

Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee

Issue: Art digitalization as means of preserving cultural heritage and cultural diversity

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INTRODUCTION

Digitalization in every form is one of the most defining characteristics of the contemporary era. Art is one of the first expressions practised by man, and ever since its birth, it has not stopped developing and evolving. Every time a new instrument or tool is created, humans find a way to use it in order to create art either with it or through it. This evolution applies to technology as well and the result of combining these two has gained popularity in the art scene over the past decade (e.g. digital drawings, 3-D printers, and graphic design). This so-called "Art Digitalization" is therefore extremely convenient when applying it to the matters of cultural heritage preservation in the backdrop of the 21st century. Digitalization could be one of our most prized weapons when it comes to the preservation of our cultures. For the majority of the countries, the 20th century was a harsh era in which nations destroyed their cultures due to multiple wars, industrialization and the influences of other neighboring countries. The cultural heritage and cultural diversity of a nation have a very high value, not only due to their present or possible economic value, but mainly because they stir a certain emotion within us, make us feel as though we belong to something- for instance, a country, a tradition or a way of life. Especially in our modernizing and globalizing world today, we should take advantage of this digitalization to keep our cultural heritage and diversity relevant and accessible for generations to come. Thus, the safekeeping and preservation of our cultural heritage is entirely in our hands and requires active effort.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

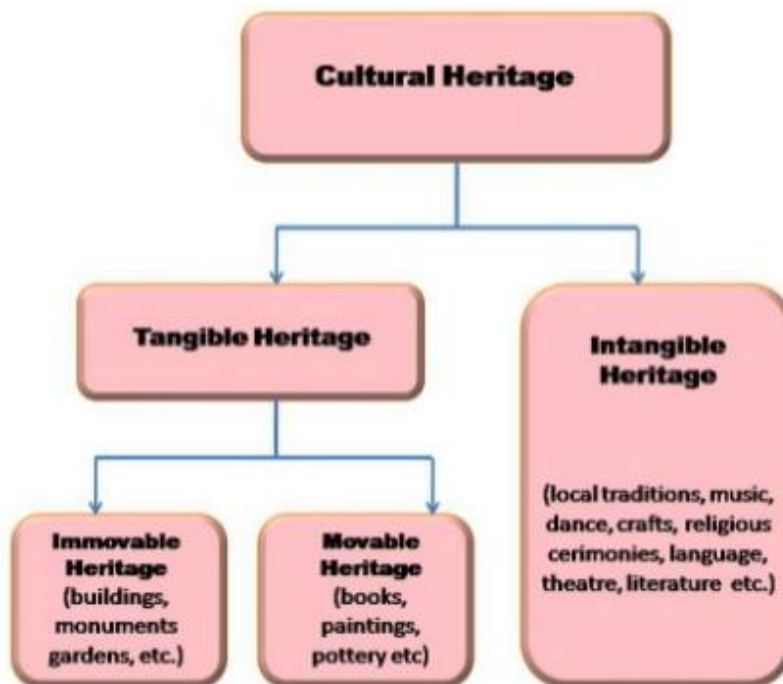
Culture

"Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."¹

Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage is the remaining legacy of physical artifacts and intangible features of society or a group that is inherited from past generations. It often is divided into different categories based on the definition of heritage. Heritage is to be divided into the following 3 main categories: Cultural Heritage, National Heritage and Heritage in the event of armed conflict. Cultural Heritage can then further be divided into two broader sub-categories (Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage). Tangible Heritage includes movable heritage such as paintings, sculptures, coins and manuscripts, immovable heritage such as monuments and archeological

Forms of Cultural Heritage



In the photo: A graph visualizing the differences of the two types of cultural heritage

¹ Definition of 'culture' by Edward Burnett Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* (1871)

sites, underwater cultural heritage such as shipwrecks and underwater ruins. Intangible Heritage refers to oral traditions, rituals and performing arts.

Cultural Diversity

The term “culturally diverse” is often used as a synonym with the concept of “multiculturalism.” Multiculturalism is defined as:“...a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society.”²

Digitalization

Digitalization (often also referred to as "Digitization") is the the conversion of analog information into digital a format. Digitalization is of immense importance when it comes to the processing of data storage and transmission, because it "allows information of all kinds in all formats to be carried with the same efficiency and also intermingled"³.This is why it is a very popular and commonly used way of preserving information for many organizations around the world.

Art Digitalization

Art Digitalization is a creative practice that uses digital technologies e.g. 3D printing, Virtual Reality and scanning as part of the creation of the artwork/ presentation. Through the digitalization of art, content can be stored on the web in special archives which makes the preservation process efficient.



In the Photo: a virtual reality headset. Photo Credit: Flickr

² C. Rosado, *What Makes a School Multicultural?*, accessed December 2010.

³ McQuail, D (2000) *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (4th edition), Sage, London, pp. 16–34

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Globalization, armed conflict and war, natural disasters, pollution, uncontrolled urbanization and unchecked tourist development are causing problems to our cultural heritage, each in their own way. These problems vary from inaccessibility to complete destruction of world heritage sites. The digital era, in which we are currently living, gives us the opportunity and the mechanisms to immortalize such heritage through modern technologies which do not only offer a sustainable solution to the problem, but also offers accessibility to the public which wants to reconnect with its heritage, creating an emotional link to each individual's past. What are the ways in which we can insure the preservation of our cultural heritage, and why exactly is this important? In order to be able to wrap your head around this problem, one needs to understand the ideas involved.

Art Digitalization-A quiet revolution

Digital Technology has brought about significant change in many areas of our lives, even in the cultural field, namely tangible pieces of art.

In the Photo: The Nirgul Tablet, project mosul, part of the digital replications of ancient artifacts ruined in the Middle East. Photo Credit: Project Mosul

The new emerging mediums such as 3D virtual Reality (VR) or computer graphic techniques are revolutionizing the more traditional art forms. This has become a new way of promoting and selling art. This is a positive change for art lovers since the art market was previously monopolized by auction houses frequented by wealthy and regular customers. The rules of supply and demand are being reshaped by Online Art Marketplaces selling affordable paintings and drawings. However, some may say that the digitalization in art can lead to quality impoverishment in the art world, since anyone with a working computer is able to create artworks on top of having access to a large number of online clients. For some, this phenomenon is leading to art becoming less exclusive and lacking in uniqueness. What does this digitalization mean when applied to exhibitions, which are the main forms in which humans encounter popular artwork? Many national museums are taking advantage of the technological revolution by digitalizing their collections and archives in 3D, which is also a new and powerful marketing tool. Any client/visitor with internet connection can be given access to the collection. How does this all connect to cultural heritage? Digital art is helping with the preservation of our cultural heritage. One project that serves as a prime example, which helps us understand the usefulness digitalization brings to that field, is the **Mosul Project**. Led by the website *Sketchfab*, which helps publish and share 3D and VR content, this project united archeologists who all had one goal: to recreate (in 3D) the remains

of missing monuments, e.g. the Palmyra site devastated by ISIS between the years 2015 and 2017.

The importance of Preserving Cultural Diversity and Cultural Diversity

Preserving culture, heritage and cultural diversity is of the utmost importance, especially in our current globalized and modernized society, because it will play a crucial role in maintaining the diversity in our developing and further globalizing world today. Furthermore, it is said that the preservation of traditional knowledge that may come along with the physical artifact is even more important than the conservation itself. It is important that traditions are passed on without losing their core value, but it is equally important to keep in mind that this "passing on" of heritage changes from generation to generation. Digitalization has therefore proves itself to be an excellent way of making cultural heritage accessible to our generation. Additionally, preserving Cultural Heritage can bring advantages to a country. For instance, an increase in the tourist sector can follow as a result of proper cultural heritage preservation done in a unique way.

Digitalized Cultural Heritage

National and international organizations have been supporting the efforts that were once performed by public institutions and private bodies for the conversion of physical cultural heritage into "digital ". This digitalization has not only happened for documents and images, but also for audio/video resources, for the performing arts e.g. song and dance, for sport and for folkloristic customs, monuments and landscapes. Moreover, intangible cultural heritage has found its way into the digital world, which is the part of culture that has always been more challenging to preserve. Now oral memories, food and drink, and even local traditions can go digital.

After the digitalization process, the content is made available for the web (or museums depending on if the content is needed for an exhibit), resulting in the web overflowing with countless digital objects of artistic/cultural value. User-generated content is also filling the web, which creates more challenges. What does one do with an enormous number of files? They need to be collected and organized in order for responsible organizations and professionals to manage them, and make them re-usable to the whole community. A prime example for a platform that occupies itself with this matter is *Europeana*, the EU's leading digital platform for cultural heritage. Launched in 2008, Europeana gives access to all types of content from different heritage institutions. Over 3000 institutions across

Europe contribute to Europeana, and those range from major international institutions like the Louvre in Paris, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and the British Library. Such platforms strive to build an open and trusted source for cultural heritage to be stored, to support the cultural heritage sector through innovation and advocacy, to make heritage available for users wherever and whenever the need for it exists and to find a modern way for users to engage with their cultural heritage.

It is impressive that the benefits of digitalized cultural heritage do not only benefit the public, but their value has a positive impact on the content provider as well, be it a private body or a museum. An example could be unseen photographs, stashed away for the longest time that could now be stored in digital format. This applies to ruins, paintings and even landscapes that are by definition heritage. Small, more obscure collections displayed by lesser known museums can become more visible than before thanks to special apps or virtual exhibitions. Through having their content digitalized, content providers are given the opportunity to spread the wider re-use of their collections to reach new market/visitors, to achieve a stronger presence in the cyberspace and to simultaneously gain a more evident visibility in the "real" world.

Digitalization, therefore, is an excellent tool to exponentially increase the spread of cultural heritage with the goal of educating people of cultural diversities, while also taking advantage of its business potential. In the Digital Era, cultural heritage will become less and less accessible to the elite, less locked away and more accessible to the greater public. It can be promoted, re-created, re-used, used for educational purposes and be open to the masses. By participating in culture, people can become active participants in co-creating the culture around them, simultaneously becoming active influencers. It can play a pivotal role for the socio-economic development of the community. But the ultimate goal is for this method to become widespread.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

European Foundation

This is the European Commission's digital platform for cultural heritage. It gives access to over 53 million items that can be used by teachers for educational purposes, professionals in cultural institutions such as museums or libraries, artists, or anyone that has an interest in exploring their culture.

International Digital Media and Arts Association (iDMAa)

This association was founded in early 2004 by a group of 15 universities. Their goal is to serve "educators, practitioners, scholars, and organizations with interests in digital media." They have carried out research and become involved in the digitalization of art and are therefore experts on the issue.

RICHES (Renewal, innovation & Change: Heritage and European Society)

RICHES is a research project that strives to reconnect the individual to their cultural heritage through digital technologies. Their step-program on their mission towards innovation can be viewed here:

<https://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/projects/riches/riches-renewal-innovation-change-heritage-and-european-society/>

UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization is a UN organ established on 16 November, 1945. It has mentioned that the cultural digitalization "is thus a global issue relevant to all countries and communities.", concerning its availability. Countless attempts have been made to preserve both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, but none yet to digitalize it.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1931	Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments
1946	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded
1950	International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works was founded
1954	Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict
2004	International Digital Media and Arts Association (iDMAa) was founded

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property ratified by Finland in 1994. It is a humanitarian convention under UNESCO whose goal it is to protect cultural property when involved unarmed conflict.
- Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 7 December 2000
- Digital Agenda for Europe: This Agenda calls for more convenient access to cultural content even in remote areas, by implementing smart technologies and a more efficient integration of citizens
- Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
- Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage
- Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
- Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society in 2005

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Art Digitalization is an art form that is still fairly new but nothing surprising anymore. To use its concept of digitalization and use it in the preservation of cultural heritage has not become public knowledge yet. The main actors that have been involved in this issue are the platforms and organizations mentioned above. This is an innovative method that is not widespread and that has not been tackled by organizations like Europeana or UNESCO. UNESCO has addressed the importance of cultural heritage many times, but it has not yet been involved with its digitalization. Therefore, previous attempts to solve this issue come solely from single independent organizations that are not that known yet. It is our responsibility to spread the word.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The big challenge of facing the new digital era is finding a way that betters people's lives, including the challenge of unlocking the potential that digital cultural heritage would bring to our world. On the one hand, it is very positive for economic growth, education and welfare for the whole community, but, on the other hand, organizations will need to foster more and more shared knowledge that will be accessible to all citizens. A step that needs to be taken by governments is a continuous support to programs for digitalization, thus allowing academic institutions, research centers, final users and private enterprises to develop and cooperate a collective intelligence in order to understand the impact of all kinds of digital technologies in every aspect of our lives. What is especially important is to allow and encourage communication between different communities with different cultures, language and knowledge. Raising awareness is key. That communication and dialogue should be sparked in sectors such as the cultural heritage sector, education, interior design, humanities research, cultural and creative enterprises, digital infrastructure enterprises providers, etc.

Challenges that will have to be faced:

- Intellectual Property Rights Issues
- Societal changes due to the advent of the digital age
- Digital cultural heritage's economic force
- The guarantee of openness of the digital archives
- In-depth research on digital cultural heritage and Humanities

- The risk of a loss of authenticity and integrity
- Trusted sources are of high importance (beware of platforms such as Flickr, Facebook etc)

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