

Chapter 16

Cultural Heritage Redesigned Through Digital Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, digital storytelling is examined as means of cultural heritage preservation by focusing on personal attachment to stories themselves. In the contemporary digital society, stories are being told and they are being told differently. Thus, digital storytelling is becoming a significant part of social life and seems to be imposing a trend in humanitarian issues. This chapter attempts to examine the issue through a brief literature review on the connection of digital storytelling and cultural heritage. Examples of small-scale studies conducted within academic theses (mainly postgraduate) or funded projects are utilized in order to record the telling or retelling cultural stories, whether in everyday life or in more formal contexts, such as museum visits. Overall, the aim of the chapter is to reach an understanding of how short stories can redefine the way we perceive cultural elements, following the current societal trends for speed and increased interaction.

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that humans live in a digital society. Over the past couple of decades, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been integrated in everyday life, affecting and enhancing many aspects of it. In this context, children are born in a media-dominated society which allows them to interact with a variety of information from a very young age. Information is exchanged often through stories, in multiple contexts.

Nowadays, the way stories are conveyed has changed significantly. For example, Social Networks have redefined the concept of stories, altering significantly people's perception of many aspects of cultural capital, including language, history, education, societal issues, etc. Digitalization is a part of everyday life. Each person produces large amounts of digital material, including photos and videos capturing moments of interaction with cultural elements. On the other hand, people interact with huge amounts

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of information constantly. One could wonder if an average person nowadays actually has the patience or the time to review long texts or videos. Speed and compaction seem to characterize daily interactions.

Cultural heritage is the heritage of tangible and intangible heritage assets of a group or community that is inherited from past generations. Not all heritages of past generations are “heritage”; rather, heritage is a product of selection by society (Logan, 2007). Cultural heritage includes the sites, things, and practices a society regards as old, important, and worthy of conservation. It is currently the subject of increasing popular and scholarly attention worldwide, and its conceptual scope is expanding (Brumann, 2015). As a term, cultural heritage has two constituents: a tangible and an intangible one. The former includes all sorts of artefacts (e.g. monuments, books, artworks) and the latter refers to tradition, language, preserved knowledge, etc. Others also mention a third constituent, that of natural heritage which is connected to the flora, fauna and landscape-related elements (Sullivan, 2016).

The diversity of cultural heritage elements lead to various capital preservation strategies and techniques, with storytelling being one of them. Combining the aforementioned perspectives, the question of how would that affects cultural capital preservation could be raised. As information passes by, what is really captured and processed, what is really affecting cultural cultivation? This chapter reflects upon the idea of utilizing Digital Storytelling (DS) as means of cultural heritage preservation by focusing on personal attachment to stories themselves. How is this issue being addressed currently? What seem to be the next steps in the corresponding research? What has not yet been examined?

(DIGITAL) STORYTELLING

For thousands of years, stories have been the medium for teaching principles and moral values (Brady, 1997). At the same time, they were means of entertainment, education, preservation of cultural heritage and formation of moral values. Especially while written language had not appeared yet, storytelling was the only way to transmit culture, values and history of a social group (Egan, 1989).

One can find many definitions of what storytelling is in the literature. One of the most accurate is that of Kim & Ball-Rokeach (2006), according to whom Storytelling is the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal images and elements of a story, while enhancing the recipient’s imagination. In this way they describe a dynamic and ever-changing relationship between the teller, the story and the audience. Miller (2008) describes story as a series of real or fictional events in which causality is somehow entangled.

As a word, it comprises of two elements; story and telling. Story, corresponds to the story itself which has a specific structure, is classified into genres and has commonly accepted structural elements and characteristics that have been extensively studied and recorded in the literature. Telling, describes the connection between the teller and the audience, but not only. It also involves the space and time in which the telling itself takes place, but also the space and time in which the actual story takes place. These space-time can coincide or differ significantly. For example, one can today tell a story that will take place on another planet in a few thousand years or a story that took place in a different part of the earth a few thousand years ago.

Thus, the teller presents the story utilizing verbal and non-verbal communication, gestures, grimaces, in order to enchant the listeners. He/she “listens” to the reactions of the audience, in order to react appropriately and to keep their interest at a high level. The listeners are active recipients who experience the story in their own way depending on their prior experiences, they immerse themselves in it and are

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