Depict, envision, experience. Visual narratives for virtual heritage

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Abstract

Every fragment of a historical remain has the power to trigger the evocation of the past in the mind of the person who contemplates it. The travel to the past, even this travel that takes place only in the imagination, has many similarities with the travel in space. Both bring to the traveller the excitement of the experience and the discovery of remote things and places.

Tourism can be seen as a contemporary manifestation of the human innate desire for exploration, with historical heritage forming the core of countless tourist plans. Virtual Heritage can be used in this context to greatly improve the travel experience. Aside from the technical and scientific aspects of the digital reconstruction of historical elements, the visual representation of the past constitutes a formidable tool for interpretation.

Not only the reconstructed shape of an archaeological remain, but also the atmosphere, customs, spirituality and lifestyles can be main subjects of the virtual depiction, thus helping for a better apprehension and learning of the historical context of the site.

All forms of cultural tourism related to historical heritage can benefit from the use of VH technologies. International organizations explicitly support their use in a context of responsibility and rigour, especially in regard to the use of artistic liberties. [1]

Different narratives may be used for each case. Artistic tourism may benefit from the use of virtual models to describe stylistic, plastic and formal merits of the historical element. Ethnographic tourism may require an effort on visual narratives that centre on anthropological, non-tangible aspects, in search of the emergence of the visitor's sense of empathy for the host culture.

Archaeological tourism has been traditionally treated in Virtual Heritage with a clear focus in virtual reconstruction, insisting more in the formal depiction of places and objects than in their use and impact on the life of people of their time. Technology nowadays can produce an intense feeling of translation in time for the visitor, and visual contents can help to create an emotional link between the tourist and the ancestors. The significance of the archaeological site in then empowered, paradoxically by taking importance away from the physical remain in itself, but changing its role to convert it into the tangible nexus between two moments in the history of people.

In this keynote, several cases on the design and implementation of VH installations will be described, both in real and virtual museums and interpretation centres.

References

[1] ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee: International Cultural Tourism Charter. Managing tourism at places of heritage significance. International Council on Monuments and Sites. December 2002.