



Understanding the Social Value of Digital Technologies for Museums

Help to shape Culture24's next Let's Get Real project

Let's Get Real 6 (LGR6) is the next collaborative action research project within Culture24's successful digital change programme Let's Get Real. LGR6, in collaboration with the Happy Museum and Battersea Art Centre, will look at the social value of digital technologies for museums. We want to explore how publicly funded cultural spaces such as museums & galleries and their collections can remain relevant in a changing digital age and begin to understand their social purpose. Keep reading to find out more about the thinking behind LGR6.

Between July and October 2017 Culture24 is scoping the LGR6 research project in a new and collaborative way and we invite you to help us design the scope/content of the action research. We want to understand your museum's relationship to social value and to digital technologies; how it has begun practically considering their connection (if at all); whether you have come across best practice examples of meaningful social value derived from digital technologies, from the cultural sector and beyond and what specific questions within this field you would like to see the LGR6 project explore.

To help capture your views we have designed a super short online survey which you can access [here](#). Please take 5 minutes to share your views and also share this call for help widely across your networks. The deadline for feedback is **Friday 29 September 2017**. We will use your feedback to help scope the project, issuing a project brief, timetable and call for sign-ups in October 2017.

Why is understanding the social value of digital technologies vital for all museums?

Understanding the social value of digital technologies for museums is a largely unexplored area but one that is vital in helping them pursue their social and civic agendas.

Across the museum sector there has been an important [discussion](#) concerning the evolving social value of museums and how they deliver positive social impact. At the same time we also recognise the significant changes that digital technologies have had on the way we live our lives today, on our communities and on wider society. In LGR6 we want to interrogate the sweet spot between these two areas.

If museums are to remain relevant in our fast-evolving and increasingly digitally-influenced world they need to recognise how needs, behaviours and expectations (for individual, communities and society) are changing because of digital technologies and how to respond to these changes meaningfully. The societal shift taking place is far more profound than simply more people surfing the web or using their smartphones. It's about changes to our identity, our wellbeing, the information we consume, the democracy we participate in and the networks and communities we connect with. LGR6 aims to help museums understand what their responses should be in

this changing world, and how to practically advance these, so that they can create meaningful and relevant value.

Museums often understand the value of digital technologies framed around financial, institutional, educational or audience development terms. This is through a range of activities that include digitising and publishing collections; engaging audiences in digital storytelling via social media or in-museum technologies; e-commerce focusing on online ticketing or online retail; exploring new digitally enabled fundraising and business models; enhancing online brand and digital marketing strategies; interrogating audience data for insights and improving internal efficiencies through adopting technologies such as CRM and internal collaboration systems. Much value is being created for museums by embracing digital technologies in these ways. However, what is lacking across all this work is an understanding of how digital technologies can create social value. As organisations that regard themselves as inherently being of high social value, this feels like a missed opportunity for museums.

We will look to learn from the ways other sectors and practices are embracing digital technologies to drive powerful social change agendas. For example:

- how cities are using shared open online data to create innovative solutions to address local urban issues (eg [Data Mill North](#))
- how charities are using digital campaigning to generate support around particular causes (eg [nomakeupselfie](#))
- how the design processes of the digital maker movement are helping communities create and participate together (eg through [FabLabs](#))
- how [online petitions](#) are enabling citizens to raise awareness of particular issues and set the agenda for public debate
- how the digitally influenced 'sharing economy' is creating [products](#) that connect neighbours and find solutions for people's daily needs.
- how grassroots community movements such as the [Transition Network](#) are spreading globally through an open-source sharing of resources.

What specific questions could LGR6 look at?

LGR6 will focus on specific questions in order to help museums explore the relationships between social value and digital technologies.

The kinds of questions that could be useful to look at are:

- How can museums embrace digital tools, technologies and digital culture to foster activism, democratic and civic values and active citizenship
- How can digital tools, technologies and culture be used by museums to combat social isolation?
- How might co-creative practices (either digitally or 'in the real world') help museums develop meaningful connections to marginalised local communities?
- How can museums tap into the digital behaviours of younger audiences as a way to engage them in topics which have relevant social value to them?

- Where are the opportunities for museums to enhance digital wellbeing both for museum professionals and their audiences?
- How could digital tools, technologies and culture help museums to become stewards of the future as well as the past?

How the resulting LGR6 project will be structured

After this consultation ends in September, Culture24 will use it to scope the LGR6 research project with sign-up opening in October 2017. The project will run from November 2017 to Summer 2018. We will be looking for 10-15 bold arts or heritage organisations to sign up. Each LGR project is collaboratively funded with all project partners paying a fee to participate. In the past this has been £2,800 per organisation and we will assess the level of contribution this time during the consultation phase.

It is likely that the LGR6 project will follow a similar structure to past LGR projects and will consist of four face to face workshops in London. Mentoring and guidance is given to all participants in between workshops so that they can run small scale experiments in their own museums to test the ideas discussed at the workshops in their own contexts. The LGR project methodology is:

- Learning together (via collaborative workshops)
- Learning from others (via expert input)
- Learning by doing (through individual experimentation)

Taking part in LGR6 means you will be part of a lively and engaged peer network with a shared sense of purpose, with space to experiment with approaches, tools and tactics in a supported environment. We have found that the project works just as well for small, medium or larger organisations as there is a lot that can be learned from different types of expertise, working practices, contexts and leadership. and approaches to change and risk.

Participating organisations will identify strategic and practical approaches to challenges within their own institutional contexts and learn from the contexts of other participating organisations. Individual participants have the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from peers and to develop the confidence, language, skills and processes to become agents for change within their own organisations.

LGR6 is being developed in partnership with the [Happy Museum Project](#) and Culture24 is one of the fifteen first [Happy Museum Affiliates](#), all seeking to put societal wellbeing and sustainability into the heart of their activities. The workshops will be hosted by Battersea Art Centre who are also involved in shaping the programme. Both of these organisations have strong track records of developing and evaluating programmes of work committed to social impact.

More background reading

Let's Get Real: Let's Get Real is a programme of collaborative action research projects, conferences, workshops and masterclasses, led by Culture24. The programme supports the cultural sector to be relevant and responsive to the changing needs and behaviours of audiences of today. Over the past six years we have worked intensively with over 150 museums, galleries, heritage sites & performing arts organisations, held 5 conferences, published numerous reports, run workshops in collaboration with partners such as Europeana, British Council, Audience Agency, and been invited to speak about our work across the UK and internationally.

CULTURE24: Culture24' wants to build a shared understanding of issues relevant to the cultural sector by connecting the wider practice from other sectors with a deep knowledge of cultural practice/policy and first hand experience in digital production/publishing. This allows us to understand deeply the needs of the arts and heritage sector and explore the impact of key issues. Many organisations are still at the beginning of their journey to embed digital meaningfully across all areas of their organisation and Culture24 provides leadership to understand and guide that journey. Our ambition is to help the cultural sector to be relevant and responsive to the changing needs and behaviours of audiences of today. We advocate for a cultural offer (digital or otherwise) that is open and responsive to users; uses data to drive insights and develop the digital skills & literacies of people working in these organisations.

HAPPY MUSEUM PROJECT: This project mirrors Happy Museum purpose which is to reimagine the role of museums for a changing world through supporting the wellbeing and sustainability of their communities. It engages the digital world with the same values and ambitions that the Happy Museum is seeking to address in the real world of museum spaces, collections and communities. The digital world, like the real world, offers huge opportunities for connection, collaboration, engagement, activism and learning. Museums, apart from the ubiquitous gift shop, are often bastions of shared, trusted public space to explore these opportunities, in an era of constant encroachment by corporate influence. This encroachment of real space is mirrored in the virtual world by the dominance of a small number of digital monopolies (Google, YouTube, Apple, Facebook eBay, Paypal and Amazon) described by Kate Raworth in Doughnut Economics as 'the rapid enclosure of the twenty-first century's most creative commons.'

Happy Museum has an active and growing community of practice with over 30 museums and other organisations working to interrogate the ways that it's six principles might help build wellbeing and resilience in museums, their staff, volunteers, participants and community.

BATTERSEA ART CENTRE: As custodians of a new collection, BAC want to understand how it could be more integral to their overall social change programme. With over 10,000 objects in storage, and limited opportunities to have many objects physically exhibited, BAC are keen to consider how the collection and its stories can be shared and accessed through online platforms and social media.

Internally they need to better understand what is the purpose of digital? In particular the differences between using it to drive Income generation or to generate understanding and dialogue with audiences. As a venue with an established online box office, has the focus to date on sales missed an opportunity to make civic and socially engaged work more visible? How does BAC as an organisation unpack this?

For BAC this is an interesting time to be talking about this as, following the success of Artistic Director David Judd's blog and our desire to explore how we might increase the use of the producing teams voices within digital platforms. We also need to gain skill and confidence digitally.