

DIGITALMEETSCULTURE.NET

Interactive magazine about new technologies meeting culture worldwide.

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Abstract— In the context of global growing access to the Internet, and over-flooding of on-line information about any topic, it is sometimes hard for users to collect materials and news about their interests.

digitalmeetsculture.net is a project run by company Promoter, and it was imagined as an on-line magazine about the digital culture for collecting and sharing information and events, in a global dimension, taking into account the different approaches that scientific, humanistic and artistic culture have to the digital age.

The portal was also built in order to create a useful tool for the dissemination of digital cultural heritage project: by giving wide visibility to the projects' activities and achievements, by deepening their topics through interviews and related articles, and by offering a repository service for the projects' results.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of digital culture enlarged very much from its initial aspect of technical-scientific knowledge and values related to the information technology and its application. Nowadays, digital culture is referred to the application of digital technologies to any field of human expression. New ideas like Digital Art, Digital Heritage, Digital Native, Digital Age are currently accepted and used.

Internet is indeed “the” tool for communication at every level and with every purpose: it is used for disseminating project activities, for business promoting, and more in general for finding or sharing any information. Beside this, Internet is also a powerful resource for entertainment and amusement. In the context of global growing access to the Internet, and over-flooding of on-line information about any topic, it is sometimes hard for users to collect materials and news about their interests.

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The phenomenon of globalization and the spread of digital infrastructures created an interrelation among the fields of culture, once considered very distant. Today, the sciences, the arts, the humanities, while retaining irreducible differences, tend to meet, contaminate and mutually enrich through the use of new media and new technologies. Also geographically distant cultures are becoming nearer because of easier access to information worldwide.



The use of the network and of digital technology is evolving towards more and more interactive forms, with a clear trend towards the interchangeability of roles between the sender and the receiver of the information (Web 2.0). In addition, more and more artists of every discipline, from visual to performance arts, use computer technology as a tool and the web as a space for displaying and disseminating their works.

To this end, the portal digitalmeetsculture.net will discover, analyse, promote and disseminate the new achievements in the field of digital culture. It is already rising as a remarkable meeting point among different cultural fields, that takes into account the different approaches that scientific, humanistic and artistic cultures have to the digital age. The portal aims to act as a landmark and as a valuable mean of information and communication for different users in a global dimension.

Moreover, the speed and the amount of information offered by new technologies, allow, through specific projects which are promoted by academies, organizations and companies with the support of governments to increase the accessibility to cultural heritage: works of art, texts and documents - but also video and audio repositories and archives - whose physical accessibility is limited by many factors, can be readily available to the global network, thus increasing the possibilities of enjoyment, and approaching researchers, experts, enthusiasts and curious ones to a field which initially was elitist.

Such projects require indeed great visibility in order to be shared with the community, and also support for disseminating their results: the digitalmeetsculture.net portal can be an useful, customizable and flexible tool to this purpose.

II. GENERAL OVERVIEW

A. *The Sections*

The portal is composed of two specific areas dedicated to the cultural heritage in general, and to the digital art.

DIGITAL ART: The impact of digital technology has transformed human expressions as painting, drawing and sculpture, but also music, poetry and the performances; first by implementing new tools which

can be very helpful for the artists and which can enhance the creative process towards innovative and unexplored paths.

As creativity cannot be stopped, new forms such as net art, digital installation art, and virtual reality, swiftly had risen and became recognized artistic practices.

In an expanded sense, "digital art" is a term applied to contemporary art that uses the digital technologies and the digital media, also to disseminate and share the artworks with the community.

The section **DIGITAL ART** wishes to focus on the latest, innovative forms of the digital art in any expression, and to give space and visibility to upcoming events and discussions about this large, open and evolving topic. Conferences and seminars, interesting dates and case-studies will be collected; and nice showcases dedicated to associations, artists and companies, provided with many information and amazing multimedia contents in every format will offer a wide overview about what's going on.

DIGITAL HERITAGE: The digital technologies offer new modern tools for cultural heritage preservation; they also play a leading role about key issues as providing access, interaction and sharing knowledge.

Furthermore, our society is unlike before accumulating a large amount of born-digital heritage, especially documents, art-works, softwares, and the Web itself: keeping them for the future generation raises a specific range of demanding matters related to the preservation of the digital heritage.

Worldwide, preservation – both the preservation of tangible heritage through the digital technologies and the preservation of the digital cultural content – is felt as a matter of the highest importance, being so strictly connected to the true essence of the human culture.

Archives, libraries and museums in the past years have faced demanding challenges as the need of raising competences about digital technologies and opportunities, and the unavoidable matter of developing cooperation with each other in order to reach a smart integration of the information systems. A methodological and coordinated approach to digitization involves many other actors as academies, researcher centers, national and local institutions, private companies, to support properly this on-going process.



Last, but definitely not least, digital technologies represent the future of cultural heritage not only for preservation intended as a Memory Institutions' concern, but also as a device the community will benefit from:

- by providing a growing and open access for investigating and/or general purposes related to cultural heritage: to researchers, students and teachers, impaired people, and users in general
- by enhancing the interaction with every user, thus enhancing a deeper intellectual enjoyment of cultural heritage
- by developing new and challenging learning resources which will improve knowledge in all senses.

The section DIGITAL HERITAGE collects articles and information about projects and initiatives for the digitization and access to the digital cultural heritages all over the world. The key point at the base of this section is to give visibility to the institutions which work for preservation, to companies which develop tools and problem solving, to users who get benefit or gratification from digital cultural heritage.

B. Dedicated Services to EU Projects

digitalmeetsculture.net is a project run by Promoter, a relevant company based in Italy which is cleverly committed, with an open and coordinated approach, to several fields as technical development of ICT platforms and web-design, multimedia production and publishing.

Promoter's general management is composed of skilled professional people who have been managing or contributing to EU projects since the early 1990s, in different sectors belonging to several programs as Esprit, ACTS, eContent, eTen, and RTD Framework Programmes FP5, FP6 and FP7.

Promoter is currently partner of several projects in the digital cultural heritage sector, with the role of technical coordinator and an active attendance to dissemination. For example, recently, Europeana Photography, a digitization project for over 500.000 artistic and ancient photos, has just started and DCH-RP, devoted to the development of a new research e-infrastructures for the digital cultural heritage, is going to have its kick-off very soon.

It is possible to comply with the dissemination packages of such projects thanks to a dedicated service in the portal: each project is provided with a customizable showcase for presentation, RSS, general information and contacts. The showcase is easily accessible thanks to an evident button with logo, which is present in the Home Page and in any other page.

Clicking on the project's logo opens a dedicated page which contains a presentation of the project, beside related articles and interviews, and focused issues; the page contains also other useful information like contact details, auto-refreshing news (via RSS), multimedia galleries, and much more.

Another service which is going to be fully developed in the next time is the Repository Area, where any kind of documents, prototypes, websites which had been produced during the projects' life will be stored and preserved.

To sum up, therefore, the portal was also built in order to create a useful tool for the dissemination of digital cultural heritage projects: by giving wide visibility to the projects' activities and achievements, by deepening their topics through interviews and related articles, and by offering a repository service for the projects' results.

C. Target Users

The portal aims to target people with different interests and background.

In particular, digitalmeetsculture.net is addressed to people belonging to the cultural heritage sector, who are interested in the digitisation process and technologies (e.g. museums and libraries, researchers, technicians, etc.), people interested in the creative uses of the digital art (e.g. artists, photographers, performers, art critics, etc.), people interested in the digital data from the technical and scientific point of view (e.g. professionals, researchers, information technology enthusiasts, etc.); people belonging to the educational sector (e.g. teachers, students, vocational trainers...) and also general users who want to be informed and up-to-date on these matters.

Moreover, users who are directly involved in various projects related to the digital culture may find in the portal a tool to promote their activities and results.

III. THE PORTAL'S STRUCTURE

The digitalmeetsculture.net portal is designed and actually working as an on-line magazine, which will address the digital culture in all its meanings.

Its areas are linked one to each other by the Home Page that provides access to all the services of the portal (registration, contribution form, search mechanisms, featured projects, etc.) and are complemented by the "Editorials" (a section which contains articles of general interest) and "Interviews" (a section which contains the report of interviews to key people).

Each section of the portal contains a number of articles. Articles are usually composed of text, links, attachments and every kind of multimedia content, such as images and / or videos. Each article is associated to one or more topics and keywords or free tags. At the end of each article there is the possibility for registered users to leave a comment, and a list of related articles is displayed. All the articles are at first highlighted in the Home Page, and later on they are visible in the main pages of each section. When items are no more immediately visible because they get old, they are still accessible through several search options: free text, by topic and by most popular keywords.

Regarding the interaction with the users, besides the already mentioned possibility to leave a comment to an article, registered users can report events and send their own articles. In order to contribute to the portal (both for leaving a comment and for submitting events or articles) users should subscribe to the portal by providing at least their general and contact information.

A particular role is played by the Referents: key people who act as main contact inside relevant organizations or institutes, to keep the portal always up-to-date on the most prominent initiatives, projects, events and progresses in the digital culture field.

The editorial staff is assisted by Correspondents from all over the world, who cooperate to harvesting news and information.

The contents of the portal are organized in separate but correlated sections:

- The "**Editorials**" section contains articles of general interest and of theoretical – critical character pertaining to any disciplinary area.
- The "**Interviews**" section contains the report of interviews to key people in the field of digital culture.
- The "**Events**" section gives an overview of what it is happening all over the world and of the most important events related to the digital culture.
- The "**Showcases**" section is devoted to give visibility to projects and organizations involved in the digitization process of culture, heritage and art. Each showcase contains official presentation of the project or activity, articles, news and general information with constant updates.
- The **two specific areas** – digital heritage, digital art – host articles which have a specific focus on the two main topics of the portal, as access to the digital heritages, creative uses of digital art and technologies applied to the digital culture. The writing style changes according to the specific area but it keeps the same high level of disclosure and scientific rigor.
 - The **digital heritage** area will contain information about the various projects and initiatives for the digitization of the cultural heritage all over the world and insights about the digitized content and the use of informatics and digital tools in museums and exhibitions.
 - The **digital art** area will contain articles related to the latest news pertaining to the creative industry (movies, animation, games, etc..) and to the creative uses of the digital art in all its various expressions: computer generated digital art and digital manipulation of material taken from other sources (tradigital art), digital installations and interactive art, virtual environments, photography, music, experimental performance art, etc.



Besides these fully working areas, there are 2 more that will be perfectly developed in the next time:

- The **“Repository”** section is dedicated to featured projects and will host:
 1. a repository of **documents**, to archive any kind of documents;
 2. a repository of **prototypes**, to store all the software which had been produced during the project's life;
 3. a repository of **websites**, to collect and preserve all the project's websites.
- The **“Search and Offer”** section will actually be a virtual pin-board to post announcements and ads, just like any modern magazine.

On a later stage, the portal will also host a virtual gallery of photography and art, where photographers and artists will display their works and give extra visibility to their personal websites, thus promoting their activity.

IV. TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

A. digitalmeetsculture.net portal base technology

The CMS which has been selected as base technology upon which to implement the digitalmeetsculture.net portal is WordPress¹.

WordPress is an open source blog tool and publishing platform licensed under the GNU General Public License (GPL), powered by PHP and MySQL and easily customizable into a Content Management System (CMS).

WordPress has been selected as the base technology for the implementation of the digitalmeetsculture.net portal

because of its flexibility and of its easy and user friendly setup and usage, which nevertheless allows a high level of personalization, making it a very versatile CMS.

WordPress has a web template system which uses a template processor. It is therefore possible and easy to re-arrange widgets as well as to install and switch between themes. The PHP and HTML code in themes can also be edited for more advanced customizations. WordPress features integrated link management; a search engine-friendly, clean permalink structure; the ability to assign nested, multiple categories to articles; support for tagging of posts and articles. Automatic filters are also included, providing standardized formatting and styling of text in articles. WordPress supports the Trackbackⁱⁱ and Pingbackⁱⁱⁱ standards for displaying links to other sites that have themselves linked to a post or article. Finally, WordPress has a rich plugin architecture which allows users and developers to extend its functionality beyond the features that come as part of the base install.

The features which have been implemented in digitalmeetsculture.net by making use of WordPress core functionalities and plugins and by customising them according to the portal's needs are: Management and Administration, Portal visibility, Design customization, Content creation, Archiving and Searching, Moderation.

B. Users updating and interactivity

The digitalmeetsculture.net portal includes a set of tools aimed at keeping users always involved and up-to-date, such as mailing lists, newsletters, accounts on the major social networks. The continuous renewal of the

Home Page and of the main pages of the different specific areas with new articles, as well as the presence of an always updated Events section, motivates the users to visit the site several times.

Interactivity is a key-point of the portal: like any modern communication website, users can register to the portal, thus being allowed not only to simply comment the articles, but mostly to play an active part and send events and articles, until the point of joining the staff as correspondents or even referents if they wish.

The global dimension of the project is therefore sustained and implemented by enlarging the group of involved people who act as content providers, in order to open the magazine to any input.

C. Future steps

Being the portal still young, as its official launch dates back to 2011, a wide number of dissemination activities are currently carried out to make the portal more and more renowned and visited. These include: presentations and demo of the portal to the events organised by the featured projects and on the occasion of conferences, exhibitions and international meetings; links and RSS feeds included in the featured projects'

sites and in other sites; distribution of brochures and other dissemination materials, etc.

Promoter is currently carrying on financial investments for empowering the visibility of the website with the aim of positioning the website on many search engines positioned in the 5 continents.

The company will also make use of its long-time experience in European projects for networking the portal and achieve proper dissemination.

REFERENCES

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