

Digital solutions for the preservation of intangible heritage

Creating an accessible and interoperable dataset of cultural heritage

The accessibility of data related to cultural heritage remains a significant challenge that must be addressed to ensure the availability of tools for the preservation of a territorial asset for a multidisciplinary set of research fields.

A territory is susceptible to a multitude of risk categories, both natural and anthropic. All of these factors can be the cause of the loss (or permanent damage) of the cultural heritage, particularly when we consider the impact on fragile marginal areas, often characterised by a trend of abandonment. With regard to this latter topic, interesting case studies to take into account are the small and fragmented villages of the “highlands”, mountainous areas that still retain a strong cultural, material and immaterial, heritage. Their preservation has been guaranteed both due to the ancient nature of the settlements and because of their isolation, which reduces the power of external influences from larger urban centres in the plain.

The collection of data regarding this kind of heritage is still incomplete, particularly in two key research areas. The first issue concerns the collection and georeferenced representation of intangible cultural heritage, which encompasses all the knowledge, practices, traditions, and local languages that contribute to the construction of a place's identity.

The second issue concerns the interpolation of the aforementioned data sets with one another.

One of the key strategies to preserve the cultural heritage, even on a wider territory, is to establish connections between the various elements that comprise it.

The utilisation of geographic information systems (GIS) enables the visualisation of georeferenced heritage in relation to existing territorial data, which can be specifically read by the aforementioned programmes. There is a paucity of specific and collective guidelines pertaining to the collection and sharing of this heritage. This lack of communication between databases of cultural heritage has resulted in a series of isolated datasets that are not interoperable.

The challenge is further compounded when considering non-material cultural heritage, which due to its intangible nature, is challenging to collect in geographic databases. Consequently, this kind of asset remains largely unstored and unpreserved.

The situation is currently a matter of urgency in mountain marginal areas. The reason concerns the fact that the local population is emigrating, while immigrants and temporary residents are seeking new opportunities. This is a positive indicator in the context of the overall trend of abandonment, but it also poses a threat to the preservation of local traditions and heritage. In essence, those who possess this intangible knowledge are leaving it to others who are less familiar with it. In contrast to the damage risk associated with natural and anthropic threats, this dispersion risk is a more gradual and insidious phenomenon, occurring almost invisibly and potentially leading to irremediable loss.

Technological solutions can be a great contribution to fill this gap, but this strategy needs a coordination between many actors involved. The initial step is addressing this issue and identify the need of an intervention.

The objective of this contribution is to emphasise the significance of the use of technologies for the collection, visualisation, interpretation, accessibility, and interoperability of the vast quantity of data pertaining to cultural heritage in marginalised areas.

Reference

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