

# DECOLONISING MUSEUMS: THE CASE OF AFRICAN DISPLAYS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. *What are the latest trends for decolonising museums?*
2. *How can applying these trends to Dominican museums improve the relationship between Dominicans and their own past?*



## BACKGROUND

When we look at Dominican museums, we see a great disparity between how Indigenous and European legacy are represented and how African legacy is not represented. In the few cases where we see African representation in museum displays, it is either related to slavery (left image), shown hidden behind a wall (bottom right image), or displayed as folkloric or religious 'rare' cases, reinforcing the detachment between Dominican population today and this 'Other' that is shown as something from the past. Museums being a place of self-reflection and learning, this misrepresentation and invisibility of African legacy contributes to the misinformation, discrimination and racism present in the local population. Therefore, my aim is to see to what extent decolonising museums can change the narrative.

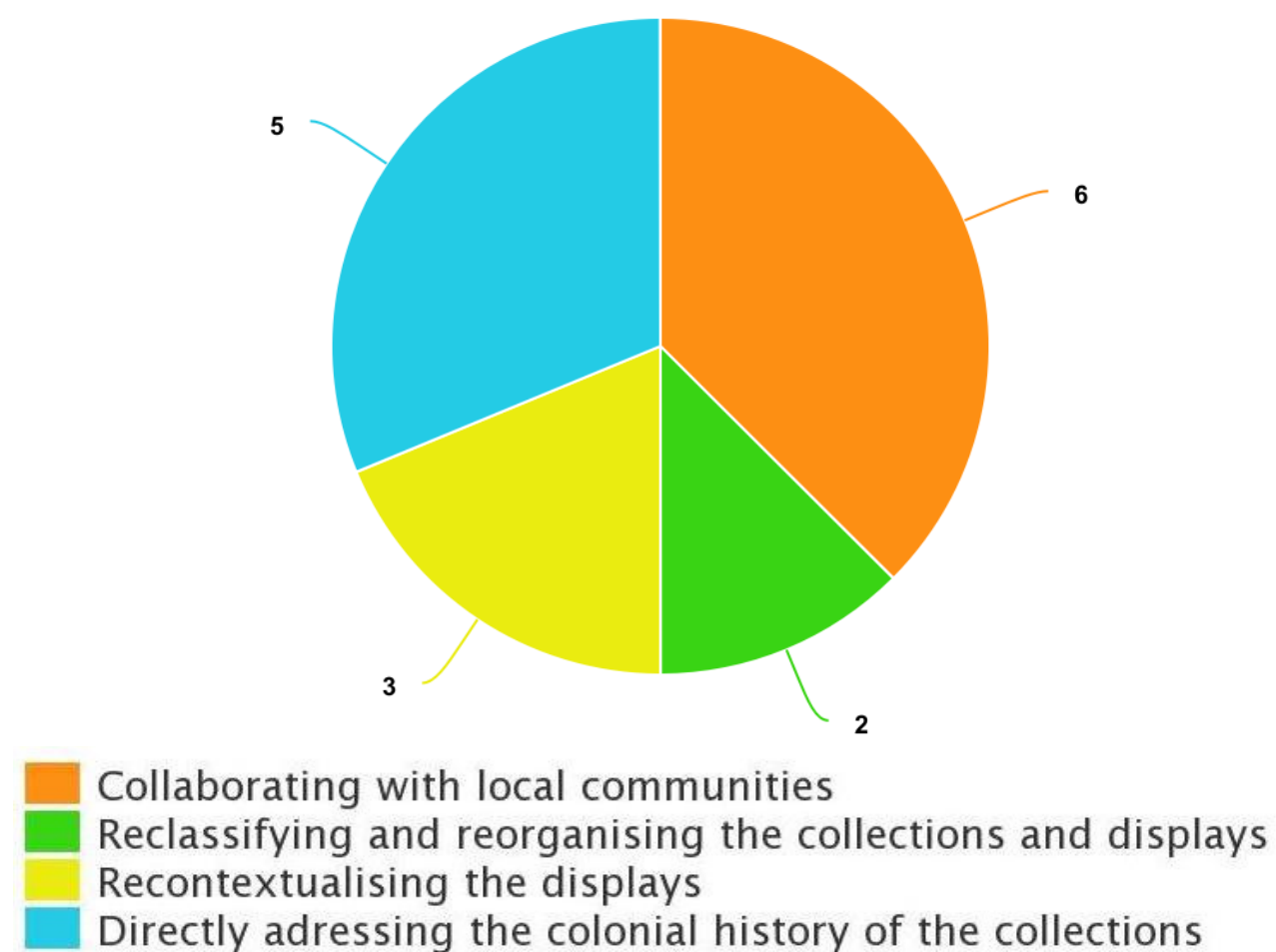
## METHODOLOGY

After reviewing the latest trends for decolonising museums both from indigenous and diaspora perspectives, I have documented the displays and collections of 16 museums in the Dominican Republic to see which of these methods would work best in each museum. Afterwards, I interviewed the guides, curators and directors of some of these museums to understand what would be the main constraints and how we could get past them.

## RESULTS

Despite the low representation of African legacy in the country compared to the Indigenous or European legacy, the museum world is not unaware of this lack of representation, but simply focused in other subjects. Most museums communicated they would welcome these changes, but for the moment they do not have the funds or staff to do it, so do not consider it a priority. The most reluctant to this process were the museums that need to reclassify and reorganise their displays as they would need more drastic changes from the definition of their institution to changing their whole display.

Proposed decolonial methodologies based on the museums' current display and the potential of their collections.



## NEXT STEP

While these trends for decolonising museums have worked well in other countries, the next step for Dominican museums will be putting them into practice. The easiest way to start and get past the constraints is collaboration: collaborating with local communities to exchange knowledge and collaborating with authorities, companies and activists to get funding for the next steps.

