Cover Sheet

Paper for the International Symposium on Electronic Art 2009 – ISEA 2009

Title:
Fluid Archive : Re-connecting the Matese Community Worldwide through Archiving Cultural Values in the Digital Age

Authors:

Aleksandar Cetkovic Associate Professor Department of New Media Zurich University of the Arts Dennlerstrasse 25c CH-8047 Zürich aleks@spaceplusplus.ch	Monika Codourey Ph.D. Research Fellow at Zurich Node of the Planetary Collegium - University of Plymouth, GB Buehlstrasse 43a CH-8055 Zürich inom@spaceplusplus.ch

Point of Contact:
Aleksandar Cetkovic, aleks@spaceplusplus.ch

Organization:
space++

Fluid Archive

Re-connecting the Matese Community Worldwide through Archiving Cultural Values in the Digital Age

Aleksandar Cetkovic, Monika Codourey
space++, Buehlstrasse 43a
CH-8055 Zürich
aleks@spaceplusplus.ch, inom@spaceplusplus.ch

Introduction

In the current era of globalization we witness vast migration movements: masses of people moving between rural and urban sites, between countries and even continents. Moreover, trans-migrants not only move from one place to another but they also play an important role in connecting the different cultures. Nevertheless old as well as new migrants tend to look for their akin in their environment – people who come from the same family or at least from the same region. In many cases, especially in urban context of megalopolis, this is nearly an impossible task without "face to face" social networking. We have often observed that whole villages or regions move to one city and keep their social structures. Such social structures allow the community to keep in touch with their roots over generations, allow easy access for newcomers and at the same time guarantees that such immigrants integrate more easily into the new environment.

Nowadays digital technology offers new possibilities and challenges for social networking. In an anonymous world, sites like linkedin or facebook allow to create non-perceived ties through databases of people with similar interests. This innovative format can be used to propagate social interaction of trans-neighbourhoods with same roots.

With this in mind, we aim to understand how digital technologies can be integrated in the participative process of constructing and transforming the territory. One of the new approaches is introducing technology as a means to revitalise the region. This does not mean creating new industry or programming jobs, but instead integrating a new technological medium of communication. Through a new definition of space enhanced through the integrated use of new media, one can enlarge the actual population by integrating a geographically scattered virtual population. Thus, technical means should be used to bring people together with an aim to intensify communication and exchange between people. Through this new extension of social space, new and unforeseen cultural and business opportunities emerge for the entire territory.

Context: Project Urban Node Matese

The initial task of the Matese Project was to define strategies and concepts that would challenge the problem of deterrence of the region. Matese is an underdeveloped rural region around Naples. Analysing the region and defining new spaces and realities that allow a new perception is one of the ways to identify the problems common to similar regions. Old intervention strategies like implanting industries, encouraging new economies or new architectural initiatives tend to fail, as such actions don't usually address existing problems sufficiently. An analysis documented through mapping of social, economical, cultural, historical views, allows us to re-think the relationship between society, planning and architecture.

In the case of Matese, one of the new approaches to revitalise the region is introducing technology as a medium of communication. We argue that the action of gathering the information (create a digital archive of the cultural and historical aspects of the region) helps to reawaken the identity of the Matese-region. Moreover the act of communication (using "fluid" archive as social media) is an approach to emergence of hybrid spaces that get created when one defines a region as an in-between of local to global. The interchange of digital footprint as a means to revive the cultural footprint that is decaying in the Matese region.

We were commissioned to conceptualise and create an archive of digital data concerning the cultural heritage of the region. This would allow raise awareness for a common culture of the migrant's abroad and the Matese people living in the region. Analysing the task, we were confronted with several problems concerning such an archive:

1) Awareness

How to make the people aware of the archive and make it popular?
How to reach out to a larger public that might use the archive?
What would be the benefit of such an archive to the Matese community?

2) Participation

What kind of data is available?
Who is going to collect the data?
How to involve members of the Matese community to participate in an early stage of the project?
How to prepare the data to be digitalised?
How to animate the Matese community to contribute to the archive?

3) Sustainability

How to accomplish long-term continuation of the project without technological or financial resources, once the platform has been created?
How to assure that the content of the archive does not freeze at the state of its creation, but that it keeps on growing?
How to achieve that the archive is kept used by the community, and that the interest for it does not diminish with time?
How to assure that there are no technological dependencies that would limit the growth of the archive, especially under the assumption that financial means and organisational resources exist only at the beginning of the project?

4) Networking

How would an archive allow the users to communicate with each other allowing to discover other participants on the basis of common heritage and interests?
How to visualise communities or groups out of collected data that, at first sight, are not necessarily obvious to the participants?

5) Simplicity

How to define an archive that would allow usage to the general public, without need of technical savvy or workshops how to use?
Most of the participants are not reachable for any lectures or workshops, so what is the common level of knowledge on which the product is to be based on?

As a result to these questions, we came up with proposal for an Internet-based platform called *Fluid Archive*.

Fluid Archive

The project Fluid Archive is an on-line platform that integrates a social networking tool and digital archive in one. The border between archive and social tool is fluid, and the archive is open and extendable. Its users are at the same time authors and consumers of the archive. The perception of the Matese Region spreads over the geographic borders through its global and local participants. Fluid Archive offers the global and local community of Matese Region a place to re-discover their "roots" and migration "routes" (to see how family histories mingle) through social networking.

The platform allows old and new migrants to define their familial and/or social roots for networking in their old and new environments. Such neighbourhoods are not based on a city quarter, but virtually in

a certain geographical and emotional range that is defined by each individual. In a region the size of London or a land like Switzerland the platform allows the participants to contact other people in their geographical proximity. In a certain sense, the platform allows to overcome the social and digital divide that reins in their environments. Through the platform, one can find people of similar backgrounds, with whom one can share the memories, customs, culture and create a regional network. Moreover, sharing cultural objects such as photographs, films, sound recordings, food recipes and field notes with other members becomes a kind of digital archive of ethnographic value. Yet the individual objects do not loose their identity and they stay in connection to their descendants oppose to anonymity of large archives.

Each registered user can: create or join "communities" of the worldwide Matese Community; define his "roots" (places of origins and family names), which allows to search for his/her ancestors from the region or to establish connection with people of common heritage; create circles of "friends" who correlate with the Matese community in some way. The different way of approaching the social network (as a community, genealogist, friends) allows a broad range of possible participation. The social network establishes a virtual community of global and local Matese people.

Everyone can create and maintain his own archive of photos, videos, sounds, and stories around Matese history and territory with other users of the Fluid Archive. The digital archive is an active, self-organizing dynamic and living form of community. There is no central storage of the archived data. The data is cross-referenced (mashed) and shared between other platforms such as flickr.com for photos, youtube.com for videos or dopplr.com for travel information. Allowing this source sharing on different platforms, the data stays alive and can be actively shared and reused on the Internet and so it is protected from obsolescence. Dynamic visualisation of the relations between data from different perspectives enables the users to better understand how information correlates.

Tagging is one of the means of organizing of information in the archive and at the same time a source for meta-data around the objects in the archive. Blogs or forums associated with the objects would allow participants to comment the contributions, therefore also creating new relations and stories around the data.

Fluid Archive deploys experimental communicative techniques that integrate both traditional and new media communication. The project is an on-line platform where members of the local and global community of the Matese region actively explore their histories and develop new modes of interpreting it. The Fluid Archive (pilot project) contributes to a critical perception of both past and the present that is accessible from any computer terminal on the planet.

Conclusion

The development of the beta version of the project has shown following points:

- New possibilities of combining different concepts of new media (on-line archive, social media, geo tagging) that can create added value to physical locations. We believe that these concepts work only if a user-oriented approach is adhered for a participative process of constructing and transforming the territory to work.

- De-centralised data storage challenges issues of: *a)* ownership of data without having to store it on a proprietary server and *b)* maintenance costs of such a system for the region. In many cases creation of such an archive would not be possible because of lack of financial means and technological knowledge.

- The further involvement of the project demands the exchange of information with the users. Additional hands-on workshops would help animate more people to contribute to the archive and display the different means of using the archive as a tool to communicate. Also analysing the way people use the platform and listening to their needs and reactions, would allow to improve the user interface and enhance functionalities.

Link: www.archiviofluido.net