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Raising awareness of population groups and increasing educational tourism

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Introduction

Over the last decades, the relationship between museums and their audiences has undergone an important change as visitors are able, with the use of technologies, to dynamically engage in, interpret and re-interpret museum exhibits, thereby improving their museum experience and the access to their cultural heritage. Virtual and augmented reality technologies provide an ideal and appealing presentation of museum exhibits while allowing different audiences to access and interact in an engrossing way with a large number of digitized objects scattered in different museum collections. The application of such participatory practices has the effect of transforming the museum into a meeting place of diverse, complex voices that dynamically express the diversity and complexity of modern societies (Hutchison, 2013). The main objective of this study is to show how the use of new technologies at the University of Crete's Museum of Education (MoE) can provoke the active participation of visitors in shaping their cultural experience in an interactive, reflective and playful way. It will explore the possibility of the online museum as an "open community" to involve its audience in all museum functions and transform it into an active subject that co-shapes its cultural identity (Cerquetti, 2016: 33)

The digital museum in the 21st century: ‘an attractive space’ for its visitors

The contribution of culture and, above all, cultural heritage as a factor of social cohesion, emerges as one of the most important challenges for 21st century societies. The recognition and understanding of different profiles, needs and cultural characteristics of each visitor are highlighted as hierarchical points in the planning of a regular development of a museum's audience. In this direction, it is noted that many museums are planning actions that will provide visitors with satisfying experiences, meet their expectations, activate them, and stimulate them to develop an interactive relationship with the exhibits/objects of the museum, which will affect their motivations, behaviors and their perceptions regarding the material and intangible evidence of their cultural heritage

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Museums, in trying to respond to new data are called upon to redefine their role and develop practices based on modern values and aim at social justice. They abandon traditional exhibition concepts, where the museum exhibition was linear and predefined, and they adopt a modern visitor center approach. In this approach, visitors are placed at the heart of the museum narrative, acquire an active role, communicate with the exhibits, give their own interpretations by activating experiences and memories of the culture from which they come from. Through this process they re-create their identity, as, by studying the evidence of the material of culture, they give meaning to the world around them. In this way, the museum objects become multimedia codes, multi-minded bodies, who can tell many stories, inviting people to reflect on issues related to their collective and cultural identity. Such an understanding confirms the philosopher's claim, Jacques Derrida (1972: 14), that "meanings can never be in a fixed and unchanging system."

In recent years, a dynamic introduction of digital media and innovative digital applications has been observed in museums based on new information and communication technologies that enable the electronic management of museum information. In this way, museum visitors can use digital systems to create or edit exhibits, which enhances interaction and their museum experience and at the same time strengthens the educational role of museums. The exhibits are approached as learning objects that facilitate and make learning attractive and critical, and the traditional museum example is transformed into a dynamic social museum-cultural message (Hogsden, & Poulter, 2012: 266).

The important role that digitization plays in the initiative of preserving and disseminating cultural heritage and encouraging educational tourism is highlighted by the European Union's eEurope 2002 Action Plan and is summarized in DigiCult 2003 (Digital Heritage and Digital Content): "Digitization contributes conservation and preservation of cultural heritage and scientific resources, creates new educational opportunities, can be used to encourage tourism and provides ways to improve citizens access to their heritage "(Hadžić, 2004: 74).

According to Borowiecki and Navarrete (2017:227), the adoption of new technologies and the publication of digital collections of cultural institutions can provide access to the whole world and thus release an untapped wealth of knowledge.

As can be seen from the above, the digitized cultural heritage becomes a channel for the development of thematic tourism (in our case the educational). High-quality information provided through digital systems enables the visitor to interact with the historical/cultural heritage of the site he/she visits, to interpret, and to acquire important features of his/her cultural and historical heritage (Gulnara et al., 2015).

Sometimes museums feel fearful or embarrassed to dynamically and effectively use digital social media, as this would deprive their physical interlocutors (Hogsden &

Poulter, 2012: 282-283). If the museum wants to preserve its prestige in online 'time zones', it will have to redefine its role in relation to its audience by adopting the 'many-to-many' model (Kelly, 2013: 54-74). The exploitation of digital media can help the museum environment to act as a digital "contact zone" that enables the museum and visitors to develop an "evolving, historical, political and moral relationship, a dynamic ambiguous exchange" (Glifford, 1997: 188-219).

The digital MoE- an experimental proposal

The Museum of Education of the University of Crete, trying to be in harmony with principles of the 21st century modern museology / museum education as analyzed above, attempts to introduce and develop innovative digital applications in an interactive and playful way based on the development of new technologies and applications of augmented reality by creating digital cultural resources (precious evidence of the history of education from the end of the 18th century onwards) and management systems in an innovative and playful way, in the natural environment of museum collections and beyond, through the digital visualization of virtual routes in schools connected with the museum itself, attempts to explore the possibilities offered by new technologies in enhancing and enriching museum learning in a way that is pleasant and reflective by promoting a critical attitude of visitors towards cultural heritage and enhancing cultural tourism.

The active interface of visitors with the educational cultural heritage through digital technology enables users to recall memories and experiences from their school past, to interpret or reflect on areas of social development, to collide, to interact with objects and exhibits and critically develop their historical thought and cultural identity. Digital media are channels of communication that allow access to the digitized cultural heritage of a site, which can act as a pole of attraction for the development of tourism, contributing to the creation of a new "cultural economy" (Hadžić, 2004: 74-79)

As Nina Simon (2010) has argued, museum exhibits are "social objects" with multiple symbolisms that prompt visitors to create interpersonal relationships with them, to construct their own concepts by incorporating them into a wider context of interpretation depending on the cultural environment they come from and sharing them. This strategy gives voice to the personal memories and experiences of people and makes "visible" the different forms of knowledge that are usually kept closed in museum spaces (Mason 2013: 166).

Conclusion

By developing a digital interactive virtual environment that will "chat" with the natural environment of the museum and will actively involve the visitor, who will be invited to critically and transformationally approach the museum exhibits/objects, the MoE investigates ways in which virtual museum spaces will become a field of social interaction rather than individual interaction and museum experience will be enhanced and transformed into a dynamic cultural and social process.

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