

Chapter 5

New Technologies as Tools for Education to Cultural Heritage in the EU Agendas: Debates and Plans – The Special Case of Archaeology

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ABSTRACT

The European Commission faced the subject of educational relation between new media technology and all expressions of culture, aiming at the adoption of pondered policies. The Open Method of Coordination Working Group had the task to study the synergies between education and culture, in particular on the part regarding the new ways of artistic and cultural education provided by new technologies. Given an account of the debate on Media Literacy across Europe, the specific recommendations expressed by the group are shown. The Digital Agenda for Europe is a further step in that direction. Highlighted is the educational application of new technology to cultural heritage, as a paratextual tool helping in its comprehension. This chapter focuses on the educational significance of using the contexts pertaining to archaeology. The necessary mental application to imagine and reconstruct past exteriorities involves a lot of them, primarily the virtual one with its technology, but much work remains to be done.

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

Should we consider Homer a more sublime poet if he had cut his rhymes on wax? Or Cicero a more clever lawyer if he could have had his pleadings typewritten? And would Shakespeare's plays be greater if never acted at the Globe but spread over the Internet? Would those authors have had better inspirations if helped by better technologies?

And more: is computer art placed on a higher step in Art History than Middle Ages frescoes? Does an ancient monument have more importance when integrated by a virtual reconstruction?

Answers are very easy. Technology never improves the inner quality of cultural expressions¹ (i.e. the art production or the testimonies of the past), but it can help their understanding. This is, of course, an educational action.

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The debate on the role of new technologies, as media of cultural education, is deeply felt in Europe. We all know that Europe is one of the parts of the world where landscape has literally been built by human culture, and the past arises and stands by all citizens, so that cultural education also strongly means understanding the place where a person lives. The European Commission recognized that it was necessary to address a specific situation.

Two concepts animated educational policies on culture and their expressions: one centered on the visit that sees cultural institutions (museums, theaters, etc.) designed as public facilities presenting works or performances, and another aimed at getting young people to know artistic activities, by making them learn a musical instrument or attend dance/theater lessons out of school hours, or even during school hours, and participate in arts laboratories under the supervision of teachers and, more rarely, artists. Yet, young people get their access to culture neither by guided visits and *matinées* for schools nor by amateur artistic activities. The most effective tools are motionless vectors, strongly concentrated on the consumption of goods produced by the cultural industries and widely spread on the Web, as evidenced by the success of digital platforms, which allow youngest people to present their own works easily. The Web is shaping a new relationship with culture that undermines the old vertical transmission, which ranged from teachers, considered authoritative or merely authoritarian, to rather passive recipients. Now the transmission is horizontal and occurs in networks. Permanent interactions are emerging, leading to new forms of art and use of cultural manifestations.

The European Commission faced this complexity and promoted, inside the European Agenda for Culture, the “Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Working Group on developing synergies with education, especially arts education,” whose final report has been passed on June, 2010 (Lauret & Marie, 2010). A significant part was dedicated

to the role of new technologies, and on December 17-18, 2009, a meeting was held in Genshagen Castle, Germany, in form of workshop about “*New Media - New ways of art and cultural education in Europe*” (Lauret & Marie, 2010, p. 56).

A preliminary paper recognized that:

- Most classic cultural and educational institutions are neither technologically nor conceptually capable of integrating the development of new technologies into their courses in a satisfactory way;
- As a result, cultural and arts courses for young people rarely deal only with the new media; furthermore, there are few known examples of good practice in this area and the artistic potential of Internet as a medium is still little recognized;
- The use of Internet as a medium for independent art is currently booming. Easy access and interesting, entertaining offers directly linked to the everyday culture of young people provide them with entirely new, individual and shared creative forms of expression;
- While the two trends continue to diverge, the large media and technology groups with their global networks have long been working on the development of new hardware and software and durable programmes. These will have an impact on society, on design courses in education as well as on arts and culture institutions (Unpublished paper, 2009).

The development of consequent policy recommendations involved to:

- Help to discover critically the variety of new media offer, acquiring the skills to tell arts and culture by adopting a commercial approach;
- Strengthen skills, especially creativity, acquired by using the Web;

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