Time Odyssey

An archaeological journey using digital storytelling

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Overview

Many cultural heritage institutions face the challenge of interpreting historical artifacts in way that creates a relatable and immersive experience. This is a challenge because standard exhibits often fail to create an engaging experience, one that allows visitors to appreciate the significance of history in their daily lives.

The digital experience presented here is one among many developed by the education department at the Eretz Israel Museum in order to make thousands-year-old artifacts relatable to young audience. The technology used in these games creates new possibilities to overcome the alienation many feel in archaeological museums by contextualizing artifacts which are removed from their original time and place. The technology enables location-based learning that emphasizes the importance of visiting the museum and encountering physical artifacts (in contrast with purely virtual games), visualization of core elements and curating connections between artifacts. This platform breaks the old paradigm that a museum visitor must make efforts to comprehend artifacts and guides her in an intelligible way during the visit.

The Museum

The Eretz Israel Museum in Tel-Aviv is a multidisciplinary museum dealing with local material culture, past and present. The museum aims to create contemporary connections between the different cultural domains - archaeology, ethnography, applied crafts, art, photography, and documentation of Israeli society. Within the museum, the education department is a centre for study and enrichment, whose objective is to bring diverse audiences closer to the worlds of content that the museum offers.

The Challenges

The department uses digital platforms to address two challenges. The first is making artifacts comprehensible by highlighting the historical, cultural, and technological context of the artifact, how it functioned in the lives of people. The efforts usually required to learn about this context are the main

obstacle that causes alienation in the museum. The second challenge is compensating for outdated exhibits that lack an engaging information. Interactive games enhance the motivation to learn and make exhibits memorable by creating a positive and emotional involvement (Bieszk-Stolorz et al 2021; Madsen 2020). They improve orientation in the museum by encouraging free roaming which is not arbitrary but directed by a specific purpose. In this sense, the games are a form of curation, presenting a theme by highlighting and making connections between different artifacts.

The Technology

The games are based on a system developed by Wandering Company. The system makes it possible to turn an exhibition of artifacts into a gamified narrative. It is achieved by making the story prior to the informational layer. For that reason, the game structure and design defines its content: texts, images and interactives elements. In this way wandering in the museum becomes a meaningful and memorable experience, anchoring the visitor's attention and framing its context. The technology makes it easy to design visual contextualization using a flexible interface on which structured data is placed. Dependency rules allow weaving different elements into a focused and optimal activity reducing content overload. Future developments will enable building a community of interest that is retained after the museum visit.

The Digital Experience Solution

The example presented in this talk is the game "Time Odyssey" in the ceramics pavilion. The artifacts in this pavilion encompass a timespan of thousands of years, different areas around the land of Israel, and diverse uses such as agriculture, food storage, lighting, communication, and religious rituals. Therefore, the exhibit can be used to educate about different topics for diverse audience. "Time Odyssey" experience is an example for the deep integration between digital storytelling and the representation of cultural heritage. It focuses on the Mediterranean Sea both as a barrier and as a space of exploration and cultural connections. Encountering the lives of people who used to live around the Mediterranean helps us understand the cultures living here nowadays.

The activity includes several topics central in Mediterranean societies: Sea voyages; Cultural encounters; Trade; Communication, visual and linguistic. Through these lens players understand how stories, ideas, values, and ways of life developed and circulated over time in a way which is relevant for contemporary culture.

Storytelling

In the game visitors play as sea traders in the Mediterranean. In each turn they choose a port in a different area and are presented with archeological artifacts related to this area. To complete the mission, they must answer questions about the artifact. Answering the questions requires searching the exhibit, careful observation and thought. The goal of the game is to trade and bring back home the most goods, stories, or ideas. To encourage free roaming in the exhibit the gameplay is free and not linear. This provides an experience of adventure and fosters acquaintance of the museum space. The game includes humorous anecdotes and an appealing graphical design.

Evaluation

We evaluated the reactions of visitors who played the game and the learning outcomes achieved through it. Visitors were surprised, motivated, and enjoyed the activity. The game served as a preparation for a concluding discussion about the importance of the Mediterranean. It promoted a discussion by showing the continuity between the global reach of contemporary culture and the ancient world. Even though our means of transport and communication are far more efficient than in ancient times, cultural encounters and influences are not a new phenomenon. These similarities show the basic human need to travel, explore, learn, evolve, and innovate.

Figures

Fig. 1. Navigation screen

Fig. 2. Ceramics pavilion (© Leonid Padrul)

Author Contributions

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References

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