DRIVER

CARDS

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WHAT ARE THESE CARDS?

First things first — what are drivers?

Drivers are forces of change shaping our world. Unlike trends, which are patterns of activities operating over a shorter term, drivers are clusters of *many* trends that form deeper structural dynamics of change over a longer time horizon — even upwards of 50 years! Drivers emerge and recede gradually, and are not likely to be reversed.

Got it. So then what are Driver Cards?

This deck of cards presents 25 drivers that are shaping our world, organised around societal, technological, environmental, economic, and political themes. Each card identifies a driver and gives a brief description. It then poses a couple of questions to stimulate thinking on how the driver might impact heritage by 2035, taking into account various trends and counter-trends. You'll also find some blank cards to fill in with any missing drivers.

Finally, what's the point of them?

Thinking intentionally and creatively about the future can help us adapt and embrace change within a dynamic, surprising world. These cards are a tool to stimulate this reflection. Critically, they are not meant to help predict or prescribe a particular future, but rather to open our minds to different potential *futures*. On the next card, you'll find a few suggested uses — but don't let these limit you!

Sources consulted: (1) the results of ICCROM's 2021 Horizon Scan Study and (2) a 2023 review of Foresight literature conducted by ICCROM under the ARCHE research alliance.

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HOW CAN I USE THESE CARDS?

Suggested use #1: Grow your 'futures literacy'

Individually or in a small group, flip through the deck and consider each driver in turn. Are they familiar? Which are surprising? How might these drivers play out in your own professional and personal contexts? Try to identify and challenge your assumptions about the future.

Use #2: Use Driver Mapping to define strategic priorities

Convene staff and key stakeholders in a workshop to explore your organisation's future operating environment. In groups, consider how each driver might develop and impact heritage by a target date (e.g., in 10–15 years), mapping the cards on an Importance–Certainty matrix. Identify priority drivers to address in your future strategy.

Use #3: Wear a different hat

Randomly select a card and consider the driver from another stakeholder's perspective that is entirely different from your own. How do you envision the driver's development and implications differently?

Use #4: Create stories about the future

Select 3–5 cards and craft a story about the future that involves topics in your professional or personal contexts. How do the drivers develop and interact? Next, try making different types of stories — one about your preferred future, or one in which your worst fears are realised.

For more details, consult the accompanying Drivers Cards Instruction Sheet.

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KEY

SOCIETAL

Aging populations
Urbanisation
Transnational migration
Youth disillusionment
Bottom-up approaches

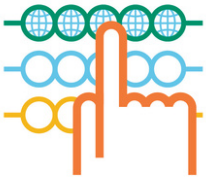
TECHNO LOGICAL

Cybersecurity threats
Artificial intelligence
Technological advances
Technology ethics
Digital divide

ENVIRON MENTAL

Green credentials
Sea level rise & extreme weather
Biodiversity loss
Nature–culture entanglement

ECONOMIC



Reduced public funding
Tourism
Alternative economic models
Outcome accountability
Shrinking workforce

POLITICAL

Declining multilateralism
Geopolitical shifts
Rising inequalities
Sustainable development
Polarisation & extremism
Diminishing Eurocentrism

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AGING POPULATIONS

Due to falling fertility and mortality rates, most countries are experiencing growth in their elderly populations, with ~1 in 6 people in the world expected to be over 65 years old by 2050. As people live longer lives, age-related medical conditions such as dementia will mandate greater attention in public health measures.

How might this impact heritage?

- What new roles might cultural heritage play for growing elderly populations around the world, particularly with regard to health/wellbeing, memory, and social inclusion?
- What might be the heritage implications of a greater potential demand for lifelong learning?
- How might heritage support generations to connect with each other?

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URBANISATION

The UN projects that by 2050, two-thirds of the global population will live in urban areas. Ongoing migration from rural to urban areas is making urban centres larger and denser, while depopulating many rural areas that may soon be threatened with abandonment.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might rural heritage be affected as greater numbers of people migrate towards urban areas?
- What challenges will the heritage sector face due to increasing urban development?
- How might heritage values change in response to this population movement?

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TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

Induced by multiple factors such as climate change and armed conflict, transnational migration is likely to continue in greater numbers, largely flowing from the Global South to North. This is resulting in growing diasporic communities and nations with ethnically and culturally heterogeneous populations.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might large diasporic and multi-ethnic communities challenge national conceptions of heritage?
- What new or altered forms might heritage assume when decoupled from its geographic origins?
- How might cultural heritage be utilised by reactionary anti-immigrant groups?

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YOUTH DISILLUSIONMENT

Widening inequalities, political disillusionment, Covid-19 traumas, and environmental angst continue to paint a bleak future for today's youth, contributing to a growing global mental health crisis. At the same time, Gen Z is proactively asserting their frustrations as they lead social justice and environmental activism, harnessing the power of online media to collaborate across geographies in driving change.

How might this impact heritage?

- What challenges might the heritage sector face in engaging Gens Z and Alpha, and showcasing its relevance to a forward-looking youth?
- What could a future heritage sector look like that is shaped by the values of today's youth?
- What risks might emerge from the use of heritage to support nostalgic escapism?

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BOTTOM-UP APPROACHES

Amidst mounting suspicion of top-down structures and 'expert'-driven approaches, grassroots initiatives continue to proliferate, empowering transformative action and creative problem-solving to enact change. Critiques of performative community involvement call for experts to not merely *consult* communities, but to transfer ownership and meaningful decision-making power.

How might this impact heritage?

- What might a future heritage praxis look like that integrates inclusive, co-creative practices into heritage conservation and management?
- What challenges might heritage professionals need to overcome to shift to new roles as listeners, connectors, and facilitators?
- What might be lost in rejecting 'authorised' heritage and technical expertise?

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Description

How might this impact heritage?

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TECHNOLOGICAL

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CYBERSECURITY THREATS

As we migrate more of our lives into the digital sphere, we can expect to see a rise in threats to cybersecurity. Premiums for institutional data protection services may become ever more costly, as hackers adopt new and effective methods to compromise digital operations and data.

How might this impact heritage?

- What threats might cybersecurity attacks pose to increasingly digital heritage operations and digital heritage collections?
- How will the intensity of cybersecurity threats, and abilities to respond to these, vary across the world?
- How can heritage organisations ensure that cybersecurity measures do not restrict the accessibility of heritage resources?

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI technologies (including generative AI tools like ChatGPT) are evolving faster than most predicted, and their application to solving problems across industry, research, and many facets of our daily lives will likely continue to accelerate — while also raising concerns about technology ethics, job displacement, and existential risk.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might AI change the nature of work within the heritage sector (considering, e.g., heritage conservation, research, and digitisation)?
- In a society saturated with AI, how might we engage with heritage in different ways?
- How should heritage institutions distinguish between 'inauthentic' AI-driven preservation and 'authentic' traditional methods?

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TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

Rapid advances in technology in the coming years will fundamentally alter the ways in which we live, work, and interact. These may include innovations in immersive and interactive experiences (VR/AR/MR, gamification, 3-D), integrated data management systems, and a greater focus on user-generated content and tools.

How might this impact heritage?

- What kinds of new technological tools may become available for conserving, managing, and consuming cultural heritage?
- What preservation challenges might the proliferation in both volume and diversity of born-/hybrid digital heritage bring?
- How might the sector ensure heritage institutions of all sizes have access to digital technologies?

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TECHNOLOGY ETHICS

Policymakers have been slow to regulate the limits of new technologies created and controlled by the private sector — technologies that currently fit profit- or surveillance-driven models. This is leading to growing ethical concerns over how exploitative technologies clash with public values such as transparency, privacy, co-creation, and accountability.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might the potential privatisation of heritage technologies and experiences impact the sector?
- What challenges could heritage organisations with public missions face in relying on digital services driven by private-sector values?
- How might the heritage sector benefit from alternative tech models that better centre humans and society (e.g., shared research infrastructures or crowd-sourcing platforms)?

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DIGITAL DIVIDE

A third of the world's population remains offline, defining digital divides that disproportionately impact developing countries, women, rural populations, and the elderly. While internet penetration and mobile connectivity are expected to expand globally, disparities may endure as technologies evolve in wealthy regions at an ever more rapid pace.

How might this impact heritage?

- Who in the global heritage sector will have access to technological tools as they emerge, and who will not?
- How might access to technologies dictate who has access to their heritage, and what are the consequences?
- How could different experiences of technology affect the heritage value of 'born digital' cultural artefacts?

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TECHNOLOGICAL

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How might this impact heritage?

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TECHNOLOGICAL

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How might this impact heritage?

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ENVIRONMENTAL

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GREEN CREDENTIALS

Global public opinion on the environment is shifting dramatically, particularly as global youth have positioned the environment as a primary concern. Stricter regulation and public favour may place pressure on businesses and organisations to publish reporting of environmental impact and carbon consumption, where failing to do so could lead to a loss of credibility and funding.

How might this impact heritage?

- If heritage and tourism are slow to centre sustainable practices, how might enhanced scrutiny affect public perceptions of heritage?
- Amid pressures towards carbon neutrality, which existing heritage practices might be shed and replaced by new sustainable ones?
- What could happen if 'greenwashing' (making false claims about sustainability efforts to boost public image) in the heritage sector erodes public trust in its green reporting?

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SEA LEVEL RISE & EXTREME WEATHER

The next decades will see the impacts of sea level rise and extreme temperatures/weather events felt in every corner of the world, leaving many poorer communities and regions most vulnerable. These may progressively disrupt economies and geopolitics, and threaten communities' homes, livelihoods, food systems, and more.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might communities, their livelihoods, and their heritage be entangled in adaptations to sea level rise and extreme weather?
- How will the inevitable loss of heritage shape conservation practice? What might inform decisions to prioritise or let go of heritage?
- What previously unimagined opportunities could emerge from heritage loss (e.g., new markets for underwater heritage tourism)?

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BIODIVERSITY LOSS

With nearly half of all species experiencing declining population sizes, further anthropogenic degradation of land and marine ecosystems could lead to the accelerated loss of biodiversity. This could cause damaging impacts on economic stability; viral disease control; and many communities' sources of food, clean air / water, and healthcare.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might the roles of heritage institutions, including collecting institutions, evolve as 'lost' biodiversity becomes a past memory?
- How will biodiversity loss alter the cultural practices and traditions tied to specific species or landscapes, including many traditional or Indigenous knowledge systems?
- What steps might heritage institutions take to minimise their contribution to biodiversity loss?

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NATURE–CULTURE LINKAGE

Conceptual divisions between the natural and human realms are progressively blurring as we see growing acceptance that human societies and the natural world are deeply interconnected. This shift is manifesting, for instance, in a focus on changing societal behaviors to solve the climate crisis.

How might this impact heritage?

- What are potential benefits and challenges of widespread adoption of a more holistic culture–nature approach to heritage?
- How might heritage conservation principles evolve in relation to changing environmental conservation practice?
- What might be the consequences of continued exclusion of cultural/heritage aspects from environmental protection practices (e.g., Indigenous knowledge and customs)?

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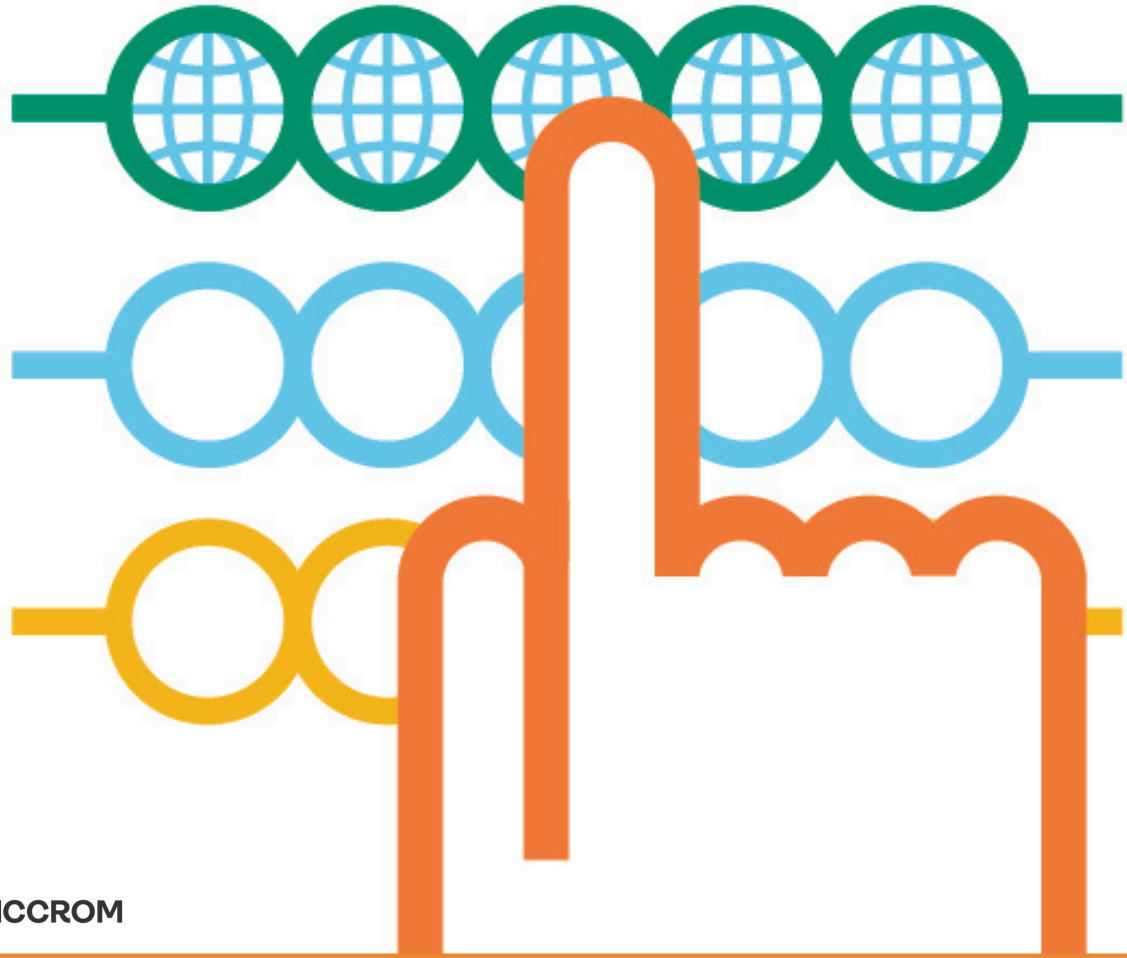

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REDUCED PUBLIC FUNDING

Driven by ongoing inflation, high costs of living, rising inequality, and global economic uncertainty, economic policies are likely to undergo significant upheaval. Significant reductions in available public funds could lead policymakers to prioritise funding to critical areas such as public health, defense, and economic stimulus.

How might this impact heritage?

- What challenges might the heritage sector face if public budget allocations for culture and heritage suffer?
- How might the work of heritage professionals change due to budget cuts (e.g., specialists become generalists)?
- What innovative financing instruments could emerge for heritage, e.g., adaptive reuse of heritage assets, crowdsourced funding, or impact investing?

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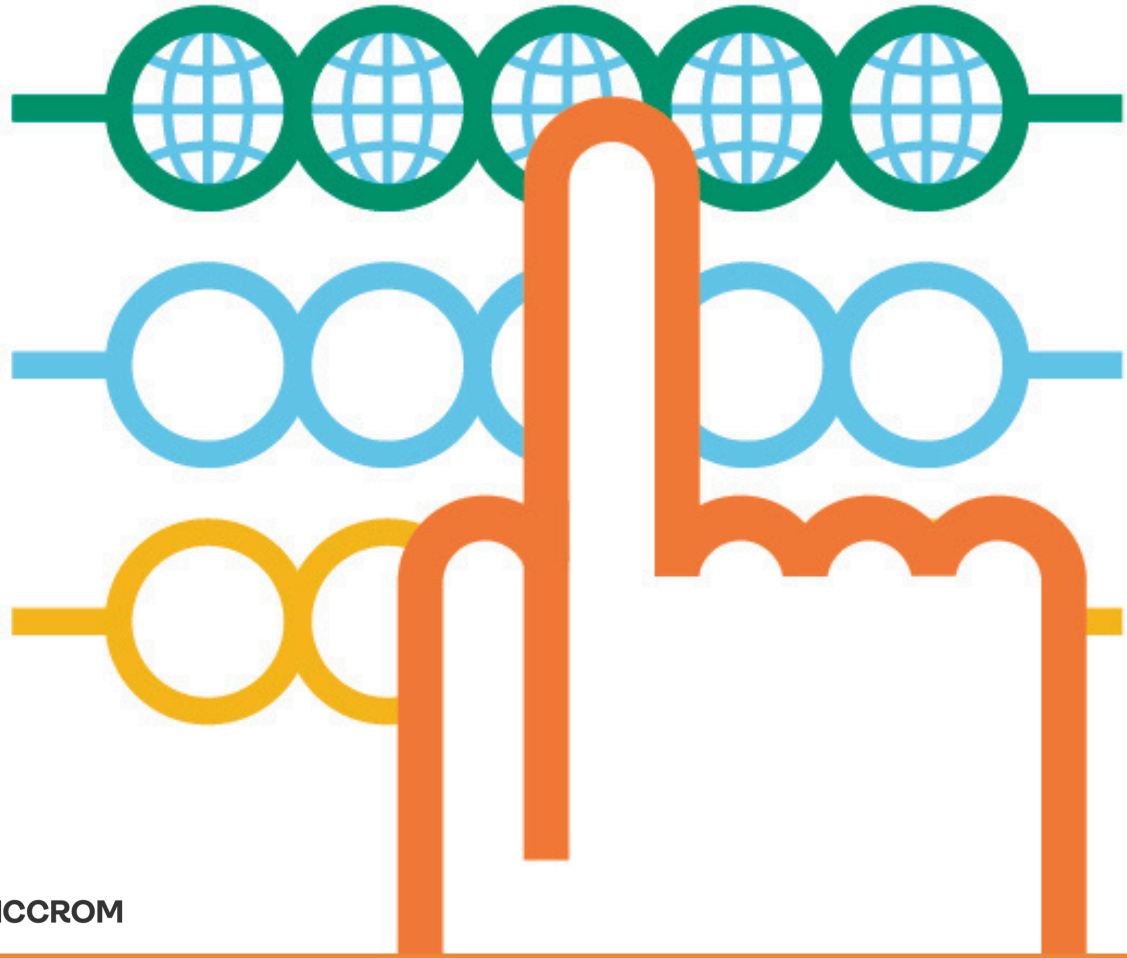

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TOURISM

Global tourism has nearly bounced back to pre-pandemic levels and continues to grow, while pressures mount over growing recognition of tourism's negative impacts on local communities and the environment. Future regulation may make tourism increasingly expensive and the preserve of the privileged.

How might this impact heritage?

- How would the continued growth of tourism at current rates impact heritage conservation and management?
- How might scrutiny over unsustainable heritage tourism practices change attitudes towards heritage, particularly World Heritage?
- How would the growth of more sustainable forms of tourism impact cultural and natural heritage sites (e.g., slow travel, eco- / rural / agri-tourism, virtual tourism)?

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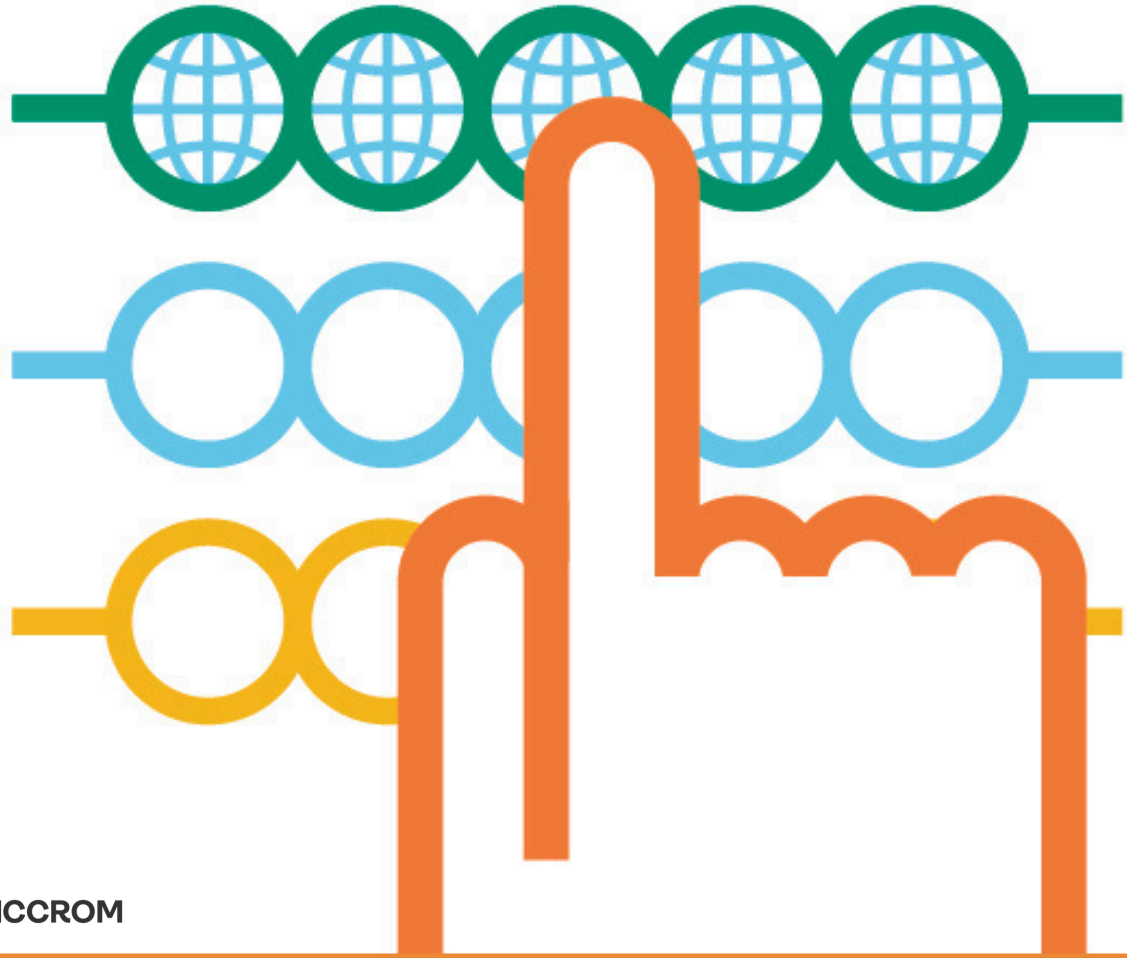

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ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC MODELS

Mounting critiques of a degenerative global economy premised on growth and inequality has produced various alternative economic models centred on greater social and environmental sustainability. While yet to be widely adopted, models such as circular, social, and wellbeing economies that focus on regenerative, inclusive wealth are gaining 'currency' among governments.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might a circular economic approach be applied to heritage management and conservation, and how might this change the nature of heritage?
- If governments shift focus from economic growth towards societal wellbeing, what might change for the heritage sector?
- What challenges might the aggressive privatisation and commodification of heritage around the world pose for its conservation?

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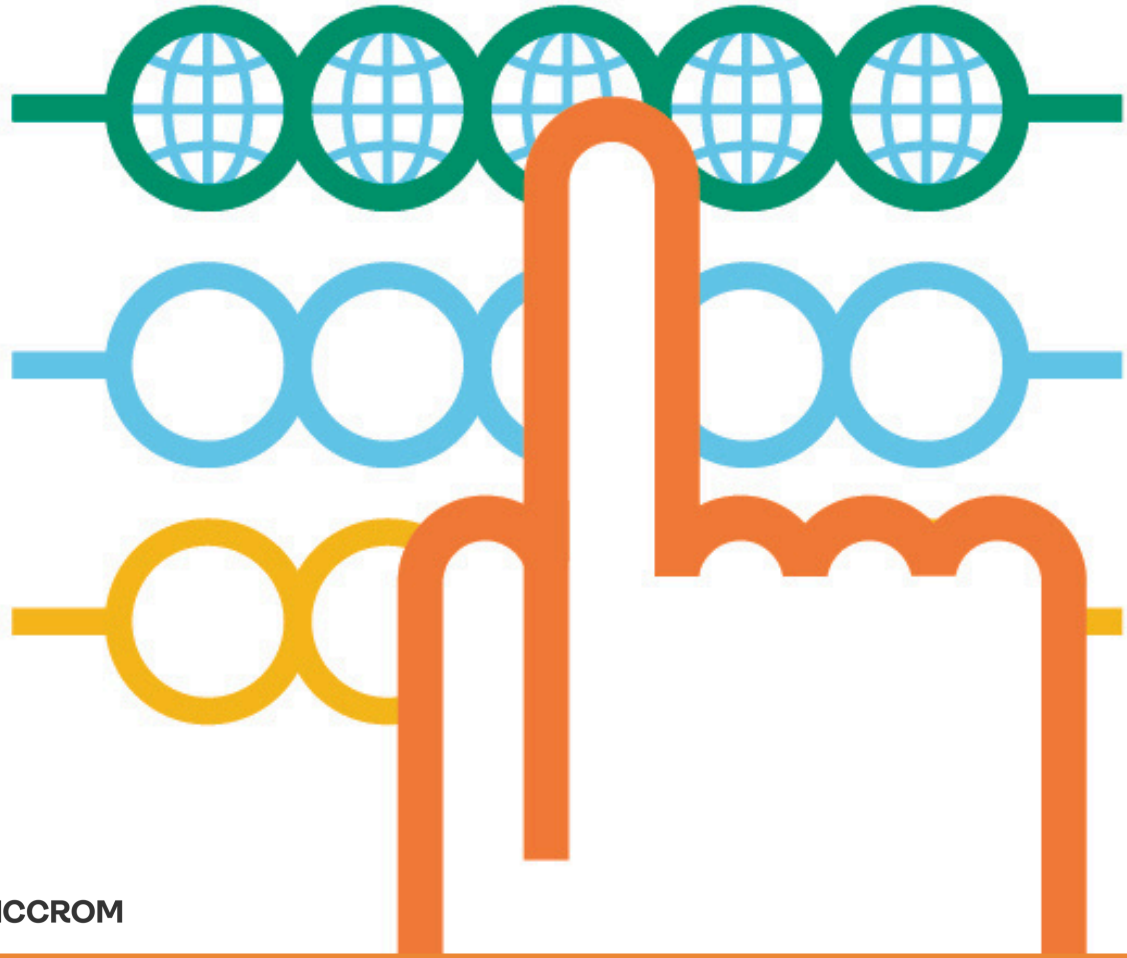

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OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

Driven by competition for public and private funds, and greater focus on transparency and accountability, there is a growing demand for organisations to provide evidence on the effectiveness of their activities. Evidencing impact — e.g., through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), impact assessments, and Theory of Change — is likely to become an essential function of organisational programming.

How might this impact heritage?

- What challenges might heritage organisations face in shifting from traditional measures of impact like visitor numbers, to measuring their impact on society?
- How might a focus on outcome accountability change how heritage organisations plan and operate, for better or for worse?
- How would things change for the heritage sector if a holistic tool emerged for evidencing the complex benefits of heritage?

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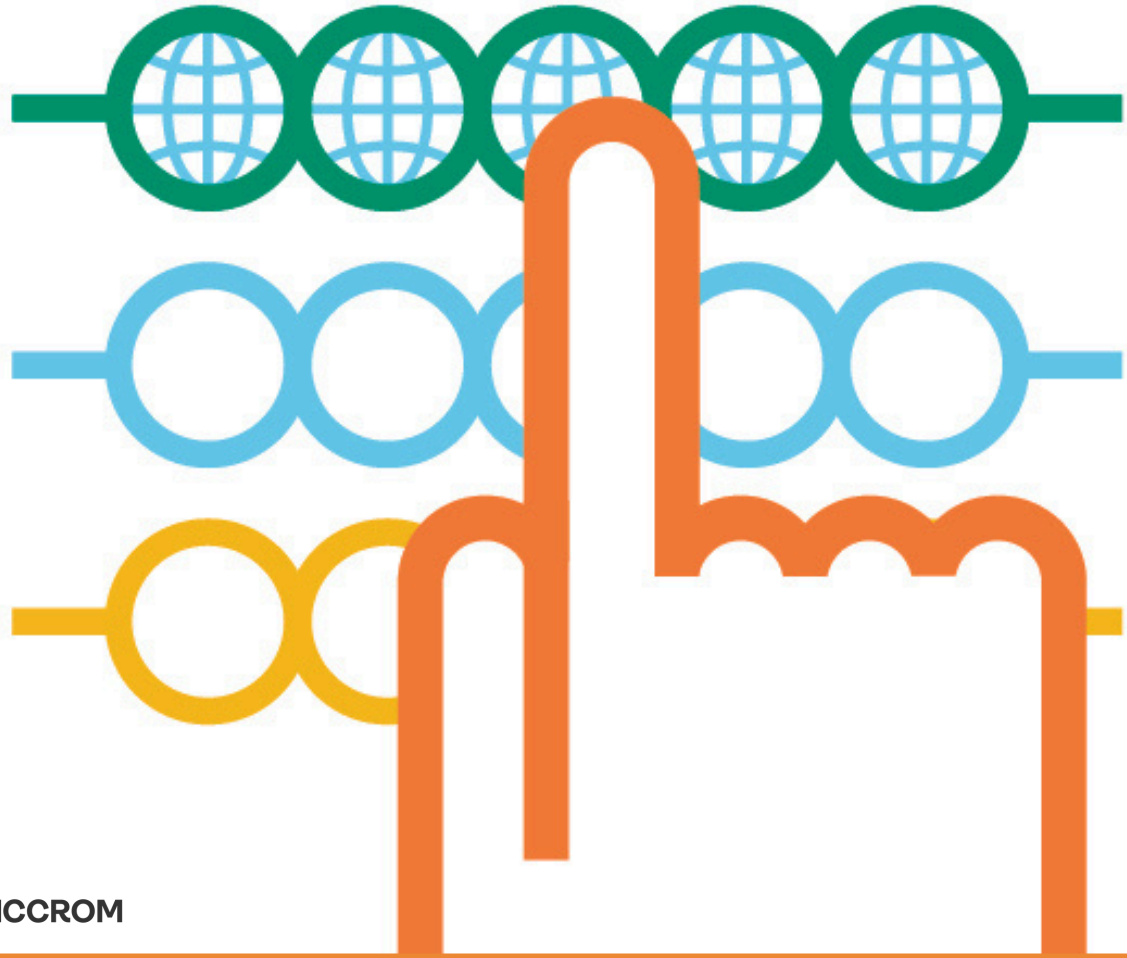

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SHRINKING WORKFORCE

Automation is expected to bring productivity gains and innovations that fundamentally change the nature of employment. The future might see the polarisation of workforce dynamics as routine work is trivialised and new, higher-skill jobs emerge; governments may instate a universal basic income to address anticipated unemployment.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might automation change the nature of work and services in the heritage sector?
- How might heritage take on new and different meanings in a potential future where people work less and search for alternative forms of meaning and fulfilment?
- What role might cultural heritage play in promoting occupations that are uniquely creative and human-centric?

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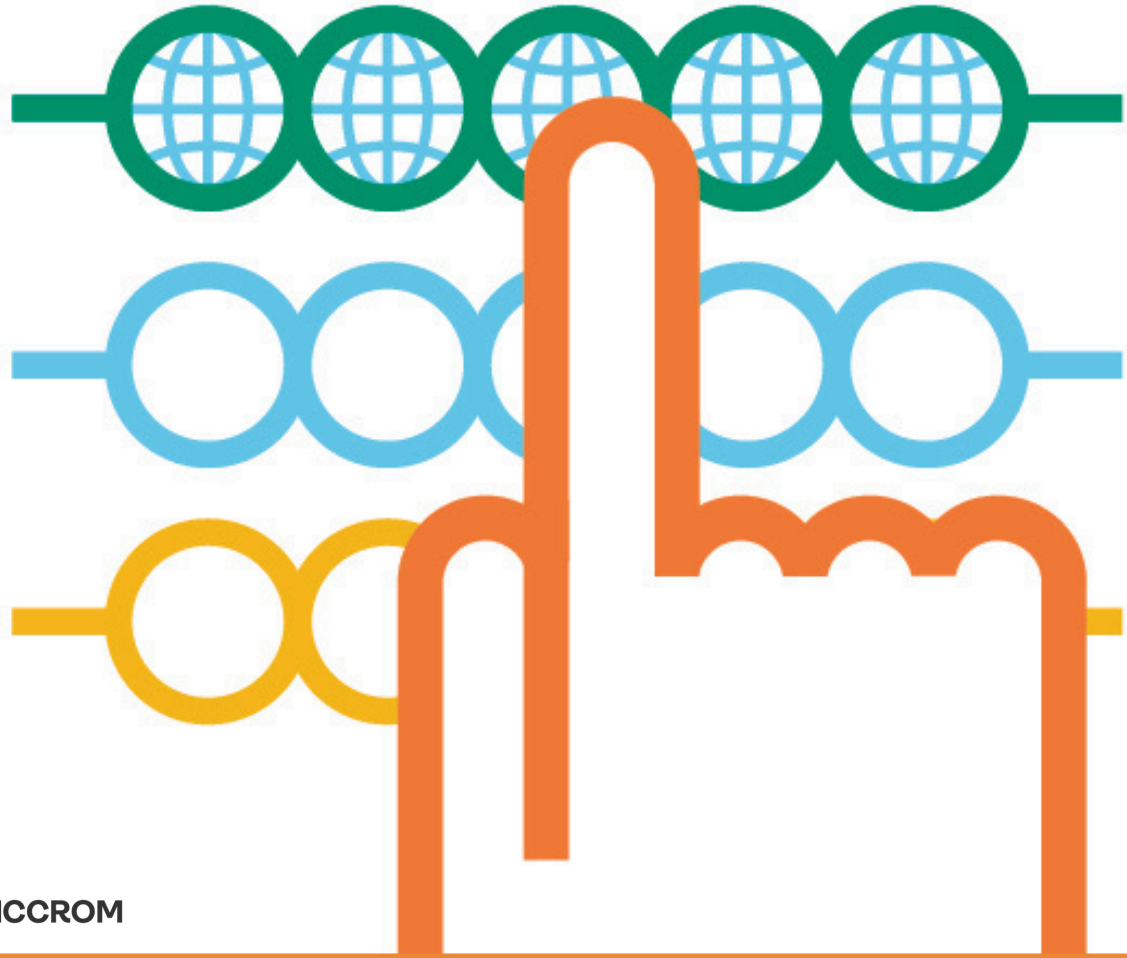

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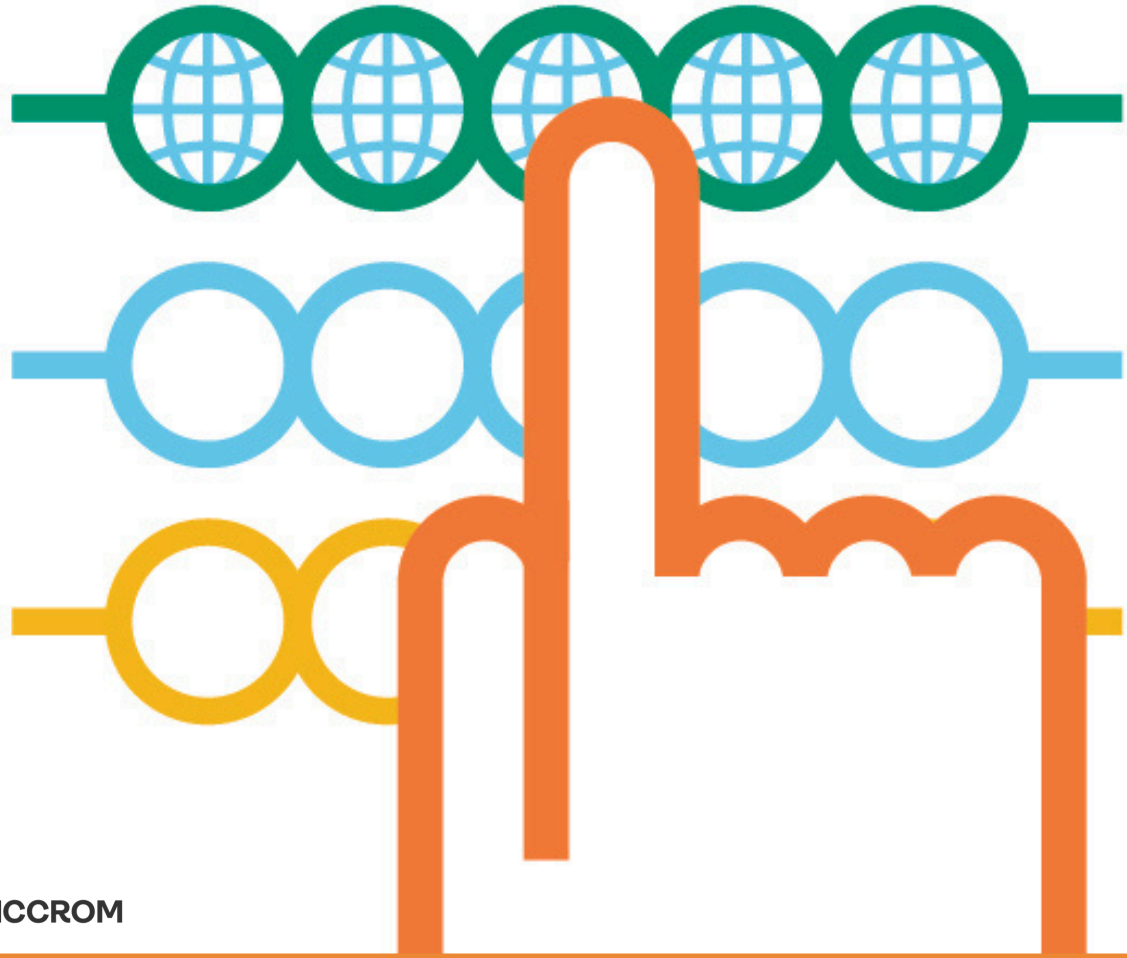

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How might this impact heritage?

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POLITICAL

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DECLINING MULTILATERALISM

Isolationist foreign policies and growing skepticism of international cooperation may threaten the future of global multilateralism, with global challenges and disputes increasingly addressed through bilateral agreements, unilateral actions, and regional alliances.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might the credibility and influence of international heritage organisations, and States Parties' engagement with international initiatives, be impacted?
- How might this alter concepts of a global heritage?
- What would heritage initiatives organised around shared regional ambitions and worldviews look like?

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POLITICAL

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GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS

As shifting global geopolitics — particularly towards emerging superpowers in the Indo-Pacific — reshuffle global power balances and spheres of influence, we may see new alliances, tensions, and armed conflicts, and potentially some rising regional actors or 'middle powers' playing important mediating roles.

How might this impact heritage?

- In what ways might heritage be centred within new and emerging geopolitical conflicts?
- Which populations/regions may have a greater say in global heritage debates and decisions, and which might remain on the margins?
- What role might heritage play within cultural diplomacy as a bridge for reconciliation and dialogue?

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RISING INEQUALITIES

Disparities of wealth, health, education, and employment between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' continue to reach new extremes, leading to greater tensions and social fracturing across intersections of nationality, race, gender, class, and sexuality.

How might this impact heritage?

- What risks does the potential elite privatisation of heritage pose, e.g., regarding heritage commodification, exclusion, and waning perceptions of heritage as a public good?
- How will rising inequalities affect marginalised and oppressed peoples' cultural rights?
- How might growing discontentment with global inequalities drive change in the heritage sphere?

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As international cooperation increasingly aligns its objectives to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the coming years mark a period in which governments and NGOs will rally to determine what sustainable development efforts will look like post-2030.

How might this impact heritage?

- To what extent might heritage be recognised for its contributions (or detriments) to environmental and social sustainability?
- What are the stakes if culture and heritage are marginalised in the post-2030 agenda?
- How would recognition in the post-2030 agenda change the heritage sector's work and objectives?

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POLITICAL

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POLARISATION & EXTREMISM

Triggered by changing demographics and resource shortages, rising populism and nationalism around the world may fuel highly charged political rhetoric and conspiracy theories. These trends, which threaten to compromise civic trust and erode liberal democracy, are increasingly challenged by grassroots activism.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might heritage be exploited in new or different ways as a tool to extend the political interests of nations and groups?
- To what extent might 'authorised' narratives seek to maintain the neutrality of heritage within politically polarised contexts?
- What sorts of grassroots efforts might seek to counter the politicisation of heritage — e.g., through a focus on the shared heritage of small-scale experiences of daily life?

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POLITICAL

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DIMINISHING EUROCENTRISM

Ongoing efforts to dismantle the bureaucratic, economic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological legacies of colonial power have placed immense scrutiny on the Eurocentric perspectives that govern much of today's world. Efforts to decolonise institutions, narratives, and knowledge are making way to recognise a plurality of knowledge systems, worldviews, and rights of Indigenous, marginalised, and subaltern groups.

How might this impact heritage?

- How might 'universal' heritage ideals be contested and reconfigured in the future?
- How might public opinion evolve surrounding contested colonial heritage and repatriation?
- What sorts of experiences, media, and values might be incorporated into the cultural heritage of 2035 — and what heritage and heritage values might be let go of?

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POLITICAL

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How might this impact heritage?

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