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NEOTHEMI

ICT and Communicating Cultures

Edited by

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UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DEL MOLISE



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INTRODUCTION

The University of Molise has recently celebrated the opening of the University Library, an absolutely relevant structure in its relation with its territory, and a witness to the importance of the local realities in the national context. It is easy to host new guests in a real site and show its virtues, beauties and peculiarities. Not so easy, but as pleasant and most useful, is to lead new virtual publics through an interactive site and introduce the virtues, peculiarities and dynamics of a project that, through a pioneering use of ICT, spreads over Europe the cultural heritage of 10 different countries.

Neothemi – with its educational contents, its site, its publications and its tools, as well as its network - is the outcome of a culture of cooperation based on the creation of a network that, rising from the University of Molise, connects to each other numerous Institutions Europe-wide. It is worth underlining such concepts in introducing the products of the final conference – the third one, after Budapest and Helsinki – that took place in our own University. Young Universities have the moral duty to accept the challenges of the third millennium with regard to the international cooperation, culture, exchange of good practices.

The occasions of dissemination are crucial points in a project's life, especially when this links the intercommunication between different and distant realities to the educational use of the new technologies in their function of web weavers. The concepts of mutual acknowledgement and exchange between cultures, and of respect of the self and the other remain crucial, though just as important are the love and safeguarding of one's own background and, at the same time, the pleasure arising from sharing this very richness.

Local realities in Europe are richer than ever expected: our regional cultures are full of values that match with other local cultures: to know and respect them brings both safeguard and progress. Such process concerns not only the less visible local cultures, but seems to concern also those, better known, which are spoiled by superficiality and inattention arising from an exhausted experience.

“Neothemi - ICT and Communicating Cultures” not only reflected the efforts of three years of funding, investments, relationships and progress, but proved also an important start point for a culture enriched by the correct and wise use of new technologies. Such good use is not only related to the technical skill and tools’ versatility, but especially to the naturalness with which the ICT has favoured the real dialogue and the integration of diversities. We are convinced that the virtual museum of Neothemi – synergistically implemented by the participating countries – can be a vehicle of mutual acquaintance, a facilitator of access for the most diverse social categories, a tool of enjoyment and knowledge at the same time.

The impetus coming from pilot projects as Neothemi is a matter of pride for such a young and dynamic University as ours. It is time to open a century by starting experimentations, and show that in the era of global interconnections of knowledge, as well as competences and technologies, local realities can be leaders in the cultural and civil international progress.

Introducing such work is a further occasion, for our University, to celebrate for having welcomed and promoted such a significant project, and for having provided it not only with a suitable logistic support, but with a constant nourishment made of engagement and participation, that make its outcomes the sound basis for a better tomorrow.

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**A PREFACE:
NEOTHEMI METAPHORS
AND CROSSED PATHS**

*“This text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it is reversible;
we gain access to it by several entrances,
none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one”
(R. Barthes, 1974)*

*“I produce texts, therefore I am, and to some extent
I am the texts that I produce.”
(R. Scholes, 1982)*

“Human beings are hardwired into the storytelling process – whether they are the ones spinning the tales or those listening to them....The difference between the eras is reflected in the way these stories are structured” (Lunenfeld, 2000). As editor I am the spinner of this tale and all the contributions are part of a story, a hypertext, which is not simply organized into a linear sequence of bound pages but is in itself a network of units with hot spots or interactive links.

Lunenfeld called ‘unfinished’ the aesthetic of the digital medias defined as discontinuous, dialectic and virtual as well; the introduction to a volume rooted in digital technologies is therefore a piece of writing ready to be completed, updated and ‘finished’ over and over again.

Is this volume about communication?

Is this text about digitalised culture?

Is this book a metaphor of a metaphor of a metaphor?

Communication is about exchanging information and it is a process where the sender is usually making the message maximally understandable, yet being able to read between the lines and especially to glimpse alternative views has become more and more important. “Interpreting a book...requires us to make a choice about what key to use to unlock it...” (Rabinowitz, 1987) and in fact F. Kermode stated, better than many others, the importance of an

interpretation in every form of narration. “Hope,” he says “is the fatal disease of the interpreter” (Kermode, 1979), therefore – despite the historical crisis of the theories known as the “death of the author” (Foucault, 1969 and Barthes, 1968) – hypertextuality brought forward once again the idea that reading a text, no matter what kind of text it is, still is a way to make your own text of it.

As G. Landow has pointed out, in fact hypertexts have become the standard way to convey information and to give readers a large freedom of choices which changes the parameters of the communication game. “Hypertext writing both emphasizes and bridges gaps and... brings with it implications for our conceptions of text as well of reader and author” (Landow, 1994). A text becomes therefore a work in progress, an open-ended piece of writing which calls for a writer who values collaboration and an active reader. A topography, the so called ‘topographical writing’ by M. Joyce (1995) is offered here to navigators who can choose a personal reading path through this book, thus making it into a totally different form; alternate routes are valued and the reader’s notes and responses to the text may take the form of more texts supporting or contradicting the one offered. The interactive reader who is invited to join a common and collaborative communication with the writer, seems to perfectly counterbalance the notion of the ‘impatient user’. The ‘waiting operator’ of the early automation has been replaced, as T. Nelson prophesized, by “a new kind of user: slam bang, sloppy, impatient, and unwilling to wait for detailed instructions.” (Nelson, 1977).

To organize the material in hyper-textual format and to address a creative reader is in line with a volume such as this, collecting contributions from eleven European countries (Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom) around the issues of virtuality, learning and cultural heritage. The World Wide Web is in fact the largest hypertext known, navigators are devouring information at incredible speed and culture in our post-modern world is dominated by media screens. And yet this collection of essays is not in favour of network idealists brushing aside any concern with the use of new technologies. Some of the contributors in fact express their worries about an uncritical use of ICTs; we would rather support a more objective position between the unlimited idealistic faith in progress on one side, and the ‘Luddite’ resistance to virtuality on the other. To favour a balanced position is to embrace M. Heim’s ‘virtual realism’ while being aware that “The cyberspace dialectic sustains opposition as the polarity that continually sparks the dialogue, and the dialogue is the life of cyberspace.” (Heim, 1998).


This book is a collection of selected papers presented at the Neothemi project (The New Network of Thematic Museums and Institutes) Final Conference held at the University of Campobasso, Italy, 8/9 October, 2004. Some are the result of parallel sessions and some of the workshops organized to disseminate and promote an interaction on the areas covered by the project. The multifaceted philosophy of the project is conveyed in the choice of organizing the essays both as a hypertext and in a traditional way, linearly following the five parts (Introduction to ICT and Communicating Cultures, Cultural Heritage and New Perspectives, Virtuality and Learning, Neothemi: Thematic Outcomes, Neothemi: Final Evaluation). This project develops around a virtual museum, as a clear metaphor of preserving and sharing different national cultural heritages through ten countries' pavilions, electronically constructed and each representing a different national identity. Neothemi chose the metaphor of the museum because of its being a network of institutions whose main aim was to find an open but regulated way of allowing local cultures to compare themselves and interact effectively in a global project. Cultural heritage, based on the recollection of the past, is a driving force in shaping the identities of both individuals and communities, and at the same time it travels with them towards the future and globalisation. We are well aware that a book is a highly sophisticated technological tool – as pleasurably and provokingly suggested by U. Eco in 1994 – therefore, even if the virtual museum is certainly the most powerful image to convey the project's ultimate aim, nonetheless both the choices and the same organization of this volume are consciously and strongly metaphorical.

Each country with an individual–national cultural heritage has built its own themed 'pavilion' but the project has encouraged the creation of links between the different perspectives gained from countries with different historical and cultural experiences. Neothemi itself being a website and a virtual environment is but a hypertext where navigators can choose their own path; the content of communication is determined by the way it is conveyed and the medium shapes the message. The organization of this volume is trying to translate the project onto the page, and computer screens have their paper counterpart bearing the same message.

The metaphor can be carried farther, has Neothemi simply produced contents or is it a network of institutions promoting collaborative learning, social and emotional involvement, and creative personality development? If the hypertext is one of the ways to stimulate a collective production, then it is again the best way of symbolizing a collaboration where all steps of the process have been negotiated stimulating a global perspective and critical thinking.

What are the hot spots encoded in this volume to allow the reader to navigate through its pages?

Neothemi key-principles have always been connected with education supporting collaborative learning through the use of new technologies and with the dissemination of cultural heritage through a virtual environment: our 3D museum. Therefore all contributors have concentrated their efforts around one or more of these issues: *Methodology, Experience/Practice, The Arts, Museology, Virtuality, Cultural Identity*.

In the first three parts of the volume different crossed readings are suggested every time the following icon appears  and two blank pages at the end of this preface are left for the reader giving space to personal choices and permitting more individualised paths.

Aren't a hypertext, Neothemi, and more generally the World Wide Web, but a continuous work in progress?

Before weaving threads among pages and giving multiple entrances and suggested paths, which will be visually shown in the book, all the text units are presented in detail.

Borrowing Barthes' definitions, this 'writerly text' is more akin to a constellation and I choose to cut it up into fragments here called 'lexias' or units of reading. Abstracts of the contributions are offered in order to encourage valuable reflections and to help engaged readers in reshaping this book according to their own personal agendas. All authors of the following papers were active presenters in the parallel sessions showing the high value of cultural exchanges and cooperation across national barriers.

LEXIAI

Archaeology is the realm of earlier periods, it is the study of what history and culture have transmitted to our present. It is usually difficult to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity but keynote speaker *P. Mauriello* makes us understand how new technologies and tools can successfully help the reconstruction and preservation of the past. Nowadays, in fact, non-destructive ground surface geophysical prospecting methods are progressively more used for the investigation of archaeological sites and for physical and geometrical reconstruction of hidden artefacts.

Virtual excavations are the only means for local reconnaissance and discrimination, prior to any excavation work.

High-resolution data acquisition and tomographic processing procedures are applied in cultural heritage geophysics, as well as in micro-geophysics for

monument preservation. Two results are therefore described in detail: the study of the archaeological area of the city of Cuma in south-Italy and the assessment of the state of conservation of the Aksum obelisk.

LEXIA2

The use of new technologies, the branch of art chosen, and the methodology behind the research offer certainly a totally different insight in the text by *P. Worrall*. The investigation about ICT, communication, art and culture is glancing to the future with contemporary eyes. Sixteen hyperlinks constitute the media text by Worrall who invites the reader to think about the transformation of existing communities of practice into innovative knowledge communities. The large use of communication tools in everyday life is the technological counterpart of a new media learning where students can both gain experience being exposed to diversified materials and learn new cultural values. To enable the use of innovative tools, changes in the resources are required, and new approaches and **methodologies** can be either integrated within existing practice or be the central tool within a set project.

In **art** and design therefore new technologies can help to develop existing processes or produce new outcomes. While virtual galleries, museums and, more in general, exhibition spaces can be disappointing, an international network of practicing artists and art museums can help in overcoming unsatisfactory results. A selection of best **practices** is offered: firstly the European Schoolnet project, for an insight into the educational use of information and communication technology in Europe, and then one of its parts: The Virtual School with resources and services for learning activities. The Virtual School Art Department, in particular, aims at the development of new strategies for improving education through new learning models (new pedagogy), tools (materials and equipment) and environments (virtual platforms knowledge sharing). Some initiatives, like The Culture Box and Encounters Live, are described showing the use of recent approaches to respond to the 21st century digital citizen's needs.

LEXIA3

A critical look at the current situation of **archaeological museums** is offered by *G. De Benedittis*, who is warning the readers against the pursuance of the spectacular to attract the crowds, at the expense of quality. A description of the development of the role of the archaeologist and an overview on

weaknesses in the Italian archaeological museums is highlighted. Museums can testify to cultural heritage and reach the cultural enrichment of a community, offering a straightforward and objective reading of their contents. They have recently responded to this challenge by providing a **virtual experience**. The danger here is that a market demand for virtual reality in museums may give relevance only to an entertaining ‘show’ rather than to cultural communication. A proficient use of new technologies can certainly be reached without falling into the trap of technology for its own sake. The final suggestion is to recognize the intrinsic value of ICT, to favour an interdisciplinary approach where different skills and competences can together organize exhibitions, and a critical attitude to the use of virtual reality ‘The point is not whether to use the virtual, but how to use it.’

LEXIA4

In the realm of **art pedagogy**, suggests A. Kondoyianni, technology combined with an experiential approach can promote a new creative learning **methodology**. This paper shows how successfully drama exercises and techniques can be applied in educational museum programs. Drama is an appropriate method for experiential learning, and information and communication technologies can facilitate knowledge and offer a valuable sense of success and enjoyment. Modern **museums** through the application of new technologies, can become stimulating centres offering scientifically structured learning environments mixing art and science. Besides the school environment encourages the acquisition of knowledge and helps develop social skills. The school–museum interaction is therefore the proposal for a creative learning through an experiential approach based on education and culture through the application of ICT.

The objective of the survey presented is to find out which drama techniques were appropriate to each kind of museum in order to fulfil the aims of the programmes, which were cognitive, social, affective, and aesthetic. A description of different exercises applied in three kinds of museums is presented before drawing conclusions.

LEXIA5

The creation of a themed data base for numismatics is indispensable nowadays for the management of the enormous amount of data emerging on, for example, coins in museums, archaeological findings and private collec-

tions. *R. Lanteri* offers an overview of how the need for creating a database has been felt in different countries. Spain, Germany, France, Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, have all starter projects in this field and the most significant DBs are at the British Museum and the American Numismatic Society.

The example, chosen to prove the necessity of an organized catalogue with the help of a computerised system, is the experience of the Misurata (Libya) treasure, the greatest finding relating to the first half of the fourth century A.D. currently known in the world, consisting of 108,000 coins.

A database for numismatic research, has been created for cataloguing and handling the data proceeding from this enormous amount of materials. Once available on the web, it will offer a kind of **virtual numismatic museum**, with various levels of access to information and images, for students, researchers and connoisseurs. Educational activities will be organized showing once more how new technologies and multimedia tools can facilitate knowledge and the acquisition of culture.

LEXIA6

To bring archaeology in line with the most advanced technologies and to render national cultural heritage the patrimony of everybody are among the main goals of The Archaeological Park and the Palaeolithic Museum of Isernia: La Pineta. Considerable discoveries have been made in the area, interesting both from the anthropological point of view and because of the presence of prehistoric finds. *A. Minelli* and *C. Peretto* leads us in a visit to this site with its exceptional wealth of material to be studied and restored. The two structures, the excavation pavilion and the Palaeolithic Museum, harmonise perfectly with the particular nature of the site for the interdisciplinary aims of research, conservation, education and development within its present-day context. The excavation pavilion has been the setting of various activities which have transformed it into a **museum-laboratory** and the site is imagined as an archaeological park to promote a fresh approach to culture and to the archaeological heritage through new **methodologies**. Experimental projects for archaeological research with the use of advanced technologies can at this point ensure that it does not remain the prerogative of experts in the field. Thanks to the use of a computerised laboratory and to the possibility of managing this data with the tridimensional model, it has been possible to reconstruct the extension of the archeosurface in its original complexity; and currently multimedia supports are concentrating their efforts to communicate the information and to encourage a greater degree of participation.