

Chapter 16

Urban Memory in Space and Time

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ABSTRACT

Cities are places where various aspects of past events are projected and expressed through personal memories and narrations; urban memory can be regarded as an expression of collective memory that has been shaped within a particular space as time goes by. This chapter considers urban memory as an important aspect of the cultural heritage of a city to be captured and preserved for future generations. This chapter introduces the concept of urban memory and how it is related to space and time. It presents a survey of applications that aim to capture, preserve and exploit urban memory and proposes a system that allows citizens to interact with urban memory both by offering their memories and by viewing others' memories. The proposed system aims to transform cities in a cultural environment where cultural heritage is both preserved and enhanced.

INTRODUCTION

Memory is the mental capacity through which events are stored, preserved and recalled in mind; memory according to Halbwachs (1992) is a matter of how minds work together in society as “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories”. Each group or society shares a collective memory; Halbwachs (1992) identifies

the role that space plays in shaping the collective memory and Nora (1989) defines the value of specific places (*les lieux de memoire*) in this process. Boyer (1994) considers that a city as a whole can be regarded as a collective memory. Therefore, cities are places where events that have occurred during the time are projected and various aspects are expressed through personal memories and narrations. Lately, a number of researches have been conducted on the topic that Crinson (2005) names “urban memory”.

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Urban memory can be regarded as an expression of collective memory that has been shaped within a particular space as time goes by; thus it expresses relations between the past and the present of the place that we live. Traditionally individual memories pass through generations via narrations and are enclosed within narrow communities, like families, without interacting and without composing collective memories. Therefore as the time goes by the individual memories are either lost along with their carriers or altered due to the changes in the physical environment. We believe that it is crucial that individual memories are recorded, preserved and passed on to younger generations and through interactions are combined to form the urban memory.

We consider the urban memory as an important aspect of the cultural heritage of a city, as unlike other aspects it can be captured and preserved for the next generations. This chapter introduces the concept of urban memory and how this is related to space and time. The main objective of this chapter is to present a survey of applications that aim to capture, preserve and exploit urban memory and to propose a system that can allow citizens to interact with urban memory both by offering their memories and by viewing others' memories. The proposed system will transform cities in a cultural environment where cultural heritage is both preserved and enhanced.

In the following section we introduce key terms like collective memory and urban memory, and then we present a survey of systems that aim to capture, preserve and share urban memory on the web. Next, we identify the features of a system that allows citizens to interact with urban memory using ubiquitous computing technologies, we present the lifecycle from an individual memory fragment to the urban memory and we present in detail the architecture of the system that we propose. We discuss how individual memories can be collected and preserved, then we present how they can be processed in order to be semantic annotated based on temporal, spatial and thematic context and we

demonstrate how urban memory can be projected and presented to citizens exploiting ubiquitous and mobile computing technologies. Finally we conclude reflecting on how such a system can transform cities in cultural environments where cultural heritage is both preserved and enhanced.

FROM COLLECTIVE TO URBAN MEMORY

Memory has always been very important to people as history springs from it; in Greek mythology this is represented by the fact that Mnemosyne, a titaness that personified memory, gave birth to Clio, the muse of history. The name Clio derives from the Greek verb *kleo* (Greek: κλέω/κλείω) which means to “recount”, “narrate”, and “make famous”. Muse Clio is the scholar or researcher who ignites the desire to record, to research and to give an account of events in time.

Although memory and history are often considered synonymous, nowadays research considers them as fundamentally opposite. According to Nora (1989) memory is life; it remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction of what is no longer. In essence, memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present whereas history is a representation of the past. Memory can be characterized as the lived experience, whereas history the preservation of lived experience (Crane, 1997). According to Halbwachs (1992) history is the remembered past to which we no longer have an “organic” relation while collective memory is the active past that forms our identities; therefore both history and collective memory are publicly available social facts, the former “dead,” the latter “living”.

As Halbwachs (1992) identified the study of memory is not a matter of reflecting on the properties of the subjective mind; rather, memory is a matter of how minds work together in society.

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