The Rome Archaeological Area and Use of Multimedia

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This research focuses on the valorization of the archaeological landscape in urban contexts and analyzes the case of Rome’s archaeological area. The aim is to understand how the concept of purpose of the Cultural Heritage, which from being a characterizing sign of the elite, became a resource on large-scale tourism. However, what could be done in order to make the share of archaeological evidence more accessible without decreasing the scientific quality of the cultural offer? The use of the augmented Reality as a guide on the site has been experimented in multiple forms throughout the Archaeological Area of Rome and has increased even the visits among the citizens. From the analysis of the current cultural offer and the comparison with other international realities, it has been possible to trace some guiding lines, which should combine this type of representations and ensure a balance between the real and virtual world.

Although, from the study, it emerged that the use of augmented reality as narrative tool of the ancient events seems to be leading the citizen to “wear” the garment of the tourist in his own city, rather than bringing the urban reality into the archaeological context. Indeed, in Rome’s case the urban context is assuming features aiming to touristic exploitation. Banal souvenir shops and mediocre restaurants have replaced artisan workshops, once highly frequented and characterizing the landscape around the Archaeological Area.

To integrate urban archaeology in everyday life as a space in the city and valorize the Cultural Heritage, the simple image of the elements constituting the original archaeological landscape is not enough. In order to save the cultural identity of this heritage, it is necessary to preserve even its context and respect the authenticity of the locations, not to fall in the mere (though didactic) spectacle of the Cultural Heritage.

Key words: Cultural Heritage, Virtual Reality, Virtual Restoration, Valorization.


INTRODUCTION

The focus of the proposed research is in the context of the current debate on making best use of the archaeological landscape in urban contexts and begins by reflecting on the significance of heritage in contemporary civilization and on how the concept of exploiting cultural assets has changed, from being riches which were the prerogative of an elite, to becoming a resource for tourism on a vast scale. This has inevitably altered both the actual planning and how archaeological areas in an urban context are perceived.

The objective is to identify and study what new systems are used by institutions (and which systems would be useful for the purpose), to adapt the use of the central Archaeological Area of Rome, a case study considered a symbolic example, with the needs of contemporary city, in order to make it into a space geared for tourism, but also a cultural draw for citizens.

The choices made in organizing the central Archaeological Area of Rome have not always been driven by the desire to make the reading of archaeological finds accessible to everyone, with interpreting them often being the sole preserve of scholars.

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1 Such as London’s Streetmuseum (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSfSTATEZUYo), the Dome Under of Utrecht (https://www.domunder.nl/en), the virtual visit of the Santa Maria Cathedral of Vitoria in Spain (http://vr360.catedralvitoria.eu).
Evidence of this trend is found in the way, for example, the area of the Roman Forum and the Imperial Forums features a layout that is heterogeneous in time and space; elements belonging to diverse epochs or different architectural ensembles mingle, positioned in a landscape that leaves visible the traces of history represented at various moments in time, but makes interpretation difficult.

Yet this place was, until a few years ago, much more of an integral element in the urban fabric than is the case now. The interactions between the city and the archaeological landscape represent the most significant change since the creation of the Monumental Zone in Rome, and it is, in fact, by analyzing relationships with the urban context that we can understand how much and in what way the effects of the tourist market have influenced the development of this area.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the past the number of tourists was certainly not significant enough to be able to impact choices in terms of planning, administration and, especially, commerce; this is probably also why interventions undertaken in the Archaeological Area of Rome were initially strongly urban in nature, without the current exploitation of the image of the ruins solely for tourism purposes.

The Monumental Zone was created in 1887, by a ‘declaration of public utility to isolate some monuments in the southern part of Rome and connect them by means of walkways and public parks’[Commissione Reale 1914]. As was highlighted in the very report attached to the plan, the aim of the work was to safeguard the Cultural Heritage from building speculation and improve areas considered to be among the most insalubrious in the Capital (Fig. 1).

The implementation of this project, carried out over the subsequent decades, included providing citizens with a pathway linking public parks and broad tree-lined avenues, intended to encourage the use of the archaeological heritage within the urban context of the capital.

There were various later actions altering the layout of the area; the most significant, in terms of the grandiose nature of the works, were the interventions completed during the Fascist period. However, before the advent of mass tourism, the area still remained an integral part of the daily life of the capital. There are various examples of the use of this area by citizens, not connected to the tourism aspect of visits to the archaeological park and closer to the use by citizens of their heritage sites. Beneath the Arch of Constantine, for example, was the finishing post for the Waiters’ Race, an event which took place around the 1930s and which in various years saw Roman waiters taking part in a race around the Coliseum carrying a loaded tray, ending under the Arch of Constantine (Fig. 2). On another occasion, also in the ’30s, a blessing of motor cars took place in the vicinity of St Frances Church (the protector of motorists, her Basilica lying between the Roman Forum and the Temple of Venus and Rome); this event last took place on 12 March this year on the Via dei Fori Imperiali. We should also mention one of the most famous and significant examples, the 1960 Olympics events, with numerous spectators arriving to watch the wrestling in the spectacular setting of the Basilica of Maxentius, used again in the 70s for the Arch. Renato Nicolini’s film festival, the Estate Romana².

The Park, too, was open to the public and was used by the inhabitants of the area as an urban space, as were the grounds of the historic Roman villas, a heritage site for the world but also for the city, bearing in mind that this also made it possible to cross the area to reach neighboring areas without having to go around it, with all the inconveniences that entailed.

So, although they were very different in their purposes, from the sporting interest of the Olympics to the desire to encourage Romans to be active in the “Years of Lead” in the 70s³ which kept them indoors, there have in the past been various events able to bring citizens in to experience these citizen spaces.

In theory, the current trend is to no longer interpret urban archaeology as somewhere remote from daily life, but as a space in the city in which an individual site or single monument is an integral part of a unified local area, with an integrated service infrastructure. On the one hand, this approach allows the conservation of the architectural finds and, on the other, it ensures that the city’s heritage is used to meet the contemporary needs of the city, there being a fluid connection, without the physical and perceived barriers existing at some of the other archaeological sites in our capital (such as, for example, the well-known Largo di Torre Argentina or the Arch of Janus) which constitute a true

² In recent years, it has been attempted to resume this event with the literature festival, housed right under the vaults of the Basilica of Maxentius.
³ The Years of Lead is a term used for a period of social and political turmoil in Italy that lasted from the late 1960s until the early 1980s, marked by a wave of both left-wing and right-wing incidents of political terrorism.
“urban oxymoron” [Segarra Lagunes 2002]. The problem still sits on the desk of academics and administrators, in an attempt to integrate theory into the implementation of well-intended plans.

One of the responses suggested by a selection of institutions as a way of attracting citizens back to live in the archaeological center seems to lean towards using multimedia as a narrative tool for the events which affected the ancient ruins. The use of augmented reality as an on-site guide has been tried in various forms in the central archaeological area and has achieved a degree of success, not only for tourists.

In the case of the Domus at Palazzo Valentini (Fig. 3), gradually revealed by lighting, the visitor enters into a dark space, in which the various sections are illuminated as the narrator tells their story. Another example, in the Imperial Forums, is the route through the structured space in the Forum of Caesar (Fig. 4), which passes through the hypogea areas below Via dei Fori Imperiali, allowing visitors to explore areas previously off-limits to the public, or, again, the show in the Forum of Augustus, which projects on to the massive wall of the Suburra district the history of the Forum and the fire of 64 AD in the time of Nero. An example to mention too is Santa Maria Antiqua (Fig. 5), with its narrative explaining the complexity of its artworks and also the history of the Domus Aurea, from its construction to the damnatio memoriae, and from its rediscovery in the Renaissance through to 20th century digs, experienced in person by visitors thanks to the use of immersive reality, which is also used for the Coliseum tour Live Ancient Rome.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

From analyzing the characteristics and outputs of the new ways to make use of the central Archaeological Area an extremely varied picture emerges, seeming to present two worlds which are apparently antithetical: the archaeological remains evoking a vanished culture, and technology, representing a world that is evolving continuously and rapidly. And yet there is another way to interpret these two realities, which would have one supporting the other, especially when the cultural contents are inaccessible [Limoncelli 2012].

After the London Charter, the Seville Principles and the Florence Declaration it would be appropriate to formalise a modus operandi (not setting out detailed rules but rather stating broad principles) for the creation of videomapping or other multimedia representations, to avoid spectacularization, by which real artefacts are hidden in favour of the virtual word. Cultural assets should become a vehicle for communicating cultural values, in an era in which their almost exclusive role seems to be as assets to exploit for economic benefit [Settis 2007].

In this context, we could identify two levels of observation; at first, the context around the individual representation, with analysis of the cultural offering, leading to the identification of a number of technical parameters, established in order to determine the actual quality of the visit. Secondly, the geographical context, considering the phenomenon on a wider scale, analysing the effects produced on the contemporary city [Bartolone 2013].

In this regard, we could extend the consideration to the urban context within which the archaeological landscape sits, in order to establish whether, and how, the new ways to exploit heritage can influence the area of the city surrounding it [Ricci 2002].

From these reflections arises the need to:
- draw up guidelines for the new ways of making use of the central Archaeological Area which have emerged from unstoppable and rapid technological development, as proposed in the relevant legislation and regulations and based on what has already been achieved by virtual reconstruction;
- explore the significance and use of “virtual restoration”, by highlighting the potential and challenges of a relatively recent discipline, which must not view technology as an end in itself, but as a means to support the process of conservation and valorisation [Limoncelli 2012];
- express the need to extend to the areas of urban fabric around the central Archaeological Area the policies to protect the cultural identity of heritage, because it is necessary, today more than yesterday, to also preserve the context in order to ensure that cultural values are passed on [Settis 2005].

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4 Which established the principles for the use of computer-based visualisation processes and outputs in research and communication in the sphere of Cultural Assets in order to preserve cultural qualities.
IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The use of technology can indeed make it easier to format the various explanatory guides [Bonacini 2014], by both encouraging an organic view of archaeological contexts for those who are not experts in the field, and by also providing a cultural spectacle for those who know about the places they are visiting, not to mention the direct connection that every visitor should have with the archaeological assets, in that they are being preserved in their own period, with visitors able to see them with their own eyes.

In addition, analysis of the urban context in which these events take place appears to show that the methods used in these initiatives, replicated in various formats across the whole of the Archaeological Area, encourages citizens to take on the guise of tourists in their own city, rather than carrying urban reality into the archaeological context.

What surrounds the Archaeological Park, indeed, is no longer an urban fabric lived in by its inhabitants, with artisan shops on the historic central district Rione Monti (Fig. 6) or the wool and cloth production workshops in the Villa Silvestri Rivaldi (historic villa over Via dei Fori Imperiali) at the time when it housed the beggars of the Pio Istituto Rivaldi. Today, the landscape in the area around the Archaeological Area is heavily geared to the tourist market, which is definitely a long way from, and unrelated to, the noble intentions of the cultural debate on the idea of reconnecting archaeological areas with the urban fabric of the contemporary city.

In recent years, most of the commercial activity has converted to blatant exploitation of tourism, with the sale of shoddy products, a long way from the quality of excellent local products. The cheap souvenir shops and poor quality restaurants have changed the face of the historic Roman streets, being part of a process which has unfortunately affected numerous European cities [Settis 2005]. In the space of a few years, cultural capitals and cities have found themselves facing a vastly greater mass of tourists than in previous decades, a process set in motion by travelling becoming much easier.

All this has, in Rome and not only in Rome, led to the inhabitants moving further and further away from the center of the city, as evidenced by the numerous guest houses and B&Bs which have taken the place of homes, resulting in the depopulation of the centers of some cultural cities, notably Venice, and Amsterdam, too (Fig. 7).

Everything is becoming geared to exploiting tourism, which has now even invaded the inside of monuments; just think of the innumerable ticket offices, walkways, lifts, wash rooms and places providing tourist accommodation; these have resulted in modifications, albeit partial (and to meet a functional rather than merely an economic requirement in these instances), to the appearance of the Coliseum, for example, and the same applies to many other cultural sites.

But what makes the archaeological landscape is seeing traces of man on the land, including in relation to the symbolic aspects that are characteristic of him in contemporary times, which Manacorda defines as “the direction of history” [Manacorda 2007] and which emerges not only in areas affected by the existence of finds, but also includes the surrounding areas, which form part of the environmental context in which the archaeological finds reside, including the areas in their vicinity.

Thus, what needs to be recovered is not merely the view of the architectural elements which made up the landscape of the archaeological site in an urban environment in its original phase of life. This is not enough to safeguard the cultural identity of the city’s heritage and restore to the citizens an archaeology which is conscious of its public use through history, and is also understood to be a unique and valued element of the design of the new city [Ricci 2002].

DISCUSSIONS

If, according to current opinion, the best form of conservation seems to be for it to be guaranteed by use, then viewing archaeological discoveries as part of the contemporary city would tend to lead to the development of plans able to incorporate the characteristics, the possibilities and the critical elements needed to organize sites, to restore their organic nature and accommodate (to the extent possible) the requirement to bring the inhabited centers up to the standards of western cities, by management and planning which would have “the aim of guiding and harmonizing its transformation as necessitated by the processes of social, economic and environmental development” [European Landscape Convention, 2000], then paying particular attention, too, to the question of regulation, both at a local and national level.
According to the Prof. Arch. Mario Manieri Elia, the duality between archaeology and contemporary cities, which is a barrier to viewing urban archaeology organically, could in practice be resolved by starting from the assumption that

“in our space-time universe this division does not exist and, like any other division, is a construct invented by man, in his eagerness to understand in part the complexity of reality […] We need to resign ourselves to the fact that we are in history and also in the planning” [Segarra Lagunes 2002].

From this point of view, the thinking of academics regarding action to integrate archaeology and the contemporary city is supported by regulatory tools which, now more than before, concentrate on taking the context into consideration [Ancona 2012].

Architectural and urban planning analysis must also flow contextually into landscape planning, its task being to plan and prepare for the creation of an integrated set of measures aimed at producing a managed system with urban and landscape planning working together, taking zoning perspectives into account and the necessary regulations for transforming land usage, to avoid the creation of situations which conflict with the objectives of the archaeological plan, especially in relation to putting in place the array of infrastructure elements required for it to work.

Archaeology should then work closely with the regulatory framework governing the land. Policies for building and large infrastructures can no longer avoid dealing with the conservation status of archaeological findings.

The relationship between protecting and town planning, therefore, constitutes a key point of convergence in which archaeology, regardless of whether the evidence of traces is very clear or less so, plays a vital role, of which our country, too, is gradually becoming aware [Fazio 2006].

PROPOSALS

Based on the analyses produced during this research, a scenario opens up which offers a number of usage opportunities that we could develop in the immediate future. From the analysis of the current cultural offer and the comparison with other international realities5, a number of aspects to be considered have been identified, as determinants of the quality of the representation offered. These parameters could be useful for evaluating and managing multimedia shows, in order to restore the archaeological areas to those who live there and not entrust them to tourism alone.

These parameters can be divided into two main categories: direct (explicitly identifiable) and indirect (easily inferred by studying the cultural offering).

In terms of direct assessment, we could identify the following criteria:

- type of digital technology, from laptops to headsets [Brancati et al. 2015];
- degree of autonomy in enjoying the Cultural Assets in terms of the exhibition. E.g. the Archeoguide method with personal headsets for each visitor, or the ARAS method, with headsets at the location, which one can choose whether to use or not [Bonacini 2011];
- predominance of the real or the virtual on the tour route (e. g. Palazzo Valentini, in which the view of reality is subordinate to the show on offer because the darkness of the room does not allow the real ruins to be fully appreciated);
- the scientific nature of the contents with explicit referencing of sources and historical rigour applied to reconstructions, as well as their philological authenticity [Ciotti and Roncaglia 2010; Dezzi Bardeschi 2007];
- availability of one or more interpretation aids;
- communication format (e. g. whether in person, by a hologram, or a narrating voice);
- whether the visit follows a set route or there is free choice;
- the option of accessing metadata for more detail on what has been shown via Augmented Reality, e.g. iTACITUS and MobiAR models [De Paolis et al. 2007, Empler 2015].

The indirect criteria may be summarised as follows:

- interaction between the visitor experience and the archaeological site (including in relation to the link between what is seen in the stories told and the architectural finds visited);

5 Such as London’s Streetmuseum (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSFATEZtUYo), the Dome Under of Utrecht (https://www.domunder.nl/en), the virtual visit of the Santa Maria Cathedral of Vitoria in Spain (http://vr360.catedralvitoria.eus)
whether user action is active or passive. Active visit: has greater autonomy and flexibility, or passive if the user watches films, looks at documents;
- possibility of replicating the type of visit and, if so, in what contexts
- possibility of organising the visit by planning it first remotely;
- opportunities to replicate the visit virtually, running through it again remotely (post visit activities, according to London Charter, points 4.5, 4.6);
- how evocative is the media show in terms of what has been defined as ‘emotional resources’ [Giannotta et al. 2014];
- compliance of the reconstruction with the binding legal framework in Italy and Europe.

Moreover, after evaluations made according to the above parameters, it’s possible to trace some guiding lines, which should combine this type of representations and ensure a balance between the real and virtual world. The possible uses identified, in addition to those examined, include:
- the possibility of visualisations of the city of the future, based on projects already planned but not yet realised (for example work on structures or architectural ensembles, using the development of a virtual restoration project to show what it will look like before it is actually created);
- the possibility of showing alternative scenarios (showing projects never realized on the area);
- bringing together information on tourist and city services which the visitor can use before or after the visit (e.g. transport systems, how to access the area and any ticketing information, various types of tourist services);
- ‘cultural recalls’, using the integration of data to invite further visits to the area, suggested by making links based on the preferences shown by the user during their visit;
- development of virtual tours including the urban area, to show parts of the city and walkways which have profoundly changed, looking at them from a broader architectural angle (development based on London’s Streetmuseum);
- opening up the cultural offering to people with disabilities, too, with special tours for the deaf, using avatars to communicate the information in sign language (e.g. Google Glass model, created for the Egyptian Museum of Turin);
- creation of exhibitions which also show the restoration work carried out to give the ruins the appearance that the visitor can see with their own eyes (Perhaps in the context of special tours).
- to allow the visitor the option of incorporating various interpretative aids, perhaps following detailed information on the structures or periods which most enthuse them
- in general, aim to communicate cultural value in ways other than through images

Only if technology is seen as a tool which can be adapted to meet the need to preserve and protect cultural assets, abandoning the point of view which sees it as the final objective of the process, is a real collaboration possible between the ‘scientific’ world and the ‘human’ world, abandoning the opposing positions that they normally take [Bennardi and Furferi 2007, Maino and Maino 2011].

CONCLUSIONS

Usage must not be the aim of the restoration but rather we have to give the possibility of making the heritage asset accessible to the community, and hence planned in accordance with scientific, rather than merely financial, criteria.

Truly restore the central Archaeological Area to the city, more wide-ranging technical policies are needed, taking account of:

- the historical dimension: this means reconstructing the history of the urban fabric which is inextricably entwined with that of today [MIBACT 2007];
- the technical dimension: planning for archaeological digs must take account of the needs of the contemporary city, so must link into town planning. In relation to this aspect we must not neglect the concept of choosing interventions on the basis of usage, too, so that the cultural content of archaeological ensembles does not degenerate by being used and open to the public;
- the planning dimension: alongside the theme of knowledge sits the idea of linking the major excavations to parts of the contemporary city.

6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSFsA TEZio
7 Point 6.1 London Charter.
It would be appropriate to work not only on individual architectural or archaeological finds but also “to assert the value of memory as an active factor for development” [D’Andria 2012], rather than exploit its resources to produce wealth (wealth which, although also valuable because of the possibility of reinvesting it in the sector from which it comes, must not be the aim of the valorisation activities, but only the fruit of good practice).

Changing course in terms of conservation policies has become a necessity in order to protect heritage [Benton and Cecil 2010], but, unfortunately, the Rome case is not unique.

Tools and means of communication also remain important for the quality of urban planning, which necessarily operate on two parallel levels; on the one hand, in fact, we should not neglect the scientific and specialist aspects; whilst on the other, as a consequence of growing globalization, the need to translate the results of archaeological research into clear and accessible language, making use of all the multimedia and reconstruction tools, is making progress; but this must be done with respect for the authenticity of sites, so as to avoid turning Cultural Assets into mere spectacle.

FIGURES

*Fig. 1. Plan of the Reserved Monumental Zone, 1887 (La zona monumentale di Roma e l’opera della Commissione Reale, Roma 1914, Table1).*
Fig. 2. The Waiters’ Race around the Coliseum Square (Rome, 1930).

Figure 1. Roman Domus of Palazzo Valentini (www.palazzovalentini.it).
Fig. 4. Caesar forum (www.viaggioneifori.it).

Fig. 5. Videomapping in S. Maria Antiqua.
Fig. 6. The oven, housed in the spaces of the surviving structures of the Forum of Nerva (Rome, 1870).

Fig. 7. Relief of tourist activities in the central area of Rome. The innkeeper locates the B & B, the offers of stay and the restaurants (Roma Tre University, Dip. Architettura, Working Group for the Colosseum Valley MasterPlan).
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