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# Micro-folie: A new frontier of museum digitalization

(doi: 10.7390/108971)

Aedon (ISSN 1127-1345)

Fascicolo 2, maggio-agosto 2023

**Ente di afferenza:**

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## Testimonianze

### Micro-folie: A new frontier of museum digitalization

di [Giulia Artoni](#) [\*]

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**Keywords:** micro-colie; digital museum; network; rural areas

This report illustrates a new French digital museum model called Micro-Folie and its social and educational implications. Micro-Folie's founding concept is to make the collections of the great French national museums accessible to the public through digital technologies with the aim of creating a free interdisciplinary space for the community, based on art and culture.

**Keywords:** micro-colie; digital museum; network; rural areas.

#### 1. Introduction

In recent years, the art field has been pushing strongly toward the full-scale adoption of digital technologies to enhance the user experience. The success of internet-based communication in the art field has prompted the increasing adoption of the web in creating new types of art and valorizing heritage.

The overcoming of technology in art brought a new effort to develop novel art tools. This work analyzed the most relevant traits of this development by focusing on the French experience of the Micro-Folie digital museum model.

The cultural project of the Micro-Folie is an innovative concept that embodies a digital museum and other multidisciplinary spaces.

The objective of the Micro Folie is to create a free interdisciplinary space for the community based on art and culture. This aspect encourages people to participate in their nation's artistic development and educates them on critical thinking and social consciousness.

Another objective of the Micro-Folie is to tackle social inequalities. To do so, they are installed in rural places far from the big cities, outer suburbs, or poor areas. For this reason, the Micro-Folie thus becomes a true cultural network of proximity, able to animate rural areas and popular districts.

Important is the concept behind the Micro-Folie: make available to the public, via digital technologies, the collections of major French and international museums.

By projecting ultra-high-definition images on screens and tablets, the French artistic heritage seems closer and more accessible. Digital cultural development is the perfect environment that enables and supports the idea of a French digital museum model, which is the building block of a Micro-Folie. Furthermore, the Micro-Folie is enabled by digital transformation since it entirely relies on devices such as computers and tablets.

This physical and virtual cultural space, which promotes art, innovation, and personal creativity is promoted by the State, funded by the French Ministry of Culture, and supported by the Parisian public institution La Villette.

The Micro-Folies are economical devices, simple to install, that give the communities in which they are installed, a space of conviviality and knowledge sharing in the name of art.

The importance of this project was highlighted during the French presidency of the Council of the European Union, where it was mentioned among the cultural events promoted by the EU decision-making body.

The ambition is to create a unified network between the different Micro-Folies born in France and other countries of the world, expanding more and more this project of cultural and digital democratization.

#### 2. The project

The concept of Micro-Folie was born under the impetus of Audrey Azoulay, French Minister of Culture, now General Director of Unesco, and coordinated by the public body managing both the park and the Grande Halle of La Villette in Paris. This digital museum network brings together twelve major cultural institutions [1], and it's designed as a cultural venue that is global, modular, connected, and accessible. Its spaces allow visitors a wide range of options, such as browsing the digital collections of the leading national museums with the help of connected screens and mediation devices, hosting shows of all kinds, and encouraging exchanges between artists, local associations, mediators, and

inhabitants.

The idea of Micro-Folies was born as the ideal extension of three existing projects: Café Europa concerning the scenography, the monumental screen, the *Folies* of Bernard Tschumi in the Parc de La Villette in Paris [2] as regards the architectural structure, and the Maison Folies [3] for the relationship with the territory and urban space, especially for the peripheral location. Three projects, born in different moments and contexts, sharing similar intentions: to exploit digital innovation, revitalize peripheral areas of cities or small villages, and stimulate and bring people closer to culture.

A Micro-Folie is a free device that offers cultural, playful, and technological content that can be installed in all existing places. It can be built into an existing structure or integrated into a new program. Micro-Folie must reach as diverse an audience as possible, federate local players, and spread throughout the area. It can also complement and reinforce pre-existing cultural dynamics or rely on artists present in the area. In addition to the Digital Museum, which is at the heart of the project, each Micro-Folie can also integrate complementary modules according to the needs of the area concerned, existing structures, and links with local initiatives: a social space that can materialize, for example, through the creation of an associative bar or an area dedicated to children with the highlighting of specific local contents (wealth of patrimonial territory, gastronomy, etc.); a scenic space; a media library/games library; a coworking space; a workshop/FabLab space; a cinema/virtual reality space; an outdoor area [4].

Currently, there are one hundred and forty-five Micro-Folies installed in France, divided as follows: six in Corsica and eight in the various overseas territories in French Guiana, Guadelupe, Réunion, Saint Pierre, and Miquelon. Not limited to France itself, the Micro-Folie has also been transported outside the nation into the French institutes, in the Alliances françaises, or the international cultural institutions. Currently, twenty-eight Micro-Folies have been installed outside the French territory (Ivory Coast, United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Jordan, Turkey, Brazil, Colombia, Turkey, New Caledonia, Egypt, Peru, Maurice, Italy, Belgium, Uruguay, Canada, United States, China, Canada, Burma, Romania, and Iraq).

2022 was a significant year for the development of this project. After two years of difficulties and delays caused by the Covid 19 emergency, many new Micro-Folies opened. A significant boost to this cultural project was given by the France Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the semester of January-June 2022. The Micro-Folies project, conceived by the Ministry of Culture, was one of the cultural events promoted by this Presidency. Within the framework of the French presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Micro-Folie project expanded and saw the birth of two crucial initiatives: a "Micro-Folie Mobile" and the inclusion of a new more European collection in the digital museum of Micro-Folie [5].

One of the interesting aspects of Micro-Folie is the idea of giving access to culture without generating transport flows. As a side effect, installing Micro-Folie in areas far from urban centers causes a decrease in carbon dioxide and other pollutants in the atmosphere caused by the lower impact of transport. The environmental sustainability of the activities, and here, in particular, the activities related to the Micro-Folie, is an action strongly linked to the protection of the environment and to the attention that today is placed on climate change. These good practices are among the objectives that the European Commission has set itself to achieve the reduction of emissions: reduce emissions by half by 2030 and the zero emissions target for 2050. The Micro-Folie device thus fits into a future perspective of local virtual tourism, linked to the logic of savings, which will affect the policies of all states in the coming years.

### 3. Conclusions

With its technical and cultural specifications, the Micro-Folie is proposed as a device that breaks down the digital divide, allowing guided and free access to digital to all who do not have this opportunity daily. Considering that this access involves artistic and cultural issues, we cannot agree that it is not only a device for social development but also an educational one.

This device has implications for the issue of environmental sustainability, thanks to its formulation allowing for to reduce costs and polluting inputs. That is why it would be desirable for this museum model not to be limited to the French territory but also to be considered by other countries.

This article aims to demonstrate how the Micro-Folie digital museum device can overcome social and educational inequalities. After careful analysis, it can be argued that the Micro-Folie allows all those with economic difficulties or educational deficiencies to come into contact with the French artistic heritage free of discrimination and prejudice.

This analysis is not intended to be exhaustive; it is one of the first in-depth studies in the field of Micro-Folie. It contributes to studying the positive implications of these innovative devices on culture; many aspects can be developed from this research.

### Note

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[1] Centre Pompidou, Louvre, Musée d'Orsay, Château de Versailles, Cité de la Musique-Philharmonie de Paris, Musée National Picasso-Paris, Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Opéra National de Paris, Festival d'Avignon, Institut du monde arabe, Réunion des musées nationaux-Grand Palais, Universcience.

[2] <https://www.tschumi.com/projects/104>.

[3] <https://vpah-hauts-de-france.fr/ressources/le-concept-de-maison-folie/>.

[4] D. Fusillier, *Rendre la culture accessible dns tous les territoires grâce au numérique*, in *Réalités Industrielles*, Février 2022, pagg 58-60.

[5] <https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20221120094515/https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/>.