the almost exclusive basis of online presence. In situ immersive mediation devices (such as augmented reality, VR headsets, or geolocated routes) remain a minority and are very costly to maintain over time.

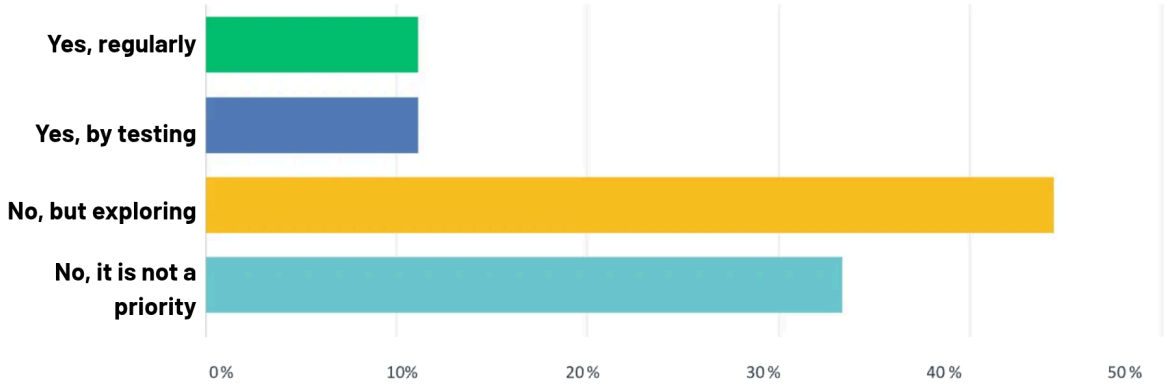


Chart 2: Degree of Integration of Emerging Technologies (AI, IoT, Blockchain)
Source: MCA / ACCR Survey 2026

An examination of Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage demonstrates a striking gap between global media debate and professional practices in CCRs: 88.89% of institutions state that AI is involved in less than 25% of their daily tasks. When mobilized, AI is confined to support functions like editorial drafting (proofreading, translation of content for foreign visitors) or light graphic assistance for communication. Complex AI applications for interactive mediation or processing heritage data remain in exploratory study phases (44.44%) or are simply set aside due to lack of perceived relevance (33.33%).

Digitization of administrative management and collaborative tools

Unlike artistic or scientific uses, which remain selective, the paperless transition of administrative and organizational workflows is widely engaged across the network.

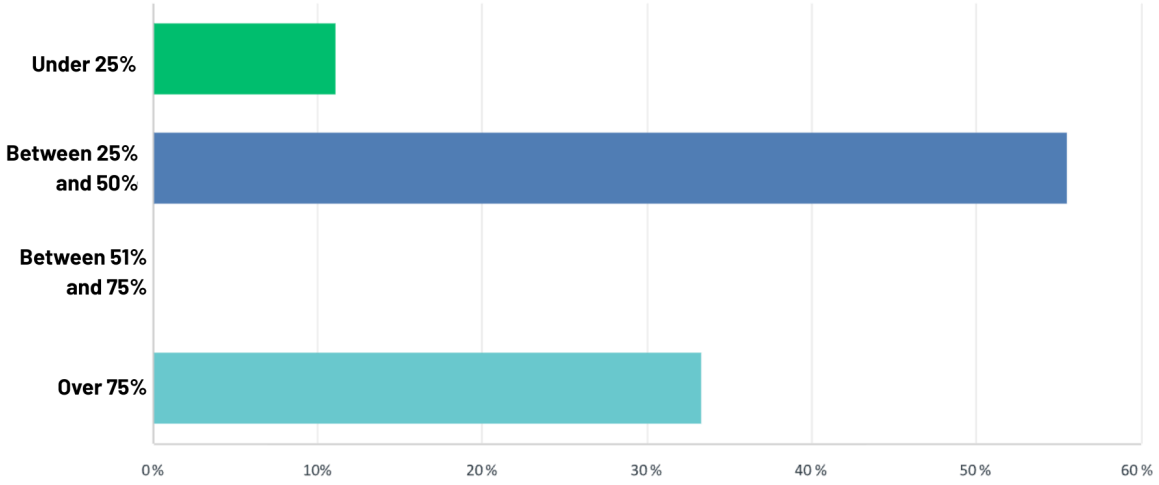


Chart 3: Proportion of Digitized Administrative Processes: Source: MCA / ACCR Survey 2026

More than half of CCRs (55.56%) have digitized between a quarter and half of their management processes (online ticketing, accounting, room bookings), while 33.33% report a paperless rate above 75%. Daily use of cloud collaborative suites (Microsoft Teams, Google Drive, shared spaces) has become the norm for 55.56% of staff. However, this operational shift occurred without a global strategic vision, creating a perception of information overload within small teams.

Work transformation, mental workload, and psychosocial risks

The massive introduction of digital technology within CCRs has not been neutral regarding occupational health and organizational climate. While 55.56% of respondents acknowledge that digital tools have improved the speed of internal information circulation, this fluidity has been accompanied by a marked increase in professional constraints. An overwhelming majority of 66.66% of staff report an increase in their workload (of which 22.22% cite a "sharp increase" directly attributable to information overload, uninterrupted email processing, and the multiplication of instant messaging channels).

On the employment front, digital technology has not generated economic rationalization or job destruction: 77.78% of centres report perfect stability in workforce size. Nevertheless, internal sociological tensions are emerging: 33.33% of employees express a feeling of isolation or digital divide due to unequal mastery of new tools. Moreover, the permanent pressure to modernize creates a notable atmosphere of professional anxiety.

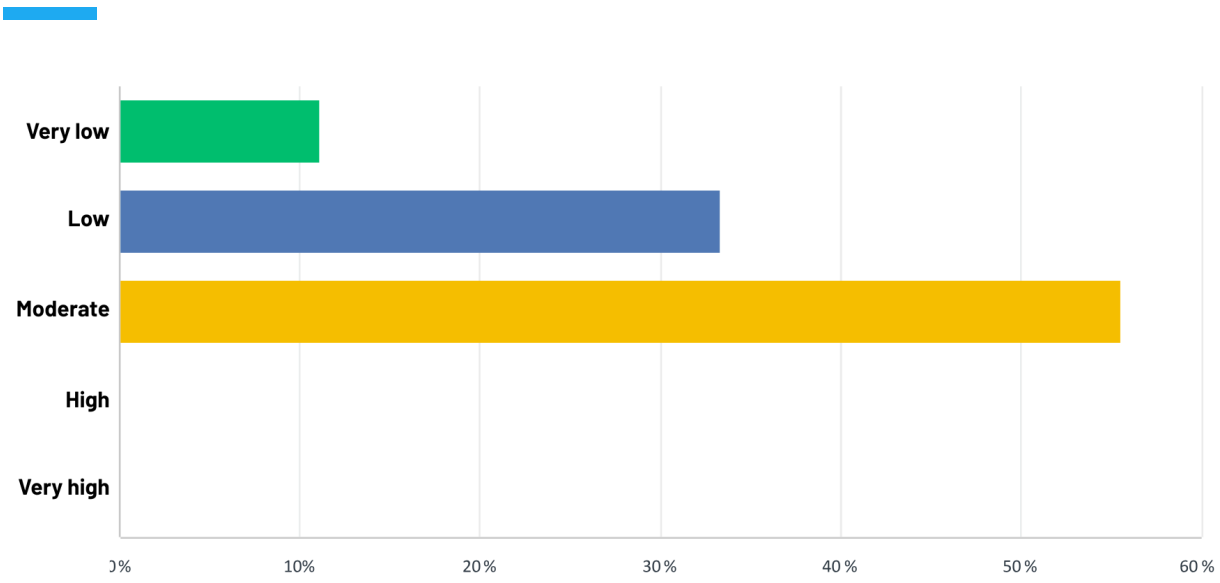


Chart 4: Level of Stress and Anxiety Felt Regarding Digital Requirements

Source: MCA / ACCR Survey 2026

Restricted budgetary margins

Financial analysis reveals the precariousness of economic models underlying the digital transition of CCRs. Technological investments are continually weighed against other artistic or built heritage maintenance budget items.

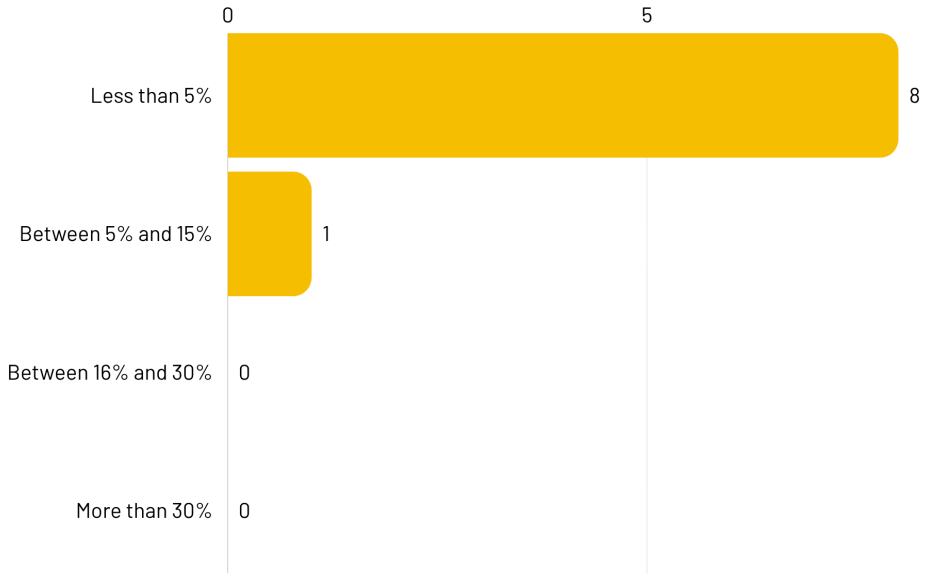


Chart 5: Percentage of spending in digital projects or digital development

Source: MCA / ACCR Survey 2026

For 88.89% of institutions, the budget envelope allocated to digital projects represents less than 5% of the annual cultural budget, preventing any long-term heavy technological investment strategy. But the most striking finding of the study lies in the absolute gap separating major European Commission programmes from the daily reality of ACCR member CCRs. All respondents (100%) confirm using none of the centralized platforms funded by the European Union. Reasons given in qualitative interviews highlight the extreme technical complexity of these tools, the lack of direct benefits for local site attendance, and the lack of internal engineering to format data according to required standards.

Audience permeability, digital sobriety (Green IT), and technical vulnerabilities

Theoretical promises of digital technology regarding audience expansion and ecological transition clash with the reality of collected figures:

- **Uncertainty on audience "permeability":** The argument that a strong virtual presence generates physical visits to heritage sites remains largely unverified. For 75.00% of CCRs, the ability to measure whether an online user becomes an actual visitor is impossible to evaluate or is purely unmeasured. Yet 25% of the surveyed digital CCRs admit that both virtual and physical audiences mix.
- **Inclusion and accessibility lagging:** Despite legal and ethical requirements, 75.00% of centres offer no digital devices adapted to users with disabilities (hearing, visual, or motor).
- **Digital sobriety (Green IT):** While CCRs are engaged in ecological transition for their buildings, 75.00% of them integrate no digital sobriety criteria (data storage management, extending equipment lifespan, eco-designed web). This delay is explained by the absence of adapted operational methodology guides for culture.
- **Cybersecurity and GDPR compliance:** Only 37.50% of centres report strict compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Even more critical, 50.00% of institutions admit having no cybersecurity policy, storing archives and financial data on vulnerable local servers or unsecured public cloud solutions.

Conclusion

The digital transformation of Cultural Encounter Centres should no longer be approached through forced modernization or naive technological fascination. As shown by this study for Michael Culture Association and the TRANSFORM network project, the real challenge in the coming years lies in building sustainable, human, and eco-responsible models. By putting team training, sobriety of usage, and respect for the spirit of sites at the center of public policies, Europe will enable its

heritage institutions to be both authentic spaces for intellectual retreat, creation and brilliant laboratories for the 21st century.

An interesting aspect of this report is that the analysis is incomplete by default. This is primarily due to the fact that the majority of the CCRs to which the survey was sent (35 out of 48) did not respond. While the burden of constant survey requests and a lack of time to respond are factors to be taken into account, we can also assert that a significant portion of the non-responses is due either to a lack of interest or to the absence of an organizational stance on the matter. In this sense, the missing data speaks volumes. For these reasons, this study represents one building block among many in a process of genuine analysis of the sector with regard to digital technologies and their impact on work. MCA and ACCR are committed to continuing this research.

In addition to the study, which was conducted online, it was important to speak directly with the directors of the CCRs. We had open conversations with them, asking them directly about their digital strategies, the impact on staff, and what they would like to see in public policies.
Their profiles vary widely: they range from CCRs with well-established digital strategies and capabilities already in place to CCRs that, whether by choice or due to resource and time constraints, do not have a systematic approach to digital initiatives. The profiles of each of them can be found on the following pages.

Notable Case 1:

Dominicains de Haute Alsace

France

Their Digital Strategy

The Dominicains de Haute-Alsace's digital strategy dates from 2019, the creation of the audiovisual centre. Digital has also been part of the CCR's mission since 2014. It is a management-led project, and mapping has been part of it from the start, along with geodesic technology. The aim is to attract the public through digital, as with the Noël Bleu initiative in Guebwiller, which promotes heritage through a festival of lights.

Dealing with Digital inside the team

Digital requires new skills, yet no professional insecurity is observed. Digital has not influenced decision-making or governance at the Dominicains de Haute-Alsace, and AI use is limited. The director reports no digital divide and no fear among staff members: everyone adapts, although some show slight reluctance because of digital's ecological impact, so reasoned use is recommended. The ticketing officer's job description has been slightly modified, and ticketing staff have taken on new missions. Digital has not been used as a pretext for not replacing staff. The only position set to evolve is that of accounting.



Les Dominicains de Haute Alsace - Photo Michel Kurst

Dealing with Digital with the public

Human contact remains, and audio guides have been introduced; the centre holds that CCRs should open a dialogue on the limits of human interaction created by digital. The geodesic mapping dome is a somewhat immersive space for presenting creation, and there is also an immersive video-mapping room. Digital mainly helps retain audiences through online sales, the CRM, and targeted newsletters; campaigns can reach up to 1,500€ in sales. Heavy digitalisation creates difficulties for communities, and the centre develops visual and auditory accessibility projects; people with reduced mobility have access to performances.

Digital: a leverage or a drag?

Adobe and cloud subscriptions consume the budget, and maintenance drains resources. Ticketing, however, has improved: 70% of sales are online, and its staff has new missions. The centre does not sell its mapping works, to avoid unfair competition. Data is available locally and copied on internal storage, and a NAS is under consideration. Digital should not take precedence over live performance; it improves processes but can move fast without limits.

Notable Case 2:

Foundation Santa Maria La Real

Spain

Their Digital Strategy

The digital strategy was initiated by the employees of the Foundation, and the management answered their solicitations by implementing digital solutions, especially in terms of project management.
AI is used mainly for CRM management, communication, and to support teams in analysing documents, preparing presentations, and facilitating the application for funds process. The final evaluation and decision are always made by a human.

Dealing with Digital inside the team

The digital tools contributed to flattening the decision-making processes and to increasing cooperation. As members of the team are working remotely, the digital tools encourage communication and exchange. They also helped develop the craft workshop activities.
To manage the digital changes, the Foundation appointed a responsible person for the digitisation project who organises internal webinars recorded and available on SharePoint. HR designed a protocol for digital disconnection that is at the disposal of the employees.



Foundation Santa Maria la Real

Dealing with Digital with the public

Digital tools such as 360° videos and augmented reality glasses are used for the valorisation of heritages. Visitors can choose the type of experience they want to have while visiting our sites, guided, supported by digital tools, or by themselves.
Digital tools are also used to disseminate information on projects and activities, as well as to sell tickets.

Digital: a leverage or a drag?

The digital strategy has positively impacted the Foundation's operations and outreach. It has been an initial investment in terms of funds and time, and are starting to see a return on the investment. AI is taking more place in digital uses for heritages, and we raise awareness of the ethical issues that its use can produce (historians are very skeptical of its uses).

Notable Case 3:

CCR Abbaye de Neumünster – neimënster

Luxembourg

Their Digital Strategy

The Abbaye de Neumünster has someone in an executive/administrative role who has ensured that digitisation is being rolled put in the organisation, so that everyone can focus on the strategic picture. Digital becomes a common point of reference. A proposal was put forward to the Board of Directors for substantial budgets to develop digitisation but the question was how to balance the budget for the building maintenance and the investment in digital heritage. From this equation is excluded the cost for digital management and day-to-day operations. They measure the impact over time, to see if the investments are sustainable. Their digital strategy is based on the decentralisation of decision-making: this allows for transparency, but not everyone is included in the decision-making process. A system to monitor the implementation of decisions is in place.

Dealing with Digital inside the team

To avoid digital dividing, the staff went through training courses. Lots of them. While some of the team members were taking roundabout paths or getting others to do things for them in this sphere, the younger staff became the reference point in the organization. No specific recruitment was done to deal with digital.



Abbaye de Neumünster - Photo: Patrick Giraud Calypso

Digital: a leverage or a drag?

In terms of management of the Abbey, digital is more a cost than other, with the hope it will become beneficial. They invest in it because they think it is necessary. It also creates risks in terms of cybersecurity: the staff stays vigilant, with 2 team members who are tasked to take care of it. Work-wise, the impact depends on the teams. For some of them training took more time. Those responsible for standardising the information are under greater pressure, because there is less room for spontaneity. There's less dialogue and decision-making is more centralized. It's a solitary task in front of the computer. There's less room for improvisation, making special cases a challenge.

A message for Policy-Makers

CCR must be a forum for humanist reflection on these issues. They see an exponential decline in human solidarity. These tools are assets and we must use them, but we must be a forum for reflection in a way that goes beyond economic profitability. Efficiency is not about money but about quality. It is a luxury we must make use of.

Notable Case 4:

La Ferme de Villefavard

France

Their Digital Strategy

The Ferme de Villefavar is still at an early stage in the digitalization process. It does not have the resources to implement a digital strategy at the moment; it is a project for the next 2–3 years. They do not have support to preserve heritage digitally, but they are moving in that direction. In particular, low-tech solutions such as QR codes to link to testimonies from villagers who have been interviewed, linking to the website, are being tested.

Dealing with Digital inside the team

The Ferme de Villefard has met no strong resistance to digital. Some generational resistance exists, depending on people's habits and usage, but goodwill prevails among staff. New tools add to the mental load: adopting new ways of working that are not intuitive or part of the team's habits takes time and the "taming" of usage. In the long term, digital could become a facilitator, though it can also be disruptive. With a budget, the Ferme would recruit a digital specialist with the skills it expects, as well as production officers and a heritage officer, to help it develop.



Ferme de Villefavard Photo: Sébastien Mahieuxe

Dealing with Digital with the public

For the Ferme de Villefard, digital remains a support function. It sees how visitors react when the place is toured and its history told, and it believes in encounter, since it is a place of encounter. Because almost nothing is in place yet, little can be said about digital's effect on the public. Attendance is neither very young nor very international. Whether digital media would attract young people is an open question: perhaps. Translation could be made available to everyone.

A leverage or a drag?

The Ferme de Villefard strongly believes in using digital wisely, as it can bring positive things. It must remain at a scale manageable for people and must not push the human side aside. The Ferme also mentions the application of cultural rights, with digital tools linked to European cultural rights. Digital could put into perspective things that would be harder to do with information resources, such as networking, and offer new perspectives.

Notable Case 5:

Saline Royale d'Arc et Senans

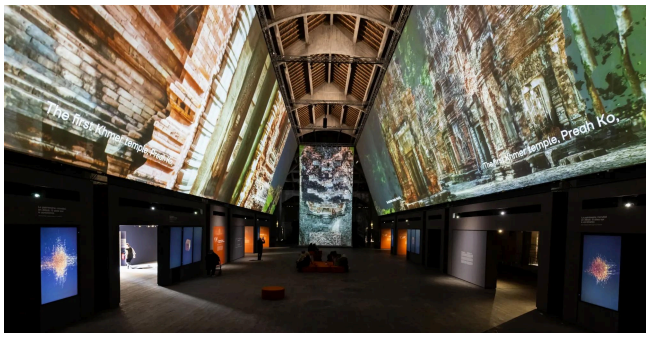
France

Their Digital Strategy

The digital strategy at the Saline was established ten years ago and revisited in order to take into consideration technological advancements. The scope of the strategy is to enlarge the cultural offer for the visitors; investment in management tools has not been a priority. It has been a decision of the governance, and it prioritizes investment in digital outputs connected to the visit on the site (no digital twin of the Saline Royale for virtual visits, for instance). The latest investments concerned recording studios that allow the Saline to diversify its activities.

Dealing with Digital inside the team

Given that the digital strategy focused on applications and audioguides replaced by the histopads (augmented reality tablets allowing visitors to discover during the visit the past stories of the monument), the impact on the team has been minimal. Management and communication tools evolved with society and private use. Employees could train if they felt it was necessary or interesting (especially on the AI solutions).



Lights Centre, UNESCO Heritages, Saline royale
Photo: Yoan Jeudy

Dealing with Digital with the public

Improving and diversifying the experiences of the public (visitors, audiences for the concerts, artists in residence, corporate clients) have been at the heart of the digital strategy. The investment is fruitful. For instance, the installation of The Lights Centre, a project of 3D digitization of UNESCO heritage sites in the world currently in danger, allowing virtual visits of the sites and their surroundings, increased the number of visitors to the Saline. The recording studios also enabled the development of masterclasses for musicians worldwide through an online platform.

A leverage or a drag?

The digital strategy proved successful and allowed the Saline Royale to diversify its activities and cultural offer as well as to attract new visitors. For governance, the success lies especially in the scope of the investment, and they raise the attention of the teams on the dangers of AI use in everyday activities.

Credits

This report has been co-authored by

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