



## Chapter XVII

# Reinforcing and Opening Communities through Innovative Technologies

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*The aim of the Campiello<sup>1</sup> research project (Esprit Long Term Research #25572) is to promote and sustain the meeting of inhabitants and tourists in historical cities of art and culture. This overall objective is undertaken in two main steps: reinforcing the community bounds via collective participation in both creating community knowledge and optimizing access to it. Once the local community's sense of belonging has been reinforced, sharing its knowledge with outside people will become more natural.*

*In this paper first we present the various technological aspects, as well as where and how innovative technology can help local communities. Then we present the context of experimentation, future plans and current achievements in one of the two project settings: Venice.*

## Introduction

Local communities are declining under the pressure of globalization (mass media, delocalization of production, etc.). World-famous art cities are in a particularly difficult situation in this respect since on the one hand tourist flows take over the inhabitants' territory, and on the other hand the industrialization of tourism tends to transform art cities into a new sort of cultural Disneyland. In an art city like Venice,

local communities suffer from a progressive and seemingly irreversible diminishing of identity. Can Information and Communication Technology (ICT) help local communities survive and revitalize their social lives? Can ICT help transform the relationship between tourists and local communities of cities of art and culture?

The Campiello project (Campiello, 1997-2000) — a European Community funded project — aims to answer these questions (Agostini, Grasso, Giannella, & Tinini, 1998; Grasso, Koch, & Snowdon, 1998). In fact, it experiments with the use of innovative information technologies as well as interaction paradigms in supporting the dynamic exchange of information and experiences between the community of people living in historical art cities, their local cultural resources, and foreign visitors.

The overall objectives are the following:

- *Supporting the dynamic exchange* of information and experiences between the communities of people who live in historical art cities and external (often foreign) visitors, using the local cultural resources and events organized in the local context as triggers.
- *Enabling people to interact and cooperate* in building a new and richer sense of community based on an exchange of knowledge about the cultural resources.
- *Interrupting the relegation of the local communities* to separate areas within historical art cities, allowing them to reconnect with their territory.

Two local communities were chosen as contexts for the project: Venice in Italy and Chania in Crete (Greece). Both cities nurture a culture heritage linked to their territory, while sharing it with people of different cultures from all over the world. In this paper we focus on Venice.

Due to its status, the city of Venice is the historical city where the critical condition of friction between local community and visitors is highest. The enormous number of visitors puts a heavy load on the city's weak physical structure and on its social structures too. Local people must share their cultural resources and public utilities, as well as the places where they meet and socialize, with visitors from other countries. There is a tendency to create separate meeting places for the local community, isolated from tourist areas. Moreover, new events organized within these cities are directed to tourists and not to the people living there; in fact, local people have no priority in participating in these events and rarely contribute to their organization. On the other hand, visitors — accessing exclusively the city's most visible and renowned resources — gain only a superficial understanding of the local culture. In order to enhance the Venetians' feeling of citizenship and visitors' opportunities to discover the deep and complex beauty of Venice, Campiello realizes a system developing new tools, technologies and solutions. Its main goals consist in making the local inhabitants active participants in the creation of the cultural information, and in supporting new and improved connections not only between the local community and tourists but also between the local inhabitants and the "official" managers of the town's cultural resources. This is achieved by supporting the bidirectional exchange of information about the town, its places and events. So the aim is to build not only a network for empowering existing communities but one that

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