Chapter 4
Multimedia Experiences for Cultural Heritage

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ABSTRACT

The chapter analyzes, with particular regard to the Italian context, the aspects related to the fruition of cultural heritage and to the expectations of the potential public. There is often a lack of adequate media for communication, which should create interest in a non-specialist public. Multimedia and interactive technologies can be a valuable support to enhance internal and external communication for museums and cultural sites, reaching a wide audience in a differentiated and customized manner depending on their interests. The aim is to understand the link between the work of art and the geographical, physical, historical, and cultural context in which it was born, to open the horizon to a synoptic and organic understanding of heritage, contributing to its protection and educating citizens. Finally, a case study concerning the museum and territory of Mondragone (Italy) is presented.

INTRODUCTION

The total difference between the supports for communication and learning used especially by younger people and the didactic supports usually used in cultural sites makes it appear unattractive and difficult to understand archaeological sites, museums, exhibitions organized according to a traditional approach, without attention to a communication policy able to reach and interest a wide audience. This is the major challenge of the future, particularly in a context, such as the Italian one, where cultural sites are so widespread that they are largely unknown by the wide

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public. Moreover, in Italy, compared to the great foreign museums, the attention to these aspects is arrived late and is not organically coordinated on the territory, often carried out on the initiative of a single museum or to the maximum of a single regional ambiance.

New technologies are the most suitable instrument to make the exhibits talk about their past with the typical methods of the multimedia and integrated communication to which the public has grown accustomed in every other context of the everyday life. Too often instead, the lack of didactic supports and an overly technical language makes it difficult to comprehend, and therefore to appreciate them by a non-specialist audience.

For some years, more attention has been devoted to these issues, and new professional figures are involved in the design of cultural products according to various meanings: the design of pathways from the point of view of the usability and aesthetics, the shared management, the graphic and visual design. The concept of fruition has also expanded to include not only the accessibility of a site, but also the possibility to understand the objects observed. It has also included the study of virtual access modes where the physical accessibility is precluded for different reasons.

This attitude is evident from the recommendations issued by the organizations dealing with the enhancement of the cultural heritage.

The ICOM’s ethical code in the museum’s definition also focuses on communication-related aspects. “A museum is a permanent, non-profit institution serving the society and its development. It is open to the public and conducts research on material and immaterial testimonies of humanity and its environment: acquires, preserving, communicates and, above all, exhibits them for study, education and pleasure.” (ICOM, 2004).

ICOMOS documents also highlight the importance of communication with the public as an essential element of the process of conservation and management of cultural heritage, recognizing that each act of conservation is implicitly a communication act, since it presupposes a choice about what to preserve and above all how to present the preserved objects to the public. “Presentation specifically concerns a planned communication of an interpretative content by collecting information of the same nature through physical access to the cultural heritage site. It can be transmitted through various technical means, including elements ranging from information panels to a museum presentation, from recommended itineraries to conferences, guided tours and multimedia applications.” (ICOMOS, 2008).

According to ICOMOS, the principles on which the interpretation and presentation should be based, are unrelatedly with the used medium, which may vary by choosing from time to time the most effective and appropriate one, in relation to the specific context. In all cases, it should facilitate understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage sites and promote public awareness and commitment for their protection and
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