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DIGITALIZATION OF MUSEUMS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

This article examines the interrelationship between the digitalization of the museum sector and the transformation of cultural anthropology within the context of the development of the digital society. It analyzes how the implementation of digital technologies is reshaping the functions of museums, the methods of preserving, interpreting, and representing cultural heritage, while simultaneously influencing the methodological framework of contemporary cultural anthropology. The study demonstrates that the digital museum is gradually evolving from a traditional space for the preservation and exhibition of tangible artefacts into an open, interactive platform for the production, dissemination, and reinterpretation of cultural knowledge. Particular attention is devoted to the development of virtual exhibitions, three-dimensional modelling, digital archives, augmented and virtual reality technologies, artificial intelligence, and interactive communication tools, all of which significantly expand the possibilities for preserving, researching, and promoting cultural heritage.

The article argues that digitalization transforms not only museum practices but also the subject area of cultural anthropology by stimulating research on digital communities, networked forms of cultural memory, virtual identities, digital materiality, and new models of human interaction with cultural heritage. It is established that anthropological inquiry increasingly encompasses digital environments as autonomous cultural spaces in which new social practices, symbolic systems, and mechanisms of collective memory construction emerge. The study further demonstrates that digital technologies do not replace the traditional museum; rather, they create hybrid forms of cultural communication that integrate visitors' physical and virtual experiences.

Special attention is paid to the challenges associated with digital transformation, including the authenticity of digital objects, the long-term preservation of digital resources, digital inequality, the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, the protection of cultural heritage, and the provision of inclusive access to museum collections. The article emphasizes that the digitalization of museums is establishing a new paradigm of interaction between cultural heritage, society, and scholarly knowledge, thereby fostering interdisciplinary research at the intersection of museum studies, cultural anthropology, digital humanities, and information technologies. It is concluded that the digital transformation of museum spaces constitutes one of the key drivers of the modernization

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of cultural anthropology, opening new perspectives for the study of culture, memory, and sociocultural communication in the digital age.

Keywords: *museum digitalization, cultural anthropology, digital cultural heritage, virtual museums, digital humanities, cultural memory.*

Formulation of the problem. The digital transformation of the humanities has become one of the defining characteristics of contemporary societal development. Over the past two decades, digital technologies have fundamentally reshaped the ways in which cultural heritage is created, preserved, interpreted, and disseminated, transforming museums from traditional institutions for the preservation of collections into open digital platforms for communication and knowledge exchange. The digitization of museum collections, the development of virtual exhibitions, and the application of three-dimensional modelling, artificial intelligence, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) technologies are no longer merely technical innovations; rather, they are creating new models of interaction among cultural heritage, researchers, and society.

At the same time, the digitalization of museums should not be regarded solely as a technological process. It fundamentally alters the very foundations of cultural knowledge production, the mechanisms through which historical experience is represented, and the principles governing the interpretation of both tangible and intangible heritage. Consequently, museums have increasingly become an important subject of cultural anthropological inquiry, which examines not only cultural practices themselves but also the institutions through which these practices are constructed, represented, and endowed with social significance. Whereas in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century the museum served as one of the principal instruments of anthropological knowledge production, today the digital museum is emerging as a dynamic environment for generating new forms of anthropological knowledge.

This issue has gained particular significance following the adoption of the new definition of the museum by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2022, which shifted the emphasis from collections to people, inclusivity, diversity, and community participation. Within this framework, digital technologies have become one of the principal instruments for implementing a human-centred model of the museum, while simultaneously generating new challenges related to digital inequality, the ethical use of data, digital repatriation, the decolonization of museum practices, and the reconsideration of the authority traditionally vested in museum curators.

In contemporary scholarship, the digitalization of museums has been examined primarily within the fields of museum studies, information science, digital humanities, and cultural policy. Considerably less attention has been devoted to analyzing this phenomenon through the lens of cultural anthropology, despite the fact that an anthropological perspective provides a unique opportunity to explore how digital technologies reshape the relationships among culture, power, memory, identity, and society. The reciprocal influence between the digital transformation of museums and the conceptual evolution of contemporary cultural anthropology remains insufficiently explored, particularly in relation to postcolonial studies, digital ethnography, the anthropology of data, and digital heritage studies.

Task statement. The aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the digitalization of museum activities and the transformation of contemporary cultural anthropology. To achieve this objective, the study examines the human-centred turn in museum development, the specific features of the digital repatriation of cultural heritage, the changing role of museum curators, transformations in digital collection management systems, the emergence of digital ethnography, challenges associated with the digital preservation of intangible cultural heritage, and the postcolonial reinterpretation of museum practice.

Outline of the main material of the study. The relationship between museums and cultural anthropology is structural in nature and has evolved over an extended historical period. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anthropology was institutionalized largely within the museum environment: the first academic departments of anthropology in the United Kingdom and the United States were established in association with natural history and ethnographic museums, using museum collections as the primary empirical foundation for anthropological research. In this context, the museum functioned not merely as an institution for preserving artefacts but also as a site for the production of anthropological knowledge, where the concepts of culture, ethnicity, and civilizational hierarchy were constructed and refined.

From a classical perspective, a museum collection may be interpreted as a materialized form of anthropological conceptualization. The very processes

of selecting, classifying, spatially organizing, and interpreting objects are not neutral procedures but rather intellectual and ideological constructs reflecting dominant theoretical models of culture as well as asymmetrical power relations between the collecting subject and the represented object. In this sense, the museum operates as an institutional mechanism for encoding anthropological representations of the "Other" [1].

This interdependence underscores the fundamental significance of the digitalization of museum practice, which extends far beyond mere technological modernization. The digitization of collections, the transformation of cataloguing systems, the expansion of online access, the implementation of virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) reconstructions, and the application of algorithmic systems of interpretation constitute not only infrastructural innovations but also implicit anthropological positions. These developments shape regimes of access to knowledge, redefine the authority of interpretation, and reconfigure concepts of cultural ownership, thereby raising fundamental questions regarding who has the right to represent cultural heritage and under what conditions such heritage becomes accessible.

The traditional museum model and classical museum anthropology were founded upon an object-centred epistemology, in which the artefact constituted the primary unit of knowledge. Within this paradigm, the museum functioned as an institution dedicated to the accumulation, classification, and visual representation of material objects, while visitors assumed the role of passive recipients of interpretative narratives constructed through curatorial authority. Consequently, anthropological practice focused primarily on provenance research, typological classification, and the interpretation of artefacts as representative expressions of culture.

Criticism of this model emerged from several theoretical traditions beginning in the 1980s. Postcolonial scholarship challenged the legitimacy of historical practices of collecting cultural objects within the broader context of imperial and colonial power relations. Constructivist and post-structuralist approaches demonstrated that museum knowledge is not a reflection of an objective cultural reality but rather the outcome of discursive and power-laden processes of classification. At the same time, community-centred approaches highlighted the asymmetry between the subjects of cultural representation and those who exercise interpretative authority over cultural heritage [2].

The repatriation of cultural objects to their source communities has become one of the central issues in contemporary cultural anthropology and museum studies, as it directly addresses questions of historical justice, cultural ownership, and postcolonial ethics. Recent institutional developments indicate a gradual transformation in the policies of leading museums. In particular, in 2022 the Smithsonian Institution adopted its Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns Policy, which provides for the restitution of cultural objects on the basis of ethical evaluations of the circumstances surrounding their original acquisition. The policy explicitly recognizes that objects obtained through coercion, theft, or without the consent of their owners may be subject to return [6]. A symbolic precedent illustrating the implementation of this policy was the restitution to Nigeria in 2022 of one of the Benin Kingdom artefacts seized by British forces during the punitive expedition of 1897 [6].

At the same time, physical repatriation remains constrained by a range of material, technical, institutional, and epistemological factors. Some museum objects are so fragile that their transportation poses a significant risk of damage, while many source communities lack the infrastructure required for the long-term preservation of returned collections. Moreover, empirical research demonstrates the absence of a universal consensus regarding the preferred form of "return". For some communities, physical restitution remains the primary objective; for others, priority is given to access to digital records, high-quality digital surrogates, or shared stewardship models for cultural heritage management [7]. Consequently, the classical model of repatriation has become conceptually insufficient for addressing the diversity of contemporary postcolonial claims.

In response to these limitations, the concept of digital (virtual) repatriation has emerged as an alternative or complementary approach to the return of cultural heritage. In the scholarly literature, digital repatriation is understood as a compensatory mechanism of postcolonial restitution that develops where the physical return of cultural objects is impossible or significantly constrained. Rather than transferring the original artefacts, this approach involves the creation and dissemination of digital surrogates of cultural heritage objects [8].

The technological infrastructure of digital repatriation encompasses a range of interconnected practices, including three-dimensional scanning and modelling of artefacts followed by the transfer of digital copies to source communities; the development of specialized digital collection management systems, such as the Mukurtu CMS platform, designed to enable Indigenous communities to exercise ethical control

over access to cultural materials; and the digitization of archival resources–including photographs, audio recordings, and field notes–that have historically been preserved in museums and academic institutions across the Global North [8]. Within this framework, digital repatriation functions not merely as a technical procedure but as an instrument for redistributing symbolic authority over cultural memory.

An analysis of empirical practices of digital repatriation demonstrates their heterogeneous character and their dependence on local cultural and political contexts. Yiyun Zhou's comparative study of the Malagan Carvings (Papua New Guinea–United Kingdom), Te Hau-ki-Tūranga (Māori–New Zealand), and the Mukurtu platform illustrates that digital technologies facilitate a transition from a monological museum model to a dialogical one, in which source communities become active participants in the interpretation, governance, and representation of their cultural heritage rather than remaining passive objects of museum knowledge production [8].

At the same time, the scholarly literature emphasizes the conceptual limitations of digital repatriation. It is widely acknowledged that a digital reproduction of an object cannot be considered equivalent to the original physical artefact, particularly in cases where the object was removed under conditions of colonial violence. Digital surrogates cannot restore the material authenticity of cultural objects and, therefore, cannot undo the original act of expropriation. Nevertheless, they can partially restore access to cultural knowledge and collective memory, thereby contributing to forms of symbolic and epistemic restitution [9].

An important theoretical critique concerns the tendency to reduce decolonization to processes of digital transformation. In particular, L. Gibson argues that museum practices of classification and cataloguing, developed during the colonial era, historically reinforced hierarchical systems of cultural knowledge and racialized representations of the "Other". Rather than dismantling these inherited structures, digital technologies may reproduce and even amplify them through new technological formats and infrastructures [10].

Consequently, digitalization should not be regarded as a decolonizing mechanism in itself. Without a critical reassessment of classificatory regimes, the epistemological foundations of cultural description, and institutional policies governing access to heritage, digital representations risk merely scaling historically embedded asymmetries, thereby granting them broader global reach and renewed institutional legitimacy.

A normative response to these challenges has emerged through the evolution of standards governing digital cultural data. The FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) established a technical framework for open science designed to maximize the discoverability, accessibility, and reusability of research data. However, within cultural anthropology and Indigenous studies, these principles have been criticized for overlooking issues of power, sovereignty, and ethical governance.

Against this background, the CARE principles (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics) were developed to shift attention from the technical accessibility of data toward its political, ethical, and community-based governance [11]. The CARE framework recognizes that cultural heritage data are not neutral informational resources but constitute a form of collective cultural property. Accordingly, it affirms the institutionalized right of source communities to exercise authority over cultural data, determine conditions of access, and participate directly in processes of interpretation and knowledge production.

The transition from FAIR to CARE therefore represents not merely a technical evolution in data management standards but a fundamental epistemological shift – from the universalist paradigm of unrestricted openness to a contextualized ethics of cultural responsibility. This transformation directly reflects the core principles of contemporary postcolonial anthropology and Indigenous data governance.

Within the classical museum and anthropological paradigm, the curator occupies a central institutional position in the production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge about cultural objects. This functional role is grounded in an asymmetrical model of communication in which the curator is constituted as the authoritative holder of expert knowledge, while visitors and audiences are positioned primarily as its recipients. In this respect, museum communication assumes a predominantly monological character, with interpretative authority concentrated within the institution itself.

From an anthropological perspective, this model is structurally analogous to the classical ethnographic paradigm of fieldwork authority, in which the researcher presents themselves as the direct witness and authoritative interpreter of the "Other's culture". As demonstrated in the works of C. Geertz and J. Clifford, such an epistemological position reinforces a regime of scholarly authority grounded in claims of experiential immediacy and interpretative monopoly [12].

The digital transformation of the museum sector substantially reconfigures this traditional monological model of curatorial authority by creating conditions for more decentralized forms of producing and consuming cultural knowledge. This transformation manifests itself in at least two interrelated dimensions.

First, open digital collections and interactive platforms fundamentally reshape modes of access to museum content, enabling users to construct their own trajectories of interpretation without being constrained by a predetermined curatorial narrative. As a result, a growing divergence emerges between institutionally intended communication – what the museum seeks to communicate – and users' interpretative practices, namely the meanings and knowledge that audiences actually construct through their engagement with digital collections [13].

Second, digital infrastructures create new opportunities for source communities to participate directly in the representation and interpretation of their own cultural heritage, thereby transforming the very logic of museum authority. Within a broader anthropological framework, this development reflects a shift from an object-oriented model of a "science about Others" toward a relational model of a "science with Others", based on collaborative knowledge production and shared interpretative authority.

Overall, the scholarly literature identifies a systemic shift in both the managerial and epistemological paradigms of museums–from the predominance of objects as the primary focus of interpretation toward the prioritization of human experience, participation, and communication [4]. In this sense, digitalization functions not merely as a technological catalyst but also as an institutional mechanism for implementing the broader human-centred turn in museum practice.

The concept of the smart museum represents a further stage in the institutional evolution of museums under conditions of digital transformation. A synthesis of 143 scholarly and institutional publications (2012–2025) identifies fifteen defining characteristics of this model, among which human-centredness, cultural embeddedness, collaboration, adaptability, and multinarrativity are particularly significant from an anthropological perspective [14].

The concept of multinarrativity is especially important because it challenges the traditional assumption of a single, unified museum narrative. Instead, the museum is reconceptualized as a space in which multiple – and at times competing – interpretations of the same cultural objects coexist, reflecting the broader pluralization of regimes of cultural knowledge.

Within this emerging model, the role of the curator undergoes a profound transformation. Curatorial practice gradually shifts away from authorial control over interpretation toward the functions of mediator, editor, and facilitator of communicative processes among museums, audiences, and the communities that create and sustain cultural heritage. From an anthropological perspective, this development corresponds to the transition from the position of the «authoritative observer» to that of the researcher as collaborator, sharing interpretative authority among multiple knowledge holders.

The digital transformation of museum collections also requires extensive infrastructural work involving metadata systems responsible for the description, classification, indexing, dating, and attribution of cultural objects. Although these operations may appear primarily technical, they are fundamentally interpretative in nature and constitute a distinct level of knowledge production about cultural heritage.

Within this framework, metadata can be understood as a specific form of anthropological text, recording not only the characteristics of cultural objects but also the historically contingent regimes through which they are classified and represented. As Yiyun Zhou argues, metadata are "data about data"; however, it is precisely at this level that implicit epistemological assumptions – including colonial classificatory categories and hierarchical conceptions of culture – become embedded within digital information systems [8].

An analysis of museum Collection Management Systems (CMSs) conducted by C. Lewis demonstrates that, even where Indigenous classificatory frameworks are formally incorporated, these systems frequently remain structurally asymmetrical. Limited interoperability between data structures and the fragmented implementation of alternative taxonomies require museums to reconsider the architecture of their information systems. In this context, Lewis emphasizes the necessity of prioritizing Indigenous knowledge systems, recognizing the institutional authority of Indigenous communities, and ensuring their right to determine conditions of access to museum data [11].

Accordingly, Collection Management Systems (CMSs) should be understood not merely as technical tools for managing museum collections but as complex epistemological infrastructures within which postcolonial regimes of knowledge classification are either reproduced or critically deconstructed.

The institutional GLAM cluster (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) is increasingly

conceptualized as an integrated environment in which digital humanities, information technologies, and cultural anthropology converge. Within this interdisciplinary space, new modes of producing, preserving, and analysing cultural data are emerging that transcend the traditional boundaries of individual institutional domains.

A systematic review published in 2025 identified thirty-two major research directions within the digital convergence of the LAM sector, organized into four overarching thematic clusters: participatory knowledge transfer, digital technological competence, digital preservation of cultural heritage, and the sociocultural impact of research practices [15]. This typology demonstrates the emergence of a new interdisciplinary field in which cultural heritage is increasingly understood as a dynamic informational resource rather than a static repository of historical artefacts.

Open digital collections maintained by GLAM institutions are fundamentally transforming the conditions under which anthropological research is conducted. Access to digitized archives and museum databases reduces the need for researchers' physical presence in archival repositories, expands opportunities for transnational comparative analysis, and creates favourable conditions for applying machine-learning methods to identify previously hidden patterns within cultural datasets. At the same time, these technologies are reshaping the very nature of anthropological knowledge by moving it toward computational analyses of large-scale cultural data.

Within this framework, the digital resources of GLAM institutions are increasingly regarded not only as archives of cultural memory but also as active infrastructures of cultural production. As noted in the literature, "digitized materials frequently generate new momentum for cultural revitalization, language revitalization, innovative artistic practices, and the creative industries" [9]. Consequently, digitalization transforms cultural heritage from a passive object of preservation into an active resource for cultural production and broader processes of social transformation.

The classical understanding of fieldwork as the foundational method of anthropology has undergone a profound epistemological transformation in the context of digitalization. The traditional model, based on the researcher's physical presence within a geographically bounded field site and direct interaction with informants, is gradually giving way to a more flexible and decentralized understanding of the research environment.

In contemporary anthropology, the «field» is increasingly conceptualized as a network of socio-digital interactions encompassing online communities, social media platforms, virtual environments, and hybrid forms of cultural communication. Within this expanded framework, digital environments function as fully legitimate sites for the production of cultural practices and are therefore subject to anthropological analysis on an equal footing with conventional ethnographic settings.

Within the museum context, digital fieldwork assumes a distinctive configuration that includes investigating online audiences' interactions with digital collections, analysing the responses of source communities to digital repatriation initiatives, and examining how museums' digital communication strategies shape public narratives surrounding cultural heritage. Particularly illustrative are studies of museums' digital practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially initiatives such as #MuseumAtHome and #AtHomeAtTheMuseum, which demonstrated the emergence of entirely new modes of interaction between museums and their audiences within exclusively digital environments [16].

The development of digital ethnography has been accompanied by the emergence of new categories of empirical evidence, particularly large-scale collections of user-generated content that may be interpreted as spontaneously produced cultural representations. In this context, the analysis of online visitor reviews has become an increasingly valuable source for reconstructing public cultural perceptions of museums.

The study by Yuandi Jiang and colleagues, based on the analysis of more than 64,000 visitor reviews from thirty museums representing six thematic categories using TF-IDF, Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), and topic modelling techniques, demonstrates a significant shift in perceptions of museums from an object-centred toward a human-centred model of visitor experience [17]. The findings also reveal substantial differences among various types of museum institutions, highlighting the differentiated nature of digital cultural consumption.

Methodologically, this approach represents a transition from classical interpretive ethnography to big data analytics, whereby cultural attitudes are reconstructed through the analysis of users' digital traces generated during interactions with cultural institutions. In this respect, digital ethnography establishes a new empirical foundation for anthropological knowledge, grounded in scalable corpora of unstructured digital data.

A further stage in the evolution of digital anthropology is associated with the integration of artificial intelligence into the infrastructure of museum collections. The application of large language models and conversational interfaces to digital archives is creating a fundamentally new mode of interaction between researchers and cultural materials that may be conceptualized as interface ethnography.

Studies of conversational AI systems designed for digitized museum collections demonstrate a transition from search-oriented models of knowledge access toward dialogical modes of interaction, in which artificial intelligence functions as an interpretative intermediary between users and museum collections [18]. This development fundamentally transforms the traditional architecture of access to museum knowledge: instead of conducting linear searches through catalogues, users increasingly engage in interactive dialogue with algorithmic systems capable of mediating interpretation and facilitating knowledge discovery.

From a theoretical perspective, these developments raise a series of methodological questions that remain unresolved within contemporary anthropology: Can algorithmically generated responses be regarded as a form of knowledge? To what extent does artificial intelligence reproduce or transform existing systems of cultural classification? And can the analysis of interactions between users and AI systems become an independent object of ethnographic inquiry? In this respect, artificial intelligence is gradually evolving from a research tool into a potential participant in the anthropological field itself.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), encompassing oral traditions, ritual practices, performing arts, and traditional craftsmanship, presents particular challenges for the digitalization of museum practices. Its defining characteristic lies in its processual and contextual nature, which makes it resistant to reduction into stable digital objects.

According to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), ICH exists only through the practices of its bearers and cannot be fully separated from the social contexts in which it is enacted and transmitted [19]. Consequently, the digital recording of rituals, songs, or craft traditions serves an important documentary function but cannot reproduce the living practice itself as an evolving sociocultural process.

From the perspective of critical anthropology, this creates the risk of the museumification of the living – the transformation of dynamic cultural practices into static representations detached from the contexts that give them meaning. Such an effect may be interpreted as a digital manifestation of the classical anthropological problem of "cultural fixation", characteristic of early ethnographic approaches.

At the same time, empirical studies reveal an opposing tendency. Access to digital archives may stimulate processes of cultural revitalization, language revitalization, and the restoration of traditional practices, particularly when communities themselves act as active agents in the use and management of digital resources [9]. The digitalization of intangible cultural heritage is therefore an inherently ambivalent process, the outcomes of which are determined not only by technological infrastructures but also by regimes of access, governance, and cultural agency.

The interaction between the digitalization of museum practices and contemporary cultural anthropology may be interpreted as a unified process of postcolonial reconfiguration involving knowledge production, institutional authority, and regimes of cultural representation. Rather than representing the parallel evolution of two autonomous domains, these developments exhibit profound structural interdependence, whereby technological transformations within museums and theoretical shifts in anthropology mutually reinforce and legitimize one another.

Since the 1980s, cultural anthropology has undergone an extended period of critical reflection on its own epistemological and political foundations. Foundational scholarship has demonstrated that anthropological knowledge was historically produced within asymmetrical power relations in which the "Other" functioned primarily as an object of description, classification, and interpretation rather than as an equal participant in knowledge production [1]. Museums, as institutions, have been subjected to comparable critiques. Postcolonial debates concerning the origins of museum collections, practices of expropriation, and monopolies over cultural representation have stimulated far-reaching processes of institutional decolonization, particularly within leading museums and international museum organizations.

Within this context, digitalization functions as an inherently ambivalent force in postcolonial transformation. On the one hand, it provides new instruments for the decolonization of museum spaces, including digital repatriation, the implementation of ethical frameworks for data governance and access – particularly the CARE Principles – and the gradual transformation of source communities from objects of museum representation into active participants in the

interpretation and governance of cultural knowledge. In this respect, digital technologies have the potential to expand participation while redistributing symbolic and institutional authority within the field of cultural heritage.

On the other hand, digitalization also carries the risk of reproducing – or even reinforcing – colonial structures through new technological forms. These risks include digital inequalities in access, asymmetries in technological infrastructure, and the persistence of classificatory systems and metadata architectures that continue to reproduce historically entrenched Eurocentric or colonial epistemological categories. Under such circumstances, the apparent openness of digital archives and platforms becomes largely formal, concealing unequal distributions of opportunities for access, participation, and interpretation.

Consequently, the digital museum and contemporary anthropology occupy a shared field of tension between the emancipatory potential of decolonization and the risk of a new form of digital coloniality. It is precisely this duality that makes anthropology an indispensable analytical perspective for critically examining the digital transformation of museum institutions. Anthropological inquiry enables digital innovations to be understood simultaneously as instruments of emancipation and as mechanisms through which structural inequalities may be reproduced in technologically reconfigured forms.

Conclusions. The findings of this study demonstrate that the digitalization of museums extends far beyond the implementation of new information technologies in museum practice. Rather, it constitutes a comprehensive sociocultural transformation that reshapes the principles governing the production, interpretation, and dissemination of cultural knowledge. Consequently, the digital transformation of the museum sector is intrinsically linked to the conceptual evolution of contemporary cultural anthropology, which is increasingly oriented toward human-centred approaches, the plurality of cultural narratives, collaborative engagement with communities, and the critical reassessment of its own colonial legacies.

The study establishes that the contemporary museum is progressively moving away from the classical object-centred paradigm toward the human-centred model embodied in the ICOM 2022 museum definition. Digital technologies function not only as technical instruments for implementing this paradigm but also as catalysts for developing new forms of interaction among museums, visitors, and the communities that create and sustain cultural heritage. Open digital collections, interactive services, virtual exhibitions, and digital communication platforms contribute to the democratization of access to cultural heritage while simultaneously highlighting persistent challenges associated with digital inequality and the uneven distribution of technological resources across countries and social groups.

Particular attention has been devoted to the reconceptualization of digital repatriation as one of the principal instruments of the postcolonial reconfiguration of museum practice. The study demonstrates that although digital surrogates cannot fully substitute for the physical return of cultural property, they significantly expand opportunities for source communities to participate in the preservation, interpretation, and governance of their own cultural heritage. At the same time, the findings confirm that digitalization alone does not guarantee the decolonization of museum practices. Without a critical revision of classificatory systems, cataloguing principles, access policies, and governance models, digital technologies may continue to reproduce existing forms of symbolic inequality within newly digitized environments.

The research further reveals that digitalization is fundamentally transforming the professional role of the museum curator. Curatorial practice is gradually shifting from the position of the exclusive interpreter of museum collections toward that of a facilitator of multivocal dialogue among researchers, museum institutions, digital platforms, and diverse social communities. Comparable transformations are occurring within cultural anthropology, where the classical model of "studying the Other" is increasingly being replaced by collaborative and participatory approaches to knowledge production.

The study also demonstrates that digitalization creates fundamentally new opportunities for the advancement of digital ethnography, the analysis of large-scale cultural datasets, the interinstitutional integration of GLAM resources, and the application of artificial intelligence to museum collections. These emerging opportunities are accompanied by new methodological challenges concerning the ethical governance of data, algorithmic bias, the authorship of digitally mediated interpretations, and the need to balance open access to information with the rights of cultural communities to exercise authority over their own heritage.

In conclusion, the digitalization of museums and the transformation of cultural anthropology should be understood as mutually reinforcing processes that evolve in parallel while continuously shaping

one another. The digital museum is increasingly emerging not merely as a technologically modernized institution of memory but as a dynamic space for social dialogue, collaborative knowledge production, cultural reflection, and the development of new forms of interaction among people, cultural heritage, and digital technologies. It is the anthropological perspective that provides the most comprehensive framework for understanding these transformations, as it shifts analytical attention away from technologies themselves toward the people who engage with them, their cultural practices, power relations, representational regimes, and the processes through which collective memory is constructed. This constitutes the principal theoretical conclusion of the present study and its primary contribution to the contemporary development of museum studies and cultural anthropology.

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Зуляк І. С., Кліш А. Б., Палюх А. Я. ЦИФРОВІЗАЦІЯ МУЗЕЇВ І ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ КУЛЬТУРНОЇ АНТРОПОЛОГІЇ

У статті досліджено взаємозв'язок процесів цифровізації музейної сфери та трансформації культурної антропології в умовах розвитку цифрового суспільства. Проаналізовано, як впровадження цифрових технологій змінює функції музеїв, способи збереження, інтерпретації та репрезентації культурної спадщини, а також впливає на методологічний інструментарій сучасної культурної антропології. Показано, що цифровий музей поступово трансформується із традиційного простору накопичення й демонстрації матеріальних артефактів у відкриту інтерактивну платформу виробництва, поширення та переосмислення культурних знань. Особливу увагу приділено розвитку віртуальних експозицій, тривимірного моделювання, цифрових архівів, технологій доповненої та віртуальної реальності, штучного інтелекту й інтерактивних засобів комунікації, які розширюють можливості збереження, дослідження та популяризації культурної спадщини.

Обґрунтовано, що цифровізація змінює не лише музейні практики, а й предметне поле культурної антропології, актуалізуючи дослідження цифрових спільнот, мережевих форм культурної пам'яті, віртуальної ідентичності, цифрової матеріальності та нових моделей взаємодії людини з культурною спадщиною. Встановлено, що антропологічний аналіз дедалі більше охоплює цифрові середовища як самостійні культурні простори, у яких формуються нові соціальні практики, символічні системи та механізми конструювання колективної пам'яті. Доведено, що цифрові технології не замінюють традиційний музей, а створюють гібридні форми культурної комунікації, поєднуючи фізичний і віртуальний досвід відвідувача.

Окрему увагу приділено викликам цифрової трансформації, серед яких проблеми автентичності цифрових об'єктів, довготривалого збереження цифрових ресурсів, цифрової нерівності, етичних аспектів використання штучного інтелекту, захисту культурної спадщини та забезпечення інклюзивного доступу до музейних колекцій. Наголошено, що цифровізація музеїв формує нову парадигму взаємодії між культурною спадщиною, суспільством і науковим знанням, сприяючи розвитку міждисциплінарних досліджень на перетині музейної справи, культурної антропології, цифрової гуманітаристики та інформаційних технологій. Зроблено висновок, що цифрова трансформація музейного простору є одним із ключових чинників модернізації культурної антропології, відкриваючи нові перспективи дослідження культури, пам'яті та соціокультурної комунікації в цифрову епоху.

Ключові слова: *цифровізація музеїв, культурна антропологія, цифрова культурна спадщина, віртуальні музеї, цифрова гуманітаристика, культурна пам'ять.*

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