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Museo Narrante: the Foce Sele Hera Sanctuary Virtual Museum

Abstract: The communication of one century of archaeological research at the Foce Sele Hera Sanctuary has been the main reason for the creation of a new virtual museum, for which a name that represents a museological approach, "Museo Narrante", i.e. the Museum that tells stories has been chosen. The museum is conceived as a museum without objects, interactive, multi-sensorial, and multi-medial. Its main issues are: i. minor sites valorization; ii. museums as territorial communication networks; iii. levels of reliability; iv. multiple interpretation. The overall intent is to give viewers evidence and argument instead of a pre-packaged explanation. This paper shows how this concept guided the whole exhibition, with the realization of different tools to present to the public the stories of the Foce Sele Hera Sanctuary and the archaeological investigation of the area in a new way.

Introduction

The communication of one century of archaeological research at the Foce Sele Hera Sanctuary has been the main reason for the creation of a new virtual museum, the Museo Narrante, i.e. the Museum that tells stories, a museum which has no objects, is interactive, multi-sensorial, multi-medial, and whose main issues are the following:

i. Minor sites valorization.
The archaeological site of Paestum attracts thousands of visitors from all over the world, offering a visit to both the urban area and to the traditional Archaeological National Museum. How then to valorize the suburban Heraion, with its own peculiarities, while also raising interest and attracting visitors to the sanctuary, 8 km away from the well-known town?

ii. The concept of museums as territorial communication networks.
The findings from the Heraion have been stored and shown in the National Museum in a world-known museological history. The problem arises of how to show the results from the new excavations and the findings from decades of research in a unique information system, without moving findings from the National Museum? Also how to combine the archaeological site, the results of its archaeological investigation, and its different archaeological interpretations?

iii. The intent to communicate to the public the different levels of reliability of the data presented.
Another very challenging issue the new Museum had to face was the effort to communicate to the public not only the various archaeological hypotheses, but also the different levels of their reliability. As an example, a 3D model of the whole sanctuary is presented to the public, showing the buildings and the sacred garden of the Goddess Hera (based on the paleo-botanic findings). The reconstruction of the buildings on which scholars do not agree is presented with a transparent texture and the various hypotheses are presented to the visitors on a panel. This way visitors are given the possibility to distinguish between reconstructions based on stronger archaeological scientific data, with wide consensus among scholars, and ideas still under discussion and study, that deserve to be shown and communicated regardless.

iv. The presentation of multiple interpretation of the archaeological scientific data.
One of the most interesting case-studies was the musealization of different interpretations of the Metopes. The metopes are parts of a fridge that has been reconstructed in various ways by scholars (Greco 2001; Greco / Ferrara 2003). In the following information we will present and discuss how we communicate the various interpretations, using installation of casts of the various metopes hanging from the ceiling, lit up alternatively, and complemented by a movie and a voice-over telling the various versions.

The overall intent is to give viewers evidence and argument instead of a pre-packaged explanation: many tools were realized for this purpose and integrated into a unique tour for the visitor. Scientific archaeological data is presented to the general public in such a way as to stimulate learning and interest.

Virtual Museums and Archaeology

During recent decades there have been an increasing number of application of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) to museums, and today the range of employments is wide: the main fields of experimentation and research vary from web-museums to multimedia installations on site, to augmented reality systems, and so on.

The increase of interest in the application of ICT, particularly the Internet, to museums is officially identifiable in 1991, with the first International Conference on Hypermedia and Interactivity in Museums (ICHIM). Discussion on these themes with periodic meetings and initiatives up have continued on since then.

A new important step in the growing methodological debate was the beginning of the annual Museums and the Web conference in 1997 (BEARDMAN / TRANT 1997).

Over these years we can notice a rising interest in ICT and the Internet and an increasing number of museums that developed application supported by ICT, for example, realizing for the first time their own institutional web site.

This attention to the use of ICT in museums fostered much discussion and research on methodological issues. Research has focused mainly on the attempt to understand real possibilities and future perspectives of such applications for museums. In particular it has been discussed whether ICT may increase the quality of the museum services to users, improve the communication and furthermore enrich the debate on museology as an applied science as such (FORTE / FRANZONI 1997; SCHWEIBENZ 1998; RAYWARD / TWIDALE 1999, with bibliography).

Actually, in recent decades there has been an evolution in the concept of a museum itself, again influenced by the impact of the application of ICT to humanities in general.

In the 1970s the definition of a museum was still strictly related to physical objects, to their organization in collections and in places for their fruition, while the function of spreading knowledge and information is considered a fundamental aspect of a museum's function (BURCAW 1975).

In 1980s there was a "paradigm shift" in museology studies: for the first time the focus shifted from objects to information (WASHBURN 1984). In this context in the literature there is a parallel between the communication function of museums and that of mass media. With this cultural background the importance of didactical and divulgation aspects of museums increases: the concept of self-explanatory objects gradually changes with more attention to the context as the creator of meaning. (FORTE / FRANZONI 1997).

Now the museum function can acquire the information value, plus the capability to create and recreate contexts. In order to define such museum function of connection among visitors, objects and information, Hoptman uses the term "correctedness" (HOPTMAN 1992). According to this scholar this feature is the theoretical basis on which the concept of "virtual museum" is based. The Virtual Museum offers different levels, perspectives, information dimensions on different themes; in a virtual museum there is not only a plurality of traditional media, but a whole range of them and a connection among them, that offers a new rich information, not traditionally previously able to be conveyed. Furthermore Hoptman highlights how these virtual museum features favoured the interaction of visitors with the collections, allowing them to exploit the information presented in a more personalized way.

On this subject, Hooper-Greenhill underlines the change in fieri from a "collection driven museum" to a "audience-driven museum" (HOOPER-GREENHILL 1994). At the same time Davis concludes that the digital museum may be "visitor-centered" instead of "curator-centered" (DAVIS 1994; DAVIS 1995). Obviously one of the best platforms able to support such changes has been the Internet, due to its hypermedial nature and worldwide spread (SCHWEIBENZ 1998). It is to be noted that the concept of Virtual Museum is far from well defined in the studies. In the scientific literature there are various terms or expressions, with various similarities and differences, to indicate sources of museum information, in a digital format, and / or diffused via the Internet: electronic museum, digital museum, on line museum, hyper-medial museum, meta-museum, web-museum, cyber-museum. A well known definition of virtual museum is the one from Geoffrey Lewis in 1996 in the on line discussion list "museum-l" in the online version of Encyclopaedia Britannica (LEWIS 1996).

Lewis describes the virtual museum as "a collection of digitally recorded images, sound files, text documents, and other data of historical, scientific, or cultural interest that are accessed through electronic media. A virtual museum does not house actual objects and therefore lacks the permanence and unique qualities of a museum in the institu-

tional definition of the term". In this definition it is evident that is the distinction established between the traditional museum and the virtual museum, is as strong as the distinction between real and digital (RAYWARD / TWIDALE 1999); and, moreover, has the possibility to offer, through a virtual visit, a real experience with a wide information richness. This wide definition does not focus the concept of virtual museum only on its presence in the web, but on the digital content of the virtual visit. In this paper we will refer to the Museo Narrante as a virtual museum since it doesn't store objects but has instead mainly digital contents and stories.

Fig. 2. The history of the research at Foce Sele. Displays and projector system.

Fig. 1. The Museo Narrante. Masseria Procuriali.

Museo Narrante: the Foce Sele Hera Sanctuary Virtual Museum

The discovery of Foce Sele Hera Sanctuary is one of the most fascinating stories of 20th century archaeology. It was the willingness, the study and the perseverance of Paola Zancani Montuoro and Umberto Zanotti Bianco that led to the detection of the sanctuary, whose memory had been lost over the centuries by the action of Sele River, which had covered the remains and buildings with mud and vegetation (ZANCANI MONTUORO / ZANOTTI BIANCO 1954).

The archaeological investigation of the site has been carried on during the 20th century in various phases, up to the 1980s when a new period of interest in the site began, and this is still on going (GRECO / FERRARA 2003).

Communicating archaeological data from the new excavations, relating these data to the past studies, to the site and the territory are the main reasons for a new museum.

The Paestum Archaeological National Museum already stores and presents to the public the findings from the old excavations. Firstly the world-renowned metopes, and secondly a figured fridge, whose reconstruction is still open to hypotheses and debate. The new museum had to be something
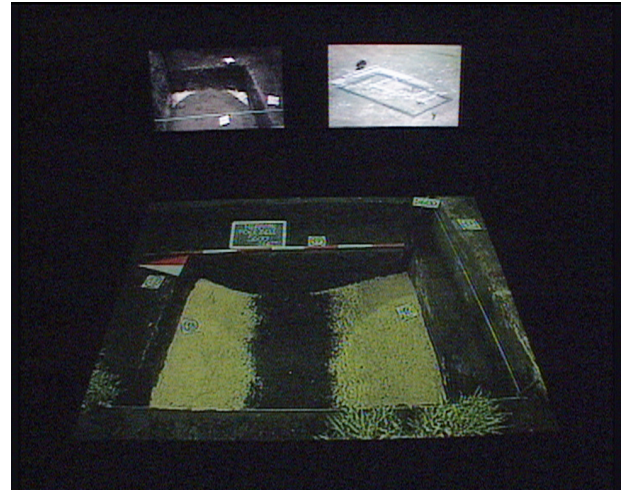
completely different. It had to offer something to the public that was not possible to be communicated by the national museum.

Making the most of the issues from the new museological debate, a new project was conceived: a virtual museum, showing information instead of objects. An old building, close to the archaeological site, has been restored and used to host the museum. Multimedia, virtual reconstructions, lights, suggestions, movies, and audio, interact to convey meaning and to enrich the visit. A temporized schedule directs the whole guided tour; each room is dedicated to a theme, and the connections between the rooms tell their own story, in a cognitive space where evidence is preferred to explanations.

First room. The discovery. The first room is dedicated to the discovery of the site and to the territory. In this room, which is a type of reception area for visitors, panels show the ancient Greeks roots to Paestum, while the stratification of geological periods is shown to the public by a core sample of the terrain. The room is completed by a movie that introduces the whole experience by telling the story of the discovery of the site, the history of its life, and the overall strategy of the exhibition.

Second room. The research. The second room is dedicated to the history of the archaeological investigation of the site, from the discovery in 1934–1949, through the studies of the 1950–1962, to the current analyses. The story is told by audio, while three synchronized displays show a reconstruction of what happened during the various steps of the excavations. Two displays are mounted side by side, representing the first phase of excavation and

the second period of investigation and show the scientific archaeological data collected. The third display is on the ground, and the movie simulates the true excavation, with the different strata removed step by step, and the discovery of the main findings and traces.

Third room. The cult. Maquettes of the votive offering are contextualized in a reconstruction of the ancient bothroi, the pits where they were buried after their ceremonial use. Panels explain the different functions of the goddess Hera, to relate the offerings to their votive meaning.

Fig. 3. Foce Sele Hera Sanctuary 3D virtual reconstruction.

Fourth room. The Sanctuary. A 3D model of the whole sanctuary is presented to the public by a multimedia totem. The 3D model presents not only the buildings but also the sacred garden of the Goddess Hera: the plants and the vegetation shown are based on the paleo-botanic data collected by specialists.

The attention to the presentation on different levels of reliability of reconstruction is patent in this model, where the buildings whose reconstruction is still unclear, are covered by a transparent texture, to underline that there is a different level of certainly on their real aspect in the past. In order to complete the information given, the various hypotheses are explained to the visitors on panels, together with the archaeological data on which they were based and proposed.

Fifth room. The metopes. The metopes are parts of a fridge, that has been reconstructed in various ways by scholars. Today there is no agreement on the real destination of the metopes, so it has been decided to present to the public not a single hypothesis, but all the different hypotheses, by a panel, and let the metopes tell the myths they represent.

Since various metopes may be interpreted according to different myths, it has been decided to explain their different meaning according to different myths. In order to do that, 36 casts of the various metopes have been suspended from the ceiling. While a voice-over tells the myths, the related metopes are lit up alternatively, and the temporized exhibition is completed by a movie presenting further archaeological data to make visitors understand better the stories that they hear.

Connections: the helicoidal stairs in the silos. Also the staircase that goes to the upper floor is used to give information to the public: casts of the votive figurines hang from the walls, and people can watch them while walking up and in the mean time they hear female voices calling the goddess with ancient Greek epiclesis, so people can gather further knowledge of the ancient cult.

Connections: the view of the excavations. After the first part of the exhibition, visitors pass by a connection from which they have a comprehensive view of the excavations, so they can gain a better understanding of the context of the archaeological data.

First floor: the square building. The room on the first floor is dedicated to the so-called "square building", a building that was related to female activities and to weaving. Suggestions of the ancient functions of

Fig. 4. The Metopes room.

the building are conveyed by paintings representing girls using looms to weave dresses for the goddess.

Second silos: the decadence. The exit from the museum is a second staircase similar to the first one, that is dedicated to the decadence of the sanctuary, with new kinds of cults, sounds and voices.

Main Benefits, further Developments and Perspectives

As expected, a few years after the opening it was possible to notice that the use of different museological strategies introduced, fulfilled many of the project requirements. Today the Foce Sele Hera Sanctuary museum and archaeological site are part of the tourist attractions and scientific archaeological offerings of the Paestum territory. The Museo Narrante, the National Museum, the archaeological urban and sub-urban sites are a network of integrated information, attracting people to a rich and articulated cultural and didactical experience. The stories of the Museo Narrante may be a first step for the visit of the National Museum where the findings from the Heraion are shown or alternatively a second step of further investigation after viewing the urban area. The information communicated to the public is a mixture of scientific archaeological data that can aid their comprehension, while attracting people's interest about the past and simultaneously improving their attention to the process itself of construction of meaning about the past. Evidence, argument and scientific archaeological data is presented to the general public in such a way as to stimulate their learning and interest. This first phase of the existence of the museum has communicated to the public in a stimulating way the archaeological data from the new excavations. The forthcoming second phase will be dedicated to the later periods of life of the sanctuary.

Credits

Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici delle Province di Salerno, Avellino e Benevento; Presidenza del consiglio dei Ministri, Dipartimento del Turismo, progetto finanziato con fondi programma multiregionale turismo culturale – sottoprogramma 1 – misura 5 – 1998 Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II; Università di Firenze, Università di Lille (Juliette de La Genière) PRAC; Centro Jean Berard; Società Magna Grecia; Laboratorio fotografico della Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici delle Province di Salerno, Avellino e Benevento.

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