Educational Chances for Cultural Expressions out of the New Technologies: EU Policies and the Case of Contexts in Archaeology

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ABSTRACT

The European Commission faced the subject of educational relation between new media technologies and expressions of culture in order to adopt pondered policies. This article reports on the proceedings of an Open Method of Coordination Working Group, whose task has been to study the synergies between education and culture, regarding the new methods of artistic and cultural education provided by new technologies. By illustrating the debate on Media Literacy across Europe, it shows the specific recommendations expressed by the Group. Special focus is given on the educational application of new technologies to cultural heritage. By using this paratextual tool society could improve comprehension. As happened during a workshop of the Working Group, this paper focuses on the educational significance of using archaeological contexts. The necessary mental attitude to imagine and reconstruct past exteriorities involves a lot of contexts, above all the virtual one.

Keywords: Archaeology, Cultural Heritage, Culture, Education, European Commission, ICT, Media Literacy, New Media, New Technology

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

Should we consider Homer a more sublime poet if he had cut his rhymes on wax? Or Cicero a more clever lawyer if he could have had his pleadings typewritten? And would Shakespeare’s plays be greater if never acted at the Globe but spread over the Internet? Would those authors have had better inspirations if helped by better technologies?

And more: is computer art placed on a higher step in Art History than Middle Ages frescoes? Does an ancient monument have more importance when integrated by a virtual reconstruction?

Answers are very easy. Technology never improves the inner quality of cultural expressions (i.e., the art production or the testimonies of the past), but it can help their understanding. This is, of course, an educational action.

The debate on the role of new technologies, as media of cultural education, is deeply felt in Europe. We all know that Europe is one of the...
parts of the world where landscape has literally been built by human culture, and the past arises and stands by all citizens, so that cultural education also strongly means understanding the place where a person lives. The European Commission recognized that it was necessary to address a specific situation.

Two concepts animated educational policies on culture and their expressions: one centered on the visit that sees cultural institutions (museums, theaters, etc.) designed as public facilities presenting works or performances, and another aimed at getting young people to know artistic activities, by making them learn a musical instrument or attend dance/theater lessons out of school hours, or even during school hours, and participate in arts laboratories under the supervision of teachers and, more rarely, artists. Yet, young people get their access to culture neither by guided visits and matinées for schools nor by amateur artistic activities. The most effective tools are motionless vectors, strongly concentrated on the consumption of goods produced by the cultural industries and widely spread on the web, as evidenced by the success of digital platforms, which allow youngest people to present their own works easily. The web is shaping a new relationship with culture that undermines the old vertical transmission, which ranged from teachers, considered authoritative or merely authoritarian, to rather passive recipients. Now the transmission is horizontal and occurs in networks. Permanent interactions are emerging, leading to new forms of art and use of cultural manifestations.

The European Commission faced this complexity and promoted, inside the European Agenda for Culture, the “Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Working Group on developing synergies with education, especially arts education,” whose final report has been passed on June, 2010 (Lauret & Marie, 2010). A significant part was dedicated to the role of new technologies, and on December 17-18, 2009, a meeting was held in Genshagen Castle, Germany, in form of workshop about “New Media - New ways of art and cultural education in Europe” (Table 1) (Lauret & Marie, 2010, p. 56).

A preliminary paper recognized that:

- Most classic cultural and educational institutions are neither technologically nor
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